History of Kerala Christianity on the Basis of Newly Found Documents: Methodological Challenges and Possible Answers
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Here we have a Christian community that is perhaps as old as Christianity itself. Yet its history has been written – more often than not – for the purpose of proving preconceptions and, many times, without documentary evidence. Can we do something about this situation? What kind of documentary and hard evidence is there?
Some undatable ancient Christian monuments in Kerala. Will we be able to date them? Left: Granite cross at Nadamal; right: baptismal font, Agaparambu
The first and foremost challenge: The disappearance of the evidence
The demolition of the old Portuguese-time church of Angamaly. On the board in the center one can see how the new church will look like. In the end the sanctuary (on the right side) was spared.
Fragments of old coffer-work during the demolition of the old Portuguese-time church at Angamaly. If the community itself destroys its own historical monuments, how will it be able to remember its past? The blue colour of the picture is due to the blue plastic covering of the entrance.
Worshipping angel during the demolition
17th-century mural in a church in Kothamangalam. The mural was damaged when, in the 19th century, a wooden altar was constructed and when, in the 20th century, electricity was installed.
A copper plate document and a bunch of palm-leaf documents found in Alangad, now in the Ernakulam Archdiocesan Archives. The copper plate document originally contained four plates – only one was found. It is written in Kolezhuttu script and still awaits deciphering.
First page of a palm-leaf manuscript in the possession of Fr James Aikkaramattam. It is the last surviving manuscript from a priestly family’s collection that was burnt during the cleaning of the house. It contains a theological text in verse, not yet identified. On the left side, also on the detail: “Taking refuge in the Lord.” Language: Malayalam with archaic features; script: Arya ezhuttu - thousands of such documents are disappearing on a daily basis.
A rat-eaten manuscript, now in the Ernakulam Archdiocesan Archives (Ms MAP Syr 7). The present archivist, Fr Ignatius Payyappilly, found and rescued the manuscript. On the photo below: a historic letter by the Malankara Metropolitan Mar Thoma VI from 1778, to Pope Pius VI. Right: the letter’s Garshuni Malayalam version; left: its Syriac version. This is the only known copy of this document, which I would consider as the key witness enlightening a set of historical events. It was discovered during the digitisation of the archives. What would have happened if the rats had eaten it completely?
• **First task**: To rescue, collect and preserve whatever document can still be saved. With these documents India’s “past” and, so, part of humanity’s “past” is rapidly disappearing….

• **Parallel to this**: to survey and photograph the monuments that are still standing. One cannot know what happens to any of these monuments tomorrow.
Our team working on the historical documents and monuments
Members of the team:
Dr Susan Thomas, historian
Rev Ignatius Payyappilly, archivist
Rev Dr George Kurukkoor, philologist
Fabian da Costa, photographer
Attila Baticz, IT specialist
Anaz Abdulkareem, cataloguer, Ph.D. student in history
Aravind Krishnan, Joseph Varghese, Gladwyn P. Xavier, technicians
Sponsors of the work

• German Research Council, Bonn, Germany
• Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Collegeville, MN, USA
• Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
• The work is carried out by an Indian NGO, registered in Kerala, the Association for the Preservation of the Saint Thomas Christian Heritage, in close collaboration with the Kerala Council of Historical Research.
• This kind of work will only become sustainable on the long term if Indian institutions will also take part in the sponsorship!
Team members 1: Father Ignatius Payyappilly, archivist, with a reliquary cross at Pallippuram. Tradition holds that the cross was carved by Saint Thomas himself – we have christened this type of cross “the Saint Thomas Cross.”
Team members 2: Dr Susan Thomas and Mr Geejo George, studying palm-leaf manuscripts at Karingachira
Team members 3: Dr Susan Thomas and the author working on Syriac funerary inscriptions in the cemetery of the Jacobite church in Nadamal, Tripunnithura
Team members 4: Rev Dr George Kurukkoor, a great connoisseur of Old Malayalam. He teaches our younger staff to read the ancient scripts. Without him the Old Malayalam documents would remain silent.
• Team members 5: Fabian da Costa, the project’s photographer and visual director at work
Team members 6: Anaz Abdulkareem cataloguing a Christian palmleaf document
Team members 7: The technician’s team at work. On the left: digitisation of palm-leaves; on the right: digitisation of paper manuscripts.
Team members 8: Attila Baticz, the project’s IT guru
The second challenge: linguistic and documentary complexity of the sources
Languages and scripts

