

Historical Sketch of Saint Thomas in Taxila

Wajid Bhatti

Lecturer, Department of Archaeology, University of the Punjab, Lahore

Email: wajid.arch@pu.edu.pk

Abstract

Taxila was ruled by various political dynasties like Achaemenians, Greeks, Indo-Greeks, Mauryans, Scythians, Parthians, Kushans, Sassanians, and White Huns. During the Parthian rule, St. Thomas visited Taxila. As a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, he sowed the seed of Christianity in Taxila. After the ascension of Jesus Christ, the Disciples of Christ dispersed all around the world, and St. Thomas selected the Indian region to spread the Gospel. The whole story of St. Thomas is based on Gnostic record "Acts of Thomas" and few sources of Synoptic records. All these records narrate his visit in South India and North-West India (Pakistan). He was sold by Habban, a foreign trader around 52 CE. He moved to Mailepuram (Mylapore) and then to Taxila. After preaching in Taxila he moved to China. He converted many prominent rulers among was Gondophares, the king of Taxila and his brother Gad. The research aims (a) to trace and identify the vestiges of St. Thomas' presence in Taxila. (b) to add some historical evidence in Eastern & Western Church history (c) to fill gaps in early Christian history of Pakistan. Historical evidences has revealed the Jewish settlement which existed long before St. Thomas' visit in Taxila.

Keywords:

Saint Thomas, Christianity, Gandhara, Taxila, Apocryphal Literature, Apocalypse.

Introduction

Since the first appearance of Gandhara *Rig Veda* denoting a certain geographical unit, it has been a subject of controversy as to what part of South Asia it precisely refers to. Chinese travellers identified Peshawar Valley and Gandhara, which is made up of two words, “Gand” and “hara” which are translated as scent or fragrance and land (Qureshi, 2003, p. 12). Persian inscriptions of Behistun, Persepolis and *Naksh-e-Rustam* also include Gandhara (Gadra) in the list of Persian satrapies. In the *Vedic* and *Puranic* Literature, Gandhara is as often as possible alluded as "Uttara" (northern) nation, possessed by *Gandharavas* (Rapson, 1955, p. 26). Moreover, *Kien-to-lo* is also identified as Gandhara by the Chinese Pilgrim (Cunningham, 2002). The estimation of its limits is anyway out of the blue portrayed just by Xuan Zang. In a similar vein, the country of Kien-to-lo spanned approximately 1000 li from east to west and 800 li from north to west. It appears that the term Gandhara isn't bizarre in the locale as there are different names following a similar example. These are *Nagarahara*, *Pothohara*, *Vanahara* and *Nirahara* etc. The origin of the names ascribed to these regions requires investigation and explanation. The suitable answer could be sought in the geographical characteristics of each region. *Nagarahara*, also termed Na-kie-lo-ho, which translates to “land marked by a city,” has lent its name to the encompassing area.

The plain terrain to the east of the Indus River seems to have acquired its name owing to its mound-like topography. Indeed, the word Potho is a *Prakrit* rendition of the word *Pusht*, signifying ‘back.’ Given that this area is situated at the rear of elevated hills, it logically earned the designation ‘*Pothohara*,’ denoting ‘the land at the back.’ The instance of categorization is observed even south of the Salt Range, where a vast area is

still identified as '*Vanahara*', meaning 'woodland', and the region at the back of Margalla (particularly Mar Qila) is known as *Nihara*, indicating a land distinguished by the presence of a river or rivers. Hence, it looks evident that each of these regions derived its name based on the geographical characteristics of the land it portrays. If the term Gandhara had been exclusively associated with the Buddhist era, its supposed meaning (suggesting fragrance) would indeed be practical. While one could easily discover a connection to the spiritual essence of Buddhism, the name predates the Buddhist period and was first cited in the *Rig Veda* approximately one thousand years prior to the advent of Buddhism. The engraving originating from Hamdan discards Gandhara and specifies just the name of 'Hindu' Satrapy Achaemenian Empire (Qureshi, 2003, p. 29). It is possible that the execution of Hamadan epigraph Ganj Nameh resulted in the entire Sindhu Valley, including Gandhara, being collectively addressed to by the title 'Hindu as the Achaemenian Satrapy.

