

Antiquities from San Thomé and Mylapore,
the traditional site of the Martyrdom and Tomb
of St. Thomas the Apostle.

Compiled on behalf of
THE DIOCESE OF MYLAPORE

by the Rev. H. HOSTEN, S.J.,
of the Calcutta Archdiocese.



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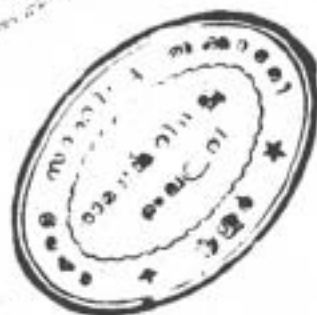
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Thomas de Padua,
Chancellor Diocese of Mylapore.

ANTIQUITIES

FROM

SAN THOMÉ AND MYLAPORE.



Antiquities from San Thomé and Mylapore.

By

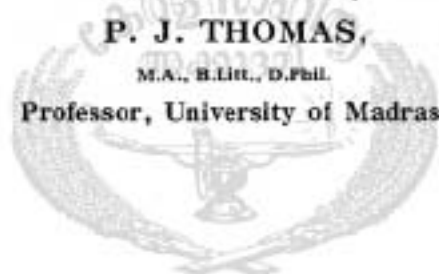
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With a Foreword by

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F. H. FRANCO, V.G.,
*Administrator of the Diocese
of Mylapore.*



SAN THOME, MYLAPORE, MADRAS,
10th April, 1936.

FOREWORD.

The book before us deals principally with Christian antiquities around Madras, but contains also accounts of similar antiquities and traditions in other parts of India and the Indies. The underlying theme is of course the tradition that the Apostle Thomas founded the Christian Church of India, and the author finds vestiges of ancient Christian communities scattered all over the Indies, although only the 'Thomas-Christians' of Malabar have survived to this day. Parts I to III form the nucleus of the book and give a descriptive account of the inscriptions and other antiquities preserved in Mylapore, Little Mount and St. Thomas Mount—places hallowed by association with the Apostle. This part of the book was printed in 1924 with a preface and index. Subsequently the author added papers on special points of interest about Mylapore and about early Christian crosses and other monuments found in Travancore, Coimbatore, Mysore, Bombay Presidency, Burma, Ceylon, Maldives, Cambodia, Malacca, Java, Tonkin and other lands. The work was inspired and encouraged by the late Rt. Rev. Dr. Teixeira, Bishop of Mylapore, himself a scholar with a keen interest in the Thomistic antiquities. Nearly the whole work was written and printed by 1927, but it remained incomplete owing largely to the illness of the author. Apparently he had hopes of eventually completing the work, but they were frustrated when he was ordered to return to Europe in 1932.

Early in 1935, the Rt. Rev. Charles de Sá Fragoso, the Bishop of Mylapore, entrusted me with the preparation of the work for publication. Having been a student of the subject from my school days and having had occasion to examine some of the proofs of the present work, I consented to assist in this matter and offered to consult Fr. Hosten himself, whom I hoped to meet in Europe during the summer of 1935. But before I passed Suez, Fr. Hosten died (16th April, 1935). However, I proceeded to Brussels in July and with the help of the Jesuit Fathers of College Saint-Michel and the Flemish Jesuit Provincial House at Chaussee de Haecht where Fr. Hosten died, I ransacked the papers left by the late Father, and found that there was practically nothing pertaining to the present work. I took the opportunity to consult there the great Bollandist scholar, Fr. Peeters, who is a recognised authority on early Persian and Eastern History.

The idea of completing the work was therefore abandoned. After all it is a collection of papers, and not a unified treatise, and therefore the question of completing it does not arise. Nearly all the formes were printed before 1927 and they are

now given out as they were printed. All that I have done is to add a Foreword, a short account of the Indian tradition of St. Thomas and a table of contents. Fr. Eelen, S.J., of Kurseong, has been good enough to write a biographical account of Fr. Hosten which will be greatly appreciated by all the late Father's friends.

