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<CT>King Alfred and India: an Anglo-Saxon Embassy to Southern India in the Ninth Century</CT>

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<Abstract heading>ABSTRACT</Abstract heading>
<Abstract>This article explores the ninth-century embassy to India purportedly sent by King Alfred, examining the evidence for this voyage, as well as its context, feasibility and credibility. It is argued that India, rather than Judea, was the intended destination of the alms dispatched to St Thomas and St Bartholomew in 883, given contemporary Anglo-Saxon knowledge of the lives of these two saints, and that such a destination would fit with the intellectual climate of Alfred's court and be a suitable symbolic gesture. A journey to India would have a good context in the evidence for both a Syriac Christian community and a significant shrine of St Thomas in southern India that people from early medieval Europe might visit, with the likely location of the shrine being investigated. The archaeological and documentary evidence for the availability of early medieval trade routes to India is also analysed, as are the identities of Alfred's emissaries. </Abstract>

<A heading>INDIA, ST THOMAS AND ST BARTHOLOMEW IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND</A heading>

One of the most intriguing pieces of evidence for long-distance contact and interaction between early medieval England and the wider world is the embassy to India that King Alfred the Great supposedly sent in 883, and the aim of this article is to offer an examination of the evidence for this voyage, before going on to consider its potential context and feasibility. Versions of this tale occur in the annal for 883 (or 884) in manuscripts B, C, D, E and F of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, although these vary in some important details. The relevant portion of this annal from MS D, which contains one of the fullest versions of the account, runs as follows:

> <EXT>*883 … 7 Marinus papa sende þa lignum Domini Ælfrede cyninge, 7 þy ilcan geare lædde Sighelm 7 Æþelstan þa ælmessan to Rome þe Ælfred cyning gehet þyder, 7 eac on Indea to sancte Thome 7 to sancte Bartholomeae, þa hi sæton wið þone here æt Lundenne, 7 hy þær, Godes þances, swyðe bentigðe wurdon æfter þam gehatum.*[1]</EXT>
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> <EXT>883 … And Pope Marinus sent some wood of the Cross to King Alfred. And that same year Sigehelm and Athelstan took to Rome the alms which King Alfred had promised thither, and also to India to St Thomas and St Bartholomew, when the English were encamped against the enemy army at London; and there, by the grace of God, their prayers were well answered after that promise.[2] </EXT>

Needless to say, this passage has been the subject of considerable interest. Although it is missing from MS A of the *Chronicle*, it is thought to be a near-contemporary insertion into the *Chronicle* text, probably made during Alfred's reign, given its presence in MSS B, C, D,

[1] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS. D*, ed. G. P. Cubbin, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 6 (Cambridge, 1996), 28, and Cotton MS Tiberius B IV, fol. 36v; this text is essentially the same as that in MS E, see *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS. E*, ed. S. Irvine, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 7 (Cambridge, 2004), 51. See below on the differences between this text and that in MSS B and C; MS F has an abbreviated version of the text in D and E under 883, omitting the names of the men carrying the alms and the reference to London, but retaining the destination as India: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS. F*, ed. P. S. Baker, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 8 (Cambridge, 2000), 73.

[2] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Revised Translation*, ed. and trans. D. Whitelock, D. C. Douglas and S. I. Tucker (London, 1961), p. 50.

E and F, and added by either an early redactor of the *Chronicle* or possibly even the compiler himself.[3] With regard to its content, some have suggested that 'India seems an unlikely destination for two English thanes' and argued that we might thus see *Indea/India* as a mistranscription of Judea, based on the variant form *Iudea* that occurs in MSS B and C.[4] However, whilst possible, this is by no means a necessary assumption, and a reading of Sigehelm and Æthelstan's intended goal as indeed being India remains a defensible position.[5] In this context, it is worth noting that MSS B and C not only have a variant form of Sigehelm and Æthelstan's intended destination, but also omit key phrases in their text of the annal, so rendering the whole tale obscure. This must raise questions about any claim of priority for their reading of *Iudea* over D, E and F's *Indea/India*, and support the suggestion that B and C's *Iudea* is simply an example of the common error of writing *Iudea* for *Indea/India* that is found in some other Old English texts too.[6] Furthermore, a final destination for Alfred's two emissaries at shrines in India, rather than Judea, would fit far better with contemporary Anglo-Saxon knowledge of the two saints mentioned in the Chronicle's account than the reverse. As the ninth-century *Old English Martyrology* attests, both St Thomas and St Bartholomew were, for example, closely associated with India in tales that were current in King Alfred's time. St Thomas the Apostle is said to have 'travelled through the lands of pagan people and the eastern parts of the world, and in India he built their king's hall in heaven, whose name was Gundaphorus', something that the king's brother saw when 'his soul was led to heaven with God's angels', before he returned and 'was alive again on earth'

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[3] S. Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', *Kings, Currency, and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, ed. M. A. S. Blackburn and D. N. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 1–45 at 21–4; S. Irvine, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Idea of Rome in Alfredian Literature', *Alfred the Great*, ed. T. Reuter (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 63–77 at 64–5; O. Pengelly, 'Rome in Ninth-Century Anglo-Saxon England' (unpubl. DPhil thesis, Univ. of Oxford, 2010), pp. 164–5, 246, 286. On the events of this annal being correctly placed in 883, and not in 886 as some have argued, see also D. N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 6–7 and n. 35, and J. L. Nelson, 'The Political Ideas of Alfred of Wessex', *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. J. Duggan (London, 1993), pp. 125–58 at 154–6.

[4] J. Harris, 'Wars and Rumours of Wars: England and the Byzantine World in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries', *Mediterranean Hist. Rev.* 14 (1999), 29–46, quotation at 39; others holding to this interpretation include R. Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1998), p. 192, and J. Parker, 'Ruling the Waves: Saxons, Vikings, and the Sea in the Formation of an Anglo-British Identity in the Nineteenth Century', *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture*, ed. S. I. Sobecki (Cambridge, 2011), pp.195–206 at 200.

[5] See, for example, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS. C*, ed. O'Brien O'Keefe, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 5 (Cambridge, 2001), 63; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. M. J. Swanton (London, 1996), p. 79; K. S. Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 53; K. S. Beckett, ''Old English References to the Saracens', *Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Related Themes in Memory of Lynne Grundy*, ed. J. A. Roberts and J. L. Nelson (London, 2000), pp. 484–509 at 491; D. Anlezark, *Alfred the Great* (Bradford, 2017), p. 54; C. R. Hart, *Learning and Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England and the Influence of Ramsey Abbey on the Major English Monastic Schools* (Lampeter, 2003), p. 178; Pengelly, 'Rome', pp. 245–7, 254, 267, 277; R. E. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 112, 117; 170; N. J. Andrade, *The Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity: Networks and the Movement of Culture* (Cambridge, 2018), <this is an external reference please do not hyperlink> p. 225, n. 67 </this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>and p. 228; H. R. Loyn, *Society and Peoples: Studies in the History of England and Wales, c. 600–1200* (London, 1992), p. 253; A. Williams, *Æthelred the Unready: the Ill-Counselled King* (London, 2003), p. 177; A. Casiday, 'Thomas Didymus from India to England', *Quaestio Insularis*, 4 (2003), 70–81 at 81; L. T. White, *Medieval Religion and Technology: Collected Essays* (London, 1978), pp. 214–5.

[6] MSS B and C have the text entered under 884 and omit '*þe Ælfred cyning gehet þyder*', rendering the passage 'obscure' as Taylor notes, or 'nonsense' as Plummer puts it, with MS B furthermore omitting '*sæton*' too: MS B, ed. Taylor, p. 38, and Cotton MS Tiberius A VI, fol. 21r; MS C, ed. O'Brien O'Keefe, p. 63, and Cotton MS Tiberius B I, fol. 132v; C. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1899) II, 96. For another instance of *Iudea* being mistakenly written for *Indea/India*, see MS C of the *Old English Martyrology*, described by Rauer as a 'common but catastrophic error': *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary*, ed. and trans. C. Rauer (Cambridge, 2013), p. 166; C. Rauer, 'Errors and Textual Problems in the *Old English Martyrology*', *Neophilologus* 97 (2013), 147–164 at 160 (quotation).

and so able to report what the hall looked like.[7] St Thomas then travelled to 'another Indian country' (*on oðre Indea mægðe*), where he faced down a 'horrible devil', before

> <EXT>One of the pagan bishops then killed the servant of Christ, and the texts sometimes say that he was stabbed with a sword, sometimes they say he was stabbed with spears. He suffered in the city of Calamina in India (*He þrowode in Calamina on Indea ceastre)*…[8] </EXT>

Likewise, St Bartholomew is described as 'Christ's missionary in the country of India, which is the outermost of all regions … In this country he cast out idols which they had previously worshipped there'.[9] After an angel of God appears to reveal that the people of India had previously been worshipping devils, the *Old English Martyrology* goes on to say that

> <EXT>the king of that people received baptism and his queen too, and all the people who belonged to his kingdom. Then the pagan bishops went and complained about that to the king's brother; he was in another kingdom, and he was older than he was. He therefore ordered Bartholomew, the servant of Christ, to be flayed alive. Then the believing king came with many people and took his body and transported it away with great splendour, and put it in a fantastically large church (*ond hine gesette in wundorlice micle cyrcean*).[10]</EXT>

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[7] 'And he þurhferde hæðenre eorð<an> and myddangeardes eastdæl, and myd Indeum he getymbrede hyra cyninges healle on heofenum, se wæs on naman Gundaforus. And þæt geseah þæs cyninges healle on heofenas gelæded myd Godes englum, þæt seo heall wæs getymbred ynnan and utan myd grenum and myd hæwenum and myd hwytum, and se wæs eft lyfigende on eorðan, se ðe sæde þæt hyt wære þus getymbred on heofenum'. *Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. C. Rauer (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 226–7.

[8] 'Þa þæra hæðenra bysceopa sum ofsloh þone Crystes þegen, and gewrytu secgað hwylum þæt he wære myd sweorde þurhstungen, hwylum hig secgað þæt he wære myd sperum ofsticod. He þrowode in Calamina on Indea ceastre'. *Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. C. Rauer (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 226–7. The text subsequently goes on to claim that Thomas's remains were 'transported from India to the city which is called Edessa' (*and hys lychama wæs alæded of Indeum on þa ceastre þe ys nemned Edyssa*), a detail that is found in many other texts as far back as the fourth century, when the Edessenes first started to claim and promote this notion. Whilst it might be suggested that Edessa was the site to which Sigehelm and Æthelstan were sent – as in, for example, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. and trans. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904), pp. 288–9, and D. Anlezark, 'Alfred and the East', *Ideas of the World in Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. M. Atherton, K. Karasawa and F. Leneghan, Stud. in OE Lit. 1 (Turnhout, 2022), 43–67 at54–5, 58, 59 – this is unlikely to be the case, however. Not only is St Thomas alone associated with this city, not St Bartholmew, but Edessa (modern Urfa, Turkey) is also very clearly located in neither Judea nor India, and Anlezark's notion (pp. 55, 58) that the Anglo-Saxons might have considered Edessa to be somehow in India is implausible (see further below, pp. 000, n. 000, on Anglo-Saxon concepts of the location of India). It is moreover worth noting that the claimed translation of St Thomas's remains is mentioned by neither Cynewulf nor Aldhelm in the accounts discussed below, and that there was, in fact, a cult-site of St Thomas in India at the *Calamina* of the *Old English Martyrology* that people in early medieval western Europe from the sixth century onwards were aware of and might visit (see further below; note, descriptions of this site indicate that there was a specific tomb there and relics that were claimed to be those of St Thomas). On the fourth-century and later claim that St Thomas's remains were translated to Edessa and how this was connected to his supposed original tomb-site in India, see, for example, N. Andrade, 'Networks, Apostolic Itineraries, and Mediterranean Witnesses to the Oral Traditions of South India', *Networks and the Spread of Ideas in the Past: Strong Ties, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange*, ed. A. Collar (London, 2022), pp. 205–26. Note, Anlezark's further suggestion with regard to St Bartholomew that Sigehelm and Æthelstan were actually being sent to Benevento, Italy, to take gifts to his relics there (pp. 57–8, 63), is likewise entirely out of accord with what the *Chronicle* says about the intended destination of Alfred's alms.

[9] 'Se wæs Cristes ærendwreca in India mægþe, seo is ealra eorðena seo ytemyste … In þisse mægþe he towerp deofolgild ða þe hi ær beeodon'. *Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. C. Rauer (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 166–7.

[10] 'Ða onfeng ðære þeode kyning fulwihte ond his cwen, ond eal ðæt folc þe to his rice belomp. Þa foron ða hæþnan bisceopas ond ðæt wregdon to ðæs kyninges breþer; se wæs on oþrum kynerice, ond he wæs yldra

Subsequently, the unbelieving king 'became insane' and the pagan bishops 'became insane and died'. Cynewulf's arguably ninth-century Old English poem *The Fates of the Apostles* also explicitly links these two saints with India:

> <EXT>Certainly, it has been no secret fact abroad that Bartholomew, a soldier strong in the strife, went to live among the people of India … So too Thomas bravely ventured to other parts in India, where the heart was illumined and the purpose strengthened in many people through his holy word. Then this man of exalted spirit by miraculous power, through the might of the Lord, revived the king's brother in front of the multitudes so that he rose up from the dead … and then in the strife Thomas gave up his life to the people. A sword-assault by a heathen hand dispatched him where the saint fell wounded in front of the multitudes. From there his soul sought out the light of heaven in reward for his victory.[11] </EXT>

The same associations are present in Bede's influential *Martyrology* and *Vita metrica sancti Cuthberti*,[12] and in texts by Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604) and Isidore of Seville (d. 636) that were definitely circulating in seventh- to ninth-century England. For example, Gregory says in his *Homiliae xl in Euangelia* of 590–2 that on the day of judgement, the peoples of the world will be presented to God by their apostles, so that Peter 'will appear there with a converted Judea, which he drew after him … and Thomas a converted India'.[13] Isidore also refers to Thomas being assigned India in his *De ortu et obitu patrum* of 598–615, whilst further stating that St Thomas died at *Calaminia* in India, 'where he was buried in honour' (ch. 73: *ubi et sepultus est in honore*), and that St Bartholomew was active in India as well, preaching the gospel of St Matthew there.[14]

ðonne he. Þa het se forþon Bartholomeus ðone Cristes þegen cwicne beflean. Ða com se gelyfeda kyningj mid micle folce ond genom his lichaman ond hine þanon alædde mid micle wuldre, ond hine gesette in wundorlice micle cyrcean', with *India* mistakenly written as *Iudea* in a single manuscript, MS C, of the *Old English Martyrology*. *Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. Rauer, pp. 166–7.

[11] 'Huru, wide wearð wurd undyrne þæt to Indeum aldre gelædde beaducræftig beorn, Bartholameus! … Swylce Thomas eac þriste geneðde on Indea oðre dælas, þær manegum wearð mod onlihted, hige onhyrded, þurh his halig word…'. *The Fates of the Apostles*, lines 42–4, 50–62, in *The Vercelli Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp (London, 1902), p. 52, trans. S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1995), pp. 155–6. For the date, see K. Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 6–7.

[12] For the *Martyrology*, see *Edition Pratique des Martyrologies de Bede de l'Anonyme Lyonnais et de Florus*, ed. J. Dubois and G. Renaud (Paris, 1976), pp. 119, 155 (references in B and B^2 only, see pp. vi–vii and P. C. Hilliard, 'Bede's *Martyrology*: a Resource and Spiritual Lesson', *Bede the Scholar*, ed. P. Darby and M. MacCarron (Manchester, 2023), pp. 265–83 at<this is an external reference please do not hyperlink> 266, n. 7</this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>); for the reference to St Bartholomew and India in Bede's early eighth-century *Vita metrica sancti Cuthberti*, see P. McBrine, *Biblical Epics in Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England: Divina in Laude Voluntas* (Toronto, 2017), p. 251, and J. Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity: the Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto, 2008), pp. 23–6.

