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Chronological

A Very Brief History of Christianity in India

Introduction

This book aspires to help people understand the variety and complexity of Indian Christianity. We incorporate several perspectives throughout: sociological, political, theological, geographical, and anthropological. However, without a basic understanding of the *history*, our task will be fruitless. This first chapter is, therefore, critical.

What follows is a concise narrative of the pivotal, defining moments in Indian church history. The choices we have made are strategic and illustrative, and will help the reader to make sense of the rest of the chapters. Without the facts, the context, and the stories discussed below, understanding Indian Christianity would be hardly possible.

We take a fairly standard approach to this narrative. The

first section discusses the origins of the St. Thomas tradition, considering what portions of it could be true. We will look at the sometimes hazy history of the Thomas Christians up to the time of European contact. The second section looks at the arrival of Vasco da Gama and explores the profound changes that came alongside a rather militant Roman Catholicism. The third section deals with Protestant Christianity in India: its origins, connections to empire, and a discussion of how India came to be so closely associated with the English world. In the fourth section, we consider the meteoric rise of Pentecostalism in India and how it has made a tremendous impact on Indian Christianity in such a short period of time.

Orthodox Indians trace their origins to AD 52. Roman Catholic Indians take special notice of the year 1498. Protestant Indians uphold the year 1706 as particularly significant. Pentecostal Indians attach importance to the year 1905. We must point out, however, that when a new form of Christianity took root in India, *by no means did it supplant the previous forms*. Indian Christianity is a tapestry with four major, vibrant strands interlaced throughout: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal. And, generally, all four styles of Christianity intersect and interlace. Over time, they have impacted each other. Indeed, this reciprocity goes on not only within Christian traditions, but also between Christianity and India's vast, colorful, and multilayered religious tapestry.

Christian Origins and the Saint Thomas Traditions (from AD 52)

Any Christian who has traveled in India is aware of the Thomas Christians, based in the southern state of Kerala. Their remarkable story brings Indians—both Christian and non-

Christian—great pride. If true, the Indian church could lay claim to being the oldest Asian church outside the Roman Empire. The tradition is not seriously questioned by Indians. Indians claim the evidence for St. Thomas in India is as strong as St. Peter in Rome.[1]

Could "doubting Thomas" possibly have made the journey all the way to India to spread the gospel in AD 52, as Indians claim? Many expert historians are open to the possibility. Very few of them outright reject it.

There are many variations of the story. The best place to start is by looking at the *Acts of Thomas*, a text from at least the early-third century, which survives complete in Syriac and in Greek.[2] The book consists of about 170 good-sized paragraphs, is quite detailed, is full of miracles, and represents a strongly ascetic perspective. It assumes that Thomas is Jesus's identical twin brother—a tradition in some early Christianities that was based on Thomas's name. Toma is Aramaic/Syriac for "twin" and Didymus is Greek for "twin."[3]

The *Acts of Thomas* begins with the apostles gathered in Jerusalem, ready to fulfill Jesus's Great Commission that they go out into the world to preach, baptize, and create disciples. They cast lots to determine who should go where, and India gets assigned to Thomas. He is very reluctant, but Jesus appears to him during the night and encourages him.

Shortly thereafter, an Indian merchant named Abban arrives onto the scene. Abban is a representative of King Gundaphorus, from the northwest part of India (the Punjab, Pakistan, and Afghanistan). Abban is shopping for a carpenter who can build

1. See Robert Frykenberg, *Christianity in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), viii.
2. See Günther Bornkamm, "The Acts of Thomas," in *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, eds. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, Edgar Hennecke, and Robert McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964).
3. Ibid., 448 (section 11).

a nice palace for the king. Jesus appears and volunteers Thomas for the job.

During the sea voyage, they stop at a city called Andrapolis to rest and replenish supplies. While there, the king of Andrapolis invites the entire city to the wedding of his daughter. Thomas attracts the attention of the people due to his being foreign as well as his singing ability. A Hebrew flute-girl is present and translates for him. The king takes notice and asks Thomas to pray for his daughter and the man she will soon marry. Thomas complies, but right then Jesus appears to the couple and persuades them to abandon "filthy intercourse" and commit themselves fully to him and to chastity.[4] The king is incensed, but Thomas has already set sail. Later, the chaste couple and the Hebrew flute-girl convince the king to become a Christian, along with many of his subjects. Eventually, many of these converts sail to India to join Thomas.

