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Narratives of religious identity:
the self-perception of the
Jacobite Syrian Christians of Kerala

Volume I

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Abstract

This thesis examines the question of the religious self-definition of the Jacobite Syrian Christian community in Kerala. The leading question is: to what extent does the indigenous narrative of that community about their religious identity differ from existing dominant historical accounts? It examines texts in Malayalam from the Jacobite Syrian Christians, particularly the unpublished 18th century Mathai Vettikkunnel manuscript, in order to investigate the narrative of their religious identity, in the context of existing scholarly discourse.

During the Portuguese period, in 1599, the composite body of the undivided Syrian Christian Church was Latinized, mainly based on the allegation that they were Nestorians affiliated to the Church of the East, Nestorianism being a heresy rejected at the Council of Ephesus, in 431. The Latinization was rejected by the Syrian Christians in 1653, and the confusion that followed culminated in a schism in the Church in 1663, when two religious identities emerged: one Jacobite Syrian, and the other, Romo-Syrian. Portuguese writings asserting the Nestorianism of the Syrian Christians in the Pre-Portuguese times were re-iterated by subsequent historians, who developed the narrative that the Syrian Christians were Nestorians from the inception of their Church. These scholarly constructions continue to dominate the discourse on the subject, from Gouvea (1606), to La Croze (1724), to Hough (1839), to Neill (1984), and to Perczel (2011).

This thesis is an investigation of the identity of the Jacobite Syrian Christians, and their own perceptions of their origin, doctrinal position, and ecclesiastical affiliations that had evolved up to 1599. In doing so, it critically examines a range of documents in Malayalam, in particular the account given by Mathai Vettikkunnel, a cleric from Manarcadu in Kerala, and ten primary source documents, as well as four indigenous secondary sources in the form of historical narratives, which are well-known within the Jacobite Syrian community but have rarely been used by scholars. Mathai Vettikkunnel's text is transcribed and translated, and provided with a detailed historical commentary, with a view to tracing the narrative arc as articulated by Mathai Vettikkunnel and other Jacobite Syrian Christians with regard to their religious identity in pre-Colonial times. These accounts also form the basis for re-examining the alleged

Nestorian doctrinal position of the Syrian Christians in the pre-Latinization period. In examining the Jacobite Syrians' claims that they had maintained Antiochian links from the 4th century onward until the arrival of the Portuguese, special attention is paid to three areas: firstly, the question of the alleged Nestorian beliefs of the pre-schism Syrian Christian Church; secondly the agency, period, manner of the establishment of links with Antioch claimed by the Jacobite Syrians, and thirdly, how this self-perception of the Jacobite Syrians of their identity informed their rejection of Latinization.

This thesis argues that the data found in Mathai Vettikkunnel and in the corpus of indigenous literature testifies to the complexity of the Jacobite Syrian Christians' self-perception, and that it is at variance with the early Portuguese assertions and the currently dominant view on the subject in academic writings. It argues that there is strong evidence suggesting that the connection of the Jacobite Syrians with Antioch originated as early as the 4th century, when according to their own accounts, Semitic Christians from Mesopotamia migrated to Kerala, and that it was the forging of the combined Mesopotamian-Semitic and Keralan identity that helped in maintaining its links with Antioch, and its sustained resistance to Latinisation.

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Dedication

To the loving memory of my late parents

John and Elizabeth Abraham, Illikalam, Kumarakom

For their exemplary lives

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation:	Referent
SCM:	Syrian Christians of Malabar – referring to the St Thomas Christians in Malabar after the arrival of the Edessan bishops in 345AD, until 1653
JSC:	Jacobite Syrian Christians – referring to the SCMs who were re-affiliated to the Syrian Orthodox Church after the arrival of Mar Ahattalla in 1653 and the rejection of Roman authority. This is in contrast with the Romo-Syrians
CotE:	Church of the East
MV:	Mathai Vettikkunnel's unpublished letter 1720
CMS:	Church Missionary Society

Chapter 1 Introduction

In 1597, the Roman Catholic Archbishop Alexis Menezes (1559-1617) wrote about the Syrian Christians of Malabar as follows:

‘They had been in schisms and Nestorian error for a long time. To eradicate all these errors, I have decided to go there myself. I will convene a Synod of the clergy and bring them under the authority of the Roman Church and make them agree to accept the bishop whom the Pope appoints and cleanse their Church from all errors and from all schisms and remove from their midst all the books containing heresy. This is a dangerous journey. It is the Babel Patriarch who sends bishops to rule this Church, and not the Patriarch of Alexandria as was known to us. He (the Babel Patriarch) is a public heretic with a thousand errors and never desires to give them up....’¹

It was after writing these words to a fellow Catholic bishop, that Menezes embarked on his historic journey to Malabar² (Kaniamparambil 1989:63-4). Impelled by his conclusions about the doctrinal identity of the Syrian Christians of Malabar³ (referred

¹ The quote is taken from a letter of Archbishop Menezes, dated 19th Dec. 1597, to the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem (based in Rome), found in Kaniamparambil 1989:63-4, who in turn cites it from Catholic historian Fr. Bernard of Thoma 1916, Chapter 10. Arch-Corepiscopus Dr. Curien Kaniamparambil (1913-2015) was a theologian and historian of the Jacobite Syrian Christians.

² The Portuguese first used the term ‘Malabar’ to denote the south-west coast of India. This region was known earlier as ‘Malé’ (*Periplus* c.60, Pliny 77-79, and Cosmas c.550). The Portuguese erroneously took the medieval Arab term ‘Ma’bar’ (meaning ‘ford’ or ‘passage’), which was used for the Coromandel coast on the east side, and applied it to the west coast as ‘Malabar’. Malabar was not a term used by the people of the country, but rather *Malayala* (Caldwell 1875:25-29; Yule and Burnell 1886:411-13). The term ‘Malabar’ will be used in this thesis to denote the geographical region corresponding to that of present-day Kerala.

³ The term ‘Syrian Christians of Malabar’ (SCM), will be used to denote the undivided Christian community of Malabar, from 4th century. The Portuguese referred to the SCM as ‘Christians of the *Serra*’ (= Malabar) (Antonio Gouvea 1606:36,49). By the time of the Dutch arrival, the schism had divided the SCM, and the Dutch distinguished the two as ‘Syrian Christians’ and ‘Romo-Syrians’ (Baldaeus 1672:636,638, and Heber Drury’s translation of Jacob Visscher 1862:101).

to as ‘SCM’ hereafter) as cited above, Menezes arrived in Malabar in 1598, and, by the procedural and juridical instrument of a Synod held in 1599 in Diamper⁴, the Syrian Christians of alleged ‘Nestorian error’,⁵ were ‘reduced to the obedience of the Holy Roman Church’ (Geddes 1694:444). Through the Synod of Diamper, and the account of it recorded in Anton Gouvea’s *Jornada* of 1606,⁶ this identification of the SCM as ‘Nestorian’ entered the subsequent historical narratives about this community. This marked a key point in the divergence of perceptions of the SCM’s religious identity, which have remained controversial to this day.

This thesis will examine the question of perceptions of religious identity of the Syrian Christians of Malabar, through the analysis of a range of Jacobite texts, in particular an unpublished manuscript⁷ from 1720, by Mathai Vettikkunnel, a cleric from Manarcadu, Kerala.

1.1. Historical and religious context

The Portuguese annexation of Malabar, following Vasco da Gama’s arrival in 1498, was underpinned by the ‘*Padroado Real*’, a special dispensation from the Pope to the kings of Portugal, to avail themselves of certain revenues and religious prerogatives⁸ of the new territory in exchange for evangelising the country (Correa 1859:300)⁹. Their commission regarding the evangelising of Malabar also appears to have been uncompromisingly harsh.¹⁰

⁴ ‘Diamper’ is derived from the Malayalam *Udayamperoor*, a small town about 20 kilometres east of Kochi, and in the 16-17th centuries, an important centre of the SCM.

⁵ ‘Nestorianism’ as a dogma and a label will be discussed in Chapter 5.

⁶ Detailing Menezes’s journeys and actions in Malabar, the *Jornada* does not in fact include the 200 Decrees that were passed at Diamper.

⁷ Leiden University Archives: Or. 1214; Special Collections.

⁸ This included the right to appoint bishops to the new territories, which introduced a parallel religious authority to Rome, later leading to conflicts between the two, as will be seen in due course.

⁹ A Papal Bull allowed King Manuel and his successors full possession of the new territories, ‘without prejudice to any prior claims of other Christian powers’ Ravenstein (1898:115 footnote).

¹⁰ Accompanied by Catholic missionaries, Admiral Cabral’s remit in Malabar (in 1503) was to preach Christianity to the ‘heathens’ first, but if they rejected this religion of ‘charity’ and ‘love’, or obstructed or denied them commerce, then: ‘put them to the fire and the sword, and carry on fierce war against them’ (Stanley: 1869:vi, 86-7). According to eye-witness accounts, unspeakable cruelties were committed by Gama and his men in 1503 (Stanley 1869:25, 92, 318).

From the very outset, the Portuguese Catholics' encounters with the SCM were susceptible to misunderstandings and conflict. Lacking local accounts, it is difficult to obtain a balanced picture of the religious life of the SCM as encountered by the Portuguese. Almost all extant literature has emanated from the Portuguese perspective, and almost all material aspects of it have undergone changes since then.¹¹ Some general factors that emerge from these early accounts are: the SCM inhabiting the mercantile coastal cities were rich and prosperous, (Stanley 1869: 97-8), they were devout Christians (Ferroli 1939:99-100), said Mass like the Greeks, their bishops came from 'Babylon'¹², their traditions were markedly different from the Latins (Jones: 1863:178), they were about 30,000 people,¹³ they enjoyed considerable civil liberties and the protection of local Princes, and that they possessed an estimation of themselves as a separate people, conducting their lives 'apart from the non-Christian population' (Ferroli 1939:99-100).¹⁴

However, these early positive impressions of the SCM in relation to the honourable place they enjoyed in society, the respectable trades they followed, and the devoutly Christian lives they led (Mundadan 1984 Vol.1:156, 193-4), soon changed to one of censure.¹⁵ From the Portuguese perspective, the native Christians professed a different faith, their liturgy was in Syriac, their bishops seemed to arrive from Mesopotamia or Persia (Ferroli 1939:64),¹⁶ and they noted that the SCM referred to themselves as *Surian* (Malekandathil 2003:31). The Portuguese clerics do not appear to have enquired as to whether the Syrian bishops were being accepted as their own by the Syrians, or were rejected as imposters. The presence of these Syrian bishops in

¹¹ Most churches of Malabar at present lost their ancient architectural style, rebuilt in the 16th to 19th centuries in the Portuguese style.

¹² James Hough, the early 19th century English Chaplain, in his four volume *The History of Christianity in India* mentions how although Babylon and its empire had ceased to exist about five-hundred years before the Christian Era, the term continued to be used to refer to the region and the people (Hough Vol.1:243).

¹³ This number is seen conflated to '30,000 families', from which could be drawn '25,000 warriors', in Mundadan 1984 Vol.1:156.

¹⁴ In a country where each cast conducted themselves with minimal contact with each other, this was not unusual in Malabar of the time.

¹⁵ Excerpts from early censorious accounts of the SCM are given in Mundadan 1984 Vol.1:202-203, 477-85, 502-8.

¹⁶ Episcopacy in the SCM was derived from the Mother-Church in Syria/Mesopotamia. A similar tradition of drawing from a distant Mother Church rather than the indigenous people was followed in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church from the 4th century, where bishops came from the Coptic Church in Alexandria (Johann Mosheim 1832:272-3, 282 f.n.2). Gouvea noted how the SCM were deeply attached to the Syrian bishops (Dr. Pius Malekandathil's translation 2003:126).

Malabar and their activities were to have a defining impact on the SCM, because they were in direct conflict with the Portuguese power and the Catholic Church. According to Schurhammer (1934:20-21) these bishops' professed doctrinal and ecclesiastical identity informed the Portuguese clerics of religious identity of the SCM as different from that of Rome, and early encounters of the SCM with the Portuguese clerics from as early as 1503 or 1504 appears not to have been cordial.¹⁷

From the Syrians' perspective, they received the European traders and their clergy in the spirit of Christian fraternity, permitting the Catholics to use their churches to hold Masses. But when these freedoms began to be abused (Geddes 1694:9-11), the Portuguese clerics were prohibited from entering their churches, leading to conflicts at least from 1510 onwards.¹⁸

To the Portuguese Catholic missionaries, their own particular branch of Christianity was: 'the true and pure catholic religion, without which there could be no salvation; all the objections of schismatics were lies and artifices, whereby the Evil Spirit sought to seduce them, and lead them to hell' (Hough 1839:359-360). To the Portuguese clerics, the Syrians' liturgy, customs, and practices appeared to be 'Judaical', corrupt, and 'heathenish', and these 'evils' needed to be purged out of them to be worthy to be called true Christians (Geddes 1694:89-96). The Syrians' refusal to recognise the Pope of Rome as their Head was tantamount to declaring themselves schismatics,¹⁹ because, to the Catholics, there could only be one true Head of the Universal Christian Church and that was the Pope of Rome. Portuguese attempts in the early decades of the 16th century at reforming the SCM to Latin ways failed, leading to the frustration of the Catholic missionaries (Mundadan 1984:304-5)

With the arrival of Jesuit missionaries from the mid-1500s, these efforts began to be more focused and more precisely articulated, especially in the context of the arrival of

¹⁷: Schurhammer (1934) mentions how in the early decades of the 16th century, the bishops of the SCM (referred to as the 'Babylonian Prelates') were teaching 'heresies' (p.9), while the Catholic clergy were endeavouring to bring them to the 'obedience' of and 'submission' to Rome through 'instruction' (p.21) and the payment of a salary (p.22). Success was slow to materialise, as Bishop Mar Jacob accepted Roman rite only 'in his old age' (p.20), ie., by the middle of the 16th century.

¹⁸ In the interests of trade and political stability, Albuquerque, the Portuguese Archbishop of Goa, refused to carry out his king's order to 'visit the Christians with fire and sword' (Hunter 1886:117).

¹⁹ K.N. Daniel 1933, cites two 16th century Portuguese historians, Do Couto and De Souza, referring to the SCM as 'heretics and schismatics' (pp308-9).

three successive bishops over the next four decades, who were Nestorian and deputed by either the Church of the East (CotE)²⁰, or the branch that had adopted Roman Confession (Geddes 1694:17-22,24,30-40). The Jesuit Fathers argued that since these bishops had received Apostolic Succession from someone other than the Pope, they were schismatics, and in receiving Sacraments from them, the SCM too were schismatics (Gouvea 1606:32). From their understanding of the SCM liturgy and practices, and from the source of their bishops, the Portuguese were convinced that the SCM were Nestorians.²¹ Nestorianism was an acknowledged heresy, and because its doctrines were heretical, the SCM too were heretics. As both heretics and schismatics, the SCM had were required to abjure their heresy, join the Catholic Church and accept the Pope as their Head (Geddes 1694:42). But the SCM resisted all the missionaries attempt at proselytization to Catholicism, showing ‘no wish to convert’ (Correa:1859:302, Geddes 1694:12). Adopting these entrenched stances, a state of hostility persisted between the two sides. In the latter half of the 16th century, the three bishops who had arrived in Malabar were arrested in turn, examined by the Inquisition in Lisbon, and found to be guilty of professing Nestorianism. Two never returned to Malabar (Hough 1839 Vol I:285-288). But still the SCM prevaricated.

In a swift and decisive action carried out in the span of six months, Menezes brought the conflict to a forced resolution by holding the Synod of Diamper in 1599.²² Bringing all his powers of political, military, ecclesiastic and Roman dialectic domination to bear down on the Syrians, he was able to force them to accept Rome’s authority and confess the Pope as their Head, and to: ‘ask him [Menezes] for forgiveness for the past errors and to subject themselves to his obedience and to that of the Roman Church’ (Gouvea 1606:183). The Synod took place with participants

²⁰ As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the Church of the East was Dyophysite rather than ‘Nestorian’ in the sense of following the teachings of Nestorius. But during the period being discussed in this paper, the label ‘Nestorian Church’ referred to the CotE, and that label will be need to be used to discuss sources.

²¹ De Souza, writing in 1593: ‘these Christians [were] infested with the errors of Nestorians’ (cited in Daniel 1933:309).

²² Gouvea’s eye-witness account of the Synod in *Jornada* presents a favourable picture, but the Protestant minister Geddes gives a deprecating account drawing on original Portuguese documents he had access to in Lisbon, in his *History of the Church of Malabar* (1694:91-6), as do later historians James Hough (Vol.II:23-32), Hambye (1957:64), and Kaniamparambil (1982:128).

surrounded by Portuguese soldiers, which would have been sufficient to intimidate the SCM from rebellion.²³

The Syrians submission to Rome at Diamper however, was short-lived, and in 53 years they rejected Rome and returned to whatever faith it was that they had held before. This rejection of Rome took place at that historically pivotal point that came to be known as the ‘Oath of the Leaning Cross’ in January 1653, which is thought to have been triggered by the sudden death of the Syrian bishop Mar Ahattalla, who had arrived from Mesopotamia the previous year. The SCM saw this prelate and his death as symbols of their resistance to Rome and their identity as distinct from Catholicism, and proceeded to consecrate their Archdeacon Thomas as a bishop in accordance with patents received from this bishop before his death. The particular significance of Thomas’ elevation to episcopacy was that this was the first time in the SCM’s history that an indigenous cleric was being accorded this ecclesiastical high office. After twelve years’ uncertainty about the validity of this consecration at the hands of those of lesser orders, the consecration was canonically perfected when Archbishop Mar Gregorius, deputed by Antioch, arrived in 1665. With this, the SCM believed that they returned to their link with Antioch, both doctrinally and ecclesiastically, and came to be referred to by the pejorative epithet the ‘Jacobite Syrians’.²⁴ Those who remained under Rome’s authority were termed ‘Romo Syrians’. The Jacobite Syrian Church alone is the subject of this study.²⁵

²³ The manner in which the Synod was conducted will be examined in Chapter 6.5. From the early times of their arrival in India, the Portuguese had set the pattern of their dealings, in the ferocity with which they set about accomplishing their objectives. They had driven other trading nations out of the Arabian Sea, and had destroyed the city of Calicut in 1503 (Varthema 1508 in Jones and Badger 1863:178, Vanidas Elayavoor:1996/2008 127-131).

²⁴ Hereafter, referred to as JSC. In this thesis, SCM denotes the undivided Church that the Portuguese encountered in the 16th century, which was Latinised at Diamper in 1599, and continued as one Church until 1653. When the term ‘Jacobite Syrian Church’ (JSC) is used, it denotes one half of the SCM that rejected Rome, as opposed to the other half that remained under Rome. This latter group, for unambiguity, will be referred to as Romo-Syrians, although both groups continue to call themselves ‘Syrian Christians’.

²⁵ Just as the term ‘Nestorian’ was used to refer to and condemn those who followed the doctrine of Nestorius which was rejected at the first Council of Ephesus in 431, the term ‘Jacobite’ was used as a pejorative term for the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. At the 451 Council of Chalcedon when Christological formulas were debated, Antioch, along with other Oriental Churches rejected the Chalcedonian Formula of Christology, and was anathematised. The Syrian Church in particular was persecuted to the point of near-extinction, but was revived by the efforts of the Syrian prelate Jacob Baradaeus (d.578). The term ‘Jacobite’ thus came to be applied to this revived Syrian Church of

1.2. Dominant narratives

In attempting to determine how the JSC came to adopt the Jacobite faith of Antioch in 1653, Hough in his monumental work on the history of Christianity in India, developed a narrative based on the historical circumstances of this event. According to Hough (1839 Vol.II:299-300), towards the middle of the 16th century, the SCM decided to reject Roman authority and:

‘followed up the bold step they had taken in seceding from the Church of Rome, with an application to their ancient Patriarch at Mosul, to send them a bishop without delay. To guard against disappointment, they wrote also to the Patriarchs of the Copts, in Egypt, and of the Jacobites, in Syria, for the same purpose.....the Syrians’ impatience must have caused them to overlook the probable inconvenience that might have ensued, from the arrival of two bishops [from the Jacobite and Nestorian Churches] holding sentiments diametrically opposed to each other.It is very probable, however, that the Christians were too little acquainted with the respective tenets of those churches.to attach much importance to such a consequence, even if they had contemplated its probability.and the Syrians evidently attended more to the expediency of securing the primitive order of their church, than to points of doctrine’.

At what point this entered the narrative is unclear. The questionable nature of a Church that had till then resisted proselytization, indiscriminately appealing to three Churches that between them held two diametrically opposing dogmas required an examination of Hough’s sources, and this is satisfied in Joseph Thekkedath: ²⁶

‘It seems most likely that it was during these years (1648-9) that the Archdeacon (of the SCM) took the fatal step of writing secretly to the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, and to the Nestorian Patriarch of Babylon, giving them exaggerated reports of the state of abandonment in which the St. Thomas

Antioch after Baradaeus (Horatio Southgate 1840 Vol.II:179-80; Bar Hebraeus’ Chronicon Vol.2, translated by Chediath 1990:48-9; Ignatius Aphram Barsoum, translated by Matti Moosa 2003:300).

²⁶ Fr. Thekkedath (d.2019), a prominent Church Historian and Superior of the Salesians in Bangalore, in his .

Christians found themselves, and asking them to remedy the situation.’

Thekkedath bases this observation on his reading a report on this letter by a Capuchin missionary, Elzeario de Sansay of Cairo, written in 1649.²⁷

The Syrian Church of Antioch alone responded by sending the SCM a bishop, which according to Hough, was the point of commencement of the ecclesiastical link between Malabar and Antioch.²⁸ Thus, seen alongside Menezes’s observation that the SCM were Nestorians in the 16th century, two persisting assertions made by European historians (and Indian historians following Western accounts) regarding the historical and doctrinal identity of the SCM seem to emerge: firstly, that the SCM were ‘Nestorians’ attached to the CotE of Baghdad prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, and secondly, that they became ‘Jacobites’ affiliated to Antioch fifty years later, and that this latter adoption was done as a matter of expediency. The literature survey in Chapter 2 will examine how these narratives developed, and how, over the next 500 years, successive historians drew on these earlier interpretations to build up a narrative that diverged very significantly from the narrative of the SCM community themselves.

1.3. Rationale for this study

Accounts of the religious identity of the SCM by their own writers were relatively difficult to access for many European historians: for most people in the SCM community, their histories were passed down through the oral tradition, almost all written accounts that did exist were in Malayalam, they were generally kept in private keeping, and a number of them were destroyed at the Synod of Diamper and in the ongoing conflict between the SCM and Catholic missionaries after their 1653

²⁷ Thekkedath 1972:38. These documents are in the Propaganda Fide archives SOCG 191 f.658, and copies in SOCG 212 ff.207-8,247. Thekkedath does not indicate the Catholic missionary’s sources for this information.

²⁸ Hough 1839 Vol.II:299-300.

rebellion.²⁹ However, this does not explain the neglect of the SCM's own narrative by those writers who did have access to written SCM sources or the opportunity to gather information from members of the community themselves. It appears that many historians simply considered the SCM to be unreliable witnesses of their own history and identity (Hough 1839: Vol.1:40,42).

As John Webster, a missionary of the American Presbyterian Church in India (1963-2001) noted:

'Despite the presence of such diverse sources in so many repositories, I did not get everything I was looking for. Three deficiencies were particularly frustrating. One was the general lack of relevant materials in Indian languages, as so few seem to have been preserved. The second is that the Indian "voice" is so silent in these sources. It does come through at key moments, often after passing through a missionary filter, but it would be much better to have heard more independent Indian voices in the sources consulted' (Webster 2008:11).

This thesis will examine a number of significant written texts, especially from the 17th and 18th centuries, that reflect the Jacobite perception of the SCM history and religious identity. It will critically analyse variations in these narratives and those from the dominant historical narratives, initially shaped by European historians.

The Jacobite narratives often present their religious identity through the recitation of key historical events, of which three appear critical: firstly, the arrival of St Thomas in 52 bringing Christianity to Malabar, secondly, the arrival of a group of settlers from Edessa in 345 bringing the Syrian liturgy, language, religious practices and the ecclesiastical links with Antioch, and thirdly, the arrival of another group of Mesopotamian settlers, who reinforced the Syrian links and secured the future well-being of the SCM community. A close examination of these three key points and their treatment in the indigenous sources and critical analysis of terms and dates is required.

²⁹ In the course of the Synod at Diamper, the Archbishop is reported to have burnt books publicly every evening, when 'he used to put on the pontifical vestments, to perform the office and procession of the dead' (Malekandathil 2003:294). The same was repeated fifty years later, when after the rebellion of the SCM, and the Portuguese captured the Syrians' Archdeacon, Archbishop Garcia burnt the Archdeacons' books and vestments, and poured out the holy oils into the fire' (Kaniamparambil 1989:94)

1.4. Theoretical framework

In his 'Culture and Imperialism,' Edward Said has argued the notion that the concept of 'nations' is essentially 'narrations'. 'The power to narrate,' he asserts, 'or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them' (Said 1994:xiii). Said postulates that narrative is the method by which explorers have described unfamiliar regions of the world. It is also the method by which the colonised have asserted their own identity and the existence of their history. Said identifies land as the primary object of conquest in imperialism, and, in the context of imperialism, extended this to the articulation of identity of the indigenous people. He argues that the locus of contention was 'reflected, contested and decided', which in essence were the stories of the loss and regaining of land (Said 1994:xiii). When this is extended to the context of religion, the locus of contention is moved to the lived experience of religion, and the narrative is the naming and articulation of that religious identity, and how it is contested, lost or won. In the realm of religion, identity becomes defined along the parameters of culture, that is to say, all those rituals, practices and modes of being and behaviour, communication and discourse.

Underpinning this research is a theoretical framework that attempts to identify how constructed narratives were used in the context of political colonialization by European powers in Malabar since the 16th centuries. It will examine how far the narratives that have developed with respect to the identity of the Syrian Christians in Malabar are aligned with the Syrians' own narrative, and how far they appear to have been shaped by colonial interests.

John B. Thompson has noted that, as the nature of discourse is already an interpretation of events, or action, or expression set down in writing, or in any other communicative acts, its analysis therefore is only 'an interpretation of an interpretation.' (Thompson 1984: 133-139). Language and discourse are a form of social phenomena. Social phenomena, according to Thompson, are enmeshed in power relationships which are marked by conflict, and exemplified through the struggle over words, action and force. Words and actions, wittingly or unwittingly, sustain or resist networks of power and domination in relation to others in the social world.

As William Taylor has argued, ‘Narratives of identity’ are ways in which communities describe and define themselves – both to themselves and others’ (Taylor 2013:1). In the context of colonialization, however, there is a tension between the narrative identity of the community itself and the narrative identity created and imposed by the dominant culture. Discursive construction of narrative attributes presupposed identities and histories. It is made possible by the assumption of agency of such assignments by the superior power, within the framework of its own arrival in the context, before which colonised had no histories, and after which, the identity as well as the narrative of history is constructed within this framework.³⁰

According to Nicholas Canny³¹ a trait of the colonialist mindset was that they ‘went to great lengths to establish the inferiority of others so as to provide a justification for acts of aggression’ (Canny 1998:202). Part of the colonists’ narrative is the idea of process and development, and the formulation of notions of cultural evolution. An assumption was that the coloniser was at a more advanced point than the colonised on that continuum of cultural evolution, and it was the civic duty of the coloniser to help the colonised move along that continuum through the provision of education (Canny 1998:192). When the colonised were already Christian, that position of inferiority in cultural evolution was articulated in terms of what state the Christianity they practised was in, for example describing their moral and spiritual inadequacy, and the lack of order and maintenance of their religious houses (Canny 1998:188-9). This thesis considers whether the divergence in narratives between the SCM and the (initially) European narratives reflect a similar mindset as that described by Canny above. It examines the extent to which there is tension between the narratives of the colonised and the colonisers in Malabar, and the processes by which the colonisers established their narratives, which in due course became the dominant narrative.

Speaking of the worth attributed to a studied subject, Taylor (1997:72) states:

³⁰ See Rae 1892 *The Syrian Church in India* p228 for this mode of argument, where he states that without European historical accounts, the SCM history is ‘an absolute blank’.

³¹ Canny 1998 *The Ideology of English colonialization: from Ireland to America*, in *Theories of Empire 1450-1800*.

‘...on the human level, one could argue that it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time – that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable – are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we abhor and reject.....It would take a supreme arrogance to discount this possibility *a priori*’ (Taylor 1997:72-73).

In Malabar, the narratives of the colonisers have been so well established that the colonised themselves often accept those over their own. The importance of this study is to re-evaluate the construction of these divergent narratives, particularly with an analysis of the Syrian Jacobite accounts, their inter-textual consistency, and their interpretation in the light of other sources.

An important feature of the SCM religious identity is the role of collective memory in its articulation and transmission across generations. According to Ricoeur, memory: ‘can be seen as the precondition and the mechanism of both identity and history’ (Dudley Andrew: Tracing Ricoeur, in *Diacritics* 30:2:2000, p.64). Socrates first used the term *Anamnesis* to mean a ‘significant, or teleological memory’ (Ricoeur:2004:21), but in its post-modern interpretation, teleology pre-supposes causality, and it gives a narrative understanding of the subject and the independent separateness of the self.³² *Anamnesis* provides the recalling, reiteration of tradition in which the subject participates, and these events of participation help in liberating the identity.

The individual and collective memories may have been seen to present philosophical tensions of being opposed to each other, but Ricoeur again points out the superficiality of such tensions because of the unity of individual and collective recall, which he has demonstrated with the example of the Gospel parable of the drachma (Ricoeur 2004: 99). Maurice Halbwachs affirms the role communal memory plays in the phenomenon

³² Judy Lochhead in *Postmodern Music Postmodern Thought* 2002:6 has argued that the notion of ‘action axioms’ that have teleological or pre-existing ends in the historical process is reductive and harmful to those whose stories are diminished or overlooked, and suggests a better model, which is a narrative understanding of oneself, one’s independent separateness, and tradition which one participates in, all helping to liberate identity.

of the formation of collective identity, where the notion of ‘collective identity’ is one in which: ‘those who conceive their unity and peculiarity’ do so collectively through those unities and peculiarities and: ‘through a common image of the past’ (Halbwachs 1980:128).

The significance of this is not inconsequential, for as Ricoeur has observed on the relationship between memory, history and communal identity, memory and history inhabit the same territory (Ricoeur 2004:397). Thus, when we enter the field of history it is: ‘not with the single hypothesis of the polarity between individual memory and collective memory’, ‘but with the hypothesis of the threefold attribution of memory: to oneself, to one’s close relations, and to others.’ This threefold relation as seen in Ricoeur’s theory on memory is the device which brings together the different individual life-experiences as remembered elements of the past to form the collective identity (Ricoeur 2004:132).

In the case of the Church as a whole, the concept of *anamnesis* formed the centre of its theology, and of its practice, in the re-enactment of the Eucharist, recalling the past event in the present while simultaneously anticipating the future (Andrew, 2000:64). Through its hymnody this significant memory extended into the commemoration of individual saints, heroes and heroines in the formulation of a communal identity, which in turn reinforced: ‘a particular view of history and the identity of the community’ (Morony 2005:29).

Cardinal Gibbons, citing the Symbol of Constantinople³³, enumerates the attributes of a True Church as being: Universal, Apostolic, One and Holy. In examining the communal identity of the Syrian Christian Church of Kerala, these profound doctrinal factors are only perceived as subsumed by the collective experience and memory of the community, as practised in its everyday rites and traditions, as well as set down in its written and oral narratives.

³³ Malayalam translation by Thomas Inchakkalodi 1962:12

1.5. Original research: three research questions

This thesis is an investigation of the identity of the Jacobite Syrian Christians, and their own perceptions of their origin, doctrinal position, and ecclesiastical affiliations that had evolved up to 1700. In doing so, it critically examines a range of Jacobite documents in Malayalam, in particular the letter Mathai Vettikkunnel, and a number of other indigenous sources dated between 1503 and 1982. These sources are well-known within the Jacobite Syrian community but have rarely been used by Indian or European scholars. These accounts also form the basis for re-examining the alleged Nestorian doctrinal position of the Syrian Christians in the pre-Latinization period. In investigating the Jacobite Syrians' claims that they had maintained Antiochian links from the 4th century onward until the arrival of the Portuguese, special attention is paid to three areas:

1. How valid is the allegation of Nestorian identity of the pre-Latinized Syrian Christians of Malabar?
2. What was the nature and history of the relationship of the Syrian Christians of Malabar with the See of Antioch?
3. How far did the Jacobite Syrians' religious self-perception influence their response to Latinization?

1.6. Structure of the present study

Chapter 2 *Literature Survey* reviews the literature on the history and identity of SCM spanning the period from 16th century to present day publications. It will identify the more dominant themes and assertions that have evolved over time and taken shape in the scholarly engagement with this subject to the present day.

Chapter 3 produces a critical edition of the unpublished letter in Malayalam, written by Mathai Vettikkunnel in 1720 to the then Dutch governor, containing a lengthy narrative of the origin and evolution of the SCM, and which at present is the oldest surviving account written by an indigenous Syrian Christian. The Mathai Vettikkunnel text is transcribed, translated, and provided with a detailed historical

commentary, with a view to tracing the narrative arc as articulated by Mathai Vettikkunnel. This text will be analysed by the hermeneutical circle of interpretation, and will be critically evaluated on the basis of a broad framework of exegetical parameters, including the location, date, and ongoing discourse regarding this community to which the text is directed. By this process, this aims to determine the identity and Church-affiliation of the author, as well as the nodal points, dominant themes and identity-markers employed by the author in communicating the narrative history and religious identity of his Church.

In Chapter 4, a corpus of primary Jacobite sources of the 17-18th centuries are presented. The narrative nodal points, dominant themes and identity-markers identified in Chapter 3 are examined in these sources, in order to consider how far this corpus exhibits concordance with Mathai Vettikkunnel's narrative, as well as their inter-textual coherence and consistency, in terms of the perception and articulation of the religious identity of the SCM.

The three research questions will be addressed through these internal sources by the dialectical process, drawing on a wide range of scholarly texts, including religious and political histories, and doctrinal, linguistic, and anthropological studies. By taking into consideration the frames of reference of these texts, as well as the modes employed in their expression, the study aims to arrive at a more nuanced interpretation of texts and events, situating them in the complex social milieu of Malabar in the relevant historical periods.

Chapter 5 analyses the question of the SCM's religious beliefs, in particular whether they were Nestorian or not. It re-examines the evidence presented in these dominant narratives and how the Jacobite texts position themselves alongside them.

Chapter 6 critically analyses the challenges and alternative accounts of the dominant narratives on the Apostolic foundation and the establishment of ecclesiastical links to Antioch, as claimed by the Jacobites. Further, it critically examines how this religious identity, as articulated by the Jacobites, informed and directed their response to Latinisation throughout the 16th century, particularly in 1599, and their rebellion of 1653. Finally, the thesis addresses the last of the research questions, whether Jacobitism was introduced to Malabar in the mid-17th century, or whether this was part

of their identity from an earlier period. This chapter ends with an examination of the theoretical notions that exemplify how far belief-systems are articulated as clearly defined dogmas in religious communities, the mode and manner by which such belief-systems are transmitted across generations, and the degree of their susceptibility to change.

Chapter 7 summarises the findings of the research and considers their significance for reviewing the currently dominant narrative in existing histories on the SCM, as well as areas for further research.

Chapter 2 Literature Survey

There is a vast body of literature about the Syrian Christians of Malabar. What began as short references to this body of Christians in antiquity, developed, from the Portuguese colonial period onwards, into longer detailed accounts which addressed and explored issues of their religious identity and origins. While the Portuguese accounts were written from a clearly Roman Catholic perspective, the accounts of the 17th to late 19th centuries, written in the particular context of Dutch and English powers competing to establish colonies and trading monopolies and of rivalry between Catholic and Protestant denominations at a time of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, are seen to reflect a view of the SCM as seen through a distinctly Catholic or Protestant filter. While some texts were written by people who spent many years in Malabar³⁴ and were able to speak and read Malayalam, a significant number of texts were written from Europe with no access to primary sources. The volume and accessibility of published writings from these earlier European authors have clearly been influential on the historical accounts of the SCM in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The paucity of SCM texts during this period was noted by the Scottish minister George Milne Rae in 1892:

‘To foreign scholars the Syrians likewise owe their knowledge of the history of their own church. Take away the history of the Syrian Church in high Asia, the ‘Christian Topography’ of Cosmas, and the great work of Assemanus, take away the Persian crosses and the copper-plate charters, and the history of the Syrian Church in Malabar, at least till the coming of the Portuguese, would be an absolute blank’.³⁵

³⁴ For example, Jacob Visscher, Claudius Buchanan, Benjamin Bailey, George Howard.

³⁵ Rae 1892 *The Syrian Church in India* p228.

This is not entirely accurate, as there were SCM texts at that time, although far fewer. While literature produced by the SCM has been referenced by some historians, it has generally not been given sufficient credibility to shape the dominant narratives that exist in published histories of the community.³⁶ As will be seen in Chapter 4, texts from the Jacobite Syrians were almost all in Malayalam (or Syriac) until the 20th century, when the first accounts in English from the Jacobites start to appear.

The survey in this chapter will focus on the body of literature, relating to the religious identity of the SCM, written in English or other European languages from the 16th century to the present day, and trace the development of what has become the dominant narratives.

2.1. Early references

From antiquity to the late medieval period, the existence of a Christian community in southern India has been mentioned by many writers, but without reference to the doctrinal identity of the community.³⁷ By contrast, there are no known original SCM manuscripts that are referenced from this early period.

2.2. The Portuguese period (1498-1663)

There is little evidence of Portuguese efforts in the early 16th century of collecting any histories obtained from the SCM. However, there was a significant number of letters and reports that were written during the 16th century by the Portuguese political and

³⁶ Rae surveys the literature to date and states that Gouvea was ‘substantially correct’ and more credible than any account of the SCM themselves (1892:230-1).

³⁷ For details of these, see Ferroli 1939:58-67, Gillman and Klimkeit 1999:161-3.

religious authorities. The historian Diego do Couto³⁸ and Archbishop Francisco Roz³⁹ were some of the earliest Portuguese to write about the history of the SCM. The seminal work of the Portuguese period is the early 17th century *Jornada* by Anton Gouvea, in Portuguese,⁴⁰ being an account of the Synod of Diamper of 1599. In addition to tracing the history and evolution of the SCM, from St Thomas and the Mesopotamian migrations, he describes the religious rites and practices of the SCM, interpreting them as Nestorian and thus justifying the Synod.

2.3 Dutch Period 1663- 1775

Initial Dutch response to the Syrian Christian presence in Malabar appears to have been positive to some extent, possibly reflecting, as Protestants, their anti-Catholic sentiments, reflected in the early expulsion of all Portuguese Catholics from Malabar. However, the Dutch authorities did allow the Catholic missionaries to return, leading to Mar Thoma IV's refusal to respond to Visscher's invitation for a meeting (Drury 1862:8). This lack of dialogue was reinforced by the fact that the SCM had mostly retreated into inaccessible mountainous areas, and the Dutch relied on Catholic sources to gain an understanding of the SCM and their beliefs. Consequently, Dutch accounts of the Syrian Christians tend to reflect heavily earlier Catholic accounts.

One of the first Dutch Protestants to write an account of the SCM was Philippus Baldaeus, a soldier-cleric⁴¹ who lived in Kochi between 1663 and 1673, and published his *Description of the most celebrated East India coasts of Malabar and Coromandel* in 1672.⁴² Baldaeus himself drew on Portuguese documents that were captured when the Dutch took Kochi (Baldaeus 1671:636). He accepts and recounts the SCM foundational narrative originating with St Thomas (p.637), and also recounts how the

³⁸ Do Couto 1616 *Decadas da Asia*: Vol. VII, Book X, Chapter X pp521-528.

³⁹ Francisco Roz's full manuscript (*Relação da Serra* 1604) remains unpublished (British Library, additional MS 9853), but excerpts relating to the SCM are published in Monteiro d'Aguar (1930).

⁴⁰ The translation of the *Jornada* into English, by Fr Dr Pius Malekandathil (2005), will be used in this study.

⁴¹ Baldaeus 1672:634.

⁴² Originally written in Dutch in 1672, this paper refers to the English translation printed in 1703.

Syrian Church in the 4th century, was revived by ‘*Martome*’,⁴³ a native of Syria (p.638). He assigns to later ‘diverse other teachers’ from Syria, Chaldea and Egypt, the introduction of Syriac liturgy, restoring among them the ‘former purity of Religion’ (p.638), and traces the introduction of the ‘Nestorian heresy’ to its links with Syria (p.638).

In the early 18th century, Jacob Canter Visscher, another Dutch cleric, sent detailed letters to his family in Amsterdam (1714-24), which attracted significant interest in Europe.⁴⁴ The earliest surviving account of the SCM was also written in this period, by an indigenous priest, Mathai Vettikkunnel (c.a.1720) contained in a letter addressed to the Dutch Commander.⁴⁵

Michael Geddes⁴⁶ published in 1694 a strongly critical account of the Portuguese colonial exploits in Malabar, their interference in the religious life of the SCM during the 16th century, and the forcible convening of Synod of Diamper in 1599, including the full text of Decrees of Diamper for the first time. His account stands in contrast to Gouvea’s positive portrayal of the Synod, but Geddes does not treat the subject of the religious identity or alleged Nestorianism of the SCM.

In 1724, Mathurin La Croze, a French Catholic who became a Protestant, published his *Histoire du Christianisme aux Indes*. Though never visiting Malabar and relying solely on earlier Catholic accounts, he was the earliest writer to challenge the foundational narrative of the SCM. He believed that the Apostle’s identity had been confused, either with that of one of Mani’s disciples of the same name (Hough 1839:40-1)⁴⁷ or with Thomas Cana (Hough 1839:46-7). Regarding the doctrine of the Syrians, La Croze, referencing Cosmas, asserts that they were Nestorians, since, according to him, Christianity was established in Malabar in the 6th century⁴⁸. Citing

⁴³ He appears to mean Knai Thoma, the 4th century merchant, but wrongly uses the term ‘Mar Thome’ (St Thomas) which is the term used by the SCM to denote the Apostle.

⁴⁴ First published in Dutch by Cornelius Visscher in 1743, accessed here through Major Heber Drury’s English translation, *Letters from Malabar* (1862).

⁴⁵ Leiden University Archives: Or.1214. Chapter 3 is a critical edition of this unpublished Malayalam text.

⁴⁶ Geddes, based in Lisbon as chaplain to the English factory (1678-83), wrote his *History of the Church Malabar* in 1694.

⁴⁷ La Croze’s account of the SCM is accessed through Hough 1839, who quotes him extensively.

⁴⁸ As cited in Hough 1839 Vol I:73.

Renaudot, La Croze argues that the Antiochian links of the SCM began with the arrival of Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem in 1665.⁴⁹

Another influential publication in the 18th century was Giuseppe Assemani's⁵⁰ *Biblioteca Orientalia* (1725), which contained Latin translations of various Syriac texts with commentaries. Assemani described the SCM as being Nestorians from the 6th century, receiving bishops from Babylonia, and refers to Knai Thoma⁵¹ as 'Archbishop of Persia who was a leading prelate of that sect'.⁵²

2.4 British Period – 1798 to mid-20th century

The initial attitude of the British to the SCM was positive, as can be seen in the recommendations to the British East India Company to defend the 'primitive Church' from any further depredations by Rome (Kerr's Report: 1806:519). Influential writers in this period include R H Kerr 1806 and Claudius Buchanan 1812⁵³, whose accounts reflect their wish for the SCM to unite with the Anglican Church, partly for political expediency.⁵⁴ Kerr also argued for the need to guard against the continuing spread of Catholicism in the country, which was disseminating misinformation and prejudice against the British as well as their Protestant faith (Kerr 1806:524). These two ministers approved of the SCM's rejection of most tenets of Catholic dogma and

⁴⁹ As cited in Hough 1839 Vol II:300-1.

⁵⁰ A Lebanese Maronite, who became the Curator of the Vatican Archives, and brought a large number of Syriac volumes from Mesopotamia.

⁵¹ In SCM accounts, he was a 4th century merchant who brought the Edessan settlers.

⁵² As cited in Hough 1839 Vol I:86.

⁵³ Buchanan was Chaplain of the East India Company in Calcutta, and Kerr was Senior Chaplain at the Fort St. George, sent by Lord William Bentinck, Governor of Madras. Kerr's remit was to gather: 'every possible information' relating to the establishment of Christianity in Malayala. They visited numerous Syrian churches, interviewed its Metropolitan and clergy, and Kerr's official Report and Buchanan's personal account were published in the American journal, *The Panoplist*, (1808) Vol.III. 518-532. Buchanan's collection of SCM manuscripts, including the ancient Peshitto Bible, received from the Syrian Metropolitan, are now in the Cambridge University Library: 'Buchanan Collection' (Oo I.1-51). For details of these, see F C Burkitt 1928 *Buchanan MSS at Cambridge* in Kerala Society Papers, Series 1:40-44.

⁵⁴ Kerr argues that the objective was more to use education as a way of making them more compliant to British authority, than interfering with their religious tenets (Kerr 1806:522-5).

practice, though Kerr accepts the argument from La Croze that they were Nestorian from the 6th century.⁵⁵

Buchanan did not address the subject of the origins of the Syrian church (though recognising its antiquity). Baron von Wrede⁵⁶, basing his argument on La Croze, expressed scepticism about its Apostolic foundations and claimed that the SCM were Nestorian from the beginning, though Kerr argued against Wrede saying the SCM historical accounts were ‘very far from fabulous’.⁵⁷

The next wave of publications on the SCM came from Benjamin Bailey and Joseph Fenn⁵⁸, whose writing was generally published as reports or articles in missionary journals, and reflecting a more Protestant evangelical position.⁵⁹ When the Anglican Bishop Middleton and the political agent of the East India Company, Colonel Munro, attempted to bring about the union between the SCM and the Anglicans, it was firmly resisted by the SCM, leading to a detriment in their relations, which was reflected in the development of a more critical approach of the SCM in subsequent publications.⁶⁰

In 1839, James Hough published *The History of Christianity in India* that became one of the most influential reference points for future historians.⁶¹ He reviewed a wide range of sources, presenting arguments for and against key aspects of SCM history and identity, including the foundational narrative, the links with Syria and the issue of Nestorian beliefs. In his Preface, he says that he undertook the work because of the misrepresentations of the British Protestant Church by various Catholic writers in

⁵⁵ Kerr 1806:520 says: ‘That the Christians in Malabar were taught the tenets of Nestorius, is proved by La Croze, on the direct authority of Cosmas, an Egyptian merchant (himself a Nestorian)’.

⁵⁶ Baron Von Wrede 1803 *Account of the St. Thomas Christians on the coast of Malabar* in Asiatic Researches Vol. VII, pp.362-80.

⁵⁷ Kerr 1808:520.

⁵⁸ Sent by the Church Missionary Society to Kottayam, the centre of the Syrian Christians at that time, to develop a relationship with the Syrian Church, following recommendations from Kerr and Buchanan.

⁵⁹ Bailey 1819 *Abstract of a Brief History of the Syrians in Malabar, preserved among themselves, as their Genuine History*. In Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East, Vol.19, 1818-19, p317-320. Fenn 1818 Letter, in *Proceedings of the CMS for Africa and Asia*, Vol.19, 1818, p322-327.

⁶⁰ Meetings at episcopal level between 1818 and 1835 failed to persuade the Syrians to unite with the Anglicans, as they were unwilling to change important tenets of their doctrine and practices in favour of Anglican ones. The increasingly critical treatment of the SCM’s ecclesiology is reflected in the writings of British historians from the mid-19th century onward, most notably Milne-Rae and Burkitt.

⁶¹ Hough, a missionary in Tamil Nadu from 1816, visited Malabar in 1826, and returning to England, published his 4-volume of Christianity in India in 1839.

popular journals of the time.⁶² Following La Croze's original proposition, Hough particularly gives weight to the account of the 6th century Alexandrian traveller, Cosmas Indicopleustes, who reported that the Malabar Christians' bishops came from Persia⁶³ and Persia was interpreted as meaning the 'Nestorian' CotE (Hough 1839:Vol 1:87). Hough thus reaffirms the Catholic allegation (in 1599) that the SCM, prior to their Latinization, held heretical Nestorian dogmas. Hough argues that in 1653 when the SCM appealed for help to Alexandria, Antioch and the CotE, it was only Antioch that responded, by sending Patriarch Mar Ahattalla, and that this was the point at which the SCM aligned themselves with Antioch.⁶⁴ Picking up on La Croze and Wrede, Hough also develops the argument against the Thomasine foundation narrative and the Edessan migration that, according to the SCM accounts, aligned the St Thomas Christians with Antioch (Hough 1839 Vol.I:32-45). Hough suggests that there may have been confusion between St Thomas and a later Thomas (whom the SCM claim brought the Edessan migration party in the 4th century (Hough 1839:95-97), suggesting that Christianity reached Malabar through emissaries from Alexandria (Hough 1839:44). As will be discussed in Chapter 5.3, he argues that the SCM moved between Jacobitism and Nestorianism between 4th and 9th centuries.

By the mid-19th century, as political changes strengthened the British position in India,⁶⁵ they moved towards encouraging and establishing a breakaway reform group among the SCM, rather than bringing the Syrian Church itself within its fold. The reform group, supported by the CMS, became the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, initially created in 1852 and formally separated from the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in 1889. With court cases over the ownership of churches and other assets, the ongoing schism was particularly bitter in the second half of the 19th century. In this period, the number of publications about the SCM by British writers – both living in India and in Britain – increased significantly, and became more critical of the SCM's dogma,

⁶² Hough, 1839, Vol.I vii, citing Abbe Dubois (1765-1848), a French Catholic missionary, who stated in his *Letters on the State of Christianity in India*, that Protestantism lacked ritual and ceremony, and so was unattractive to the Indian culture. Hough also enumerated nineteen particulars on which the SCM agreed with the Protestant Reformed Churches of Europe and elsewhere, and, more importantly, he also detailed in what respects the SCM differed from the Church of Rome (1839 Vol. II:13-18).

⁶³ See McCrindle's 1897 translation of Cosmas, p119.

⁶⁴ Hough 1839 Vol.II:299-300.

⁶⁵ By 1865, the British Crown took over control of India from the East India Company, and streamlined its rule along colonial lines.

practices and historical accounts. W.W. Hunter⁶⁶ states that the SCM foundational narratives were ‘mere legends suggested to them by foreigners in the Middle Ages’ (Hunter 1886:235-6), and that they were clearly Nestorian because of the connection with Persia, drawing on Cosmas and others (Hunter 1886:237). Alternative explanations for how Christianity reached Malabar (other than St Thomas) were suggested as the arrival of emissaries from the Mesopotamian region or even through the Manichaeans (Burnell 1885:85).⁶⁷ Henry Yule argues that all Christian communities in the Arabian Sea rim were Nestorian (Yule 1915:219-220).⁶⁸ Rae argues that the SCM first became Jacobite in 1665, when a Jacobite bishop happened to be the first bishop to reach them after a general plea for help (Rae 1892:261). Rae is also critical of ‘errors’ of doctrine and practice among the SCM, claiming that they were derived from ‘the Nestorian Church of Babylon’ (Rae 1892:232-3).

However, criticism of the SCM narrative account was not universal in this period. George Howard⁶⁹ analyses the liturgies of the SCM and concludes they were Jacobite and pre-date the arrival of the Portuguese, arguing that the examples of Nestorian liturgies condemned at the Synod of Diamper were not actually adopted by the SCM.⁷⁰ Whitehouse argues a number of historical points that support the SCM foundational narratives, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Hunter 1886 *The Indian Empire: Its People, History and Products*.

⁶⁷ Burnell, A.C. (1885) *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*

⁶⁸ Yule (1866) *Cathay and the Way Thither*, Vol. I. Reference here to revised edition by Cordier in 1915.

⁶⁹ Assistant Chaplain in Madras, published *The Christians of St Thomas and their Liturgies* in 1864, based on Syriac manuscripts obtained in Malabar.

⁷⁰ ‘It is doubtful whether the Nestorian heresy took a deep hold in this branch of the Church’ (Howard 1864:18).

⁷¹ Whitehouse was Minister of the Government Church, Cochin, and published *Lingerings of Light in a Dark Land* in 1873.

2.5 20th century

Early 20th century histories present a continuation of the 19th century arguments. Richard Garbe⁷², citing 19th century authors such as Burnell and Hunter, rejects the St Thomas and Edessan migration traditions of the SCM, arguing that in their isolation and ignorance, they had mixed names of the three Thomases (St Thomas, Thomas a disciple of Mani, and Knai Thoma) and concentrated them upon one person of the Apostle (1959:144), explaining this as ‘Indians of the Dravidian race were ignorant people’.

The original SCM community had by this time divided into six major denominations: the Syro-Malabar Catholics, the Chaldean Catholics, the Latin Catholics, the Syro-Malankara Catholics, the Mar Thoma Protestant Church, and the Jacobites. As a consequence, many histories of this period can be seen to be more teleological in nature as writers from different denominations endeavoured to explain the linear narrative of their own denomination.⁷³

The number of Catholic writers in English on the Christians in South India also increased (G.T. Mackenzie,⁷⁴ Bishop Adolphus Medlycott,⁷⁵ Adrian Fortescue,⁷⁶ Jesuit Father Domenico Ferrolì,⁷⁷ and Cardinal Eugene Tisserant⁷⁸). In general, these historians were more accepting of the SCM foundational narrative,⁷⁹ but generally argued in favour of the Nestorian identity of the undivided Syrian Church of Malabar before the arrival of the Portuguese. The mid-20th century saw a significant growth

⁷² Garbe, of German origin, and Sanskrit scholar: his 1914 work *India and Christendom* was translated in 1959.

⁷³ The immediate impetus for publishing denominationally divergent accounts was the Travancore Government deputing its Chief Minister (or Diwan) Nagam Aya to produce a State Manual, giving an account of the country and its people.

⁷⁴ Mackenzie (1901) *Christianity in Travancore*.

⁷⁵ Medlycott (1905) *India and the Apostle Thomas: An enquiry with a critical analysis of the Acta Thomae*.

⁷⁶ Fortescue (1913) *The Lesser Eastern Churches*.

⁷⁷ Ferrolì (1939) *The Jesuits in Malabar* Vol.I.

⁷⁸ Tisserant (1957:18) *Eastern Christianity in India*. Translated by E R Hambye

⁷⁹ Medlycott details other sources that support his argument in favour of the Thomasine foundation story (1934:18-161).

in the number of native Keralan Catholic historians⁸⁰ publishing books or articles on the history and identity of the SCM: Mani Nidhiry,⁸¹ J Panjikaran,⁸² Father Bernard of St Thomas,⁸³ J. Thaliath,⁸⁴ Joseph Thekkedath,⁸⁵ Placid Podipara,⁸⁶ all drawing particularly on the work of the German Jesuit Father, George Schurhammer, who rejected the Nestorian identity of the SCM, and arguing instead that that the SCM were Catholics prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, with only some pagan accretions in their practices, proposing that they were Uniate Chaldeans.⁸⁷ In 1911, P.U. Lukas brought together ancient privately-held documents to copy and publish a large corpus of SCM Ballads, bringing this critical SCM source to public access for the first time.⁸⁸

As well as the more specifically denominational accounts, there were also histories published by a number of secular historians, most notable of which was Nagam Aiya's *Travancore State Manual*. Aiya was a Hindu, and as the Travancore Maharajah's Chief Minister, wrote his seminal work, which included a lengthy chapter on the SCM.⁸⁹ Edgar Thurston and K Rangachari published an ethnographic study of castes and tribes of South India, gathering information directly from the informants within the communities, providing a source for comparing SCM and Hindu accounts for some historical events.⁹⁰

What is clearly noticeable in the corpus of histories available is a paucity of native Jacobite Syrian Christian involvement or interventions in the process of historical writings in the 19th and 20th centuries in European languages, especially when other

⁸⁰ Some were sent to study in European institutions and, acquiring proficiency in classical and modern European languages and in the Western mode of research and historical writing, their works gained academic acceptance.

⁸¹ Nidhiry, J. (1908) *Mar Toma Nasrāṇikaḷute Satya Viśvāsam*, written from the notes and records of his late father V. Rev. Fr. E. A. Nidhiry.

⁸² Panjikaran (1912). *The Syrian Church in Malabar*.

⁸³ Bernard of St. Thomas (1916) *Mar Toma Kristyāṇikaḷute Caritram*.

⁸⁴ Thaliath (1958) *The Synod of Diamper*.

⁸⁵ Thekkedath (1982) *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. II.

⁸⁶ Podipara (1970) *The Thomas Christians*.

⁸⁷ Schurhammer 1934:passim

⁸⁸ Lukas 1980 '*Purathanappattukal*'.

⁸⁹ Aiya 1906 *The Travancore State Manual* Vol. 2:135-223. Unfortunately, the former British Resident G.T. Mackenzie who actually wrote the chapter relating to the SCM, allowed his own particular sympathies to colour, and at times seriously distort the narrative. See Aiya's *Prefactory Notes* to the controversies raised by Mackenzie (pp.114-130).

⁹⁰ Thurston and Rangachari (1909 Vol 6).

denominational writings were forcibly presenting their case to the detriment of the Jacobite narratives, the few Jacobite accounts that did appear in this period generally failing to receive wider readership or recognition. The most influential Jacobite work was by Ittoop Pukadiyil in 1869, and written in Malayalam drawing on ancient *ola* manuscripts, formed the first published history of the SCM from a Jacobite perspective. E.M. Philip's *Indian Church of St Thomas*, written in 1907 on the other hand, was the first narrative history by a Jacobite account in English in a scholarly style, neither of which gained wider readership.⁹¹

Despite the presence of indigenous Jacobite accounts, some leading historians of the 20th century such as Alphonse Mingana⁹² Leslie Brown⁹³ and Stephen Neill⁹⁴ also seem to have been reliant on secondary sources, i.e. earlier European histories. They categorically reject key events in the SCM narratives as etiological myths, with Brown for example dismissing the St Thomas tradition as 'they are written to magnify Thomas for the reflected glory' and to show this Church's independence from the West (Brown 1963:45). Mingana appears to be particularly withering of indigenous SCM accounts, for instance referring to the Syrian tradition of the Edessan migration as 'worthless', and their dating of it a 'stupid chronological mistake' (1926:44fn.1). The only Indian scholar whose arguments Neill engages with is George Moraes, a Catholic writer with a Western education,⁹⁵ and even of him, says he 'strains the evidence more than it will go' (Neill 1984:24). Nevertheless, these historians' views appear to have become so entrenched in the dominant Western historical narrative of the SCM that they are seldom critically evaluated.

⁹¹ Overcoming many obstacles, Philip's book got published only in 1950. These and other significant Jacobite publications will be discussed in Chapter 4.

⁹² Mingana, Alphonse *The Early Spread of Christianity in India* (1926).

⁹³ Brown, Leslie 1982 *The Indian Christians of St Thomas*.

⁹⁴ Neill, Stephen 1984 *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707*.

⁹⁵ Moraes 1964 *A History of Christianity in India: from earliest times to St Francis Xavier AD 25-1542*.

2.6 21st century

Since the latter part of the 20th century there has been a significant improvement in access to historic documents as well as changes in historical methodology. Collaterally, there has been a shift in attitude to oral tradition and its value as a historical source, particularly since Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* in 1982. R.M. Swiderski 1988b, for example, focuses on an analysis of *mārgamkaḷippāttā*⁹⁶, the Ballads which form the oldest source of the SCM's indigenous history.

The 21st century has seen an exponential growth in the number of publications by Indian authors. From those within the Catholic tradition, the argument developed in the early 20th century that the SCM were always part of the Catholic Church, and that the Synod of Diamper was aimed at reuniting them with Rome, and has become an axiomatic part of some historians' accounts, with notable publications by Pius Malekandathil in 2012, 2013, and Jacob Kollaparambil 2001, and A. Mathias Mundadan 2000, 2003, which also emphasise the Malabar Christians' unique Indian identity.

A third schism that had begun in the early 20th century, and came to a head in the mid-20th century, where part of the JSC separated to form an 'Indian Orthodox Church' (also known as the 'Malankara *Orthodox Syrian* Church'), is reflected in the writings of some historians.⁹⁷ In their historical accounts, scholars of the Indian Orthodox Church appear to emphasise the St Thomas foundational narrative, and highlight the independence of the SCM. Firmly holding 1665 as the *terminus a quo* for the introduction of Jacobite doctrine and Antiochian links into Malabar, they argue that these links with Antioch constituted a form of 'spiritual colonialism' from which they had broken free.⁹⁸ Kurien Thomas,⁹⁹ in his critical edition of the *Niraṇām Chronicle*, appears to systematically promote this view, casting the efforts of foreign bishops, whether of Antioch, Rome or Babylon as attempts at foreign domination. Joseph

⁹⁶ See Lukas (1910) for the first collation of these ballads.

⁹⁷ See Kaniamparambil 1982:320,358.

⁹⁸ See Cheeran 2007, Varghese 2006.

⁹⁹ Kurien Thomas 2000 *Niraṇām Grandhavarī* (*Niraṇām Chronicle*).

Cheeran¹⁰⁰ attempts to provide alternative explanations of how Orthodoxy reached Malabar (other than Antioch and Syria), tracing aspects of the SCM such as the ancient liturgy and episcopacy, to the Coptic Church in Alexandria (Cheeran 2007:17-23, 33). He attributes the beginning of Antiochian links and the severance of the connections with Alexandria, to the arrival of Mar Ivanios in 1730, (Cheeran 2007:135-171).

A further development in recent decades has been a changing perspective on the CotE, impacting on the narrative of the Syrians in Malabar. In previous centuries, the CotE was considered heretical for upholding the dyophysite doctrine of Nestorius, but this interpretation has gradually changed with a greater accommodation by other Churches of doctrinal differences, in the spirit of ecumenism. Publications, notably that by David Wilmshurst,¹⁰¹ have enhanced the understanding of the CotE and argued the case for its significant involvement in the religious history of Malabar and the Nestorian identity of the SCM (Wilmshurst 2000:15-6).

The increasing access to a wide corpus of manuscripts through digitisation programmes¹⁰² has brought to light a number of interesting details, but has not fundamentally changed the narrative as given by the Syro-Malabar. In 2000, Istvan Perczel began an extensive programme of digitising all the Syriac and Malayalam literature of the various denominations of the SCM, and this is still in progress. These initiatives have enabled access to some hitherto unknown manuscripts that would otherwise be inaccessible to scholars, supporting a number of research projects and leading to a range of journal articles. Perczel is a leading scholar, publishing papers on the history and identity of the SCM, which contribute significantly to the contemporary dominant narrative. He states that in pre-Portuguese times ‘the ecclesiastical, liturgical and commercial bonds integrated them to the Syriac-writing diaspora of the Middle East, more specifically into the East Syrian Church of the East’, and maintains they were Nestorians (Perczel 2006:421).¹⁰³ He therefore dismisses the

¹⁰⁰ Cheeran 2009 *Indian Orthodox Church AD 52-2007*. Fr Dr Joseph Cheeran is a leading scholar of the Indian Orthodox Church.

¹⁰¹ Wilmshurst 2000 *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913*.

¹⁰² The principal project is called SRITE, with a consortium of international scholars (led by Prof. Dr. Stephen Gerö, Universität Tübingen, and Dr. István Perczel, CEU) digitizing thousands of manuscripts in Syriac, Malayalam, and other ancient local languages.

¹⁰³ Perczel 2006 *Language of Religion, languages of the people, languages of the documents: the legendary history of the Syrian Christian people of Kerala*.

Edessan migration and other references to links with Antioch as ‘semi-mythical or teleological’¹⁰⁴ created to justify the 18th century affiliation to Antioch. He argues that the oppression of the SCM by the Portuguese led to the increasing opposition of Catholicism and the ‘growing influence of the Antiochian Jacobite Patriarchate, [which] led to a re-Syriacisation of the St Thomas Christians’ culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ (Perczel 2006:422). Underpinning this argument is the assumption that the SCM moved between the Nestorian and Jacobite faiths without resistance, focusing only on the Syriac language and culture, rather than on doctrine.¹⁰⁵

2.7 Conclusion

This review of the literature that has contributed to the current narrative on the religious identity of the SCM indicates the complexity of disentangling original sources, as the difficulty of identifying the reliability of earlier sources being as great as with later ones. A greater number of sources or publications presenting one particular narrative or account is not an indication of reliability. The scepticism of Western writers to the accounts of indigenous sources is paradoxically conjoined with speculative alternative explanations of events and phenomena, and this perspective has also been adopted by some local historians as well.

The inconsistent or inaccurate use of terms has also been an issue in the development of histories across the centuries. Distinctions between Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic and Indian Orthodox have not been clarified, nor have titles such as Patriarch, Pope (or *papa* its generic form) and Catholicos (even interchanged with ‘Catholic’).

¹⁰⁴ Perczel 2009 *Four apologetic Church Histories from India* in *The Harp: A Review of Syriac and Oriental Ecumenical Studies*. Vol. XXIV p204.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Belonging to the jurisdiction of the Church of the East, and later to the Chaldean Patriarchate, meant more to the Kerala Christians than a mere canonical status’ (Perczel 2006:398).

Geographical areas such as Babylon, Persia, Armenia, etc. are also seen to be used interchangeably.

As with all historical analysis, the key challenge is identifying how contemporary contexts impacted on the motivations and perspectives of the writers of different texts. The complexity of shifting colonial powers, different Church missions, and schisms among the SCM themselves, have all contributed to the confusing array of narratives in relation to the SCM history and identity.

The three key issues that emerge from this survey of literature on the SCM history and identity, are formulated in the research questions for this thesis: a) the allegation of their Nestorian beliefs and identity, b) challenges to their claims of Apostolic origins in the first century, and c) the claim that Syrian Orthodox authority and beliefs were not adopted by the SCM until the arrival of Jacobite bishops in the seventeenth century. The examination of these issues relating to the identity of the JSC will be addressed through the critical edition of the unpublished Mathai Vettikkunnel manuscript in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Mathai Vettikkunnel manuscript

3.1 The Manuscript

3.1.1. Date and author

This manuscript is dated approximately to 1720, and is attributed to Mathai Vettikkunnel, a native-born Syrian Christian priest. The manuscript is a letter of appeal to the Dutch Governor in Kochi, the seat of the Dutch East India Company, which controlled the central part of Kerala called Malabar at the time, especially the kingdom of Kochi and its tributary states. Neither the date nor the author's name are given in the manuscript, but both appear in a Syriac version of the same letter. It is a specimen of the characteristic narrative style and perspective of the Syrian Christians of Malabar, regarding the foundation and evolution of their historical identity as a Church. It is an important addition to the corpus of documents described in Chapter 4, representing the indigenous literary accounts of the Syrian Christians. However, in those aspects that it is distinct from others, it reflects the particular context in which it was written and its purpose.

3.1.2. Syriac and Malayalam versions of the letter

The Mathai Vettikkunnel manuscript was produced in two versions: one in Syriac and one in Malayalam, the vernacular language of Kerala, both written around 1720. The scholar Carolus Schaaf of Leiden University made the first translation of the Syriac version into Dutch, a year after it was received in Leiden.¹⁰⁶ Jacob Canter Visscher,

¹⁰⁶ This is believed to be around 1721 or 1722. Thomas Yeates, a Cambridge University archivist, states (1818:151) that 'it lay a twelvemonth under the care of a professor', until Schaaf translated it.

the Dutch Chaplain in Kochi at the time, included this Dutch translation in one of his letters to his brother, C. Visscher, who published it in the Netherlands in 1743.¹⁰⁷ J.P.N. Land made a second translation of the Syriac text into Latin, and published it along with a short commentary, in his *Anecdota Syriaca* in 1862.¹⁰⁸

The Malayalam version is held in the library archives of the University of Leiden (The Netherlands),¹⁰⁹ but it has never been published and has to date remained unnoticed by the scholarly community. The present researcher discovered this manuscript in 2015 when examining the Leiden Archive catalogue, which supplies the following entry:

Or. 1214

Syriac and Malayalam, in Malabarese script. Leaves of European paper, pasted together as a scroll, measuring 120 x 31 cm.

Historia Syrorum in ripa Malabarica. CCO 2351 (V, p. 71); CCA 529.

Malayâlattil olla suriyâni-kkârka bhavicca, What happened to the Malabarese Syrians.

Short description by R. Rost, published by J.P.N. Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. I (Leiden 1862), pp. 7-8. Title reproduced *ibid.*, Tab. B.

[* in Skr. 53]

The catalogue also names the author as ‘Mathai Vettikkunnel’, who was recognised as a Syrian Christian from Kerala. ‘Vettikkunnel’ is a prominent family of the Kottayam district in Kerala.¹¹⁰ After a preliminary, physical examination at Leiden,¹¹¹ the document was studied from a high-resolution photograph obtained from the archives.¹¹²

From the fact that the Syriac and Malayalam versions have mostly the same content and purpose, it is plausible that they were written at the same time and by the same author. However, the presence in the Syriac version of errors in the vocalized renderings of local names and places indicate the possibility that the Syriac version

¹⁰⁷ Neither Schaaf nor Visscher is thought to have consulted the Malayalam version, as neither are reported to have known that language. Heber Drury translated Visscher’s Letters into English in 1863.

¹⁰⁸ *Anecdota Syriaca* (Land 1862 Vol.1: Syriac text pp 24-30, Latin translation pp 123-127). Title: *De rebus quae acciderunt Syris (in ripa Malabarica) eorumque historia* (=Concerning things that happened in Syria (on the Malabar coast, and their history). This Latin version has been further translated and published by others, most notably: Giamil 1902, Kulathramannil 2000 and Perczel 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Leiden University Archives Or. 1214; Special Collections.