[13] 'Ibi Petrus cum Iudaea conuersa, quam post se traxit, apparebit. Ibi Paulus conuersum, it ita dixerim, mundum ducens. Ibi Andreas post se Achaiam, Iohannes Asiam, Thomas Indiam in conspectu sui regis conuersam ducit'. Gregory the Great, *Homiliae xl in Euangelia*, I.xviii.17, ed. R. Étaix, *Gregorius Magnus, Homiliae in Evangelia*, CCSL 141 (Turnhout, 1999), 131–2, trans. D. Hurst, *Forty Gospel Homilies by Gregory the Great* (Piscataway, 2009), pp. 147–8. Gregory the Great's *Homiliae xl in Euangelia*, was well-known in Anglo-Saxon England, with this specific passage having moreover influenced the Whitby author of the late seventh- or early eighth-century *Anonymous Life of Gregory the Great*: M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 181, 209–10, 235, 241, 258–9, 304–05; P. Hayward, 'Gregory the Great as "Apostle of the English" in post-Conquest Canterbury', *JEH* 55 (2004), 19–57 at 51; P. Meyvaert, 'Review of *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an anonymous Monk of Whitby* by Bertram Colgrave', *JTS* 22 (1971), 253–6 at 254–5.

[14] 'Thomas, Christi didymus nominatus et iuxta latinam linguam Christi geminus ac similis salvatori; audiendo incredulus, videndo fidelis. Hic evangelium praedicavit Parthis, Medis, et Persis, Hircanisque ac Bactrianis, et

These links between St Thomas, St Batholomew and India are present in the works of Aldhelm of Malmesbury (d. 709/10) too, who King Alfred apparently considered to be England's finest poet and whose works enjoyed a very wide circulation in Anglo-Saxon England, such that he became 'one of the principal authors on the English curriculum' and it might be said that 'to the Anglo-Saxon reading public Aldhelm was the pre-eminent author, not Bede'.[15] So, in his Latin poem *Carmina ecclesiastica IV* (*On the Altars of the Twelve Apostles*), Aldhelm relates the following:

> <EXT>On Thomas: … Christ, therefore, the holy offspring of God, sent this man, who was performing many miracles with magnificent success, to convert the peoples of the orient with holy books. India at that time worshipped icons with unspeakable rites … but it confessed the true faith when Thomas won its salvation and (henceforth) believed in Christ, Who controls the sceptres of heaven. Accordingly, when his time in this present life had been spent, Thomas straightaway sought the ethereal heaven. A temple-priest, the officiant of an ancient shrine, transfixed (Thomas) with a hard blade so that he was dripping with blood (but) he is to receive his rewards when the earth of its own accord shall gape open and all corpses rise from their ancient tombs.
>
> On St Bartholomew: Mighty India stands as the last of the lands of the earth … Given over to pagan rites, India used to worship idols. But Bartholomew destroyed the pagan shrines, duly smashing the images of the ancient gods …[16] </EXT>

Similarly, in his prose *De uirginitate* (*On Virginity*) of *c.* 675/86 we find reference to

> <EXT>Didymus [i.e. Thomas], at one time the disbelieving doubter of the Lord's resurrection – but once the scars of Christ's wounds had been seen, (became) its confident preacher – who illumined the tripartite provinces of eastern India with the

destinans orientalem plagam et interna gentium penetrans et praedicationem suam usque ad titulum suae passionis perducens: lanceis enim transfixus occubuit in Calaminia Indiae ciuitate, ubi et sepultus est in honore'. *Isidoro de Sevilla. De ortu et obitu patrum*, 73, ed. C. C. Gómez, *Isidoro de Sevilla. De Ortu et Obitu Patrum* (Paris, 1985), pp. 209–11; S. F. Johnson, 'Apostolic Patterns of Thought, from Early Christianity to Early Byzantium', *The Holy Apostles: a Lost Monument, a Forgotten Project, and the Presentness of the Past*, ed. M. Mullett and R. G. Ousterhout (Washington DC, 2020), pp. 53–66 at 53–4. See Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 181, 213, 235, 261, 310–11, on Isidore of Seville's *De ortu et obitu patrum* in Anglo-Saxon England; the text includes references to St Thomas in India and his burial at *Calaminia* (chs. 73 and 80) as well as to St Bartholomew in India (ch. 74).

[15] On King Alfred's view of Aldhelm as the finest Anglo-Saxon poet, see M. Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', *ASE* 36 (2007), 15–69 at <this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>18, n. 17</this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>, and A. Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 5; on Aldhelm's 'immeasurable influence on the Latin culture of preconquest Anglo-Saxon England', see, for example, M. Lapidge and M. Herren, *Aldhelm: the Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 2–3.

[16] 'In Sancti Thomae Apostoli … Hunc igitur soboles misit veneranda Tonantis Eoas gentes almis convertere biblis Plurima magnificis patrantem signa triumphis. India tum sacris coluit simulacra nefandis Doctrinis veterum stolidis instructa parentum, Sed confessa fidem Thoma lucrante salutem Credidit in Christum, caeli qui sceptra gubernat … In Sancti Bartholomei. Ultima terrarum praepollens India constat … Idola quae coluit paganis dedita sacris; Sed Bartholomeus destruxit fana profana Effigies veterum confringens iure deorum'. Aldhelm, *Carmina ecclesiastica*, IV.6, ed. R. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi opera* (Berlin, 1909), pp. 24–5, 28, and trans. M. Lapidge and J. L. Rosier, *Aldhelm: the Poetic Works* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 53–4, 55; B. Savill, 'Cult of Saints, E06924', *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, database, 24 October 2018, http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06924, and 'Cult of Saints, E06927', *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, database, 24 October 2018, http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06927, accessed 20 August 2024.

> clear light of evangelical preaching and totally annulled the execrable rites of (pagan) sanctuaries and the empty offices of their priests …[17]</EXT>

Interestingly, Aldhelm goes on to include a lengthy quotation from St Thomas in *De uirginitate* after this, which, as Augustine Casiday has noted, was taken from the fourth-century *Passio sancti Thomae apostoli*, a Latin translation and abbreviation of the originally Syriac *Acts of the Apostle Thomas*, confirming the circulation of this early account of St Thomas's missionary activities and martyrdom in India in seventh-century England; the same text is also believed to have been used by both Cynewulf and the author of the *Old English Martyrology* in their accounts of St Thomas too.[18]

<A heading>THE SYMBOLISM AND INSULAR CONTEXT OF SENDING ALMS TO INDIA</A heading>

In light of all of the above, it is hard not to see the explicit mention of St Thomas and St Bartholomew as the recipients of Alfred's alms in the annal for 883 as strongly supportive of the contention that *Indea/India*, rather than *Iudea*, is indeed the correct reading for the intended destination, and deliberately meant.[19] In fact, it may well be that, instead of India being an 'unlikely destination for two English thanes', its remoteness from early medieval England was, in fact, the very point of Alfred's gift: that, in return for success against a Viking raiding-army that had occupied London,[20] King Alfred had deliberately pledged to send alms not simply to Rome – which was the frequent recipient of contemporary Anglo-Saxon alms and pilgrims[21] – but to the very furthest-known reaches of Christendom, to the land that was conceived of as mirroring Britain's position on the very far edge of the known world.[22] Whilst there was sometimes a degree of confusion over exactly what counted as 'India' in Late Antiquity and the early medieval period,[23] it is clear that India was indeed

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[17] 'Didymus ... qui Eoae tripertitas Indiae provincias sereno evangelicae praedicationis lumine illustravit et execranda sacellorum lustramenta et inepta pontificum flaminia funditus evacuavit'. Aldhelm, *De uirginitate*, XXIII, ed. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi opera*, p. 255, and trans. Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: the Prose Works*, p. 81; B. Savill, 'Cult of Saints, E06548', *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, database, 13 October 2018, http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06548, accessed 20 August 2024.

[18] Casiday, 'Thomas Didymus from India to England', pp. 78–81; A. J. Ford, *Marvel and Artefact: the 'Wonders of the East' in its Manuscript Contexts* (Leiden, 2016), p. 118; C. Rauer, 'The Sources of the Old English Martyrology', *ASE* 32 (2003), 89–109 at 108; J. E. Cross, 'Cynewulf's Traditions about the Apostles in Fates of the Apostles', *ASE* 8 (1979), 163–75.

[19] As noted in, for example, Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions*, p. 53; M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300–900* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 958; and Pengelly, 'Rome', p. 246.

[20] For the view that there was indeed a Viking raiding-army that occupied London in 883, see Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', pp. 21–4, and the other works cited in n. 3 above.

[21] See, for example, R. Naismith and F. Tinti, 'The Origins of Peter's Pence', *EHR* 134 (2019), 521–52; Pengelly, 'Rome', pp. 20–66; N. Howe, 'Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England', *Jnl of Med. and Early Mod. Stud.* 34 (2004), 147–72.

[22] Pengelly, 'Rome', for example pp. 225–39, 247, 277–8; M. B. Busbee, 'A Paradise Full of Monsters: India in the Old English Imagination', *LATCH: Jnl for the Stud. of the Lit. Artifact in Theory, Culture, or Hist.* 1 (2008), 51–72.

[23] P. Mayerson, 'A Confusion of Indias: Asian India and African India in the Byzantine Sources', *Jnl of the Amer. Oriental Soc.* 113 (1993), 169–74; Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, pp. 18–19, 72–93; P. Schneider, 'The So-called Confusion between India and Ethiopia: the Eastern and Southern Edges of the Inhabited World from the Greco-Roman Perspective', *Brill's Companion to Ancient Geography: the Inhabited World in the Greek and Roman Tradition*, ed. S. Bianchetti, M. Cataudella and H.-J. Gehrk (Leiden, 2016), pp. 184–202; Busbee, 'India in the Old English Imagination', p. 56; and M. Busbee, 'The Idea of India in Early Medieval England', *India in the World*, ed. C. M. Gámez-Fernández and A. Navarro-Tejero (Newcastle, 2011), pp. 3–16 at 5. Note, however, the cautions in G. Nedungatt, 'India Confused with Other Countries in Antiquity?', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 76 (2010), 315–37.

considered in Anglo-Saxon England to be 'the last of the lands of the earth' to the east and 'the outermost of all regions'.[24] As such, it was the clear counterpart to Britain, which was frequently identified as being located 'virtually at the end of the world towards the west and north-west',[25] as Gildas writing in the sixth century put it, or 'at the very ends of the earth', as Bede and others describe it.[26] Even though England was arguably conceived of as being somewhat less liminal and more properly part of Europe by the ninth and tenth centuries,[27] its relative geographical position compared to that of India continued to be recognised. So, the only surviving Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi*, the Cotton World Map – which was probably drawn at Canterbury in *c.* 1025–50, although it is thought to have been based on a lost Anglo-Saxon exemplar of perhaps the earlier tenth century[28] – shows Britain and Ireland on the outer edge of the known world near the very bottom left (north-west) corner, whilst India and Sri Lanka are marked on the opposite edge of the map at the very top (east) and centre, with the eastern Mediterranean and Jerusalem lying at the heart of the world between them.[29] Although Ireland and Thule are even more peripheral than Britain on this map, the parallel between Britain and India's respective locations on opposite edges of Afro-Eurasia remains clear.[30] A similar concept of the relative geographical positions of India and Britain is likewise present in the Old English translation and adaptation of Orosius's *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem*, perhaps written in the very late ninth century (or possibly the early tenth century), which identifies India as lying to the west of the Indus river and in the eastern part of the Earth, being the furthest east of all countries, whilst Britain – albeit with Ireland and Thule beyond – lay in the Ocean on the western edge of the world.[31]

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[24] Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: the Poetic Works*, p. 55; *Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. Rauer, pp. 166–7. See also the influential *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville, which was circulating in Anglo-Saxon England and places India between the 'river Indus' and 'the place where the sun rises': *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. S. A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and O. Berghof (Cambridge, 2006), XIV.iii.5 at p. 286; Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 176–8, 181, 214–15, 311.

[25] Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, ch. 3, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom in *Gildas: the Ruin of Britain and Other Works* (London, 1978), p. 16.

[26] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, v.7, trans. B. Colgrave, in *Bede: the Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. J. McClure and R. Collins (Oxford, 1994), p. 244; see, for example, N. G. Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces: Anglo-Saxon Constructions of Place* (Toronto, 2017), pp. 58–71, 101–02, 221, on England's perceived marginality in medieval texts and maps. See also Stephen's *Vita sancti Wilfrithi*, 5, trans. J. F. Webb in *The Age of Bede*, D. H. Farmer (Harmondsworth, 1988), p. 110, who describes England as lying at 'the ends of the earth', and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, in which Britannia is described as 'an island in the Ocean [aka 'the Britannic Ocean'], cut off from the whole globe by the intervening sea' (XIV.vi.2 and IX.ii.37, in *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. Barney *et al.*, pp. 193, 294).

[27] F. Tinti, *Europe and the Anglo-Saxons* (Cambridge, 2021), pp. 10–12; H. Appleton, 'The Northern World of the *Mappa Mundi*', *ASE* 47 (2020), 275–305 at 282, 285–7, 299–300, 305; Howe. 'Rome'; Naismith and Tinti, 'Peter's Pence'; Pengelly, 'Rome'.

[28] Cotton MS Tiberius B. v, fol. 56v; N. G. Discenza and H. Estes, *Writing the World in Early Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2023), pp. 2–4; and see Appleton, 'The *Mappa Mundi*', on the potential lost tenth-century exemplar.

[29] Discenza and Estes, *Writing the World*, pp. 2–4; Busbee, 'India in the Old English Imagination', p. 58.

[30] Appleton, 'The *Mappa Mundi*', pp. 282, 285–7, 299, notes that Britain is drawn with unusual detail and size on the Cotton Map and is moreover depicted not as lying 'perilously on the margin', as it was envisaged by Gildas and Bede, but rather 'firmly within the compass of the world'. Nonetheless, this doesn't negate Britain's clear marginal position on the map, as Dicenza and Estes, *Writing the World*, p. 4, note – although enlarged and with Ireland and Thule lying beyond it, Britain's position relative to India is clear, with it being located on the edge of the Afro-Eurasian 'world island', just as India and Sri Lanka are located on its opposite edge.

[31] *The Old English Orosius*, ed. J. Bately (London, 1980), i.1, iii.9; Busbee, 'India in the Old English imagination', pp. 56–8; Busbee, 'Idea of India', pp. 5–6; Pengelly, 'Rome', p. 247, 261, 263–5; Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, pp. 64–6. On the date and authorship of this text, see J. Bately, 'The Old English Orosius', *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. N. G. Discenza and P. E. Szarmach (Leiden, 2014), pp. 313–43. Anlezark, 'Alfred and the East', p. 53, appears to suggest that the India of the Old English *Orosius* 'undoubtedly includes Persia', but the text does not support this and rather follows Orosius's original fifth-century text on the clearly

If India and Britain were thus conceived of as largely mirroring each other in their locations at the opposite edges of the known world, so that the pledge of sending alms to India could well have been a deliberate act of votive symbolism undertaken in return for victory over the Vikings at London, this may not have been the only potential motivation for such a mission being sent. Indeed, it has been suggested that this expedition would, moreover, have had a sound context in the geographical curiosity about the wider world and its limits that was in evidence at Alfred's court and the desire of the king and his courtiers to 'probe the horizons of their inherited geographical understanding'.[32] This desire is evidenced most notably by two accounts added into the Old English *Orosius*, these being the reports of the travellers Ohthere and Wulfstan on the physical, political and ethnographic geography of the north. Wulfstan, probably an Anglo-Saxon traveller, records his eastwards trip to the Baltic port of Truso and *Estland*,[33] whilst Ohthere's report 'to his lord, King Alfred' (*Ohthere sæde his hlaforde, Ælfrede cyninge*), concerns two journeys from his home in *Hálogaland* in northern Norway, one to southern Norway and Hedeby, and the other around the North Cape into the White Sea – the latter trip is clearly stated to have been undertaken to see how far the land extended to the north and if anyone lived there, with the text suggesting that Ohthere was being explicitly questioned at Alfred's court about the northernmost margins of the world and the geography of Scandinavia.[34] Given this, the idea that two emissaries of an Anglo-Saxon king might indeed have been sent to India in the 880s would appear to be not only defensible in terms of an awareness of St Thomas and St Bartholomew's well-documented links to this region, but also to have credible motivations in terms of both India's perceived position (and remoteness) relative to England *and* the intellectual and geographical curiosity of the West Saxon court at that time. Accepting this does, of course, raise a number of additional questions, including: what were Sigehelm and Æthelstan being sent to visit in India with their royal gifts? What was the wider context for such a visit, and how could they have travelled there? And who might these two travellers have been, and did they manage to undertake this journey and return to report what they had seen?