The Achaemenians ruled over Gandhara for about two centuries, but with the exception of a few scattered mentions, that long period of dominance is nowhere recorded. Various political dynasties played an important role in Gandhara, like Achaemenians, Greeks, Indo-Greeks, Mauryans, Scythians, Parthians, Kushans, Sassanians, White Huns, also known as Ephthalites, Trukh Shahis, and Ghaznavi Period have additionally assumed a vital part in the political history of Gandhara (Qureshi, 2003, p. 24). Sometimes the Peshawar valley and Taxila are collectively known to be Gandhara; even the Swat valley was also included in it. The heart of Gandhara was Peshawar valley. The kingdom of Gandhara was ruled from many capitals such as *Pushkalavati* (Charsada), Taxila *Takshashila* or *Takashila* (Qureshi, 2003, p. 15), *Purushapura*

(Peshawar) and its final days from *Udabhandapura* (Hund) on the Indus. In early Buddhist literature, particularly in the *Jatakas*, Taxila is as often as possible said as a college focus where understudies could get direction in any subject whether religious or common, from Vedas to arithmetic and solution, even to soothsaying and arrow based weaponry. This pre-distinction of the city as a seat of scholastic and useful education was a result of her geological position at the north-western portal of the sub-landmass. Students travelled to Taxila to undergo education in the three Vedas and the eighteen *Silpa*.

Acts of Saint Thomas informs us regarding the historical backdrop of Saint Thomas in India around 52 CE with Habban a remote broker. He arrived at Maliankara (Cranganore) in Kerala where he lectured the Gospel, fashioned supernatural occurrences and changed over numerous. At that point, he moved to Mailepuram (Mylapore), and after that, went to China at some point, he came back to Maliankara and moved to Madaras again, where he spent the rest of his time on earth in educating, lecturing, and drawing a substantial number of mistreated and the smothered into his crease. Saint Thomas accomplished numerous miracles, and the local king, Lord Mahadeva, provided him a location along the coast, which is now the site of the old Church of Mylapore. His conversion exercises enraged the universal, and opponents from their rank vowed to finish him. Saint Thomas hid himself in a cave near the current St. Thomas Mount (approximately five kilometers from Mylapore). Then moved to North-West India (Modern day Pakistan) and preached there at Taxila. Finally, he moved back to Mylapore, where he was killed by those enemies. His remains were shifted to Mylapore and interred in 73 CE at a location that remained obscure to several centuries.

Demonstration of Saint Thomas was found in 1822 in Syria, the book recounted how St. Thomas having been relegated by Christ to spread the Gospel to Indians, touched base by vessel in the capital of King Gondophares. This Act of Saint Thomas is basically a Gnostic (gnosis in Greek) source according to Christian Theologians.

These Gnostics were followers of a variety of religious innovations in the early Christian centuries that concentrated on the idea that individuals could be saved by mystery understanding. Gnostic conviction is based on stark dualism. Until the nineteenth century, our understanding of Gnostics was based on the written work of Christians such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen, Tertullian, and Epliphanius. Many academics have written that progress was being made at the time. From the beginning, distinctions were formed between real and fraudulent versions of the Christian message. Although there are different theories regarding the visit of Saint Thomas to India and agreements and disagreements both are fond on this issue of his visit to India. (Marshall, 2016, p. 14)

Saint Thomas (Disciple of Jesus Christ)