As the reader will see, the book is an *omnium gatherum* on St. Thomas and on Christian antiquities in the Indies. Nor does this contain all the late Father's writings on the subject. During his visits to Malabar, he made a thorough study of the Christian tradition in Travancore, collected songs and legends, studied the many ancient crosses found all over the country, carried out expeditions to explore historical sites (like Chayal), took an active part in controversies among Malabar scholars on details of local Christian History and carried on a brisk correspondence with a large number of people, some of which is referred to in these pages. His curiosity was unappeasable and his mastery of detail unsurpassed. He was captivated by the Indian tradition of St. Thomas, and was consumed with a passion for discovering the truth of the riddle that has baffled many generations of scholars before him.

Fr. Hosten has brought together information of a varied nature, partly collected by himself and partly gathered from books and manuscripts in many languages which are not accessible to the ordinary scholar, at any rate in India. He writes like a pioneer exploring a new field; in some cases like an animated tourist recording his impressions. He had not the time to collate facts and to weigh evidence; and the conclusions he has drawn are therefore tentative. The explorer has done his work; he has brought together many objects of great historical value. It now remains for the scientist to scrutinise the objects, to sift the evidence and to draw proper conclusions.

But the work of the pioneer is the most difficult and Fr. Hosten has done it admirably. The book he has written is the most detailed study so far made of early Christian antiquities of India. It is inconclusive, as such work must necessarily be. But it will long remain as a reference book of great value and His Lordship the Bishop of Mylapore deserves the gratitude of scholars for bringing out such a work at a time like the present when interest in historical researches is growing everywhere.

Senate House,
Madras, April 6th, 1936.

P. J. THOMAS.

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WAS THE APOSTLE THOMAS IN SOUTH INDIA ?

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.

The tradition that St. Thomas the Apostle preached and died in India is as old and deep-rooted as any of the early Christian traditions accepted by historians. In the case of most of these venerable traditions there is not enough documentary evidence compelling unanimous acceptance, and yet to disprove them is extremely difficult, owing to the array of circumstantial evidences supporting them. It is true that many mediæval traditions cannot claim any historical basis. But the tradition about St. Thomas is of much earlier origin, being handed down through well-known writers from Apostolic times. Many legends clustering round this tradition may be mediæval accretions, but that does not weaken the original tradition. An impartial study of it will convince one that it stands on the same plane as many of the generally accepted historical facts about ancient India.

1. *Testimony of the Early Fathers.*

Wherever the Apostle Thomas is mentioned, in breviary or liturgy, in poem or history, he is almost invariably associated with India. All Patristic writings, whether Greek, Latin or Syriac, bear testimony to the connection of the Apostle with India. It is significant that this belief was most pronounced among early Syriac Fathers, who by their proximity to India claim the greatest respect in this matter. According to a well-known authority, "To refer to all the Syrian and Christian Arab authors who speak of India in connection with Thomas would be equivalent to referring to all who have made mention of the name of Thomas".

The earliest known reference to St. Thomas in Syriac writings is in the *Doctrine of the Apostles*, which may be dated about 200 A.D. and not later than 250 A.D. It says : " India and all its own countries and those bordering, even to the farthest sea, received the Apostle's hand of priesthood from Judas Thomas, who was guide and ruler of the church he built there and ministered there ".¹ This was written at Edessa, in Mesopotamia; about the same time, the well-known historical romance the *Acts of Thomas* was composed in or around the same city by

¹ Cureton's *Ancient Syriac Documents*, p. 33.

some anonymous Syriac writer, and in the 4th century St. Ephraim composed his incomparable hymns about the Apostle of India, narrating with pointed phrase and convincing illustration how Thomas "purified a tainted land of dark people". "The sun-burnt India thou hast made fair" "the cross of light has obliterated India's darkened shades".¹