With regard to their intended destination in India, the usual and most credible interpretation is that alms were being sent to specific Christian sites associated with St Thomas and St Bartholomew that were believed to be located there. Certainly, it seems likely that this is what was envisaged by Alfred for Sigehelm and Æthelstan's trip. As the above accounts make clear, there was a definite sense in seventh- to ninth-century England that St Thomas had successfully converted the people of India – who thus 'confessed the true faith … and (henceforth) believed in Christ', according to Aldhelm – before he was martyred and

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defined boundaries of India, as Pengelly ('Rome', p. 261) notes; on Orosius's boundaries for India showing no evidence for any confusion between India and other regions, see also Nedungatt, 'India Confused?', p. 332.

[32] Pengelly, 'Rome', pp. 246–68, 276–8 (quotation at p. 250), who discusses the king's geographical curiosity and how dispatching an expedition to the far-eastern limits of Christendom may have been a deliberate choice on the part of Alfred and his court (especially pp. 246–7, 267, 277); J. Hines, 'Wulfstan in Truso: Old English Text, Baltic Archaeology, and World History', *Global Perspectives on Early Medieval England*, ed. K. L. Jolly and B. E. Brooks (Woodbridge, 2022), pp. 115–35 at 116. See also F. Leneghan, '*Translatio Imperii*: the Old English *Orosius* and the Rise of Wessex', *Anglia* 133 (2015), 656–705, on the political underpinnings of the Old English *Orosius*, and B. Allport, 'Home Thoughts of Abroad: *Ohthere's Voyage* in its Anglo-Saxon Context', *EME* 28 (2020), 256–88 at 272–4, 286–8.

[33] A. Englert and A. Trakadas (eds), *Wulfstan's Voyage: the Baltic Sea Region in the Early Viking Age as seen from Shipboard* (Roskilde, 2009), pp. 14–28; Hines, 'Wulfstan in Truso'; J. Jesch, 'Who was Wulfstan?', *Wulfstan's Voyage*, ed. Englert and Trakadas, pp. 29–36; and see Allport, '*Ohthere's Voyage* in its Anglo-Saxon Context', p. 285, on how this account may have been modelled after that of Ohthere.

[34] J. Bately and A. Englert (eds), *Ohthere's Voyages: a Late 9th-Century Account of the Voyages along the Coasts of Norway and Denmark and its Cultural Context* (Roskilde, 2007), pp. 44–7; Pengelly, 'Rome', pp. 248–51; Allport, '*Ohthere's Voyage* in its Anglo-Saxon Context', pp. 261–3, 272–4, 286–8. On the voyage, Ohthere, and his meeting with King Alfred, see now also M. Korhammer, 'Ohthere's Northern Voyage: a Close Reading and Practical Interpretation', *VMS* 18 (2022), 113–48.

was, initially at least, buried at *Calamina* in India.[35] Likewise, although St Bartholomew would not lead and present to God the 'converted India' at the Last Judgement (this being St Thomas's honour, according to Gregory the Great), he too had preached the gospel in 'other parts in India', to use Cynewulf's phrase, and had converted and baptised a large number of people there, with the *Old English Martyrology*'s text implying that he had been martyred and buried in India 'in a fantastically large church'.[36] Further support for the presence in England of this notion of a continuing Christian community in India to whom alms might be taken can be had from another text that was known in early medieval England. The Byzantine author and spice merchant known as Cosmas Indicopleustes probably wrote his *Χριστιανικὴ Τοπογραφία* (*Christian Topography*) in Alexandria, Egypt, in the mid-sixth century, and in this work he demonstrates a notable degree of knowledge of India and Sri Lanka, making a number of references to Christians in India and Sri Lanka in the following manner:

> <EXT>Even in the Island of Taprobane [Sri Lanka] in inner India, where also the Indian sea is, there is a church of Christians, clergy and believers … The same is true in the place called Male [Malabar, India], where the pepper grows, and in the place called Kaliana, and there is a bishop appointed from Persia … [Sri Lanka] has a church of Persian Christians who are resident in that country, and a priest sent from Persia, and a deacon, and all that is requisite for the conduct of the worship of the Church.[37] </EXT>

The circulation of this Greek work was not, it should be noted, limited to the Byzantine Empire or the Mediterranean world. Indeed, it now seems likely that at least one manuscript of Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography* was present at Canterbury in the seventh century, and it has been suggested that the *Cosmographiorum codex* that Benedict Biscop bought in Rome and subsequently sold to King Aldfrith of Northumbria (685–705) may in fact have been an illuminated copy of this too.[38] Cosmas's illustrations are also thought to

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[35] The *Old English Martyrology*, Bede's *Martyrology*, Isidore of Seville's *De ortu et obitu patrum* (ch. 73) and other sources all suggest that St Thomas's relics were subsequently transferred to Edessa, modern Urfa, Turkey, although not all of the Anglo-Saxon sources mention this – it is absent in both Aldhelm and Cynewulf's accounts, for example. On this claim, see above, n. 000, and Andrade, 'Mediterranean Witnesses'.

[36] Bede, in both his *Martyrology* and his *Vita metrica sancti Cuthberti*, associates St Bartholomew solely with India, as does Aldhelm in his *Carmina ecclesiastica IV* and the *Old English Martyrology*; however, Isidore of Seville in *De ortu et obitu patrum* (ch. 74) places St Bartholomew's ultimate death and burial in Great-Armenia, and Cynewulf has a version of this too: on the varying tales of the area of operation and martyrdom of St Bartholomew current in the early medieval period, see E. Rose, *Ritual Memory: the Apocryphal Acts and Liturgical Commemoration in the Early Medieval West (c. 500–1215)* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 79–123. Note, on some very early references to St Bartholomew in India, and a cautious acceptance of these, see I. Perczel, 'Syriac Christianity in India', *The Syriac World*, ed. E. King (London, 2018), pp. 653–97 at 657–60, though see also Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, pp. 88–92.

[37] *Cosmas Indicopleustès, Topographie Chrétienne, Tome I (Livres I–IV)*, ed. and trans. W. Wolska-Conus (Paris, 1968), III.65 at pp. 502–03; *Cosmas Indicopleustès, Topographie Chrétienne, Tome III (Livres VI–XII. Index)*, ed. and trans. W. Wolska-Conus (Paris, 1973), XI.14 at pp. 342–5; S. Neill, *A History of Christianity in India* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 36–7; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, p. 110. On Cosmas Indicopleustes and his knowledge of India, see further Walker, 'Church of the East in Late Antique Eurasia', p. 1019; M. Kominko, *The World of Kosmas: Illustrated Byzantine Codices of the Christian Topography* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 10–17; S. Fallar, 'The World According to Cosmas Indicopleustes – Concepts and Illustrations of an Alexandrian Merchant and Monk', *Jnl of Transcultural Stud.* 1 (2011), 193–232; W. Baum and D. W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: a Concise History* (London, 2003), pp. 33, 54; Perczel, 'Syriac Christianity in India', pp. 662–3; P. Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Politics in the Indian Ocean* (Delhi, 2010), pp. 4–7.

[38] B. Bischoff and M. Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 208–11; Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 32, 177; M. W. Herren, *The Cosmography of Aethicus Ister*, Pub. of the Jnl of Med. Latin 8 (Turnhout, 2011), pp. lxviii–lxx; A. Lampinen, 'Forging the Feel of Ancient Ethnography in Pseudo-Jerome's *Cosmography of Aethicus Ister*', *Animo Decipiendi? Rethinking Fakes and Authorship in Classical, Late Antique, & Early Christian Works*, ed. A. Guzmán and J.

have influenced those of the famous *Codex Amiatinus*, which was produced before 716 in Bede's monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow, with the suggestion being made that the monks preparing the *Amiatinus* illustrations consulted an illustrated copy of Cosmas's *Christian Topography* when producing them,[39] whilst Simon Keynes has noted that at least one copy of the *Christian Topography* was probably still present in southern England in the early ninth century.[40] Cosmas's work may also have influenced parts of the Old English poem *Genesis A*, which survives in a manuscript of *c.* 1000 but may have been composed in the eighth century.[41]

<A heading>CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL INDIA</A heading>

If King Alfred and his advisors thus may well have believed there to be a Christian community located in 'the last of the lands of the earth' to the east, mirroring the position of Britain, to which alms might be sent for sites associated with St Thomas and St Bartholomew, how well-founded was this belief? In this context, it needs to be acknowledged that the existence in India of an early and notable Eastern Christian community, known usually as 'Thomas Christians' after their claimed founder, St Thomas the Apostle, is well-established. Although the exact circumstances of this community's origins are much debated, there is little doubt that stories of St Thomas's missionary activity in India were circulating in the Mediterranean world by the third and fourth centuries AD, nor that there was indeed a permanent Christian community established in southern India by at least Late Antiquity.[42] So, for example, the Christian Arabic *Chronicle of Seʿert*, a universal history based on Syriac sources, is believed to offer plausible testimony for fifth- to sixth-century Christians in India, referring to Maʿna, a bishop of Rev-Ardashir at coastal Persis (Fars, Iran), sending materials for use among Christians in India in the late fifth or early sixth century.[43] Likewise, Ishoʿdad

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Martinez (Groningen, 2018), pp. 229–44 at 229–30, 240–1; Bede, *Historia abbatum*, 15, ed. C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1896) I, 380, and trans. D. H. Farmer, in *Age of Bede*, ed. Farmer, p. 201.

[39] C. Chazelle, 'The Illustrations of the Codex Amiatinus and of Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography*', *All Roads Lead to Rome: the Creation, Context and Transmission of the Codex Amiatinus*, ed. J. Hawkes and M. Boulton, Studia Traditionis Theologiae 31 (Turnhout, 2019), pp. 11–25; G. Fowden, 'Alexandria between Antiquity and Islam: Commerce and Concepts in First Millennium Afro-Eurasia', *Millennium* 16.1 (2019), 233–70 at 247–8.

[40] S. Keynes, 'Between Bede and the *Chronicle*: London, BL, Cotton Vespasian B.vi, fols. 104–9', *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe and A. Orchard, 2 vols. (Toronto, 2005) I, 47–76 at 54–5; Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School*, pp. 210–11, 545.

[41] J. Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 146–7.

[42] See especially R. E. Frykenberg, 'Thomas Christians and the Thomas Tradition', in Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, pp. 91–115; C. Baumer, *The Church of the East: an Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity* (London, 2006), pp. 25–30; Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*; Neill, *History of Christianity in India*; and Baum and Winkler, *Church of the East*, pp. 51–8.

[43] Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, pp. 143–4; A. Scher, 'Histoire Nestorienne (Chronique de Seert): Second Partie (I)', *Patrologia Orientalis* 7 (1911), 93–203 at 116–17; Baum and Winkler, *Church of the East*, p. 53; A. Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in India* (Manchester, 1926), p. 28; E. R. Hambye, 'Some Eastern Testimonies Concerning Early and Medieval Christianity in India', *Proceedings of the Indian Hist. Congress* 21 (1958), 582–90 at 588; Perczel, 'Syriac Christianity in India', p. 663; P. Wood, 'Kollam's Christians and their Networks', *The Kollam Plates in the World of the Ninth Century Indian Ocean*, ed. E. Lambourn, K. Veluthat and R. Tomber (New Delhi, forthcoming), draft version, pp. 5–6, kindly provided by Philip Wood. Note, J. M. Hegarty, 'Across the Indian Ocean: Reconsidering Christianity in South Asia to the Ninth Century', *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Lössl and N. J. Baker-Brian (Hoboken, 2018), pp. 207–31 at 223–4, and J. Walker, 'From Nisibis to Xi'an: the Church of the East in Late Antique Eurasia', *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. S. F. Johnson (Oxford, 2012), pp. 994–1052 at 1019, are willing to

of Merv mentions that a certain 'Daniel the Presbyter, the Indian', assisted Mar Koumi in preparing a Syriac translation of a Greek text for Bishop Mari of Rev-Ardashir, something that must have taken place in the early to mid-fifth century.[44] Even more significant are two letters of Ishoʿyabh III, Bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Patriarch of the Church of the East from *c.* 649 to 659, which were written in the context of a dispute between him and the metropolitan bishop of Rev-Ardashir. These complaints indicate that the latter was responsible for administering Indian episcopal sees at that time, but had created a situation whereby 'the episcopal succession has been interrupted in India', and that he received taxes from the people of India. As such, the content of Ishoʿyabh III's complaints point to the presence of an organised and presumably reasonably substantial Chrisitan community in India at that time.[45] Moreover, India subsequently seems to have received its own metropolitan bishop at some point *c.* 650–790, though the date and context of this is not wholly certain.[46]

Given all of this, the account of the mid-sixth-century church in India and Sri Lanka by Cosmas Indicopleustes that was circulating in early medieval England appears to have been reasonably accurate, in particular with respect to the close links to Persia that he notes, the presence of at least one Eastern Christian bishop in India, and the reference to Christians being found at a number of places along the coast of India and in Sri Lanka. Further references to this Christian community in India, showing its continued existence into the period of Alfred's emissaries, are found in the works of Timotheos I, Patriarch of the Church of the East in 780–823. These include comments on the possibility of marriages between Christians of both Mesopotamia and India, a note that 'many monks' were accustomed to travel by sea from Mesopotamia to India (*Beth Hinduwāyē*) in that period, and a passing reference to the fact that the Christians of this region continued to be under the authority of

give some credence to references in the *Chronicle of Seʿert* to late third- and fourth-century Christian activity in India, but Andrade is cautious about the reliability of the *Chronicle* before the fifth century; the *Chronicle* itself was probably created in the tenth century from much earlier Syriac materials, see P. Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert: Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq* (Oxford, 2013), p. 3.

[44] *The Commentaries of Ishoʿdad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha*, ed. and trans. M. D. Gibson, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1916) V.ii, xi–xiv, 22; Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, pp. 143–4; R. Harris, 'Some Notes on the History of the Syriac New Testament', *The Expositor*, 8th ser., 6.5 (1913), 456–65, especially 462–3; Baum and Winkler, *Church of the East*, p. 53. Ishoʿdad of Merv was bishop of Haditha (near Mosul, northern Iraq) in the ninth century, and the reference to 'Daniel the Presbyter, the Indian' comes at the end of his commentary on the *Epistle to the Romans*.

[45] R. Duval, *Ishōʿyahb Patriarchae III: Liber Epistularum* (Leipzig, 1905), pp. 182, 186; Neill, *Christianity in India*, p. 44; Hambye, 'Eastern Testimonies Concerning Early and Medieval Christianity in India', p. 585; Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, p. 144; Baum and Winkler, *Church of the East*, pp. 53–4; Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, p. 7; J. Dauvillier, 'I: Les Provinces Chaldéennes "de l'Extérieur" au Moyen Âge', in J. Dauvillier, *Histoire et Institutions des Eglises Orientales au Moyen Age* (London, 1983), pp. 261–316 at 312–3; J. M. Fiey, *Pour un Oriens Christianus Novus: Répertoire des Diocèses Syriaques Orientaux et Occidentaux* (Beirut & Stuttgart, 1993), p. 95; J. M. Fiey, 'Īšōʿyaw le Grand: Vie du Catholicos Nestorien Īšōʿyaw III d'Adiabène (580–659)', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 36 (1970), 5–46 at 33–4.

