

Various information available on the net.

3.6 BARTHOLOMEW, also NATHANAEL

The missionary work of Bartholomew is linked with Armenia (present day Armenia, eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, north western Iran) and India. Other locations include Egypt, Arabia, Ethiopia and Persia (Iran). Traditionally he met his death by being flayed or skinned alive, and then beheaded. Derbent, north of present day Baku on the Caspian Sea may have been his place of martyrdom. Alternatively he may have suffered this cruel fate in what is now India.

Quotations are from J.B.Phillips, "The New Testament in Modern English", 1962 edition, published by HarperCollins,

Eusebius the church historian of the early church (early fourth century) in his Ecclesiastical history mentions that Pantaneus, the first known head of the catechetical school in Alexandria, visited India about AD 180.

[Pantaneus] displayed such zeal for the divine word that he was appointed as a herald of the Gospel of Christ to the nations of the east and was sent as far as India. ... It is reported that among the persons there who knew Christ, he found the Gospel according to St. Matthew, which had anticipated his own arrival. For Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them and left with them the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language which they had preserved till that time. (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 5:10.)

Later in the fourth century, Jerome mentions that a deputation from India asked Demetrius, the bishop of Alexandria to send Pantaneus to India to hold disputations with Hindu philosophers. Accordingly the great Christian scholar Pantaneus was sent and there he found the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew left by Batholomew.

In the first place, this tradition of Pantaneus going to India and finding a Christian community there which was visited by Bartholomew in the first century confirms the first century origins of the Church in India. Secondly, it raises the question as to who was the apostle of India, Thomas or Bartholomew or both? For a long time the historians tended to down play the apostolate of Bartholomew in India as it seemed to take away the apostolate from Thomas and gave it to Bartholomew.

JORDANUS (JORDAN Catalani) (fl. 1321-1330), French Dominican missionary and explorer in Asia, was perhaps born at Séverac in Aveyron, north-east of Toulouse. In 1302 he may have accompanied the famous Thomas of Tolentino, via Negropont, to the East; but it is only in 1321 that we definitely discover him in western India, in the company of

the same Thomas and certain other Franciscan missionaries on their way to China. Ill luck detained them at Tana in Salsette island, near Bombay; and here Jordanus' companions ("the four martyrs of Tana ") fell victims to Moslem fanaticism (April 7, 1321). Jordanus, escaping, worked some time at Baruch in Gujarat, near the Nerbudda estuary, and at Suali (?) near Surat; to his fellow-Dominicans in north Persia, he wrote two letters – the first from Gogo in Gujarat (October 12, 1321), the second from Tana (January 24, 1323/4) – describing the progress of this new mission. From these letters we learn that Roman attention had already been directed, not only to the Bombay region, but also to the extreme south of the Indian peninsula, especially to "Columbum," Quilon, or Kulam in Travancore; Jordanus' words may imply that he had already started a mission there before October 1321. From Catholic traders he had learnt that Ethiopia (*i.e.* Abyssinia and Nubia) was accessible to Western Europeans; at this very time, as we know from other sources, the earliest Latin missionaries penetrated thither.

<http://home.t-online.de/home/nikolaus.urban/jordanus.html>

From the evidence available to us, especially the East Syrian and Indian traditions, it is reasonable to believe that the Indian church has an independent origin, independent of Persian Christianity, in the apostolic activity of St. Thomas in the first century. The Indian tradition of its apostolic foundation is much stronger than that of Rome or Alexandria or Constantinople. We may further assume that St. Thomas is the apostle of all India, and Bartholomew who was a companion of Thomas also visited India and brought with him a copy of the Gospel of the Nazarenes

Now, we have a clear mention that the Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew - not Greek or Aramaic, as widely thought - and was carried out of Israel by one of the original apostles to the Far East. Two of the earliest Church Fathers and historians, Eusebius and Origen, wrote that a second, long-overlooked apostle, Bartholomew, also went to India and took a Gospel text with him, according to Princeton scholar and author Samuel Moffett. In his ground-breaking book, "A History of Christianity in Asia," Moffett reveals that Pantaenus, a church historian and missionary who traveled to India in 180 A.D., discovered the copy of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew that Bartholomew had taken with him.

"It is reported," wrote Eusebius, a fourth century bishop and church historian, "that among person there who knew Christ, (Pantaenus) found the Gospel according to St. Matthew (which had arrived ahead of Pantaenus by more than a century). For Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them, and left them (in India) the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language which they had preserved."

While the Book of Acts list the 11 apostles - Judas having hanged himself - it doesn't say how they were paired. But what is known is that Jesus instructed to work and travel by twos. So, it would be natural for Thomas to travel with a companion to India and for

Bartholomew to have taken along a freshly copied text of Matthew's Gospel, especially if it were the first and only Gospel written at the time. Jews customarily took their sacred text with them, as we see from the New Testament accounts of Paul's travels, and it was this Gospel of Matthew that Pantaenus found a century and a half later in India.

The trend of contemporary opinion is that the Gospel of St. Matthew was written after and dependent upon the Gospel of St. Mark. ... It is highly unlikely that one of the 12 apostles would have taken his material from Mark, who had not been an (original) apostle." The Catholic Dictionary also dates Matthew as having been written before 50 A.D. By bringing Matthew's Gospel to India, Bartholomew would also confirm this early dating, thereby refuting the contemporary theory that Matthew was written between 70 and 125 A.D.

Another aspect of the anti-supernaturalist theory is that the Gospels were written long after the fact. There are still many diehards among biblical critics who accept their own dating of the Gospels and say they were not written by eyewitnesses. It is precisely here, in the clash between unbelief and belief, that liberals and believers cross swords.

Yet the testimony of the early church reminds us that the Gospels have as much to historical as ethical value and that apostles such as Bartholomew and Thomas, eyewitnesses to the ministry of Jesus, did not give their lives for a mere myth.

Father Stephens was able to impress his superiors with his passion and zeal for serving in the East and 4 April, 1579 saw him sail out of Lisbon.

When the ship arrived in Goa on 24 October, 1579, Stephens became the first Englishman to reach India by the route of the Cape of Good Hope. His letters to his trader father and other members of his family were full of fascinating detail of great value to the people looking for commercial opportunities. He himself was totally preoccupied by his own calling, that of converting the heathen to Christianity. In a letter dated 24 October, 1583 to his brother, he writes that soon after his arrival he was attacked by a very serious illness. On recovery he was promoted — "advanced to Holy Orders" as "there was an enormous number of souls to be harvested" and "very few labourers" to perform the task.

Stephens' first parish was the Peninsula of Salsette, just north of Bombay and under the dominion of the Spanish king. His success may be judged from the fact that when he arrived Salsette had only 8,000 Christians; 14 years later there were 35,000; and by the time of his death 1619 the peninsula was almost entirely Christian.

If any further information can be found with regards to the origins of
The East Indians of Bombay
Please email culture@east-indians.com