

MARTIN GIELEN

**ST. THOMAS
THE APOSTLE OF INDIA**

**KOTTAYAM
1990**

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EDITOR
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INTRODUCTION

Here is an attempt by Martin Gielen(+ 1987) from Venlo, Holland to see St. Thoms the Apostle of India in a new perspective. He spent about ten years in the various libraries in Europe in search of new evidences on St. Thomas and towards the end of his life he was fully dedicated to the study on the Apostle. In 1985 Gielen finished his work. But he could not publish it and in 1987 he slept in the Lord.

In September 1984 when I went to the Symposium Syriacum at Oosterhesln (Holland) Martin invited me to his house at Venlo to have a look at the work he was preparing. At that time he asked me to undertake the publication of his work in case he happens to die beforehand. I agreed. At that time I did not think that Martin would pass away so soon without its publication.

After his death, Nellie Gielen-Vorsbeck, his wife sent me the typed script, some 670 pages. I went through the copy several times and made suitable corrections. There was still the problem of financing its publication. Then the Missiebuero in Roermond, Holland readily agreed to finance it and immediately I started its printing. The Editor of this Book and the Governing Board of the Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India Publications are thankful to Missiebuero for its geneorsity.

As for the editorial work, it is enough to say that I had to do quite a lot of work. Martin analyses the life, missionary activities and the possible writings of St. Thomas, in four parts. According to him, some of the New Testament writings were from St. Thomas. He particularly mentions the Epistle of Jude and the Epistle to the Hebrews.

He sees the influence of Thomas in some other works too. Some of the so called apocryphal works, such as the Revelation, Gospel and Acts of Thomas in their original form were from Thomas. But since the Church did not take care to protect them from falsification, and did not include them in the Canon of the Sacred Scriptures, they underwent mutilation in the hands of the Gnostics. We must admit that Martin proposes these as hypotheses and not as conclusions. He raises new questions and leaves them open for further study and research.

One must definitely admit the patience with which the author undertook the study on St. Thomas. He is more a popular writer than an academic scholar. He points out that the Apostle is not merely the *doubting* Thomas. He is much more than that. The author's hypothesis is that Thomas is a nick name, meaning twin. Its Greek form is *Didymos*. The real name of the Apostle is *Juda Thaddaeus* or Thaddai. And he says that *Addai* is another form of Thaddaeus (Thaddai). Hence Thomas must be identified with Addai. But eventually, he says, people forgot all about it and called the Apostle always by the nick name. Thomas. Perhaps one can label all these as conjectures or wishes. But it is a fact that Martin opens a new door. He presents the Apostle as the "brother of the Lord", who knew Judaism and its "laws" perfectly well, who travelled far and wide, perhaps more than the rest of the Apostles, and who had definitely great influence in the early Church. As the author says, "we can only throw light on the matter, if we can manage to get the figure of Thomas in his time and his surroundings". He adds: "The figure of Thomas has become surrounded by a mixture of truth and myth.....After long and deep thinking over the many virtually insoluble problems, we found ourselves faced with unexpected surprises. Entirely new points of view were discovered. Several old oriental traditions were confirmed. Other traditions were rejected as untenable. By no means all the problems were solved to our satisfaction. To produce the remaining evidence, a

great deal of study of the source materials will be necessary, a task which I gladly leave to specialists"(p. 5-6).

Remembering Martin Gielen for his positive and considerable contributions we earnestly pray that God may receive him and give him eternal rest with all the just through the intercession of St. Thomas the Apostle of India. The Thomas Christians in India are in a very special way thankful to Martin Gielen for his courageous venture in presenting the Apostle Thomas in an entirely new perspective. May I joyfully present this publication to the people of God.

Editor,
Geevarghese Chediath

Kottayam
September 20, 1990.

PART I

THE PERSON AND HIS
PARENTAGE

Chapter I

Legend or Truth

It was a long standing contact with India through the work of an old friend which led me to write this book. This friend and former fellow townsman is Father Frans Schlooz, Salesian of Don Bosco, who has become widely known the world over for his labours, over more than forty years, for lepers, the dying and refugees in India. As director of the Social Welfare Centre "Beatitudes", in the suburbs of the city of Madras, he was working almost in the very same area where according to eastern tradition the apostle Thomas spent the last days of his fruitful apostolate, where he died a martyr's death, and where he was buried. This tradition is considered by some in the western world as legendary. Legendary, in this context, means untrustworthy, unproveable, entirely fictitious and in conflict with the truth.

We may show this by the following citations:

"Little is known with certainty of the missionary activity of the other apostles, apart from Peter and Paul. The Scriptures give no details of it. There are, however, indications that Christianity had reached Afghanistan and India by the third century, and perhaps even earlier."¹ Again, "It is impossible to prove that Thomas visited India."² "Peter is the only one of the twelve whom we see active as a missionary."³

It is remarkable that the majority of other writers believe that all the apostles, except James the Less, took part in the preaching of the Gospel outside Palestine.

1. A. Mulders, *Missiageschiedenis*, Bussum. 1957, p. 31.

2. A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, Leiden, 1962, p. 27.

3. H. Lietzmann, *Die Geschichte der alten Kirche*, Berlin, 1961, p. 62.

"The fates of the other apostles, who all died before the year 70, are almost wholly unknown to us. At the most we may point to the possibility, not the reality, of an apostolate of Thomas in India. Probably Christianity first reached the Indus area in the third century from Syria (Edessæ); South India in the fourth century as a result of the settlement of Persians or Armenians. Our first certain information comes from the sixth century when Cosmas, who travelled to India around 530, confirms the presence of Christian communities in India."⁴

"It is not improbable that before the end of the third century Christianity had arrived in India itself. We have also the well-known and detailed story of the introduction of the faith to India by the apostle Thomas. The narrative is so interwoven with miraculous stories that scholars are at least inclined to question it and many of them are disposed to dismiss it as having no basis in fact. How it arose at all becomes a subject of interesting speculation. A vast quantity of ink has been spilled in the attempt to prove that Thomas actually made converts in India, either in the north or south or in both places."⁵

"Everything leads us to believe that before the rise of the Sassanid dynasty (224-632) the Persian empire had no organised Christian communities. Not until about the year 250 could Christianity accomplish its expansion to the banks of the Tigris."⁶

This attitude, then, is entirely in accordance with the view that Christianity was not brought to India, from Persia, until the sixth century by one Thomas Cana who is believed to have been later confused with the apostle Thomas.

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4. Bihlmeyer-Tüchler, *Kirchengeschichte*, I, Paderborn, 1966, p. 64.
 5. K. S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, I, London, 1947, p. 107.
 6. J. Labourt, *Le Christianisme dans l'empire Perse*, Paris, 1904, p. 17.

Diametrically opposed to this view is the Indian tradition, which indicates the places where the apostle preached.⁷ The *Thomas-Christians* of Kerala in Southern India are proud to have derived their Christian faith directly from the apostle, and to have preserved it loyally through the centuries. India honours the apostle Thomas as a national saint, celebrates his anniversaries on a large scale, and has issued postage stamp with his image on them. Many books and articles have been published in India on his presence there, a literature which has remained unknown in the west, or has been dismissed with a certain contempt. The west has, on the other hand, concerned itself rather too much with such apocryphal writings as the *Acts of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Thomas*, found in Egypt, which have merely contributed to even greater confusion and uncertainty.

We can only throw light on the matter if we can manage to set the figure of Thomas in his time and his surroundings, that is, if we can give a reasonably based reconstruction of his life. To my astonishment, there did not appear a single book which treated the life of this apostle as a whole. The accounts of his life in Encyclopaedias are conspicuous for their superficiality and uncertainty. Their authors, as a rule, do not spend much time on a controversial figure such as Thomas, but confine themselves to repeating what others have already written, without making a thorough search for the truth. As a result, the figure of Thomas has become surrounded by a mixture of truth and myth from which no rational person can grow any the wiser. To attain any clear results, one has to dive deep into the details given in the bible, early Christian literature, the church history of the first centuries, archeology and art. It required a long and arduous study, which lasted more than ten years, and in which it was

7. G. Ghediath, *Mar Thoma Slihywle Indian Sabha*, Kottayam, 1988; X Koodapuzha, *Bharathasabharitram*, Kottayam, 1990; P. J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, London/Bombay, 1970.

possible to make only very slow progress, because of the mass of contradictions. Many of the early writings have been lost, or have only come down to us in mutilated form.

After long and deep thinking over the many virtually insoluble problems, we found ourselves faced with unexpected surprises. Entirely new points of view were discovered. Several old oriental traditions were confirmed. Other traditions rejected as untenable. By no means all the problems were solved to our satisfaction. To produce the remaining evidence, a great deal of study of the source materials will be necessary, a task which I gladly leave to specialists.

What we can say is that as a result of this study, an entirely different Thomas has been revealed from the figure whom we thought we knew. We have revealed the main lines along which his life developed, his origins, his background, his incredibly wide field of activity and his enormous significance for the history of both Christianity and Judaism. A complete surprise, for this writer too, was the discovery of his writings by which a solution has probably been found for many extremely serious problems faced by biblical scholars in the past, when they attempted to explain and clarify the Holy Scriptures. Perhaps there may be readers who have great difficulty with our critical approach to the Holy Scriptures, with the freedom with which we defend quite radical points of view and propose minor corrections. We base our procedure in this on the encyclical letter *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pope Pius XII, issued in 1943 on the study of the Holy Scriptures.

Chapter 2

The Real Name of Thomas

Every person is known by his name. The name which is given to us by our parents at our birth follows us throughout our life. Everything that anyone does is recorded under his name. Only by the use of someone's name can his deeds be transmitted to posterity. If that name is not entirely certain, or is later altered, then a lasting source of confusion arises.

One of the very first startling discoveries which one makes in studying Thomas, is that his real name was not Thomas at all. At first it sounds strange, but it is nonetheless true. Almost all writers over the centuries have been agreed that Thomas is a mere nickname, derived from the Aramaic word *tauma*, which means twin. In the Old Testament and in Jewish tradition the name Thomas hardly ever occurs. To Jewish ears it is an impossible name. In our day too, the word "twin" could not be used as a personal name. Out of curiosity I have searched for a Mr. Tweeling or Zwilling in Dutch and German namelists, but could not find a single one. Just try to imagine that you had to appear under the name "Twin". It is so laughable that it is an object of scorn and gives an immediate invitation to make jokes. We may be sure, then, that Thomas would never have introduced himself under this ridiculous sounding name. And why should he have done so? He had, in fact, already a name of his own which was very popular among the Jews. A name derived from one of the fathers of his race, A name of national pride, which recalled the heroic deeds of the Maccabees. A religious and pious sounding name, derived from Jehudah, which means "I will praise and glorify God". We cannot avoid the fact, but must say, with some hesitation, that he bore the name of Judas.

Psychologically, it is difficult for a Christian to accept this and to realise its consequences fully. The name has fallen into discredit as a result of the betrayal of the other apostle, Judas Iscariot. The latter sold his beloved master for thirty pieces of silver to his enemies (Mt. 26:48-50).

The name of Judas became a symbol of treachery, and was shunned as far as possible. Even now no Christian mother would ever think of naming her son Judas. It was forgotten that there had also been other apostles who bore this name. The name Judas, for the apostle Thomas, was forgotten, above all in the west, and had, as it were, to be rediscovered here.

The ecclesiastical historian Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History* four times refers to *Judas*, who was also called Thomas. The name *Judas-Thomas* occurs in almost all the old Syriac writings, which have come down to us, such as the *Doctrina Apostolorum*, the *Epistula Apostolorum*, the *Doctrina Addaei* etc. The decisive fact is that the name Judas-Thomas is also found in the old Syriac manuscripts of the Gospel of John, *Syrus Sinaiticus* and *Syrus Curetonianus*. In the later manuscripts of this gospel, the name is replaced by the Greek word for twin, *Didymos* (Joh. 11:16; 20:24; 21:2). The most detailed proof is naturally found in the *Acts of Thomas*. In this he is referred to *ten* times under the name of *Thomas*. We meet him *fifteen* times under the name of *Judas-Thomas*, or as *Judas* who was also called Thomas. No less than *fifty* times, he is simply called *Judas*. No doubt is possible: *The real name of Thomas was Judas*. In later western translations and retellings of the story, the name *Thomas* gradually gained the upper hand, until it had completely superseded the name Judas.

Chapter 3

The Acts of Thomas

This very detailed account of the acts of the apostle Thomas formed one of the best loved stories of the Christian world. It was carefully transmitted to posterity. The original text, if it ever existed, has disappeared but there are many redactions in Greek, Syriac, Armenian, Latin and Coptic (Egyptian) which have been preserved. They differ from each other but in their essentials they reveal a large measure of agreement.⁸

The entire narrative comprises about sixty to a hundred pages, in which thirteen separate incidents in the life of Thomas are related, concluding with an account of the martyrdom of the famous and holy apostle Thomas. To give an impression of its content and style, it seems sufficient to relate the story of the first incident in a little more detail.

The apostles were together in Jerusalem and drew lots to divide the countries of the earth among themselves, so that each one should travel to the land where the Lord sent him. India fell to the lot of Thomas. He, however, was unwilling to go there, and said that because of his weakness he could not make the journey:

“How can I, who am a Hebrew, travel there and preach the Gospel to the Indians?”

While he was considering this, the Saviour appeared to him in the night and said to him:

8. A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, Leiden, 1962; See the bibliography in J. Quasten, *Patrology*, I., Utrecht-Antwerp, 1975, p. 139-140.

"Fear not, Thomas, go to India and preach the Word there, for my spirit is with you."

He did not obey, but said:

"Send me somewhere else, wherever thou wilt, for I will not go to India."

Then it happened that a merchant, named Habban, arrived, who had received instructions from king Gundafor to buy a carpenter and bring him to India.

The Lord saw him, towards noon, in the market and said:

"Dost thou wish to buy a carpenter? I have a slave who is a carpenter, and I wish to sell him."

He pointed to Thomas in the distance, and agreed with Habban to sell him for three pounds of silver. He wrote a bill of sale, which read as follows:

"I Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter, confirm that I have sold my slave, named Judas, to you, Habban, merchant of Gundafor, king of the Indians."

When the bill of sale was ready the Saviour took Judas who was also called Thomas and led him to Habban the merchant. When Habban saw him, he said to him:

Is this man your Master?

The apostle answered and said:

"Yes, he is my Master."

Habban said: I have bought you from him.

The apostle was silent.

The following morning, during his prayers, Thomas said

"I shall go wherever thou wilt, Jesus. Thy will be done."

He went to the merchant Habban, taking nothing except the price of his purchase which the Lord had given him with the words:

"May my grace and this price be with you wherever thou goest."

The apostle helped Habban to put his goods on board. When they were on board their ship and sat down, Habban began to question the apostle saying:

What sort of craft do you know?

Thomas replied: "Making ploughs, ox yokes and scales from wood. Also, making boats and oars for boats, masts and small rudders. I can also make tombstones, columns, temples and royal palaces from stone."

The merchant Habban said to him:

"It is well, for such an artist is the man whom we need."

They then set off, had a favourable wind and sailed on in good heart until they came to Andrapolis, a royal city in India. When they had left their ship, they went into the city. And there they heard on all sides, the sounds of flutes, water organs and trumpets.

The apostle questioned them saying:

"What sort of holiday is this, which is being celebrated in the city?"

Then the inhabitants of the place said to him:

"The gods have led you too to this place to join our revelry. The king has but one daughter, and now he is giving her a husband in marriage. The bridal feast is being held with joy, amid the presence of many guests."

The king has sent heralds out to command everyone to come to the feast: the rich and the poor, slaves and free men, strangers and natives. If anyone refuses and does not come to the wedding, he must answer for it to the king.

When Habban heard this he said to the apostle:

"Let us go too so that we shall not incur the king's anger, especially since we are foreigners."

After they had entered the inn for foreigners, and enjoyed a little rest, they too went to the wedding feast. Since

the apostle saw that all the guests were seated, he too sat down in their midst. Everyone looked at him, as people look at a stranger who has come from afar. Habban the merchant, however, seated himself at another place like a lord. While everyone ate and drank, the apostle took nothing.

Those who were sitting by him asked:

"Why have you come here, if you do not eat and drink?" He answered them:

"I have come here for a more important matter than food and drink, to carry out the will of the king."

While they were eating and drinking, garlands and fragrant unguents were brought. Everyone took some of the balm: one anointed his face, another his beard, and a third other parts of his body. The apostle anointed the crown of his head, put some in his nostrils, some in his ears, and taking the garland of myrtle and other flowers which had been brought to him, he set it on his head. He also took a small reed in his hand. A woman flute player went around, pausing before each guest to play a little. The flute player was a Jewess by birth. But when she came to the apostle, she remained standing by him and played:

"The King of the Jews is the true God.

The King of the Jews is the true God."

While the apostle listened with downcast eyes, a wine pourer came, and, angered that he was not drinking anything, struck him in the face. The apostle raised his eyes, fixed them on the man who had struck him and said:

"My God will forgive you that injustice in the world to come, but in this world he shall show his wonders, and I shall soon see how the hand which struck me shall be carried off by dogs."

When he had said this, he began to sing a long song in honour of the bride, praising her as a daughter of the light, with her radiant beauty, her garments which resembled the flowers of the spring:

"She aroused joy by her wisdom, her mouth was fit to sing songs of praise. Her tongue was like a carpet unrolled for him who enters. Her fingers open the gates of the city. Her bridal chamber is sweetly scented with balsam and other fragrant perfumes."

When he stopped singing, all those present looked at him. He was silent. Even his face was altered. They did not understand his words, because he was a Hebrew and had sung in Hebrew. Only the flute player understood everything. As she left she played to the others, but looked often at him, loving him as a fellow countryman. He was a fair youth to see, more so than all the others who were present.

The wine-pourer, however who had struck him a blow in the face, had gone to the well to fetch water. There he was attacked by a lion, which killed him, tore his limbs apart and left them lying there. The dogs seized them, among them a black dog took his right hand and fetched it to the place where the feast was being held. Everyone was alarmed and asked who it was, who had left them. When it became clear that it was the wine-pourer who had struck the apostle, the flute player stopped playing, threw herself at his feet and said:

"This man is either a god, or an emissary of God, for I heard him say to the wine-pourer in Hebrew: 'I shall see how the hand which struck me shall be carried off by dogs.' Just as he said, it has happened."

Some of them believed her, others did not. The king, who had observed this, approached and said to the apostle:

"Arise and come with me and pray for my daughter, for she is the only child I have, and today I give her in marriage."

The apostle however did not wish to go with him, for God had not yet been revealed to him. The king led him reluctantly into the bridal chamber, so that he should pray for the newly married couple. The apostle approached and began to pray in these words:

"My Lord and my God, who accompaniest thy servant, guide of those who believe in him, refuge and consolation of the despairing, hope of the poor and liberator of the imprisoned; healer of souls which are suffering; redeemer of all creation; Thou, who makest the world to live and gives strength to the soul, Thou who knowest the future, that You bringest to fruition through us; Thou art the planter of the good tree and by thy hands all good works are brought to pass; I ask thee, Lord Jesus, while I pray and beseech Thee on behalf of these young people, that Thou wilt give them whatever will help them, be of use to them, and make them pious."

When he had laid his hands upon them and said "The Lord be with you", he left them and went away.

The preceding passage is a short abbreviated part of the first of the Acts of Thomas. Those readers who find it an attractive story, and believe that the *Acts of Thomas* will be of great value for the reconstruction of his life, must unfortunately be disappointed. It is not an historical record but a tale, in which poetic licence and popular fantasy have the upper hand. The appetite for stories of the miraculous is amply catered for in a way which seems to us incomprehensible and often unpalatable.

The second chapter relates the story of Thomas' arrival at the court of king Gundafor, who gave him instructions to build a palace. The money which the king sent, however, was divided by Thomas among the poor and needy with these words:

"The Lord has destined this for you and he gives food for everyone, for he is the guardian of widows and orphans."

Warned by his friends, the king had Judas, who was also called Thomas, arrested. In his interrogation Thomas explained that he had in fact built a palace, but that the king would not see it until he should depart this life. After long hesitation the king decided to have him flayed alive and then burned. Meanwhile, a brother of the king, named Gad, had died. The king was saddened, for he was very fond of his brother. Angels bore Gad's soul to heaven, showed him the many dwellings there and asked him where he wanted to live. He chose a fine palace for himself, but was unable to have it, for it had been built by Thomas for his brother. At his request he was allowed to return to earth to buy the palace from his brother. The king now saw his error and understood the words of Thomas about his future eternal palace in heaven. He had the apostle released from prison, asked his forgiveness for what he had done and said that he was ready to serve the God whom Thomas preached.

This tale, and others like it are told with oriental exaggeration, mingled with texts which are familiar to us from the gospels, and illuminated with poems, incomprehensible to us, from unknown sources. In succeeding chapters we are told of: A snake which killed a young man, and at Thomas' command had to suck the venom out again, so that the young man was restored to life; an ass foal which could talk; a woman who was possessed by a devil; a young man who had killed his beloved; a general who called in his aid for the healing of his wife and daughter and who took Thomas to another part of India; wild asses which offered themselves as beasts of burden when exhausted horses could no longer draw a carriage; the conversion of several women who were related to another king, their baptism and the baptism of the king's son. This last event led ultimately to his martyrdom.

We cannot linger on this work, for it is impossible to distinguish fantasy and truth, in the absence of other sources. It is certain that many heretical influences have forced their way into the narrative. We shall see later how far a core of true information can be revealed. When it is necessary and

useful, we shall return to this work in later chapters. Since it cannot be used as a basis for our knowledge of the apostle Thomas, we shall have to turn to more solid sources, such as the Gospels, the early history of the church and early Christian literature.

Chapter 4

The Task of the Twelve Apostles

From the beginning of His public life, we see that Christ gathered around Him a group of disciples. They accompanied Him on His journeys, listened attentively to Him, and became as it were His family: He called the men He wanted; and they went and joined Him. He appointed twelve as His companions whom He would send out to proclaim the Gospel (Mark 3:14).

Luke is even more specific:

During this time He went out one day into the hills to pray, and spent the night in prayer to God. When day broke He called His disciples to Him and from among them He chose twelve and named them apostles: Simon to whom He gave the name of Peter, and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who turned traitor (Luke 6:12-13).

We shall concern ourselves exclusively with the twelve persons who were chosen by Christ Himself during His public life. Other persons to whom the name of apostle was later given, such as Luke, Matthias, Paul and Barnabas, thus fall wholly outside our subject. That there were twelve of them is amply proved by numerous gospel texts,

and is generally recognised as accurate by tradition. Several exegetes of the Scriptures see in this number a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, and attempt to identify each apostle as a representative of a tribe. Others see in it a symbol of a completeness. There are twelve hours in the day by which the world is illuminated. There are twelve months in the year, in which our life continually repeats itself. In any case it was a group which was large enough to serve as a basis for the government of a community, small enough to maintain the bond of mutual love and unity of purpose. To them were applied the words which Jesus spoke at the Last Supper, just before His Passion:

This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I call you servants no longer; a servant does not know what his master is about. I have called you friends because I have disclosed to you everything that I heard from my Father. You did not choose me; I chose you. I appointed you to go on and bear fruit, fruit that shall last, so that the Father may give you all that you ask in my name. This is my commandment to you: love one another (Jn.15:12-17).

The Greek word *apostolos* means envoy, messenger. They were to be sent out just as Christ Himself had been sent by His heavenly Father. They would remain in His presence, listen to His directions, be given special duties as a preparation and practice for their future task. That is, the expansion of the church, which He would build upon a rock, and of which Peter and the apostles were to be the foundations (Mt.16:18-19, Lk. 20:31-32). It is a church in which they shall have all the power. Jesus showed them the way in which they were to exercise that power: with mildness, always ready to forgive (Mt. 18:21), with humility and devotion, so that they shall see in their rule only a means of being of

service (Jn 13:16; Lk 22:24-27). As the Passion approached, their instructions became more specific and urgent. They must continue the sacrifice of the New Covenant and also make the sacrifice of their own lives. They were to be sent out as Jesus had been sent out by the heavenly Father (Jn.17:18). The Holy Spirit would enlighten them so that they, who had been witnesses of the miracles of Jesus, would witness in their turn (Jn. 14:26; 16:13; 19:35; 15: 26-27; 20:30; 21:24; Acts 1:8). In carrying out this task they were not to expect the honour and the reverence of the world but mockery, contempt and persecution:

If the world hates you, it hated me first as you know well. If you belonged to the world the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, because I have chosen you out of the world, for that reason the world hates you. Remember what I said "a servant is not greater than his master." As they persecuted me, so they will persecute you (Jn.15:18-21). I have told you all this to guard you against the breakdown of your faith. They will ban you from the synagogue; indeed the time is coming when anyone who kills you will suppose that he is performing a religious duty. They will do these things because they do not know the Father or me. I have told you all this so that when the time comes for it to happen you may remember my warning (Jn. 16: 1-4).

In amazement we wonder how people with such a prospect in front of them dared to accept this apostolic task and to bring it to fruition. If we proceed from a human standpoint it is incomprehensible and inexplicable. It was not their own courage on which they relied. It was the Holy Spirit of God, which was to inspire them, which was to endow them with exceptional strength, and a courage which was beyond human powers. The Holy Spirit was to fill them, rest on them, dwell in them. The Holy Spirit was to enlighten them and help them, so that

they who were once witnesses of Jesus' miracles would bear witness in their turn. They received the power to work miracles in the name of Jesus. They received the power to forgive sins and to pronounce them unforgiven. By their efforts the mustard seed, the church, would grow to a mighty tree. From their lips would the glad tidings be preached to the uttermost ends of the earth. (Mt. 24: 14; 26:13).

Chapter 5

The Place of Thomas Among the Twelve

In the Gospels and in early Christian literature, there are at least *fifty* lists of the names of the Apostles. These lists differ slightly, since the same apostle is not always listed under the same name. Thomas is mostly given as eighth, which at first sight seems quite a solid factual basis.

Great confusion surrounds the names at the end of the lists. In particular, the frequent occurrence of the name Judas presents an almost insoluble puzzle, which has provoked many scholars to ponder it, to suggest combinations of names, or to sheer guesswork. The main cause of this confusion must be sought in the failure to remember the real name of Thomas, and in a distaste for the name of Judas. In fact, a nickname like Thomas - The Twin - does not belong in a proper list of names. I am convinced that the name of Thomas was not added to the lists until later, because it was felt that the earlier compilers had made a mistake. This must have happened very early in the second century, for his name, despite its odd sound, occurs in virtually all the lists. We may regard this as a proof of the great

popularity of Thomas among the first generations of Christians. A list from which his name was missing was in their eyes not complete. In this way began a process of adaptation, by which the name of Thomas was inserted wherever it seemed to have been forgotten by the predecessors. As far as I am aware, Thomas' name is omitted only from the gospel of the *Ebionites*, a community of Jewish Christians around Jerusalem, who however must certainly have been aware of the true name of Thomas.

In fact, we have to look for Thomas under the name of *Judas*. In this we have a wide choice. Spread over the many lists we come upon the names of:

Judas Iscariot the betrayer
Judas the son of James
Judas Thaddeus or Addeus
Judas Lebbeus
Judas Zealot

Take note: All these names refer to *one* of the twelve apostles. Thus we have to ask ourselves the question: How many Judases were there among the apostles? The confusion is total. If we were to mention all the contradictory opinions held throughout Christendom, the whole book could be devoted to the subject, without shedding any real light on it. This was a problem which occupied me intensely for many months. The solution is very surprising and relatively simple if we accept as decisive the text of John 14:18-23, which deals with Christ's words of parting at the Last Supper:

I will not leave you bereft, I am coming back to you. In a little while the world will see me no longer, but you will see me; because I live, you too will live, then you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you. The man who has received my commands and obeys them - he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father; and I will love him and disclose myself to him. Judas

asked Him - the other Judas, not the Iscariot, - 'Lord, what can have happened that you mean to disclose yourself to us alone and not to the world?'

By the addition of 'not the Iscariot' the identity of the questioner was apparently fully established and clear for any reader. If there had been several Judases, then a further explanation must have followed. Thus, we have here an indirect solution to the problem. As well as Judas the betrayer there was only one other Judas present, and it cannot have been anyone other than our Judas-Thomas. That this 'Judas' did in fact refer to Thomas and not Iscariot is evident from various old manuscripts. The so-called *Codex Syrus Curetonianus* names 'Judas Thomas' at this point. The *Codex Syrus Sinaiticus* gives only the name *Thomas* instead of *Judas*, not Iscariot. In any case, the question was typical of Thomas. The question of a young, critical apostle, who wanted to penetrate to the truth; who was disappointed in his expectation that Jesus would reveal himself to the entire Jewish people as their Messiah.

All the apostles hoped that Jesus would take upon himself the leadership of the Jewish state in the struggle with the Romans. We also have here an explanation of the name Judas Zealot which occurs five times in the lists of the apostles. Thomas, with Simon the Zealot, belonged to the rigorist group of the Zealots, the zealots for the honour of God, the Law, and the freedom of the Jewish state.

The conclusion, that besides the betrayer there was only one other Judas, lends us to the logical inference that all the variants of the name of Judas which refer to an apostle, must be applied to our Judas-Thomas.

Chapter 6

Judas Thaddeus, the Helper in Hopeless Causes

The greatest obstacle to the assertion that there was only one Judas among the apostles, apart from Judas Iscariot, is the presence of Judas Thaddeus. He received a hagiography of his own, and his own feast day 27 October, on which he is commemorated with Simon the Zealot. The events of his life, his martyrdom and his tomb are surrounded by hopeless confusion. The most important sites at which his relics were honoured were Rome, Toulouse, Reims, Clervaux, the old imperial city of Goslar and the famous monastery of Husfeld, north of Fulda. He is especially popular with the people of Austria and Poland, where there are many who bear the name of Thaddeus. From the extent of his veneration, it is apparent that he has often helped many believers in a miraculous manner to overcome the difficulties of their lives. He has also helped me, in a remarkable way, in the task which at first appeared hopeless, of reconstructing the life of the apostle Thomas.

Because of his name, Judas, I had to concern myself with him intensively. He very early gave me the first intimation that there was something which did not add up. There were many vague indications that he could have had something to do with Thomas. Thaddeus was called the apostle of Edessa; Thomas too was the apostle of Edessa. Thaddeus was the colleague of Simon the Zealot. Thomas too is referred to as Simon's colleague. For thirteen years Thaddeus traversed the immeasurable realms of the Persians. Thomas too, in my reconstruction, travelled for about fifteen years in the country of the Parthians. Seen from the viewpoint of the West, the Persians were a part of the Parthians

and the Parthians a part of the Persians. The name Thaddeus, which also occurs as *Addeus* and *Addai*, is, according to many authors, derived from the Aramaic 'Thad' meaning 'breast' and could be defined as 'the frank', 'the open-hearted'.

Almost as often, he is called Lebbeus (Lebbai) a word derived from the Hebrew *lev*, which survives as the Dutch word *lef* (nerve, pluck) thus we can translate Lebbeus as 'plucky, courageous, the man with nerve'. Both names are to be seen as popular nicknames describing his character. This person must have made an exceptional impression on the first Christians. Yet remarkably, the names remain unattached to any person, without any clear connection with the gospels and church history unless we link them to Judas Thomas. Thaddeus is sometimes called Didymus; Didymus is the Greek form of Thomas. Thomas is occasionally called Thaddeus.

R. A. Lipsius summarises the confusion in this observation: 'The identification of Thomas with Thaddeus or Lebbeus rests, apparently, above all on the considered conjecture of the authors, but since Origen it has been generally found among the Greeks, the Latins, the Copts and the later Syrians.'⁹

Throughout history, men have played with the idea that Thomas and Thaddeus could have been one and the same person, but without ever being able to reach a generally accepted identification. The doubt whether Thomas and Thaddeus were really two different persons crops up everywhere, including the authors of our own time. Because of the many difficulties and contradictions, scholars have failed to go back to the origins of the question in order to draw the only true conclusion. It is clear from various passages in the gospels that the character of Thomas can be described as openhearted, and courageous.

9. R. A. Lipsius, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden*, Braunschweig, 1883.

Let us confine ourselves to the events preceding the resurrection of Lazarus:

After hearing of (Lazarus') illness Jesus waited for two days in the place where He was. After this He said to His disciples 'let us go back to Judea'. 'Rabbi', the disciples said, 'it is not long since the Jews there were wanting to stone you. Are you going there again?' Jesus replied, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone can walk in daytime without stumbling, because he sees the light of this world. But if he walks after nightfall, he stumbles because the light fails him.' After saying this He added, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep but I shall go and wake him.' The disciples said, 'Master, if he has fallen asleep he will recover'. Jesus however, had been speaking of his death, but they thought that He meant natural sleep. Then Jesus spoke out plainly; 'Lazarus is dead. I am glad not to have been there; it will be for your good and the good of your faith. But let us go to him'. Thomas, called 'the Twin', said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us go also, that we may die with him' (Jn. 11: 6-16).

Some commentators believe that these words oblige them to conclude that Thomas was a pessimist and tired of life. In reality he was keenly aware of how matters stood and was fully prepared to risk any dangers with courage and to die with Jesus if need be.

We may also refer to the work of the Bollandists. In 1643 they began to publish accounts of all the saints who figure in the calendar of the church, beginning with the saint of 1 January. Their work, written in Latin under the title of *Acta Sanctorum* forms an impressive series of large folios, the pride of many an old monastic library. Begun in Vienna, their work was continued in Paris, London and Brussels. Unfortunately it has not progressed beyond the saints of early December, so that they have never arrived at a thorough study of the apostle Thomas

whose feast day fell in the west on 21 December. Their description of Judas Thaddeus comprises 31 pages in which many doubts about numerous acts attributed to him are clearly evident.

As the great work will most probably never be completed, the Bollandists have begun to publish a series of *Analecta Bollandiana*, in which over eighty books have already appeared. I may conclude this chapter about *Thaddeus* with a quotation from the *Analecta Bollandiana*:¹⁰

“Until the sixth century the apostolate and martyrdom of Thaddeus in Armenia was unknown. Only in the tenth century were texts about him discovered. Not until the twelfth century did he receive a place in the liturgy. According to a certain text he was martyred by Sanatrouk in Edessa, while according to another text he escaped death and continued to preach in the East.”

Until not long ago, the Bollandists were regarded as the super-specialists who knew all there was to know about the saints. Our final conclusion is not a rejection of Judas Thaddeus, but a complete identification of him with Judas-Thomas, through which the patron of hopeless causes acquires a new lustre and a firmer basis in fact.

A major support for the accuracy of the cycle: Thomas=Judas Thomas = Judas Thaddeus = Judas Lebbeus, is found in the most important Father of the Eastern church, Saint Ephraim. He lived and worked in Edessa, the site of Thomas' burial place. He died there in 373 after a fruitful life as an author. Because of his work he was honoured with the title of 'pillar of the church', 'prophet of the Syrians' and 'harp of the Holy Spirit', for his many poems and hymns won a firm place in the liturgy. He wrote a song in praise of Thomas, in seventeen stanzas, from which we cite this passage from the eleventh:

10. *Analecta Bollandiana*, no. 80. p. 430.

Blessed art thou Thomas, the twin in thy deeds.
Twin is thy spiritual power, not one thy power,
not one thy name. But many and signal are they,
renowned is thy name among the apostle, From my
lowly estate thee I haste to sing.....¹¹

Other abundantly clear proofs of the accuracy of this theory will be presented in the course of this book.

Chapter 7

The Brothers of the Lord

In the east, there exists or existed an old tradition that Thomas was a brother of the Lord. In the west, respect for the traditions of the east is not very great. Even the mere thought that Thomas may have been a brother of Christ, arouses resistance. At first sight, one can find nothing in the gospels which seems to point to a relationship between Christ and Thomas. Yet this tradition is recorded in ancient writings and is quite well documented.

A Coptic manuscript has been found bearing the title:¹² "This is the preaching of the apostle of India, the Brother of the Lord, who is usually called Thaddeus, as he preached it in Syria and Mesopotamia." The contents of this manuscript have unfortunately been lost. Further, we also know of an old Armenian manuscript with the title:¹³ *Martyrdom of Thomas, the Brother of the Lord.*

11. Lamy, S. *Ephraemi Syri Hymni et Sermones*, IV., Mechiliniac, 1902, col. 694.

12. F. Haase, *Apostel und Evangelisten in den orientalischen Überlieferung*, Münster, 1922. p. 11.

13. *Ibid.* 5,

The whole problem becomes even stranger, as some in the west believe that gnostic documents found at Nag Hammadi and elsewhere compel them to conclude that Thomas was the twin brother of Christ. According to some this was a fabrication of anti-Christian groups who wished to ridicule the virginity of Mary. If one combines the idea of a 'brother of the Lord' with the name Thomas or 'Twin' one soon arrives at the idea of a twin brother. We can scarcely assume that Christian groups ever fell into such a foolish error, for it is wholly in conflict with the Holy Scriptures. We believe that this assumption is based more on the faulty translation of eastern texts which are difficult of access, than on the opinion of eastern Christians. In the east where Thomas preached and lived, people would have been more aware of who exactly Thomas was, than in the west where even his real name was forgotten.

The discussion in the west has concentrated on the question of whether Jesus had any brothers in the normal sense of the word. The question is still alive and there is a difference of opinion between believers and theologians and biblical experts. If Mary had several children - some texts speak of many sons and more daughters - then this destroys the picture which Christianity and above all the Catholic Church has of her as the *Dear Lady*, who was chosen by God to be the mother of Christ, the Virgin Mother who remained immaculate and intact both before and after the birth of Christ.

On the basis of texts from the gospels and also to spare the traditional devotion to Mary, it has also been assumed that these brothers were children from an earlier marriage of Joseph, the so-called *Stepbrother theory*, which has made headway in protestant circles, in particular.

There are several witnesses from the past which point in this direction. If it were true, it would also destroy the picture of Joseph, formed especially by the Catholic Church, as a rather older man, living a celibate life, and

chosen by God precisely because of his purity to be the chaste husband of the Virgin Mother and the foster father of God's Son. He is depicted with a lily in his hand as a symbol of purity. Thus we find ourselves in the middle of the problem of whether we are dealing with real brothers of Christ, or with blood relatives in the second degree, that is with cousins.

The Greek manuscripts use the word *adelphos*, which means a true brother. They avoid the word *anepsios* from which our word nephew is derived. To determine the real significance of the words, we have to go back to the original Hebrew or Aramaic, in which there was no separate word for 'cousin'. To avoid a long winded paraphrase, the word 'brother' or 'sister' was often used even when it was referring to male or female cousins. The frequent use of the word brother for cousin is very clearly shown by J. Blinzler.¹⁴ In the Old Testament Blinzler indicated twenty places where it is very obvious that cousins are meant when 'brothers' and 'sisters' are referred to. The habit was also quite common among the Romans, especially in the higher circles. In medieval Hebrew the expression 'second brother' was used for cousin, that is 'brother in the second degree'. Even now among some eastern tribes, for example the Bedouin of trans-Jordan the word 'brother' is used for more distant relatives, especially when one wishes to express particular respect or affection.

The use of 'brother' and 'sister' for cousin was an habitual manner of speaking in Aramaic. There was no shorter way of expressing the family tie. From the silence of the gospels about Joseph, it has been inferred that the foster-father of Jesus died early. After his death, Mary is thought to have associated, with her child, more and more closely with her nearest relatives. The children from these families who

14. J. Blinzler, *Die Brüder und Schwester Jesu*. Stuttgart, 1967.

grew up with Jesus were regarded as His brothers and sisters, by their neighbours. The primitive church took over this nomenclature and preserved it also in the Greek translations.

The male relatives of the Lord took an important part in the government of the early church. The name 'Brothers of the Lord' became a sort of honorary title which was given to them as a group by others, and remained with them for the rest of their lives. It is clear from numerous passages in the gospels that Jesus had no actual brothers or sisters:

"The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel, a name which means 'God is with us'" (Mt. 1:23).

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth with a message for a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David; the virgin's name was Mary" (Lk. 1:26-27).

In all the stories of His childhood, the story of the Shepherds, the presentation in the Temple, the flight to Egypt, and the return to Nazareth, Jesus alone is referred to, with no mention of any brother or sister. From the account of his finding in the Temple, it is evident that Jesus, at the age of twelve, was still the only son of Mary. The evangelists do speak of the brothers and sisters of Jesus (Lk. 2:41-52) *but never of sons and daughters of Mary or Joseph*. Bearing eastern traditions in mind, Jesus on the cross just before His death, would never have entrusted Mary to John if there had been other sons who could have cared for her (Jn. 19:26).

For a conclusive proof it is naturally useful to know precisely just who these brothers and sisters really were. Who were their father and mother? Where did they come from? Was Thomas really one of the brothers? For many years we have been occupied with the answer to these problems, and consulted a very extensive literature on them, going over it many times. In order to get at the truth we had

to overcome an important obstacle: the natural repugnance which every Christian feels at the name of Judas. Even though, on reasonable grounds, we have been convinced that we have to look for Thomas under his real name Judas, it is and remains a hard fact to swallow. To get at the truth, we have to have the courage to think the matter through, with an eye on our objective. Once we have overcome this natural hurdle, the problem becomes much simpler. Let us look for advice to the inhabitants of Nazareth, in whose midst Jesus lived, who knew his brothers, and even spoke of them explicitly in the gospel of Matthew:

"...Jesus left that place and came to His home town, where He taught the people in their synagogue. In amazement they asked, 'Where does He get this wisdom from and these miraculous powers? Is He not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, His brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? And are not all His sisters here with us?' (Mt. 13:54-56).

The Judas who was meant here can on other grounds also—be none other than our Judas-Thomas. Now we also find pointers in this direction in the west. Priscillianus, bishop of Avila in Spain, who was martyred at Trier in 385, speaks in one of his works about 'Judas the brother of the Lord, the twin who touched the wounds of Christ.' In a thorough search of the literature of the first centuries, one would undoubtedly find several indications that Thomas was one of the so-called brothers of the Lord, and that eastern tradition on this point had proved reliable. The main characteristic of the brothers, as Christ revealed in these words, was their reluctance to believe in his mission. Could this characteristic perhaps have been applicable to Thomas also?

Chapter 8

The Unbelief of the Brothers

It is a general human trait that one is especially critical of those with whom one deals every day. Many relationships are disturbed by irritation about trivialities when one has lost sight of the whole personality. It is evident from many of the lives of the saints that acceptance in the family circle above all is beset with the greatest difficulties. Often the person concerned is accused of hallucination, hysteria and presumption, and often he is even declared insane.

This happened to Jesus too. His so-called brothers were far from sympathetic. If they had been able, they would have hindered his public life.

As Mark relates:

"He entered a house; and once more such a crowd collected round Him that they had no chance to eat. When His family heard of this, they set out to take charge of Him, for people were saying that He was out of His mind" (Mk 3:20).

For His brothers, Jesus' appearance in public was something completely strange, which they did not at first know how to cope with. The unbelief of the brothers was also connected with their expectations of an earthly Messiah.

From various lists of the apostles, it appears that besides Simon, Judas-Thomas was also given the name of 'Zealot.' Simon was also called *Kananeos*, which has been wrongly translated as the man from Kana, where the wedding feast took place. In fact, however, it is derived from the Aramaic word *qan'ānā* which means zealot or enthusiast. In our day they would have been called freedom fighters or resistance fighters. The whole

Jewish nation longed for the coming of the Messiah, the Redeemer who would free them from the hated Roman occupation. Above all in Galilee, where Jesus lived, support for the underground movement was very strong. Virtually all the men were members of it, or sympathised with it. When the brothers saw the miracles which Jesus performed, and when crowds of people poured in to see and hear Jesus they too had to change their attitudes. Their resistance and hesitation were transformed to enthusiasm. After Jesus had spent half a year travelling through Galilee, in their eyes it was time to go to Judea - to Jerusalem. A good opportunity was offered by the imminent Feast of Tabernacles which was to be celebrated in Jerusalem in great pomp and in which all the men who were able were obliged to take part. This was a feast instituted by Moses in remembrance of the gifts which the people had received from God during their journey through the wilderness. It was also a feast of thanksgiving for the harvest of grapes and olives, the harvest festival. Its celebration fell at the end of September and the beginning of October and lasted for seven days. It was a genuine popular festival, for men who built huts of branches and leaves in the courtyards and on the roofs of their houses, and in the squares of the temple and the city. Solemn sacrifices were offered each day, processions were held and meetings held by the men.

Jesus too had to appear in the festivities:

His brothers said to Him, 'You should leave this district and go into Judea, so that your disciples there may see the great things you are doing. Surely no one can hope to be in the public eye if he works in seclusion. If you are really doing such things as these, show yourself to the world.' For even His brothers were not believers in Him (Jn. 7:3-6).

Judas-Thomas spoke in the same sense during the Last Supper:

'Lord, what can have happened, that you mean to disclose yourself to us alone and not to the world?' (Jn. 14:22).

Was Thomas acting as the spokesman of the brothers on both occasions? Thomas answers so well to the picture which the gospels give of the unbelief of the brothers that he may very well have been one of these brothers. The various reproaches which Jesus addressed to His brothers could also have been applied to Thomas. He was given yet another nickname: doubting Thomas. His name became a symbol for the whole of Christianity of obstinate refusal to accept the truth. Gregory the Great said: 'We are more strengthened in our belief by the doubts of Thomas, than by the belief of the other apostles'. Through his stubbornness he gave a very valuable proof of the genuineness of the Resurrection. By his spontaneous repentance and openness he gave an abundant witness of the divinity of Christ. His unbelief, born of despair after he had seen the lifeless body of Christ, became a consolation for all who doubt or are uncertain.

Let us conclude with the words of John, who relates the events which took place after the resurrection of Christ:

"Late that Sunday evening, when the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' He said, and then showed them His hands and His side. So when the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus repeated, 'Peace be with you' and then said, 'As the Father sent me, so I send you'. He then breathed on them saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive any man's sins, they stand forgiven; if you pronounce them unforgiven, unforgiven they remain'. One of the Twelve, Thomas, that is 'the Twin', was not with the rest when Jesus came. So the disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord'. He said, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails on His hands, unless I put my finger into the place where the nails were, and my hands into His side, I will not believe it.' A week later His disciples were again in the room and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them, saying, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here; see my

hands; reach your hand here and put it into my side; be unbelieving no longer, but believe'. Thomas said 'My Lord and my God.' Jesus said: "Because you have seen me you have found faith. Happy are they who never saw me and yet have found faith" (Jn. 20:19-29).

John concludes the chapter with the words: There were indeed many other signs that Jesus performed in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. Those here written have been recorded in order that you may hold the faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this faith you may possess eternal life by His name (Jn. 20:30-31).

Chapter 9

The Mother of Thomas

If Thomas was one of the brothers of Christ, then one of his parents must have had a very close relationship to the Holy Family. Either his father or his mother must have belonged among the closest relatives of Christ. Many exegetes have concerned themselves with detailed study of these family relationships. There are a few passages in the gospels which refer to relatives of Jesus.

The women came into prominence especially after the apostles had betrayed or deserted Christ. The men had fled and were keeping themselves at a distance during the carrying of the cross, the crucifixion and the burial of Jesus. We, therefore, have to look for the mother of Thomas among the women who remained loyal to Christ, stood by Him and cared for His body after His death. All the evangelists refer to them in their accounts of the crucifixion:

"A number of women were also present, watching from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and waited on Him. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee" (Mt 27: 55-56).

"A number of women were also present, watching from a distance. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome who had all followed Him, and waited on Him when He was in Galilee, and there were several others who had come up to Jerusalem with Him" (Mk 15: 40-41).

"His friends had all been standing at a distance; the women who had accompanied Him from Galilee stood with them and watched it all" (Lk 23: 49).

"But meanwhile near the cross where Jesus hung, stood his mother, with her sister, Mary of Klopas, and Mary of Magdala" (Jn 19: 25).

For the exegetes it has been a very difficult proposition to reconcile these texts with other passages from the scriptures and to explain them correctly. Were there three or four or more women, standing under the cross? Did Mary have a sister or sister-in-law who was also called Mary? Have the texts been preserved in their original form? Are the punctuation marks, the commas and the full stops, in the right places? In this connection it is important to recall that the Jews and the Greeks did not know our punctuation marks, which were not added until later.

The basis for this reconstruction of the life of Thomas is not the legendary stories of his miracles, which are told of him, but the factual and sober details which are given to us by the Holy Scriptures in their original form. Divine inspiration and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, do not cover the mistakes of sleepy transcribers,

careless translators or presumptuous commentators who often try with good intentions, to clarify and improve the text. One assumes this, the other that. Their assumptions are taken over or rejected and refuted by others. In this way an enormous literature on this subject has arisen, which is unbelievably complicated. Many readers are discouraged and they sigh with regret that we will never be able to disentangle the true relationships. Let us look at the texts again, more closely.

The first two evangelists, to our astonishment, do not mention Mary the mother of the Lord. We can explain this from their viewpoint. They or their informants remained standing some distance away from the cross, for fear of being regarded by the soldiers as supporters of the crucified, who might try to mount a rescue attempt for Him. The women too, apart from Mary, at first watched from a distance. When the crucifixion neared its end, and it was clear to the soldiers that there would not be any trouble, their leader gave his permission for the other women to approach more closely. We may assume that John, who was himself standing by the cross, has written the most trustworthy account. Out of modesty he concealed his own name and that of his mother Salome. It is his habit not to refer to himself. Slightly later he mentions the lance wound in Christ's side, from which blood and water flowed. Here too, he uses a paraphrase to indicate himself:

"This is vouched for by an eyewitness, whose evidence is to be trusted. He knows that he speaks the truth"(Jn 19:35).

In fact, all the evangelists give precisely the same version. They merely employ different words and give a few other particulars. If we fuse the details of the various texts into a single sentence, we arrive at the following result:

Around the cross stood:

- 1) His mother Mary
- 2) His mother's sister, Salome, who was the mother of the sons of Zebedee of whom John himself was one.

- 3) Mary of Klopas, who was the mother of James the Less and of Joses.
- 4) Mary of Magdala, also called Mary Magdalene.

There are thus two possible lines of relationship: The side of Mary and her sister Salome, and the side of Joseph and his brother Klopas. For many years we thought it was necessary to look for the relationship in the first line, that of the mother of Jesus. Salome is known in ancient writings as the girl who loved the Child Jesus so much that she wanted to go with Him on the flight into Egypt. Joseph sent her home again, since his task was difficult enough without a second child. Salome married Zebedee, later a well-off fisherman, who lived by the lake of Genasereth. We chose this line because it was plain to us from later study that Thomas paid special attention to the service of the temple and the priesthood. The same trait is strongly marked in the family of Mary. Her cousin Elisabeth is said by Luke to have been a woman who belonged to the daughters of Aaron, the priestly clan par excellence. She was named after the wife of Aaron, who was also called Elisabeth. The Jews had much respect for their ancestry and keeping family pedigrees was a matter of honour. For preference, priests married women from another priestly family. Her husband Zacharias was also a priest and belonged to the eighth class of the priesthood, that of Abia. We formed the impression that the family of Mary was a great deal more extensive than appears from the Scriptures. As the places where they would have lived, we may mention Ein Karem, Bethany, Kana, Kapernaum, Nazareth and Kochaba. Is it possible to locate Thomas in one of these? For many years we tried to find a solution along these lines, but without finding any reliable links.