- **Malayalam** – written in Vattezhuttu, Kolezhuttu, Thekken-Malayanma, Garshuni (or Suriyani) Malayalam, Arya ezhuttu (Modern Grantha – from the 17th century), Modern Malayalam
- **Tamil** – written in Tamil or Vattezhuttu
- **Syriac** – written in East or West Syriac and their variants
- **Portuguese, Latin, Italian, Dutch, English**
The material carrier of the documents

- **Inscriptions:** on granite slabs, crosses, wooden objects, murals, incised or painted
- **Legal documents:** on stone steles, copper plates, palm-leaves, paper
- **Literary and liturgical:** on palm-leaves and paper
Inscriptions
A stone inscription from 1494 (Kollam 669), presently at Padmanabhapuram Palace, granting royal concessions of taxes to the church of Kumarimuttam, which, in exchange, lights a coconut-oil lamp for the Venad King.

Language: Tamil; script: Tamil (discovered by A. S. Ramanatha Ayyar in 1924)
Inscription, dated 1581, at Muttuchira, From this document we learn, among others, that in the 16th century instead of the earlier wooden crosses the communities started to erect granite crosses.

Language – Malayalam; script – Vattezhuttu.
Description of the Muttuchira Vattezhuttu inscription by A. S. Ramanatha Ayyar

“This record begins with the date A.D. 1528 in which a cross (ślīva mentioned as tiḻivā) of wood appears to have been erected under the orders of the Patriarch (tamburān) and then it enumerates a few bishops who had been in charge of the Syrian church of Malabar in the beginning of the sixteenth century A.D., such as Mar Denha and Mar Givargis (George). After them is mentioned Mattāyi-pādīri who went to Portugal and who is represented as the marumagan of one of the bishops. […] The bishop Mār Simeon, together with his vicar (pādīri) Jacob is said to have taken out this wooden cross (mara-tilivā) on the 13th Kanni of the year A.D. 1580, which was the anniversary day (tilivā perunāl) of the Invention of the Cross (by St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine), and to have consecrated a stone cross (karuṇjal-tilivā) instead, on Good Friday, the 29th day of Mīnam in A.D. 1581” (Travancore Archeological Series VII/I, Trivandrum 1930, p. 76). Mar Simeon was a Nestorian bishop.
The basement of the cross at Muttuchira, dated 1624, and elements of its decorations: a typical example of Indo-Christian art. Note the blend of Christian, Hindu, and even Buddhist, symbols (the vajra). One of our tasks would be to initiate the study of this art, which, hitherto, has escaped scholarly attention.
Christian tombstone preserved at the Kanjoor Syro-Malabar Church. Language: Malayalam; script: Kolezhuttu: “In the year 783 of the Kollam era, in the month of Medam, on the 16th day according to the old counting, Katthoṭṭungel Qorudu Kochawda went the good way” (translated by Fr George Kurukkoor). The date is 1608 AD; the “old counting” is the pre-Portuguese calendar; Qorudu is the Malayalam version of the Syriac Quriaqos; Kochawda means “Small Abraham”. Small Abraham was the defunct’s personal name, while Quriaqos was the name of his father.
Syriac inscription on a granite cross at Koratty. Its date is uncertain (16th century?): “This is Jesus of Nazaret, the king of the Jews” – “Jah” [God’s name] – “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.”
Syriac inscription in Kandanad, commemorating the construction of the episcopal palace: “This palace was built in the days of our Lord Mor Ignatios, Patriarch of Antioch, who is Elias II, and for the use of our Metropolitan, Mor Qurillos Yuyaqim from Tur Abdin, through the expenses of the Jacobite Syrians, in the year 1846 of Christ” (throughout this document, Syriac texts are translated by István Perczel). A detailed and documented history of the Antiochian Jacobite missions in India is yet to be written.
The episcopal palace of Mor Qurillos Yuyaqim in Kandanad, built in 1846
Manuscripts
A Syriac manuscript from the collection of the Church of the East, MS Thrissur Syr 20 – a *Kashkol* (Book of the Ordinary Prayers), copied in 1585 in Kothamangalam
A palm-leaf chronicle from Kuruppampady, dated 1770, telling the story of the separation of the Catholic and Jacobite communities. **Language: Malayalam; script: Kolezhuttu.** On the magnified detail: “In the year 1768 after the birth of Christ…”
MS Mannanam Mal 14, a Church History from the end of the 18th century, preserving original documents from the 18th century. Language: Malayalam and Syriac; script: Garshuni Malayalam and Syriac. Garshuni Malayalam is a mixture of Syriac and Old Malayalam (Kolezhuttu or Thekken-Malayanma) characters. On the magnified detail: “…they consecrated Mar Alexander of Kuravilangad a bishop.”
Third challenge: How to use the testimony of the documents? Do they tell us a continuous story?
Some basic dates and events