St. Thomas, as mentioned in the Bible, is counted among the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. As indicated by Eusebius his genuine name was Judas yet it is mistaken for Thaddeus who is likewise specified in the concentrate, it is a probability that Thomas was his surname. The book of Acts and all four gospels mention him by Johnsubmitted, who gave him the active role and submitted his Greek name “Didymus,” and it is equivalent to his Hebrew name (John 11:16). The Biblical meaning of this name is “the twin” or “double.” According to church tradition with Thomas his sister was also born, her name was “Lydia” that is the reason why he was given name “Didymus” (Yad, 2007, p. 18). The Gnostic sources disclose that he had a place with Benjamin clan. He consumed a

large portion of his time on earth as Hermit close Antioch (close Syria) yet he was conceived in the Galilean city of Pansada. Professionally he was an angler (Yad, 2007, p. 22). The inventory of missionaries discloses to us that he is combined with Philip (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). Church customs reveal to us that Saint Thomas established Christian places of worship in Palestine, Mesopotamia, Parthia, Ethiopia and India (Pliny, 2012, pp. 15-19). It is general acceptance among the Christians of Pakistan that Christianity reached to them in the first century through Saint Thomas, one of Jesus Christ's twelve disciples, also known as "doubting Thomas". There is a common belief that he initially came to Taxila in the Holy Land, deploying John Thomas as a Bishop, and later went to Kerala. In South India, Christians hold a strong tradition that Saint Thomas went there, constructed ancient churches called "Mar Thoma" or the Syrian Orthodox church, and was martyred by a Tamil King at St. Thomas mount near Chennai (Madras) (Yad, 2007, pp. 18-26).

Alexander John Malik, the Bishop of the Church of Pakistan, thinks that the river Sin, which runs 20 km north of Taxila and all the way to Karachi, is how he arrived in Taxila (Takshasila); he also thinks that this river is how Thomas arrived in the Taxila region. The cross of Saint Thomas, which is currently the Church of Pakistan's emblem since 1970, is said to be a relic from his time spent in Taxila. He was brought to the Indian subcontinent and sold into slavery by an Indian by the name of Habban. The apocryphal Acts of St. Thomas, whose veracity was questioned by several academics, claims that the King was introduced to the mythical Gondophares in Taxila. The King governed the Indo-Parthian Dynasty beginning in 21 CE and lasted for at least 26 years. A few coins with the picture of Gondophares were found in Afghanistan by General

Alexander Cunningham, bringing historical accuracy to the fore. Another indication of Stupas' presence in Taxila is his cruciform foundation. There is another interesting belief among few Christians of Pakistan that the holy shroud of Turin was originally woven in Sindh and even the Bible also gives reference of this cloth, both the Old and New Testament also give references regarding this cloth. (Proverbs 31:24) and even Herodotus 5th century historian used the word "Sindon" for Shroud in his historical accounts, moreover Bishop William G. Yang writes in his book the original word of Hind was Sindh, Dr. F.S Khairullah explains in his work "Qamosul Kitab" that the Hebrew word "Hadad" gave shape to another word "Ando" in Persian which shifted in Sanskrit to "Sandhu" (Esther 1:1).

A few additional examples of his arrival may be found in Taxila, where Saint Thomas is credited with saving the locals from a natural calamity in the settlement known as "Karm Thoma." Moreover, there is another Islamic Sufi group in Sindh known as Thatta Nagar Fakirs who also practice Christian rites and possess a book claimed to be the Gospel of Matthew. This group of people call themselves "Barthamai (Sons of Thomas), many say these are the descendants of the church established by St. Thomas. According to another believed narrative, Melchior, one of the magi who brought the baby Jesus to Bethlehem, was a student at Takshashila University (Gaberial, 2007, pp. 17-18).