As a result we began to search among the relatives of Joseph and came upon Mary of Klopas. The name Klopas is often given in the Greek texts as Kleophas. But the two names have nothing in common with each other. There is a completely different reason for this

alteration. The name Klopas greatly resembles the Greek words *Klopais* and *Klopaïos* which mean 'thief' and 'thievish' or 'like a thief'. We find this in our word 'Kleptomania', the pathological desire to steal. No-one would like to be called 'Mary of the thief'. For that reason and that reason alone, the Greeks turned the name into the more respectable sounding Kleophas. That Klopas was a brother of St. Joseph is a fact which we may accept on the authority of Eusebius of Caesarea (+ 339).

A discovery which was of great importance to us was the realisation that the traditional defence of the word 'brother' as meaning 'cousin' was not entirely correct. The 'brothers were cousins, but not all cousins were called 'brothers'. If both concepts had been equally valid, then the children of Salome too, especially James the Elder and John the Evangelist would have had to be called 'brothers of the Lord'; As far as I am aware, there is not a single trace of this to be found in the Gospels. The title of 'brothers and sisters of the Lord' was *not a general name* for His male and female cousins, but *a very special title* for a number of persons from *one particular family*, which had a *very special relationship* with the family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus. If we return to the inhabitants of Nazareth we see that they referred to four persons as 'brothers of the Lord': James, Joses, Judas and Simon. The name Joses is a variant of Joseph. In order to distinguish a son from his father or uncle of the same name, a variant form was used in daily intercourse. Joses was most probably named after his uncle, St. Joseph.

Many protestants regard these brothers and sisters as the children of Joseph and Mary out of their later married life after the birth of Christ. We quote from one such statement:¹⁵

"That we repeatedly encounter the brothers in the company of Mary, His mother, indicates that they

15. F. W. Grosheide, *Christelijke Encyclopedie*, I., Kampen, 1977, p. 30.

were rather sons than stepsons of Mary. From Matthew 1:25 it follows that after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary lived together as husband and wife in the full sense, while in Luke 2:7 Jesus is called the 'firstborn' son of Mary, which must surely mean that she had several children."

The texts which are referred to here read: "Rising from sleep, Joseph did as the angel had directed him; he took Mary home to be his wife, but had no intercourse with her until her son was born, and he named the child Jesus" (Mt 1:24-25) and "She gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him round and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them to lodge in the house" (Lk 2:7).

These texts do not state that Mary and Joseph brought several children into the world. Nor that they lived together as husband and wife afterwards. That might have been possible in itself but to draw such a conclusion from these words goes too far. It is stated that before the birth of Christ they had no intercourse with each other. The texts are silent on their later relationship. The matter was also much too intimate for that. The title of 'firstborn' had quite a different significance for the Jews from that which it has for us.

"God said to Moses: All that openeth the matrix is mine" (Ex 34:39).

The first born is dedicated to God. He was a tribute for God. He was the precursor and the leader. He was entrusted with the service, was the servant. A servant is the same as *Kohen*, a word which we are accustomed to translate as 'priest'. The father redeems the child, buys it back from the possession of the tribe of Aaron.¹⁶

The ceremony which was associated with this was called by the Christians 'the presentation in the temple.'

16. Cfr, S. de Vries, *Joodse riten en Symbolen*, Amsterdam, 1968, p. 200-3.

This title has nothing to do with the fact of whether there were any other children born of the marriage afterwards. We have to look beyond the end of our noses. We must not lose sight of the rest of the gospel by presenting one text alone, and drawing conclusions from it.

We must, then, admit that the four brothers of the Lord who are named were indeed children of Mary—but of another Mary, Mary of Klopas. This assertion is far from new. Jerome, and after him, the great majority of other expounders of the Scriptures, have always argued that they were children of Mary of Klopas. The texts cited at the beginning of this chapter, Matthew 27:55 and Mark 15:40, twice refer to James the Less and Joses as the children of Mary of Klopas. Two names, given twice in the gospels, are surely sufficient testimony of the truth. If she was the mother of these two named brothers, then she was also the mother of the two other brothers, i.e. of Simon and of Judas-Thomas. To discover the truth of the matter, we shall have to immerse ourselves in the circumstances of the life of this woman and her husband.

Chapter 10

Sons of Klopas, Alpheus, Joseph or James?

From the third century until our own times, it has remained a very hotly debated question, whose sons the brothers of the Lord actually were. The first generations of Christians naturally knew precisely what the real situation was, and had no problems with it. The title was adopted without demur and almost without explanation, in determining the texts of the gospels. In the second century, Hegesippus knew that it referred in fact to male and female cousins. With the passage of time, knowledge of the local

tradition in Nazareth about the family relationships, became less and less clear. The necessity of explaining to the faithful, who the brothers and sisters of the Lord had really been, could not be escaped. Apart from deliberately misleading versions put forward by heretics, like the Ebionites, the general opinion was that their mother must have been Mary of Klopas.

Was this woman married to Klopas, the brother of St. Joseph, or was she a daughter or sister of Klopas? Many texts refer to her as the *wife* of Klopas. Is this description original or was it only added later by a commentator on the scriptures? It is a question with great consequences. The word 'wife' has become the source of much confusion. Many biblical scholars have let themselves be misled by this 'wife.' She also came to be regarded as a sister or sister-in-law of Mary, on the basis of the text: "Meanwhile near the cross where Jesus hung stood His mother, with her sister, Mary of Klopas and Mary of Magdala" (Jn. 19:25).

It seemed a significant find: a double family: Via Klopas-Joseph and via Mary the mother of Christ. But first of all, the barrier of her husband's name had to be surmounted. The son of Mary of Klopas is always named in the lists of apostles as James the son of Alpheus (Gr. Alphaios) A fact like this cannot be swept under the carpet. Exegetes are mostly learned men who are not to be caught out at the first difficulty. They thought that Alpheus was derived from the Semitic root *halaph*, of which there are at least two dozen derivatives in Greek literature. We may mention, among others: Alas, Alaphaios, Aliphinos, Xalaphanis, Xalipos, Kalap, Kalappia, Kallapos. From this to Klopas was only a short leap. In this chain of reasoning James the son of Alpheus remained one of the known apostles and the tradition was saved.

The great fathers of the church were appealed to, including Jerome, who is supposed to have said: "Jacobus filius Alpei sive Klopas." - James the son of Alpheus or Klopas. The word *sive* can also have quite another significance than that of equating the names Alpheus and Klopas.

Other exegetes who were unwilling to accept this alteration of names as correct, were faced with the necessity of presupposing the existence of several men called James. As well as James the Great, James the Less, of course, who was the son of Mary of Klopas, and who became bishop of Jerusalem they also presupposed a third James, the son of Alphaeus, who was only an apostle and of whom we are assumed to know nothing further with certainty. Augustine too no longer knew the ins and outs of the matter. In his commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians he says: "Jacobus domini frater vel ex filiis Joseph de alia uxore vel ex cognatione Mariae matris eius debet intelligi." - James the brother of the Lord must be understood either as one of the sons of Joseph by another wife, or as one of the relatives of his mother Mary.

It is not clear to us whether Augustine meant by this reference to 'mother Mary', the mother of James, Mary of Klopas or Mary the mother of Christ. By persistent embroidery on these themes, the whole subject has become so involved that one finally lays down one's weary head and concludes by asserting that the real state of affairs is no longer capable of being unravelled.

The *'wife'* of Klopas had become a perfect snare, from which this writer was only able to free himself in 1982 after very lengthy and arduous studies. The *wife* of Klopas, alas, led many into the wrong path - a blind alley. We repeat, emphatically, that the problems did not arise from the references in the gospels but from the commentary and the explanations which scholars applied to the texts. We choose resolutely for the second possibility, that this Mary was a *daughter* of Klopas. Because of the similarity of many forenames, a person was made recognisable to his neighbours by adding a patronymic. It is a normal custom among all cultures and all peoples. That she was his daughter is the most natural explanation, and moreover it solves all the problems which have arisen, and renders unnecessary any complicated explanations. The *'daughter'* of Klopas also fits better into the relationship of the generations.

According to tradition, Klopas and Joseph were rather older men, who had both died long before Jesus commenced His public ministry. The children of *Mary of Klopas*, who was the mother of a large family, were much younger than Jesus. James was not called the 'younger' for nothing. The difference in ages between him and Jesus would certainly have been ten to fifteen years. If they had been the children of Joseph by an earlier marriage, they would have been much older than Jesus. Thus it was the *daughter* of Klopas who was married to Alpheus. James, the eldest of her children, was thus a son of Alpheus, which is confirmed by virtually all the lists of the apostles. Of the thirty lists which we consulted, not one calls him the son of Klopas. They do refer to him consistently as the son of Alphai, Chalfai, Halphai or Alpheus, often also with the title *frater domini*.

There are many who say that we can know nothing about this Alpheus. Is this true? If one immerses oneself in the source material, then by logical reasoning one can establish the following facts:

1. That he was the *husband* of one of the most resolute women in the New Testament, who knew well what she had to do at the death and burial of Jesus.
2. That he was the *father* of James the Younger, the most admired figure among the Jewish Christians, a man of great tact and courage.
3. That he was of priestly descent, since the priestly dignity was inherited, and his son too had access to the holy places of the temple.
4. That he did not live in Nazareth, since in that case his wife would have been named after him. According to one source, he is said to have lived in Sebaste, a place to the north of Nablus, and south of Nazareth.
5. That he died early, leaving a widow with about four or five children, in difficult circumstances.

How do we know this? From our study of Thomas, who was one of her children. When Alpheus died, Thomas had not been born. He and Simon were called the brothers of James, but *never* sons of Alpheus. Furthermore, there is also the reference to Abdias, who later became the travelling companion of Thomas, and was appointed by him as bishop of Babylon in Mesopotamia. From his hand, we have a work which deals with the activity of Simon, and Judas-Thomas in that region. Naturally, the original manuscript has been lost, and the text which has survived is a redaction, whose reliability we are not in a position to judge. There is, however, a very important statement in it, that Simon, and Judas-Thomas were *stepbrothers* of James.¹⁷ Such a statement would not be made without good reason. *Stepbrother*, in this context, means that they had different fathers but the same mother, Mary of Klopas whom we already know.

What do people do if a young widow is left with a large family of small children? They look for a new husband for her. They consult priests, relatives and friends. Where do they find a good husband for such a widow? Far away. In Paneas, in the extreme northeast of Palestine at the foot of Mount Hermon, where caravans from the north and east entered the country. Here, from this second marriage, Thomas was born, and probably also Simon as well as several other sisters. We know this from the Syriac work, the *Doctrina Addai*, and from a statement of Epiphanius.¹⁸ To assist the young widow in her need, and to make a second marriage possible for her, it was decided that her family must come to her aid. James and Joses, and perhaps also one or more of the girls were entrusted to the care of Joseph and Mary, and taken into the household of the Holy Family.

An Ethiopian source states that James was called the brother of the Lord because he was brought up with

17. R.A. Lipsius, *op. cit.* I, p. 118.

18. *Ibid.* p. 245.

Jesus in the house of Joseph.¹⁹ Another confirmation of this fact is found in Eusebius,²⁰ who says that the apostle James was *called* the brother of the Lord, and also *called* son of Joseph. That is, he only wishes to say that James was *called* a son of Joseph, and that he was not so in reality. In another place he draws a distinction between children of the flesh and children according to the law. We know the expressions: 'The word is made flesh' and 'flesh of my flesh'. Children of the flesh are one's own children, blood children. He calls James a son of Joseph *according to the law*. Children according to the law are adopted children. Here Eusebius is using not the Jewish but the Roman terminology. He was, of course, living in a Roman city, Caesarea the capital of Palestine. Among the Romans, adoption was very familiar and often practised. In the first century, four successive emperors, came to power as a result of adoption.²¹ There were detailed laws which regulated adoption.

Among the Jews there was no need of such laws. Jewish society was founded on a stable marriage, a healthy family life and strong family ties. Forming a family was the fulfilment of man's vocation, to preserve society, to make it grow and blossom. Good relationships and mutual help between related families were the preconditions for the continued existence of the people. It was a family duty of the highest priority that one should care for relatives who had fallen on hard times. Caring for a widow was an obvious duty from which no member of the family could escape unpunished. It was an obligation which extended to relatives in the fifth degree. Above all, reliance was placed on the brother and on the head of the family.

St. Joseph, as brother of Klopas and after his death head of the family, was the natural person to look after

19. F. Haase, *op. cit.* p. 271,

20. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, II. 1.2.

21. They were Trajan (97-117), Hadrian (117-138), Antoninus Pius (138-161), and Marcus Aurelius (161-180).

this matter according to Jewish custom. Joseph and Mary would have behaved dishonourably if they had not taken pity on the older children of Mary of Klopas, in order to make a second marriage possible for her. They must have done this readily and with love. Thus, the current explanation is unjust, which imagines that after the death of Joseph, Jesus attached Himself to His local relatives, so that His male and female cousins were later called the brothers and sisters of the Lord. The reality is precisely the opposite. Several children of a relative in need were taken into the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph for a longer or shorter period. Jesus was then approximately fifteen years old, so that he was able to contribute to the upkeep of these children, who were rightly considered by the local people as adopted brothers and sisters, *desposunoi*, and belonging to the household of the Holy Family, of which Joseph was the head. The other children must have been taken in by the family of Klopas himself.

This brings us back to the *wife* of Klopas who is mentioned in several texts of the Gospels. Where does this name come from? If Klopas had a daughter, Mary of Klopas, then he must have had a wife as well. This wife, the mother of Mary of Klopas, was also one of those who stood by the cross. The evangelists say repeatedly that there were *many* women who followed Jesus from Galilee. How many is 'many'? In any case, more than four or five. Perhaps even ten, twelve or twenty. Among those women was - how could it be otherwise? - the wife of Klopas. And her *daughter* Mary of Klopas. This solution is served up to us on a golden spoon by no less a person than St. Jerome, who in a letter to Hedybia wrote: "We read that there were four Marys in the Gospels: the first the mother of the saviour; the second His aunt, who was called Mary of Klopas; the third, Mary the mother of James and Joseph; the fourth Mary Magdalene, although others assert that the mother of James and Joseph was His aunt."

The question remains, who was the father of Thomas? It is possible that we may find a pointer to the father of Thomas in Luke 6:16. Instead of the nickname Thomas, he uses the name *Judas Jacobi*, Judas of James. According to normal linguistic usage, his father would thus have been called James. A single critic has spoken of a nonce - James slipped in to make the explanation easier. The opinion of a number of exegetes, who thought that this Judas must thus be a son of the James who was previously mentioned, the son of Alpheus, only makes the matter even more impenetrable. We too could not accept that 'son of'. How old would James the younger have been in that case? Father and son both among the apostles, is unacceptable in the eyes of the majority of biblical scholars. There remained only the translation: *brother* of James. Judas-Thomas presents himself explicitly as the brother of James in the Epistle of Judas. Luke wrote his gospel much later than Mark and Matthew, and at that time James the bishop of Jerusalem was for him the best known figure. He no longer refers to the mother of James as Mary of Klopas, after her long dead and long forgotten father, as *Mary of James* (Lk 24:10). We continued to regard the reference to Judas, the son of James, as an erroneous translation of *Judas Jacobi*.

When we began our reconstruction, we intended to remain open and impartial before everything which had come down to us from the mists of antiquity. We intended to remain critical whenever there were any contradictions, with which this subject swarms. Authors have written and said so much that they are unable to prove. We proposed in such cases, to set the contradictory reports alongside each other, and to investigate by whom, when and where, a statement had been made. And above all to investigate precisely *what* had been said. A contradictory statement not made until the twelfth or thirteenth century could readily be thrown into the wastepaper basket of incorrect assumptions, inaccurate explanations and false delusions. We proposed to prefer at all times the oldest, most natural and most logical solution.

But in the case of Judas son of James, our acquired distaste for the name Judas continued to dominate our thinking. To arrive at a clearer picture, we spent several days collecting all the references to Judas as the *son* of James. In a very short time we found, to our great amazement, that ancient eastern and western Christian literature referred to 'Judas son of James' on at least *twenty* occasions. Among them was the famous manuscript of the *Peshitta*, the Syriac translation of the Bible, which in influence and the extent of its dissemination can be compared with the Vulgate in the west. The *Diatessaron* of Tatian (c.170) a conflation of the four gospels, also refers to Judas son of James. Now one could remain firmly convinced of one's own opinion that all these texts should really have referred to Judas the brother of James, but to do so would be to act like a fool, who thinks that everyone else is mad except himself. Whether we were willing or not, we had to conform to the abundantly clear evidence from the past that Judas Thomas was the son of one James, who was the second husband of Mary of Klopas, who herself was thus called 'Mary of James' for this reason.

In Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13, the genitive case in *Judas Jacobi* cannot have different meaning from that which we encountered shortly before in *Jacobus Alphaei*, where it very definitely means the son of Alphaeus. Certainly, the genitive can also be used to mean brother, but that usage is uncommon and unparalleled in the New Testament.²²

Instead of a contradiction we have here a coincidental identity of names between Thomas' brother and his father, the second husband of Mary of Klopas. Summarising all these laboriously acquired facts we can thus establish that the so-called brothers and sisters of the Lord were in fact: *children*, in the meaning of *grandchildren*, of Klopas, the brother of St. Joseph; *for one part*, children of Alphaeus, the first husband of Mary of Klopas, who

22. Blinzler, *op. cit.* p. 124.

probably lived first at Sebaste and after the death of their father returned to Nazareth; *for another part*, children of one James, the second husband of Mary of Klopas, who lived in Paneas, in the extreme north east of Palestine. Of the first group of children, James and perhaps also Joses or one of the girls, were adopted into the household of Joseph and Mary at Nazareth. The children of the second marriage, including Judas Thomas and Simon, grew up in Paneas, and continued to live there. Judas Thomas was thus a brother of the Lord in a more distant sense, since his brother James grew up with Christ in the family of Joseph. He himself would probably have visited Nazareth often enough, because of the continued close family ties, so that the inhabitants of the place considered him as belonging to the family of Christ. The four possible fathers who were named at the beginning of this chapter thus *all* appear to have had something to do with the brothers and sisters of the Lord: Klopas, their grandfather; Alpheus, the father of the eldest children; Joseph the fosterfather of James and possibly of others. James the father of the younger children, and the second husband of Mary of Klopas. In hindsight the question appears simpler than we had expected.

Chapter II

The Virginity of Mary

In general, we understand by virginity a permanent resolve to abstain from acts of sexual pleasure which are directly or indirectly intended to perpetuate the human species. Virginity or celibacy is a state of life which is usually chosen for religious motives. By a solemn promise, one confirms his/her resolution to refrain from all experience and pleasures of a sexual nature, and thus from marriage also.

During the last century in particular, the presence of the brothers and sisters of the Lord in the Gospels has led to doubts being expressed about the virginity of Mary. The marriage of Mary and Joseph came to be seen as a normal marriage. Earlier admiration for virginity and the celibate life dwindled to nothing, and even became the object of scorn and contempt in certain circles. But the doctrine of the early church was always that Mary was a virgin before the birth of Jesus, remained a virgin during the birth and was still a virgin after the birth. We can of course approach this reverently and piously. We can accept it from the standpoint of human believers, since it is to some extent beyond our human comprehension. Perhaps that is the best approach. How can we describe, with human words and concepts, the way in which God became man, how the conception in fact took place, and the birth came to pass? They were most intimate events which have remained hidden from the outside world. Can there be anyone who can speak to us with authority on this subject? What do you think of the man in her confidence, the physician who visited Mary, spoke much with her, and wrote:

"Many writers have undertaken to draw up an account of the events that have happened among us, following the traditions handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and servants of the Gospel. And so I in my turn, your Excellency (Theophilus) as one who has gone over the whole course of these events in detail, have decided to write a connected narrative for you, so as to give you authentic knowledge about the matters of which you have been informed" (Lk 1:1-4).

The same physician did not wish to relate a legend, a tale of his own imagination, or a parable, but to give a factual and sober report of the facts, which to a great extent were known only to Mary and her closest relatives. He tells us the history of Zacharias, to whom an angel appeared in the temple, to announce the birth of John

the Baptist to him. He relates that in the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a *virgin* who was betrothed to a man called Joseph, who was of the house of David. The name of the Virgin was Mary.

"The angel went in and said to her, 'Greetings, most favoured one! The Lord is with you! But she was deeply troubled by what he said and wondered what this greeting might mean.

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for God has been gracious to you; you shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall give him the name Jesus. He will be great; He will bear the title "Son of the Most High;" the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will be King over Israel for ever; his reign shall never end'.

'How can this be,' said Mary, 'when I have no husband?'

The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy child to be born will be called "Son of God" (Lk 1:28-35).

The events which followed this were described in more detail by the evangelist Mathew, whose account tells us more about Joseph's side of the story:

"This is the story of the birth of the Messiah. Mary his mother was betrothed to Joseph; before their marriage he found that she was with child by the Holy Spirit. Being a man of principle and at the same time wanting to save her from exposure, Joseph desired to have the marriage contract set aside quietly. He had resolved on this when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. 'Joseph, Son of David,' said the angel, 'do not be afraid to take Mary home with you as your wife. It is

by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. She will bear a son; and you shall give Him the name Jesus (Saviour) for he will save His people from their sins." All this happened in order to fulfil what the Lord declared through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel," a name which means "God is with us" (Mt 1:18-23).

The last words had been spoken by the prophet Isaiah (7:14). A virgin who becomes pregnant is in fact a contradiction, an impossibility. A girl who becomes pregnant is a virgin no longer. These cryptic words take us back to the year 735 BC: When the king Ahaz refused to listen to the Prophet Isaiah the prophet spoke:

"Listen House of David, are you not content to wear out men's patience? Must you also wear out the patience of my God? Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: A virgin is with child, and she will bear a son and will call him Immanuel, 'God is with us'" (7:13-14).

Other confirmation of the virginity of Mary is given by Luke in his account of her visit to Elisabeth whom Mary praised as the blessed among women, because the child in her womb was blessed. He gives further confirmation, rather later, in the family tree of Jesus, in these words:

"When Jesus began His work He was about thirty years old, the son, *as people thought*, of Joseph, son of Heli" etc. (Lk 3: 23).

The family tree given by Matthew also confirms this, for after repeating 'son of' several times, he does not call Joseph the father of Jesus but 'the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus called Messiah (Mt.1:16).

A surprising and to most Christians unknown witness to the virginity of Mary comes to us from the prophet

Mohammed (570-632). He says that he received his calling as God's messenger from the angel Djibril (Gabriel) the same one who also asked Mary whether she was willing to become the Mother of the Messiah. After the story of the announcement to Zacharias that he would father a son Jahja (John) there follows the annunciation to Mary in these words: The angels said, 'Mariam, God has chosen you above all the women of the world. O Mariam, be humble before the Lord, kneel down and bow with those who bow (before God) (Koran 3:42-43). The angels said, 'O Mariam, God proclaims to you a word of his power. His name shall be the Masih (Messiah), 'Isa (Jesus) the son of Mariam, of high renown in this life, and the later life, and who shall belong to those who surround God. He shall speak to men in the cradle, and as an adult, and shall be numbered among the righteous. She said: My Lord, how can I be with child, when no man has touched me. He said: God creates what He wishes. When He has decided to dispose of a matter, then He needs only to say: come to pass, and it comes to pass. He shall teach him the scriptures, the Wisdom, the Law, and the Gospels (Koran 3:42-48).

Elsewhere Mohammed relates that God Himself spoke to him about the conception of Mary:

Then We sent to her Our Spirit, which took on for her the likeness of a well formed human being. (Koran 19:17). She said: How can I have a son, since no man has touched me, and I am no whore. (Koran 19:20). He Said: Thus, your Lord has spoken. It is easy for Me. It comes to pass because We wish to make it a sign for the people and a gift from Us. It is a firm decision (Koran 19:21). If any child of the people looks to you say then: I have made the promise of abstinence to God the compassionate. Thus I need not justify myself to any man (Koran 19:26).

To the witness of the Gospels and the Koran we may add those of the church, the primitive church, the liturgy and the authority of the teaching of the church. Merely to mention

the early writings on this subject would alone fill many volumes. We shall name only several of the better known authors: Justin, Ignatius of Antioch, Athanasius, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory Nazianzen, Ephraem, Cyril of Alexandria, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome etc.

The doctrine was already laid down in the old *Symbolum Romanum*. It was solemnly declared in 381 in the Niceno - Constantinopolitan Creed, which states:

"I believe in God the Father, Almighty
the creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,
and born of the *virgin Mary*."

In the repetitions of that Creed, everywhere and throughout the centuries, the believing church gives an impressive and unanimous witness.

As far as the liturgy is concerned, we refer only to the song of praise, the *Te Deum*, of which parts go back to the oldest known liturgical texts of east and west: Tu ad liberandum suscepturus hominem non horruisti Virginis uterum - Thou, who became man to redeem us, did not shun the womb of the *virgin*.

From the very beginning the virginity of Mary has been an accepted fact and prescribed as a belief. Whoever cannot, or will not accept that, no longer belongs to Christendom, and can no longer be called a Christian. Denying the virginity of Mary is followed by the rapid and total collapse of faith, which is a gift of God's grace: Christ is then no longer the Son of God, but an exceptional man. God is no longer the Creator and Ruler of the Universe but merely a product of human imagination. God's Word, the Gospel, is no longer the glad news for all humanity, but a human composition rooted in its own time. God's laws and commandments are no longer binding, but everyone is free to do what he likes, as he likes. The celibacy of priests

and monks is no longer a sign and an example to humanity to strive for higher values, but a folly which is no longer in keeping with the times, in which there is so much to enjoy.

For those who doubt or no longer accept the Scriptures as the Word of God, there are still a number of more human motives which may be adduced. True, they are lacking in absolutely decisive proof, though that can hardly be demanded in such an intimate matter, but they do form a logical historical chain of events. In so doing, they explain and strengthen what has gone before.

First of all there is naturally the fact that Mary had no other children after the birth of Jesus. The other children for whom she helped to care were those of Mary of Klopas by her marriage to Alpheus. The family of Mary belonged to a Jewish group who at the beginning of our era had many adherents and were known as the Essenes.

According to the Proto - Gospel of James, Mary had already been dedicated as a tribute to God by her mother Anna, before her birth, in these words:

"As the Lord my God lives, I shall, if I have a child, either a boy or a girl, offer it to the Lord my God, as a tribute, and it shall stand in the service of the Lord all the days of its life."

When Mary was three years old, she was taken into the temple and remained there until her twelfth year. Afterwards she was placed under the protection of the widower Joseph, who had been chosen for this by a sign from God. Joseph was reluctant to accept this task and said: "I already have sons and I am old, while she is a young girl I fear that I will become an object of mockery to the sons of Israel."

Compelled by necessity he took on the protection of the girl but was very disturbed when he later noticed

that Mary was pregnant. The long story which now and then agrees with the Gospel of Matthew, but also frequently differs from it, is ascribed at the end to James, the foster son of Joseph, the son of Alpheus, with whom we shall be much concerned in the next chapter. This Proto-Gospel can be regarded as the prototype of an attractive story, to which additions were repeatedly made and in which pious imagination and reality were mixed in a constantly growing whole. It is from this work that we know the names of Mary's parents, Anna and Joachim. According to this work Joseph was only the protector or guardian of Mary's chastity, and at the most we can thus only speak of a paper marriage. The last name must be seen as a Greek bastardisation of the Hebrew name Eliachim, which in the genealogy recorded by Luke is given as Eli or Heli.

The statement that Mary was betrothed to Joseph must be seen in the light of the time and place. The word 'betrothal' had a quite different meaning for an oriental from that which it has for a westerner of our day. It was something which went beyond the person concerned, but was a family matter arranged by the parents or guardians. Did this betrothal to Joseph take place after the death of her parents? If so, then Mary was an heiress: "When a man dies leaving no son, his patrimony shall pass to his daughters" (Num. 27:8).

These daughters then had to marry within the tribe of their father: "Any woman of an Israelite tribe who is an heiress may marry a man from any family in her father's tribe. Thus the Israelites shall retain each one the patrimony of his fathers" (Num. 36:8).

Thus, both Joseph and Mary belonged to the tribe of David, as is indicated in a number of other passages in the Gospels. According to the normal explanation, the words of Mary, 'How can this be, when I have no husband?' must imply that she intended to preserve her virginity despite her betrothal to Joseph. If she had

wished to lead the ordinary life of all women, then she would not have given that answer to the angel, but would have said 'I am ready to become a mother'.

In all these considerations we must not lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with a choice made by God. The choice of a woman who wished to abstain for her whole life from earthly, transient things, and devote herself to the supernatural destiny of mankind.

We must admit that the fathers of the church, such as Augustine and Jerome, no longer knew precisely what the relationships within the Holy Family had been, and that they were in doubt about the father of the brothers and sisters of the Lord. There is a very important matter, with which they never had any trouble, over which they thought long and deep, to which they devoted many works: the virginity of Mary. More than three hundred sermons are preserved of the same Augustine who has been cited in an attempt to deny the virginity of Mary.

We cite from one of his seven Christmas sermons:

She was a virgin when she conceived
a virgin when she bore her child
a virgin in her pregnancy
a virgin in her motherhood
a virgin throughout.

Why do you wonder so much at this, o man?

God had to be born thus, for he humbled himself to become man.

For before He was made, He was, and because He was all powerful He could be made, while He remained what He was.

He made for Himself a mother, while He was with the Father.

And when He was made from out of his mother, He remained in the Father.

How could He cease to be God when He began to be a man?

He who had given it to His mother, that she did not cease to be a virgin when she bore Him. And so: the Word, in becoming flesh, did not enter into the flesh in coming to earth, but the flesh was added to the word, so that just as man is both soul and body, so Christ was both God and man.

St. Ivo, bishop of Chartres, who died in 1116, and is the patron saint of lawyers, was the author of the following meditation for Annunciation day when the angel Gabriel's message is commemorated:

Today the womb of a virgin became the gate of heaven; through which God came down among men, to prepare for us the pathway to heaven. Just as now a ray of the sun, when it strikes a crystal, does not bore through it or shatter it, when it enters or passes out of it, so, with how much more right must the virgin's womb have remained untouched when the true and eternal Son entered and left it? We read how this immaculate virginity was prefigured to Moses in the burning bush, which burned without being consumed; how it was prefigured in the rod of the high priest, Aaron, which bore blossom, against nature, without sap or fertilising seed, Why then should we not believe that God can make a human being out of a woman, without the aid of a man, since He created the first man, neither from a man nor from a woman? Let us consider this seriously, Let us consider, how marvellous and numerous are the goods which are promised us in heaven,

so that no earthly temptations may detain our blind and covetous souls from the race which shall win us the prize of a heavenly calling.

Chapter 12

Were the Brothers of the Lord Apostles?

Since many biblical critics of the last century cast doubt on or attacked almost everything, we too must concern ourselves with the question, whether the brothers of the Lord were also apostles. In various texts of the gospels, a distinction is made between the disciples or apostles on the one hand and the brothers of the Lord on the other. They are mentioned separately, especially on those occasions when their lack of belief is concerned. Many exegetes conclude from this that none of the brothers belonged to the apostolic college of twelve, a conclusion which goes too far and has caused the inevitable confusion.

It is certain that the brothers did not belong to the disciples of Jesus during the first years of His public activity (Mk 3:21, 3:31-35). The calling of the original apostles took place gradually. From Jewish sources we know that Jesus at first chose only five disciples.²³ Not until later were the brothers chosen to complete the twelve, even though some of the evangelists give the final composition of the apostolic group rather earlier. Luke gives the list twice: The first time before the Sermon

23. Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum N. T. aus Talmud und Midrasch*, Munchen, 1924, p. 529.

on the Mount, the beatitudes, (LK 6:12-20) and the second time after Christ's Ascension when they gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 1:12), where they met in prayer, together, with several women, Mary the mother of Jesus and His brothers (Acts 1:14). What Luke understood by "the brothers of the Lord" is evident from the sentence which follows immediately afterwards: "it was during this time that Peter stood up before the assembled brotherhood, about one hundred and twenty in all, and said, 'Brothers, the prophecy in scripture was bound to come true.....'" (Acts 1:15).

The word 'brothers' is used here as meaning fellow believers, followers of Christ in the broader sense. Could there be biblical exegetes who really believed that Jesus had one hundred and twenty brothers in the sense of blood relations? With which brothers are we concerned? With those who were named on the occasion of Jesus' visit to His home town of Nazareth.

Let us cite the passage once more, this time from Matthew, who appears to be the best informed of the evangelists on Jewish and local matters: "When He had finished these parables Jesus left that place and came to His home town, where He taught the people in their synagogue. In amazement they asked; 'Where does He get this wisdom from and these miraculous powers?. Is He not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, His brothers *James, Joseph Simon and Judas?* And are not *all* His sisters here with us?" (Mt. 13:54-56).

The remark that *all* the sisters lived in or near Nazareth can give an indirect indication that this was not the case with the brothers. Joseph, sometimes called Joses or Jose, is mentioned in this Gospel in order to clarify the identity of his mother, but so far as we are aware he plays no striking role in the early Christian Community. In Matthew's text Judas - Thomas is the last mentioned. This agrees with his position on most of the lists of the apostles. We may conclude from this that

Thomas was the youngest of the brothers named. Although Simon and Judas-Thomas lived far away in Paneas, their names were known to the inhabitants of Nazareth. How is this to be explained?

There are certain things which at first sight seem very strange and incredible, but which, as soon as they are placed in their context, fall naturally and logically into place. In the *Acts of Thomas*, he gives as his trade or craft: the making of ploughs, ox yokes, balances and rudders from wood; and also making tombstones, temples and palaces from stone. The temples and palaces can be left aside as poetic exaggeration and legendary ornament. Making the wooden implements and utensils was the normal Job of a village carpenter, which was also the trade of St. Joseph. Both Thomas and Joseph are represented in art with a carpenter's square in their hand, the simple tool of every carpenter, mason and architect. Is it too daring to suppose that Thomas would have learned his trade in the workshop of St. Joseph, and that he worked with him in the building of simple houses? Hardly have we written down this assumption than we are compelled to correct it, because of the text in Mark which in all the old manuscripts reads:

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us? (Mk 6:3).

For the inhabitants of Nazareth, Jesus *Himself* was the carpenter, and no longer mainly seen as the *son* of the carpenter. The reason was probably that Joseph His foster father had already been dead for a long time. Let us look now at each of the brothers in turn. We shall deal in more detail with James and Simon, because they will rarely appear again in the course of this book. Our knowledge of Thomas, on the other hand, is placed in a broader and better context if we know something about the contribution which his brothers made to Christianity.

Adolf von Harnack wrote of the conversion of those Jews who in the second century had been merged entirely into the greater Christianity: "Until that time the brothers and relatives of Jesus- who had begun the missionary effort- played a leading role, including the Christian communities which were situated outside Jerusalem. We may conclude as much from the letter of Africanus to Aristides (Eusebius, *H.E.* 1,7) in which it is stated that the relatives of Jesus had spread out over the country from the Jewish villages of Nazareth and Kochaba, and that they bore the name of *Desposunoi*. This Greek word means 'they who belong to the Lord, the kinsmen of the Lord.'²⁴

Judas Thomas, the doubter

For the sake of those who have trouble with their faith, we begin with the youngest of the brothers, who wanted to see before he could believe. In his case, the matter of his apostolate is also the most simple. There is no reasonable exegete who would doubt it. On most lists he even occurs twice, first under his nickname Thomas, the Twin, and later under his real name Judas or Judas Thaddeus. The problem in his case was that in the west it had been entirely forgotten that he belonged among the brothers of the Lord. Recognising Thomas as such opens a wholly new perspective. It gives us a basis for the solution to our problem, a solid starting point from which we can reason further. The biblical commentators who did not have this basis, got more and more bogged down in endless discussions which contributed nothing to answer the question, but merely made the whole matter unbelievably complicated. Ninety per cent of this fruitless discussion could have been avoided if more attention had been paid to sources outside the Scriptures and if they had been more receptive to the eastern tradition which says that Thomas was one of the brothers of the Lord.

24. A. von Harnack, *Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Leipzig, 1915, p. 98.

Simon the Zealot

In the case of the second brother, Shemoun, also called Simeon or Simon, matters are more complicated. In the texts of the New Testament which are available to us so far, we find only a mention of his name, mostly coupled with his nickname 'the Zealot'. We also know, of course, his place in the lists of the apostles. Almost always, he is placed between James the son of Alpheus and Judas-Thomas. We can establish this from the most important texts, such as Luke, the *Diatessaron* of Tatian, the *Peshitta* etc. If we proceed from the assumption that James and Thomas were stepbrothers then it is not to be expected that an unknown Simon will be inserted between them. The clearest text is that of Luke who says: "Jacobus Alphei, Simon zelotes et Judas Jacobi" - James (son) of Alpheus, Simon the Zealot and Judas (son) of James.

We wish to query the reference to the Zealot at this place. In many lists Judas Thomas is also called a Zealot. Both brothers belonged to the group of zealots for the law, the Jewish national resistance movement against the Romans. The name can thus be applied to both brothers. Another possibility is that we have here an interpolation, added to the text by later transcribers or translators.

In most cases the purpose of such interpolations was to make the text clearer. In this way so many 'improvements' were added to the original texts that we should rather speak of 'worsening'. Luke wrote for the pagan Greek world, and as a rule he omitted the specifically Jewish details, which were not of any importance for his readers. If we leave out the word 'Zealot' we get the following: Jacobus Alphei, Simon et Judas Jacobi - James (son) of Alpheus, Simon and Judas (sons) of James.

By the last mentioned James, we understand of course the second husband of Mary of Klopas, who is otherwise unknown to us. Outside the Gospels, Simon is

referred to on one occasion as the brother of James²⁵ and on another occasion as the son of James²⁶. Furthermore, he is quite often referred to as Simon - Judas, which is probably a remnant of the original reference to Judas Thomas after his name in the oldest lists of the apostles. Everything points to a very close relationship with Judas Thomas with whom he is said to have spent more than ten years travelling around the twelve provinces of the great Parthian empire. He is said to have preached at Samosata, Parih, Zeugma in the neighbourhood of Edessa, Halep, the present day Aleppo in Syria, and so on.

According to Georgian and Armenian traditions he later travelled with Andrew to the area around the Black Sea, the Pontos Euxeinos. The main scenes of their activity lay in the district which is now known as the Crimea, then called the Tauric Chersonnese or the Bospora Iberica. Simon is said to have built a church in Kyrrhos or Cyrrhus, a place which it has not been possible to identify. He too is depicted with a carpenter's tool, a saw, and become the patron saint of woodcutters. Could this Simon have worked in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth? According to others he is said to have been martyred with a saw, and cut into pieces: 'Jacet Bospora in porte Foro'—he lies buried in the district of the Bospora Iberica, near the Crimea, the strait which gives entry to the sea of Azov.

Here in fact there was a place called Bosporus, which may have changed its name frequently in the course of time. At any rate he seems to have died before the year 50, since he was no longer present when Mary died. To make matters even more complicated, western tradition too laid its hand on him. He was supposed to have preached in Africa and Egypt and even to have visited Britain. He was also identified as the successor of James in the diocese of Jerusalem. An apostolate of twenty years is perfectly possible, but it is more difficult

25. Haase, *op. cit.*, II. p. 97.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 24; R. A. Lipsius, *op. cit.*, II p. 143.

to reconcile the conflicting accounts of his martyrdom at Suanir in Persia, Ostracine in Egypt, Jerusalem and in England: that is of course impossible. There must have been confusion of persons who had the same name. The frequent recurrence of the same name in related families has caused much confusion elsewhere. We must not think that the first generation of Christians simply made all this up. Every story has some fact or other at its core. The Aramaic name for Zealot or enthusiast was Quanaana, from which his original nickname Quenanaeos or Kananite might be derived. But was there also perhaps, a cousin Simon of Kana, who was called Kananaios?

Simon of Klopas, the second bishop of Jerusalem was certainly a completely different person. He is never referred to as a brother of the Lord, but as a cousin of the Lord. If his father Klopas was a brother of Mary of Klopas, then this change too can be explained by the confusion around the name of Klopas. Several members of the family who bore the name Simon played a part in preaching the faith in the first century and perhaps in the second also. The mistakes arose in later centuries when the west no longer knew what the east was aware of. It would demand a long and very intensive study to reach a solution to all the problems which surround the family of Simons. We do not have the time or the knowledge of eastern languages which would be necessary for it. And moreover, a third brother requires certain essential corrections.

James the Martyr

In the college of the twelve apostles, there were two persons who bore the name of James: James the elder was a son of Zebedee, a brother of John the evangelist. While John himself lived a very long life, that of his brother was brought to an early end by the intervention of Herod Agrippa (A.D. 41-44) a grandson of Herod the Great (Acts 12: 1-2). The relics of this

James are said to have been taken to Spain, where one of the most famous places of pilgrimage in Europe arose around his tomb, - Santiago de Compostela. Peter would surely have undergone the same fate if he had not been freed from prison by a miraculous intervention. He ordered his escape to be reported to the second James, who had been appointed by the apostles as the leader of the community of Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 12: 3-17).

To distinguish between the two Jameses, the first is called James the Elder, or the Greater; the second is called James the Less, or James the Younger (Mk 15:40). After the death of James the Elder, it was no longer necessary to make this distinction. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul could write as follows without causing any misunderstanding: "Three years later I did go up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas. I stayed with him for a fortnight, without seeing any other of the apostles, except James the Lord's brother. What I write is plain truth: before God I am not lying" (1:18-20).

Some writers have translated this text in such a way as to suggest that it means: I saw none of the other apostles, but I did see James the brother of the Lord. They distinguish between a James, the brother of the Lord, who was not an apostle, and a James the son of Alphaeus, who was. Such a translation is of course unnatural, and torn from its context. In this epistle to the Galatians, it was precisely his ties with the apostles which Paul wished to emphasise clearly. A meeting with the leading figures among the apostles was of great importance to him, and for his authority among the Galatians. He owed his choice as an apostle directly to Christ (Acts 9: 1-9) but in order to be accepted by his opponents it was also useful to be able to point to his unity with the other apostles. He points out that the apostles James, Cephas and John, who were called the pillars of the church, all fully recognised his choice by Christ as the apostle of the heathens (Gal 2: 6-9).

Another incorrect statement which is sometimes made is that the Greek Orthodox Church recognises two separate persons: James the son of Alpheus, whose feast day is celebrated on 9 October, and James the brother of the Lord, who is commemorated on 23 October. On a visit to Greece, it was evident to me that there can be no truth in this suggestion of a distinction between two persons. The difference in feast days had a quite different origin. "The veneration of the apostles was at first a local and not a general practice. Most of the apostles met their deaths in foreign countries where the necessary record was not kept. There was no one on the spot who could have kept it. Not until much later were there men who collected the accounts of their lives and deaths which circulated among the people. This is the origin of the variance in the feast days of the apostles. The different methods of reckoning time have also impeded attempts to determine the feast days, for they were not properly understood by translators. It is certainly distressing for the historian that the variance among his data does not permit him to arrive at a generally accepted result"²⁷

If there had been a third James as well as the two who are known to us, then the very accurate Luke would certainly have made a note of it, to prevent confusion. A third James who was an apostle but not a brother of the Lord is never referred to in Luke. In fact, establishing that James the brother of the Lord was a son of Alpheus, as was demonstrated in the previous chapters, takes away all the force from any counter-argument.

The apostle James was at the same time the brother of the Lord and the first bishop of Jerusalem. Traces of this can be found in the Liturgy. In an Armenian Hymnarium, the second Sunday after the Assumption of Mary is celebrated as the feast day of the three brothers who were apostles: Thomas, James and Schumawon (Simon).²⁸

The often heard complaint that nothing can be known with certainty about Christ and the origins of Christianity is

27. F. Haase, *op. cit.* p. 72-73.

28. *Ibid.* 83.

also applied to James. Everything that was said about him has come to be regarded as pious fabrication. Do we have a sufficient basis of historical fact to reconstruct the life of James? Our main source is naturally Eusebius of Caesarea, who refers to this first bishop of Jerusalem very frequently and in great detail. In his turn Eusebius based his narrative on three important informants, whose writings he knew and from whom he took his quotations. Unfortunately these sources have been lost to us. His earliest source was Papias, who collected his information when he was bishop of Hierapolis in the centre of Asia Minor, between 125 and 135.

He wrote:

If anyone came, who had been in the company of the apostles, I questioned him about their words: what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other disciple of the Lord had said.²⁹

His second source was Hegesippus, who set down the traditions about the apostles. His third source was Clement of Alexandria who from 190 to 222 was head of the school for catechumens in this centre of culture and learning, and who collected the data from Jewish, Christian and pagan literature of the second century. Three sources of entirely different origin: Asia Minor, Palestine (Rome) and Alexandria. With a few small variations they are largely in agreement.

To these, we may add the details given by Luke, by Paul, and by James himself who was the author of the first of the so-called 'catholic' or universal epistles. If we are able to integrate the sum of this information into the data which is given us by Flavius Josephus and the pagan historians, then we have a reasonable basis for a trustworthy survey of his life. We shall try to give a factual and connected account of the personality, the views and the life history of this brother of the apostle Thomas. Since he was adopted into the Holy Family at Nazareth it is obvious that prayer, the

29. Eusebius, *EH*. 3. 39. 4.

temple and the Jewish law must have played a very important part in his life. Hegesippus calls him a Nazorean³⁰ a term which has nothing to do with his dwelling place at Nazareth, but is derived from the Hebrew word *nazir*, which means a setting apart or devotion. It concerns a promise which is made according to the law (Num 6) to dedicate oneself entirely to God. Paul himself had also taken these vows in a temporary form (Acts 18:18) and asked the advice of this apostle about them. James was known for his faithfulness to the Jewish law and his strictness of life. He was highly esteemed by everyone and was given the name *Justus*, the just. He prayed continually as an intermediary between God and man, so that his knees showed callouses like a camel's.

From the statement that he had access to the temple and could enter the Holy of Holies, we may conclude that he was of priestly descent and that he performed his priestly duties at the appropriate times. Through his influence, there were many among the priests and the pharisees who came to sympathise with the ideas of Christ. It was these people who caused difficulties. "The Word of God now spread more and more widely; the number of disciples in Jerusalem went on increasing rapidly and very many of the priests adhered to the faith" (Acts 6:7). "Then some of the pharisaic party who had become believers came forward and said, 'They must be circumcised and told to keep the Law of Moses.' The apostles and elders held a meeting to look into this matter" (Acts 15:5-6). No agreement was reached on this question. After Peter, Barnabas and Paul had given their opinions, James addressed them saying: "My friends,.....listen to me. Simeon has told how it first happened that God took notice of the Gentiles, to choose from among them a people to bear His name; and this agrees with the words of the prophets, as Scripture has it: 'Thereafter I will return and rebuild the fallen house of David; even from its ruins I will rebuild it and set it up again, that they may

30. *EH.* 2. 23. 4-18,

seek the Lord - all the rest of mankind, and the Gentiles whom I have claimed for my own'. Thus says the Lord whose work it is, made known long ago. My judgment therefore is that we should impose no irksome restrictions on those of the Gentiles who are turning to God, but instruct them by letter to abstain from things polluted by contact with idols, from fornication, from anything that has been strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:13-20).

The separation between Judaism and Christianity was not yet complete. As a Jewish priest James had to observe the greatest caution if he did not wish to suffer the same fate as his namesake. In his epistle, the exhortation which he addressed to his Jewish listeners, he confines himself to the general concerns of humanity. With great tact he avoids any discussions of Jesus as the Messiah, in order not to offend the Jews for whom this concept was still unacceptable. As a brother of the Lord he had no need to go into circumstances which were generally known in Jerusalem. It was better for him as a relative of Jesus not to get involved in the very bitter controversies which were raging all round him. He could, without risk of being misunderstood, confine himself to the affairs of his community and the more practical application of the faith.

At that time, a great scarcity had just arisen in the Roman empire as the result of repeated poor harvests. The poorer people of the cities suffered in particular from the rapid rise in the price of food. In Palestine this scarcity was greatest under the governors Fadus and Tiberius Alexander (44-48). In order to give aid to poor Christians in need, Paul and Barnabas collected money on their travels and sent it to James and the *presbyteroi* (elders or priests) for them to distribute (2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 2:10).

The practical bias of James, who was also called *Oblias*, bulwark or pillar and refuge of the people, is abundantly clear from these words: "My brothers, what use is it for a man to say he has faith when he does nothing to show

it? Can that faith save him? Suppose a brother or a sister is in rags with not enough food for the day and one of you says, 'Good luck to you, keep yourselves warm and have plenty to eat,' but does nothing to supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So with faith: if it does not lead to action, it is in itself a lifeless thing" (James, 2:14-17). "You see then that a man is justified by deeds and not by faith in itself" (James 2:24). "As the body is dead when there is no breath left in it, so faith divorced from deeds is as lifeless as a corpse" (James 2:26).

The Epistle of James is perhaps the oldest of all the writings which make up the New Testament. The Christians were still attending the temple and the synagogues and celebrated the Eucharist in their own houses. It is virtually certain that these exhortations were first spoken and written in Aramaic, and that a Greek translation was not made until later. In so doing it was intended to make them accessible for a wider circle of readers. We shall return to the authorship of the Greek version, which is familiar to all of us, in the last part of this book.

The direct link with the problems of the Christians in Jerusalem or Palestine has perhaps been pushed rather into the background as a result of this translation or revision. The epistle deals with specifically Jewish faults such as an exaggerated regard for riches and rich people, the evils of slander and defamation, which hit the Christians in particular. In the Jewish circles Jesus was referred to as Joshua ben Pantera, Jesus the son of the Panther. It was suggested that he was the illegitimate son of a liaison between Mary and a Roman soldier and a more damaging and scornful insult to the Christians could hardly be imagined. According to later commentators Jacob, the father of Joseph and Klopas was supposed to have been nicknamed 'the panther',³¹ Paul too was the victim of a virulent campaign of defamation among the Jews and the Jewish Christians. They could not

31. Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, I, 38.

forgive him for having changed from a violent persecutor of the Christians into their defender. It is in this context that we will better understand James' words against malicious gossip and slanders:

"The tongue.....is a small member but it can make huge claims. What a huge forest can be set ablaze by the tiniest spark; And the tongue is in effect a fire. It represents among our members the world with all its wickedness; it pollutes our whole being; it keeps the wheel of our existence red-hot and its flames are fed by hell. Beasts and birds of every kind, creatures that crawl on the ground or swim in the sea, can be subdued and have been subdued by mankind; but no man can subdue the tongue. It is an intractable evil, charged with deadly venom" (James 3:5-8).

James strove to bring about reconciliation, mutual understanding and a good relationship between Jews and Christians:

"Who among you is wise or clever? Let his right conduct give practical proof of it, with the modesty that comes of wisdom. And if you are harbouring bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, consider whether your claims are not false and a defiance of the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes from above; it is earthbound, sensual, demonic. For with jealousy and ambition come disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is in the first place pure and then peace-loving, considerate and open to reason; it is straightforward and sincere, rich in mercy and in the kindly deeds that are its fruit. True justice is the harvest reaped by peacemakers from seeds sown in a spirit of peace" (James 3:13-18).

James did not limit his activities to Jerusalem but also contributed to the preaching of the gospel in the surrounding districts. He reserved for himself the task of preaching to the Jews, who regarded him as the great central figure.

Although Peter was recognised in the east as the chief of the Apostles, James as head of the mother church of the Jews was for them the great leader. In a gnostic writing of the Coptic church it is James who gives the other apostles their instructions to proclaim the faith in distant lands.