• **52 AD:** According to tradition St Thomas arrives in Kerala – the date is legendary; according to some alternative documents the Apostle arrived first in Mailapur, Chennai, where the first community was founded.

• **345 AD:** Thomas of Cana (or of Jerusalem), a Syrian Christian merchant, arrives in Kodungallur and founds the first Syrian colony. He receives privileges from the Cera king (Ko Cera-kon or Ceraman Perumal), recorded on copper plates. From that time onward the Indian Christian community is under the jurisdiction of the Church of the East, having its headquarters in Mesopotamia. The copper plates were lost in the 16th century, so that the date 345 cannot be ascertained.

• **823-25 AD:** Another Syrian Christian colony from Persia, led by the merchant Sabrisho and two bishops, Mar Shapur and Mar Prot, arrives in Kollam. They, together with the Jewish merchants and the previous Christian merchant guild Manigramam, received extensive privileges from Ayyan, the king of Venad. The Kollam copper plates, ca. from 880 AD, are extant, and so the date 825 should be slightly reconsidered. Descendants from this second immigration wave still remember their family history.
Events and dates continued

• Second half of the 9th century: the extinction of the Christian community of the Coromandel Coast, due to the activity of Māṇikka-vāśagar, a Śaiva saint, who was perhaps a minister of a Pāndyan king, probably Varaguṇa II (862-885). This can be established on the basis of Christian historical works.

• 1494 AD: According to the Treaty of Tordesillas, concluded between Spain and Portugal and endorsed by the Pope, India falls within the power of the King of Portugal, who has the right to appoint the bishops of the newly discovered and acquired lands – this is the Portuguese Padroado (Patronage).

• 1498 AD: Vasco da Gama arrives in Kozhikode.

• Before 1556 AD: Mar Abraham, the last Persian Metropolitan of the Saint Thomas Christians, arrives in India as a Nestorian Bishop. He is captured, confesses the Catholic faith, is sent to Rome and comes back in 1568 as a Chaldean Catholic (East Syrian united with Rome) bishop. According to the Padroado rule, he has to submit himself to the Archbishopric of Goa.

• In 1578, Mar Simeon is sent by the Nestorian Patriarch as Mar Abraham’s rival, but is captured and sent to Rome.

• 1597 AD: The death of Mar Abraham; 1599 AD: the death of Mar Simeon.
Events and dates continued

• 1599 AD: The Synod of Diamper (Udayamperoor): the customs and beliefs of the Saint Thomas Christians are condemned as “heretical”, their Syriac books containing the “heresy” are to be burnt and their whole life is to be reformed. New Syriac texts are to be created, translated from the Latin etc.

• 1653 AD: The community revolts and secedes from the Portuguese Padroado bishops. It consecrates its local leader, the Archdeacon, a bishop, under the name Mar Thoma.

• 1656: The Dutch expel the Portuguese from Cochin.

• 1663: Mar Alexander Parampil becomes the first indigenous Catholic bishop. This constitutes the first lasting split in the community.

• 1665: First Jacobite mission in India: Mor Gregorios Abd al-Jaleel.

• 1685: Second Jacobite mission in India: Mor Baselios Yaldo and Mor Iyovannis Hidayat Allah.

• From that time onward there are two antagonistic communities, one belonging to a European and one to a West Asian Church. These communities will, with time, split into ever more communities, so that at present we have 7 Churches and jurisdictions.

