

Two Mistaken Pictures

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Always in the Nazrani history, visual evidences are in shortage. Even among the available few, several are mistaken or misinterpreted. Here are two examples of it.

First among them is a mural in the southern wall of the nave of the St. Mary's Cheriapally, Angamaly, Ernakulam District, Kerala, India. Prof. George Menachery printed it in the back cover of the book edited by him with the title Indian Church History Classics Vol. I, *The Nazaranies*, (The South Asia Research Assistance Service, Ollur, 1998). He identified it as Archdeacon Geevarghese in the imprint page.



Marthoma I, the Great

In late Seventeenth Century

John Fenwick, in his book *The Forgotten Bishops*, (gorgias press, Piscataway, N.J., 2009) quoted this picture from *The Nazaranies*. However, He refused Menachery's claim as Archdeacon Geevarghese. He acknowledged it as a bishop but dated it as of the eighteenth century.

Certainly, Archdeacon Geevarghese, who held the office of the *Archdeacon of All India* in the seventeenth century, is entombed at the church mentioned above. A Syriac inscription about his demise is engraved in the eastern wall of the nave. However, according to the practice existed until the late nineteenth century, only the bishops were entombed in the nave of the Nazrani church. Being an Archdeacon according to the East Syrian rite, Archdeacon Geevarghese was only a priest in the hierarchy. The priests and deacons were entombed within the railings west of the nave until the nineteenth century.

Also, the costumes of the person in the mural under discussion, correspond with that of a bishop. The Mitre, pectoral cross, blessing cross are clearly identified him as a bishop. As the primate of the Nazranis, along with similar Mitre, the Malankara Metropolitan occasionally uses the same vestments even today. Whatever be the counter arguments, the pastoral staff he carries does betray the claim as Archdeacon Geevarghese. All the above clearly proved that the person in the mural is nobody but a bishop.



H.H. Baselius Marthoma Paulose II

Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan in 2010 AD

Then the next question arises. Who is that bishop? St. Mary's Cheriapally, Angamaly also housed the tomb of Mar Thoma I, the great, the first indigenous bishop of the Malankara Nazranis after the Oath of Coonen Cross in 1653 AD. It is stated that Mar Thoma I, the great, who entered into rest on April

24, 1670 AD, was entombed in southern wall of the said church within the nave. The Mural is located exactly above his tomb even though no other traces of its exist. A close examination of the said mural revealed that it was painted later over an existing wall painting covering the entire wall.

It is logical to confirm that the Mural in the Angamaly church is of Mar Thoma I, the great. Being the leader of the revolution against the Roman Catholic regime over the Nazranis from 1599 to 1653 AD, which was succeeded by the Oath of *Coonen Cross* on January 3, 1653 AD, he was worth to be painted over his tomb. The chronology suggested by John Fenwick may push quarter a century back to the late seventeenth century.

It seems that this confusion was made deliberately since Mar Thoma I, the great, is a *persona non-grata* forever to the Roman Church. No wonder if the Roman Catholics tried to wipe out Mar Thoma I, the great from the history. The Nazranis throw the Roman Catholic regime of 54 years successfully under his leadership in 1653 AD. All powers of the mighty Roman Catholic Church supported by the Portuguese empire and its military did not help to sustain that domination in front of the Nazranis's will and his leadership. Even the consecutive attempts on his life did not turn him back. The *Coonen Cross* revolution is the only defeat of the Pope of Rome in the history except that to the protestant reformation. A small community like the Nazranis without any political support overrun the Roman Catholic persecution only because of Mar Thoma I, the great.



Group Photo of 1882 AD

The second picture under discussion is a photograph of 1882 AD. In several books, this photograph referred to as a group photo of the bishops of the Nazranis along with the clergy. Even the biography of Kadavil Paulose Mar Athanasios Metropolitan, edited by the present author along with Joice Thottakkad (*Karmashshiyude Kaathel*, Kottayam, 2008, MOC Publications) carries the same with the aforesaid concept.

Noticing the difference in Mitre, some authors went further and identified the bishops sitting at the extreme ends as Antonio Francis Xavier Alvaris Mar Yoolios, Metropolitan of India, Goa and Ceylon, and Rene Vilatte Mar Themothios of America. Even though the Nazrani Metropolitans consecrated both, they were not a part of the Nazrani community.

The odd in this conclusion is that, Rene Vilatte Mar Themothios Metropolitan never landed in the Indian sub continent. He was consecrated at Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Edavom 17, 1067 Malayalam Era (1882 AD), by the metropolitans Kadavil Paulose Mar Athanasios, Parumala Geevarghese Mar Gregorios (later canonized as St. Gregorios of Parumala) and Alvaris Mar Yoolios of Goa. According to the travelogue of Deacon Karuchira Geevarghese (later H. H. Mar Baselius Geevarghese I, Catholicos of the East), who accompanied the consecrating bishops to Colombo, confirmed that Rene Vilatte Mar Themothios left to America on Edavom 26, 1067 Malayalam Era, the very same day the Nazrani team returned from Colombo after his consecration.