An old Syriac document expresses it as follows: "Jerusalem and all the districts of Palestine, the lands of the Samaritans and the Philistines, the territories of Arabia, Phoenicia, and the people of Caesarea, all received the priestly blessing of the apostle James, the law-giver and leader of the church of the apostles which was founded on Mount Zion in Jerusalem."³²

At the present day Mount Zion lies just outside the old medieval walls of Jerusalem. It was there that the upper room was situated, in which the Last Supper was held, where the apostles often gathered, and where the Holy Spirit descended upon them. The name Zion is used in the New Testament to indicate the church (as in Hebr. 12:22) or heaven (Rev. 14:1). Partly as a result of the personality and influence of James, the number of Christians constantly increased. By their unity of purpose and their mutual love, the followers of Christ won the high regard of the people.

A Jewish source complains of this in an exaggerated fashion: The Christians increased by thousands and ten thousands, and prevented the Israelites from going up to Jerusalem for the ceremonies. The anxiety in Israel was great, as it had been in the days when the golden calf was made and no one knew any longer what he should do. The faith of the Christians grew in strength. Twelve men went out and travelled to twelve kingdoms and made prophecies. The Israelites were led astray and followed them. They were men of repute and they strengthened the belief in Jesus, while they called themselves apostles. Around them gathered a great multitude of people, of the children of Israel. The learned men saw this evil matter and were

32. The Teaching of addai: in A. Vööbus, *The Synodicon*, I, 195.

disturbed by it. One said to another: Woe to us, for we have sinned, for evil things have happened in Israel in our days, such as we and our forefathers have never experienced.³³

The alarm of the Jews led eventually to the martyrdom of James. It began with the arrest of Paul who, as a Roman citizen, appealed to the emperor in Rome. After Paul had made his appeal, and had been sent to Rome by Festus the governor, the Jews lost hope of overmastering him. They turned against James, the brother of the Lord, to whom the apostles had entrusted the bishopric of Jerusalem. The scribes and the pharisees said to James: "The whole people is at risk of putting all its hope in Jesus. We ask you to restrain the people. They are mistaken about Jesus, believing Him to be the Messiah. We beg you to speak to those who come here for the Passover about Jesus. We all have faith in you. We know for certain and all the people know it too, that you are upright and no respecter of persons. Convince the multitude so that they will no longer be mistaken about Jesus. Go and stand on the pinnacle of the temple, so that everyone will be able to see you standing up there, and will be able to hear your words."³⁴ They went with him on to the pinnacle of the temple and said: 'Justus, tell us what the door (i. e. the meaning) of Jesus is, for the people are in error over the crucified one.' He answered in a powerful voice: 'Why do you question me about the son of man? He sits in heaven at the right hand of of the Almighty and he shall come on the clouds of heaven. Many were convinced and praised the witness of James in the words: "Hosannah, the Son of David." The scribes and pharisees on the other hand said to each other: We have made a mistake in giving Jesus such a witness. Let us go up and throw him down. They called; Oh, Oh, even the righteous one is in error. They fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: Let us kill the righteous one,

33. Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.* I. 38.

34. H.E I. 23, 10-11.

for we cannot bear him any longer. They went up and threw him down, saying to each other: "Let us stone him for he is not yet dead." Then James rose and knelt down and said: "Lord, I beseech you, forgive them for they know not what they do." While they were still stoning him, one of the priests, the son of Rechab, called out: Stop, what are you doing? The righteous one is praying for you. Then a fuller of cloth took the club with which he worked his cloth and struck the righteous one on the head. Such was the witness which James gave. He was buried at the same place, close by the temple, and his tombstone is still there. He was a true witness to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. They killed him, profiting from the absence of the authorities. At that moment Festus had died in Judea, and the whole government of the country was without any order or supervision. Some time later Vespasian laid siege to the city. Even the reasonable Jews saw in the martyrdom of James the reason for the siege of Jerusalem which immediately followed it.

We have devoted a great deal of attention to the brothers of the Lord. Perhaps there are people who are astonished that so many of Christ's relatives made up the administration of the first church, the college of the twelve apostles. In making such a choice Jesus conformed to the mentality of the Orientals for whom it is a normal and universal custom to involve one's family members in the management of one's affairs. They were chosen in spite of their reluctance to believe in Jesus's calling. They were the most critical of his disciples, who only gave up their unbelief after the Resurrection. As well as Thomas, James and perhaps also Simon needed a separate appearance of the risen Christ before they could overcome their unbelief once and for all. This is alluded to in a sentence from the otherwise lost *Gospel according to the Hebrews* and in a comment by Paul in 1 Cor. 15: 7. When those on the road to Emmaus returned to Jerusalem to make their report, they were received with the cry: "The Lord is truly risen and has appeared to Simon". Only afterwards did they

have the chance to tell what they had witnessed. The exegetes have constantly assumed that this refers to Simon-Peter but could it not refer to Simon, the brother of the Lord? His brothers did not believe in Him. Christ reduced the importance of the family relationship to its true proportions in the words: "My mother and my brothers—they are those who hear the word of God and act upon it" (Lk. 8:21).

Chapter 13

The Lost Son

By asserting that a nickname like Thomas - the Twin, did not at first appear in the lists of the apostles, but was only added later, we find ourselves in a remarkable situation. Thomas thus appears twice on most of the lists: in the eighth place as Thomas and in the tenth or eleventh place as Judas Thaddeus or Judas Jacobi. A list from which Thomas the doubter was missing, was regarded as incomplete. There was a process of filling in the gap, which took place in the first three centuries. If Thomas appears twice on the lists, then the intelligent reader will conclude that that leaves only eleven apostles, and that one name is missing to make up the twelve. Which apostle has been lost? We do not need to look far for the answer.

It was the apostle who was brought to Christ by Philip, who said to him: 'We have met the man spoken of by Moses in the Law, and by the prophets: it is Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth. 'Nazareth', Nathanael exclaimed, 'can anything good come from Nazareth?' Philip said, 'come and see'. When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, He said, 'Here is an Israelite worthy of the name; there is nothing false in him'. Nathanael asked Him, 'How do you come to know me?' Jesus replied, 'I saw you under the

fig tree before Philip spoke to you'. 'Rabbi', said Nathanael, 'you are the Son of God; you are King of Israel'. Jesus answered, 'Is this the ground of your faith, that I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You shall see greater things than that'. Then He added, 'In truth, in very truth, you shall see heaven wide open and God's angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' (Jn 1:45-51).

When the double appearance of Thomas compelled them to preserve the total of twelve apostles in some way, scholars identified Nathanael with Bartholomew, arguing that the name Bartholomew, or 'the son of Tolmai', was merely an addition to the name Nathanael.

If this were true then Bartholomew would have had to disappear much earlier. The point has always been doubted. St. Augustine and Gregory the Great were among those who have believed that these were two different persons. The scenes of their labours were also different. It is said of Nathanael that he worked in Egypt, and went as far south as Aden on the Red Sea. Bartholomew on the other hand worked in Mesopotamia, Persia and India.

The Ethiopian church which on many points has preserved traditions better than the west, has never accepted the fusion of the two names and has always recognised both Bartholomew and Nathanael. The Syrian church did not introduce the identification of the two apostles until the ninth century, while the Latin church did not do so until the twelfth.

If we reinstate Nathanael as an apostle, one of the twelve whom Jesus Himself chose, then return to the tradition of the first twelve centuries of Christendom. Thus, if we may give a reconstruction of the original list, we should find that it reads as follows, giving the original Aramaic names:

1. SHEMEON bar Jona, Semeon, Simeon, also called Peter, Keppa, or 'the Rock'.
2. Andraia, Andreas, the brother of Simon Peter.
3. Ja'aqob, Jacob, James son of Zabdai (Zebedee) and Salome, also called James the Great or James the Elder.
4. Johannan, John, the brother of James, the author of a Gospel and of Revelation.
5. Philip.
6. Bartholomew.
7. Nathanael.
8. Mattai, Matthew the tax gatherer and author of a Gospel.
9. Jacobus Alphei, James the son of Alpheus.
10. SHEMEON, Simeon, or Simon the Zealot.
11. Jehuda, Judas Jacobi, also called the Twin, Thomas, Didymus, Addai, Thaddeus and Lebbeus the bold.
12. Jehuda of Karioth, Judas Iscariot, the betrayer.

The reader who thinks that by the 'lost son' we mean the apostle Nathanael has misunderstood us. No, we mean in the first place the apostle who as a result of the confusion over his name in the west has fallen into obscurity and, outside the texts of the Gospels, lived on only as a doubtful, vague character in bizarre tales whose historical value has been regarded as highly dubious. Judas Thomas the twin is the main person in our study. In this book we wish to give him back to Christianity, as he was, as he lived and worked as one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. And so to conclude our laborious investigation of his person and his parentage, we give the following description of Thomas:

NAME: Jehuda or Judas, which means 'I Will praise God.'

FATHER: James, living in Paneas in the extreme north of Palestine.

MOTHER: Mary of Klopas, the mother of a large family, whose first husband Alpheus, had died early. She was one of the most active women in the Gospels, who came to the fore during the crucifixion and burial of Jesus.

BROTHER: of the apostles James the Less and Simon and as a result of this relationship himself one of the so-called 'brothers of the Lord.'

AGE: still very young at the time of his choice as an apostle. Much younger than his brother James the Younger. In ancient art he is often represented as a beardless youth of fifteen to twenty years old.

APPEARANCE: *Similis Christi*, according to the manuscripts, like Christ, manly and powerful. His miraculous strength is the subject of an Indian legend. Among the writings found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt there is one bearing the title 'Thomas the Athlete.'

CHARACTER: Full of youthful ardour. Extremely critical, so that the older apostles were irritated by his boldness and referred to him by the diminutive, 'Twin', *tauma*, Thomas. Naturally, he had a twin, according to one source a twin sister called Lysia.³⁵ Another source gives him a twin brother called Eleazar or Lazarus.³⁶

OCCUPATION: In so far as one can speak of the occupation of a youth of his age, he would have been

35. Chron. Pas, 9.: PG. 92. col. 1076.

36. Clement, Hom. II: PG. 2. col. 77.

occupied in the building trade, in both timber and stone. He probably spent some time in Nazareth for this purpose, in the household of the Holy Family. Having grown up in a pious family, which honoured the law of Moses, as well as Jewish ritual and the service of the temple, prayer, study, penance and fasting probably played an important role in his life.

It is said of him, with some exaggeration, in the *Acts of Thomas* (20):

"He fasts and prays continually, and eats only bread with salt, his drink is water. He wears only one garment in fair weather and foul. He takes nothing from anyone and gives all he has to others."

Hegesippus says that the brothers of the Lord were pillars of the church, and that Judas in particular was *admirabilis*, an object of wonder. How and why he was so admired, we shall try to find out in the following sections.

PART II

THE APOSTOLATE OF THOMAS
(FIRST PERIOD)

Chapter I

The Sending Out of the Apostles

It is by no means an easy task to reconstruct the apostolate of Thomas. Of course, we could hide behind the views of many authoritative historians who assert that we can know nothing with any certainty about the journeys of any of the apostles except Paul. It would be the easiest way, which would require little effort and would free us from the need for a great deal of a complicated work. We have deliberately avoided this way, and spent years busily searching for a number of missing links which we shall attempt to work out in more detail in the succeeding chapters.

The main task of Thomas and of all the other apostles was to proclaim and spread the Glad Tidings of God's will, that all men shall be blessed and shall attain the knowledge of the truth; that God had sent His own Son in the person of Jesus Christ to men to show them the way to the truth and to eternal life. As witnesses of this truth the apostles had to go forth and proclaim the teaching of Christ about His divinity, His incarnation, His passion and death on the cross, His resurrection on the third day and His glorious Ascension. In Mathew we see that Jesus sent them to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt 10:5-6). The lost sheep of the House of Israel were the Jews who lived outside Palestine in the so-called *diaspora*. The view that the apostles remained for several years in and around Jerusalem and were only compelled to leave it later as a result of persecution, is one which must be decisively rejected. Persecution already existed during the lifetime of Jesus and increased after His death on the cross. Out of fear of the Jews the Christians had to meet in secret behind closed doors. We may assume that most

of the apostles left immediately after the Ascension of Christ, to proclaim what had happened in Jerusalem, to the scattered Jews.

Where did they go? Where were these Jewish communities outside Palestine? There were in fact far more Jews in the diaspora than there were in Palestine itself.¹ On the basis of many calculations, scholars have reached the conclusion that there were about two million Jews in Palestine at that time, while the number of Jews outside the country is estimated at about seven to eight million. They formed closely knit communities, mostly by their own choice, living together in defined areas with their own administrative organisation and system of justice. They ran their communal affairs in an entirely democratic fashion. Their meeting place, the *Kinneshet* or *Knesset*, was translated into Greek as 'Synagogue'. It is clear that the apostles, as Jews, first addressed themselves to the *Knesset*, the Synagogue, and there announced their good news. They did so until they were no longer permitted to speak, until according to Christ's prophecy, they were expelled from the synagogues.

Some of these Jews were descended from the earlier exiles, as in Egypt and Mesopotamia, some of them had taken service with various rulers as mercenaries. For the most part, they had settled in foreign cities for the sake of trade. Often, they made up ten to twenty per cent of the population of a city. In 140 BC the Sibyl said: "All the earth is full of you Jews and all the sea." This is certainly an exaggeration, but the Greek geographer Strabo of Cappadocia, a contemporary of Jesus, is cited with agreement by Flavius Josephus, as saying that the Jewish nation could be encountered in every city and that it was not easy to find a single inhabited spot on the face of the earth which had not given shelter to that race.

1. A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, Gloucester (Mass), 1972, p. I-18

Another contemporary of Jesus, the famous Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, gives a detailed list of the places where the Israelites had settled, and adds: "And I say nothing of the lands on the other side of the Euphrates and the Tigris, nor about Babylonia; where, with a very few exceptions, all the Persian provinces have Jewish settlements."

If we wish to trace the path of Thomas, then we must find out where these Jewish settlements in the east had been founded. It is logical that the task of preaching the Gospel in the most distant lands should have been given to the youngest and most energetic of the apostles. It was the custom of the Jews of the diaspora to make the journey to Jerusalem several times in their lives. Even when they were surrounded by a heathen culture, the Jews continued to regard Jerusalem as the centre of their religion and civilisation. In remote countries they turned their faces to the Holy City when praying. Children were sent there to be educated. Every Jew from his twentieth year paid a tax for the upkeep of the temple and special missions were sent to bring the sacred revenues to the living heart of Jewry, Jerusalem.

At Pentecost too, when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles, there were many Jews of the diaspora present in Jerusalem: "They were amazed and in their astonishment exclaimed, 'why, they are all Galileans, are they not, these men who are speaking? How is it then that we hear them each of us in his own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites; inhabitants of Mesopotamia, of Judea and Cappadocia, of Pontus and Asia, of Phrygia and Pamphylia, of Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them telling in our own tongues the great things God has done'" (Acts 2: 1-11).

The first four peoples named, the Parthians, the Medes, the Elamites (or Persians) and the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, indicate the territory where according to

tradition the field of Thomas' labours lay. All of these lands belonged to the vast Parthian empire. It is very remarkable that *Judea* is mentioned in the fifth place. The accuracy of this passage has been questioned from antiquity up to our own times. Judea does not fit into the list of distant countries, which begins in the east and ends in the west. They were in Judea already: Jerusalem is in Judea. To say there were people from Judea in Jerusalem is in fact a ridiculous and superfluous statement. Many commentators have proposed to substitute for the word 'Judea' the name of another country which resembles it. Naturally, we thus come to suspect that the word '*India*' originally stood at this place. In both Greek and Latin, the written word 'Iudea' does not differ very much from the word 'India'.

As we shall see later, there were several Jewish communities in India, which played an important role in commerce with the Roman empire. As early as John Chrysostom it was pointed out that India must be meant. Later transcribers who no longer knew about the Jewish settlements in India changed the name to Judea.

One of the earliest references to the activity of Thomas is found in the *Clementine Recognitions*. There the following incident is narrated: In Jerusalem Caiphas the High Priest tried to attack the doctrine of Jesus by claiming that He had taught useless things. Thus, for example, he asserted that Jesus had taught that the poor were blessed and would receive an earthly reward, that those who were righteous would be sated with meat and drink, and other things of this nature. Thomas went boldly on to the offensive against him, and showed that these accusations were mere nonsense. He showed that the prophets, in whom Caiphas too believed, had proclaimed these things even more strongly, and that Jesus had merely explained how they were to be understood.²

2. *Clementine Recognitions*, I. Ixi.

In reconstructing the various journeys of Thomas, we must remember that his life continued for thirty years longer, and that in such a time span there were of course a great many possibilities which may escape a superficial consideration. The apostles did not settle in one place or in one country, but followed the instructions of the Lord and travelled from city to city and from district to district. For the reconstruction of the apostolate of Thomas we have at our disposal a large number of reference in the *Fathers of the Church*, *The Apocryphal Writings* and the local traditions.³ It is more important to integrate the life of Thomas into the general history of the expanding church. The history of the church and political events in this part of the world obliges us to divide the apostolate of Thomas into two main periods.

The first period, which we estimate at about fifteen years, included his overland journeys via Edessa, Armenia and the country of the Parthians to northern India. From many sources we know that Thomas was back in Jerusalem about the year 50 at the death of Mary, and that he attended the council of the apostles in Jerusalem. Then followed the second period, in which he travelled along the sea trade route via Alexandria, the Nile, Nubia, Ethiopia and the island of Socotra to south India, where according to Indian tradition he landed at Maliancara, Kodungalloor in Kerala. This second period, until his death, is estimated at about twenty years.

It must not be thought that the life of an active apostle, extending over more than thirty years, can be pinned down to two lengthy journeys. It is almost certain that Thomas would have joined his compatriots who largely controlled the trade with the east, and that he made several journeys back and forth. From his epistles, we know that the apostle Paul returned to Jerusalem no fewer than six times. We can assume with a certainty approaching probability that Thomas too returned at least

3. A.E. Medlycott, *India and the Apostle Thomas*, London, 1905.

four or five times to his native land to maintain his contacts with his family and fellow believers. Thomas is known almost as the 'astronaut' among the apostles, the one who travelled most, longest and furthest to proclaim the Good News. A reconstruction of his separate journeys is of course impossible, but we can say that he addressed himself in the first place to his compatriots abroad, that he sought to attach himself to the Jews who had settled almost everywhere in the known world to carry on their trade.

Chapter 2

Edessa the Blessed City

The first important connection in our investigation is formed by Edessa, the city which is said to have been blessed by Christ, and which was later called the *City of Thomas*. The town lay between the upper course of the Euphrates, and the Tigris, on the river Daisan, called the *Skirtos* in Greek, and famous for its sudden inundations. At the present time the city is in Southern Turkey, and is called Urfa, a place of about 100,000 inhabitants. It is said to have been founded under the name of Erech by Nimrod, a grandson of Noah, who in Genesis 10: 8 is described as a mighty hunter before the Lord. The mountain on which the citadel lies is still called the 'Throne of Nimrod' and the hills to the south of the city also still bear his name. Abraham too is said to have stayed here and a lake nearby is still called 'Birket Abraham; the lake of Abraham. This is understandable if we recall that the city of Harran (Charan) known to the Romans as Carrhae, from where Abraham set out for Palestine, lies forty kilometres to the south on the same river. According to Julius Africanus, Jacob's tent was also to be found in Edessa, but was destroyed by lightning in the days of the emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161).

The city had many points of contact with history of the Jews, and an important part of its population consisted of Jews who also had a synagogue there.

The relationship of Edessa to Christendom began during the lifetime of Jesus Himself, if we may believe the account given by Eusebius of Caesarea. In his *Ecclesiastical History* he writes that Abgar the king of Edessa, was attacked by an illness which no human power could cure. Abgar wrote to Jesus a letter which was copied in the archives of Edessa and which read as follows (I. 13):

A copy of a letter written by Abgar the Toparch to Jesus and sent to Him at Jerusalem by the courier Ananias: 'Abgar Ukkama the Toparch to Jesus the good Saviour who has appeared in the district of Jerusalem, greeting. I have heard concerning you and your cures, how they are accomplished by you without drugs and herbs. For, as the story goes, you make the blind to recover their sight, the lame walk, and you cleanse lepers, and cast out unclean spirits and demons, and you cure those who are tortured by long disease and you raise dead men. And when I heard of all these things concerning you I decided that it is one of two things, either that you are God and came down from Heaven to do these things, or are the Son of God for doing these things. For this reason I write to beg you to hasten to me and to heal the suffering which I have. Moreover I heard that the Jews are mocking you and wish to ill-treat you. I have a city very small and venerable which is enough for both of us.'

The reply from Jesus to the Toparch by the courier Ananias:

'Blessed are you who believed in me, not having seen me, for it is written concerning me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, and that those who have not seen me will believe and live.'

Now concerning what you wrote to me, to come to you, I must first complete here all for which I was sent, and after this completing it be taken up to Him who sent me; and when I have been taken up, I will send to you one of my disciples to heal your suffering and give life to you and those with you.⁴ The Syriac text adds to this: "and your city shall be blessed and no enemy shall ever conquer her."

The genuineness of this correspondence has often been doubted. Several writers even call it the most successful pious fraud of antiquity. Why this hateful observation? Do not all the Gospels contain the message of Jesus, only later reduced to writing? The only charge which can be made against the inhabitants of Edessa is that they interpreted this message as a letter which He Himself had written. George Philips gave an acceptable explanation of this as long ago as 1876 in the preface to his book *The Doctrine of Addai the Apostle*.⁵

"First it is historically true that Abgar Ukkama was king of Edessa in the time of our Lord. Having been long afflicted with a disease, and having heard of the miraculous cures effected by Christ, there is surely nothing more probable, nothing more natural, than that he should write a letter to our Lord inviting him to Edessa to remove the affliction under which he was labouring. But then our Lord is said to have written a letter in reply. This has caused - and it is not surprising that it should - great opposition. It has been made the main argument of the opponents of the genuineness of the work. It is inconceivable, they say, that if Christ wrote a letter, it should have been hidden for three centuries in the archives of Edessa. Christ is not known to have written anything else. If Christ had written a letter to Abgar, it would have been a part of sacred scripture, and placed at the head of the New Testament...

4. J.B. Segal, *Edessa the Blessed city*, Oxford, 1970, p.62.

5. George Philips, *The Doctrine of Addai the Apostle*, London, 1876.

Happily for me (i.e. George Philips) it is not part of my duty to answer the arguments which have been advanced against the supposed letter. According to the St. Petersburg manuscript and in this it is supported by the Armenian version, the reply of our Lord was merely a verbal message returned through Hannan to Abgar. He said to Hannan, 'Go and say to thy Lord, etc.' As a further proof that it could only have been a verbal message, it is expressly stated ... that Hannan related to Abgar everything which he had heard from Jesus, as His words were put by him in writing. If there be reasons why our Lord did not write a letter, there can be none against a verbal message. This mode of reply was consistent with what our Lord did on other occasions. It was a verbal reply to the question of John the Baptist, which He sent through His messengers (Lk 7:22). That the reply of our Lord was a written letter is, therefore, an error and the error was committed by Eusebius. It is not difficult to explain how Eusebius committed this mistake. He knew that the reply was in writing and kept in the archives, and he supposed that our Lord Himself had put it in writing, whereas it was done by Hannan. Our Lord, in His answer to Abgar, made no revelation of Himself which He did not make to those disciples who were in attendance on Him. He informed Abgar that He was going to His Father; but this communication He repeatedly made to His followers" (See Jn 14:12, 28; 16: 10, etc.).

In itself a correspondence between Abgar and Jesus would have been possible since the language of Edessa was Aramaic, which was the daily speech of Jesus. The King Abgar referred to here, who bore the title of Ukkama, 'the Black,' ruled from the year 4 BC to 7 AD, and then again from 13 to 50 AD. According to Eusebius the answer of Jesus was a written letter, but according to the *Doctrina Addai* it was a verbal message, which was later apparently written down. Whatever the truth may be, everything points to an early contact of Edessa with Christianity. That the fame of Christ as a healer and performer of miracles soon spread beyond the borders of

Palestine is abundantly clear from the Gospel of Matthew (4:23-25). Eusebius continues:

After the Ascension of Jesus, Judas who was also called Thomas, sent the Apostle Thaddeus who was one of the seventy, to the king.

A remarkable sentence, which has caused much confusion. First of all, the question, why did Thomas himself not come? Was it for Thomas, who was still very young, to send someone? Or was he perhaps sent himself? The purport of this statement is that an apostle brought the faith to Edessa, virtually immediately after the ascension of Christ. Who was this mysterious apostle Addeus? From many sources it is evident that he was also called Thaddeus. According to some Thaddeus was merely a variant form of the name Judas. Segal too points out that the name Judas had very early been associated with that of Addai, of which it can indeed be a variant form.⁶

The Thaddeus who is mentioned in Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3: 18, is called the brother of James in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13. He was thus the author of the epistle of Jude and belongs among the so-called brothers of the Lord. Addai, Addeus, Thaddai and Thaddeus are thus other names for Judas, the same Judas who was also called Thomas, the Twin. In the first part of this book we have already shown in detail that Thaddeus and Thomas were two names for one and the same person. In Eddessa, the threads come together again and bind the proofs even more firmly to one another. Adolf von Harnack may point out with some scorn that Judas the son of James, Thomas and Thaddeus have all been lumped together, but he omits to mention the fact that 'Thomas' was only a more or less derisive nickname and that the apostle himself would never have used this name. Especially in the east, where Aramaic was known and the true meaning of the word 'Thomas' was understood, he would never have appeared under the

6. J. B. Segal, *op. cit.* p. 66.

mocking title of Thomas. It is worth mentioning that the name Thomas never appears on the calendars of the church in the east. J. M. Fiey points out that this is a very inexplicable matter.⁷

The only possibility is that we have to look for him under one of the other names which Thomas acquired in the course of time. Above all under his original name Judas, of which Addai can be a variant in Aramaic. Only then is it to be explained, that Thomas was always regarded as the founder of the local church at Edessa. Adelbert Merx also asserted that Addai was the original name of Thaddeus and Judas-Thomas, as is clear from the Syriac *Doctrina Apostolorum*, from the legend of Abgar and from its Armenian translations.⁸ In Armenian writings, Thaddeus is also called Didymus, which means twin, and is the Greek word for Thomas. In the fifth century Etheria visited the city of Edessa as a pilgrim and gave a very detailed report of what she had found there.⁹ She refers to the "tomb" of Thomas, the most important goal of her travels, but is completely silent about the tomb of any Addai or Thaddeus. The grave of Addai was the grave of Thomas. In Kirk Magara, in the neighbourhood of Edessa, a tombstone has been found on which is carved a copy of a letter of Jesus, in a large format, two metres long and one metre wide, and very well preserved.¹⁰ On the basis of linguistic peculiarities of the Greek capitals in which the inscription is carved, the tomb has been dated to the fifth century, but according to experts it could also be older. Because of its importance, we give a complete translation of this text:

Blessed art thou Abgar, and thy city which is called Edessa. Blessed art thou, for thou believed in me without having seen me, for health shall be given

7. J. M. Fiey, "Le sanctoral syrien Oriental....." in *L'Orient Syrien* 8 (1963), 40.

8. F. Haase, *op. cit.* p. 273.

9. *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, tr. by G. E. Gingras, N. Y. 1970, (ACW-38) Ch. 17-21. p. 75-86.

10. J. B. Segal, *op. cit.* Plate 31.

thee all the years of thy life. Concerning what thou wrote to me, to come to thee; It is necessary first of all to accomplish that for which I have been sent; after accomplishing it to be taken up to the Father, who has sent me. But I shall send thee one of my disciples, BY NAME THADDEUS, WHO IS ALSO CALLED THOMAS who shall both cure thy suffering and give eternal life and peace to thee and all who are with thee. And for thy city he shall do that which is needed to bring it about that none of your enemies shall ever conquer her, to the end of the world. Amen.

LETTER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

By the words 'Thaddeus, who is also called Thomas' the people of Edessa evidently wanted to clear up any confusion which existed in the west, but apparently in vain. Both names were used indiscriminately. At first the Aramaic name Addai (Thaddeus) had the upper hand, but later after the incorporation of Edessa into the Roman empire in 240, the name Thomas, which was usual in the west, made headway.

We find another indication in the statement of Epiphanius that Thomas was born in the town of Paneas in Galilee. According to the *Doctrina Addai* Thaddeus was born in the same place. Here too, both names come together.¹¹

Let us return once more to Eusebius for a critical look at that key sentence:

After the Ascension of Jesus, Judas who was also called Thomas sent the apostle Thaddeus who was one of the seventy, to the king.

11. R. A. Lipsius, *op. cit.* I. p. 245. Paneas, or Panias was called Caeserea Philippi by the Romans. It was in this place that the confession of Peter and his choice as the leader of the Church took place (Mt 16:18-20). Nowadays it is called Banias.

First of all Thaddeus is called an *apostle*, and in the same sentence he is described as *one of the seventy followers*. This in itself is a contradiction, for he must have been either an apostle or one of the seventy or seventy two followers. Elsewhere Eusebius relates that the names of the apostles were well known to everyone through the Gospels but that a list of the seventy followers was no where to be found.¹² In the other work which deals with this question Thaddeus is described as one of the seventy two followers.¹³ The number seventy two is more original than the number seventy.

It goes back to the tradition that the books of the Old Testament were translated into Greek by seventy two Jewish scholars in Alexandria in seventy two days, which translation, under the name of the Septuagint, became generally accepted—a story which of course is not to be taken literally. Further we also find the number seventy two in Luke 10:1 who is the only one of the evangelists to relate that Jesus sent out not only the twelve apostles but also seventy two followers. The accuracy of this is doubted by many commentators. The content of the passage in which Luke describes the sending of the seventy two is virtually the same as the words which, according to the other evangelists, Jesus used when He sent out the twelve apostles (Mt 10: 7-14; Mk 6: 7-11). There is a great similarity between the figures '12' and '72' especially in the Greek method of writing the numerals, so that perhaps the reference to seventy two instead of twelve can be traced back to a small spelling error.

The suggestion in the text of Eusebius that Thomas sent someone else to Edessa, must be seen as a later, incorrect and rather maladroit attempt to explain the difference of names. The reference to 'one of the seventy', is, in my opinion, possibly not original.

12. HE. 1. 12. 1

13. Philip George, *op. cit.* preface.

According to an ancient Armenian writing, Christ Himself during the Last Supper gave Thomas instructions to go to Edessa after His death. Jerome too in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew is said to have declared that the apostle Thaddaeus, also called Judas Jacobi and Lebbeus, was sent to Edessa.¹⁴ Thomas, who was actually called Thaddaeus was *himself* sent and accomplished the commission *himself*. We conclude then that Addai or Thaddeus was one of the twelve apostles, and can have been none other than the apostle Judas, who was also called Thomas. What is very important is that we can now use the data about Addai-Thomas to reconstruct the apostolate of Thomas, by which means a great many apparent inconsistencies disappear like snow before the sun. For the sake of simplicity we will from now on use only the name Thomas whenever his by-names, Thaddeus, Lebbeus, or Judas the son of James, occur in the original texts.

Let us now return to Edessa and Eusebius whose words we give in a greatly condensed form. After his arrival in Edessa the apostle took up his residence with Tobias, the son of Tobias. When the news of his arrival became known to the king, he sent for Tobias, and said: "I hear that a man of authority has come and is staying in your house; bring him to me." Tobias rose early the next day and came with Thomas to Abgar. When they entered, the king saw a marvellous radiance on the face of the apostle. All his counsellors who were present were amazed that the king bowed down before him, for they had not seen the light. The apostle explained that he had been sent by Jesus to cure the king. He laid his hand on him in Jesus name, and once he had done so, the King was cured of his illness.

14. "Taddeum apostolum ecclesiastica tradit historia missum Edessam ad Abgarum regem Osroenae; qui ab evangelista Luca Iudas Jacobi dicitur, et alibi appellatur Lebbeus quod interpretatur corculus" (*Saint Jerome, Commentaire sur Saint Matthew, vol. 1, Paris, 1977 (SC. 242), p. 188. (tr. by E. Bonnard)*)

The apostle also healed Abdus, the son of Abdus, who suffered from gout, after Abdus had knelt before him. Abgar asked the apostle to tell him about the coming of Jesus, what had happened to Him, and where His power had come from, to do those things which had reached the ears of the king. The apostle did not wish to go into this at once, but since he had been sent out to preach, he asked the king to arrange a meeting of the citizens the following day, to hear his words. The king ordered gold and silver objects to be given to the apostle, but he refused them saying: now we have renounced our possessions, how can we accept the property of others? These events took place in the 340th year of the Seleucid era.

Further local details are given in the Syriac *Doctrina Addai*. Thomas, brought to the court by his host Tobias, preached before the king, his mother Augustina, his wife Shalmuth the daughter of Mihرداد, and his nobles. Abgar gave orders to Abdus to call the people together in the square called Beth Tabara, the great open space near the house of Awida the son of Abednahad, to hear the teaching of the apostle. Thomas preached again, explaining that he was no healer but a disciple of Jesus Christ. He condemned the worship of the stars and of idols. He did honour to Jesus and forced his hearers to recognise Him. The city, under the leadership of Abgar, his son Manu, his mother and his wife, accepted the new faith. The king encouraged the apostle to build a church, and supported him in such a way that his words had authority in the whole city. In a frenzy of enthusiasm the heathen priests overturned the altars on which they had formerly made their sacrifices to Nabu and Bel, their gods. Only the great altar in the centre of the city was allowed to remain. The apostle baptised them, and those who had been accustomed to pray to stone and wood, sat at his feet. Even the Jews, who were familiar with the Law and the prophets, were convinced and went over to the Christian faith.

The story, of which the oldest redaction known to us dates from the fifth century, gained wide popularity in the Christian world, but it contains many details, especially in the later development, which do not add up historically. A core of genuine events cannot be denied, even though they are embedded in a colourful and imaginative narrative. At any rate, at the place where Thomas preached to the people, there arose the first Christian church, which was destroyed by a disastrous flood of the river Daisan in the year 201. It was rebuilt, but destroyed again several times in the course of the centuries, by floods and earthquakes.

Edessa was the beginning and in a certain sense the end of the apostolate of Thomas. In Edessa, the caravans from the west and the east crossed the routes which led north and south. It was from Edessa that he went out to Armenia and the many provinces of the Parthian empire, to his final martyrdom in India. It was to Edessa that his bones were brought by a merchant from India. This probably took place at a very early date, perhaps as early as the end of the first century or the beginning of the second. The bones were taken away in secret, and rather carelessly so that some of them remained in the grave in Madras. In an excavation in 1523, it was evident that the inhabitants were very angry at the robbery and had protected the grave in such a way as to ensure that a further robbery would no longer be possible. Why did the people of Edessa wish to possess the bones of St. Thomas? Not merely because he had sent an unknown Addai to them with a message. The apostle must have been of enormous importance for Edessa, and that can only have been the case if the identification of Addai with Addeus, Thaddeus, Judas the son of James and Judas-Thomas is based on truth. Perhaps there was at that time a persecution of Christians in India, and there were men who wished to keep the remains of the beloved founder of the church at Edessa in safety. The shrine of Thomas, with his grave, was at first outside the city walls, to the west of Edessa. Apparently the relics were taken as booty by the Parthians

in their war with the Roman emperor Alexander Severus (222-235). In the peace negotiations with Artaxerxes, the return of the bones to Edessa was demanded. This took place in 232.

Here, by the tomb of Thomas, gathered bishop Barsai of Edessa and eighteen other bishops, to determine their position against the heresy of Arianism, which was greatly favoured by the emperor Valens (364 - 378). Arianism denied the divinity of Christ and tried to bring about a church without sacraments, in line with the prevailing tendencies in paganism. Emperor Valens visited Edessa in 372 and issued an ultimatum that all Christians should go over to Arianism. History relates that the emperor wished to put to death all the citizens who would not obey his commands. The citizens streamed out of the city to the shrine of Thomas, to wait for their martyrdom there.

St. Ephraim describes the event as follows:

The doors of houses stand open;
(the city) has left them and gone forth with her
pastor to die rather than forswear her faith.

'Let the city, villages, buildings and houses
(the inhabitants cry) be given to the Emperor;
our goods and gold we shall leave;
we shall not forswear our faith'.....

May Christ bless her inhabitants - Edessa whose
name is her pride.

The name of her apostle is her glory, the city that
is mistress of her fellows,

the city that is the shadow of the heavenly
Jerusalem.¹⁵

The emperor, who was impressed by the attitude of the townspeople, contented himself with the expulsion of the bishop and of the faithful clergy. The meeting at

15. See J. B. Segels *op. cit.* p. 175

the tomb of Thomas is seen in a sharper light if we recall that Thomas too doubted in his faith. Not until Christ had appeared to him and had invited him to place his fingers in the wounds in His side, did he admit that he was convinced, in the words 'My Lord and my God'. Here he gave the clearest explanation which we can find in the Gospels for belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, the divinity which was denied by Arianism. Edessa was the first city which went over virtually *in toto* to Christianity.

Eusebius asserted that from the time of the apostles to his days (324) the city had been entirely Christian. In August 394, the remains of Thomas were solemnly transferred from the shrine outside the city to a new or rebuilt church within the city walls. In 441-2, a general called Anatolus presented a chapel made wholly of silver, to house the relics. At the same time, Etheria, visited the city on a pilgrimage to the most important places of Christendom. She gave a detailed account of her travels and wrote:¹⁶

Directly after our arrival, we went to the church and the martyrium of St. Thomas. According to our custom, we prayed there and after doing everything which we were accustomed to do at the holy places, we read several texts which concerned St. Thomas. The church which is there is great, very beautiful, newly built and truly worthy to be a house of God. Because there were many things, which I wished to see, I had to stay three days. I saw in this city a great number of shrines and also holy monks, who lived, some of them by the martyria and others at quite a distance from the city, in remote places where they had their hermits' dwelling places.

In the fifth century Edessa was a large city, known far and wide for the faith of its citizens. The religious

16. Egeria, *Diary of pilgrimage*, (ch. 19) *op. cit.* p. 77.

houses and the schools were famous for the piety and learning of their theologians. There were already more than ten churches. The main church, probably that which Etheria praised for its beauty, belonged to the *Mirabilia*, the wonders of the world at that time. Above all the feast of St. Thomas was celebrated there on a very large scale. Towards the end of the sixth century Gregory of Tours gives a description of it from the viewpoint of the west. In the fifth month, that is in our February or March, a vast multitude streams in from all quarters, in fulfilment of their vows, and to hold a market. During thirty days, they can buy and sell without paying any taxes. The rest of the story excels in oriental exuberance and more or less intentional exaggeration. Let us hear what Gregory goes on to say about the feast of Thomas:¹⁷

Among the people no discord arises, no fly settles on meat, none that is thirsty lacks drink. On other days water is drawn from the wells from a depth of a hundred feet, now if one digs a little one finds clear water springing up in abundance. There is no doubt that this is bestowed by the merit of the Apostle. When the days of the festival have run their course, taxes are again imposed on the public, the flies that had come to an end appear, the waters that were near to the ground are swallowed up. Thereupon ... the rains cleanse all the hall of the church of dirt and different forms of filth deposited during the festival so that one would think that had not been trodden (by foot).

It was also customary to swear a solemn oath or promise at the tomb of Thomas. Isaac of Antioch (+460) makes fun of this custom, saying:¹⁸

The man who swears and adjures by the church-
we have no respect for his oath ... If by the shrine

17. *Liber gloria martyrum*: ch. 32; *PL*. 71; J.B. Segel, *op.cit.* 176.

18. See J.B. Segel, *op. cit.* 169.

of the apostle Thomas you swear not (he cries) 'I shall not hold your oath true.' (Thomas) they hold dearer than his Lord, because the demons have mourned (by his tomb). If one swears by the Church—it is in haste; by the apostle's shrine he lingers.

The Aramaic dialect of Edessa grew into the cultural language of the eastern church, Syriac, the medium of a very extensive Christian literature. One of its most famous writers was St. Ephraim, who was honoured as a father of the church. The inhabitants of Edessa spoke Syriac in its most perfect classical form. The transcribers in the monasteries copied all the important manuscripts. According to Arabic sources there were three hundred monasteries in the district of Edessa in the sixth century. What Rome and the Latin language had been for all of Europe, Edessa and Syriac became for the east, the church language par excellence, which maintained itself until our own days. The tomb of Thomas had the same meaning for the Christians of Mesopotamia, Armenia, Persia, India and China, as the tomb of Peter in Rome for those of Latin Christendom.

The flowering of Edessa as a centre of Christianity was brought to an end by the Islamic conquest of the city in 639. It is true that there was freedom of worship and the city did produce a few more famous theologians, but the bells of the churches could be rung no more. The inhabitants lived under the permanent threat of the domination of Islam. The church there went under, like so many other flourishing churches in the east and North Africa. Once, the possibility of a revival seemed to present itself when the crusaders occupied the city and Baldwin of Bouillon became King of Edessa. But this shortlived contact with the Christians of the West was to the detriment rather than the advantage of the Christians who had to live in an Islamic environment. Just before Christmas 1144 the city was conquered by the Turks, and within a few years the total collapse of the city as a Christian centre had been completed. The churches were demolished or transformed into mosques. The shrine of the apostle Thomas was used as a stable.

Chapter 3

Thomas and the Shroud

From the total destruction of Edessa, escaped the most precious and also the most awe-inspiring relic which Christianity knows: the shroud of Christ. In earlier history this was known under the name: the portrait of Edessa. Now, it is generally called the shroud of Turin. It is a piece of woven linen cloth more than four metres long and about one metre broad, in which the dead body of Christ was laid in the tomb, the shroud being folded over the head and reaching down to the feet. It shows an image of the front and back of a powerfully built man with a beard and long hair, laid out in the attitude of a corpse. The face in particular is recognisable and is considered to be an image of Jesus. After years of study and research, the British historian, Ian Wilson, with the assistance of many scholars, wrote a book about it under the title *The Shroud of Turin*.¹⁹

In Wilson's study it remained rather unclear who had brought the shroud to Edessa and why. I felt that my researches into Thomas enabled me to fill some important gaps in the earliest history of the shroud. I informed Mr. Wilson of this, and asked his permission to use the data in his book to give a synthesis of the events surrounding the presence of the shroud in Edessa. Mr. Wilson gave his agreement at once, and agreed with my main argument that Thomas was a byname of Addai or Thaddeus, and that it was thus Thomas himself who brought the shroud to Edessa.

19. I. Wilson, *The Shroud of Turin*, New York, 1978.

Thomas Humber, the author of another book on the *Shroud* says in his conclusion:²⁰ "Finally, we wish to explain that it is very doubtful that we will ever succeed in giving a satisfactory outline of the history of the Shroud from its origins, unless I. Wilson or other researchers are fortunate enough to discover new important facts."

Well, let us accept this challenge and try to reconstruct the history of the precious relic from its earliest origins, making use of our knowledge of Thomas - i. e. the real Thomas, and of the books of J. B. Segal, I. Wilson and Thomas Humber. We shall confine ourselves to the period during which the Shroud was kept at Edessa and to its transfer to Constantinople in 944.

The Texts of the Gospels

"When evening fell, there came a man of Arimathaea, Joseph by name, who was a man of means, and had himself become a disciple of Jesus. He approached Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave orders that he should have it. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen sheet, and laid it out in his own unused tomb, which he had cut out of the rock; he then rolled a large stone against the entrance and went away. Mary of Magdala was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave" (Mt 27:57-61).

From the data given by the other evangelists we can add: that it was already evening when Joseph of Arimathaea came to the spot (Mk 15:42); that Pilate did not give his permission for the body to be taken from the cross until he had been assured by the centurion that Jesus was already dead (Mk 15:44-45); that the cloth was not bought by Joseph of Arimathaea until he had received Pilate's permission (Mk 15: 46); that Nicodemus came to help him and brought about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes (Jn 19:38-42) and that the Sabbath was already breaking (Lk 23:54).

20. T. Humber, *L'énigme du Saint Suaire*, Paris 1979, p.73.

There was no more time to wash and anoint the body of Jesus, since the Sabbath rest began at the sixth hour because of the approaching Feast of the Passover. The women only looked on at the work of the men who laid the naked body in a linen cloth and used several smaller cloths to bring the body, distorted by the crucifixion, into a lying position. They put the spices alongside the body and folded the linen sheet loosely over it from the head to the feet, so that the women could later wash and anoint the body: "The women who had accompanied Him from Galilee followed; they took note of the tomb and observed how His body was laid. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes; and on the Sabbath day they rested in obedience to the commandment;" (Lk 23: 55-56).

The Resurrection

Early on the Sunday morning they returned to the tomb but were amazed to see that the great boulder which had closed the tomb had been rolled away and that the body had disappeared. Only the Shroud was still there, as were some smaller cloths. From the reactions of all of them, it is clear that no one had thought of the possibility of a resurrection. Not until after Christ Himself had appeared to many on this first day, and had shown His transfigured body with the signs of His wounds, did their dismay and amazement change to joy, at first hesitant, but then raised in the triumphant cry: The Lord is truly risen as He said. Alleluia!

As a precious and tangible proof of this resurrection the shroud was taken from the grave to the home of the apostles. Mary of Klopas, whom we have identified in our reconstruction as the mother of Thomas, was among the women who had come to anoint the body of Christ (Mk 16:1). Once the cloth had been brought to safety in Jerusalem, Jesus' followers realised that they had a rather lugubrious object on their hands. A cloth which had been in contact with a dead body was regarded as unclean, and

had to be destroyed, for everyone who touched it became in his turn unclean. After the enthusiasm of the first days, they must have thought it more sensible not to talk about it, and to keep its existence secret for the time being. Probably they did not investigate the shroud any more closely. When the apostles and the women left Jerusalem—The Lord shall go before you to Galilee—the shroud ended up in the place where Mary of Klopas and Thomas lived, Paneas, in the northern tip of Palestine. Perhaps, it was there that they first discovered that the cloth bore a clearly recognisable imprint of the features of Christ. But this discovery only made the cloth even more unacceptable, for the original prohibition of images of Jahweh, or idols, had grown into a distaste for any image of a person. If the apostles, out of respect for Christ, had consoled themselves with His image, their Jewish neighbours would have regarded them as blasphemers. For both reasons, thus, they concealed the true nature and provenance of the image. It was from Paneas that the first legends arose, in this atmosphere of secrecy, which tried to explain the appearance of the face of Christ on this cloth.

Edessa

The shroud can have remained at the most a few weeks in Paneas, since according to the Syriac *Doctrina Addai* it was only a few weeks after the Ascension of Christ that the apostle went to Edessa to visit king Abgar and to cure him, in accordance with Christ's promise. An Armenian manuscript adds the detail that Christ gave this commission to go to Edessa to Thomas during the Last Supper, and Jerome too gives some indications in this direction. It was known in Palestine that the heathens found images of persons acceptable, and that images were of frequent occurrence in Parthian art. The safety of the shroud would thus be far better ensured in Edessa than anywhere in Palestine.

According to a chronicle made in Constantinople around the year 945 Thomas carried the shroud with him

folded up, when he entered the king's presence, and the radiance which made the king fall on his knees before him, issued from the image on the shroud, which cured the king when he touched it. The king asked how it was possible that such power could flow from this object. The apostle told him about the great miracles performed by Christ, His divine passion, His burial and Resurrection from death, and His Ascension. Thomas undoubtedly told the truth, including the true story of the origin of the shroud.

One of the many names which the shroud has borne throughout history was that of the *tetradiplon*, or sheet folded four times, a word which never occurs in Greek literature. The king gave Aggai, the man who made gold and silver crowns for him, orders to put the shroud into a frame so that only the face was visible, as in a portrait, Thomas Humber wrote these words of a later time, but they may also be applied to this period.²¹

The shroud was, we may assume, preserved discreetly, far above the gaze of the public. A few priests of high rank, and the members of the royal family, who received permission to see it, were only shown a part of it. The shroud was folded and probably framed in such a way that the bloodstained body remained hidden, and the only visible part was the Holy face, in all its impressive majesty.

Aggai, the royal goldsmith, was an important person, who became the colleague of Thomas, and at his departure was appointed leader of the Christians in Edessa. The king also had the red tile, or *Keramion*, made, on which an image of the head of Christ was set, and which was mounted above the west gate of the city of Edessa. It was a general custom among the Parthians to decorate the gates of their cities with the images of their gods. It is said that there was also an inscription in these words:

21. T. Humber, *op. cit.*: p. 71

Christ the God,
 he that hopes in you,
 shall not be disappointed.

If this inscription really was made in the first century then it was a recognition of Christ as God from the very first years of Christianity, such as we have also seen in the reaction of Thomas after Christ had appeared to him and invited him to reach his hand into the wounds in His side, to which Thomas, full of humility, replied: My Lord and My God (Jn. 20:28).

Persecution and Disappearance

On his death Abgar was followed by Ma'nu V, who ruled for only a short time and was succeeded around the year 57 by Abgar's second son Ma'nu VI, who returned to paganism and persecuted the Christians. He gave Aggai, the leader of the Christians, orders to go back to his former occupation: "Make me a crown of gold, as you made earlier for my father." Aggai refused, saying: "I will not give up the office which has been entrusted to me by a follower of Christ, to go back to making heathen ornaments."

This act of *lèse-majesté* was fatal for the Christians. With a cruelty which was not uncommon at that time Aggai was attacked by the servants of the king, who broke both his legs and then put him to death. Because of the persecution, the image of Christ above the west gate also had to disappear. The shroud with Christ's image had apparently already been brought to safety though it is not known who did this. Whoever it was, he did his work excellently. He hid the shroud in a niche in the west gate, on the place where the *Keramion* had been situated. To protect it, he placed the *Keramion* above the shroud and as a sign of reverence put a lamp by it, a common motif in the burial of the dead in antiquity. The niche was bricked up again so that it created a hermetically sealed cavity ideal for the preservation of the

cloth. The hiding place had been carefully chosen. The west gate lay in a place where the landscape rose steeply, so that even the worst floods could not cause any damage. Edessa was often attacked by sudden floods in the course of the centuries, as in 201, 303, 413 and above all in 525. In each of these inundations palaces and churches were destroyed. The person who had sealed up the shroud in the gate does not seem to have had the opportunity to return to the hiding place or to tell his secret to the surviving Christians.

The Finding of the Shroud

All memory of the existence of the shroud disappeared in the following centuries, and even the numerous writers who lived in Edessa made no mention of it. The pilgrims who visited this centre of Christianity knew nothing of an image of Christ. Yet the west gate had a special attraction and significance for Christians, even though they no longer knew precisely why. When the pilgrim Etheria was conducted round Edessa by bishop Eulogios he showed her the gate where the envoy of Abgar had brought in the reply from Jesus.

The bishop said a prayer at the gate and said to her that from the day when the messenger Ananias brought the letter of the Lord through that gate, until now, those who are unclean or wear mourning have not been allowed to pass through this gate, nor may any dead person be carried out through it.²²

According to Wilson's reconstruction, the flood of 525 was the indirect cause of the finding of the shroud. That year was one of disaster in the history of Edessa. On April evening when many of the townsfolk were already asleep, the river rose so suddenly that ten thousand people were killed, a third of the population. Many buildings, including palaces, churches and the city walls

22. Egeria, *op. cit.* p. 80.

were swept away in a few moments by the torrent. The damage was so enormous that the emperor Justinian in Constantinople sent his engineers to change the course of the river. They made a dam between the river and the city which is still in existence. The city walls and the gates were rebuilt and it was probably during this work that the old west gate which dated from the time of Abgar V was demolished and that the shroud and the tile with the image of Christ were found.