• Question: Are we able to add the flesh of micro- and macro-history to this skeleton?
Some important documents
MS Ernakulam MAP 4: First page of Mar Abraham’s (Metropolitan of Malabar between ca. 1555 and 1597) personal copy of the East Syriac canon law collection, copied in 1563, in Gazarta
Latin inscription at the bottom of the page and, on the margin, personal note of Mar Abraham:

- "This belongs to the Discalced Carmelites" (*Pertinet ad Carmelitas Discalcatos*)
- “Cursed be Nestorius, the rapacious wolf. He does not belong to us and we do not belong to him. We do not see him and we do not know him; he was not from among us, nor are we from his folk; but his name cleaves to us and as many times as we reject it from us, it does not become rejected and does not leave. For this reason we anathematise him and excommunicate him and we make him alien from our Church and our faith, as the holy Roman Church commands and preaches and teaches. And we also confess and believe that the Lady Mary is the Mother and Bearer of God and that our Lord Jesus Christ is in two natures and in one person (*hypostasis*), truly God, according to the Roman innovation (sic!). This curse was written by Mar Abraham, Metropolitan of the Christian Agnamaly (sic!).” [On the right side, two additions by a later hand: “Blessed” – before “Lady Mary”, and “without division” – after “truly God”. Somebody felt that the expressions of Mar Abraham were not correct enough.]

Now, was this Mar Abraham (1) a secret Nestorian, as the Jesuit Francisco Roz held? Or was he (2) a faithful – though misunderstood – Catholic (as proposed by some European scholars)? Or was he (3) just the leader of his people whose customs and traditions he tried to vindicate and to preserve? If we read the above note, we may understand this better – I am opting for the third solution.
The most important symbolic event of Western colonial intrusion into the life of the Saint Thomas Christians: The Synod of Diamper (Udayamperoor) in 1599
From Decree XIV of Action III of the Synod of Diamper (1599) condemning the “heretical” Syriac books of the Saint Thomas Christians to be burnt

- Also [the Synod condemns] a Book intituled, An Exposition of the Gospels; wherein it is everywhere pretended to be proved, that there are two Persons in Christ, and that Christ as a pure Creature, was obliged to adore God, and stood in need of Prayer; that he was the Temple of the most Holy Trinity; that Christ’s Soul, when he died, descended not into Hell, but was carried to the Paradise of Eden; which was the place he promised to the Thief on the Cross: that our Lady, the Virgin, deserved to be reproved for having vainly imagined, that she was Mother to one that was to be a great King; looking upon Christ as no other than a pure Man; and presuming that he was to have a Temporal Empire, as well as the rest of the Jews; That the Evangelists did not Record all Christ’s Actions in Truth as they were, they not having been present at several of them; which was the reason why they differed from one another so much. .... (translation by Michael Geddes)

- Now, were all these condemned books indeed burnt?
MS Piramadam Syr 14: An anonymous Nestorian commentary on the Gospels, identical to the one condemned at the Synod of Diamper. It contains the commentaries of Isho Dad of Merv, a 9th-century East Syriac theologian. This is not the only condemned text that has survived Diamper!
MS Mannanam Syr. 46, ff. 192-195: Syriac letters by early Jesuit missionaries (ca. 1579-1609) – below: the beginning of the first letter
Translation of the first letter in MS Mannanam Syr. 46, by a Jesuit missionary to the Archdeacon

[f. 192r]: “To the Head of the deaconate which is <full> of sublime spiritual gifts, peace! The cause for us not coming to you is that the Prince of Cochin wrote and sent to us <about the fact that> Abraham, the adversary of the Padri sent to him and to the bishop <proposing> that this dispute (or: schism) should be solved before them. All this <happened> after <some> Christians came here and to Vawmas’aye (Bawmas’aye?) for this reason. Because of this we have written to the Prince that he should fulfil his <probably Abraham’s> wish. And it was because of this that we have abandoned the issue rather than <allow> that there be much pretext against the King [perhaps of Portugal], <saying> that he does not fulfil the promises concerning those things that earlier he had promised them. Moreover, the people of the locality of Parur mistreated some people from among the men belonging to the holy Roman Church and so it was not befitting that after we received blows by their hands we should go to them. So please know all this, for there is no other explanation besides this.”