2. Which India ?

Many critics have stated that the India of the early Fathers is an indefinite geographical expression, meaning sometimes Persia or Arabia or even Abyssinia. We know that such mistakes have been made by mediæval European writers who were ignorant about India, as in those days Islam had erected a barrier against European contact with the East. But to assume that the same mistakes must have been committed by the early Greek and Syrian Fathers betrays a most deplorable ignorance of the history of the time. Mesopotamia and Syria, the countries where the Syriac Fathers wrote, were in active commercial contact with India, both by overland route and by sea route via Persian Gulf. As for the Greek Fathers, it would be absurd to say that they did not know India, seeing that the most authoritative of contemporary Greek writings on Geography and Trade—Pliny's *Natural History* (C. 50-60 A.D.), *Periplus Maris Aethiæ* (C. 150 A.D.) and Ptolemy's *Geography* (C. 150 A.D.)—knew India, especially South India, with an amazing minuteness of topography. By "India" they all meant the country between the mouths of the Indus and the Ganges. By the "discovery" of monsoon winds in circa A.D. 47, the voyage to India became a comparatively easy matter and every year numerous ships sailed from the Red Sea (especially Arabian) ports to the West Coast of India. As the monsoon winds directed the sailing ships straight to the Malabar Coast—according to Pliny, Muziris (Cranganore)² was the first port touched in India—the Greeks and Arabs knew South India best and when they speak of India, they mean chiefly that part of the country. Ptolemy, for example, gives a full topographical account of Malabar with its ports and inland towns. From Malabar, traders went by coasting vessels or by interior routes to other parts of India. These were the works from which the early Fathers obtained their knowledge of India; and therefore, when they say that Thomas was in India, the presumption is that it was the real

¹ *hramel Hymni* (Edit. Lamy), IV, p. 703. See also Burkitt, *unity outside the Roman Empire*; Wright's *Apocryphal*

ore was formerly the capital of Malabar (Chera), but it is Cochin State.

India, and the onus of proving that it was not is on those who deny it.¹

3. *The Indian Tradition.*

There is an independent local tradition in India to support the patristic testimony above quoted. Three separate versions of it have been handed down, one held by the "Christians of St. Thomas" of Malabar, another by the Malabar Hindus and a third by people around Mylapore. The first exists in ancient songs, whose antiquity cannot be accurately fixed; but early European travellers (*e.g.*, Marco Polo, 1292 A.D.) have recorded the Malabar tradition, and the songs about St. Thomas were known to the first Portuguese sojourners in India. The existing written versions of these tradition are not of great antiquity, but this hardly detracts from their value. Epigraphy is of little help in regard to Malabar history; for, owing to damp air and heavy monsoons, neither cadjan leaves nor paper will keep long in that country. All ancient traditions had therefore to be periodically re-written, and naturally embellishments must have been made from time to time.

The substance of the Malabar tradition is that St. Thomas after preaching the Gospel elsewhere, sailed from Arabia to India and landed in Cranganore about the year 50 A.D., travelled and preached all over South India, established seven churches in Malabar and many outside, ordained priests to succeed him, and in 68 A.D. received the crown of martyrdom in Mylapore. He is also said to have converted a certain king, called "Cholaperumal" in some versions and "Kandapparaser" in others, besides many brahmin families of high position. Several miracles are also narrated. In some respects, the story resembles that contained in the Syriac work, the *Acts of Thomas* mentioned above; but the Malabar tradition cannot be a rendering of the *Acts of Thomas*, seeing that there are features in it which point to an independent origin, and this is confirmed by the existence of those features in certain early European writings about Thomas. Rather the probability is that the clever Syriac writer dramatized the simple story that came from India, spinning out many Indian names and incidents, and connecting the Apostle with an otherwise known Indo-Parthian King Gudapharasa. The *Acts* may be valuable or worthless, but the South Indian Tradition does not depend upon it, except that possibly it gave the theme for its talented writer.²

¹ See *Periplus* (Ed. Schoff), p. 39. Pliny, Book VI, Chapter XXVI. Also Warmington, *Commerce between the Roman Empire and India* and my paper on the India of the Early Christian Fathers, *Young Men of India*, January, 1928.

² The best account of the Malabar tradition is in the Malayalam work, *The Christians of St. Thomas* by the Rev. Bernard, a Syrian priest. For the Mylapore tradition, see my paper in the Report of the Indian Historical Records Commission (1924).

4. *The Apostle's Tomb at Mylapore.*

There is no doubt that the Malabar tradition has been embellished by later editors, but there is a substratum in it which is ancient and reliable. We shall here take only the story of the Apostle's death in Mylapore. At one time, this was regarded as a Portuguese fraud, but later research has considerably dispelled the doubts and to-day it would be hazardous to question it, unless one could explain away the testimony of the numerous pre-Portuguese travellers who have written about St. Thomas' tomb there. To begin with the later ones, Barbosa (1518), Nicolo Conti (1440), John Marignoli (1350), Friar Oderic (1325), Marco Polo (1292), visited and commented upon the tomb and the Church that stood near it and the many Syrian Christians that lived close by. Before them we have the testimony of the Muhammadan travellers of the 9th century who called it "Betuma" (House of Thomas). King Alfred is said to have sent offerings to St. Thomas in India (883 A.D.) and as no other place in India or anywhere else in the world ever claimed to possess St. Thomas' tomb, those offerings must have gone to Mylapore, if at all they went anywhere. Similarly references abound in Syriac writings about the tomb of St. Thomas in India. "Amr, the Christian Arab historian (1340) says distinctly that 'his (Thomas') tomb is in the 'island' of Mailapore in India, on the right hand side of the altar, in his monastery".¹