When Thomas reaches Gundaphorus, he is given ample funds for the building project. However, Thomas notices the people are poor and in need, so he distributes the funds to them. The people are amazed at Thomas's piety, simplicity, and kindness. The king, however, puts both Thomas and Abban into prison and vows to execute them.

That very night, the king's brother, named Gad, falls ill and dies. His soul travels to heaven, where the angels show him that there is a palace being built for the king in heaven, rather than on earth. The brother's soul returns to his body and he tells the king what he saw; immediately, Thomas and Abban are freed. Gundaphorus and his brother promptly confess their belief in Christ. Then, Thomas baptizes them in a bath, anoints their heads with oil, and celebrates the Eucharist with them. Many of the king's subjects also convert to Christianity.

4. Ibid., 449 (section 12).

In chapter 6 of the *Acts of Thomas*, there is a young couple in love, but the young man decides to follow Christ. He tries to persuade his girlfriend to do the same, but she refuses. He kills her, so he will not have to bear watching her fall in love with another. The apostle Thomas, however, raises her from the dead and asks her what she experienced during death. She describes vivid scenes, quite similar to Dante's inferno, with people being tortured in horrible ways. Thomas then preaches to the people that they should forsake their families, their consorts, and their earthly pleasures in order to follow Christ, avoid the torments of hell, and enjoy the "true fruits" that cannot be taken away.[5]

About halfway through the *Acts of Thomas*, the apostle begins traveling to other parts of India, preaching and teaching. He ends up in the land of King Misdaeus (also known as Mazdai), in the southeast of India, known today as the state of Tamil Nadu. He conducts his ministry in the city of Mylapore (Mailapur: now a suburb of Chennai). Thomas preaches his ascetic form of Christianity, emphasizing chastity. Many of the prominent women of the kingdom accept his teachings, including the queen, and their husbands become outraged to the point that they plan his execution. He is then led to a mountain outside the city—today that place is revered as "St. Thomas Mount." After giving him a chance to pray, four soldiers "smote him and slew him."[6] That next day, however, Thomas appears to the people who were mourning him, and he encourages them, much like the appearances of Jesus after his death in the gospels.

Sometime later, one of King Misdaeus's sons becomes possessed by a demon. The king goes to the tomb of Thomas

5. Ibid., 476 (section 61).
6. Ibid., 530 (section 168).

for help. He thinks the bones of Thomas might have healing properties. On the way, Thomas appears to the king and mockingly asks him why he believes in the dead rather than in the living. He then tells the king that Jesus Christ is about to show him mercy. When he arrives at the tomb, the body of Thomas is not there; it had been taken over to the Western regions of India by some disciples. The king takes some dust from the tomb, however, and places it on his son while confessing his belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. The son is healed and King Misdaeus becomes a follower of Christ. The *Acts of Thomas* ends there, finally pointing out that Thomas was faithful to the Lord Jesus's commission—he had planted the gospel in India.

What is to be made of such a story? Can it be believed at all? It should be pointed out that coin evidence establishes the existence of a Parthian-Indian king named Gundaphorus. There is also a stone tablet from Peshawar, Pakistan, that helped scholars accurately date his reign to the first half of the first century AD.[7] He ruled over a large swath of territory in northwest India.[8]

Was the trip from Jerusalem to India even possible? Definitely. We know that monsoon winds carried Romans and others to the southwest of India, known as the Malabar Coast—the modern state of Kerala. Traders who made the journey were rewarded with bountiful supplies of pearls and spices that could be sold for huge profits in their homelands. India was well-known to the Romans; they had settlements

7. Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 29.
8. See Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 98. See also Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 27. Neill provides a helpful discussion of Charles Masson, "The wizard who performed the remarkable feat of bringing Gondopharnes [Gundaphar] back to life" through his coin discoveries in the 1830s.

there in the first century AD.[9] The trip took about three months with a ship carrying 200–300 tons of cargo.[10] It would be surprising had Christians *not* made their way to India at that time, considering they fanned out in all directions as missionaries. The Jewish presence in India is ancient, and no doubt Christians would have connected with them upon arrival.