The first written account of these events dates from 544, when the historian Evagrius (527–600) states that the portrait of Jesus was carried round the city to invoke His protection during a siege. The report of the find spread rapidly throughout Christendom. Pilgrims flocked into Edessa from all sides to see the portrait. For the first time in history a true picture of Christ was available. It received the name *Acheiropoietos*, "not made by human hands." Artists made copies of it which were spread over all parts of Europe. The portrait of Edessa was the model for all the images of Christ which were made in succeeding centuries. It played a very important role in the iconoclastic controversy which raged in the Eastern Roman Empire from 725 to 845. It was a powerful weapon in the defence of the honours paid to images. It was brought forward as a proof that God Himself had given us an image of Himself, and in a miraculous manner.

Romanus Lecapenus, the Byzantine emperor was dismayed that the most important of all the images of Christ was still in Edessa, by that time Muslim territory. His good administration and strong armies had put Islam on the defensive and his able general Johannes Curcuas had recaptured such cities as Nisibis and Dara, well to the east, from the Muslims. In 943 his army was at the gates of Edessa and was preparing to lay siege to the city. At the emperor's instructions Curcuas made the most remarkable peace proposals ever put forward by a victor, asking only for the surrender of the sacred portrait,

the *mandylion*. In exchange he promised to spare the city, to release two hundred leading Muslim prisoners, to pay twelve thousand silver crowns and to sign a treaty of eternal peace between the empire and the cities of Edessa, Harran, Sarug and Samosata. The emperor had appointed bishop Abraham of Samosata to receive the *mandylion* from the hand of the bishop of Edessa. The ceremony was carried out according to the agreement. After the handover, however, bishop Abraham stated that he had only received a copy of the *mandylion*, and he seems to have been well aware of the true nature and appearance of the precious shroud. A second time, the clergy of Edessa tried to mislead their opposite numbers by handing over an imitation. Not until the third attempt was bishop Abraham convinced that he had the true and genuine cloth in his hands. On 15 August 944 the shroud was borne into Constantinople, amid great ceremony, as a possession of the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, and was to remain there for two centuries. Two hundred years later, Edessa fell to the Turks and was so devastated and plundered that it was never able to re-establish itself as a centre of Christianity.

The Formation of the Legend

It is to the transfer of the shroud to Constantinople that we owe the most detailed account of the portrait of Edessa, probably made in 945 on the orders of the new emperor, Constantine Porphyrogenitus. In thirty one chapters it gives an account of everything which was known about image, or related of it. For that time it was an excellent piece of work, which had been preceded by an extensive study. It is however, very remarkable that the author does not seem to have known that he was dealing with the burial cloth of Christ. He gives various explanations of how and when the image was said by his informants to have come into existence. He is honest enough to admit that some of the explanations are in conflict with each other and that the facts had become garbled over the centuries. The secrecy with which the portrait of Christ was surrounded,

was the reason for the emergence of these legends. We must not condemn those who invented the legends too strongly. They were faced with riddles which they sought to solve. They had insufficient knowledge and insight into the true character of the image. One put forward an assumption, which was taken over, by later writers, who added their opinions and explanations to it. Often they were learned or holy men whose assumptions were transmitted to posterity as the truth. We have no objection to legends as long as they are recognised as such, as long as they do not supplant or distort the truth.

The life of the apostle Thomas, in particular, is so overgrown by legend that it is difficult to get at the truth. The historian who is confronted by a mass of often contradictory legends in the end does not know what to do with them and is tempted to dismiss all his information as legendary. That of course is disastrous for any historical writing, even though it may seem to be the easiest way out. In such a way, the historical events and the miracles of the Gospels have often been degraded by modern critics into legends, so that in fact violence is done to the truth. A much better method is to put all the legends alongside each other, to set them in the time and the milieu in which they arose, to distinguish clearly what has been added to them by way of ornament and imagination and thus to determine their common basis. Each legend contains a core of truth even if, for lack of other evidence, it is sometimes hard to find. The legends which clustered round the image of Christ form a unique opportunity to examine the way in which such tales originate and are spread. We know their origin, the object around which they centre, and have an excellent source to aid us in the report of 945.

The Portrait of Ananias

We find an attempt in the story of Ananias or Hannan, the *tabellarius* or secretary of king Abgar, who is said to have composed or delivered the so-called letter of Jesus. He is supposed to have received instructions to invite

Jesus to come to Edessa, or if that was not possible, to draw a portrait of Him. When he arrived in Judea, Ananias found the Lord in the open air, speaking to a great multitude. Because he could not get close to Him, he took up a place on a nearby rock, from which he could easily see the Lord, who stood out above the crowd. He watched Him closely, took a sheet of paper in his hand, and began to draw.

With divine inspiration, Jesus realised what was happening, and called Thomas, saying: Go and bring Me that man who is sitting on the rock and drawing My picture. Bring Me the letter which he has with him, so that he may fulfil the instructions of the person who has sent him. Thomas went and recognised Ananias from what Jesus had said, and fetched him to Jesus. Before Ananias took the reply from Him, Christ told him the reason for his coming and the purport of the letter. The text gave the answer of Christ, as given in the previous chapter. Knowing the desire of Abgar to possess an image of Him, Jesus washed His face and dried it on a cloth, on which He left, in some divine or inexplicable way, His own image. He gave this cloth to Ananias telling him to take it to Abgar, so that he might have some consolation in his sickness.

Christ's death agony

Another attempt to explain the origin of the portrait is said to have been the work of St. John Damascene (+749). He appealed to the text of the Gospels, which state that Jesus in his death agony, sweated water and blood (Lk 22:43). An angel came from heaven to console Christ, and is said to have wiped His face with a cloth, on which an image of His divine features was impressed. Jesus gave the cloth to Thomas, telling him to send it to king Abgar after His Ascension. Artists took over these imaginary stories, and made them the subject of their works, but always with the face of the living Christ, so that the paintings appeared more attractive and more lifelike than the original of Edessa, which showed the face of the dead Christ.

The common basis of these legends is that in all of them, the image on the cloth originated in a miraculous way, and that the apostle Thomas played a significant role in its preservation.

Chapter 4

Armenia

From Edessa to Armenia is but a short step. The country lies in an inaccessible mountain region between the Black Sea, and the Caspian Sea, at the headwaters of the river Tigris. Here too, we find ourselves in a biblical land of ancient times. In Armenia lies mount Ararat, where the ark of Noah was stranded after the deluge which punished mankind for the degeneration of their morals.

There was a time when Armenia extended as far as Edessa, and the Armenians formed an important part of the population, when an Armenian became bishop of the city. Now, the territory belongs partly to Turkey, partly to Iran and partly to the U.S.S.R. After the conversion of king Tidrat III by Gregory, the Illuminator, around 300, the entire people became Christian, thus forming the first Christian nation in the world. The Armenian church, which still exists in the east and in various centres in Europe and America, appeals to a direct apostolic foundation, and has always insisted on this as an established fact, in its attitude to the outside world. The names and dates of the persons concerned are the subject of different opinions.

The Patriarch or *Catholicos* is considered as the incumbent of the throne of the apostle Addai, who came to Armenia from Edessa. The same confusion of names which we encounter here, has also bedevilled the histo-

rians of the Armenian church. All the more so, since in the south of Armenia, the Syriac influence was dominant, while in the north the Greek was uppermost. There was at first no indigenous tradition, for the Armenian alphabet was not invented until 306, and a native literature only developed in the later centuries. The first evangelist of Armenia was known under the following names: Addai, Addeus, Thaddeus, Judas - Thaddeus, Judas of James, Lebbeus and Thaddeus Didymus. When we recall that Didymus is the Greek word for twin, for Thomas, then we need no longer be in doubt who is meant by all the names. In the seven bynames of Thomas, which derive from seven different traditions, we can see a sevenfold confirmation of the fact that Thomas was the first who proclaimed the faith to the Armenians.

Thomas, however, was not the only apostle who was active in Armenia. Tradition, also refers to *Simon the Zealot*, whom we must consider as Thomas' colleague. More important still was the task of the apostle *Bartholomew*, who met the apostle Thomas on the hill of Artashu and took over his work. An early tradition gives a list of seven heads of the church before the year 200, beginning with Thaddeus, who is said to have ruled from 35 to 43, followed by Bartholomew, who is said to have remained there from 44 to 60. This is of course untrue, for the apostles were travelling evangelists, who did not remain in one place, but appointed a colleague in a place when they had preached the faith there and then went on.

It is related of Thomas that he once entered Armenia from the north. Perhaps this is connected with the Russian tradition that Thomas also visited Moscow, but we have not been able to find any further information about this. After Bartholomew, two other pupils of the apostles are said to have governed the church, Zacharias who died a martyr's death in 72, and Zementus who died in 76. In their eagerness to strengthen their link with the apostles some Armenian authors have claimed that Bartholomew was martyred and buried in their country.

In fact Bartholomew also preached to the entire east, including India, where he was beheaded. We do not wish to discuss all the problems which Armenian writers have created in their zeal, but a correct version of the fate of Bartholomew is of importance for the history of the church in India. Eusebius and Jerome point out that Bartholomew preached in India. He is said to have left there the gospel of Matthew which was found in the second century by the scholar Pantaenus of Alexandria, who had been sent there by his bishop at the request of an embassy from India.²³ The Armenian tradition that Bartholomew died in their country, has been taken over by several western writers, but only originated in the seventh century. The much older indications in the *Passio*, and in the *Martyrology* of Jerome, about his death in India, seem in hindsight to be based on truth. The attitude of the Armenians' neighbours, the eastern Syrians is also revealing. One of their writers, Amr of Teheran says: Bartholomew preached in Greater Armenia but he did not remain there; he went to the lands of India, where he was flayed.

Because, in our opinion, Thomas and Thaddeus were one and the same person we cannot omit to refer to an Armenian tradition that Thaddeus was martyred and buried in their country. His grave was shown in Artaz, where there is still a monastery of St. Thaddeus, four miles from the town of Macu, which was the seat of the Armenian patriarch or Catholicos until the year 300. These tradition about the grave of Thomas are—how could it be otherwise—very confused and unreliable. One author writes that he was killed in Libya and buried there. According to others he is said to have died and been buried in Berythus. In still other traditions, he died in Arat, Adrahat, or Arara, which again differs from the Armenian tradition, which claims that it was in Artaz. Let us conform to the conclusion of the *Acta Sanctorum*

23: Eusebius, *H.E.* 5. 10: PG. 20, 453-456; Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 36: PL, 23, 651.

'de Sancto Thaddaeo apostolo, qui est Judas...' p. 444, which reads: The variety of opinions itself is a sufficient proof that we know nothing certain about the grave of the apostle Thaddaeus.

Perhaps - but only perhaps - a solution may be found in the name Arat or Arara, which might be a derivative or an Arabic variant form of Al Ruha, a name given to Edessa in later times. In this way we would return by a devious route to the grave of Thomas which is already familiar to us in Edessa, the city rich in waters.

Chapter 5

The Empire of the Parthians

The empire of the Parthians emerged about 150 B.C. and stretched from the eastern frontier of the Roman empire to India. The Parthian kings regarded themselves as the successors of the great Persian rulers, such as Cyrus and Darius. They bore the title of *Shah Shahana*, the King of Kings. They wore Persian costume and adopted Persian manners. Their rule lasted until 226 A.D. when the Sassanids, descendants of the true old Persians, resumed power. In the period before Christ, and during the first expansion of Christianity, we are thus concerned with the empire of the Parthians, which was far from being an unknown place to the Jews in Palestine. Many Jews lived in the Parthian empire, where they enjoyed wide freedom and autonomy. As a rule the Parthians concerned themselves little with the administration of the individual provinces. Often an ally was appointed as governor, responsible for the collection of taxes. When dealing with *Edessa* and *Armenia* in the previous chapters, we were in fact already within the sphere of influence of the Parthians.

Mesopotamia

Let us begin with the land of the two rivers, the district between and around the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, the old country of the Assyrians, known to the Greeks as Mesopotamia. In this territory there were three great cities with important Jewish populations, Edessa, Nisibis and Arbela. We have already discussed the role of Thomas in Edessa in great detail. *Edessa* was linked to both the other places by the trade route along which caravans brought spices, precious stones, cloth from India, and silk from China to the rich cities of Asia Minor and the countries around the Mediterranean Sea.

Nisibis was a fortified city where the Jews sought refuge in times of need, and where the contributions for the temple in Jerusalem were collected. Here there was a famous Jewish academy which was known even in Palestine itself. It is the ancient tradition of Nisibis that the apostle Addai proclaimed the gospel in Edessa and the lands around it, the places in the south, Nisibis, the district to the east of Edessa and the whole of Arabaya. From epitaphs too, it is evident that Christianity had made headway early on, while the city also gave the church the author and Father, *St. Ephraim*, the poet of the Syrians.

The third city was *Arbela*, the capital of the kingdom of Adiabene, whose royal house had even adopted the Jewish faith. In the chronicles of Arbela, the writer Meshihazekkha (550-569) citing an earlier writer, gives us a list of the first twenty bishops of Arbela. The list begins with Mar Paquida, of whom it is related that he was ordained by the apostle Thomas himself. The work also gives the route which Thomas followed on his first evangelising mission in that area: from Edessa he went to the south of Arzenene and then followed the valley of the Tigris. Near Hakkiri in the south-eastern corner of Turkey, close to the frontier with Iraq and Iran, there is a cave high in the mountains, only accessible by a ladder, where the apostle Thomas (Addai) and his disciple Mari

are said to have dwelt while they were preaching in the country. The cave is in the district of Walto, close to the village of Mart Mariadi. The two are also supposed to have visited the village of Beit Glale, about ten kilometres away, while the whole town was gathered in the mountains to worship an idol. Only the crippled daughter of the king had remained at home. We may imagine the astonishment of the king's advisers when they saw her walking towards them, in front of the Evangelists. Little more was needed to convert the populace.²⁴

There was also a memory of the apostle Thomas preserved in the more eastern town of *Urmi*, close to Lake Urmiah, a stopping place on the road to the east. Here, a church was said to have been built on the site of a house where Thomas had stayed on his way to India.

Babylonia

Further south lies the ancient land of Babylonia, a law-lying plain on the lower course of the Euphrates and Tigris. A large part of the population of Palestine had been brought here in various deportations, the so-called Babylonian exile. Under king Cyrus, in 536 B. C., the Jews had again been permitted to return to their own country. Many of those who had risen to prosperity and importance in exile, preferred to stay where they were. Because of their numbers they felt themselves to be just as free and independent as the Jews in Palestine. Many cities were inhabited almost exclusively by Jews. Their main centre was Nehardea, a walled city on the Euphrates, easily defensible because of its situation. They chose their own political leaders, 'the princes of exile' or 'exilarchs' who had to be descended from David. They were recognised by the Parthian king, and in order of importance they were the fourth among his vassals. The apostles could not fail to address themselves to such a great concentration

24. J.M. Fiey, "Proto-histoire chrétienne du Hakkari Turc", *L'Orient Syrien*, 9 (1964), 462.

of their co-religionists. In the *Epitome Canonum*, Babylonia is described as the fifth centre from which Thomas worked on the conversion of the east. The apostles Simon and Judas Thomas consecrated Abdias the first bishop here. He had accompanied them from Palestine and had even seen the Lord. Abdias is said to have written a history of the work of the apostles in Hebrew, a *Historia Apostolica*. His pupil Eutropius is supposed to have translated it into Greek, while the historian Julius Africanus is alleged to have divided it into ten books and translated it into Latin.²⁵

In the time of Alexander the Great, Babylon had been replaced by Seleucia-Ctesiphon as capital. This was a double city, with Seleucia on the west bank of the Tigris and Ctesiphon on the east, to the south of the present day city of Baghdad. Ctesiphon was the winter capital of the Parthian rulers. The Christians of this city consider themselves linked to the apostle Thomas by an unbroken series of bishops and patriarchs. Their patriarch derived from this succession a certain authority over the other bishops of the east, which naturally aroused much resistance. In June 612, all the eastern bishops, gathered at the court of king Chosroes II, declared that the gospel had been brought to the east by the holy apostle Addai one of the disciples of the Lord.²⁶

If we look instead at the close ties of race and language which bound the inhabitants of Palestine to those of Mesopotamia, Armenia and Syria, it is clear that Christianity must have expanded very readily in this direction also. Christianity in a certain sense is an out-growth of Judaism, and in the time of the apostles it spread from one Jewish settlement to another, along the great trade routes which led to the east. As a rule the apostles began in the synagogue and formed a small nucleus of followers. Normally they began in an unobtrusive

25. R. A. Lipsius, *op. cit.* I. p. 117ff.

26. J. B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale*, p. 564 f. 581.

way, of which the Jews said nothing at all, unknown to history and only reaching us in exceptional cases. Thus Thomas is said to have reached Tagrit, a fortress town on the Tigris, on his way to Persia and India, in the twelfth year after the Ascension. There he is said to have brought about the conversion of a person called Bar Hadbsabba, with his family and a group of the inhabitants.

Media, Persia, Parthia, Hyrcania, Bactria

Certainly in the first century there were few who were aware of the extent of the spread of Christianity. There were as yet no historians, and when, later on oral traditions began to be recorded in writing, the information was often vague and confused. No local traditions of the work of the apostle Thomas in the true heartlands of the Medes, the Persians, and the Parthians are known to have come down to us but we must make what use we can of general statements.

Sophronius, for example, is said to have recorded that Thomas planted the sign of the cross among the Medes, the Persians, the Carmanians, the Hyrcanians, the Bactrians and other neighbouring people. *Isidore of Seville* (d.636) says that Thomas preached the Gospel of Christ to the Parthians, the Medes, the Persians, the Hyrcanians, the Bactrians...²⁷ The poet and philosopher *Bardanes* (154-222) sings the praises of the doctrine of the gospels, which had already taken root not only in Persia, Media, the land of the Parthians and Hyrcania, but also much further east in Bactria, deep in central Asia.

Hyrcania lay to the south of the Caspian sea, where the capital of Iran, Teheran, is now situated, Jews from the neighbourhood of Jericho had earlier been brought here as slaves. It seems logical that the apostle Thomas,

27. *Isidore, De ortu et Obitu. Patrum* 74; 132. *PL.* 83:152.

in his travels, proclaimed the gospel to these Jews also. Eusebius confirms that there were Christians living there in the second century.

In *Bactria*, which is even further to the east, lived the descendants of the colonists of Alexander the Great. They had established a state with a Greek culture, which at its greatest extent included all of Afghanistan, western Pakistan, and part of the Punjab. Among these colonists were many Jews who had taken service in the army, and later received as their reward large tracts of land in the conquered territories. Constantine the Great (323-337) who gave Christianity its freedom in the west wrote to king Shapur of Persia:

"I am rejoiced to hear that in persia too, the most important places enjoy the presence of Christians."²⁸

Cosmas Indicopleustes, the traveller to India, in 547, records with pleasure that he had encountered numerous Christian communities, with priests, monks and bishops, in the most scattered countries: among the Bactrians, the Huns, the Indians, the Armenians, the Medes, the Elamites and the whole of Persia; Labourt writes in his foreword that in Persia, we are concerned with a fragment of the lost history of the church.²⁹ At the time of the Muslim invasion there were seven archbishoprics, and more than eighty dioceses, stretching from the mountains of Armenia to the shores of South India.

But the much older evidence of Origen (185-253) is that the apostles had spread over all the accessible world to proclaim the gospels to mankind:

Thomas was allotted the Parthians; Matthew, Ethiopia; Bartholomew, western India; John, Asia; Andrew, Scythia; Peter, Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia and Cappadocia; Paul filled with the gospel of Jesus all those from

28. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 4.13.

29. *Le Christianisme dans l'empire Perse*, Paris, 1904.

Jerusalem to Illyria. Others were sent to this place or that, according to the will of the Holy Ghost, as their own accounts state.³⁰

We find roughly the same statements in various other early ecclesiastical authors, such as Eusebius, Socrates, and Rufinus of Aquileia. But why should we look for so many statements in well known authors when we have a more detailed account from Thomas himself? He wrote to Rome, at the time when he was crossing the boundless lands of the Parthians with his brother Simon, and something of the content of this letter is passed on to us by Clement of Rome who acted as the secretary of Peter and later became the fourth Pope of Rome. In a classically well formed period, Thomas informs us of the welcome which the moral laws of Judaism and Christianity found among the heathen peoples of the Parthian empire.³¹

"As Thomas who is preaching the Gospel among them has written to us, among the Parthians there are not many men who give themselves up to polygamy. Among the Medes there are no longer many people who give their dead to the dogs, and among the Persians there are no longer many men who take pleasure in marrying their mothers or committing incest with their daughters, while the women of Susa no longer commit adultery which was formerly permitted by their customs."

30. Origen, In explanatione Genesis, lib. III: PL 118. 831

31. *Clementine Recognitions*, 9. 29.

Chapter 6

The Wise Men From The East

According to an old tradition, the apostle Thomas on one of his earliest journeys paid a visit to the wise men of the east, who had come to adore Christ at Bethlehem. They were later known in the west as the three kings. Thomas is said to have instructed them in the Christian faith, to have baptised them and ordained them priests, and to have appointed them as bishops. A sculpture near the high altar of Cologne cathedral, which is supposed to contain their relics, shows them being consecrated bishops. Like virtually everything else which has been handed down to us in the traditions of this apostle, this tale too has been regarded as legendary by many, and dismissed as unhistorical.

Indeed, the whole story of the coming of the wise men from the east has been considered by some exegetes as a later, imaginary interpolation in the gospel of Matthew. If this is true, then there is no historical basis for the story of Thomas' meeting with the wise men. But we have to assume that there is some truth in the narrative. Several Ecclesiastical writers understood it as historical and not merely imaginative. St. John Chrysostom says:

"The Word made flesh gave, at its coming into the world, the first proof of its grace and light to Persia, in the persons of wise men... So that even the Jews in Jerusalem had to hear of the birth of their Messiah from the lips of the Persians."

At that time, of course, the word 'Persians' referred to the inhabitants of the Parthian empire, which extended as far as modern Afghanistan, Pakistan and a large tract of North India. In complete conformity with this is a

tradition of Mosul, a city 400 kilometres east of Edessa on the Tigris in Mesopotamia, and called the 'Tower of the Jews' because so many of them lived there. This tradition says that the present day cathedral of the Jacobites is built on the site where one of the wise men had his house, and where the apostle Thomas stayed.

Several ecclesiastical authors have said something of the visit of Thomas to the wise men of the east, their conversion and baptism. In his book H. Crombach refers³² to Dorotheus of Tyre, Sophronius of Jerusalem, Jerome, Baronius, Jacobus de Voragine, Petrus Canisius, Salmeron, Cornelius a Lapide, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, as well as a number of other writers who were authoritative in his time, such as Petrus de Palude, Esquilinius, Eckius, Bernardus de Busto, Thomas Stapleton and others. In various medieval legends which go back to the Latin work of John of Hildesheim, a connection is assumed between the three wise men and India.

The most definite statement of this view is that of Fr. Heras, who was formerly director of the Indian Historical Research Institute in Bombay, and who believes on many grounds that the wise men were Indian *rishis* or astrologers. Heras also points out that all orientals were called Persians in the west. His most important argument is that of the gifts which they gave: gold, frankincense and myrrh. This custom of making gifts at the birth of a child existed and still exists in many parts of India, while it is unknown in Persia, according to Heras. Gold or coins were given to help in the bringing up of the child, frankincense to create an agreeable fragrance and myrrh mixed with mother's food promote the yielding of milk. Be this as it may, we wish to conclude by observing that the legend of Thomas' meeting with the wise men from the east could have been founded on real facts. There is always an historical event at the heart of any legend, even though

32. H. Crombach, *Historiae s.s. Trium Regum Magorum*, Coloniae Agrippinae, 1654. p. 551-3.

it is often hidden under a mass of assumptions, ornaments and imagination. The word 'legend' has thus acquired the pejorative meaning of incredible, unreliable, mendacious. Originally it meant only, *legenda*, that which is to be read, worth reading. We must always be able to distinguish the central core of truth from the surrounding fantasy. Legends too can yield important details on closer study and so help us establish the truth.

Chapter 7

Gundaphor the Indian King

As almost the only supporting evidence for the reality of Thomas' apostolate in north west India, we have at our disposal the detailed story which is known as the *Acts of Judas-Thomas the apostle*. We have already said something about this work in chapter 3 of the First Part.³³

The Acts of Thomas are the best preserved of all the so-called apocryphal writings. Even though they do not belong to the canonical books of the New Testament recognised by the church, they have been carefully studied by many generations of Christians. We shall devote a separate chapter to the origin, composition, and character of the work later. What value does it have for the reconstruction of the life of the apostle Thomas? Is it a mixture of historical facts with all kinds of imaginary details? The majority of western historians have refused to acknowledge any historical value in the Acts of Judas-Thomas. Their central figure, king Gundaphor, was entirely unknown in secular Indian, Persian or Greco-Roman literature. Dr. Mingana summarised the opinion of scholars as follows:³⁴

33. See p. 9-16 above.

34. A Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in India*, p. 3.

"Almost all the critics of the latter half of the nineteenth century had pronounced a negative verdict on the question of the historicity of the mission of Thomas, and relegated it to the swollen catalogue of apocryphal fiction, classed in the domain of what we generally call a myth."

But archaeological excavations in India have made an entirely new verdict necessary. From excavations and coin finds, it has been possible to laboriously reconstruct a forgotten piece of history. It now seems that during a period of about four hundred years, three dynasties of princes ruled in north west India. The first dynasty was of Greco-Bactrian origin, and their coins show only Greek inscriptions. At the end of the second century before Christ, Parthian rulers were in power. About the year 50 B. C. they were driven out by the Kushans, Indo-Scythian invaders who conquered the area and largely destroyed its existing culture. The story of king Gundaphor can only be historically based if Gundaphor was a contemporary of the apostle Thomas. After the name had been known only from the Acts of Thomas, in various forms such as Gonduphur, Gondophernes, Gudnaphar, and Gondapor, it suddenly appeared on coins found in the excavations, in the Greek form Undophares and the Indian form Guduphara.

The image on the coin shows a typically Parthian face, and the name itself is related to other Parthian names such as Artaphernes, Phrataphernes, etc. The coins bearing his name were found over a very wide area, from which it appears that he was one of the most powerful of the Parthian rulers. Coins of three types with his name have been found, bearing such titles as 'Great King of Kings', 'Saviour', 'the Invincible', 'the man dedicated to God'. Coins have even been found on which the name Gundaphor occurs in conjunction with the name Guda or Gudana, in which we may trace the name of his brother Gad, which in its Latin version is correctly given as Gaudius. But those who believe that this is sufficient proof of the historicity of this unknown king still have to overcome the barrier of the period at which he ruled.

The Indian scholar, G. M. Moraes, has investigated these matters thoroughly and set down the results of his research in a book.³⁵ He traces the whole relationship of India and the west from the time of Alexander the Great, the history of the Greco-Bactrian rulers and the Parthian kings who penetrated to the east in the reign of Mithradates (124-88 B.C). The conquests were probably the work of Maues, whom he appointed as viceroy in the newly acquired territories. During the feeble rule of the successors of Mithradates, Maues began to acquire a more independent position. Though he had at first been content with the title of *Basileus* or king, he soon adopted the style of King of Kings, which really belonged only to the Parthian rulers. In accordance with the custom of the country, he and his successors issued coins which bore a Greek inscription on one side and an Indian one on the other. From the history of these coins, from the form of the letters, and the inscriptions used, it has been possible to deduce the dates and succession of the Parthian kings. Gundaphor's predecessor in this district was Azes, who came to power in about 30 B. C. and also reigned for a long time. Under his rule, the last remnants of the Greek kingdoms of Kabul and the eastern Punjab were added to the Indo-Parthian territory. Azes was succeeded by Gundaphor. That Gundaphor was the direct successor of Azes, is evident from the coins which prove that they both had the same *Strategos* or general in their service, Aspavarman the son of Indravarman. The archaeological strata in which the coins of the two kings were discovered are consecutive, proof of their direct succession. The year of Gundaphor's accession to the throne is given us by the inscription of Takht-i - Bahi, a stone found near Peshawar, and dated in the twenty-sixth year of his reign, on the fifth day of Vaisakha of the year 103.

The calendar used is not given but the reference to a Hindu month makes it clear that it is an Indian

35. G. M. Moraes, *A History of Christianity in India*, Bombay, 1964.

chronological system. Until the existence of another chronology is proved, we must accept that the date is given in the local calendar, the so-called *Vikrama-samvat*, which began in about 58 B.C. The year 103 of the Vikrama calendar would coincide with the year 46 of the Christian era. We thus arrive at the year 19 A.D. as the beginning of the reign of Gundaphor, a year which is more in accordance with the chronology which had been calculated independently of the inscription. The clear evidence assembled from historical sources, numismatics and the inscription proves without doubt that Gundaphor reigned in the first half of the first century of our era, and that he was thus a contemporary of the apostle Thomas.

The kingdom of Gundaphor extended over what the Romans knew as *Areia*, *Drangiana* and *Arachosia*, also known as 'White India'. In terms of our own day, it included parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan and a great parts of India as far as the modern capital, Delhi, and beyond. Numerous coin finds in this area have confirmed this. It was the custom of the Parthian kings to entrust parts of their territories to their blood relatives who then bore the title of Satrap or Viceroy. From the coins it seems that Gad and also persons called *Orthagnes* and *Abdagases* were satraps of Gundaphor. Gundaphor was thus the head of a dynasty, of Parthian origin, which ruled over an empire which can properly be included within the ancient Indian cultural sphere. He united in his person the Parthians and the Indians, and can be regarded with equal right as either Parthian or Indian. The statement of the early Fathers of the Church that Thomas preached in Parthia, is so far as it concerns this area in agreement with the traditions which sends him to India. Although the region was also accessible via the sea route and the mouth of the Indus, we believe that Thomas would have approached it along the silk road through Bactria. Thomas travelled from Judea to Syria, from there to Armenia, and Mesopotamia, thence via *Soltania*, a city in Persia, to *Kandahar* and *Gavorstan*. A few miles north-west of this last place is the capital city of *Takshashila*, also called *Taxilia*, and now *Taxila*. It was

an old royal city where the Aryans from central Asia had established themselves.

In Taxila, many languages were spoken since it lay at the point where three great trade routes met: Sanskrit, Persian, Greek and even Aramaic. An Aramaic inscription has been found on a monument to a high official called Romedote. Aramaic was also the basis of the local script—Kharoshthi—which was used for both official and unofficial purposes during the first century. It is probable that it was the presence of a Jewish colony which attracted Thomas here. The merchant who brought him bore a Semitic name, and was either a Jew or a Jew converted to Christianity. His position as a merchant of the king must have given him the opportunity to travel everywhere. That he fetched Thomas with him as an artist and builder is entirely in accordance with the custom of the times.

Thomas could have made contact with his fellow Jews and proclaimed to them the good news of the coming of the Messiah. He could have discussed religion with learned Brahmins, Persian priests and Buddhist monks. King Gundaphor was, as a Parthian, a follower of Zoroaster, but he tolerated and encouraged other religions. On the coins struck during his reign, we can see images of the Greek gods, Zeus and Pallas Athene, and also of Siva and other Indian deities.

On his coins Gundaphor preferred the title *Deva-vrata* which means 'The one devoted to God', to the more normal titles of *Deva-putra* 'Son of God' or *Devanam Priya* 'beloved of the Gods'. He also used a symbol which is described by one author as a chalice, such as Christ used at the Last Supper. The chalice and not the cross is said by some to be the oldest known Christian symbol, but there are others who dispute the accuracy of this.

According to an Ethiopian version of the Acts of Thomas, the apostle remained for four years in the kingdom of Gundaphor. In proclaiming the faith the apostles confined themselves to establishing the church and left its further development to local leaders.

Where his further travels took him is probably to be deduced from other information given to us by the historians of the Church. The apostles were recalled from their missionary territories to be present at the death of Mary, and to take part in what has been called the first council of the young church.

Gundaphor is said to have died soon after his baptism, and his kingdom was rapidly subdued by the conquering nomads from central Asia. So thorough was the destruction that even the memory of the Parthian kings disappeared. We had to wait for the rediscovery of their coins and the excavations of archaeologists in the last century. No trace remained of the young church which had been so promising. It and its protectors, the Parthians, vanished together. A community of fakirs in Tatta calls itself by an Aramaic name, the sons of Thomas, and claims to be descended from the Christians who were baptised by Thomas. In Soviet Turkestan, tombs with inscriptions in Syriac have been found, bearing names which belong to north-west India. In 1935, a cross was found near the place king Gundaphor's palace once stood, and it is now preserved in the museum at Taxila. It is to be hoped that further proofs will be forthcoming from the extensive ruins of ancient Taxila, which stretch over an area of about twenty five square miles.

Chapter 8

The Dormition of Mary

The decisive turning point in the apostolate of Thomas was his return to the west at the death of Mary, the mother of Christ. While until the middle of the previous century only a few manuscripts on the death of Mary were known, there are now more than thirty which have been discovered.

It seems that this literature, known by the name of the *Transitus Mariae* or Dormition of Mary, had already appeared in the second century and was widely disseminated by the third. The tradition that the death and burial of Mary took place in Jerusalem was generally accepted in the west on the basis of three sermons of St. John Damascene, (749). The sermons, full of sacred eloquence, deal wholly with the death of Mary, and were given in Jerusalem at the place where it was assumed that the grave of Mary was situated. John Damascene appealed to a declaration of an earlier archbishop of Jerusalem, Juvenal, who in 451 at the council of Chalcedon, had spoken as follows:³⁶

“In the Holy Scriptures, inspired by God, we are not told what happened at the death of Mary, the holy Mother of God, but we assume - according to an old and reliable tradition - that at the moment of her glorious dormition, all the holy apostles who were scattered over the earth for the salvation of the peoples, were brought to Jerusalem in one moment, through the air. When they were at her side, the angels appeared to them in a vision, they heard the divine music of the higher powers, and

36. S. Jean Damascene, *Homélies sur la Nativité et la Dormition* (tr. by P. Voulet), SC 80, Paris, 1961, p. 170-171.

so, in divine and heavenly glory, the holy virgin gave in an inexpressible manner her holy soul back into the hands of God. As far as her body was concerned, the bearer of divinity, it was buried amid the songs of the angels and the apostles, and laid in a tomb in Gethsemane, the mount of Olives, where the song of the heavenly choirs was heard for three days without interruption. When on the third day the song had ceased, the apostles who were present opened the coffin at the request of Thomas, the only one who had not been with them, and who had arrived on the third day, for he wished to pay his respects to the body which had borne God."

Unfortunately the writings about this event are richly embellished with legendary traits, show many variations on important points, and contain many contradictions and improbabilities. Some of them locate the events in Bethlehem or in the valley of Josaphat. The date of the death of Mary is given variously as 2, 11, 12, 22 and 24 years after the Ascension of Christ. Her age at death is given as 57, 59, 60, 70 and 72 years, the last being the greatest age given. All in all, we have a literature which offers us few solid facts. Everything which is handed down by man undergoes a process of addition by one, omission by another, which plays into the hands of uncertainty and doubt. Before the year 630 John of Thessalonica gave his version of the Dormition of Mary, since he regarded the work as an entirely falsified production of the heretics. In this case it seems useful to us to turn to an entirely different source: mysticism.

Has God come to our aid by granting to certain persons of holy life, visions which revealed the true state of affairs? At any rate, the stories of the visionary Anna Katharina Emmerich of Dulmen in Westphalia, Germany, reveal a logical train of thought. Anna Katherina herself said of her visions:

"The many wonderful passages from the old and New Testaments and the countless pictures from the

lives of the saints, have been given to me by the mercy of God; not so much to instruct me— for I cannot understand many of them—as to tell them to others, and to bring back to life much that was hidden and out of sight. I know that I would long ago have died, for I have now had a vision that I would have been dead long ago if everything had not had to be made known through the Pilgrim. He had to write down everything; for the prophecy, that is the making known of the visions, is my task.

This 'pilgrim' was the poet Clemens Brentano, born at Frankfurt, who wrote down everything in a diary from 1818 to her death on 9 February 1824. The very critical writer Godfried Bomans who mingled doubt with mild humour in a masterly fashion, wrote of the visions of Anna Katherina Emmerich: "Whoever reads this cannot believe his eyes. The nun speaks of the life of Jesus with the conviction and detail of an eye-witness. She mentions hundreds of details which were only recognised as historically well founded a hundred years later, when we had made some progress in exegesis. She writes in general as if she had been there.... The most striking thing is that no-one in her time could have known about these details, while she herself was a woman of limited historical education. At that time so little was known about the circumstances of the time of Jesus that for years afterwards these visions were regarded as historical nonsense, until science and scholarship began to adopt her statements one by one."

Of course we must remain very critical when dealing with data from visions. There too, there are possibilities of error and of distortion of the facts. There can be a difference between that which is seen by the visionary and the way in which she related it, or felt obliged to explain it. The one who wrote down the visions may have added something from other sources or from

his own imagination, especially when he was combining fragments from many different visions about the same subject into a single narrative.

Bearing in mind the necessary caution, but convinced of the possibility of these visions, we give what Anna Katharina herself had to say about them:³⁷ On 13 August 1822 she said: "Last night I had a great vision of the death of the Holy Virgin, but I have forgotten almost all of it. To the question, how old the Virgin Mary was, she suddenly turned aside and said, she was sixty four years and twentythree days old. I saw the sign X six times then I and then V, isn't that sixty - four? After the Ascension of Christ Mary lived for three years at Sion (Jerusalem), three years at Bethany, and nine years at Ephesus, where John had brought her soon after the Jews had sent Lazarus and his sisters away by sea. Mary did not live in Ephesus itself, but in the district where several women who were known to her had earlier settled. Mary's house was, as you come from Jerusalem, about three and a half hours from Ephesus and on a hill to the left side. This hill ran down aslant to Ephesus so that as you came from the south east, it seems to be quite near just in front of you, though it is really a long way when you go on further. Somewhere to the south of Ephesus, where there are rows of trees, and where yellow fruits are lying on the ground, narrow footpaths lead up to the hill, which is covered with undergrowth; on the top of the mountain, there is a hilly plain, about half an hour's walk around and also overgrown, where she had her house. It is a lonely area, full of fertile and charming hills and clean dry caves between small sandy patches, wild but not desolate, with many spreading trees with smooth stems, pyramid shaped and casting a wide shade underneath."

"When John fetched the Holy Virgin, here, after having a house built for her, there were already several

37. Clemens Brent no, *Leben der hl. Jungfrau Maria*, Aschaffenburg, 1964, p. 405.

families of Christians and holy women living in the district, some of them in caves in the ground, which they had made into dwellings by simple timber structures, and some of them in flimsy tents and huts. They had come here to flee from violent persecution. Because they used the caves and holes as places of refuge, just as nature had made them, their dwellings and settlements were mostly a quarter of an hour's walk from each other, and the whole settlement looked like a scattered peasant village. Only Mary's house was made of stone. Behind this house a little path ran up to the top of the mountain, from where you could see over the hills and the trees to Ephesus and the sea with its many islands. This spot seemed to be closer to the sea than Ephesus which is some hours from the coast. Nearby is a castle, where a deposed king lives. John often stayed with him, and also converted him. This place later became a bishopric. Between the dwelling of the Holy Virgin and Ephesus ran a wonderful winding brook."³⁸

"The Holy Virgin lived here alone with her servant maid who gathered whatever little food they needed. They lived very quietly and in the deepest peace. There was no man in the house. Often the travelling apostles and their disciples visited her. After she had lived here for three years, Mary was very homesick for Jerusalem. John and Peter took her there. I think that there were several apostles gathered there: I saw Thomas, I think, it was a council and Mary was there to give them advice. When she arrived I saw her at dusk in the twilight, before she entered the city, visiting the Mount of Olives, the hill of Calvary, the holy tomb, and all the holy places around Jerusalem. The mother of God was so saddened and distressed that she could hardly stand and Peter and John held her by the arms to support her. She came here from Ephesus once again eighteen months before her death. Then I saw her once more, veiled against the night, visiting the holy places with the apostles. She was inexpressibly sad and constantly sighing: O my son, my son."

38. *Ibid.* p. 406.

"When she came to the rear gate of the palace where she had met Jesus who fell under the weight of the cross, she sank to her feet, overcome by the painful memory, unconscious, and those who were with her thought that she was about to die. They took her to the Cenacle in Zion, where she lived in the rooms at the front. Here the Holy Virgin was so weak and sick for several days that she was often unconscious, and they often expected her to die, and were planning to prepare a grave for her. She herself chose a cave in the Mount of Olives, and the apostles had a beautiful tomb made there by a mason. Meanwhile it was said several times that she was dead, and the rumour of her death and of the tomb in Jerusalem was also spread to other places. But when the grave was ready, she was already cured and strong enough to return to her house at Ephesus, where she died a year and a half later. They kept the grave which had been made for her on the Mount of Olives in honour, later built a church above it, and John Damascene so I heard in the spirit, who would he be? then wrote that he had heard it said that she had died and been buried in Jerusalem. The reports of her death, her grave and her assumption to heaven, God only allowed to be the subject of a vague tradition, so as not to give any opportunity to the heathen feeling still prevalent in Christendom, for she could easily have been worshipped as a goddess."³⁹

Anna Katharina also recounts how she saw the apostles arrive at the house of Mary, not borne through the air instantaneously, but after long and exhausting journeys. They had been summoned by visions to be present at the death of Mary. Their distant journeys had often been accomplished by means of the miraculous aid of the Lord, without they themselves being aware of it. She states that it was forty-eight years after the birth of Christ when Mary died, or thirteen years and three months after His Ascension. In great detail she describes everything which took place before and after the death of Mary, how the apostles

39. *Ibid.* 410.

and disciples took their departure and how she gave her blessings to each in particular. James the Great arrived at the last moment, having come from Spain via Rome and Philip came with a colleague from Egypt. Thomas was not there. He only arrived some days after the burial at Mary's house near Ephesus.

Anna says: "Thomas was in India when he received the warning, but he had already decided, before receiving this warning, to go further north in Tartary, and could not force himself to neglect this. He always wanted to do too much, and thus often arrived too late. So he went further north, almost across China, where Russia is now, when he was called again, and hastened to Ephesus. The boy whom he had with him was a Tartar whom he had baptised. Something became of this boy later, but I have forgotten it. Thomas never went back to Tartary after the death of Mary."⁴⁰

A tradition about Thomas' call to return has been preserved, and he is alleged to have said: "I also travelled through the land of the Indians, when the preaching of the grace of Christ won ground and the sister of the king was on the point of being baptised by me in the palace, when suddenly the holy Ghost said to me..."⁴¹

In great detail the visionary nun relates how Mary's soul was taken up to heaven in a supernaturally brilliant light. The apostles made a tomb, half an hour from the house, in a cave which formed the final station of the Cross and was regarded as the tomb of Christ. Close by was a hill, which must have indicated the hill of Calvary. After the burial, the nun saw a ray of light from heaven descend to the grave, in which Mary's body was carried up to heaven by Christ Himself. She did not know if the apostles and the women who were praying by the grave had also seen this. The day after the burial, she relates how Thomas arrived, in these words:⁴²

40. *Ibid.* 427.

41. R. A. Lipsius, *op. cit.* p. 279.

42. Clemens Brentano, *op. cit.* p. 441-442

"Tonight I saw the apostles still praying sadly in their house. The women had already gone to rest. Then I saw the apostle Thomas with two companions, dressed for a journey, appear before the hedge of the courtyard, and knock at the door, to make them open. There was a disciple with them called Jonathan, a relative of the holy family. The other companion was a very simple man from the country where the most distant of the Three Kings had come from, whom I always call Partherme, because I can never remember the name exactly, (Parthyene or Parthenland?) Thomas had fetched him from there, he was wearing a cloak and was a youth, as obedient as a child."

"A disciple opened the door and when Thomas and Jonathan entered the house of the apostles, he ordered his servant to remain seated before the door. The good brown man did everything he was ordered and sat down quietly. Oh, how sad they were when they heard that they had arrived too late. Thomas cried like a child when he heard of the death of Mary, the disciples washed their feet and refreshed themselves a little. Meanwhile, the women had awoken, and got up, and when they withdrew Thomas and Jonathan were taken to the place where the Holy Virgin had died. They threw themselves on the ground and wet it with their tears. Thomas also knelt for a long time in prayer at the altar of Mary. His grief was deeply moving, I still cry whenever I think of it. When the apostles had finished their prayers, which they had not interrupted, they all went to welcome the newcomers. They took Thomas and Jonathan in their arms, pulled them up, embraced them and led them to the front of the house, and refreshed them with little rolls of bread and honey, and they drank from small tankards and beakers. They prayed together again and all embraced each other. But now Thomas and Jonathan wanted to see the grave of the Holy Virgin, and the apostles lit torches fixed to staffs, and all went with them to the grave of Mary. They did not say very much, they were silent for a time at each of the stations of the cross, thinking of the suffering of the Lord and the grief of His mother, who had the memorial stones placed here, and had so often watered them with her

tears. When they came to the tomb in the cave, they all fell on their knees, but Thomas hurried to the entrance of the cave with Jonathan and John followed them. Two of the disciples pulled back the bushes in front of the entrance, stepped inside and knelt in reverent awe before the resting place of the Holy Virgin. Then John approached the light coffin, made from reeds, which stood out a little above the deathbed untied the three grey bands which kept the cover on and put it to one side, Then they let the light shine on the coffin and saw with great astonishment the burial clothes of the holy body lying before them empty. The face and breast had been pulled apart, the wrappings of the arms had been untied and lay there loose, but still in the form in which they had lain, only the glorified body of Mary was no longer on earth. They looked with upraised arms in astonishment, as if the holy body had just disappeared in front of their eyes. John called from the cave to those outside: Come and be amazed, she is here no more!"

The marvellous thing about the visions of Anna Katharina Emmerich is that she gave so many details which can be investigated afterwards. As for the tomb of Mary, she says that this will one day be discovered. She also gives many indications which can help us to do this. The tomb forms the twelfth station of the cross, which was laid out by Mary on the model and according to the distances of the Path of Suffering which Jesus had to tread in Jerusalem. She gives in great detail the way in which this way of the cross was laid out in the area behind the house. The stations were all by long smooth white stones, some of them octagonal with a small hollow on top in which a cross could be placed. Each stone was marked with a Hebrew letter. The stations lay in deeper, small, round hollowed out basins so that people could walk round them to read the inscriptions. Only the station of the Hill of Calvary lay on a hill. The truth and the genuineness of these visions will no longer be open to doubt when the tomb of Mary is found, near Ephesus, on the basis of these indications, and if it answers to the description which she gave in 1821.

PART III

THE APOSTOLATE OF THOMAS
(SECOND PERIOD)

Chapter I

Alexandria and the Nile Region

It is to Alexandria that we must look for the beginning of the second phase of the apostolate of Thomas. This city had been founded by Alexander the Great whose successors had made it into the most important harbour of the eastern Mediterranean. It became even more important when the Romans occupied Egypt in 30 B.C. The Romans sought a link with India and China which would avoid the Parthian empire. The land trade through Parthia was on a small scale, subject to tolls and often carried by unsafe roads.

The flowering of the independent kingdoms of Nubia and Ethiopia, which sought Roman support in their struggle against the Arabs, favoured the emergence of a new trade route. In Alexandria, as well as the Egyptians and Greeks, there were many Jews who played a great role in the commerce and industry of the Roman empire. Finance was for a great part in their hands, as was the trade in grain and textiles. According to Philo, two-fifths of the population of the city were Jews. The city was also a centre of Jewish culture and learning.

Egypt

Unfortunately very little is known of the origins of Christianity in Alexandria and Egypt. A. von Harnack wrote that the most unfortunate gap in our knowledge of the early history of the church is that caused by our virtually total ignorance of the Christian church in Alexandria and Egypt before the year 180. It lay outside the sphere of Luke, who in the Acts of the Apostles concerned himself almost exclusively with the territory where the apostle Paul had preached. J.M. Farquhar assumed that the apostle Thomas had been the leader of the Christian faith in

what was then the greatest trading city of the world. There, Thomas would have come into contact with Ethiopians, Arabs, Indians, Parthians and the peoples of the Persian Gulf who were all involved in commerce and shipping. We feel that Thomas' stay in Alexandria would be somewhere around the year 50, after the death of Mary and before the start of his second great journey to India. This agrees logically with the Indian tradition that the apostle came to Kodungalloor (Cranganore) in Kerala, South India, in the year 52.

Thomas had every reason to choose this route. In the year 46 the Romans had discovered the Hippalos route, which made a more rapid connection with India possible. Travel by this route was undergoing a huge expansion at that time. The main reason must have been the political situation in the east where the long expected war between the Romans and the Parthians had broken out.

Some indication of the early penetration of Christianity into Egypt is found in the traditions of the Coptic Church which so often allude to the flight of the Holy Family from the massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem. The Copts also have a feast in honour of the coming of Christ to Egypt. The representation of the Holy Family, with Mary seated on an ass, suckling the child Jesus in her arms, while Joseph walked alongside, is still a very common motif in art. At one of the places where the Holy Family stayed, near Cairo, the tradition was strikingly demonstrated by a series of apparitions of the Virgin Mary, witnessed by many hundreds of thousands, in 1968 and 1969.

The preservation of the knowledge of the places where the Holy Family stayed points to a very close connection, for these facts can only have been derived from the immediate family of Christ. Was it Thomas who provided this information? The central position of Alexandria on the trade routes makes it likely that many, not to say all, of the apostles spent some time there on their travels, and made contacts with the existing Christian communities. We may mention Peter, Philip and Simon in particular.

Let us follow the normal trade route as it is given by the Roman historian Pliny the Elder, who lived from 23-79 A.D. If the wind was favourable, one could sail up the Nile to Koptos in Middle Egypt in twelve days. From Koptos one travelled on camels across the desert in twelve stages to the coast of the Red Sea, to the harbour of Myos Hormos and later to the more southerly Berenice. There was a garrison which protected this district. For travellers, there was an assembly place where 2000 persons could be accommodated at a time. The greater part of the journey was made at night, since the heat was too great in the daytime. From Berenice, the shipping route along the Red Sea to the south in the direction of Aden, and the more remote island of Socotra was followed. Trade with India was by no means a one-sided affair concerning only Romans, Greeks and Egyptians. Indians too visited Alexandria and Egypt.

Nubia and Ethiopia

It cannot be decided with certainty whether Thomas took the route through the Nile valley, Koptos and Berenice to India. There are some rather vague reports that he also preached the gospel to the Nubians and Ethiopians. A great deal depends on how we calculate the chronology. Was there a period of two, four or six years, of which we are still ignorant, between the death of Mary and the apostolic council in Jerusalem and his arrival in the west coast of India?

South of Koptos on the Nile, there were also many settlements where his fellow Jews were living. It therefore seems logical that the apostles must have paid some attention to these Jews who lived further up country, when they proclaimed the Gospel. The most famous settlement was Elephantine, the island in the Nile, where for several centuries an important Jewish garrison had been posted by the Pharaohs to defend the southern frontier of Egypt. From there it was only a short distance to Nubia, which lay between Egypt and Ethiopia, and is now known as the Sudan. Marco

Polo, the Venetian traveller, states that Thomas converted many people in Nubia to Christianity, before going to India, where he died. The Ethiopians were partly of Semitic origin. The official church history of Ethiopia begins with the appointment of Frumentius in Auxum by St. Athanasius (295-373) the bishop of Alexandria. Various texts refer to the evangelist Matthew as the apostle to whom the preaching of the Word in Ethiopia had been entrusted. This does not exclude the possibility that other apostles who reached this area may have made their contributions. In a commentary on the statement in the *Recognitions* of Clement, that Thomas preached the gospel of Christ to the Parthians, we read that others add that the same apostle preached the gospel to other peoples, among them the Ethiopians.

Ethiopia too had trade links with the Roman world via the Nile. If Thomas' route led him up the Nile to Nubia and Ethiopia, he could have pursued his journey to India from one of the Ethiopian ports on the Red Sea.

