The Malabar Christian Copper Plates.

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INTRODUCTION.
(Some Opinions)

Prof. Dr. STEN KONOW:

"I have no doubt that you are right in saying that Malayalam was, in certain features, different from Tamil even before A.D. 900. There can be no doubt that Malayalam and Tamil are derived from a common base. They can be considered as sisters of the same age, and to my mind it is not possible to say that one of the two is older or younger. I am not even convinced that the difference is always one of time and development. Today I should only like to congratulate you on having finished a long and laborious study with results which will accrue to the credit of Indian scholarship in general and of yourself in special." (Letter from Kristiania dated 22-6-1923).

Dr. E. HULTZSCH:

You are "doing a real service to linguistics. The method which you follow is the only true and correct one and will commend itself to European scholars." (Letter from Halle dated 13-6-1923).

Dr. L. D. BARNETT:

"Undoubtedly the contemporary documents must be the first and chief source for our knowledge
of any language, and one which must take precedence of the grammars. Naturally the language .......... was never quite homogeneous throughout the Malayali speech-area; but that fact does not detract from the importance of the inscriptions as first-hand evidence.” (Letter from London dated 2nd Jan., 1924).

**Dr. F. W. Thomas:**

“What you wrote .... concerning the history of the Malayalam language is interesting, and I shall look forward to seeing it expounded in English.” (Letter from London dated April 17, 1924).

**Sir Richard Carnac Temple:**

“It is a pleasure to me to publish your Malabar Miscellany articles (in the Indian Antiquary).

“The Christians have been so long in S. India and their history so interesting and I may say still so little studied that I am always glad to publish anything that can seriously throw light on the subject” (Letter from London dated 14-2-1925).

**Stanley P. Rice, Esquire; A.C.S.**

“...........read with great appreciation your article in the last (April) issue of the ‘Asiatic Review’ on the Magna Charta of the Malabar Christians. Letter from London, dated 23rd April, 1925. See Ch. II, VI and IX which deal with this Magna Carta.”
EX OBIENTI LUX.

PREFACE.

The Malabar Christians of St. Thomas have very valuable, historic copper plate\(^{(1)}\) documents and have been long enjoying exceptional social, commercial,\(^{(2)}\) political,\(^{(3)}\) and religious privileges. But very few of them have any clear idea of the importance of their Magna Carta or of the glory that was theirs. The first ten chapters of the book are meant to remedy this defect to some extent.

I have tried my best to make this book clear, correct and concise in its statements. Exhaustiveness and finality are, of course, impossible. I very much regret that the reading and interpretation of the Cufic and Pahlavi portions of the third document, which

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\(^{(1)}\) They have also three lithic inscriptions in Pahlavi of the Sassanian period (226-651 A.D. according to M. N. Dhalla's *Zoroastrian Civilization*, 1923), one of which was discovered by me in 1921 (*Indian Antiquary*, 1923, p. 355 and *June*, 1924). There are, besides, a lithic fragment in Greek (*Ibid*, 1923, p. 356), and another also in the same language.

\(^{(2)}\) Thomas Cana, Sabir Isai and Krali Kottan of the copper plates, were three foreign merchant princes among the Malabar Christians.

\(^{(3)}\) They had, in pre-Portuguese times, a dynasty of Christian kings called the VILLIVARVATTAM SWARUPAM, *Ind. Ant.*, for *June*, 1923).
Prof. Ernst Herzfeld of Germany and Dr. J. J. Modi, B. A., Ph. D., C. L. E., of Bombay are preparing at my instance are not yet ready for insertion in this book.

A short summary of the book is given below.

CHAP. I. The four sets of copper plates: (1) The two plates of Thomas Canav of 345 or 745 A. D. according to traditions; (both missing); (2) the three plates of the Quilon Tarisa Church, of the 9th cent. (last plate missing); (3) the four plates of the same church; later in the same cent. (first plate missing); (4) the plate of Iravi Korttan, of 1320. (Pp. 1—3).

CHAP. II. Translation of a necessarily imperfect and inaccurate Portuguese rendering of the first set, made probably in 1544, when the two plates were pawned to the Portuguese for 200 reals. A literal public copy said to exist, but not yet discovered. These plates may now be in the Torre do Tombo of Lisbon or in some old Franciscan Convent of Portugal. (Pp. 5—9).

CHAP. II IV-V. Improved readings and translations of the other three sets. New materials, facts and interpretations included. Linguistic evidence points to Kielhorn’s 1320 A. D. for the plate of Iravi Korttan, and not to Daniel’s 130 A. D. (Pp. 9—27).