Saint Thomas in Taxila

It is very unfortunate that there is one scholar named Pierre Perrier who claimed in his research that Saint Thomas never visited Taxila, but he moved to China directly while preaching from the South of India (Perrier & Walter, 2008, pp. 15-100). Both Indian and Pakistani scholars agree on the visit of Thomas to Taxila. Indian researcher

Simon guarantees that Saint Thomas came to India in 52 CE with Habban, an outside broker. When he got to Maliankara (Cranganore), Kerala, he preached the gospel, worked miracles, and transformed a lot of people. He then travelled to Mailepuram (Mylapore), then to North-West (Takshashila), then to China, returned to Maliankara for a while, and then travelled back to Madras once more. There, he spent the remainder of his life teaching, giving lectures, and bringing a sizable number of the oppressed and abused into his overlap. After he worked miracles, the local lord Mahadeva offered him a location near the sea, where the ancient Mylapore Church now stands. His altercations aggravated the norm, and opponents of their caliber pledged to finish him. Thus, he took refuge in a cave near the current St. Thomas Mount near the Little Mount (about five km from Mylapore). Finally, he was slain by those formidable opponents at St. Thomas Mount. His body was conveyed to Mylapore and was covered in 73 CE at a spot which was overlooked for a long time.

Historians from Pakistan also agreed on visit of Thomas to Taxila, Yousef Jaleel agreed the visit of Thomas to Taxila. Baraktullah another clergy and Christian historian from Pakistan also agreed on visit of Thomas to Taxila (Barkat, 2010, pp. 50-59). Dr. Majeed Abel and Freda Carey also agreed on his visit to Taxila; not only historians but archaeologists also agreed on the visit of Thomas. Marshall is also among those who accord on the visit of Thomas (Marshall, 2016). Saifur Rahman another archaeologist form Pakistan agree on his visit to Taxila (Dar, 1983), Dr. Ahmed Hassan Dani (historian and an archaeologist) also concern on his visit to Taxila (Yad, 2007, p. 82).

Saint Thomas in Apocryphal Literature

It is also very important to discuss about the apocryphal literature regarding Saint Thomas.

Acts of Saint Thomas

The acts of Saint Thomas do abound in legends as is characteristic of any apocryphal literature. What is of interest to us in India are certain factors which touch upon our land and the mission of Saint Thomas here. The content of the Acts of Saint Thomas has these expressions of Thomas when India tumbled to his parcel: "*I am a Hebrew; how might I educate the Indians?*" It is evident that he came here to India around then. A second reassuring factor in the Acts of Thomas regarding the apostle mission in India is the mention in this narrative of one Gundaphar as the the King of India. It may set aside the very existence of the king by such name. Till the middle of the 19th century there was no sufficient historical evidence for him and he was considered legendary. On the other hand, Gondophares appears on a significant number of coins discovered in the provinces of Punjab in the west and south, as well as in Kabul and Kandahar. According to investigations made by scholars one may reasonably say that the period of the Gondophares of the coins is between 20 and 45 CE. His kingdom lay around Peshawar. The Acts of Saint Thomas was found in 1822 in Syria, the book recounted how St. Thomas, having been relegated by Christ to lecture the Gospel to the Indians, touched base by vessel in the capital of King Gondophares. Acts of Saint Thomas is Gnostic source as per Theologians. Gnostics were followers of a variety of religious movements that emerged in the early centuries of Christianity and were centered around the idea that people may be saved by mystery learning, or gnosis in Greek.

Gnostic belief is characterized by a stark duality. Our understanding of the Gnostics was entirely based on Christian writings up to the nineteenth century, including those of Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen, Tertullian, and Eplphanus. Theologians claimed that in the interval, historical progress had been at work. Nonetheless, clear distinctions between authentic and counterfeit renditions of the Christian message were made from the first(Wright, 2001, pp. 14-18).