¹¹⁰ See Section 3.4.3 of this chapter for details.

¹¹¹ In August 2015.

¹¹² See Appendix 2.1 for an image of the whole document.

was not actually written by Mathai Vettikkunnel¹¹³ but by his contemporary and associate, bishop Mar Gabriel,¹¹⁴ who would have been more proficient in writing Syriac. From the additional details contained within the Syriac version though, it is unlikely that the Syriac version was written solely by Mar Gabriel. It seems most likely that the Malayalam version was written entirely by Mathai, and the Syriac version had some degree of collaboration, with Mathai supplying the information and Mar Gabriel writing the text.

Although the Syriac and Malayalam versions are similar in their general narrative arc, there are some discrepancies, with some elements expanded and some contracted in each, as will be discussed at relevant points in section 3.3.¹¹⁵ The Malayalam text alone is the subject of this study, and will be referred to as MV from now on. There is no firm evidence regarding the exact relationship between these two versions – whether one was copied from the other, or even whether the same author wrote both.

3.1.3. Physical description

The Mathai Vettikkunnel manuscript¹¹⁶ is given a minimal description in the Leiden catalogue. It is in fact written on European paper, 31cm wide, with four pieces pasted one below the other to form a long piece measuring 120cm in length. The paper has suffered some fraying along the edges but without encroaching on to the text itself, which remains clear and legible. The text is contained within a margin of 1.5cm to the left, and approximately 1cm to the right, and approximately 6cm at the top and bottom. The document is stored as a scroll. The text, in black ink, in the Malayalam language, is in the Malayalam script¹¹⁷ of the early 18th century and is written in a uniform hand throughout. There is no colophon, and the text has no divisions into paragraphs or any punctuation whatsoever. It is laid out in 103 equally spaced lines of equal length.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ In the following chapters, the manuscript will be referred to as ‘MV’, and the author as ‘Mathai’.

¹¹⁴ Historically, Mar Gabriel’s identity has been controversial, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.4.

¹¹⁵ A tabular comparison of the two versions is given in Appendix 2.3.

¹¹⁶ Hereafter, this manuscript will be referred to as ‘MV’, and the author as ‘Mathai’.

¹¹⁷ The Leiden catalogue erroneously describes the script as: ‘*Malabarese*’.

¹¹⁸ See Appendix 2.1 for an image of the whole document, and Appendix 2.2 for sections in detail.

3.1.4. Content

The title of the text is *Malayāḷattiloḷḷa Surīyānikkārkkā bhavicca bhavittaṇṇaḷ* that could be translated as ‘Events that happened to the Syrians of Malayala’. However, the rather formal Sanskrit phrase *bhavicca bhavittaṇṇaḷ* carries a sense of strong negative impact, and therefore a more accurate translation would be: ‘*The catastrophes that have befallen the Syrians of Malayala*’. The title relates to the loss of the privileged and prosperous lifestyle the Syrians enjoyed under the local kings’ protection, and the progressive deterioration of their fortunes from the middle of the 16th century onwards when they began to be oppressed by the Portuguese Catholic missionaries, which intensified from early 17th century when they were reduced to Rome, and which was continuing at the time of the writing of this account in early 18th century.

The content of the MV is a petition to the Dutch Commander, pleading for him to exert his civil authority and take action to protect the Syrian Christian Church which had come under pressure from the Catholic Church and its proselytising efforts.¹¹⁹ It is also the oldest surviving purposeful account of Syrian Christian history and identity, articulated by a native member of this Church for an external audience.

The author appears to have believed such help would be forthcoming provided that he could impress upon the Commander’s mind the urgency of the situation, and the worthiness of the indigenous church to receive such protection. This is implied by the carefully and lengthily articulated historical account which forms the major part of the text. On several points it appears reasonable to believe that Mathai was in close proximity to the events he describes at the turn of the eighteenth century in connection with the Syrian Church which adds authenticity and urgency to his appeal.

¹¹⁹ So far there is no record of the Dutch Commander at the time, Johannes Hertenberg (1716-1723), of having received, read, or responded in any way to this appeal.

3.1.5. Political context

Fifty-seven years prior to the writing of this letter, in 1663, the Dutch had defeated the Portuguese and taken control over key trading ports along the Malabar coast. By the time of this document's writing in 1720, the Dutch East India Company had secured its control over the territory of Malabar and its spice-trade.¹²⁰ The economic and commercial power the Dutch exercised in the territory was underpinned by the political power they wielded over the rulers of the region, won either by conquest or by treaties (Visscher 1743:41). This political power though centred in Kochi, extended over Kochi's tributary states and beyond to independent states in the interior.¹²¹ The two letters were handed to the addressee through an intermediary, Jacob Canter Visscher¹²², the resident Dutch Reformed Church minister of the time in Kochi.¹²³

3.1.6. Religious context

As stated in Chapter 1, the majority of Syrian Christians had rejected the authority of Rome by the Oath of the Leaning Cross in 1653. In the subsequent decade, no ecclesiastical support reached them from Mesopotamia, while the Portuguese clergy continued their efforts to bring the Syrians back under their control. Without a bishop, the Syrian Christians struggled to withstand these efforts, the result being that individuals and parishes gradually reverted to Roman Catholicism.

When the Dutch took the Fort of Kochi in 1663,¹²⁴ they are reported to have systematically evicted all Portuguese clergy, and deported all Portuguese citizens to Goa, for fear of sabotage by their religious sympathies (Baldaeus 1672:635).

¹²⁰ Malabar was considered a desirable territory to possess, as seen in the literature of this period. See the full title of Baldaeus 1672.

¹²¹ Although the Principality of Thekkumkoor where the Vettikkunnel clan resided was distant from Kochi and did not share a border with it, the long-arm of the ruling Dutch was able to reach into neighbouring kingdoms in the interior and influence events there.

¹²² Visscher was in Kochi from 1717 to 1724, from where he wrote 37 letters to family and friends in the Netherlands, offering an 18th century European perspective of the country and its people.

¹²³ There is no clear indication of when and how the letters were removed to Leiden University. According to M. J. de Goeje, the archivist at Leiden (1873: Vol.5, p.72), they were sent to Professor Carolus Schaaf of Leiden in 1720 by the 'Nestorian bishop Mar Gabriel', who is referred to in the document.

¹²⁴ With the Dutch taking Kollam in 1661, Kodungallur in 1662, and Kochi in 1663, the defeat of the Portuguese power in Malabar was complete.

However, under pressure from Rome's influential representatives in Europe, the Dutch revised their policy of extreme intolerance of European Catholics, and permitted their return in 1663. However, because of the Dutch antipathy towards the Jesuits, only the discalced or 'bare-foot' friars such as the Carmelites and Franciscans were allowed to return.¹²⁵ Thus the loss of Portugal's political and religious power in Malabar by 1663, rather than abating these efforts, only seem to have intensified them. The Roman Catholic hierarchy found favour¹²⁶ with the Dutch civil and religious authorities despite the Dutch Reformed Church being Protestant.¹²⁷ The Catholic Church was able to continue their encroachments into the Syrian Church with support from the Dutch, along with the highly productive leverage they procured with the local rulers through the disbursement of generous gifts.¹²⁸ Consequently, the late 17th and early 18th centuries when MV document was written, was a period when, by slow attrition, the Syrian churches and their people were gradually being absorbed into the Catholic Church, as key historians from the period testify.¹²⁹

Whereas after the Syrian Christians' rebellion of 1653 in which they declared themselves free of Rome's authority and only two out of the 75 Syrian parishes that existed at this time subscribed to the Catholic faith (Ferrolì 1939:366; Hambye 1997 Vol.III:21)¹³⁰, by the end of the 17th century the balance of Church-affiliation was already tipping in Rome's favour. It is in this context, that MV wrote his appeal. That there were three Catholic bishops and a number of missionaries and clerics (exact numbers are not known) resident in Malabar by the last quarter of the 17th century affords an estimation of the resurgent Catholic church that was operating in Malabar

¹²⁵ Mackenzie describes how the return of Catholic clerics was effected (1901:29-30). But the Jesuits were not permitted to enter anywhere in the territory of Kochi (Mackenzie 1901:79).

¹²⁶ The eviction of the Catholic bishop did not last as the next bishop was allowed to return and the indigenous Catholic people were allowed to receive him at Kochi with great fanfare, with the Dutch providing volleys of gun salutes (Baldaeus 1672:635-6).

¹²⁷ Whitehouse 1873:189-190 discusses how the Portuguese won over the cooperation of the Dutch in enabling their return to Malabar.

¹²⁸ The Carmelite 'missionary-bishops' also state this in their histories. Although the nature of these bribes is not mentioned, a sense of it can be had from the Carmelite bishop Paolino Bartolomeo's eclectic set of gifts to the King of Travancore: 'two European paintings, a large mirror, fifteen pounds of red sandal wood, twelve bottles of Persian rose water' and a letter from the Popes in 'a richly embroidered pocket-book' (Drury:1862:173).

¹²⁹ See Philip Baldaeus (1672); Jacob Canter Visscher's 37 letters from Kochi 1717-24, translated by Heber Drury (1862); Michael Geddes (1694), and Maturin La Croze (1724).

¹³⁰ They both were Jesuit historians. Hambye's *History of Christianity in India: Eighteenth Century*, (with George Menachery) Church History Association of India, 1997

after its initial eviction from the country, despite Dutch Protestants being in power. (Hambye 1997 Vol.II:107; Vol.III:21; Baldaeus 1671:636).

By the treaty between the Dutch and the King of Kochi, all the Christians of the territory were directly under the protection of the Dutch (Visscher 1742:41-2). When the Dutch began to put pressure on Mar Thoma IV (the indigenous bishop of the Syrian Christians from 1695 to 1729) to bring his Church over to the Dutch Protestant faith, he began writing desperate letters to his Patriarch in Antioch in 1705, 1715 and 1720.¹³¹ In these letters, he confessed a lack of the requisite rhetorical skills to withstand the arguments put forward by the Dutch ministers, and pleaded for knowledgeable bishops and teachers to be sent from Antioch. Challenged by ecclesiasts of three different Churches (Dutch Protestant, Roman Catholic and CotE), on the validity of his Syrian Church's doctrine and its allegiance to Antioch, Mar Thoma IV came under pressure either to give sound theological answers or to renounce his faith, and take himself and his people over to one or the other of those Churches. It is most probable that the priest Mathai wrote the two versions of his appeal, in Malayalam and in Syriac, at this juncture, and had them delivered to the Dutch Commander in Kochi.¹³²

3.1.7. The author, Mathai Vettikkunnel

Holding the defining Malayalam title *kattanār* (= priest)¹³³, Mathai Vettikkunnel was a historical individual who lived in the early 18th century. While the name Mathai (Mathew) is common among Syrian Christians, the surname 'Vettikkunnel' identifies him as belonging to a large clan of that name. The Vettikkunnel clan itself, according to local histories, is a branch of the great Pakalomattom clan¹³⁴ (Kottayil 2000: 44),

¹³¹ These letters form part of the key indigenous sources discussed in Chapter 4, and are provided in Appendix 17, with translations into English.

¹³² According to the Leiden archivist Goeje, the appeals were handed to the Commander through the Dutch minister, Jakob Canter Visscher. In the catalogue *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium* (of Leiden), Vol. I, p. 72, de Goeje notes that MSS 1212-1215 seem to have been given to Schaaf in 1720 by the Nestorian Metropolitan Gabriel, as he concludes from a letter written on 15-3 of the same year and preserved in the library of the Municipal University of Amsterdam, MS 7 IV 4.

¹³³ The term *kattanār* and *kašīšo* to denote priests is applied traditionally only to priests of the Syrian Christian Church, and not the Catholic ones (2019).

¹³⁴ Kottayil 2000:35,36,38-40,44: *The Great Clan-gathering of Pakalomattom- a concise history* provides details of how this family traces its history back to St Thomas the Apostle, and the prominence of Pakalomattom as the family from which all the Archdeacons and bishops of the Syrians were drawn, this honour devolving to others only later (Syrian-Catholics in the 16th and Syrian Jacobites early 19th

on which St. Thomas the Apostle is said to have conferred priesthood. Vettikkunnel clan has produced its share of prominent clergymen, and are native to the village of Manarcadu near Kottayam in central Kerala.¹³⁵ In the early 18th century, the village had only one church, the Syrian Christian Church of St. Mary's, and Mathai Vettikkunnel's name appears at the top of a list of vicars of this church at the time (Kottayil:103).¹³⁶ There is also a mention of a priest Mathai Vettikkunnel in a contemporary document: the letters of Mar Thoma IV to the Patriarch of Antioch,¹³⁷ which corroborates the existence of such a person at that time and in that context.¹³⁸

Mathai was a prominent figure in the history of the Syrian Christians for his leading role in resisting Catholic efforts to take control of his parish church, the St. Mary's of Manarcadu. According to the Vettikkunnel family accounts, Mathai was nearly forced to offer Holy Qurbana with unleavened bread as the Catholics demanded. The parishioners made a short ballad in appreciation of Fr. Mathai for averting these threats (Kottayil 2000:26). However, his efforts were controversial, for as a parish priest,¹³⁹ he was neither invested with episcopal power nor the authority to assume the role as spokesperson of the whole Church, circumventing the already existing hierarchy Bishop Mar Thoma IV, to approach the civil authority of the Dutch unilaterally. Nor did he

centuries). This work traces the branches of this clan, their property-holdings, migrations and consequent adoption of new secondary and tertiary names, and the building of new churches wherever they migrated to. This is key to understanding why priest Mathai had the confidence and motivation to speak on behalf of the whole Church.

¹³⁵ From the clan's genealogical history and local village-records, the Vettikkunnels were agriculturists, holding considerable estates and rice-fields. The property upon which sits St. George's church, the sister church to St. Mary's, as well as three other properties are recorded as offered to St. Mary's Church of Manarcadu by the Vettikkunnel family (Golden Heritage 1993:30; Kottayil 2000:103-4).

¹³⁶ The list is defective in that it begins only in the early 18th century. It lists many priests from this family down the generations, including one at present (2019). This parish of St. Mary's was prominent at this time by its staunch anti-Romanist stance, when after the Synod of Diamper (1599), the remaining three Syrian churches in the region, Kottayam Valiapally (Great St. Mary's), Kottayam Cheriapally (Little St. Mary's), and Puthupally St. George's, were all jointly owned by Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholics (Whitehouse 1873:203).

¹³⁷ Letter from Mar Thoma IV to Ignatius, Patriarch of Antioch; Amsterdam University archive catalogue page 202:A, in Estrangelo script, 1709.

¹³⁸ The name of another priest, Itty Thommen of Vettikkunnel, features in the turbulent period of conflict with the Catholic Church after the rebellion of 1653. This individual was, according to the Vettikkunnel family history: *Suvarṇa Pāṭṭrukam* (=Golden Heritage)1993:25-28, a close confidant of Mar Thoma I and an activist in the Syrian Christian Church, but is not to be confused with the author of the text under study.

¹³⁹ According to the Syrian Orthodox Church's Canon, while its bishops were exclusively drawn from celibate monastic ranks, its parish priests were married individuals. However, when brought under Rome, the Syrians were forced to subscribe to the Catholic Canon of celibacy of parish-priests. Although the Church broke with Rome in 1653, this practice took another 150 years to be completely dismantled.

have temporal or personal proximity to the seat of political and ecclesial power in Kochi. It is a mark of his strong personality that in spite of these constraints, as well his linguistic limitations, he wrote this appeal to the Commander in the languages in which he was conversant: Malayalam and Syriac.¹⁴⁰

3.1.8. The language

Malayalam, in which this text is written, belongs to the Dravidian family of languages of southern India. Kerala's evolving political and cultural identity was derived from that of the dominant Tamil kingdom of Pandya to the east, and was closely aligned with it until the 12th century. This was reflected in its language as well. With the weakening of Tamil dominance in the medieval period, Malayalam began developing its own separate identity, characterised by the assimilation of the two languages Sanskrit and Tamil. This merging manifested itself in a new script, fusing elements of the Grantha and Tamil scripts, as well as new phonology and grammar.¹⁴¹ By the late medieval period the language deviated enough from Tamil to form a distinct language in its own right¹⁴², and the *Vatteluttu* or Round-script of Tamil, and the Grantha alphabet fused to form the modern alphabet of Malayalam (George 1972:1).

Written in the early eighteenth century, the language of the MV reflects a stage of linguistic development when this shift was more or less complete. While retaining some Tamil linguistic features, the language generally exhibits a close affinity with Sanskrit in phonology, vocabulary, and to a less extent, in its morphology.

The following examples illustrate this:

¹⁴⁰ Mathai's forceful personality is reflected in a story given in *Suvarṇa Pāitrukam* (1993:29). Priest Mathai was once travelling by *vallam* (local boat), a *muttukkuṭa* (colourful filigree-trimmed silken ceremonial umbrella of Kerala) held over his head, when the local chieftain, envious of Mathai's grand progress, asked for the *muttukkuṭa* to be handed over. Mathai instructed his men to hand over the parasol with due deference, but when the *vallam* pushed off, he instructed them to open the 40 other *muttukkuṭa* stored in the boat and continued on their way.

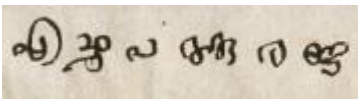
¹⁴¹ The intermediary stage of Sanskrit-Malayalam fusion is denoted by the term *Maṇipravālam* according to Krishna Menon 1990:9.

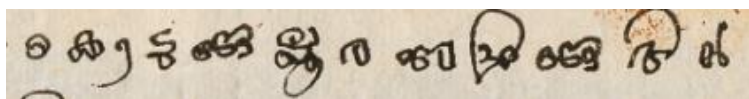
¹⁴² An illustration of confusion around the distinction between Malayalam and Tamil in this period can be seen in Philip Baldaeus' painstaking transcript (1672:663-665) of what he calls Malayalam alphabet, vocabulary and translations of Christian doctrine etc. which in actual fact is Tamil.

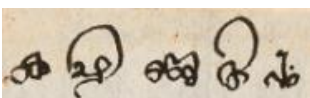
- i. The recurring use of the Tamil phoneme ‘b’ instead of the ‘v’ in modern Malayalam as in the following pairs: *banna-vanna* L.24; *bālunna-vālunna* L.26; *bāṇṇam-vāṇṇam* L.33; *bānā-vānā* L.43; *baccā/baippiccā-vaippiccā* L.31, 38, 44, 50; *sambalsāram-samvalsāram*; *baśamāya – vaśamāya* L. 74, 99.
- ii. A recurring linguistic feature is the inflection of Prepositional Particles at the end of verbs, ending in ‘a’ or instead of ‘ā’ to indicate incompleteness of action in intra-sentential contexts, as for example using *vanna* instead of *vannā* and *aṛiyicca* instead of *aṛiyiccā*; Also in constructions like: *piṛappetta*, *mara*, *vanna*- all with ‘a’ endings, instead of ‘ā’.
- iii. Malayalam has many verb inflections, and usually in modern usage, the verbs are converted into *vinayaccam* = adverbial participles. This variant used could either be idiosyncratic or historical-oral (K.M. George 1972, p.16).
- iv. Vestiges of Tamil inflections are seen in the use of *itinre*, rather than *itinte*
- v. Orthography: The orthographic configuration exhibit features of old forms of ligatures, and the absence of vowel-indicating diacritics. The partly alphabetic and partly syllabic letters of Malayalam as they are used in this text are distinct from the pre-1971 orthography of modern Malayalam, and the letters show considerable variation in their form from modern Malayalam, which presents the reader of the Mathai Vettikkunnel document with some degree of difficulty.

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The change in the orthography of /l/, /a/ and /ññ/ can be seen in the following examples:

1.32  എഴുപത്തുറണ്ടു *elupattu-ranta*

1.36  കൊടുങ്ങല്ലൂർ അഴിഞ്ഞതിൽ *Koṭuñṇallūra alīñṇatil*

1.36  കഴിഞ്ഞതിൻ *kaḷiñṇatin*

¹⁴³ The orthography was revised in 1971, when uniform, free-standing diacritics were introduced to replace individual alphabet-variations with inherent diacritics. The difficulty can be overcome after familiarising oneself with the earlier forms, which are consistent with the pre-1971 alphabet, and once vocalised, it is comprehensible to modern speakers of the language.

The text does not follow some of the formal conventions of letter-writing. For example, it does not open with an address of the Commander to whom the petition is addressed, only indirectly invoking the addressee in L.96. ‘But in these days, at the present time, if the Honourable Commander is convinced that the goodwill of the Company...’. By immediately beginning with the historical narrative, Mathai gives prominence to the most important part of the appeal, which is to narrate the historical identity of the SCM. In doing so, he seems to follow the Syriac conventions of historical narratives (originating from Judaic practice) of starting right at the earliest reference point – which is often the creation of the world, and moving on to the central turning point of human history, which is marked by Christ. In the case of the MV, the earliest reference point is given as the arrival of St Thomas. The sense of urgency is also highlighted by the frequent mixing of register of formal and informal expressions.

For example, in ll.28-30:

‘രജാവിനടുത്ത പതവികൾ ഒക്കെയും ആദിത്യ ചന്ദ്രൻമാരുള്ള
കാലങ്ങളിൽ എല്ലാം സുറിയാനിക്കാരായ നസ്സാണികൾ
നടന്നുകൊള്ളത്തക്കപൊലയും നടത്തിക്കൊള്ളത്തക്ക
പൊലയും ചെമ്പുകടേൽ എഴുതി ചെരുകൊൻ പെരുമാൾ
തമ്പുരാൻ തിരുവളം ചെയ്ത കൊടുത്തപടി വാങ്ങിച്ച തകടുകൾ
ഇന്നയോളവും കാണാനുള്ളതാകുന്നു’

(...he granted the Syrian Nasranis innumerable royal privileges to last in perpetuity as long as the sun and moon remain, that they may walk and conduct themselves accordingly, and execute as such. And [he] wrote these privileges on copper-plates and the Lord Chera-kon Perumal in his pleasure gave it, which copper plates they straight away received, and these plates are to be seen (with us) until this day.)

the Sanskrit words ‘പതവികൾ’ (privileges) and ‘ആദിത്യ’ (sun) are seen to be used in conjunction with the informal Malayalam usage ‘കൊടുത്തപടി വാങ്ങിച്ച’ (straight away received). Other examples of formal usages are seen in l.54:

‘പ്രേതം ചെയ്തൊരെ സാധിക്കയില്ല’ (made many efforts of diverse fashions....and finding this not possible), and l.101: and ‘സുറിയാനി മരിയാദെക്ക’ (in the tradition of the Syrians), and informal usages are seen in ‘പല പ്രദൃക്ഷങ്ങൾ’ (ll.7-8) (many conjurings), and (l.26) ‘തിരുവളത്തിൽ ഏറ്റിയതിൻറെ’ (having intimated to His Majesty’s mind).

Agglutinated phonemes and elided forms in the spoken language are orthographically rendered just as they are spoken, as, for example in:

‘ഇടപ്പെള്ളിലും’ (1.5), ‘മലയാളത്തിലൊളള’ (1.27), ‘തിരുവളം’ (1.32), ‘നാലേരും’ (1.46) ‘മയിലാപ്പുന്ന’ (1.62)

The body of the text is an account of events spanning 1700 years. Some parts seem to originate from an archetypal narrative including a memorised repository of set phrases, and others from extemporised constructions by the author. The use of some formulaic phrases and constructions such as:

1. 1.7: ‘മാണിക്കവാചെരന്ന കൂടൊത്രക്കാരൻ പിറപ്പെട്ട മയിലാപ്പുരാ മാറവെന്ന്’
(there set out a sorcerer by the name Manikka-Vacher)
2. 11.21-24: ‘ഉറഹായി എന്ന ദിക്കിൽ വാണിരുന്ന മെല്ല്യക്കാരനും ബഗദാശിൽ നിന്നും നിരവെയിൽ നിന്നും ഒരശിലെമിൽ നിന്നും പല കത്തങ്ങളും ചെമ്മാശെൻമാരും നസ്സാണികളും അവിരാട്ടകൂടെ സ്ത്രീകളും പയിതങ്ങളും കയ്യവടക്കാരൻ തൊമ്മായും കൂടെ പിറപ്പെട്ട കപ്പൽ കരയെറി വീണ്ടും ബന്ന മലയാളത്തിൽ പുക മിശിഹായുടെ കാലം മുന്നൂറ്റ നാല്പത്തഞ്ചിൽ മാലിയാംകരയിറങ്ങി’

(from the region of *Urhai* the Bishop who governed [the place of Urhoi], along with many priests from Baghdad, Nineveh and Urishalem, deacons, and Nasranis, and along with them women and children, set off in the company of the merchant Thoma, and boarded ship and arriving again in Malayala-country in the Year of Christ 345 disembarked in Maliamkara)

3. 11.36-38: ‘കൊടുങ്ങല്ലൂര അഴിഞ്ഞതിൽ പിന്നെ മശിഹായുടെ കാലം എണ്ണൂറ്റ ഇരുപത്തു മൂന്നിൽ ബഗദാശിയിൽ നിന്ന സുറിയാനിക്കാരായ മെൽപ്പട്ടക്കാര മാറശാബൊറും മാറപ്രൊത്തും സൗറീശൊ എന്ന ശരീരവും കൂടെ കൊല്ലത്തു വന്ന്’

(when after Kodungallur had come undone, in the Year of the Messiah 823, from Baghdad there arrived the Syrian bishops Mar Shabor and Mar Phroth and the personage by name Saur Isho in Kollam)

indicate that they were probably taken from a memorised oral tradition.¹⁴⁴

By contrast, the clearly demarcated lexical and syntactic phrasing of the carefully constructed appeal towards the end of the text indicate the deliberate composition by the author. The prevalence of Sanskrit vocabulary is an indication of the writer’s

¹⁴⁴ The features of a memorised narrative are especially noticeable in phrases such as ‘മാണിക്കവാചെരന്ന കൂടൊത്രക്കാരൻ’ that also occur in other Jacobite sources in Malayalam. These will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, when the text is examined alongside other Jacobite Malayalam sources.

erudition, and so it appears that the letter's lack of formal conventions at times is probably an indication of haste rather than ignorance of the correct form. Although at times when the context requires it, Mathai is shown to be capable of using more indirect phrasing, he uses very direct and harsh phrasing in his criticisms of the Portuguese and the actions of the Carmelite clerics.

1. ll.60-61 'പറങ്കി പരഷ പിടിച്ചുകെട്ടി കൊട്ടെക്ക കൊണ്ടുവന്ന കടലിൽ ഇറക്കി കൊന്നത്'

(the Frankish men captured at Mylapore, and brought him bound to the Fort and lowered him into the sea and thus murdered him),

2. ll.63-4: ഇന്നി എന്നേക്കും നമ്മുടെ സന്തതികാലത്തിലും പറങ്കിപ്പരഷയൊട ഗുണദോഷം ഇല്ലെന്ന സത്യവും ചെയ്ത എല്ലാവരും കൂടെ ഒരു കടുദാശ എഴുതി ഒപ്പുക്കുത്തി പിരികയും ചെയ്തു

(and took an oath that from henceforth forever, even in the times of our children, we will not ally with the Frankish men for good or ill, and all together having written a declaration to this effect and affixed their signatures to it, they dispersed),

3. ll.83-6: കാതൊലിക്കായുടെ കല്പനയാലെ മലയാളത്തിന്നു വന്ന സുറിയാനിക്കാരൻ മാറശെമൻ മലയാളത്തിലുള്ള സുറിയാനിക്കാർക്കു ദൂരത്തിൽ നിന്നെഴുതിയ കറി കുറുമ്പിലെത്തിപ്പാതിരിമാര പിടിച്ചു വായിപ്പിച്ചറിഞ്ഞു കുറുമ്പിലെത്തി പാതിരിമാരും സംപാളൂർ പാതിരിമാരും കൂടി നിരൂപിച്ച സുറിയാനിക്കാരൻ മെത്താൻ വരുന്ന വഴിക്കു കാവൽ കല്പിച്ചു കണ്ടുപിടിച്ചു കൊണ്ടുപോയി പുതിച്ചെരി കൊട്ടയിൽ വിലങ്ങിൽ ആക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു

(a letter that was sent to the Syrians of Malayala from Surat by the Syrian bishop Mar Shim'on by the decree of the Catholicos of the East, was captured by the Carmelite Padres and read and understood the contents and the Carmelite Padres and the Padres of *Sambālūr* got together and consulted and appointed guards to intercept the Syrian bishop along the way and they captured him and took him to the Fort of Puthucherry, where they imprisoned him).

This is particularly noticeable in such lines as above, and reflects the intensity of Mathai's antipathy towards them.

3.1.9. Summary of the contents of the text

The text can be thematically divided into four parts. The first part (lines 1-14) is concerned with the establishment of Christianity in Malabar by the Thomasine evangelical mission, and how this primitive Church nearly relapsed into paganism by the activities of a preacher called Mankikka Vacher. The second section (lines 15-40) deals with the rejuvenation of the Church by two cohorts of Mesopotamian Christian communities that arrived in Malabar and settled among the indigenous Christians, the first in 345, and the second in 825. From these arrivals, the Malabar Christians are presented as procuring for themselves, episcopal links with the main body of Christians in the Levant. Through this channel all other benefits pertaining to a Church identity seems to have accrued to them, which saw them flourishing for the next millennium. The third section (lines 41-73) deals with the arrival of the Catholic Portuguese in Malabar, and the 150-year-long conflict between the two Churches, which was temporarily halted when the Portuguese were expelled by the Dutch in 1663. In the fourth and last section (lines 74-103), the Mathai sets out his purpose in writing, which was to appeal to the Dutch Commander for protection of the Malabar Church, as in his perception it was under threat of becoming extinct due to the encroachments of the Catholic Church.

Impressing upon the Dutch Commander's mind the historical identity, venerable antiquity and purity of the Malabar Church, is clearly of utmost importance to the writer, in order to convince the Dutch Commander of the just and worthy cause for which he is pleading. This is reflected in Mathai devoting the major part of the text to tracing a historical narrative of the Malabar Church. He does not approach the statement of his purpose until l.96, with the exposition of the appeal being contained in the last eight lines. This appeal takes the form of an earnest supplication to the Commander for protection of the Syrian Christians from what is described as the continued persecution and depredations by the Roman Catholic authorities and by their allies amongst the population; as a result of which the very existence of the Syrian Christians' Church was under threat. The urgency of this plea is evinced in the declaration: 'daily the numbers of Syrians are diminishing in Malayalam-country' (l.91-92), quickly followed by the petitioner's suggested redress, that if the Dutch were to show their favour to the Syrians and come to their aid: 'all the Nasranis of

Malayala¹⁴⁵ will certainly revert to being Syrians as before, separate (themselves) from the Franks¹⁴⁶ and go in accordance with the Syrian traditions ...’ (1.100). The writer pleads for Dutch aid in restoring to the Syrians freedom to practise their religion, i.e. the non-Catholic Syrian faith, without interference and oppression from the Catholic Church authorities in collusion with the native rulers.

The chronographs and chronologies produced in the Syrian Orthodox (principally located in Syria and Mesopotamia) such as that of Michael the Great (12th c.) and Bar Hebraeus (13th c.) show a pattern that is Biblical-Genealogical in scope, and attempts to remove ambiguities by anchoring events with two or more dating systems.¹⁴⁷ They start with Adam the First Man, and progresses through the Patriarchs, Prophets and Kings to Christ’s salvific incarnation and the spread of the Gospel. Discussion of key Jacobite Syrian Christian sources used in this thesis (see Chapter 4) show that the Syrian Christians of Malabar also emulated this style in the breadth and scope of their chronologies and narratives, and to some extent, the multiple dating system as well.¹⁴⁸ Although the MV also follows this style of beginning at the point of the introduction of Christianity to Malabar through the agency of St. Thomas the Apostle, Mathai uses the simpler Gregorian Calendar of the Romans which had become prevalent (though not exclusive) among Kerala Christians by the time of his writing.

¹⁴⁵ The Portuguese called the people *Malavares*, while the Dutch called them *Malabars*. The indigenous people call the country *Malayāla*, themselves *Malayālar*, and the language *Malayālar*. With *mala* signifying mountains, and *ālar*, people, it is thought to have derived from the original settlers of the country (Drury 1862:9). In British times, ‘Malabar’ denoted only northern Kerala, with Kochi occupying the middle, and Travancore, the south. *Malayāla* forms the lexical base in country-denoting suffixations used in the MV, as in: *Malayāyāla+ttil=Malayālattil=* in the country of *Malayāla*; *Malayāla+ttil+uḷla=Malayālattiluḷla* =those living in the country of *Malayāla*.

¹⁴⁶ *Parānki*= a pejorative term applied to the Portuguese, from the Moorish ‘Franks’; and by extension to the Roman Catholic Church and its clerics. The Dutch were called the neutral *Lantakkār* ((Ho)llanders’) and the English, *Ingrīsu*, from ‘English’.

¹⁴⁷ Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Michael *Rabo* (=the Great)’s (1126-1199) *Chronicle* was translated from its Classical Armenian version into English by Robert Bedrosian in 2013, and, Matti Moosa made a translation from the original Syriac version into English in 2014: *Michael Rabo (the Great), a universal history from the Creation*. (Both accessed online. See Bibliography website addresses.) Volume II of Bar Hebraeus’ (1226-1286) *Ecclesiastical History* was translated into Malayalam by Chediath and Appassery (1990) from Abbeloos J.B. and T.J. Lamy’s Latin translation *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* from the original Syriac (1872-1877). An English translation by David Wilmshurst was published by Gorgias Press in February 2016.

¹⁴⁸ These were the Greek, (*yaunāyakkārūṭe kālam*), the Ptolemaic (*īguptāyakkārūṭe kālam*) and the Christian (*mašihā kālam*) Eras as seen in the Niraṇām Chronicle discussed in Chapter II (Niraṇām Chronicle: passim).

Compared to other texts of this genre of Malabar Syrians Christians' historical writing,¹⁴⁹ the text contains some elisions and contractions, making it not entirely parallel to them in that while most of the important nodal points of the narrative are touched by MV, some are glaring in their omission. For example, the arrival in the latter half of the 17th century of three sets of Syrian bishops whose prolonged presence in Malankara till their deaths was instrumental in steadying the Syrian Church during that unsettled period is entirely omitted. Another significant omission is any mention of his own bishop and Metropolitan of the Jacobite Syrians at the time, Mar Thoma IV, who was alive and referred by Dutch historians of that period. The doctrinal identities and denominational affiliations of some of the bishops who arrived over the centuries are also glossed over, which make identifying their relationship with the SCM, and the faith they helped to establish among them, unclear. While these features do not detract from what is contained in the text, they add a certain level of intrigue to it, requiring careful reading to understand its purpose and meaning.

3.2. English translation

Each numbered line corresponds to a single line of the manuscript. The limited number of punctuations in the translation are all supplied for ease of reading.

Title: "The catastrophes that have befallen the Syrians of Malayala"

Section 1: L1-6: Arrival of St. Thomas the Apostle in Malankara in 52

¹⁴⁹ For example, the 1771 Document, Niraṇām Chronicle, Kandanad Chronicle follow this pattern, and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

1. Fifty-two years after the birth of the Messiah¹⁵⁰, the Apostle Thomas arrived in Mylapore¹⁵¹ and preached The Way¹⁵² and built the Church there.
2. And after this, travelling from there and arriving in the mountain country of Chera-kon¹⁵³ he disembarked in the land of Maliankara¹⁵⁴ and preaching The Way
3. and erecting churches, in Maliankara, and Kottakayil and Idappally and Gokkamangalam and Niranom and Tiruvankottu¹⁵⁵
4. he ordained two priests as well. After this he went again to the Pandya country¹⁵⁶ and while preaching The Way there by the hand of a *Kāvya*¹⁵⁷
5. he was stabbed and thus ended his days. But after Thomas the Apostle had ended his days in said manner, and after some years
6. had passed, the priests in the Hindu and Malayala land died. And when many more years had passed

Section 2: L7-14: Apostasy of the St. Thomas Christians

¹⁵⁰ The Syrian Orthodox Church breviaries consistently refer to Christ as ‘*māšihā*’ (Syriac for Messiah=the Anointed), instead of the Greek: ‘*Christ*’. In Malayalam also, in common usage among Christians, Christ is referred to as: ‘*Yēšu mišihā tampurāṇ*’= ‘Lord Jesus, the Messiah’, not ‘Lord Jesus Christ’.

¹⁵¹ Mylapore (on the east coast), traditional location of St. Thomas’ martyrdom; now a suburb of Chennai in Tamil Nadu. See map in Appendix 1.2.

¹⁵² ‘*mārgām*’=The Way, denoting Christianity or Islam; ‘*mārgām kooduka*’ = conversion into Christianity or Islam; from which is also derived: *mārgāmkālī* = ‘*Play of The Way*’ = traditional Syrian Christian reel-dances accompanied by ballad-singing (Malayalam-English Dictionary). Biblically, it denotes religious precepts: *Teach me thy way*: Psalm 86:11; *They walk in His ways* Psalm 119:3 etc.

¹⁵³ Country of *Cēra-kōn*, denoting ‘King of the Cheras’.

¹⁵⁴ *Mālian-kara* (after elision and doubling according to Sandhi-rules) becoming = *Mala+ṇka+ra* / *Malanṇkara*, corresponding to Kodungallur.

¹⁵⁵ Six places are mentioned, while the more established narratives give ‘seven-and -a-half churches’ as those established by St. Thomas.

¹⁵⁶ The Pandya Kingdom of Tamil country on the south-east coast of India is inferred.

¹⁵⁷ *Kāvya*: an un-believer, a Hindu; literally, ‘one who recites the (Hindu) scriptures’ a term also seen used in Abdel Ahad 1948:383.

7. there set out a sorcerer by the name Manikka-Vacher¹⁵⁸ opposing The Way and Baptism.¹⁵⁹ And arriving in Mylapore
8. he performed many conjurings and forbade Baptismal immersions. And because of this all the leading figures of The Way,
9. and the Elders, abandoned Baptism and believed Manikka Vacher. And in those days those people who were not shaken,
10. in order that they (themselves) would not abandon the Baptism and The Way, left Hindowi-country¹⁶⁰ and arrived in Malayala-country. And those in Malayala-country
11. and those who had arrived from Hindu-land became relatives. As a result, a hundred and sixty families (now) in Malayala-land
12. were counted as Christians and dwelt in Malayala-land for many years. (When) because they had no priests,
13. and because they had not among them many people who were knowledgeable about the truth of the matters, they came to be closely associated with the unbelievers that surrounded them. And consequently
14. of the cohort of one-hundred-and-sixty households, wholly ninety-six households abandoned The Way, and 64 households stood steadfast in it.

Section 3: L15-22: Merchant Thoma of Jerusalem

¹⁵⁸ The name of this ‘prophet’ is given as ‘*Mānik-bōšr*’ in the Syriac version; the Persian ‘prophet’ Mani generally recognised as a subverter of mainstream Christianity in the 3rd c. is inferred.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Opposing Baptism’= forbidding the initiatory Sacrament of baptism; in effect, proscribing Christianity.

¹⁶⁰ ‘*Hindowi*-country’= ‘Hindu-country’= Mylapore; signifies generally the Coromandel Coast. This, or ‘Ma’abar’ were the terms used by Arab traders to refer to the east coast till well into the late Medieval times (Yule 1866:258)

15. In those days in the Kingdom of Urhai¹⁶¹, because of a vision seen in a dream by the Bishop who ruled there,
16. by the decree of the Catholicos of the East¹⁶² (they) deputed a merchant called Thoma¹⁶³, a Nasrani¹⁶⁴ who dwelt in Urshilem¹⁶⁵
17. to go to Malayala to conduct his business¹⁶⁶ and also to see if there were Nasranis (there). And he boarded ship and disembarked in Malayalam.
18. After which he summoned the Nasranis from Maliankara and such other places in Tiruvamkottu and met them.¹⁶⁷
19. And after speaking to them abundantly, he reassured those sixty-four¹⁶⁸ households of Nasranis of Malayala as though they were his older and younger brothers,
20. and strengthened them. And again, boarding the ship he set off and arrived in *Urishalem*¹⁶⁹,
21. and (he) going to the place where the seat of the Catholicos was, informed him¹⁷⁰ of all these affairs, after which, by the order issued by the

¹⁶¹ Urhai/Urhoi: = Syriac name for the city now called (Sanli) Urfa, previously known as Edessa, named after its Macedonian namesake.

¹⁶² Catholicos: a Greek term used in Eastern Roman Empire denoting financial or civil offices. After the Council of Nicaea (325), it denotes the suffragan bishop of the See of Antioch.

¹⁶³ 'Thoma' is the Hebrew/Syriac version of the name 'Thomas'. This merchant is known in Kerala Syrian Christian historical narratives and ballads invariably as 'Knai Thoma', in clear distinction from *Thoma Sleeha*, 'Apostle Thomas'.

¹⁶⁴ *Nasrāni*: It is not certain when exactly this term came to be used to denote the St. Thomas Christians, the earlier term being '*mārgākkār*' (= 'Those of the Way'; See note 48 to L.1).

¹⁶⁵ *ūrīśalēm* = Syriac rendering of Jerusalem, more commonly approximated in Malayalam as '*Yerushalem*'.

¹⁶⁶ An indication of ongoing trade between Mesopotamia and Malabar.

¹⁶⁷ Kandanad Chronicle mentions (2008:28) that this Jerusalemite merchant Thoma identified them as Christians by the crosses they wore in their hair.

¹⁶⁸ The remaining sixty-four Christian families after the majority ninety-six had reverted to Hinduism (L14).

¹⁶⁹ At its inception, the seat of the Catholicos in the East was in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, but because of ongoing war between the Persian and Roman empires, the seat moved to Baghdad 8th century, and later to Maraga during the Ilkhanate. It was never in Jerusalem (Chediath 1990:22-25). But here in MV it is stated that Knai Thoma met the Catholicos in Jerusalem, for which there is no clear explanation.

¹⁷⁰ This sentence in the Syrian version reads differently as: 'Then [Thomas] showed to the Catholicos what the brothers in Malabar had promised', the meaning of which is unclear. There is no corresponding statement in the Malayalam version.

Catholicos, from the region of *Urhai*¹⁷¹

Section 4: L 22-32: Arrival of the Edessans; granting of honours and privileges

22. the Bishop who governed [the place of Urhoi], along with many priests from Baghdad, Nineveh and Urishalem¹⁷²,

23. deacons, and Nasranis, and along with them women and children, set off in the company of the merchant Thoma.

24. [They] boarded ship and arriving again in Malayala-country in the Year of Christ 345 disembarked in Maliamkara.¹⁷³

25. [They] met and conferred with the 64 Nasrani households in Malayala-country, and went together

26. and met the King then reigning over Malayala-country the Lord Chera-kon Perumal. And after having intimated to His Majesty's mind¹⁷⁴ all the circumstances,

27. His Majesty in his pleasure¹⁷⁵ granted sufficient and more land within the precincts of the land of Kodungallur.¹⁷⁶

28. And after which, he granted the Syrian Nasranis innumerable royal privileges to last in perpetuity as long as the sun and moon remain,¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ According to the Canons of Nicaea, the Bishopric of Urfa came under the See of Antioch.

¹⁷² The place names generally are rendered in their Syriac forms: *urhōi* (Urfa or Edessa), *bāgudāš* (Baghdad), *ninuve* (Nineve) and *ūrišālēm* (Jerusalem) (L21-22).

¹⁷³ This is the same port where St Thomas arrived in 52 (L.2-3), i.e. Kodungallur.

¹⁷⁴ Malayalam usage indicating deference to the ruler: *tiruvalattil etti* = literally, 'raised to his honorable majesty's mind'; colloquially elided phrase, for: *tiruvalattil kayatti*.

¹⁷⁵ A literal rendering would be 'his royal majesty's mind brightened'

¹⁷⁶ Muziris or Kodungallur = one of the cities in Chera kingdom. MV gives the impression of it being a sprawling city (L27 and 31), which agrees with early accounts of the place, the port from which pepper was exported from as early as the 1st century CE, as seen in the Periplus of the mid-1st century (Schoff 1912:44, 205, 208-9).

¹⁷⁷ A Malayalam trope, meaning, 'in perpetuity'.

29. that they may walk and conduct themselves accordingly, and execute as such. And [he] wrote these privileges on copper-plates

30. and the Lord Chera-kon Perumal in his pleasure gave it, which copper plates they straight away received, and these plates are to be seen (with us) until this day.¹⁷⁸

31. After this, within the precincts of the country of Kodungallur, land was marked out¹⁷⁹ and given to them, where they built a church. And aligning East-West

32. and facing North and South, they also built 472 shop-fronts, and behind the shop-fronts (as many) dwelling houses

Section 5: L33-40: Arrival of a second cohort from Mesopotamia

33. and lived in accordance with The Way with humility and courtesy for many days. And in those days, from Baghdad and Nineveh,

34. from Urishalem and from many other places, there arrived regularly under the order of the Catholicos of the East many Syrian

35. bishops, and they came to Malayala and governed over the Syrians of Malayala.

36. Subsequently, when a long time had elapsed in this manner when after Kodungallur had come undone¹⁸⁰, in the Year of the Messiah 823,

¹⁷⁸ Important documents, especially royal decrees and proclamations were inscribed on copper plates (Veluthatt: 'Valappalli Copper-plate of Rajasekhara'; 'Perinchellur Copper-plate', Thiruvalla Copper-plate etc., 2013:24,61; image on p.48). Of similar rectangular shape and dimensions of *olas*, the inscribing was done by gold-smiths, as evidenced in one of the SCM inscriptions (Nair:1859:38).

¹⁷⁹ *tara-vaḷaṇṇatinakam* is the phrase used in Malayalam here, meaning a '*tara-enclosure*'. 'Tara' broadly translates as 'village', but in medieval Kerala, it differed in its fundamentals from the village-units of other parts of India. It was the 'ultimate unit' (Logan 1957: IX; 132), where civic administration was conducted according to caste-specific rules and laws, by each caste's leaders or elders. There was no law above that, and no procedure for appeal either. (See lengthy discussion in Balakrishnan 1983:145-155)

¹⁸⁰ The destruction of Kodangallur in early 9th century is implied, which according to some sources was the result of a trade-war between the Jews and Moors, when the Syrians took the side of the Jews. Citing an earlier source (now thought lost), Yohannan in his '*History of the Paravur Mar Thommen Parish*

37. from Baghdad there arrived the Syrian bishops *Mar Šabor* and *Mar Aprōt* ¹⁸¹

38. and the personage by name *Saur Īšō* ¹⁸² in Kollam and having paid homage and presented gifts to the king called *Cakṛavartī* ¹⁸³

39. built churches in Kollam ¹⁸⁴ and erected there a city too. In this manner innumerable Syrian bishops came to Malayala

40. and in this manner leading in The Way and building churches. When the Year of the Messiah one thousand five hundred years had passed,

Section 6: L41-52: Arrival of the Franks (Portuguese)

41. the Franks arrived in Malayala-country (+). And they settled in the Malayala-country as well. ¹⁸⁵ Even in those days

42. by the decree of the Catholicos, the Syrian Bishops Mar Denha and Mar Yacoub and Mar Thoma

43. and Mar Yau Aalaha, in this manner as stated, four bishops arrived together and presided over Malayala

44. and built many churches. But when these four had entered their eternal rest,

45. when the Year of the Messiah had exceeded 1580, again by the decree of the Catholicos of the East, a Syrian

church’ (1919:12) says: ‘In the 9th century the Arabs set fire to the *Māhādevārpattaṇam* of the Christians of Kodungallur’.

¹⁸¹ *Aprōt*: also given as ‘*Pheroz*’ (Philip 1950:94).

¹⁸² ‘*Saur Īšō*’: also given as ‘*Sabrīšō*’ (Zachariah 1973:41).

¹⁸³ Mathai omits the name of the King of Kollam who received this cohort, referring to him only using the generic term ‘*Cakṛavartī*’= Emperor, an Aryan model of kingship supported by several feudatory kings (Veluthat:2013:31).

¹⁸⁴ One of the seven places where St Thomas is said to have established a church.

¹⁸⁵ ‘*kuṭiyirippum avarkkāyi*’ is the expression used here. Passive syntax without denoting agent: ‘the tenancy (or settlement) became theirs,’ freely translated as: ‘they took the tenancy (established themselves there)’.

46. Bishop Mar Abraham by name arrived in Malayala-country. In those days the Franks put about a fashion that

47. Syrian bishops who came to Malayala by the decree of the Catholicos could no longer come.

48. And to this effect, they appointed guards all along the way and began to cause the bishops to be captured stealthily and murdered. And when as a result

49. Mar Abraham had suffered much, by the Grace of our Lord,

50. he escaped from the clutches of the Franks and ruled in Malayala, erected many churches and entered his eternal rest. But in those days,

51. because the arrival of Syrian bishops was interrupted, and because of the absence of bishops,

52. the Syrians of Malayala were suffering mental distress. The Franks by the order of Pope Deromi,¹⁸⁶

53. the bishari¹⁸⁷ and bishop of the Fort,¹⁸⁸ a Frankish bishop called Alleshu¹⁸⁹, arrived in Malayala. After which,

Section 7: L53-58: The Synod of Diamper

54. he made many efforts of diverse fashions to overturn the Syrians of Malayala. And finding this not possible,

¹⁸⁶ Pope Deromi: the generic term 'Pope of Rome' is used as a proper name. The Pope at the time was Clement VIII.

¹⁸⁷ A corruption of the Malayalam-ised word: Vicar - '*vikāri*'.

¹⁸⁸ The Portuguese administered Fort of Kochi- a tract of land in the harbour area of the city of Kochi, with high walls and a draw-bridge. By late 16th century it had its own Vicar-apostolic, appointed by Rome.

¹⁸⁹ *Allēšu* = Alexander.

55. he gave the Royal Personage of Perumpatappu¹⁹⁰ 30,000 *person-inscribed coins*¹⁹¹.
And for three years in full

56. he persecuted the Syrians of Perumpadappu¹⁹² and distressed their hearts. As a result of this,

57. the Syrians of Malayala came to obey the Frankish bishop.¹⁹³ After some years of carrying on in this manner, entangled with the Franks,

58. and having had all the Syrians' rites and traditions changed and the marriage of priests forbidden,

Section 8: L59-64: The Syrians break away from the Catholic Church

59. since they were entangled¹⁹⁴ with the Franks and had walked in this way for 55 years,

60. by the order of the Catholicos a Syrian hierarch Mar Ignatius¹⁹⁵ came to Malayala whom the Frankish men captured at Mylapore,

61. and brought him bound, to the Fort¹⁹⁶ and lowered him into the sea and thus murdered him, which all the Syrians of Malayala came to hear.

¹⁹⁰ *Perumpatappu*: the dynastical name for the kings of Kochi. Baldeus 1671:622 recounts how according to the mythology of the origins of Kerala kings, when Cheraman Perumal of the fourth century adopted a new religion (it is contested whether this was Christianity in the 4th century or Islam in the ninth century), and went away on a pilgrimage, he divided his kingdom among his chieftains, where the territory of Kochi fell to his sceptre-bearer known as Perumpatappu, from which the dynastical name arose.

¹⁹¹ 'Person-inscribed' = coins with a head on them, here referring to the Venetian *Real* prevalent in Malabar-trade at the time. The local coins (*phaṇam*) did not have heads on them.

¹⁹² In the Portuguese period of 16th-17th centuries, most of the centres of the Syrian Christians populations were in the kingdom of Kochi, with the exception of Kollam and Niraṇām further south.

¹⁹³ The Synod of Diamper by which the reduction of the SCM was effected, was a seminal event in the narrative of the SCM, but MV does not name it.

¹⁹⁴ This 'entanglement' signifies a complex entwined relationship. It will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.4 Latinisation.

¹⁹⁵ MV does not give his designation.

¹⁹⁶ Portuguese Fort at Kochi is inferred.

62. As a result of this, all the Syrians of Malayala gathered at the church in Mattancherry¹⁹⁷ and convened a meeting and consulted

63. and took an oath that from henceforth forever, even in the times of our children, we will not ally with the Frankish men for good or ill.

64. And all together having written a declaration to this effect and affixed their signatures to it, they dispersed. (And after this, having seated himself in the Fort of Kodungallur)

Section 9: L:65-73: Continued depredations of the Portuguese

65. After this, having seated himself in the fort of Kodungallur, the bishop of the Franks¹⁹⁸ secretly wrote letters to the priests and Nasranis and sent them messengers, and

66. secretly despatched for some (of them) expensive cloths and jewellery.¹⁹⁹ As a result of this,

67. having accepted these inducements, some of them clandestinely²⁰⁰ went and saw the bishop. And to those who came to see him

68. he (gave) presents, both in words of promise and in money.²⁰¹ And when things were going²⁰² in this manner,

¹⁹⁷ The district adjacent to the Portuguese fortified and moated area called 'Fort Kochi'.

¹⁹⁸ Bishop Garcia is inferred.

¹⁹⁹ Expensive gifts are inferred here, such as jewels or cloth.

²⁰⁰ That the Syrians went to see the bishop in secret is inferred.

²⁰¹ Signifying that while some of these gifts were in cash, others were promises of cash or other gifts.

²⁰² Or 'carrying on like this' is inferred.

69. those Syrian churches who had not wavered²⁰³ all began to obey the Frankish bishop²⁰⁴. But then the Franks

70. and those Syrians who had joined with the Franks together gave bribes to the respective local Lords of the land, the Kings.

71. And those Syrians who remained separate from the Franks without joining them, they had them tortured, and in which ever manner that they could, the Frankish men

72. harassed those Syrians who had not united with them. And again (those Syrian bishops who were coming) by the decree of the Catholicos of the East

73. they began secretly murdering them (those Syrian bishops). And in those days,

Section 10: L74-82: Arrival of the Dutch, and the Syrians hope for redress

74. by the mercy of the Lord who controls everything, those who execute truth and justice and walk in the commandments of the Lord²⁰⁵

75. and rule their country by faith in the Lord, by the order of that (same) Company²⁰⁶ who ruled the country,

76. there arrived in Malayala the honourable Amaran²⁰⁷ who, just as by the commandment of the Lord, one named Isho-bar-Nun

²⁰³ The reference here is those parishes that had not allied with the Catholics after the Oath at Mattancherry.

²⁰⁴ What is inferred here is that as a result of handing out of bribes, promises and other inducements, many more of the Nasrani parishes also began to switch their allegiance from bishop Mar Thoma I to the Archbishop Garcia.

²⁰⁵ The high esteem in which MV held the Dutch is elaborated, that they: 'walk in the commandments of the Lord', and rule with 'truth and justice'.

²⁰⁶ The writer's misapprehension that the Dutch East India company was the supreme authority of the Netherlands rather than a private trading one, is indicated.

²⁰⁷ 'Amaran' signifies the Dutch commander; most likely a corruption of Adriaan van der Meyden, who led the campaigns to evict the Portuguese from Kollam (1662) and Kochi (1663).

77. had expelled the heathens²⁰⁸ residing in the land of Canan²⁰⁹, he (Amaran) expelled from the fort of Kochi those even more treacherous than the heathen²¹⁰

78. and the honourable Amaran expelled them from all other forts as well.²¹¹ As a consequence of this,

79. from that time till now the hapless Syrians have rejoiced and even now offer praises to the Lord.

80. And as a result of which alone from then till now by the order of the Catholicos of the East,

81. Syrian bishops have been coming to Malayala without hindrance and in this manner it is now²¹²

82. over one thousand seven hundred and some more years gone.²¹³ When by the decree of the Catholicos of the East,

Section 11: L83-95: The Carmelites & Jesuits return; persecutions resume

83. a letter that was sent to the Syrians of Malayala from Surat,²¹⁴ by the Syrian bishop Mar Shim'on

²⁰⁸ The Biblical story of how Joshua ('son-of-Nun') with Divine intervention, captured the city of Jericho effortlessly is inferred here as a metaphor for the Dutch routing of the Portuguese in Kochi.

²⁰⁹ Land of Canaan in Palestine; from the Syriac: *kanān*. In Malayalam, variably as *kaṇāṇ* or *kīṇāṇ*.

²¹⁰ The Portuguese are indicated as being: 'more treacherous than the heathen'.

²¹¹ Historically, upon taking the Fort of Kochi, the Dutch are reported to have systematically evicted all Portuguese clergy and citizens from there for fear of sabotage by their religious and nationalistic sympathies. (For a long account of this see Baldaeus 1672:631-635)

²¹² The Syrian Christians' relief, and the restoration of their freedoms in the practice of their religion (receive their bishops from Syria) is inferred as being directly linked to the establishing of the Dutch authority in the country. Three bishops, Mar Gregorius, Maphrian Mar Baselius Yaldho and Mar Ivarius, are thought to have arrived in Malabar in this period (between 1665 and 1691) MV does not mention them by name.

²¹³ The termination of this period of reprieve is dated to: '1700 and some more years'.

²¹⁴ Once a prosperous port, Surat on the coast of Gujerat was fought over by European colonial powers as well as Indian rulers of the Mughal and Mahratta kingdoms till the mid-17th century, when its trade diminished. One infers, according to this account, that in the late 17th to early 18th century period, the

84. by the decree of the Catholicos of the East, it was captured by the Carmelite Padres and read and understood the contents.

85. Then the Carmelite Padres and the Padres of *Sambālūr* got together and consulted and appointed guards

86. to intercept the Syrian bishops along the way. And they captured them and took them to the Fort of Puthucherry²¹⁵, where they imprisoned them.

87. Especially in the year 1705,²¹⁶ Bishop Mar Gauriel²¹⁷ who came after Mar Shim'on,

88. when he arrived in Malayala by the decree of the Catholicos,

89. seeing that the number of Syrians who joined with the Franks and who went by their rites was great,

90. and that all the priests including those of the Syrians of Malayala-country, as well as those Syrians who had joined with the Franks,

91. went about disobeying the traditions of the Syrians like the marriage of priests,²¹⁸

92. and that day by day the number of Syrians of Malayala were decreasing,²¹⁹ seeing of all this, he became greatly, greatly heartsick,

93. and in order to separate the Syrians who allied themselves with the Franks away from them

Portuguese surveillance against Syrian bishops was operational only intermittently, as evidenced by the many bishops who managed to evade it, and the many who were captured.

²¹⁵ *puticcēri kōttayil* =Fort of Putucherri (Pondicherry on the east coast) where the Capuchins had a monastery and where this bishop, a historical figure, is thought to have been held until his death (Podipara 1970:166).

²¹⁶ *marā gaurīyel*=Mar Gabriel.

²¹⁷ Two letters of JSC Metropolitan Mar Thoma IV dated 1709 and 1720 refer to the same Mar Gabriel, and the internal evidence and the chronological concurrence point to this being the same Gabriel. The Dutch Chaplain Jacob Canter Visscher of Kochi, also corroborate that Patriarch Elia of the CofE sent Mar Gabriel to Malabar. Mar Gabriel's doctrinal and jurisdictional conflict with Mar Thoma IV is documented in Syrian sources. These sources will be discussed in Chapter 4.

²¹⁸ Celibacy of priests was one of the Catholic tenets enforced on the Syrians by the Synod of Diamper in 1599. Here celibacy of priests is used as a marker, of those who: 'joined with the Franks'.

²¹⁹ As a result of the Syrians being persuaded to join the Catholic Church.

94. he managed to bring under his sway forty-two churches²²⁰ after which the Padres of Sambaloor.²²¹

95. And the Carmelite Padres endeavoured together and brought twenty of these churches back under their sway like before.

Section 12: L96-103: Appeal to the Dutch Commandeer for protection

96. But in these days at the present time, if the Honourable Commander²²² is convinced that the goodwill of the Company

97. is on this impoverished bishop of the name Mar Gabriel the Syrian

98. and if he believes that in protecting the destitute, the Lord who rules over everything,

99. the God Almighty is pleased bearing this in mind, and if the Honourable Commander will extend his goodwill,

100. it is certain that all the Nasranis of Malayala will become Syrians as before,²²³ and separate themselves from

101. the Franks, and walk in the tradition of the Syrians, this is certain.

102. These facts and truths, the Commander who is of Christ, and his honourable self and all those other Masters who are of

103. Christ, may they come to know and have compassion on and give succour to the Syrians we beg.

²²⁰ Visscher (writing in 1723) also attests this (Drury 1862:103-104).

²²¹ *Sampālūkkār* (*Sampālūr+kār* =the St Paulists, i.e. Jesuits), from the St. Paul's seminary established by St. Francis Xavier (one of the first Jesuits) in Goa, in 1542 (Hough 11839 Vol.1:175).

²²² The Dutch Commander.

²²³ 'Nasranis of Malayala will become Syrians as before': here 'Nasrani' signifies the whole 'caste' of St. Thomas Christians, including those that had adopted the Catholic faith, and those that had not.

3.3 Commentary

The discursive landscape of the early 18th century into which this appeal was launched was a complex one, both in political and religious terms. The nature and purpose of the appeal Mathai makes, and the kind of help and protection he envisaged forthcoming from the Dutch can be understood only in appreciation of these elements. The early 18th century was a time of intense and ongoing conflicts, changing allegiances, competing denominational identities being formed, and conflicting narratives of identity being articulated. Mathai recounts how, at each pivotal point in the foundational and evolutionary history of the Syrians of Malabar, actions and interventions of one or more significant individuals took place which were critical in the direction it took and the way it progressed. An examination of these pivotal points and the individuals concerned will help in disentangling and putting together a coherent understanding of the Syrian Christians' perception of their historical identity at this point of its expression.

3.3.1 Name of the community

Historically, the Syrian Christians of Kerala referred to themselves as *Nasrāṇikal* (Nasranis)²²⁴, but from their first encounters with them, the Portuguese referred to them as the 'St. Thomas Christians', 'Malabar Christians', or 'Christians of the *Serra* (= mountains)'.²²⁵ The first use of the term 'Syrian Christians' is seen in Visscher (1742:100) where he heads a chapter on them with: '*Description of the St. Thomas or Syrian Christians*', indicating that by the late 17th or early 18th century, the term 'Syrian Christians' had become the normative reference, at least among the Europeans, to denote the St. Thomas Christians.²²⁶ Although it is possible that this community was alert to the Dutch use of this term and were using it reciprocally and self-

²²⁴ *Nazraye* was the term used in the Palestine- Syria - Mesopotamia region, to refer to the Jewish converts to Christianity in the primitive Church (Budge's translation of Bar Hebraeus 1923:42).

²²⁵ See Schurhammer, citing early 16th century sources (1933: *passim*); also, the Portuguese friar Gouvea (1606, *passim*); and the first Dutch account by Philip Baldaeus (1672:636).

²²⁶ The assumption that the term 'Syrians' was used by Europeans because of the St. Thomas Christians use of Syriac as liturgical language is perhaps inaccurate. The term *ܣܘܪܝܝܐ* '*Suryoyo*' was used by the Jacobite (non-Chalcedonian / Miaphysite) Syrian Orthodox Christians, from the 6th century onwards to distinguish them from the Christians of Arab origin, who were known as '*Tayyaye*'. Bar Hebraeus reports an Arab Christian as stating: 'All the tribes of the *Tayyaye* are orthodox (non-Chalcedonian)' (Budge 1932:62-65).

referentially, this cannot be determined conclusively as the Malayalam term throughout MV is *surīyāṇikkār* (from *surīyāṇi*+*kkār* = the Syrians) rather than ‘*surīyāṇi-kristyāṇikaḷ*’ (= Syrian Christians), which could be a corruption of the Syriac term ܣܘܪܝܝܐ ‘*Suryoyo*’.

Some of the nodal points in the narrative of MV will be critically examined to understand better the discrete elements and the overall message the author appears to convey through this document. This will begin with the arrival of Christianity, the establishment of the Church and its relationship with wider indigenous social structures, its episcopal support from abroad, and its encounters with Europeans from the 16th century. These points are examined in detail in order to contextualise and interpret them so as to understand better their significance in the evolving ecclesiology and religious identity of the SCM.

3.3.2. The foundation of the Church in Malabar by St. Thomas (l.1-5)

In writing an appeal pertaining to events in the 18th century, Mathai Vettikkunnel chose to begin at a point as far back as seventeen centuries prior to that, to the year of the alleged arrival of St. Thomas, in 52. This would indicate his perception of this event as the prime causal factor in the foundation and subsequent propelling forward of the narrative arc, 96 lines later to arrive at a statement of his immediate purpose in writing this appeal. The subject of Thomasine mission to Malabar at a precise date, the conversion of a large body of people in Malabar to Christianity, and the Apostle’s martyrdom are briskly covered in just over four lines, pared down to the bare points of the narrative. It covers the arrival of the Apostle, first in Mylapore on the east coast, then in Malabar, the establishment of several ‘churches’ in different population-centres, and his martyrdom in Mylapore. Details are not supplied, as although dating of the arrival is linked to a dynasty of kings (l.2: ‘the country of Chera-kon’), the exact date of arrival or the regnal period of a particular ruler is omitted. The martyrdom is reduced to a single action by an imprecise agent: ‘pierced by the hand of a pagan’. However, this forms the firm base from which the rest of the narrative is built up, giving it its mythical quality.

The Malayalam word for ‘church’ - *paḷḷi* - is used in its free-standing form, and it could denote a Jewish, Christian or Muslim place of worship.²²⁷ Mathai supplies a list of only ‘five and a half’ churches, although SCM tradition gives ‘seven-and -a-half churches’ being established by St. Thomas.²²⁸

The next 25 lines recount the stable progression and prosperity of the Christian community under the protection of local kings.

3.3.3. The St. Thomas Christians’ apostasy (ll.6-14)

Mathai speaks of the apostasy of the St. Thomas Christians as a result of the work of a certain Mani²²⁹ in South India, referring to him as *Manikka Vacher*, and describing him as a *kūdōtrakkāran*, meaning a sorcerer or a practitioner of black magic. In the Syriac version of MV, the corresponding term is *Manîk-bošr*²³⁰ and it looks more likely that the Malayalam term *Manikka Vacher* is a corruption of the Syriac *Manîk-bošr*.²³¹ This question will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.1.3.

Mathai indicates that Mani (or his disciples) won converts to his religion by the preaching of a message that was different from the Gospel they had received from St. Thomas and by the display of supernatural acts. Prohibition of baptism (MV l.8) - the ritual by which Christians were initiated, implies some coercion. By this measure,

²²⁷ As a prefix, it denotes a royal connection, as in ‘*paḷḷi-metta*’=‘Royal bed’, ‘*paḷḷi-urakkam*’=‘Royal sleep’ etc. Since at least the 18th century, the word could mean a Christian church or a mosque. (See Joseph Mar Dionysius: 1901:43, reprinted 2009)

²²⁸ SCM tradition ascribes ‘half-church’ status to Thiruvamkottu. Dames, the translator of Barbosa’s 1516 text, describes Thiruvamkottu as a prosperous small town, south of present-day Thiruvananthapuram, which was part of an ancient kingdom of that name (1921:Vol.2:102 footnote). The Portuguese destroyed it in 1504. After a long period of decline, the kingdom revived and became the powerful ‘Thiruvithamcoor’ in British times (‘Travancore’), which in the period 1729-1758, conquered all the smaller kingdoms to its north as far as Kochi, bringing to an end the rule of the ancient 32 Principalities (Menon 1991:231-240).

²²⁹ Mani (216-274) was the Persian founder of *Manichaeism*, the syncretic religion that combined elements of Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Hinduism. The Semitic term *Mānī Hayyā* (‘Mani the Living’) was Mani’s epithet, transcribed as *Manichaios* (Greek) or *Manichaeus* (Latin). The epithet indicated the particular healing or life-giving quality of divine beings or benign individuals. (Piras 2005:5646).

²³⁰ Land translates this into Latin (1862:123) as ‘*Verum illo tempore exiit magus cui nomen Mani*’= there arrived a sorcerer called Mani.

²³¹ The substitution of ‘v’ phoneme instead of ‘b’ phoneme is seen in numerous instances in the MV as noted in section 3.1.8 I, by which process, it is possible that *Manîk-bosr* was rendered as *Manikka Vacher*.

Mani was in effect attempting to deny the Christians new converts, and to turn them away from that religious identity and follow him instead. The success of Mani's mission, leading to apostasy of large numbers of Christians, is attributed to the leaders and elders of the community abandoning Christianity and adopting the new Manichaean creed.²³²

It appears that the early SCM was counted not in terms of individuals but of households, which would usually mean an extended family of several brothers, their wives and children living together, along with servants and dependents. The head of such families were either the father of the brothers, or in his absence, the eldest brother. In such patrilineal families,²³³ it would follow that when the head of the house converted or apostatised, the whole household went with him. This would explain the drastic reduction of the Christian community as a result of the apostasy of its leading figures (ll.12-13). Mathai begins to use the original self-referential term 'Nasrani' from l.12 onwards, and but uses both 'Nasranis' and 'Syrians' interchangeably in the latter half of the text. This reflects two points: firstly, that the term Nasrani was used to refer to the St Thomas Christians by the general population around them. Secondly, it reflects that by the time of his writing the MV, the Nasrānis also used the self-referential term 'Syrian' as distinct from 'Franks', referring to the Catholics.

MV places Mani's initial evangelical efforts in 'Mailapur' and 'Hendowi' (l.11), the pressure of which forced the Christians to abandon them and seek refuge in Malabar (l.10). 'Hendowi' has often been misunderstood to mean 'Hindu country' meaning 'India', leading to misinterpretation of this text, and attendant confusion as Malabar is within India, and these Christians could not have gone from 'Hendowi' (India) to Malabar, which is also in India.²³⁴ But the Coromandel coast was often referred to as

²³² This incident is absent in the Syriac version, and in mentioning the dissension in the primitive Church, the author admits he did not know why. See Appendix 2.3 for a comparison of the Malayalam and Syriac texts of MV.