[46] *Ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib, Fiqh an-naṣrānīya: "Das Recht der Christenheit", II. Teil*, ed. and trans. W. Hoenerbach and O. Spies (Louvain, 1957), p. 123; *Scriptorum Veterum Nova Collectio e Vaticanis Codicibus*, ed. A. Mai, 10 vols. (Rome, 1838), X, 141–2. See C. Buck, 'The Universality of the Church of the East: How Persian Was Persian Christianity?', *Jnl of the Assyrian Academic Soc.* 10 (1996), 54–95 at 68–9; Fiey, *Pour un Oriens Christianus Novus*, pp. 95–6; Baum and Winkler, *Church of the East*, p. 54; Dauvillier, 'Les Provinces Chaldéennes "de l'Extérieur"', p. 313; Hegarty, 'Christianity in South Asia to the Ninth Century', pp. 225–6; Hambye, 'Eastern Testimonies Concerning Early and Medieval Christianity in India', pp. 588–9; Mingana, *Early Spread of Christianity in India*, pp. 64–5; A. Mignana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East: a New Document* (Manchester, 1925), pp. 74–6; I. Gillman and H.-J. Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500* (Abingdon, 1999), pp. 171, 184–5, for varying views on the date of this; Philip Wood suggests, pers. comm., that a later rather than an earlier date within this range might be most appropriate for the establishment of India's own metropolitan.

the Patriarch.[47] Most interesting of all are two letters written by Timotheos I to the Indian Christian community that have been preserved by Ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib, an Eastern Christian monk and secretary to the Patriarch, in his eleventh-century *Fiqh an-naṣrānīya*. One talks about the election and ordination of the metropolitan bishop and advises that Indian Christians ought first to listen not to their king, but to the Patriarch, and only after the Patriarch's approval should the matter be referred to the king, suggesting both the existence of a metropolitan bishop in India associated with a well-organised community then and that the king in this unspecified region of India had some rights over the election and ordination of the Metropolitan of India.[48] The other is addressed to 'Arkn, the head of the faithful in India', and makes mention of both the metropolitan bishop and subordinate bishops within India, before emphasising that they ought to obey canon law regarding ordinations.[49] The Metropolitan of India is moreover mentioned again a few decades later by the Patriarch of the Church of the East in 853–8, Theodosios, when he exempted the metropolitans of India and some other distant provinces from attendance at synods, instead requiring them to send a letter of adherence to the Patriarch every six years with details of the affairs of their dioceses.[50]

In addition to such documentary evidence for the existence of Christian communities in India into the eighth and ninth centuries, there are also a number of relevant physical artefacts. The best known of these are the nine granite 'Saint Thomas Crosses' that have been discovered so far along the coast of India, from Goa in the west to Chennai in the south-east, along with one example from Sri Lanka.[51] In all but two cases, these crosses carry a Middle Persian, Pahlavi-script inscription that is the same on all the crosses that bear it, suggesting that they were copied from a single original, usually identified as that found in 1547 on the Great Mount at Mailapur/Myalpore (Chennai).[52] The most recent study of this inscription translates it as follows: 'Our lord Christ, have pity on Sabrišōʿ, (son) of Čahārbōxt, (son) of Sūray, who bore (brought?) this (cross)'.[53] The Mailapur/Mylapore cross is often considered on palaeographic grounds to date from around the seventh or eighth century, although a sixth-century date has also been suggested,[54] and as a group the crosses have been assigned broadly

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[47] H. Labourt, *De Timotheo I Nestorianorum Patriarcha* (Paris, 1904), pp. 41, 45, 64; O. Braun, *Timothei Patriarchae Epistulae I* (Paris, 1915), p. 70; Hambye, 'Eastern Testimonies Concerning Early and Medieval Christianity in India', pp. 585–6; M. Dickens, 'Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, third series, 20.2 (2010), 117–139 at 118, 120.

[48] *Fiqh an-naṣrānīya*, ed. and trans. Hoenerbach and Spies, p. 121; Hambye, 'Eastern Testimonies Concerning Early and Medieval Christianity in India', p. 586.

[49] *Fiqh an-naṣrānīya*, ed. and trans. Hoenerbach and Spies, pp. 120–21; Hambye, 'Eastern Testimonies Concerning Early and Medieval Christianity in India', pp. 586–9, though see I. Perczel, 'Four Apologetic Church Histories from India', *The Harp* 24 (2009), 189–217 at 210–11 (n. 61), on the significance of the title/name *Arkn*.

[50] J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis, Tomi Tertii, Pars Prima* (Rome, 1725), p. 347; J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis, Tomi Tertii, Pars Secunda* (Rome, 1728), pp. 438–9; Labourt, *De Timotheo*, pp. 48–9; F. Nau, *L'Expansion Nestorienne en Asie* (Chalon-sur-Saone, 1914), p. 269; E. C. D. Hunter, 'Syriac Christianity in Central Asia', *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 44.4 (1992), 362–8 at 363 (including n. 8) and <this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>367, n. 38</this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>; Mingana, *Early Spread of Christianity in India*, p. 34; Mignana, *Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East*, p. 27.

[51] Perczel, 'Syriac Christianity in India', p. 671; Cereti *et al*., 'Saint Thomas Crosses'; Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, pp. xvi, 5–6.

[52] Neill, *Christianity in India*, p. 47; Cereti *et al*., 'Saint Thomas Crosses', pp. 289, 293–4; Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, pp. 6, 15; Perczel, 'Syriac Christianity in India', pp. 672, 674; Wood, 'Kollam's Christians and their networks', p. 7 (fn. 25).

[53] Cereti *et al*., 'Saint Thomas Crosses', pp. 296–7, although Perczel, 'Syriac Christianity in India', p. 671, reads the name as 'Sapir Īšō'.

[54] Neill, *Christianity in India*, pp. 47–8 (eighth century) and Mingana, *Early Spread of Christianity in India*, p. 73 (seventh or eighth century); Wood, 'Kollam's Christians and their Networks', <this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>p. 7, n. 25 </this is an external reference please do not hyperlink> (*c*. 600); Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, p. 6 (sixth century).

to either the sixth to ninth centuries or the seventh to tenth centuries, with it being recently suggested that the copies of the original Mailapur/Mylapore cross found on the west coast of India in Kerala may have their origins in the ninth century or thereabouts.[55] Aside from these crosses, there is also the intriguing evidence of the surviving Kollam/Quilon copper plates, which date from 849–50 and are written in Old Malayalam in the Vatteluttu script. Kollam was the southernmost and largest medieval port on the Malabar coast of western India and a key stopping point on the route between the Persian Gulf and China according to the *Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa 'l-Hind*, or *al-Kītāb al-awwal*, of 851–2.[56] It appears from the copper plates that the trade of Kollam and the taxes it generated were, at that time, partly under the control of mercantile groups headed by an Eastern Christian named Maruvan Sapirisho (Maruvān Sapir Īšō), who was both chief merchant and held the title of 'Superintendent of Weights and Measures' at Kollam.[57] The grant recorded on the plates was made in the fifth year of Stāṇu Ravi, the Cēra ruler of Kerala, and sets out the donation of land and tax privileges to a church apparently founded by Maruvan Sapirisho at Kollam, along with privileges and duties of the two trade groupings who controlled the market at Kollam, the *Maṇigrāmam* and the *Aṇjuvaṇṇam*, with this then being witnessed by twenty-five men drawn from the Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian and Jewish communities there.[58] Subsequently, the trade of Kollam appears to have continued to be under what has been described as 'substantial Eastern Christian control' through until at least the fourteenth century, with the final elements of this apparently surviving until 1503.[59]

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[55] Sixth to ninth centuries: Hegarty, 'Christianity in South Asia to the Ninth Century', p. 225; Baum and Winkler, *Church of the East*, pp. 53, 57; Baumer, *The Church of the East*, p. 29; and Perczel, 'Syriac Christianity in India', p. 671. Seventh to tenth centuries: Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, pp. 211–2; Baumer, *The Church of the East*, p. 30; C. Jose and R. K. Mohanty, 'Antiquity of Christianity in India with Special Reference to South Central Kerala', *Heritage: Jnl of Multidisciplinary Stud. in Archaeol.* 5 (2017), 100–39 at 120. See Perczel, 'Syriac Christianity in India', pp. 671–2, for the suggestion that the crosses from the Malabar Coast of western India originated in the ninth century, although G. Spalding-Stracey, 'Journeys, Borrowing, and Assimilation in the Material Culture of Early Christian India', *Jnl of the Australian Early Med. Assoc.* 17 (2021), 117–33 at 127, prefers an eighth-century date for those of Kerala, south-western India; Walker, 'Church of the East in Late Antique Eurasia', <this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>p. 1037, n. 198, </this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>suggests that the crosses 'could be as late as the ninth century'.

[56] E. Lambourn, '"Describing a Lost Camel" – Clues for West Asian Mercantile Networks in South Asian Maritime Trade (Tenth-twelfth Centuries AD)', *Ports of the Ancient Indian Ocean*, ed. M.-F. Boussac, J.-F. Salles and J.-B. Yon (Dehli, 2016), pp. 351–407 at 376, 378; C. Pellat. 'Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa 'l-Hind', *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. P. Bearman (Leiden, 2012), consulted online on 8 August 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8311; M. Kowalska, 'From Facts to Literary Fiction. Medieval Arabic Travel Literature', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5–6 (1987–88), 397–403 at 397–8.

[57] Lambourn, 'West Asian Mercantile Networks', p. 379; Perczel, 'Syriac Christianity in India', pp. 665–6; Wood, 'Kollam's Christians and their Networks', pp. 11–14. According to later sources, recorded only in the post-medieval era, Kollam was founded by 'the Syrian Fathers, Mar Sapor and Mar Parūṭ (Piruz), with the illustrious Sabrishoʿ' in 823, who asked for permission 'to build a church … and erect a town': Mingana, *Early Spread of Christianity in India*, p. 45. Neill, *Christianity in India*, pp. 45–7, and Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, pp. 39–40, 43, 48–9, 54, both accept this account, but see Perczel, 'Syriac Christianity in India', pp. 666–7, and Wood, 'Kollam's Christians and their Networks', pp. 11–14, for some cautions on this point.

[58] S. Lonair and E. Lambourn, *The Copper Plates from Kollam*, project website, http://849ce.org.uk/, accessed 20 August 2024 via the archive at https://web.archive.org/web/20170608134326/http://849ce.org.uk/; Lambourn, 'West Asian Mercantile Networks', p. 379; Wood, 'Kollam's Christians and their Networks', pp. 11–14; Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, pp. 39–43; Jose and Mohanty, 'South Central Kerala', pp. 121–2. Note, the Pahlavi script of some of the signatures supports a ninth-century date: Cereti *et al*., 'Saint Thomas Crosses', pp. 300–01. With regard to the variety of faiths apparently present at Kollam, it is worth noting that the situation at Kollam is unlikely to be unique in India, see Lambourn, 'West Asian Mercantile Networks', p. 366.

[59] Lambourn, 'West Asian Mercantile Networks', pp. 379 (quotation), 385, and see further *Cathay and the Way Thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China: Vol. II, Missionary Friars— Rashíduddín—Pegolotti—Marignolli*, ed. and trans. H. Yule and H. Cordier (London, 1914), pp. 191, 216–17. John of

<A heading>THE TOMB AND SHRINE OF ST THOMAS IN SOUTHERN INDIA</A heading>

In light of the above, it is clear that there was indeed a Christian community in India to whom Sigehelm and Æthelstan might have travelled in the ninth century with King Alfred's alms. What, then, of the belief that there were also specific sites associated with St Thomas and St Bartholomew in ninth-century India that might receive these? With regard to St Bartholomew, no surviving medieval account identifies a particular site or specific area of India associated with his cult, although a link to the Kalyan area (near Mumbai) has been suggested on the basis of early accounts of Bartholomew's activity in India, and there certainly seem to have been Christians present in this region in both the sixth and tenth centuries, some way to the north of the known distribution of 'Saint Thomas Crosses', which is noteworthy.[60] When it comes to St Thomas, however, there is much more certainty to be had. Indeed, by *c.* 500, the tradition had begun to circulate in Greek, Latin and Syriac sources that St Thomas had died at *Kalamene*/*Calamina* in India, a name believed to derive from Sanskrit *Cholamandalam*/Tamil *Cholamantalam*, that is the Coromandel coast of south-eastern India, and the appearance of this name in these sources has been argued to reflect a knowledge of the establishment of a tomb/shrine associated with St Thomas on the Coromandel coast by this point at the latest.[61] This location is, of course, mentioned in the

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Marignolli, who visited Kollam and stayed there for some time in *c.* 1348, describes the harvesting of pepper there and says that, contrary to what is sometimes claimed, 'the Saracens' are not those in charge of this, but rather 'the Christians of St. Thomas. And these latter are the masters of the public steel-yard, from which I derived, as a perquisite of my office as Pope's legate, every month a hundred gold *fan*, and a thousand when I left' ('Ista oculis vidi, & minibus contrectavi mensibus quatuordecim, nec comburitur, ut menciuntur scriptores, nec nascitur in desertis, sed in hortis, nec Saraceni sunt Domini, sed Christiani Sancti Thomæ, qui habent stateram ponderis tocius mundi, de qua pro meo officio tanquam legatus Pape habebam omni mense fan de auro talis monete centum, in fine mille'): John de Marignolli, *Chronicon Bohemorum*, ed. G. Dobner, *Monumenta Historica Boemiæ, Tomus II* (Prague, 1768), pp. 88–9, trans. Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither III*, pp. 217–18. Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, p. 40, notes that the Christians of Kollam/Quilon held on to their rights to keep different types of weights and measures at Kollam until 1503, when they were finally taken away due to malpractice by some of the community's trading members.

[60] L. P. Van den Bosch, 'India and the Apostolate of St. Thomas', *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas*, ed. J. N. Bremmer (Leuven, 2001), pp. 125–48 at 139–43, 145; R. D. D'Silva, 'Early Phase of Christianity in Bassein', *Proc. of the Indian Hist. Congress* 33 (1971), 342–9 at 342–3; A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India: Volume I, From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century* (Bangalore, 1984), pp. 65–6. For a sceptical view of the connection between St Bartholomew and India, see Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, pp. 88–92. Note, Cosmas Indicopleustes in the mid-sixth century names one of the places with a Christian community then as *Kalliana*, which has been identified as Kalyan, near Mumbai (for example, Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, pp. 4–6), whilst Abū Dulaf in the tenth century observed that at Ṣaymūr, modern Chaul near Mumbai, 'there are synagogues, churches, mosques and fire temples': G. Ferrand, *Relations de Voyages et Textes Géographiques Arabes, Persans et Turks Relatifs à l'Extrême-Orient du VIIIe au XVIIIe Siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1913), I, 223; Lambourn, 'West Asian Mercantile Networks', p. 366. There were still Christians in the Mumbai area in the fourteenth century too, when they are mentioned at Thana, Mumbai, in the context of the martyrdom of Franciscan friars there in the 1320s: *Cathay and the Way Thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China: Vol. II, Odoric of Pordenone*, ed. and trans. H. Yule and H. Cordier (London, 1913), pp. 114, 117–18, 127–8.

