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To cite this version:

Florence Dsouza. Udayamperur and kerala's early christian churches. 2011. halshs-00683371

HAL Id: halshs-00683371

https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00683371v1

Preprint submitted on 28 Mar 2012

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UDAYAMPERUR, AND KERALA'S EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

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The Synod of Udayamperur (a place near Kandanadu, south-east of Cochin) was held on June 20th 1599, under the Archbishop of Goa at that time, Alexis de Menezes, while a Portugese military force surrounded Udayamperur, which was part of the territory of the Raja of Travancore. It was a means for the Roman Catholic Church authorities in Goa to establish their supremacy over the Malankara Syrian Church which claimed its origins went directly back to the visit to India of Saint Thomas the Apostle, around 52 AD, long before the Roman Catholic Church was established in India by the Portuguese around 1510. The 1599 synod of Udayamperur left a terrible mark on the history of Christianity in India as the occasion when Archibishop Alexis de Menezes imposed Latin prayer books and a liturgy in Latin on the Malankara Syrian Church, ordering the burning and destruction of all available prayer books and religious records in the Syrian-Aramaic language. [See : http://members.rediff.com/theckethil/kk1.htm].

The views of two European travellers who visited Kerala respectively some 150 years and 200 years after the 1599 synod of Udayamperur are informative about the conditions of the Christian churches in Malabar and Travancore in the late 18th- and early 19th centuries. These two European witnesses are (a)a French philologist named Anquetil Duperron (1731-1805), who spent six years in India (1755-1761) and one month in Kerala (from 31st December 1757 to 25th January 1758), shortly after the British victory at the Battle of Plassey in Bengal, and (b)a Scottish Anglican Church Missionary of the British Church Missionary Society (CMS) named Claudius Buchanan (1766-1815) who spent twelve years in India (1796-1808) and two months in Kerala (November and December 1806).

While Anquetil Duperron was the son of a Paris trader, whose publications after his return to France from India were devoted to promoting knowledge about Indian cultures and languages in Europe, Claudius Buchanan was the son of a schoolmaster of the Glasgow region, whose energies and writings were directed towards propagating Christianity in Asia. The fifty-year interval which separated Anquetil's visit to Travancore in 1758 from Claudius Buchanan's visit there in 1806, had witnessed the spread of British dominance in India while the French presence in India had dwindled to five small coastal territories (Pondicherry, Chandernagore, Yanam, Karikal and Mahé) since the 1783 treaty of Versailles which ended the Franco-British

hostilities after the American War of Independence. However, complete British supremacy in India only became a fact in 1818 (with the British defeat of the Marathas), and British Christian missionaries were only officially allowed to preach the Christian religion in India after 1813.

The French philologist Anquetil Duperron mentions his brief halt at Udayamperur on his way back to Matencheri and Cochin from Kandenate where the schismatic orthodox Syrian Church's Archibishop Basile Schokor Eulla resided in January 1758. Anquetil was accompanied by a young monk named George, of the schismatic orthodox Syrian Church (under the Patriarch of Antioch) [*Voyage en Inde*, (1771), 1997, p.213]:

"In half an hour [from Kandenate] I reached Odiamper, in the company of the young monk George. Odiamper is not far from Kandenate on the river Mangakarao [Mannakunam?], in a terrain which forms a large arc from south west to south east. The village of Udayamperur is now almost completely in ruins. The remaining walls are far from impressive.
These two places, Kandenate and Odiamper, are to the east-north-east [sic, but in fact east-SOUTH-east] of Matencherri. By the east-south-east from the first [Kandenate], one goes towards Travancore, and by the north-west to the Kingdom of the Muslim Samorin [Nawab of Calicut]."

Anquetil gives in French the contents of the engravings on copper plaques or "olles" of a series of local privileges concerning taxes, land rights, rights to purchase and sell, rights to ride on elephants, the Christian church's right to punish those it considered guilty, granted around 800 AD, by Scharan Peroumal or Ayyan Atikal, the Travancore Raja who resided at Cranganor [Kodungalloor], and written down by "the second king Tama", in part at the temple of Vaikom [south west of Cochin on the road to Kottayam], and in part at the palace of Iringalakkuda [close to Kodungalloor, north of Cochin]. According to Anquetil, these privileges granted by the Kodungalloor Raja were received in writing by an Armenian merchant (of the Syrian Christian Church), named Thomas Knaye around 800 AD, to the sound of drums, trumpets and gunshots. Although the authenticity of the text of these privileges is not quite certain, it is what Anquetil claims was communicated to him by the Syrian Christian clergy of the Cochin area in January 1758. [*Voyage en Inde*, (1771), 1997, p.222-225.].

Anquetil also includes a list of the churches under the Varapuzha diocese, officiated in January 1758 by the Apostolic Vicar for the Malabar coast, the Italian Bishop Florent de Jésus. The list is interesting because alongside each entry, feature four different labels which

show Anquetil's understanding of the four distinct currents of Christian belief practised in Kerala in 1758 : (a)the Syrian Catholic churches which accepted the authority of the Pope in Rome, but practised their own Malankara rites in Latin; (b)the schismatic Syrian Catholic churches, now known as the Mar Thoma Syrian Churches, since they were under an independent Malankara Bishop, who claimed direct descent from St. Thomas the Apostle and since they had always practised their Malankara rites in the Syriac language; (c)the Latin Catholic Church who were under the Pope in Rome and practised the Roman Catholic rites in Latin; and finally, (d)the schismatic Syrian Church (not Catholic at all), now known as the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, under the Nestorian Patriarch of Antioch and Babylon, with Nestorian rites in the Syriac language, with their episcopal headquarters in Kandenate.