²³³ Susan Viswanathan's ethnographic study of the Jacobite Syrians of Kottayam (1993:117, 131-2) shows that the Syrians followed the patrilineal system in terms of identity. The commanding power of heads of typical Brahmins households are discussed in Wood (1985:34-35, 51-57).

²³⁴ The Malayalam sandhi rule of syllabic-loss makes *Hendowi+il*=*Hendowil*, and this can be read as being *Hindu+wil* = *Hinduwil* (from India), leading to its interpretation as 'from the Hindu-country' (India). Mathai makes clear the distinction between Malabar and Hendowi as two separate regions (and not the former within the latter) in l.6 as well where he speaks of when: 'the priests in Hendowi and Malayala had died...'.

Hendo or Hendowi in Arabic and Syriac texts, Hendowi being ‘an obsolete name for the Mahratta language’ (Arbuthnot 1881:133), most probably from the Moghul and Mahratta kingdom that were established in Madurai and Tanjore from medieval times onwards.²³⁵

3.3.4. The city of Urfa /Edessa (ll.15-21)

A divine intervention is indicated, whereby the Bishop of ‘Uraha’ (Urfa) –who is not named – sees a vision, the nature of which is not clarified. A higher authority, namely the ‘Catholicos of the East’ is introduced here, who initially sends a fact-finding mission to Malabar.²³⁶ A Jerusalemite merchant, Thoma is deputed to this, and on his return, it is the same Catholicos by whose order, a large party of clerics and people are garnered to emigrate to Malabar, ostensibly to strengthen and stabilise the diminished Church there.

urahā (l.15) is generally understood to be the Malayalam rendering of Syriac *ܐܘܪܗܐ* *Urhoi*, of ancient Syria²³⁷ one of the earliest kingdoms to adopt Christianity (Cureton 1864:xxiii-iv; Wilmschurst 2011:17). According to the Canons of the Council of Nicea (325), this Bishopric came under the See of Antioch (Schaff and Schaff 1910:274-6; Abdel Ahad 1948:615).

L.17 indicates that Thoma and the Catholicos were unsure of the existence of Christians in Malabar, indicating the relative obscurity of the Malabar Christian community.²³⁸ The readiness with which a merchant who had trade-connections in Malabar, offers his assistance indicates a pre-existing trade between Mesopotamia and

²³⁵ Although the word ‘Hendo’ (or Hindo / Hindu) would indicate all of India, Arab writers distinctly referred to the east coast by this term. It appears that the term ‘Coromandel’ is relatively new, as the region in ancient times was known as Chola-Mandalam (kingdom of the Cholas), which in Portuguese language was approximated as ‘Coromandel’. Further confusion between the west and east coast of India arose because the Arabs also called the Coromandel coast ‘Ma’abar’, meaning ‘ferrying place’ (over to the island of Ceylon). (Lengthy account with etymology and historical usage of these terms given in Yule and Burnell 1886:401, 411-13).

²³⁶ See comments later in this chapter (3.3.10) for l.42 and for a discussion of the term Catholicos in MV.

²³⁷ Also called Edessa in the Seleucid period; currently, Sanli-Urfa in eastern Turkey.

²³⁸ For a comparison with the extended narrative of the Edessan migration in the Syriac version of the MV, see Appendix 2.3.

Malabar. Upon meeting them, an immediate rapport was established between the Christian merchant Thoma of Jerusalem and local Christians of Malabar (Il.18-19).²³⁹

3.3.5. The Edessan migration (Il.22-32)

The deputation of the merchant Thoma of Jerusalem to Malabar, his successful return, and his subsequent leading of a group of people²⁴⁰ to emigrate and settle in Malabar, are given in tight brevity.²⁴¹ The merchant Thoma is described as a ‘Nasrani’ (=a Christian) himself, and this points to the involvement of the Jewish Christians in trade with Malabar. The merchant Thoma is seen to be an able leader who brings the party safely to Malabar, unites them with the Malabar Christians, and who speaks to the Malabar king on behalf of both the native and immigrant Christians, with the result that the king was pleased with them. It is this mutual friendship between the king and Thoma that wins for the Christians a charter of honours and privileges from the king,²⁴² which were inscribed on copper-plates. By this charter, the Christians were able to secure for themselves the right to settle and trade in Malabar, as a result of the mutual favours the indigenous king and immigrant party along with their co-religionists received.

The leading cleric of the party is given as the Bishop of Urhoi (l.22) who had seen the vision, and the consequences of it are seen to be of extraordinary dimensions, whereby the large party of a bishop, priests, deacons, and ordinary families (Il.22-3) from ‘Baghdad, Nineveh and Jerusalem’, under the leadership of one man, are seen willing

²³⁹ The Syriac version of MV mentions the merchant identifying the Christians of Malabar by the crosses they wore.

²⁴⁰ The inclusion of Baghdad as one of the cities from which they came, poses a problem of chronological inconsistency. But, since in remembered oral histories, the names of people and places, as well as dates, form the key points on which the narrative is built up, it is possible that the *bagudāši* of MV is a corruption of another place name. However, some historians believe that references to ‘Bagdat’ in some ancient manuscripts is the same ‘Bagdad’ which later became the capital of the Abbassids (Jim Davila 2013:396).

²⁴¹ The use of the term ‘Nasrānis’ to denote the St. Thomas Christians is anachronistic at this point, as this term is thought to have come into use only after these specific events narrated, the previous name for the Christians having been *mārgākkār*.

²⁴² The reason for the generosity of the king to the foreigners, not only allowing them to settle but also giving them a charter of privileges, may have been their value in improving international trade. While it is true that the specific trading caste of Vaishyas were absent in Malabar of antiquity, south-Indians were engaged in trade, and the Dravidian race on the whole, were the main ship-builders and sea-traders in pre-Christian times (Schoff 1912:209, 238-9).

to sever familial and fraternal ties and emigrate to an unknown country, almost certainly never to return.

3.3.6. Chera-kon/Cheraman Perumal (Il.26-29)

The Perumals were a dynasty of kings that ruled the Kingdom of Cheras²⁴³ in the Malabar region, with its capital in Kodungallur (Schoff 1912:238, Day 1863:42). According to legendary myths, the dynasty became extinct abruptly in the 4th century when, dividing his kingdom among his 32 lieges, the king went away on a pilgrimage promising to return, and when he did not, the territories devolved to successive heirs of these lieges.²⁴⁴ Do Couto, the mid-16th century Portuguese historian, reports that this was the state in which the Portuguese encountered the territory of Malabar, constituted of small principalities ruled by their princes (Do Couto 1616:521-528). Though rejected by many leading indigenous historians,²⁴⁵ this dynasty's legendary history is entwined with that of the Syrian Christians as evident in the next section (3.3.7).

The King is introduced only by his dynastic name, Cheraman Perumal, making the corroboration of this migration difficult. Mathai in his letter does not refer to the king merely as 'Chera-kon'²⁴⁶ or 'Cheraman Perumal' but adds the honorific affix '*tanpurāṇ*' ('Lord') as a loyal subject would. The king's generous material gifts to the Christian community are enumerated (Il.27-8), but more significant are the many royal honours and privileges he granted them. The significance of this king's name as a remembered pivotal point, according to MV, is evident in the royal prerogatives he granted the Christians that were fundamental to the preservation and growth of

²⁴³ Kesavan Veluthat (2018) argues that 'Kerala' emerged as a unified political and geographical entity only: 'by the time we come to ninth century AD' (p16). He notes, however, that the less-defined Chera chieftdom existed from 'early historical period' (p14), from early Tamil references to 'Cērā' and 'Cēramān', and the Prakrit/Sanskrit references to '*Keralaputra*' in Ashokan inscriptions, and references to the same rendered in Greek as *Kerobotros* (p14).

²⁴⁴ According to legend, they ruled, expecting Cheraman Perumal's return to reclaim his kingdom (Joseph 1930:201-204). See Francis Day's *Land of Perumals* (1863:41-46).

²⁴⁵ Both secular and religious historians are divided on the legends relating to Cheraman Perumal. A long exposition of the various arguments is in Kerala historian Menon's account (1991:115-116) and he accepts the existence of the three South Indian kingdoms Chola, Chera and Pandya in this period (the Sangam Age, c.200 BC-c.300 CE). For a lengthy discussion, see Menon 1991:168.

²⁴⁶ *Kōn* denotes king, hence 'King of the Cheras'. *Cēramāṇ* is derived from *Cēramakaṇ*, which equates to the Pali term used by Emperor Ashoka: *Kerala-putta*, indicating 'son of Chera'. Sometimes *kō-chera-kon* is also used, where *kō* means King, and denotes a double-honorific title.

Christianity in Malabar from the 4th century onward. These privileges included protection from violence, freedom to practice their religion in apposition to the Hindu religion practised by the rulers, chieftains and practically all those in authority, among whom they lived. They were granted freedom to proselytize, freedom to practise trade as their occupation, and authority over serving-castes, social esteem and high honour.²⁴⁷

Details are provided of how the Christian district of Kodungallur was laid out (on an East-West axis facing North and South), and the ‘shops at the front, dwelling house at the back’ (ll.31-32) style of construction indicates the urban nature of the settlement and commerce being its livelihood. It is thought that the unified community of Malabar Christians (local and Mesopotamian), that emerged from the 4th century onwards took its name *Malaṅkara Nasrāṇikal*, from the district of Malankara (Maliankara, l.2) in the city of Kodungallur where St. Thomas first landed and established one of his churches, and where the Christians were given a safe place to settle by Cheraman Perumal in the 4th century.²⁴⁸

3.3.7. The Copper-plate grants (ll.29-30)

Local sources consistently cite 345 as the date of the first immigration of a Syrian community in Malabar, This is most prominent in their Ancient Ballads, where the date is given in an alphabet-numeric code (or chronogram), 345 being rendered as: *ṣō-vā-lā-kālam* = ‘in the year 345’.²⁴⁹ These privileges, the Christians believed, were inscribed on copper plates, that were in their possession till the mid-16th century. From the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, successive historians have mentioned these

²⁴⁷ According to this legend as reported to Couto (1616, see Appendix 9.5 for translation) and extant in SCM literature, the Christians were governed by their Archdeacons after the Perumal’s abdication. They appointed the family of Villiarvattom as dynastic rulers in the 9th century, and in late medieval period, when the last of the princes of this dynasty died without issue, authority over the SCM is thought to have devolved to the king of Kochi, called *Perumpadappu Swaroopam* (Perumpadappu Dynasty) (Pukadiyil 1869:120-21, McKenzie 1901:10; Kaniamparambil 1989:38).

²⁴⁸ The ancient city of Kodungallur was spread around the mouth of the great River Periyar. It is thought to have been destroyed in a sea-surge in 1341 (Menon 1991:148), and further destroyed in wars between the Zamorin of Calicut and the Portuguese in the first decade of the 16th century (Feroli 1939:371), both events forcing the Syrians to migrate to inland settlements. From this point, Kochi became the main trading centre in central Malabar.

²⁴⁹ See Appendix 9.4 for the cipher, as given in Cherusseril 1982:7.

copper-plates.²⁵⁰ Mathai asserts that the copper-plates were ‘still to be seen [with us] until this day’. However, his claim is inaccurate, as they were already ‘lost’ in the mid-16th century, as noted by Portuguese accounts of the time, but Mathai does not seem to be aware of this (Mundadan 1984 Vol. I:178).

3.3.8. The city of *Māhādevārpaṭṭaṇam* (ll.27-33)

The statement that the Christians ‘lived in accordance with The Way with humility and courtesy’ (l.33) highlights that the community comprising of local and Levantine/Mesopotamian Christians co-habited as loyal subjects to local kings and in harmony with other indigenous communities. The king’s magnanimity is striking, considering the arrivals were of an entirely alien race to the local milieu. The fact that they had no overt contact with religious hierarchs in Mesopotamia may have helped in their acceptance.²⁵¹

The logistics of settling this large group of people into the middle of a city can be better understood on examination of the layout of the ‘city’. The text denotes Kodungallur imprecisely as both a city and a country (l.27 and l.31: *Koṭuṇṇallūr-dēśam* (country of Kodungallur), which agrees with early accounts of the place. The city, like others in Malabar, was open on all sides, ‘not surrounded with ditches or walls’ (Lockman 1743 Vol.I:176), but spread out with houses surrounded by groves,²⁵² and was not fortified till 1604 (Baldaeus 1672:631). Kodungallur was twenty miles inland from the sea-coast (Logan 1899:76,80), and *Mālyāmkara* (or in elided oral form *Malāṅkara*) is thought to have been an area nearby, where land was given to the indigenous and Mesopotamian Christians to settle, by the king known only by his

²⁵⁰ Among European historians, Gouvea mentioned this first in 1606 (Malekandathil 2003:17), followed by others (Hough 1839:103-4 who dates it to the 8th century; Mackenzie 1901:4, Note 14 on p.59-60).

²⁵¹ A parallel can be seen in the way the Zoroastrians (or *Parsis*) fleeing religious persecution under Islamic rule of 9th century Persia, were welcomed to settle in Gujerat by the magnanimity of the Hindu king (Encyclopaedia Iranica: Parsi communities 1: Early History).

²⁵² The reason for easy-going city structure, according to Lockman, is that the numerous kings and chieftains of Malabar had never known conquest by a great foreign power, as even the Moghuls could not invade Malabar because of the mountain-barrier to the east. According to Lockman, when threatened with incursions from the sea-board, they retreated into the inaccessible hinterlands (1743 Vol.I:367).

dynastic name ‘Cheraman Perumal’.²⁵³ It is thought to have been on a nearby island in the river-mouth of the great river Periyar, where the Christians built themselves a city and named it *Mahādēvārpaṭṭaṇam*, meaning ‘City of the Great God’.

3.3.9. The Kollam migration (Il.36-39)

The second wave of Mesopotamian settlers in the MV is drawn specifically from the city of Baghdad, and in this instance only the leaders are mentioned, a named individual called *Saur Īšō*, referred to with an honorific title: ‘personage’, and the two bishops, his companions, Mar Sabor and Mar Aprot. Mathai dates this event by referencing an allegedly historical event: ‘when Kodungallur was undone’, and gives the specific year, 823. By this phrase is implied the destruction of Kodungallur (or at least that Christian enclave of the latter city called *Māhādevārpaṭṭaṇam* where they claim they settled in after the Edessan migration) in the 9th century, which is a recurring part of the Syrian narratives. According to these narratives, a trade-war erupted between the Jews and the Moors, and when the Syrians took the side of the Jews, their strongholds in Kodungallur in the north and Kollam in the south were burnt down, leading to the mass exodus of both the Christians and Jews to other principalities.²⁵⁴ The arrival of this second wave of settlers under their influential and wealthy leader Sabrisho, it is implied, led to the subsequent rebuilding of the city of Kollam and the restoration of an enclave of it to the Christian community comprising of the old Christians and the new settlers.²⁵⁵

While the historicity of the destruction of Kodungallur in 825 cannot be verified, considerable literature by Arabic authors are extant that treat the subject of Arab-Muslim penetration into south Indian coastal cities in the 8th-9th centuries (Logan 1887 Vol.I:191-6). It is possible that such an attack took place in order to take control of

²⁵³ See map in Appendix 1.2.

²⁵⁴ Yohannan in his ‘*History of the Paravur Mar Thommen Parish church*’ (1919:12), citing *olas* he consulted in this church’s archives, states: ‘In the 9th century the Arabs set fire to *Māhādevārpaṭṭaṇam* of the Christians of Kodungallur’ because the Christians had sided with the Jews.

²⁵⁵ Unlike Mathai’s pared down version, other SCM sources provide details of this party, how it consisted of a large contingent of lay settlers, and details the accomplishments of Sabrisho and the bishops Mar Sabor and Aprot. This will be discussed in Chapters 4.2.2, 5.4.5 and 6.2.

trade from the Jews and Christians, as Logan states that *Nasranis*, Jews and *Jonakas*²⁵⁶ were the chief traders of medieval Kerala.²⁵⁷ The destruction of the Christian enclave is nowhere mentioned as a causal factor for settlers' arrival however, the link merely appearing as a device for dating it.

This particular turning point in the SCM narrative history was picked up by 19th century European historians, and find extensive mention in several 18th-19th century European writings.²⁵⁸ Whitehouse names the key individuals the same as in MV, and dates the arrival of the settlers to 825, and cites his own sources: 'At that time the Jews and Arabs in this country were at war. We and the Jews were allies. The Arabs commenced the war, destroyed the city (Kodungallur), slew the two Rajahs of Vilyanvattale, (*Villiārvattam* in Malayalam) and burnt their bodies' (1873:75).²⁵⁹ Buchanan reported a parallel narrative from the Jews of Kochi: 'the desolation of Cranganor [anglicised form of Kodungallur] the Jews describe as being like the desolation of Jerusalem in miniature...' (Buchanan 1812:134-5). Though not explicitly stated, they appear attribute it to internecine quarrels and describe their abandonment of Kodungallur and subsequent settling in Kochi, but no date is given. While causal links between these events have not been historically validated, the fact that the Malayalam calendar, *Kolla-varṣam* (Kollam Era), in common use in Kerala till the mid-20th century (Yule Hobson Jobson 1903:750), began in 825, indicate some connection between the destruction of Kollam, the arrival of the Christian settlers, the re-building of the city, and the commencement of the new era.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ *yōnaka*: Malayalam term denoting Arab or Turkish Muslims.

²⁵⁷ It is possible that by the phrase 'Kodungallur had come undone', Mathai meant the predominantly Christian district of *Māhādevārpattāṇam* within it. A parallel can be seen in relation to the Jews of Mattancherry, generally denoted as 'Jews of Kochi' although 'they do not live in the city of Cochin, but in a town about a mile distant from it, called Mattancherry and Jew Town. It is almost wholly inhabited by Jews...' Buchanan (1831:7).

²⁵⁸ Buchanan, after interviewing the Jews of Kochi, gives the same account from the Malabar Jews' perspective (Buchanan 1806:133-35).

²⁵⁹ Historian and British civil-servant William Logan's account of these two Mesopotamian migrations gives a confusing picture (Logan 1887 Vol.I:203-205).

²⁶⁰ Kerala historian Sreedhara Menon treats this subject in detail (1991:97-104), examining the various theories on the commencement of the Kollam Era, including the SCM narrative. Although he argues that 'Kollam existed even before the commencement of the Kollam era. It is therefore difficult to believe that the Kollam era began in 825 A.D. in commemoration of the founding of Kollam'. He also provides a parallel narrative from a Kannada chronicle, where '*Kollam Azhinta Andu*' (=the year Kollam was undone) is mentioned, but leaves the question unresolved.

MV gives the accomplishments of the leader Sabrisho and the bishops as gaining permission to settle, and building more churches (l.39), and receiving a charter of rights and privileges inscribed on copper-plates. These copper-plates given to Sabrisho are still extant,²⁶¹ as are the granite slabs bearing crosses carved in relief, and its inscription bearing the name of Sabrisho.²⁶²

MV covers the history of the next 480 years with, not any references to the state of the Church, but rather how the ecclesiastical links established by Mar Joseph in 345 was nurtured by the regular arrival of bishops from Mesopotamia deputed by the Catholicos of the East to govern over the Syrians of Malabar (ll.34-5), emphasising the maintenance of uninterrupted links with Church in Mesopotamia.

3.3.10. The 'Catholicos of the East' (l.42 and *passim*)

This hierarch is referred to a number of times in the text (ll.16, 21, 42, 45, 47, 60, 72, 80, 82, 84, 88) as a significant person who initiates or facilitates many of the key actions narrated, including a mass-movement of people. The Bishop of Urfa (l.16) who had seen the vision is given only a secondary role in the first migration of the Mesopotamians, as it is by the 'order' of the Catholicos of the East that making contact with the Christians in distant Malabar is accomplished.²⁶³ The Catholicos then co-ordinates and dispatches the first set of migrants, indicating his superior authority in the Church in Mesopotamia with considerable powers to delegate others to act on his behalf, to the extent of despatching a large cohort of people to go and settle in distant Malabar.

²⁶¹ See T.K. Joseph for his research into these plates. Joseph reliably shows that there were more than one set of copper-plates given to Sabrisho (1929:32-35), and the donor is identified as: *Aiyan, king of Venad*, Venad being the name of the kingdom of which Kollam was the capital (Narayanan 2002:111-9). Kookel Keloo Nair's comparative study of three sets of related copper-plates gives the donor of one set as *Ayyen Adigul Teeruvati*, reigning in 'the 5th year of Stanoo Ravi Goopta *Kō* (=king),' and the recipient as *Sapir Iso* (1859:46-53), but Nair does not resolve the issue of dating it. Nair gives the full transcription of the text.

²⁶² See section 5.4.7 for recent investigations on the granite cross inscription and the copper plates.

²⁶³ The three Patriarchates recognised at the Council of Nicaea were Rome, Alexandria and Antioch, and Antioch had authority over all the Eastern regions including India (Murdoch 1861:233-234; Yacoub III 1952:56).

In the context of trade between the Arabian-Persian coasts and India being firmly established from ancient Roman times (Vincent 1800:2-13), it is not improbable for the merchant Thoma to have made this journey to Malabar before, and thus was able to accept the deputation from the Catholicos to Malabar on his fact-finding mission on the state of the Christians of Malabar and reported back to him.²⁶⁴ After the settling of the first group of Mesopotamians, MV mentions again how the link to Mesopotamia was maintained without interruption by the regular arrival of bishops, and the arrival of a second cohort of settlers, ‘by the order of the Catholicos’ (l.34).

MV (ll.41-52) reports that the four bishops, Mar Denha, Yacoub, Thomas and Yau (Yab) Alaha that came in 1503 were also sent by the Syrian ‘Catholicos of the East’, as was Mar Abraham in 1550. The Portuguese authorities’ denial of the Catholicos’ authority to send bishops to Malabar is highlighted next, with the bishops he sent being obstructed, persecuted or even killed (ll.47, 60, 83-88).

However, in all these references to the Catholicos, no indication is given of the Church he represented, nor his seat, hampering the identification of his ecclesial identity and doctrinal affiliation. MV uses the term Catholicos to refer to a hierarch but the referent of this term is left imprecise. An indication of his patronal care and dedication to his office is evident in the Syriac version of the MV,²⁶⁵ but this does not help in determining his identity. As the identity and doctrinal affiliation of the SCM was forged on the basis of the bishops sent by the Catholicos, this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.5.1.

²⁶⁴ See Appendix 2.3 for a translation into English of the Syriac version of MV, which gives more details.

²⁶⁵ Far more detail is given in the exchange between the Catholicos of the East and merchant Thoma of Jerusalem in the Syriac version of MV: firstly, that he sends messengers to all the dioceses, and finding Thoma knowledgeable of Malabar, deposes him with the words: ‘I beseech you, my beloved son, to set out for Malabar, to inspect the inhabitants of the region, and to tell me what has happened to them’. Secondly, on his return, when he reported to the Catholicos that he had met the Christians of Malabar, the Catholicos is reported as saying: ‘although I am ready to lay down my life, I ask you to tell me what it is that my children most desire me to do’. It is unclear what is meant by the last part of this account, of Thoma showing the Catholicos: ‘what the brothers in Malabar had promised.’ (Appendix 2.3).

3.3.11. The Portuguese in Malabar (ll.41-54)

The narrative here moves forward 700 years to the point of the arrival of the Portuguese in ‘1500’²⁶⁶. The establishment of their power, without any mention of the wars and hostilities of the first decade after their arrival, is spoken of almost in passing with a euphemistic expression: *kuṭiyirippum avarakkāyi* (= ‘and the tenancy or possession became theirs as well’). By this agency-free, passivized expression of the Portuguese coming to occupy Malabar (possess the ‘tenancy’), the writer seems to be adopting a neutral position, the ‘tenancy’ not as something fought over and won by them, or given to them, but acquired by them. The early period of their presence in Malabar seems to have passed unremarkably, (ll.41-44) with bishops sent by the Catholicos arriving and governing the Church in comparative peace, with the persecution of these bishops beginning later in the Portuguese period (ll.44-52).

3.3.12. The Synod of Diamper and the Latinisation of the Syrians (ll.55-58)

In his efforts to subvert the faith of the Syrians, the Archbishop of Goa, Alexeis de Menezes (referred to as *allēšu*, l.53) is portrayed as ‘harassing’ the Syrians (specifically those living in in the Kingdom of Kochi) for ‘three full years’ before which they were brought under the control of Rome. The Portuguese are portrayed in a most negative light, with the word *paraṅki* used to denote them.²⁶⁷ Interestingly, Mathai does not name explicitly the Synod of Diamper, which was the most important historical event in the history of the Syrians, and which was convened by Menezes in 1599.²⁶⁸ What is implied here is that when the continuous effort by Portuguese, firstly by the Franciscan missionaries and then the Jesuits, to persuade the Syrians to accept Papal supremacy for about a hundred years had not succeeded, Menezes arrived, determined to resolve this matter. However, MV asserts that this objective was accomplished (according to the text), only by bribing the King of Kochi (l.55) with

²⁶⁶ Vasco da Gama first arrived in Malabar in 1498.

²⁶⁷ ‘Franks’ (‘Al-faranj’ or ‘Farangi’ in Arabic)– was used from Palestine eastwards, to refer to all Europeans, and brought to Malabar by the Turkish/Arab traders. In Malabar it was used to refer only to the Portuguese, in Malayalam, corrupted to ‘*paraṅki*’, implying, ‘hostility and disparagement’ Yule & Burnell (1886 / 2015:230).

²⁶⁸ Augustinian friar Anton Gouvea’s: *The Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes* (1606) gives a detailed eye-witness account of this Synod, but does not give the Decrees of the Synod. Keralan scholar Prof. Scaria Zacharia published his critical edition of the Decrees of this Synod in 1994.

30,000 ‘coins inscribed with images’.²⁶⁹ The relationship between the Portuguese and the king of Kochi was strongly interdependent,²⁷⁰ and so Kochi’s support of the Portuguese is unsurprising. The text indicates the persuasiveness of Menezes, and the Syrians’ submission to the King of Kochi as their temporal ruler, as the two reasons by which their submission to Rome was accomplished.

MV refers to the Latinised state of the Syrians as an ‘entanglement’ with the Portuguese, enumerating some of the ways in which the decrees of Diamper : “having changed all their rites and traditions of the Syrians and having forbidden the marriage of priests” (ll.58-9) had been implemented for 55 years, contrary to Syrian practice. Mathai’s highlighting of the prohibition of the marriage of priests indicates its particular impact on priestly families in the community, as it was enforced with the immediate break-up of existing families of married priests (Malekandathil 2003:307-8).²⁷¹ This is a particularly poignant comment since Mathai belonged to such a family, as will be discussed in section 3.4.3.

3.3.13. Mar Ignatius Ahattalla and the Oath of the Leaning Cross (ll.60-64)

The arrival in India of the hierarch ‘Mar Ignatius’ and his untimely death referred to (ll.60-64) is presented as a pivotal point in the history of the Syrian Church, which is borne out by the fact that it led to the Syrians’ rebellion against Rome and the ensuing schism which divided the Church into two - ‘the Syrians’ and ‘the Romo-Syrians’. MV only provides a minimal identification of this individual as ‘Mar Ignatius, the hierarch’. However, in this context, this would have been understood as the Patriarch

²⁶⁹ That Menezes bribed the King of Kochi with 30,000 ‘ducats’ is attested by other historians (Visscher/Drury 1743:107). This could have been Portuguese reals or Venetian ducats. Land’s (1862:126) Latin translation (Syriac version of MV) gives *‘triginta millia aureorum duplicium’* (thirty thousand double-gold coins).

²⁷⁰ In 1503 when the King of Kochi nearly lost his kingdom in an attack by the Zamorin of Calicut, the Portuguese had come to their rescue and restored the kingdom to him, for which the King remained a grateful ally. The Portuguese in turn gave him military protection, material gifts, and titles (Menon 1991:180-1), in return for trade monopoly.

²⁷¹ The forcible separation of married priests from their wives carried out by the Catholic Church after the Synod of Diamper is exemplified in an instance narrated by Gouvea (Malekandathil 2003:307-8), where a young Syrian priest, forced to ‘return’ his new wife to her parents, died within a few days. Protestant historian Hough narrates this incident as ‘a mockery of sacred things’ (1839 Vol.II:147).

of Antioch,²⁷² as the name Ignatius is usually attached to the Heads of this See.²⁷³ The apparent anomaly that ‘Mar Ignatius’ was: ‘sent by the Catholicos’, is confusing, but could indicate a consultation between the two, as seen in earlier instances mentioned by MV (ll.16, 21).²⁷⁴

The reference to the ‘Oath taken in Mattancherry’ (l.62) is clearly the Oath of the Leaning Cross of 1653, which the SCM state was their rejection of Roman authority. References to the declaration written on paper and called ‘Alangad²⁷⁵ Padiyola’ (= ‘Declaration’) are found in Syrian histories, but there is no record of its preservation or transmission.²⁷⁶ The statement: ‘we will not ally with the Frankish men for good or ill’ (l. 63) has led to a polarisation of positions between the Syrian and the Catholic historians. The SCM understood this as a rejection of the Roman Catholic Church and its authority entirely, while the Catholic historians interpret it as a rejection of the then Portuguese bishop Garcia, or the Jesuits.²⁷⁷ The phrase in l.63 ‘even in the times of our children’ indicates that the rejection was in perpetuity and not confined only to contemporary individuals and conflicts. These events are reported to have taken place in three different locations, indicating Mathai’s familiarity with the country, and his expectation that the Dutch would also understand these locations.

3.3.14. Continued depredations of the Portuguese (ll.65-73)

The first part of this section highlights the significant campaign specifically by the then Archbishop (Garcia) after the Oath of the Leaning Cross, to win back the

²⁷² According to Moolayil (*Tract of 1943*, 2005:165), this is the Patriarch Shim’on shown in the list of Antiochian Patriarchs. Historians of the Jacobite Syrians of Syria, as well as other denominations, refer to him as Patriarch Mar Shem’on of Antioch. Moolayil explains this anomaly: ‘in the old days, in Malayala country, he was referred to simply as ‘Ignatius, Patriarch of Antioch’. Only later did historians add ‘Mar Ahattalla’ to his name.’ He is thought to have occupied the throne of Antioch from 1640 to 1652. He was the first Patriarch of Antioch to reach Malankara. If he was a Maphrian, he would have been designated by a number, and have been referred to by his own institutional name.

²⁷³ The Syriac Orthodox Patriarchs of Antioch adopted, from 1293, the name ‘Ignatius’ (after the Illuminator).

²⁷⁴ The Patriarch, occupying a higher position than his suffragan the Catholicos in the episcopal hierarchy of the Syrian Church, could not have been deputed by the suffragan in the strict sense of the term. Mar Ahattalla’s identity and related events will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.5.8.

²⁷⁵ Alangad (also known as Mangad), 8 kms north-west of Aluva, was one of the leading centres of the SCM.

²⁷⁶ A translation of the text of the Oath and the *Padiyola* are given in Appendix 13.

²⁷⁷ Kollaparambil 1981:164.

Syrians, through a process of bribery and persuasion. Mathai indicates that this campaign included favours and gifts ('expensive cloths and jewellery' - ll.65-7), and implies that the inducements were aimed at lay individuals, invited to meet the archbishop in secret.²⁷⁸ Further, Garcia is alleged to have extended his efforts to the local rulers as well, to carry out persecution on his behalf (ll.70-71). For the SCM to have been 'tortured' and 'harassed' (l.71-2) could have been possible only with the consent of the secular rulers, primarily those of kingdoms of Kochi, the seat of Portuguese power,²⁷⁹ and those adjacent to it, which is the significance of the bribing of 'local Lords of the land' (l.70). As l.72 indicates, even at this juncture, messages were being smuggled out with fresh appeals to the Catholicos in Syria for support. However, no help actually arrived according to MV, because the Portuguese 'began secretly murdering them' (l.72-73) before they reached Malabar.

In enumerating these immoral activities of the Archbishop, MV appears to be implicitly drawing a contrast with the Dutch. The high praise of the Dutch, regarding their moral uprightness, is likely to have been received well by the Dutch authorities, who as Protestants, would have been highly critical of the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church.

As a result of the Archbishop's endeavours, Mathai states that some of the parishes that had initially rejected Rome, 'wavered', and reverted to Catholicism under Garcia (l.69). Catholic historians affirm that initially 73 of the 75 parishes of the SCM took part in the Oath rejecting Rome and were signatories of the subsequent written declaration affirming it, and only two parishes remained loyal to the Catholic Archbishop Garcia. These two were the Latin parish of the Portuguese in Fort Kochi, and the parish of Mar Sabor and Mar Aphroth in Diamper (where the Synod was held in 1599). They also confirm that many were persuaded to return to the Catholic authority over the following decades (Ferroli 1939:366; Hambye 1997 Vol.III:21). The large-scale winning back of the SCM by pecuniary inducements is attested to by

²⁷⁸ Garcia was acting from Kodungallur, while the seat of the Syrian Christian Archdeacon was at Angamaly and all their records were kept there (Buchanan 1812:88). After the Synod of Diamper, when Archbishop Roz attempted to style himself as the Archbishop of the SCM, he moved his headquarters to Angamaly. However, finding himself unsafe there, he moved it back to Kodungallur in 1606.

²⁷⁹ These included the Kingdom of Kochi and its tributaries, and excluded those kingdoms further south, including that of the city of Kollam.

the next Catholic Archbishop Joseph Sebastiani as well (Hough, citing Catholic bishops, and La Croze: 1839 Vol. 2:370).

3.3.15. Arrival of the Dutch (ll.74-82)

This section starts with a panegyric about the integrity of Dutch people and their nation being founded on Christian principles.²⁸⁰ The parallel drawn in ll.76-7 is between ‘Amaran’ (the Dutch commander)²⁸¹, to ‘*Isho-bar-Noon*’ or Joshua-son-of-Nun, the Israelite military commander. According to the Biblical story, Joshua defeated the Canaanites against great odds, and secured the country for the Israelites.²⁸² MV extends the analogy in attributing the Divine protection enjoyed by the Israelites to the Dutch as well, conveying a sense of overt flattery. A sharp contrast is made between the SCM’s previous state and the present one where they ‘rejoiced’ and ‘offered praises to the Lord’ for this reversal of their fortune from an unexpected source, restoring to them the freedom to receive bishops from Syria without the threat of imprisonment or death.

MV does not mention the arrival of three Jacobite bishops in the latter half of the 17th century, Mar Gregorios Abd al Jaleel in 1665, and, Mar Baselius Eldo, the Jacobite the *Maphrian*,²⁸³ and Mar Ivanios Hidayatalla, in 1685, as mentioned in Jacobite sources.²⁸⁴ It is not clear why Mathai omits mention of these bishops, but it may be partly linked to his wish to avoid overcomplicating his collaboration with Mar Gabriel, the Nestorian bishop, in his struggle against the Catholic Church. It may also have been to simplify the message to the Dutch commander, thus in effect, condensing the narrative to bring the letter quickly to contemporaneous events and to his appeal. The

²⁸⁰ This is not necessarily Mathai’s attempt to win favour with the Dutch, but the general Malabarian opinion of the Dutch, as a foil to the Portuguese. The Portuguese rule was often marked by extreme violence, inhuman acts of cruelty, and they had burnt the city of Calicut in 1503. It was these actions that intimidated the kings of Malabar into submission (Varthema 1508; Jones and Badger 1863:178; Vanidas Elayavoor:1996/2008 127-131).

²⁸¹ Under Van Goens the Dutch Commander (Baldaeus 634)

²⁸² The Biblical narrative recounts how God fought on the side of the Israelites, giving them miraculous victories. Book of Joshua 6:6-20, and *passim*.

²⁸³ *Maphrian* =title of the suffragan bishop of the Patriarch of Antioch.

²⁸⁴ Whitehouse 1973:191, Mackenzie 1901:35 mention the arrival of the three bishops Mar Gregorios, Mar Baselius, and Mar Ivanios. Interestingly, earlier Catholic and Protestant historians (such as La Croze and Hough, and the closest contemporary to MV, Visscher) do not mention them.

phrase ‘in this manner it is now over 1700 years’ (l.82) indicates, in Mathai’s perception, the millennial progression of his Church, with uninterrupted provision of bishops from one source, i.e., the Catholicos in Syria.

3.3.16. Persecutions resume (ll.83-95)

Referring to Carmelites (ll.85-86), and the Jesuits (ll.94-95) MV indicates how persecution of the Syrians resumed even with the Dutch in power, rendering the Syrians’ condition worse than before, the persecution only becoming more covert.²⁸⁵ The ‘Syrian bishop Mar Shem’on’ (l.83) is believed to be Mar Shem’on (Simeon) of Ada, who came to Malabar in 1701, but who was soon expelled from the country, and died in Pondicherry under mysterious circumstances.²⁸⁶ The highlighting of these acts of violence throughout the text, accompanied by expressions of anxiety about the serious erosion in numbers of the Syrians, can be seen to add urgency to Mathai’s appeal to the Dutch for protection.

While the name of the third bishop to arrive in this period (in 1705) is given as Mar Gabriel (l.75),²⁸⁷ there is no indication in this text of his doctrinal identity, or how he evaded capture by the Portuguese, despite a general understanding at that time that he was a Nestorian. MV mentions how, ignoring their respective bishops’ warnings against him, forty-two parishes accepted him as their bishop, drawn equally from the Catholic and Syrian side (l.94). Mathai appears to validate this acceptance of a Nestorian bishop as an attempt to stanch the haemorrhaging of the Syrians over to Rome.²⁸⁸ Gabriel’s efforts, however, were reversed when Rome won their parishes back (l. 95). The experiences of these two bishops of the CotE, i.e. Mar Simeon and

²⁸⁵ The British Resident Colonel Munro (1811-24) remarks on this in his report: ‘... and the Dutch, formerly in the possession of Cochin (Kochi), whose policy was marked with perfidy and meanness, abandoned them (the Syrians) to their fate’ (cited in Hough 1839 Vol.IV:321).

²⁸⁶ His identity, like that of Mar Ahattalla, has not been established though much discussed by scholars, because of the lack of consistency in the use of titles and allegiances (Perczel 2011:303-307). See Chapter 5.4.2 and 6.5.11 for more information on Mar Simeon.

²⁸⁷ The date of Gabriel’s arrival is given variously in different documents, in 1708 according to Niraṇām Chronicles. (p.129), and 1709 (Podipara 1970:168). For a review of some of the documents regarding this preserved in Catholic archives, see Perczel 2013:429, note 28.)

²⁸⁸ The Carmelite Paolino of San Bartolomeo (1775) the Syrians ‘had an intention of uniting themselves with the schismatic bishop’ (Drury 1862:175).

Mar Gabriel, in the lifetime of Mathai appears to have had an impact on him, as he treats them at length (l.87-96). The narrative of the Syrians' history comes to an end at this point (l.96).²⁸⁹

3.3.17. Appeal to the Dutch Commander for Protection (ll.96-102)

Having presented the 1700-year span of history of his Church and the long line of its bishops coming from Syria to sustain it, Mathai states the purpose of his writing only by line 96.²⁹⁰ He again appears to invoke the sense of justice of the Dutch to come to the Syrians' aid at this critical time for the Syrian Church, to withstand Catholic depredations against them, and so that 'all the Nasranis of Malayala will become Syrians as before' (l.100).

It appears that Mathai was aware of the on-going religio-political conflicts between the Iberian kingdoms and the Dutch, as he seems to be using this as leverage in urging the Dutch to adopt a position of supporting the SCM. He accords the Dutch due praise as their saviours, describing them as: 'those who execute truth and justice and walk in the commandments of the Lord, and rule their country by faith in the Lord' (ll.74-75). The implication here is that the moral strength derived from this moral integrity won them God's favour. He uses the analogy of Joshua in the Old Testament to applaud the routing of the Portuguese by the Dutch in Kerala, to the relief and joy of the Syrians: '(just as) by the Lord God's command, in the manner in which Joshua-son-of-Nun had evicted the heathen who dwelt in the land of Canaan, (your commander *Amarān* or Adam van der Duin) had evicted those more treacherous than the heathen - the Franks - out of the Fort at Kochi...' (line 76-78). The plea in this sense, is to tie the Syrians' cause with that of the Dutch against the Catholic Church and the Catholic countries who were political and religious adversaries to Protestant Netherlands as well, just as they were to the Syrians.

²⁸⁹ Mar Gabriel's identity, and Mathai's counting him as a 'Syrian bishop' (ll.91-2), will be discussed in section 3.4 of this chapter.

²⁹⁰At the time of this appeal's writing, the Dutch Commander (between 1716 and 1723) was Johannes Hartenberg.

3.3.18. Omissions

One of the significant observations about the MV document is the many omissions of particular details that are extant in other JSC accounts. The Bishop of Edessa who arrived with Knai Thoma is not named as Mar Joseph. The 16th century bishops who arrived during the Portuguese period, Joseph Sulaqa and Simeon are not named in MV. Even more critically, the Jacobite hierarchs, Mar Gregorius Archbishop of Jerusalem, Maphrian Mar Baselius Yaldho, and bishop Mar Ivanios are not named. The Synod of Diampur is not mentioned as such, and the reduction of the SCM to Rome is attributed to three years of Menezes' sustained persecution of the Syrians and the bribing of local rulers, etc. Similarly, the Catholic Archbishops Ros and Britto are not named, but what they effected among the SCM is summarised (l51) 'all their rites and traditions were changed'. In MV, there are references to the hard-line policies of Archbishops Garcia and Sebastiani, but again they are not mentioned by name.

3.3.19. Purpose of the MV

The memorised oral nature of the text is evident from its brevity of detail such as names and dates, despite the broad scope of its narrative. For example, he notes that there were seven and a half churches (ll.15 and 22), but gives the names of only five. In many instances, names and dates are omitted, such as the name of the *Uruhoi* (Edessa) bishop, one of the two bishops who arrived in Kollam (l.28). The King of Kollam is not remembered by name at all, but by his title: 'Emperor' (*cakṛabartī*), a generic term for 'Great King'. In this context, it would appear reasonable that the writer omits details that are not critical to this purpose.

What is being asked of the Commander alone is unambiguous: 'protecting the destitute' (l.98) Syrians. The pre-requisite is that the Commander needed to have a change in his estimation of the Syrians. When he understood the antiquity and unwavering 'purity' of the Syrians' Church, he would surely see that they were deserving of the extension of his 'goodwill' towards them. The writer hopes that the Commandeer will recognise the 'facts and truths' as he has narrated so far, and by this, the writer is certain, 'the Nasranis of Malayala will become Syrians as before and separate themselves from the Franks and walk in the traditions of the of the Syrians.' He summarises the appeal in the final sentence with unambiguous clarity: 'have

compassion and give succour to the Syrians we beg' (l.102), as this would protect them from the depredations of the Catholic Church, and enable them to return to their old religion and practice it freely.

From its clearly expressed purpose, MV aims not to set out a definitive historical account, but to communicate to the Dutch authorities the nature of the Syrian Church as one of antiquity with a pure lineage that from historical times, had been under the ecclesiastical authority and episcopal support of a Mother Church in the Levant or Mesopotamia. He also highlights the threat this Church was facing to its very survival, due to the proselytising efforts of the Catholic Church, which he portrays as fiscally corrupt, together with the implication of theological and moral corruption as well. Yet, paradoxically, the identity of this Mother Church, and by extension the identity of the SCM faction that MV is writing in defence of, is conspicuously absent from the text. The ecclesiastical identity of the last two Eastern bishops to have arrived in Malabar in the period immediately preceding the writing of this appeal, and whether they were accepted or rejected as their legitimate bishops by either the Syrian Church or the Syrian Catholic Church of the time, could have given some clues in this matter, but this is seen to be hampered by the febrile and confused atmosphere in the religious circles of the time. This is evident, firstly from the death under mysterious circumstances of the first, Mar Shim'on, and secondly from the evanescent nature of the 'allegiance' accorded to the second, Mar Gabriel, where, although 42 parishes drawn from the Catholic and non-Catholic factions had adhered to him at first, after his death, they reverted to their original states.

This leads to the conclusion that in order to arrive at an understanding of the identity of what is termed 'the Syrian Church' at the time of writing this document, a more detailed analysis and discussion is needed of the text as part of the context and discourse within which it was written, as will be addressed in Chapter 5.

3.4 Analysis and discussion

In attempting to understand the message conveyed in the MV, the codes of meaning of words and phrases internalised by Mathai as a Syrian Christian (whether Jacobite or Romo-Syrian), and their illocutionary significance, will be discussed in this section, through the hermeneutical circle of interpretation. This discussion will extend beyond the primary text and will also reference aspects of cultural behaviour that reflect the lived religious experience of the author, his self-identity within the community, and the socio-political milieu in which he was operating.²⁹¹

The MV is unique among the corpus of Syrian Christian primary and key secondary sources examined in this study, being the only one that is a letter of appeal to the civil authorities of a colonial power, to whom the plea for protection of his Church is addressed. In this sense, it is also the first textual intervention from a significant native Syrian individual into the on-going dialogical process. Mathai is not launching his narrative text into a void, but rather into an active field of dialogue among the Europeans about the St. Thomas Christians they encountered in Malabar.

3.4.1. The Dutch in Malabar

Mathai's adulation of the Dutch in the speed with which they took Kochi from the Portuguese is borne out by historians.²⁹² Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch prime interest in Malabar was not annexation of territory (Taylor 2004:209). but the extension of trade.²⁹³ In spite of some of the colonial excesses they committed in other regions, in Malabar the Dutch reflected the Enlightenment-spirit of the age, cultivating scholarly interests, especially those of commercial and scientific value.²⁹⁴ Keralan

²⁹¹ As Melford Spiro has argued in his discussion of how culture is shaped, the complexity of a subject can be understood only by the study of its mode and its subsistence techniques, and the political and cultural niche in which it functions, rather than by seeking meanings in its articulated expressions and statements alone (Spiro 1996:765)

²⁹² The speed of the Dutch defeat of the Portuguese was aided by the fact that the cities of Malabar were not fortified, and the Portuguese had only fortified a part of it in Kochi, called Mattancheri in 1504. (Baldaeus 1672:631)

²⁹³ The Dutch East India Company (VOC-Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie), centred in Batavia (Jakarta), had widespread interests in south-east Asia.

²⁹⁴ Philip Baldaeus's 900-page-long account (1672) of the Dutch conquests of Malabar etc. included a study of the vernacular language. Hendrik van Rheede, aided by local physicians, compiled a herbarium, the *Hortus Malabaricus* (Amsterdam 1678-1693) on medicinal plants of Malabar.

historians generally agree that in contrast to the Portuguese before them, the Dutch governed the territory of Malabar efficiently and honourably,²⁹⁵ though they were under pressure from other European mercantile nations who endeavoured to displace them (Phillips & Sharman 2015:109).²⁹⁶

3.4.2. Dutch perception of the SCM

Encouraged by the Catholic clerics, the Dutch believed that the Protestant faith and their style of worship without pomp and visual spectacle was unattractive to the Syrians (Drury 1862:113).²⁹⁷ Besides, the Catholic Church was already entrenched in the region,²⁹⁸ whose propaganda against Protestantism was effective. Believing that the Dutch shared in their own antipathy towards the Catholics,²⁹⁹ the MV expresses high expectations from them in terms of religious protection. This sentiment of unity and purpose however, appears not to have been reciprocated as seen in the attitude of the Dutch, as expressed in Baldaeus 1672 and the letters of Visscher³⁰⁰ written between 1714-24. It is interesting to note that even after being in Malabar for over sixty years, the Dutch had failed to get a clear grasp of the religious identity of the non-Catholic group of SCM. While Baldaeus asserted that this non-Catholic group were Nestorians (Baldaeus 1672:635-6), Visscher's account indicates more his confusion about them. (Drury 1862:103). Visscher describes their services 'a medley', including 'heathen', 'Papist' and 'Greek or Syrian' elements (Drury 1862:104), and attributes these, partly

²⁹⁵ See Raman Menon Poothezhath (1958:94-5). Poothezhath wrote his *Shaktan Thamburan* (account of an 18th century king of Kochi) based on the archives of Kochi State.

²⁹⁶ By 1795, the English were to completely oust them from Malabar (Menon:1991:234-7).

²⁹⁷ In Visscher's opinion, there were many parallels in the religious practices of Catholicism and Paganism, such as worship of images, lamps in church, minor deities/saints, vows, adorning images with flowers etc, which was the reason why the pagans took more readily to Catholicism.

²⁹⁸ Visscher observes 'the great number of Romish Priests in this country', that 'Half the population indeed of that city [Goa] consists of clergy', that every Portuguese ships brings in 40 or 50 more of them, and that 'as it is impossible for them all to obtain a livelihood there, they spread themselves throughout the country' (Drury 1862:112).

²⁹⁹ Initially, the Dutch had made a spectacle of their antipathy towards the Portuguese by systematically expelling all Portuguese citizens, including RC clerics. Sebastiani is reported to have begged on his knees to be given time to consecrate an indigenous cleric as a bishop of the Romo-Syrians, leading to the consecration of Alexander de Campo in 1663, in Kuravilangad St Marys Church.

³⁰⁰ Jacob Canter Visscher was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in Malabar, from 1714-24. Visscher's perception of the Syrian Christians who were not Romo-Syrians is candidly expressed in private letters to family members in Amsterdam (translated by Drury 1856), but without identifying their doctrinal or ecclesial identity.

to Catholic influences (kneeling in church, keeping statues) and partly by what he saw as Nestorian influences.³⁰¹ More significantly, Visscher adds ‘nor can any correct account be given at the present day, of their confession of faith’ (Drury 1862:104).

Baldaeus and Visscher, the Dutch writers closest to the events of the latter half of the 17th and early 18th centuries, interestingly do not appear to remark on the ongoing conflicts between the Syrians and the Catholic Church, nor their neglect in protecting the Syrians from these. Hough mentions how the Catholic hierarchy had bought off the local princes and chieftains, and hired their soldiers in hunting down Mar Thoma I (Archdeacon Thomas) of the Jacobite Syrians and other prominent priests and laymen of the Syrian community in their relentless efforts to subdue the Syrians after the rebellion of 1653 (Hough 1839 Vol 2: 364-368). Whatever expectations the non-Catholic Syrians may have had at first about the Dutch in protecting them, the MV makes it clear that matters at the time of its writing were worse than before, as is evident from the title of his appeal ‘Catastrophes that have befallen the Syrians of Malayala’. In trying to understand the MV, the immediate circumstances that led Mathai to write this appeal, and more pertinently, the cause of which Church he was promoting, a closer examination of Mathai’s identity is required.

3.4.3. Mathai’s identity

While being brought under Rome’s authority and being Latinized was, to the SCM, a spiritual ‘catastrophe’, the author Mathai and his family appear to have also been victims of temporal calamities. According to the Vettikkunnel family’s accounts, with the harassment, oppression, and threats to life and property faced by the JSC, a large number of was forced to flee to safer locations, and the Vettikunnels are thought to have been one of these (Kottayil 2000:15). In his critical edition of the Syriac version of the MV, Perczel (Perczel 2009:192) has observed that the extensive recounting of alleged Catholic persecution of the Syrians, points to the author’s extreme hostility towards Rome, and an affirmation of his identity as not being a Roman Catholic. However, Perczel also observes that Mathai makes some fundamental omissions in his

³⁰¹ Visscher formed these views after a personal visit to a Syrian Church in Kottayam (Drury 1862:104).

text, including the arrival of three Syrian Jacobite bishops, which was a critical point in the narrative history of the non-Catholic Syrians in the latter half of the 17th century.³⁰² This leads Perczel to conclude that Mathai was not a Syrian Jacobite either. Taken together, these two actions, one of omission and the other of commission, poses a challenge to the interpretation of the MV.

From the many references in the MV, to ‘the Catholicos’ sending bishops to Malabar over the long historical period discussed, Perczel also appears to interpret his identity as the ‘Catholicos-Patriarch of the East’, and points to the MV endeavouring to show that this Catholicos-Patriarch (of the CotE) was ‘the only valid Christian authority in India’ (Perczel: 2009:191). However, this is not substantiated by the text, or the personal histories and circumstances of the author Mathai, or by the parish where he was a leading priest and a *malpan*.

However, the Malayalam work *Suvarṇa Pāitrukam* (Golden Heritage), the formally arranged clan-history of the Vettikkunnel family³⁰³, traces its genealogy from Apostolic times until the 16th century in a sketchy manner (*Suvarṇa-Paithrukam*: 12-17), but from the mid-16th century onwards it presents a more cohesive and dated account. It identifies the family Vettikkunnel as a branch of the priestly Pakalomattom clan,³⁰⁴ residing in Kaduthuruthy until the Oath of the Leaning Cross in 1653. Involved in a conflict with other clan-members (described briefly as ‘a betrayal’ without details),³⁰⁵ it was one among a large number of the non-Catholic Syrian families that migrated from Kaduthuruthy in *Vadakkumkoor* (=Northern Kingdom) to *Thekkumkoor* (=Southern Kingdom), in around 1663. ‘When Priest Chandy [a member of this family who adopted Catholicism] was made a bishop,³⁰⁶ his first act was to excommunicate [Archdeacon] Mar Thoma I and Priest Itty-Thommen. By this time most of the [Syrian] people of Kuravilangad had already joined the Catholic group. Those who were loyal to Mar Thoma then began to emigrate to other places’

³⁰² The Jacobite bishop Mar Gregorios Abdel Jaleel arrived in 1665, and the Maphrian Mar Baselius Eldo and Metropolitan Mar Ivanios arrived in 1685.

³⁰³ Compiled and published by the Editorial Board of Vettikkunnel Family History 1993, Kottayam.

³⁰⁴ This is corroborated in the history of the Pakalomattom clan (*Pakalomattom Maha Kudumba Yogam* 2000:103-7).

³⁰⁵ Members of the Vettikkunnel family in personal discussion merely described it as a ‘betrayal’.

³⁰⁶ Called bishop Alexander de Campo by some historians. This can be denoted as the first schism in the SCM. See Thomas 2017:96.

(*Suvarṇa-Pāitrukam*:11). The Vettikkunnel family settled in the market-town of Manarcad in Thekkumkoor.³⁰⁷

Suvarṇa Pāitrukam gives a number of significant details of the life and times of the author of the MV, Mathai Vettikkunnel. He was ordained priest as a boy, by the Syrian bishop, Mar Andreos. There is speculation that Mar Andreos himself was a Nestorian (Philip 1950: 182), but his nearest contemporary, Mar Thoma IV, in his letter of 1721 to the Patriarch, recognises him as a Syrian bishop, while he identified Mar Gabriel as a Nestorian.³⁰⁸ It is also refuted by the family and the parish of St Mary's Manarcad.³⁰⁹ Mathai was a *kattanār* (rendered as 'cassanar' by European historians) or priest, a class of SCM, generally portrayed as the instigators of all the religious conflicts in Malabar.³¹⁰

MV mentions the distinction between the two Churches involved in the conflicts only by referencing the Catholic churchmen as Franks, St. Paulists, or Carmelites, and the non-Catholics as 'Syrians'. Whether by 'Syrian' he meant the Nestorian CotE, or Chaldean-Uniate, is not made clear. At this critical time when Church affiliations, doctrinal positions and Church identities were being articulated in opposition to each other, the omission of these distinctions also hinders in the understanding and interpretation of the MV. In the absence of textual evidence, an understanding of the reasons for these omissions, and a fixing of the doctrinal position and affiliation of the author becomes possible only by a closer examination of the actions of the author. A fuller grasp of the interlocutory force of this appeal and a fuller interpretation of the

³⁰⁷ Many SCM families keep genealogical records, and twelve of them examined by the researcher speak of such emigrations in the 17th century. Fr. Mathai Mariam of Palekkunnel (a Syrian-Catholic priest from another branch of Pakalomattom) in his *Family Diary*, mentions how Kuravilangad church was the scene of many conflicts between the Catholic and Syrian factions in the 17th century after the schism. When Sebastiani consecrated Chandy Parambil as bishop of the Catholics, the neighbouring Kuravilangad and Kaduthuruthy parish-churches became the scene of many conflicts. Fr. Mathai Mariam gives the circumstances of his family fleeing Kuravilangad as an ancestor 'being involved in a fight in the church, when he lost his arm' (Palekkunnel (2000: xi-xii). This indicates that actual violence and blood-shed was involved in the conflicts even within churches, and the intensity of hostilities. In the Malabar Christian Directory by Philip George (ed.) (1940), a high percentage of leading Syrian Christian families of the southern regions trace their settling there between 1599 (Latinization) and 1663 (rebellion and Oath) the Edavazheekkal of Kottayam (p.369), the Plapparambu of Vakathanam (p.421) et al.

³⁰⁸ See Appendix 17.2, Letter 4.

³⁰⁹ See *Suvarṇa Pāitrukam* pp. 33-39.

³¹⁰ Paulinus Bartholomeo, writing in 1780, attributed to them the first schism of 1653 (Drury 1865:175). It is possible that cathanars were at the forefront of confrontations with the Catholic Church, as there were no bishops to provide leadership for prolonged periods.

MV thus becomes possible by a search beyond the text, into the personal circumstances and analysis of the actions of the author.

3.4.4. Schism in the Church and schism in the family

Two factors require closer examination in order to understand Mathai's assumed role as a priest representing the whole Syrian Church, as conveyed in this appeal are, firstly, how in his perception, the Catholic Church's actions precipitated the schism in the Syrian Church, and secondly, the split in the Pakalomattom family. Both of these are conveyed in the way he phrases the non-Romo-Syrians' current predicament and seeks redress from the Dutch.

The Catholic Church's elevation of a member of the Pakalomattom (Chandy Parambil) as bishop of the native Syrians appear to have brought greater authenticity for those returning to Rome's authority in 1663. As mentioned earlier, only two parishes, Kaduthuruthy and that of Diamper, had initially sided with the Portuguese Catholics and Romo-Syrians in the aftermath of the rebellion in 1653, and now with this added authenticity, more were persuaded to align themselves with Rome under this bishop.³¹¹ The Vettikkunnel family history mentions the violent confrontations between the Catholic bishop's supporters, and those like the Vettikkunnel and other Pakalomattoms who 'had stood steadfast and unswerving in the received faith of the Jacobite Church' (Kottayil 2000:15).³¹² Consequently, Kuravilangad church became the scene of intense internecine conflicts of the two factions of the Pakalomattom family.³¹³ The historic importance of the consecration of Chandy Parambil in 1663 as the cause of the schism in the community is exemplified by the family histories that speak of

³¹¹ Even before this, the Carmelite missionaries sent to Malabar to pacify the rebellious SCM had begun to draw away some of the Syrians into the Catholic fold.

³¹² Kaniampambil 1982:146-7 gives a list of the parishes that accepted this alternative 'bishop' and those who did not.

³¹³ Conflicts had already become frequent after the Synod in 1599, at times causing riots outside and inside the parish-churches. Ferroli, citing a letter from Archbishop Britto in 1628 says: 'Cassanars (priests) have come to blows in public, to the great scandal of all. Rebellious Christians are expelled from the Church' (Ferroli 1939:363), the 'rebellious Christians' meaning those opposing the Catholic authorities.

migrations after this event.³¹⁴ The MV appears to indicate that in the perception of the Syrians, it was the consecration of Chandy Parambil that caused the schism, which was to impact severely on his family and others like them. This would agree with Perczel's conclusion that Mathai was not a Catholic, but it also appear to identify him on the opposite side, i.e., the Jacobite Syrian side.

3.4.5. Mathai's actions as a parish priest

In trying to delineate whether Mathai himself was affiliated to the Jacobite Syrian, Nestorian CotE, or Chaldean-Uniate Church, a second aspect of his personal circumstances require examination. Apart from crises in the wider Church, according to the history of the family, Mathai at this time also had to contend with events at the Jacobite Syrian church, St Mary's Church, Manarcad, where he was the parish priest. The neighbouring parish of Pala was firmly Catholic, and the Roman Catholic authorities were making every effort to bring over Manarcad parish under their jurisdiction.³¹⁵ This was a serious threat to the Manarcad church remaining Jacobite Syrian, and Mathai is reported to have used extreme measures in countering it successfully.³¹⁶ The *Paithrukam* also asserts the Vettikkunnel family's strong adherence to the Jacobite-Syrian Church, indicated by numerous factors. Firstly, at the Oath in 1653 and immediately afterwards, a priest from an earlier generation, Vettikkunnel Itty Thommen, was at the forefront of the rebellion. He was thought to have been close to the Archdeacon Thomas in the decade of conflict immediately afterwards (*Suvarna-Paithrukam*:17,24), in the 1650s when the Portuguese Archbishop Garcia carried out severe persecution against Mar Thoma I. In addition, Mar Thoma II was consecrated in Manarcad church, an indication of its importance to the Jacobite-Syrians. The pattern of conflicts within parishes appears to have been common across Malabar, where many parishes were divided in their allegiance to Rome or Antioch. Bishops of opposing Churches were able to use these uncertainties

³¹⁴ The family histories examined do not provide details of exactly what happened, possibly because migrations were considered humiliating. But when the local rulers sided with the Romo-Syrians, the Syrians caught up in conflicts appear to have had no option but to leave, giving up homes, assets and church buildings built by their ancestors, to seek refuge elsewhere.

³¹⁵ Through some means, a written document is thought to have been procured from Manarcad by the Pala church, which ceded the Manarcad church over to the Catholics. The nature of this document is not clear, but the word '*Padiyola*' is used to describe it, meaning a promise or a declaration.

³¹⁶ See *Suvarṇa Pāitrukam* 1993:25-6 for a short ballad composed by the parishioners in praise of Mathai.

as a means of laying claim and appropriating to themselves parish churches and its assets, and parishioners and priests were on their guard.³¹⁷

3.4.6. Mathai's relationship with his bishop Mar Thoma IV

With his status as a *malphono* ('teacher') and the vicar of a leading church, Mathai appears to occupy a central position within the events of this time giving him the courage to approach the powerful Dutch commander in Kochi, despite his linguistic inadequacies. Whereas his defence of his own parish church could be seen as legitimate, it may appear presumptive for Mathai to represent the whole SCM Church and write this appeal to the Dutch governor, when the non-Romo-Syrian Church had a canonically-consecrated Metropolitan, Mar Thoma IV to do so. However, it appears Mar Thoma IV himself was in a difficult relationship with the Dutch, who had been putting pressure on him to convert to the Protestant faith.³¹⁸ At meetings with the Dutch commander, Mar Thoma IV found himself unable to defend himself doctrinally and theologically.³¹⁹ The political pressure could also have been factor for him to take a pragmatic approach, as he was aware of the haemorrhaging of members of Syrian church members to the Catholic faith. In this dilemma, he was seen to have been prevaricating to the Dutch demands, by never clearly refusing the Dutch, although it is now known that he was appealing to Antioch for support to resist the Dutch through desperate letters sent to Antioch.³²⁰

3.4.7. Mar Gabriel

The arrival of Mar Gabriel in 1705 in Malabar appears to have made the conditions even more confusing. Widely known as sent by the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Cote and consequently might be identified as a 'Nestorian', he was however, willing to

³¹⁷ It was believed that even when a parish-church was taken over by an opposing Church, most parishioners also would eventually return to it. Unlike the ecclesial structures in the West, the parishioners of SCM considered the church and its assets as belonging to them, as their ancestors had erected them. To leave was also a breach of faith with the ancestors buried there, whose anniversaries had to be kept. These factors made the SCM have deep attachments to their churches. The *Paithrukam* alludes that this was how the Catholic Church won back many parish churches over time.

³¹⁸ Visscher mentions Mar Thoma IV's meetings with the Dutch commander, without giving details (Drury 1862:103).

³¹⁹ This will be discussed further in Chapter 4, where Mar Thoma IV's letters are presented.

³²⁰ See Appendices 17.1 Letter 1 of Mar Thoma IV.

disguise his allegiance and beliefs. He appears to have been a duplicitous individual by all accounts, alternating between Jacobite, Nestorian and Catholic dogmas opportunistically. Initially, professing allegiance to Rome, he offered Mass with unleavened bread in Rome, but in a chameleon-like manner, he presented himself as a Chaldean (Uniate) to parishes of the Catholics, and as a Syrian bishop to the Jacobites.³²¹ In all contemporary accounts examined, he is referred to as a Nestorian. It is possible that both sides were trying to win back converts from the opposite group, by hoping that Mar Gabriel will lure them in.

To the Jacobite Syrians, Mar Thoma IV's meetings with the Dutch may have indicated his inclination to accommodate their demands, and consequently potentially another 'betrayal'. Priests like Mathai who played active roles in the preservation of the Syrian Church may have taken it upon themselves to find alternative means of keeping the Church from another apostasy, this time into Protestantism. Mathai's strategy is evident from the fact that in 1705/7 when Mar Gabriel arrived in Kochi, he went to meet him personally, possibly to utilize him against European conversions, whether Catholic or Protestant. He is reported to have assessed Mar Gabriel as follows: 'he is neither a priest nor a verger, but will suffice for the current purpose'.³²²

It has been suggested that Mathai harboured Nestorian sympathies because of this his collaboration with Mar Gabriel. In support of this, it has been argued that a generation earlier, the Vettikkunnel family hosted for a time a Syrian bishop, Mar Andreos (in c.1680), whose identity is challenged as possibly Nestorian.³²³ This has been linked with the absence in MV of references to Antioch or the arrival of the Jacobite bishops in late 17th century. However, these observations are outweighed by all other available

³²¹ The true identity of Mar Gabriel was difficult to determine because of this ambivalent behaviour (Perczel 2011:308). They repeatedly demanded Mar Gabriel to confess the Catholic faith without success.

³²² This phrase has become a Malayalam proverb used to indicate someone's willingness to use another person opportunistically. The original phrase is: 'Neither a father nor an uncle but fit for the present purpose' (Philip 1950(1st edition):185. A slightly different version in Malayalam: *achanum alla kapyarum alla, pakshu thalkala a:vashyathinu mathiyakum* (= neither a father nor a sexton but sufficient for the present purpose).

³²³ Patriarch Yacoub III writes that Andreos was not recorded as coming from the Syrian Jacobite Church, although the JSC believed him to be Syrian Orthodox (Kaniamparambil 1982:153-4). Although there is no record of Mathai's ordination, the dates suggest that he is most likely to have been ordained at the turn of the century, and therefore by Mar Thoma IV, who was the Metropolitan in residence from 1685-1724. Mar Thoma IV himself was consecrated by the Antiochian Syrian Metropolitan, Mar Ivanios, arrived 1685, died 1694 (Kaniamparambil 1989:104).

evidence from family and parish histories that indicate his firm adherence to the Jacobite-Syrian Church: history and missal of the Church of St Mary, Manarcad, 1967, contained in the Malayalam book *Albhutasaudham* (= Miraculous Edifice), as well as the clan history and genealogy of Vettikkunnel contained in the book *Suvarṇa Pāitṛukam* (= Golden Heritage), 1993, which affirms that Andreos a Syrian Prelate, the Vettikkunnel family were Jacobites, and Matthai as Head Parish priest of Manarcad St Marys Church was a zealous Syrian.

3.5. Conclusion

Mathai's objective in writing the appeal was to win a sympathetic understanding of his Church by the Dutch authorities, to be realized in extending them protection from the temporal and religious power of the Catholic Church which threatened its very survival, and which it was powerless to resist. In devoting 95 of the 103 lines to tracing the evolved 'identity' of the community stretching over a 1700-year period, Mathai sublimates the appeal itself to the need to relate the historical trajectory of the community.

In its style of 'beginning at the beginning', i.e. going back to the Thomasine foundation of the Church MV displays an epistolary style that is grounded in Syriac Christianity and which was exemplified by some of the renowned writers of the Syrian Orthodox Church, the most notable being Michael the Syrian (d.1199) and Gregory bar Hebraeus (d.1286). This mode of narrative is in keeping with the literary output of such minorities in the Byzantine, Sassanian and Islamic Empires, as noted by David Taylor (2013 Vol.2:160). Like them, here too what comes across is clearly the voice of a subject people, often maltreated subjects rather than rulers or those close to power. Taylor has pointed out that the Mesopotamian Churches were often embedded into the courts of rulers, but were rarely in proximity to real power, their narratives being, 'not quite sub-altern history, but not étatist either'.³²⁴ This scenario would appear applicable to the Syrian Christians as well, as is understood from MV where, what

³²⁴ Taylor 2013:160.

comes across is clearly the voice of a subject, subordinate people, rather than rulers, or those close to power.³²⁵ It might be surmised that MV was written not to justify or explain the authorities' policies or to enhance the position of the rulers (in this case the Portuguese and other Roman Catholic hierarchs and their civil extensions), but 'rather they report on the consequences of these decisions and actions on the ruled' (Taylor 2013:160).

This critical edition and discussion indicate that the MV articulates and encapsulates what in the Syrian Christians' perspective, is their historical identity and evolution over more than a millennium. What can be taken from Mathai's historical preface to his appeal are the following four points about this Church: firstly, that it was established in antiquity, secondly, that it was established by an Apostle, thirdly, that it had an uninterrupted existence from its point of inception to the time of writing, and fourthly, that it was part of the universal Christian Church through its episcopal links with Syria. Mathai's version of the Syrians' historical narrative will be examined in the light of a collection of other significant Jacobite Syrian sources, marshalled for the purpose, in Chapter 4.

³²⁵ Ishoyahb who was elected Catholicos -Patriarch of the Church of the East was sent as an ambassador of the Persian king to the Byzantine Emperor (Bar Hebraeus/Chediath 1990:54).