Chapter 2

The Island of Socotra

The assembly point for the Roman convoys which traded with India was the island of Socotra, which lies at a strategic point where the Gulf of Aden leads into the Arabian Sea. It is a fairly large island, 130 km long and between 30 and 40 km wide, with red-brown volcanic rock formations, and scattered fertile coastal plains. Nowadays it is a desolate and lonely place with fewer than ten thousand inhabitants, but in antiquity it was a staging post for Indian trade with the West and bore the Indian name of Dvīpa Sukhādāra, the island of good fortune.

According to Indian tradition the apostle Thomas is said to have spent three months there and to have made

many converts among the inhabitants, who were of Indian, Greek and Arab origin.¹ The language was, as everywhere in the commercial world of those days, Greek. Perhaps Thomas also found Jews from Alexandria there. He would have appointed deacons and priests. In any case, there was a bishop on the island at quite an early date.

The ecclesiastical writer Elias of Damascus mentions Socotra as the seat of an archbishop. According to Philostorgius, the Indian monk Theophilus came from here. He was an adviser of the emperor Constantius who sent him on a mission to Socotra and India in 354 A. D. Cosmas, writing before the year 553, said that many Christians dwelt on the island, and that they had priests who had been sent there from Persia. Arab travellers of the ninth century bore witness that the majority of the inhabitants were Christians.

Marco Polo's report is well known, and refers to the state of the island in 1293 when he visited it on his return from China and India: "The people of Socotra are all baptised Christians and have an archbishop. Their archbishop has nothing to do with the Pope of Rome, but comes under the great Archbishop who resides in Bagdad. He rules over the bishop of the island and over many other bishops in that part of the world, just as our Pope does over us."

In about 1440 Niccolo Conti wrote: "The island of Socotra is six hundred miles around and is for the most part inhabited by Nestorian Christians."²

That was the state of affairs at the coming of the Portuguese, who gave very detailed descriptions of Socotra, built a fortified settlement there and had many contacts with the inhabitants.³ *Martin Alfonso de Mello* wrote in 1527 that the Christians on the island were descendants of those

1. On Christianity in Socotra: G. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier, His Life, His Times*, Vol. 2, (tr. M. J. Costelloe), Rome, 1977, 115-130; 12I, n. 118 and the bibliography there.

2. A. Mingana, *op. cit.* p. 31.

3. G. Schurhammer, *op. cit.* p. 115-120

whom the apostle Thomas had converted there.⁴ Castro, a very conscientious reporter, affirmed in 1541 that the people of Socotra had, according to their own evidence, been converted by the apostle Thomas.

We have a detailed description of the island from the missionaries:⁵ All the people wore a simple cross round their necks, for they were proud to be Christians, although because of their centuries of isolation and seclusion they now knew very little of their faith. Reading and writing were unknown to them; they possessed no books or writings. They all bore Christian names. The women were mostly called Maria, the men for the most part were named after one of the apostles: Peter, John, Andrew, Matthew and above all Thomas, to whom their churches were dedicated. Unlike the Moers they had only one wife. They no longer knew about the sacraments, but they were still familiar with circumcision, like the Christians in Abyssinia. In each church were a cross and lamps, and a Kasisa or priest who also acted as a judge. The churches were small and without any ornament. They had no bells, but called the people to worship with two blocks of wood fastened together, as was the custom in Europe during Holy Week. Each church had only one altar with a cross above it. In the church of their capital, *Suk*, there were two crosses in the form of two lilies. Four times a day the priest came to the church to pray.

Some time after 1542 Francis Xavier wrote from Goa:⁶ "The inhabitants of Socotra pay especial reverence to the apostle Thomas, for they boast of being descendants of those Christians whom he once converted in these parts. Yet none of these Christians are baptised, for their 'priests' do not even know what baptism is. During my stay on Socotra I baptised many children, to the great delight of their parents. Most of the parents brought their children to be baptised of their

4. *Ibid.* p.120.

5. *Ibid.* p. 124-8: G. Schurhammer-J.Wicki. *Epistulae S. Francisci Xaverii*, I. p. 123. 124.

6. *Ibid.* p. 124.

own volition, and these good people gave us some of the little that they possessed, so that we might share it with them. They were so friendly and hospitable that I did not dare to refuse the dates which they offered me so generously. These people urged me most eagerly to remain with them, and they promised that all the inhabitants of the island would come of their own free will to be baptised. I repeatedly asked the governor to permit me to stay in this island, where the field was ripe for the harvest. But because the island was not protected by a Portuguese garrison and was in constant danger of being plundered by the Turks, the governor feared that I should be taken prisoner and carried away; therefore he was unwilling, under any condition to listen to my plea."

In view of the impoverished state of the Christian faith as Francis Xavier found it on Socotra, it is not surprising that it continued to decline and eventually died out altogether. The last report of Christianity on Socotra is that which we have from the Carmelite *Vincenzo Maria*, who visited the island in 1680. He states that in his day there were still some feeble remnants of the Christian faith there. No wonder that Christian life on the island came to an end, since they were so isolated, and the Patriarchs of Bagdad failed to provide them with bishops and priests. When the Muslims occupied Socotra, Christianity died without a struggle.

Let us return to the time of Thomas, who waited for the arrival of the west monsoon and the ships which gathered in the neighbourhood of Socotra before attempting the great voyage across the Indian Ocean. The fleet left the assembly point of Socotra in July or August, and returned to it in October or November when the wind turned to the opposite direction. The route was safe, especially if the ships sailed in convoy, and pirates were no longer a problem. In the days of the apostle Thomas, the voyage to India was as safe as it became fifteen centuries later when the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and the French rediscovered the way there. The usual speed of these ships was 10 km per hour

so that 240 km could be covered in a day. The distance in a straight line from Socotra to south India is about 2400 km, so that with a strong west wind, the crossing could be made in ten days.

Chapter 3

Kerala, the Land of the Coconuts

The Roman ships which crossed the Arabian Sea, had the choice of a large number of harbours on the 1400 km-long west coast of south India, a choice decided by the trade which they had in view. The main goal of the trade in spices was the Malabar coast, with Muziris as its central port.

This city was the capital of the kingdom of Chera, which was later called Travancore-Cochin and is now the state of Kerala. This name, from Kera-alam, means 'the land of the coconuts'. From ancient times South India was divided into three important kingdoms, all three of which are said to have formed the field of the apostle Thomas' missionary endeavours. Firstly, the kingdom of *Chera* or *Kera*, the main objective. Secondly the kingdom of *Pandya*, with its capital Madura lying further inland. The third kingdom, *Chola*, lay on the east coast, the district which later became known as the Coromandel coast.

The beginning of Thomas' mission, however, lay in the west of the Malabar coast, where according to Indian tradition he stepped ashore for the first time in South India in 52 A. D. at Maliankara or Malancara, Kodungalloor (Cranganore). The day of his landing was celebrated in earlier centuries with a procession of boats and the singing of songs. This place formerly lay on the north bank of the river Periyar, but is now on a small island off the coast, a few miles from the earlier capital, Muziris. In 1953 a shrine

was erected there to house a relic of the apostle Thomas, brought from Ortona in Italy, by Cardinal Eugene Tisserant.

Pliny the Elder gives as it were, some confirmation of the local circumstances at the time of Thomas, his contemporary, by referring to Muziris as the first trading port of India and by adding, "The landing place for ships is at some distance from the coast and the cargo has to be carried between the coast and the ships in smaller boats or lighters. Coelobothros was king there when I wrote."

The author of the *Periplus* too confirms this local detail by telling us that Muziris was a city of great prosperity, two miles from the mouth of the river on which it lay, and that it was the seat of a kingdom under the rule of Coelobothros. According to the Indian writer Perumalil, Coelobothros is the Greek form of Keralaputra, which merely means the king of Kerala.

The capital itself was divided into four districts:

1. *Muziris*, its Indian name being Muchiri or Muizi, the port and commercial city.
2. *Tiruvanchikkulam*, the old centre where the royal palace was situated.
3. *Trikannamatilakam*, the northern quarter where there was a famous temple of Shiva.
4. The suburb of *Karura Pattanam*, which extended eastward to a nearby hill. We give these names because they have often been used indiscriminately and have led to confusion. To make matters simpler, the place was sometimes called *Vanchi*, an obvious abbreviation of *Tiruvanchikkulam*, while the Jews used the name *Shingly*, which is derived from *Cyngalim* or *Shingala*.

Chapter 4

The Jewish Settlements In India

Why should the apostle Thomas have gone to South India? We have already pointed out that the apostles let themselves be guided in their choice of routes by their duty to preach the good news first of all to their fellow Jews abroad, the Jews of the diaspora. Were there Jewish settlements in that part of the world? Were they important enough to justify such a long journey?

As early as the tenth century B.C. there had been trading relations between the Jews and the Indian sub-continent. In the Old Testament we read that the merchants of king Solomon (972-932 B.C.) traded with Indian ports:

"And king Solomon made a navy of ships in Eziongeber which is beside Eilat, on the shore of the Red Sea in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to *Ophir*, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents and brought it to king Solomon" (1 Kg 9:26-28). "And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from *Ophir* brought in from *Ophir* great plenty of sandalwood trees and precious stones. And the king made of the sandalwood trees pillars for the house of the Lord and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers; there came no such sandalwood trees, nor were seen unto this day" (1 Kg. 10:11-12). "For the king had at sea a navy of Tarshish with the navy of Hiram; once in three years came the navy of Tarshish, bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks" (1 Kg. 10:22).

Where were these cities, *Ophir* and *Tarshish*, which are mentioned? According to many *Ophir* is the present day Bepur in north Kerala. But according to others it is the present Sopara, about 36 miles north of Bombay. But *Tarshish* could not be identified.

We should pay attention to the statement that the traders of Solomon fetched ivory, apes and peacocks from the Indian ports. It is much more important proof of these relationships, however, that these animals are called by their Indian names in Hebrew. The Indian name for ape was *kapi*, or in Hebrew, *kop*; the old Tamil name for peacock was *tokei*, which in the bible became *tuki*. Ivory in Hebrew is *sanhabbin*, which means 'teeth of the elephant'. The Indian word for elephant is *habh*. Furthermore, the Jews, some centuries before Christ, were familiar with the use of cinnamon, cassia and teak, which came from India and Ceylon. If the ships arrived every three years, that points to a long and arduous voyage from a distant country. S.S. Koder, a leading Jewish scholar of Cochin, basing himself on the biblical texts and the authority of various writers, states that the first Jewish colony in India was settled when king Solomon's fleet arrived. There were repeated migrations of Jews to India in later centuries, and the settlers received the name of Bene Israel, the sons of Israel. In the year 1167 Benjamin of Tudela found 1000 Jews in Muziris-Cranganore. Marco Polo, who visited India about 1293, speaks of the presence of Jews at Quilon. From later documents we know that the Jews had seven or eight important settlements in South India.

We also found some details about these settlements in the book *Noticias do Judeos do Cochin* of Mozes Pereya de Paiva, the leader of a delegation of Jews from Amsterdam who went to Cochin in 1686. According to his report, printed in Lisbon, there were four synagogues in Cochin, and 128 Jewish families, and two synagogues with 150 members in Ernakulam, as well as a single synagogue in Parur, Palayur, Chenot, and Muttom. According to Indian tradition the apostle Thomas founded seven churches on

the Malabar coast, at Palayur, Muziris (Cranganore), Parur Kokkamangalam, Niranam, Chayal and Quilon.

It is noteworthy that these churches all lay in or near the places where earlier Jewish settlements had been established. Among the Jews it was a custom to ask a visiting fellow Jew to address the synagogue, to give a word of encouragement, and to tell them the news from Palestine or the country from which he came. Thomas would surely have used this opportunity to speak of the life and death of Jesus Christ, the long awaited Messiah. The Jews certainly had a very important place among the earliest Christians.

Chapter 5

The Extent of Roman Trade

There have been some writers who rejected the apostolate of Thomas in India on the grounds that it was not clear whether the writings concerned referred to the country which we now mean by India. According to them the name India was often applied to Ethiopia and Southern Arabia.

The question whether the Romans really knew India, and carried on a trade with it, has been thoroughly studied in the last fifty years and very convincingly answered. The conquest of all the peoples around the Mediterranean area had given Rome a wealth such as had never been known before. In a short time, they had developed a taste for luxuries from the east, and had abundant money to pay for them. After piracy had been suppressed and the trade routes made safe, merchants from all parts of the world flocked to Rome. The kings of South India and Ceylon also sent embassies to Rome to develop

commercial relations. Probably, they made treaties allowing trading posts to be set up, and manned and defended by the foreign traders themselves.

In the same way, in later centuries the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes, the French and the English were given such permission. These agreements were based on the mutual advantage of both partners, and were sufficiently explicit to last for some time. Muziris became the trading post of the Romans, who established a garrison there to protect their commerce and shipping. The Roman garrison at Muziris numbered two cohorts, each of 600 men, so that the total strength was 1200 soldiers. The *lingua franca* of both troops and traders was Greek. The presence of many foreigners in this city is also confirmed by various references in classical Tamil literature. In the *Akanānūr* we read: 'The thriving port of Muziris where large and beautiful ships of the Yavanas, laden with gold, came splashing the white foam on the waves of the Periyar, which belongs to the Chera, and go back laden with pepper.

Muziris is also mentioned in the famous *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a copy of a Roman map, 6.82 metres long and 34 cm wide, on which all the roads of the Roman empire are depicted. This map gives the whole of the then known world, stretching from Ireland and Britain to the confines of India. It indicates in the neighbourhood of Muziris, a temple in honour of the emperor Augustus, though this has not yet been located at the present time. The great inland lagoon which begins at Muziris is also shown under the name of Lacus Muziris. According to the author of the *Periplus*, (A.D. 89) great quantities of pearls, ivory, silks, nard oil from the Ganges, malabathrum (a sort of cinnamon) from the interior, precious stones of all kinds and diamonds, sapphires and tortoise-shell were brought from here.

The sheltered roadstead of Muziris was above all the outlet for the pepper which grew so profusely in the humid

7. cit. by G. Moraes, *A History of Christianity in India*, p. 37.

hinterland. In Rome in particular, the demand for pepper was enormous to the great indignation and astonishment of Pliny the Elder who wrote: It is surprising that the use of pepper has grown so fashionable when one thinks that the other usual condiments are sometimes favoured for their sweetness and sometimes for their attractive appearance. In pepper, neither the fruit nor the berry is attractive, the only desirable quality about it is a certain prickling sensation, and yet it is brought here from India, an enormous distance. Who was the first man who ventured to sell such a thing as food? Who was the man I ask myself in amazement, who was not satisfied to stimulate his appetite by hunger alone?

The demand for pepper rose so rapidly that it could soon be sold in Rome for a hundredfold profit. India began to rob Rome of its riches. According to the most recent estimates, the trade with the east cost one hundred million sesterces per annum, of which half ended up in south India. Pliny wrote sarcastically: We pay so dearly for our luxury and our women. Both pepper and ginger grow wild in their own countries, and yet we buy them by weight, like gold and silver.

The author of the *Periplus* observes that a great quantity of coins was taken to the harbours of the Malabar coast. Naturally, attempts were made to redress the one-sided balance of this commerce by sending all kinds of good to be sold in India, such as Italian wines, glassware, copper, tin and lead, linen, coloured fabrics and grain for the consumption of the seafarers, since it could not be obtained locally. They also brought presents for the kings of the east, expensive silver vessels, slaves, singing boys and girls for the harem. There is nothing new under the sun. Even emperor Tiberius complained in the Senate of the exceptional drain of gold and silver to foreign countries, including Rome's enemies. In the second half of the first century, there were even restrictions on the export of gold and silver from Rome. The continuing drain of bullion from Rome also explains the great number of Roman coins which have

been found, mostly by chance in south India. Truly systematic excavations have never been made there, but in September 1947 a hoard of 80 gold and silver Roman coins, the most recent from the time of Nero, was found at Eyyal close to Muziris. In particular, coins of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero are often found. Everything points to a climax in the commercial relationship at about the time when the apostle Thomas visited India.

The Romans, and therefore the Roman Church Fathers knew more about India than we would have believed possible some time ago. Pliny gives a detailed description of the Indian peoples, their animals, their plants and minerals. The Roman trade made it an easy matter for Thomas to travel to India, especially since this trade was largely in the hands of his fellow Jews.

Chapter 6

The Significance of the Local Traditions

The presence of Jewish settlements and the enormous extent of Roman trade with India are indications of the possibility of an apostolate of Thomas in India but not decisive proof of it. We must not look for that proof in citations from western Christian writers, as so many others have done, but rather in data from the country itself, the places where Thomas lived, preached and travelled.

It is hardly surprising that we possess virtually no Indian writings on the origins of Christianity. An important factor in this is that many of the materials on which documents were written were extremely perishable, especially dried palm leaves, which could not survive for long intact in such a humid climate. To determine the course of history we have to fall back on traditions which have

been handed down from generation to generation. Of course we have to allow also for the contradictions and legendary accretions which are inevitable in the emergence and transmission of these hoary traditions. The main theme, that Thomas preached the gospel in Kerala, is clear, sharply defined, accepted for centuries by Hindus and Christians alike, closely connected with everyday life, strengthened and supported by traditions which persisted in local communities, in family history, in song and in dance.

Cranganore⁸

At this central place Thomas is said to have converted the king and appointed his relative Kepha a priest, who then accompanied him on his travels along the coast. He is also said to have built a church and a stone cross which was still greatly venerated until the coming of the Portuguese. Both his landing place and this church were the goal of many pilgrims in former times, most of them arriving by boat.

Paravur (Kottackavu)⁹

A few miles south of Cranganore lies the old city of Paravur, whose present beautiful church is reputed to be the fourth on that site since its foundation by Thomas. This place too, was visited by pilgrims honouring Saint Thomas.

Palayur¹⁰

St. Thomas is said to have founded a church at Palayur. It was known to the Romans as Palora. The name of a nearby hill is Jūdakkunnu, 'the hill of the Jews', indicates that there was once a Jewish settlement here

8. A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, I*. Bangalore, 1984, p. 109-110; G. Chediath, *Mar Thoma Sleehayude Indian Sabha*, p. 5-6.

9. *Ibid.* 7-8

10. *Ibid.* 8

and there are still ruins of an old Jewish synagogue visible a few hundred yards from the present church. Even so, it was not the Jews who played a part in the work of Thomas here. Tradition relates that Thomas managed to convert the majority of the Brahmins by performing a miracle. Their temple was transformed into a church. The Brahmins who were not converted cursed the place, and even today they call it *Chāvakūdu*, the accursed place. No Brahmin will take food here, or bathe in the pond. They removed to a nearby place, Vammanat, with the words, 'Inyathe kuli Vēmmanād;' or 'the next bath in Vēmmanād'. These words became a much used proverb in the local language, to refer to a definitive parting. Oral tradition appears to be confirmed by the excavations on the site. It has revealed that the present church is built on the remains of a Hindu temple, with its sacred pond, spring and broken images. In the sixteenth century a new church was built around the old one, but the people would not allow the old church to be demolished before the new one was completed.

Kokkamangalam¹¹

According to tradition, the cross which Thomas had erected in this place was cast into the sea by the enemies of the new faith. It floated on the waters and came to land on a small island near Pallipuram. On the site where it was washed ashore there now stands a chapel. It is thought that the cross which is venerated in the church of Pallipuram is the same one which was cast up on the shore.

Maleattur

Maleattur is a famous place of pilgrimage in Kerala. According to tradition the Virgin Mary is supposed to have appeared to Thomas on the top of a nearby mountain. Especially on the first Sunday after Easter, when the gospel of doubting Thomas is read (Joh. 20: 19-31) pilgrims flocked

11. *Ibid.* 7

here in great numbers, above all couples who had been married in the past year. While climbing the mountain, they called on the apostle Thomas under the name *Muthappan* or grandfather.

Niranam¹²

In Niranam, they show the site on which the house of the Maliekal family stood. A member of this family was ordained priest by the apostle, and the song of *Thomas Ramban* was written there.

Chāyal (Nilackal)¹³

Although nothing is left of this city but a few ruins, the city, which is in the mountains, is still named as one of the places where the apostle Thomas preached.

Kollam (Quilon)¹⁴

Although the name of this place was not known to the Greek and Roman writers, it is evident from the works of Marco Polo, de Marignolli and Barbosa that the Christian community there boasted of the descent of its church from one founded by Thomas. The church which he is said to have established was a centre of Christianity for a thousand years, but the building itself has been washed away by the sea.

Family tradition

Throughout Kerala, one can find Christian families who are proud to claim descent from ancestors who were baptised by the apostle Thomas. In Palayur there are the families Pakalōmattam, Sankarapuri, Kalli, and Kālikāvu. In Niranam, the families of Pattamukil Penakkamatan, and Maliekal, and in Paravūr, Nedumpally and Kottokaly

12. *Ibid.* 6-7.

13. *Ibid.* 7.

14. *Ibid.* 6; A. M. Mundadan, *op. cit.* 111.

families. Several of these families have provided the Thomas - Christians with centuries - long succession of priests. Since these priests often bore the name of Thomas, they were distinguished from each other as for example the fortieth or fiftieth Thomas of their family, it being accepted that the first priest of the series had been ordained by the apostle himself. Naturally, these families enjoyed great respect and the government of the church often rested on their shoulders.

Sung Traditions

In a society in which the majority of people can neither read nor write, oral tradition has a very important part to play. Almost always, this tradition is handed down in songs which are sung by the community, or performed for the people by singers. Kerala, perhaps even more than the west, had its anonymous poets, who retold the history of the country and its Christianity in song.

The most famous of these songs are:

1. *Mārgam Kali Pātt* - the song of the Way.¹⁵ The word 'Way' is an ancient expression for Christianity; it recalls the words of Christ to Thomas: I am the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). In the east too, in Sanskrit, the 'way' meant the way of religion. The song is a strongly rhythmic one, sung by twelve men who also perform a special dance, while wearing turbans decorated with peacock feathers. Its theme is the arrival of Thomas in south India, his apostolate and death.

2. The *Veeradian* songs¹⁶ are a kind of ballad sung by a caste of Hindus known as the Veeradians. They sing of the coming of Thomas, his mission and death, on the occasion of Christian weddings and other festivities, and are given offerings in thanks. Also, at Christian weddings

15. X. Koodapuzha, *Bharathasabhacharitam*, Kottayam, 1990, p. 105.

16. *Ibid.* 108,

groups of women compete in singing songs which deal with subjects from the Bible and the life of Thomas.

3. By far the most important of the songs is the *Thomāparvam* (Rambān Pātt)¹⁷ which gives us the most comprehensive description of the travels of Thomas that we possess. Because the song as it were contains the entire tradition of Kerala, we wish to treat it, its pros and cons, with the greatest objectivity. It is a simple folk song, which has of course undergone alteration and addition in the course of time. We find a reference to the song in a report made by Amador Correa, who states that in 1564 the Portuguese bishop of Cochin accompanied a pilgrimage of the native Christians from Muziris to Pārur, and that he was full of praise for the reverent way in which the women and the children performed the song.

The text is as follows:¹⁸

I will sing of the way in which our holy religion was introduced to Kerala.

The apostle Thomas landed at *Maliankare* with the merchant Habban.

He performed miracles and in eight months he established the church of Jesus Christ in that city.

Then he went to Mailepuram (Madras) where he preached the gospel of the Lord for four and a half months and then took ship for China.

He stayed four and a half months in China and returned to Mailepuram.

After he had been there for about a month, the son-in-law of the Rajah, the king of Thiruvanchikulam came to him and begged him to return to Malabar.

They took ship and came to Maliankara, where the apostle converted the Rajah and his family, forty Jews and four hundred heathens in less than six months.

17. *Ibid.* 101.

18. Madassery, (ed.), *Nammude Pattukal*, Kottayam, 1968, p. 137-155.

He preached to the people, built a church with a cross, and ordained priests. One of the first whom he consecrated was the Rajah's son-in-law and was called Kepha. Accompanied by Kepha he went to Quilon, where he set up a cross and baptised 2400 heathens.

From Quilon, he went on to Chayal, in the mountains, Stayed there a whole year as he had done in Quilon, baptised 2800 heathens and set up a cross. At the request of the rulers of Tripalesaram, he returned to that village. But when he saw that the people had desecrated the cross which he had set up, he cursed that place.

Nonetheless, he remained there for two months.

He once more set up a cross and instructed the people so that they should no longer return to heathendom, and ordained as a priest Thomas, one of the leaders who had remained true to his faith.

During these two months that he stayed in Tri pales- waram he strengthened all the Christians in their faith and converted two hundred heathens.

Not far from there, further south, he built the church of Niranam and ordained as priest his first pupil Thomas Maliyekal who had been born there.

Then he went to Kokkamangalam, where he stayed for a year and converted fifteen hundred heathens, set up a cross and taught the people how they were to worship God.

He again visited Kottakavu Parur, stayed almost a year there and converted 2200 people.

From there he went to Maliankara along the southern road, and was pleasantly surprised to see the flourishing state of the Christian community there.

He stayed there only two weeks and went away to the north, to Palayur, where in one month he baptised 1280 heathens and according to his custom set up a great cross.

Towards the end of the year 59 he returned to Mailepuram.

He went back once more to Malabar and the angels protected him on his journey.

He stayed two months at Maleattur and converted 220 heathens, stayed a whole year at Niranam and was satisfied with the faith of the people and the exemplary life that they led; he gave communion to those who had not yet received the sacrament.

Then he took his leave of the Christians and told them that they would never see him again, and set off for the land of the Tamils.

Thomas Rabban and Kepha the son-in-law of the Rajah accompanied him for seven and a half miles and then took their leave of him.

It would be impossible to relate all the wonders which our patron saint and profector, St. Thomas, performed by making the sign of the cross with the hands that had touched the wounds of the Lord.

He raised 29 dead men to life, freed 250 who were possessed by devils, healed 330 lepers, restored their sight to 250 blind people and the use of their Limbs to 120 cripples, and their speech to 20 deaf mutes.

He healed 280 sick people who had been given up by their physicians.

He converted to the Christian faith; 17,490 Brahmins; 350 Vaisyās (merchants) and farmers, and 4289 Sudra's.

He ordained two bishops and seven priests, of whom four were called Rabban and appointed 21 deacons.

The author then adds:

This song is an abbreviated version of the detailed history which was written by Thomas Rabban the second priest of the family of Maliyekal; and was composed for the use of the people, by the humble priest Thomas, the forty-eighth of the same family, who hereby gives witness while asking for blessing at the feet of the holy apostle Thomas, on the 2 July 1061 (or 1601).

What is the attitude of the learned world to this song? A song which has centuries of development behind it and has always been very popular among many generations of the Thomas Christians, who sang it in their own language on numerous occasions. The most scathing criticism is that of Dr. A. Mingana. We quote his dismissal of the song:¹⁹ "it would be useless to emphasise the fact that these traditions are a dim echo of the *Syriac Acta*, and that apart from this fact there is as much history in them as in some good stories of the Arabian nights entertainments. To say more than this would be an insult to the intelligence of the historian."

Let us answer this damning criticism factually. There is no basis at all for the comparison with the *Act of Thomas*. We have studied that Syriac work thoroughly in various versions and have found nothing whatever in it which is at all comparable to the data in the song. The two works have completely different origins and entirely different content. In the Acts of Thomas there is no mention of any of the events so fully described in the song. True, the last part of the *Acta* does deal with South India, but clearly in a completely different district and in any case not in Kerala. It goes much too far to deny the historical basis of the song altogether. Unfortunately it has been the custom among many short sighted armchair scholars to reject with contempt anything which derived from popular tradition or popular piety, and to assert that it was the historically unproveable product of fantasy and imagination. Mingana was a specialist in Syriac manuscripts and set aside all the Indian literature in Malayalam, the local vernacular, because it did not fit into the research which he saw as his life's work. He took no account of it, and did not intend to speak of it. It fell outside the scope of his research. If one sets to work so myopically, then it is better not to pass any opinion about material which one does not know and is not master of.

19. A. Mingana, *op. cit.* 77.

The song gives us many factual details, which are by no means fairy tales but may very well correspond with the truth. The arrival together with the merchant Habban, for example, is a very logical statement. Various authors see in this merchant a Jew converted to Christianity, with whom Thomas had also travelled in the kingdom of Gundaphor. The merchant had the same reason to change his place of business, i.e. the invasion of the Scythians and the blockade of the land route as a consequence of the war between Rome and the Parthians.

Perhaps we approach the truth if we assume that Thomas acted more or less as a colleague and travelling companion of Habban. As well as his missionary activities, the apostle continued to follow a trade in order not to be entirely dependent on his converts and fellow Jews. Assisting the merchant could have been vitally important for Thomas and could have opened the way to a great many contacts for him, with the kings and other leading figures in the countries which he visited. In particular, we think it is highly possible that the song is correct in saying that he soon continued his mission to the east coast of India, to Mailapur and that he went from there to China. One goal of the journey, seen from the merchant's point of view, was of course to restore the broken contacts with the Chinese traders.

We may also lend credence to the suggestion that the apostle Thomas travelled several times between the west and east coasts. Farquhar points out that St. Paul also found it useful to revisit frequently the churches he had founded. The experience of modern missionaries confirms the need to give continued supervision and help to new churches. Thomas too would often have revisited the churches which he set up to encourage the faithful and to encourage the work of evangelisation. We would like to go a little further in reconstructing the journeys of the apostle in South India, which occupied a period of about twenty years. There are a few vague indications that he made the journey from Alexandria to South India

several times. The ease and regularity of commerce in the Roman Empire must have played some part in this. Moreover the need for contact with his family and the other apostles would have required more frequent journeys. In a short period, the links between the western world and India had been so much improved that the Roman senator Seneca, in about 65 A.D., could say that a journey from Spain to India could be reckoned in days.

There is a suggestion that the apostle Bartholomew acted as a colleague of Thomas on one of his voyages and went to a more northerly district, near the present city of Bombay, where there was also an average Jewish community.

Chapter 7

From Kerala to Madras-Mylapore

To reach the east coast from Kerala, there were two different routes to choose from: the sea route round Cape Comorin, the southern tip of India, past Ceylon to the Bay of Bengal, where Madras lies; or a land route across the South Indian peninsula, often preferred to avoid delay from contrary winds.

The most travelled route was that from Palayur, the northernmost point where Thomas is said to have founded a church. The route then followed the valley of the river Ponnani to the district of Coimbatore. After crossing the mountains, it led to the valley of the Kaveri, which flows into the sea to the south of Madras. The use of this route by merchants is evident from the fact that many more Roman coins have been discovered in the district of Coimbatore than in the whole of the rest of South India. Eleven hoards with hundreds of gold and silver Roman coins of the first century have been found.

In his book, *Rome beyond the imperial frontiers*, Sir Mortimer Wheeler writes: ²⁰ "The district of Coimbatore..... lies at the point where the mountains of the Eastern Ghats, swinging westwards, merge into the Western Ghats, and leave a gap about 20 miles wide and only 1000 feet high, between east and west. Today, through this, the Ponnani, or Palghat or Coimbatore gap, the railway from Madras and the Carnatic plain penetrates to Calicut and Cochin, and the traditional use of this route is indicated by the legend which lands St. Thomas on the Malabar coast near Cranganore and takes him thence overland to the Madras coast. Along this same route crowd the coins now in question. Along it at first, we cannot doubt, came the ancient traffic from Muziris and Nelcynda to *Podouke emporion* and *Khaberis emporion* on the opposite coasts, evading the dangerous voyage round Cape Comorin. The avoidance of circum-peninsular navigation was a habit of ancient travelling. The little Cornish peninsula and the Jutland peninsula were thus short-circuited at one time or another. So too was peninsular India. Strabo in the time of Augustus wrote that in his day only stray individuals had sailed round India to the Ganges. It is a fair inference that the Roman agencies established in the east coast ports under Augustus and Tiberius were, so far as the westerners were concerned, the termini of trans-peninsular routes....."

In Madras we come to another chapter in the life of the apostle Thomas. It is the place where his mission was brought to completion and crowned by his martyrdom. Apart from the *Acts of Thomas*, here too we lack the ancient documents which could serve as our basis. Here too we encounter the same uncertainties and contradictions which we have met elsewhere, and which can only be solved by intensive study of the scanty data, and by a reconstruction of the milieu in which the apostle lived.

In the past, writers have attempted to clarify the situation by a one-sided reliance on texts from the western

20. M. Wheeler, *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers*, London, 1954, p. 143-5.

Fathers of the church-but in vain. These texts were as a rule very short, very fragmentary and susceptible of more than one interpretation. Places were named in them which could not be identified by foreign scholars. The same district often received different names in the course of time. Even when the name was the same, the method of writing often varied enormously among the Indians, Persians, Syrians, Greeks and Ethiopians. A striking example is the name of the place where Thomas met his end: Mylapore. It was at that time a great and thriving city, which was probably called Mylai, variant forms of which were Mayila, Meilan, and Tiru Mayila - or holy Mayila.

The name is derived from the Tamil word *mayil* 'bird' or more particularly 'peacock'. Peacocks are found in the wild here and formed an article of export from early times. The suffix '*pore* or *pur*: meaning 'city', was later added, as often was the case in the east (cf. Singapore, Jaipur, etc.) As well as Mylapore, we find the variant forms: Malepur, Malpuri, Mayilapil, Maliarpha, Manarpha, Manaliarpha, Mirapolis, Mirapor, Milipur, Molepoor, Meliapor.

For some time the suffix *pur* was replaced by *pattam* or *fattam* which also means city. Pope John XXII, in a letter dated 31st March 1330, from Avignon, referred to a city called Molephatam. In the days of the Portuguese explorers the once flourishing city was no more than a few ruins. They named the place where their war veterans settled San Thomas. After the defeat and expulsion of the Portuguese by the Dutch in 1621, the present name Madras came to the fore.

In Madras-Mylapore, the sites which are connected with the life and death of Thomas are still pointed out. The most important goal of pilgrimages is the place where Thomas was buried, where he himself is said to have founded a church, which was often rebuilt and where the gothic cathedral now stands. To the south of this building lies the Adayar river, and a few miles upstream the *Little Mount*, a rocky hill about 100 feet high. On this hill was a cave in

which the apostle was accustomed to pray. At that time the area was an overgrown wilderness, where he withdrew whenever his life was under threat. The cave is about fifteen feet long, the same distance across, and about six feet high. It can be entered, with difficulty, through a narrow aperture. This cave was an ideal place of concealment. It has not been thought appropriate to widen the entrance or to embellish it in any way, and the whole site has been left in its original state. Above the mouth of the cave, a marble tablet with this inscription has been set:

The cave where lay hid persecuted just before being martyred by RAJA MAHADEVAN, king of Mylapura

A. D. 68

THOMAS one of the twelve, the great apostle of India, the very one who put his fingers into the wounds of his Lord and God.

Several churches have been built above the cave. At the moment there is a large circular church which can contain about a thousand worshippers. In the neighbourhood there is, or was, a rock outcrop which served as the pulpit from which Thomas is said to have preached the gospel. Out of compassion for the multitude who suffered a great thirst, Thomas it said to have caused a spring to issue from the highest point of the hill, by striking it with his staff. The clear waters of this spring are said to have cured the sick who drank from it. To protect the spring, a small eight-sided canopy has been built above it. The story that the impressions of the feet, fingers and knee of Thomas can still be seen in the rocks, is perhaps to be regarded as a popular legend which arose from a natural wish to ascribe a supernatural origin to such natural formations in holy places.

The third site near Madras which is associated with the apostle Thomas, is the Great Mount, or Thomas Mount, two miles further southeast and about 300 feet high. From its summit there is a magnificent view over the Bay of

Bengal, four miles away as the crow flies. According to the traditions of the east coast, this was the Calvary of Thoms. On this hill, he was stabbed to death. According to another tradition, however, he was wounded on the Little Mount and brought to the Great Mount, where he died on his knees, embracing a stone cross which he had built himself; the mysterious bleeding cross, to which we shall devote a separate chapter later. Here too, Thomas is said to have built a church, which was renovated by the Armenians about 530. Apparently the hill and its neighbourhood were the dwelling place of foreigners. In antiquity shipping had to make use of natural harbours, for the most part river estuaries, where there was adequate fresh water, and protection from the storms and tidal waves which often attacked this district. Even the harmful effects of the tides, which are very high here, could be avoided by establishing the harbours and quays a few miles upstream. We also suspect that the Roman trading station of Supathanam lay on the river Adayar, between the Great and Little Mounts, perhaps even at the foot of the Great Mount.

Chapter 8

Thomas' Work on the East Coast

We referred to Madras-Mylapore as the place where the life of Thomas came to an end. If we may place any confidence in the details given in the song of *Thomas Ramban*, it may well also have been in a sense the place at which his mission began. According to these data, the apostle journeyed on to Mylapore soon after his arrival in Kerala in the year 52. From there he travelled further to the east (to China) and then returned to Mylapore. He stayed there for some time, and later journeyed back and forth between Kerala and Madras.

Farquhar observes:²¹

"... We can scarcely be wrong in believing that Thomas must have gone from the west to the east and from east to west several times. Paul found it expedient to revisit his churches ... Thomas would wish to visit the fields in turn in order to encourage and strengthen the churches and to help to carry the work of evangelisation forward."

We may accept that Thomas stayed here about three or four times, for a longer or shorter period, during his mission of about twenty years, on the first occasion in the company of the merchant Habban, perhaps even travelling in his service. Why did he give preference to this old royal city? As far as we know there was no Jewish colony there. There must have been a special reason for this first visit and his remarkable method of travel. Near the grave of the apostle Thomas a great stone was found in 1729, on which was a carving in relief of a robust figure raising one hand in blessing and holding a book in the other. This latter symbol is often used to indicate the preaching of the gospel by the apostles. The general opinion was that this figure must represent the apostle Thomas. The same stone showed on the other side a completely different person, in whom the archaeologist H. Hosten, in his excavations in 1921, felt justified in recognising the other apostle of India, St. Bartholomew. To his amazement this was denied by the Indian Christians. They asserted that this was Rajah Kandapa, king Kandapa, who had been converted by Thomas. Now in the *Acts of Thomas* it is stated that the king of Mylapore was named Mazdai, or Mahādēvan in the local vernacular, and that he had not been converted by Thomas but had in fact given the order for the apostle to be killed. Several researchers assume that Kandapa is a variant of the name Gondaphor, or Gudnaphar, the king of Taxila.

21. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in South India*, p. 31.

Had he sought refuge in Mylapore after the invasion of his kingdom by the Scythians? If this assumption is correct, many problems become clear and explicable. Thomas made his journey in the company of Habban the merchant, the commercial representative of king Gundaphor. It is then completely logical that they soon continued their journey to Mylapore and that that city became the main scene of the activities of the apostle Thomas. The statement that this was the king who had been converted by Thomas is then in agreement with the truth. The representation of both persons on one and the same stone is also very striking and symbolically very appropriate.

The stone is still in existence, in the diocesan museum of Madras. In this connection it is possibly also of great importance to note the discovery of two stone medallions, resting on Doric columns with the portraits of two men who are looking at each other. The older man has a beard in the Persian style and is wearing a crown. The other man is younger, with no beard and short curly hair tied in a headband. The heads show some resemblance to those of kings and princes, as they appear on the Indo-Bactrian coins. Who are the men represented here? Can the king with the beard be Gondaphor or Kandapa, and the other man be his brother Gad, whom we encountered in our chapter about Taxila?²²

22. B.A. Figredo, *Voices from the dust: Archaeological Finds in San Thome and Mylapore*, Madras, 1952, p.39.

Chapter 9

The Legend of the Tree Trunk

In and near Madras there are said to be two churches founded by Thomas, one on the Great Mount and another on the place where his tomb is now found. The latter building was known to the Syrians as Beth Thuma, the house of Thomas, the word 'house' being used much as we speak of a church as a 'house' of God.

There is a remarkable legend attached to the building of the church. The wood was taken from a tree trunk washed up on the shore, and so huge that it provided all the timber required. In itself, this is of course by no means a miraculous event. In every district by the sea, the inhabitants look out for driftwood and other materials, grateful for such gift of God. A similar event occurred in 1583 when the Jesuits in Madras were building a church. They could not proceed with the roof, since they did not have any beams of sufficient length. When they had begun to make a thatched roof, a tree trunk, long enough for the necessary beams was washed up near to the church.²³

It is interesting to trace how the popular imagination has embellished this story of the tree trunk and handed it down in ever more exaggerated versions. We shall give the story in its fullest form, as a typical example of what is usually described as a legend. The exaggeration has been laid on so thickly that we may assume that the most skilful popular storytellers did their best with it, acting on the adage, *si non vere, è ben trovato* (It may

23. H. Hosten, *Antiquities from San Thome and Mylapore*, Madras, 1936 p. 242.

not be true but it is well imagined). Perhaps there is some sort of popular humour at the bottom of it, which has not been recognised as such by scholars in their studies.

St. Thomas went with several companions to Ceylon, where according to eastern belief, the earthly paradise must have been situated. Arriving at Adam's Peak, he had a great tree felled, and dragged it to the shore by his girdle. When they reached the sea, Thomas said to the tree trunk, "Go now and wait for us in the city of Mirapolis." When the huge tree was washed up on the shore there, the king ordered his entire army to drag it, but ten thousand men were not able to pull it on to the beach. Then the apostle himself came to the beach, riding on an ass, and called out: "Do not touch the tree trunk, for it belongs to me!" "How," the king asked, "can you prove that this tree is yours?" The apostle united the belt which he had around his waist, told his companions to fasten it round the tree, and then he hauled the tree up the beach all by himself. The king was convinced by the ease with which he had done this, and gave the saint all the land he could ride round. Thomas had beams sawn from the timber and made from them the pillars, roof, doors and window-frames of the church. But when he came to pay the men for their work he had no money left.

The Christians of that place were afraid, for they were poor and could not help the apostle. Thomas however told them: "Have faith in God. He has given us the timber. He will also provide the money which we need to pay the labourers." The apostle had all the sawdust collected in a great heap, made the sign of the cross over it, and said to the Christians, "My children take this and sow it over the land that the Rajah has given to me and to our church!" The Sawdust germinated and grew into a magnificent forest which soon covered the land. Thomas had the trees felled, sold the wood and paid the contractors and their workmen.

Just as every legend has some definite event at its core, so too this story is based on the building of a church

or chapel by Thomas. The original church was demolished and replaced by a new building on the same site, on several occasions. The wood from this tree was preserved with great reverence in a separate building. This timber was still present at the site in 1545 when Francis Xavier visited Mylapore and was given a crucifix made from it. The doors of the church, too, held together in an iron framework, were still said to be of the original timber.²⁴

Chapter 10

The Martyrdom of Thomas

The oldest and longest account of the martyrdom of Thomas is found in the *Acts of Thomas*, dating from the end of the second or the beginning of the third century. It relates in great detail a large number of events which are said to have led to the martyrdom of the apostle. In the absence of other sources of such early date, we have no means of testing its accuracy by comparison. It is a romanticised story, with numerous speeches and conversations attributed to the apostle. Sometimes it resembles a play or an historical film, rather than a logical narrative. The author was not interested in chronology or in geographical data. He does not even mention the place where the events are supposed to have happened.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the *Acts of Thomas* is that wherever Thomas appears, he always enters into relations with the local ruling house or members of the royal court. It is impossible to recount the entire story in all its vicissitudes here. It gives so many particularities which have nothing directly to do with the matter in hand that it would be confusing, rather than enlightening, to go into them.

24. G. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, p. 571 ff.

In comparison with this very circumstantial narrative, whose origin is to be sought in Syria or Persia, the indigenous Indian tradition, in so far as it differs from it, seems very soberly factual. It has nothing to say of any intrigues with the royal house or any imprisonment. It alleges that the result of Thomas' mission was to create great unrest and jealousy among the priests and servants of king Mahadevan, who sought an opportunity to kill him. Having escaped from his hiding place on the Little Mount, he was stabbed in the back with a lance, by stealth on the Great Mount, where he was on his knees in prayer before a cross which he himself had carved in stone, the so-called bleeding cross. While the tradition of the west coast places the martyrdom of Thomas on the Little Mount, the traditions of the Madras district have moved it to the Great Mount, most probably under the influence of the events associated with the bleeding cross, to which we shall devote a separate chapter.

According to the *Acts of Thomas*, the king gave orders to the soldiers to murder Thomas when he had gone half a mile or three *stadia* outside the city. Where was the city of Meliapur at that time? The distance given rather suggests the Little Mount than the Great Mount, which is considerably further off. There are a few other versions of the death of Thomas, all of much later date and containing so many improbabilities that we can attach little value to them.

PART IV

CHRISTIAN ANTIQUITIES IN INDIA

Chapter I

The Grave of Thomas at Madras-Mylapore

While the names of towns and cities are constantly undergoing change, the site of a grave usually remains permanent out of reverence for the dead, especially when it is the tomb of a king or holy man, whose memory may endure for centuries.

St. John Chrysostom (+ 407) wrote that we no longer know where many great men, among them Moses, Aaron, Daniel, Jeremiah and many of the apostles, are buried. Only the graves of Peter, Paul, John and Thomas are known.¹ Madras - Mylapore is the only place which claims to possess the original grave of the apostle Thomas. The site of the grave is still shown in the gothic cathedral which was built in the same place as many earlier churches. This cathedral stands next to the sea, on the south side of Madras, and its lofty spire can be seen from a great distance. Before the high altar is a small crypt under which the apostle Thomas was buried. Burning candles and fresh flowers still bear witness to a lively gratitude in the hearts of Christians, for the work which he accomplished here. Little is known to us of his cult during the earlier centuries. As well as by the Indians, his grave must have been visited mainly by Persians, Syrians and Armenians, but unfortunately the rise of Islam in those countries in the seventh century spelled the ruin of Christendom there. Even so, the grave of Thomas in Madras was held in honour by Hindus and Muslims as well

1. Hom. in Ep. Hebraicum: 26.2: PG. 63. 170; A. Medlycott, *op. cit.* 46-48.

as by Christians. When the Portuguese first arrived at Mylapore they observed that a Muslim was appointed to watch over the tomb, and in the opinion of some, his ancestors had originally belonged to the Thomas-Christians.²

Our first detailed accounts regarding the tomb come from the Portuguese who arrived in Kerala around the year 1500, and were delighted to find co-religionists there. From them they heard that the grave of Thomas was to be found on the other coast in Mylapore, in Chola land, which later received the name of the Coromandel coast. Research in the Portuguese archives during the last decades has yielded an impressive series of documents which deal with the grave of the apostle Thomas and the traditions around it. While the documents from before 1517 were scanty and very brief, from the period 1517-1604, 24 detailed letters and reports have been found, which give a faithful account of what the Portuguese found and heard in Mylapore. The first such visit by the Portuguese was described by Gaspar Correa. Two Portuguese merchants, Diego Fernandes and Bastiano Fernandes, who returned from Malacca in native ships landed at Paleacate, now Pulicat in 1517, 25 miles to the north of Mylapore, and found several Armenian Christians there.

These Christians invited them to accompany them on a pilgrimage to the house of the apostle Thomas. They found the church and its surroundings in ruins and covered in undergrowth. The church was very ancient, and no Christians had lived in the neighbourhood for many years. Only the walls of the chapel and the tower were still standing. The grave of the apostle was said to be situated in the chapel, to the rear of the high altar. In and around the church there were several other tombs and monuments. Outside the church, but within the churchyard, they found the grave of an Ethiopian, who had been a colleague of the apostle. Two other colleagues

2. A. M. Mundadan, *Traditions of the St. Thomas Christians*, Bangalore, 1970, p. 82.

of his were also said to be buried nearby. In 1523 the Portuguese began to prevent further decay by building a stone wall to protect the vault and the tower. When digging the foundations they came across the grave of a king who was known to the inhabitants as Tane Mudaliar, 'the Servant of God', and who, they claimed, had been converted by the apostle Thomas.

They also found a tombstone with an inscription which according to the Portuguese could be translated thus: 'I give the tenth part of the incomes from trade, both by land and sea, to this house, and I order all those who follow me and are descended from me to do likewise, as long as the sun and moon continue to shine. I curse those who shall neglect this command.' Unfortunately the stone can no longer be found.

While working on the new wall, the Portuguese also found it necessary to concern themselves with the grave of the apostle. On 2 June 1523 Father Antonio Gil was given leave by the governor of the coastal district, Manuel Frias, to undertake an excavation. He asked for and received the aid of Father Pedro Fernandez, who was 70 years of age, of Diego Fernandes, Bras Fernandez and Diego Francisco. After praying and performing a mass, they began their work on Saturday in June 1523. A great deal of sand had to be removed, and three layers of concrete had to be broken through before they reached the grave itself, which was sealed by two tombstones, neither of which revealed any inscription. The total depth was about twelve feet and it is not surprising that they had to cease work about midnight, without having found any remains.

On Sunday, early in the morning, they resumed their work and after removing a great deal more earth, they found very decayed human bones, which hardly filled a small chest. The course of the excavation is recorded in a document which takes the form of a deposition under oath, signed by those present. A schematic drawing was also made. At the foot of the grave they found a

Kalam, or earthenware pot filled with soil. This is entirely in accordance with the declaration made by the papal legate Marignoli, who had visited Mylapore in 1394, and wrote down what he had been told there. He had heard that according to tradition the earth which was drenched with the blood of the apostle had been collected and buried with him. Pilgrims had been accustomed to take the soil from the apostle's grave home with them as a souvenir.

Roughly in the middle of the corpse a lance-point was also discovered, made of the Malabar iron, in the form of an olive leaf, with a fragment of the wooden shaft still attached. This was a striking confirmation of the *Acts of Thomas*, in which it is stated that he was killed by a lance, and that the soldiers had thrust them with such force that one was broken, leaving a part of it in the apostle's body. The point of the lance with a fragment of the bones, contained in a monstrance, are still shown as relics in the cathedral of Madras, and brought out for public veneration in the novena before the feast day of the apostle. Part of the church is known as the chapel of the kings. The Portuguese thought immediately of the so-called Three Kings, the wise men of the east and gave it the name of the 'Capella dos reis magos.' In a later examination of the local Christians by Frei Andrei de Santa Maria in October 1600, however, it appeared that there was no trace of any cult of the three kings, and that this title was incorrect.

We feel that it is to be seen rather as a proof of the accuracy of the *Acts of Thomas*, which states that Thomas was buried in or near the burial place of the kings. The lowest part of the grave was rectangular and built for stones of a very special kind, measuring $15\frac{1}{2} \times 8 \times 3$ inches. In 1921, A.H. Longhurst, superintendent of the Archaeological Department, Southern Circle, explained that these stones must be very ancient, and were of the same type as the Buddhist Stufas, though elsewhere in north India they were rather larger.

Twenty four years later, in Arikamedu near Pondicherry, the first Roman trading station in India was excavated. It had been begun in the time of emperor Augustus and abandoned about the end of the second century A. D. Three periods can be distinguished in the remains and finds made there. In the first period, i.e. the first half of the first century A. D. the buildings were of timber, numerous sherds of *terra sigillata* pottery were discovered originating from the leading centre of their manufacture, Arezzo in Italy. They ceased to be exported after 50 A. D. Some of the potsherds bore the names of the potter who made them: Vibius, Camura, and Itta, names which have also been found in Europe, on the Roman military posts along the Rhine and elsewhere but again always dating from the first half of the first century A. D. In the second period, a great warehouse was built of brick, begun after 50 A. D., and abandoned before the year 100, because of the great risk of floods from the rivers in the rainy season. In the third period, the bricks used were of a much larger size. The bricks of the tomb of Mylapore are virtually the same dimensions as those of the Roman warehouse, built between 50 and 100 A. D. and they show that the tomb of the apostle must thus be dated to that period.