[61] Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, pp. 144–5, 212–13, 222–32; G. Nedungatt, 'Calamina, Kalamides, Cholamandalam: solution of a riddle', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 76 (2010), 181–99; and N. Andrade, 'Mediterranean Witnesses'. Note, Andrade sees the tomb/shrine of St Thomas at *Calamina* as being itself established in Late Antiquity by Christians in southern India who had links to Persia and had arrived in India during that era, with knowledge of establishment of the shrine then carried to the Mediterranean and Europe by members of the Byzantine Egyptian socio-commercial network, such as Cosmas Indicopleustes, who were in 'direct contact with south India and with the Christians who lived there by then' (p. 130). For a contrasting view that would allow for the presence of Christians in India prior to Late Antiquity and the potential

ninth-century *Old English Martyrology* account of St Thomas, as well as by Isidore of Seville, whose *De ortu et obitu patrum* was undoubtedly circulating in Anglo-Saxon England and states that St Thomas was 'buried in honour' at *Calaminia*.[62] That such a tomb/shrine had indeed been established by the sixth century is moreover confirmed by Gregory of Tours' *Liber in gloria martyrum* (*Glory of the Martyrs*). Written at Tours in north-western Gaul, where Gregory was bishop, and finished in *c.* 590, this account includes an important discussion of the tomb of St Thomas as part of Gregory's wider treatment of that saint. In this he both recounts a number of significant details regarding the shrine of St Thomas in India and specifies that the source of his knowledge of the shrine and church there was someone who had actually visited it, a point of considerable import in the present context. The section in question runs as follows:

> <EXT>31. The tomb of the apostle Thomas. According to the history of his suffering the apostle Thomas is said to have been martyred in India … in that region of India where he had first been buried there are a monastery and a church that is spectacularly large and carefully decorated and constructed. In this church God revealed a great miracle. A lamp was placed there in front of the spot where he had been buried. Once lit, by divine command it burned without ceasing, day and night: no one offered the assistance of oil or a new wick. No wind blew it out, no accident extinguished it, and its brightness did not diminish. The lamp continues to burn because of the power of the apostle that is unfamiliar to men but is nevertheless associated with divine power. Theodorus, who visited the spot, told this to me.[63] </EXT>

This is, of course, arresting. Just who this Theodorus was is left unsaid – one possibility is that he was Gregory's fellow Gaulish bishop of that name, who was at Marseille from *c.* 575–94 and who is depicted by Gregory as a 'man of great sanctity' in his *Historia Francorum*, VIII.12 – but in any case there seems little reason to doubt that this Theodorus had been to the tomb of St Thomas in India, as Gregory relates.[64] As such, the implication of this passage

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existence of a known tomb of St Thomas in India then too, see, for example, Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, pp. 91–115; Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, pp. 21–115; G. Nedungatt, *A Quest for the Historical Thomas: a Re-Reading of the Evidence* (Bangalore, 2008); G. Nedungatt, 'The Apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* and Christian Origins in India', *Gregorianum* 92 (2011), 533–57; G. Nedungatt, 'Christian Origins in India According to the Alexandrian Tradition', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 77 (2011), 399–422. See also C. A. B. Joseph, 'The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas and Empire', *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Oxford, 2023), pp. 239–58.

[62] *Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. Rauer, pp. 226–7; *Isidoro de Sevilla. De Ortu et Obitu Patrum*, ed. Gómez, ch. 73 (p. 211); Johnson, 'Apostolic Patterns', pp. 53–4; Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 181, 213, 235, 261, 310–11.

[63] 'Thomas apostolus secundum historiam passionis eius in Indiam passus declaratur. Cuius beatum corpus post multum tempus adsumptum in civitatem, quam Syri Aedissam vocant, translatum est, ibique sepultum. Ergo in loco regionis Indiae, quo prius quievit, monasterium habetur et templum mirae magnitudinis diligenterque exornatum atque compositum. In hac igitur aede magnum miraculum Deus ostendit. Lignus etenim inibi positus atque inluminatus, ante locum sepulturae ipsius perpetualiter die noctuque divino nutu resplendet, a nullo fomento olei scirpique accipiens; neque vento extinguitur neque casu dilabitur neque ardendo minuitur, habetque incrementum per apostoli virtutem, qui nescitur ab homine, cognitum tantum habetur divinae potentiae. Hoc Theodorus, qui ad ipsum locum accessit, nobis exposuit'. Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, 31, ed. B. Krusch, in *Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum: Tomi I, Pars II, Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Miracula et Opera Minora* (Hannover, 1969), p. 57, and trans. R. Van Dam, *Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Martyrs* (Liverpool, 1988), ch. 31 at p. 51. See further Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, p. 227; Andrade, 'Mediterranean Witnesses', pp. 205–07.

[64] Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum/Decem libri historiarum*, VI.11, VI.24, VIII.5, VIII.12–13, VIII.20, IX.22, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison in *Scriptores Rervm Merovingicarvm: Tomi I, Pars I, Gregorii Episcopi Tvronensis Libri Historiarvm X* (Hannover, 1951), and trans. L. Thorpe, *Gregory of Tours: History of the Franks* (Harmondsworth, 1974); Andrade, 'Mediterranean Witnesses', p. 205; I. Wood, *The Merovingian*

from Gregory's *Liber in gloria martyrum* is that not only was there a Christian community and claimed tomb-site of St Thomas in India that people in western Europe were aware of, as indicated by the references to it made by Isidore of Seville and others, but that there was also a monastery and church – 'spectacularly large and carefully decorated and constructed' – located at this tomb-site which visitors from western Europe might credibly journey to during the early medieval period and then return home from to tell others about.

With regard to the specific location on the Coromandel coast (*Kalamene/Calamina*, *Cholamandalam*) where this shrine and church were found, it was presumably the site at Mylapore/Mailapur, Chennai, where Thomas Christians venerated his tomb in subsequent periods, and there is widespread agreement that such a location is credible, supported by the fact that the only 'Saint Thomas Cross' known from the Coromandel coast was found here, with this cross being usually considered to be sixth- to eighth-century in date and the original from which all other 'Thomas crosses' were subsequently copied.[65] Certainly, European travellers in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries report encountering a single important tomb-site and church associated with St Thomas on the Coromandal coast. For example, in about 1292, John of Montecorvino stayed for thirteen months at 'the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle' on the Coromandel coast (named *Maabar/Maebar* in his account, from the Arabic name for the Coromandel coast, *Maʿbar*), which he locates as in both 'the country of India' and 'the territory of St Thomas', with his companion Brother Nicholas of Pistoia being 'buried in the same church' on his death during their visit.[66] Similarly, the *Travels* of Marco Polo relates of the 1290s that 'the body of Messer St Thomas the Apostle lies in a little town in the province of *Maabar*', i.e. on the Coromandel coast, and that 'many Christians … make pilgrimages to this place',[67] whilst Odoric of Pordenone – who visited with his companion James of Ireland in the early 1320s – noted of the 'realm which is called *Mobar*', i.e. *Maabar/Maʿbar*, that

Kingdoms 450–751 (London, 1994), pp. 84–6; G. I. Halfond, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils, AD 511–768* (Leiden, 2010), p. 74.

[65] Neill, *Christianity in India*, pp. 47–8; Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, p. 6; C. G. Cereti *et al*., 'Saint Thomas Crosses'; Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, pp. 211–2; Hegarty, 'Christianity in South Asia to the Ninth Century', p. 225; Baum and Winkler, *Church of the East*, pp. 53, 57.

[66] John of Montecorvino, *Letters*, ed. L. Wadding, *Annales Minorum seu Trium Ordinum a S. Francisco, Tomus Sextus, Editio Secundo* (Rome, 1733), p. 69 ('Ego frater Joannes de Monte Corvino de Ordine Fratrum Minorum, recessi de Thaurisio civitate Persarum anno Domini MCCXCI & intravi in Indiam, & fui in contrada Indiæ ad Ecclesiam sancti Thomæ Apostoli mensibus XIII & ibi baptizavi circa centum personas in diversis locis, & socius fuit meæ viæ frater Nicolaus de Pistorio de Ordine Fratrum Prædicatorum, qui mortuus est ibi & sepultus in eadem Ecclesia') and F. Kunstmann, 'Schilderung von Ober-Indien nach einem Schreiben des Dominikaners Menentillus von Spoleto', *Münchener Gelehrte Anzeigen*, 22 (1855), p. 172 ('Maabar in della contrada di Santo Tomé'); trans. C. Dawson, *Mission to Asia: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, ed. C. Dawson (New York, 1966), p. 224, and Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither III*, pp. 45, 61. See M. O'Doherty, *Eyewitness Accounts of 'the Indies' in the Later Medieval West: Reading, Reception, and Re-use (c. 1300-1500)* (University of Leeds Phd Thesis, 2006), p. 52; Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither III*, pp. 5–6, 58–70; and A. D. W. Forbes, 'Maʿbar', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. P. Bearman (Leiden, 2012), consulted online on 8 August 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4721.

[67] 'Le cors meisser Saint Thomeu le apostres est en la provence de Maabar, en une petite ville… Bien est il voir que maint cristiens et mant saracin hi vienent en perlinajes'. Marco Polo, *Il Milione*, CLXXVII, ed. L. F. Benedetto, *Marco Polo, Il Milione, Primar Edizione Integrale* (Firenze, 1928), p. 187, trans. N. Cliff, *Marco Polo: the Travels* (London, 2015), p. 219. See also Van den Bosch, 'India and the Apostolate of St. Thomas', pp. 145–7; note, *The Travels* also indicates that 'Saracens' made pilgrimages to the shrine of St Thomas, on which point see the interesting fourteenth-century Arabic *Al-Nahj al-sadīd* that mentions Muslim pilgrims in India visiting 'the monastery of Mar Touma [St Thomas]' and seeing his relics – this is discussed in E. R. Hambye, 'Saint Thomas the Apostle, India and Mylapore: Two Little Known Documents', *Proc. of the Indian Hist. Congress* 23 (1960), 104–10.

> <EXT>in this realm is laid the body of the Blessed Thomas the Apostle. His church is filled with idols, and beside it are some fifteen houses of the Nestorians, that is to say Christians, but vile and pestilent heretics.[68] </EXT>

The actual name of the 'little town' where this singular church and cult-centre were found on the Coromandel coast seems first to be documented by Europeans in the account of John of Marignolli, who visited *Maabar* and 'the church of St Thomas' in 1348–9. In his narrative, he supplies the name 'the city of *Mirapolis*' for the site of St Thomas's church and death, which Yule and O'Doherty consider to be a 'westernized but still recognisable' form of Mailapur/Mylapore.[69] This location is further confirmed by the account of Niccolò de' Conti's visit here in *c.* 1420, where the name of the cult-centre is given as *Malpuria* and *Malpuria*/Mailapur is said to be

> <EXT>a maritime city … Here the body of Saint Thomas lies honourably buried in a large and beautiful church; it is worshipped [venerated] by heretics, who are called Nestorians and inhabit this city to the number of a thousand.[70] </EXT>

The location of the tomb of St Thomas is mentioned in non-European sources too. The *Akẖbār al-Ṣīn wa 'l-Hind* of 851–2 – which is sometimes ascribed to Sulaymān al-Tādjir – has been interpreted as indicating that the house, or tomb, of St Thomas was ten days sailing from the important southern Indian port of Kollam,[71] but the most notable and specific reference to the location of St Thomas's tomb comes in an early thirteenth-century Syriac work entitled *The Book of the Bee* (*Ktābā d-deboritā*). Written by Soloman, the metropolitan bishop of Prāṭ d-Mayshān (Baṣra, Iraq), this says that

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[68] 'Ab hoc regno sunt decem dietæ usque ad unum aliud regnum, nomine Mobar … In hoc autem regno positum est corpus beati Thomæ apostoli, ecclesia cujus plena est ydolis multis. Penes etiam quam sunt forte xv domus Nestorinorum et Christianorum qui nequissimi et pessimi sunt heretici'. Odoric of Pordenone, *Relatio*, 18, ed. and trans. Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither II*, pp. 141–2, 297. *The Travels* of Marco Polo similarly refers to the 'houses of St Thomas' that were 'around the church': *Il Milione*, CLXXVII, ed. Benedetto, pp. 187–8, trans. Cliff, *The Travels*, p. 262.

[69] 'Tercia provincia Yndie vocatur Maabar, ubi est Ecclesia Sancti Thome, quam manu propria edificavit, & alia, quam edificavit cum operariis, quibus solvebat de lapillis maximis, quos vidimus, & de uno ligno inciso in monte Ade in Seyllano … & precepit ligno, dicens, vade expecta nos in portu civitatis Mirapolis…'. John de Marignolli, *Chronicon Bohemorum*, ed. Dobner, *Monumenta Historica Boemiæ II*, pp. 110–11, trans. Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither III*, pp. 249–54, and see O'Doherty, *Eyewitness Accounts of 'the Indies'*, p. 59 (quotation). See also J. Valtrová, 'Indian Christians in Medieval European Travel Accounts', *Eastern Christianity, Judaism and Islam Between the Death of Muhammad and Tamerlane (632–1405)*, ed. M. Gálik and M. Slobodník (Bratislava, 2011), pp. 195–213 at 201, and Hambye, 'India and Mylapore', pp. 105–06.

[70] 'Malpuria deinde, maritima civitas in secondo sinu ultra Indum sita, Nicolaum except. Hîc corpus sancti Thomæ honorifice sepultum in amplissima ornatissimaque Basilica colitur ab hæreticis. Hi Nestoritæ appellantur, qui ad mille hominum in ea urbe habitant'. Poggio Bracciolini, *Historiæ de varietate fortunæ*, IV, ed. J. Oliva, *Poggii Braccoolini Florentini, Historiæ de Varietate Fortunæ Libri Quatuor* (Paris, 1723), p. 129, trans. J. Winter Jones, 'The Travels of Nicolò Conti, in the East in the Early Part of the Fifteenth Century', *India in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. R. H. Major (London, 1857), p. 7. See also A. E. Medlycott, *India and the Apostle Thomas* (London, 1905), pp. 95–6; Hambye, 'India and Mylapore', p. 106; G. Campbell, 'Conti, Niccolò de' (*c.* 1395–1469)', *The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2005), https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198601753.001.0001/acref-9780198601753-e-933, accessed 11 August 2024.

[71] Baum and Winkler, *Church of the East*, pp. 56–7; Andrade, *Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity*, p. 228; Andrade, 'Mediterranean Witnesses', p. 214; Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, p. 56; *Relation des Voyages Faits par les Arabes et les Persans dans l'Inde et à la Chine dans le IXe Siècle de l'Ère Chrétienne*, ed. and trans. M. Reinaud, 2 vols. (Paris, 1845), I, lxxxvii–lxxxviii, 18. Note, however, the different interpretation offered in Ferrand, *Relations de Voyages* I, 40; G. Ferrand, *Voyage du Marchand Arabe Sulaymân en Inde et en Chine Rédigé en 851* (Paris, 1922), pp. 13, 42; and *Aḫbār aṣ-Ṣīn wa'l-Hind: Relation de la Chine et de l'Inde Rédigée en 851*, ed. and trans. J. Sauvaget (Paris, 1948), p. 9.

> <EXT>Thomas was from Jerusalem, of the tribe of Judah. He taught the Parthians, Medes and Indians; and because he baptised the daughter of the king of the Indians, he stabbed him with a spear and he died … he was buried in *Maḥlûph*, a city in the land of the Indians.[72] </EXT>

Needless to say, it is hard to avoid seeing the place-name Mailapur/Mylapore as underlying the Syriac form *Maḥlûph* found in this text.[73] Likewise, an Arabic text of the first half of the fourteenth century identifies the place in India where the tomb of St Thomas was located by a name, *Meilan*, that is generally agreed to derive from and reflect Mailapur too, with this information moreover apparently coming from an eyewitness report, given that the author also describes the tomb as lying 'to the right of the altar in the monastery bearing his name'.[74] The reference to a monastery in the latter text is, incidentally, also of particular interest, given that a monastery at the tomb-site is mentioned both in the account reported by Gregory of Tours and in the mid-fourteenth-century Arabic *Al-Nahj al-sadīd wa-l-durr al-farīd fīmā baʿd taʾrīkh ibn al-ʿAmīd*, written by a Coptic Christian named Al-Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍāʾil. The latter notes that pilgrims in India and Sri Lanka go to

> <EXT>the monastery of Mar Touma [St Thomas] (الى دير مرتوما), which possesses the still preserved hand of one of the disciples of Our Lord, the Messiah; in the monastery there is a vaulted niche where the hand is found, and a holy oil which oozes from this hand.[75] </EXT>

A final interesting reference to this site comes from 1504, in a letter sent by Eastern Christian bishops in south-western India to the Patriarch of the East. They mention in passing 'the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle', which 'some Christian men … are now busy restoring', before going on to say that this was located 'on the shores of the sea in a town called *Mailapore*'.[76]

In light of the above, it would thus seem clear that there was indeed at least one plausible and identifiable destination in India for Alfred's emissaries to have visited with their

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[72] Soloman, *Ktābā d-deboritā*, XLVIII, ed. and trans. E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of the Bee: the Syriac Text* (Oxford, 1886), pp. 105, صهد; Hambye, 'India and Mylapore', p. 105; H. G. B. Teule, 'Soloman of Basra', *Christian–Muslim Relations: a Bibliographical History, Volume 4 (1200–1350)*, ed. D. Thomas and A. Mallett (Leiden, 2012), pp. 193–5.