For centuries, Indian Christians have preserved the Thomas story through song, poetry, and ritual. They do not mention Gundaphorus, but they record much interesting information, such as Thomas establishing seven churches and converting thousands from the upper castes. They place his death at St. Thomas Mount, outside of Mylapore, just as in the *Acts of Thomas*. Tradition says he died in the year AD 72.

There can be little doubt that someone significant was buried at Mylapore since so many writers mentioned the tomb throughout the ages. Gregory of Tours discussed it in the sixth century and Marco Polo actually visited the site in the thirteenth century. It is possible the tomb belonged to another Christian who became conflated with Thomas over time. For example, the historian Eusebius, friend to Emperor Constantine, wrote of Pantaenus's mission to India in the second century. Pantaenus was a Jewish convert to Christianity who led the famed Alexandrian academy, where Origen and Clement were his students. When he traveled to India, he understood the Indians as saying that the apostle Bartholomew had visited there and left them a Hebrew version of the gospel of Matthew.[11] Some Indians claim he misunderstood "Mar

9. See Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 245.
10. See E. H. Warmington, *The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India*, 2nd ed. (London: Curzon, 1974), 6ff, cited in Moffett, 32.
11. Paul Maier, trans., *Eusebius: The Church History* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 166 [book 5, section 9].

Thoma" (Bishop Thomas) as "Bar Tolmai," which explains why the usually reliable Eusebius could make such a mistake.[12] But no Indian looks to Bartholomew as the founder of the Christian faith in India. That honor is reserved exclusively for Thomas.

How did the Christians of Kerala become so connected to the Syrian form of Christianity? After all, today, the Thomas Christians are regularly referred to as "Syrians" or "Nasranis"—a word referring to Jesus the Nazarene, but which is also connected specifically to the Syrian Christians of Kerala.[13]

The easiest explanation is that, historically, India was more connected to the Syrian forms of Christianity than either the Greek East or Latin West. Syria was a province of the Roman Empire, located on the eastern side of the Mediterranean. The Romans created the province of Syria Palestine in the 130s AD, a region that today includes portions of Syria, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, and southeastern Turkey. As Christianity spread in the early centuries of the faith, three vague forms began to emerge along linguistic lines: Latin, Greek, and Syrian. The successors to these early developments are alive today: the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. While the Oriental Orthodox Churches are very small today in comparison with the Eastern and Western European traditions, suffice it to say that there was a time when the Oriental Churches were strong, vibrant, and prolific in mission work.[14] In church history, they are known as the group that recognized only the first three ecumenical councils rather than all seven of them.

12. Moffett, 38.
13. See Leonard Fernando and G. Gispert-Sauch, *Christianity in India* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 55.
14. See Philip Jenkins's excellent work *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How it Died* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

India became connected with the Oriental Orthodox family of churches due to geography more than anything else. The Oriental Orthodox Churches have always been closely connected to what is known today as the Middle East. Today, Oriental Orthodoxy is associated chiefly with the churches of Armenia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Syria, and South India. Their diaspora is now widespread due to global migration. South India has a vibrant Oriental Orthodox community although they have split into various factions throughout the centuries.

We should also mention here the Assyrian Church of the East, known historically as the Nestorian Church—named after a Patriarch in Constantinople named Nestorius, who lived from 386 to 450. In the West, Nestorius is sometimes referred to as a heretic for his belief that Mary should not be called "the mother of God." In reality, he was an early proponent of what many Protestants in the world believe today—that Mary was not divine, and it is dangerous theologically to elevate her to a position on par with the members of the Trinity. Nevertheless, Nestorius was condemned and removed from his see, which was, at that time, the most powerful position in Christendom.

The Nestorian Church is part of the Syrian family of churches. These churches produced some of the greatest missionaries of all time, especially in Asia. They were closely connected to the various Persian empires throughout history, which explains why they grew further away from the Greco-Roman traditions. When the Persian empires became dominated by Islam in the seventh century, Persian Christians became further isolated from Greek and Roman Christians. Muslim rule spelled disaster for them, but they managed to survive in various places. They survived in India because Muslim rulers never dominated the south as profoundly as they did the northern and central parts.