It is a well known phenomenon that the ground level of a city which has been occupied for centuries, rises in the course of time. The degree of accumulation is dependent on the intensity of the occupation. Thus, many cities have been discovered in the east by investigating *tells* or mounds which stand fifteen to thirty feet above the level of the surrounding countryside. Such an investigation, using potsherds to date the strata, has not been carried out for Madras-Mylapore and is unlikely to be done because of the intensive settlement of the area. The very deep situation of the grave of Thomas is a clear indication of its antiquity and credibility.

Chapter 2

The Year And Day of His Death

According to the tradition of Madras-Mylapore, Thomas met his death as a martyr in the year 68 of our era. In Kerala, on the Malabar coast, they place this event in the year 72, while the Portuguese adhered to a date of 75 A.D.

We do not know what calculations lie behind these dates, but the differences, in our opinion, can be blamed on the starting point chosen: whether one takes the true year of the birth of Christ or the erroneous calculation which has become the standard. They differ at most by seven years, which as we have already seen is the result of a faulty calculation made when the Christian calendar was adopted in the sixth century. We repeat the desirability of a world wide research project into the different chronologies in use, to bring them into harmony. It might then appear that the year 68 of one chronology is precisely the same as the year 75 of another. The determination of the date has only a relative value, full of errors and lacunae; it is after all a human achievement.

Time, and the alteration of the seasons, are not determined by man, but depend on a natural order, which the Creator of the Universe has given us through the course of the planets and the sun, and which, as far as we know, is bound by fixed rules, and has remained the same throughout human history. In any case, although there are three dates assigned for the death of the apostle Thomas, we can be certain that he died only once. Naturally the annual commemoration of his death became an important event for the Christians of India. He was regarded as the common father of their faith, and the day of his death

was kept as a family feast, for mutual visiting and a communal meal. It was also the day deceased parents and ancestors were remembered. This feast was celebrated on 3 July.

In Edessa too, this day was kept as a yearly feast, although many writers have believed that in this case it commemorated the removal of the relics to the new church, which was built within the city walls at the end of the fourth century to honour St. Thomas. It is probable that the new church was dedicated and the relics transferred there on 3 July, the customary day on which the death of Thomas was remembered. In the Latin church 21 December was for centuries the day of St. Thomas, though no reason for this difference was ever demonstrated. In the last revision of the calendar of saints' days, the Latin church decided to conform to the date, 3 July, which has always been accepted in the east as that of the death of Thomas, so that he is now remembered on the same day throughout the greater part of the world.

Chapter 3

The Fate of The Relics

In almost all religions, the veneration of holy personalities forms an important part of their cult. Hinduism in particular is well known for its many places of pilgrimage, where the faithful regularly congregate in vast numbers at regular intervals. In Christendom, the faithful used to assemble for prayer from the earliest times at the graves or by the mortal remains of the martyrs. For preference churches were built above the grave of a saint and it was mandatory to enclose some relic in the base of every altar.

The veneration of the saints is based on the belief that they, as friends of God, are still able to lend their

aid and their strength after their death. Their intercession with God is requested to obtain certain favours. The first example of such a cult around the grave of the apostle Thomas is seen as soon as the lifetime of king Masdāi or Mahādēvan.³

We should pay special attention to the statement that there was some difficulty in finding the bones, since one of the brothers had secretly removed them to the west. This theft, if we may so call it, had already taken place before the end of the first century. In India, there has always been some difficulty in admitting this, and it has always been concealed as far as possible from the faithful. When the Portugues investigated the grave in 1523, they too thought that they would be able to find the entire skeleton, but their own detailed report reveals that they only discovered a few bones in the tomb, barely enough to fill a box 11 × 22 cm. The finding of the pot of earth and the point of the lance with which the apostle had been murdered, were however important indications that it was indeed the grave of the apostle which they were excavating. The presence of a very hard layer of concrete above the tombstone proper also pointed to efforts made by the local people to prevent a second robbery. Was it really a theft? It is quite possible that Thomas expressed a wish to be buried in Edessa, the city where he had first preached the gospel, and which had served as the starting point of his many apostolic journeys, and with which he had probably kept up a continued contact by letter. According to Syrian tradition it was the merchant Khabin who brought the relics back to Edessa.

The fate of the relics in India after their discovery in 1523 has been rather tumultuous. In 1559 they were taken by the king of Vijayanagar to Chandragiri, an event to which we shall return later. The city of Mylapore which the Portuguese fortified and renamed San Thome, was often besieged and frequently changed hands as a result of the

3. The last chapter of the *Acts of Thomas* narrates it.

wars of the Dutch, the French and the English, aided in their turn by the Indian rulers. The city was plundered many times, while plagues, famine and earthquakes also tormented the inhabitants. In fact, nothing remains of the relics in Madras except the lance-point which is contained in a monstrance, and a small silver box which has served as a reliquary. On it, St. Thomas is depicted laying his hand in the side of Christ. The images form a synthesis of Christian, Islamic and Hindu motifs and were probably made by a local craftsman towards the end of the sixteenth century. The front can be let down to reveal the contents. Where these former contents, the remaining bones of Thomas, have gone, is now unknown. It is suspected that they are concealed in some unknown place, or else dispersed among many churches in Kerala.

The part which was taken to Edessa by the merchant Khabin was housed in the burial place of the kings, to the west of the city, another indication of the great veneration in which Thomas was held and of the important relations which he had with Abgar V and the kings of Edessa. On 22 August 394, when Cyrus was bishop of Edessa, the relics were removed to a newly built church, within the city walls, which was dedicated to St. Thomas. From here, relics were also probably presented to other churches dedicated to him under the name of Addai or Thomas. These churches were called *Martyria*, which actually means martyrdom, to indicate that a relic of the martyr was venerated in them. The four places which were later claimed as the site of the martyrdom of Thaddeus may possibly be places in which relics of Thomas were housed and venerated.

But the relics were not to find lasting rest in Edessa either. In the time of the second crusade, Edessa was the scene of bitter fighting and in about 1144 the remains of the apostle were transported to the island of Chios off the coast of Asia Minor, to protect them from desecration. When in 1258 this island too was in danger of a Muslim invasion, the relics were conveyed in the ship of Leone Acciaivoli to Ortona in Italy, on the Adriatic north

of Rome. The relics are said to have arrived there on 6 September 1258, and are still there. Thomas' skull in particular is still shown and venerated there.

When Thomas' martyrdom was commemorated in 1972 all the Indian priests and theological students in Europe gathered in Ortona on a pilgrimage. From Edessa, Chios and Ortona, relics made their way to Jerusalem, Rome and other places in the west. Ambrose of Milan, Gaudentius of Brescia and Paulinus of Noia received parts for their churches. In Paris, before the French revolution, the church of St. Denis contained a shrine for the relic, on which was the inscription: "Hic est manus beati Thomae Apostoli quam misit in latus Domini Nostri Jesu Christi" - This is the hand of the Apostle Thomas, which he placed in the side of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Maastricht too, part of the arm of St. Thomas is said to be preserved. The genuineness of these relics is only to be determined with difficulty. The returning crusaders often brought forged relics back with them. As a counter measure the catholic church required a document to accompany each relic, with proof of its authenticity; threatened those who forged, sold or openly venerated false relics with excommunication; but permitted the continued veneration of ancient relics except when it was certain that they had been forged.

Chapter 4

The Bleeding Cross

One of the important attractions for pilgrims and tourists who visit the Great Mount of Thomas, is the so-called Bleeding Cross. It is a great stone in which a cross has been carved, of a form and with an ornament which is not known in Europe. In the east it was given the name of the cross of Thomas, or Persian Cross.

According to Indian tradition it was made by Thomas himself. This is in accordance with the view that Thomas was a carpenter, stonemason or builder by trade, as we found it stated earlier in the *Acts of Thomas*. To make and set up such a cross would have been part of Thomas' task, when he chose and laid out a place for the faithful to come and worship in. Similar crosses are found in several places where Thomas is said to have preached: in Socotra and in Kerala. As a rule the cross formed the middle point of the Liturgy, with much bowing to it, or burning of incense before it. It is still said of the cross on the Great Mount, that Thomas was kneeling in prayer before it when he was assassinated, and that his blood poured out over the cross. The monument was found in its present site by the Portuguese, who laid out the foundations of a new church around it in 1547.

Let us follow the report made by bishop Frei Andre de Santos Maria of Cochin, under whose jurisdiction the territory of Madras and Mylapore then fell: "This stone is as big as a mill-stone and was lying with the cross carved on it turned down, and the reverse upwards. As the whole appearance of the stone on the reverse was rough and unpolished, it looked just a rough stone lying about. Those who were digging the foundations were about to leave it there without taking much notice of it. But moved by God, they turned it face upwards and noticed the beautiful cross carved on it with the inscription around the same. This stone had on one side of the cross, a streak of blood, and looked to be so fresh as if it had been shed at that very moment; which blood, - although it went on disappearing both by action of time and by the sweat and water which the stone exudes when the miracle takes place, and although some people scrape it - even now gives traces of what had once been there, notwithstanding that already fifty years had elapsed since the stone was discovered and placed there by way of reredos of the altar."

The sweating of the stone is said to have taken place during a mass on 18 December, the feast of the expectation

4. Henry d' Souza, *In the Steps of Thomas*, Madras, 1972, p. 56.

of our Lady. The stone took on a dark colour, and gave off so much water that handkerchiefs could be moistened with it. For this and other reasons it was given the Latin name *Crux Mirabilis*, the miraculous cross.

It is difficult, after three centuries have elapsed, to reach a verdict on these events, which were associated with the cross. Yet one may wonder whether the people of the time were not a little too credulous in accepting miracles. Is there a natural explanation to hand? Can the 'blood', the red stain, not be derived from the red earth, which is common in India, including the Mount of Thomas? Can the sweating of the stone not be ascribed instead to the natural formation of condensation? It is widely known that many stones display this phenomenon in certain atmospheric conditions. In particular, old stone floors show this natural phenomenon several times a year. Hosten states that the stone is known to have sweated on other days, according to many testimonies, several times between 1561 and 1700, and that it was often observed early in the morning before anyone had been admitted to the church.

Other stones too showed the same effect at the same time. The matter grows even more mysterious if we turn our attention to the inscription on the stone. The inscription is in very ancient characters which no one can decipher. The king of Portugal pressed for someone to be found who could do so. Finally an old Brahmin was discovered, who was prepared to make an attempt. At first he refused to go up to the altar to read the inscription, but at length he yielded to the pressure put upon him. He made a fine rigmarole of it! Each sign was, so he claimed, supposed to represent ten, fifteen or twenty words, as it was thought the hieroglyphs of the Egyptians did. His translation is said to have read thus:

"In the time of the law of Sagamo, a man of God, Thomas, was sent to this part of the world by the

5. H. Hosten, *Antiquities from San Thome and Mylapore*, Calcutta, 1936, p.38-39.

Son of God, whose pupil he was, to bring the knowledge of God to the people. He built a temple there, performed miracles, and was finally martyred by a lance, thrown by a Brahmin when he was on his knees in prayer. The cross was coloured by the blood of the saint, as a permanent of him."

It is very doubtful if the Brahmin really gave such a translation, which is also in conflict with the Indian tradition that Thomas himself made the cross and the inscription on it. In any case, before the translation reached Europe, it had already undergone so many changes that we can no longer recognise this reading in it. In 1667, Athanasius Kircher gave a version, attributed to the Brahmin, which differs completely from the translation which we have cited. Even the characters which he reproduces are unrecognisable.

The first European to attempt to translate the inscription, Dr. A. C. Burnell in 1873, was followed by a whole series of other scholars, who differed so widely amongst themselves that one no longer knows whom to trust. One of the more recent translators assumes that the language used was Sassanian-Pahlavi of the fifth or sixth century. No-one now knows this language, and the assertion has been adopted and repeated without further research. It sounds scholarly, and there is no-one who can contradict it with any authority. Convinced of the importance of a correct identification of the characters, a true dating of the language used, and a correct translation, I have made many attempts since the beginning of my studies to find someone who can be regarded as an expert in Parthian, in Sassanian-Pahlavi, Old Persian, but unfortunately without any result. Even three attempts to get information from Iran itself were fruitless. In 1923, Hosten was already complaining that no picture of the cross of Mylapore which had been published to date could be considered as a faithful reproduction. He also complained that it was astonishing to an outsider like himself, that no two of the six Pahlavi experts had been able to reach any agreement on the translation of the inscription. One of these scholars even put forward four different versions.

Since language experts leave us in the lurch, we shall have to try to solve this mysterious riddle in another way. The cross, at Mylapore is a very complicated one. At the base, we see three steps, in imitation of the hill of Calvary; on the place where the cross is planted we see an ornament in the shape of a leaf or flower, extending above and below. The cross itself has four equal arms which at each end show a threefold fleur de lis, somewhat similar to the French lily or the trefoil of the Scouts. There is however a clear difference, in that the middle leaf rather resembles a round ball or pearl, which in its turn is crowned with a smaller pearl. Above the cross is a carving of a dove with outspread wings and tail, which seems to be pecking at the small pearl of the middle leaf. Several authors have assumed that we may see an emblem of the Holy Spirit in this, but that is not certain. Alongside the calvary, flower and cross motifs, we see on either side a column or pillar of persian or Parthian appearance. On the capital of each pillar sits a dolphin with a wide open mouth, into which a string of pearl seems to be disappearing. At that time the dolphin was regarded as a symbol of humanity, since its head, according to some authors, resembles the head of the embryo in the womb. The wide open mouth of the dolphin, greedily devouring the pearls, must be a reminder to Christians that they should eagerly desire the costly pearls of the faith! The whole harmonious tableau is surrounded by a rounded curve in which the inscription referred to is carved. It must be clear to everyone that we are dealing with a masterpiece of craftsmanship, composition and symbolism, which must have been preached by a series of trial attempts.

Thus, we find various similar crosses in Kerala, which show the same features of composition and execution. Two of these crosses even appear, at first sight, to have precisely the same inscription as the cross on the Mount of Thomas near Madras. H. d'Souza observed that not one of these crosses is known for any miraculous bleeding, which is certainly true. He also says that historians think that all the crosses in Kerala and Ceylon, whether made

of stone or wood, are only imitations of the one on the Mount of Thomas, which, in his opinion, is the only one which can be ascribed to St. Thomas' own hands. This opinion, is not shared in the other places where these crosses have been found. Hosten, who made many journeys to study the crosses *in situ*, remarks:⁶

All the crosses in Malabar are yet different in numerous details from that of St. Thomas Mount or from one another. We should not admit for any cross that it is copied from another, unless we find it to be a perfect replica.

The crosses are all of the same kind, but never identical. As far as their character and their execution is concerned, some of the crosses discovered must be attributed to the same sculptor.

Let us look once again at the most important cross and try to trace its history. The cross in the church of Valiyapalli at Kottayam, on the left side of the altar, shows calvary with four steps, but lacks the pillars with the dolphins and pearls. It seems to be older than the cross near Madras, but shows the same characters. This cross is said to have come from the ruined church of Cranganore - Muziris. An invasion of Muslims from Calicut drove the Jews and Christians from this place and destroyed their synagogues and churches. The survivors settled in Cochin and its hinterland around Kottayam. If they later fetched their cross from Muziris, it shows what great value they attached to it.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 343.

Chapter 5

The Portrait of Our Lady by Luke

A second object which claims the attention and the veneration of visitors to the church on the Great Mount of St. Thomas, is a rather small portrait on wood of Our Lady. As a rule it stands on the same altar whose rear wall is formed by the bleeding cross.

It is said to have been fetched with him by the apostle Thomas, and to have been painted by the evangelist Luke. The attribution of pictures of the Mother of God to Luke is regarded in the west as a very doubtful question indeed. I recall from my student years that it was then dismissed as purely legendary. The story was said to have owed its origin to the medieval painters' guild, which was embarrassed by its lack of a patron saint, and chose the evangelist Luke since he was such a colourful story-teller. Naturally, given this background, we were extremely critical of and prejudiced against the Indian legend.

The question of the portrait painted by Luke is a hotly disputed point, in which there is a great deal of literature for and against in the west. The opponents deny the question altogether or else they appeal to two arguments: a text from Augustine and the alleged silence of the church in the first few centuries. The text of Augustine is to be found in a work written between 410 and 416; *On the Holy Trinity*. It reads as follows: *Non enim novimus faciem virginis Mariae*- For we do not know the face of the virgin Mary. - The silence of the church is said to mean that not until the fourteenth century do we find any allusion in writing to a portrait of Mary by Luke. This statement is in its turn supposed to be derived

from a dubious source of the fifth or sixth century. The cult of Mary as such is said not to have originated until then.

At first sight, these two arguments seem conclusive enough. What must our counter-arguments be? Let us first examine the statement of St. Augustine more closely. It is more or less suggested that Augustine in this text expressed his view as to whether St. Luke was a painter, and whether there were any portraits in existence of the Mother of God. That is not correct. The text has been torn from its context. The philosophic and not easily comprehensible Father is making a sharp distinction between three things: 1. supernatural belief (*credere*) in a truth which has been revealed by God. 2. our natural knowledge of something through the observation of our senses (*noscere, videre* and *scire*). 3. the knowledge which we attain by prolonged thought about something (*cogitare*). Alluding to the observations of the senses, he says: "We have not acquired any knowledge of the face of the Virgin Mary (*novimus*, perfect tense). We do not know what Lazarus looked like, nor have we seen Bethany, nor the grave of Lazarus or the stone which Christ had taken away when He restored him to life; nor the new grave, hewn from a rock, from which He Himself arose. Nor the Mount of Olives from which He ascended to heaven. In general we, who have not seen these things, do not know at all whether in reality they appeared as we picture them to ourselves. Indeed it is, considered a *priori*, more probable that they do not correspond with the picture which our imagination has created for itself. For whenever a place or a person or any other object appears, at our first sight of it, exactly as we have earlier imagined it to be, then we regard that as a minor miracle, so rarely, indeed almost never does it occur. On the other hand we believe (*credere*) that the Lord Jesus Christ was born of a virgin who was called Mary. But as for what the words 'virgin, born and called' mean, that we do not believe; we *know* it. But as to whether

7. Augustine, De Trinitate: PL 42:952.

Mary had such a face as we picture to ourselves, when we speak of her or think of her, that we have neither known nor do we believe (*utrum autem illa facies Maria fuerit qui occurerit anima ista loquimur aut recordamur, nec novimus omnino, nec credidimus*). Therefore, without harming the faith, one may say: perhaps Mary had such a face, perhaps not; but no one may say, without injuring the Christian faith: perhaps Christ was born of the virgin Mary.

Summarising, we can say that St. Augustine was here giving a scientific exposition of the distinction between faith and knowledge, between divine revelation and the observations of the human senses, which are of subsidiary importance. It is as certain as can be that he was not expressing an opinion about the question, whether or not Luke ever painted a portrait of the virgin Mary. At most, and then with some reserve, one could infer that Augustine, who had not yet been to Palestine and the east, had no personal knowledge of the existence of Mary; but for the purpose of his argument, that was of no importance.

The Silence of the Church

The silence of the church for centuries is an assumption which rests only on our ignorance. It is not a decisive proof that Luke never painted a portrait of the virgin Mary. Much from the earliest centuries has not come down to us in writing, and a great deal has been lost. Moreover, we are here concerned with an eastern tradition, since Luke came from Antioch and worked there. Our ignorance may not be taken as the basis of an assertion for which no other proof can be found. The question is, whether the church was really silent on this matter. Let us examine more closely the ancient witnesses from the east.

We open the series with *Theodorus Lector*, a reader at the famous cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. He wrote a history, now unfortunately lost, from which *Nicephorus Collistus* in the fourteenth century repeated the statement that the empress Eudokia sent from Jerusalem

to her sister-in-law, Pulcheria in Constantinople, a portrait of the Mother of God, painted by the apostle Luke. In what year this happened is not known, but it must have been between 438 and 453 when Pulcheria died. Pulcheria had the portrait presented to a new church which she had built for it.

For almost a thousand years, the portrait was honoured in the church of the *Hodeges*, or leaders, and it received the name of the *Hodegetria*, which we might translate as "leader on the path of life." The first recorded written reference thus dates to seventy years after the image was brought to Constantinople. As a precious relic of the apostolic age, which enjoyed a continuous cult, the name of its maker could easily and surely have been transmitted by oral tradition.

The next reference comes to us from *Andrew of Crete* (660-740). In his work in defence of the veneration of images, he reports:⁸ All those who lived before us asserted that the apostle and evangelist Luke painted the risen Christ and His immaculate mother, with his own hand. Rome to her glory possesses this portrait and a similar one is carefully preserved in Jerusalem.

It is related of the patriarch *Germanus of Constantinople* (+733) that he remonstrated with the iconoclastic emperor Leo the Isaurian, in these words: From the beginning, after the ascension of Christ, images have been made. Among them belongs the portrait of the most pure Mother of God, which the evangelist Luke painted and which he sent from Jerusalem to Theophilus.

The confessor and teacher *John Damascene* (+749) explained:⁹ "The tradition has been handed down to us that the apostle and evangelist Luke painted the Lord and His mother. The city of Rome is said to possess her portrait,

8. PL. 97: 1304.

9. PG. 94. 1175.

and another is carefully preserved in Jerusalem." From the same author we have a fiery speech in which he takes up a position against the iconoclastic emperor Constantine Copronymus (741-775) in these words: "Look at the evangelist and apostle Luke; did he not paint the venerable portrait of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and sent it to Theophilus?"

Most conclusive of all is the statement of the synod which was held in the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 836 and attended by the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, with 185 bishops, 17 abbots and 1153 monks. They composed a detailed synodal address which was sent to the iconoclastic emperor Theophilus (820-842) in Constantinople. It restates the common conviction shared by the entire eastern church. In this important document, of which many manuscripts have been preserved, this solemn declaration is made: "The holy apostle and evangelist Luke painted the most sacred and venerable portrait of the Mother of God on wood at the time when she was still in Jerusalem and living on the mount of Sion; and in so doing he made it possible for the generations to come to behold the features of the all-pure virgin, as in a mirror; and when she was shown the portrait she declared: My grace and my blessing shall accompany this image."

We ask ourselves: must we really bring forward any more proofs that the church has never remained silent on the tradition that Luke painted the mother of God? Must we add many more statements from later centuries? Let us confine ourselves to listing the names of some of those who refer to it: Abbot Theodore the Confessor (+818), Abbot Theodore Studite, (+826), Methaphrastes (961-964), Theophanis Cerameus (12th c.). An anonymous pilgrim from the west, probably from England in 1183; Pope Innocent II (1204), Rabban Sauma, a monk of Turkish origin (1287), Georgius Pachymeres (1310), the already mentioned Nicephorus Callistus, who wrote an *Ecclesiastical History* in eighteen books (+1335), and Andrea Dandolo of Venice (+1354).

The painters' book of Mount Athos which exhorts Christian painters to say this prayer before they begin their work: "Lord Jesus, who through your Holy Spirit, enlightened the apostle and evangelist Luke, so that he could depict the beauty of your most pure mother, when she bore you as a child in her arms, enlighten and strengthen the heart and the soul of your servant, guide his hand...."

In the whole early church there is not a trace of any who doubt or attack this ancient tradition. In that respect we may rightly speak of the silence of the church!

The Life of Luke

Much more important than all this delving in ancient writings, is to direct all our attention to the person himself, and to the works which are attributed to him. Can we find a place in the life of Luke for his activities as an amateur painter? Can there have been contacts between him and the mother of God? Can we trace the links between him and the pictures which are ascribed to him? Were the pigments, the techniques and the style those usual in the time in which Luke lived? The answers to these and similar questions can take us farther than assertions made in writings which date from a thousand years later.

Luke was born of pagan parents, as we can determine from a statement of Paul that he had only three colleagues of Jewish descent, whose names he gives. It follows from this that Paul's other colleagues, including Luke, were of pagan descent. As such they were not bound by the obligations of the Jewish law, and did not need to observe the prohibition on the making of images. In the foreword to his Gospel he points to the many writings which were in circulation, concerning the life of Jesus; states that he had himself spoken to eye witnesses, and that he had investigated everything *from the beginning*; from the very beginning, in the most literal sense. Luke - and only Luke - goes into detail about the message borne by the angel Gabriel, the visit of Mary to Elisabeth, the birth of Jesus and the adoration of the shepherds. All of

these were subjects which were known only to Mary, and which she had treasured in her heart. We must accept that he heard all this directly from her, and thus that he must often have visited her. He had already a great part of his life as a physician behind him. In antiquity there were three great centers of medical education: Athens, Alexandria and Tarsus, the city from which Paul came. As an experienced doctor, he must certainly have been received with open arms by the Christians, and have enjoyed the complete confidence of Mary, who was only a few years older. During the more than two years which Paul spent in Jerusalem and the nearby town of Caesarea, he was accompanied by Luke. It is also very possible that Luke visited Mary at Ephesus. According to the reconstruction of Paul's journeys, he visited Ephesus on his second and third voyages. If Mary was living near Ephesus at that time, then it is quite possible that Luke visited her.

After the death of Paul, Luke lived for many years in the heart of ancient Greece, where according to his biography he died a natural death at the age of 84, sitting under an olive tree in Achaia. St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Paulinus bear witness to this. This district of Achaia lies on the gulf of Corinth. During his lifetime as a follower of Jesus, we can thus distinguish a period of ten years in which he could have had frequent and close contacts with Mary; followed by a quite long period of twenty years in which he could have occupied himself in writing his gospel and practising the art of painting. Over such a period of years, he could have painted a respectable number of works. We repeat, with some emphasis, that we are dealing with a Greek tradition. Luke, who grew up in the Greek city of Antioch, who spoke and wrote Greek, who visited many Greek cities around the Mediterranean, and who ended his life in Greece itself, this is the Luke who is recognised and venerated as the painter of the mother of God by the Greek church. This is laid down in the old Greek liturgy and in the Greek calendars of saints. Are we to suppose that the twentieth century Latin west knows better than the Greeks themselves?

Mother and Child?

According to tradition, Luke painted Mary from life in Jerusalem, and even a superficial consideration of several reproductions at once shows the probable truth of this. There is something unnatural, unreal and strange in many of the works which are attributed to Luke: mother and child do not seem to belong together. We see a woman of quite advanced age, whose gaze is directed more to the hereafter than to her child, to which she is not paying the slightest attention. I would like to put it forward as my own opinion that the child was not added until much later, perhaps in the fifth century.

We cannot expect that the sober and sensitive Luke would have painted Mary as a young woman, with a child in her arms, while she actually sat before him, nearly forty years older. That would require too great an exercise of the imagination. The memory of Christ as her adult son, of His grievous passion and cruel death on the cross was still too fresh for Him to be painted as a child so soon after His crucifixion. If the first depictions of Mary as the Madonna with her child dated from the fifth century, then she would certainly have been represented as a young woman. It is an argument for the strength of the tradition, that against all logic - painters have remained faithful to the picture of her as a rather older woman. This faithfulness is only to be explained if there were true to life portraits of her in existence from the very beginning. Luke thus painted Mary as she then was. Perhaps as a praying figure, with her arms pointed downwards which may be the origin of the type of the 'Madonna orante'. It is possible that at a later stage Luke was rather freer in his treatment of his subject. There are reputed to be no fewer than six hundred icons painted by Luke or in imitation of his originals.

Technique, pigments and style

It is of great importance to discover how Luke painted - what materials and pigments he used. According

to tradition he painted on wooden panels, as was the usual custom of the time. The colours were mixed with beeswax (encaustic) which gave them a surprising permanence and freshness. We can still marvel at this in the portraits found on Egyptian mummies at Fayum.

But if the painters of Fayum, independently of the Syrian Luke, were able to paint realistic portraits in brilliant colours on wooden panels, why should the reverse not be true also? In the Hellenistic cultural milieu from which Luke came, portraiture had been practised since long before his time, and there was no lack of examples for him to follow. In the Hodegetria - portrait by Luke - we see the same trait. L. Curtius observes, very justly, that the essence of ancient portraiture lay in its absolute sobriety, the absence of any pose or any decorative grouping of the clothing. The same connoisseur remarks that ancient portraits had a religious significance, for the portrait of one's ancestors formed a sort of 'shrine' in the home. Portraits of saints too, and pictures which were venerated, that is true icons, were already familiar to the ancient pagan world, although naturally very few of these have been preserved to our own day.

We ask ourselves: if an unknown artist in an Egyptian village, in the first or second century or earlier, could make a sacred icon, why not the highly cultivated and much travelled Luke of Antioch, in Jerusalem at the same time?

The Picture on the Mount of Thomas near Madras

After this lengthy - but for the west, very necessary digression we return to the simple, little wooden portrait of Our Lady at Madras. It is preserved on the high altar of the church on the Great Mount of Thomas, just underneath the stone with the cross of Thomas. It is not so much the fact that it is supposed to have been painted by Luke, which we wish to bring to the fore, but the assertion that it was brought with him by the apostle Thomas himself. Native pilgrims from Malabar, Burma and Ceylon did not

ask to see the portrait painted by Luke but rather the scapular of St. Thomas. The apostle is said to have worn this picture hanging round his shoulders and to have shown it during his preaching.

As far as memory records, it has always remained in the same place. At times of danger and plunder it was temporarily concealed, and brought out again, once conditions were more favourable. Once the image was buried at the foot of the mount of Thomas, with other precious articles. When it was dug up with a spade and a pickaxe it was badly damaged, as could be clearly seen until thirty years ago. A cross stands on the site at the foot of the hill where the painting was buried for a time. Various attempts were made to paint over the damage, and one of the bishops of Mylapore is said to have commissioned an artist for this purpose. He was so convinced that he could paint a better and more attractive portrait that he even made a jest of it, but at the moment he raised his brush to begin, he was struck blind, so the popular tradition relates. At another attempt to apply new paint to the panel, it flowed off like mercury without leaving any trace behind. It was decided to leave the painting as it was. Not until 1955 did the artist Margarite Scheideman paint out a few blemishes on the face and some flecks on the portrait, at the request of the archbishop of Madras-Mylapore. Are we concerned here with a genuine original portrait, preserved since the first century, and which has undergone no retouching in the course of time? So far as is known, the little wooden panel has only been removed from its place once, for a short time in 1558 or 1559.¹⁰

It would be too rash to assume that in the Madras portrait, we have to do with an original painting by Luke. It shows some characteristics which we do not encounter in other paintings, and which are difficult to identify, for example the symbol to the left of the head of Mary. What

10. H. Hosten, *op. cit.* 46.

is it? To what does it refer? We have put this question to many experts, but have not been able to get a satisfactory and unanimous answer. Is it a mirror, as a symbol of the purity of Mary? Is it an eye? What is the significance of the stripes to the right of the head?

Our question is whether there is any relationship between Luke and Thomas. If Luke was among the first Christians in Antioch, it stands to reason that he must have had very close contacts with Thomas. Moreover, Antioch, the third most important city of the Roman world after Rome itself and Alexandria, was the terminus of many caravan routes bringing silk from the east and China. The route from Antioch to the east went via Edessa, and Thomas would have made several journeys to Edessa via Antioch. If the painting in India is really by Luke, then it must derive from a much later period, and cannot have been acquired by Thomas until before his last journey to the east. This contact could have taken place in Alexandria or Rome, with both of which there were numerous trading links. If we assume that the evangelist Luke was a painter, then it is very likely that he made not just one painting, but a great many. He may also have left a copy of the same portrait of Mary in Jerusalem, and sent another copy to his friend Theophilus in Antioch, or perhaps also to Rome.

To get a general view of the tradition concerning Luke and the place which it has in Christian antiquity, it is useful to look more closely at some of the leading portraits and to give some of the details which have been handed down concerning them.

Jerusalem

It is in this city that the earliest portraits of Mary are said to have been painted by Luke, from the life. An image was later placed in the entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where in 384 the sinner *Mary of Egypt* is said to have been converted while praying before it.

Antioch

A second copy is said to have been made by Luke and given to Theophilus. According to several exegetes, Theophilus held an important office in the Roman provincial government in Syria, which included Palestine. Dedicating a work to a highly placed functionary was, at that time too, already a means of guaranteeing it greater fame and wider circulation. According to the Clementine *Recognitions*, Theophilus had the great hall of his house in Antioch rebuilt as a church and if the portrait of Mary was placed in this church, then we would be enabled to see in it the first signs of the veneration of Mary as the mother of Christ.

Constantinople

We have already discussed the question of how this image came to find itself in Constantinople. Its title, *Hodegetria*, 'she who shows the way', can also be explained by the gesture with which Mary points to Jesus. Jesus said of Himself: I am the way, the truth and the life. It is to that way that Mary points: the way to eternal life. The 'way' was a widely used term for the faith in the first centuries of Christianity. During the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 the painting, with the jewels which were attached to it, was cut into four pieces and divided by lot, but before that date many copies had been made and widely distributed throughout the east.

Rome

Several works ascribed to Luke are to be found in this city. Among them is the picture in the oldest church dedicated to Mary, *S. Maria Maggiore*, an image which has come to bear the title of *Salus Populi Romani*, the welfare of the Roman people, and which was carried around the city when it was under siege in 590. According to an old tradition, first written down in the reign of pope Honorius III (1217-1227), this painting had been painted by Luke in Troas, the ancient Troy, where he spent some time.

Let us conclude this chapter with the evidence of a Nijmegen-born saint, Petrus Canisius, who lived from 1521 to 1597. Canisius spent a great part of his life on a study of Mary. He was the author of a standard work in Latin, whose title can be translated: *On the Incomparable Virgin Mary, Mother of God*. In this and other works he often refers to Luke as a painter. We cite just one such sentence: "It is an ancient and immutable tradition that Mary was painted by Luke, and that this tradition has been preserved in the church."

Even if we are not able to answer all the questions, we may still accept that Luke worked among the earliest Christians as a physician, as an author and as a painter. It was Luke who gave form and content at its very beginnings to the Christian art which was to grow to such vast dimensions.

Chapter 6

The Monastery in Madras

As well as the tomb and the church of the apostle Thomas, a monastery is said to have been built very early, perhaps even before the middle of the third century. Around the year 363, this monastery is said to have been inhabited by about two hundred monks.

The oldest written references to it are found in a Syriac work dealing with the life of the hermit Yonan, written about 390 by a priest who was himself a monk and calls himself Archimandrite (or abbot) of the monastery of St. Thomas in India. The hermit Yonan, who came from Baghdad, is said to have stayed as a pilgrim in the monastery near the tomb of the apostle thomas. The name of the author is given in the relevant literature as *Zadoe*, which however is not a personal name but a title still

generally given by the Hindus to a monk or priest (*sadhu*). These details are convincingly supported by the evidence of St. Jerome (342-420) who says that during his stay in Palestine he was very often visited by monks from India, Persia and Ethiopia.¹¹

The Frankish historian *Gregory*, bishop of Tours (538-594) informs us that the body of Thomas was brought to Edessa and that on the site in India where he had first rested, a monastery was located, as well as a church of amazing size, carefully built and embellished.¹² "Ergo in regionis Indiae quo prius quievit, monasterium habetur et templum mirae magnitudinis, diligenterque exornatum atque compositum."

The arab writer *Amr of Teheran* states in 1340 that the grave of Thomas is located to the right of the altar in his monastery.¹³ The Muslim historian, *Mufazzal*, son of Abil Fazail, wrote in 1358 that pilgrims from Ceylon visited the monastery of Mar Thomma. The last reference to the monastery is found in a detailed report by four Nestorian bishops who visited India around the year 1500. The monastery seems already by that date to have been ruinous and desolate. They wrote:¹⁴ "As to the monastery of St. Thomas the apostle some Christian men have gone into it, have inhabited it and are now busy restoring it. It is distant about 25 days from the above mentioned Christians (in Kerala). It is on the shore of the sea in a town called Mailapore in one of the Indian countries."

The tomb, the church and the monastery were all connected with each other and for many centuries they formed a single whole. According to H. d'Souza the monastery even gave its name to the present day city of Madras. The Syriac *Madrastha* or *Madrasth* means monastery

11. PL 22:870.

12. PL 71: 733

13. BO. 3. 2. 34

14. A. Mingana, *Early Spread of Christianity in India*, p. 39.

or house of prayer, the same meaning as the Arabic word *Madrasah*. In ancient writings the name of Madras is given as 'Madrast'. In the same way in Europe, the presence of a *monasterium* gave its name to such places as München and Münster.

The true extent of the monastery can not yet be determined, since the built-up nature of the site renders any large scale excavations impossible. As in the case of the grave of Thomas, the foundations will probably lie about twelve to sixteen feet beneath the present day ground level. Limited excavations in 1923 revealed walls five feet thick, while a number of handsomely carved stones have been found over the years and placed in the diocesan museum.

The rich ornament of the monastery, to which Gregory of Tours refers, would be owing to the lavish donations given by the local rulers. In this context, we may refer to the tombstone of a king, found during the excavations of 1523, and which bore the inscription we have already quoted. Among the carved stones discovered at this site, we are struck by the frequent recurrence of a motif: a cross with a peacock or bird of paradise on the reverse.

Chapter 7

The Peacock as a Christian Symbol

The peacock, one of the most beautiful birds in nature, originated in India, where it lives in the wild, in the forests. From ancient times, peacocks were exported, and the centre of this trade was probably Mylapore, 'the city of peacocks.' The peacock was a gift from India to the peoples who dwelt around the Mediterranean. In the days of king Solomon, if we may trust the biblical references, peacocks were already being brought from India to Jerusalem (cf. I Kg. 10: 22 and II Chr. 9: 21). Alexander the Great,

who admired many wild peacocks on his campaign in the orient, is said to have taken the peacock under his protection, by imposing heavy penalties on those who hunted them.

The connection between Thomas and the peacock is not to be established with certainty. Did he have some indirect role in the trade in peacocks? At that time there was a mania for peacocks in Rome, and they fetched very high prices. There are several legends associated with Thomas, in which peacocks play some part.

The Portuguese, Barbosa, recorded this story which he had heard from the inhabitants of Quilon in Kerala. Thomas is supposed to have withdrawn to the desert, as a result of persecution by the heathens. A hunter, who was in search of peacocks, saw a group of them, the leader sitting on a flat stone. He shot an arrow, the leader was wounded and flew away, but in the air it changed into a human being and fell dead. The governor of the city who was informed of this wonderful event, came and immediately recognised the body of the apostle. The saint had left the imprint of his footprint on the stone on which he had been sitting.

This is a story which was not recorded in writing until the sixteenth century and to which we can attach no value. Such tales are often Hindu legends, simply applied to the apostle. More important is the fact that before the year 1500, there were already numerous representations of the cross, with a peacock, found near the grave of Thomas, especially near a small tower on the outside, whose foundations were next to the tomb. There is also a cross of Thomas in Kottayam, which shows two peacocks next to the cross. The peacock, usually depicted in pairs, was chosen to honour the cross. Even now, during solemn masses in Madras, two images of peacocks are placed on the altar. The peacock is a symbol of paradise, heaven, eternal life. When it is associated with the cross, it conveys the Christian symbolism that man will attain heavenly bliss through the cross and through suffering.

It is also striking that the representation of the peacock was also very rapidly introduced into Rome, and is frequently encountered in the most ancient catacomb paintings. Paradise was imagined as a pleasure garden, a park full of flowers, shade-giving trees and shrubs, and playing fountains. Doves and the beautifully feathered peacocks were the ornament of Roman gardens. When the grave was being decorated a more sober effect was sought, and paradise was depicted by a single palm tree, a dove or often a peacock, sometimes in combination with a cross, sometimes not. In Ravenna too, where art was greatly influenced by eastern models, the oldest sarcophagi often display peacocks, always in pairs, grouped symmetrically around a vase or a cross or the monogram of Christ, alpha and omega. We also find the peacock on early Christian tomb monuments in Egypt and memorials in China.

Might not the use of the peacock as a Christian symbol have originated in the city of peacocks? Might we not owe it to the apostle Thomas?

Chapter 8

Western References

In our study so far we have based our assertions as far as possible on Indian tradition, archaeological discoveries and the most ancient work which deals with Thomas, the *Acta Thomae*. Since these sources have remained largely unknown in the west, or have been rejected as unscientific and untrustworthy, Indian scholars have sought confirmation of the accuracy of their traditions in the Syriac and western writers throughout the ages.

The continued rejection of this tradition in the west is shown, for example in the *Handbuch der*

*Kirchengeschichte*¹⁵ which still assumes that the Christian communities in India were first founded by Persians in the fourth or fifth centuries. It is of course true that there were at this time Persian Christians fleeing from persecution in their own country, who sought refuge in India, where their co-religionists had been present for many years, and with which they had had frequent contact because of the grave of Thomas.

The aim of this chapter is to show that many western writers have always accepted the preaching of the Gospel in India by Thomas as an established fact. In this way, we shall also obtain a useful overview of the writings about the work of the apostles, and about Thomas in particular. Some of the data from this extensive literature will also be elaborated so as to explain the authority of the writer. Other authors will simply be mentioned by name, with the source given, to avoid excessive repetition.

Doctrina Apostolorum

An old Syriac work known as the *Doctrina Apostolorum*, probably written or rewritten about the year 250, refers to the presence of a community of Christians in India in these words:¹⁶ India and all the countries which border on it, even to the most distant seas, received their preaching from Judas-Thomas who was the leader and governor of the church which he built and served there.

Pantaenus

The leader of the catechumens' school at Alexandria, Pantaenus, was sent to India around the year 180, by his bishop, Demetrius of Alexandria, at the request of the Christians there, to assist them in their preaching. *Eusebius*

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15. H. Jedin, (ed), *Handbuch der Kirchen-Geschichte*, I, Freiburg, 1962, p. 418.
16. Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents*, London, 1864, p. 32; A. Medlycott, *op. cit.* 35-36.

of *Caesarea* says of this event in his *Ecclesiastical History*.¹⁷ *Jerome*, (342-420) gives roughly the same details and adds that Pantaeus went to India at the request of envoys from that nation.¹⁸

Arnobius

Arnobius of Sicca in north Africa, wrote, around the year 303-305, an apology against the heathen, *Adversus Gentes*. He claimed that Christianity had long since made its entrance among a great many races and peoples. He names *India* in the first place, and then Persia, Media, Arabia, Egypt, Asia and Syria, the Galatians, the Parthians, the Phrygians, Macedonia and Epirus, a vast number of lands on which the rising and setting sun shone.¹⁹

Theophilus

Around the year 354 emperor Constantius sent a priest called Theophilus as ambassador to Arabia, Abyssinia, Ceylon and India. According to an historian of the time Theophilus preached the gospel on the *Maldives*, an island chain to the southwest of India, and sailed from there to other parts of India. There he reformed several matters which were improperly done: for example, they listened to the reading of the gospels while seated and did other things which were thought to be in conflict with the divine laws. After bringing everything into conformity with sacred custom, as was fitting, he confirmed the doctrine of the church. This statement confirms the existence of a community of the faithful who held services at which the gospels were read and the presence of an appointed clergy.²⁰

17. *HE. V.* 10, 1-3.

18. *PL.* 22: 667; 23: 651.

19. *ACW.* 7:125.

20. Cfr. A. Medlycott, *op. cit.* p.202.

St. Ephraim

St. Ephraim (306-373), the most important of the fathers of the Syrian church, was an exceptionally fertile writer and poet. He was given the title of 'Prophet of the Syrians, Harp of the Holy Spirit, Pillar of the Church.' Living in Edessa, the city of the apostle Thomas, he often speaks of him, giving not so much his own personal opinion as the view of the whole Syrian church in whose liturgy his numerous hymns won a permanent place. Ephraim speaks repeatedly of the apostolate of Thomas in India, his martyrdom there, his burial and the many miracles that he performed in that country. In a reference to the bringing of the remains of Thomas to Edessa, he says that the city had received, in them, the greatest pearl which India had to offer. In Edessa it was known that the true grave of Thomas was at Mylapore in India, and the Edessans always recognised the claims of the Indians who considered Thomas their own apostle.²¹

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

Gregory of Nazianzus, an acknowledged doctor of the church (329-390) asked:²² "Were not the apostles strangers among the many nations to whom they went forth, so that the glad news could reach all the world? What did Paul have in common with the heathens, Luke with Achaia, Andrew with Epirus, John with Ephesus, Thomas with India, or Mark with Italy?"

St. Ambrose

Ambrose of Milan, a man of great learning (333-397) is reputed to be the author of a treatise on the customs of the Brahmins, *De moribus Brachmanorum*. He describes the journey of a bishop called *Museus* to India, and that of a scholar from Thebes, who arrived in Muziris, the port of

21. *Ibid.* 18-38.

22. *Oratio* 33: PG. 36: 228.

access to the whole of India on this side of the Ganges. He says of Thomas, that he even managed to gain access to the kingdoms which were isolated by wild mountains. ²³

Theodoret
Theodoret (386-457) speaks of the apostles and says that they brought the laws of the gospel to all peoples, not only the Romans and those who lived in their empire, but also the Scythians and Sarmatians, the Indians, Ethiopians, Persians, the Seres, the Hyrcanians, the Bactrians, the Britons, the Cimbrians and the Germans, in a word all the races of mankind. ²⁴

It would take us too far to deal with all the patristic texts which refer to India and Thomas, in detail: we merely give the name of the author and the source where the text can be found. St. John Chrystostom (+407) in Homily XVII, *Epistula ad Hebraeos*, ²⁵ St. Gaudentius, bishop of Brescia, in the 5th c. *Sermo XVII*, ²⁶ St. Paulinus of Nola, 5th c. in Poema XIX, Carmen XI in S. Felicem, ²⁷ Gregory of Tours, (+594) in *Gloria Martyrum*, c. 31, 32. ²⁸

Isidore of Seville

Isidore (599-636) says of Thomas: "This Thomas preached the gospel of Christ to the Parthians, the Medes, the Persians, the Hyrcanians, the Bactrians and the Indians who dwelt on the east coast. He even reached the peoples of the interior and crowned his mission there by a martyr's death; was stabbed with lance and died in *Calamina*, a city of India, where he was given an honourable burial." ²⁹ *Calamina* is another name for Mylapore - Little

23. Enarratio in Psalmis, 21: PL. 17: 1143.

24. Sermo IX de Legibus: PG. 83: 1038.

25. PG. 63: 170.

26. PL. 20: 961, 965.

27. PL. 61: 514.

28. PL. 71: 733-734.

29. PL. 132: 83, 152.

Mount. During the centuries in which all these writers lived, there was still an intensive trade between India, Ceylon and the west, as can be shown by the discovery of numerous coins of the later eastern Roman emperors, among them Theodosius (408-450) Marcian (450-457) Leo (457-474) Zeno (474-491) Anastasius (491-518) and Justin (518). The commerce between Rome and India thus continued for centuries and was not brought to an end until the conquest of Alexandria by Islam in 641. After this, the idea of India grew vaguer in the minds of Europeans and by the twelfth century the confusion was already great. Almost every country outside Europe was called 'India', all the countries of the east were called 'the east Indies' and those across the sea to the west, 'the west Indies'. In this way, the original inhabitants of America came to bear the name of Indian. Not until the great voyages of discovery by the Portuguese and Spaniards was there a clearer awareness of the position of the various countries. Thus, from the seventh century the term 'India' began to acquire a wider meaning. It had not been so in the time of the Romans, for whom India was always the country which we know as India today. Nevertheless, the memory of Thomas' apostolate in India remained fresh, and was generally accepted in western Christendom.

Usuardus

Usuardus († c. 875) too mentions, under July in his list of martyrs, the death of Bartholomew in India and the death of Thomas in a more remote part of India. He refers to Mylapore - Madras as being 'in fine mundi' - at the end of the world.⁸⁰

King Alfred the Great of England

In the year 883 king Alfred the Great sent an embassy with gifts to Rome and then on to the grave of Thomas in India, in fulfilment of a pledge he had made when he had

80. PL. 124: 393.

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to defend London against the still heathen Danes. The mission was carried out by Swithelm or Sighelm, the bishop of Sherborne, and Athelstan, and is recorded in the *Anglo - Saxon Chronicle* which relates the early history of England and its earliest kings. The event is also referred to indirectly in other sources, among them the chronicle of Florence of Worcester who wrote in 1117, of the year 883:

"Asser the bishop of Sherborne died and was succeeded by Swithelm, who bore the gifts of king Alfred to St. Thomas in India and returned in safety."

William of Malmesbury confirms this in an original work, in which he says: ³¹

"King Alfred was very scrupulous in the giving of alms; confirmed the privileges of the churches which his father had founded. He also sent many gifts overseas to Rome and to St. Thomas in India. The envoy who was chosen for this was Sighelmus, bishop of Sherborne, who arrived in India with great success, something which amazed everyone at that time."

Isoiahb and Solomon

Isoiahb, bishop of Nisibis (1187-1222) bears witness that Thomas died in India. His contemporary, Mar Solomon, bishop of Basra on the Persian Gulf, says that this took place at Mayluph, a city in the country of the Indians.³²

Barhebraya

Maphrian Gregory Barhebraya (1226-1286), one of the most famous Syriac writers, stated in his commentary on the gospel of Matthew: "Thomas preached to the Parthians, the Medes and the Indians, was killed at Calamina and his body was brought to Edessa."

31. Henry d'Souza, *op. cit.* p. 31-33.

32. *BO.* 3.1.306.

In his Ecclesiastical History we also read:³³ Thomas the apostle was the first chief priest of the Orient. In the book, 'The Preaching of the Holy Apostles', we read that from the beginning, in the second year after the resurrection of the Lord, the holy apostle Thomas proclaimed the faith of Christ in the lands of the east. From there he went further in the direction of India, and preached to various people, especially the Parthians, the Medes, the Persians, the Carmanians, the Bactrians, the Margi and the Indians." He also gives a short account of Thomas' mission and death in India, as we have related it.

John of Monte Corvino

In 1291 the Franciscan friar John of Monte Corvino made a journey to the east and said:³⁴ "I stayed in the country of India, where there is a church of the apostle Thomas."

Marco Polo

The famous Venetian traveller Marco Polo visited the grave of Thomas in 1292 and wrote:³⁵ "The body of St. Thomas lies in the province of Maabar, in a certain small city which has not many inhabitants." *Maabar or Mubar* is the Turkish name of the Coromandel coast, and means 'point of separation' or 'point of meeting.' Merchants from the west came here as did those from the east. Marco Polo observes that the grave was honoured by the Christians and the Saracens (Muslims) who called the place *Beittuma* that is: the house of Thomas.

Oderic of Pordenone

In the fourteenth century Oderic visited the west coast of India, and the kingdom of Minibar, and wrote:³⁶ From this kingdom it is a ten days' journey to another

33. *BO*, 3.2.33; Abbeloos - Lamy (ed. & tr.) *Gregorii Barhebraei, Chronicon Ecclesiasticum III*. Paris, 1877, col. 3-6.

34. A-Medlycott, *op.cit.* p.89-90.

35. *Ibid.* 84.

36. *Ibid.* 92.

district which is called Mobar and in that district lies the body of the blessed Thomas the apostle.

Marignolli

Bishop Joannes de Marignolli, who travelled as a papal envoy to China, visited the grave of Thomas in 1349, and wrote:³⁷ "The third province of India is called Maabar and here is the church which St. Thomas himself built."

We also have the well known account of *Niccolo Conti*, a merchant who visited Malepur in 1440. He says that the body of Thomas was worthily buried there in a great and beautiful church, and that the place was also honoured by the Nestorians.³⁸

For the period after 1517, the western references, especially those of Portuguese origin, are far too numerous to be listed. After a few Portuguese traders had settled there, there followed a great number of veterans. They rebuilt the church and the tomb, built a wall to fortify the entire settlement for easy defence in time of revolt and called the town San Thome, which is still its name today. The merit of the Portuguese was that they set in train a great investigation, recorded the evidence of the local inhabitants in writing, and thus preserved it for posterity. One drawback was that they often uncritically wrote down everything that they were told.