The letter is addressed to the Archdeacon, George of Christ. It treats the beating up of Pero Luis, the first Indian Jesuit in Paravur, which happened sometime around 1579. So the letter should be dated to ca. 1579. “Abraham, the adversary of the Padri” is Mar Abraham, Metropolitan of India.
MS Thrissur Syr 7: Letter, in Syriac, of Chandy Kadavil Katthanar (Alexandros Lmenaya, Alexander the Indian,) to Antonio Toscano SJ, ca. 1625/30
Translation of the beginning of Chandy Kadavil’s letter to Antonio Toscano

• [f. 113r] To the priest Antonio Toscano, the Jesuit teacher (rabban), Prior of Edapally, beloved in our Lord, and to your disciples, the Thomasian priests [that is, priests belonging to the Congregation of St. Thomas at Edapally], illustrious teachers and brilliant ascetics who dwell with your loving Teachership, peace! I, priest Alexander who is called Lmenāyā, being a servant of your Lovingkindness and the most miserable and needy of humankind, I desire much to come to your Lovingkindness, the most beloved, glorious, holy and pleasant of all the Messiah’s Christendom, because I heard living words come forth from your golden mouth and I beheld your beautiful face and lovely countenance shining from the study concerning the Sun of Righteousness, and I learned to know your good way of life and wonderful deeds, your awesome discipline and manifold good works, so that I was rejoicing [f. 113v] in a great spiritual joy. And not only this but, when I collect in my mind your words that are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb and when I impress the model of your stupendous direction in my intellect, <both of> which are for the salvation of my darkened and negligent self, I end up in a study which is useful for me.

• This flowery style is that of a real poet as we will shortly see…
Translation of the beginning of Poem 7 of Chandy Kadavil

• [106v] O, Lord full of joy,
• in your incomparable mercy
• give a mind of purity
• and a skilled discernment for intelligence
• to me, your feeble and rude servant,
• who is ill, weakened by sickness
• – for singing the praises
• of Mar Franciscus, full of chastity,
• from Beth Inash (?) <place> of justice
• a holy man [agios – a Greek term!] renowned for <his> virtue.
• I will sing

• [107r] a chant of joy
• about all the wondrous story.
• Alap: To the God of all those who exalt Him,
• and the Creator of all the merciful,
• the Donator of all salvation,
• the Vivificator of all the corporeal beings,
• Beth. the Maker of all that is in Heaven and Earth,
• who shows His beloved glory
• and his great and overflowing power,
• to Him is due praise from all the minds.

Chandy Kadavil's Syriac poetry is blending East Syriac liturgical traditions with those of European humanism, learned in the school of Bishop Francisco Roz, who himself was a real linguistic and literary genius. Chandy's Syriac language is full of Graecisms and Hebraisms, all synthesised in a very Indian manner.
MS Samanvaya Syr 18, on the last leaves of a Syriac grammar book: Copy of a Letter of Ignatius Abd-al-Masih I, Patriarch of Antioch, to his faithful in Malabar (1685 AD) – the letter permits to understand the circumstances of the delegation of the first Antiochian prelates – Mor Gregorios Abd al-Jaleel (1665) and Mor Baselios Yaldo (1685).
A detail from the Letter of Moran Mor Ignatios Abd al-Masih I to the faithful of Malabar

- After greeting you with a holy kiss, let that, which we are relating to each one of you, be known to you, o brethren, my beloved, namely that the apostolate to you of Gregorios, that is, the venerable Abd al-Jaleel, was from the divine Providence, because you were not able to appoint and to consecrate for yourselves venerable bishops. Afterwards, you were in need and have already sent three times <envoys to us>. And we yielded <to your request> out of the love of Christ, and have sent to you our Fathers, our Father Mor Baselios, that is, Patriarch Yaldo, together with those who accompany him, not in order that he stays with you, but in order to fill your need and to consecrate for you venerable <bishops> and metropolitans. And after having fulfilled your requests, send them back to us. We do not want him to come to us after a long period, but after three years.
Colophon by the hands of Mor Yovannis Hidayat Allah, Jacobite Bishop of Niniveh residing in India, written in 1689, *Piramadam Syr 27, 25r*
Colophon of the translation of the Revelations of St Gregory the Theologian, from the Arabic to Syriac, by Mor Yovannis Hidayat’ Allah, *Piramadom MS Syr. 25, f. 41v*
Translation of the colophon of Mar Yovannis Hidayat’allah

