

Reading Acts of Thomas: with special consideration of its sexual ethic

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The casual reader of AofT may be forgiven for thinking that St. Thomas counsels against sexual relations, even between husband and wife, and that he ‘had a problem with sex’. This article casts some light on this matter and aims to assist students of AofT to read between the lines, or to quote the Magadhalene Sutras, to “see what lies below the surface” of the text. Takshashila

Textual critique

Every book in the Eastern Bible, except for Acts of Yesu, is spiritual teaching and cast in esoteric language. Unlike some Scriptures, the Eastern Bible is not history, or a collection of folktales, or historical accounts of societal issues. However, in common with other Scriptures each work in the Eastern Bible results from within a particular social context, often because of a social context, and its author speaks from within his/her viewpoint and ‘take’ on the situation at that particular time and place in history. Therefore, the student needs to know something of history to see what lies just beneath the surface. Additionally, the student needs to know something about spirituality to understand the lessons that lie beneath the surface.

In any textual critique, students should first consider the three basic questions: who wrote the work or what is the author’s context, why did the author write, or what is the purpose of the work, and who is the intended audience of the work. Once we understand more about the author and his context, the purpose of the work, and the intended audience and its context then we are a good step closer to putting on reading glasses conditioned to filter out our own context and see the work in its original setting.

For the sake of simplicity, allow us to illustrate just one example how context, author, purpose, and audience influences one’s understanding of a text. Let us assume, as in the case of AofT, we are faced with a text that seemingly contain spiritual teaching and religious ethic. Furthermore, the text in question makes frequent mention of the importance of light, personal freedom, blindness, and makes use of multiple examples of suffering as payment for transgressions –but above all, the text considers non-consensual homosexual assault the greatest abomination before God.

A superfluous reading of this text may, on the surface, create the impression that the author has a problem with sex and is telling us that above all sins homosexual congress is an abomination before God, and that personal freedom of movement is man’s greatest desire, and that all suffering is due payment for past transgressions against God and society.

But our ‘take’ on the text will change when we learn that the author is an inmate in one of the Roman underground salt mines of the 1st century, where murderers and condemned criminals are pitted for as long as they shall live and they will never again see the light of

day. And in these prisons inmates frequently gang up on the weak to rape and sexually molest them as a means of venting their frustrations with life down there. In other words, the author speaks to the audience's context; his purpose is to provide hope and a new ethic to make life tolerable down there.

This knowledge tints our reading glasses and henceforth everything we read in that text is filtered through this understanding –and the text takes on new meaning and speaks to our own context in a new way.

Such is the art and purpose of textual critique.

Now, let us consider AofT's behind the scenes information that may provide us better understanding which will accordingly tint our reading glasses.

Who wrote AofT?

The author of the book is Xenophon, the young man slain by the 'serpent' in AofT 3:16. (There is a more comprehensive article available on blessed [Xenophon](#)). In brief, for the purpose of this discussion, Xenophon was well educated in letters and was fluent in the two international languages, Greek (probably his home language) and Aramaic. He worked closely with St. Thomas for many years and set up Church of the East's library and publishing facility in Srinagar. Later, when St. Thomas returned from his last trip to India, Xenophon was ordained as +Teacher in charge of the area that included (modern) Kashmir, Pakistan and North India. This was by any means the most important diocese of Church of the East at the time. As +Teacher, Xenophon served on Senior Council seated in Srinagar, which was attended by the Suren (Gondophares' family) and later Kushan kings –not to mention other seers and sages from Persia, China and India.

Besides the fact that he was a most splendid +Teacher, Xenophon has excellent literary and language skills and is well suited for the task of publisher and librarian. The quality of the work in AofT is beyond compare for the time and setting –it is nothing less than a literary masterpiece.

Finally, millions of normally sane people of standard intelligence around the world today believe that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, even though half way through the second book Moses dies, 'never allowed to enter the promised land', yet the story continues for some hundred years after his death. The Christian Gospels, written about one hundred years after Yesu left the area, many years after the death of the purported authors, seem to be first hand accounts of the Lord's work among the Jews. Fortunately for us, AofT does not pose similar problems. The author of AofT relies on information gathered from years of personal observation of the works of the saint, from discussions with St. Thomas whom he served daily for a number of years, and from other witnesses (notably St. Siphor) –and the book is published before the death of the author.