Chapter 4: Collated Jacobite Syrian sources

One of the features of the SCM noted by historians from 17th to early 20th centuries was the dearth of historical literature of indigenous origin prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, other than generationally passed down oral traditions. According to Keralan historian P.J. Thomas: ‘Literature pertaining to the history of the *Nasrani Māppiḷa* (SCM) is very rare. But a considerable amount of such information can be seen in their ancient ballads’ (Thomas 1935:148). Portuguese writers state that at the time of their arrival the Syrians were already in possession of written texts of Scriptures, liturgies and similar works, in Syriac or *Garshuni* (*Karson* script), although there is no mention of works of a historical nature. European commentators tended to suggest that the Syrian Christians’ was not a literate culture.³²⁶ However, at the Synod of Diamper in 1599, there was a search for Syrian books by the order of Archbishop Menezes, for amendment or destruction because of their ‘heretical’ contents, which would indicate the existence of a large number of written texts at that time.³²⁷ The SCM themselves attributed the absence of SCM literature to the post-Diamper burning of books, and the depredation of the Church in the subsequent centuries. The majority of the books that have survived in Malabar, in Malayalam or Syriac, are at present scattered across different denominational headquarters in Kerala and private collections, and a smaller portion in European archives, making it difficult for scholars to access them and investigate their collective contribution. From the late 20th century,

³²⁶ Jesuit Archbishop Roz (of Cranganore; d.1624) asserted that the SCM had no literary texts but only traditions, and that any historical knowledge about them could only be gleaned from such works and chronicles written by Europeans (cited in Kollaparambil 2000:69). Kollaparambil gives a detailed discussion of SCM literature before the Portuguese (2000:68-9), mentioning collections such as the one in the Jesuit seminary (of 1547) in Fort Vaipin, and cites Portuguese and Latin sources: Dionisio’s letter 4.1.1578, ARSI, Goa; J. Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, Rome, 1970 Book XI:133,137; Maffeus J.P. *Historiarum Indicarum*, Libri XVI, Koln 1588: Book II:210. Thomas also provides evidence of SCM writing prior to the arrival of the European missionaries (Thomas 1935:35-6,147).

³²⁷ Pius Malekandathil (2003:295-6), in his translation of Gouvea’s *Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes*.

copies of Scriptures, breviaries and Psalters and chronicles of Malabarian origin have come to light.³²⁸ Regarding literature of a historical nature, the Syrians' tradition maintains that their Archdeacons³²⁹ and later, their Metropolitans, did keep uninterrupted written Chronicles (Kurian Thomas 2000:17). The 17th-18th centuries saw a number of letters as part of the on-going discourse about the SCM, in the context of colonial and denominational tensions in the region. From the mid-19th century, the Jacobite Syrians (hereafter, 'JSC') began to collate and publish what surviving literature they had, in order to formulate a connected history of their origins and evolution.

This chapter will examine the extent to which MV represents the JSC's perception of their own historical and distinctive religious identity, through an intertextual analysis of texts produced by different JSC writers in the same period, roughly spanning the 17th and 18th centuries. While such literature exists, they rarely seem to have been used or referred to in the European and European-style historical accounts, such as those surveyed in Chapter 2.³³⁰

In the first part of this chapter (4.1), a corpus of eighteen selected indigenous sources produced by the JSC, in the form of chronicles, bishops' letters and (secondary source) histories are introduced, with details of their provenance and content. The second part (4.2) examines the correspondence and intertextuality of MV's narrative in relation to these Jacobite sources, and their collective contribution to the JSC's self-perception and their self-articulated historical and religious identity. The key themes examined are the foundation of the Church, the threat to their existence in the early centuries, the critical and transformative support they received from two migrations from Mesopotamia in the first millennium, the continued episcopal support they received from the Syrian Church of Antioch, and their resistance to Roman Catholic proselytization.

³²⁸ These have been catalogued by Van der Ploeg 1983, and Perczel 2002:289-298 who mentions a 'rich collection' of literature produced by the SCM. For a lengthy discussion of SC literature, see Kollaparambil (2000:68-9).

³²⁹ The historical Head of the SCM, and hereditary bearers of this title, until episcopacy was introduced in 1653.

³³⁰ Possible reasons were either their existence was not known, or they were inaccessible, being in Malayalam or Syriac.

1. Joseph the Indian narrative (1503)
2. Mar Ahattalla's letters (1653)
3. Mar Thoma I's letter to the Patriarch (1660)
4. Mar Gregorius Ab'd al Jaleel's letter (1665)
5. Mar Abd' al Masih I's letter to the JSC (1685)
6. Mar Thoma IV's letters (1710-1720)
7. Niraṇām Chronicle (ca 1770)
8. 1771 *Ola* Manuscript (1771)
9. Kandanad Chronicle (ca 1875)
10. Syrian Christian Ballads

In addition, four later histories will be included in the analysis, as they provide insight and access to a wider range of manuscripts and sources that are no longer available:

11. Pukadiyil Ittoop (1869) *Malayāḷattuḷḷa Surīyāni Kristyanikalude Sabhācarittram* (The History of the Syrian Christians of Malayalam-country)
12. E M Philip (1900/1950) The Indian Church of St. Thomas
13. Zachariah K.T. (1973) *Malaṅkara Surīyāni Sabhayum Antiokya Simhasanavum* (The Syrian Church of Malaṅkara and the Holy See of Antioch)
14. Dr. Curien Kaniamparambil (1982/1989) *Surīyāni Sabha: Charithravum Vishvasa Sathyangalum*. (History of the Syrian Church and its Doctrine)

It is also important to mention five other indigenous primary sources which were written outside the 17th-18th centuries but still provide useful additional information and insight into the research questions.

15. Punmathra Mar Dionysius' letter to Lord Gambier (1821)
16. Edavzhikkal Philippose's letters (1869)
17. The Stathicon (1875)
18. Royal Court Appeal Judgement (1889)
19. The Mavelikara *Padiyola* (1836) and the Mulanthuruthy *Padiyola* (1875)

4.1 Details of the Jacobite sources

Primary sources

4.1.1. Joseph the Indian narrative (1503)

Celebrated in Europe when it first appeared in the early 16th century, this is the earliest account of the St Thomas Christians of Malabar by a member of that community. ‘Joseph’, as the only name the author is known by, was the first Syrian from Malabar known to have travelled to Europe and had exchanges with Catholic ecclesiasts and even the Roman Pontiff, thus becoming the foremost witnesses of his Church. In 1501 he travelled to Europe on Admiral Cabral’s ship journeying from Kochi to Lisbon, and from there, overland to Rome in the company of a Portuguese cleric. His intention was make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and onward to Antioch where he was to be ordained, but he does not seem to have accomplished these, returning to Kochi not long after.³³¹ While in Rome and later in Venice, Joseph was interviewed by the Catholic clerics on his Church, and other general particulars of Malabar. His account was first published in Venetian Italian (unspecified date, before 1507), in the *Fasciculus Temporum* as ‘The travels of Joseph the Indian’. Catholic historian Fr. Antony Vallavanthara published a comparative study of the Italian, Latin and Dutch translations, translating each into English.³³²

Content

Joseph gives a description of his country and his Church to his Roman Catholic hosts in Rome and Venice. The impression given is that of a country at peace and prosperity and a Church in a quiet and stable state. He mentions their sacraments, practices and fasts. He states that the Church in Malabar had theologians and exegetists, and gives details of the ecclesiastical structure of the Church of Antioch, its Catholicos, metropolitans, bishops and priests, and how the bishops of Malabar are consecrated by the Patriarch. The most significant part of his account is an exchange Joseph had with Pope Alexander VI in Rome, where the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Malabar Church,

³³¹ References to him are seen in early 16th century Portuguese accounts, as a Malpan in Kodungallur, and often coming into conflict with them (Mathias Mundadan 1984 Vol.I:159, 292-3 footnote 32; a summary of contents pp.261-2, and a Catholic interpretation of SCM-Antioch relations: pp.503-4).

³³² See Vallavanthara (a Carmelite priest in Kerala) *India in 1500AD: The Narratives of Joseph the Indian*, 1984.

and how its bishops are consecrated in Antioch. its connection to Antioch is described. When the Pope challenged him on what authority the Patriarch of Antioch was consecrating bishops for Malabar, Alexander seems to have met his match in Joseph who defended his claims with scripture-based arguments.

4.1.2 Mar Ahattalla's letters (1653)

There are three letters in the Vatican Archives attributed to Mar Ahattalla, the Syrian Patriarch, written in Syriac, between December 1652 and January 1653.³³³ Mar Ahattalla had arrived in Mylapore responding to the appeals of the SCM, and finding himself imprisoned by the Jesuits in Mylapore, Mar Ahattalla is thought to have written them, addressed to Archdeacon Thomas and the SCM. Two Syrian deacons pilgrimaging to St Thomas's tomb at the time happened to meet Mar Ahattalla and communicate with him, and through them these letters were despatched to Malabar. Mar Ahattalla's arrival in Mylapore, his eventual death in Kochi, and the Syrians' breaking away from Rome's authority, are critical events in the history of the SCM. Several historians have referred to the contents and given partial translations, most notably, Kollaparambil (1981). However, this study will be based on fresh translations of the three complete letters.³³⁴

Content

Letter 1: Mar Ahattalla informs the SCs in Malabar of his arrival and indicates his detention by the Jesuits, and urges them to send him a number of men to rescue him.

Letter 2: He bestows upon the Archdeacon elevation to the status of bishop by this letter, and declares that on the reading of it, and, 'upon the words falling in his ears' this shall be effected. By his Patriarchal prerogative, he releases the Archdeacon and the SCM from oaths and promises they had made to the Catholic Archbishop. Fearing that he may be prevented from arriving in Malabar and seeing them personally, he instructs the SCM to select 12 priests who, by laying their hands on the Archdeacon, his elevation as their Bishop will be sanctified.

³³³ These three manuscripts are in the archives of the Propaganda Fide (SOCG), in the Vatican: SOCG234 ff355, 344 and 354 respectively.

³³⁴ Full text of these three letters and their translations are in Appendix 14.

Letter 3: He confers episcopal faculties on the Archdeacon, and instructs him on how he should assume the role of bishop, but with certain caveats, and exhorts the SCM to be hopeful of a good resolution to the crisis.

4.1.3 Mar Thoma I's letter to Patriarch (1660)

This letter of 21st December 1660, was written by the Syrian Christians' Archdeacon Thoma, who was elevated as the SCM's Metropolitan by twelve priests, in accordance with Mar Ahattalla's letter in 1653.³³⁵ He refers to himself as 'Metropolitan of the SCM', and describes Patriarch Ignatius Shem'on of Antioch as the 'Head and Good Shepherd' of the Diocese of Malankara.

Content

Metropolitan Mar Thoma I describes all the events that transpired in the SCM with the arrival and death of Mar Ahattalla in 1653. He states his belief that it was Antioch that had sent Mar Ignatius Ahattalla to the SCM, and how he was imprisoned by the Jesuits, happened to meet two Malabarian deacons in the church in Mylapore, and how they were able to bring to Malabar news of his incarceration, and his letters. Mar Thoma I affirms that the SCM 'obey the instructions of Ignatius, who is the Patriarch of India and China'. He begs Antioch to send to Malabar a 'patriarch' who is a scholar in the Syriac language.³³⁶

4.1.4 Mar Gregorius Abdal Jaleel's letter (1668)

Mar Gregorius, the Metropolitan of Jerusalem³³⁷ under the See of Antioch, and deputed by Antioch, arrived in Malabar in 1665, twelve years after the SCM had

³³⁵ All references to this letter in, Yacoub III 1952:102-3. According to Yacoub III, the letter was carried to Antioch by Deacon Stephanos Asmar of Amid, and it is in the Antiochian Patriarchal archives at present. He gives a detailed summary of the letter (p.103).

³³⁶ Malayalam translation of Mar Thoma I's letter, in Yacoub III 1952:102-3. Yacoub III also gives another letter, from Mar Thoma II written in 1683, to Patriarch Abd al Masih I. Mar Thoma II recounts state of the JSC after the death of Mar Gregorius (1665), being 'severely persecuted' but 'refusing to surrender' to the Franks. He begs the Patriarch to send Metropolitan and four *malpans* to Malabar, or else the JSC will be destroyed by the Franks, who will bribe the Dutch and the local rulers to forcibly unite them to the Franks (1952:124-5).

³³⁷ At the Council of Chalcedon, the bishop of Jerusalem was granted Patriarchal rank, and was initially consecrated by the Patriarch of Antioch, but later other Sees also had their own designates there (Schaff

rejected Rome at the Oath of the Leaning Cross in 1653.³³⁸ In this period of intense hostility between the Catholic Church and the SCM after the Oath, as seen in MV (L70-76), the Catholic Church was endeavouring to win back the Syrians to Roman authority by any means. Mar Gregorius' arrival, in response to JSC's appeals to Antioch (Kaniamparambil 1989:97), is thought to have brought stability to the JSC's affairs to some extent. His first act, according to JSC historians, was to 'complete and perfect' Mar Thoma I's consecration as the first native bishop, Mar Thoma I (Kaniamparambil 1989:98).³³⁹ The letter was written from St. Thomas church in North Paravur.³⁴⁰ Mar Gregorius died in 1670 or 1671 (Kaniamparambil 1982:151).

Content:

The letter³⁴¹ is addressed to the JSC churches of North Paravur, Mulanthuruthy and Kandanad,³⁴² in reply to pleas to Gregorius to instruct them in some areas of Syrian Orthodox doctrine and practices, which after more than fifty years of Latin indoctrination, they had become uncertain about, such as purgatory and celibacy of priests, and whether oaths made under duress at Diamper were binding. Consequently, the letter is a strong affirmation of what constituted Syriac Orthodox Church's doctrine and practices, and a rebuttal of Latin ones.³⁴³

4.1.5 Mar Abd' al Masih I's letter to the JSC (1685)

This letter was discovered appended to a Syriac grammar book in 2013.³⁴⁴ It was written by the Patriarch of Antioch, Mar Abd' al Masih I (1662-1686), to the JSC of

1884 Vo.III:283-4). Accordingly, Mar Gregorius is referred to by JSC historians as 'Patriarch Gregorios of Jerusalem'.

³³⁸ Kaniamparambil (1982:150) dates the death of Mar Gregorius as 1671, his interment, in North Paravur church, and mentions how he is regarded as a saint in this church, and his anniversary held with solemnity.

³³⁹ This was because Mar Thoma I's elevation was only notional and incomplete, firstly because it was performed under extraordinary circumstances by twelve priests, and secondly, he was not given episcopal faculties such as ordaining priests, according to the directives of Mar Ahattalla.

³⁴⁰ About 20 kms north of Kochi.

³⁴¹ The relevant part of it is given in Appendix 15.2. A Syriac copy is preserved in the family of Edavazhikkal in Kottayam. The translation into English is from Philip 2002:145-148.

³⁴² All three are in the neighbourhood of Kochi, and, as ancient and influential parishes, were the scenes of open conflict between JSC and Catholics.

³⁴³ See Appendix 15.2 for a translation into English of one section of this letter.

³⁴⁴ Pampakuda archives, MS Samanvaya Syr 18, f. 271r-272r. According to Perczel (2013:427 footnote 23), a copy of the letter 'was found on the last leaves of a manuscript containing Syriac grammar in the

Malabar, and sent with Maphrian Mar Baselius Yaldo and bishop Mar Ivanius Hidayatalla, who arrived in 1685.³⁴⁵

The Patriarch mentions how the Holy See had earlier sent Mar Gregorius to Malabar (1665) ‘because you were not able to appoint and to consecrate for yourselves venerable bishops.’ Now, yielding to the pleas of three envoys from the JSC of Malabar³⁴⁶ ‘out of the love of Christ’, he was sending them a delegation of five, headed by the aged Maphrian.³⁴⁷

He asks them to return the ‘deposit’ he has entrusted with them (Mar Baselius) without delay, that they bring him as far as Basrah, from where ‘a merchant of our land’ will take over.

The Patriarch expresses his confidence that the JSC did not need instruction on doctrinal or faith matters, ‘because it is clear from your letter that you are correct in the confession of the Mother of God, Mary; of Christ being one nature, one hypostasis and one will, which is His, the Father’s and the Spirit’s; and that one is the holy, universal and apostolic Church; and of the orthodox Fathers’.

4.1.6 Letters of Mar Thoma IV (1688-1728)³⁴⁸

Consecrated by Mar Ivanios, the SO bishop who arrived in 1685, Mar Thoma IV was the Metropolitan of the JSC until his death in 1728. While Mar Ivanios was alive, he had a strong ally, but after Ivanios’ death in 1694, he appears to have been harried on three sides all through the forty years of his rule, by the ongoing intrigues against his Church by Catholic Churchmen, the conflict with the Nestorian bishop Mar Gabriel

collection of the Samanvaya Ecumenical Research Centre in Pampakuda, Kerala’. Perczel does not give its contents.

³⁴⁵ Details of their journey, in Kaniamparambil 1982:152-3; 1989:102-3.

³⁴⁶ The reference is to Metropolitan Mar Thoma II’s letter (1683) through the ‘merchant Joseph’, detailing the troubles the JSC was going through (Kaniamparambil 1982:152).

³⁴⁷ See Appendix 5 for a translation into English of Mar Abd’ al Masih’s letter.

³⁴⁸ These letters are in the Municipal University library Special Collections Hs.VI H 3: (*d, f, i 1-2, r, and k 1-2*), of which five were examined, from high resolution digital images procured from there. These, and their translations into English are given in Appendix 17. A tabular summary of all six letters from Mar Thoma IV are in Appendix 17.3.

(1705),³⁴⁹ and demands from the Dutch to adopt Protestantism, and their withdrawal of protection when he refused. For his times, Mar Thoma IV appear to have been a frequent letter-writer.³⁵⁰ Five of his letters, written from three different parish churches in Malabar between 1709 and 1729 were examined. All are written on paper in an even, elegant hand, and all are in different scripts of the West Syrian variant of Syriac.³⁵¹

Content

All start with an invocation to God with the word ‘Yah!’³⁵² All are dated, the months being of the Malayalam calendar and the years in the Christian era. All end with the writer’s designation as the ‘Fold-door’, whereby the writer asserts his authority as the Metropolitan of JSC,³⁵³ and all appear to convey the desperation of this metropolitan to get help to save his Church.

In Letter 1 to Schaaf (1717)³⁵⁴, Thoma calls himself ‘bishop of the ancient and orthodox Syrian Christians of Hindoo’, and refers to the Patriarch as seated on the ‘illustrious throne of Antioch, the fourth Patriarchate, and head of the catholic (Universal) Church’ who is the ‘good shepherd’. He explains the SOC’s Christological and Trinitarian doctrines, and argues that this was the faith professed by the 318 Fathers of the Council of Nicaea, the 150 at the Council of Constantinople, and the 220 of Ephesus. He lists the seven sacraments of the JSC and its fasts, and explains the Scriptural foundations of the use of leavened bread in the Eucharist. He pleads with Schaaf to take up the case of his Church with the Commander in Kochi, ‘for our redemption from the hands of the *Frangoye* (Franks), who harshly persecute us’. The reader also gets an impression of the futility of his writing to Antioch, or

³⁴⁹ With the help of native rulers, he was harassed, and his life was under threat, as a result of which he was constantly on the move or residing in remoter areas (Kaniamparambil 1982:156-8). Thomas Yeates (1818:152-154).,

³⁵⁰ Amsterdam University library catalogue lists 32 of his correspondences with the Patriarch of Antioch and Carlous Schaaf.

³⁵¹ For transcripts and their English translations, see Appendix 17.

³⁵² A formulaic short-form for the invocation: ‘In the name of the self-existent Triune God’.

³⁵³ This title is conferred upon metropolitans of JSC at the time of consecration. It is borrowed from Christ’s use of the imagery of himself as the door through which one may enter the ‘sheepfold’ of the Church (John 10:1,2,7,9), and as the vigilant Shepherd (John 10 11-16) who guards the fold-door, within which the ‘flock’ are secure from outside threats.

³⁵⁴ He calls himself ‘Mar Thoma the *fifth* bishop in India’. According to Philip (1950:151-2) the JSC consider him as Mar Thoma IV. An explanation to this anomaly can be deduced from Pukadiyil (1869:143).

pleading with the Dutch authorities, as the letters, and their copies, appear to have come to rest in the Dutch archives.³⁵⁵ In letter 2 to Schaaf (1720) he refers to the JSC as the ‘true Syriac faithful Christians of India, who proclaimed the blessed St. Thomas, the Apostle’, and, ‘infinite under the glorious and saintly see of St. Ignatius of Antioch’. In Letter 3 to Schaaf (1718), Thoma refers to JSC as belonging to the ‘Antiochian Diocese’, and laments that the Church was now divided into two factions because of the bribes and deceit of the Carmelites. Letter 4 (1721) is to the Patriarch of Antioch, pleading for more episcopal support to withstand the arguments and incursions of the enemies of the Church, as after the death of the previous bishops, ‘we are like sheep without a shepherd’.³⁵⁶ Letter 5 (1718) is to the king of the Netherlands, sent through Schaaf, begging him to write to the Commander of the Fort or Kochi for protection of the JSC from the Jesuits and Carmelites.

The arrival of the Nestorian bishop Mar Gabriel triggered Mar Thoma IV’s troubles³⁵⁷, and he began writing these letters on the Dutch Commander’s advice. But from these letters, it appears that Thomas’ persistent plea was not for protection from Nestorian incursions, but from Catholic persecution.³⁵⁸ The letters place the reader at what was the centre of, not a doctrinal but a temporal struggle of the JSC to resist the Catholic’s efforts to reduce it to Rome once again in the early 18th century.³⁵⁹ For this, the ecclesiastical bond of Apostolic Succession and the spiritual bond of grace and self-denial that seemed to operate between the two could not but have been an exceptionally strong one that had stood the test of time.

³⁵⁵ The Dutch Commander, Adam van der Duin: ‘had no idea whatsoever of the identity and abode of the SO Patriarch of Antioch’. To trace the journey of these letters to Amsterdam Municipal University library, see Van der Ploeg 1983:255-264, who gives summaries of these letters, but his interpretations appear to be written from a Catholic perspective, ignoring numerous instances where Mar Thoma IV statements indicate the SCM’s ancient links with Antioch (pp.259, 260).

³⁵⁶ Thomas Yeates published an abridged translation of this letter (1818:152-154).

³⁵⁷ Thoma says: ‘Now someone came, who called himself Metropolitan of Nineveh and told that he was sent by Mar Eliah Catholica. His name is Gabriel and he teaches that there are two natures and two persons (*qnômê*) in Christ; he also talks in a very scandalous way of the blessed Virgin Mary the Mother of God, but, ‘we did not believe him’.

³⁵⁸ Thoma appears unaware of Schaaf’s limited influence with the Dutch king and the Commander of the EIC, and as a Protestant scholar, how far he was sympathetic to Thoma’s cause.

³⁵⁹ It was another 33 years before Antioch responded by sending a large contingent of hierarchs to help the JSC, in April 1751

4.1.7 Niraṇām Chronicle (1770-1815)

From the 16th century onwards when the SCM began to abandon their ancient strongholds of Angamaly, Kaduthuruthy, Kuravilangad, etc. and settle in southern areas,³⁶⁰ the churches Kandanad and Niraṇām were the seats of Malaṅkara metropolitans, and both became the repositories of reliable sources³⁶¹ in the history of the SCM (Cheeran 2008:xxiii). By the second half of the 18th century, the original archetypal account of the SCM, hereditarily kept by its bishops of the Pakalomattom line (i.e. the Mar Thoma I, II, III and IV) came into the possession of Metropolitan Mar Dionysius³⁶² (1770-1808) and this is thought to have been the archetype (now presumed lost) of many later copies that are now extant.³⁶³ Etched on prepared palm-leaves³⁶⁴ (*ola*) in Malayalam *Vattezhuthu*, it consists of 179 *olas* inscribed on both sides.³⁶⁵ It is thought to have been written in the town of Niraṇām in southern Kerala, one of the ancient sites of St. Thomas' evangelical work. The text is continuous, unpunctuated and undivided, with headings appearing only in the last sections.³⁶⁶

The earlier chapters are thought to have been copied from an earlier archetype.³⁶⁷ Previously called the 'Diary of Mar Dionysius', the actual scribe is thought to have been *Ramban* (=monk) Philippose of Kayamkulam (Kurian Thomas 2000:26), the bishop's confidant and constant companion, as well as renowned scholar in Syriac,

³⁶⁰ See Appendix Map 1.3.

³⁶¹ The almost exact corroboration of some sections of these Chronicles indicate a common archetype from which they were copied.

³⁶² Buchanan met him during his travels in 1806-7, and acquired from him the Syriac Bible written on vellum, which the Metropolitan described being 'a thousand years in their possession', now in the Cambridge University archives (Buchanan 1812:89).

³⁶³ The '*Kottayam Accara Manuscript*' and the '*Mavelikkara Karuthedathu manuscript*' are recensions of Niraṇām Chronicle. (*Accara* and *Karuthedathu* are names of families in Kottayam and Mavelikkara respectively.)

³⁶⁴ Late medieval-early modern Malabar appears to have been not as illiterate as depicted by some Western historians (Whitehouse 1873:80). Visscher erroneously mentions the Malabars' writing with an iron stylus 'on the leaves of the coconut trees' (1743:86), as the wider, more rigid palmyra-palm leaves are commonly used. The researcher's elder family members have spoken of their own parents (born late 19th century) carrying in their waist-band among other things, a folding-knife, a writing-stylus, and a length of *ola*, from which short lengths were cut, notes etched, and despatched. The CMS missionaries mention how people took down their sermons in short-hand on *olas* (Buchanan 1812:49).

³⁶⁵ At present it is in the safe-keep of the Kaniyanthara family of Mepral in Kerala. Between 1770-1790, Mar Thoma VI was put under intense pressure to submit himself and his church to Rome (Kurian Thomas 2000:25).

³⁶⁶ Two published critical editions of this document exist, both in Malayalam: Paul Manalil 2002, Dr Kurian Thomas 2000.

³⁶⁷ Dr. Kurian Thomas 2000:26.

Malayalam, Syrian theology and doctrine, at the behest of Metropolitan Dionysius.³⁶⁸ This context of on-going severe persecution from the Catholics to force the Metropolitan apostatise to Rome was highly relevant in the updating of this Chronicle. In the last years of Dionysius' life, a different scribe continued it for another decade after his death. From references to contemporaneous events in the present tense at the end, it is thought that the Chronicle was ended between 1824-1829 (Kurian Thomas 2000:17).

This study uses Paul Manalil's edition (2002), divided into titled chapters for citations, checking it against a copy of the original manuscript transcribed into modern Malayalam made in 1975, by the Kerala University Archaeology Department.³⁶⁹

Content:

Sections I and II of *Niraṇām* are a concise history of the Universal Church, beginning with Creation and ending with Christ's salvific mission on earth and the evangelical journeys and the martyrdom of the Apostles, emphasis being on setting out the dates of key events.³⁷⁰ It then gives the early history of the Church, the various heresies, and the Great Councils that codified its doctrine and creed. The particularities of the origin, faith, doctrine and vicissitudes of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch are given some expansion, with the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon given prominence as the point of origin of the Nestorian dogma, its coalescence in the Catholicosate of Seleucia, the resultant schism between Antioch and Seleucia, and some intimations on the increasing dissension between Rome and Antioch on matters of doctrine and

³⁶⁸ Evident from the third-person references to Metropolitan Dionysius (*passim*) and from the use of the present tense in the events from 1770s onwards, and from the statement: '....however, in the year 981 (Malayalam Era, corresponding to 1806) while seated in Kadamttom, it was commanded that the events of the present time, and matters relating to the bishop who died in *Niraṇām* [Dionysius' predecessor, Mar Thoma V] be written down, and that much good would derive from it, and that was why this was written....'. (Kurian Thomas 2000:127).

³⁶⁹ A photocopy of this transcript (185 pages) was kindly made available by *Kasshisho* Sreeba George Panackal, Vicar of St. Peter's Simhasana church, Trishur, in 2017. His own photocopy of 2000 was made from a photocopy of the original transcript in the possession of Advocate P.C. Mathew of Pulikkottil family, Kunnankulam.

³⁷⁰ This event-focused manner of writing, with occasional dates, was perhaps an aid to memorising long chronographies. *Niraṇām* (p.27) gives an account of how the gospels were written and the Apostles set out on their missions in this manner.

precedence. From the pace, exactitude and lucidity of these sections, they are evidently condensed and transcribed from an archetype.

Entitled ‘Events that occurred in Malayala-country’, Sections 3 significantly omits entirely the evangelising progress of St. Thomas in India. The events till the Oath of the Leaning Cross are only mentioned in extreme brevity, moving quickly on to the contemporaneous events of late 18th century, ending with details on the JSC’s troubled relationship with the British Protestants in the first three decades of the 19th century and the aftermath of these.

Section 4 traces the genealogy of the priestly families and the migration of the SCM, and ends with an incomplete list of the Archdeacons and Metropolitans who governed them. Section 5 returns to the history of the Universal Church,³⁷¹ and includes an affirmation of the Syrian Orthodox doctrine. Section 6 entitled ‘The Essays of Mar Ivanios’³⁷² contain concise treatises on some of the major doctrinal polarities that distinguish the Syrian Church from Catholics and Protestants, with extensive Biblical references to justify the Antioch’s doctrinal position.³⁷³ Section 8 contain brief entries on diverse subjects such ecclesiastical theology, the Passion of Christ, and the route from Malankara to Antioch.³⁷⁴ Section 9 titled ‘The Qualities of Gems’ contain couplets³⁷⁵ with their analyses. Sections 8 and 9 bear signs of being uncritically copied from another source. Section 10 is a private letter of admonishment by the bishop to one of his relatives. Section 11 ‘*Memre*³⁷⁶ of Mar Ivanios’ (of 1685) contain 35 Biblical and doctrinal subjects rendered in verse, recognised to be of high literary quality. Most significant among these is Memre 32 which alone is historical, which

³⁷¹ From the way it uses the first-person plural addressing directly the reader, this could be a copy of the origin, progress, faith and doctrine of the JSC, prepared at the behest of the British Resident and missionaries, as mentioned in Section 3.

³⁷² Antiochian emissary bishop, resident in Malankara mid-18th century.

³⁷³ The subjects include the use of leavened bread, rejection of images (statues) in churches, married status of parish-priests, the doctrine on baptism and demarcation of days (sunset to sunset versus morning-to-morning), practices which Rome regarded heretical and wished to expunge at the Synod of Diamper.

³⁷⁴ Inaccurate in some details, but mostly accurate.

³⁷⁵ In Malayalam with heavy admixture of Sanskrit.

³⁷⁶ *Memre*=(Syriac) hymns

though incomplete, recounts the history of the JSC from St. Thomas to the time of the arrival of this hymnodist in 1685.³⁷⁷

4.1.8 The 1771 *Ola* Manuscript

This manuscript is inscribed on *ola* (palm-leaves) and is now in Kottayam, in the Syro-Malabar church there. Each leaf of this *ola grandham* (palm-leaf book) is twelve inches long, dark brown in colour and inscribed with an iron stylus, the whole stack of leaves being about 3 inches thick. They are threaded through with cord and bound between wooden boards.³⁷⁸

Kollaparambil published just the text of this in 1999, and it is accessed through this (sixth edition 2017:81-94). Kollaparambil's introduction mentions the composition in the mid-eighteenth century, a comprehensive history of JSC Church by the 'New Faction'.³⁷⁹ He has argued that its objective was to establish the JSC Church's link with Antioch from an early age, and how later this became the source of the early CMS missionaries in Malabar.³⁸⁰

According to Kollaparambil, this account was copied into an *ola* manuscript in August 1771, a transcription of which is the text he presents.³⁸¹ He describes the whole *ola grandham* (book) as containing 154 numbered leaves or *olas*, divided into two sections. The first part is a copy of the *Puthen Pana* (=New Verse)³⁸², an epic poem

³⁷⁷ Thought to have been translated from Syriac into Malayalam by Ramban Philippose, whose command of Syriac and high literary Malayalam are apparent throughout.

³⁷⁸ This description of the material qualities, is taken from Kollaparambil 2007:82-3.

³⁷⁹ *Puthencoor* (=New Faction, as opposed to the 'Old Faction'= those who chose to return to Rome) was how Catholic authors referred to those who remained as the 'Syrian group' from the first schism in 1653, and continue to do so in the 21st century.

³⁸⁰ In the long extracts included, W.J. Richards (CMS missionary, Travancore), does not mention this as the objective of the composition. Richards introduces it as: 'There is a very interesting account in *Malayalam*, the language of Malabar, which is non-Roman, and has been extant since the middle of the eighteenth century, and, beginning with St. Thomas, brings the history of the Syrian Christians of Malabar down to A.D. 1770' (1908:72-88).

³⁸¹ The Manalil Mecheril family of Vadakara, near Thalayolaparambu (Kottayam District) were the original custodians of this 1771 copy. It came into the possession of the Catholic priest and eminent historian Dr. Jacob Kollaparambil. After him, the present custodian (2018) is Fr. Baiju Mukulel, the archivist of the Kollaparambil collections.

³⁸² The dictionary definition of *Pana* is: 'a kind of rustic song or versified story'. Here the subject is Christ's salvific mission.

composed by the Jesuit priest, Ernest Hanxleden (1681-1732).³⁸³ The second part begins with a summary of the Books of Genesis and Kings. The history of the Syrians appears on *olas* 32 to 38, and it is preceded and followed by the Jacobite Church's doctrines and its theological contentions with the Catholic Church Kollaparambil 2017:82-3), such as that of the use of leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist and the observation of fasts.

The 18th century when the first account was written and the present copy was made, was a period when the JSC Church was still struggling with the continued attempts by the Catholic Church to proselytise them to Catholicism,³⁸⁴ with well-articulated challenges to, and propaganda against the JSC Church, causing confusion among the people. The text is evidently an attempt to instruct the JSC community of their transmitted narrative history to instruct the people and to re-affirm them in matters regarding their origins, Church-affiliation, doctrine and practices.

The opening colophon attributes the early histories to unidentified archetypes: 'from the books of ancient days'.³⁸⁵ The intended reader and the purpose are stated as: 'for the affirmation of the faith of the believing Syrians, to read and study the causes and ancient history,.....that they may be completed in all the knowledge and perfected in the faith, that they may walk in godly ways in what they (those gone before us) entrusted upon us'. The scribe's name is not given, instead stating: 'we the divinely-appointed teachers have arranged this book in brief,' indicating multiple hands either in the writing or in the 'arranging' of the text, and in bringing the account up to date. The final assertions: 'Amen. We swear' convey the scribes' claim of their integrity in

³⁸³ Hanxleden was a German (a Hungarian according to Mackenzie 1901:79) Jesuit missionary trained at the St. Paul's seminary in Thrissur in Kerala, and became a renowned scholar in Malayalam and Sanskrit. Appointed secretary to the Catholic Archbishop of Kodungallur, John Ribeiro, neither could reside in Kodungallur because of severe opposition from the Dutch, and lived mostly near Thrissur, outside the Dutch territory.

³⁸⁴ Although the Dutch had evicted the Jesuits from their territories, the Carmelites were allowed to continue their work in Malabar. Their activities however, seem to have had a negative impact on both the JSC and the Romo-Syrians. This will be examined in more detail in Chapter 6.5.

³⁸⁵ Characteristically, Syrian manuscripts are named after either a place or family name.

the transmission of the text and fidelity to its archetypes, as well as declare the scribes' own probity.³⁸⁶

Content

The second section begins with the books of Genesis and Kings of the Old Testament in concise form, followed by an exposition of Jacobite doctrines contrary to the Catholic ones, on matters such as the use of leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist, periods of fasting etc. This is followed by the excerpt used in this study, on *olas* numbered 32 to 38, which is a history of the *Nasranis*, or SCM. In five long paragraphs, it recounts the evangelical mission of St. Thomas, followed by two paragraphs (6-7) of the Manichaean apostasy. The next two long paragraphs (8-9) deal with first Mesopotamian migration, the establishment of the ecclesiastical structure, and the state of the Church till the early 9th century when the second Mesopotamian migration (10) is thought to have taken place. This is followed (11) by an account of the arrival of the Portuguese, the Synod of Diamper in 1599, and the fifty-five years of being under Latin authority, followed by a long account (12) of the Syrians' rebellion and breaking away from Rome in 1653. The next section recounts the arrival of the Carmelites and the schism in the Church (13-14), followed by the arrival of the Jacobite bishops (15) in the latter half of the 17th century. Paragraph 16 deals with the arrival of Mar Gabriel in the early 18th century and the ensuing confusions in the Church, and finally (17) the arrival of another contingent of Jacobite bishops in the mid-18th century. It ends with the date of copying given in *Vattezhuthu* (=Round-script), as 'Malayalam Era 947, Friday (no date)³⁸⁷ in the month of Kanni' (September 1771).

Given the nature of the historical and doctrinal parts of the text, the inclusion of the Hanxleden's epic poem *Puthen Pana* (=New Epic) is clearly a later interpolation for three reasons: firstly, that the text reinforces the doctrine and faith of the non-Catholic part of the SCM; secondly, that it is severely critical of the Catholic Church's activities in Malabar; and thirdly that in its pattern of narrative, it is in keeping with other Syrian

³⁸⁶ The second section of the 1771 *ola* (in Malayalam) is given in Kollaparambil 2017:83-94. For a translation of this into English, see Appendix 3. The paragraph-structure of Kollaparambil is retained in the translation.

³⁸⁷ This seems an omission by the transcriber.

accounts which characteristically begin with the foundational narrative without any reference to European or Levantine ecclesial authorities.

4.1.9 Kandanad Chronicle

Bearing the title *Kandanattu Karottuveettil Mar Divanyasyosinte dayari-kurippukal* (Diary-notes of Karottuveettil Shemvoon Mar Dionysius of Kandanad)³⁸⁸, this Chronicle was written by the Jacobite bishop Shemavoon Mar Dionysius (1823-1888)³⁸⁹ and includes copied matter from an archetype on the early history of the Syrian Church, and later eyewitness accounts from his own time, the late 19th century. Written by hand on paper, the manuscript is a voluminous 1600 pages long, and is now in the archives of the St. Peter and St. Pauls' Church, Kadungamangalam,³⁹⁰ where its author Mar Dionysius resided for long periods, and where he is interred. This study will use the Syrian priest and scholar Rev. Dr. Joseph Cheeran's recension of it (2008) to access the body of the text. It acquired the name *Kandanad Grandhavari* because Mar Dionysius was a member of the Great St. Mary's parish church in Kandanad, and composed the historical parts of the Chronicle using the many sources there (Cheeran 2008:xxiv).

Content

Though crafted as a personal diary, the Chronicle is much more than that of an individual, but, as is customary with such Syrian writings, that of Christianity in general and the Syrian Church of Malankara in particular (Cheeran 2008:xiii). Divided into four sections and consisting of 21 chapters, the text is in the first person even where ancient history is narrated, conveying the impression that the author identified himself with those original Christians and saw himself as a true successor to that lineage and pedigree. The received historical narrative of the Syrian Church from its foundation to the arrival of the Portuguese is given concisely in the first 120 pages,

³⁸⁸ This title is appended by a later unknown scribe.

³⁸⁹ He was of Kandanad St. Mary's parish, who later served as Bishop of Kochi Diocese in the last ten years of his life.

³⁹⁰ In Kochi District.

with events of the late 17th and early 18th century given in greater detail, and culminating in the narrative history up to his death in 1888.

The manuscript begins with: ‘After the ascension of our Lord, the events that happened in his Church I write in brief’. A concise summary of the chapter is given as an introduction, and the sentences are numbered, following the custom in old Syriac Bibles³⁹¹, but both these features are abandoned after the third chapter. Part 1 is comprised of the traditions and legends transmitted from the Antiochian SOC that had become prevalent in the Syrian Church in Malabar. Part 2 begins with the arrival of St Thomas and the establishment of the Malabar Church. The significance of this Chronicle is that it contains in the second chapter of Part 2 a detailed account of apostasy of the Church after the arrival of ‘Mani the sorcerer’, and the arrival of the Edessan migrant party that reinstated Church and ecclesiastical order, as well as introducing the Syriac language and liturgy to this Church. It further gives a concise account in three pages of the key events of the Portuguese period including the Synod of Diamper and the Oath of the Leaning Cross. Chapter 3 in Part 2 is also significant for valuable details on the Oath of the Leaning Cross and the arrival of Antioch-deputed bishops in the latter half of the seventeenth century, and the arrival of Mar Gabriel, the Nestorian Bishop, in 1705. The manuscript picks up in minute detail the various religious conflicts that were occurring in Malabar at the time, and when it reaches the eighteenth century it takes on the character of the Bishop’s diary notes of each day. As a contemporary participant of and witness to these conflicts, especially the disputes with the Anglican missionaries during the second half of the 19th century and the subsequent schism of the JSC Church³⁹², this part is given much elaboration. The manuscript is appended with numerous letters, *Padiyola* (declarations of allegiance), Bulls and Royal Proclamations.

³⁹¹ The New Testament first translated by Syriac *Malpans* of the Syrian Church at the behest of Buchanan, and printed in Bombay in 1811 follows this pattern.

³⁹² The Syrian Church experienced a second schism in 1889 after a long and bitter legal battle over assets and questions of identity, when the Reformist group seceded from the Syrians. In 1898 it took on the name ‘Mar Thoma Syrian Church’, as opposed to the (Jacobite) Syrian Orthodox Church.

4.1.10 Syrian Christian Folk-songs and Ballads

Of the several categories of songs that are sung among the SC, only those recounting St. Thomas the Apostle's evangelising journeys and martyrdom, and those relating the 4th century Edessan migration under the leadership of merchant Knai Thoma and Bishop Mar Joseph of Urfa, are thought to be of pre-16th century origins. detailing the party's departure from Mesopotamia, their arrival in Malabar, their meeting with the native king 'Cherakon'³⁹³ and the king's conferring on them gifts of land, honours and privileges. The third are of the Old Testament,³⁹⁴ while the fourth recount the erection of parish-churches and their granite crosses.³⁹⁵ The last are secular folk-songs titled 'Wedding Songs'.

Fr. Dr. Vellian discusses the role played by the Ballads in the collective memory of the SCM in perpetuating their foundational stories, their form and function being that of dissemination of knowledge and the transmission to successive generations and fixing them in memory.³⁹⁶ Of particular significance to the SCM is the Ballad of St. Thomas the Apostle, called the *mārgāmkalippāttā* (= Ballads and play of *The Way*), which is sung at patronal feast-days and family celebrations, and reels danced around a centrally placed oil lamp, the elements bearing symbolic significance. Unlike other categories of ballads³⁹⁷ which bear linguistic features indicating post-15th century origins,³⁹⁸ the St. Thomas and Edessan-migration ballads, with their obscure usages and frequently occurring Tamil vocabulary and phraseology are thought to be clear indication of their antiquity (Vellian, Preface to the 6th Edition, in Lucas 2002:xxix).³⁹⁹ Dr. P.J. Thomas in his study of SCM contribution to Malayalam literature (first published 1935, here 1989:59-60) Lucas 2002:xxiii) concedes that 'it is difficult to

³⁹³ Chera+*kon* = *kon* meaning king.

³⁹⁴ Such as 'Joseph's song', 'Little Tobias', 'Moses' circle-reel', 'Adam's song' and 'Prophet Jonah's song' and many others.

³⁹⁵ The SCM churches invariably appear to have a granite cross erected in front of them, thought to be following the Hindu tradition of erecting steles in front of temples.

³⁹⁶ See Vellian's Prefaces to earlier editions, in Lucas 2002:xvii-xxx., childhood eye-witness accounts and 20th century changes.

³⁹⁷ Such as those recounting the building of parish-churches, erecting of granite crosses, Biblical stories, or Wedding Folk-songs.

³⁹⁸ See also;

³⁹⁹ In 1910, P.U. Lucas first compiled and published 'Ancient Ballads', when late 19th-early 20th century notions of Western modernity threatened to obliterate from memory (Lucas, 10th edition, 2002:xiii-xvi). But it was Dr. Vellian who spent several decades studying the SCM Ballads (See also

determine their dates' These were rendered into Malayalam and re-instated in subsequent editions (Lucas 2002:xxix).⁴⁰⁰

Secondary Sources

Three more modern published works will be used as sources in this study: Pukadiyil, Philip and Fr. Zachariah, mainly because they had access to primary sources at the time of writing which are no longer accessible now. All three authors were indigenous members of the JSC Church, well-educated for the times they lived in, and undertook the critical examination of the wide range of extant literature available to them (often preserved in their family archives), collated them into carefully analysed history from the JSC perspective. As they were setting out to counter the large numbers of Western histories that were being published about their community, they were careful to adopt the same methods of scholarly historical research, when such an approach had not been attempted before in any native Syrian writing, especially Pukadiyil and Philip. Philip is particularly rigorous in the application of this approach, sustaining arguments through their many ramifications, and supplying evidence and citations to his claims and conclusions. The other two, though lacking in citations, are still remarkable for the thoroughness of their investigations, the comprehensiveness in the gathering of evidence and setting out of histories that are near-approximations of modern historical accounts.

4.1.11 Joseph Ittoop Pukadiyil (1869)

Pukadiyil, was a British civil servant in Cochin. His *malayāḷattuḷḷa suriyāni kristyāṇikaḷute sabhācaritram* (History of the Syrian Christians of Kerala, 1869) was written at a time when the JS Church was facing a second schism as a result of the reformatory trends in the Church. This work uses various cross-referenced primary sources in creating a succinct narrative of the JSC, providing a wealth of information from some primary sources now presumed lost. In a biographical introduction to the 2nd edition⁴⁰¹, the comprehensive and diverse set of sources Pukadiyil had accessed are

⁴⁰⁰ See also Dr. Vellian's Preface (8th Edition), Lucas 2002:xxiv. The Ballads as an authentic vehicle of SCM heritage became recognised in Kerala when the performance of *mārgāmkālī* was included in the prominent performing-arts forum, the State Youth Festival in 1980.

⁴⁰¹ Written in 1906 by the author's son Mr. Joseph Ittoop, and included in the 3rd edition (2004), pp. 15-28.

listed as: ‘those derived from the significant store of knowledge from the persons and books in the possession of’ *Malpan* Konatt of Pambakkuda, *Malpan* Geevarghese Kaithayil of Kollattu, and *Malpan* Abraham of Maramannil. While the ‘ancient manuscripts’ in the possession of: the Panakkal and Paramel families of Kunnamkulangara, Kallooppa family of Adangapurathu, Chalakuzhy family of Thiruvalla, Pakkaruveedu family of Mavelikkara and Anjilimoodu family of Cheppad provided further information and details, the Records in the Syrian Seminary of Kottayam, and the Records held in the Royal Archives of the Travancore State were also consulted. The resulting book was celebrated as an accretion of all JSC-related records and material to date, and as such was accepted by the District, High, and Royal Courts of Travancore and Kochi as documentary evidence in the legal proceedings against the Reformist group at the time, and was extensively cited in the Royal Court Judgement of 1889. Though strongly espousing the JSC’s historical identity, the sections on doctrinal and theological matters reflect Pukadiyil’s own Protestant sympathies.

Content:

Part I of about seventy pages gives a summary of the incarnation of Christ, the Apostolic missions, the persecutions of the Early Church, convening of the Great Councils and the instituting of the five Patriarchates. Further, it gives a lengthy section on the qualities and obligations of bishop-elects, and another on the JSC’ faith and doctrine, followed by an account the doctrinal and historical divergence of the Jacobite-Syrian and Romo-Syrian Churches, and how the first wave of Protestant missionaries had helped defend the JSC from Catholic proselytization.

Part II recounts the establishment of Christianity in Malabar by St. Thomas to the Antiochian hierarchs who over the succeeding centuries secured it in the faith, and the generations of bishops from Syria who brought instruction and spiritual leadership. It proceeds to give an account of the arrival of the Portuguese, the vicissitudes the Church at their hands, the relief brought by the Dutch and ends with its emancipation by the British.

4.1.12 Philip, E.M. (1950)

Philip's *Indian Church of St. Thomas* was published, in English, in 1950.⁴⁰² He was an educated Anglophile Jacobite, and though a layman, came from a long line of JSC clerics who had played key roles at critical times in the JSC's history. The books and documents preserved in his family-archives facilitated in the writing of his work, as did those in the Church headquarters, and innumerable other historical documents he had access to as Secretary to the JSC Association, during the critical period of litigation between the JSC and the Reformist group (1870-1890).

Content

In his preface Philip states his objectives in writing the book as primarily to present a JSC perspective of its narrative history in the face of numerous Western publications accounts that were 'prejudiced by incorrect information received from interested persons', secondly to give 'a full connected history or all the available accounts of this ancient Church' (Philip 1950:13), thirdly, to remove misunderstandings of the Church's doctrinal position, and fourthly, 'to expose a critical review.... for the consideration of the Anglican Churchmen' (Philip 1950:14), whose histories had become source material for subsequent historians to the detriment of the JSC perspective.

The book covers the Portuguese period from the Syrian perspective, the Syrians' rebellion and breaking away, Carmelite activities in Malabar, and the significant developments among the different Christian communities in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Philip also includes some extensive expositions on the doctrinal position, and the rites and practices of the JSC.

⁴⁰² Completed in 1907, no publisher could be found in England or India for it because of the sensitive nature of its contents in the context of the heightened religious rivalries. The authors' translation of it into Malayalam was published in Kerala in 1927. The English original was eventually published after the British left India, in 1950.

4.1.13 Zachariah, K.T. (1973)

Chorepiscopus⁴⁰³ Zachariah (b.1918) was a priest in the JSC, and *Malpan* in the Jacobite Seminary in Vettickal, near Kochi. His Malayalam work *Malankara Surīyāni Sabhayum Antiokya Simhasanavum* (The Malankara Syrian Church and the See of Antioch) is a valuable source because of the original manuscripts cited. The text includes matter extensively copied from an *ola* manuscript he claims to have been preserved in the Chalakuzhy family⁴⁰⁴ of Thiruvalla⁴⁰⁵, now presumed lost.⁴⁰⁶ Zachariah lists the following works he consulted: 1) Priest Abraham Palappallil's *surīyāni samūha vṛuttandam* (An account of the Syrian Community) (1877)⁴⁰⁷; 2) Priest Mani Nidhirikkal's *marttōmma Nasrāṇikaḷute satya viśvāsam* (The true faith of the Nasranis of St. Thomas) (1909); 3) Priest P.P. Joseph's *pūrvika pitākkaṇmārum potu sunṇahadōsukalum* (Ancient Church Fathers and the Great Councils) (1905), and 4) the Chalakuzhy-family's *Ola* manuscript, providing details that are not found elsewhere.⁴⁰⁸

Zachariah's book (1973) was written at a time when a second schism in the Jacobite Church, begun in the early 20th century was complete, and the faction that rejected Antiochian supremacy, constituting itself as 'Indian Orthodox Church' had seceded from the JSC Church. As the title indicates, Zachariah's objective appears to have been to trace the historical links between the JSC and Antioch.

Content:

Zachariah traces the establishment, at the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus, the separate Patriarchates and their geographical areas of jurisdiction, for the smooth governance of the Universal Church. From this period, he traces priesthood

⁴⁰³ A position below that of bishop in the Syrian ecclesial hierarchy, but usually a married parish-priest, who is also scholar in Syriac, Scripture, Doctrine etc. The office is equivalent to an English Rural Dean (Richards 1908:100).

⁴⁰⁴ Ittoop Pukadiyil also mentions *Chalakuzhi Ola* (1869:25).

⁴⁰⁵ Near Kottayam in central Kerala.

⁴⁰⁶ Extensive search for this manuscript has not produced any results so far.

⁴⁰⁷ A digital copy of this book was given to the researcher towards the end of this project, from an original in a private collection.

⁴⁰⁸ Zachariah compiled extensive notes with a view to writing a book on the subject, but published only this concise volume. In January 2018, this researcher was able to locate and consult a large collection of his notebooks, undiscovered and uncatalogued, in the archives of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary in Vettickal (Ernakulam District).

in the diocese of Malabar being continually replenished by the Patriarch of Antioch or, his suffragan, the Catholicos, who deputed bishops to Malabar. He maintains that Apostolic Succession (i.e., the ordination of priests by the laying-on of successive legitimately consecrated bishops) in Malabar was also received through the legitimate conduit of Antioch. Zachariah holds that the Antioch-affiliated episcopacy and priesthood in Malabar also linked it to the Judaic origins of Christ himself, directly positioning them (albeit a remote branch) linked to the same 'Order of the priesthood of Melchizedek'.⁴⁰⁹ Citing the Canons codified at Nicaea and other Great Councils, he argues that although the Catholicos of the East (also called the 'Great Metropolitan of the East') was given authorities similar to the Patriarch such as the right to consecrate bishops, he was nevertheless, a suffragan (or second in command) to the Patriarch of Antioch in their respective seats, the Patriarchal seat being in Mardin and the Catholicosate in Mosul.⁴¹⁰

Chapter 5 discusses the Thomasine mission, with details supplied on the events in each of the locations. The Christians' 3rd century apostasy is mentioned, leading to the 4th century Edessan migration, with frequent citations from Ancient Ballads of the SCM (Chapters 6-7),⁴¹¹ with Antioch playing a prominent role in the narrative. This appears to be the only source that gives a long list of the copper-plate-inscribed privileges of the SCM. Zachariah treats the second Mesopotamian migration of 825 at length, linking the Malabar Church to Antioch, the re-establishment of the Archdeaconate, and the re-instatement of the SCM in royal patronage and protection, leading to their subsequent prosperity. By these accounts Zachariah affirms the date and manner in which the SCM came to be linked with Antioch from ancient times, and how Antioch sustained it with episcopal support over the centuries until the Portuguese arrival.

⁴⁰⁹ St. Paul identifies Christ as: "a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:6, NIV).

⁴¹⁰ These seats were frequently moved to other locations in accordance with the rise and fall in power, of various dynasties of Caliphs, Mongolian Khans etc., and their tolerance or persecution of the various sects of Christianity. The authority of the Patriarch of Antioch and the Catholicos relative to each other, is reflected in the order of seating, and their functions at consecrations of each other, as described in Bar Hebraeus (Chediath 1990:6).

⁴¹¹ Zachariah quotes especially those ballads used by the '*Knanayakkar*' (Knanite or 'the Southist' community) within the SCM, who trace their origins to 4th century Mesopotamia. See also Chapter 6.4.1. for more information on these.

Chapters 9-11 deal with the depredations suffered by the SCM under the Portuguese, including the forced convening of the Synod of Diamper in 1599, and the breaking away in 1653 at the Oath of the Leaning Cross. The desertion of some key SCM to the Catholic side is given in detail, followed by the steadying effect of the arrival of the Jacobite bishops in the latter half of the 17th century. Except for the mention of Mar Gabriel, events of the 18th century is condensed, with mention of the arrival further bishops from Antioch and the severe persecution under the Carmelites. Chapters 12 to 21 recounts the decline of the Church from the 18th century onwards, bringing the history up to date till Zachariah's own time in the mid-20th century.

4.1.13 Malaṅkara Malpan V. Rev. Corepiscopos, Dr. Curien Kaniamparambil (1982, 1989)

Corepiscopos Kaniamparambil (1913-2015) was one of the JS Church's leading figures in the 20th century, and recipient of numerous awards and honours by successive Patriarchs of Antioch. He has taught and written extensively on subjects ranging from Scriptural exegesis, Syriac grammar, Syriac-Malayalam dictionary, biographies, faith and doctrine of the Syriac Orthodox Church, and history of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church of Kerala. The greatest of his works is thought to be a translation of the complete Syriac Peshitta Bible into modern Malayalam (1994). His seminal historical work is the 800 page-long *Surīyāni Sabha - Caritravum viśvāsa-satyaṇṇaḷum* (The Syrian Church - its History, Doctrines and True Orthodox faith) is a comprehensive account of the history, faith and doctrines of the undivided SCM, and the JSC. The 1989 work *The Syrian Orthodox Church in India and its Apostolic Faith* (420 pages) in English, is an abridged version of the 1982 work, with some sections expanded. A serious weakness of these two works, especially to those outside the JSC milieu, is the non-academic citation-system used by the author.

Content

Beginning with the post-Resurrection Apostolic times, Part I traces the early history of Christianity, the heresies and the Great Councils. From this point, the narrative is restricted to the history of the SOC of Antioch, with the post-Chalcedon persecution of the SOC, and its revival by Jacob Baradaeus in the 6th century (pp1-85). It then

moves on to the traditional historical narrative of St. Thomas' evangelisation of Malabar, the apostasy in the 3rd century and the arrival of the two cohorts of Mesopotamian settlers in the 4th and 9th centuries. It enumerates the Syriac traditions and practices from Apostolic times, transmitted through the successive Syrian bishops and, based on this, endeavours to affirm the non-Nestorian identity of the SCM from ancient times, through each period until the 16th century (86-120).

The conflicts with the Portuguese, the forced convening of the Synod of Diamper, the Oath of the Leaning Cross, and the Carmelite persecution are given detailed treatment with extensive quotations from indigenous documents (121-145). This appears to be the only source that lists the parishes after the schism of 1663.⁴¹² Pages 170 to 500 is devoted to an account of the on-going struggles and two further schisms in the JSC during the Dutch and British colonial periods, quoting extensively from indigenous documents.

Part II is an exposition of the faith and doctrines of the universal SOC, especially its position on the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines, and the Sacraments of the SOC, defending them with Scriptural and Church-Fathers' writings. The 1982 work further treats with the faith and traditions of the SOC on the history of the Apostles, the writing of the New Testament books, fasts, ancient institutions, prayers, and a short section of Appendices. (506-800). The 1989 work, in English, Part I in 287 pages, treats the history of the JSC in greater detail than the first, Part II, the doctrine, theology and ecclesiology of the JSC in 111 pages, and Part III, a brief history of the SOC in 31 pages.

Other relevant indigenous sources:

In addition to the 14 Sources mentioned in this chapter, there are a number of other primary source materials from outside the period of focus in this study but which nevertheless form part of the wider corpus of JSC literature. These are, in brief:

⁴¹² According to Kaniamparambil the tally was 44 on the JSC side, and 24 on the Romo-Syrian side (Kaniamparambil:146-7).

4.1.14 Letter from Punnathra Mar Dionysius, to Lord Gambier of the CMS in 1821:

From 1818 onwards there was pressure from CMS missionaries to persuade the JSC to adopt Protestant reforms in accordance with the faith and practices of the Church of England. Several areas of the JSC doctrine and practices came under censure, such as belief in the intercessory powers of Saints, worshipping in a foreign language, and their ‘superstitious practices.’ When the earlier gentler measures were replaced by more direct pressure (Stock, 1899:234), the JSC resisted, and the JSC Metropolitan Mar Dionysius wrote this letter, stating their case against a union. At the outset, he states:

‘We who are called Syrian-Jacobites, residing in the land of Malabar, even from the times of Mar Thoma the Holy Apostle, until the wall of Cochin was taken by the Frankish king, kept the true faith according to the manner of the Syrian Jacobites, of real glory, without division or confusion.’⁴¹³

4.1.15 Letters from Edavzhikkal Philippose

A correspondence between the Anglican cleric G.B. Howard and the Syrian priest Edavzhikkal Philippose: *The Syrian Christians of Malabar, otherwise called the Christians of St Thomas* in 1869, dealing primarily with doctrinal and Christological matters, and was translated into English by Rev G B Howard. It is now in a book form in the archives of Cambridge University.

4.1.16 The *Shalmootho* of Saint Geevargese Mar Gregorios of Parumala (1876)

The *Shalmootho* (Oath of allegiance) is a declaration of faith and obedience, written by St. Gregorios, and read addressing the Patriarch of Antioch Ignatius Peter III, at the time of his episcopal consecration in 1876 by the Patriarch.⁴¹⁴ As a bishop of the SCM ‘anciently in obedience to the Throne of Antioch’, the Saint declares his acceptance of Antioch as his supreme Head, and his complete obedience and submission to its spiritual and ecclesiastical authority.

⁴¹³ See Appendix 18.1 for an English translation of Mar Dionysius’s letter.

⁴¹⁴ Full text in Malayalam, in K.V.Poulose 2002:55-61.

4.1.17 Royal Court of Appeal Judgement of 1889

This is the full judgement given by the judges at the Appeal Court, when the Reformed Mar Thoma Syrian Church sought to take possession of the Syrian Church in Malabar and its assets. The judgement rejected the appeal, and ruled in favour of the Jacobites retaining ownership of SCM churches, after an exhaustive analysis of the validity of Jacobite claims that the SCM links with Antioch were ancient and identifying it as the original Church, and rightful owners of SCM assets.

4.1.19 Two 19th century *padiyola* (Declarations) ⁴¹⁵

These declarations were written by the JSC at two critical points in their history, and contain important information about their ancient links with Antioch.⁴¹⁶

- a) ‘Mavelikara *Padiyola*’ (1836) was written by leading churchmen and elders of the SCM assembled in Mavelikara, rejecting the Church of England’s invitation to reform its liturgy and practices. It declares the SCM’s position under the See of Antioch as unchangeable, and the SCM’s determination to adhere to the liturgy and practices of Antioch, and rejects the Church of England’s incursions into the SCM.⁴¹⁷
- b) ‘Mulanthuruthy *Padiyola*’ (1875) was written by leading churchmen and elders of the SCM stating allegiance to Patriarch Ignatius Peter III, in the context of second schism in the SCM Church when the Reformed Mar Thoma Syrian Church seceded. It was written on the third day of the Mulanthuruthy Synod, June 30th 1876. It begins by reiterating its anciently existing links with Antioch, briefly narrating the history of the

⁴¹⁵ *Padiyola* were written declarations when important collective decisions were agreed upon, or loyalties and obedience were pledged. They were written on special *ola*, from which arises the term *Padi-ola*=*Padiyola*.

⁴¹⁶ Other *Padiyola* relating to the SCM are extant. The Angamali *Padiyola* was produced by the Romo-Syrian Church in 1787, at a time of severe persecution from European Carmelite clerics (Paremmakkal 1989:480-83), rejecting all foreign bishops to rule over them. See Whitehouse 1873:308-10 for the text in English. Similarly, Cheeran has argued that the Arthat *Padiyola* (1806) produced by the St. Mary’s Orthodox church of Arthat (affiliated to the Indian Orthodox Church), rejected the rule of all foreign bishops in 1806. See *History of the Indian Orthodox Church* (Cheeran 2007:177-8).

⁴¹⁷ See Appendix 18.2 for an English translations of the Mavelikara *Padiyola*.

SCM, touching on the significant milestones of St. Thomas, the Edessan (345) and Kollam (825) migrations, Diamper, Oath of the Leaning Cross, the arrival of Mar Gregorius (1665), Mar Baselius (1685) a second Mar Baselius (1751), and the writing of the Mavelikara Declaration rejecting Protestant reforms. It declares complete submission to the ecclesiastical and spiritual authority of Antioch, and ends with a declaration of submission to this faith, and that ‘...we swear that we and our children will not move either to the left or to the right until the end of our lives’, calling on God, the Holy Bible, the Patriarch, and the assembled as witness to it.⁴¹⁸

4.2 16th to 18th century discourse on the Syrian Christians

These JSC corpus of literature (hereafter ‘Sources’) were examined, focusing on the key constituent nodal points in the narrative-arc, degrees of concordance or divergence among themselves and in relation to MV. The following constituent nodal points of the MV narrative-arc were treated across the corpus of literature:

- a) Apostolic origins and foundation of the Christianity in Malabar;
- b) the two Mesopotamian migrations of 345 and 825;
- c) episcopal provenance until the 16th century;
- d) the relationship of the SCM with the (Nestorian) CotE bishops of the 16th and early 17th centuries;⁴¹⁹
- e) and the JSC’s response to Latinisation.

4.2.1. Apostolic origins and foundation of Christianity in Malabar

The traditions regarding St. Thomas’ arrival in south India in 52, the conversion of indigenous people to Christianity, and the establishment of ‘churches’ in Malabar and the Coromandel coast at that early date, seems to be the cornerstone of the SCM’s religious identity as recounted in all the Sources that treat with the subject, without variation. While the letters do not treat this subject at all, the two Chronicles, the 1771

⁴¹⁸ See Appendix 18.3 for an English translation of this.

⁴¹⁹ The term SCM refers to the undivided St. Thomas Christian community of Malabar. The term JSC (Jacobite Syrian Christians) refers to the post-1653 Antiochian-affiliated section of the SCM.

ola, and the five published books treat them at length, some giving pared down versions as in MV, but others, considerable detail. The Sources treatment of this subject is seen to acquire particularised breadth when literary and oral narratives of individual parish-churches in their physical locations are added. They generally agree on the following key elements: the Apostle first arrived in Mylapore at the behest of a king called ‘Chozha Perumal’, that he disembarked in ‘Maliampara’ in 52, that he performed many miracles which led to the conversion of local people, established churches in ‘seven-and-a-half’ places, appointed certain families to perform priestly functions, was martyred in Mylapore, and that his relics were translated to Edessa at some point before the 5th century.⁴²⁰

4.2.2. The two Mesopotamian migrations of 345 and 825:

a) The Manichean Apostasy of the SCM

The progress of Christianity in south India in the following four centuries is condensed in the Sources, with the passing of time indicated with inexact phrases like: ‘after a short time had elapsed’, or, ‘after a long time had elapsed’. Just as in MV, the next two landmark-events the Sources mention are the slow termination of the priests ordained by the Apostle, and the arrival of Mani the ‘Sorcerer’ in Mylapore, preaching a doctrine antithetical to Christianity and winning many leading men as converts. The Sources’ treatment of the arrival of Mani in south India are synchronically consistent, indicating that he came from Persia not long after 200 (Zachariah 1973: 26-27, Pukadiyil 1869:109), and caused confusion among the Christians.⁴²¹ Of the two Chronicles, Niraṇām omits the Manichean apostasy, while Kandanad Chronicle gives long details of Mani’s teachings and the resulting dissensions that followed among the Christians (Cheeran 2008:27-8),⁴²² with some identifying him as ‘*Māṇikkāsa*’ (Pukadiyil 1869:109).

⁴²⁰ For translations of some sections of SCM ballads and narratives about St Thomas, see Appendices 4 and 7.

⁴²¹ The confusion may have been caused by the fact that Mani’s religion was structured along the same lines as Christianity. A.F.J. Klijn, in his critical edition of the *Acts of Thomas*, quotes a verse from Mani: ‘Victory to our apostle, our Lord Mani and the Twelve, the seventy-two envoys (2003:33), showing the parallels with Christianity, where Christ too had twelve Apostles, and sent out seventy-two Evangelists.

⁴²² For a translation of these pages from Kandanad, see Appendix 9.1.

Mani is reported to have caused the apostasy of many Christians on the Coromandel coast, including their leaders, and the flight of the remaining to Malabar, seeking refuge. Together those that had arrived from the east-coast and those in Malabar were, at this point reported to have constituted 160 families⁴²³ who stood firm as Christians, but that number, according the Sources, began to reduce significantly because of the absence of priests, the dearth of knowledgeable and influential people to hold the community together, and the attractions of the pagan milieu in which they lived, until they dwindled to 64 families. Juxtaposing the point at which the Thomasine Christian community was under threat of becoming extinct on the Malabar coast from being absorbed entirely back into Hinduism, and the arrival of a large cohort of Mesopotamian Christians, thus, is interpreted in the Sources as a divine intervention.

b) The first or Edessan migration of 345

In the Syriac version of the MV⁴²⁴, the manner in which the Syrian hierarchs in Mesopotamia came to know of the problems of the Christians in Malabar, and how they addressed the question of helping them, is presented in dramatic detail compared to the Malayalam version studied in this thesis, with reference to the bishop of Edessa's dream, and direct quotation of words spoken. Niraṇam mentions this event only briefly, while Kandanad gives details especially the nature of the bishop's vision.⁴²⁵ While Kandanad lists 40 of the privileges granted to the SCM by the king Cheraman Perumal,⁴²⁶ Zachariah gives a full list of 72.⁴²⁷

The Sources are consistent in attributing the privations of the 4th century Malabar Christians to the apostasy of significant elders among them, the depletion in their numerical strength, and 'the absence of priests', which had reduced the Sacramental functioning of the community (however primitive that already was) to: 'the Elders conducting baptisms and marriage in a concise manner at home' (Manalil: 105). The

⁴²³ The combined number of Christians, from Mylapore and from Malabar.

⁴²⁴ Appendix 2.3.

⁴²⁵ According to Kandanad, the Apostle Thomas appeared to the Bishop of Edessa in a vision. See Kandanad (Cheeran:28) for details (translation of relevant section given in Appendix 9.1 Section VI).

⁴²⁶ In this part of the narrative in Kandanad, the language shows distinct features of Tamil, indicating that he was copying from an archetype that was in Tamil, from a time before Malayalam evolved in late Medieval period.