The monastery of Mylapore mentioned above has been mentioned also by the European travellers just quoted; but it existed in much earlier times. Gregory of Tours in the 6th century records the accounts which he heard from the monk Theodorus about "the church and monastery of striking dimensions" that stood near the tomb of St. Thomas in India. Lately valuable evidence for the existence of this monastery as early as the middle of the 4th century has been discovered. This is contained in a Syriac work, called *Life of Hermit Yonan* written about 390 A.D. by Zadoe who calls himself 'priest, monk and archimandrite of the Monastery of St. Thomas in India'; and in this work it is said that Mar Yonan came from Anbar (modern Baghdad) into India to visit the said monastery. It is by no means certain that the monastery of Zadoe was in Mylapore, but even apart from it, there is ample circumstantial evidence for believing that there was from ancient times a shrine where St. Thomas lies buried. Pilgrims from not only India, Ceylon and Burma but from distant countries visited the shrine from early days. But in the 15th century, the place seems to have fallen into ruins. The Portuguese renovated the place and built a beautiful church over the Apostle's tomb.²

¹ Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, IV, p. 34.

² On Mylapore and the Portuguese, see F. A. D'Cruz, *St. Thomas, the Apostle in India*. See also the following pages.

5. *An Indigenous Church in South India.*

Many critics (*e.g.*, Milne Rae and Richard Garbe) have attributed the early Christianity of India to the evangelical efforts of "Nestorian" missionaries from Persia. There is no doubt that Christians from Mesopotamia and Persia colonized on the Malabar coast between the 4th and 9th centuries A.D. According to tradition, a Syrian merchant called Knayi-Thomas (Thomas of Cana) settled down in Malabar in the 4th century, accompanied by many followers, and this is quite probable seeing that in the middle of the 6th century, Cosmas found in South India and Ceylon a community of Persian Christians with a Bishop of their own. But these colonists were never known in Malabar as missionaries; they were chiefly traders, and are said to have fraternized with the descendants of St. Thomas' converts. That there was in South India before the arrival of Persians an indigenous community of Christians is clear from the following independent lines of evidence.

About the year 354 A.D., the Emperor Constantius is said to have sent to Arabia, Abyssinia, Ceylon and India a missionary called Theophilus. According to a contemporary historian, Theophilus preached the gospel in Maldives and from there sailed to other parts of India, "and reformed many things which were not rightly done among them; for, they heard the reading of the Gospel in a sitting posture, and did other things which were repugnant to the Divine Law; and having reformed everything according to the holy usage, as was most acceptable to God, he also confirmed the dogma of the Church".¹ According to Medlycott, and Mingana, this valuable statement implies the existence of (1) a resident congregation of the faithful, (2) Church services regularly held at which the Gospels were read, and (3) consequently a ministering clergy. This Latin account squares very well with the Syriac text quoted above, from the *Doctrine of the Apostles*, which clearly says that India received the Apostle's *hand of priesthood* from Judas Thomas", and confirms the Malabar tradition that the Apostle consecrated priests in Malabar to follow in his foot-steps.² Nor need there be any doubt that the Christians whom Theophilus found were indigenous. Although the "Apostolic Constitutions" had laid down that the reading of the Gospel must be heard in a standing posture and although this had been accepted all over the Christian

¹ See Abbe Migne, *Pat. Gr.* lxxv, 481-489. Quoted and commented in Medlycott, *India and the Apostle Thomas*, p. 178.