[73] Hambye, 'India and Mylapore', notes that 'the Syriac spelling *Māhlūph* (with a possible confusion between the consonant *hēth* and the semi-consonant *yod*), as written by Solomon of Basrah, is sufficiently close to the original Tamil, *Mayilapuram*, to be recognisable' (p. 105).

[74] 'His tomb stands on the peninsula *Meilan* in India, to the right of the altar in the monastery bearing his name', with Hambye commenting that *Meilan* is clearly a 'corrupt form of Mylapore' – J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis, Tomi Tertii, Pars Secunda* (Rome, 1728), p. 34, trans. Medlycott, *India and the Apostle Thomas*, p. 96, and see Hambye, 'India and Mylapore', p. 107. On the text and disputes over its authorship and title, see M. N. Swanson, 'Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā', *Christian–Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Mallett, pp. 900–05.

[75] Al-Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍāʾil, *Al-Nahj al-sadīd wa-l-durr al-farīd fīmā baʿd taʾrīkh ibn al-ʿAmīd*, ed. E. Blochet, *Moufazzal ibn Abil-Fazaïl: Histoire des Sultans Mamelouks, Fasc. III*, Patrologia Orientalis XX.1.96 (Turnhout, 1985), 192–3, trans. Hambye, 'India and Mylapore', p. 106, and Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, p. 57; see further Hambye, pp. 106–09, and S. Moawad, 'Al-Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍāʾil', *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online*, ed. K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas and D. J. Stewart (Leiden, 2018), consulted online 30 December 2024 at https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_36578.

[76] The Syriac text is edited and translated into Latin in Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis, Tomi Tertii, Pars Prima*, p. 594, and translated into English in Mingana, *Early Spread of Christianity in India*, p. 39. See Baum and Winkler, *Church of the East*, pp. 106–11; Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, p. 58; B. Varghese, 'East Syrian Missions to the Malabar Coast in the Sixteenth Century', *From the Oxus River to the Chinese Shores: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia*, ed. L. Tang and D. W. Winkler (Zürich, 2013), pp. 317–40.

alms, namely the tomb-site and cult-centre of St Thomas on the Coromandal coast that was recorded in Greek, Latin and Syriac sources from around 500 onwards as *Calamina* and which appears to have been visited by at least some people during the early medieval period. Furthermore, it seems likely that the location of this tomb/shrine was indeed at Mailapur/Mylapore, Chennai, at the northern end of the Coromandel coast, given both the archaeological evidence of the 'Saint Thomas Cross' found there and the repeated references to a single, important tomb-site and cult-centre for St Thomas on this coast, which, when it is named, is consistently identified as being located there.

<A heading>EARLY MEDIEVAL TRADE AND TRAVEL BETWEEN INDIA AND EUROPE</A heading>

If it thus seems likely that India, not Judea, was indeed the place to which King Alfred sent Sigehelm and Æthelstan with alms in thanks for his victory over the Vikings at London, and that there was moreover a Christian community in India with a tomb-site and cult-centre of St Thomas on the Coromandel coast to which they might travel, what then of the wider background to this visit? How credible is it that Alfred's emissaries could have genuinely travelled there, and how might they have done so? In this context, the early medieval journey of Theodorus (possibly the Bishop of Marseille) to St Thomas's tomb in India then back to western Europe – where he could inform the Bishop of Tours, Gregory, of the magnificent monastery and church that he found there – naturally looms large as a definite instance of just this journey taking place. Similarly noteworthy is the case of the aforementioned mid-sixth-century Christian from the Mediterranean, commonly known as Cosmas Indicopleustes, whose epithet means 'the one who sailed to India'.[77] Not only does his description of the Christians of India and Sri Lanka accord notably well with our evidence from other sources, as was observed above, but a recent examination of his text and the associated manuscript illustrations concludes that Cosmas's account and image of, for example, pepper cultivation and harvesting in western India is 'so detailed and accurate that personal inspection and experience are almost a certainty' and 'suggest that it is likely that Cosmas travelled to India' too, despite the scepticism that has sometimes been expressed as to this.[78] Furthermore, Cosmas also mentions another Alexandrian merchant, Sopatros, who he indicates had visited Sri Lanka in around 500 and who had apparently told Cosmas about his time there.[79]

Consequently, the combined weight of the accounts of Gregory of Tours and Cosmas Indicopleustes indicates that some people were indeed journeying from the Mediterranean world to India in the early medieval period and, moreover, returning with information about this region and its Christian community. We do, of course, need to recognise that these visits coincided with a period for which there is significant material evidence for contact between the Mediterranean and Europe on the one hand and the Indian Ocean world on the other, with

[77] Walker, 'Church of the East in Late Antique Eurasia', p. 1019; Kominko, *The World of Kosmas*, pp. 10–12. Kominko suggests that his epithet may have its origins in the sixth century.

[78] Fallar, 'The World According to Cosmas Indicopleustes', p. 218; Wolska-Conus, *Topographie Chrétienne, Tome III*, XI.10–11 at pp. 334–5. Faller suggests that Cosmas also 'witnessed coconut trees and how they are harvested', based on his text and image of this (pp. 219–20); his image and knowledge of 'mozá (*μοζᾶ*), the Indian date palms', may likewise suggest a visit to the Indus valley, where one of the most highly praised varieties of dates is called *mozāti* (pp. 214–15).

[79] *Topographie Chrétienne, Tome III*, ed. and trans. Wolska-Conus, XI.17–19 at pp. 348–51. For some scepticism regarding Sopatros, see Kominko, *The World of Kosmas*, p. 13, and R. R. Darley, '"Implicit Cosmopolitanism" and the Commercial Role of Ancient Lanka', *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History*, ed. Z. Biedermann and A. Strathern (London, 2017), pp. 44–65. However, even if Sopatros were invented by Cosmas, Darley notes that 'the peripheral details' of the account 'suggest a fairly regularized communication with the island, in which travellers from the west could be fitted into a (theoretically) managed commercial system' (p. 60).

Early Byzantine coins and pottery having been found in India and Sri Lanka,[80] and items from the Indian Ocean world in the Mediterranean region and Europe. For example, the enormous quantities of garnets used in the garnet cloisonné gold jewellery that is found widely distributed across early medieval Europe – notable examples include the late fifth-century burial of Childeric at Tournai, Belgium, and the early seventh-century Sutton Hoo burial in East Anglia – have been shown to have primarily had their origins in India and Sri Lanka.[81] Encountered not only in very wealthy graves, but also those of more modest means, the most recent study of these gems suggest that only from the end of the sixth century do European sources start to replace Indian and Sri Lankan garnets, and some Indian garnets continued to be used on the Continent until *c.* 680–90, something apparently true in Anglo-Saxon England too, with a notable number present on the early to mid-seventh-century garnet cloisonné items in the Staffordshire Hoard of *c.* 650–75.[82]

Indo-Pacific beads produced in southern India, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia – recognizable both morphologically/typologically and by archaeometric analysis due to their use of Southern Asian high aluminous soda (m-Na-Al 1) glass – have similarly been identified in very large numbers from cemeteries dating to *c.* 400–600 in western Europe, with one cemetery in France (Saint-Laurent-des-Hommes, Dordogne) containing as many as 3,037 of these miniature, monochrome, drawn beads.[83] These beads are also encountered at the Late Roman/Early Byzantine Red Sea port of Berenike, Egypt, where they make up 51%

[80] See, for example, R. Tomber, *Indo-Roman Trade: from Pots to Pepper* (London, 2008); S. Jansari, 'Roman coins from the Masson and Mackenzie collections in the British Museum', *South Asian Studies* 29.2 (2013), 177–193; R. Darley, 'Self, Other and the Use and Appropriation of Late Roman Coins in Peninsular India (4th–7th Century CE)', *Negotiating Cultural Identity: Landscapes in Early Medieval South Asian History*, ed. H. P. Ray (New Delhi, 2017), pp. 60–84; T. Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate: AD 500–1000* (Oxford, 2012); S. A. Abraham, 'Recent Developments in the Archaeology of Long-distance Connections across the Ancient Indian Ocean', *Ann. Rev. of Anthropology* 52 (2023), 115–35 at 122–3.

[81] For the origins of the garnets in use in Europe from the fifth to seventh centuries, see T. Calligaro, P. Perin, F. Vallet and J.-P. Poirot, 'Contribution à l'étude des grenats mérovingiens (Basilique de Saint-Denis et autres collections du musée d'Archéologie nationale, diverses collections publiques et objets de fouilles récentes): nouvelles analyses gemmologiques et géochimiques effectuées au Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France', *Antiquités Nationales* 38 (2006–07), 111–44; H. Hamerow, 'The Circulation of Garnets in the North Sea Zone, AD 400–700', *Gemstones in the First Millennium AD*, ed. A. Hilgner, S. Greiff and D. Quast (Mainz, 2017), pp. 71–86; C. Boschetti, B. Gratuze and N. Schibille, 'Garnet Trade in Early Medieval Europe: the Italian Network', *European Jnl of Archaeol.* 26.1 (2023), 101–19; C. Pion, B. Gratuze, P. Perrin, and T. Calligaro, 'Bead and Garnet Trade between the Merovingian, Mediterranean, and Indian Worlds', *The Oxford Handbook of the Merovingian World*, ed. B. Effros and I. Moreira (Oxford, 2020), pp. 819–59 at 834–51; Abraham, 'Long-distance Connections across the Ancient Indian Ocean', p. 124. The Sutton Hoo garnets have recently been subject to scientific analysis and have been shown to include garnets from both India and Sri Lanka: M. Symonds, 'Seeking the Silk Roads: an Extraordinary Story of the Power of Connections', *Current World Archaeol.* 127 (19 September, 2024), https://the-past.com/feature/in-search-of-the-silk-roads-reconnecting-people-objects-and-ideas-from-ad-500-1000/, accessed 27 September 2024. For the Staffordshire Hoard garnets and their origins, see J. Ambers and C. Higgit, 'Garnets', *The Staffordshire Hoard: an Anglo-Saxon Treasure*, ed. C. Fern, T. Dickinson and L. Webster (London, 2019), pp. 129–32.

[82] Pion *et al*., 'Bead and Garnet Trade', especially fig. 36.16 and pp. 846–51.

[83] C. Pion and B. Gratuze, 'Indo-Pacific Glass Beads from the Indian Subcontinent in Early Merovingian Graves (5th–6th Century AD)', *Archaeol. Research in Asia* 6 (2016), 51–64; Pion *et al*., 'Bead and Garnet Trade', pp. 819–34. No cemeteries from Anglo-Saxon England have yet been included in those examined by Pion and Gratuze for the presence of these beads, but the descriptions of 191 beads found in the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Buckland at Dover, Kent – V. I. Evison, *Dover: Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery* (London, 1987), p. 62 – suggest that these are probably present here too, and an examination of photographs of these beads from graves 46 and 32, kindly provided by Sue Brunning, pers. comm., the curator of the European Early Medieval Collections at the British Museum, adds considerable weight to this suggestion; my thanks here are due to Sue Brunning for the photographs of the beads and also to Rose Broadley, pers. comm., for examining these images too and confirming the possibility of these beads being Indo-Pacific. Note, Evison, *Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery*, p. 62, states that a bead of this type was also found in a *Grubenhaus* of *c.* 700 excavated at Swindon, Wiltshire.

of all of the beads discovered there – providing a strong indication as to the likely route of travel for the European examples – and are found alongside other Indian imports including peppercorns (from the Malabar coast), coconuts, cotton textiles and rice.[84] As with the garnets, in western Europe these Indo-Pacific beads are found in graves of 'varying degrees of richness' and 'do not appear to be the prerogative of a privileged few', which is a conclusion of considerable interest when considering the scale and nature of the trading routes that brought them to the Mediterranean and Europe.[85] In this context, it is worth noting that neither the Indian/Sri Lankan garnets nor the Indo-Pacific beads are likely to have been the main objects of trade, and would instead have almost certainly formed a small part of larger cargoes that consisted of often-archaeologically invisible goods such as spices, incense, coconuts and textiles (as found at Berenike and Shenshef in Egypt), as well as other precious and semi-precious stones, like amethysts, sapphires and carnelians, all of which are thought to derive from India and Sri Lanka in this period too.[86] Certainly, this would seem to be supported by the account of Cosmas Indicopleustes, who mentions a wide range of trade-goods potentially involved in sixth-century Indo-Byzantine trade, including these items and more,[87] as well as by the evidence for the popularity and widespread usage of pepper in the Roman era and Late Antiquity.[88]

However, there is no reason to think that subsequent centuries saw the complete severing of routes between India and the Mediterranean/Europe. Pepper from India definitely continued to be used in north-western Europe into the mid-seventh century and beyond, and in potentially impressive quantities: for example, the Merovingian king Chlothar III (657–73) granted to the monastery at Corbie in northern France the annual concession of toll income on 30 pounds of pepper (grown in India), along with sizeable amounts of other spices including cinnamon (from Sri Lanka) and cloves (from Indonesia), and this grant was reconfirmed by Chilperic II in 716.[89] Likewise, in England, Bede's few personal possessions included pepper

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[84] Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate*, pp. 38, 39, 41, 45; J. Then-Obluska, 'Cross-cultural Bead Encounters at the Red Sea Port Site of Berenike, Egypt: Preliminary Assessment (seasons 2009–2012)', *Polish Archaeol. in the Mediterranean* 24 (2015), 735–77; S. E. Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route* (Berkeley, 2011), pp. 228, 238; J. Then-Obłuska, 'Indian Glass Beads in Northeast Africa between the 1st and 6th Centuries AD', *In Ancient Glass of South Asia: Archaeology, Ethnography and Global Connection*, ed. A. K. Kanungo and L. Dussubieux (Singapore, 2021), pp. 533–57.

[85] Pion and Gratuze, 'Indo-Pacific Glass Beads', p. 59.

[86] J. Drauschke, 'Byzantine Jewellery? Amethyst Beads in East and West during the Early Byzantine Period', *'Intelligible Beauty': Recent Research on Byzantine Jewellery*, ed. C. Entwistle and N. Adams (London, 2010), pp. 50–60 at 51–2, 54, 58; Pion *et al*., 'Bead and Garnet Trade', pp. 833, 848, 849, 851; Pion and Gratuze, 'Indo-Pacific Glass Beads', p. 58; Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate*, pp. 39, 41, 45–6; Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, pp. 192, 228, 237, 238, 276.

[87] *Topographie Chrétienne, Tome III*, ed. and trans. Wolska-Conus, for example pepper (XI.10 at pp. 334–5), coconut (XI.11 at pp. 336–7), gems (XI.13 at pp. 342–3), variety of trade-goods from India and Sri Lanka (XI.15–16 at pp. 344–48).