⁴²⁷ This list was discovered in Zachariah's handwritten notes, copied from the Chalakuzhy *ola*, in the MSOC Seminary library in Vettickal (Ernakulam District). See Appendix 9.2, which also includes a slightly different list from Vellian (2001:65-7).

sources expand on the vision of the Bishop of Edessa, as St. Thomas appearing to him and speaking words of a reproaching nature (1771 *ola* section 8), which helps in clearing the ambiguity of impetus behind the emigration to Malabar'. Knai Thoma is portrayed in the narratives as not an ecclesiast in any conceivable way, but a man of considerable abilities who played a key role in the shaping the prospects for the Christians of Malabar. The commission he received from the hierarchs was: 'you yourself must go to Malabar and stay there, and fulfil all their needs' (1771 *ola* Section 8).⁴²⁸

While Bishop Joseph of Edessa was the party's spiritual leader, he is seen not doing anything unilaterally, but after consulting with the Metropolitan of Jerusalem, the Catholicos of the East, and the Patriarch of Antioch, and that it was at the behest of these three hierarchs that the immigrating party was assembled and sent off to Malaṅkara. It appears from the Sources that it was in the coalescing of the commanding power of the hierarchs and the organisational abilities of this merchant, that the migration and the successful settling of the Edessans in Malabar was executed, with the general consequence of its enduring impact on the St. Thomas Christians of the region.⁴²⁹ Apart from the privileges and honours inscribed on copper-plates that Knai Thoma secured from the king, it is also indicated that Cheraman Perumal made subject to them, seventeen castes of people of the artisan and labouring classes to fulfil the Christians' needs.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁸ This individual is referred to in Syrian sources as '*Knai Thoma*' and not as 'Jerusalem Thoma'. MV agrees with other sources in describing him as a merchant. Confusion around the term 'Armenian' will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.3.3.

⁴²⁹ The Edessan party are said to have given expensive gifts to Cherman Perumal which included: 'a pint-measure full of precious gems, and a bushel of gold coins' (Zachariah 1973:82). The charter of privileges for the Christians he secured in return, inscribed on the so called 'Copper-plates Knai Thoma' (or at least a version of it from Portuguese times, as the originals were lost). See Aguiar 1930:180-182 for an English translation of Roz's copy of the copper plates.

⁴³⁰ Zachariah cites the a number of Ancient Syrian Christian ballads to support his views: the 'Women's Ballads' Strophe 4: 'Fair Jerusalem'(Lukas 1980:5); Strophe 5: 'Malankara of Old' (p.6); Strophe 6: 'Today have you forsaken us O Holy Father', and the one titled: 'By the Command of the Three' (p.7-9); 'Kaippuzha palliyude pattu- (Ballad of the Kaipuzha parish-church) Strophe 6 (p.95); and again in more detail in 'The Ballad of Kottayam Great St. Mary's church' (p.60) and 'The Ballad of Kottayam Little St. Mary's church' (p.160) as well as Strophe 4 of 'The Wedding-Ballads' that begin with: 'In the Noble City of Jerusalem', and Strophe 6: 'Today are we sent off O Holy Father?', and Strophe 6- Another Rhythm: 'By the command of the Great Three' (p.430). The 'Great three' are interpreted as the Patriarch of Antioch, the Catholios of the East, and the Bishop of Jerusalem.

c) *The second, or Kollam migration of 825*

Most sources mention a significant event occurring immediately prior to the second migration, referred to as the Kollam migration, and that is the destruction of Kodungallur by the Arabs.⁴³¹ Whether this initiated the second migration in 825 is not clear. All the Sources mention how two bishops, Mar Sabor and Mar Aphroth, arrived in Kollam in 825 under the leadership of the merchant Sabor Isho, accompanied by a large group of Mesopotamian Christians. While Niraṇām (Manalil: 115), Kandanad (Cheeran: 31) and Philip (85-6) narrate this migration concisely, a more detailed account is to be found in Zachariah.⁴³² Zachariah recounts how, upon presenting valuable gifts to the King of Kollam, the settlers received in return from the king, land to settle in and build a church. Just as in the case of the Edessan migration, this king is also said to have also granted them numerous privileges and honours inscribed on copper-plates. Significantly, the two bishops are remembered for the many churches they got built which bore both their names, '*mār sābor-aphrōttu-palḷy*' (=Church of Mar Sabro-Aphroth), and also by the terms *kandīšā-palḷy*' (church of the Holy Ones) and *tārīšā-palḷy*, (Orthodox Church),⁴³³ connecting the Malabar Church to the See of Antioch (Zachariah 1973:41-7). Above all, they are said to have instituted a Christian kingdom in Malabar with a dynastic ruler⁴³⁴, 'King Joseph of the House of Yakob', after the Patriarch Joseph of Antioch who had sent the bishops (Pukadiyil 1869:120-21).⁴³⁵

⁴³¹ See Whitehouse for some details 1873:75-76,81.

⁴³² This summary is based primarily on the account given in Zachariah (1973: 43-50), copied from the Chalakuzhy *ola* manuscript.

⁴³³ The churches built by Sabor-Aphroth are listed as the ones in Kollam (825), Kayamkulam (828), Kaduthruthy (830), Udayamperoor (832) and Angamaly (834). The Kayamkulam church continues to bear the appellation 'Kayamkulam *kandīšā-palḷy*' (Zachariah 1973:44), after these bishops. See also Chapter 5, section 5.4.5.

⁴³⁴ Zachariah 1973:45 mentions how the bishops brought two insignia-rings from Antioch, one for the prince and the other for the archdeacon, and instituted that at the demise of one, the other was to place the insignia on the next incumbent. The dynasty was called the House of Villwalvatom. Citing Paolinus a San Bartolomeo, the 18th century Carmelite missionary in Malabar, Whitehouse 1873:64-5 notes that the princes were of the family of Waliyedathu (which has entered modern histories in its Portuguese rendering *Baliarte*), that the kingdom was based in Udayamperoor, that he paid tribute to Kochi, and that at the last one dying without issue, the kingdom reverted to Kochi, rather than to one of his co-religionists.

⁴³⁵ Pukadiyil 1869:119 adds that it was from this time nobility was conferred on the Syrians and they acquired the title 'Māppiḷa' (=Nobleman) affixed to their names, by which even those of high-caste were to address them. Consequently, the SCM were identified by the generic term 'Nasrani Māppiḷa' (=Christian Nobleman) by those of other communities.

4.2.3. Episcopal provenance until the 16th century

After the arrival of the Bishop of Edessa Mar Joseph in 345, MV mentions only very briefly the episcopal support the SCM received from abroad, in the 480-year period between the two migrations, and the 700-year period between the Kollam migration and the arrival of the Portuguese. But in both periods, three salient factors are seen: that the bishops who arrived were ‘Syrian’, that they arrived ‘regularly’ from various cities in Mesopotamia, and that they arrived by ‘the order of the Catholicos of the East’.⁴³⁶

However, Jacobite sources provide additional details (Niraṇām/Manalil 2002:116-7, Pukadiyil 1869:119-120), Cheeran 20008:31). Niraṇām (pp.116-7) is more precise, with the names and dates of eight other bishops given, who arrived after the second Mesopotamian migration of 825, between 905 and 1407, and all bearing the title of Metropolitan (Manalil 2002:116-7). While the Niraṇām does not state explicitly state Antioch as the source of these bishops, the See of Antioch as the source is implied. After enumerating the Four Primary Patriarchates of Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople and Antioch, Niraṇām adds: ‘These Four Patriarchs have been (thus) established. The 6th Patriarch is Antioch’s Second, the Catholicos of Tigris. Malayalam-country is under his jurisdiction’ (Niraṇām/Manalil 2002:103-4). Kandanad also gives a succinct account of the progress of the Syrian Church in Malabar from the 9th to the 16th centuries, until the arrival of the Nestorian bishop Mar Abraham, as: ‘...and in this manner the Archdeacon continued to govern us, disciplining and defending the Church, and in all those times, the bishops who were continually coming from Antioch continued to accord this authority to the Archdeacons in Malayala, and thus governed Malayala, after which the Franks arrived in Kochi, after which their [the Syrian bishops’] arrival was interrupted.....Thus until the year 1545 of our Lord, we have continued in this tradition and we were of the True Syrian Church (*sthuthi chovvakkappetta suriyāṇikkār* = ‘Syrians following the true /right/orthodox doctrine’, which denotes the Syrian Orthodox Church) (Kandanad/Cheeran 2008: 31).

⁴³⁶ As also seen in MV, II33-40. Kandanad/Cheeran 2008:31.

4.2.4. The relationship of the SCM with the (Nestorian) CotE bishops of the 16th and early 17th centuries

MV mentions the arrival of four bishops soon after the Portuguese arrival in 1498, Mar Thoma, Mar Yabahalla, Mar Denha and Mar Yacob, he does not state their doctrinal identity, except that they were ‘Syrians’, they came by the decree of the Catholicos, and that they built many churches (II.42-44). Although three of the Sources, the 1771 *ola*, Niraṇam and Kandanad do not mention these four bishops, Zachariah and Kaniamparambil provides details, most notable of which is their undertaking extensive church-building (Zachariah 1973:53-55). According to Zachariah, they were deputed by Antioch, their arrival was celebrated by the SCM, and that whereas the original number of seven churches established by Apostle Thomas was increased to twelve by bishops Sabor and Aphroth, these bishops raised the number to 72 (Zachariah 1973:53-55).⁴³⁷ Regarding the three bishops who came in the latter half of the 16th century, Mar Abraham of the Nestorian CotE, Joseph Sulaqa and Simon, both of the Chaldean Uniate Church, the sources give some details of the relationship that developed between them and the SCM, especially in the case of Mar Abraham (Manalil 2002:117, Cheeran 2008:32). Pukadiyil mentions how there was ‘great argument’ between the SCM and Mar Abraham about his Nestorian beliefs, but that he was accepted under certain conditions, especially that he was not to interfere in the SCM faith and doctrine, because they had no other bishops (1869:125). However, Mar Abraham’s apostasy from his own doctrines of the CotE under pressure from his Jesuit inquisitors, and his submission to Rome, led the Syrians to reject him (Pukadiyil 1989:126, Cheeran 2008:32). Kaniamparambil briefly mentions that the 1503 bishop Mar Jacob, and Mar Abraham, Joseph Sulaqa, and Simon were unprincipled bishops, and consequently were rejected by the SCM (1982:124). Kaniamparambil concludes that Mar Abraham, Joseph Sulaqa, and Simon were crypto-Nestorians, who in the troubled times of the SCM in the 16th century, were trying to bring them under the Nestorian CotE, but that

⁴³⁷ This last number is probably erroneous because in 1663 when the Dutch were in Malabar, both indigenous (Kaniamparambil 1982:146-7) and Dutch sources (Drury 1862:109) give the number of churches as 64.

in simultaneously attempting to please Rome as well, they became rejected by both, and died tragic deaths (1989:56-63).

Joseph the Indian's account, notably coming prior to all the Sources, states that the Patriarch of his Church was in Antioch, his 'over-bishop' was called the 'Catholica', who sends bishops and Metropolitans to Malabar (Vallavanthara 1984:168-70; 231-233).

4.2.5. The JSC's response to Latinisation

The fourth important point for investigating the Syrians' self-perception of their identity is their response to the Latinisation measures carried out by the Portuguese. MV conveys an impression of harsh persecution that the SCM suffered during this period, often without giving specific details. Across the range of Syrian sources, different details are presented though the overall narrative is the extreme harshness of the Portuguese-Catholic treatment of the SCM in this process, by direct interference in their church affairs, or indirectly, oppressing them through the local rulers.

The JSC accounts consistently indicate that the SCM never accepted Latinisation as a result of persuasion, but only accommodated Latin practices and Rome's authority under pressure. Examination of this period is presented into two sections: firstly, the 150 years of Portuguese rule, and secondly, the Dutch period beginning in 1663 until the time of MV.

Another aspect of this period is the arrival in Malabar of bishops from four different jurisdictions: Antioch, Rome, the CotE and the Chaldean Uniate Church. The Syrians' attitude to them and their response to their teachings will also contribute to the understanding of their self-perception.

a) 1599 Synod of Diamper

Jacobite sources do not present a comprehensive account of what transpired during the Synod of Diamper⁴³⁸, but they consistently refer to how it was conducted under severe restrictions imposed on the SCM representatives. Pukadiyil observes that the gravest charge against the Syrians that evoked this Synod had been that of professing ‘the two persons and two natures in Christ’ Dyophysite doctrine on Christ’s incarnation when it did not hold it in the first place (Pukadiyil 1869:133). Jacobite sources also describe how Menezes had received the help of the local rulers for the forcible conduct of the Synod, by the ‘fabulous bribes’ that were given to the King of Kochi (1771 *ola*: para.19; Cheeran 2008:32; Manalil 2002:117-8).⁴³⁹ Kandanad mentions ‘placing an axe leaning against the door’ of the church in Diamper where the Synod was held (Cheeran 2008:32), perhaps symbolically to indicate Menezes’ intention to cut the ‘Nestorian heresy’ at its root. These sources mention the many disruptions to the proceedings caused by the Syrians, how they were put down, and how the Synod was brought to completion with the reduction of the SCM to Rome, and the burning of their so-called heretical books.⁴⁴⁰ The 1771 *ola* states that despite the oaths of subjection to Rome sworn at Diamper, the Archdeacon and the people refused to follow Latin ways, and force was employed and bribes were offered to the Archdeacon, for their compliance (1771 *ola* 90-91). Zachariah mentions how the ‘Franks’ caused a great deal of injury to the Syrians in this period, enforcing the Latin Mass, and placing of statues in churches, which the people ‘painfully endured’ (1973:65).

b) Oath of the Leaning Cross and schism in the Syrian Church

MV mentions the arrival and alleged murder of the Syrian bishop Mar Ahattalla in 1653 (II.59-64) as a pivotal point in the history of the SCM that led to their breaking free of Rome, and re-establishing their independence. According to Kaniamparambil, the SCM wrote to the Patriarchates of the Churches in Alexandria and Antioch, and

⁴³⁸ The synod was held at the Udayamperoor parish church of Mar Sabor and Mar Aphroth, from the 20th of June 1599. ‘In the Malayalam year 774 (1599), in the month of Midhunam (June), they held what they called a Synod in Udayamperoor’ (Manalil 2002:117).

⁴³⁹ Zachariah comments on the bribing of the king as ‘whether or not it harmed his subjects, the Christians’, and provided native ‘lance-wielding guards’ alongside Portuguese soldiers to repress any sign of insubordination. (Zachariah 1973:62)

⁴⁴⁰ Catholic historian Jesuit Fr. H. Hosten has noted that far more Syrian books were systematically burnt after Diamper (Hosten 1927:85 footnote 32). See also Chapter 4.2.5 and Chapter 6.5.6 for more information on this.

Mar Ahattalla's arrival was in response to this (1982:132). This event is described in detail in the Sources, and they identify this hierarch consistently as Patriarch Mar Ignatius,⁴⁴¹ who the JSC believed was a Patriarch of Antioch. The exact time-scale of events is obscure, although Jacobite sources agree on the sequence of events: Mar Ahattalla was imprisoned in Mylapore by the Jesuits, and was met by two deacons from the SCM who brought this news back to Malabar. The Portuguese brought Mar Ahattalla to Kochi, on route to Goa. The SCM gathered there in protest, but faced by the prospect of a riot, the Portuguese drowned Mar Ahattalla in the harbour. This precipitated the '*Kūnān Kurishū Sāthyām*' or 'Oath of the Leaning Cross', with the SCM rejecting all authority of Rome over them in perpetuity.⁴⁴²

The Jacobite sources also indicate how the defeat and ejection of the Portuguese clergy by the Dutch in 1662-3 brought relief to the JSC.⁴⁴³ However, the arrival of the Carmelites bishop Joseph Sebastiani in 1656⁴⁴⁴, and his vengeful attitude towards Mar Thoma I, to the extent of plotting to kill him, are narrated at length (Philip 1950:139-141; Zacharia 1973:69-71; Kaniamparambil 1982:138-141), corroborating the text of MV (1.65-73) which implies that this second phase of persecution was more severe than the first.⁴⁴⁵

c) Arrival of the Jacobite Maphrian and three other bishops

While MV omits the arrival of the Jacobite bishops in the latter half of the 17th century, other sources give details of the events of this period. They mention how, responding

⁴⁴¹ *Ab 'd Alla*, according to Yacoub III 2000:104.

⁴⁴² See Manalil 2002:119-124; 1771 *ola*:12&13; Cheeran 2008:32-35; Pukadiyil 1869:136-142; Philip 1950:134-143, Kaniamparambil 1982:132-136, and 1989:80-87. For longer accounts from the Jacobite sources, and relevant translations, see Appendix 11.

⁴⁴³ The sources appear to interpret some corollary events, such as the death of the king of Kochi on the same day as that of the death of Mar Ahattalla in an accident, the comprehensive defeat and expulsion of the Portuguese from the Malabar coast at the hands of the Dutch in 1663 accompanied by heavy losses of life and property, and, at the point of eviction from Malabar, the Catholic Archbishop Garcia having had to plead with the Dutch for concessions, as divine retribution (Pukadiyil 1869:137,139; Philip 1950:135).

⁴⁴⁴ Kaniamparambil 1989:88-89.

⁴⁴⁵ This included the propaganda that Mar Thoma I's priestly ordinations were uncanonical, and that those who received functions from such priests jeopardised their spiritual salvation (Pukadiyil 1869:136). Jacobite sources recount how Sebastiani captured Mar Thoma I and his chief advisor Anjilmoottil Itty Thommen Kattanār, but when the JSC smuggled them out, he vented his anger by burning Mar Thoma I's possessions, and further violence perpetrated against the Jacobite people, the confiscation or destruction of property and church-goods, and inducing the local kings to impose heavy fines on anyone giving refuge to Mar Thoma I (Kaniamparambil 141-143).

to Mar Thoma I's appeal of 1660⁴⁴⁶, the Patriarch of Jerusalem Mar Gregorius Abd al Jaleel, deputed by Antioch, arrived in 1665, and performed Mar Thoma I's canonical consecration (Niraṇām 126), and purged the Syrian Church of some of the more serious doctrinal errors it was forced to adopt under Latin rule. He was followed by Mar Andreos in 1678, and then in 1685, Antioch sent a four-member delegation including the Syrian Maphrian Mar Baselius Yaldo of Mosul, two monks (*Ramban*) and a lay-person. Fearing the Portuguese, they disembarked on the east coast and travelled over the mountains on foot. The octogenarian Maphrian died within 13 days, but he had elevated Ramban Hidayattallah as Mar Ivanius, Metropolitan of the Syrians. Mar Ivanius himself died in 1694 (Pukadiyil (1869:142-44; Zachariah 1973: 71-74;).

These sources generally speak of how Mar Gregorius (1665) and Mar Ivanius (1685) re-instated the Jacobite rites and practices in the JSC, re-affirmed the Jacobite doctrine and theology, and the use of leavened bread in the Eucharist, the marriage of priests etc., and how the JSC accepted their teachings (Zachariah 1973:73-4; Kaniamparambil 1982:149-151, 155-6).

4.2.6 Conclusion

To summarise the above findings, Vettikkunnel's narrative history of the Syrian Church as presented in his appeal generally aligns well with other indigenous Syrian sources. Its style is consistent with similar narrative histories of this community of Malabar Christians in the way in which it starts with the foundation of the Church by St. Thomas, and goes through the two Mesopotamian migrations as a means to establish the Church's early links with Antioch for episcopal support that ensured its survival and prosperity for over a millennium. Where Vettikkunnel summarises the Portuguese clerics' efforts to persuade the Syrians to conform to Rome and alludes to later depredations under the Jesuit and Carmelite rules, these sources, offer more elaboration and substantiation while at the same being consistent in their core narrative.

While Mathai failed to identify the different bishops arriving in Malabar and the Syrians' relationship with them, thus leaving the reader unclear about the religious

⁴⁴⁶ See Chapter 4.3.1 for more details about this letter.

identity of the SCM, other sources were seen to have clearly delineated these, as well as the SCM's ambivalent state during the Latinised period. They moreover, name the two factions that emerged from the schism of 1663, unambiguously as *Jacobite-Syrian* and *Romo-Syrian*.

The reasons for Mathai's opaque narrative was speculated upon, and an attempt was made in Chapter 3, where his particular circumstances were examined. It was found that Mathai's actions, as vicar and *malpan*, were informed by two factors, firstly, his wish to protect his staunchly Jacobite parish-church from being taken over by the Catholics, and secondly, to draw away other parishes that had succumbed to Catholic pressure, for which he had co-opted of the Nestorian bishop Mar Gabriel's help. It was suggested that if he himself had Nestorian sympathies, he, his parish, and others like them, would have remained so after the death of Gabriel, but this was found not the case, as the Sources state that they reverted to their old states. From this interpretation of the MV alongside the Sources, it appears fairly conclusive that Mathai was espousing the cause of the party that had *not* allied itself with Rome after the schism of 1663, and that by term 'Syrians', he was referring to none other than the Church that later came to be called the Jacobites. Regarding the religious identity of this non-Catholic Church, the Sources appear to accord with the MV in anchoring and affirming as being the continuation of the pre-Diamper undivided Syrian Church. The following two chapters (5 and 6) will critically examine this self-perception of the Jacobite Syrian, both in terms of the accounts in the Sources discussed in this chapter, as well the challenges that have been raised against them by external historians.

Chapter 5: Perspectives on the Nestorian identity of the SCM

The analysis and discussion of MV has shown that the narrative history and evolution of the SCM was inconclusive with regard to its doctrinal identity, and the source from which its bishops received their consecration on the principle of Apostolic Succession.⁴⁴⁷ Mathai did not explicitly identify the Church he was advocating in relation to either of these elements. It was also seen that while he made numerous references to its bishops and Catholicoi arriving from Syria, he did not clearly articulate these hierarchs' doctrinal identity, nor the Patriarchal See to which they were attached. The presence of two Patriarchs in the same geographical region of Mesopotamia, one of the CotE, and the other of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch (Miaphysite, non-Chalcedonian),⁴⁴⁸ obfuscates the identification of the Church that was deputing bishops to Malabar, and consequently, what the religious identity of the Malabar Church was at the time of the Portuguese arrival.

According to Bar Hebraeus, when the Catholicos of the East based in Seleucia (who had been the Antioch's second hierarch) was in the late 3rd century, instructed to consecrate its own hierarch without sending him to Antioch, it marked the formation of the CotE as an independent Church.⁴⁴⁹ This separate identity was consolidated

⁴⁴⁷ The concept of Apostolic Succession was, at its inception, the principle by which the Christian faith as preached by Christ's Apostles' was entrusted to successive Church Fathers and elders (later titled *episcopos* and bishops) to be safeguarded and passed on to the next generation by the act of 'laying on of hands' and consecration of them. By this generational succession, the Episcopal Churches claim their authenticity by tracing their episcopacy back to the Apostles. The safeguarding of doctrine and faith of each See is ensured by vows of affiliation given by each bishop to the hierarch (González 2005:15).

⁴⁴⁸ The official name of this Church in Syriac is *idto Suryoyto treeysath šubho* (Syrian Orthodox Church), but changed its English translation to *Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch* at the Synod of 2000. (Syriac Orthodox Resources <http://sor.cua.edu/History/index.html>). See also the *Address* given by Patriarch Yacoub III at Gottingen University (1980:3).

⁴⁴⁹ According to Bar Hebraeus, until late 3rd century, Seleucian Metropolitans were consecrated by 'Western Fathers', i.e., the Patriarchs of Antioch (Chediath 1990:221-2). When a candidate sent to Antioch, was crucified in Antioch by Roman authorities accused of being a Persian spy, this practice

when the Synod of 424 in Seleucia ruled against further appeals to the ‘Western Fathers’ (i.e to Antioch), which led to the CotE becoming a fully separate and ecclesiastically ordered ‘Persian’ Church (Mar Aprem 1983:15).⁴⁵⁰ After the Council of Ephesus in 431, the Catholicos-Patriarch of Seleucia aligned himself with the leading figures of the School of Nisibis who adhered to the Nestorian Dyophysite theology.⁴⁵¹ The resultant doctrinal separation of the CotE from other Churches in the mid-5th century led to the Churches taking up opposing antagonistic and entrenched positions.

The CotE consolidated its ecclesiastical order and Christological dogmas in the course of the 5th and 6th centuries (Etheridge 1846:66-73; Brock and Coakley 2018).⁴⁵² However, some people in the region remained loyal to Antioch (Zakka Iwas 1983). After the sacking of Antioch in 540 by the Sassanian Emperor Khosrau, great numbers Syrian Orthodox Christians from the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire were brought to Persia as slaves, and settled in new cities in the Mesopotamian region (Frye 1962:230). According to Bar Hebraeus, this was how the number of Syrian Orthodox grew considerably in the Sassanid dominions (Chediath 1990:44) – but there had also been earlier deportations under Shapur I. They had initially only one Metropolitan (in 559) later increasing to more regional bishops, and pledged their allegiance to the ‘Western’ Church, i.e., the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, their original Church before captivity and resettlement in Mesopotamia. In 628, Patriarch Athanasius Gamalo (or Garmai, in Zakka Iwas 1983), elevated Marutha, as their Great Metropolitan, with the title ‘Maphrian of Tigris’ with authority to govern over all the Syrian Orthodox in Persia (Chediath 1990:56-7). Considering the on-going hostilities between the Persian and Roman (Byzantine) Empires, the Maphrian, as suffragan to Antioch, was given autonomy to consecrate bishops for the Eastern regions.

was stopped, and Antioch gave to Seleucia permission to consecrate its own Metropolitan, titled ‘Catholicos-Patriarch of the East’.

⁴⁵⁰ Thereby, the terms ‘West’ and ‘East’ referred in these contexts were consistently interpreted as Antioch and Seleucia respectively.

⁴⁵¹ By the mid-5th century, under Barsawma, Narsai and Magnus of the School of Nisibis, ‘Nestorianism’ (as in Dyophysitism) became established in the Church of the East (Chediath 1990:39-41). See also Neale 1873:201

⁴⁵² Brock and Coakley (2018) entry for *Church of the East* in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* Edited by Brock et al. <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Church-of-the-East>.

In Mesopotamia, this branch of the Syrian Orthodox Church appears to have kept itself distinct and apart from the (Nestorian) CotE which was under the Catholicos-Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, as seen in Bar Hebraeus (Chediath 56-100). Doctrinal and political differences often created hostility between the two Churches,⁴⁵³ referring to each other pejoratively as ‘Nestorians’ or ‘Jacobites’.⁴⁵⁴

5.1. Nestorianism

The characteristic of the Nestorian Church⁴⁵⁵ that distinguished it from other Churches was primarily its Christological formulation. The controversy among Church leaders of the 4th and 5th centuries over different ways of expressing the nature of Christ in his Incarnation, led to the Chalcedonian Schism of 451. The three different formulations that emerged as a result, can be summarised in very simple terms as follows:⁴⁵⁶ the Nestorian Church’s formula stated that in Christ, the divine and the human co-habited as distinct entities, and that the Divine part did not suffer or die on the cross, but only the human part did (‘two persons with two natures’ or extreme-dyophysite formula). This was anathematised at the Council of Chalcedon, where the Churches of Constantinople and Bishops held that the incarnated Christ embodied one person but in two natures, emphasizing that the two natures were present in Christ ‘without

⁴⁵³ As Wilmshurst observes (2011:69-70): ‘So many Jacobite monks came to live on Mt. Izla in God’s service that it was eventually given its present name Tur ‘Abdin, ‘the mountain of servants’. The monasteries of the Church of the East across the border in Persia could be clearly seen from Qartmin Abbey, but the Jacobites, protected by Roman soldiers and Roman fortresses, could contemplate their enemies with impunity’.

⁴⁵⁴ It has been claimed that the Orthodox Maphrians, after their ordination, were ‘investitured’ by the *Nestorian Patriarchs* in the 12th and 13th centuries (Wilmshurst 2011:161-2), but this is contrary to the all the Jacobite Syrian accounts consulted. Wilmshurst does not supply the authority on whom he bases this claim.

⁴⁵⁵ The term ‘Nestorian Church’ is here used to refer to the CotE without prejudice, although scholars, in particular, Brock and Coakley 2018 have noted that ‘The Church of the East follows the strictly dyophysite (‘two-nature’) Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, as a result of which it was misleadingly labelled as ‘Nestorian’ by its theological opponents’ (Brock and Coakley 2018). Just as the term ‘Jacobite’ has become accepted as a reference to the Syrian Orthodox Christians of Kerala affiliated to the See of Antioch, the term ‘Nestorian’ is also used only distinguish from other Churches. Neither of these two Churches consider either Nestorius or Jacob Baradaeus as their respective founders, nor do they subscribe to doctrines specifically formulated by them. Mar Aprem (1983:14) the head of the Chaldean Syrian Church in Kerala with close links to the ancient CotE, and historian Wilmshurst (2011:10), appear to use the term ‘Nestorian’ for the CotE.

⁴⁵⁶ See McGuckin 2004:140, Kaniamparambil 1982:57-60 and Mathew 2006:30-36

confusion, without change, without division and without separation’ (‘one person, two natures’ or Chalcedonian / Miaphysite formula).⁴⁵⁷

The Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Armenia and Ethiopia rejected the Chalcedonian formulation, arguing that the ‘two-natures’ part of the Miaphysite formula remained too close to the Nestorian formula. These anti-Chalcedonian Churches adopted the formulation of Cyril of Alexandria, which stated that the incarnated Christ was one person with one nature, uniting all aspects of both the divine and the human natures (‘one person, one nature’ or Miaphysite formula), and emphasizing that the two natures were ‘without admixture, without separation, without confusion and without alteration’.⁴⁵⁸ Thus, the Syrian Orthodox Church’s Christological formula, antithetical to the Nestorian one, was termed *Monophysite* implying the Syrians believe that the human nature of Christ was subsumed within his divine nature. The Syrian Orthodox Church itself, prefers the term Miaphysite (meaning both human and divine natures are intermingled and indistinguishable).

5.2. The allegations of Nestorianism at the Synod of Diamper

According to Hough, the 200 Decrees that were passed at the Synod,⁴⁵⁹ contained ‘the best, indeed it may be said, the only account extant of the doctrines and customs of their church at the time of their publications’ (Hough 1839 Vol.II:11). Of these 200 Decrees, the allegation of Nestorianism on the SCM is clearly articulated in only

⁴⁵⁷ Rev. Badger, the 19th century English chaplain also noted, after long association with them, on the injustice of the term ‘Nestorian’ as: ‘Nestorius constantly denied that he held this doctrine; and his followers in modern times are no less steadfast in disclaiming it’ (Badger 1852:2). But, Abd Yeshu, the ‘Nestorian Metropolitan of Nisibis and Armenia’, wrote in 1298: ‘...when they heard that he [Nestorius] taught the doctrine of the two Natures and two Persons, one SON OF GOD, one CHRIST, and that he confessed the orthodox faith, they bore witness to him, because they themselves held the same faith. Nestorius then followed them, and not they him...’ (Badger 1852:400).

⁴⁵⁸ For an exposition of the doctrine and theology of the JSC, see O M Mathew’s English translation (2006) of Malabar Jacobite theologian, Malpan Geevarghese (later, Metropolitan Mar Dionysius Geevarghese)’s *Mathopadesa Sarangal* (first published in 1900).

⁴⁵⁹ For detailed accounts of the Synod of Diamper and its Decrees, see Gouvea (1604), Geddes (1694), Hough (1839 Vol.I), Mundadan (1994), and Zacharia (1998). They differ in their evaluation of the conduct of the Synod, but all state that the Syrian Church was Nestorian prior to Diamper, and rejected it afterwards.

seven.⁴⁶⁰ However, the allegation of the Syrians' holding this heretical belief-system is the recurring theme and one of the reasons for this was that there were in Malabar, books that contained these Nestorian heresies.⁴⁶¹

The 'Nestorian errors' contained in one or more of these books included:⁴⁶²

- a) denial Mary to be the Mother of God (Session III Decree 6)
- b) designating the Patriarch of Babylon the 'Universal Pastor' and 'Head of the Universal Church' in the Eucharist and in prayers (Session III Decree 8)
- c) commemoration of Nestorian saints during the Eucharist (Session III Decree 9)
- d) the liturgies and prayer books of Nestorius, Theodorus and Diodorus are condemned (Session V, Decree 2 p137)
- e) general condemnation of Nestorian books (Session III Decree 14).

In addition, Session III Decree 20 stated that heretical doctrines distinguishing the Nestorian Church from other Churches were being 'preached and believed in this diocese', namely its Christological doctrine, the doctrine on the Incarnation, its rejection of Rome's supremacy, its commemoration of heretical Church Fathers in its liturgy (Zacharia 1994:107-8). In Session V Decree 3 a Nestorian ceremony during the Fracture of the Eucharistic Bread is also described and condemned (Zacharia 1994:137-8).

Session III/Decree 14, refers to 'the many errors sown in this diocese, and left in the books thereof, by the perfidious Nestorian heretics' (Zacharia 1994:92). Articles of heresy collated from 19 of them included the fundamentals of upholding the dyophysite doctrine, denial of transubstantiation, refutation of Christ being the Son of God, denial of Mary's title as 'Mother of God', and many more lesser articles.

⁴⁶⁰ Session III, Decrees 6, 8, 9, 20; Session V, Decrees 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4. See Zacharia 1994, pp.92, 93, 94, 107, 137, 138 respectively.

⁴⁶¹ See Van der Ploeg (1983) *The Syriac Manuscripts of St Thomas Christians*, and Briquel-Chatonnet (2012) *Syriac Manuscripts in India, Syriac Manuscripts from India* pp.284-5 for details of the books alleged in the Decrees to be Nestorian

⁴⁶² Cited from Zacharia 1994.

5.3. Changing doctrinal position

Historians from the 19th century onwards have generally maintained that Jacobitism came to Malabar through the bishops that arrived in the latter half of the 17th century. They however, concede that the SCM accepted Jacobite bishops periodically in the medieval period. According to Hough, from its inception, in the indistinct period before 420 the Church in Malabar was Jacobite (Hough 1839:Vol 1:87), and then from the early 6th century, i.e. from the time of Cosmas, it was Nestorian, till 696. From 696-825 (until the arrival of the Kollam bishops) it was Jacobite, and from 825 to 1599 (Diamper), it was Nestorian again.

The secular Malabar historian Nagam Aiya⁴⁶³ has presented his interpretation that in the absence of regular supply of bishops from a particular Church, the SCM were willing to ‘accept the help and counsel of any Christian missionary or sect that came from the west and it is probable that from time to time, Nestorian bishops, Jacobite patriarchs and Latin missionaries found a tractable and obedient flock in Malabar’ (Aiya 1906:123-4).⁴⁶⁴ On the SCM’s poor grasp of doctrine, Firth states that ‘...the Jacobite Syrian Christians of Malabar were not theologically minded, and that the main object of the dissidents at this period was to get a bishop who was not Roman’ (Firth 1961:107). The Keralan historian Scaria Zacharia endorses this view, that the Christological disputes between Churches were too abstract and philosophical for the SCM to understand or engage with – ‘lacking in well-defined dogmas and practices (Zacharia 1994:14) – rendering them susceptible to such periodic reversals, and further, that the Portuguese unnecessarily attributed Nestorianism to the SCM while they (the Syrians) ‘were unaware of such theological disputations’ (Zacharia 1994:59).

The implication here is that the SCM lacked sufficient knowledge and mental capacity to distinguish between Nestorian and Jacobite faiths. However, while this kind of doctrinal drift or change may have been plausible over prolonged periods of episcopal absence prior to the 16th century, subsequently the changes were not driven by

⁴⁶³ Dewan of the Travancore king in the early 20th century. Dewans were Chief-ministers of the kings of Travancore and Kochi, during British colonial period.

⁴⁶⁴ Aiya evidences this argument by pointing to the tendency of various denominations of present-day JSC to legitimate their own antiquity on the basis of one or the other bishop that arrived in various points in history.

ignorance or lack of conviction, but by specific circumstances. In 1599, the SCM were forced to adopt Roman dogma under political and military pressure. In 1653, the SCM took a self-initiated decision to reject Roman authority.⁴⁶⁵ The question of whether the SCM moved from Nestorianism to its polar opposite i.e. Jacobitism, in accordance with the professions of visiting bishops seems unlikely for a number of reasons. Firstly, the relationship between the Nestorians and Jacobites in the mother-countries of Syro-Mesopotamia was always mutually exclusive, and at times hostile.⁴⁶⁶ Secondly, it seems less credible that this community in Malabar could have moved between two opposing doctrines indiscriminately and yet held themselves together as a single Church, its relative homogeneity frequently referred to by the Catholic missionaries of the 16th century. There is no record of parishes within Malabar holding different doctrines or allegiances, and this is reflected in the Decrees of the Synod of Diamper where Menezes refers to the Church in Malabar as one entity.⁴⁶⁷ This cannot be due to a strong centralised ecclesiastical and juridical structure, as Malabar lacked such a central authority, leaving individual parishes relatively independent.⁴⁶⁸ If bishops from both the CotE, and the SOC were arriving in Malabar and were having some impact on at least some of the parishes, it would have been reflected in the Church at the time of Diamper, with parishes holding a variety of allegiances ranging from CotE, to Chaldean Uniate, to (Jacobite) Syrian Orthodox.

Thirdly, moving between doctrines seems unlikely considering that when the Portuguese missionaries attempted to introduce Roman Catholic dogmas to the Syrian Church, the SCM obstinately rejected this throughout a hundred-year period, from 1498 to 1599, in spite of the many social, political and economic advantages this would have resulted in. If as Zacharia argues, the SCM had defined their religious identity

⁴⁶⁵ The 1665 acceptance of the Jacobite bishop is seen by the JSC as a resumption of previous affiliation, rather than a new doctrinal position.

⁴⁶⁶ Hostilities appear to have been kept under check for fear of the rulers. Relationships were at their best in the 13th century when Bar Hebraeus was the Jacobite Maphrian, and Yahballaha the Catholicos-Patriarch of the CotE. Bar Hebraeus in his *Chronicon* mentions numerous incidents relating to this hostility causing both parties being summoned before the rulers because of false accusations (Chediath 1990:73,105-7), and engaging in public theological disputations with each other in the presence of the rulers (1990:46, 77,83).

⁴⁶⁷ Menezes refers to the SCM as 'the bishopric of the Serra' (Zacharia 1994:73). There are no indications in the Decrees of different faiths and practices within the SCM community.

⁴⁶⁸ The SCM is often described as having almost no ecclesiastical hierarchy, with the sixty odd parishes operating as autonomous mini-Republics (Mundadan 1984:190). Bartolomeo (1796) draws parallels of this to the Brahmins' ordering of their community (cited in Pallath 2019:41).

only by the Indian-Malabarian cultural parameters and not by doctrine and theology, the move to Catholicism would have been easier and advantageous. Although rarely engaging in doctrinal debates, the SCM appear to have adhered very strongly to one set of rites and traditions which were seen as the clear expression of doctrine, dogma and affiliation.

This raises the question of how the SCM were persuaded to renounce their original faith and accept Roman Catholicism over a short period of seven days of the Synod of Diamper. Gouvea portrays the SCM as offering little resistance and were readily pacified with the Archbishop's arguments (Malekandathil 2003: 263-5). However, force and intimidation appear to have been an integral part of the Synod of Diamper.⁴⁶⁹ According to Zacharia 'there were many restrictions which prevented the participants from expressing their views on every subject'. As one of the eye-witnesses stated 'much of what was read was done, in such a hurry and confusion that the Christians did not understand nor consequently accept it' (Zacharia:1994:41).⁴⁷⁰ Gouvea also admits that there were there were loud protests on the second day involving about seventy men shouting and 'fighting' outside the church (Malekandathil 2003:267). On the third day 'doubts (were) raised', but quelled by a group of fellow Syrian Christians who had been primed by the Archbishop in advance through inducements (Malekandathil 2003:275). Although Gouvea mentions that the SCM were 'full of an infernal fury' and 'rushed with passion' into the church over two days, he asserts that they were silenced at the sight of Menezes in pontifical vestments (Malekandathil 2003:274-276; Zacharia 1994:27-8). There is no acknowledgement from Gouvea of the presence and role of armed soldiers in the church.

⁴⁶⁹ It was given an air of authority by the presence of a large number of Portuguese civil and military officials, bishops, scores of Portuguese and native clergy, seventy of them being native priests newly ordained by Archbishop Menezes into the Roman faith to ensure overwhelming support during the proceedings, and liveried soldiers lining the church inside and out. The King of Kochi and his ministers were present as observers, and Archbishop Menezes presided in full pontifical robes, mitre and staff, 'in order to have more majesty and reverence' (Malekandathil 2003:276).

⁴⁷⁰ Citing Roz 1603, and Campori 1604.

5.4. Evaluation of alleged Nestorianism

In the light of the above discussion, the alleged Nestorian identity of the SCM needs to be critically evaluated on the basis of wider literature, as well as Syrian Christian sources, addressing each key aspect in detail.

5.4.1 The three Nestorian bishops Mar Abraham, Joseph and Simeon

Menezes noted that the bishops who arrived in Malabar in the late 16th century were deputed by the ‘Catholicos-Patriarch of Babylon’, and with this understanding, the new discourse of ‘Nestorianism’ articulated first by Menezes (as seen in the Introduction) seems to have entered the European discourse on the Syrians.⁴⁷¹

The claim of SCM Nestorianism was seen to be validated by the presence in Malabar, in the 16th century, at least three bishops of that faith. The first of these was Mar Abraham, whose arrival in 1547 coincided with that of the Jesuits.⁴⁷² The context of his arrival is that the previous bishop, Mar Jacob, who had been persuaded to co-operate with the Catholics, particularly the Franciscan missionaries, had just died in 1550 (Schurhammer 1934:23). The arrival of the young bishop, Mar Abraham, caused concern among the Jesuits, they had hoped that in the absence of bishops, the SCM would gradually come to accept Roman Catholicism. Mar Abraham’s adherence to Nestorianism is revealed through several factors, notably being sent by Mar Elia, the Nestorian Catholicos-Patriarch, and also the set of books he brought with him to Malabar, including the *Nomocanon* of the Nestorian Church.⁴⁷³ The SCM appeared

⁴⁷¹ Menezes stated that until 1598 he had assumed that the Syrian Church’s bishops had come from Babylon or Alexandria, and he had revised it only after encountering Mar Simeon in Lisbon and recognising him to be an unreformed Nestorian. ‘They [the indigenous Christians of Kerala, anciently called Malabar⁴⁷¹] had been in schisms and Nestorian error for a long time... To eradicate all these errors, I have decided to go there myself.....I will convene a Synod of the clergy and bring them under the authority of the Roman Church.... It is the Babel Patriarch who sends bishops to rule this Church, and not the Patriarch of Alexandria as was known to us. He (the Babel Patriarch) is a public heretic with a thousand errors and never desires to give them up’ (Menezes in a letter of 19th Dec 1597 to the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem residing in Rome, quoted in Kaniamparambil 1989:63-4).

⁴⁷² Francis Xavier arrived in Malabar in 1545. Alternative dates for the arrival of Abraham are given by some historians, but 1547 seems most credible (Pukkadiyil 1869:125-6). Payyappilly 2016:36 says he arrived in 1556, based on Portuguese writers mentioned in footnote 36, p92.

⁴⁷³ Van Der Ploeg denies that he was a Nestorian, citing a note that he wrote in the *Nomocanon* where he denounces Nestorius (1983:13/14). This was, however, mostly likely written under pressure from the Jesuits, as is evident from the fact that he was on numerous occasions challenged by them and even twice sent to the Inquisition for investigation.

to accept his authority as their bishop, performing some episcopal functions, and finding the books he brought useful. However, Pukadiyil (1869-125-6) presents a different picture of how he was accepted by the SCM. He states when he arrived, they examined him and found there was a difference between his doctrine and faith and theirs, which led to ‘much argument’ (1869:125). Because they had no bishops at the time, the SCM decided to accept him as their bishop on condition that he only performed the episcopal function of ordaining priests. An agreement signed by Archdeacon Geevarghese on 24th *Kumbham* (February) accepted Mar Abraham on condition that he did not pervert the faith of the SCMs. On hearing of this, the Portuguese arrested and imprisoned him, with the help of the King of Kochi, and persuaded him to abjure his heresy by writing a ‘curse’ on the *Nomocanon* of Nestorius.⁴⁷⁴ Syrian sources affirm that the SCM, finding he had aligned with Rome⁴⁷⁵ rejected him completely, and continued under the governance of their Archdeacon (Pukadiyil 1869-125-6).⁴⁷⁶ Building himself a church in Angamaly, Mar Abraham consecrated it in the name of Mar Hormizid, a Nestorian saint (Zacharia 1994:95).

Mar Joseph, who arrived in 1556, professing to have adopted Roman Catholicism as a Chaldean Uniate bishop, with the Chaldean Church recently having seceded from the CotE, was eventually rejected by the Portuguese for continuing to teach Nestorian doctrines (Hough 1839 Vol 1:250-257). Similarly, another Nestorian bishop, Mar Simeon, who arrived in 1578, outwardly accepted Papal authority, but was also rejected for continuing to profess Nestorian dogma (Hough 1839 Vol 1:285-88; Menacherry 1998:33-34).

Syrian sources show that when Nestorian bishops came in the 16th century (Mar Abraham, Joseph, Simeon, Simeon of Ada and Gabriel), the SCM appear to have accepted their presence in Malabar given the constrained circumstances they found themselves in, under the Portuguese. However, this acceptance, according to Syrian sources, far from being a full recognition, was conditional and limited. The SCM

⁴⁷⁴ Payyappilly 2016:161-3, with a translation on p166.

⁴⁷⁵ He was sent to Rome, and returned to Malabar a second time.

⁴⁷⁶ Mar Abraham at this point wrote to Babylon to have a second bishop sent to be his helper. The Portuguese placed guards along the ports of Malabar to intercept any Babylonian bishops. According to Payyappilly, Mar Abraham wrote this curse, and made this confession in 1558 (2016:166), and he attended the council in 1578. Mar Abraham excused himself out of attending further councils in Goa (Geddes 1694:40).

curtailed these bishops' rights to hold the Eucharist service, but they did accept certain episcopal functions, such as the consecration of churches, in the absence of Syrian bishops (Mundadan1984 Vol I:177-8). Similarly, they did not hesitate to withdraw their acceptance if one of their bishops for any reason deviated from their faith. This can be seen in the way Mar Jacob, one of the 1503 cohort, 'was entirely abandoned by the church of Malabar' when he apostatised to Rome.⁴⁷⁷ The fact that, despite the existence of scores of churches in Malabar, Mar Abraham had to resort to building himself a church indicates that he was never completely accepted or considered their bishop. This is seen in stark contrast with the way the SCM treated unambiguously Jacobite bishops such as the cohort of three bishops that arrived in 1490: 'they were received by the faithful with great joy and they went to meet them with joy, carrying before them the book of the Gospel, the cross, censers and torches and they introduced them with great pomp and with the changing of psalms and hymns. And they, the bishops, consecrated altars and ordained very many priests...' (Schurhammer 1934:3). SCM sources (Kaniamparambil 1982:124) on the history of bishops Mar Abraham, Joseph and Simeon shows them as weakened in their attempts to straddle two different dogmas – Nestorian and Roman Catholic – while still trying to gain acceptance among the SCMs. It appears that these bishops were only accepted by the SCM for limited pragmatic functions, and their Nestorian doctrines were clearly rejected by the SCM.

5.4.2. Nestorian books in Malabar

In the purge of heretical literature, the Synod of Diamper⁴⁷⁸ listed and anathematised 26 books, Breviaries and documents (Zachariah 1990:98-105).⁴⁷⁹ The presence in Malabar of these 'Nestorian' texts is shown as conclusive evidence that the Syrian

⁴⁷⁷ Daniel 1933:327. In this article, Rome and the Malabar Church, K.N. Daniel argues that from Mar Jacob's letters, cited in Schurhammer 1934:10-19, 'it is evident that he was a convert to Roman Church' (p323) and 'was fighting hard to Romanize the Church of Malabar' (p.324).

⁴⁷⁸ The Synod of Diamper, Session III, Decree xiv, xv and xvi (Zachariah 1990:98-105).

⁴⁷⁹ Hosten has noted that far more Syrian books, collected by the order of Menezes at and after the Synod of Diamper were systematically burnt. Hosten says, citing a letter from the Seminary of Vaipicota, near Parur, on November 28th 1599, by J.M. Campori, S.J.: "Fr. Roz and I are busy examining their books. We delete, cut out, and throw into the fire entire books. All considered this work as a marvel. Formerly they were so attached to their books that they would not even allow them to be opened by us. Now they are not annoyed to see us erase, truncate and burn entire books as we pleased" (Hosten 1927:85n32).

Church at the time was Nestorian. It is possible that many of these books listed at Diamper were confiscated from 16th century Nestorian bishops, while other books that are cited as evidence of Nestorianism in Malabar can, on closer inspection, be seen to be in fact either Jacobite or of uncertain origin.

While acknowledging the existence of Nestorian-originated books in Malabar, Philip argues that these were introduced to Malabar by the Nestorian bishops who arrived in the latter half of the 16th century (Philip 1950:122-3). In reference to the arrival of Mar Abraham in 1549, the Syrian sources mention that he brought a large number of books (Pukadiyil 1869:125). Mar Joseph copied several books while a prisoner of the Portuguese, in Bassein, including the *Nomocanon* of Abdisho 1556.⁴⁸⁰ Mar Simeon who came in 1584, is also thought to have brought many books and, during his long detention by the Portuguese in Bassein,⁴⁸¹ and copied several of them for use in Malabar churches. However, because of the Portuguese antipathy towards this bishop, he was sent to Lisbon to stand the Inquisition, and his books were removed to Goa, where they were found to contain indications of ‘Nestorian heresy’, which were used to indict Mar Simeon.⁴⁸²

Currently the most comprehensive catalogue of Syriac manuscripts of the SCM was produced by J.P.M. Van der Ploeg,⁴⁸³ which includes many volumes which are described as being Nestorian. While this may be justified in some cases, there are indications that a number of them were mis-identified or misunderstood, giving a misleading interpretation that the Malabar Church was Nestorian in doctrine, and affiliated to the CotE, prior to the Synod of Diamper. The several copies of Bar Hebraeus’ *Awṣar Rozê* and Commentaries by Dionysius Bar Salibi mentioned by Van der Ploeg are presented as being of Nestorian origin, where they could equally be interpreted as Jacobite.⁴⁸⁴ A copy of the same book at the Anjoor Jacobite Bishop’s archives (MS.1) is described as being several centuries old, which Van der Ploeg

⁴⁸⁰ (VatSyr 128)

⁴⁸¹ A Portuguese territory on the coast of Gujarat in the north-west of India.

⁴⁸² Pope Gregory XIII in 1580, commanded the Syrian Archdeacon to ‘shun’ ‘this pest’ (Ferroli 1939:168). Ferroli describes Mar Simon as a ‘cunning wolf’ who was found out by the Curia, and mentions his death in Lisbon (Ferroli 1939:169).

⁴⁸³ Van der Ploeg (1983) *The Syriac Manuscripts of St Thomas Christians*.

⁴⁸⁴ Van der Ploeg 1983:61

assumed had been brought after 1665. In a *Kashkol*⁴⁸⁵ written 1731-4, several Jacobite features are identified and yet it is described as a Nestorian book with ‘Jacobite variants’.⁴⁸⁶

Van der Ploeg, along with Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet in her catalogue (2012), make particular mention of the New Testament copied in Malabar in 1510 by Mar Jacob (Vat.sir.17). According to Van der Ploeg, this MS is undoubtedly Nestorian, as it ‘contains the whole New Testament according to the canon of the CotE’ (Van der Ploeg 1983:7), but he adds that it also contains books lacking in the New Testament of the CotE.⁴⁸⁷ Briquel-Chatonnet states that its content ‘follows the use of the Syriac Christians’ (2012:285).⁴⁸⁸ Van der Ploeg argues that the inclusions conforming to the Catholic NT were made by Mar Jacob ‘who was strongly influenced by the Portuguese’, but he is unable to identify or explain the source from which Mar Jacob copied these additional material in Syriac, and leaves the matter unresolved.⁴⁸⁹ Catholic historian Ignatius Payyappilly however, argues: ‘in fact, many of the books that were condemned at the Synod of Diamper [for being Nestorian] could be [have been] brought to India not earlier than the times of Mar Abraham.’⁴⁹⁰

The SCM Sources point to another example, and that is the Bible presented to the Rev. Claudius Buchanan by the Syrian bishop Mar Dionysius, in 1806.⁴⁹¹ While Francis Burkitt follows the general European argument that it must have come to India with the Jacobite bishops of the 17th century, (Burkitt 1928b:41-42), Buchanan himself reports bishop Dionysius’ statement as follows: ‘And yet, said he, ‘we have kept it, as some think, for near a thousand years’ (Buchanan 1812:98). While Burkitt dates it to no earlier than the 12th century, Thomas Yeates dates it to the 7th century.⁴⁹² Although

⁴⁸⁵ In Dharmaram College MS1, Van der Ploeg 1983:154-5.

⁴⁸⁶ Another Bible among the Buchanan manuscripts in Cambridge (0o.1.7), copied in approximately 1682 by Geevarghese, is identified as Jacobite, but Van der Ploeg is puzzled by this as it is only a short period after the so-called introduction of Jacobitism (Van der Ploeg 1983:205).

⁴⁸⁷ 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and the Book of Revelations.

⁴⁸⁸ Based on the presence of the episode of the adulterous woman in John, the epistle of Jacob (James), and others mentioned by Van der Ploeg (note 470).

⁴⁸⁹ Van der Ploeg 1983:7.

⁴⁹⁰ Payyappilly 2016:165.

⁴⁹¹ Now referred to as the Buchanan Bible, it is now in the University of Cambridge Library Archives. See Burkitt for details.

⁴⁹² Yeates, the Syriac scholar and editor of Buchanan’s papers, adds (in a handwritten note in the University of Cambridge Library Archives): ‘It is supposed to have been written about the 7th century’.

the exact date of the Bible is not known: Geevarghese argues that the use of Estrangelo indicates that it was written pre-12th century (Geevarghese 2002:138). Geevarghese adds that this Bible exhibits its Jacobite provenance in several ways. One of the rubrics refers to readings for Saturdays in Lent, which indicates that the Church using it were Jacobites, as the Nestorians did not celebrate Eucharist on Lent Saturdays (Geevarghese 2002:141). Philip notes that it includes commemoration readings for Mar Severus (of Antioch), the sixth century Jacobite Patriarch (Philip 1950:118-9). The Jacobite bishops of the 17th century arrived in Malabar under very difficult circumstances, making it unlikely that they carried heavy codices with them.⁴⁹³ Geevarghese identifies seven points upon which the Buchanan Bible indicate its probable Jacobite origin, including: its omission of the Books of Esther and Wisdom, its rubrics relating to Eucharist on Saturdays in Lent⁴⁹⁴ (when the Nestorians did not elaborate it), and absence of rubrics for Friday-Eucharists (when the Nestorians do celebrate it)⁴⁹⁵, and a rubric that says ‘For the Eucharist on the day of the commemoration of Mar Severus, Patriarch of Antioch’ (Geevarghese 2002:140-43). He goes on to argue that ‘If it is Jacobite, then, we may very well infer from it that the Church of Malabar, which was using it in its divine services, could not have been anything but Jacobite in its creed’ (Geevarghese 2002:142-3).

All the above factors taken together indicate that, while the presence of Nestorian manuscripts in Malabar at the time of Diamper is incontestable, particularly those copied in the latter half of the 16th century, it is also clear that there were also many Jacobite manuscripts in Malabar, and that many texts that have been described as Nestorian may have been misidentified.

5.4.3. The letter of 1504 by resident ‘Nestorian bishops’ in Malabar

⁴⁹³ See Chapter 6.5.11 for more information on the arrival of these Jacobite bishops.

⁴⁹⁴ Neale 1847 Vol.II:713.

⁴⁹⁵ Neale 1847 Vol.II:731,750,751.

Significant controversy around the identity of the SCM in Malabar stemmed from arguments around five ecclesiasts, Mar Yaballaha, Jacob, Denha, Thomas and John who arrived in Malabar in 1503. Some historians have asserted that they were Nestorian and that this is evidence of the SCM being Nestorian before the Portuguese arrival.⁴⁹⁶ Most information comes from three letters first brought out by Assemani in 1725 and reproduced in Georg Schurhammer: a joint letter to their Patriarch (published by Assemani in Latin in 1725, and found in Schurhammer 1934:4-8), and two other letters by Mar Jacob to the King of Portugal (Schurhammer 1934:10-19). The first letter is clearly addressed to ‘Mar Elias, the Catholic’⁴⁹⁷ Patriarch of the Orient’, who is known to be the Patriarch of the CotE.

However, by the early twentieth century, the Romo-Syrian scholars began to challenge that original allegation of Nestorianism. Fr Emmanuel Nidhiry and Fr Bernard of St Thomas in Malayalam presented the case that the original SCM were not Nestorian.⁴⁹⁸ However, Schurhammer⁴⁹⁹ was the first to present these arguments in English, for ‘dispelling the erroneous conception of some European writers that our forefathers were Nestorian heretics before and during the Portuguese settlement in India’.⁵⁰⁰ The presented argument was that these bishops were ‘not schismatics, or separated from ... Rome’, but belonged to the *Chaldaic* Catholic Church which broke away from the Nestorian Church to come under Rome but retained its Eastern rites (Podipara in Schurhammer 1934:v). This is problematic, because as Schurhammer acknowledges the initial origin of Chaldean Church was only in 1553 (and took centuries to consolidate),⁵⁰¹ and therefore any bishops arriving from the CotE before that date must have been Nestorian. Schurhammer sets out to resolve this (Schurhammer 1934:39-

⁴⁹⁶ See Wilmshurst 2011:170. Schurhammer 1934:37 and Feroli 1939:102 contend that they were ‘Chaldeans’, although this was a particular term used to refer to the Church founded by Yohannan Sulaka, which seceded from the Nestorian CotE fifty years later in 1553.

⁴⁹⁷ The correct term would be ‘Catholicos’, but this is often misspelled in English as ‘Catholic’, which can lead to confusion about their identity.

⁴⁹⁸ Nidhiry (1908) *mār toma Nasranikalude Sathya Vishvasam*; Bernard of St. Thomas 1916 *Mar Thoma Christyanikalude Charithram*

⁴⁹⁹ This letter is preserved in a copy of the 16th century in Codex Vatic. Fondo Siriaco 204 f. 154v-160 (formerly Cod. Syr. 5) in the Vatican library. A critical edition and Latin translation were published by Assemani in 1725, in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (Rome 1725) III, P.1, 589-599. The ‘historical introduction’ given in Schurhammer 1934:2-4 is by an unknown author.

⁵⁰⁰ In the Foreword to Schurhammer 1933, by Bishop Kalacherry.

⁵⁰¹ Schurhammer 1934:33.

41) by arguing that there had been a continuous stream of attempts in the previous centuries by the CotE to establish links with the Roman Catholic Church.

This theory has been challenged by the Jacobite scholar K N Daniel.⁵⁰² He treats each point in detail, refuting the alleged Nestorianism of the SCM. However, this paper appears to have been a forgotten piece of scholarship, with later 20th century scholars continuing to use the letters as presented in Schurhammer without referencing Daniel's critique.⁵⁰³

The Portuguese attempts to Latinize the SCM, which started in the early 16th century, were mainly directed at these bishops, and will be treated in detail in Chapter 6.5. In response to this, the SCM are said to have assembled in Angamaly and written an appeal to Pope Gregory of Rome, which said:

‘Therefore, from the beginning, enable our Lord and Holy Father the Patriarch who is on the throne of Antioch, just as in ancient times, to continue to send us bishops yet again. For we have come to know that when they are sent here, they are being detained and oppressed. We beg the Holy Father of Rome to save us we beg, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the name of the Holy and Blessed Mary, Mother of God, this we beg’ (Zachariah 1973:55-6).

The Syrian view is that this letter was written as an appeal to the Pope to instruct his Latin missionaries in Malabar not to oppress them, and to stop hindering their Syrian bishops reaching them. The SCM are seen, in this crisis, to approach directly the highest authority of the Catholic Church, the Pope of Rome, in order to redress their grievance.

Generally, the Syrian view of these 1503 bishops is one of uncertainty, as their activities are generally not mentioned in Syrian sources (Pukadiyil 1869:124), but in the face of these letters presented by Assemani and Schurhammer, they are unable to explain the anomalies. There are also some questions arising from the way the letter from the 1503 bishops has been presented, and the implications drawn. In the

⁵⁰² See Kerala Society Papers 1933:307-340 (Volume II Series 2).

⁵⁰³ H Hosten also presents many areas of doubt regarding this letter of Kerala Society Papers Volume I Series 5. 1504:1930:225-254.

introduction (p3), a first group arrive, Mar Thomas and Mar John, and are received enthusiastically by the local Christians in 1517, and increased the number of churches considerably from 15 to 72 (Zachariah 1973:55). In Jacobite sources, this first group came to Kollam, Kodungallur and Angamaly, major SCM centres, whereas the second group (Mar Jaballaha, Mar Denha and Mar Jacob) came to Cannonore, where scarcely any SCM lived.⁵⁰⁴ The letter was written from Cannonore, and from the manner in which the name of the region ('Malabar'), the number and names of its cities, and the strength of its Christian population are enumerated, suggests that neither the writers nor the addressee had any prior knowledge of the SCM (Kaniamparambil 1982:122). They sign off the letter as Bishops of Sin and Masin (China and Greater China, regions with Nestorian churches), and there is no more record of them in Malabar from any sources.⁵⁰⁵ These factors point to the second group being Nestorian, and the authors of the letter.

In Jacobite sources⁵⁰⁶, the first group included Mar Jacob together with Mar Thomas and Mar John,⁵⁰⁷ and say that Mar Jacob apostatised (to Rome) in the latter half of his fifty year stay in Malabar, and was consequently rejected by the Syrians. While it seems likely that the second group of bishops were Nestorian, this fact alone does not appear to support the argument that the SCM were Nestorian.

There are also some doubts about aspects of the letter itself. In Schurhammer, there is a lack of clarity about the distinction between the original text of the letter and the text of the introduction to it (whose author is not specified).⁵⁰⁸ The letter is unusual in including extensive details describing the valorous acts of the Portuguese, and their generosity to these bishops (Schurhammer 1934:5-7).

⁵⁰⁴ Schurhammer 1934:7.

⁵⁰⁵ Of these five bishops, three are reported to have died soon after arrival (Schurhammer 1934:5), which may explain their absence in Malabar records, but which may be alternatively explained by their departure for 'Sin and Masin' (China). Van der Ploeg (1983:7) states how nothing more is known of Mar Jacob's companions, they having disappeared 'leaving no traces behind them', which appears extraordinary after such a promising first letter.

⁵⁰⁶ Kaniamparambil 1989:54.

⁵⁰⁷ Thomas is active in 1518 and 1536, and Jacob after leaving an account of his activities as seen in two letters to the King of Portugal (Schurhammer 1934:10-19), died only after having met with Francis Xavier in 1545.

⁵⁰⁸ Schurhammer 1934:2-4

5.4.4. The colophon for the 1301 codex⁵⁰⁹

This colophon is in the Syriac Codex of Pauline Epistles (Vat.sir.22), allegedly copied in Malabar in 1301, which was removed to Rome as one of the prohibited books after the Synod of Diamper in 1599. The Codex is a lectionary system of the Cathedral Church of Kokhe of the CotE, and Dr. William Macomber's comprehensive study of it in 1967 (*Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 1917-67, Rome, pp.483-516) analyses it in comparison with other lectionary systems of this Church. This codex along with the letter of 1504 by the four bishops resident in Malabar at the time, are presented as textual evidence for the Nestorian affiliation of Syrian Church of Malabar in pre-Portuguese times.⁵¹⁰

The colophon was brought to the attention of scholars by Assemani⁵¹¹ in 1725, and has particular significance because of its reference to the Codex being written in Malabar. The colophon itself has not been critically or epigraphically studied, but a preliminary examination indicates that there are reasons to question this conclusion. The colophon begins (f.93v, in red ink)⁵¹² with the following statement:

“This Holy Book was completed in the Church of Mar Quryaqos in the royal city of Shingala in Malabar in India.... in the days of Mar Yaqub the Metropolitan Bishop and superintendent of the See of the Holy Apostle Mar Thoma, and the administrator of us all.... it was ended on Wednesday in ... the month of July... in the year 1612 for the Greek [1301]Glory to god and on us Ameen written by the weak and sinful student Zechariah Joseph son of Zechariah....”

⁵⁰⁹ A lectionary for readings from St. Paul, thought to have been taken from Malabar by the Portuguese; now in the Vatican archives. The colophon is on three sides of the last two folios (ff.93v, 94 r,v).

⁵¹⁰ Van der Ploeg 1983:187-9; Mingana 1926:501-2.

⁵¹¹ Assemani (1687-1768) was a Lebanese Maronite, and a Syriacist. Following the Uniate status given by Rome to the Nestorian Church in 1553 and its subsequent rejection of it, Pope Clement XI sent Assemani to collect manuscripts bearing the history of the Jacobites and Nestorian Churches. He is famed for the vast collection of ancient manuscripts (more than 2150 volumes from Egypt-Syria-Palestine) he brought back to the Vatican, and as Chief Librarian in the Vatican library, for cataloguing them and writing his exhaustive four-volume *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (Wilmschurst 2011:267-8). See Assemani's text of the colophon in English, in Kollaparambil 2015:127-8.

⁵¹² See Appendix 6 for images of ff. 93v and 94r and translation of the colophon into English.

In the second column of the same page (f.93v in black ink) it speaks of the Catholicos-Patriarch

‘the Great Captain of the Holy Catholic Church in the East who holds the boat in the mighty flood,⁵¹³ the bright candelabra that gives light to all corners, the Arch-shepherd and Chief Prelate, Chief of Chief-priests, the Father of Fathers, the Blessed and Saintly Father Mar Yahballaha V, the Turk, Catholicos-Patriarch of the East, the Head of all corners, and the One that brings light to the East, who stands on the High Tower of the Catholic Church, and gives light to all its troops, and who opens the paths: may the Lord lengthen his life and multiply his days, that he may lead it eternally to glory, and may he raise the Head of its children, Amen.’⁵¹⁴

Here firstly, ‘Yahballaha the Turk’ is designated as the Vth Catholicos-Patriarch of the Nestorian Church, (the term used is ‘*Hmishoyo*’) whereas this celebrated hierarch⁵¹⁵ is normally designated as the ‘Third’ (*tlithioyo*), which crucial piece of information the copyist seems to have been unaware of.⁵¹⁶ Secondly, on the following page (f.94r) it states its authority as being ‘the rite of Kokhe’ (= the cathedral church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, See of the Patriarchs of the CotE in earlier times). However, according to Van der Ploeg, this rite in fact ‘was introduced between the 14th and the 17th centuries, maybe in the beginning of the 16th (Van de Ploeg 1983:188-89), and therefore it seems unlikely that a scribe in Malabar possessed such detailed knowledge of the provenance of this new rite. A cursory examination of the text indicates that it in fact bears closer resemblance to the Jacobite rite.

Fourthly, on f.93v, the orthography of the text in red and black shows some dissimilarities. The text in red bears close similarities with the main body of text, so this can be taken to be by the hand of the same copyist. But the colophon in black on

⁵¹³ In Wilmshurst 2011:194 it is ‘the holder of the key of the Holy Apostolic CotE’

⁵¹⁴ Translation from Syriac into English by Dr Mikael Oez.

⁵¹⁵ Mar Yahballaha III was of Turkic origin (Uighur or Ongut), and his intended journey to Jerusalem was interrupted by political unrest in the region. As a monk with influence at the Il Khanate court, and later as Catholicos-Patriarch of the CotE (1281-1317), he and his illustrious Jacobite contemporary Bar Hebraeus, together brought concord among the normally antagonistic Nestorians and Jacobites of the time (Wilmshurst 2011:187-88).

⁵¹⁶ Van der Ploeg, however, translates it as Yahballaha III, stating that ‘whereas in reality he was the 5th of this name’, thus compounding the error (1983:188).

f.93v differs in the case of one example, and that is the *tau-olaf* endings, and this characteristic is seen on *tau-olaf* endings on f.94r as well.

Finally, Baby Varghese questions whether a 14-year old deacon was competent enough to produce such a MS as this (Varghese 2014:1). Besides, Kollaparambil (2015:127) dates the arrival of this codex (Vat.sir.22) in Rome to 1569 through Mar Joseph Sulaqa. If the codex had been copied in Malabar and was in the possession of the SCM, it is doubtful that this bishop was able to carry it away with him, because on both the occasions that he left Malabar, he was under arrest and being sent to the Inquisition in Lisbon on suspicion of professing Nestorian heresies (Geddes 1694:12,24), not an ideal time to carry Nestorian books with him.

The codex is undoubtedly of Nestorian provenance as William Macomber's detailed analysis has shown, of its rubrics following the lectionary system of the Cathedral Church of Kokhe in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and as stated in the colophon in red ink. However, it is not clear that it was written in Malabar as stated in the colophon's addendum in black ink. While no conclusion can be drawn on the basis of any of the arguments presented above, all the small pieces of evidence point to a possible interpolation of that section of the colophon in black ink (f.93Vii-94Vii), indicating that current scholarly conclusions on the doctrinal affiliation of the Malabar Church based on this colophon may not be on safe ground. Consequently, it appears that it would be safer to set aside this colophon as evidence of the Malabar Church being of Nestorian identity in the 14th century. As Assemani himself stated regarding the state of the Malabar Church in Medieval times: 'Jacobites ...possessed for several centuries a considerable interest in India' (Etheridge 1846:156, citing Assemani: *'Praeter Nestorianos etiam Monophysitae in Indiam pervaserunt'* = Besides the Nestorians, there were also *Monophysites* throughout India).⁵¹⁷ It is possible that the colophon was added at some point between 1599 and 1725 for the purpose of identifying the

⁵¹⁷ According to Jacobite sources, Mar Abraham who arrived in mid-16th century brought with him a great number of books. It is reasonable to think that this codex was one of them, because he too was recognised as holding Nestorian heresies (Geddes 1694:20,30-31), and that, at some point after the Synod of Diamper, it was one among the many proscribed books removed to the *Propaganda Fide* archives in Rome .