Therefore, with regards to the identity of the author, we know that Xenophon, born 20CE in Takshashila (Taxila), student of letters, wrote AofT -first publishing it in chapters from 45CE onward and by 80CE (the year St. Siphor died) the first Eastern Bible canon was announced and it included AofT. Xenophon was fluent in Greek and Aramaic and

additionally he mastered (at least) Sanskrit and Bactrian and the Kharoshti and Brahmi scripts. AofT was completed in 65 or 66CE, shortly after Siphor arrived in Srinagar. The first publication of the book was in Kharoshti but we know of Greek and Aramaic versions that circulated in the West. However, during later years AofT and other books of the Eastern Bible was published only in Devanagari script, in Sanskrit, especially during the Gupta period and beyond.

Xenophon was 18 years old when he met the Lord in 38CE (AofT 3:16ff). When St. Thomas passed over in 62CE, at age fifty two, Xenophon was forty-two years old. Xenophon left the body somewhere between the age of seventy and seventy three –we don't know the year, except that “the great and enlightened King Kanishka buried Teacher Xenophon with great honours in the same tomb used for blessed Teacher Siphor”. Kanishka came to power in 78CE, Xenophon was alive in 80CE, but in 83CE, his passing is lamented by a prosaic lover (the “comely girl” of AofT 3:16ff perhaps?).

What is the author's context?

Takshashila, Xenophon's earlier home, was one of the world's more fascinating and charming cities. Even five hundred years earlier Takshashila was renowned for hosting what was perhaps the world's first university and boasted more spiritual learning centres, schools of philosophy, mathematics, and astrology than any other place in the world. Takshashila was the main centre of study in the art of the Magi of the East –the wise men who divined the time, place, and person of the Great Incarnation of our Lord. Takshashila was the place where westerners learned to incorporate the zero as a number (remember your Roman numerals?), where many western philosophers studied, and where civilisation dawned on humanity.

Early during the first century, Takshashila was conquered and got a new ruler (Gondophares, 20CE), and a massive earthquake, at the time of the Lord's crucifixion, ravaged the city and destroyed many school buildings, institutions and palaces. However, Takshashila remained the prime university city, attended by the sons of rich and noble people from all over the world. Takshashila's libraries were more sought after than that of Alexandria (it was older) and a new medical faculty in Parthia was recently incorporated.

Prostitutes were not in short supply and concubines and would-be concubines decorated every street, motel, and pub. Ample supply of marijuana, opium, and wine mixed with opium helped the university city's moral decadence along. This was Xenophon's India, his heritage, and the place where he was schooled.

He was himself a victim of another's greed and lust –that was how he met St. Thomas and how he came face to face with the Lord. His was not a near-death experience but a death experience. His reaction upon returning from death is consistent with the personality of the Xenophon we know later in his life. Was it mere youthful arrogance or just his personality that causes him to stand up and demand explanations of the man who just brought him back to life? He really lays it on the saint: - you were there yourself;

now you ask me to tell you what happened there; who was that man with you; who gave you instructions; what the heck did I ever do to you to deserve such terrible treatment?

Son of a rich man, well schooled, an enquiring mind, a very determined man with a highly developed sense of duty. He is the type of man that could set up a publishing concern and go to pains to collect material from all over the world, edit it, and publish it in various languages. We need to remind ourselves that Xenophon lived many ages before printing presses and viable paper. They copied by hand and edited every copy by lamplight. He was a master theologian and wrote text books for training of clergy. And then he had another side as well – he could sit around tables with kings, princes and seers and sages from Persia, Parthia, China, and India. His position in the Church required of him to be the one where the buck finally stops and he had to make calls of judgement that affected the entire diocese and beyond.

Did Xenophon marry the girl of AofT 3:16ff? Did he keep concubines? How many wives did he have? We have no answers to these questions. These may seem silly questions but the tabloids always want to know answers to irrelevant questions.

Xenophon lived and worked in Srinagar during his later life – an actual paradise on earth. Considering his social status, background and sensibility we think he probably lived well, had a nice house, had good transportation, and could entertain important guests. He ministered at the old and dilapidated Wayist temple in Srinagar, one of the oldest temples in the city and was patron of at least one work camp for children. The early work camps of Church of the East were alternatives for slavery and being destitute. In contrast with Buddhism of the day, Wayist monks, and nuns served the community, and children in hostels manufactured book covers, Saikaralis, and religious articles. Children's hostels became very successful in later years and were financially self supporting because Wayist worship has always been home-based and every home or business had at least one shrine. Ironically, that human rights movement is today outmoded and is denigrated as an exploitation of child labour – such is the nature of progress.