Other persons who wrote about Thomas during these centuries, may be briefly mentioned: *Francis Xavier*, who visited India in 1545, and wrote many letters on what he had found there. *Petrus Canisius*, who in 1593 wrote commentaries on those passages in the gospels where Thomas is mentioned. *Athanasius Kircher* of Fulda, who in 1667 published at Amsterdam a book entitled *China Monumentis*, in which much attention is paid to the miraculous cross of Madras. *Guy Tachard*, who in 1711 visited Madras and gives a detailed description of the local situation and the traditions about Thomas.³⁹ *Assemanus*, who was curator of

37. *Ibid.* 94.

38. *Ibid.* 95.

39. Hosten, *op. cit.* p. 152-159.

the oriental library of the Vatican, and published three volumes between 1719 and 1728 under the title of *Bibliotheca Orientalis*. Michael Le Quien, who in 1740 published in Paris a three volume standard work on the eastern churches, entitled *Oriens Christianus*. J.F. Raulin, General of the Order of the Augustinians, who had many missionary establishments in India. Under the title of *Historia Ecclesiae Malabaricae* he published a very well documented scholarly book at Rome in 1745, in which a dissertation on the apostolate of Thomas is included.

As for the books and articles of the nineteenth and twentieth century, H. Hosten gives an incomplete bibliography of about thirty pages of titles. We have been able to consult only some of these works, and the literature is so enormous that even after ten years of study, we still feel that we are only at the beginning of a task to which we can see no end. Let us therefore conclude with the summing up given by the Syriac specialist Dr. Mingana in 1926:⁴⁰ "It is the constant tradition of the Eastern Church that the Apostle Thomas evangelised India. There is no historian, no poet, no breviary, no liturgy and no writer of any kind who, having the opportunity of speaking of Thomas, does not associate his name with India. Some writers also mention Parthia and Persia among the lands evangelised by him, but all of them are unanimous in the matter of India. To refer to all the Syrian and Christian Arab authors who speak of India in connection with Thomas, would therefore be equivalent to referring to all who have made mention of the name of Thomas. *Thomas and India are in this respect synonymous.*"

Exactly the same is true of the western writers from the origins of Christianity through the ages. A contrary opinion is not to be seen until we come to the scholars of the last century, who sometimes appear to have raised doubt to the highest article of faith. Doubters, at any rate, have come to the right place in Thomas.

40. A. Mingana, *op. cit.* 15-16.

Chapter 9

The Thomas-Christians

If inscriptions on stone can bear witness to the truth of a tradition, then the existence of a living community of people can do so even more positively. The Thomas-Christians of India insist that they owe their Christian faith to the preaching of the apostle Thomas. They call themselves *Mar Thoma Christiānikal*, or Mar Thoma Nazrānikal; they form a native Indian community.

They have a fixed place in Indian society and are scarcely to be distinguished from their compatriots in external appearance and customs. Their ancient churches, sometimes more than a thousand years old, show a relationship with the early Indian temples. Their solemn rites at births, wedding-feasts and funerals are virtually the same as those of the highest caste-Hindus. Because of their descent from a number of kings and Brahmin priests, they were at first regarded as aristocrats and the equals of the Brahmins. They formed, as it were, a caste of their own, and exercised a protectorate over other, lower castes. In Kerala, only the kings and the chief minister were able to exert authority over them. They had special privileges, which belonged only to the ruler and the nobles, disposed of their own army, and had their own jurisprudence. For many centuries, they lived in a social and ecclesiastical system peculiar to themselves.

Persecutions on the east coast were the reason why Christians from that quarter took refuge in Thiruvancode, near Cape Comorin, in the interior and at Malabar on the west coast, the present day state of Kerala.⁴¹ The name by which they were referred to in Indian society is most remarkable and very ancient. It is the same name which the Jews of Palestine gave to Jesus and His followers: Nazrani, Nazarenes. The name 'Christ' is derived from the Greek word

41. P. J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, London/Bombay, 1970, p. 29.

Christos the anointed one or Messiah. The Jews did not wish to consider Jesus as their Messiah, and so, with a certain contempt, they called Him 'the Nazarene', no doubt thinking of the popular saying: "can anything good come from Nazareth?" It is certain that it was the Jews in Kerala who helped to fasten this name of Nazarenes (Nazarānikal) on the Christians, even though at such a distance it lost its opprobrious connotation.

The local rulers used the same name, sometimes with the addition of Mapillai which means something like 'great sons, or noble Nazarenes' as a token of their respect. Their ecclesiastical languages were Syriac or Chaldean, which derive from Aramaic and are very closely related to it. It was the language in which the Son of God expressed Himself, the tongue used by the apostles, the language which, after Greek, was in those days the general commercial *lingua franca* of the east. The Thomas-Christians held fast, and rightly so, to this liturgical tongue and offered strong resistance when the Portuguese attempted to introduce Latin as the language of the church.

But history moves on and gradually, in our day, both Latin and Syriac are being superseded by the present day vernaculars. It would, however, be a great loss to Christendom if the link with the ancient tongues were to disappear entirely. From the point of view of ecclesiastical the Thomas-Christians were dependent on the eastern churches of Mesopotamia and Persia, and it was from there that they received support through the appointment of bishops and priests, especially in the late middle ages. Like those churches, they continued to regard the successor of Peter, the Pope of Rome, as the head of universal Christendom. This is evident from all their books, their ecclesiastical laws, and the pronouncements of many patriarchs of the east.⁴²

In Kerala the Thomas Christians' cultural and social importance is greater than their number would suggest, for because of their love of their fellows, their care for sufferers, old people, invalids and lepers, they are highly regarded by

42. *Ibid.* 46-54.

the whole of Indian society. These Christians have a long history of emergence, persecution, decline and revival behind them. They have been able to survive more than a thousand years of separation from the western Christian world. There is no other community which has been so explicit or so vehement in tracing its Christian faith back to the preaching of an apostle. Podipara writes, in triumph: "There are no rival traditions, nor rival tombs, nor rival Thomas-Christians in the whole world."

In addition to the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala, there were also St. Thomas Christian communities in several parts of Central and West Asia, in China, the Indonesian Islands especially in Sumatra, in Burma and South East Asia and Sri Lanka. The St. Thomas Cross was found out in more than one place in Sri Lanka and in the seventh century there were flourishing Christian Communities there. The Anuradhapuram Cross (Sri Lanka) is famous.⁴³ In China, the newly discovered monuments reveal the existence of flourishing christian communities there. Christianity reached China both through the Sea and through the land. Indonesian historians narrate that in the seventh century there were flourishing "Nestorian" Christian communities there.⁴⁴ All these point to the fact that Christianity was established in these regions in a very early period. If there were flourishing Christian communities in the seventh century, the Christianity must definitely be ancient. That point to the apostolate of St. Thomas. Although the presence of Christianity in the seventh century is not a conclusive proof of the apostolate of St. Thomas there, we can not close the chapter. New researches and findings will one day reveal the existence of an Apostolic Church in these regions. The Kerala tradition confirms that St. Thomas visited the South East Asian Countries and China. In course of time, these Christian communities either migrated to Kerala or became extinct.

43. *Ibid.* 28.

44. Hosten, *op. cit.* 474-5.

45. Mar Joseph Powathil, "Banduk Windum Vilikkunnu," in *Deepika* Aug. 5, 1990, p. 4.

PART V

WRITINGS OF THOMAS

Chapter I

Did Thomas Write Anything?

If one puts this question to biblical scholars in the west, they will answer, for the most part in the negative. Perhaps a few of them may refer to one or more works of an apocryphal nature, of which scarcely any reliable texts are available. The appearance of Thomas as an author is decisively rejected as incapable of proof.

The most important document which is brought forward by the east, is a Syriac version of the *Doctrine of the Apostles*, which has also been preserved in Armenian and Coptic versions. It summarises the literary activity of the apostles as follows: "James (the Younger) wrote from Jerusalem; Simon from the city of Rome, John from Ephesus, Mark from the great city of Alexandria, Andrew from Phrygia, Luke from Macedonia, and Judas-Thomas from India." Since those in the west do not accept that Thomas ever visited India, they naturally also reject this text. Here we touch the heart of the problem. When western scholars obstinately continue to repeat each other's assertions that we can know nothing with any certainty about the apostles and that their fates are wholly unknown to us, we have to see this as due to a lack of information; as an undervaluation of eastern publications, and as a proof of their stubborn prejudice. All too often they regard the west as the standard for all our knowledge of Christianity, with Rome as the central point and Latin as the generally accepted language of the Christian culture.

The reality is quite different. Not only did the origin of Christianity lie in the east, but in the first centuries, its centre of gravity was also in Jerusalem, Antioch and

1. ANF. 8, p. 670; F. Haase. *Apostel und Evangelisten in den Orientalischen Überlieferungen*, Münster, 1922, p. 50.

Alexandria. Not Latin, but Greek, was the generally used language of liturgy and Christian literature—even in Rome itself, until the third century. All the ancient and important works of Christianity were thus first written in Greek and not translated into Latin until later, and even then only partially.

In order to get at the truth about the apostles, and their writings, we thus have to go back to the ancient eastern sources. This is no easy task, because of the many linguistic problems, the abundance of contradictions and the lively eastern imagination, which has often obscured their original form. Very frequently, these works were altered to conform to the viewpoints of their transcriber, or made to serve the opinions of heretics. The numerous persecutions of the church have also hindered the transmission of the early texts in their original purity. The possession or concealment of Christian texts was often punishable by death. For all these reasons, the earliest history of the church and the work of the apostles, has come to be something of a vacuum. Not until the last century were many discoveries made in the east, so that the systematic study of the ancient writings was able, with difficulty, to get under way. As far as Thomas is concerned, we are in a very unfavourable position, owing to the spread of Islam and total destruction of his Church in several places.

A second important indication that Thomas was active as an author is to be found in the *Epistula Apostolorum*, which was found in Cairo in 1895 and probably dates from the second century. The apostles are presented as speaking, and saying:² "We John and Thomas, and Peter and Andrew and James and Philip and Bartholomew and Nathaniel, Judas the Zealot and Kephas, we have *written* to the churches of the east and the west, the north and the south, to tell you of and to proclaim to you our Lord Jesus Christ; how we

2. H. Duensing, *Epistula Apostolorum nach de m äthiopischen und Koptischen Text*, Bonn, 1925, p. 128.

heard him and touched Him, after He had risen from the dead, and how He revealed to us great things, astonishing and true."

There are two remarkable errors in this text: it is odd to find *Kephas* mentioned besides *Peter*, and it seems that the author or perhaps a later eastern transcriber was no longer aware that Peter (Petrus) was the Latin form of Kephas. The second error is the reference to *Thomas* in the second place, where he does not belong. As in the first text his proper place, in view of his youth, is at the end. In the original text we also encounter him under one of his many bynames, *Judas the Zealot*. This twofold reference is a proof of his great fame as an author in the first centuries, and it also shows clearly the confusion which had already grown up around his name at a very early date.

Thomas also appears as an author in the compilation known as the *Pistis Sophia* a title which we may translate as 'The Believing Wisdom' or 'Belief and Wisdom'. The texts which have been discovered date from third century and were written in Egypt, but probably go back to a Greek original and are also known under the name of the 'The Books of the Redeemer'. In them Jesus is described appearing to the apostles after the resurrection and saying: "Listen my worthy Philip, for I speak to you, for it is you and Thomas and Matthew who are charged to write down everything that I shall say and do, and all the things which you shall witness." In a later chapter Mary too confirms this command given to the three apostles, and points to the rule of Moses, that every transaction is to be confirmed by two or three witnesses - in this case, Philip, Thomas and Matthew.³

In the *Acts of Thomas*, the apostle also appears as a writer and even as the composer of several songs. A Syriac version gives a 'Song of Praise' by the apostle

3. H C. Puech, "Gnostische Evangelien und Verwandte Dokumente", in Hennecke - Schneemelcher, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, I. p. 194.

Thomas, a sort of psalm, an exalted hymn to God the Father as creator of the universe, and to Christ as the first-born Son of God.

In an Armenian list of works composed by Samuel of Anj there is reference to a gospel and a letter of Judas, which are said to have been by Thomas.⁴ The finding of a manuscript bearing the title *The Gospel of Thomas* at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945, has given rise to countless publications but it is less well known that Thomas is also the reputed "author" of an Apocalypse or revelation which deals with the signs which will precede the end of the world. Finally we mention the "Tales of the Childhood of Jesus," which were attributed to Thomas from the earliest ages of Christianity. An eastern tradition also says that Thomas wrote letters from India to Edessa, the city where he had begun his apostolate. In western literature we find the statement that Thomas wrote letters from Parthia to Rome, which is confirmed by the *Clementine Recognitions*.

All in all, this is an impressive list of witnesses to the "literary activities" of Thomas. We may thus close this chapter with a general statement that Christian tradition, in the west as well as the east, has always counted Thomas as an important writer. Which of these works are really by him, and whether they have been handed down to us in their original texts, is a question which deserves closer investigation. It is also of the very greatest importance to determine whether Thomas may also have been the author of some parts of the canonical Scriptures whose authorship has remained unknown or rightly open to doubt, up till now. That would provide a solid basis for further investigation.

4. F. Haase, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

Chapter 2

The Epistle of Jude

Here we are making a brief analysis of the Epistle of Jude. We assume that this epistle is the work of Thomas. We base our argument on the earlier explanation of the fact that the real name of Thomas was Judas. Among the apostles, there was, besides the traitor Judas Iscariot, only one other Judas, who, in various countries and at various times, came to bear a number of bynames, among them Thaddeus, Addeus, Lebbeus, Judas of James and Thomas.⁵ Since the epistle has always been generally ascribed to Judas, Thaddeus, if we follow a consistent reasoning we must inevitably accept Thomas as the author.

For our knowledge of the apostle Thomas it is thus of great importance to immerse ourselves in the content of this epistle, for it is above all in his writings that the personality of an author is most clearly expressed, and there too many things become clear which were formerly vague and uncertain. The epistle reveals a logical structure, is very clear and leaves no doubt about its purpose and aim. In the preamble, the author presents himself as follows:

From Judas, servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those whom God has called, who live in the love of God the Father and in the safe keeping of Jesus Christ. Mercy, peace and love be yours in fullest measure (Jude: 1-2).

As well as his name, Judas or Jude, the author also gives two further particulars about himself: he is a servant

5. See on detailed explanation above, p. 7-8

of Jesus Christ and brother of James, the first particular being spiritual in its nature, the second of bodily and fleshly nature. The word 'servant' describes Judas not as an ordinary Christian, but as an apostle (cf. Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; James 1:1-2; Peter 1:1). There is a distinction between the two capacities, as is evident above all from the phrasing of the Greek: of Jesus Christ the servant, but the brother of James.

Although Judas, like James was a brother of the Lord, he refers to himself only as a servant, following in this the example set by James the first bishop of Jerusalem, who in his epistle also said nothing of his relationship to the Saviour, although he was generally known to be a brother of the Lord. Both the apostles felt, and rightly, that relationship of merely earthly kin were no longer important, now that Christ was seated as the Son of God at the right hand of his Father. Instead of the blessing which Paul used, 'Grace and Peace' we find here the threefold 'Mercy, peace and love'.

The situation in which the readers of the epistle found themselves was a dangerous one, because of tempters leading them astray, and therefore they had need of God's mercy: (the faith) is in danger from certain persons who have wormed their way in, the very men whom Scripture long ago marked down for the doom they have incurred. They are the enemies of our religion, they pervert the free grace of our God into licentiousness, disowning Jesus Christ, our only master and Lord (Jude 4).

The betrayers present themselves as Christians while inwardly they do not believe in Christ. They are conscious betrayers, who have no other purpose but to mislead the faithful Christians. They are godless men, who have no reverence for God or for what is holy, but shamelessly practise evil, yielding to their unbounded sensual lusts, especially in sexual matters. The gospel contains the doctrine of the unearned or free grace of God, which saves us from sin and grants us a new life, in which we serve God with love as

his free children. The misleaders have twisted this doctrine and depict Christian freedom as the right to live a life without any restrictions. Not only do they infringe the laws of God but they also justify their conduct as theoretically warranted, appealing to their perversion of the doctrine of God's grace.

Judas reminds them of three examples from the past from which it is evident that God will unfailingly punish the sinners and misleaders with a terrible punishment. Sodom and Gomorrah are mentioned to indicate the nature of the vice. They are called servants of the flesh, contemners of everything that is holy. They pour abuse on things they do not understand. Of supernatural things, like God, Christ, the angels, the Kingdom of God, of all these things the worldly tempters have no understanding. Like the brute beasts they confine their understanding to that which they know by natural instinct or their senses, that which has to do with their sexual life, with eating, drinking and all their other carnal pleasures. They forget not only their Christian dignity but also their human dignity and put themselves on a level with the brute beasts and therein is 'their undoing' (verse 10). Then follows a reference to three terrifying examples from the history of Israel, i. e. Cain, Balaam and Korah; Cain the contemner and mocker of the holy, and the murderer of his brother; Balaam, who fell into treachery and advised the enemy of Israel to lead them astray into idolatry through vice; Korah, who rebelled against Moses and proclaimed an unbounded freedom.

The condemnation of the tempters which Judas delivers is exceptionally forceful and strongly worded: "These men are a blot on your love feasts where they eat and drink without reverence. They are shepherds who take care only of themselves. They are clouds carried away by the wind without giving rain, trees that in season bear no fruit, dead twice over and pulled up by the roots. They are fierce waves of the sea foaming shameful deeds; They are stars that have wandered from their course and the place for ever reserved for them is blackest darkness" (12-13).

He aims to warn his readers in order to protect them from contamination. They must bear in mind the prophecy that such people would occur in their communities. He calls his readers to have faith, and to pray to the Holy Spirit: they must keep themselves in the love of God and look forward to the day when our Lord Jesus Christ in His mercy will give eternal life (verse 21). They must set right the doubters, and rescue others by snatching them from the fire. They must have pity on some, and on others their pity must be mixed with fear, hating even the very clothing which is tainted with sensuality (verse 22-23).

After pointing out in strong terms the dangers which threaten his readers, the author is unwilling to close without first doing honour to God, on whom everything depends: "Now to the One who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of His glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our Saviour through Jesus Christ, be glory and majesty, might and authority before all time, now and for evermore. Amen!"

Here in this chapter we made a small analysis of this small epistle. We will have occasion to refer back to this epistle again when we analyse the other writings, related to Thomas.

Chapter 3

The Epistle to the Hebrews

This epistle, addressed to the Jewish Christians, is one of the most important of the New Testament, both by virtue of its length and the lofty nature of its contents. Its main purpose was to protect the Jewish Christians from a relapse into Judaism, then enjoying a period of flourishing national consciousness in the struggle against the Romans. The Christians, who had taken to heart the prophecies of

the Saviour, held themselves aloof and had to suffer persecution as a result of their apparent lack of patriotic feeling. So far as its temporal fortunes went, Christianity had met only humiliation and scorn. Its worship was very sober and had to be held largely in private houses, often in conditions of great secrecy.

This was in marked contrast to the services of the temple, which were conducted with an impressive display of pomp. The danger of a relapse from the faith was present everywhere. The loyalty of many Christians to the doctrine of Christ left much to be desired. There were signs of relaxation in the spiritual field, of indifference to higher values, and a dramatic fall in attendance at worship. The mutual love of the faithful had suffered, and their devotion to good works was undermined. The epistle was intended to offer a counter-attraction to the temptations of Judaism, and it praises the superiority of Christianity.

In great detail it reveals the exaltation of Christ above the mediators of the Old Covenant, Moses and the angels. The high priesthood of Christ stands far above the priesthood of the Old Covenant, just as His sacrifice on the cross infinitely excels those of the Old Testament. The author demands greater faithfulness in spiritual matters, calls on his readers to show mutual love, hospitality and purity in marriage, to shun covetousness, to imitate the earlier leaders of the faith and to obey its present leaders.

The elegant style, with its carefully composed and euphonious periods, the calm and harmonious development of its themes, its careful choice of words and its classic sobriety, gives the epistle to the Hebrews the place of honour, in a literary point of view, among the writings of the New Testament. It is in marked contrast to the language and style of the epistles of Paul.

It is sufficient to cite the magnificent and monumentally structured opening sentence: "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by

the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than them. For unto which of the angels said He at any time 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?' (Heb. 1:1-5).

There is no other epistle in the New Testament which raises so many questions and has given rise to so many differences of opinion. The main question, with which that of the time and place of origin is connected, is: who was its author? Among non-catholics, it is almost universally accepted that Paul had nothing whatever to do with this epistle, though they do admit that Hebrews shows many similarities to the intellectual thought-world of Paul. Origen said: 'It is not without reason that the ancients have handed down this epistle to us as one of Paul's, but who really wrote it, only God knows.' These words, from such an authoritative writer as Origen, have in fact operated to put a stop to further speculation.

It may seem rash that I, a layman in this field, should dare to attribute this letter to the apostle Thomas, and to suggest that he wrote it from India about the year 63. As far as I am aware, no-one in the west has ever thought of looking to Judas-Thomas for the solution of this problem. Invariably, scholars have sought to find the author within the circle around Paul. After a deep study, lasting several years, I believe I can cite the following arguments in support of my hypothesis:

1. That *an apostle* must have been the author of this letter, is evident from the general way in which it came to be accepted into the canon of the New Testament. Clement of Rome who had known the apostles personally,

cites the epistle in the same way as the other books of the holy Scriptures. An epistle of later date, by an unknown author, would never have won such general acceptance.

2. From the content of the epistle, which is full of specifically Jewish subjects, and constant reference to the Old Testament, it appears that it must have been an apostle who had very close connexions with the *Jewish-Christians*, especially those in Jerusalem.

As the brother of James, the first bishop of Jerusalem, and the cousin of Simon, the second bishop, Thomas was indeed very intimately concerned with affairs at the centre of Jewish Christianity. In the epistle, we find an allusion to the death of James: "Remember your leaders, those who first proclaimed God's message to you; and reflecting upon the outcome of their life and work, follow the example of their faith" (Heb. 13:7).

After the death of James, much confusion was caused by one Thebulis or Thibutis who had hoped to be chosen as the successor of James. If Simon, a cousin of Thomas, was really the second bishop of Jerusalem, then it would seem logical for Thomas to have used all his authority and power to come to his aid. This comes very clearly to the fore in these words: "Obey your leaders and defer to them; for they are tireless in their concern for you, as men who must render an account. Let it be a happy task for them, and not pain and grief, for that would bring you no advantage. Pray for us: for we are convinced that our conscience is clear; our one desire is always to do what is right (Heb. 13: 17-18).

In this carefully composed epistle, these lines appear rather abrupt and unbalanced, if one does not know the author, for by his sudden transition to 'pray for us' he seems to place himself alongside and among the 'leaders'. The text can only be explained and understood if there was a very close relationship between the author and the first and second bishops of Jerusalem, and that was indeed the case for Judas-Thomas.

3. The author was not only an apostle, but one who had *travelled*, as is evident from the following text: "All the more earnestly I ask for your prayers, that I may be restored to you the sooner" (Heb. 13:19).

From this verse it is clear that the author was absent, that he wished to come to Jerusalem, but apparently because of the great distance was not able to do so, and that therefore he had set down in writing everything which he wished to say for the preservation of the faith. It was Thomas who was the traveller *par excellence* among the apostles, who visited the far flung Jewish communities, yet because of his family links, still remained intimately concerned with Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish Christendom.

4. The allusion to *God as a builder* is one which might well be expected from a man like Thomas, who was originally a carpenter, mason and architect: "(Christ) was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, in as much as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man, but he that built all things is God" (Heb. 3:2).

5. The author's words about *faith* are most striking: "And what is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see. It is for their faith that the men of old stand upon record. By faith we perceive that the universe was fashioned by the word of God, so that the visible came forth from the invisible" (Heb. 11:1-3).

It is as if the apostle, who, in the west, was to receive the contemptuous by name of 'doubting Thomas' here wishes to excuse his former lack of faith. For he had refused to believe in the resurrection of Christ, until he saw the wounds of the nails in Christ's hands. He goes into great detail about the *profound faith* of figures from the Old Testament, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses (Heb. 11:4-40). Jesus is the beginning and end of our faith, for he endured the cross, making light of its disgrace (Heb. 12:2).

6. Since in the previous chapter, we ascribed the epistle of Jude to Thomas, it may naturally be expected that both epistles, being by the same author, should *display a far reaching agreement* in ideas and style.

That is indeed the case. As far as their main trend is concerned, both epistles reveal a complete agreement. Both of them share the same pure and carefully chosen Greek, the same vocabulary, the same familiarity with Jewish customs and concepts, the same sentence-structure, the same figures of speech, the same use of deliberate alliteration, and the same choice of abstract phrase to refer to God. In both epistles, we find similies derived from nature, which are wholly absent from the writings of Paul. Even more important: both epistles have in common a number of words which occur no where else in the New Testament. The irrefutable conclusion is that both epistles must have had the same author.

The question arises, whether the apostle Thomas had sufficient knowledge of Greek to write these masterpieces of fine Greek prose. We must remember that from the commencement of his lengthy apostolate he had constantly frequented the merchants who traded with the east, and visited all the centres of trade and culture where Greek was the *lingua franca*. Almost everywhere in their synagoges outside Palestine, the Jews used the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. This version had also reached India along the normal trade routes and was in use among the Jewish communities there. The citations from the Old Testament are taken from this Greek translation, all the more proof that the epistle was written from the diaspora. It is self-evident that, for Thomas too, Greek must have been his second mother tongue, and that he was in a position to acquire great skill in it.⁶

7. His brother James had previously addressed a message, as leader of the Jewish Christians, to the twelve

6. See *Revue Biblique*, 48 (1939) 506-529

tribes in exile, by which was meant the Jews of the diaspora. It was an unusually forceful and edifying message, and it too belongs to the accepted canon of the New Testament. It is thus entirely logical that after James' death, his brother should have emerged as *the spokesman of the Jewish Christians*, and that he should have built on the theme that had been the occasion of James' martyrdom: the proclamation of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ and the exaltation of Christianity above Judaism, the main theme of the epistle to the Hebrews.

8. The connection between these events and the two epistles of Thomas becomes even clearer if we remember that he himself *refers to* it in the epistle of Jude.

Immediately after his opening words of greeting, and after presenting himself as a servant of Christ and a brother of James, he says: "My friends, I was fully engaged in writing to you about our salvation - which is yours no less than ours - when it became urgently necessary to write at once and appeal to you to join the struggle in defence of the faith, the faith which God entrusted to his people once and for all (Jude, v.3).

This urgent call to take up the struggle is the epistle of Jude; while the careful exposition of common salvation, on which he was engaged, is the epistle to the Hebrews. The epistle of Jude addresses itself principally to the Jewish Christians in and around Jerusalem. The epistle to the Hebrews was directed to the Jews and the Jewish Christians in general, although its closing chapters had clearly been influenced by the alarming events in Jerusalem. Both letters were thus written at about the same time, and sent together, both to Jerusalem and to Rome. The date attributed to them by many exegetes, around 64 A.D., tallies with the need to allow some time between the death of James and the composition of the epistles and their sending from India.

Our arguments become clinching if we point out the allusion to the epistle of Jude which we find at the

close of the epistle to the Hebrews: "I pray you brothers, bear with this exhortation, for I have written to you in a short letter" (Hebr. 12:22). The epistle of Jude is indeed one of the shortest in the New Testament. After the detailed exposition of the faith in the other epistle, the exhortation in the epistle of Jude could be kept short and to the point.

If these two letters, which show such a striking similarity, are indeed both by Thomas, then we can find in them complete confirmation of the description of the man and his character which we gave in the first part of this book. Furthermore, his influence on the entire church is then convincingly established, so that a more conclusive rehabilitation of this forgotten and often reviled apostle, can scarcely be imagined. An important part of the history of the church thus gains in clarity and perspective.

Chapter 4

The Didache

When I was studying the epistle of Jude, I found many similarities between the epistle of Jude and the *Didache*. Many scholars also have spoken about it. F. Maier several times referred to it. Zahn observed that, part of the *Didache* is based upon the epistle of Jude. Their similarity in sentence structure is undoubtedly striking. Bardenhewer states that in a work which dates from about the year 300, part of the *Didache* was transcribed verbatim, and attributed to the apostle Judas of James. That was reason enough to concern ourselves with the work which is known under its Greek name, the *Didache*, which means Teaching or Doctrine.⁷

7. Its full name is "Didache thou Kuriou dia ton dōdeka apōstolōn tois ethnēsīn."

The original title indicates that we are dealing with a document of the greatest importance, in which the apostles function merely as mediators in the transmission of that which the Lord Jesus Christ had entrusted to their care. The document purports to be derived from the apostles, who are said to have composed it after discussion among themselves, or perhaps to have given it their approval after one of their number had composed it. In the first centuries it was considered to belong to the canon of the Scriptures. As such it was frequently cited, and was familiar to virtually all the early Christian authors. Thus, it must have been written by one of the apostles. It was written at a time when the apostles were still fully active, and before the majority of the gospels had been composed. It is intimately related to the first Pentecost of the Church, which filled the apostles with the Holy Spirit and inspired them with their unbounded zeal to work for the expansion of the Church, God's Kingdom on earth. The commandments which are found within it are among the oldest in Christianity.

It is difficult to summarise its rich and varied content in a few words. The basis of the work is its treatment of the one God, the Creator, the Almighty who rules over all things. Christ is our Lord and saviour, the Son of God, the God of David. He is present in His church and will return at the day of judgment. He has spoken to us through His glad tidings, the gospels. Through Him, we know the truth and the life eternal, the faith and our immortality.

The *Didache* also gives detailed rules for the conduct of life and the relations between men. It prescribes the liturgy for baptism, it determines the days of fasting and lays down that we are to pray three times a day in the words of the prayer which the Lord taught us: the Our Father. It gives prayers for communion, the blessing of the chalice and the breaking of bread. It sets out rules of ecclesiastical discipline for the judgement of those who shall teach the faith, the conduct of the apostles, and the testing of those who prophesy. It deals also with the duty of hospitality towards brothers in the faith, the way of life of the church's

ordained servants, worship on Sundays, the election of bishops and deacons, and the brotherly admonition to be given to those who go astray.

The work ends with a warning to the faithful to be ready for the last day, it describes the events which will precede the end of the world, the kingdom of antichrist, the signs of the truth and of the second coming of the Lord. It formed the basis and starting point for the further development of the doctrines, dogmas and moral theology of the church, for her liturgy and her revelation. It was generally accepted and treasured for its excellence in composition and its sobriety of expression. It left its traces everywhere, for fourteen centuries. Abbot Pirminius of Reichenau, and St. Boniface, the apostle of Western Europe, an Englishman who was murdered with his followers at Dokkum in Friesland, made use of it in their sermons. Because of the development of the organisation of the church and its liturgy, several parts of the work become rather antiquated, and were amplified or replaced by more up to date treatments, which took over the former task of the *Didache*. In the fourteenth century it disappeared from history entirely, only to be recovered in 1883 by Kyr. Bryennios, the Metropolitan of Nicodemia, in a monastery in the Phanar district of Constantinople.

Its language is Greek, with strong Jewish influences. About a hundred citations can be traced back to the Old Testament, and as in the epistle to the Hebrews they are derived from the Septuagint translation. More than two hundred citations have been taken from the New Testament, but it is striking that these quotations are hardly ever literal. They share the general form and content, but have a vocabulary and a character of their own. As a possible date of composition, we would suggest immediately after the death of Mary, around the year 50, when the apostles were together and could have discussed the content of the work.

E. Jacquier presents an analysis of the probable author whose name was then wholly unknown to him:⁸ "He was

8. *Didache*: in *DTC*, 1.2 (1923), Paris, p. 1683.

certainly a Christian of Jewish origin. This is proved by his knowledge of the Old Testament, his rabbinical method of reasoning, the numerous allusions to Jewish customs, and the absence of any polemic against the Jews. Moreover, he was a colleague of the apostles, one of those who had heard them; he lived in their milieu or perhaps even in intimacy with James the Less; for both in its choice of subjects and in its predominant spirit, his work is reminiscent in more than one place of the letter written by that apostle. For him, Christianity is above all a moral doctrine, full of love and brotherhood. The author had held a religious function, for he is familiar with the forms of the liturgy."

That is Jacquier's opinion. Everything tallies wonderfully well. Jacquier could not have known in 1931 that the author was indeed a brother of James and himself an apostle. The place of origin of the work is not known. Certain expressions indicate that it was written in a district which was hilly and lacking in water. Several scholars have thought of Syria, in this connection, but may we not also think of Persia or India? It is possible that the author of Didache was the author of the "Epistle of Jude." At least this much is certain: the author of Didache has drawn largely from the epistle of Jude; the dependence is undeniable. But the identity of the authorship has yet to be substantiated. But we dare to propose it as a hypothesis.

Chapter 5

The Epistles of Peter

The influence of James and of his brother Judas-Thomas, is underlined even more clearly, if we look at the epistles which are attributed to Peter.

The first epistle of Peter reminds us in many places of the epistle of James. Professor Keulers remarks that a direct relationship between them is undeniable:⁹ "Especially close, is the connection between I Peter and James. Besides their great similarity in expression and method of presentation, there are many other points of contact between the two letters." It is known that Peter did not write himself, but had this done for him by his assistants, who acted as his secretaries and interpreters, and who were more familiar with Greek. Thus, Mark wrote down the texts which he had heard from the lips of Peter, and which were the basis on which he composed his Gospel. The first epistle of Peter was composed, as Peter himself says, with the aid of Silvanus, also known as Silas. We are told that the man who put the second epistle into writing was the young Clemens Romanus.

Even more striking is the agreement between the second Epistle of Peter and that of Jude. Let us listen once more to Professor Keulers:¹⁰ The agreement with the epistle of Jude is so great that it cannot possibly be ascribed to mere chance. The only explanation is that one of the two authors made use of the work of the other. Whereas previously it was accepted that the epistle of Peter was the earlier in date, now a days most authors believe the epistle of Jude

9. J. Keulers, *De boeken van het Nieuwe Testament*, VII. Roermond, 1946 p. 108.

10. *Ibid.* 85.

to be older. The evidence for this latter opinion is indeed convincing. The text of Jude is more detailed and contains several individual idiosyncracies, while the second epistle of Peter is shorter and of a more general nature. Difficult and obscure expressions in Jude are simplified and clarified by Peter. Historical examples given in Jude are arranged in chronological order in Peter's epistle. All these things only become explicable if Peter incorporated the already existing epistle of Jude in his own work. It must be observed that the reflections of Jude, which were intended for the Jewish-Christians were made applicable by Peter to his readership, which consisted for the most part of Christians converted from paganism."

In order to make this resemblance clear to everyone, we give a citation which recalls the moral corruption of the tempters and deceivers. Compare II Peter 2: 10-14 with Jude, verse 10 *et seq.*: "reckless and headstrong, they are not afraid to insult celestial beings, whereas angels, for all their superior strength and might, employ no insults in seeking judgement against them before the Lord. These men are like brute beasts, born in the course of nature to be killed. They pour abuse on things they do not understand; like the beasts they will perish, suffering hurt for the hurt they have inflicted. To carouse in broad daylight is their idea of pleasure, while they sit with you at table they are an ugly blot on your company, because they revel in their own deceptions. They have eyes for nothing but women, eyes never at rest from sin. They lure the unstable on to their ruin, past masters in mercenary greed, God's curse is upon them." And this passage also (II Peter 2: 17-19): "These men are springs that give no water, mists driven by a storm; the place reserved for them is blackest darkness. They utter big, empty words and make of sensual lusts and debauchery a bait to catch those who have barely begun to escape from their heathen environment. They promise them freedom, but are themselves slaves of corruption."

The genuineness of this epistle has been seriously disputed, because of the striking difference in vocabulary

between it and the first epistle of Peter. They have only a hundred words in common, while 369 words in the first epistle are not to be found in the second. The second letter has 230 words which are not found in the first. The difference in education and background of the two interpreters may be responsible for this. Perhaps the basis of the first epistle, the letter of James, was originally written in Aramaic, while the words taken from the epistle of Jude were taken from the Greek. That could explain the great difference in vocabulary.

Others doubt the authenticity of the epistle because they find it difficult to imagine that Peter, the head of Christianity and the prince of the apostles, should have committed a sort of plagiarism by taking over the words of an unknown Jude. Even though the letter has borrowed a great deal in its structure, purpose and words, yet it still displays particular characteristics which point to Peter as its author. The exordium reads: "Simeon Peter, servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, the same precious faith as we have..." The use of the form Simeon is a proof of the antiquity of the epistle. In the New Testament, the name Simeon was very early replaced by the more familiar Simon.

There is also a clear indication of his approaching death. As his last exhortation to the faithful, Peter wishes to give them further warning, and to do so he uses an image from Greek literature, that man has no permanent dwelling place in this world, but as it were lives in a tent which can soon be broken up: "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tent, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me. But I will see to it that after I am gone, you will have means of remembering these things at all times, (i. e. by the letter) (II Peter 1: 14-15).

To prove the truth of his witness he appeals to something which only Peter, James and John were aware of:

the transfiguration on Mount Tabor. They alone could claim to have witnessed the majesty of Christ as Son of God on that occasion. Peter says: "It was not on tales artfully spun that we relied when we told you of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and His coming: we saw Him with our own eyes in majesty, when at the hands of God the Father He was invested with honour and glory, and there came to him from the sublime Presence a voice which said: This is my Son, my beloved, on whom my favour rests." This voice from heaven we ourselves heard; when it came, we were with Him on the sacred mountain" (II Peter 1:16-18). A threefold proof of the authenticity of this epistle, and its instigator, Peter.

Is the epistle then completely reliable in every respect? No, for in my own personal opinion, a capital error has crept into it. In chapter 3, verse 15, the name of Paul suddenly appears without any occasion for it. We may wonder what Paul had to do with this reworking of the epistle of Jude. His name is a foreign element in the text. It is completely illogical that Peter, after repeated references to the epistle of Jude, should suddenly begin to speak of Paul. In the original text, the name of Judas must have stood at this point, and later transcribers, who no longer knew anything of an apostle Jude, as an author, have tried to improve the text by altering the name of Judas to Paul—an obvious error, since the names of Peter and Paul were so closely linked in Rome.

Let us consider a moment, and put ourselves in Peter's shoes. He was already in prison, and awaiting his execution. There he received the news of the apostasy of many of the Jewish Christians. There too he learned of the epistle to the Hebrews and the epistle of Jude. Since the deceivers were also active among the Christian converts from paganism, Peter felt himself called on to send them a warning also: In the difficult situation in which he found himself, he gave instructions for the epistle to be adapted, so as to be better understood by the formerly pagan Christians.

After adding to it various ideas of his own, he also wanted to pay some attention to the original author, and to thank him for his epistle. He did so in these words: "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience with us is our salvation, as Judas our friend and brother said when he wrote to you with his inspired wisdom. And so he does in all his other letters, wherever he speaks of this subject, though they contain some obscure passages, which the ignorant and unstable misinterpret to their own ruin, as they do the other scriptures" (II Peter 3: 15-16)

These words refer to the end of the world, about which Thomas wrote more than Paul—we may point to the *Didache* (ch: 16). In the very first sentence of the epistle to the Hebrews, it is stated that we are living in the latter days of the world. The coming of Christ forms the beginning of the latter days, the final phase of human history. The too literal interpretation of this concept of the 'day' has been the origin of much confusion, which Peter wishes to remove in his last testament to the faithful, by explaining: "And here is one point, my friends, which you must not lose sight of: with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling His promise, as some suppose, but that He is very patient with you, because it is not His will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance" (II Peter 3: 8—9).

If our assumption is correct, that the original reference to Judas was replaced by one to Paul, then this is the key to the solution of many other virtually insoluble problems with which biblical scholars have wrestled. It opens the door to the discovery of the other writings of Thomas. If our version is correct, then Peter is saying that he has read *all* the writings of Judas-Thomas, and this little word *all* indicates that there must certainly have been more than three of them. Peter also gives us valuable information about their contents: all the works of Judas-Thomas allude to the latter days-to the dawn of the final period of human history.

Chapter 6

The Stories of the Childhood of Jesus

So far we have concerned ourselves with the New Testament writings. We have suggested that "the Epistle of Jude" "the Epistle to the Hebrews" are from St. Thomas. We have also suggested that there is a great influence of the Epistle of Jude on II Peter. The same could be spoken of II Timothy written by Luke at the direction of Paul. Luke has drawn much from the Epistle of Jude just as Clement drew much from the Epistle of Jude in writing II Peter. We also proposed that there are evidences of dependence on Jude in the Didache.

Now we turn our attention to a few Apocryphal Writings. Apocryphal writings have not been included in the canon, to which belongs the four gospels, the epistles of Paul and the other apostles, twenty-seven books in all. As well as these recognised writings, there were from the very beginning a great many other works in circulation which also dealt with the life of Jesus and the apostles, but whose origin was uncertain. Luke, in the very first sentence of his gospel, indicates that there had already been many before him who had given an account of the events as they had been handed down by eye witnesses and servants of the word. What these writings were, we do not know, but it is certain that Luke knew them, and it may be that he borrowed something from them. This literature was very extensive: some of it was older than the four gospels while other parts attempted to expand the gospel narratives by relating details not to be found in them. Their rejection by the community of the church meant that there was no institution which acted to preserve the purity of the texts. Every translator or redactor altered what he thought necessary or useful, omitted or added whatever he felt would serve his purpose. Thus there arose a definite literary genre,

a sort of popular literature in which the marvellous element came to occupy the most prominent place, and popular fantasy was given free rein.

The work with which this chapter deals received the name of "Stories of the Childhood of Jesus." It is a summary of a number of wonderful events alleged to have happened in the childhood of Jesus, between His fifth and twelfth years. Some scholars believe that the collection of stories has some connection with the penetration of Christianity to Persia and India, and that several eastern legends have been incorporated into it. Others think that its origin must be sought in Egypt, among the Christians who had been converted from paganism, and who had no knowledge of the real events. A third possibility is that we are dealing with simple childish tales, in which it was not their historical accuracy but much more their lively narrative style and appeal to young listeners, which were paramount.

The work is divided into nineteen short chapters, of which we shall cite a few in their entirety: 1. I, Thomas, the Israelite, proclaim and make known to you all, brothers of the heathen, the great deeds of the childhood of our Lord Jesus which He performed in our country, where He was born. 2. When the boy Jesus was five years old, He was once playing by the ford of a stream. He guided the stream into little channels, and made it at once clear, and with a single word He commanded the water. After making some clay supple, he formed twelve birds from it. It was on a Sabbath day when He did this. There were many other children playing with him. When a Jew saw what Jesus had done in play on the Sabbath, he immediately went to tell his father Joseph: look, your son is by the stream he has taken clay and made twelve little birds of it. He has desecrated the Sabbath. When Joseph came to the place, he saw it and scolded Him saying: Why do you do what you may not do on a Sabbath? Jesus, however, clapped His hands and called to the birds: Away with you!

They opened their feathers and flew away, chattering loudly. When the Jews saw this, they were amazed, went away and told the elders what they had seen Jesus do.

3. The son of the scribe Hannan was once playing with Jesus. He took a willow branch and with it he broke the dam which Jesus had built to collect the water, so that it flowed away. When Jesus saw what the child had done He became angry and said: You stupid, godless fool, what have you to do with my pond and water? See, now you will dry out like a tree and bear no more leaves, roots or fruits. At once, the child completely dried up. Jesus went away and returned to the house of Joseph. The parents of the dead child took him in their arms, weeping, and brought him to Joseph accusing him of having a son who could do such things.

To our taste, some of these stories are so coarse that for that reason alone they are not worthy of belief. Every word which the child Jesus utters, is immediately fulfilled; To a child who, while running, had grazed Jesus' shoulder, He said: You will not go any further, and the child fell down dead (4). The parents who came to Joseph to complain of Jesus' behaviour were struck blind (5). Great difficulties also arose with the teachers, for the child was far wiser than they were. He accused the teachers of not even knowing what the letter A meant. He brought them to despair by putting questions to them which they were unable to answer (6 and 7).

We ask ourselves, with amazement, why the child in these stories is so vengeful. It is a question of eastern and Jewish mentality, in which vengeance is not only a justified and legal affair, but even considered as an obligation. Joseph strikes Jesus a blow on the ear, but Jesus is angry and says: It is enough to look at me, and you don't need to strike me. Don't you know I am yours? Do not hurt me. Even so, Joseph's warnings had the result that those whom Jesus had accused or punished, were restored to health (8).

Of quite a different character are the following cases: 9. A few days later Jesus was playing on a terrace above a house and one of the children who was playing with him fell off the terrace and died. The other children, who saw this, ran away and Jesus remained behind alone. When the parents of the dead child arrived, they accused Jesus of having made their dead child fall. Jesus said to them: I did not do it. They were angry and blamed him. He jumped down from the terrace, stood by the body and cried out in a loud voice Zenon (that was the dead child's name) stand up. Tell me if it was I who made you fall. The child arose and said: No, Lord, you did not make me fall, but you have restored me to life. The onlookers were struck with amazement; the child's parents glorified God for the miracle and prayed to Jesus.

13. His father was a carpenter, and he made ploughs and yokes. A rich man gave him an order to make a bed for him. Because one of the most important planks was shorter than the piece next to it, they did not know what to do. Then the child Jesus said to Joseph: Lay the two planks on the ground and place them flush with each other at your end. Jesus went to the other end, grasped the shorter piece of wood and pulled it, making it just as long as the other. His father Joseph stood in amazement, embraced Him, kissed Him saying: How fortunate I am that God has granted me this son.

Attempts to entrust the child to another teacher remained fruitless. One teacher struck the child out of irritation with His questions, and was immediately punished himself (14). Another teacher was more sensible, but wisely declined to teach Him any longer, sending him back to Joseph (15).

There follow several more miraculous cures: James, who was dying of the bite of a poisonous snake, was healed (16). A small child which to the great distress of its mother had died, was brought back to life (17). While a house was being built a builder fell dead from

it; Jesus took his hand and said: I say to you man, stand up and go on with your work. When the people saw this, they were astonished and said: This lad is from heaven, for He has saved many from death and will be able to bring salvation his whole life long (18).

Of course, all these tales are in conflict with the tradition and with the gospel of John, which relates that Jesus performed His first miracle at His mother's request, at the marriage feast in Cana, where he changed water into wine (John 2:11). For us, it is interesting to learn that this work has been ascribed to the apostle Thomas. A Greek manuscript bears the title: "The Writing of the Apostle Thomas about the behaviour of the Lord during His Years of Childhood." It seems that it was still known then that Thomas was a relative of Jesus, and could be considered in a position to relate something authoritative about the childhood of Jesus. Also noteworthy is the title: "Thomas the Philosopher from Israel tells of the Childhood of the Lord." Why should Thomas be described as a wise man or philosopher? Not because of these garbled and childish stories, surely! Was it known that Thomas was the author of other, and much more philosophical writings, such as the Epistle to the Hebrews?

The Book concludes with a story which sounds very familiar to us: 19. When He was twelve years old, his parents went to Jerusalem as was their custom, to celebrate the feast of the passover. After the passover they set off home again with their travelling companions. While they were on their way home, Jesus went back to Jerusalem. His parents thought that he was among their companions. When they had gone one day's journey, they looked for him among their relatives. But when they did not find him, they were dismayed and turned back to look for him in the city. On the third day, they found Him sitting in the Temple in the midst of the teachers, listening to them explain the Law, and putting questions to them. All of them looked at Him, and were amazed how He, a small boy, could reduce the oldest men and the teachers to

silence, while He expounded the main points of the Law and the prophets to them. His mother went to Him and said: Why have you done this to us my child; see, we have been worried looking for you. Jesus said: Why did you look for me? Did you not know that I must be in the house of my Father? The scribes and the pharisees said to her: Are you the mother of this boy? She said: Yes I am. Then they said: Blessed are you among women, for the Lord has blessed the fruit of your body. For we have never seen or heard such glory, such virtue and such wisdom before. Jesus stood up, followed His mother and was obedient to His parents. He grew in wisdom, in age, and in love. To Him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This last chapter, which does not occur in all the manuscripts, may have been added later. For that reason we have given it a separate place, and devoted extra attention to it. Many words are literally the same as the gospel of Luke, 2:41-52, yet there are some remarkable differences. Was this story borrowed from Luke, or do both narratives derive from another or older source? Let us quote what Professor L. Hermans has to say about it. He was the successor of Dr Jos, Keulers at the Great Seminary at Roermond, as lecturer in exegesis, and made a special study of the childhood narratives in the early part of the gospel of Luke. In his book, *De Bijbel over Jezus' geboorte en jeugd*, (The Bible on the birth and childhood of Jesus) he writes: ¹¹

"From the pure and refined Greek of the elegantly written prologue, we suddenly come, from Luke 1:5 onwards to a story which is semitic in its colour and its atmosphere; a story which impresses us as decidedly Jewish and Old Testament in its language, its style and its assumptions. This semitically - coloured language and style made earlier scholars suspect on interpolation, as if the childhood narrative had only been added to the gospel of Luke later. Most

11. L. Hermans, *Bijbel over Jezus' Geboorte en jeugd*, Roermond, 1960, p. 17-18.

exegetes have now drawn back from such radical hypotheses and acknowledge that these chapters belong to the work of Luke, at least in its definitive redaction. On the other hand there is no agreement on the explanation of this semitic character. Some of them believe that these semitisms can be put down to an imitation of the language of the Septuagint. Others, however believe that we have to do with the semitisms of translation: that Luke made use of one or more Hebrew or Aramaic documents, which he included, perhaps after a slight editing process in the definitive redaction of his gospel. The arguments for a written Hebrew original appear to be gaining ground among exegetes. The hellenist Luke who at any event came to Christianity from a pagan background, can hardly have been the author of these first two chapters. Their Palestinian local colour points to a Jewish - Christian, who was familiar with Jude, Jerusalem and the Temple of the Jews. The Semitic style which is still recognisable in the Greek text of Luke 1:2, suggests to us someone whose mother tongue was Hebrew or Aramaic. Furthermore, we continually observe the spirit and religious feeling of pious Judaism, which felt itself bound to the temple and the law, and laid a strong emphasis on the Old Testament laws and customs which Jesus' family observed, for example the dedication in the Temple and the pilgrimages to it. Everything seems to point to the original narrator having been not a Greek but a Jew, who had gone over to Christianity, and who is possibly to be looked for in the priestly circles of Jerusalem."

Professor Hermans also writes: ¹²

"Luke's preface also bears witness to his great reverence for the facts as they happened, which he had investigated minutely from the very beginning. Apparently he collected as many testimonies as possible, and like the evangelists who preceded him, he put himself under the authority of the first eye-witnesses and preachers. In compiling his gospel account of the childhood of Jesus, he must in all probability

12. *Ibid.* p. 69.

have made use of Hebrew documents, which in their turn went back, via eye-witnesses, to certain facts in the youth of John the Baptist and of Jesus. Naturally, it is in the family circle of these two men that we must look for these witnesses. Luke's stories of His childhood thus seem, albeit vaguely and only implicitly, to point to several persons among the relatives of John and Jesus who were witnesses of the events.

In our summary personal description of him, we established that Thomas was of priestly descent, and came from a very pious and orthodox Jewish milieu; that he was a brother of James the Less, who had access to the holy of holies, where he constantly prayed. Do not all the circumstances lead us to the conviction that Thomas must have been the author of the source from which Luke derived his information, and of which an original fragment may be preserved in section 19 of the Childhood Narratives?