Again, John Fenwick, in his book above mentioned, referred to this photograph. He identified the bishop on the far left as Mar Abdisho Thondanat of the Chaldian Syrian Church. However, he titled this photograph as *Mar Dionysios V and clergy*. But his description as *the clergy are in black cassocks, but the Latin tonsure is still worn* (p xvii, *The Forgotten Bishops*), points out that he is under the common notion that it is a photograph of the Nazrani clergy. However, he failed to explain the presence of the Chaldian Syrian metropolitan Mar Abdisho Thondanat along with them.

A cross examination with the portraits available with the Arch Bishop's house of the Chaldian Syrian Church at Thrissur, Kerala, India confirms that the

bishop on the far left is Mar Abdisho Thondanat. Further assessment substantiate that the bishop sitting in the middle is Mar Dionysius V, then primate of the Nazranis. The bishop sitting second from right with full black beard is St. Gregorios of Parumala, who was only 34 years of age then.

The three Rembans (monks) with white crosses over black head wrap and two Kathanars (priests) with beard and black cap are indeed the Nazranis. Joice Thottakkad acknowledged the Rembans as Fr. Kochuparampil Paulose Remban, Fr. Mookancheril Geevarghese Remban, and Fr. Chalappurath Yakob Remban. This may be true since the features of Fr. Mookancheril Geevarghese Remban are clearly identifiable with his other photographs. However, Joice Thottakkad identified the bishops sitting far left and right as Alvaris Mar Yoolios and Rene Vilatte Mar Themothios respectively. This argument carries no weight since it is certain that Rene Vilatte Mar Themothios never visited India and the bishop on the far left is recognized as Mar Abdisho Thondanat. Then two Nazrani bishops are yet to be traced out. The occasion of their meeting could be recognized for this purpose.

According to the chronicle of Mar Simon Dionysius, then Nazrani bishop of Kochi, there was such an occasion in 1882 AD. The British Governor of Madras, Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff, visited Kochi on Chingam 18 and 19 (30 & 31 August) 1882 AD. John Child Hannyngton, the British resident of Kochi invited all bishops of Kerala to meet the Governor on the 31 August. Consequently, Mar Dionysius V invited all bishops under him to that event. On the appointed date, Mar Dionysius V reached the British residency at Ponjikkara, Kochi, along with Parumala Mar Gregorios, Paulose Mar Ivanios (later H. H. Baselius Paulose I, Catholicos of the East). Mar Simon Dionysius and Mar Abdisho Thondanat were reached there separately. Palakkunnath Thomas Mar Athanasius, founder of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and Mar Coorilos of Anjoor, now known as the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, were absconding. According to Mar Simon Dionysius, both the Roman Catholic bishops of Varapuzha were also present there. They had had the meeting with the governor; present the citation they jointly prepared along with a brief history.

He also confirms that none of the other bishops of the Nazranis arrived for the meeting but the representatives of about ten churches around Kochi were also present.

Mar Simon Dionysius mentions nothing about a group photo in his chronicle. However, several other points are tallying. There are four Nazrani bishops and Mar Abdisho Thondanat are seen in the picture as he stated. The Roman Catholic priests in the photograph are also justifiable by the presence of the Latin bishops. The background resembles with the British residency building at Kochi.

The Two Latin bishops mentioned above were Leonardo Mellano of St. Louis OCD, Arch Bishop of Varapuzha and Joao Gomas Ferreira, Bishop of Kochi. The bishop sitting at extreme right end is clearly distinguishable as a Roman Catholic bishop by his Cassock and with the tip of his Latin style girdle. He is most probably the earlier, Arch Bishop Leonardo Mellano of St. Louis OCD of Varapuzha.

The Bishop sitting second from the left resembles Mar Ivanios. In that case, the bishop sitting third from the right is beyond doubt Mar Simon Dionysius, of whom no portrait is available to appraise. The priests standing behind are not the Nazrani priests with Roman Catholic vestments and tonsure but the real Latin priests except the Rembans and Kathanars. This event is highly important since it is the first ecumenical meeting of the Christian hierarchy in Kerala.

Another point is also worth to note. John Fenwick took the bishop sitting at the far right as Alvaris Mar Yoolios and classified him as "...from whom several lines of *epscopi vagantes* derive". Both his assumptions are erroneous. In reality, *epscopi vagantes* derived from the other non-Nazrani bishop, Rene Vilatte Mar Themothios. Mar Yoolios was only a co-celebrant along with the two other Nazrani bishops in the consecration of Mar Themothios. Mar Yoolios, a great patriot and Goean freedom fighter, remain obedient to the Church until his demise.

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