The Book of Thomas the Contender

This book could have been composed in the first half of the 3rd century C.E. Jude was the original name of the apostle. The Greek name “Didymus”, the twin, which is a translation of Thomas as mentioned earlier, could have been added later to suit the Greek audiences. The character of Thomas is presented in the book as a valiant person who contends against the temptations of the flesh. This writing has a long dialogue between Jesus and Jude, Thomas in the form of questions and answers almost like a book of Catechism. It looks as if Jesus after his resurrection and just before his ascension to heaven had decided to give a summary of his teachings and added some insights to his doctrine to a few of his selected disciples. Among them was also Thomas. And it looks as if Thomas had some special claim to such a special revelation for his being a “twin” of Jesus, by reason of his external appearance as mentioned earlier (Anthonyamy, 2009, p. 31).

The Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel of Saint Thomas was composed between the second and third hundreds of years CE. It was found at Nag Hammidi in Egypt in 1945 and distributed in 1958. The gospel contains a series of proverbs, parables and sayings of Jesus and exhibits

certain Gnostic ideas popular in the early Church. Jesus is presented as the speaker with Thomas, who wrote down what he heard from Jesus. It is quite evident that this book too had its origin in the traditions of Syriac speaking Churches where Thomas had been revered. This Gospel of Thomas is different from the Canonical Gospels of the New Testament. The main issue of Gospel of Thomas seems to be to project Jesus as the teacher of wisdom. A distinctive community of Jesus' followers was formed to propagate this wisdom. Most scholars have their opinion that the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas had its influence from Gnostic teachings of the time which propagated the importance of knowledge as the source of salvation, as against involvement in activities (Kolangaden, 1993, p. 20).

The “Infancy Gospel” of Thomas

This is writing from the middle of the 2nd century CE containing many miracles attributed to Jesus in his infant or boyhood stage. It is simply part of the folklore of the time. The boy Jesus, between the ages of five and twelve, is presented as one who performed such miracles. While the Gospel of Thomas presents a sage-like Jesus with attributes of wisdom. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas depicts the boy-Jesus with a playful temperament and the stories attributed to him at this stage of his life do have a frivolous character about them. This apocryphal work too has a Syrian tradition behind it and the fact that Thomas was a great hero in the early Syrian Christian community gave rise to this account too under this spurious authorship (Anthonyamy, 2009, p. 37).

There are different ideas regarding visit of Saint Thomas which are discussed below:

Thomas in Early Church Writings

Early church works likewise tell about Thomas' visit to India, these authors of Christian vestige covering a time of almost seven centuries starting with the post-missional circumstances. These early church pioneers are known for their orthodox in doctrine, blessedness of the life, and they were highly recognized by the Church. (Anthonysamy, 2009, p. 78).

Doctrine of the Apostles

This was composed by the early church Fathers in 250 CE. The document was originally written in Syriac. The statement regarding Thomas in India is as follows:

Following the apostles' deaths, there were leaders and mentors in the churches, and they taught the flocks everything the apostles had taught them and what they had learned from them. Following their deaths, they once more dedicated and transmitted to their students everything they had learned from the Apostles; in addition, they shared with them what James had written from Jerusalem, Simon from Rome, John from Ephesus, Marl from the important city of Alexandria, Andrew from Phrygia, Luke from Macedonia, and Judas Thomas from India. This allowed the Apostles' epistles to be obtained and read in the temples around the world, just as those Triumphs of their Acts, which Luke wrote, are read, so that the Apostle may be identified by this (Anthonysamy, 2009, p. 58).

Saint Ephream (4th Century)

Syrian church Father St. Ephream in the 4th century, who made several references in his hymns, mentions that Saint Thomas visited India (Anthonysamy, 2009, p. 59).

Saint Gregory Nazianzen (329-390)

He is known to be the great scholar and doctor of the Church, he has also explained in his writings that where from the disciples have made their way, Peter indeed belonged to Judea, Luke to Achaia, Andrew to Epirus, John to Ephesus, Thomas to India, Mark to Italy (Anthonysamy, 2009, p. 60).

Saint Paulinus of Nola (353-431)

He is also concerned about the fact that the Apostles indeed have taken the command of Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to the end of the earth (Acts 2:8). St. Paulinus penned his documentation, “God then dispatched His Apostles throughout the world's vast urban centers, offering his holy endowments on all fronts Parthia gets Matthew, India Thomas” (Glucklich, 2008, p. 162).