in *Piramadam MS Syr. 25*, f. 41v

• “The grace of God be on those who listen to this [story], on those who read it, on those present and on those far away, and on the scribe, Mor Ivannios, the foreigner, Bishop of Niniveh, who has translated it from the Arabic to Syriac in the church of St George in Kōdamattam (today Kadamattam), in the year 2000 of the Greeks (that is, 1689 AD), in the month of Nisan, on the 24th day. May God have mercy on the departed of the scribe for the ages of ages. Amen. Amen. End.”

• This is the only manuscript known to date, which contains this Syriac translation of the Arabic original of the *Revelations of St Gregory*. Unfortunately the text’s beginning is lost.
Mannanam Mal 14, 46r-45v: Copy of a letter by Mar Shem’on of Ada, East Syrian Metropolitan, from 1701 AD, to his faithful in Malabar
A detail from Mar Simeon’s letter

- After requesting that you be in spiritual peace and asking about your condition I let it know to your graceful love that I came from Mar Eliah, Patriarch of the East; let his glorious see be fortified! Amen.

- First I went to Jerusalem and from there I went to the great Rome and to Spain and to the land of Portugal; from there I came to the land of India, to the city of Anjuna and asked about you and he <whom I asked> told me: “Those people are not here, the people whom you seek, but go to the city of Surat, there you will find them.” I went to Surat and did not see anybody from among you, but I saw a Jew and a book [letter] of yours was with him. I took it from him, kissed it and read, rejoiced very much and asked him: “Where would be these Christians?” – and he told me: “In the land of Kochi.”

- The letter is a testimony to the desperate efforts of the East Syrian patriarchs to maintain their jurisdiction in Malabar.
MAP MS Syr 7, f. 512r: A copy of a letter by Patriarch Yohannan Hormiz to his faithful in Malabar, from 1830
A detail from the letter of Yohannan Hormizd

- After duly enquiring about your spiritual well-being and asking about your condition, we let it be known to your beloved kindness that from the day when we sent Priest Joseph and Priest Hormizd, there came to us no reply from you, until now. Now we have sent Reader Abdisho, who will go to your place of residence to find out about your condition and will come and let us know about your condition. He will let you know about our condition; he will let you know everything about our activity now that we are asking our Lord and are soliciting the abundant ocean of His mercy that He may bless you with all heavenly blessing and take away and make depart from you the sufferings and the affliction and that He may liberate you from the temptations and the rebellion and the evil scandals, by the prayer of the Apostles and the Fathers, so that during your lifetime you may remain healthy and be preserved in the sign of the living Cross of the Lord. Yes and Amen.

- This letter testifies to an intense contact between the Chaldean Patriarch and his faithful in Malabar, during a period when Yohannan Hormizd was under suspension by the Pope. All these dealings and contacts were clandestine from both parts.
Letter of Mor Dionysius I (1759-1809) to Pope Pius VI, *Ernakulam MAP Syr 7*, f. 516v-517r. On the right: the Malayalam Garshuni text; on the left: the Syriac text
• “After the fact that they behaved despitefully and jeopardised this plan, I asked the illustrious Joseph Kariatty, from Alangad, student in the school for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, apostolic preacher in India, <with compunction> in my heart, in many tears and in distress <…> the Saviour may grant that I end my erring. When he saw my compunction, <…> he was inflamed by my tears, and he promised in truth <…> that “I will go to Rome and <pray that> nothing happens to me on the way and I will be anxious about presenting your supplication before the feet of our Lord, the holy Pope. For it has not been heard that the Church would abandon a penitent man.” Therefore I trusted his great love <…> because he took my cause upon his shoulders in order to bring it to Rome upon my behalf…”
A detail from the Malayalam version of the letter of Mor Dionysius I (Mar Thoma VI) to Pope Pius VI (1778 AD)

- Because of these high priests and their padri’s many scandals, divisions and defections are caused among the faithful in Malabar. That is to say, the matter that one bishop binds, the other bishop unbinds; and what one bishop unbinds, the other bishop binds again. God alone knows the conditions of their acts. I very much hesitate to report all this to your Lordship.