To complete Anquetil Duperron's reports on the Christian Churches in Travancore and Malabar, let us now look at the Scottish Missionary Claudius Buchanan's observations of November and December 1806, half a century after Anquetil's passage. In December 1806, accompanied by Leiutenant-Colonel Macauley, the British Resident in Travancore at that time, in a "tour to the interior", Buchanan states [*Christian Researches in Asia*, 1811, p.113]:

"We first visited Udiamper, or as it is called by the Portuguese writers, Diamper. This was formerly the residence of Beliarte, King of the Christians, and here is the Syrian Church at which Archbishop Menezes from Goa, convened the Synod of the Syrian clergy in 1599, when he burned the Syrian and Chaldaic books. The Syrians report, that while the flames ascended, he went round the Church in procession, chaunting a song of triumph."

At Verapoli [Varapuzha] Claudius Buchanan in December 1806 gives a short description of the various Christian dioceses in Kerala [*Christian Researches in Asia*, p.116]:

"[Verapoli]: This is the residence of Bishop Raymondo, the Pope's Apostolic Vicar in Malabar. There is a college here for the sacerdotal office, in which the students (from ten to twenty in number) are instructed in the LATIN and SYRIAC languages.—At Pulingunna [Panangad?], there is another College, in which the Syriac alone is taught. Here I counted twelve students. The Apostolic Vicar superintends 64 churches; exclusive of the 45 governed by the Archbishop of Cranganore, and exclusive of the large Dioceses of the Bishops of Cochin and Quilon, whose churches extend to Cape Comorin, and are visible from the sea."

Earlier, while reporting on his exchanges with Mar Dionysius, Metropolitan of the Syrian Church of Malabar, based in Kandanadu (the successor of Archbishop Basile Schokor Eulla, encountered by Anquetil in 1758), Claudius Buchanan observes : "for I had now ascertained that there are upwards of 200,000 Christians in the South of India, besides the Syrians, who speak the Malabar language" [*Christian Researches in Asia*, p.106]. This would have

included the Malankara Syrian Catholics, the Mar Thoma schismatic Syrian Catholics, and the Latin Catholics, to use Anquetil's four-part classification.

Claudius Buchanan mentions how the Syrian Bishop of Angamalai (to the north east of Cochin and of Alwaye) approximately in the year 1506, soon after the arrival of the Portuguese on the Malabar coast, had deposited the copper and brass plates inscribed with the privileges accorded to the Saint Thomas Christians "by a Prince of a former age", in the fort of Cochin for safe custody, but that they had since "been unaccountably lost", according to the Portuguese historians, and that their disappearance was confirmed in 1770 by the Dutch Governor of Cochin, Adrian Moens. Buchanan claims that the original six Christian tablets of a mixed metal, engraved in nail-headed or triangular-headed letters, had finally "been recovered in this last month [December 1806] by the exertions of Lieutenant-Colonel Macauley, the British Resident in Travancore." [*Christian Researches in Asia*, p.121.] A total of fourteen metal sheets (eleven sheets on Christian privileges in Travancore, and three sheets on Jewish privileges in Travancore), were collected by Buchanan in December 1806 [*Christian Researches in Asia*, p.121]:

"As no person can be found in this country who is able to translate ithe Christian tablets, I have directed an engraver at Cochin, to execute a copper-plate facsimile of the whole, for the purpose of transmitting copies to the learned societies in Asia and Europe".

Upon his return to England in 1808, Claudius Buchanan deposited the Syrian manuscripts and the copper-plate facsimiles of the Christian and Jewish mixed metal tablets, which he had collected from the Malabar coast, in the Cambridge University Library [*Christian Researches in Asia,* note at bottom of p.122]. He also encouraged the printing of vernacular Malayalam translations of the ancient Syrian Bible [*Christian Researches in Asia*, p.125], and after his visit to Goa in 1808 he denounced the absurd bureaucracy and dogmatism of the New Inquisition, instituted in 1775 [*Christian Researches in Asia*, p.130-139]. He makes the following remark on a portrait in Old Goa of Archbishop Alexis de Menezes, "who held the synod of Diamper near Cochin, and burned the books of the Syrian Christians in 1599", [*Christian Researches in Asia*, p.137]:

"From the inscription underneath [the portrait of Archbishop de Menezes] I learned that he was the founder of the magnificent Church and Convent [of the Augustinians in Old Goa] in which I am now residing [in 1808]."

So, more than two hundred years after his atrocities in Udayamperur, Alexis de Menezes was still commemorated as a great Christian leader in Goa, in 1808.

What conclusions can we draw from the comments of a French Catholic philologist in 1758, and of a Scottish Anglican missionary in 1808, on the 1599 Synod of Udayamperur? We could perhaps take inspiration from a recent article by the French scholar, Marc Gaborieau, on the French orientalists' perception of Islam and the major Asian religions (Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism), where he suggests that the multiple religious and cultural differences in Asia are better explained as part of an ongoing historical process of juxtaposition, adaptation and layered stratification of practices, rather than as an undifferentiated intermingling, or as essentialist incompatibilities and conflicts. [Gaborieau, "L'Islam et les grandes religions asiatiques selon les orientalistes français", para 6.3 & Epilogue]. This enables us to understand better the continued presence of the Saint Thomas Christians in Kerala, alongside of the Roman Catholics and the various denominations of Protestant Christians in a very heterogeneous India, where the entire Christian population (all denominations included) represents only 2.5% of Indian's total population of 1.16 billion, that is, at most, some 28 million individuals (nevertheless equivalent to about half the entire population of either France or Great Britain).

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