CotE, and through it the Malabar Church, as affiliated to Rome as early as the 14th century.

5.4.5. Kollam bishops

A number of historians claim that the party that migrated to Kollam in Malabar in 825 was Nestorian, from the names of the two bishops Mar Sabor and Mar Aprôt, which were Persian, and from the fact that the relief-cut stone crosses they brought, still extant in Malabar, were called ‘Persian Crosses’ (Neill 1984:45).⁵¹⁸ The date of their arrival (after the establishment of the CotE) also fits with the narrative that they were Nestorian. One other detail that is cited is that they came from Mar Augên’s monastery on Mount Izla⁵¹⁹ which was under the CotE, and therefore they were Nestorian. There is a strong modern interpretation that since this monastery was Nestorian, all the bishops attached to it were also Nestorian, and which in these two ecclesiasts’ cases, was further attested by their Persian names. However, the Jacobite narrative (Zachariah 1973:43 referencing the Chalakuzhy *ola*) is that Bishops Sabor and Aphroth (*mār sābōrum aphrōttum* in Malayalam) were from the monastery of Mar Augên ‘in the region of *Usali*’ (possibly a corruption of Mount Izla) and were consecrated by Joseph, the Patriarch of Antioch, and, ‘wishing not to return to their country’, the Patriarch deputed them to Malabar. This, together with their subsequent activities in Malabar, is interpreted as confirmation that they were personally Jacobite whatever the status of Mar Augên’s was at that time.⁵²⁰ Wilmshurst mentions a list compiled by Michael the Syrian (d.1199), of Syrian Orthodox bishops consecrated between the 9th and 12th centuries (2011:98-99).⁵²¹ Wilmshurst also noted that a hundred years after Michael the Syrian, ‘Bar Hebraeus casually mentioned a ninth-century Jacobite bishop in India’. However, he (Wilmshurst) dismisses it, being

⁵¹⁸ These Persian Crosses will be discussed in section 5.4.7 of this Chapter.

⁵¹⁹ In the ongoing hostility between the Jacobites and Nestorians (see Ch.5, footnote 441), it is thought to have changed hands numerous times between the Jacobites and the Nestorians. According to Wilmshurst, it was ‘an important Nestorian foundation, named after the *mythical founder* of monasticism in Iraq’ (italics added) (2011:69). Brock states that ‘in fact Mar Augên’s Monastery did not become Jacobite until after the 16th century, and this is known from manuscripts written there’ (Brock, January 2020, personal communication).

⁵²⁰ Mar Augên’s was situated close to the Jacobite monastery of Qartmin high on the main plateau of Mount Izla, which ‘was a Jacobite stronghold’ (Wilmshurst 2011:69).

⁵²¹ The difficulty in locating this list has left it unconsulted in this discussion.

merely an indication that ‘the Jacobites were not entirely averse to mounting poaching expeditions into Nestorian territory’ (Wilmshurst 2011:99).

Further, as Mar Sabor and Aphroth were referred to as *kandīṣānal* (=Holy Ones) the churches they established in the vicinity of Kollam were called *kandīṣā-pall̥y* (church of the Holy Ones), which appellation according to Zachariah survives to the present day (1973:44).⁵²² These churches were also called *tārīṣā-pall̥y*, *tārīṣā* being a corruption of *trīṣāi-ṣubhō* (=Thrice Holy), a term used to denote the Jacobite Syriac Orthodox Church in the Mesopotamian context at that time, because of the last line of its doxology ‘O thou that was crucified for us, have mercy upon us’. This being a doctrinal statement that was anathema to the CotE because of its confession that ‘God’ died on the cross, it is unlikely that these bishops were Nestorians, nor could it further be substantiated that they either brought to Malabar, or re-affirmed the Nestorian faith of the SCM in the 9th century. the cross.⁵²³ The Kollam bishops are not known to have built any churches dedicated to the saints of the CotE, as Mar Abraham had done in about 1580, when he built a church in Angamaly and dedicated it to Mor Hormisdas. There is also no record, subsequent to their arrival, of their introducing new doctrines or rites, indicating that they were more likely to have been Syrian Orthodox in faith.

5.4.6. Nestorian and Jacobite Churches’ links with India in the medieval period

Accounts of the progress of religion among the SCM, between the Kollam migration and the arrival of the Portuguese, presents a confusing picture. Assemani concedes that ‘*Praeter Nestorianos etiam Monophysitae in Indiam pervaserunt*’ (Besides the Nestorians, there were also Monophysites throughout India).⁵²⁴

⁵²² Zachariah gives the example of the ‘*kandīṣā-pall̥y of Kayamkulam*’, a town near Kollam, built in 828 by these bishops (1973:44).

⁵²³ The Synod of Diamper was held in one of these churches, and one of the acts of the Synod, under Menezes’ directive, was to rename it from *Tharissa-pally of Mar Sabor and Aphroth* to *All Saints Church*.

⁵²⁴ Cited in Etheridge 1846:156. Other scholars note some of Assemani’s occasional erroneous interpretations and conclusions regarding the Syrian Orthodox Church in Syria. Aprem Barsoum (Syrian Orthodox Patriarch 1933-1957) in *Al-Lulu al-Manthur* (1943) lists ten of them (Matti Moosa’s translation: 2000:51,107,108,121,123,134,147,149,151, 173, 208). Moosa observes Aprem Barsoum’s work was not ‘the solitary work of an unlearned Eastern Patriarch, but part of the considerable output

References to Jacobite bishops coming to Malabar are frequently encountered in different texts. The Catholic historian Michel Le Quien⁵²⁵ is cited as mentioning that in the middle of the 14th century, Christians of Malabar applied to Alexandria for a bishop, and that Alexandria obliged by consecrating and sending a Syrian Jacobite to them (Philip 1950:130). Another Catholic cleric, Paulinus Bartolomeo, is also cited as stating⁵²⁶ that ‘the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch claimed jurisdiction in India, and that Nilas Doxopatrius affirmed in 1043 that the authority of Antioch extended over Asia, the East and the Indies.’ Hough’s asserts that although he would not question that the Malabar Christians ‘were Nestorians’ in the 6th century (Vol.I:86), ‘it is now well-known, that their [the Malabar Christians’] creed has for many ages past been more in accordance with that of the Jacobites; and there can be little doubt that it was changed at the time when their patriarch, at Seleucia, adopted the Jacobite tenets’ (1839 Vol.I:87). He supports this on the evidence of the ascendance of the Jacobites in the 9th-10th centuries.⁵²⁷ Hough’s argument (1839 Vol.I:86-87 and 114-117) appears to be that the SCM were firstly Jacobites in the 4th century, and adopted Nestorianism before Cosmas’ time, but afterwards received Jacobite tenets again in the 7th century.⁵²⁸ Nevertheless, after a lengthy discussion on the subject,⁵²⁹ Hough concludes that the SCM had, from ‘time immemorial’, acknowledged the Patriarch of Babylon as their primate, and that when the Portuguese arrived in early 16th century, their faith, in ‘resemblance’, ‘doctrine or discipline’, was none other than ‘that of Nestorius’ (1939:241). Buchanan’s report of meeting the SCM for the first time in 1806 is noteworthy here, as he mentions the SCM having declared their links with Antioch to the Portuguese.⁵³⁰ Ferroli, a Jesuit Father, also concedes ‘Not all agree that they were

of a man thoroughly conversant with his subject’ (2000:viii). Wilmshurst also notes an error in Assemani’s interpretation in *The Martyred Church* (2011:173).

⁵²⁵ Catholic historian, based in Paris (d.1733).

⁵²⁶ It is to be noted that Paulinus received his information from Renaudot, who himself was quoting Allatius. These earlier authorities have not been verified.

⁵²⁷ Citing the *Notitia* of Nilus Doxopatrius, according to Hough, the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch ‘extended over all Asia, the East, and the Indies, whither he sent a *Catholic* bearing the title of Romogyris’ (Hough Vol.I:87). The term Catholic in the Eastern Churches’ context, has to be read as ‘Catholicos’. The ascendancy of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in the 9th-10th centuries is also argued by Yacoub III (Yacoub III 2010:55).

⁵²⁸ Hough 1839:Vol.I:240.

⁵²⁹ Hough discusses this at length in Vol.1:238-294.

⁵³⁰ Buchanan reports that on their first arrival, when the Portuguese claimed all the churches in Malabar to the Pope, the SCM replied: ‘Who is the Pope,’ said the natives, ‘we never heard of him’.....‘We’ said they, are of the true faith, whatever you from the West may be; for we come from the place where the

infected with Nestorianism, though most Portuguese historians will call them Nestorians' (Ferroli 1939:177). Although Mathai Vettikkunnel's letter did not make the identity of the Syrian Church of Malabar clear, it is noteworthy that Mathai consistently referred to its bishops as 'Syrians' and not 'Persians'.

5.4.7. 'Persian Crosses' in South India

A great deal of attention has been paid by scholars to the stone crosses of south India, commonly known as 'Persian Crosses'.⁵³¹ The eight extant Crosses known by their place-names are: 1. St. Thomas Mount, 2. Kottayam Valiapally (Small), 3. Kottayam Valiapally (Large), 5. Kothanallur, 6. Muttuchira, 6. Alengad, 7. Kadamattom, and 8. Goa. The St. Thomas Mount Cross⁵³² is thought to be the original, others being copies.⁵³³ The crosses are carved in low-relief on granite slabs, bearing similar though not identical equal-armed crosses, and the same inscription cut on arches framing them, rounded in 1,3, 5,7, and pointed in 2, 4 and 6.⁵³⁴ The inscriptions are most legible and decipherable on 1,2 and 3, the others being at times poorly executed or garbled copies, and scholarly interpretations were based on these.⁵³⁵

The SCM called them 'Cross of St. Thomas' (Malekandathil 2003:244), but European epigraphists designated the term 'Persian Crosses', from the language of the inscriptions, identified as Pahlavi.⁵³⁶ Many scholars have produced mutually incompatible interpretations,⁵³⁷ one being 'In punishment by the cross (was) the

followers of Christ were first called Christians' (Buchanan 1912:70), the reference being to Antioch (Acts of the Apostles 11:20-21).

⁵³¹ Altogether there are eight such Crosses, all are in sound condition at present, except the last one, of which one half is missing. For a full account of their locations, images, and a compilation of interpretations of the inscription on them, see <https://www.nasrani.net/2010/10/09/saint-thomas-cross-a-religio-cultural-symbol-of-saint-thomas-christians/>

⁵³² In St. Thomas Mount Shrine, 20 kilometres west of Chennai.

⁵³³ The Portuguese unearthed this Cross during excavations in 1547. See Herman D'Sousza 1952:78-87 for a full account.

⁵³⁴ Kothanallur has no inscription.

⁵³⁵ The dimensions of Cross 1 is not known. Cross 2 measures H75.5cm, W56.5cm, and Cross 3, H150cm, W100cm (Cereti et al 2002:298). According to Winckworth, Crosses 2 and 3 are copies of the Mylapore cross, now in the church of St Mary the Great in Kottayam, a Jacobite Church, erected in 1550 (T.K. Joseph 1929:18), and are believed to have been brought to Malabar by Mar Sabor and Aphroth in the 9th century. See Appendix 10.2 for images of all three Crosses.

⁵³⁶ See Winckworth (1930) *Revised Interpretation of the Pahlavi Cross Inscriptions* Kerala Society Papers, Series 5:267-269.

⁵³⁷ Winckworth 1930:164, Appendix.

suffering of this one; He who is the true Christ, and God above, and guide ever pure’ (Rae 1892:122, citing epigraphist A. C. Burnell 1874). According to Rae, this was ‘intelligible on Nestorian premises’ and concluded that it was produced by Nestorians based on ‘historical and logical bearings’ (Rae 1892:123). He argued that as they reflected Nestorian beliefs, the SCM were also Nestorians.

However, more recent interpretations give different readings.⁵³⁸ C.P.T. Winckworth in his 1930 paper on these inscriptions⁵³⁹ notes about the Pahlavi: ‘this language is pre-Islamic Persian, but that it was written in a running character derived from Aramaic letters; and further, most common words were written in Aramaic....but read as Persian’ (Winckworth 1930:161.fn2). His initial interpretation is as follows: ‘My Lord Christ, have mercy upon Afrās, son of Chahārbukht, The Syrian, who cut this’ (Winckworth 1930:161). According to Winckworth, the key word here סורינא, ‘which has hitherto baffled interpreters, is simply a transliteration into Pahlavi characters of the Syriac *Suryōyō*, [meaning] ‘Syrian’.⁵⁴⁰ In other words, Afras, son of Chahārbukht was a member of the Syrian Church. He affirms this use of *Syrian* as ‘an ecclesiastical, and not an ethnological or geographical designation’ (Winckworth 1930:163). As to the identity of ‘Afras’, Winckworth argues that it is most probably the well-known Persian name ‘Aprahat’, which ‘might have been written by the Syrians as Apras’ (Winckworth 1930:164), further noting the possible connection between this ‘Afras’ or ‘Apras’ and ‘Prut’, one of the signatories on the Kollam copper-plates (referred generally in SCM literature and in this thesis as ‘Mar Aphroth’, one of the bishops who came to Kollam in 825). In a subsequent letter to the Kerala Society, he amends his interpretation of a word in the last part, to *burrit* (meaning ‘cut’) or *buxt en* (meaning either ‘preserved’ or ‘put round’). He prefers the latter, but either of these interpretations suggest that the cross may have already existed before Afras added the inscription (Winckworth, cited in Joseph 1930:268). T.K. Joseph, Secretary to the Kerala Society, collated this information and suggests that the Kollam bishops went to

⁵³⁸ Interest in these crosses peaked in the early 20th century, and several papers, with considerable variations in their findings, were published by Keralan and European scholars, between 1928 and 1930, in the archaeological publication *Kerala Society Papers*.

⁵³⁹ He presented this at the Seventeenth International Congress of Orientalists (Oxford 1928), and it ‘was generally accepted by the Iranian scholars there present’ (Winckworth 1930:161).

⁵⁴⁰ Winckworth 1930:162-3.

Mylapore, where they recovered the stone cross, added the inscription to it, made copies of it and brought those to Malabar (Joseph 1930:269).

More recently, Philip Gignoux also dates it to the 7-8th century, and reviewing various previous interpretations, generally agrees with Winckworth, but proposes the name of the inscriber to be Sabrišō rather than Apras (Gignoux 1995:411-422). Carlo Cereti also proposes the name 'Sabrisho', suggesting the whole translation as: 'Our Lord Christ, have pity on Sabrisho, (son) of Chaharboxt, (son) of Suray, who bore (brought?) this (cross)' (Cereti 2002:297). This name Sabrisho may refer to the leader of the Kollam migration, the merchant Sabrisho.

Interestingly, although Winckworth identifies Apras as *Suryoyo* by faith, he still refers to the bishops as Nestorian (Winckworth 1930:164). Milne Rae also, as seen earlier, came to the same conclusion, which augmented the dominant narrative that the SCM were Nestorians. Jacobite sources however, maintain that these crosses were brought to Malabar by the bishops Sabor and Aphroth, and the merchant Sabrisho, who led the Kollam migration in 825 (Zachariah 1973:43). Winckworth's interpretation that the inscription was made by someone who was *Suryoyo*, the term being 'an ecclesiastical, and not an ethnological or geographical designation' is significant here. Although Cereti's interpretation is more recent, it appears less probable in some ways: Cereti's 'son of.. son of...' is unusual, and Winckworth's interpretation appears to have been accepted at the International Congress of Orientalists, and it also aligns with the Jacobites' own narrative. The Jacobites' account is further supported by the transverse inscription of the Kottayam Valiapally Large Cross in Estrangelo Syriac, which is translated as 'Let me not glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (cited in Milne-Rae 1892:119).⁵⁴¹ Philip argues that this verse 'may be found written on the first page of many an old Jacobite Syriac manuscript; and it is the motto adopted by the modern Jacobite Church in Malabar'. This Estrangelo inscription, according to Philip, in fact points to an anti-Nestorian doctrine, and adds 'Hence if we were to accept Mr. Rae's interpretation of Dr. Burnell's translation, we are obliged to conclude that a Persian Nestorian set up a

⁵⁴¹ From St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, 6:14. Burnell's dating of it to post-10th century (Milne-Rae 1892:120) is problematic here, and a more recent treatment of this subject has not been found.

doctrine which he himself believed to be a blasphemy' (Philip 1950:114). This points to the possibility that this transverse Estrangelo inscription was deliberately chosen to denote a particularly Jacobite position and doctrinal identity of those who venerated this stone cross.

5.4.8. Cosmas' testimony and Patriarch Jesuyahb's letter

Mar Aprem (1983:24-25), Metropolitan of the Chaldean Syrian Church⁵⁴² in Kerala, states that 'most scholars agree that the Indian churches were associated with the CotE from very early days, but in the absence of records, the exact date of this connection remains obscure. The earliest we have is Cosmas' (Aphrem 1983:24-25). Cosmas Indicopleustes, writing his travelogue around 550, states that he met Christians in Socotra, Calliana (north-west coast of India), Malabar and Ceylon, and they were all supplied with bishops from Persia,⁵⁴³ which most scholars accept as incontrovertible evidence that the Churches in these regions were affiliated to the CotE in the 6th century. There are two assumptions in this: firstly, that Cosmas was Nestorian himself, and that when he refers to bishops from 'Persia' they must have been Nestorian (Hough Vol.1 1839:86). La Croze appears to be the first to assign a Nestorian identity to Cosmas (Hough 1839 Vol. 1:72-3). McCrindle, in his introduction to his translation of Cosmas' *Christian Topography* (1897:ix), qualifies this, noting that earlier historians (such as Photius and Montfaucon) do not mention Cosmas being a Nestorian.

The conclusion that he was a Nestorian appears to have been made without referencing Cosmas' clear statements that points more to Cosmas' non-Nestorian identity: 'He then who denies to the Lord Christ the possession of perfect manhood is deceived by failing to understand the great dispensation which God has planned as well as to conceive aright the Christian doctrine. In like manner again he who denies his perfect godhead is chargeable with guilt and is utterly misled' McCrindle (1897:83-4). More

⁵⁴² 'The Assyrian Church of the East in India is known as the Chaldean Syrian Church'(Metropolitan Mar Aprem, in www.churchoftheeastindia.org. See also Mar Aprem (1983:9) *The Study of History, Faith and Worship of the Chaldean Syrian Church in Trichur since 1814*.

⁵⁴³ See McCrindle's translation 1897:118-9

tellingly, Cosmas refers to Mary as Theotokos ‘Mother of God’⁵⁴⁴ and mentions Alexandrian Church Fathers, Theophilus and Athanasius which a Nestorian is unlikely to have done.⁵⁴⁵ The fact that Cosmas came from Alexandria would suggest that he most likely belonged to the Coptic Church which was in doctrinal agreement with the Syrian Orthodox Church as William Cureton also points out, (Cureton 1848:xxxix).

In the most recent detailed scholarly study, *The World of Cosmas*, Maja Kominko (2013:21) states that ‘largely because of the link with the East Syrian schools, modern scholars often brand Kosmas ‘a Nestorian’, an accusation which does not appear in any Byzantine source’. Kominko points out that although Cosmas omits Nestorian from his list of heretics, he omits Miaphysites as well. She attributes this misrepresentation of Cosmas to ‘an over-simplistic conceptual model of the three-fold picture of heretical Nestorian- orthodox Chalcedonian-heretical Miaphysite’.⁵⁴⁶ Cosmas did not subscribe to the Dyophysite Christology, but rather ‘asserted that Christ’s humanity and divinity were combined within one person’ which he extended to his conceptual framework of the universe as well. This weakens the long-held view that Cosmas was a Nestorian, and that by reporting that the Churches he found along the Arabian sea-coast all had Persian-appointed bishops, pointing to their Nestorian identity. This is significant, in that from La Croze (1724) historians to the present day⁵⁴⁷ have dated the introduction of Nestorianism to Malabar at least from just before Cosmas’ time, and have upheld that the Christians of Malabar held this belief wholly⁵⁴⁸ or intermittently⁵⁴⁹ until the Synod of Diamper in 1599 when they were persuaded to abjure it.

The letter written by CotE Patriarch Jeshuyahb in 660, expressing regret that no bishops had been sent to India, is also presented in support of the Nestorian identity of the SCM.⁵⁵⁰ Ferroli’s interpretation of the letter based on Yule however, appears

⁵⁴⁴ McCrindle 1897:239

⁵⁴⁵ McCrindle 1897:221-2,290

⁵⁴⁶ Kominko 2013:21.

⁵⁴⁷ Gilman and Klimkeit 1999:168.

⁵⁴⁸ Renaudot, cited in Hough 1839 Vol.I:86.

⁵⁴⁹ Hough 1839 Vol I:114-116.

⁵⁵⁰ Yeshuyab: ‘In your region, since you have neglected the canons of the church, the succession of priesthood is cut off from India; nor India alone, which extends from the sea-coast of Persia to Colon, but also your own region of Persia is deprived of the light of divine doctrine’. Ferroli (1939:75) gives a translation of this letter, from the Latin in Assemani’s *Bibliotheca* III:113, among other sources.

erroneous, because Yule, as a matter of fact, explains that the place referred to as ‘Colon’, which many historians have interpreted as Quilon or Kollam in Malabar, is itself erroneous, as, ‘...this is an arbitrary and erroneous rendering in Assemani’s Latin’ says Yule, ‘the Syriac has *Kalah*, and probably therefore refers to the port of the Malay regions noticed under CALAY and QUEDDA’ (Yule and Burnell 1886:751-2). On the authority of extensive citations of Syriac documents at his disposal, Yacoub III has argued that the Patriarchs of the CotE had exercised no authority over the Church in Malabar in the early medieval period (Mannakkuzhiyil’s translation 2010:57). As Malabar was not included in the list of dioceses under the Maphrian of Tigris either, if Malabar had ‘Persian’ bishops, they were most likely to have been sent from the bishopric of Fars which was not under the CotE, and that this was how Socotra and Malabar continued in the Jacobite faith. Fars only came under the CotE later, under Patriarch Timothy I (d. 823) (Mannakkuzhiyil 2010:50-53). Before this, when Jeshuyahb was writing his letter in 660, the context is clearly that people of Nestorian faith were absent in the places he mentions – and hence his call for Nestorian bishops to be sent to India, but Yacoub III maintains that they were unsuccessful in either sending bishops, or the SCM adopting Nestorianism in this time. Yacoub III adds that after Fars joined the CotE, it was the metropolitan of Herat who fulfilled the spiritual needs of the SCM and quotes the Jacobite Syrian theologian Dionysius Bar Sleeti stating that ‘the faith of the Syrian Church in India and that of ours is the same’ (Mannakkuzhiyil 2010:59).

5.4.9. Early perception of the Syrian Christians of Malabar by the Portuguese

Missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church that arrived with the Portuguese came with their own frame of references and particularities relating to that Church in its European milieu. It had broken away from the rest of the (Chalcedonian) Byzantine Church, by what came to be called the Great Schism of 1054, under mutual pronouncements of anathemas and condemnations. After this, Rome could no longer presume authority over Eastern regions of the Roman empire as it used to, or claim

primacy among all the other Sees,⁵⁵¹ its authority was confined to Western Europe. With advent of the Crusades, information about Eastern Churches such as the Jacobite and the Nestorian CotE had reached Rome, and, according to Church historians, Rome began entertaining the idea of augmenting its authority beyond Byzantium, by bringing these Eastern Churches under itself.⁵⁵² This wish to bring other Churches under itself was again based on Rome's claim of universal jurisdiction over all Christendom, including beyond the limits of its own Patriarchate, against the rights of independent Sees of the Pentarchy established in the 4th and 5th century Great Councils of the Church (Hough 1839Vol.I:238-9; Preiser-Kapeller 2016: 277).⁵⁵³ Anyone who resisted Rome's authority was regarded as schismatics, and this justified Catholic proselytization efforts to bring the 'schismatics' back under Rome. When they sent their peregrinating missionary-monks to the East from the 13th century onwards, 'the central aim of the missionaries' had been to convert Oriental Christians to Catholicism (Preiser-Kappeller 2014:280).

The Portuguese perception of the Syrian Christians in the first half of the 16th century can be determined from the literature of the period.⁵⁵⁴ They do not seem to have formulated a clear picture of what the doctrinal and ecclesiastical identity of the Syrian Christians was, in this fifty-year period when they first encountered them.⁵⁵⁵ The Catholic churchmen appear to have limited their understanding of the SCM to only three inter-related propositions, firstly that they were not Catholics, secondly that they

⁵⁵¹ One of the reasons for the claim of primacy was because St. Peter, the chief Apostles to whom Christ had entrusted his Church, was martyred and buried in Rome, by which Rome claimed its Apostolic Succession to St.Peter.

⁵⁵² Catholic missionaries are thought to have travelled from Sultaniyya and Tabriz to Malabar and Mylapore via Hormuz (Preiser-Kapeller 2016: P.286).

⁵⁵³ This universal authority was based on the celebrated 'Constantine's donation', which bestowed on Rome "power, and dignity of glory, and vigour, and honour imperial", and "supremacy as well over the four principal sees, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople, as also over all the churches of God in the whole earth". This was claimed by Pope Sylvester (314-335) and successive Popes, until Lorenzo Valla, an Italian humanist cleric (1406-1457), argued that the document was forged (Prosser 2001).

⁵⁵⁴ Admittedly, the literature of the early 16th century was confined to letters from the missionaries or civil authorities forming the main source of information. - These in themselves were imprecise, and the 19th century historian Jones describes them as 'imperfect and prejudiced accounts of the early Portuguese' (Jones:1863:181, footnote).

⁵⁵⁵ Of the many historians who have treated these early Portuguese accounts, that of Mundadan (a Keralan Roman Catholic of the Carmelite Order and learned professor at a Catholic institution in India), seems to be most thorough and exhaustive, having consulted original material in Portuguese language in the archives of Goa and Lisbon and Rome. Of the six volumes of *History of Christianity in India* (1984), I and II are most relevant to this study.

did not acknowledge Papal authority over them, and thirdly that did not follow Latin rites and practices in their worship, and these factors alone appear to have shaped the discourse of the time. As non-Latin practices, they noted that the SCM worshipped ‘in the manner of the Greeks’, used leavened bread and expressed juice of raisins instead of wine for the Eucharist, and used Syriac in their liturgy. They further noted that the SCM observed Wednesdays and Fridays as ‘fast days’, but not Saturday which was the Latin practice, and most significantly, that the priests were married.⁵⁵⁶ Although Nestorianism was condemned by all Christendom, including both the Chalcedonian and Oriental Orthodox Churches at that time, this allegation does not appear to have been proposed or entered Portuguese literature from the first half of the 16th century. However, in all the literature that he examined, A.M. Mundadan was unable to find any instances of a clear articulation by the Portuguese clerics, what the Syrians’ doctrinal identity was.⁵⁵⁷

Observing these Christians’ liturgy in Syriac, rites and practices being different and their bishops seeming to arrive from Mesopotamia or Persia, and above all, that they did not acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope of Rome, the Portuguese were led to conclude that they were ‘false Christians,’ and a heretical denomination (Jones 1863:178; Ferrolì 1939:64, 71). They believed that their own Catholic faith was: ‘the true and pure Catholic religion, without which there could be no salvation; all the objections of schismatics were lies and artifices, whereby the evil Spirit sought to seduce them, and lead them to hell’ (Hough 1839:359-360).

When the Portuguese clerics claimed the churches they saw as belonging to the Pope, the SCM are reported to have said ‘Who is the Pope? We have never heard of him’.⁵⁵⁸ Similarly, when the Latin missionaries tried to persuade the SCM of their own concepts of Papal Supremacy and Rome’s Universal authority, and attempted to claim the *Padroado* rights conferred on them by the Pope, beginning with censuring the way in which the SCM conducted themselves in religious matters, the SCM are reported to have resisted it, seeing it as interference in their religious life (Geddes 1694:3), leading to early mutual disaffection (Schurhammer 1934:20). To the Portuguese, the SCM

⁵⁵⁶ Mundadan 1989 Vol.I:193-203

⁵⁵⁷ Mundadan 1989 Vol.I:196

⁵⁵⁸ Reported in Buchanan 1812:70

were obstructing their own salvation, while also spurning the spiritual, ecclesiastical and material advantages of becoming co-religionists with the dominant European power. Besides, their own efforts at wider evangelical work was being hindered by the presence of the Syrians, who in denying Papal authority and jurisdiction over them were being rebellious and insubordinate, as this denial itself was a heresy (Hough 1839 Vol.I:444, Preiser-Kappeller 2014: 279).⁵⁵⁹

‘Conform to Rome’ was the Portuguese missionaries’ repeated demand on the Syrians, some directly (Schurhammer 1934:20,) and some through subtler means (Ferroli 1939:100).⁵⁶⁰ Even at the cost of losing their churches, the SCM refused to accept Roman authority, preferring to migrate into the hinterlands of Malabar (Pukadiyil 1869:123-4).

With the arrival of Francis Xavier in 1545, the Jesuits Fathers brought a new vigour to the Latinisation process from the mid-16th century onwards. In the hope that education would ease the SCM into accepting the Roman faith, a Latin college was started in Kodungallur.⁵⁶¹ Prominent Syrian families were keen to get their sons educated there, as noted by Xavier in his letters (Schurhammer 1934:20-1). According to Mundadan, these efforts were a failure as the SCM refused to admit the Portuguese-trained young priests into their churches.

In these early encounters of the Portuguese with the SCM, the Catholic missionaries did not note in them any heretical dogmas of Nestorianism. The only charge raised against them at this time appears to have been that of their rejection of Rome’s authority, as cited by Mundadan (1984 Vol I:293, 315), on the authority of the 16th c. Portuguese Governor Soares.⁵⁶² Further, over the first five decades of the 16th century,

⁵⁵⁹ Hough refers to the two fundamental tenets of the Catholic Church: ‘Implicit obedience to the Pope’, and ‘Denial of the Papal supremacy is the sole cause of heresy’ (1839 Vol.1:444).

⁵⁶⁰ The Portuguese Governor Soares is reported to have told the Syrian priest Joseph of Kodungallur parish church (the same ‘Joseph the Indian’ who had travelled to Europe with Cabral and declared to Pope Alexander VI that his Patriarch was in Antioch) in 1516, that he should tell his people, that according to the wish of the Portuguese king, they ought to conform to the customs and teachings of the Holy Roman Church. Soares invited Joseph to see the example of the Jews and Muslims, who, regardless of where they lived, followed a uniform set of customs (Mundadan 1984 Vol 1:293).

⁵⁶¹ By the Franciscan Friar Vincent (Geddes 1694:10).

⁵⁶² This is especially noteworthy in the context that Rome did not tolerate any challenges to its secular or religious authority in the late Medieval period. Hough gives a concise account of the consolidation of Papal power in Europe in this period (Vol.I:141-150). He also points out that the Inquisition was established as early as the 12th century to counter challenges to this, its object being, ‘to destroy any

the main focus of attention appears to have been on the form and practices in religious observances (Schurhammer 1934:21-22).⁵⁶³ More significantly, it appears that in the early Portuguese efforts in bringing the SCM under the authority of Rome, there is no mention of Nestorianism as a factor.⁵⁶⁴ In the context that the Portuguese were quick to identify the three bishops of the second half of the 16th century, Mar Abraham, Joseph and Simeon, as being Nestorian⁵⁶⁵, it seems fairly certain that in their first 50-year interventions into the affairs of the Church of the SCM, and close monitoring of their bishops, the Portuguese clerics would have discovered practices as distinctly Nestorian if they had existed. The fact that they did not, points to the higher probability that in the first half of the 16th century, the SCM were not Nestorians.

5.4.10. Doctrine

Regarding the doctrinal position and faith of the Syrians, Mundadan, after examining early 16th century letters and notices on the SCM in the archives in Goa and Lisbon, states that ‘Most of the documents are vague and too general in their statements, using such obscure terms as “errors” or “schisms” or “heresy” or “Nestorianism”’.⁵⁶⁶ Mundadan argues that ‘the majority of the instances cited as errors are merely differences in Rite, customs or practices, or are at best some abuses’ (1984:509), and that according to these early 16th century documents, ‘no positive heretical beliefs were found by any one’. The earliest writer on the subject, Duarte Barbosa, does not identify the SCM he encountered in Kodungallur as Nestorians, but as followers of ‘the

one, whoever he might be, that should presume to act, or even speak, against the Church of Rome’ (p.147). It would appear that the SCM were ignorant of this claimed Papal status in Europe, and the threat it faced.

⁵⁶³ Ferroli, citing Portuguese historians, mentions how as early as 1503, the Portuguese Dominican missionaries were entering Syrian churches and conducting baptisms, and forcing the Syrians: a) to eat fish on their customary fasting days (when they abstained from all animal food); b) to start the Great Lent on Ash Wednesday (as opposed to the Sunday before); and c) to use unleavened bread in the Eucharist (1939:100).

⁵⁶⁴ Mundadan (1984 Vol I:289) mentions the Portuguese missionaries’ describing the JSC as being ‘corrupted with the errors of Eutychus and Nestorius’ but he is citing here from Pessoa, an 18th century historian.

⁵⁶⁵ According to Ferroli (1939:168-9) Mar Joseph and Mar Simeon were caught out by self-incriminating statements and letters professing Nestorian dogmas, and Mar Abraham survived only because he managed to escape from the Inquisitor’s prison in Goa on two occasions.

⁵⁶⁶ The term “Nestorianism” itself has not been detected in any of the sources presented by Mundadan, except in post-Diamper ones.

doctrine of the Blessed Saint Thomas', and moreover, mentions that there was in in Kodungallur, a church dedicated to St. Mary (Dames' translation, 1521:89).

Furthermore, Mundadan asserts that there was no written pre-16th century record of the doctrinal position of the Syrians, (1989: 82); where such statements existed, they were later additions.⁵⁶⁷ He also maintains that what doctrinal positions the SCM held were subsumed into the Syrians' borrowed Hindu socio-cultural practices (1989:76-8). However, this is not substantiated by 16th century notices on the Syrians' practices, when, as the same sources Mundadan has used show, the SCM are recorded as 'tenaciously' following recognisably Christian rites and traditions which embodied Christian doctrine, the criticism being only that they were not Latin (1984:505,509). In this context, it appears difficult to validate Mundadan's assertion that the doctrine and theology of the SCM was derived from the Nestorian church (1989: 74, 76).

The decrees of the Synod of Diamper include a number of clear statements about the need to reject Nestorian practices (Zacharia 1994:107), without necessarily stating what the SCMs' so-called 'heretical' doctrinal position was. Menezes argued that the Trisagion (Thrice Holy chant used the SCMs) reflected Nestorian Christology, as it alluded to the Trinity being crucified on the cross. However, the Christological position reflected in the use of the Trisagion is uniquely Jacobite and in complete opposition to Nestorian dogma. Philip has argued that it is also a misinterpretation of the theology that is reflected in the Trisagion, as the Jacobites also do not say all three Persons of the Trinity were crucified (Philip 1950:125-7).

When Menezes challenged the Archdeacon on his 'Nestorian' heretical beliefs on Christ's Incarnation, Hough explains the Archdeacon's silence as the result of being intimidated by Menezes, and goes on to say 'The Syrian Christians were orthodox on the doctrine of the Incarnation' (Hough 1839 Vol I:367). Here, Hough seems to contradict himself from his earlier statement asserting the Syrians' Nestorian identity from the late 5th century, till Diamper in 1599.

⁵⁶⁷ For a lengthy discussion of this based on early 16th century letters and notices, see Mundadan 1984:485-518.

5.4.11. Liturgy

Another position put forward, especially by some European writers' the 19th century onwards, is that they had belonged to more than one rite (Jones:1863:181, footnote). Hough concedes that Jacobitism (referred to as 'Eutychian or Monophysite notions') may have been introduced as early as 696 (Hough 1839 Vol1:114-6), though he believes Nestorianism was also prevalent. Apart from the difficulty of reconciling how such opposing doctrines could be held within one community at the same time, the purported dual nature of the SCM does not appear to be supported by literature from the Portuguese period. Ferroli 1939 (citing Portuguese 16th century texts) and secular 16th century writers (Barbosa and Varthema) indicate that the SCMs were one community in terms of religious rites and practices.⁵⁶⁸ Several aspects of their identity mentioned by the indigenous priest Joseph the Indian indicate the same, the whole community of Christians being seen as one.

One of the clearest statements emanating from the SCM against the prevalence of the Nestorian liturgy, its distinctive elements being the use of leavened bread, the use of wrong formula and heretical rites relating to the consecration of the Elements (Zacharia 1994:137), comes from a group of contemporary Catholic scholars in Malabar, including Joseph Pulikkunnel, Jacob Vellian and Varghese Pathikulangera, who argue against the adoption of Nestorian liturgy among the SCM, maintaining that the Nestorian bishops who did arrive in Malabar performed only church consecration and ordination up to the diaconate level, with those ordained only allowed to function as cantors,⁵⁶⁹ and not celebrate the Nestorian *Raza*, the Nestorian sung High Mass (Pulikkunnel 1997:52).

Ferroli cites contemporary witnesses that Mar Abraham 'administers sacraments without the sacred vestments, and often he makes another Priest say Mass, and he only consecrates' (Ferroli 1939: 174). These observations support the view that Mar

⁵⁶⁸ Gouvea's *Jornada* consistently refers to the SCM as '*Christians of the Serra*' 1606:281,287; or alternatively as 'this bishopric', as in *Acts and Decrees of Diamper* Zachariah 1994:109113,119.

⁵⁶⁹ Citing Matheus Diaz, a Latinized Malabarian priest, and Dionysio, the rector of the Portuguese college in Kochi. According to the Nestorian tradition, the sung *Raza* was performed by bishops and co-episcopas, with ordinary priests and deacons serving only as assistants in these services.

Abraham was not permitted by the SCMs to say the Nestorian Mass. Ignatius Payyappilly, a Catholic historian, mentions that the Jacobites were ‘quite hostile to Mar Abraham’ (2016:165), citing the 1771 *ola* as saying that SCM only accepted Mar Abraham ‘because we had no bishops’ and that they rejected him when he later ‘preached the customs of the Franks to us’.⁵⁷⁰ The SCM sources examined do not appear to state this categorically, but it was seen in Section 5.1 that Mar Abraham was not permitted to ordain priests.

Within Malabar, a range of liturgies were used that were variations of the St James liturgy, including that of Theodore, liturgies that are not recognised or used by the Nestorians. When the Synod of Diamper rejected the liturgy of Diodorus, this actually indicates a non-Nestorian Church (Philip 1950:121). One significant point to be made is that since Diamper, no copies of Nestorian liturgy (*Raza*) have been found in Malabar. Pulikkunnel says, ‘it is inconceivable that every last text of the Raza in Malabar was burnt by the parishioners [as required by the Decrees of Diamper]. It can only point to the fact that none of our churches had the Raza liturgy’ (Pullikkunnel undated:11). If the Nestorian liturgy had been in use in Malabar, it would have been expected, in Pullikkunnel’s opinion, to find at least some copies somewhere throughout the country, even though many documents were burned at Diamper.

Another point relates the commemoration of saints and Church Fathers in the liturgy. The SCMs commemorated a number of saints who were ‘repudiated by Archbishop Menezes as Nestorian heretics, but who are considered Jacobite saints’⁵⁷¹, and not actually included in the Nestorian calendar of saints’ (Philip 1950:124-5).

5.4.12. Eucharistic practices

The Synod of Diamper made a particular mention of an ‘error’ in the rituals connected with the fracture of the bread in the Eucharist, describing these in detail (Zacharia 1994:137-8). However, Philip and Geevarghese point out that these rituals are specific

⁵⁷⁰ Payyappilly (2016:165)

⁵⁷¹ Philip references Howard 1864:253-4 for this information.

and ‘peculiar’ to the Jacobite tradition, and not Nestorian.⁵⁷² A related aspect is the use of the expressed juice of raisins⁵⁷³ instead of wine in the Eucharist, which was rejected by the Synod of Diamper but which is also a practice accepted in the Jacobite Church of Malabar, though not in the Nestorian Church.⁵⁷⁴ Geervarghese also points out that in 1558 the Nestorian Bishop Mar Joseph attempted unsuccessfully to remove this practice as part of his reforms (Geevarghese 2002:153).

The Nestorian practice of using leavened bread in SCM Eucharist was another point by which their Nestorian identity was affirmed (Mundadan 1984:200). There is the anomalous statement by Joseph the Indian that the SCM used *unleavened* bread, with the added clause ‘as we do’: ‘They consecrate the Body and Blood of our Lord, *as we do, with unleavened* bread’ (Vallavanthara 1984:174). But Vallavanthara in his discussion, proposes that there is an allusion to ‘when it was available’, perhaps made by Joseph’s Roman Catholic interlocutor in Venice in 1502 (Vallavanthara 1984 Note 93, pp.281-82).⁵⁷⁵ In a list of rites and practices of the SCMs, Ferroli also notes that the SCM used leavened bread for the Eucharist, ‘prepared with flour, oil and salt’ (Ferroli 1939:178).

Of course, this point about the Eucharistic bread is in fact immaterial as both Nestorian and the Jacobite Churches celebrated the Eucharist with leavened bread. Nevertheless, the particular manner of making this bread is peculiar to the Jacobites. From early testimonies of the Portuguese (Baretto 1561:179), the SCM used a kind of bread made of rice flour, oil and salt, with a small portion of wheat in the middle of it, and instead of grape wine, they either used palm wine or expressed juice of raisins. These elements were not permitted in the Nestorian tradition.

⁵⁷² Philip 1950:121-2; Geevarghese 1906:146-7

⁵⁷³ Earliest of this by Barbosa in 1514, who stayed in Malabar from 1514 for an extended period (Dames 1921:101)

⁵⁷⁴ It was permitted in the Coptic Church in Egypt in the 9th century when the use of wine was forbidden in the whole country, following Islamic law (Geevarghese 2002:153)

⁵⁷⁵ It is unclear whether this was a mistranslation or something other explanation, as in all other instances, Joseph makes clear that the SCMs were following Antioch’s traditions and practices. Vallavanthara argues that it is possible that the phrase ‘as we do’ points to Joseph’s interlocutor trying to find common ground with him, because in most other respects, the practices Joseph was describing were different from those of Rome. The Latin version reads: ‘Consecrant Corpus Christi & Sanguinem si tamen id consequi possunt, in azymis, hoc est, in pane non fermentato more nostro’, that is, ‘They consecrate the Body and Blood of Christ, if possible, in azymis, ie., with unleavened bread, as we do’, which implies its use when available (Vallavanthara 1984:175).

5.4.13. Church lay-out

A cursory examination of the layout and structure of the Syrian churches in Malabar also point to their not having been suitable for the performance of *CotE Raza*, and in fact no church in Malabar appears to have had the features considered essential to Nestorian rituals (such as the *Bema*, separate lecterns for Old and New Testament readings, a place for keeping relics). Pulikkunnel, after studying this, concludes that ‘the Indian Churches were never designed to celebrate the Chaldean Raza’ (Pulikkunnel 1997:52-3). From the earliest account of the interior of the Syrian churches in Portuguese times, the arrangement is described as being very simple, with only a cross inside apart from the altar, which can still be seen in the oldest existing Syrian church in Chengannur (Mundadan, citing early 16th century Portuguese missionaries 1984:195).

5.4.14. Religious practices in general

At the Synod of Diamper, Menezes produced a list of fasts to be observed in future, adding that some of these were already observed and some were new to Malabar (Zacharia 1994: 186-7). Five of these are traditionally observed by Jacobites, the others being common to Catholic, Jacobite and Nestorian traditions. Philip has noted that the fact that Menezes does not mention four additional fasts that are traditional to the Nestorian Church indicates that those explicitly Nestorian fasts were not observed in Malabar (Philip 1950:127), again indicating that the SCM were not Nestorian.

Similarly, the celibacy of clergy was one of the Latin traditions enforced by the Decrees of Diamper (Zachariah 1994:165-6). Whitehouse (1873:85) cites the Portuguese historian Osorius (16th century) as observing that among the St Thomas Christians, ‘the priests marry; yet the first wife being dead they cannot marry again’. This reflects a Jacobite practice, as Nestorian clergy were in fact permitted to remarry after widowhood. The Decrees of Diamper record that there were in Malabar priests who had married more than once and continued to practise priestly functions, as well as those who, after remarrying in widowhood, abstained from priestly functions. This

would indicate there were at least some priests that continued to follow Jacobite strictures against remarried priests continuing in their ministry (Philip 1950:123).

Examining these variant narratives, what becomes apparent is the polysemic nature of some terms, and their imprecise use hindering accurate interpretation of texts and contexts, leading to misconceptions, hasty conclusions and extrapolations by some historians. Some of these that have entered the general discourse on the Syrians' pre-Portuguese doctrinal affiliation and its historical narrative, and have now after successive repetitions, become accepted as 'facts', will be discussed in the following section.

5.5 Misunderstanding of terms and references

5.5.1. Christianity in the Arabian Sea rim

In navigational terms, significant points on the Arabian Sea rim were Ethiopia, the Himyarite kingdom on the coast of Aden, the island of Socotra at the mouth of the Red Sea, and the island of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, Arabia Felix (now Yemen/Oman), the west coast of India, and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). It is a general assumption among some historians that all these regions were Nestorian, especially in the early Middle Ages, and base this primarily on the report of Cosmas.⁵⁷⁶ Cosmas reported (from informants in Ethiopia) that the inhabitants of Socotra 'were Christians, and their priests were from Persia,' and Vincent interprets this to mean 'they were Nestorians' (Vincent 1807vol. ii:342 f.n.211) This appears to be based on the same misunderstanding that assumed all priests and bishops from Persia were Nestorian, as discussed in Section 5.7 of this chapter. By the time of Hough, this interpretation was most influentially upheld by Hough, who asserted 'there is no reason to question the truth of the account given by Cosmas, that the Christians of India in the sixth century

⁵⁷⁶ See Vincent 1807vol. ii:342 fn.211.

were Nestorians' (Hough 1839 vol.1:86), and which was repeated by others after him (Jones 1863:291-2).

However, Jones (citing De Faria y Souza's *Portuguese Asia* 1666 Vol.I:121-124) says that ⁵⁷⁷ when the Portuguese took Socotra in 1507, it was noted regarding the people of the island 'They are all Jacobite Christians, like the Abissins. The men use the names of the Apostles, the women chiefly that of Mary. They worship the cross, which they wear on their clothes, and set up in their churches, where they pray thrice a day in the Chaldean language, alternatively, as in a choir.' (Jones 1863:291 fn1). Following these indications, it appears more accurate to conclude that the three communities of Christians [the Ethiopian, Socotran and Malabarese] were Monophysite Oriental Christians at the advent of the Portuguese in this region. Interpreting Marco Polo's references in the 13th century⁵⁷⁸ that the Socotrans were Nestorians, Jones proposes that, although the Socotrans were originally Nestorians, they 'following the example of some of their co-religionists in India, they subsequently embraced the Monophysite doctrines of Jacob Baradaeus'.⁵⁷⁹ This argument (with the unlikely scenario of the Socotrans converting to the Jacobitism following the distant Malabarians) would be avoided if it is accepted that Cosmas when he used the term 'Persia', he did not necessarily mean the CotE, and that in Socotra, and possibly elsewhere, the Christians he encountered were not necessarily of the Nestorian Church.

5.5.2. The terms 'Babylon', 'Persia', and 'Catholicos'

A significant area of confusion is in the use of the terms 'Church of Persia' and 'Bishops of Babylon', and Catholicos of the East' by writers beginning with the early Portuguese missionaries, as seen in their letters from 1500s onwards (Schurhammer 1934:21), and in Gouvea (Malekandathil 2003:247). Although Menezes appears to have used the term 'Babylon' and 'Syria' interchangeably in the letter cited at the beginning of Chapter 1 of this thesis, where he refers to 'Babylon' as the place of

⁵⁷⁷ See Jones' translation of *Travels of Ludovico Varthema* (1863:290, footnote1).

⁵⁷⁸ Marco Polo (cited in Jones 1863:292) stated that Socotra was 'the seat of an archbishop, who was subject to a *Zatolica* [Catholicos] who resides at *Baldak*, [Baghdad,] by whom he (the Archbishop) was elected'.

⁵⁷⁹ Jones 1863:292.

origin of SCM bishops. But later, in his confrontation with the Archdeacon of the SCM, when he forced the Archdeacon to sign the document excommunicating his Patriarch, Menezes used the term ‘*Syrian Patriarch*’ (Hough 1839 Vol.I:347). Jones in 1863 also shows similar confusion (Jones 1863:181 footnote). Mundadan asserts that in the absence of records from this period, ‘all we know from history is that not only did the Church of Malabar depend upon the Chaldean⁵⁸⁰ Church juridically and hierarchically, but also that all its prelates came from Chaldea or Babylon or Persia or Armenia’ (cited in Mar Aprem 1983:24-25). Mar Aprem goes on to assert that all these terms signified ‘one and the same thing - the territories of the Chaldean Church inside the old Persian Empire’.⁵⁸¹

One of the main reasons for this confusion is that both Syrian Orthodox and Nestorians existed in the region of ‘Persia’ and ‘Babylon’ at the same time, centred first in the capital city of Seleucia, and later in Baghdad and Mosul. The Seleucian Metropolitans were consecrated by the Patriarchs of Antioch until late 3rd century,⁵⁸² when historical circumstances put an end to this practice.⁵⁸³ After the expulsion of Nestorius at Ephesus (431), his followers moved east, under their leader Bar Sauma in ca.460, and with the closure of their School in Edessa in 489, this Church with its centres in Nisibis and Seleucia, became identified with Persia (Gillman and Klimkeit 1999:62).⁵⁸⁴ While most Christians within the non-Roman Eastern regions adhered to Metropolitan Bar Sauma and his successors⁵⁸⁵, this appears not to have been universal, as there remained pockets of resistance to the Catholicos, who continued their affiliation to Antioch,

⁵⁸⁰ Adding another dimension to the confusion, the terms ‘Chaldea’ and ‘Chaldean Church’ also seem to have been brought into the literature relating to periods prior to 1553 when a Church by this name did not exist. The Chaldean Church originated in 1553, when a part of the CotE seceded to join Rome.

⁵⁸¹ Metroloitan Mar Aprem 1983:24-25.

⁵⁸² See Bar Hebraeus in Chediath’s translation 1990:221-2), and footnote 449 in introduction to Chapter 5.

⁵⁸³ Patriarch Yacoub III (1952:50-3) summarised this as follows: the term ‘East’ referred to regions that were to the east of the Roman Empire, which included Athur (Northern Iraq), Arabia and Persia, also broadly called ‘Aramaic’ regions, and St Thomas is thought to have evangelised here before his journey to India. In the third century, Christianity arrived in Riordashir which was the capital of the Fars region, and in the island of Socotra, and by the end of that century, Fars became an archbishopric and Socotra a bishopric. Citing Photius, Yacoub III adds that the Christians in Fars and Socotra worshipped in the Syriac language. At this time, Bishop David of Fars is thought to have travelled to India, to carry out evangelical work. The Archbishop of Fars had under his jurisdiction Qatar, Merv, Karman, Shiraz, Socotra and India, and he also sent Syrian bishops to India.

⁵⁸⁴ The doctrinal schism of Chalcedon (451) became more entrenched and political in the latter half of the 5th century (Gilman and Klimkeit 1999:62-3).

⁵⁸⁵ The introduction of Nestorianism into the CotE is attributed to this Bar Sauma, according to the Jacobite narrative (based on Simeon of Beth Arsham).

though without a Metropolitan.⁵⁸⁶ Their need was redressed by Patriarch Athanasius Gamolo in 628, when he consecrated a parallel Catholicos for the Miaphysites in the Sassanid Persian empire, under the title ‘Maphrian of the East’, bringing the Syrian Orthodox in the region within the ambit and ecclesiastical order of Antioch (Kiraz 2011).⁵⁸⁷ Although ‘Maphrian’ was his official title, he was also titled ‘Metropolitan’ (Moolayil 2005:157), and moreover, the term ‘Maphrian’ was synonymous with the term ‘Catholicos’ (Kiraz 2011), which left any reference to a ‘Catholicos’ undifferentiated between Nestorian or Jacobite prelate, unless explicitly stated.

Significantly, with the Nestorian Church gaining political favour with the Persian rulers in the 5th-7th centuries, there was continual hostility between the Nestorians and the Monophysites. Over the following centuries, depending on the favour or disfavour of the rulers (including invasions by the Turks and Mongols), the seats of both Catholicoi were moved, from Seleucia and Tigris, to Baghdad, to Mosul (formerly called Nineveh), to Mardin, to Tabriz, and to Sulemania, and other cities (Hough vol.1 240; Chediath 1990:*passim*). The two Churches continued to be commonly referred to during this period as ‘the Nestorians’ and ‘the Syrians’.

From this it follows that neither the term ‘Catholicos’, nor the name of a city, would unambiguously indicate whether the referent was the Supreme Head of CotE or the suffragan of Syrian Orthodox Patriarch.⁵⁸⁸

Similar confusion relates to the use of the term ‘Babylon’, with writers referring to the mother church of the SCM as the Babylonian Church. Thus, Moraes wrote: ‘The Catholic clergy came to the inevitable conclusion that so long as the Christians were served by the Babylonian Patriarchate, there was no chance of leading them to the Roman fold’ (Moraes 1964:224). The term ‘Babylon’ was used from the early

⁵⁸⁶ Although Bar Hebraeus states ‘in those days (late 6th century) Jacobites were very few (in the region)’, he lists a few bishops in the east at this time who resisted the CotE (Chediath 1990:49,51,52,53,56).

⁵⁸⁷ The first Maphrian was Marutha of Tagrit (628-49). the prelate who held the second rank after the patriarch in the Syrian Orthodox Church. He had sole and autonomous authority over the Syrian Orthodox churches in Persia.

who held the second rank after the patriarch in the Syrian Orthodox Church. He had sole and autonomous authority over the Syrian Orthodox churches in Persia.

⁵⁸⁸ Patriarch Yacoub III (1952:50-3) citing Patriarch Aphrem Barsoum, Bedjan, Bar Hebraeus, and others, also affirms that when reference is made to a bishop ‘from Persia’, it did not always imply a Nestorian bishop.

Portuguese times, Mathews Diaz, a Portuguese-Malabarian priest writing in 1550, stating that the SCM until then ‘had the Patriarchs of Babylon as their prelates’ (cited in Schurhammer 1934:21-22).⁵⁸⁹ It is further seen used in relation to the two bishops in residence, Mar Jacob and Mar Thomas, where they are reported as doing ‘all after the manner of Babylon’, and later how, ‘with much diligence and zeal’ the Portuguese missionaries, had brought them to the obedience of Rome (Schurhammer 1934:21-22).

This confusion is recognised and given a historical explanation by Hough as follows: When the ancient city of Babylon silted up, the city moved to Seleucia⁵⁹⁰ in the 3rd century BC. Citing Strabo and Pliny, Hough reports that although the city became Seleucia, the surrounding area continued to be called Babylonia, and the residents of Seleucia were known as Babylonians (Hough Vol.1:243). When Seleucia declined by the time of the rise of Islam, the small settlement of Bagdat in that region developed into the Abassid Caliphate’s new capital and was called Baghdad. As discussed earlier with the term ‘Persia’, the original ecclesiastical link between Antioch and Seleucia did not cease when the Nestorian Church established itself in that city. Therefore, the term ‘Babylon’ did not necessarily indicate Nestorianism, as Hough acknowledges: ‘From this Canon it is evident that the Church of Seleucia, or Babylon, was originally subject to the Patriarch of Antioch, the primate nearest to that city’ (Hough 1839:Vol.1.244).

5.5.3. The term ‘Armenian’

On the argument that Knai Thoma was an Armenian merchant, Thomas Yeates (1818:158-9) observes: ‘these are allowed to be incorrect by more able writers of Syrian ecclesiastical affairs. Mar Thomas Cana⁵⁹¹ was an Aramite, i.e. a Syrian by nation; and was not an Armenian’. From the claim that he was Armenian several historians have developed a theory that all the Edessans that arrived including their

⁵⁸⁹ Mar Jacob died in 1550 after Diaz’s letter was written.

⁵⁹⁰ Seleucia was named after its founder Seleucus Nicator, one of Alexander’s generals.

⁵⁹¹ Conflation of the two terms ‘*Mar Thoma*’ denoting the Apostle, and ‘Thoma of Cana’ or ‘Knai Thoma’ denoting the merchant, is a recurring error in Western accounts of the SCM.

bishop, were Armenians, and also perhaps Nestorians (despite the fact that the Armenians were not Nestorian in doctrine).⁵⁹²

One of the 1503 bishops, Mar Jacob, introduces himself in a 1523 letter to King John of Portugal, as ‘Jacob Abuna, Armenian priest, who rules over the so-called Quilon - Christians in India’.⁵⁹³ While this appears to agree partly with Yeates’ interpretation above, the gloss as ‘Chaldean’ must be mistaken as the term ‘Chaldean’ Church came into existence only after 1553 when a section of the CotE accepted Rome’s authority. Up to this point (effectively a schism in the Nestorian CotE), there were only two churches in Mesopotamia: the Jacobite Syrian Christians of Antioch and the Nestorian CotE.

The term ‘Aramaeo’, as Yeates points out, is used to refer to Arameans (he used the term ‘Aramite’), the Aramaic-speaking people in north-west Mesopotamia, including Syria. This is almost certainly referring to the Jacobite Syrian Church, as the ‘Nestorian’ CotE was based in east Mesopotamia. This throws a different light on a number of citations that use the term ‘Armenian’. For example, Joao Garces (1529) writes the St Thomas Christians rejected Catholic missionaries because ‘they believe rather their bishops that came from Armenia’ (Schurhammer 1934:20). Kollamparambil describes the Patriarch Ahattalla who arrived in 1653 (and considered a Jacobite Patriarch by the Syrians) as the ‘Armenian Patriarch’ (Kollamparambil 1981:187). Geddes 1694:41 reports that Menezes had commanded the blockading of ports to intercept ‘all Chaldean, Persian or Armenian ecclesiastics’ journeying to India. Regarding the 1503 bishops, Barros reports⁵⁹⁴ that the Armenian Patriarch had sent four bishops a few years before the arrival of the Portuguese in Malabar, of whom two died soon after, and that the other two divided the land, with their seats in Kollam and Kodungallur. Francis Xavier also describes Mar Jacob in 1549 as ‘a bishop from Armenia called Jacob Abuna’ (Schurhammer 1934:21).

⁵⁹² According to Schurhammer, ‘Armenian’ was a Portuguese mis-translation of ‘Aramaeo’ which Schurhammer glosses as ‘Chaldean’ (1934:10, footnote 33), ie. a former Nestorian, now a Catholic Uniate.

⁵⁹³ Schurhammer 1934:10.

⁵⁹⁴ Barros says he gathered this information from a Syrian (Malabarian) student in Lisbon.

But Raulin explains the source of this confusion as a misreading of ‘Aramaeus’ (= a Syrian) to mean ‘Armenus’ meaning an Armenian. Assemani also described Knai Thoma as a Nestorian bishop, as discussed in Whitehouse (1873:60). Although the terms Jacobite and Nestorian were well-defined in Mesopotamia itself, the late-medieval schisms within these Churches where parts of them seceded to join the Roman Catholic Church appear to have brought in some confusing usage of terms. This is explained in detail in Southgate (1840 Vol.II 179-81), which can be summarised in the table below.⁵⁹⁵

Denominations	Term used by the Roman Catholics to refer to this denomination	Term used by the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) to refer to this denomination
Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite)	Jacobites	Syrians
Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) who have converted to Roman Catholicism	Syrians	Syrian Catholics
CotE (Nestorian)	Nestorians	Nestorians
CotE (Nestorian) who have converted to Roman Catholicism	Chaldeans	Chaldeans, or Nestorian Catholics

Table 1 Terms used to denote denominations in Mesopotamia (Southgate 1840)

It is seen from this table how closely affiliated and narrowly demarcating the terminology was with regard to the Syrians affiliated to Antioch and the Nestorians of

⁵⁹⁵ Bishop Horatio Southgate (American Episcopal Church) spent extended periods between 1836 and 1850, studying the various religious communities in the Ottoman and Mesopotamian regions, and wrote two books on them.

the CotE. Confusion was added, however, when the Catholicoi of both sides were referred as '*Catholics*'.

5.6. Episcopacy in the Church of the SCM

Hough has argued that episcopacy was the 'primitive constitution' by which Churches were governed from the beginning, as, 'no church, whether orthodox or heterodox, is to be found in the annals of Christianity under any other form of government, prior to the 16th century' adding that wherever Christianity was planted, it was 'with this kind of government alone'. This he argues, was the polity of the Church in India as well, 'from the earliest period', but in noting its existence 'from the beginning in a church so remote as that of Malabar', he adds that if such a Church attaches more importance to the Apostolic Succession alone, she becomes 'degenerated indeed', and with this defends his argument that the SCM were heretics.⁵⁹⁶

However, in the case of the Church of the SCM, this can be seen to have been much more nuanced. Section 5.1 of this chapter suggests that the presence of the three Nestorian bishops in the latter half of the 16th century was insufficient to define the doctrinal identity of the Church in Malabar. Rather this phenomenon appears to have been the result of the peculiar structure of this Church with parishes governing themselves independently of bishops. The following unique features made it outside the pattern which Hough described, making it different to interpretations of governance based on Western Churches' commonly understood ecclesiastical hierarchy. The SCM appear to have attached so much importance to their rites and practices that anyone, even if he was a bishop, if he is known to be a practitioner of another set of rituals, was denied entry into their churches.⁵⁹⁷ This was their way of steadfastly defending their doctrine and faith in so far as they were reflected in the rites and practices

⁵⁹⁶ Hough 1839 Vol.1: 113-4.

⁵⁹⁷ As when Archbishop Menezes tried to enter the SC churches. Gouvea, recounts these with extreme brevity in his otherwise detailed account (Malekandathil 2000: 129, 212), but Geddes elaborates them. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6 on the SCM resistance to Latinisation.

According to the sources of the SCM, until the end of the period studied:⁵⁹⁸

- a) Bishops deputed by Antioch or its Saffragan Metropolitans arrived in Malabar only intermittently;
- b) Even when they arrived and stayed in the country for prolonged periods, their monastic life and linguistic constraints appear to have limited the spheres of their temporal influence;
- c) Almost all parish churches were built by the local community, and those assets were theirs;
- d) Candidates were selected from the parish and sent away to live and train with well-known *Malpans*⁵⁹⁹ after which they returned, and stayed in the parish the rest of their lives;⁶⁰⁰
- e) Where there was more than one priest, the senior-most was the parish-priest;
- f) Priests had no remuneration except a portion of the offerings at the church, as well as a fixed percentage of bridal dowries and fixed fees for extraneous priestly functions.⁶⁰¹

From this outline of the structure of parishes of the SCM, it appears that the priests were answerable only to the people they served, and were independent of episcopal or secular powers. The leading members and representatives of the community held ultimate authority over the parish in ecclesiastical and temporal matters, while the priests determined its spiritual matters.⁶⁰² While these powers were confined to that community, within the church's boundary-walls it held supreme, so much so that even a bishop was allowed to enter only at their discretion.⁶⁰³ Mundadan gives a detailed account of the organisation of parishes (Mundadan 1984:185-92).

This state of the polity of the SCM, differing from what Hough had outlined as the norm in the West, enabled the SCM to 'disfavour' Mar Jacob when he apostatised to Roman Catholicism, to 'examine' Mar Abraham in 1550, and finding the doctrine he

⁵⁹⁸ In fact, it remained in this state until the late 19th century, when reforms began to be implemented by successive hierarchs, beginning with Patriarch Ignatius Peter III in 1875.

⁵⁹⁹ Malpans were parish priests who were Syriac scholars and so able to train new priests.

⁶⁰⁰ See Thomas 2017:95.

⁶⁰¹ The Decrees of Diamper (Session vii, Decrees 2,20,21) proscribed parishes from paying their priests for priestly functions because from the Western Churches' perspective, that was equated with Simony (Zacharia 1994:158, 167-821). The same was condemned in the words of early Portuguese writers (Schurhammer 1934:20,21).

⁶⁰² When these two sources of authority merged in one person as coming from a leading family and was a priest or even a Malpan, they were highly regarded, but their authority still remained within the parish

⁶⁰³ Gouvea reports many instances when Archbishop Menezes was forced to retreat when he tried to enter the SCM churches. When forced by secular powers and he did gain entry, Menezes often found there was no one to receive him (Malekandathil 2003:212).

professed being contrary to theirs, to deny him acceptance, but also under the circumstances, the SCM found it expedient to accept him conditionally.⁶⁰⁴

5.7. SCM sources on the identity of bishops

The SCM sources examined allude to or in some cases assert, that from the arrival of the Edessans in 345, the ecclesiastical links with Antioch continued uninterrupted for over a thousand two hundred years.⁶⁰⁵ Philip argues that it was the flourishing state of the Syrian church in Mesopotamia in the mid-medieval period, that helped in the continued nurturing of the SCM at this time (Philip 1950:96-98). The *Niraṇām Chronicle* and the *Kandanad Chronicle* are clearly written from the perspective of the Jacobite Syrian Church, giving the history of Universal Church up to Chalcedon, including the rejection of both Nestorius and the Churches that adopted the Chalcedonian formula, and mention doctrinal unity with the Coptic Church in Alexandria (Manalil 2002:108-115). They give the Jacobite version of Mar Ahattalla's death, and the Oath of the Leaning Cross in 1653. The arrival of Jacobite Syrian bishops was by no means regular or frequent, and at times the gaps stretched to several decades, and in one case as long as a century. But it is stated that this ecclesiastical link continued uninterrupted from the 4th till the turn of the 15th century, with no mention of any change in the doctrine or the See that was sending the bishops to Malabar, or the Church in Malabar having professed any faith other than the Jacobite Syrian.

Philip agrees that Nestorian bishops were present in Malabar in the 16th century, but pointing out that nevertheless, the SCM did not subscribe to the Nestorian doctrine in their practices (1950: 88-90), following it up with a chapter (Chapter 12:pp124-158 or

⁶⁰⁴ This conditional acceptance itself appears to have been revoked and Mar Abraham rejected entirely by the SCM, when after his first expulsion from Malabar by the Jesuit Fathers, he returned with Papal Briefs (Pukadiyil 1869:126).

⁶⁰⁵ As the SCM stated in their rallying-cry in Vypeen, when the archdeacon was forced to excommunicate the Patriarch (Geddes 1694:62).

107-132 in the 2002 edition) refuting that the SCM were Nestorians. Similarly, the Jacobite Deacon Geevarghese submitted a thesis under the title of '*Were the Syrian Christians Nestorians?*' (Geevarghese 1910), analysing the decrees of the Synod of Diamper in the light of close knowledge of Jacobite Syrian doctrine, liturgy and practices, and rejected the same.⁶⁰⁶ Kaniamparambil draws the following inferences about the state of the Syrian Christian Church from Menezes' letter to another bishop in 1599: 1) Nestorian bishops were present in Malabar; 2) other heresies were also present (implying the Jacobite 'heresy'; 3) from the evidence of bishops from Alexandria, Rome's understanding was the Jacobite Patriarch was also sending bishops to SCM, as the Patriarchs of Alexandria were never Nestorians (1982:125).

The clearest statements on the identity of the SCM prior to the Portuguese arrival comes from Joseph the Indian, who travelled to Rome in 1501 and whose account was published in Venice shortly after. In Rome, Joseph stated that he was going to meet his Catholicos in Mosul, and that the supreme head of his Church was the Patriarch of Antioch who consecrated bishops for the SCM. This had caused Pope Alexander VI to challenge him as to from where Antioch had derived this authority, to which Joseph gave a long explanation of how St. Peter had first established the Church in Antioch, and only afterwards, in Rome⁶⁰⁷ (Vallavanthara 1984:170-1, 231, 233). This was in fact his third journey to Mosul, indicating the strength of the link between the SCMs and Antioch. Philip and Kaniamparambil appear to accept the narrative that Joseph the Indian and his companion George received their ordination from Mar Simeon the Catholicos-Patriarch ('Catholic' in Schurhammer) of the Orient residing in Gazarta bet Zabadaï.⁶⁰⁸ However, this seems questionable as Joseph had been clear about his non-Nestorian affiliation, and there is no mention of his faith or affiliation being compromised by receiving his ordination from the Nestorian Catholicos-Patriarch. Moreover, in the subsequent two decades (i.e. till about 1520), he is seen to be serving as the vicar of a church of the SCM in Kodungallur (Schurhammer 1934:20, Mundadan

⁶⁰⁶ The M.A. thesis of JSC Deacon P.T. Geevarghese at the Madras Christian College, titled: '*Were the Syrian Christian Nestorian?*' (1907, republished by Dr Kuriakose Corepiscopa Moolayil, in *Four Historic Documents* (2002:107-164).

⁶⁰⁷ In stating this to the Pope, it appears that Joseph, speaking in 1502, was unaware of Rome's claim of universal authority, and the audacity of the statement.

⁶⁰⁸ It is probable that they were conceding to Assemani's interpretation cited in Schurhammer (1934:2-3).