- For this reason myself and the priests who are in the Holy Church in Malabar are describing our petitions and grievances, in order to bring them, by the grace of the almighty God, to your Throne. We are sending the venerable Kariyattil Yausep Kattanar and Paramakka Thomman Kattanar to your holy Throne, in order to have consolation and salvation by the graces that will be donated to us by your Petrine power…. 

- Since we, who are living under the pagan kings, are poor, it is by many of us together, meeting their expenditures, that we are sending these two people to your Lordship. Because of this, I, Metropolitan Dionysius, request from your Holiness what the priests who are sent are requesting from your Throne.

(translated by Fr George Kurukkoor)
Interestingly, the alleged Syriac translation of the letter does not correspond to its original Malayalam text. According to our reconstruction, Mor Dionysius wrote the original in order to offer a deal to the Pope: if the latter accepts that Mor Dionysius becomes the unique head (Metropolitan) of the Saint Thomas Christians of Malabar, Mor Dionysius would be ready to join the Catholic Church, together with his people, consisting of 50,000 faithful. For this reason he is sending the two priests, Joseph Kariattil and Thomas Paramakkal, to Rome. However, when Joseph Kariattil translated the letter into Syriac, he gave it a twist. He eliminated Mor Dionysius’ claim for the headship but enhanced his own role as being the only possible mediator acceptable for all the parties. Moreover, he was keen on transforming the original letter’s content so that it becomes perfectly conform with the official Catholic theology, something completely ignored by Mor Dionysius.

At the end of the day Joseph Kariattil came back to Malabar, consecrated Metropolitan of all the Christians in Lisbon. However, he died in mysterious conditions in Goa, before reaching his people and accomplishing his mission. The Saint Thomas Christian tradition holds that he was poisoned by the Portuguese.
A palm-leaf chronicle from Kuruppampady, dated 1770, written in Kolezhuttu Malayalam on the story of the separation of the Catholic and Jacobite communities. From this chronicle we learn that in Kuruppampady, just like at many other places, after the separation of the Catholic and the Jacobite communities around 1665 the two communities lived in peace, sharing the same church. This peaceful coexistence came to an end in 1768, when the communities proved unable to share the same sanctuary. The legal procedures of the separation, giving much food for thought, are described in this chronicle (the chronicle is translated and published by Dr. Susan Thomas).
An inscription, dated 1802 AD, on a timber in the attic of a church in Kanjoor. Language: Malayalam with Tamil and Syriac loanwords; script: Kolezhuttu.
Translation of the Kanjoor inscription

• “In the year 1902 after the birth of Christ, that is, in the year 977 according to the Kollam era, in the month of Mithunam, on the 5th day, the roof was erected and the bolster was built up. In the year [9]78, in the month of Thulam, on the 8th day, the beams upon the wall were placed. As far as possible, in that position, the supports upon which the cross-beams were resting were not changed. In Yedavam month, on the 12th day according to the old counting, having fixed the ceiling and placed the adornments, Master Ñyañîda, from the carpenters of Kannayalacheril, wrote this (translated by Fr George Kurukkoor).

• Kollam era 977 corresponds to 1802 AD. The calculation of the date according to the Christian era has been made erroneously, adding 925, instead of the required 825, to the Kollam era date.

• When the Portuguese came in India, they introduced the Gregorian calendar; this also influenced the counting of the days of the month in the Malayalam month- and year-system. However, the large majority of the inscriptions uses the pre-Portuguese system, indicating that it follows the “old counting.”

• The inscription commemorates the reconstruction of the roof of the church after Tippu Sultan of Mysore set the church on fire in 1790.
The documents presented here are just individual spotlights in the darkness of history. They were selected from among many, while others could have been selected instead. However, I believe that as we multiply the spotlights, the darkness will be dispelled. Of course, this is not an automatic process. Enlightening the darkness needs the interpretative activity of the intelligent human mind. However, the documents and monuments preserved will give an objective basis for this mental activity.