Chapter 7

The Origin of the Acts of Thomas

As we remarked at the beginning of this study, the narrative known as the 'Acts of Thomas', though handed down faithfully through the centuries, forms a rather unequal and loosely connected whole. Sometimes its account of the activities of Thomas strikes us as reliable, sometimes as strange and unpalatable to the taste of a modern reader. The work is regarded by many as a piece of edifying popular literature, without much historical value.

For a long time it has been believed that its origin was to be sought in the third century, and to be placed in Edessa; and that the probable author was Bardaisan. But A. J. F. Klijn went deeper into the doctrine of Bardaisan and came to the conclusion that there can be no question

of any influence being exercised by him on the Acts of Thomas. Ascetism or rigorous moral doctrine is unknown in the teaching of Bardaisan, and his favourite subject, astrology, is entirely lacking in the Acts of Thomas.¹³

In his book "Bibliotheca", Photius of Constantinople (815-898) refers to one Leucius Charinos as the author of Acts of Peter, John, Andrew, Thomas and Paul. In all probability Leucius was only one of the many who worked over the apostolic narratives and to whom we may apply these words:¹⁴ "Each copyist must be considered to be a rewriter adding to the text, omitting from the text and altering the text according to his own taste and theological outlook." Because of the lack of objective data from the distant past, every attempt to identify the author of these works only brings us into the realm of conjecture and presumption.

For a very long time scholars have believed that the Acts of Thomas were written in Edessa during the third century. There is nothing - nothing at all - in the narrative which points to Edessa. If it were written in the city of Thomas, then a writer who lived there would most certainly have said something about Thomas's presence in that city. The author reveals not the slightest acquaintance with the geography of the west, and has Thomas put to sea for India from Jerusalem, omitting all the intermediate stages. Later investigators look for an origin much further east, and date it to the beginning of the second century. To judge from the content it must have been written in Parthia or India. Its total silence on the apostolate of Thomas in Syria and Edessa is a clear pointer in this direction. We can assume that the work made its way to the west largely via Edessa.

The texts at our disposal go back to two separate sources. The first part of the work is disconnected series of miraculous stories, with talking animals, the *Miracula*, clearly revealing the influence of the Gnosis and of the

13. A. J. F. Klajn, *The Acts of Thomas*, Leiden, 1962, p. 38-46.

14. *Ibid.* preface, p. viii.

pagan world, where wonderful tales were very popular. These were the fables and myths against which the apostles Peter and Paul had already issued explicit warnings: mixing belief and superstition would risk the loss of belief. The second part is a quite logically constructed and connected, but romanticised account of the passion, the events alleged to have led up to the martyrdom of Thomas. The persons named are connected with the royal house, and it was probably in the circles surrounding the royal house of Parthia that tradition preserved this information. If we set aside the fables as later accretions, if we strip away the oriental poetic colouring and the romance-like narrative, what are we left with? Not much, many will reply.

But we are left with something special, a large number of sermons and prayers of the apostle Thomas himself; a number of solid Christian truths, with which no one will have any difficulty, shining forth through their evangelical power of expression and their apostolic fervour.

We give two citations to illustrate this: "Believe also in Jesus the Messiah and He shall forgive your former sins, and cleanse you of your carnal desires which remain on earth, which accompany you and go before you. Put off the old man and put on the new. Put off your old ways of life and give up your sinful behaviour. Let them, who have stolen, steal no more, but strive to live by work. Adulterers shall sin no more, so that they shall not call down eternal punishment, for adultery is worse in the sight of God than all other immoral acts. Lay aside covetousness, and lies, and drunkenness and slander, and do not repay evil with evil. For all these things are hateful to God, whom I proclaim, and against His will. Rather, walk in humility, in self-control, in holiness and hope in God, so that you shall be His servants, and shall receive from Him the gifts which are only given to few" (No.78).

"False apostles and lying prophets shall come who shall abolish the laws, and whose end shall be in accordance with their deeds. They shall tell you to take care for

your sins, for they themselves will always be found in sin. They shall be dressed outside in lambs' fleeces but within they are savage wolves; They, who are not content with one lawful wife, and lead many women to perdition. They, who will not beget children, but who corrupt many children, for which they shall receive punishment. They, who are jealous of the happiness of others and rejoice in their misfortunes; They, who are not satisfied with what they have, but want everything to be at their service, they are still honoured as followers of Christ. They, who say one thing with their mouths, but think something else in their hearts. They who instruct others to refrain from evil deeds, but themselves never do any good. They who are considered sober and warn others from adultery, theft and covetousness but abandon themselves to these things in secret" (No. 79).

Whose words are these? Is there a work by the apostle himself underlying the *Acta Thomae*? Perhaps a collection of his sayings written down by himself or by a devoted collaborator? These are questions which could be answered by a careful study by linguistic specialists. Such a work, if it ever existed, must have left its traces in the oldest Christian literature, and could be rediscovered. In the archives of many monastic libraries and universities in east and west, there are many ancient manuscripts, of which only fragments are preserved, but which point to a work containing prayers of the apostle Thomas.

We cite a few titles:

"This is the preaching of the holy apostle Thomas" (Coptic). "This is the preaching of the apostle Judas, the brother of the Lord, who is commonly called Thaddaeus, as he preached it in Syria and Mesopotamia" (Coptic). "The preaching of Judas the fortunate, the brother of the Lord, who is also called Thaddaeus" (Arabic ms.). "The life and preaching of Thomas in India."¹⁶

The Armenian tradition too indicates the existence in the beginning of the fifth century, of a generally disseminated work called the Book of the preaching of the holy Thaddaeus in Armenia.¹⁶

If these sermons derive originally from Thomas, then he would have written them in Greek. In this context, it is striking that specialists have established that the sermons and prayers in the Greek texts are better and preserved in a state closer to the original than is the case in the Syriac version.¹⁷ It seems that more respect was paid to the accurate recording of words from the lips of the apostle himself than for the rest of the narrative. While there is virtually no link between the *Acta Thomae* and the other apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, there is a link between the Preaching of Thaddaeus on Christ to which Eusebius refers, and the Doctrine of Addai.¹⁸ No wonder, if it is the case that this Addai or Thaddaeus was none other than Judas-Thomas.

To get at the truth, one must also take into account the *Acts of Simon and Judas* which describe the missions of both apostles in Babylonia and Persia. It is of great importance that the two apostles are said to have spent thirteen years travelling round the twelve provinces of the Parthian empire, preaching the gospel everywhere. This work forms a link between the work of Thomas at Edessa, and that at the court of king Gundaphor in north India.

It is astonishing, after many years of study, to arrive at the discovery that there are five important sources of great value for the reconstruction of the life of the apostle Thomas; five sources, popular in form, mixed with ridiculous stories, of suspect provenance, neglected by the churches, despised by scholarship, mutilated and falsified by centuries of adaptation. Five sources which cover the entire life of the apostle and which may become comprehensible when the

16. S. Weber, *Die katholische Kirche in Armenien*, Freiburg, 1903. p. 73.

17. R. A. Lipsius, *op. cit.* p. 240.

18. Klijn, *op. cit.* p. 45.

obstacle of the many names borne by the same person, is removed. It is a fascinating challenge to reconcile and harmonise the chronology of these sources, which were always separated from each other, so that all the works and deeds of Thomas are arranged in a single narrative.

1. *The Acts of Thaddaeus* also called the *Doctrine of Addai*, or *Acta Edessenae* (Eusebius) which describes Thomas' mission at Edessa.
2. *The Acts of Simon and Judas* relating their joint work in Mesopotamia, Babylon and the land of the Parthians.
3. *The Miracula St. Thomae*, the first part of the *Acta Thomae*, on his Journeys and vicissitudes in northern India, and his contact with king Gundaphor. These three sources concern the first fifteen to twenty years of his apostolate.
4. The song, transmitted by popular tradition, called *Rāmbān Pātt* which is the most comprehensive description of the travels of an apostle that we have, dealing with his landing in Kerala, his journey to Mylapore and to China.
5. *The Passio Thomae* the second part of the *Acta Thomae*, containing the events which led to his martyrdom in Madras - Mylapore.

Chapter 8

The Gospel Of Thomas

One of the most remarkable discoveries in the last hundred years was made in 1945 in the village of Nag Hammadi, on the bank of the Nile, in Upper Egypt, about sixty miles north west of Luxor.

Without doubt, the most important and the most widely discussed part of the find is *the Gospel according to Thomas*, to which more than three hundred books and articles have been devoted. It is, indeed, a subject which has set biblical scholarship in turmoil, and we cannot fail to devote a detailed description to it. To begin with, we must observe that the name 'gospel' has been more or less misleading. The work is in no way similar to the form of the four gospels which described the life of Jesus Christ in chronological order, and gave Christendom an historical narrative. The gospel of Thomas is a loose collection of 114 *logia*, sayings or pronouncements of Christ, apparently without any internal connection or order. To facilitate study, they have been numbered, and we too will consistently give these numbers at the beginning of a quotation.

The introduction is as follows:

These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke, and which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down.

1. And He said: Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death.
2. Jesus said: Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he

will become troubled. When he becomes troubled he will be astonished and he will rule over the all.

We are glad to follow this good advice by Thomas, and to continue seeking, until we have found the truth about his so called gospel, and have mastered the confusion which this work generated. About eighty sayings show a marked resemblance to the texts known to us from the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but they are never literal citations. Virtually all of them reveal a different choice of words, or a difference of approach.

This is clear from the following passage:

25. Jesus said: love your brother like your soul, guard him like the apple of your eye.

26. Jesus said: you see the mote in your brother's eye, but you do not see the beam in your own eye. When you cast the beam out of your eye, then you will see clearly to cast the mote out of your brother's eye.

31. Jesus said: no prophet is accepted in his own village; no physician heals those who know him.

34. Jesus said: if a blind man leads a blind man they will both fall into a pit.

36. Jesus said: Do not be concerned from morning until evening, and from evening until morning about what you will wear.

58. Jesus said: The harvest is great but the labourers are few. Beseech the Lord therefore to seek out labourers for the harvest.

90. Jesus said: Come unto me for my yoke is easy, and my lordship is mild, and you will find repose for yourselves.

All these sayings sound familiar, even if their phrasing is a little strange to our ears. No one will dare deny their genuine Christian origin. We find the parables too in the gospel of Thomas, that of the sower (9), the mustard seed (23), the pearl (76), the tax for the Emperor (100). Some of them are even more detailed than in the other gospels.

The briefest of all the logia consists of only two words. '42. Jesus said: be passers-by.' - This refers to the idea that men are only pilgrims on earth, who must not attach themselves to earthly goods, but in their brief lives, should yearn for eternal life.

There are also many sayings which are incomprehensible, and which we are entirely at a loss to understand, such as:

7. Blessed is the lion which becomes man when consumed by man, and cursed is the man whom the lion consumes and the lion becomes man.

4. Jesus said: The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a little child of seven days about the place of life, and he will live.

112. Jesus said: Woe to the flesh which depends upon the soul, woe to the soul which depends upon the flesh.

An extensive literature has grown up around the work as a whole, and the explanation of the individual logia, and scholars very often differ greatly in their interpretation. We cannot go into this in more detail, since we have to concern ourselves with the central question: can the apostle Thomas really be considered the author of this work? The attribution to Didymus Judas Thomas at the beginning is no guarantee whatsoever that he was really the author. In many circles, it was customary to produce all sorts of tales, and, for greater credibility to attach to them the name of a well-known person, preferably an apostle. Apocryphal literature

gives us countless examples of this—in fact their titles alone could fill several pages. The fathers of the church were virtually unanimous in their opposition to the idea of a fifth gospel. The standpoint of Cyril of Jerusalem, who died in 386 is abundantly clear: ¹⁹

“In the New Testament, only four gospels are valid. The others bear false titles and are dangerous. The Manichaeen too wrote a gospel of Thomas, which, tricked out in the fine-sounding name of a gospel, has harmed the souls of simple folk. No-one must read the gospel of Thomas, for it does not come down from the apostles, but from one of the three evil disciples of Mani.”

It is tempting to follow these words and reject the whole as the product of an heretical imagination. The very serious detailed studies which modern scholarship has devoted to this work, demand a closer evaluation. There are a number of questions which we cannot just wave away light-heartedly, but which demand more thorough study. What was Cyril actually speaking of? Which text had he in front of him when he recorded such a damning verdict? Nicephorus gives us a closer indication: the Gospel of Thomas has 1300 lines (stichata)—a simple statement of the book's size. Now, the work which we know by that name is a great deal shorter—only half as long, at 670 lines. Either he had a much more detailed version, before him, or he was writing about an entirely different book.

We think first, in this context, of the narrative which we have discussed under the title *the Stories of the Childhood of Jesus*, the imaginary. This work too was known in the first centuries, under the name of “the Gospel of Thomas”. To make the case even more complicate, *the Acts of Thomas* were sometimes also presented, in antiquity, as a “Gospel of Thomas”. We must free ourselves from the modern concept

¹⁹ Catecheses, 4:31,36.

of a gospel, when we immerse ourselves in ancient literature. Then, the name was used for many religious works which stood in some form of relationship to Christ. The name 'evangelist' also had another meaning, and is used three times in Scripture for a person who has a special gift for the preaching of the gospel, but who is clearly distinguished from the group of the apostles and prophets (Acts 21:8; Ephes. 4:11; 2 Tim., 4:5).

When Luke wrote his gospel, many before him had already compiled narratives of the events, as they had been handed down by eye-witnesses and the servants of the word. According to the official line, only the gospels of Mark and Matthew are supposed to have been at his disposal. But "many" is more than two. In total there are more than thirty works which have been given the name of "gospels" in the course of history. We cite, among others, the gospels of Peter, of James, of Bartholomew, and of Philip. Other gospels were referred to by the names of the Christian groups who used them, as the gospels of the Hebrews, of the Ebionites, the Egyptians and the Nazareans. Still other gospels were current among heretics, as for example that of the "four corners of heaven", the gospel of truth, the gospel of the ending of all things. There are six gospels which are ascribed to the heads of heretical movements. It is understandable that the church brought order to this confusing array of writings, and chose only four gospels which were to be permitted for liturgical use. The disadvantage was that all the others sank into the background, were regarded as suspect, and were for the most part lost. By chance, several of these writings have now been rediscovered.

Where must we place the gospel of Thomas? Is it a work of heretical origin? A product of the Gnosis, of Encratism or Manichaeism? Our answer depends on the question, when and where it was written, and whether it is the original version which we have before us. Let us see what several experts have written:²⁰ The Coptic text of the gospel of Thomas

20. E. Haenchen, *Die Botschaft des Thomasevangeliums*, Berlin, 1961, p. 8.

may have been written around the year 400, or better, transcribed from an older Coptic copy. The scribe made many errors of transcription or omission. He already had a very corrupt text in front of him, and transcribed it mechanically without understanding it. Finally, this Coptic text goes back to an older Greek text which might have been composed around the middle of the second century."

The Codex must probably be dated either in the second half of the fourth century A. D. or in the beginning of the fifth century. But the original of the gospel according to Thomas - the second of the seven writings contained in this volume - goes back much earlier. We are dealing here with a translation or an adaptation in Sahidic Coptic of a work, the primitive text of which must have been produced in Greek about 140 A. D., and which was based on even more ancient sources.²¹

We have in the first place a Coptic version of a Greek work, containing sayings which probably were originally uttered in Aramaic. Some sayings at least may therefore have passed through two stages of translation with all the attendant possibilities of modification. Again, the collection has a history behind it in the course of which the scribes who copied it may have introduced not only the scribal errors which can be observed, but also modifications of their own such as a closer harmonisation with passages familiar from the canonical gospels. And finally we have to allow for the changes made at the hands of one or more editors, one at least of whom was a Gnostic, although his predecessors need not have been.²²

It is true that the Manichaeans had a preference for the gospel of Thomas, but they did not themselves write it. The evidence of Origen (185-253) is a convincing proof that it is of earlier date.²³

21. Guilleumont, *The Gospel according to Thomas*, Leiden, 1976, p. 6.

22. R. Mc. L. Wilson, *The Gospel of Thomas*, (Studia Evangelica, III) Oxford, 1961, p. 456.

23. Grant-Freedman, *Het Thomas Evangelie*, Utrecht-Antwerpen, 1962, p. 92.

If one believes that we are dealing here with a tradition which deviates from, and is independent of, that of the synoptics, and which takes us back to the beginning of Christianity in Palestine, then the gospel of Thomas takes a central place in the investigation of the earlier history of Christianity.²⁴

So we come, ineluctably, to the question whether or not the work goes back to the apostle Thomas himself. As far as I can determine, this possible connection is nowhere emphasised in the extensive literature. The person of Thomas is or was so unknown and shadowy that no one dares to come to this conclusion, obvious as it is.

After ascribing other works to Thomas, in previous chapters, it is not difficult for us to defend his authorship of this collection. What arguments can we bring forward?

1. We believe the most important indication is the special character of the work - its genre. It is a copy-book example of a very primitive summary, without an explanatory narrative, without any noticeable cohesion. In the very earliest period of Christianity, there was not yet any need for a logically arranged account of the events surrounding Jesus. The facts were generally known, and could be retold from memory.

Very soon, the question began to be raised, what exactly Christ had said, how He had expressed Himself. This question was put to the apostles, who were able to write down the actual words of Christ from memory. Matthew and the other apostles would have begun in this way, establishing the sayings of Jesus as the basis on which the later gospels arose. This work too is a primitive form of gospel, and, as such, is to be dated very early. It will have been the first of Thoma's writings, but it does not contain his words, but the words of Christ, who spoke Aramaic; so that they must first have been written

24. Ehlers, *Kan das Thomasevangelium aus Edessa Stammen?* (Novum Testamentum-12), Leiden, 1970, p. 284.

in Aramaic. This explains their presence among the Jewish-Christians of Palestine, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Their origin does not have to be looked for in Edessa, the city of Thomas; also Jerusalem or Alexandria are other possibilities. Once the gospels were written and there was no longer any need for this primitive literary form, the collections fell into disuse, even though they continued to be known for several centuries. The threefold reference to Didymus Judas Thomas as their author, may not be dismissed without good reason.

2. We should pay particular attention to a *logion* in which Jesus puts a question to his disciples, and in which Thomas himself appears as a speaker: 13. Jesus said to His disciples: Make a comparison to me and tell me whom I am like. Simon Peter said to Him: Thou art like a righteous angel. Matthew said to him: Thou art like a wise man of understanding. Thomas said to Him: Master, my mouth will not at all be capable of saying whom Thou art like. Jesus said: I am not thy Master, because thou hast drunk, thou hast become drunk from the bubbling spring, which I have measured out. And He took him, He withdrew and told him three things. When Thomas returned to his companions they asked him: What did Jesus say to you? Thomas said to them: If I tell you one of the things which He told me, you will pick up stones and throw them at me; a fire will come out of the stones and burn you up.

We also find a reference to these three words or three sentences in the Acts of Thomas. In a prayer Thomas exclaims: Jesus, hidden secret, who has revealed Thyself to us, Thou art He who has let us see countless secret things. Thou art He who has called me away from my companions, and said three words to me, which made me burn with rage, and which I was not able to relate to others.²⁵

25. J. Doresse, *L'Évangile selon Thomas, ou les paroles Secrètes de Jésus*, Paris, 1959, p. 140.

We may conclude from these words that on this occasion Jesus spoke of His divinity, His participation in the Holy Trinity of God: the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. For Thomas, this was the worst possible kind of blasphemy. It was still possible for the Zealots, to whom Thomas and his brother Simon belonged, to accept Jesus as an earthly Messiah, but to consider one of his own family as God was something that far exceeded his grasp. The name of God was so exalted and holy for pious Jews that it was not permissible to pronounce it aloud. That would be considered blasphemy, which the Jews punished by stoning to death. The unbelief of Thomas is not so much an example of human doubt and uncertainty, as of his immense reverence for the Jewish concept of God. It is to this logion that we must refer the words of astonishment that Thomas spoke to Christ: Lord, why wilt Thou reveal Thyself only to us, and not to the world (Jn 14: 22).

3. The value of the work appears from the traces which it has left everywhere in Christian literature. A number of logia are quoted almost literally in very ancient works of orthodox and heretical writers of east and west. Our estimate is made more difficult because we only know a corrupt Coptic text, while the Greek fragments of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri are too few and too badly damaged to be able to convince anyone.

It is impossible to discuss this in detail here. We refer only to the writings of Clemens Romanus, who, as we have already stated, had a correspondence with the apostle Thomas. We find the most important continuation of his collection of the words of Christ in the *Diatessaron* of Tatian. Tatian, however, had employed a fifth source which was unknown in the west. Victor, bishop of Capua from 541-546, calls the work *Diapente*, "one from five", which is a more accurate title. It is abundantly clear that the fifth source was the gospel of Thomas, which is characterised by its difference of vocabulary. "But surprisingly we find that these apparently forgotten

sayings have influenced the biblical idiom of many nations during the middle ages and even up to the present time. For it proves that this uncanonical gospel tradition has found its way into the different diatessera (or "Lives of Jesus" preserved in Latin, English, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Armenian and Persian, which may be traced back to the *Diatessaron* written by the Syrian Tatian about 170 A.D.²⁶

The works referred to here are the Codex of Boniface, from Fulda, the Heliand, the Stuttgart Harmony, the Diatessaron of Cologne, the Life of Jesus from Haaren, the Limburg Life of Jesus or Liege Diatessaron, the Cambridge Diatessaron, Pepsysian Harmony, and the Venetian Diatessaron, all vernacular works which are ancient and valuable monuments in their respective literatures. A work which is so widespread and so generally accepted throughout Christendom, and has served through so many centuries to instruct the faithful, must surely be of apostolic origin.

4. More controversial is the question whether the gospel of Thomas perhaps served as the basic text of the gospel of Luke. As is well known, Luke contains many details which derive from an Aramaic source, and which are not to be found in the other two synoptic gospels. Did Luke obtain them from the apostle Thomas?

"Of the three synoptics, the gospel of Luke undoubtedly has most in common with the gospel of Thomas. How is this to be reconciled with the fact on the one hand, that collection goes back to a Jewish-Christian text, and on the other that the Jewish-Christian traditions are consistently closer to the gospel of Matthew? Are we to explain this fact by assuming that Luke made use of a Jewish-Christian source in addition to those which are known? In this case, we would be dealing with a common source for both Luke and the gospel of Thomas."²⁷

26. G. Quispel, "The Gospel of Thomas and the N. T.", in *Vigiliae Christianae* 1967, p. 191.

27. H. Schürmann, "Das Thomasevangelium und lukanische Sondergut" in *Bibl. Zeitschrift* 7, Paderborn, 1963, p. 236.

The "synoptics" are the three evangelists (Matthew, Mark and Luke) who follow the same general plan in their accounts of the life of Jesus. It is unlikely that the gospel of Thomas goes back to another source. It is itself a source, as is evident from its primitive form. Was there perhaps another Jewish gospel, derived from the gospel of Thomas? It is unthinkable that the Jews in the east, at Edessa, and in Mesopotamia, the Aramaic-speaking descendants of the Hebrews of Jerusalem, should have relied for their knowledge of Jesus exclusively on the four Greek gospels of the Hellenistic and pagan Christians.

Fragments of no fewer than three Jewish-Christian gospels have come down to us:⁵⁶

1. The gospel of the Hebrews, cited by Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and thus of some authority in Egypt.

2. The gospel of the Nazaraeans, originally written in either western or eastern Aramaic (Syriac) and still in use among the Nazaraeans or Jewish-Christian Christians of Aleppo in the fourth century, but naturally much more ancient in origin.

3. The gospel of the Ebionites, probably in use among a faction of the Jewish Christians strongly opposed to Paul, and living in western Syria, the present-day Lebanon,

The first of these, in particular, is now probably to be seen as a possible continuation of the gospel of Thomas. Some of the latter's *logia* are literally repeated in it. In the works of Jerome, we find these words:⁵⁹ "The gospel which is called that of the Hebrews, and which was translated into Greek and Latin by me recently, and which Origen also frequently uses....."

28. G. Quispel, *Het Evangelie van Thomas en de Nederlanden*, Amsterdam-Brussel, 1971, p. 54.

29. Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, ch. 2.

Apparently this great scholar regarded this gospel as quite normal and acceptable. Why did it have such value for him that he translated it twice? Was the author of the epistle to the Hebrews perhaps also the author of the gospel of the Hebrews? The similarity of titles might point in this direction. James and Thomas were the undisputed leaders of the Jewish-Christians, and it would be perfectly logical if they had also borne a large share in the production of this gospel for the Jewish-Christians. A definitive answer remains impossible.

Chapter 9

A Conversation of Jesus with Thomas

In the same codex which contains the Gospel of Thomas, we find at the end, a work of about six pages, entitled: *The Book of Thomas the Athlete*. In the English edition of the Nag Hammadi Library, the title is rendered as *The Book of Thomas the Contender*, which means one who strives, struggles or competes for something with all his might.

The work is by no means a new discovery. It was already known much earlier at Rome, where it is Coptic ms. cxv. 7 in the Vatican Library³⁰. There, however, the title is quite different, and more in keeping with the content: *Colloquium Jesu cum Thoma post Resurrectionem*, or a conversation of Jesus with Thomas after the Resurrection.

The best way to treat a document is always to let it speak for itself. We cite from the beginning: "The secret words that the Saviour spoke to Judas Thomas, which I, Mattheus, wrote down. I was walking, listening to them speak with one another. The Saviour said: Brother Thomas,

30. F. Haase, *op. cit.* p. 10.

while you have time in the world, listen to me and I will reveal to you the things you have pondered in your mind. Now since it has been said that you are my twin and true companion, examine yourself that you may understand who you are, in what way you exist, and how you will come to be. Since you have been called my brother it is not fitting that you should be ignorant of yourself."

The assertion of this text that Thomas was called a twin brother of Jesus is one which we cannot share. That would mean both had the same mother, and were born at the same time which is entirely at odds with the Christian tradition. We find in this text a mistaken combination of the ideas of twinship and brotherhood. Thomas was a twin, as his name shows, but he was also, or was called, a brother of the Lord. The time at which this conversation took place is said to have been after the Resurrection and before the Ascension of the Lord. That such a conversation was possible is shown by the words of Luke: "He showed Himself to these men after His death, and gave ample proof that He was alive: over a period of forty days He appeared to them and taught them about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). John, the author of the fourth Gospel, also emphasises that many of Jesus' actions were not recorded in writing: if it were all to be written down in full then I believe the whole world would not hold the books that would have to be written" (Jn 21:25).

We must therefore remain open to the possibility that details may come down to us from the distant past, and especially from the east, which will be of importance for our knowledge of the doctrine of Jesus, and which may fill out and enrich our limited understanding. It is incorrect to reject as heretical everything which is not in the four gospels, without a thorough investigation, even when these writings have been handed down in a mutilated state, or can be explained in a heretical sense.

Thomas clearly sees the difficulty of proclaiming the truth to mankind, and asks for advice. Jesus demurs and

says: If the things which are visible to you are only understood vaguely, how can you listen to things which are not visible? Thomas insists and asks Jesus to speak of the things which are invisible to and hidden from us. Then Jesus alludes to the animal in man, to the fire which is present in him, the fire of sexual passion. The entire work deals with what in modern terminology we should call sex. The last part of the work is a long monologue by Christ, apparently addressed to all the apostles who were present. It is a lament for those who let themselves be consumed by the fire and praise for those who are able to control their lust for the visible and sensual knowledge. As it is the work appears to be the work of *Gnostics* who were opposed to marriage. We are not in a position to see the contribution of Thomas in this work. It is possible that the original work was mutilated and transformed by the heretics to suit their impiety.

Chapter 10

The Revelation of Thomas

The revelation of Thomas has come down to us via a number of very ancient manuscripts, which were found at the old monastery of Benedictbeuren, Munich, Vienna, Rome and Karlsruhe. The texts, which differ greatly amongst themselves, were all in Latin, while an Old English version also appears to have existed. For more detailed information, we refer the reader to the specialised literature.³¹

Christ speaks to Thomas about the end of the world. In itself this is not exceptional, for in the New Testament

31. D. P. Bihlmeyer, "Une Texte non-interpolé de l'Apocalypse de Thomas" in *Revue Benedictine* 28 (1911) 270-282; M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford, 1924, p. 555-562.

too. Christ often refers to His return to earth, the end of the world and the last judgment. Following his custom, and his longing for the truth, Thomas must often have questioned Him about this. We give one passage from it to enable the reader to form an opinion: "Listen Thomas, to what shall happen in the last times. There will be famine, blasphemy injustice and wickedness. Everyone shall only say what people like to hear and my priests shall not have peace among themselves. There will be great confusion among all peoples, downfall. The house of the Lord will be deserted and the altar unhallowed, so that spiders shall weave their webs in them. Gladness shall perish and joy recede. In those days evil will abound. There shall be no truth and avarice shall be in abundance."

In some texts there then follows an application of this prophecy to the conditions and events of the fifth century. Even then there were people who believed that the latter days were already upon them, and that the Antichrist was establishing his power on earth. These interpolations, which refer to certain kings and emperors, conclude with a number of laments of which we cite a selection: "Woe to those who remain then upon the earth. Woe to those who build, for they shall not dwell therein. Woe to those who plough the fallow land, for they shall bear children to hunger and want. Woe to those who buy house after house or field after field, for all shall be consumed by the fire. Woe to him who does not control himself while he has still time for thereafter he shall be condemned for eternity. Woe to those who turn aside from the poor when they ask alms."

The revelation concludes with a detailed description of the seven days which will precede the end of the world, a description which makes a confused and incomprehensible impression. According to another source, there is no question of a period of seven days, but of nine jubilees, which are to elapse between the Ascension of Christ and His return to earth. But the meaning of this is not clear.

In dealing with any manuscript of ancient date, one must ask oneself whether the text has been altered in transcription, expanded or adapted to so-called pastoral necessities, or even misused for individual purposes. We only possess the Latin texts, while it is probable that this revelation was originally written in Greek. New discoveries, especially in the east are necessary in order to determine the history of the origin of this text. Could Thomas have had occasion to write such a remarkable work? Was it something which lay within his sphere of interest? Had he the opportunity or the calling to write it?

In order to answer these questions we refer to some other writings which we proposed to be the works of Thomas or influenced by his works. Didache has a complete chapter which is apocalyptic in tone (ch. 16). Even in the very short epistle of Jude, we find various allusions to the end of the world and the last judgment which will be pronounced on the sinners (Jude, 17-18). After the violent condemnation of the false teachers who misused the grace of God as a cover for loose living, and who abandoned themselves to unnatural vice, on the grounds of imaginary visions, thus doing the same as the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Epistle adds, to the amazement of many exegetes: "It was to them that Enoch, the seventh in descent from Adam, directed his prophecy when he said: I saw the Lord come with his myriads of angels, to bring all men to judgment and to convict all the godless, of all the godless deeds they had committed, and of all the defiant words which godless sinners had spoken against Him" (Jude, 14-15). The epistle of Peter written under the influence of the Epistle of Jude also goes into detail on the end of the world, the second coming of Christ, on which the mockers kept asking scornfully: where is the second coming then, which He promised. "And here is one point, my friends, which you must not lose sight of, with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day" (II Peter 3:8).

The revelation of Thomas is the only one to speak of the end of the world as taking seven days. Probably, this is a symbolic allusion to the story of the seven days of creation. John, in his revelation, also speaks of seven churches and seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls. Peter, therefore, gives an explanation, that the seven days of the revelation of Thomas are not to be taken literally, but must be understood as follows: "... as Judas our friend and brother said when he wrote to you with his inspired wisdom. And so he does in all his other letters whenever he speaks of this subject, though they contain some obscure passages, which the ignorant and unstable misinterpret to their own ruin, as they do the other scriptures" (II Peter 3:15-16).

From these words of Peter we can determine that the revelation of Thomas must already have been written quite early and soon altered and misused. In fact, there is a statement of the time, to be found in the chronicle of Jerome, which says that the revelation of Thomas was written in the eighteenth year of the reign of the emperor Tiberius. Trying to harmonise this statement with the erroneous Christian calendar naturally leads us to a dead end. By our calculation, the year given was either the fifth or sixth after the passion and death of the Lord. The possibility of erroneous explanation is still present. There always were, and are, people who think that the end of the world is nigh. We do not wish to lend any support whatever to them. The end is very far from being in sight. As conclusion we may say that the "Revelation of Thomas" corresponds to the apocalyptic ideas in Jude. But in course of time several interpolations were made in it and thus we have now one in a mutilated form.

Chapter II

The Anaphora of Addai and Mari

No doubt the title of this chapter will be incomprehensible to many readers. For their benefit, then, a short explanation; *Anaphora* is a Greek word with many meanings, including raising up, indication, improvement, transfer or repetition. In the Christian liturgy it is the term for the canon of the Mass, the eucharistic prayer, the culmination of the whole liturgy, which reminds us of the renewal of the Last Supper.

Mari, was the successor of Addai, who was appointed by Thomas as leader of the Christians in Edessa. Mari too was soon forced to leave Edessa, and became the apostle of the whole of Mesopotamia. After thirty three years travelling and proclaiming the gospel, he settled in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which was also the administrative capital of the Parthian kings. The city lay between ancient Babylon and modern Baghdad, and became the Rome, the Patriarchal seat of the eastern church. Who *Addai* the apostle was, will be abundantly clear to anyone who is sufficiently acute to make the connections between: Addai = Addaios = Addeus = Thaddai = Thaddaios = Thaddeus = Judas Thaddeus = Judas who was also called Thomas. It is characteristic of the general confusion that even among specialists the name Addai has not been understood and that this anaphora has been assigned to the second, third or even seventh centuries.

Among the ancient anaphoras those of Addai and his brother James of Jerusalem were the oldest: "Christ gave to the Apostles the elements of the liturgy and the Apostles, each in his way, entrusted the same intact in substance to their disciples. These elements developed into definite liturgical forms by a slow gradual steady progress in important Christian centres, under the careful vigilance of

ecclesiastical pastors. Each centre contributed its share in its own way to the development in question. In other words, each ancient liturgy is a patristic synthesis based on the Bible and Christian tradition, and each has its own special characteristics though each expresses the same faith. Here lies the importance of the ancient liturgies of the Church: they are different expressions of the ancient faith bearing witness to the tradition of the church coming down from Christ through the Apostles. Faith is too deep to be expressed in one way alone, and so different modes of its expression came into existence as its primitive witnesses. Hence the ancient liturgies are considered as inestimable treasures in the church."³²

The anaphora of Addai and Mari is clearly of Jewish-Christian origin. It was written in Aramaic or Syriac. The Thomas Christians were proud to celebrate the eucharist in the same words and in the same language as Jesus Christ had done during the Last Supper. We shall give the text as it was found in Urmi, the city on the lake of the same name, now Rezaiyeh in northern Iran, where a church was built on the site of the house in which Thomas was believed to have stayed on his way to the east. We follow the translation and the numbering of Dom Botte:³³

1. "Worthy to be praised by every mouth, worthy to be confessed by every tongue, to be prayed to and exalted by every creature, is the glorious name of the Holy Trinity, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who created the world through His goodness, its inhabitants in His mercy, who saved mankind through His compassion, and who has poured out His grace upon us mortals.

2. Before thy majesty, o Lord, thousands upon thousands of heavenly beings prostrate themselves, countless

32. Placid Podipara, *The Thomas Christians and their Syriac Treasures*, Bangalore, 1983, p. 45.

33. B. Botte, "Problèmes de l'anaphore syrienne des apôtres Addai et Mari" in *L'Orient Syrien* 10 (1965) p. 91-93.

holy angels pray to thee, heavenly legions, servants of fire and spirit, glorify thy name, with the holy Cherubim and the heavenly Seraphim, who pray to thy greatness, calling to each other without ceasing, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord the almighty God. Heaven and earth are full of His splendour, His nature and His essence, of the radiance of His glorious greatness; Hosannah in the highest, Hosannah to the son of David; Blessed is he who comes and shall come in the name of the Lord. Hosannah on high.

3. And with these heavenly powers, we too sing your praise, O Lord, we your weak, mortal and erring servants, for you have shown us your great grace, for which we cannot thank you enough; for you have clothed our humanity, you have woken us to life through your godhead, you have exalted our humility, and raised us up again after the fall, you have made our mortality to rise up, you have forgiven our faults and redeemed our sins. You have justified the guilt of our sins. You have illuminated our reason and condemned the enemy. Lord God, you let the weakness of our feeble natures prevail, through the abounding mercy of your grace. And for all the help and grace you have granted us, we bring you our praise, honour, confession and prayer, now and for ever, through eternity. Amen.

4. Lord God almighty, accept this sacrifice for the whole catholic church, for all pious and righteous fathers who have pleased you, for all the prophets and the apostles, for all martyrs and witnesses, for those who are poor and oppressed, for those who are weak and are persecuted, for all those who have died in your name and have left us, and for this people which hopes for your mercy and looks for it, and for my irresolution and weakness.

5. You, O Lord, for your countless and inexpressible graces, think kindly of the pious and righteous fathers who stood well in your sight, in this remembrance of the body

and blood of Jesus Christ which we offer on your pure and holy altar, as you yourself taught us, and give us your rest and your peace all the days of this world.

6. O Lord our God, give us your rest and your peace all the days of this world, so that all the inhabitants of the earth may know that you alone are true God and Father and that you sent your beloved Son Jesus Christ to us. He Himself, Lord and God, came and taught us in all purity and holiness.

7. Remember the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the witnesses, and the bishops, the teachers, the priests, the deacons and all the children of the holy catholic church, who are marked by the sign of the holy baptism.

8. And we too, O Lord, your weak, sinful and sick servants, who are gathered together in your name and are with you, we too have received according to tradition example which comes from you. And therefore we now celebrate with joy, with praise, with prayer and gratitude this great, wonderful, holy, life giving and divine secret of the passion, the death, the burial and the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

9. O Lord, may your Holy Spirit descend and rest upon this offering of your servants; may It bless and hallow this sacrifice, so that it may bring the forgiveness of sins and the redemption of debts, in the great hope of our resurrection from the dead and the new life in the kingdom of heaven, with all those who have found favour in thy sight.

10. And for all these great and wonderful gifts to us we wish to praise you and glorify you without ceasing in your church, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. With loud voice and open mouths we bring you praise, honour, confession and prayer to your living and lifegiving name, now and for ever and through eternity. Amen."

Despite all these lofty words, we have to state that there is something missing from this eucharistic prayer-

and something very important. Something essential, which in fact ought to be at the heart of it, the words of institution. Their absence has become a much discussed problem among theologians and liturgiologists. The main reason why they are lacking is the desire to protect the holy words against profanation and misuse. It is a question of the *mysterium fidei*, the secret of the faith, and a secret can be profaned when it is written down clearly for all to read. In the first centuries in particular, it was necessary to protect the Eucharist against the attacks of the Jews and the pagans. Dom Botte points out that the text in para. 8 forms the conclusion of the words of consecration, and that the presence of these words indicates that the central part has disappeared, perhaps because the text had to be recited entirely from memory, as was also the case earlier, in the Gallican and Mozarabic rites. It seems impossible to me that such a characteristic lapse of memory could have occurred in an anaphora which never contained the words of institution.³⁴

The forgotten words can probably be found in the text of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who died in 428. "In the night in which He was handed over, He celebrated with His apostles, this great, holy and divine mystery. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to His disciples and said: This is my body which is broken for you, in forgiveness of your sins. In the same way He took the cup and said: This is my blood of the new covenant, which has been shed for the forgiveness of sins of many. Therefore, all of you, take and eat this bread, drink from this cup and do whenever you are gathered together in remembrance of me".

It is useful to observe that these last words agree entirely with the text of the evangelists Matthew (26: 26-29), Mark (14:22-25) and Luke (22: 19-20), and also with the text of Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians (11: 23-25). Of course it is impossible for us to give the precise words

34. *Ibid.*, 103

of Thomas' original formula, and to say what has been added in later centuries. Also lacking is a description of the acts and gestures which belong in the celebration of the eucharist. The name means that the first version goes back to the apostles Addai and Mari, and was used by them in the liturgy.

Can the composition of such a liturgical text be fitted into the life of Thomas as we have been able to reconstruct it? We have already remarked several times that his stepbrother James belonged to the Jewish priestly class and faithfully performed his duties in the Temple. Was this also the case with Thomas?

At any rates, it would have been wholly in accordance with Jewish custom if the second husband of Mary of Klopas had been chosen from a priestly family. It is characteristic that in the epistle to the Hebrews Thomas pays great attention to the priesthood. The epistle describes the high priesthood of Christ in great detail and shows that the sacrifice of the Old Covenant has been superseded by that of the New, which is embodied in the sacrifice of the Mass, the Eucharist.

"For every high priest is taken from among men and appointed their representative before God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb. 5:1). "So it is with Christ: He did not confer upon Himself the glory of becoming high priest. It was granted by God, who said to Him: 'thou art my son, today I have begotten thee' (5:5). "Such a high priest does indeed fit our condition: devout, guileless, undefiled, separated from the sinners, raised high above the heavens" (7:26). "Every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence this one too must have something to offer," (8:3). "But now Christ has come, the high priest of true salvation. The tent of His priesthood is a greater and more perfect one, not made by men's hands, that is not belonging to this created world; the blood of His sacrifice is His own blood, not the blood of goats and calves, and thus He has entered the sanctuary once and for all and secured

an eternal deliverance. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkled ashes of a heifer have power to hallow those who have been defiled and restore their eternal purity, how much greater is the power of the blood of Christ' (9:11-14).

In the *Didache*, we find a detailed explanation of the eucharist or Last Supper, with the guidelines for the participation of the faithful: Chapter 10 of *Didache* concludes with this remarkable sentence: "Only those who have been baptised in the name of the Lord are permitted to eat and drink of your eucharist. For the Lord has said: give not the holy thing to the dogs." The *Didache* is most emphatic that only those who are holy are to be allowed to take part in celebrating the eucharist: (10:6): "If anyone is holy, let him come. If not, let him be excluded Maranatha. -The Lord comes or has come.

We also find numerous references to the celebration of the eucharist by Thomas in the Acts of Thomas, especially in those passages where the apostle himself speaks, e.g chapter 29: "My children, our Lord will do today whatever He will, but let us pray and beg of Him that there be to us no hindrance towards Him, but just as at all times when He wisheth to show His power in us, so now let His will be accomplished. And when he had spoken thus, he laid his hands upon them and broke the eucharist, gave it unto all of them and said: May this eucharist be unto you for grace and mercy and not for judgment and vengeance. And they said: Amen."

In chapter 49 and 50 we read: "And the apostle ordered his deacon to make ready the eucharist: and he brought a bench thither and over it a linen cloth. He brought and placed on it the bread of the blessing."

"And he began to say: come, gift of the exalted come perfect mercy, come Holy spirit, come revealer of the mysteries, come power of the Father and wisdom of the Son, for you are one in all. Come and communicate with us in this

eucharist which we celebrate and in this offering which we offer and in the commemoration which we make. He made the sign of the cross over the bread and began to give it. And he gave first to the woman and said to her: Let it be unto thee for the remission of transgressions and for the everlasting resurrection. After her he gave it to the persons who had been baptised with her. Then he gave to every one and said to them: Let this eucharist be unto you for life and rest and not for judgment and vengeance. And they said: Amen.

In chapter 51 we find the story of a man who partook of the eucharist although unworthy and was immediately punished for this. Also striking is the account of the eucharist which Thomas celebrated shortly before his martyrdom at Mylapore. While in prison Thomas instructed Vizan, the son of the king, to prepare everything in his house for the service and the baptism of a number of followers, including the general Sifur. We quote in full this account of the last eucharist which he celebrated on earth, from chapter 158:

"After they were baptised and were come up, he brought bread and the mingled cup and spoke a blessing over it. Thy holy body which was crucified for our sake we eat, and thy life-giving blood which was shed for our sake; we drink. Let thy body be to us for life and thy blood for the remission of sins. For the gall which thou drank for us, let the bitterness of our enemy be taken away from us. And for thy drinking vinegar for our sake, let our weakness be strengthened. And for the spirit which thou didst receive for us, let us receive thy perfect life. And because thou didst receive the crown of thorns for us let us receive from thee the crown that withereth not. And because thou wast wrapped in a linen cloth for us, let us be girt with thy mighty strength which cannot be overcome. And because thou wast buried in a new sepulchre for our mortality, let us receive intercourse with thee in heaven, and as thou didst arise, let us be raised and let us stand before thee at the judgment of

truth. And he broke the eucharist and gave it to Vizan and Tertia and to Manashar and Sifur and Mygdonia and the wife and daughter of Sifur and said: Let this eucharist be to you for life and rest and joy and health, and for the healing of your souls and of your bodies, and they said Amen. And a voice was heard saying to them: yea and amen. And when they heard this voice they fell on their faces and again the voice was heard, saying: Be not afraid, but only believe."

Chapter 12

The Hymn of Thomas

There are many hymns and songs of praise written in honour of this apostle in many languages and countries. The song of praise with which we wish to conclude our book is one attributed to Thomas himself, which perhaps formed part of the collection of documents which were the basis of the Acts of Thomas. We found the text in the first edition of Hennecke-Schneemelcher *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, (1905). This hymn was no longer included in later editions, perhaps because the authenticity of the attribution to Thomas was doubted. At any rate, we are dealing with an ancient Syriac writing which was incorporated into the *Acta Thomae*.

It is not impossible that Thomas composed a hymn for use in the celebration of the liturgy, after the model of the Psalms of the Old Testaments, perhaps before or after the anaphora which was discussed in the previous chapter. The lofty language and thoughts of the hymn suggest various phrases from the epistle to the Hebrews. It remains a matter for specialists in Syriac and Aramaic to discover any possible connections between the two, in their original form. We will merely give the content in an abbreviated version:

Be praised Father, Lord of the universe, inexpressible being, hidden in the radiance of thy glory from the whole world.

Praise be to thee, Son, first born of life, who come from the exalted father and who art the word of life.

Be praised, unequalled Father, whose wisdom is reflected in all creatures everywhere.

Be praised, Son of the light, of wisdom, of power and insight, which exists from eternity.

Be praised exalted Father, who revealed thyself from thy concealment, through all thy prophets.

Be thou praised, perfect Son, who arose from out of the glory of the Father,

and brought redemption to our souls by the shedding of thy blood.

Be praised good Father, who hast given life to all creatures in mercy and grace, through the crucifixion of thy beloved Son.

Be praised, firstborn Son, who feeds the world with thy body, redeems our sins through the signs of thy wounds, and sprinkles us with thy blood.

Be praised, almighty Father, who sent us thy living and life giving fruit, and who through the blood of thy crucified one, gave thy grace and mercy to all thy creatures.

Be praised thou Son, Word of the light, who came from on high, satisfied us in thy knowledge, cleansed our uncleanness, and brought our mortality to life through thy sign, the cross of the light.

Be praised exalted Father by every knee which shall bend in heaven as on earth, in the name of thy beloved Son.

Be praised, only begotten Son of the Father, whose mercy came over us, and who marked us with the design of his living and lifegiving cross.

May the Father be praised, the Son prayed to, and praise given to the Holy Spirit by all lips and all

tongues by the worlds and the creations which are hidden and which are open. Perfect us in thy goodness, and lead us into the kingdom of thy peace.

Blessed are we, O Lord, who have acknowledged thee.

Blessed are we who have believed in thee,

Blessed are we through the signs of thy wounds and through thy blood shed for us.

Blessed are we, for thou art our great expectation.

Blessed are we, for thou art our God, today and for all eternity. Amen.

The systematic and logical construction of this hymn is worthy of remark. The first praise is given to God the Father, the second to God the Son, and this scheme is followed throughout the long hymn, so that there are twenty-one alternating stanzas of praise each to God the Father and Christ, the Messiah and Son of God. The whole is concluded by praise of the Holy Trinity and a very concrete application to those who offer or sing the hymn. In spite of the possible imperfections of the translation, we come to the conviction that we are dealing with a masterpiece which would not be unworthy of the author of the epistle to the Hebrews.

Conclusion

In this book we have tried to give a reconstruction of the life and work of this apostle. From the scarce and contentious details with which we began, we have built up a total picture of this forgotten apostle which brings him to new life. This book too is a song of praise!! By intensive study it was possible to find out more about him than about all the other apostles put together. The sources were often doubtful and had been handed down in a very mutilated form, as a result of human intervention, sometimes to the extent that they could no longer be understood, as with the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Doctrine of Addai*. A reconstruction means that one may include assumptions or hypotheses whose accuracy can only be established or denied later by new discoveries. We wish to take account of both possibilities, and invite specialists to be ready to make a contribution.

The total picture becomes much clearer if we survey Thomas' whole literary output. We shall attempt to arrange them in chronological order, partly as a result of our study, partly as an hypothesis. In making this summary we take into account the possibility that the older works were written only in Aramaic, and the later ones in Greek.

The sayings of the Lord, the so-called Gospel of Thomas.

Details on the Childhood of Jesus.

The eucharistic prayer or Anaphora of Addai and Mari.

Letters from the east to Edessa.

The Hymn of Thomas.

A translation into Greek of the letter of his step-brother James.

The *Didache* in collaboration with the other Apostles.

A revelation, the text of which was already falsified in his lifetime.

Letters to Clement of Rome.
 The epistle of Jude.
 The epistle to the Hebrews.

What formed the greatest problem of all for Thomas, the cause of his doubts, was undoubtedly the cross - the shame of the cross. As a zealot for God and the Law he looked forward to an earthly Messiah, the rescuer of the Jewish people whom the prophets had foretold. A Messiah who chose the cross, who allowed Himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter, was unacceptable. That the crucifixion of the Son of God was the sacrifice which sealed the new covenant, was an idea which only penetrated his consciousness slowly, after the appearance of the risen Christ. After that, the cross took a central place in his preaching. Everywhere he came and founded a community, he set up the cross as the token of remembrance around which his followers gathered to worship.

Trained as a mason and carpenter, Thomas himself, according to several traditions, built crosses in wood or stone, as for example, at Madras or Kottayam, which are preserved and still venerated as having been constructed by the apostle. Until a few centuries ago, the cross was the only ornament which the Thomas Christians knew in their Churches. In the eastern liturgy the cross is not only the symbol of the passion, but also a sign of victory over death. The cross was the cause of Christ's death. Death is the cause of resurrection. The resurrection is the cause of life and of immortality. The cross is used to symbolise and to venerate Christ, as is clear from this liturgical text:

"O cross, which is in heaven, bring peace to mankind here below, for in heaven they have no need of peace."

We may imagine that whenever he set up a cross, Thomas would give an explanation saying: "Look to Jesus, the beginning and end of our faith, instead of the joy that was His, He took the cross upon Himself, and did

not count the shame. Now He sits at the right hand of God's throne" (Hebrews 12:2). "Take your cross and follow Jesus, and you shall enter into eternal life, for if you have died with Him, you shall also live with Him" (Rom. 6:8). Christendom gave to the cross and the passion a completely new sense and meaning.

We wish to conclude with the most famous text in which the name of the apostle Thomas appears:

"Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always; trust also in me. There are many dwelling places in my Father's house, if it were not so, should I have told you? I am going there on purpose to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again, and receive you to myself, so that where I am, there may you be also; and you know where I am going and my way there. Thomas said: Lord we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way? Jesus replied: I am the way, the truth and the life, no-one comes to the Father except by me" (Jn 14:1-6)

May this book have shown the way to the truth and may Thomas free all its readers from their doubts, lead them and strengthen them on their way to eternal life.

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BO = See Assemani

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