We should point out a very important fact about the Nestorian Church and its relation to India. Throughout history, Western Christians tended to label Christians east of the Byzantine Empire as being Nestorian, even if they did not share Nestorius's views about Mary—that she was the mother of the Messiah, but not the mother of God. Because the Saint Thomas Christians were in the Far East, they were considered Nestorian.[15]

The problem with carefully understanding the chronology of Indian Christianity before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 is the paucity of literary and archaeological evidence. We get hints here and there, but our first piece of "fully convincing" evidence does not occur until the mid-sixth century in a work entitled *Christian Topography*.[16] The author was Cosmas Indicopleustes, a Nestorian Christian from Alexandria, Egypt. He was a traveling merchant, but carefully recorded his travels and created wonderfully helpful maps. He wrote two very informative passages about India's Christians. He places them in Male, or the Malabar Coast (Kerala), and in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). He refers to them as Persian Christians, and he specifically mentions that their bishop had been appointed and consecrated in Persia. Scholars disagree about whether or not he actually visited India, but his references evince a clear awareness of Christians living there.

The Christians that Cosmas Indicopleustes wrote about did not assimilate their church into the fabric of India very well. They remained dependent on Babylon (also known as Chaldea, in modern-day Iraq) and later Antioch for their leadership.

15. See Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 105.
16. See Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India*, vol. 1, 36. For a fairly comprehensive list of the earliest historical references to Christians in India, see M. K. Kuriakose, *History of Christianity in India: Source Materials*, 1–8. He includes excerpts from eleven different writers prior to Cosmas Indicopleustes, including Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Gregory Nazianzen, Ambrose, Rufinus, and Gregory of Tours.

Syriac was their liturgical language and they never translated their liturgies or the Bible into Malayalam, the language of Kerala.

According to Indian tradition, there were various waves of Christians who came before the Portuguese, and they were almost always from Persia. Some were missionaries, some merchants, and some explorers. But by far the most significant numbers of Christians who came to India from Persia were refugees trying to escape persecution. In the fourth century, Shapur II (309–379)—a powerful Zoroastrian king of the Sasanian (Persian) Empire—became suspicious of his Christian subjects when Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. A terrible persecution ensued, sending many to seek refuge in South India, with like-minded Christians.

Thomas Christians believe one large group of Christian refugees arrived at the Malabar Coast in AD 345 under the leadership of a merchant named Thomas of Cana (possibly another name for Canaan, or, Jerusalem). He brought with him 336 Syrian Christian families, including some clergy, and made a significant impact upon Christianity in the region. Tradition holds that this wave of immigration led to the establishment of 72 churches.[17] Division within these Syrian Christians occurred early on as some of them chose to intermarry with Indians and some did not. Those who did were called Northists and those who did not were called Southists—referring to where they settled on the coast. The numerically smaller Southists claim a lineage of Syrian purity, refusing to intermarry with anyone else, even Northists. This division persists even today.[18]

17. See Cyril Bruce Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 28–29.
18. See Firth, 29–30. There are other theories as to the origins of the Northists and Southists.

In future chapters, it will be seen that Thomas Christians are rather famous for their propensity to divide and sub-divide.

A second group of Christian refugees from Persia arrived in AD 823. They were led by two Syrian bishops who were brothers, Mar Sapor and Mar Parut. The local ruler issued them land grants on five copper plates, which still survive in Kerala. They are written in four languages: Tamil and Malayalam (two languages of South India), Pahlavi (ancient Persian), and Arabic.[19] The plates show that, indeed, there was a thriving Christian community when this party of Persian refugees arrived, and that the Christian community was refreshed and encouraged by them.

With the advances of Islam in the seventh century came the alienation of the Oriental Orthodox Churches from the rest of Christendom. Islam's meteoric rise began in 632 and continued at a seemingly unstoppable pace for centuries. Syrian Christianity, and Middle Eastern Christianity, in general, began a long decline that led to the demise of Christianity in many parts of Asia. When Turkish civilizations began to accept Islam in the eleventh century, it disrupted the geographically united front that Christians—Latin, Greek, and Syrian—had enjoyed since apostolic times. The Christian world began to fray, recede, and vanish in places. The Mongols began converting to Islam in the late thirteenth century. They established the largest contiguous empire in human history, and the Christians of Asia and the Middle East were their casualties. One of their rulers, Tamerlane (ruled 1370–1405), carried out one of the most devastating persecutions in Christian history, leaving "a small and insignificant community in Mesopotamia with some outlying sections in a few places such as Malabar."[20]

19. For the Sapor-Parut arrival, see Firth, 31–32. The traditional date is 823, but Frykenberg (p. 111) puts the date at 825.