² The tradition is that priests were ordained from four of the leading Brahmin Christian families, namely Pakalomattam, Sankarapuri, Kalli and Kalikavu. They still exist in Koravalangad, and the present writer is a lineal descendant. The Head of the Malabar Church, the Archdeacon, had to be selected from Pakalomattam—a practice which was continued among the Jacobites till a hundred years ago.

world, western and eastern, the news of it had not reached the Indians and they naturally continued to hear the Gospel in a sitting posture. We may remember in this connection that Maldivé Islands lie off Malabar Coast, and were always in commercial contact with it.

Another independent source of evidence is the testimony of an early Muhammadan writer that Mani, the founder of Manichaeism (born 215 A.D.), visited India to spread his rival creed, and this strengthens the Malabar tradition that the sorcerer, Mani, came to Malabar to pervert the converts of St. Thomas and that some of them succumbed to him. It is also known that owing to persecution in Persia, Mani's followers migrated to India, China and other countries. One cannot say whether the well-known Manigramakars associated with Malabar Christians were Manichaeans, but it is highly probable that Mani or his immediate disciples visited South India, and this lends support to the view that there were Christians in South India in the third century A.D.¹

6. Conclusion.

Thus we have testimony from two independent sources about the mission of the Apostle Thomas in South India. On the one hand, we have unequivocal evidence of the early Fathers that St. Thomas preached and died in India; on the other, we have in India itself a local tradition which receives more and more support as historical research advances. If the Apostle came to India at all he could not have normally avoided Malabar; and in Malabar itself we have a Christian community that claims Thomas as their founder and whose existence could be traced back to the early centuries of the Christian Era. At least from the 4th century A.D. we have reliable evidence for the fact that Persian and Syrian Christians looked to Mylapore for the tomb of St. Thomas. One cannot understand why all these people looked for it on the barren shores of Mylapore, seeing that early Christian haunts were nearer home. If they, who knew the story of the *Acts* well, thought that it happened in Parthia or Afghanistan (as modern critics would have it), it is most strange that they should have looked for Thomas' tomb and Thomas' converts in South India, as they actually did. Considering the cumulative weight of all these different lines of evidence,

¹ About the Muhammadan testimony, see *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* (Art: *Manichæism*); the Malabar tradition is that many families apostatized, and that when the first Syrian Colonists came (sometime in the middle of the 4th century) the Christian families (called *Tarseni*=orthodox, *Syr*) were few and in a desolate condition. Some identify Mani with Manikavazagar, the Tamil Saiva devotee, but this is not convincing.

it might seem that the mission of St. Thomas in South India is as satisfactorily proved as the great majority of events in India's ancient history.

NOTE ON BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Among the modern writers who have denied that St. Thomas came to South India are Milne Rae, a former professor of the Madras Christian College, in his *Syrian Church in India* (1892), Richard Garbe, professor at Tübingen, in his *Indien und das Christentum* (1914), W. R. Philipps, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1903-04), and Rev. H. Thurston, S.J., in the *Cath. Encyc.*, Vol. XIV. Among those who have affirmed it are Paulino, in *India Orientalis Christiana* (1794), Claudius Buchanan, in his *Christian Researches in Asia* (1814), Bishop Heber, in his *Journal*, Yule in his edition of Marco Polo, A. E. Medlycott, in his *India and the Apostle Thomas* (1905), Dehlmann, in his *Die Thomas Legende* (1912), A. Wath in *Der Hl. Thomas der Apostel Indiens* (1923), Farquhar, in his two papers in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* (1926-27) and Father Hosten in various writings, of which the most valuable is the work before us. Dr. Mingana, the Syriac archivist, has brought out useful documents relevant to the subject in his *Early Spread of Christianity in India* printed in the *Bulletin of John Ryland's Library* (1926), but he adopts a non-committal attitude regarding the question of St. Thomas. Of the above writers, only Buchanan, Medlycott and Hosten studied the South Indian tradition on the spot. Buchanan, a pioneer of the Church Mission Society, after laborious researches, arrived at the conclusion that "we have as good testimony that Apostle Thomas died in India as that Apostle Peter died in Rome" (*Christian Researches* (1814), p. 135. Bishop Heber who died in South India was even more sure about it. "It may be as readily believed", wrote he, "that St. Thomas was slain in Meliapur as that St. Paul was beheaded in Rome or that Leonidas fell at Thermopylae" (*Indian Journal*, II, p. 178).