[88] E. E. Mayer, '*Tanti non emo, Sexte, piper*: Pepper Prices, Roman Consumer Culture, and the Bulk of Indo-Roman Trade', *Jnl of the Economic and Social Hist. of the Orient* 61 (2018), 560–89; M. Cobb, 'Black Pepper Consumption in the Roman Empire', *Jnl of the Economic and Social Hist. of the Orient* 61 (2018), 519–59. In this context, the *piperatoria*, or pepper pots, buried in the fifth century at Hoxne, Suffolk, suggests that pepper and/or other spices were in use even in rural areas of Late Antique Britain, see Cobb, 'Black Pepper Consumption', p. 539; C. Johns, *The Hoxne Late Roman Treasure: Gold Jewellery and Silver Plate* (London, 2010).

[89] D. W. Rollason, *Early Medieval Europe 300–1050: the Birth of Western Society* (London, 2012), p. 160; I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450–751* (London, 1994), pp. 215–16; I. Wood, *The Christian Economy in the Early Medieval West* (Binghampton, 2022), p. 64 (including n. 74), 164–5. Whether these quantities of pepper and other items were still being imported into Francia in 716 is uncertain and debated, but as Ian Wood notes, they must have been so on its first granting in the reign of Chlothar III, 657–73: Wood, *Christian Economy*, <this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>p. 64, n. 74</this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>; S. T. Loseby, 'Marseille and the Pirenne Thesis, II: "Ville Morte"', *The Long Eighth Century*, ed. I. L. Hansen and C. Wickham (Leiden, 2000), pp. 167–93 at 186–91.

when he died in 735,[90] and Aldhelm at the end of the seventh century composed a riddle to which the answer was 'pepper', indicating that he expected his audience to be familiar with this spice:

> <EXT>I am black on the outside, covered with a wrinkled rind, yet inside I have a glistening core. I season the delicacies of the kitchen: the feasts of kings and extravagant dishes and likewise sauces and stews. But you will find me to be of no value at all unless my inwards are crushed for their shining contents.[91]</EXT>

Another reference to pepper comes in a letter of 739–41 written to an English abbess named Cuniburg that mentions sending both pepper and cinnamon (*piperis et cinnamomi*) to her, which is described as a 'little gift' from her three correspondents.[92] Indeed, in 'Bald's Leechbook', probably written in the late ninth-century for Anglo-Saxon physicians in King Alfred's reign, Indian pepper frequently occurs and is, in fact, mentioned more times than many native ingredients, being prescribed in more than thirty recipes in the first book alone, with cinnamon also appearing on occasion too.[93]

In addition to spices, archaeological evidence suggests that gems and beads from India and Sri Lanka continued to find their way to Europe and England too. So, whilst Indian garnets become rare in most areas during the seventh century, amethysts and sapphires – both thought to be imports from India/Sri Lanka[94] – continue to be utilised in both that era and afterwards, with amethyst being especially popular and widely distributed. For example, in southern Germany and adjacent areas inhabited by Franks, Alamanni and Bavarians, the first amethyst beads appear in the sixth century, but it has been noted by Jörg Drauschke that there are an 'amazingly high number of finds' from around the start of the seventh century and that amethysts then continued to be used through the seventh century until around 700, when the

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[90] *Epistola de Obitu Bede*, 'Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede', trans. B. Colgrave, in *Bede: the Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. J. McClure and R. Collins (Oxford, 1994), p. 302.

[91] 'Sum niger exterius rugoso cortice tectus, Sed tamen interius candentem gesto medullam. Dilicias, epulas regum luxusque ciborum, Ius simul et pulpas battutas condo culinae: Sed me subnixum nulla virtute videbis, Viscera ni fuerint nitidis quassata medullis'. Aldhelm, *Enigmata*, XL, ed. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi opera*, pp. 114–15, trans. Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: the Poetic Works*, p. 78; M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 102–03.

[92] E. Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface* (New York, 1940), pp. 77–8; M. Aaij, 'The Boniface Correspondence', *A Companion to Boniface*, ed. M. Aaij and S. Godlove (Leiden, 2020), pp. 123–51 at 145.

[93] M. L. Cameron, 'Bald's Leechbook and Cultural Interactions in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 19 (1990), 5–12 at 7–8; Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, pp. 101, 102, 104; K. S. Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 62–5. Note, it is worth emphasising that the evidence is against these medical recipes being simply indiscriminately copied and not actually used; as Beckett observes (p. 65), whole recipes containing rarely used exotic ingredients were omitted and other recipes saw modification to omit perishable exotic ingredients. Furthermore, the *Leechbook* is not the only Anglo-Saxon medical recipe book to include pepper and other eastern ingredients; they also occur in the tenth-century Old English *Lacnunga*, in which two recipes see pepper and cinnamon compounded with native ingredients according to typical English methods: Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions*, p. 65; Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, pp. 101–06.

[94] Drauschke, 'Amethyst Beads in East and West'; Pion *et al*., 'Bead and Garnet Trade', pp. 849, 851; Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate*, pp. 45–6; Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, pp. 192, 237, 276. An Indian/Sri Lankan origin is suggested for the many amethyst items from the Byzantine Empire, early medieval Europe and Scandinavia by both Drauschke and Pion *et al*., and amethysts of similar size and shape are found in Anglo-Saxon England too (for example, at Faversham), which presumably have the same origins, although some larger amethysts of different shapes are also known from England for which a potential alternative, northern source has been tentatively posited by Drauschke (p. 58).

furnishing of graves ceases and so our ability to easily see these imports ends in this area,[95] a situation that is paralleled in Anglo-Saxon England too.[96]

Sapphires are a much a rarer find,[97] but they likewise continue to be used into the seventh century and beyond. The Visigothic 'Treasure of Guarrazar' (Spain) is particularly notable here: the pieces from this treasure in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional and the Real Amería del Palacio Nacional in Madrid are decorated with 23 amethysts and 245 sapphires, with a date-range for the treasure as a whole being provided by the royal votive crowns of Swinthila (621–31) and Recceswinth (653–72) that form part of it.[98] Sapphires also occur in notable numbers on Carolingian items of the eighth to ninth centuries, including the original large, central Sri Lankan sapphire on the ninth-century Talisman of Charlemagne (which also features Indian garnets), the sapphires on both the mid–late ninth-century upper cover of the Lindau Gospels and the ninth-century reliquary of St Stephen that was once kept at Aachen Cathedral, and, most famously, the 209 sapphires found on the now largely destroyed *Escrain de Charlemagne*.[99] In addition to these gems, recent studies also indicate that some glass beads in use in both Germany and Scandinavia in the early seventh to eighth centuries were made of glass from India.[100]

Further to such documentary references and archaeological finds, it is worth noting that several trade routes leading from western Europe to India and beyond are, in fact, documented for the ninth century by ibn Khurdādhbih, a high-ranking Persian functionary and courtier who wrote the *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik* ('The Book of Routes and Realms') then.[101] He gives the following account of the Jewish Rādhānite merchants, or al-Rādhāniyya, who travelled from France to India and China and back again, which is worth quoting at length:

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[95] Drauschke, 'Amethyst Beads in East and West', pp. 53, 55–6, 58; J. Drauschke, 'Archaeological Perspectives on Communication and Exchange between the Merovingians and the Eastern Mediterranean', *East and West in the Early Middle Ages: the Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective*, ed. S. Esders, Y. Fox, Y. Hen and L. Sarti (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 9–31 at 24, 27–8, 31, in particular his observation that late (post-600) imports to North-West Europe from the eastern Mediterranean and beyond 'cannot be explained in terms of residual finds from earlier periods only but instead as clear signs of constant transactions of exchange' (pp. 27–8).

[96] J. W. Huggett, 'Imported Grave Goods and the Early Anglo-Saxon Economy', *MA* 32 (1988), 63–96 at 66–8; H. Geake, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England, c. 600–c. 850* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 41–2; J. Hines and A. Bayliss, *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods of the 6th and 7th Centuries AD: a Chronological Framework* (Abingdon, 2017), especially pp. 485, 490–1, 557–8, 566, and John Hines, pers. comm..

[97] They are relatively widely distributed, however, with sapphires known from not only Byzantine Egypt and the wider empire (for Berenike and Shenshef, see Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, pp. 192, 237, 276; Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate*, pp. 45–6), but also from some Merovingian graves (for example, two rings in the early-sixth-century grave 16 at St Denis, Paris; the lost sapphire ring of Childeric I; and a seventh-century disc-brooch in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession no. 17.192), Visigothic Spain and Aquitaine (for example, the seal-ring of Alaric II and the Treasure of Guarrazar), and early Anglo-Saxon England (the fifth-/sixth-century Escrick ring, found in Yorkshire, Portable Antiquities Scheme YORYM-715F42); see, for example, G. Kornbluth, 'The Seal of Alaric, *rex Gothorum*', *EME* 16 (2008), 299–332, and L. Webster, 'Artifacts: Colors of Status and Belief', *A Cultural History of Color in the Medieval Age*, ed. C. P. Biggam and K. Wolf (London, 2021), pp. 191–213.

[98] Drauschke, 'Amethyst Beads in East and West', p. 54; G. R. López, 'Symbolic Life and Signs of Identity in Visigothic Times', *The Visigoths from the Migration Period to the Seventh Century: an Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. P. Heather (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 403–46 at 425.

[99] G. Panczer, G. Riondet, L. Forest, M. S. Krzemnicki, D. Carole and F. Faure, 'The Talisman of Charlemagne: New Historical and Gemological Discoveries', *Gems & Gemology* 55.1 (2019), 30–46; Webster, 'Artifacts: Colors of Status and Belief', p. 204; Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.1.

[100] T. Sode, B. Gratuze and J. W. Lankton, 'Red and Orange High-alumina Glass Beads in 7th and 8th Century Scandinavia: Evidence for Long-distance Trade and Fabrication', *Annales du 20e Congrès de l'Association Internationale pour l'Histoire du Verre*, ed. S. Wolf and A. de Pury-Gysel (Romont, 2017), pp. 326–33; Drauschke, 'Archaeological Perspectives on Communication and Exchange', p. 23.

[101] T. Zadeh, 'Ibn Khurdādhbih', *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online*, ed. Fleet *et al*., consulted online on 8 August 2024 at https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30869.

<Display><EXT>Itinerary/itineraries of the Jewish merchants (known as) Rādhāniyya, who speak Arabic, Persian, *Rūmī* (=Greek and Latin?), Frankish, Andalusian (=Spanish) and Slavonic, and travel from the East to the West and vice-versa, by land and by sea. From the West they import eunuchs (*khadam*), young slaves of both sexes (*djawārī* and *ghilmān*), silk brocade (*dībādj*), beaver fur (*djulūd al-khazz*), [pelts of] the sable (*sammūr*) and [other] furs, as well as swords.

They embark in the land of the Franks (Firandja) on the Western Sea (=the Mediterranean) and disembark at al-Faramā (=ancient Pelusium, on the eastern edge of the Nile delta), then they transport their merchandise by land as far as al-Ḳulzum (ancient Clysma, located at the head of the Gulf of Suez), a distance of 25 parasangs; they then traverse the Eastern Sea (=the Red Sea) from al-Ḳulzum to al-Djār (the port of Medina) and to Djudda. From here, they continue their journey to Sind (=the Indus valley), to India and to China. From China, they bring back musk (*misk*), wood of aloes (*ʿūd*), camphor (*kāfūr*), cinnamon (*dār ṣīnī*) and other (products) which are imported from these countries. Thus they return to al-Ḳulzum, then transport their [consignment] to al-Faramā and embark on the Mediterranean. Sometimes, they made a detour through Constantinople with their merchandise, which they sold to the Byzantines. Sometimes furthermore, they went to sell them [in the land of the] king of Firandja [=the land of the Franks].

When they chose to do so, on leaving Firandja, they transported their merchandise by sea, on the Mediterranean, disembarking at Antioch, whence they made their way, in three overland stages, to al-Djābiya; they then sailed on the Euphrates to Baghdād, then on the Tigris to al-Ubulla (=a port city at the head of the Persian Gulf), and from here they gained access to Oman, Sind, India and China, all these countries being contiguous with one another.[102] </EXT></Display>

Ibn Khurdādhbih later returns to the Rādhāniyya and describes two further trade routes they utilised, one overland across North Africa then through Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and thence to India and China, and the other 'to the rear of Rome (*Rūmiya*), through the land of the Slavs', into Khazaria and across the Caspian Sea before crossing through Afghanistan, Transoxiana and then into China.[103] Needless to say, the main section of ibn Khurdādhbih's text is most intriguing, and accords well with other evidence for the activity of Jewish merchants in India. This evidence includes not only the four names of witnesses to the Kollam/Quilon copper plates of 849–50 that are given in Judaeo-Persian, i.e., Middle Persian written in Hebrew characters, but also a reference by Abū Dulaf to the presence of both synagogues and churches at Ṣaymūr (modern Chaul near Mumbai) in the tenth century.[104]

In light of all this, it seems clear that Sigehelm and Æthelstan's alleged late ninth-century journey from England to India was not only credible in terms of its proposed destination, as noted above, but also in the availability of routes for getting there. Both the

[102] Ibn Khurdādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum, Pars Sexta: Kitâb al-Masâlik wa'l-Mamâlik* (Leiden, 1889), pp. 153–5, trans. C. Pellat, 'al-Rādhāniyya', *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. P. Bearman (Leiden, 2012), consulted online on 8 August 2024 at https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6168, with minor alterations.

[103] Pellat, 'al-Rādhāniyya'; on the Radhanite merchants, see further M. Gil, 'The Rādhānite Merchants and the Land of Rādhān', *Jnl of the Economic and Social Hist. of the Orient* 17 (1974), 299–328, and J. F. Hancock, *Spices, Scents and Silk: Catalysts of World Trade* (Wallingford, 2021), pp. 50–2.

[104] Lambourn, 'West Asian Mercantile Networks', pp. 366, 379; E. Lambourn, 'Jewish Merchants in the Indian Ocean Trade', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, ed. D. E. Ludden (Oxford, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.584, accessed 27 August 2024; Ferrand, *Relations de Voyages et Textes Géographiques* I, 223.

continued circulation of imports from India (and beyond) in western Europe and ibn Khurdādhbih's testimony as to routes accessible in the ninth century for travelling from West to East and back again would certainly seem to support such a position.[105] If the journey of Theodorus to the tomb and monastery of St Thomas in southern India and then back to Merovingian Gaul was possible in the later sixth century, there is thus no particular reason to think that such a trip would have become impossible by the late ninth century. Of course, a pilgrimage such as that of Theodorus would by necessity have been undertaken via a web of overlapping commercial, ecclesiastical and diplomatic networks between western Europe and southern India, as has been recently discussed by Nathaneal Andrade. The linkages between these networks would have created 'social pathways' that could have been used then to travel to the Indian tomb of St Thomas, and it seems entirely plausible that something similar was the case in Sigehelm and Æthelstan's time too, given the evidence that we have available to us.[106] Certainly, the Irish pilgrim Fidelis appears to have travelled at least as far as the Red Sea via such linkages sometime around the start of the ninth century, with his journey and observations being recorded by Dicuil in his *Liber de mensura orbis terrae* of *c.* 825,[107] and Frankish embassies were likewise successfully sent to Baghdad in the eighth and ninth centuries too.[108]

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[105] A northern trade route that brought a small number of Indian coins and at least one statuette of the Buddha (Historiska Museet, accession no. 108115_HST, found in an eighth-century context at Helgö, Sweden) to eighth- to tenth-century northern Europe also existed, but it is perhaps less relevant to the present inquiry, not least because King Alfred is said to have sent Sigehelm and Æthelstan with alms for Rome as well as India; it may, however, have been responsible for the Indian glass used in seventh- to eighth-century Germany and Scandinavia, see T. Sode *et al*., 'Glass Beads in 7th and 8th Century Scandinavia', p. 332. For the handful of Indian coins found in northern dirham hoards, see generally R. K. Kovalev, 'Dirham Mint Output of Samanid Samarqand and its Connection to the Beginnings of Trade with Northern Europe (10th century)', *Histoire & Mesure* 17.3/4 (2002), 197–216 at 8, 16–17, in which he suggests they arrived via Central Asian merchants. A search by the present author for similar finds made in England reveals a handful of coins from the right period and region here, three from the Gandhāra region – from which the Helgö Buddha also derived – and two of the Pāla Empire of Bengal and northern India, all dating from the later ninth to tenth centuries: Portable Antiquities Scheme LANCUM-1E4BB7 (Warminster, Wiltshire); PAS NMS-FFDE36 (Horsham St Faith, Norfolk); UKDFD 25882 (near Gloucester); PAS PUBLIC-66D6B7 (near Hastings); PAS SUR-E12F27 (Thursley, Surrey). Note, although such finds are often at risk of being dismissed as relatively modern losses, this is by no means a necessary assumption, and those from the Gandhāra region are certainly of a similar type to that found associated with early medieval finds at Essleben, Bavaria, and those discovered in archaeological contexts in northern Europe, see B.-U. Abels, 'Eine indische Dramma aus Unterfranken', *Archäologisches Zellwerk. Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte in Europa und Asien. Festschrift für Helmut Roth*, ed. E. Pohl, U. Recker and C. Theune (Leidorf, 2001), pp. 145–52.