1984:293). There also appears to be a confusion between the bishops Thomas and John who arrived with priest Joseph the Indian in c.a.1502-3 in Malabar on his return as narrated in Schurhammer (1934:2-3, citing Assemani). The identity of these bishops is clearly stated: that they were drawn from the monastery of Eugene (Ougen), they were consecrated as bishops Thomas and John, and that they were sent to India with priests Joseph and George. This would indicate that these bishops held the same faith as that of priest Joseph, as Catholic accounts of this period do not mention they were dealing with clerics of two separate schismatic Churches simultaneously. They rather imply that the bishops Thomas and John, under pressure from the missionaries to conform to Rome (which was being firmly resisted by them), and Joseph the Indian now the parish-priest in Kodungallur (frequently in conflict with the Portuguese missionaries' interferences in his parish), were all of one faith and one Church (Schurhammer 1934:20, Mundadan 1984:293). A letter allegedly sent by the three other bishops Yahballaha, Jakob and Denha who arrived in 1503-4, causes a confusion of narratives, as this letter is addressed to Mar Elia, the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Cote, and states that they were sent by this hierarch to India. However, it is clear from Schurhammer's account (1934:2-10) that these last three bishops arrived independently, though at a similar time.

The Letters of the Syrian Metropolitan Mar Thoma IV provide an explicit statement of the Syrians' links with Antioch.⁶⁰⁹ He identifies himself as 'the fifth bishop of the true Syriac faithful Christians of India, who proclaimed the blessed St. Thomas, the Apostle: and infinite under the glorious and saintly See of St. Ignatius of Antioch, who is in charge of us until today'.⁶¹⁰ In Letter 4, to the Patriarch of Antioch, Mar Thoma addresses him as 'the Head of the Universal Church and Pastor of the sheep of the East. Elected by God and accepted by Peter, the Head of the Apostles', and he signs

⁶⁰⁹ Written between 1709 and 1720, Letter 1 is addressed to the Patriarch of Antioch; in Letter 2 to Schaaf in Amsterdam, Mar Thoma IV declares his affiliation to Antioch and his Church's doctrine deriving from Nicaea, Letter 3 he begs Schaaf to mediate with the King of the Netherlands to protect the 'Eastern Antiochian diocese' of Malabar; Letter 4 is again to the Patriarch of Antioch. See Appendix 17 for transcriptions and translations of these letters.

⁶¹⁰ Letter 2, to Carolus Schaaf. The other letters open with more abridged versions of this, such as: 'Thomas the feeble Metropolitan and Bishop of the true Christians of India. We the true Syriacs, the followers of Mar Thoma, the Apostle, who touched the side of our Lord'. (Letter 3), or "Thomas the infirm, Bishop of the genuine Syrian Christians of the Thomasean India' (Letter 4).

himself off as: ‘Bishop Thoma, the Infirm; Bishop of the Ancient and Orthodox Syrian Christians of India’.

The letter written in 1668 by Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem, having arrived in Malabar in 1665, states unambiguously a JSC position, and claims ‘that the Malabar Church was, from the beginning, Jacobite’ (Philip 1950:179). It is worth noting that by the time of this letter, the issue of Nestorianism was no longer current and he focuses instead on ‘correcting’ fifty years of Latinisation and the accretion of Roman dogmas and practices among the SCM. In the Patriarchal letter (from HH Ignatius Abd’ al Masih I 1685) there is a reference to the JSC of Malabar writing to the Patriarch a number of times and his sending of two bishops (one of whom was the Maphrian Mar Baselios Yaldho) and two monks in 1685.

These points indicate that from 1498 the SCM were not Nestorians. In the absence of another Church operating in Malabar at this time, and in the context that the Chaldean Church had not yet been formed, it seems clear that this Church was the Jacobite Church of Antioch. This is further evidenced by the SCM’s response to Latinisation in the subsequent 16th century, and this will be discussed in the next chapter, in section 6.5.

5.8. Conclusion

The Synod of Diamper made the alleged Nestorianism of the SCM Church a central reason for needing to purge it of its errors and bring it under Rome. That narrative was generally accepted by many European writers, and continues to be the dominant view in published histories today. However, it stands in direct contrast with SCM’s own sources that indicate its adherence to Syrian Orthodox beliefs and practices, supported by Syrian bishops who were sent by the Antiochian Patriarch or by his Catholicos. Various details of the arguments have been examined, and it seems reasonable to conclude that there is no clear case for alleging that the SCM was Nestorian in faith. There is evidence that Nestorian bishops did arrive in Malabar in the 16th century, though it seems most likely that their practices or beliefs were not adopted, but were possibly tolerated in the bid to help protect their Church against the

work of the Portuguese Catholics. These Nestorian bishops are reported to have left a number of books and texts that reflected their Nestorian beliefs, and which were then used by Archbishop Menezes as evidence against the SCM. Other evidence used to argue for the Nestorian identity of the SCM, such as the identity of the 1503 bishops, their 1504 letter, the 1301 colophon, the identity of the 825 bishops, and the ‘Persian crosses’, and their liturgical and doctrinal practices, have been shown to be open to other interpretations or possibly misinterpretations of the original texts. In addition, while there is plenty of evidence for Jacobite practices in Malabar, there is no evidence for Nestorian practices having been adopted by the SCM. A number of Catholic historians in India writing in the 20th and 21st centuries, such as Fr Bernard, Fr Nidiri, Pulikkunnel and Vellian, have recognised these anomalies in the European accounts and argued against the Nestorian identity of the SCM before the arrival of the Portuguese.⁶¹¹

Further scholarship found other areas to challenge: notably the foundational narratives of the SCM – St Thomas, the Edessan migration, and the identity of the bishops of the Kollam migration. In the next chapter, the challenges to these earlier parts of the Syrian narrative will be examined in more detail. It will also examine how this SCM self-perception informed their response to the Latinisation measures attempted by the Portuguese.

⁶¹¹ Nidhiry 1908; Bernard of St. Thomas 1924.

Chapter 6: Jacobite foundational narratives and religious identity

As discussed in Chapter 4, the narrative in MV was found to be generally consistent across a wide range of other SCM primary and secondary sources, particularly in relation to the way that the SCM religious identity is built around their perception of three main events occupying nodal points: the Apostolic foundation of their Church by St. Thomas in 52, the arrival of the Edessan settlers in 345, and the arrival of second group of settlers at Kollam in 825. The narratives relating to the arrival of the two cohorts of settlers were critical to the discussion in Chapter 5 of the doctrinal identity of the SCM, as they explained the religious identity of the Christian community in Malabar, in terms of the provenance of their faith and doctrine, and how these were preserved and sustained over the succeeding centuries. While the Edessan migration was adduced to explain the introduction of Syriac liturgy and language to the primitive Church and its ecclesiastical links to Antioch, the account of the Kollam migration provided a central position in endorsing Antioch's role in the ongoing ecclesiastical sustenance of this isolated Christian community in southern India, especially at critical times when it was under threat. Similarly, the St Thomas tradition was seen to be integral to their religious identity, particularly with its links to the Edessan migration.

This chapter will begin with a critical reading of the narratives relating to the Edessan and Kollam migrations, as discussed in Chapter 5, these were fundamental to the debate about the Nestorian identity of the SCM, as well as the Thomasine foundational narrative because of its links to the Edessan migration. The second research question: the nature and history of the relationship of the Syrian Christians of Malabar with the See of Antioch, is addressed in more detail in Section 4 of this chapter. The third research question on how far did the Jacobite Syrians' religious self-perception

influenced their response to Latinization will be addressed in Section 5. It will critically evaluate Latinization of the SCM from a Syrian perspective based on their sources, and whether the arrival of Jacobite bishops in 1665 marks the beginning of Jacobitism in Malabar, or is a resumption of their long-held relationship with Antioch. The last section of the chapter will examine how that perceived identity was articulated and transmitted across the generations.

6.1 The Edessan migration

The significance of Edessa⁶¹² to the SCM, as noted by Pratten (1871:2), is partly its shared connection to St. Thomas, who is said to have played a role in the Christianisation of both places.⁶¹³ This link was reinforced, according to the Jacobite sources given in detail in Chapter 4 (4.5.2) by the migration from Edessa in 345. The Jacobite sources were seen to reiterate this narrative as a sequence of events, which can be summarised as follows:

- a) The Christians of southern India, in the late 3rd century, were persecuted by Mani, a ‘sorcerer’, who caused some to migrate from Mylapore and Kaveri-poompattanam to Malabar, as mentioned in the Karuthedathu manuscript (Joseph 1929:Appendix II). The Manichaean persecution is detailed in the 1771 *ola* (Para.11-13), Pukadiyil (1869:109-111), Kandanad Chronicle (Cheeran 2008:27-8) and Zachariah 1973: 28-9.
- b) With persecution continuing in Malabar, the community became diminished and corrupted in their belief. Bishop Joseph of Edessa is said to have had a vision in which St Thomas instructed him help this community.⁶¹⁴ A large group of Mesopotamian Christians from Jerusalem, Edessa, Nineveh and Babylon, led by Bishop Joseph, and with the help of merchant Knai Thoma, arrived in 345. Finding favour with the ruling king Cheraman Perumal, their grievances were redressed, and moreover, with a copper-plate inscribed charter of rights and privileges, the unified

⁶¹² A city in the semi-independent kingdom of Osroene until 242 when taken over by the Romans

⁶¹³ The inhabitants of Edessa, along with their king Abgar, are thought to have converted to Christianity soon after Christ’s crucifixion, but ‘his successors afterwards relapsed into paganism’ (Pratten 1871:1). Later, St. Thomas was instrumental in sending Thaddaeus (or Adai in Syriac) to Edessa to preach the Gospel (Pratten 1871:2). For the origins of Urhoi (Edessa), and an early ecclesiastical history of the city, see Michael the Syrian (Matti Moosa 2014:675-6).

⁶¹⁴ Kandanad Chronicle (Cheeran 2008:28) – see full text in Appendix 9.6, Sarah Knight’s translation.

community of Mesopotamian and native Christians, now under the name ‘Nasrani Māppiḷa’, were able to practise their religion, as given in the 1771 *ola* (paragraphs 14-17), Pukadiyil (1869:113-115), and Kandanad (Cheeran:2003:28-29).⁶¹⁵

- c) The charter inscribed with the seventy-two rights and privileges and given to Knai Thoma, is mentioned briefly in the 1771 *ola* (paragraph 16), but enumerated in detail by Pukadiyil (1869:115-6), Kandanad (Cheeran 2008:29-30), Zachariah (1973:33-35), and Kaniamparambil (1982:101-2). They also mention the stipulation that these rights ‘were not to be altered as long as the sun and moon endured’ (Cheeran 2008:29).
- d) Niraṇām and Kandanad date the Edessan arrival to ‘293 years after the arrival of St. Thomas’, i.e., in 345 (Manalil 2002:224; Cheeran 2008:28), and the same date is given in Zachariah (1973:32), and Philip (1950:67-68). Kaniamparambil critically examines this date (1989:13-18), and affirms 345.
- e) How the foreign and native community were settled in *Māhādēvārpaṭṭaṇam* in Kodungallur, on two sides of the same street leading to their designation as the Northists and Southists, and their composition, is given in Pukadiyil (116-7), Kandanad (Cheeran:2003:30-31) and Philip (1950:69-70).⁶¹⁶
- f) Kaniamparambil treats the Edessan migration with the same details as given in the sources mentioned above (1982:100-105). He follows this with a discussion, citing external sources, of the establishment of a doctrine-based, ecclesiastical, and liturgical Church among the St. Thomas Christians (1982:106-9).⁶¹⁷
- g) All these sources mention above consistently refer to Knai Thoma as the leader of the Edessan party, the one gained them royal favour, and the one who organised their settlement in Kodungallur. They mention Mar Joseph as the Edessan bishop who came with him, and invariably date the event to 345.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 4.5.2., summaries of this events collated from these Jacobite sources, as well as translations of relevant strophes of Syrian Christian Ballads relating to them which are traditionally sung in the churches and homes of SCM on important occasions, are given in Appendix 4.

⁶¹⁶ According to Kandanad Chronicle, the settlement was called *Māhādēvārpaṭṭaṇam* after Jerusalem, the City of Christ, from *māhādēvār*=the Great God, and ‘*paṭṭaṇam*’=city (Cheeran2008:31). Another suggestion is that the Edessans named it *Mahose* (Syriac = ‘New City’) which was later corrupted to that name. The terms ‘Jerusalem’ and ‘Malankara’ appear as significant loci in the *Ballads of the SCM*, in ‘*Fair Jerusalem*’, and Strophe 5 ‘*Malankara of Old*’ (Lukas 1980:5,6).

⁶¹⁷ Kaniamparambil 1982:106-9 lists numerous distinctive features of the Church of Malabar from 345 onwards, that they: 1) observed Sunday as day of assembly; 2) following the Apostolic tradition, prayed facing east, and used prayers of the Institution, baptism, and administration of the *Mūron* (Holy Oil); 3) burnt incense and lit candles during worship; 4) used West Syriac in their liturgy and prayers; 5) used the liturgy of St. James; and, 6) used leavened bread in the Eucharist.

⁶¹⁸ Philip traces his own genealogy back to one of the seven tribes (Hadhai) that came with Knai Thoma in 345. (1950:70).

The following sections will examine general and specific challenges to this narrative.

6.1.1 General rejection the Jacobite account

According to Perczel, the Jacobite narrative is a teleological account, put forward by later historians in order to give a Jacobite identity to the SCM in pre-Portuguese times (Perczel 2009:200-201). He proposes that the Jacobite identity was only adopted by the SCM in from 1665 onwards when Jacobite bishop Mar Gregorius arrived, saying that Mar Thoma, the ‘Metropolitan of the dissident party from 1653, joined Antioch only in 1665’.⁶¹⁹ He argues ‘after the revolt of Mar Thoma and his new connection with Antioch, the Syriac language and an enhanced feeling Syrian identity gained new importance among the St Thomas Christians’.⁶²⁰

These foundational narratives are treated at length by the Portuguese historian Diego de Couto (writing in the latter part of the 16th century)¹ and Archbishop Roz (1604). Similarly, Gouvea, prefaces his account of the Synod of Diamper with an early history of the SCM (1606:14-20), mentioning Knai Thoma (‘Armenian named Thome Cana’), Cheraman Perumal (Xarão Perumal), and the copper-plate charter.

6.1.2 Date

The SCM Ballads, sung to the present day at family celebrations especially by the endogamous community that trace their origins to Edessa, gives the chronogram *sho-va-la kālathinkal* (Malayalam) meaning ‘in the year *shō-vā-lā*’ as the date of their arrival, interpreted as 345.⁶²¹ The 345 date is given consistently in the Jacobite sources listed in Chapter 4.⁶²²

⁶¹⁹ Perczel 2006:410.

⁶²⁰ Again in Perczel 2006:410.

⁶²¹ How this interpretation is arrived at, is given in Cherusseril 1982:7. For a translation of this page, see Appendix 9.4. In Kerala, a Hebrew lithic inscription using a chronogram, inscribed on the front wall of the Jewish synagogue in North Paravūr, was interpreted by T.K. Joseph. It gives ‘*huslam*’ (Hebrew) as the year (1615) in which the synagogue was built. For details, see Joseph 1930:166-7.

⁶²² These foundational narratives are treated at length by the Portuguese historian Diego de Couto (writing in the latter part of the 16th century)⁶²² and Archbishop Roz (1604). Similarly, Gouvea, prefaces his account of the Synod of Diamper with an early history of the SCM (1606:14-20), mentioning Knai Thoma (‘Armenian named Thome Cana’), Cheraman Perumal (Xarão Perumal), and the copper-plate charter.

The significance of 345 is that it pre-dates the establishment of the CotE, which appears to be an anomaly for claims that the SCMs were always Nestorian. La Croze (1724) was the first to challenge this date (cited by Hough 1839 Vol.I:95-97). Hough himself dated the migration to precisely to 780 (1839 Vol.1:94), Whitehouse (1873:48) dates it firmly to 800, and the Jesuit historian Ferroli (1939:63) dates it to ‘the eighth and ninth centuries’. These historians acknowledge that Christianity must have arrived earlier, through unrecorded arrivals of merchants or refugees, a view that is reiterated by Robert Frykenberg who proposes successive waves of refugees and settlers arriving in Malabar, resulting from the ‘Great Persian Persecutions that stretched from 340-401’ (2010:107-8). Perczel argues that the first migration could only have happened later, citing Cosmas Indicopleustes’s witness and Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy I’s letter as evidence that they ‘belonged to the jurisdiction of the Catholicos Patriarch of the East from at least the sixth century’ (Perczel 2009:200-201). Hough suggests that the Jacobite narrative of a 345 migration is a confusion of dates with the later 9th century migration, for which records still exist (Hough 1839 Vol.I:109).

6.1.3 Mani

The identity of the person named as ‘Manikka-vachagar’ is significant for dating the events. The Jacobite interpretation that this refers to 3rd century Persian Mani⁶²³ (or one of his disciples) supports the 345 date for the Edessan migration, because his persecution of the Christians in southern India was said to have triggered that migration.⁶²⁴

Although SCM sources consistently mention the figure of Mani, not all sources refer to him as ‘Mānikkā-vāchakar’: Pukadiyil (1869:109) refers to him as ‘Maneekkasa’ and the Syriac version of the MV refers to him as ‘Manik-boshr’, to which, in his Dutch translation, Visscher adds the epithet ‘*Tovenar*’ (=‘sorcerer’) (Drury 1862:106) indicating the term Mānikkā-vāchakar was not universally applied. In JSC sources, without exception, this term appears to be followed by the epithet ‘the sorcerer’.

⁶²³ The historical figure of Mani claimed that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ, and that he himself was either the new Messiah or the last Prophet. He performed supernatural feats and converted many to Manichaeism, including for a short time, the Persian Emperor Sapor I. He was put to death on the orders of the same emperor in 277.

⁶²⁴ In the Kandanad Chronicle, see Cheeran 2008:28.

According to the Kandanad Chronicle (Cheeran 2008:28), the distinct community present in the Malabar region known as ‘*Mānigrāmmākkār*’ up to the 19th century, were a part of the original SCM who had renounced Christianity and adopted Mani’s teachings. This chronicle also recounts how out of the 164 families of Christians in the 2nd-3rd century AD, 96 families separated themselves because ‘they renounced the Lord and adhered to Mānikkā-vāchakar, having learnt the *pānjākṣaram* (=Five-syllabic-chant) and such other doctrines from him. They came to be known as ‘*Mānigrāmmākkār*’, and so they are called to this day.’⁶²⁵

Perczel, in his critical edition of the Syriac version of MV, argues that the mention of ‘Manikka-vachagar’ refers not to the Persian Mani, but a 9th century Hindu saint, who converted Buddhists to Hinduism. He asserts that these ‘Buddhists’ were actually Christians of that region, when Manikka-vachagar is reported to have ‘vanquished’ Buddhists from Sri Lanka through debate, he speculates that this might have included persecution of the Christians in Coromandel, forcing them to leave their homeland. On the basis that this poet Manikka-vachagar lived in the 9th century, he moves the Edessan migration to the 9th century (Perczel 2009:199-200).

While the SCM narratives of the third century date for Mani’s arrival and the apostasy of the St. Thomas Christians are supported by some historians (Whitehouse (1873:47), and some accept only that the Christians on the Coromandel coast suffered persecution ca. 293 without naming the agency (Frykenberg 2010:108-110), yet others (Wilmschurst 2011:16-17) reject them altogether. Wilmschurst asserts that Mani never came to southern India, and that the other related details of the SCM foundational

⁶²⁵ Whitehouse treats the subject of *Mānigrāmmākkār* extensively (1873:47-54), stating: ‘Their connection with the orthodox Syrians is a curious and well supported fact’. He observes that small enclaves of *Mānigrāmmākkār* were seen in the late-19th century, in Thiruvithamcode, Kollam, Kayamkulam, Mannar, Kadmatom (1873:48-52), and further that even from early ages, they are thought to have been ostracized by both the Hindus and the Christians of Malabar as they represented ‘a mongrel system, a patchwork of Christian heresy and Magian superstition’ (1873:54), and that their repeated attempts to re-join either the Syrian or Hindu communities were blocked by those communities. Whitehouse also mentions how the C.M.S. missionary Benjamin Bailey (early 19th century) met four families of *Mānigrāmmākkār* in Kadamattom, and found some of them still practising ‘sorcery’ (1873:50-51). At the Synod of Diamper, Archbishop Menezes refers to a certain book in Malabar in which ‘there are likewise strange names of devils.....it contains also many superstitious exorcisms for the casting out of devils.....which is very common in this diocese’. See the Acts of Diamper, Session III, Decree 14 (Zacharia 1994:103). See also Whitehouse 1873:51 where he discusses this Decree as a reference to Manichaeian texts still in use in Malabar at the time of Diamper (1599). Details of the four different copper plate charters granted to four different communities have been studied by T K Joseph, and are summarised in Appendix 12.

narrative of St Thomas and Edessan migration are myths created in Edessa, using the names of Mani's three disciples (Addai, Mari and Thomas), that were subsequently transferred to Malabar, and this assertion will be examined in the next section (6.1.4) on Knai Thoma.

The possibility of Manichaeans visiting South India, based on the link between trade routes and the spread of religious ideas, has been argued by a number of Mani scholars (Deeg and Gardner 2009:12-13,⁶²⁶ Kahle 1941:190, and Gnoli 1987:160-166, cited in Pulikkunnel 1999:53). T.K Joseph cites an ancient Malayalam *ola* manuscript from the Karuthedathu family, which provides a detailed account of these events. This *ola* states that in 293, persecution by the Chola king forced the St. Thomas Christians of Kaveri-poompattanam on the east coast to migrate by ship to Kollam on the west coast, where they settled amongst Christians there, and that in 315, there was a second wave of persecution in Kollam which was initiated by Mani, reducing the number of Christians further (Joseph 1931:121).⁶²⁷ Joseph mentions another group of Christians in Tiruvancode (or Thiruvithamcode) who call themselves '*Tarutaykkal*' who 'say that their ancestors came there from Tamil country, soon after St. Thomas's evangelisation of Mylapore' (Joseph 1931:122-23).⁶²⁸ The CMS missionary, the Rev. Joseph Peet having studied the term, concluded that they were a 'class of steadfast confessors' of the True Faith, in this instance that of the Syrian Church of Antioch.⁶²⁹

Examining these diverse aspects of the SCM narratives and their related documents such as their different sets of Copper-plate grants, a clearer picture emerges. It is that the St. Thomas Christians who apostatised to Manicheanism were, rather than being marginalised or persecuted as 'heretics' or 'apostates' as was seen in the general Christian context in the Levant, in the Kerala such Christian doctrinal distinctions

⁶²⁶ 'The circumstances of Mani's journey to India have to be collected from different rather fragmentary sources but it seems clear that it took place in the period between 240 and 242 C.E.' (Deeg, M. & Gardner, I. 2009:12-13).

⁶²⁷ A transcript of part of this is available in Joseph 1929 Appendix 2. For a translation (by Sarah Knight) of this transcript into English, see Appendix 8.1.

⁶²⁸ *Tarutāykkal* according to Joseph (1931) is a corruption of the term *dhariyākkal* (=non-wearers), a term used to distinguish them from those who accepted Mani's teachings, and alluding to their refusal to wear the sacred ash of panacean properties distributed by Mani. The text recounts how, faced with persecution, this group also chose rather to abandon their country on the east coast and settle in Thiruvithamcode on the west coast.

⁶²⁹ Cited by the Rev. H. Gundert 1844:146.

appear to have been irrelevant, the kings treatment of both being more even-handed. The Manichaeans were also able to procure for themselves privilege and protection as a separate ‘caste’ called ‘*Manigrammakkar*’ (=People of the Village of Mani), and this community appears to have continued to exist at least until the late-19th century. The earliest European attempt to interpret the term is seen in a note by the CMS missionary the Rev. Joseph Peet of Mavelikara, that they were: ‘disciples of Mani, a colony of Manicheans, such as the Arabian travellers found in Ceylon’ (Gundert 1844:146).

According to Whitehouse who treats the subject of *Manigrammakkar* extensively (1873:47-54), ‘Their connection with the orthodox Syrians is a curious and well supported fact’. Whitehouse reports that small enclaves of *Manigrammakkar* were seen in the 19th century, in Thiruvithamcode, Kollam, Kayamkulam, Mannar, Kad Mattom (1873:48-52). The copper-plate grants they acquired, still extant, are known as ‘*Iravi Korten Cheppedukal*’ (=Copper-plates of Iravi Corten), when read in this context acquire significance, meaning and coherence without the confusion seen in some analyses.⁶³⁰

However, even from early ages, the Manichaeans are seen to have been ostracized by both the Hindus and the Christians of Malabar, as they represented ‘a mongrel system, a patchwork of Christian heresy and Magian superstition’ (Whitehouse 1873:54). They were stymied in their repeated attempts to re-join either the SCM or Hindu communities. The C.M.S. missionary Benjamin Bailey (early 19th century) met four families of *Manigrammakkar* in Kadamattom, and found some of them still practising ‘sorcery’ (1873:50-51). Arguably, it was the contents of one of their texts that Menezes excoriated in Diamper as containing: ‘.... strange names of devils.....it contains also many superstitious exorcisms for the casting out of devils.....which is very common in this diocese’.⁶³¹

⁶³⁰ T K Joseph (1930:5, 201-4) made a study of four related extant sets of Copper-plate charters granted by Kerala kings, disentangling their ‘giver-recipient’ status. The first one he assesses as given to the Jewish community, the second and fourth to the Syrian Christians, and the third to the *Manigrammakkar*. His findings are summarised in Appendix 12. He also argues that two sets of charters were given to the Syrian Christians after the arrival of Mar Sabor and Aphroth in 825, which

⁶³¹ Acts of Diamper, Session III, Decree 14 (Zacharia 1994:103). See Whitehouse 1873:51 where he discusses this as a reference to Manichaean texts still in use at the time of Diamper.

6.1.4 Knai Thoma

In most Jacobite sources presented in Chapter 4, Knai Thoma (or Thomas of Cana) was a key individual in the Edessan migration. He was the merchant from Jerusalem who was asked by the Bishop of Edessa to lead the migration party to Malabar, and won the charter of privileges for the community from the king Cheraman Perumal (1771 *ola*: Section 8, Pukadiyil 1869:113).⁶³² Kandanad Chronicle gives a detailed narrative of his commissioning, arrival, and establishment of the community in Malabar (Cheeran 2008:28-31).⁶³³ In the SCM narrative, the term *Mar Thoma slīhā* is used to denote the Apostle exclusively, *slīhā*, meaning ‘Apostle’ in Syriac. The merchant Thoma in contrast, is consistently denoted as ‘*Knai Thoma*’, the term ‘Knai’ meaning ‘merchant’,⁶³⁴ who is mentioned as such in a number of the Jacobite sources, as seen in Chapter 4.

His identity has been the subject of a number of alternative propositions. Mundadan summarises the different accounts given by Portuguese writers in 16 and 17th centuries (Mundadan 1984:92-5), mentioning Correa and describing as an ‘Armenian merchant’ (Mundadan 1984:91), a point Hough also advocated (Hough 1839 Vol.I:94). However, as Whitehouse (1873:60) explains, this as an error with the Portuguese interpreting ‘Aramaeus’ (=Syrian) as ‘Armenian’, noting that the Malabar Christians are known as ‘Syrians’ and not ‘Armenians’, and the liturgical language they use is Syriac, not Armenian.

Hough reports that Assemani ‘laboured hard to throw discredit upon this Armenian merchant...’, by stating that Knai Thoma was not a merchant but a ‘Nestorian bishop’ and dates his arrival to c.800.⁶³⁵ Citing Gouvea, La Croze, Assemani and Le Bas⁶³⁶, Hough also agrees that Knai Thoma was a Nestorian bishop or merchant (Hough 1839 Vol.1:72-73, 92-97 and footnote p.96).

⁶³² See Chapter 4.2.1 for more details of the Jacobite sources on Knai Thoma.

⁶³³ A translation of relevant sections of the Chronicle is given in Appendix 9.1.

⁶³⁴ Jacobite accounts do not seem to contain any reference to the Manichaean disciple Thomas, and so the need to distinguish him from the other two Thomases does not arise.

⁶³⁵ Hough 1839 Vol.1:96.

⁶³⁶ Le Bas, in *Life of Bishop Middleton* states that Knai Thoma was deputed to Malabar by the Nestorian Patriarch Timotheus (Le Bas 1831, as cited in Hough).

Mani also had a disciple called ‘Thomas’⁶³⁷, and some 19th century writers (Hunter 1886:277, have suggested that the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar most likely confused this Thomas (disciple of Mani) with Thomas the Apostle, as well as a third Thomas, the merchant of Jerusalem referred in Syrian sources as Knai Thoma. On the basis of this, Burnell (1873:3-5) and Hunter (1886:230-237) put forward the argument that the interrelated narratives of the Thomasine evangelisation of Malabar, the Manichaean apostasy and the Edessan migration were unreliable. Wilmshurst comments:

‘Scholars have long noticed the coincidence that three of Mani’s foremost disciples were called Addai, Mari and Thomas. It used to be believed that Mani named his followers after their Christian counterparts, the apostles of Mesopotamia, Babylonia and India. There is good reason to believe that exactly the reverse happened. The Manicheans were the first to bear these hallowed names, and third- and fourth-century clerics in Edessa, alarmed at the name recognition these detested pioneers enjoyed both in the Roman Empire and Persia, appropriated the reputations of the three Manichean disciples and relaunched them as Christian missionaries. Aptly, the myth-makers despatched Doubting Thomas to remote India’ (Wilmshurst 2011:18). Others have also argued that the names of Mani’s disciples were appropriated by later Orthodox Christians.⁶³⁸

A hundred years later, the Portuguese Jesuit historian Monteiro D’ Aguiar assigned a Manichaean identity to Knai Thoma and his cohort of settlers from Mesopotamia to Malabar (Aguiar 1930:170a). Aguiar’s account has numerous erroneous statements, which were robustly challenged (p.186b),⁶³⁹ Aguiar’s account appears to be the source

⁶³⁷ Mani is said to have had twelve Apostles and 72 Evangelists, mirroring those of Christ, introducing confusion equally among the Christians and later scholars.

⁶³⁸ Drijvers argues that the legend of the Apostle Addai converting King Abgar was created by Orthodox Christians to ‘outbid the local Manichaean community’, in order to counter the influence of Mani in Edessa (Drijvers 1996 *Early Syriac Christianity: Some Recent Publications* pp165).

⁶³⁹ D’Aguiar’s article, in Portuguese, was published in the *Epoca* Lisbon, (undated, ca.1925-29) with Hosten’s English translation appearing in 1930. Hosten, also a Jesuit, in his extended footnotes challenges Aguiar on numerous counts, and both receive further critical treatment in T.K. Joseph’s Notes appended thereafter. Aguiar also states that Kani Thoma had two wives, a Palestinian and a native Malabarian, (p.171a, and Hosten’s rejection p.186b), which is not supported in any of the sources of the Jacobite Syrian Christians. See Kerala Society Papers, Series 4, 1930:169-200. Hosten also gives a comprehensive account of

that was picked up by historians of the subsequent period of the 20th century, ascribing validity to numerous inaccuracies.

Gillman and Klimkeit, on the other hand, accept a number of key elements of the SCM account regarding the Edessan migration. They present three visits from abroad: ‘the definite one is that of Joseph of Edessa in AD 345’.⁶⁴⁰ They also recognise Knai Thoma as one of the visitors, but date him to the 8th century.⁶⁴¹

6.1.5 Cheraman Perumal

The local king, Cheraman Perumal, as an historical figure, is an integral part of the narrative for the Edessan migration in the Jacobite sources, as mentioned in Chapter 4: *Niraṇam Chronicle* (Manalil 2002:115), *Kandanad Chronicle* (Cheeran 2008:31), Philip (1950:85-6) and Zachariah 1973:32). He secured for the Christian community a safe and honourable position in his kingdom, which was critical for their survival and flourishing. The Kerala historian Sreedhara Menon questions this detail about Cheraman Perumal, arguing that there is no evidence for this king at this period (1991:115). He bases his argument on the absence of references to Perumal in the texts of travellers to Malabar, notably, Marco Polo, Ibn Batuta, Friar Odoric, Nicolo Conti and Abd al Razaak, travellers who visited Malabar in the late medieval period. Couto (1616), writing prior to the Jacobite sources presented in this study, cites ‘Brahmins of Calicut’, who refer to a king by the name Xarao (Cheraman) Perumal, who is linked to the SCM narrative of the Edessan migration and the granting of privileges to Knai Thoma.⁶⁴² Thurston (1909 Vol.II:467-8) in his interviews with different castes and tribes of Kerala, records how this Perumal was integral to their legends as well.

⁶⁴⁰ Gillman and Klimkeit 1999:167.

⁶⁴¹ The other one they refer to is by Bishop Theophilus in 354, a visit which does not appear in any SCM accounts, and they accept that it is ‘contested’ (Gillman and Klimkeit 1999:167).

⁶⁴² the ‘best’ and ‘most famous’ of all of them, was ‘so affectionate towards the Christians of S. Thomas the Apostle who lived in Cranganore that he did not do anything without them’ (Barros & Couto 1616:523-524). For a translation of these pages from Portuguese into English, see Appendix 9.5. Couto also reports that he was told that Cheraman Perumal adopted Christianity, went on pilgrimage to Mylapore, where he died and was buried. He asserts that this would have been one of the bodies found by the Portuguese in Mylapore in the 16th century.

6.1.6 The Knai Thoma copper plates

According to Portuguese accounts of the 16-17th centuries, the last record of the plates was that they were in the possession of the Franciscan missionaries in the mid-16th century, from which point they have not been traced (Monteiro D'Aguiar 1930:172-3).⁶⁴³ Aguiar's analysis, based on Portuguese accounts, confirms the salient factors regarding the plates, (their contents, date, the donor, and recipients) as believed by the JSC and mentioned in their sources.

Syrian sources do not give the exact text of the royal grant, only enumerating the honours and privileges granted to them by the king, which may have been a part of the copper plate text. Zachariah gives his list, copied from the Chalakuzhy family's *ola* manuscript (1973:33-40). The list in the 1771 *ola* (Appendix 3 paragraph 15) also includes the '17 Castes' assigned to the Syrians, to be their helpers and associates for mutual protection and welfare (Appendix 3 para 16 and 17).

From the 18th century, historians questioned whether the Knai Thoma plates ever existed, as neither the Dutch nor the British were able to locate them in Kochi.⁶⁴⁴ They presented alternative accounts, which appear to confuse the Knai Thoma copper plate charter with a later charter (of 825), thus degrading their historic significance to the SCM in the 4th century. Milne Rae makes no mention of the Knai Thoma plates as a distinct set, speculating that king Stanu Ravi Gupta who gave the Kollam plates (825) was also called Cheraman Perumal, with the inference that the existence of Knai Thoma plates and the Edessan migration itself as narrated by the SCM were fictitious (Milne Rae 1892:155-156).⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴³ For a detailed account of the plates and their disappearance in the 16th century, see Aguiar *Kerala Society Papers* (1930:169-193), appended with a critical evaluation by Hosten and T.K. Joseph. A similar citation of sources, also in Mundadan 1984 Vol.1:90-98, and Kollaparambil 2015:145-154.

⁶⁴⁴ Buchanan mentions how Adrian Moens, Governor of Kochi (1770) made a thorough search for the Edessan plates 'and was satisfied that they were irrecoverably lost, or rather, he adds, that *they never existed*' (1814:142).

⁶⁴⁵ Although he claims to seek chronological accuracy, Hough also appear to make this confusion, conflating the Knai Thoma plates with the Kollam plates (see extended treatment in 1839 VolII:102-3,107-9).

According to Aguiar however, the existence of these plates was noted by Portuguese and early Dutch sources of the 16th-18th centuries (De Couto, writing between 1580 and 1616, and Roz 1604).⁶⁴⁶ Visscher reported that he saw a copy of the plates when he was in Kochi between 1715 and 1724 (Drury 1862:114-5). Commenting on their disappearance, Catholic historians give an account that they were pawned by Bishop Mar Jacob (d.1550), and were then acquired by the Portuguese Franciscans.⁶⁴⁷ The general belief is that the Franciscans took them to Portugal.⁶⁴⁸ Although the exact manner in which this vital monument changed hands from the SCM to the Portuguese Franciscans may never be known, it is possible their bishop Mar Jacob (who had apostatised to Rome) was persuaded to hand them over. It is a well-documented fact that having been rejected by the SCM, he spent his last years (1545 to 1550) in a Franciscan monastery (Aguiar 1930:176). The full contents of the plates may never be known, although Syrian sources give details of parts of the text (Zachariah 1973:33-40). Roz's copy is the earliest extant translation of the plates, and is consistent with the narrative that is prevalent among the SCM.⁶⁴⁹

The most reliable complete translation and annotation of these plates appears to be that of the 19th century British scholar of the Tamil language, C.M. Whish. Whish observes on the close parallel between the contents of these plates and, a) granite-slab inscription found at a temple (Editorial in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*

⁶⁴⁶ Also discussed in Payyappally 2016:31.

⁶⁴⁷ Payyappally (Keralan Catholic priest) gives a lengthier account of their disappearance (2016:31), summarised as: Mar Jacob pawned them to an un-named person as collateral for a loan of 20 cruzados because of his 'great poverty'; redeemed by the Treasurer, de Sequeira, who had shown them to Alphonso de Sousa, Governor of Kochi, when they were translate into Portuguese. This translation was copied by Roz in his manuscript *Relação da Serra* (A Narrative about Malabar), which is now in the British Library: MSBL Add 9853, ff.86-99. From this point they were lost. Roz's copy attests that the plates were granted to the merchant Thoma 1200 years before Roz's writing his account in 1604. Roz also maintained that the church in Kodungallur was built by merchant Thoma on land he bought from Cheraman Perumal (Mundadan 1984 Vol.1:110).

⁶⁴⁸ See Buchanan 1813:141-143 for a description of a copy he claims to have found in Kochi.

⁶⁴⁹ The most recent exhaustive search for the Knai Thoma plates in Portugal appears to have been done in ca.1925-6. According to Hosten and Joseph (1927b), a certain Keralan barrister Mr. Panikkar, friend of Joseph, at the latter's behest, 'ransacked' the National Archives of Lisbon, the Torre do Tombo with the help of its Director General, without any success in locating the plates. See Hosten and Joseph 1927b:185-6.

1831 Vol.VI:11),⁶⁵⁰ and b) those in the possession of the Jews of Kochi.⁶⁵¹ ‘Cherumān Perumāl is not the name of an individual, but of every member of a race of kings of the Chera dynasty’.

6.1.7 Northist-Southist distinction

The Northist-Southist distinction is important for the SCM, who maintain that it was based on the original settlement of the combined Edessan and native community of Christians in *Māhādevārpattanam*, near Kodungallur (Hosten 1930:182-3), but the details of the manner of settlement is found only in the Jacobite sources, as mentioned earlier (Section 6.1.(e)).⁶⁵² That this distinction was being practiced at least up to 1599 is seen by the fact that at the Synod of Diamper, Menezes demanded that such distinctions be removed and that the SCM operate as one entity.

Scholars have questioned the origin of the terms and the separate identities denoted by these terms, as being of little consequence, tending to attribute them to simple geographical explanations, such as north or south of the river (Mundadan 1984:97), or none at all (Hough 1839 Vol.1:318). Malekandathil in his edition of Gouvea, doubts this aspect of the narrative: ‘this story seems to have been invented in the medieval period to explain the rivalry between the indigenous St. Thomas Christians and the immigrant Christians from West Asia, who reached Kerala under the leadership of Thomas of Cana’, maintaining that the story was fabricated ‘to carve out a pre-eminent position’ in society and ‘to legitimize their socio-economic empowerment’ (Malekandathil 2003:20 fn. 26). While it is difficult to evaluate this explanation, it remains the case that the migrant and indigenous communities integrated and, as far as is known, enjoyed the same privileges. Whitehouse is an exception to the overall

⁶⁵⁰ The reference is to a copy of the Knai-Thoma plates, engraved on a granite-slab and laid face-down at the north-gate of the Tirvannur Temple, Kodungallur (T.K. Joseph, cited in Kollaparambil 2015:151. Kollaparambil also quotes from the *Pānān Pāṭṭu* ballad, reiterating the same.).

⁶⁵¹ Whish’s text appears more reliable than Archbishop Ros’s because, while Whish’s short text bears the hallmarks of a royal decree, Ros’ is a lengthy narrative. See critical edition of Ros’ text in Aguiar 1930:180-82.

⁶⁵² The distinction is maintained to the present day, and whether Jacobite or Romo-Syrian, they are under separate dioceses: the Knanaya Archdiocese of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church based in Chingavanam, or the Kottayam Eparchy (Knanaya) of the Syro-Malabar Church (Romo-Syrian).

tendency to dismiss the distinction (1873:60-74), accepting the distinctions between the two communities, but attributing the origin of this to two different branches of Knai Thoma's family.⁶⁵³

6.1.8 Social impact of the Edessan migration

SCM sources point to the presence among them a community called the '*Knanites*' as an inescapable element of their narrative and social history.⁶⁵⁴ They emphasise that the Edessan migration of 345 brought gains that were highly significant to them as it was to affect all aspects of their religious history and social identity from that point onwards.⁶⁵⁵ Mar Joseph, Bishop of Edessa,⁶⁵⁶ is believed to have re-instated priesthood to the same families as appointed by St. Thomas, Shankarapuri and Pakalomattom.⁶⁵⁷ Historians doubt that by the Knai Thoma charter, Cheraman Perumal conferred 'any special privileges on the Christians as a body' (Whitehouse 1873:4)⁶⁵⁸, but the SCM maintain that it was precisely the privileges and honours granted by Cheraman Perumal that became the foundation on which their safety was ensured and status elevated in society.⁶⁵⁹ By the granting of his own title to Knai Thoma, they are thought to have received the title '*Māppiḷa*' in Malayalam [from *mahā-piḷḷa* = 'honoured son' or 'royal son'] (Pukadiyil 1869:119, Aguiar 1930:180, Ferroli, citing Gouvea, 1939 vol.1:75), and royal privileges (such as riding on elephants

⁶⁵³ 'All Syrian Christians now were descended from the two branches of the merchant's family' (Whitehouse 1873:61), one descended from his Jerusalemite wife and the other from his Malabarian wife (or concubine).

⁶⁵⁴ The community (or at least a part of it) claiming descent from the original Edessans of 345 are known as '*Knanaya*' (Anglicised as '*Knanite*'), corrupted from '*Cananite*'. Though doctrinally divided as '*Jacobite Knanites*' and '*Catholic Knanite*', they are unified in their practice of endogamy.

⁶⁵⁵ Kulathramannil highlights the Knanites' cultural practices as different from those of their native Jacobite or Catholic counterparts, such as those of betrothal, marriage, and blessings at the death-bed (2000:2-5). The Jacobite Knanites had their distinctness formalised when a separate Diocese was created (early 20thc.) From when the Catholic Knanite community also gained its separate Archdiocese (late 20thc.) their distinct identity has become widely acknowledged. See also, Cherucheril (1982) and Kollaparambil (1992).

⁶⁵⁶ Whether Edessa had a bishop at this early date is questionable, but according to Pratten, there were Christians 'in sufficiently large numbers in Edessa to have had a bishop, presbyters and deacons in the 3rd century' (1871:81).

⁶⁵⁷ Whitehouse (1873:188-9). The other two, Kalli and Kaliankavu, of the St. Thomas narrative, are not seen mentioned any more. The only family where priesthood is mentioned as continuing into the 16th century when the Portuguese encountered them, appear to be Pakalomattom.

⁶⁵⁸ Whitehouse conflates the donor kings, donee merchants, and the years of the different copper-plates, indicating the level of inaccuracy that has crept into otherwise reliable literature (1873:3-5). Similar conflation errors seen from Mingana 1926:75 to Andrade 2018:19-20, in one instance to the extent of interpreting the first SCM charter as granted to Thomas the Apostle (Aguiar 1930:184).

⁶⁵⁹ Pukadiyil 1869:114-8.

etc.). They were also granted royal protection as well as religious and commercial freedoms (Aguiar 1930:181). In allowing foreigners to arrive periodically and be the bishops and spiritual instructors of his Christian subjects, the king appeared not to have feared for the integrity and prosperity of his state, and the Christians appear to have returned this favour with absolute fealty to him.⁶⁶⁰ Knai Thoma and bishop Mar Joseph of Edessa, in conjunction with local community-elders, are also credited with the establishment of the hereditary office of the Archdeacon to govern them in temporal matters. From the list of honours bestowed on them, it also appears that their social rank was next only to that of the kings and Brahmins of the country, in that they were allowed to enjoy all the symbols of Malabar's social elite at the time, such as wearing gold, riding elephants, freedom from heavy taxation, hunting, musical instruments, and ululations and cheers that embellished their progress.

Among European historians, W.J. Richards recounts the Edessan migration in full, as is given in the Jacobite sources (1908:83-88).⁶⁶¹ Hough remarked that while the SCM lived modest lives on ordinary days, they were disposed to display these honours at their church-festivals and weddings.⁶⁶² Aguilar mentions the prosperity and wealth at the time of the Portuguese arrival (1930:177). The SCM, in return, gained social esteem by their attention to religious duties, truthful dealings, martial prowess, and loyalty to their local rulers. These privileges were jealously guarded, and infringements or dilutions of them vigorously resisted by the SCM (Ferroli, citing Gouvea 1939vol.1:75fn5, Malekandathil 2003:18). As Gouvea has noted: 'Presently the Christians feel a lot for not having these manuscripts⁶⁶³ with which they used to

⁶⁶⁰ The Jacobite sources repeatedly speak of how they petitioned their local kings in moments of need, and the kings granted them their appeal. The kings' betrayals of the Christians appear to have started only when they were caught up in the web of treaties with the Portuguese, or succumbing to bribes, as seen in Menezes' case before Diamper.

⁶⁶¹ Richards does not give his source. One of the first CMS Missionary Benjamin Bailey's account (1818:317-320) gives the Edessan migration only briefly, referring to them as 'Nazarites who came from Jerusalem', and dating it to 345. An English publication of such a detailed narrative fitting the date is yet to be discovered.

⁶⁶² Hough Vol.I:318-329 gives a lengthy account of the life and manner of the SC, and observes that it was the honourable position accorded to the SC bishops by the native people and kings, that fuelled the Jesuits desire to appropriate that position (p.319).

⁶⁶³ By the time of the Synod of Diamper in 1599, Portuguese authorities, including Archbishop Roz and historian Gouvea were aware of the permanent loss of the Knai Thoma plates.

defend themselves before infidel kings who were tampering with their privileges....’ (Malekandathil 2003:17).

6.2 Kollam Migration of 825

The SCM sources mention the arrival of a second party of settlers from Mesopotamia (names of places are not given) led by the merchant Sabrisho (or Sabor Isho), and accompanied by two bishops Mar Sabor and Mar Aphroth.⁶⁶⁴ They too brought a large group of settlers, gaining favours and a copper-plate-inscribed charter of rights and privileges from the king of Kollam settled in that city. As mentioned in Chapter 4 5.2.(c), the 1771 *ola* (paragraph 17), Niraṇam (Manalil 2002:115), Kandanad (Cheeran 2008:31) and Philip (1950:85-6) narrate this migration concisely, but details are found in Zachariah, mentioning that the two bishops were known as *kandīšānal* (plural of Malayalam *kandīšā*, from the Syriac *qādīšē* = Holy Ones) (Zachariah (1973:43).⁶⁶⁵

This second migration is generally uncontested by scholars⁶⁶⁶, primarily because the ‘charter of privileges’ granted to Sabrisho, which is extant, and known as the ‘Kollam copper-plates’.⁶⁶⁷ According to Joseph (1930:197), the text is in Nagari (Vattezhuthu) with some words in Grandha, while the signatures are in Kufic, Pahlavi and Hebrew. Winckworth in his study of the Pahlavi signatures on the Kollam plates (1930:320-323) mentions that each of the ten signatures have a first name and a second name, with an *izafat* showing the relationship between the two, (as in ‘son of’) and some bearing the Syriac word ‘the *Suryōyē*’ (=belonging to the Syrian, meaning the Jacobite, Church). The Persian Crosses of Malabar (discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.4.7) also the bear Sabrisho’s name, as the individual who restored the crosses, and have been dated to the 9th century. Sabrisho, together with the bishops Mar Sabor and Mar

⁶⁶⁴ Pukadiyil 1869:119-120.

⁶⁶⁵ Their accomplishments in Malabar are mentioned in Chapter 4.5.2 (c) and in 5.4.5.

⁶⁶⁶ Malekandathil 2001 treats the subject of pre-Portuguese settlements in Malabar in *St Thomas Christians and the Indian Ocean: 52 AD to 1500*.

⁶⁶⁷ The Kollam Copper-plates have been the subject of many studies (Keloo Nair: 1859: 47; Joseph 1929: 33-34, Cereti 2009, and ongoing study at De Montfort University, UK). The plates are in the (Reformed) Mar Thoma Church Metropolitan’s archives in Thiruvalla.

Aphroth are, according to the Jacobite sources, instrumental in restoring the SCM to a state of greater security and social recognition and freedom.

Although most Jacobite sources treat the subject of this second cohort of Mesopotamian settlers with extreme brevity, they are consistent on the location of their settling (Kollam), the names of the three leaders of the party (Sabrisho, Sabor and Aphroth), and date the event to 825.⁶⁶⁸ However, the mention of a conflict between the Arab and indigenous merchants, especially the SCM and the Jews, the consequent burning of the SCM's chief cities of Kodungallur and Kollam in the 9th century, and the ensuing mass migration of the SCM, in the context of the arrival of the Kollam settlers, is detailed in (Jacobite priest) Yohannan's *History of Paravur church* (1919:32-33). Zachariah also mentions the mass migration of the SCM as a result of an Arab attack on Kodungallur, when 'the Christians, along with their king, moved to Udayamperoor' (1973:45).⁶⁶⁹ The sources make no reference to any causal link between the two. Whitehouse (1873:76) discusses this at length, and speculates on the possibility that this destruction of Kodungallur and Kollam initiated the second migration, and that Kollam was re-founded after the arrival of Sabrisho and party. This is not substantiated by the fact that although known by other names (see Yule and Burnell 751-3 for a long list), the city of Kollam existed before the date of 825, and also indicated by the existence of a king who received the party and conferred on them the copper-plate grants. The commencement of the Malayalam Era in 825 suggests that this event was highly significant, although there is no explicit link established between the event and the new era/calendar.

The pattern set by Cheraman Perumal in 345 seems to have been repeated in Kollam in 825, viz: the granting of land for the immigrant community to settle, freedom to build a church and a city, and the privilege of receiving episcopal visits from abroad to receive bishops and metropolitans. Parallels can also be drawn with the immigration of 345 re the 'personage of *Saur Īshō*' who led the party in 825, the composition of the immigrant cohort that arrived with him, and the grants received from the reigning king.

⁶⁶⁸ See Manalil (Niranam Chronicle)2002:115; Pukadiyil 1869:119120; Cheeran (Kandanad Chronicle) 2008:31; Philip 1950:94-5; Zachariah 1873:43-44.

⁶⁶⁹ Zachariah goes to great lengths to attest his source for this information as the venerable old *Thāḷiyōla grandham* of Chalakuzhy family, which he painstakingly copied in 1935, staying at a fellow Jacobite, 'Poothiottu Ilavarahil the late Sri Thankachen's house for about a month' (1973:44). See footnote 394.

What is notable however is that the new arrivals, rather than maintaining an endogamous exclusivity like the Edessans of 345, merged with the indigenous population. According to Jacobite sources, these two migrations and the bishops who accompanied them, were instrumental in the establishment of the first two episcopal seats in Malabar, that of Kodungallur and Kollam in 345 and 825 respectively, so that the St. Thomas Christians, from then onwards down to the 19th century, were designated as belonging to either of these two dioceses.⁶⁷⁰ The SCM also came to procure inalienable royal patronage and protection as well as social rights and privileges which were denied to other communities as a result of these two migrations.

According to Zachariah, it was bishops Sabor and Aphroth who re-established Udayamperoor as the new centre of SCM community when they conferred a new title on the dynastic Christian king (who had fled with the Christians from Kodungallur) as *udayampērūr vilwālvaṭṭattu yākkōbā svarūpattil ousep rājāvu* (=King Joseph of the Vilwalvattathu dynasty of the Jacobites) and crowned him in that city to rule over the SCM (1973:45). According to the Jacobite narratives, it appears that it was the linking of these events of 825 that enhanced the significance of the city of Udayamperoor as the temporal seat of power of the SCM, and not Kodungallur or Kollam. Although by the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498, the ‘dynasty of the Jacobites’ had become extinct and the SCM were ruled by the kings of Kochi, the historical fact that Archbishop Menezes chose Udayamperoor (or Diamper) to hold the Synod of 1599 appears to underscore the significance of this city, and thereby the Jacobite narrative.

The details of the Kollam migration were generally unchallenged up to the 17th century, the Jacobite narrative being repeated in Gouvea (Malekandathil 2003:18-22), and further in Mundadan (1984:90-8),⁶⁷¹ but Hough conflates the two migrations into one, adding details of the Edessan migration to the Kollam migration (Hough 1839

⁶⁷⁰ The term ‘diocese’ does not seem to have been used, but rather designated as places of origin. ‘Until 1867,’ Philip says, ‘when registration of deeds was introduced in Travancore, all their title-deeds of landed properties described the names of the executors and acceptors with the special mention of *Mahādevārpaṭṭanam* (Cranganore) or *Kurakkēnikkollam* (Quilon), as the case might be, to which the Syrians concerned claimed to belong’ (1950:95). The 19th century CMS missionary Peet also says: ‘the Syrians referred to themselves as ‘those of Kodungallur’ or ‘those of Kollam’ wherever they made their subsequent sojourns’, and they ‘ascribe their descent to either of the two colonies named above’.

⁶⁷¹ See Mundadan 1984:90-98 for details of 16th century Portuguese missionaries’ references to this event. Apart from the Roman Catholic missionaries’ tendency to ascribe a Nestorian identity to the 825 settlers and their bishops, their account is essentially similar to the Jacobite ones.

Vol:97-104), and makes no reference to the rights and privileges granted to the SCM by the king of Kollam (known as the Kollam copper-plates), thus appearing to write them out of the narrative history of the SCM.⁶⁷²

6.3 St Thomas and the foundational narrative

Narratives of the first introduction of Christianity to India by St. Thomas the Apostle are a fundamental trope held by SCM, whether Jacobite or Roman Catholic (Mundadan 1984:23-5). Section 6.1 of this chapter traced how according to this narrative, the events leading up to the Edessan migration, and the migration itself, were actuated by the pre-existence of a Christian community in Malabar from earlier times. The SCM explicitly invoked the memory of St Thomas, when the Bishop of Edessa instituted priesthood in Malabar in 345 and chose the same family of Pakalomattom and others that St Thomas had chosen, as mentioned in 1771 *ola* (paragraph 17), Kandanad (Cheeran 2008:31).

The St. Thomas mission sees varying treatment in the Jacobite sources, with some giving it the pared down version as in MV, but others with considerable detail, especially in the 1771 *ola* (paragraphs 5-8), Pukadiyil (1869:103-109), Kandanad Chronicle (Cheeran 2008:23-6), Philip (1950:29-34, 35-51) and Kaniamparambil (1983:93-100). Zachariah (1973:20-27) provides the most detailed account concerning the miracles performed by the Apostle in each of the seven Malabar locations. The appointment of priests from the families of Shakarapuri and Pakalomattom is also mentioned (Manalil 2008:291). The SCM ballads, called *Tomā-pārvam*⁶⁷³ and *mārgamkaḷippāṭṭā*⁶⁷⁴ provide extensive details of St Thomas'

⁶⁷² Malekandathil attributes this to the possibility of 'the tendencies and policies of colonial masters to destroy evidences pertaining to the history of the colonized, as a part of the venture to deny identity to the latter' (Malekandathil 2003:18 footnote24).

⁶⁷³ This epic poem was orally transmitted through the generations by the Maliyekal family, specially appointed to do so, and was written down first in 1601. (Mingana 1926:77fn3 gives a list of sources.) For a prose-paraphrasing of the first 270 lines of *Tomā-pārvam*, see Appendix 4.1.

⁶⁷⁴ See Appendix 4.2.

evangelical journeys, localised events and his martyrdom in Mylapore. The commemoration of his martyrdom is observed on the 18th of Dhanu (January) every year (Yohannan 1919:3).⁶⁷⁵

St Thomas's evangelical work and martyrdom in southern India is mentioned in various ancient texts, from Church Fathers and writers from the late-Antiquity to the late-Medieval period.⁶⁷⁶ *The Contendings of the Apostles*⁶⁷⁷, an ancient Coptic text, includes this tradition in its account of each of the Apostle's evangelical journeys and eventual martyrdom (Budge 1935:265-295).⁶⁷⁸

However, in general, scholars from the 18th century to the present-day challenge this SCM tradition and propose alternative accounts for the introduction of Christianity into Malabar. La Croze was one of the first, arguing that Christianity was introduced to Malabar not much long before 6th century, using Cosmas Indicopleustes' testimony on the presence of Christians in Malabar in the early 6th century (as cited in Hough 1839 Vol.I:72). Joseph Wrede, one of the first Anglican missionaries to visit Malabar, assigned the introduction of Christianity to 'Syrian adventurers' who came to Malabar in the 5th century (Wrede 1803:379). In an undated and un-ascribed letter Danish missionaries⁶⁷⁹ attributed introduction of Christianity in Malabar, firstly to the Alexandrian theologian Pantaenus, and subsequently to 'some bishops sent thither from Antioch' (Yeates 1818:147-150). In Kerr's report on the Syrians, he states that the actions 'of a certain Syrian preacher, named Thomas, have been by error ascribed

⁶⁷⁵ Yacoub III, citing earlier scholars, adds that the relics were installed in Edessa on the 22nd of June and later moved to a greater church built in the Apostle's name, in the time of Patriarch Phelabianus I of Antioch and the Metropolitan Korah of Urfa (Edessa), and further that in 442, Commander Anatole had the relics enclosed in a silver reliquary (1948:165).

⁶⁷⁶ See Medlycott 1934:18-161, and Gillman and Klimkeit 1999:161-2 for summaries of these texts.

⁶⁷⁷ From Wallis Budge's translation of ancient Coptic texts in the British Museum, published first in 1901.

⁶⁷⁸ Cureton, in his *Ancient Syriac Documents*, mentions a reference to St Thomas sending a letter from India in *Didascalia Apostolorum*⁶⁷⁸: 'what James had written from Jerusalem, and Simon from the city of Rome, and John from Ephesus, and Mark from the great Alexandria, and Andrew from Phrygia, and Luke from Macedonia, and Judas Thomas from India; that the epistles of an Apostle might be received and read in the Churches in every place' (Cureton 1864:32). The *Doctrine* also states that 'India, and all its own countries, and those bordering on it, event to the farthest sea, received the Apostle's Hand of Priesthood, from Judas Thomas, who was Guide and Ruler in the church which he built there, and ministered there' (Cureton 1864:33).

⁶⁷⁹ Written in answer to the British Church Missionary Society's enquiry with the Danish missions in Tranquebar, on the feasibility of Syrian and Anglican Churches uniting (cited in Thomas Yeates 1818:150).

to the Holy Apostle' (Yeates 1818:147-8).⁶⁸⁰ Hough put the question to scholarly examination and identified several problems (Hough 1839 Vol.I:32-68):

- travel to India was difficult until mid-1st century;
- commerce was in its infancy and only traders travelled great distances;
- the addition of China to the Apostle's travels made it less credible;
- the tradition was not accepted by early Greek writers such as Eusebius and Socrates;
- earlier historians do not give it much credibility;
- discrepancy about the location of the Apostle's martyrdom.

Hough's arguments were re-iterated by later historians, with the late 19th century seeing a succession of publications rejecting the St Thomas tradition of the SCM (Burnell 1873:2-4; Hunter 1886:235-6, Rae 1892:15). Milne Rae claimed that 'fitting localities have been invented' for the Apostle's activities, adding: 'we look in vain among the writing and monuments of the first five centuries for any attestation of the existence of a South Indian Church. No historical evidence, we submit, can be produced to show that such a Church was planted until the beginning of the sixth century', and ascribing what history there exists, to the 'phenomenon of tradition' (1892:24). Drury attributed it to confusion with Knai Thoma, the 4th century merchant, as discussed in section 6.1.3 (Drury 1862:89-90).⁶⁸¹ Through to the 20th and 21st centuries, alternative propositions for the arrival of Christianity in Malabar have been suggested, ranging from visiting bishops and traders (Mingana 1926:509-510), to refugees fleeing from Persia in the Sassanid period in the fourth century (Frykenberg 2010:108-110).

Wilmshurst rejects the authenticity of story of Gundophar's conversion, and that the Thomas legend of Malabar was only invented in the third century, in Edessa,⁶⁸² arguing that the Syrians of Kerala adopted the Thomasine foundation of their Church from Bardesanes' hagiographical *Acta Thomae*⁶⁸³ because when the Alexandrian

⁶⁸⁰ Rev Dr Kerr wrote this in 1806, for Lord Bentinck of the Government of Madras (Yeates 1818:192).

⁶⁸¹ Although Hough's account was influential on later historians, there were some who went against this trend of rejecting the Thomasine tradition. Generally, they are seen to be those who had visited Malabar and the key sites attached to the tradition, such as Visscher (1714-24), George B. Howard (1864), Whitehouse (1873), Richards (1908) and Thurston (1909).

⁶⁸² Mingana (1926:509-10) also proposes the same.

⁶⁸³ Bardasanes (154-222) wrote the *Acta* in Syriac at the beginning of the third century, possibly in Edessa (Klijn 2003:15).

doctor Pantanaeus visited Malabar in late second century, the Indian Christians appeared to have been ignorant of St. Thomas, and because of the contradictory traditions about the location of the Apostles relics (The Martyred Church, 2011:18-19).⁶⁸⁴ More recently, Andrade examines the SCM tradition and rejects the Thomasine tradition for similar reasons (2018:18-20). Conversely, it has been argued by others that the Bardesanes' account is more likely to have been based on the South Indian narrative (Farquhar 1927:35; Philip 1950:40-42; Hambye 1957:6).

Farquhar evaluated the evidence in the early 20th century and noted: 'Thirty years ago the balance of the probability stood absolutely against the story of the Apostolate of Thomas in India: We suggest that today the balance of probability is distinctly on the side of historicity' (Farquhar 1927:49). Etheridge (1846:150-3) similarly came to the conclusion that 'it appears that a Christian church was formed in India in the apostolic age itself', and Richardson (1908:94) also argues in favour of this view.

According to the sources of the Jacobite Syrian Christians examined in this study, St. Thomas is the only agent to whom their conversion to Christianity is ascribed, with only this name and the early date of 52 AD (when he is believed to have arrived in Malabar) recurring in their accounts, and without the mention of any other Apostle or agent being instrumental in this regard at any later period in their history. Narratives of St. Thomas' arrival, his evangelising mission, and his martyrdom in Mylapore are the only accounts that delineate the origins and evolution of the small community of Christians in southern India from which the SCM evolved in due course, and these appear to be as fundamental to their religious identity as the foundational beliefs held by the Coptic Church of Alexandria are in relation to St. Mark, or the Church of Rome are in relation to Saints Peter and Paul. This examination of the Jacobite sources underscores the strength of the tradition to the SCM's self-perception of their religious

⁶⁸⁴ The contradictory traditions allude to, firstly the Edessan one which maintains that the relics were removed to Edessa in the 4th century as witnessed by St. Ephrem, (Medlycott 1905:22-32 gives some of St. Ephrem's relevant hymns in translation), and secondly the Indian tradition of ongoing pilgrimage to Mylapore in the Medieval period as mentioned by diverse travellers (see Medlycott 1905:94 for a summary of eight such accounts from 590-1340). This contradiction was further compounded by early Portuguese Catholic friars reported in 1522, of their digging at the site and finding of a full set of bones outside along the north wall of the shrine, which led Jesuit historian Ferroli to suggest that south India was the scene of activities of two, or even three different 'St. Thomas' (Ferroli 1939 vol.1:73-4, 74fn.6).

identity and has shown that the Apostolic foundation is a tradition for the SCM which has been transmitted generationally without being added to or subtracted from.

6.4 Religious identity of the SCM

In the SCM articulation of history, the two migrations and St Thomas appear to be consistently reiterated referential points which frame their religious identity.

6.4.1 Impact of migrations on religious identity

St Thomas was a key figure in the foundational narrative of the Churches in both Edessa⁶⁸⁵ and Malabar. The Edessan recovery of St Thomas's relics in the fourth century indicates that they were aware of the Christians in southern India and that there was a crisis in Mylapore where his tomb was leading to the removal of the relics.⁶⁸⁶

The Edessan migration brought the 'Syrian' identity to the Christians of Malabar: the Syriac language, the liturgy, the doctrine, ecclesiastical structure and the link to rest of the Universal Church. Edessa occupied a central position in the initial growth of Eastern Christianity (Loosley 2012:84), although the ecclesiastical centre of the region was Antioch (Abdel Ahad 1948:176).⁶⁸⁷ Drijvers describes Edessa in the early centuries as 'a religious mosaic' where religious leaders 'engaged in heated debates and polemics' (Drijvers 1996:173).

Some aspects of the Syrian Church in Edessa can be related to its strong Jewish-Christian identity.⁶⁸⁸ As Brock notes, the early centuries of Syriac Christianity 'developed in a Semitic milieu' and that St Ephrem's hymns in the fourth century emanated 'from a truly Semitic form of Christianity' (Brock 1992:14-15). For the

⁶⁸⁵ 'The origins of the Church were claimed to lie with Jesus's 'twin brother', Judas Thomas, and with his disciple Addai', as recounted in the *Doctrine of Addai* (Gillman and Klimkeit 1999:32).

⁶⁸⁶ As seen in St Ephrem's hymns (Medlycott 1905:26-32). See Appendix 7.3 for some examples.

⁶⁸⁷ The 300 monasteries and thousands of monks brought the city fame as the Holy Mountain.(Abdel Ahad 1948:176).

⁶⁸⁸ For discussion of this Jewish-Christian identity in Syria, see Gillman and Klimkeit 1999:22-27, and particularly for Edessa pp33-36.

SCM, these echoes of the Jewish identity can be seen in practices such as singing the Psalms in alternating ranks, standing in prayer, sealing off the Sanctuary with a heavy brocaded curtain, the use of gold and silver vessels in the Sanctuary, the burning of incense, reciting set prayers while putting on each piece of Eucharistic vestment, censuring the altar to ‘purify’ it, and kissing its ‘horns’ as a symbol of ‘binding’ himself to it, the ‘Hourly Prayers’ at set hours of the day, which all seem to have their origins in the Temple practices of Judaism (Abdel Ahad 1948:265, Chediath 1990:27, Bernstein: 2008:). It can also be seen in a number of cultural practices among the Knanaya community in Kerala, who, unlike the ‘Northist’ SCM, have maintained many old practices: blessing at the death-bed, marriage ceremonies, wedding songs, special foods.⁶⁸⁹ Karukaparambil notes that ‘the resemblance in wording, content and style of the wedding songs of the Knanite Christians to those of the Cochin Jews is striking’ (Karukaparambil 2005:468). For the SCM, these practices – social and religious – are understood to have come through the Edessan migration. The term *Nasrāni* which was used in Malabar as an identifier for the Christians is also thought to have come through the Edessans, as they were originally known as *mārgakkār* (=People of The Way).⁶⁹⁰ In his enumeration of the cultural practices of Mesopotamian Jews, David Solomon Sassoon⁶⁹¹ enumerates their cultural practices, and many parallels can be seen in these, to those practiced by the Knanayas of Malabar.⁶⁹²

6.4.2 ‘Jacobite’

The mother church in Mesopotamia was denoted by the term ‘Jacobite’, especially in apposition to the CotE. This term derives from Jacob Baradaeus who revived the Syrian Church of Antioch in the mid-7th century, following its decline after the Council

⁶⁸⁹ See Karukaparambil 2005:460-75 for details of these practices.

⁶⁹⁰ MV 1.8 refers to ‘The Way’ prior to the Edessans and lines 16/17 refers to Nasranis when the Edessans arrive.

⁶⁹¹ The Jews of Bagdad 1949:181-9.

⁶⁹² Knanaya cultural practices, in Kulathramannil 2000: 52-63; Knanaya ballads, in English, in Kokkaravalayil 2015:130-37.

of Chalcedon (451). ‘Jacobite’ was later used pejoratively by other Churches though the Syrian Church rejects this as it considers Baradaeus as neither its founder nor its doctrinarian (Southgate 1856:iv,v). In Syriac its full name is *ʿidto suryoyto treeysath shubho* (Syrian Orthodox Church), which in common usage is shortened to *Suryoyo* or *Surian* (=Syrian).⁶⁹³

In their earliest encounters with Europeans, the SCM referenced Antioch as the Patriarchal seat in two recorded instances: the SCM initial statement of identity to the Portuguese *circa* 1500 that they ‘come from the place where the followers of Christ were first called Christians’ (Buchanan 1812:70), and Joseph the Indian, in early 16th century, refers to Antioch as the source of the Apostolic Succession for the Suffragan Catholicos who ordained him (Vallavanthara 1984:233).

In Malabar, in the 16th-18th centuries, the Portuguese referred to the SCM as Syrians or St Thomas Christians, while the SCM used to refer themselves as *Nasrāni Māppiḷa* and to the Church as *‘Malaṅkara Itavaka’* (Diocese of Malaṅkara) or as *Malaṅkara Surīyāni Sābha* (Syrian Church of Malaṅkara).⁶⁹⁴ During the on-going conflicts with the Anglican Church in the 19th century, the term ‘Jacobite’ began to be applied to Syrian Church, which after the second schism when the Reformed Mar Thoma Syrian Church seceded from it in 1890),⁶⁹⁵ became accepted as part of its name. The present name of the Church is *The Malaṅkara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church*. But through these changes of nomenclature, resulting from European encounters or schisms, the Church retained the core identity as ‘Syrian’, denoting religious identity, rather than a geographical or ethnic identity.