Saint Gaudentius, Bishop of Brescia

He has written in his accounts that all four Saints, St. Thomas, John the Baptist, Andrew and St. Paulinus penned his documentation. God then dispatched His Apostles throughout the world's vast urban centers, offering his holy endowments on all fronts. (Anthonysamy, 2009, p. 62).

Saint Gregory of Tours (538-593)

He has conveyed two important pieces of information regarding Saint Thomas' visit to India, he said that the pilgrims visit the sacred sites in India, not only that but also he further states from the fourth century traders and travelers have been travelling India for its trade and advancement among them are the Christian pilgrims (Olivelle, 2006, p. 20).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research provides a detailed history of Christianity in ancient India through historical evidence focusing on the advent of St. Thomas with whom the faith entered this region. Since ancient times, the religions prevalent in Taxila such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity. These religions played a vital role in shaping the history of this region. Due to religious harmony different communities professing distinct religions used to live together happily and freely. The study reveals that Taxila was the place where all religions and religious leaders met with each other and they also gave respect to each other. Every religion promoted love and the same was advocated by Saint Thomas during his visit to Taxila. He was a hope amid the Indians and his message of love is also popular among today's Christians. His dialogue with Gondophares still reminds us that how he converted the King with his message of love which is lacking in today's Christianity. Christianity emerged in North-West India (Pakistan) with the coming of Saint Thomas around 52 C.E. and he is still known to be the great Christian Saint of India and Pakistan. Before St. Thomas' visit, large amount of trade was also found between Indus and Mesopotamia; moreover, Romans also had direct connection of trade with India. This also helped in understanding that St. Thomas visited this place and made disciples. He also made bishops in Taxila and one of the most important among them is John, whom Thomas nominated for evangelism. The time when Saint Thomas visited Taxila, this was the main center for Indian routes. Visitors and Pilgrims stay there, teach and learn different religions and philosophies from scholars of Taxila University. North West India's importance has been highlighted clearly in this research. Christians of Pakistan also give respect to Saint Thomas and called him "Father

of Indian Christianity", but few Nestorian Christians pay special attention to these cultural remains and Skeptic Christians believe that more archaeological evidences are needed to support this claim of early Christianity in North-West India (Pakistan) because in front of them the only evidence of Church is not satisfactory. In this research, new evidences have been given for Christian skeptics which will help them to understand the history of early Christianity in Pakistan. Church clergy reminds the Christians that Thomas seeded Christianity in India. During his visit in India his message was the message of love, harmony, hope and respect for all communities. Promotion of his message is also needed among people nowadays. Media can play a vital role to bring a general awareness in this matter and regard. Programs and transitions should be on air to educate the people about it. General awareness programs among the common public should be launched and monitored to literate a common man about the preservation of historical sites. Proper brochures should be made so that the site could be promoted. There must be a site attendant and security guard, who should be present 24/7 to protect the site from treasure hunters, illegal diggers and from local people. Site should be protected from any kind of theft. Regular maintenance is required in several contexts. Proper grass cutting should be done. Cleanliness should be observed on regular basis. Visitors should not be allowed to throw trash on the site; strict measures should be taken in this matter. What must be said at this point is that Pakistan faces many problems nowadays; threats which affect each aspect of our society and this includes our collective heritage. Neglect, corruption, disinterest all over is just a few of the dangers being faced by our Archaeological treasure and the task to conserve these aspects of our history is monumental, it is a land where religion plays an important role and people have a direct

attachment or affiliation with their religion but these archaeological remains also show one thing that people really respect others' beliefs. It is our responsibility to preserve and promote our cultural heritage. Efforts in right direction could help in promoting religious tourism attracting Christians from all over the world. This would present a soft image of Pakistan to the international community.

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