[106] Andrade, 'Mediterranean Witnesses', pp. 212–17. In this context, it is perhaps worth noting that at least one Anglo-Saxon merchant appears to have been based at Marseille in the mid-eighth century, indicating Anglo-Saxon involvement in Mediterranean trading networks by this point, see *Annales Petaviani*, *s.a.* 790, ed. G. H. Pertz, *MGH SS I* (Hannover, 1826), p. 17; Loseby, 'Marseille and the Pirenne Thesis', p. 192.

[107] *Dicuili: Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae*, ed. J. J. Tierney (Dublin, 1967), pp. 62–5; McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, pp. 304, 692, 911. See also the *Itinerary* of Bernard the Wise, or *Itinerarium Bernardi monachi Franci*, trans. P. E. Dutton, *Carolingian Civilisation: a Reader*, 2nd edn (Peterborough, ON, 2004), pp. 472–9, and discussed in McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, pp. 134–8, 147–9, 172–3, 940. This probably Frankish monk appears to have travelled to Egypt and then Jerusalem in *c*. 867–71, before returning westwards and ending up at Mont-Saint-Michel, Normandy. His *Itinerary* offers interesting details of the process of travelling from Italy to Egypt in this period, including the various 'pathways' that needed to be utilised in order to make a successful journey.

[108] McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, pp. 874, 875, 887, 890, 891, 893. With regard to networks and 'social pathways' in this period, it is interesting to note that an awareness of at least some aspects of Anglo-Saxon England and its trading links had spread to both Persia and Afghanistan by the tenth century, see C. Green, 'Britain, the Byzantine Empire, and the Concept of an Anglo-Saxon "Heptarchy": Hārūn ibn Yaḥyā's Ninth-century Arabic Description of Britain', *Global Perspectives on Early Medieval England*, ed. K. L. Jolly and B. E. Brooks (Woodbridge, 2022), pp. 94–114 – ibn Rusta, a native of Isfahan in modern Iran, includes a description of Anglo-Saxon England in his *Kitāb al-Aʿlāḳ al-nafīsa* ('Book of Precious Records') of *c*. 903–13

<A heading>ALFRED'S EMISSARIES: THE IDENTITY OF SIGEHELM AND ÆTHELSTAN</A heading>

Turning finally to the question of the identity of these two Anglo-Saxon royal emissaries, several candidates have been proposed. William of Malmesbury, writing in England in the early twelfth century, identified Sigehelm as a bishop of Sherborne in both his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* and his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, and claims that the gems Sigehelm brought back from India could still be seen at Sherborne in William's day:

> <EXT>He [Ealhstan, Bishop of Sherborne] was followed as bishop by Heahmind, Æthelheah, Ælfsige, Asser and Sigehelm. The last two are known to have been bishops under King Alfred, fourth son of Athulf ... Sigehelm was sent across the seas, to further the almsgiving of the king and also to visit [the shrine of] St Thomas in India, successfully completing a journey that anyone nowadays might well regard with wonder. He brought back with him exotic gems of the kind abundant in that country; some can be seen still, set in objects ornamenting the church.[109]
>
> Being devoted to almsgiving, he [King Alfred] confirmed the privileges of churches as laid down by his father, and sent many gifts overseas to Rome and to St Thomas in India. For this purpose he dispatched an envoy, Sigehelm bishop of Sherborne, who made his way to India with great success, an astonishing feat even today, and brought with him on his return gems of exotic splendour and the liquid perfumes of which the soil there is productive...[110] </EXT>

This identification of Sigehelm is also briefly alluded to by John of Worcester in the early twelfth-century *Chronicon ex Chronicis*, in which he states of the 'bishop of Sherborne', *Suithelmus* [sic], that 'he took King Alfred's alms to St Thomas in India, whence he returned

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which seems to refer to both the 'Heptarchy' and the Anglo-Saxon port of London, whilst the *Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam* ('The Regions of the World'), written *c.* 982 in Afghanistan, mentions trading links between Britain and both the Byzantine Empire and al-Andalus (Spain), the latter potentially reflecting contemporary Anglo-Saxon involvement in the slave trade (Green, 'Hārūn ibn Yaḥyā's Ninth-century Arabic Description of Britain', pp. 112, 113–14 at n. 59; P. Nightingale, 'The London Pepperers' Guild and Some Twelfth-century English Trading Links with Spain', *Bull. of the Inst. of Hist. Research* 58 (1985), 123–32 at 128).

[109] 'Illum subsecuti sunt Hadmundus, Ethelegus, Alsius, Asserus, Sighelmus. Quorum ultimi ambo sub rege Elfredo, Adulfi quarto filio, fuisse noscuntur … Sighelmus trans mare causa elemosinarum regis et etiam ad sanctum Thomam in Indiam missus, mira prosperitate, quod quiuis hoc seculo miretur, Indiam penetrauit, indeque rediens exotici generis gemmas, quarum illa humus ferax est, reportauit. Nonnullae illarum adhuc in aecclesiae ornamentis uisuntur'. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum. The History of the English Bishops. Volume One: Text and Translation*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 2007), ch. 80.1–2 at pp. 278–9.

[110] 'Elemosinis intentus priuilegia aecclesiarum, sicut pater statuerat, roborauit, et trans mare Romam et ad sanctum Thomam in Indiaa multa munera misit. Legatus in hoc missus Sigelmus Scireburnensis episcopus, cum magna prosperiate, quod quiuisb hoc seculoc miretur, Indiam penetrauit; inde rediens exoticos splendores gemmarum et liquores aromatum, quorum illa humus ferax est, reportauit'. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum. The History of the English Kings, Volume I*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1998), ii.122.2, pp. 190–1. Note, whilst it may have been an 'astonishing feat even today', some people from western Europe did make this trip in the twelfth century too – see, for example, Bernard the Penitent, a native of Maguelone in Languedoc, whose *Vita*, written shortly after his death in 1182, says that he made pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem and St Thomas in India: *Vita B. Bernardi pœnitentis*, I.i.7, in *Acta Sanctorum, Aprilis II* (Paris, 1866), p. 676 ('Indiam quoque & quæ ibi sanctus Thomas Apostolus fecit miracula, vidit').

safely'.[111] Needless to say, the claim that Sigehelm returned from India bringing with him 'exotic gems' that 'can be seen still, set in objects ornamenting the church', suggests that William was basing his account on local traditions at Sherborne.[112] Nonetheless, his identification has been subject to some scepticism, largely on account of the fact that William omits the names of three bishops of Sherborne who come between Asser and Sigehelm in the preserved episcopal lists, and that Sigehelm signs charters as bishop from 925 to 932,[113] not in Alfred's reign, 871–99.[114] Whether these discrepancies are fatal to William's identification is open to debate, however. The mistaken attribution of Sigehelm's episcopacy to Alfred's reign and the omission of three intervening bishops in the *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* may simply reflect an attempt by William or his source to reconcile a local Sherborne tradition that Sigehelm, Bishop of Sherborne, was Alfred's envoy to India with the dates of King Alfred, working from a false and unnecessary assumption that Sigehelm must have been made bishop during the latter's reign due to his role as emissary. In this light, it is worth pointing out that Sigehelm could conceivably have both travelled to India in 883 and attested charters from 925–32 if his pilgrimage carrying alms to India for King Alfred took place in his relative youth and he had become the Bishop of Sherborne in his relative old age.[115]

On the other hand, if the early tenth-century bishop of Sherborne named Sigehelm was not the Sigehelm sent to India in 883, contrary to what William of Malmesbury appears to have been told and shown of his supposed spoils from his trip at Sherborne, then identifying him becomes significantly more difficult: he could be the western Kentish ealdorman killed by the Danes in 902, as some have suggested, but he could equally well be another Sigehelm active in the era, either recorded or otherwise.[116] As to Sigehelm's companion, Æthelstan, he is even more obscure, and unfortunately no recorded traditions of his identity survive. He may well be a Mercian priest and chaplain of this name who was associated with Alfred according to Asser's contemporary *Life of Alfred*, but we do need to be

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[111] 'Assero Scireburnensi episcopo defuncto, successit Suithelmus qui regis Ælfredi elemosinam ad sanctum Thomam in Indiam detulit, indeque prospere rediit'. *The Chronicle of John of Worcester, Vol. 2: the Annals from 450 to 1066*, ed. and trans. R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk (Oxford, 1995), pp. 318–9.

[112] R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, *William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum Anglorum. The History of the English Kings, Volume II: General Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 98–9; D. Whitelock, 'William of Malmesbury on the Works of King Alfred', *Medieval Literature and Civilization: Studies in Memory of G. N. Garmonsway*, ed. D. A. Pearsall and R. A. Waldron (London, 1969), pp. 78–93 at 83. Thomson and Winterbottom note that 'There is no reason to doubt that William here represents local (Sherborne) tradition' (p. 99), whilst Whitelock considers that William must have been 'told at Sherborne that this church still had in its possession some rare gems brought back from India by Bishop Sigehelm' (p. 83).

[113] M. A. O'Donovan, 'An Interim Revision of Episcopal Dates for the Province of Canterbury, 850–950: Part II', *ASE* 2 (1973), 91–113 at 104–05

[114] For example, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 289–90, who declares that it is 'impossible to attach much belief to this story' and goes on to say that 'the envoy can hardly have been the Sigehelm who became bishop of Sherborne' due to the chronological issues, before claiming that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 883 in any case 'suggests that Sighelm was an army-leader', which is at best only a speculative inference from the text, as no such claim appears in any manuscript of the *Chronicle*. Whitelock, 'William of Malmesbury', p. 83, likewise rejects William of Malmesbury's identification, partly again on the above chronological grounds and partly because 'Sigehelm was undoubtedly a layman', even though the latter claim is again unstated in the *Chronicle* text and can only be a supposition.

[115] This suggestion has also been made by L. White, *Medieval Religion and Technology: Collected Essays* (London, 1978), pp. 214–5, who accepts William of Malmesbury's identification and comments that 'Sigehelm in his old age became Bishop of Sherbourne' (p. 214).

[116] *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, p. 290; Abels, *King Alfred the Great*, p. 191; D. Pratt, 'The Illnesses of King Alfred the Great', *ASE* 30 (2001), 39–90 at 69; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Revised Translation*, ed. and trans. Whitelock *et al*., pp. 59–60; Naismith and Tinti, 'Peter's Pence', <this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>p. 539, n. 42</this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>. Note, Barbara Yorke, pers. comm., considers it to be more likely that King Alfred would have chosen ecclesiastics for a mission like this rather than laymen, and probably younger men rather than older too, given the length and rigours of the journey.

somewhat cautious, as the name is common and there are multiple alternative candidates available, including at least two thegns and an ealdorman active in Alfred's reign.[117]

<A heading>CONCLUSION</A heading>

What, then, can be said of King Alfred's apparent embassy to India in the 880s? All told, it seems credible that India was indeed the intended destination for the alms carried by Sigehelm and Æthelstan in 883. Not only is this reading of the text backed by the majority of the manuscripts, but it also accords well with the identity of the two saints whose shrines were to be visited according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, St Thomas and St Bartholomew: these two were both explicitly and repeatedly associated with India in material current in Alfred's day. Indeed, India's remoteness from early medieval England could well have been the very point of Alfred's gift, and it would moreover fit with what we know of Alfred's own intellectual curiosity about the wider world and its limits. Beyond this, it would seem that such a journey would also have a good context. It is clear that there was indeed a Christian community present in India from at least Late Antiquity, as texts present in pre-Viking England claimed, and that the knowledge of a genuine shrine and church dedicated to St Thomas on the Coromandal coast of south-east India, probably at Mailapur/Mylepore, had moreover spread to western Europe by the sixth century. Indeed, Gregory of Tours' account of the church and monastery of St Thomas in India indicates that Sigehelm and Æthelstan would have been by no means the first to visit this shrine from early medieval Europe. Furthermore, a journey from western Europe to southern India appears plausible in terms of not only its proposed destination, but also the availability of routes and networks for getting there, given the continued availability of imports from India and ibn Khurdādhbih's account of the Rādhāniyya. Finally, whilst the identity of King Alfred's two emissaries, Sigehelm and Æthelstan, remains uncertain, it can be tentatively suggested that we should be wary of rejecting outright the apparent Sherborne tradition recorded by William of Malmesbury in the early twelfth century that Sigehelm, Bishop of Sherborne, was one of those who travelled to India on Alfred's behalf, before returning with 'gems of exotic splendour' which were still on display in Sherbourne Abbey church.[118] Likewise, it is not impossible that Æthelstan may have been the Mercian priest of that name who appears in Asser's contemporary *Life of Alfred* as Alfred's close confidant.

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[117] Æthelstan, a priest, is said to have been summoned from Mercia by King Alfred in Asser's *Life of Alfred*, ch. 77; he attests a number of charters and may be the Æthelstan who was appointed bishop of Ramsbury in *c*. 909, which is intriguing given the traditional identity of his companion, Sigehelm, and the suggestion made above as to his career: Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, pp. 92–3, 259. This identification is supported by Stevenson (in *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, p. 290), and Abels (*King Alfred the Great*, p. 191); Pratt, 'Illnesses of Alfred', p. 69, considers it tempting, but observes that the name was relatively common, whilst Naismith and Tinti, 'Peter's Pence', <this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>p. 529, n. 42</this is an external reference please do not hyperlink>, note a number of possible identifications, including the Æthelstan who attests S352, whom Keynes and Lapidge, p. 259, link with the Æthelstan of Asser.

[118] It is likely to have not only been gems and perfumes that Sigehelm and Æthelstan returned with, but also geographical knowledge of the sort they were arguably sent out in search of. Indeed, Pengelly suggests that the unusual reference in the Old English *Boethius* to India being 'the south-east corner of this world' (*þæt is se suðeastende þisses middaneardes*), rather than simply the easternmost land, may be a clarificatory updating and alteration of Boethius's text that was made by the translator – claimed by the text to be Alfred himself – in light of new information about the position of India that was brought back by Alfred's emissaries to India: Pengelly, 'Rome', p. 254; *The Old English Boethius: an Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2009) I, 303, and II, 44. Another possible impact of Sigehelm and Æthelstan's trip may have been the development of a significant royal interest in St Thomas at Winchester, see D. Keene, 'Early Medieval Winchester: Symbolic Landscapes', *Lords and Towns in Medieval Europe: the European Historic Towns Atlas Project*, ed. A. Simms and H. B. Clarke (Farnham, 2015), pp. 419–44 at 428, 429, 431, 432, 443.

<Acknowledgements>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the comments and suggestions provided by Rose Broadley, Sue Brunning, John Hines, Philip Wood and Barbara Yorke; all errors and interpretations do, of course, remain my own. </Acknowledgements>