



**P.N. ELAMKULAM KUNJAN PILLAI
MEMORIAL ANNUAL PUBLIC LECTURE**

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE NINTH-CENTURY CHRISTIAN COPPER PLATES

THE TESTIMONY OF THE INDIRECT TEXT TRADITION

Speaker

Professor István Perczel

Central European University, Hungary

Chair

Professor P.K.Michael Tharakan

Chairperson, KCHR

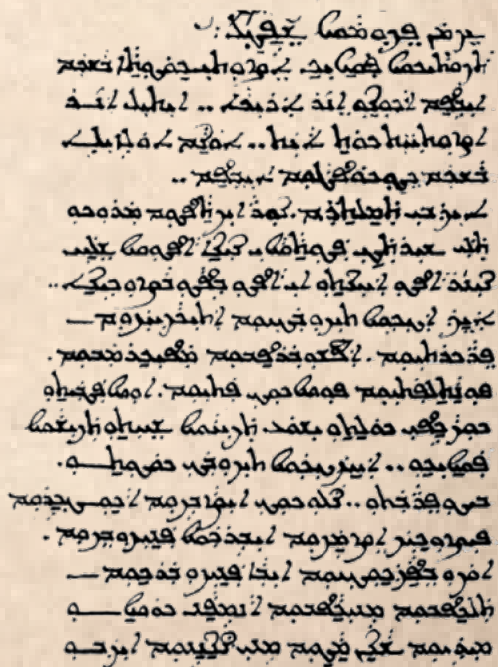
On 15 th July 2020 at 2.30 p.m

You are cordially invited

For more details visit www.kchr.ac.in/articles/195

Kerala Council for Historical Research
Thiruvananthapuram | www.kchr.ac.in

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE NINTH- CENTURY CHRISTIAN COPPER PLATES: THE TESTIMONY OF THE INDIRECT TEXT TRADITION



This lecture, dedicated to the great historian Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, treats the Syrian Christian copper plates of Kerala, namely the Tarisāppalli copper plates, dated 849 AD, to the understanding of which Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai has so much contributed. Also, the lecture will treat the lost Thomas of Kana copper-plates, traditionally dated 345 AD, whose only remnant is a Portuguese translation contained in a text entitled ‘Narrative about Malankara- written in 1604’ (Relação sobre a Serra- feito em 1604), now kept in the British Library. It analyses three indirect witnesses to the two copper plate sets: 1. a Malayalam manuscript kept in the University Library of Leiden, written in the early 18th century, which reports on the contents of the Thomas of Kana plates saying that, at the time when the manuscript was written, the plates were in the custody of the community: this manuscript provides data about the lost plates, which are not in the Portuguese text of the British Library; 2. a Suriyani Malayalam (Malayalam written in a mixed, Syriac-Vattezhuttu alphabet) transcript of the Tarisāppalli copper plates, made in 1601 and copied in a Syriac manuscript now kept in the National Library of France in Paris; 3. and the report of the French traveller, Anquetil du Perron, who was given a grantha transcript of the plates, which was translated for him in Portuguese, from which language he translated it into French.

The lecture will show that from these three indirect witnesses, written in a time when the Syrian Christian copper plates were more entire than now, give much new information about the original copper plates themselves. Their combined testimony seems to indicate that: 1. the loss by the Portuguese of the Thomas of Kana copper plates is a myth: the Syrian Christian communities got them back from the Portuguese and had them in their custody at least until the early 18th century; 2. the content of the lost, fifth, copper plate of the Tarisāppalli collection can be reconstructed based on the Garshuni Malayalam transcript and the French translation; 3. the last part of the Garshuni Malayalam transcript even contains information on the lost Thomas of Kana copper plates.



past for a positive future

Professor István Perczel

The Department of Medieval Studies at Central European University, Hungary

István Perczel is professor of Byzantine and Eastern Christian studies in the Department of Medieval Studies at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. He has extensively worked on Neoplatonist and Patristic philosophy and is studying Greek, Latin, and Syriac, recently also Malayalam, texts. In the year 2000, Perczel initiated the digitization and cataloguing of the manuscript collections of the Syrian Christians of Kerala. The project has resulted in the collection of digital images about over 1,200 paper manuscripts written in Syriac and Garshuni Malayalam (a mixed Semitic-Dravidian alphabet for writing Malayalam) and 60,000 palm-leaf manuscripts as well as the documentation of architectural monuments, artworks, and inscriptions. This material finally permits to write the factual, social, and cultural history of the Indian Syrian Christians, hitherto shrouded in legends.

Perczel's publications include *The Nomocanon of Metropolitan Abdisho of Nisibis: A Facsimile Edition of MS 64 from the Collection of the Church of the East in Thrissur* (2009); a co-edited volume, *Christianity in Asia: Sacred Art and Visual Splendour* (2016); a series of studies on Indian Christianity and the Indian manuscript collections, including 'Classical Syriac as a Modern lingua franca in South India between 1600 and 2006' (2009); and 'Garshuni Malayalam: A Witness to an Early Stage of Indian Christian Literature' (2014). The material digitized in India will be published online by Hill Museum and Manuscript Library and the catalogues are forthcoming.



past for a positive future



P.N. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai (1904-1973)

P.N. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai (1904-1973), eminent scholar and researcher in Kerala history was born to Kadackonathu Krishna Kurup and Puthen Purackal Nanukutty Amma on 8th November, 1904. He was a student of the University College, Thiruvananthapuram and later secured BA (Hons.) in Sanskrit from Annamalai University. He started his career as a school teacher and later joined the Department of Oriental Languages at the University College as a tutor. A committed researcher in Kerala history, he was a multi linguist and scholar in astronomy, manuscriptology and archaeology.

His important works (in Malayalam) are *Unnuneeli Sandesam Charithradrishtiyilkoodi*, *Keralabhashayude Vikasaparinamangal*, *Keralacharithrathile Iruladanja Edukal*, *Chila Keralacharithra Prasnangal*, *Bhashayum Sahithyavum Noottandukalil*, *Sahithya Charithra Samgraham*, *Sahithyamalika*, *Annathe Keralam*, *Janmisampradayam Keralathil*, *Samskrarathinte Nazhikkallukal*, *Keralam Anchum Arum Noottandukalil*, *Chera Samrajyam Onpathum Pathum Noottandukalil*. The important works in English are *Studies in Kerala History and Some Problems in Kerala History*. He has also authored books in Tamil.

He died on 4th March 1973.

Kerala Council for Historical Research

Vyloppilly Samskrithi Bhavan, Nalanda, Thiruvananthapuram- 695003
Phone / Fax – 0471 2310409, Mob: 94471 37651 | E mail: kchrtrivandrum@gmail.com