The Indian church was effectively cut off from the Syrian hierarchy during this time, which helps to explain their survival. Living outside the reaches of Islamic aggression, the Thomas Christians experienced a level of security that most Asian and Middle Eastern Christians did not enjoy. In fact, the Malabar Christians were quite prosperous throughout the centuries before the coming of the Europeans. They were given autonomy by Hindu princes. They were landowners. They were in charge of the extremely lucrative pepper trade that continues to be a defining feature of that part of India.[21] They were seen as high-caste, privileged aristocrats, second only to the Brahmins. They followed caste regulations, including untouchability. They traveled on elephants—a hallmark for high status in Indian society.[22] They were spared from large-scale massacres and genocidal campaigns inflicted by Mongols in northern India.

The major point here is that from the death of Islam's beloved prophet Muhammad in 632, until the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498, there was "a curtain of darkness and incomprehension" that separated Western civilization from India.[23] We do not have many sources that survive. These two parts of the world were almost completely cut off from each other. Islam had control of the seas. Westerners had almost no way to get to India without wading into Muslim-controlled waters. A quick look at a contemporary map illustrates the point: India is the sole land on the Arabian Sea that is not underneath the authority of a Muslim government today.

20. Firth, 35.
21. See Frykenberg, 118. This was the observation of John de Marignolli in 1349.
22. For this list of the social privileges of the Thomas Christians, see Woba James, *Major Issues in the History of Christianity in India: A Postcolonial Reading* (Jorhat: TDCC Publications, 2013), 69.
23. Frykenberg, 117.

Somalia, Yemen, Oman, Iran, and Pakistan are the others. India was close to becoming a Muslim land, however.

After powerful Islamic empires began to conquer and colonialize northern India, Christians were rarely allowed access to each other. First was the Delhi Sultanate, which lasted from 1206 to 1526. Next was the Mughal dynasty, which lasted from 1526 to 1857. Perhaps the salient question is not why so few Westerners reached India during these years. Rather, what should be asked is how Hinduism managed to survive during these centuries. Equally perplexing is how the Thomas Christians evaded the attention of so many Muslim rulers, given Islam and Christianity's titanic clashes going on in other parts of the world.

It is no wonder the Christians of India failed to expand throughout a politically tense context like this. The only place for them to look was inward. Perhaps this situation may also shed light on the tendency of Malabar Christians to divide. Rather than looking outward and witnessing for Christ, their only option was to cling to the few gains they already had made. Essentially, the only people who came to the Malabar Coast were refugees escaping the frequent Islamic advances that occurred throughout the centuries. But when these immigrants did manage to make it to the safety of the Thomas Christians, they essentially lost contact with the rest of the world. When foreigners relocated to Malabar, they left everything behind. This was the pattern for a thousand years.

Contact with Roman Catholics (from 1498)

The traditional date for Roman Catholic contact with India is Vasco Da Gama's arrival in 1498, but the date is misleading.

It neglects to account for several encounters that occurred before that year.[24]

- Around the year 883, two Catholic clerics from England, named Sigehelm and Aethelstan, were sent by the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred the Great (ruled 871–899). They brought alms with them and visited the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore.
- In 1293, John of Montecorvino—a Franciscan missionary and papal emissary from Italy—traveled to visit the Great Khan in Beijing (known then as Khanbaliq). He stopped in India for 13 months. He baptized around 100 people before moving on to China, where he became the first Roman Catholic Archbishop in 1307.
- Between 1292 and 1295, the famous Italian explorer Marco Polo visited Mylapore and sailed round Cape Comorin to visit the Malabar Coast. He wrote extensively about miracles associated with St. Thomas's tomb.
- In 1321, a French Dominican monk named Jordanus Cataline visited Mumbai, Quilon, and Gujarat. He met many Christians, and claimed to have baptized 300 Muslims and Hindus. He wrote an important chronicle of his travels, entitled *Mirabilia Descripta: The Wonders of the East*. He seems to have had a low view of the Indian Christians as a whole, likely because of his anti-Nestorian bias:

> In this India there is a scattered people, one here, one there, who call themselves Christians but are not so, nor have they baptism nor do they know anything about the faith. Nay, they believe St Thomas the great to be the Christ. There, in the India I speak of, I baptized and brought into

24. These visits are outlined in Frykenberg, 117–18. For a fuller account see Stephen Neill, vol. 1, 71ff.

> the faith about three hundred souls, of whom many were idolators [Hindus] and Saracens [Muslims].[25]

- In 1325, a monk named Odoric recorded traveling in South India visiting Christians. He was present at a Palm Sunday service. He discussed the martyrdom of four priests in the town of Thana. His visit to Mylapore to see the tomb of St. Thomas was offensive to him, as he felt the church was filled with idols and was under the control of the Nestorians, whom he considered "vile and pestilent heretics."[26]
- In 1349, a Franciscan named John de Marignolli stopped in Malabar on his way back from visiting the Great Khan. He stayed fourteen months. He reported that Christians controlled the pepper trade. Importantly, he commented on "a church of St. George there, of the Latin communion, at which I dwelt."[27] It is not known what exactly he meant by referring to a Latin church, for we have no evidence of one existing before the arrival of the Portuguese. Either Jordanus Cataline had erected one in the 1320s, or else Marignolli was given permission to celebrate the mass in the Latin way.[28]
- Around 1440, a Venetian nobleman traveler named Nicolo de Conti visited South India and commented on the Nestorians surrounding the tomb of St. Thomas. He also commented that "These Nestorians are scattered over all India, in like manner as are the Jews among us."[29]

While these visits do not reveal a tremendous amount of information, at least we learn that Christians were in India,

25. Cited in Neill, vol. 1, 73.
26. Cited in Kuriakose, 18.
27. Cited in Kuriakose, 19.
28. See Neill, vol. 1, 80.
29. Cited in Neill, vol. 1, 81.

mainly in Malabar, and their practices and beliefs were Nestorian and Syrian. Whether it was "an apparent stagnancy" over the centuries, or simply a political reality due to the advances of Islam, we only know that the church remained somewhat insular, like a separate Christian caste on the coast of Malabar.[30] For the most part, they seemed to get on well with the Hindu and Muslim populations. When the Portuguese arrived, there may have been 200,000 Thomas Christians in Malabar, residing in some 60 towns.[31] The Christian population must have been quite small outside of Malabar.

It would not be hyperbolic to say that Vasco da Gama's discovery of a sea route from Lisbon to India—by sailing around the "Cape of Good Hope" at the extreme end of South Africa—changed the world. The year was 1498. Only ten years earlier, explorer Bartolomeu Dias proved that a ship could sail round southern Africa successfully.

Portugal suddenly became king of the seas, and would soon experience commercial profits unlike anything ever known in Europe. No one at that time could have understood the significance of the moment. Stephen Neill wrote, "One of the great revolutions of history was taking place before their eyes."[32] Portugal—and in due course, the major powers of Europe—now had access to trade with India. No longer would European merchants have to trek meekly through Muslim-held lands, paying exorbitant duty fees, and fearing molest from potentially hostile empires. They could effectively bypass Muslim civilization. Robert Frykenberg wrote:

> This event set in motion a process that would soon make all the oceans of the world into highways to fame, fortune, and power.

30. Frykenberg, 116.
31. For 200,000, see Fernando and Gispert-Sauch, 72. For 60 towns, see Frykenberg, 124.
32. Neill, vol. 1, 108.

> At a blow, Europeans had leap-frogged over and bypassed the older civilizations of the ancient Near East. Thereafter, just as Arabs and Turks had used deserts and steppes for their caravans, traveling from oasis to oasis, so now Europeans would use the seas and oceans of the world for their convoys, setting up trading stations at strategic towns along the coastlines of every continent.[33]

There was a changing of the guard, and Europe's ascent was clear.