Vincent Smith, the famous historian, was at first sceptical about the Apostle's journey to South India but later when he came into closer contact with the sources, he wrote as follows :— "I am now satisfied that the Christian Church of Southern India is extremely ancient, whether it was founded by St. Thomas in person or not, and that its existence may be traced back to the third century with a high degree of probability. Mr. Milne Rae carried his scepticism too far when he attributed the establishment of the Christian congregations to missionaries from the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates in the fifth and sixth centuries". *Early History of India* (1924), p. 250. Elsewhere he says :— "My personal impression, formed after much examination of the evidence is that the story of the martyrdom in Southern India is the better supported of the two versions of the Saint's Death". *Oxford History of India* (1923), p. 126. Had Smith been able to examine the testimony of Syriac fathers, now available in English, and had he studied Malabar tradition at closer quarters, it is possible that he would have gone much further in his affirmation of St. Thomas' connection with India.

The reason why many scholars are so sceptical about the matter seems to be : (1) the iconoclastic attitude towards traditions intro-

duced by the modern Prussian School of historians ; (2) the imperfect acquaintance with sources which are not available in the European languages and a general disbelief in them; and perhaps (3) a natural disinclination to believe how India which lay outside the Roman empire and is identified with Hinduism should possess the tomb of one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, a privilege which only one place in Europe and no other place in the world lays claim to. One wonders how many events in the history of the 1st century A.D. in India or elsewhere are better attested than the preaching of St. Thomas in South India.

P. J. THOMAS.

Madras, 6-4-36.



Prof. Otto of Marburg, and Prof. Jarl Charpentier of Upsala." (Letter of P. J. Thoma, Esq., Colombo, September 7, 1924).

I see from the fourth article that the third appeared in May-June, 1920.

4. St. Thomas in Malabar: a Malayalam booklet published at Mannanam, Travancore, 1920.

5. Christian colonies in Malabar (awaiting publication).

"I intend bringing out a larger work on Early Indian Christianity, embodying the results of my studies; but it will take some time. I do not deal with the period after A.D. 1600." (Letter of P. J. Thoma, Esq., Colombo, September 7, 1924.)

6. A Hindu tradition on St. Thomas, by P. J. Thoma, M.A., B. Litt., Balliol College, Oxford. (A paper read at the Sixth Meeting of the Indian Historical Records Commission, held at Madras in January, 1924, Calcutta. Superintendent, Government Printing, India, 1924, pp. 1-8.

This is a reprint from: Indian Historical Records Commission. Proceedings of meetings. Vol. vi. Sixth meeting held at Madras, January, 1924, Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1924; pp. 121-129.

7. The South Indian tradition of the Apostle Thomas, in The Centenary Supplement of the J.R.A.S., 1924. Very good, and different from his other papers.

—Thomas, Saint.—Traslazione e miracoli / del glorioso Apostolo di N. S. Gesù Christo / S. Tommaso, / Descritta dell' Eccellente M. Gio. Battista de Lectis di Ortona. / Opusculo / ristampato per cura del Rev. Sac. A. Napoleone / e degli editori fratelli Bahher. Ortona, 1879, pp. 64.

G. B. de Lectis wrote on April 1, 1576.

—S. Tommaso ed Ortona versi / di / Teodoro de' Baroni Bonanni. / Aquila. Tipographia Gran Sasso d' Italia / di Carlo Langelotti, 1854, pp. III-VIII; 1-55.

—Vita di S. Tommaso Apostolo / protettore della Città di Ortona a Mare / ristampato nell' anno 1858 / in ricorrenza del sesto centenario della sua gloriosa traslazione / Chieti / Tipografia di Federico Vella, / pp. 3-56.

—Novena / del / glorioso Apostolo / S. Tommaso, / Aquila / Tipografia de Tribunali, / 1858, / pp. 16.

At p. 7: "La stessa bocca della Sapienza Incarnata si piacque renderne irrefragabile testimonianza, quando in passando per Ortona la sua diletta serva S. Brigida, le rivelò, che quivi riposavano le sacre Ossa del suo Apostolo Tomasso (ex rev. S. Birgit. Lib. VII, cap. IV e VI)."

These four are in the Library of the Bishop of Mylapore.

—St. Thomas, / Apostle of Our Lord / Jesus Christ. / A souvenir of his feast celebrated yearly / on the 21st December at San Thomé, Mylapore. Printed at the "Good Pastor" Press, Broadway, Madras, / 1917, pp. 23.