⁶⁹³ Since 2000, this translation has been revised to the ‘Syriac Orthodox Church’, according to the Syrian Orthodox Resource: <http://sor.cua.edu/Intro/index.html>. Accessed on 3rd April 2019

⁶⁹⁴ Malankara (in Kodungallur) being the location where St. Thomas was believed to have landed and established the first church.

⁶⁹⁵ When the Syrian Church underwent a third schism in early 20th century (which is still going on), the seceding Church called itself by several names, such as ‘Indian Orthodox Church’, ‘Orthodox Syrian Church’ and ‘Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church’. When conflict between the two factions intensified in the law courts, and a clear delineation was required to distinguish the two, the term ‘Jacobite’ was affirmed to indicate the original Syrian Church, which recognised the Patriarch of Antioch as its Supreme Head, maintaining that this ecclesiastical and doctrinal link with Antioch had begun in 345.

6.5 Latinization of the Syrians

In the previous discussions, some of the critical issues in the dominant narrative have been critically evaluated against the Syrian sources: (1) the SCM Christians were Nestorian; (2) the Syrian version of the Edessan migration and its impact on the religious identity of the SCM were questionable; (3) the Syrian claim of Apostolic foundation was improbable. The following section deals with two further points in the dominant narrative which differ from the Syrian accounts, that: a) by the Decrees of Diamper, the SCM were fully Latinised and accepted the authority of Rome, and, b) that, at the point of rebellion in 1653, the SCM arbitrarily adopted Jacobitism, for the first time, as the most expedient way to counter Rome. The Jacobite narrative is characterised as a teleological mode of history-writing, whereby they rewrote their history to legitimatise their newly adopted Jacobite identity.

On the basis that the native Malabar /Christians were Jacobites as the previous discussions indicate, several aspects / distinct phases of the evolving relationship between the Syrian and Latin authorities of this evolution become clearer. Similarly, from the perspective that the SCM were Jacobites at this time, the accounts of this period appear to present a different impression of the Syrians' understanding of their relationship with the Portuguese, and their response to the campaign of Latinization.

The arc of this narrative is built on the overview that the un-divided Syrian Church changed its doctrinal underpinnings to three significantly different positions, being Nestorian until Synod of Diamper, changing to Roman Catholic from 1599 to 1653, and, at the rebellion of 1653, changing again, but this time to the Jacobite faith. This trajectory is explained by attributing to the 'simple-minded' Syrians, either a poor grasp of doctrine, or to the lack of importance given to matters of doctrine.

6.5.1 The need for Latinization

The reasons for wishing to convert an already Christian community may have been related to three aspects of the context. Firstly, Rome considered itself to be the only Universal Church. Secondly, the Counter-Reformation, led by the Jesuits, added extra impetus to the wish to bring these Churches under Roman jurisdiction. Thirdly, the

Catholic missionaries were struggling to gain converts⁶⁹⁶ and saw the SCM as an obstacle to this, because their adherence to a different authority and practices undermined Catholic claims of Rome as the only universal authority. Their belief in Rome's supremacy over other Patriarchal Sees, and the perfection of the Roman dogma, rites and practices, meant that they saw anyone who opposed these as rebels and heretics fomenting schism.⁶⁹⁷ Fourthly, the missionaries may have seen the value of the SCM's material assets⁶⁹⁸, particularly in terms of church buildings and clerical infrastructure, as ways of achieving greater progress more efficiently. The Portuguese recognised the value of converting higher status members of society because of their influence over others, but to attempt to convert Hindu nobles carried risks to trade because of their position in the courts of local kings.

The Syrians rejected Catholic claims to be the Universal Church on the basis of the ecclesiastical order instituted by Emperor Constantine from 325. In establishing the four Patriarchates (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople)⁶⁹⁹ at the Great Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, Rome was accorded the status of 'first among equals', but each had their separate jurisdictions, with clear injunctions not encroach into others' territories (Murdock 1861:234). The Patriarch of Antioch had jurisdiction over 'all the East', which included India (Murdock 1861:55). Successive historians in Syria mention India as receiving bishops deputed by Antioch and sharing the same faith. Bar Salibi, quoted in Yacoub III 1952:59, says that the 'faith of the Syrian church of India and ours are the same', a point also recognised by some Catholic writers.⁷⁰⁰

6.5.2. Early attempts at Latinization

⁶⁹⁶ In 1527, Penteado reported that after ten years of missionary work, he 'has not baptised a single one' (cited in Schurhammer 1934:19). On the Coromandel coast also the Christians would not accept the preaching of Catholic missionaries but, 'they believe rather their bishops that came from Armenia' (Schurhammer 1934:19,20).

⁶⁹⁷ As early as 1330s, Jordanus was calling the Christians of Persia and India 'schismatics' (Yule 1863:8,55).

⁶⁹⁸ Wrede visited several Syrian churches in the early 19th century, and noted his surprise at their 'sumptuous buildings', and the wealth of the community that erected them, as he calculates they 'must have each cost upwards of one lack of rupees' (Wrede 1803:378).

⁶⁹⁹ There was also a fifth, the titular Patriarch of Jerusalem, but this office was under the See of Antioch.

⁷⁰⁰ Paoli A voyage to the east indies p25 and 94, and Assemani Bib Orient vol 3 p616 – both cited in Yacoub III p55-56.

Historians have written extensively about how the early encounters of the SCM with Portuguese led to conflicts. Chapter 5, discussing the alleged Nestorian identity of the Syrian Church, has shown that while Protestant and independent scholars appear to accept Menezes' argument that the SCM were indeed Nestorians up to the 16th century, a revisionist group of scholars have argued, from the early 20th century onwards, that this allegation was entirely unfounded. They assert that the SCM were never Nestorians.⁷⁰¹ This inevitably leads to the question of what the religious identity of the SCM was when the Portuguese first encountered them. In the early encounters, the Latin churchmen had made no mention of Nestor or Nestorianism, the allegation appearing only after the arrival of the three Nestorian/Chaldean bishops, Abraham, Joseph Sulaqa and Simon, in the latter half of the 16th century. In attempting to delineate the religious identity of the SCM in the pre-Portuguese period, their allegedly arbitrary move to the other end of the doctrinal spectrum to adopt Jacobitism in the mid-17th century, a critical evaluation of the events of the Portuguese period is required.

If Buchanan's report of one of the first exchanges between the Portuguese is considered reliable,⁷⁰² it appears that from the outset, the encounters between the Latins and the Syrians were in collision with each other. The Portuguese Catholic missionaries attempts to 'correcting' the Syrian practices, such as re-baptising the laity, trying to force them to use unleavened bread in the Eucharist and contravene their traditions in keeping Lent⁷⁰³, were seen as interferences in their religious life and firmly resisted. From the Catholics' side, their frustration at not gaining any converts from the socially better classes of people, appear to have made them try harder at winning the SC over to Rome.

⁷⁰¹ This division, it has to be reluctantly admitted, appear to follow particular denominational identities of the scholars, with La Croze, Hough, Whitehouse, Stephen Neill, Leslie Brown and Wilmshurst who adopt the former position all appear to be non-Catholics (primarily Protestant clerics), others like Schurhammer, Ferroli, Bernard, Nidiri, Mundadan, Podipara, Thekkedath, Kollaprambil and many more who adopt the latter position appear to be Catholics (more precisely, Jesuit fathers, or Catholic priests).

⁷⁰² When the Portuguese claimed all the churches in Malabar to the Pope, the Syrians are reported to have rejected it, declaring that they are of the place 'where the followers of Christ were first called Christians', indicating their self-perception of their religious identity as affiliated to Antioch (Buchanan 1812:70). The reference is to Acts of the Apostles 11:26.

⁷⁰³ See Podipara (1970:110) for a fuller enumeration of these.

One of the then resident Syrian bishops from Mesopotamia was Mar Thomas.⁷⁰⁴ According to Schurhammer, in 1518, he was required to give ‘testimony about the traditions of his Church’, and by 1536 he was under censure because ‘he helped little’ and was teaching ‘heresies’ (1934:9-10). The phrases ‘giving testimony’ and ‘helped little’ in the context of his being accused of teaching heresies later, would suggest that this bishop was required to make a statement about his faith and belief resulting in him avoiding active confrontations with the Latin clerics, indicating early conflicts between Latin and Syrian clerics. Eventually, it appears he conformed to Rome, because as Schurhammer continues ‘he (Mar Thomas) had now repented, had publicly gone to confession and communion and called the Franciscans’ (1934:10).⁷⁰⁵ Joseph the Indian who was a contemporary of these events, also reportedly came into conflict with Matthews Diaz, a native Malabarian who had accepted Catholicism (Schurhammer 1934:20).

The Syrians response to these incursions into their Church’s practices was to write directly to the Pope Gregory⁷⁰⁶ in 1520 from Angamaly, indicating their inability to withstand Portuguese power and also their hope for a sympathetic response from an ecclesiastical head of sister Church.

‘Therefore, enable our Lord and Holy Father the Patriarch who is on the throne of Antioch, who from the beginning had sent us bishops, to continue to send us bishops yet again. For we have come to know that when they are sent here, they are being detained and oppressed. We beg the Holy Father of Rome to save us, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the name of the Holy and Blessed Mary, Mother of God.’⁷⁰⁷

The contents indicate the Syrians’ desire to adhere to their existing faith and doctrine derived from Antioch, and that they knew where their Patriarch and the Pope of the Catholic Church were stationed as Patriarchs of different Sees. The earliest Syrian

⁷⁰⁴ Catholic historians mention five bishops present in Malabar in these early Portuguese years: Mar John who had arrived in 1490, and four others who arrived in 1502, i.e., Jacob, Thomas, Yaballaha, and Denha.

⁷⁰⁵ Schurhammer does not give details of the means by which this ‘repentance’ was achieved.

⁷⁰⁶ This letter has been partially quoted by historians to state that the Syrians were already Catholics in communion with Rome, and that the letter was asking the Pope to send them bishops.

⁷⁰⁷ Zachariah 1973:55-6.

source examined here, the account that the Syrian priest ‘Joseph the Indian’ gave in Venice in 1501 seems to concur with this. Here Joseph identifies his Supreme Head as the Patriarch of Antioch, and that he himself was ordained by the Catholicos, the suffragan to this Patriarch whose authority extended over Malabar (Vallavanthara 1984:168-173, 231,33).

When Schurhammer mentions that the Portuguese helped the rebuilding of destroyed Syrian churches, and restored their ancient rights to them (1903:9), a more nuanced reading would render these as deliberate actions, which ended in these churches being taken over by the Catholics.⁷⁰⁸ Similarly, the picture that emerges of the relationship between the Portuguese with the Jacobite bishops in residence in Malabar at the time, is one of forceful interference in their freedom to practice their religion. According to Schurhammer, three of the five bishops present in Malabar at the time (Mar John, Yaballaha and Denaha) ‘seems to have died’ in around 1503 (Schurhammer 1939:9). Mar Thoma, a fourth, in 1518 was ‘giving testimony about the traditions of his Church’, but that although he ‘had helped little’ and ‘had taught heresies’ in 1536, ‘he had now repented, had publicly gone to confession and communion, and called the Franciscans’ (Schurhammer 1939:9-10). This sequence of events points to Mar Thoma having been subjected to some kind of inquisition and coercion into the Catholic faith, an interpretation supported by Mundadan (1984:305-6), who gives a veiled account of the intense pressures which these bishops endured. Mar Denha faced the threat of exile in around 1520. The fifth bishop, Mar Jacob, appears to have been the only one to survive, and his two letters (dated 1523 and 1530) to the king of Portugal indicate the precarious position he found himself in, accepting a stipend from the Portuguese, but unable to reconcile with what was demanded of him in return.⁷⁰⁹ These letters indicate that Mar Jacob was under enormous pressure to acquiesce to Latin authority and to bring his Church over to Rome as well, and by the 1540s he had

⁷⁰⁸ In Kodungallur, Kollam and Mylapore, the Portuguese are seen to destroy churches, and pay for their re-building, in 1503,1510, and 1517. This is followed up with Catholic missionaries being appointed as vicars and teachers, ‘to baptise and instruct them in the rites of the Holy [Catholic] Faith’ (Schurhammer 8-9), by which intervention, these churches became Catholic institutions.

⁷⁰⁹ For the full text of Jacob’s two letters, see Schurhammer 1934:10-19.

been abandoned by the SCM, and was living with the Franciscans (Schurhammer 1939:21-21).⁷¹⁰

These instances indicate that the that the SCM in the early 16th century was of a faith other than that of Rome, while Mar Jacob's reference to himself as 'Jacome abuna, Armenian priest, who rules over the so called Quilon (Kollam) Christians' (Schurhammer 1939:10), indicate that the SCM were not Catholics until then.

Initially, Latinisation was confined to demanding the Syrians conform to Roman rituals and practices, rather than on the basis of doctrine. The SCM rejected these demands and so with little success⁷¹¹ by the mid-15th century, the Catholics adopted the approach of setting up two colleges, one in the Latin and the other in the Syrian tradition (in Vaipeen) to educate the Syrian priestly candidates (Pukadiyil 1869: 124).⁷¹² The Syrians however, refused to accept the young priests from these seminaries⁷¹³ and denied them entry into their churches (Hough 1839 Vol.I:246-8), and generally resisted the intended influence of the Catholic instruction (Geddes 1694:9-11).⁷¹⁴

Unable to withstand the religious persecutions of the missionaries, and denied their princes' protection, the Syrians response to these depredations appear to have been to abandon their churches and homes in Kodungallur and Kollam, and, as the Jesuit historian Ferroli also says, they retreated 'to the mountains', 'to live with the Hindus' (Ferroli 1939:100).⁷¹⁵ The 16th century is seen as a period of mass migrations of the

⁷¹⁰ Schurhammer asserts that Mar Jacob was already a Chaldean Uniate Catholic, a theory espoused by others such as Mundadan (1984:293). Schurhammer's arguments are refuted by K.N. Daniel, Kerala Society Papers, Series II:307-340.

⁷¹¹ Geddes 1694 attributes two reasons for this: one, because they were: 'too much employed in building and providing commodious Seats for their Convents, to attend to any foreign business' (p.4); and two, they thought it not wise to make any 'rude or boisterous' methods of reducing the Syrians to Romanism before they had secured: 'that whole country into their own power' (p.11).

⁷¹² According to Pukadiyil 1869:124: 'they set up institutions like a church, a convent and a seminary within the Fort, and brought in a Bishop as well', for the purpose of slowly bringing the Syrians into submission to the Pope.

⁷¹³ There were a hundred students at this college, according to Ferroli 1939:151; also mentioned by Francis Xavier (Schurhammer 1934:35).

⁷¹⁴ Geddes gives the Syrians recruits' reaction being that a) they could not be persuaded out of their ancient faith; b) they would not forsake their present bishop and submit themselves to the Pope, and c) they could not endure so much as to hear the Pope being named.

⁷¹⁵ Roz, writing in 1604 (Schurhammer 1934:22), also mentions how the Syrians left Kodungallur on account of 'the many molestations' the Latin priests inflicted on them. They 'hindered the cassanares from saying Mass with leavened bread, forced them to eat fish on fast days and insisted that Lent begin

Syrians, when they left their ancient urban settlements in Kodungallur, Kochi and Kollam, to the minor kingdoms in the hinterlands of Malabar, where they were received favourably from by local kings.⁷¹⁶

6.5.3. Arrival of the Nestorian bishops

The arrival in the second half of the 16th century, of Mar Abraham, Mar Joseph Sulaka and Mar Simeon, appear to give the Catholics a focus for their opposition to the SCM. On finding them to hold Nestorian dogmas on examination,⁷¹⁷ the SCM seem to have accepted them as figure-heads to withstand Latinization attempts, because they were unable to procure for themselves a bishop from Syria, as discussed in Chapter 5.4.1. However, these Nestorian bishops were only allowed to consecrate churches and granite crosses, ordain priests, but were not allowed to ordain clergy or celebrate the Eucharist (Mundadan 1984 Vol I:177-8).⁷¹⁸ Despite this, the Portuguese made use of the presence of these Nestorian bishops to claim errors and heresy among the SCM, leading eventually to the Synod of Diamper. The Syrians too, on their part, were compromised with the itemised challenges presented at the Synod of Diamper, particularly because of the presence of the many books these bishops had brought with them.

6.5.4. SCM's response

The Syrians did not wish to convert to Catholicism although as co-religionists of the powerful Portuguese, they stood to gain at least some advantage in terms of power. The Catholic arguments regarding theirs being the only true Church failed to make an impression on the SCM, who it was reported, showed 'no wish to convert' (Correa:1859:302, Geddes 1694:12). According to Mackenzie (1901:57-8), the SCM's attitude to Rome was distinctly averse to Catholicism, viewing the Catholic

in [on]Ash Wednesday'. Churches and material assets being acquired by the parishioners themselves in the absence of royal or diocesan patronage, their abandonment would have been serious losses to the Syrians.

⁷¹⁶ Kottayam Great St. Mary's church was consecrated 1550. Whitehouse observes the steady migration of SCM from the central provinces, southwards and eastwards (1873:64).

⁷¹⁷ This is thought to be a euphemism for more rigorous methods of questioning practised by the Jesuit fathers in this early phase of their work.

⁷¹⁸ A lithic inscription from Muttichira Church shows that Mar Simeon consecrated a large granite cross in 1580 (T.K. Joseph 1929: Appendix IV).

Church as ‘anti-Christian’ in claiming authority over the indigenous Christians of Malabar.

6.5.5. The state of the SCM at the time of Portuguese arrival

Historians mention that, persecuted by the Hindus around them, the SCM were in a weak state when the Portuguese arrived, illustrated by the surrendering to Gama, their long- extinct ruling dynasty’s⁷¹⁹ sceptre (Hough Vol.I-1839:154; Ferroli 1939: 99-100).⁷²⁰ However, this may need to be viewed with caution, as the earliest independent authority, Gaspar Correa, (Stanley 1869:354) makes no mention of it, nor do Jacobite sources make any reference to this event. In fact they indicate that SCM Church was in a stable and prosperous state at the turn of the 15th century, as seen, for example, in Joseph the Indian’s testimony that they exercised freedom in all commercial matters (e.g. measures & weights, taxation, sales rights).⁷²¹ It also appears that the SCM at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, were part of a well-established ecclesiastic Church; portrayed as devout Christians who lived their lives ‘set apart from the non-Christian population’ (Ferroli 1939:100). According to Pukadiyil, at the turn of the 15th century, when successive Portuguese Admirals such as Gama and Cabral arrived, filled their ships with pepper and departed, ‘these Syrians were continuing in this manner walking with one accord adhering to the True Faith, and in obedience to the metropolitans sent by the Patriarch of Antioch.’⁷²² Joseph the Indian is clear in his testimony about the source of his Church’s authority as being Antioch, and moreover he knew the location of his Patriarch being ‘in Antioch’, and the route to the Catholicos in ‘Armania’⁷²³, and could talk of his Church’s distinction from the Nestorians (Vallavanthara 1984:57-60, 168). It is clear that the bishops Thomas and John who accompanied Joseph the Indian on his return were of the same faith as Joseph

⁷¹⁹ It is generally accepted by Western and indigenous historians that the Villiyarwattom dynasty of Christian kings became extinct when the last ruler died without an heir, and the kingdom was brought under the protection of the king of Kochi at an indistinct late-medieval point in history (Pukadiyil 1869:121; Zachariah 1973:46).

⁷²¹ Vallavanthara 1984:164-6, 172-8.

⁷²² Pukadiyil gives a lengthy account of the gifts given to the king of Kochi, the trade alliance forged, and the prosperous and ecclesiastically ordered ‘True Orthodox’ state of the SCM under their Antioch-appointed bishops at this time (1869:122-4).

⁷²³ What Vallavanthara spells as ‘Armania’ is to be read as Syria (see Chapter 5.5.3.).

himself, i.e., Syrian Church of Antioch. The reception accorded to the priest Joseph the Indian and accompanying bishops as given in Schurhammer (1934:3) enumerates that: a) it was a joyous, splendid and enthusiastic one, b) they came out to meet them (presumably in the port of Kodungallur) with the Book of the Gospel, the cross, censers, and torches, c) they introduced them with great ‘pomp and chanting of hymns and psalms’, and that immediately on arrival, the bishops undertook a series of episcopal functions including the consecration of altars and the ordination of ‘very many priests’, ‘for they (the SCM) had been without Fathers (bishops) for a long time’. For the Portuguese missionaries to have witnessed and reported on this in such detail gives a clear indication of the strength and prosperity and of the Church of the SCM at that time. The SCM appear to have been numerically strong, of ‘30,000 *Christian families*’, with 70 churches (Schurhammer 1934:4). The ‘Christian Kingdom called Granor (Kodungallur)’ is described as a peaceful place where Christians lived in prosperity under the protection of their pagan king, with the Christians practising their religion devoutly and keeping themselves apart from the pagans (Ferroli 1939:99).⁷²⁴ Joseph also reports they were literate using *olas* to write on, and wore gold jewellery of great craftsmanship, were ordered parochially, churches which were similar to those in Europe with the exception that they were adorned only with crosses both inside and outside, i.e. no pictures or images (Vallavanthara 1984:164-6). He also states that the title of the highest authority of the SCMs was the ‘Metropolitan and Gate of All India’ (Vallavanthara 1984:275).⁷²⁵ They promised him full submission to his episcopacy if he would ‘accept the doctrine and faith as we Syrians do’ (Cheeran 2008:31-32). The strength of attachment to the ‘Orthodox’ faith is further evidenced from the circumstance that when Mar Abraham apostatised to Rome, with the SCM being left without a real or figure-head bishop, they rather chose to reject him. Kandanad says: ‘when we heard these words and (Mar Abraham’s) faith, we moved away’ (Cheeran 2008:32).

⁷²⁴ When Ferroli mentions that the Christians ‘had just sent Priests to the Pope of Rome to know the true faith...’, the reference is to this Joseph (the Indian), but the stated reason ‘to know the true faith’ is inaccurate, as Joseph himself while in Rome and in Venice, made clear his religious identity as Syrian orthodox, and reported his intension of going to Antioch to receive ordination (Vallavanthara 1984:150).

⁷²⁵ Aware of the significance of this title, the Latin bishops were anxious to preserve it as their own bishops’ title after Diamper (Mundadan 1982-89).

6.5.6. Synod of Diamper

Gouvea's account of the Synod of Diamper as a mostly sanguine event with only minor objections raised and obstructions caused by the Syrians is counter-balanced by the Syrian account that differs in the details of their response to this week-long event. Gouvea states that Pope Clement VIII's instruction in 1598 to Menezes was to 'reduce them [the Syrians] to the obedience of the Holy Roman Catholic Church' (Malekandathil 2000:125). The axe as a metaphor appears twice in Menezes' subjugation of the SCM. In forcing the Archdeacon and all the 'secular and Ecclesiastic' people of Malabar to renounce their Patriarch as he was a 'Nestorian heretic' (Malekandathil 2000:123), Menezes' words to the Archdeacon were: 'sign, Father, for it is proper to place the axe at the root of the evil' (Malekandathil 2000:124). This metaphor appears again when a real axe was placed leaning against the door of the Mar Sabor-Aphroth church in Udayamperoor, where the Synod was held (Cheeran 2008:32).

Later historians, such as Hough and Geddes, detail the oppressive actions of the Catholics, the passive acquiescence of the SCM and the unjust manner in which they were reduced through the forced signing of the Decrees. However, the SCM Sources describe several instances of SCM resistance and rebellion during the Synod.⁷²⁶

One significant point of contention was the SCM reason for refusing conversion to Roman Catholicism, which was their intransigent adherence to what they termed '*martōmā slīhāyūṭe vāl̥vum valipāṭum*', interpreted as the 'tradition and heritage' of St Thomas'.⁷²⁷ This was misinterpreted by Menezes to mean the 'law of St Thomas' (Malekandathil 2000:125-6), reflecting Rome's juridical approach to Church authority, and argued that the Church had only one 'law', that of St Peter and represented by Rome, which became written into one of the Decrees (Session III Decree VII, Zacaria 1994:93). This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.6.

⁷²⁶ See page 142 in Chapter 5.3 for details.

⁷²⁷ The semantic parameters and etymology of this phrase have not been determined, the common meaning of *valipāṭā* being a vow to offer gifts or perform penances at a religious place. Scholars like Cheeran have interpreted it as the 'tradition and heritage' of St. Thomas (Cheeran 2008:23).

6.5.7. Post-Diamper

There is little direct evidence of how far the Decrees of Diamper were implemented in Syrian Churches, and how uniform that implementation was across different parishes. Statues were placed in some SCM churches, the Pope was mentioned in the Eucharist, and Auricular Confession introduced.⁷²⁸ The Latin rite liturgy, which was initially translated into Syriac, was difficult to implement because of its unfamiliarity to the clergy. These implementations appear to have been confined mainly to those Syrian parishes geographically close to the Portuguese power, ie., Kochi, Kodungallur and Kaduthuruthy. Matters were also not helped by the on-going internecine conflicts between the different Orders of the Catholic Church in their efforts to take over control of the Syrian Church (Kollaparambil 1981:96-97, Pulikkunnel 2012:16).⁷²⁹

One of the major impacts of the Synod as envisaged by Menezes, as part of Latinization was to close the ‘Fold-door’ of the ‘flock’ of Syrians, that is, to prevent Syrian bishops arriving from Mesopotamia, deny them entry into the Syrian Church, thus affirming that the ‘shepherd’ was now Rome, via the Archbishop in Goa (Ferrolì 159-61).⁷³⁰ However, the indigenous Jacobite Syrian bishops are seen to have reclaimed the title of ‘Fold-door’ at least from 1665 (Thekkedath 1972:97). Mar Thoma IV clearly claims this title, as all the five letters (written 1718 -1725) examined in this study reveal.⁷³¹

The active resistance of the SCM to Latinization is evident through their actions in this post-Diamper period. The Archdeacon’s protests over infringements on his

⁷²⁸ These points are indicated in Mar Gregorios Abdal Jaleel’s letter 1667, in Appendix 15.2.

⁷²⁹ Pulikkunnel 2012:16) mentions how, because of the *Padroado Real* rights accorded to Lisbon, Rome had no authority to consecrate bishops or send missionaries to India, the rule of the Indian Church, (and the revenues from it), being a Portuguese monopoly. ‘In the 17th century, Rome regained strength, and it occurred to the Pope of Rome that he wanted to rule Malabar directly’. The creation of the *Propaganda Fide* in 1621 afforded, through its mainly Carmelite missionaries, the right instrument to carry out this plan, and the opportunity presented itself when the mainly Portuguese Jesuits were expelled by the Dutch. This was how Rome began sending the Carmelite missionaries under the auspices of the *Propaganda*, from 1655 onwards.

⁷³⁰ Menezes (in 1599) had challenged the Archdeacon’s claim of this title, and accused the Babylonian bishops, whom the Archdeacon obeyed, being a ‘wolf’ as he was a false ‘shepherd’ of the ‘flock’ (Malekandathil 2003:121). The Syrians’ narratives however, affirm that their Archdeacons, and later, bishops held this title.

⁷³¹ See Appendix 17.

authority⁷³², wrote to Rome for redress, and wrote to Antioch for the despatch of a bishop to come to his aid. The next Archdeacon, George, brought SCM together in an assembly at Idappally in 1632, and passed a resolution against Archbishop Britto. They forbade Jesuits from entering their churches or bishops from excommunicating anyone (Kollaparambil 1981:52). According to Van Kley, the next Archdeacon, Thomas, (appointed in 1637) first appealed to the King of Kochi for redress of the Syrians' grievances against the conduct of Archbishop Garcia, and when this was not forthcoming, 'to the Patriarchs of Cairo, Antioch and Babylon' (Van Kley 1998:162).⁷³³

This last-mentioned letter (cited by Van Kley) has been misinterpreted in key histories by Hough and Kollaparambil,⁷³⁴ as an indiscriminate appeal, which included both Miaphysite and Nestorian Patriarchs due to the recurring misunderstanding of the term 'Babylon', as discussed in Chapter 5.5.2. Hough and Kollaparambil proposed two alternative theories as possible explanations for this anomaly of appealing to Patriarchs of opposing dogmas. Firstly, that the Syrians were so indiscriminating in their doctrinal understanding (Hough 1839 vol II:299-300) that they did not see the inconsistency of their action. Secondly that the native Christians' ignorance of such matters was so profound that the finer points of doctrine was inconsequential to them, their wish being only to get an Eastern bishop to oppose the Latins (Milne-Rae 1892:261). The Syrians' sources however, agree with Van Kley that they wrote only to Antioch, Alexandria and Babylon, the last being the seat of the Jacobite Maphrian.⁷³⁵

⁷³² The removal of the See of Angamaly from its Antiochian jurisdiction, to a bishopric under the Archdiocese of Goa, transfer it from the anciently appointed city of Angamaly to Kodungallur, for the security accorded in a city with many Catholic institutions, and being near Kochi, the seat of Portuguese political and military power, whereas Angamaly was a provincial town strongly populated by Syrian Christians.

⁷³³ Note that there was the famous Syrian monastery of St Mary Deipara in Egypt and the Syrian Church, along with the Copts and the Ethiopians, shared the same non-Chalcedonian faith. Given the difficulty of communications to Mesopotamia, writing to all these centres of Miaphysite faith appears only natural. Kaniamparambil suggests that there may also have been some converted to Nestorianism by the activities of the 16th century bishops, and they may have written to the Nestorian Patriarch. But there so far no indication has been found that there was at any time in the 16th century, a group of SCM positioning themselves as doctrinally in opposition to the SCM, or any parishes professing to be separate, although these bishops' services were used by many parish churches as noted earlier, for consecration of granite crosses, new churches etc. It is more likely that Kaniamparambil was conceding to the scholarly arguments of successive European historians that supported this.

⁷³⁴ Hough's words quoted in the Introductory chapter, but he does not produce any evidence for this, suggesting the indiscriminatory nature the SCM's actions as purely conjectural.

⁷³⁵ Kaniamparambil 1982:132.

6.5.8. Mar Ahattalla and the Oath of the Leaning Cross 1653

The Latinisation process that was begun, with some vigour, in 1599 faltered in the early decades of the 17th century, culminating in a rebellion against Rome in 1653. Perczel asserts that this rebellion was the result of a ‘combination of Latinisation and racism that triggered conflicts between the Europeans and a highly learned local elite, who were revolting not against the Catholic faith itself, but rather against these twin tendencies’ (Perczel 2014:31). Stephen Neill’s account portrays the Oath as a simple event where the SCM stood ‘in front of a cross with lighted candles swore upon the holy Gospel that they would no longer obey Garcia (Neill 1984:319). However, the Jacobite sources portray this as a momentous event.⁷³⁶ Numbers in each party in the oath are also disputed, but a leading Catholic historian, Jacob Kollaparambil in his account of the events immediately following the Oath, cites the ‘almost total’ support of the Archdeacon Thomas of the Syrians, with only two parishes remaining loyal to the Catholic Archbishop Garcia (Kollaparambil 1981:148).⁷³⁷

Generally historians agree that the individual who arrived in response to these pleas was Ignatius Ahattalla, or Atalla, a translation of the Greek ‘Theodore’ (Hough 1839, Vol. II:301-305, Mundadan 1982:90-93). However, there is no shared consensus on his exact faith and provenance.⁷³⁸ After carefully examining five earlier historians, (Vincent Maria, Renaudot, Raulin, Assemani and La Croze) Hough tends to agree with the Syrians that Ahattalla was a Jacobite bishop from Antioch.⁷³⁹ However, Yacoub III states that he is not listed in the register of Jacobite hierarchs of the time, and speculates that he may have been Syrian bishop from Alexandria (Mannakuzhiyil 2010:101-104)⁷⁴⁰. This proposition was also accepted by Kaniamparambil (1982:133) who also discusses the claims that he was actually sent from Rome, but cites a letter

⁷³⁶ Zachariah 1973:64-66.

⁷³⁷ The two parishes that sided with the Catholics were Udayamperoor (where Menezes had held the Synod in 1599) which was entirely Catholic, and Kaduthuruthy, where the Catholic bishop Garcia resided, which was one of mixed loyalties. The churches within the Seminaries built by the Jesuits were also naturally loyal to Rome. The remaining indigenous Syrian parishes rejected Rome and were loyal to Mar Thoma I

⁷³⁸ Jacob Kollaparambil in ‘*The St Thomas Christians’ Revolution in 1653* (1981:186-7) strangely presents Mar Ahattalla simultaneously as an Armenian, a Catholic, and a ‘reformed’ Jacobite sent by the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Patriarch of the Nestorians (p.186, 187).

⁷³⁹ For Syrians, the name Ignatius indicated he was from the Jacobite Church, the name ‘Ignatius’ was assumed by Syrian Jacobite Patriarchs of Antioch, starting in the 11th or 12th century.

⁷⁴⁰ Originally in Arabic (1952), translated into English by Dr. Matti Moosa, and translated into Malayalam by Jacob Varghese Mannakuzhiyil 2010.

from Pope Alexander VII, making it clear that he was not. In the Syrian sources, Mar Ahattalla was the Patriarch of Antioch and was drowned by the Portuguese in Kochi harbour in 1653 (Kaniamparambil 1982:133-4).

His death sparked a protest, which culminated in the Oath of the Leaning Cross, by which the SCM rejected Rome. Zachariah gives the wording of this Oath as well as a *Padiyola* that the SCM wrote on the same day to the same effect (Zachariah 1973:65-7).⁷⁴¹ Following Mar Ahattalla's instructions sent to Malabar in three letters,⁷⁴² the Archdeacon Thoma was consecrated as Bishop Mar Thoma 1.⁷⁴³ The uncanonical nature of his elevation to episcopacy was accepted by the SCM because it followed the written instructions from Mar Ahattalla for such extreme circumstances. However, others challenged the legitimacy of the consecration⁷⁴⁴ and it was twelve years before the next bishop reached Malabar, to complete the canonical consecration.

6.5.9. 'The Syrians rejected only the Portuguese and the Jesuits, not Rome'

A major point of debate surrounding the Oath has been whether the Syrians were rejecting Roman Catholicism or just the Jesuit Fathers' authority. In the Oath, the Syrians said 'we will never unite with the Franks who have murdered our Patriarch'. Both Catholic and Protestant historians have argued that the term 'Franks' indicated only a rejection of the Archbishop, or at best, the Jesuits or the Portuguese,⁷⁴⁵ but the SCM maintain that the use of the word 'Franks' ('*parangis*' in Malayalam) was generally understood to mean all Europeans, rather than one group within them. Kaniamparambil (1989:85-7) points out that it is commonly used in phrases such as '*paranki vedom*', meaning Catholic faith rather than Portuguese faith. According to Jacobite sources, the Oath was a rejection of the Catholic faith, not just the Jesuits. As

⁷⁴¹ The text of the Oath and the *Padiyola* translated into English, is given in Appendix 13.

⁷⁴² Digital images of Mar Ahattalla's three letters, in Syriac given, in Appendix 14, together with their transcriptions and translations into English. It is doubtful if these are in fact his original letters, but copies made by Priest Geevarghese of Vengur.

⁷⁴³ At Alangatt Church, 12 priests laid hands on the head of the Archdeacon, along with Ahattalla's letter, elevating him to episcopal dignity. A council of 4 priests was appointed to assist him: Priests Anjilimoottil Itty Thommen, Kadavil Chandy, Vengur Geevargheese and Palliveettil-Prambil Chandy (Kaniamparambil 1989:88).

⁷⁴⁴ Kaniamparambil points out that Sebastiani himself was not consecrated canonically, but secretly in Rome in order not to antagonise the Padroado rights of the Portuguese kings (Kaniamparambil 1989:92).

⁷⁴⁵ 'The Thomas Christians did not at any point suggest that they wished to separate themselves from the pope' Neill 1984:319.

Kaniamparambil argues, the Catholic writers would not have referred to the Oath as the ‘Great Schism’ if it had just been a rebellion against the local archbishop, as the word ‘schism’ indicates a total doctrinal and ecclesial separation (1989:89-90).⁷⁴⁶

6.5.10.Schism in the SCM Church

At the time of the Oath, the Syrian Sources maintain that the SCM were united in their rejection of Rome, with only 400 of the roughly 200,000 Syrians remaining loyal to Garcia (Kaniamparambil 1989:88). Catholic historians present them as a minority faction of rebels, although some concede that they were the majority (Thekkedath 1972:92). Faced with this situation, Rome’s response was to send Carmelite missionaries in 1658, as the ‘gentler face’ of Catholic authority, to persuade the SCM to return to Rome’s authority. Joseph Sebastiani⁷⁴⁷ led a campaign of propaganda, persecution and inducements from 1656 to 1663, pursuing Mar Thoma I and leading laymen among SCM⁷⁴⁸, resulting in a steady erosion of numbers to the Roman fold. The Syrian sources give detailed accounts of the severity of Sebastiani’s actions (Zachariah 1973:70-71; Philip 1950:136-143; Kaniamparambil 1989:90-94) indicating the strength of SCM resistance to Catholicism generally, not just to Garcia and the Jesuits.

Sebastiani returned in 1662 as Vicar Apostolic⁷⁴⁹ with greater powers. The Dutch capture of Kochi in 1663 and the threatened expulsion of all Catholic clerics led to Sebastiani consecrating Chandy Palliveetil-Parambil as the native Catholic bishop (sometimes referred as Bishop Campo). He had been one of Mar Thoma I’s chief advisors and a member of the influential Pakalomattom family. As a result, the

⁷⁴⁶ Kaniamparambil mentions six Papal Bulls brought by the Carmelites (1989:89-90), showing that in Rome’s understanding, the Oath was not against Garcia, or the Jesuits, or the Portuguese, but against the Roman Catholic Church itself.

⁷⁴⁷ Kaniamparambil 1989:88-9 mentions four Carmelites arriving: Hyacinth, Marcel, Sebastiani and Vincent, ‘all Carmelite monks’.

⁷⁴⁸ According to Syrian sources, during this period of severe persecution, many leading Jacobite Syrian laymen fled, and others were imprisoned, ill-treated, and their assets impounded by native rulers (Yohannan 1919:70-72, Kaniamparambil 1989:93-94). Hough reports on Sebastiani’s regret that he could only burn Mar Thoma I’s possessions and not the man himself (Hough 1839 Vol 2:337).

⁷⁴⁹ A titular bishop. Canon 15 of Nicaea forbade the Pope and Patriarchs from appointing bishops to Sees other than their own. This rule could be side-stepped by ruling recruits in another bishop’s territory from outside the territory (Schaff 1882/1910:275-6).

community was divided.⁷⁵⁰ Bishop Campo appropriated the term ‘Old Alliance’⁷⁵¹ to indicate they were the old established Church of St Thomas Christians of Malabar, and that those who followed Mar Thoma I, consecrated under the instruction Mar Ahattalla, designated as schismatics and followers of a new Church, labelling them the ‘New Alliance’ (Philip 1950:136, 1771 *ola* Section 13, Cheeran 2008:35). These terms (Old Alliance for Catholics, and New Alliance for Jacobite Syrians) entered the discourse on the history of SCM, appearing to undermine the perception of the Syrians as the original Church of St. Thomas.

From the SCM accounts, the schism in the Church began at this point, with two bishops of SCM origin – Mar Thoma I and Bishop Campo –both coming from the St Thomas-appointed Pakalomattom family, but one enjoying political, ecclesiastic and financial support from the Portuguese, and the other conspicuously lacking these.⁷⁵²

6.5.11. Dating the introduction of the Jacobite faith⁷⁵³

Scholars commonly date the introduction of the Jacobite faith into Malabar, in the mid-17th century with the arrival of Mar Gregorius of Jerusalem (Neill 1984:327, Perczel 2006:411, 2013:415, Kollaparambil 1981:245). Neill refers to this as an unexpected introduction of a new ‘theological revolution’ which ‘these simple Christians’ accepted without protest (1984:327).⁷⁵⁴

However, the Syrian sources do not appear to show that the authority, faith and practices introduced by Mar Gregorios’ was, at any time, questioned or challenged by

⁷⁵⁰ Philip mentions a letter by Priest Anjilimoottil Itty Thommen, one of the leaders of the Syrians’ rebellion in 1653, to priest Kadavil Chandy, another of the four member-council of Mar Thoma I who defected to Rome, reproaching him for breaking the Oath they had taken together in Mattancherry in 1653 (Philip 1950:137). See Appendix 15.1 for the full letter.

⁷⁵¹ Philip 1950:136 and the 1771 *ola* (Section 13) remarks that from the time of Bishop Campo’s consecration, the group that allied with him took the name the ‘Old Alliance’, and they began calling the Syrians who had stood firm in their ancient faith, the ‘New Alliance’. Kandanad says: ‘we who had separated from the Franks seeing the foul murder they committed, they called US the ‘New Alliance’ (2008:35).

⁷⁵² ‘No one came to the help of Thomas’ Neill 1984:326.

⁷⁵³ Although Perczel refers to them as ‘un-named bishops’, they are actually named in JSC sources, as Mar Joseph who came with Knai Thoma, and Mar Sabor and Aphroth who came with the merchant Sapor Isho or Sabrisho.

⁷⁵⁴ Perczel casts doubt JSC accounts the 17th century bishops Mar Gregorius, Mar Baselius Yaldo altogether, proposing that this was a back-writing of history to legitimize the office of the Archdeacons, which office actually originating in the 16th century, ‘its existence had been projected backwards in time, to show both the institution and the family hereditarily holding that rank as being of very great antiquity’ (2009:210-11).

those Syrians who accepted him. This is in direct contrast with their response to bishops from other Churches: the Nestorian bishop Mar Jacob (1503), Mar Abraham (1550), the Chaldean bishops Mar Joseph and Mar Simon (late 16th century), and Mar Gabriel (1705), were all ultimately rejected as their faith and doctrine were identified as different to the SCM. Similarly, the Roman Catholic bishops were never accepted by the SCM in the 16th century, and only accepted in the Latinized period from 1599-1653 under duress. This indicates that, to the Syrians, Mar Gregorios's arrival in 1665⁷⁵⁵ was a re-instatement of their old faith.⁷⁵⁶

Given the difficult circumstances, he focused on affirming the fundamentals of Antiochian doctrine and practices, rather than abruptly correcting all Catholic accretions into their practices (Yohannan 1919:77-9). In a letter, he rejected Rome's authority over the diocese of Malabar, and negated Roman doctrines on Christology, Filioque, purgatory etc., as heretical, and reinstates clerical matrimony, Syrian dates and manner of fasting among others.⁷⁵⁷

However, according to the Syrian sources, affairs of the JSC appear to have stabilised only with the arrival, in 1685, of a four-member party of clerics deputed by Antioch,⁷⁵⁸ including the aged leader, the Maphrian Mar Baselius Yaldo⁷⁵⁹ and bishop Mar Ivanios.⁷⁶⁰ The JSC credit him with the streamlining of their doctrine, liturgy, rites, practices and governance in this critical period.⁷⁶¹

Visscher, writing *circa* 1720 (Drury 1862:104) noted that apart from some Roman elements in it, the Syrians' (as he called them) rites resembled Greek or Syrian, and

⁷⁵⁵ For details see Yohannan 1919:75-6.

⁷⁵⁶ In the late 17th century, the Syrians' attachment to Roman practices (veneration of statues, use of unleavened bread, auricular confessions etc.), appears to have been stronger in parishes closer to the seats of power in northern Kerala, and weaker in southern parts.

⁷⁵⁷ Appendix 15.2

⁷⁵⁸ For more details of their dangerous journey to Malabar, fearing Portuguese interception, see Appendix 16.

⁷⁵⁹ The nature of the relationship between Antioch and the SCM at this time is indicated by the Patriarch of Antioch Abd al Masih I's letter to the 'Heads of Church of Angamaly' through the Maphrian, asking that they 'return the treasure' (the Maphrian) he was sending to them without delay (Niraṇām Chronicle / Manalil.. :126). For a copy and translation of Abd al Masih's letter, see Appendix 5.

⁷⁶⁰ Philip describes Mar Ivanios as '....a very able, energetic, zealous, hard-working bishop, a profound Syriac scholar, a renowned poet, and sound theologian' (1950:152).

⁷⁶¹ Kurien Thomas *Niraṇām Chronicle* gives 35 *memres* composed by Mar Ivanios p177-192

that ‘in essentials they are orthodox’. It can arguably be said that such a transformation could not have been effected in as short a period as fifty years by two successive bishops, who were alive only for a total of thirteen years, and were working under constrained circumstances. The sum total points to the Syrians returning to an older, established faith, which was that of the Syrian Church of Antioch.

6.6 The articulation and transmission of religious identity

Scholars have maintained that the SCM never articulated a clear theology and doctrine, and that religious identity was confined to the observation of rituals and practices (Mundadan 1989:76).⁷⁶² When Menezes demanded that the SCM conform to Roman dogmas before the Synod of Diamper, in 1598, they referred to their religious identity by the Malayalam phrase *Mārttommayuṭe Mārgavum Valipāṭum*, (=‘The Way and lineage of St Thomas’), which they held to be unchangeable. By Session III, Decree 7 of Diamper, Menezes commanded the SCM to reject this, because, in Rome’s view, there was only one Law in the Universal Church, and that was of St Peter, represented by Rome. The Portuguese inability or unwillingness to appreciate the Indian understanding of religion as a way of life, is indicated by the misinterpretation of this significant Malayalam expression into the Roman jurisdictional terminology as the ‘Law of Thomas’, which was proscribed as an ‘error’ and replaced with the ‘Law of St. Peter’ (Zacharia 1994:42, 81,93).⁷⁶³

⁷⁶² Mundadan in his paper of 1989 treats this at length (1989:74).

⁷⁶³ In Session II decree 1, this prohibition falls under the title ‘Profession of Faith’. Session II, Decree 7 is titled: ‘Condemns the Error that St. Thomas and St. Peter published two different Laws; and maintains that there is but one Law for the Universal Church of Christ’.

6.6.1 Religious identity expressed through practice

‘The Way and Lineage of St. Thomas’ was how the Syrians had internalised their religion,⁷⁶⁴ as the manifest expression of their theology, ecclesiastical affiliations, liturgy, traditions, notions of asceticism and fasting, prayers, and rituals, and above all, adaptation to the norms of socio-cultural way of life. Gouvea noted this in his account of SCM religious practice (Malekandathil 2003:238-243). Their approach appears to have been not to engage in theological debate but to test practice as the touchstone of belief, such as the use of leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist, *theotokos* title of Mary, which Church Fathers were remembered in the diptychs, the *filioque* clause in the Creed, observances for Lent.

The Syriac language was an important part of this, as the vehicle for transmitting its link with Antioch. Menezes recognised this, when in the same letter (quoted at the beginning of Chapter 1), he said ‘the new bishop should be advised that the Syriac language should gradually be demolished, as this language is a channel for heresies, it should be imperative that the priests should master Latin’ (Kaniamparambil 1989:64).

6.6.2. Religious belief and practice

Different approaches to expressing religious identity between the SCM and European missionaries may have been an important factor in the misunderstandings and conflicts between the two groups. The Jacobite narrative maintains that Syriac religious identity brought to Malabar by the Edessan migration was sustained by the successive arrival of bishops.⁷⁶⁵ Sergei Minov traces the development of a distinctively Syrian Christian identity in the post-Ephremic period, with two integral elements: firstly the Syrian Christians’ ‘appeal to the authority of St Ephrem the Syrian’, and secondly to the ‘the affirmation of the Syriac language’ (Minov 2003:157), where language was considered to be ‘the most important constituent of ethnicity’ (Minov 2003:185). He traces this in the subsequent centuries, especially after the Muslim conquests, leading to ‘the development of a new, ethnically-based type of Syriac Christian identity. This cultural

⁷⁶⁴ Scaria Zacharia 1993:27.

⁷⁶⁵ Niraṇām Chronicle (Manalil 2002:114).

identity was underpinned by the distinctive Syriac Christian dogma derived from Church Fathers whose writings were accepted as canon, and from which they would not deviate.⁷⁶⁶ As Baldaeus observed in 1674, the SCM ‘would not consent to least Alteration of the Church ceremonies’, and this intransigence in religious practice was both the obstacle for missionaries and the means of their survival as a Church.⁷⁶⁷

Karen Armstrong,⁷⁶⁸ in her observations of the Jews and Christians of Israel in the late 20th century, saw parallels in the way religion was internalised and practised both. She describes the Jewish religion as one of ‘doing rather believing, and the discipline of living according to the Law’, and finds both Judaism and Orthodox Christianity being religions built on the same foundation of tradition (Armstrong 2005:274-6). A strong parallel can be seen between Armstrong’s observations about the mode of worship in the Jewish religion to that of the SCM, in their capacity to memorise long prayers, their standing for prayers, and prostrations, where they entered a ‘level deeper than the rational’, and where they appear to spend very little time contemplating within oneself ‘official doctrine’.

Malcolm Ruel notes that the Christian notion of belief or *credo* does not have its exact equivalent in most other religions (2005:249). According to Ruel ‘The absence of any self-conscious credal or doctrinal component forms a commonplace observation of most, if not all, traditional or community religions’ (2005:256), and this appears to have suited the SCM well.

Regarding how this religious belief was transmitted generationally, Fr. James Bernstein⁷⁶⁹ points to two modes of maintaining historical continuity and authenticity: Holy Tradition and Apostolic Succession. Worship involving the observance of traditions, which was officiated by clergy ordained through the channel of succession, and where a set liturgy was used, provided the continuity, and the physical, tangible,

⁷⁶⁶ Moss 2013 ‘Packed with Patristic Testimonies’: Severus of Antioch and the Reinvention of the Church Fathers.

⁷⁶⁷ Baldaeus 1674:638.

⁷⁶⁸ Contemporary writer on world religions.

⁷⁶⁹ James Bernstein (Archpriest, Antiochian Orthodox Church, USA), as a convert from Judaism to Orthodox Christianity, does a comparative analyses of Protestant and Orthodox Christian religious praxis (2008:161-330).

and spiritual link to its origin (Bernstein 2008:179-184). By these the modes, the correct faith and correct worship (*orthodoxia*) appear to be preserved generationally.

The SCM also appears to have used the vehicle of oral tradition in this process of preservation and transmission, in the frequent recitation of ballads. Scholars have challenged the reliability of transmitting cultural knowledge through oral tradition, but Carlo Severi argues that it is in fact more stable in oral societies, where the whole community participates in its transmission and is therefore less vulnerable to the alteration by an individual (Severi 2005:219).

6.6.3 Enculturation and the Hindu milieu

Translated into the SCM context, the importance of the rigid adherence to the minutiae of tradition becomes apparent. To the SCM, religious identity was also inseparable from the cultural identity they developed in their social milieu. They appear to have adapted religious practices from the surrounding Hindu culture to express and generationally transmitted Christian belief. Mundadan, citing 16th century missionaries in Malabar, notes how the SCM in that period, both clergy and laity, were rigid in their performance of ritual actions (1984:193-199). Gouvea mentions how the SCM kept rigid fasts (Malekandathil 2003:242) and that on days of fasting, they washed ‘the entire body early in the morning’, believing it an essential part of fasting and practiced untouchability strictly on such days (Malekandathil 2003:242-3), and how during the Great Lent, ‘they entered every day three times in the church’, and that ‘nobody was missing, praying most commonly prostrated with the face to the earth’ (Malekandathil 2003:242).

Practices that reflected Hindu culture included ritual perambulations around the granite cross outside the church, pouring oil and lighting lamps at its foot. At patronal festivals, they brought specific food-offerings, Hindu musicians played traditional instruments, and they shared communal feasts. However, these practices were often misunderstood by early European observers as accretions of Hinduism and thereby a corruption of their Christianity, and therefore proscribed by the Decrees of the

Synod.⁷⁷⁰ To the SCM, however, this was seen as a convergence of Brahminical and Syrian practices. Referencing the foundational stories through the singing of ballads and reel dancing is another example of Hindu practice which became an important part of expressing and maintaining their Syrian Christian religious identity. The religious identity of the SCM was also expressed and transmitted through other practices reflecting the convergence of Syrian and Brahminical cultures, such as in the distinct modes of dress where the women were fully covered in public,⁷⁷¹ their patrilineal family structure, the keeping of family genealogies, the rote-learning of long offices, and their standing during them.

6.6.4. Transmission of knowledge of religious identity

In reviewing the paucity of written accounts of the SCM identity, it is useful to reflect on their particular circumstances. As Andrew Palmer has noted (in the context of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Syria), it was the changes in circumstances (following its anathematization after Chalcedon, and later, coming under Islamic rule, that necessitated the careful articulation of their religious identity (Palmer 1990:96). The SCM do not seem to have experienced such seminal changes in the 1,200-year period before the arrival of the Portuguese. Their disagreements with Mar Abraham (in 1550) on their differing Christological doctrines did not seem to have led to a written statement of their doctrine, but rather a *Padiyola* of accepting him conditionally. Unlike the Mother Church, the absence of monasteries as repositories of religious literature in Malabar, may also have contributed to an absence of written statements of faith and doctrine.

They nevertheless appeared to have kept chronologies, as seen in the sources, which focused on history rather than doctrine.⁷⁷² Further, as no epigraphical or archaeological evidence has as yet been found in relation to these debates, historians

⁷⁷⁰ Session IX of the Decrees proscribes 'heathenish purifications', 'heathen festivities' (Zacharia 1994:203-4).

⁷⁷¹ See Aiya 1906 Vol.2:124-5.

⁷⁷² Various 16th and 17th century clerics have recorded the presence among the SCM a number of other written texts, such as Scripture, *olas* with prayers etc. kept in parish churches, as cited in Kollaparambil 1999/2017:68-9).

are forced to rely on narrow confines of text criticism of the limited set that have survived.

In the context of the SCM, one of the main vehicles for transmitting historical knowledge among the common people was ballads, that were composed whenever a church was built (Lukas 1980:xiv). Ballads were also used to convey knowledge about Christianity in general (as in Old Testamental stories), the foundational stories of the Mesopotamian migrations as well as the St. Thomas legends, and the accomplishments of visiting bishops.⁷⁷³ Viewed by early Europeans merely as an art form, they were classified as unreliable as historical sources, and this was compounded by their scepticism of orally transmitted histories. However, for the SCM, the ballads were the vehicle through which the ordinary individual maintained the long historical identity, as they were sung repeatedly and publicly at annual commemoration and patronal festival days, and privately in their homes at important moments celebrating rites of passage.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷³ Yohanan mentions the composition of a ballad about Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem at his death in 1681 (Yohannan 1919:86).

⁷⁷⁴ Details of the ballads are given in Chapter 4.1.10, and translations of parts of them are given in Appendix 4.

6.7. Conclusion

This chapter examined how the SCM's perception of their identity informed their response to Latinization. Beginning with the arrival of the fourth century Edessan migration led by Knai Thoma and then continuing with further support in the ninth century, the SCM saw Antioch as the source from which they received episcopal support and doctrinal guidance. Consequently, when faced with the demands of Latinization from 16th century onwards, they were not prepared to reject their ancient faith and allegiance to Antioch.

What is noticeable in the above discussions is the difference in response from the SCM to the various foreign bishops arriving in Malabar. The Syrian bishops from Edessa, and those who came to Kollam, as well as those arriving up to mid-16th century, all appear to have been received warmly, and accepted without reservation. However, the Nestorian bishops of the 16th century were treated cautiously, and accepted conditionally, only to perform certain episcopal functions in the absence of other bishops. The Roman Catholic bishops were also treated cautiously, but it was only with the implementation of the Latinization programme, that active resistance and conflict arose with the SCM. Conversely, when the Jacobite bishops began to arrive in the mid-17th century, they were, as before, immediately accepted as their bishops. As Yohannan argues, 'when Mar Gregorios came and began teaching them, the Syrians obeyed him without coercion from any temporal powers. Was it not because he was preaching their ancient faith that they followed him, despite suffering persecutions and rejecting material gains' (1919:84 footnote).

The nature of the SCM church and community can be cited as making a major contribution to the resistance to Latinization. The Catholics focused their efforts on turning the bishops, who to some extent succumbed. However, the leadership of the SCM church actually resides in the priests and leading laymen in each parish. Parishes were organised as mini-republics, where the laity had significant influence over the priests, making the process of Latinization difficult (Mundadan 1984:190). Candidates for priesthood were selected, trained and instituted under the authority of the parish, and their remuneration was derived from the various religious duties they performed. Churchwardens and lay administrators for the safe-keeping of the parish

assets, its records and accounts were also selected in this manner for set periods.⁷⁷⁵ This structure underpinned the actions of the priests and laity in resisting Latinization measures throughout the 16th century, when in the early encounters with the Portuguese, the SCM priests appear to have acted as leaders and rallying points in their resistance. The declaration at the Oath of the Leaning Cross was led by priests and laity. Hough described the priests or *cathanars* as ignorant, corrupt or ‘trouble-makers’ obstructing efforts to ‘correct’ their errors.⁷⁷⁶ Mathai Vettikkunnel, as a parish priest, in presuming to write for help to the Dutch on behalf of the whole church, reflects this position of parish priests.

At the heart of the self-perception of the SCM is the notion an unbroken relationship with Antioch as the source of their ecclesiastical and doctrinal identity. As Geddes reports, they saw the Portuguese as having ‘come to destroy their Religion, and had affronted their Patriarch, *by whom they had been Governed for above 1200 years*’ (Geddes 1694:62). The trajectory of their historical evolution whereby the two cohorts of Mesopotamian settlers arrived in the 4th and 8th centuries and strengthened the church in various ways (ecclesiastical structure, Apostolic Succession, episcopal provenance, Scripture, and liturgy in a sacred language) holds such a pivotal position for the SCM, that it appears to have become an integral part of their identity.

⁷⁷⁵ The Kandanad Chronicle gives a lengthy account of this (page 45).

⁷⁷⁶ Hough writes: ‘The morals of the Catanars are as low as their knowledge. This was to be expected from their ignorance of the Divine Commandments, and also of the motives to holiness with which the Gospel abounds.’ (Hough 1822:428)

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to tease apart the religious identity of the Jacobite Syrian Church of Kerala conflated with identities of other denominations of Syrian Christians in Kerala. The dominant historical narrative about the religious identity of the JSC presents an alternative account which has carried greater weight in recognition of the scholarship of its authors and the volume of publications produced. This has led to the relative neglect and dismissal of the JSC's own narrative; one that has been compounded by a number of factors: firstly, JSC accounts were mostly written in Malayalam, secondly, they depended on sources which were difficult to access (*olas* in family archives), thirdly, they tended not to follow the conventions of European scholarly writing, and fourthly, the evidence often came from more recent recensions of original texts (that had been destroyed during the Portuguese period) or oral ballads.

MV (Or.1214), an unpublished Malayalam version of one of the earliest written accounts of the JSC Church, written by Mathai Vettikkunnel, was critically analysed for the purpose of examining this community's original narrative. The consistency of narrative presented in this text was investigated against a corpus of currently available indigenous sources, including Joseph the Indian's account (1502), the Niraṇām and Kandanad Chronicles (18th and 19th centuries), and the 1771 *ola*. The critical examination led to four main points of divergence being identified and evaluated: a) the attribution of Nestorian doctrine and beliefs, b) the time of the establishment of ecclesiastical links with Antioch, c) the three-part foundation narrative of the Thomasine evangelisation and the two Mesopotamian migrations, and d) the SCM response to Latinization.

This investigation has indicated that in many ways the indigenous SCM narrative can be seen to have a considerable degree of reliability in both its internal consistency amongst different sources, and in its alignment with external accounts or records. The

thesis has argued that unlike many of the details of the dominant scholarly accounts, the indigenous SCM narrative appears to have greater coherence in terms of the chronology of known events and praxis.

The identity of Mathai himself is seen as an important aspect of the interpretation of the MV text. It appears most likely that he belonged to the Jacobite-Syrian Church, although at the time of his writing, he was engaged in a brief tactical collaboration with the Nestorian Bishop, Mar Gabriel, in ensuring that his parish-church resisted the on-going pressure of being brought under the authority of Rome through the Carmelite missionaries.

MV makes a significant contribution to the discourse in the early 18th century, being the earliest existing written document outlining the SCM narrative and identity from an indigenous perspective. As the Syriac version was translated into European languages and cited extensively by historians, it became an influential text to set next to the Catholic accounts that came before it. However, by his omission of an unambiguous statement naming his diocesan affiliation or the See from which it received Apostolic Succession, Mathai also contributed to misinterpretations of his text.

The question of Nestorian beliefs, which has been central to academic discourse on the religious identity of the SCM, from the 16th century to the present day, was analysed in Chapter 5 and found to be based on a number of elements which, on closer examination, are open to other interpretations. These included the meaning of terminology and references such as ‘Persia’, ‘Armenia’, and ‘Catholicos’, the presence of Nestorian books and bishops in the second half of the 16th century is acknowledged, references to Christianity in Malabar in early medieval texts. The chapter noted that a number of important points casting doubt on whether the SCM were held Nestorian beliefs:

- terms such as ‘Persia’ and ‘Babylon’ did not necessarily equate to the CotE or the Nestorian faith, as the Syrian Maphrian was based in that region;
- there is no mention of Nestorianism during the first hundred years of Portuguese writing in Malabar, with Menezes only introducing the allegation just before the Synod of Diamper;

- the evidence that when Nestorian bishops came, they were rejected on doctrinal grounds, and only allowed limited functions due to the absence of Syrian bishops;
- there is no evidence of change in the religious practices in the Church, or of divisions within the SCM community following different practices or faith;
- in their resistance to Latinization, the SCM demonstrated a rigid adherence to their religious practices, which contained and reflected their doctrine and theology;
- it appears that the relationship of the SCM with Antioch did not start with the 1665 Jacobite Bishop Mar Gregorius, but began much earlier.

Integral to the identity of SCM was the arrival of the Edessan settlers in the fourth century, which impacted on their religious, cultural and social identity. Through the Edessans' arrival, a link was established with the See of Antioch, which introduced to Malabar the Syriac language, liturgy, doctrine, ecclesiastical structure, as well as bringing the St Thomas Christians into the wider Christian Church. It gave them a framework of being liturgical, sacramental and hierarchical in worship. Because of the strong relationship between Edessa and St Thomas, this migration also helped in reinforcing Malabar's foundational tradition. As *Nasrānis*, the Edessan settlers brought with them their Judeo-Christian identity and culture, reflected in the careful observation of ritual practices and religious life.⁷⁷⁷

Aspects of the second Mesopotamian migration in the ninth century, such as the Bishops' names and the so-called 'Persian Crosses', have been cited as evidence of Persian origin and Nestorian identity. However, an examination of the details and context indicates that these may be better interpreted as belonging to the Syrian Church. In addition, these two arrivals of Mesopotamian settlers were seen to be critical in their evolving social identity, as they were the source of their gaining the grace and favour of the Hindu kings who endowed them with royal privileges and freedom to practise their religion, and conferring on them the title *Māppiḷa* (royal sons). The second migration helped to re-affirm the governance of the Church through the office of Archdeacon, which remained until Diamper.

⁷⁷⁷ Philip Wood 2013:40 mentions Christians of Syria and Mesopotamia being called 'Nazarenes'.

According to Syrian sources, the Edessan migration occurred with the specific purpose of supporting a pre-existing Christian community in Malabar, which the SCM maintained was established by the missionary work of St Thomas. It was in recognition of St Thomas's work, that the institution of priesthood was restored to the same families appointed by the Apostle. His role in converting them to Christianity was seen to be so fundamental that they have been referred to as 'St Thomas Christians' from medieval time to the present day. However, the lack of hard evidence of St Thomas's mission has led to it being challenged by many historians, and with that the overall foundational narrative. In Chapter 6.3., the arguments have been reviewed and show that there are a number of reasons for accepting the credibility of the foundational narrative: firstly, the consistency and detail of the narrative across a range of different indigenous sources, secondly, the absence of an alternative narrative for St Thomas's martyrdom, and thirdly, the number of references to the account in unrelated historical texts since early medieval times.

These two nodal points – St Thomas's mission and the Edessan migration – became such significant touchstones for the SCM self-perception and identity, in having brought Christianity through the preaching of the Apostle, and in regarding Antioch as the fount of its ecclesiastical and doctrinal identity, that they became an integral part of the narrative in the future. These foundational narratives appear to have had a significant impact on defining their identity in terms of *Nasrāni Māppīlas* by which they were first encountered by the Europeans. The contributions of these settler-communities, the institutional and physical monuments they erected, and through successive generations their continued presence in Malabar to the present day, appear to have helped in keeping alive the memory and conceptual links and informed their many encounters with European Christians from the late medieval period onwards. They appear to have had a self-assurance and confidence in their defined identity, and this was reflected in the open, generous and fraternal manner in which they initially welcomed the Portuguese.

Examining the SCM response to Latinization has imparted a clearer understanding of their self-perception and the strength of their religious identity. The call for Latinization was based on the Roman Catholic demand to abjure the heresy of Nestorianism, evidenced by the presence of Nestorian bishops and books present in

Malabar at the time. While the forceful measures by which Menezes reduced the Syrians to Rome is well-documented, their resistance to Latinization is rarely mentioned outside Syrian Sources. This thesis examined how Latinization was generally a superficial accommodation of the demands made of them, while the SCM continued to appeal to Antioch for help. It also noted that at the Oath of the Leaning Cross, whilst a small part of the community remained under the aegis of Rome, the majority of SCM appeared to reject Rome completely. Instead, through the consecration of Mar Thoma I as their first indigenous bishop, they placed themselves under the authority of Antioch and in direct opposition to Rome. That the SCM were able to resist the intense persecution at this time indicated the strength and clarity of their religious identity in their own minds.

An important aspect of SCM literature was found to be the consistent expression of religious identity through the recitation of historical tropes as epochal events: 1) the conversion of their ancestors to Christianity by St. Thomas the Apostle (53); 2) the arrival of the Edessan cohort of settlers that brought them the Syriac language and Antiochian links (345); 3) the arrival of the Kollam settlers (825); 4) the Synod of Diamper (1599) and Latinization; 5) Oath of the Leaning Cross and the rejection of Latinization (1653); and 6) the restoration of the Church to its old Jacobite identity with the arrival of Mar Gregorius (1665). MV adds another trope, the Carmelite persecution in the early 18th century, threatening the slow extinction of the JSC in Malabar, and which provoked Mathai to write his appeal. In addition, this study found that for the Jacobites their religious identity was preserved and transmitted more by the rigid adherence to and shared experience of rituals, ceremonies and traditions, rather than through the discussion of doctrine and belief, which was disadvantageous to them in their discourse with the European missionaries.

Although the history and identity of the Syrian Christians in Kerala has attracted a large amount of scholarly writing over the centuries, by the far the majority of these accounts have been written by people outside the Jacobite Syrian Christian community – either Europeans or Indian Christians of other denominations.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the Jacobite Syrian community articulated its identity and historical development in a time of significant changes, the 17th and 18th centuries. By analysing Syrian sources, this study has shown that existing assumptions about Jacobite Syrian history need to be critically re-evaluated, particularly in relation to the attribution of Nestorian identity and the origins of its Jacobitism. The analysis of these texts and other sources, together with a critical examination of the interpretation of key phrases and referents in their cultural and historical context, has indicated that the community has consistently identified itself as ecclesiastically linked to Antioch from the 4th century onwards, resisting all attempts to change its allegiance, whether from visiting Nestorian bishops in the late 16th century, or by Rome and the Portuguese, or by the Dutch Protestants. The fifty-year period of Latinization has been shown to be perceived by the Jacobite-Syrians as merely an accommodation under pressure rather than a genuine adoption of the Latin faith.

The consistent narrative found in the corpus of literature from the SCM community, including MV, presents a challenge to existing historical accounts and the lack of consideration they have given to the value of these indigenous sources. It appears that the understanding of the historic religious identity of the Jacobite Syrian Christians of Malabar would be richer if their own sources were given more credibility than is currently the case.

7.1. Recommendations

This study represents an initial collation and analysis of some key Jacobite sources. Some of the primary sources mentioned in Chapter 4 merit more extensive study, from a critical, linguistic and historical perspective.

There are indications of possible interpolations from the copyist in Mar Ahattalla's letters (SOCG 234: fol.355r; 234 fol.344r; 234: fol.354r, 354v), and these should be examined more closely. Another important area of study that has clearly needed is a closer examination of the Buchanan Bible (University of Cambridge Library, Syr.MS.Oo.I.1,2), its dating and history, and its rubrics, including a palaeographical

analysis. A critical edition of the 1771 *ola* manuscript (uncatalogued; in the Kollaparambil collections, Knanaya Catholic Archeparchy, Kottayam) has not yet been attempted, and could reveal further its relationship with other texts, from within and outside the Jacobite community.

Another text that needs further investigation is the letter thought to have been written in 1504 by the four bishops who arrived in Malabar, and the 1533 Introduction to it, particularly focusing on authorship and authenticity of these two parts (original Codex Vatican.Fondo Siriaco 204 f.154v-160r; edited in Syriac with Latin translation by J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Rome 1725, III,P.1,589-99). As mentioned in Chapter 5, this was translated and published by Schurhammer 1934, but needs much further analysis. Similarly, the 1301 Codex (Vat.Sir 22), would benefit a more detailed palaeographical analysis, particularly of the rubrics and the Colophon, in order to investigate authorship, and possible interpolation. The account of the SCM, *Noticias do Reino do Malabar*, written by the Roman Catholic Bishop Joseph Kariatty in Portuguese, now in the Lisbon National Library, is largely unknown to contemporary scholars, and could also provide a new perspective on 18th century discourse relating to the religious identity of the SCM.

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