Crucial to the story is the fact that Spain and Portugal were conquered by Muslim forces in 711. For nearly eight hundred years, the Iberian Peninsula was home to a series of powerful Muslim dynasties. In the thirteenth century, it was clear that Muslim power was receding, and in 1492—the exact year Columbus set sail for the Americas—the last Muslim powers were defeated in Granada by Ferdinand and Isabella, the great Catholic monarchs. The Reconquista was complete. Spain and Portugal were under Christian rule once again. But it was no small accomplishment. It took the collective effort of untold generations of soldiers, and 781 years of resistance, to throw off the yoke of Islam. However, the titanic Christian–Muslim clash was far from over. In 1453, the great Eastern Christian capital of Constantinople had been toppled and its inhabitants slaughtered or enslaved. In northern India, Muslim rule had been firmly in place as early as 1192 under the Delhi Sultanate. In 1526, the powerful and expansive Mughal Empire began consolidating nearly the entire Indian subcontinent under the banner of Islam. At the same time, Catholic powers were in the process of subduing the Americas, and beginning in 1517, they would have to contend with a massive schism—the Protestant Reformation—back home in Europe.

33. Frykenberg, 121.

Understanding this background is critical to understanding the rather militant mentality of those southern Europeans who came in waves to India. They needed money as their empire was expanding exponentially. They had built up within them a crusading mentality, known in the Americas as *conquistadors*. They knew the power of Islam, and they were determined to fight it, continuing the great gains they had made recently on a global scale: in the Americas, in Africa, and in many parts of Asia. It seemed as if God was on their side, and finally, after many centuries, Christianity's long recession was beginning to turn the other way. This is the mentality behind the Crusades (1095–1204) and the Inquisitions, which began in 1478. And perhaps nowhere was the Inquisition more punishing than in Goa, where the otherwise heroic missionary Francis Xavier (1506–52) requested its installation in 1545. It was put into place in 1560, but Xavier did not live to see its horrors in India firsthand.

Vasco da Gama was in his prime, and he guided a successful journey across the Arabian Sea, reaching the land of spice on May 20, 1498. As the Europeans disembarked in the city of Calicut (today known as Kozhikode), there was an immediate sizing up on both sides. Fortuitously, the Portuguese discovered several people scattered about the coast having knowledge of European languages: "slaves, runaways, deserters, pirates, and respectable merchants."[34] These individuals were their interpreters, as the sailors knew nothing of Indian language or culture. In fact, some of them, including Vasco da Gama, thought the Hindu temples were Christian churches.[35] When locals asked what they were up to so far

34. Neill, vol. 1, 91.
35. Fernando and Gispert-Sauch write, "Vasco da Gama returned to Portugal (where he received great honors), wrongly convinced that the majority in the land he had finally reached were Christians." See p. 75.

from home, they responded that they were seeking Christians and spices. But clearly, these newcomers were different from others who had arrived to their shores through the ages. There was a confidence, an emanating power, a sense that more of them would be coming soon.

The second batch of ships, much larger, reached Calicut in September 1500. There were a thousand men, including nineteen missionaries, on thirteen vessels. Muslim fears were stoked, and several violent episodes broke out, leading to "heavy bombardment" of the city of Calicut. The Portuguese slaughtered six hundred locals in the maelstrom.[36] Calm was finally attained by force under Alfonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese "Governor of India," who conquered the valuable and strategic region of Goa—"where the Muslim North and the Hindu South met"—in 1510.[37] Even today, Albuquerque's conquests are condemned by Muslims in the region. On a plaque at the important Miskhal Mosque in Kuttichira, Kozhikode [Calicut], it reads:

> This mosque was partly destroyed by the Portuguese Commander Alburkar [Albuquerque] on Jan 3rd 1510 AD (22nd day of Ramadan AH 915). The remnants of their misdeeds can be seen in the south west portion of the roof of 3rd floor as partly burned.[38]

This was the beginning of a new chapter as the Europeans now had a port where they were in firm control. They tenaciously and vigorously defended their little slice of India all the way until 1961—fourteen years after Indian independence from the British. The glory years of the Portuguese Empire, however,

36. Neill, vol. 1, 93.
37. Fernando and Gispert-Sauch, 76.
38. Recorded on site by Dyron Daughrity. The authors visited this site in 2014.