The author of AofT was a versatile man in a job that required all of his talents. AofT was by no means his magnum opus or even his greatest contribution to humankind – he produced huge works of collecting, translation, editing and copying of books ten times as large as AofT – comprising many rooms full of tablets, wood blocks and tons of parchment. AofT is a magnificent work--even two thousand years later, but Xenophon conceivably produced it in the little free time he had, relaxing in his swing chair on the porch overlooking the beautiful and serene Dal Lake and valley with its backdrop of majestic snow peaked mountains.

What is the context of AofT?

AofT reports only particular stories of St. Thomas at work. From AofT's point of view the life and times of the saint seems to be divided into five sections –1) before arriving in Takshashila, 2) converting the king of Takshashila, 3) working around Takshashila, 4) ministry to India, Tibet, and Nepal 4) ministry to the court of king Misdeas. In the case

of 4) above AofT provides us with only one half of a sentence. In AofT 6:1 we read, “*Now, while the apostle Thomas was proclaiming throughout all India the word of God, a certain captain of the king Misdeas came to him and said to him...*” In the first half of the sentence AofT covers about fifteen years of work. During this time many things happens: king Gondophares dies; the neighbouring Kushan Empire conquers the area; Gad becomes a vassal king in the Arachosia province (St. Thomas went along to assist); St. Thomas meets with the new king--who would later mint coins with the Wayist seal, honouring the Great Saviour as well as assist to reform local Buddhism to include all people (Mahayana); and St. Thomas spends time in the Deccan (India proper), and ministers along the west coast.

On the social scene - the India that St. Thomas walked into was one of extremes – extreme sensual gratification as only the largest university city in the world would provide; extreme scholarly interests removed from the average person’s life; and extremes in religious, sensual and philosophical approaches. In a certain sense, Takshashila resembled a cosmopolitan Los Angeles in the 60’s, but these hippies were rich kids. Gurus, monks and seers of any conceivable (and inconceivable) religion and philosophy abounded; more languages were spoken and more exotic dishes were served than anywhere else in the world; average people worked in the service industry as cleaners, servants, prostitutes, masseurs, gymnophysicists, manicurists and other fascinating services to the hippies and academics. Add to this environment a measure of a war, a new king taking the throne, a new national identity, and new ‘barbarians’ coming across the borders to seek a living. A boiling pot of commercial, spiritual, moral, emotional, ideological, and sensual energies exploded in the world of Acts of Thomas. Yet, the author spares us the details but rather takes us on an intimate journey with the saint and his interaction with two opposing forces – our Lord, the Avalokitesvara who helps and saves, and the negative spiritual elements that bother and drown the children of God.

The negative aspects of the world of AofT can be summarised as licentious, misogynistic, and snobbish, and the great devouring greed of that world was sensual lust. Not that there is anything intrinsically evil about sex, lust, or assigning safe social stations to people of different gender and class – but this world keeled over to the extreme and it caused most of the hardship in that otherwise affluent society. Women were expendable and children even more so. Parents sold their own children into slavery. Rather than take a second or third wife, men would abandon wives and children, rendering them destitute for as little as the company of a new spicy girl from Turkey or Budapest. Buddhist monasteries bought the cheap slaves to serve the monks and drive their craft industries. Slaves in monasteries outnumbered monks five to one (at least) –bringing their number close to a hundred thousand in the province alone. The market for prostitution was lucrative and large numbers of children met their demise in such slavery. Unwanted children were sold and unwanted babies were ‘exposed’ –literally placed on the city dump, for someone else to take (and raise as a servant) or else it would die within a few days. The city streets proliferated with destitute children and dishonoured women who lived on alms, at the mercy of drunken men –and if disease and abuse did not kill them during summer, the winter was sure to clean the streets of their presence. Trying to

get a good night's sleep in a poor area was difficult for the cries of exposed babies, the whimpers of dying children in the streets and the delirious rant of diseased widows and dishonoured women mingled with the racket of amorous cats, alarmed dogs and the drunken festival of the rich in the background. Many destitute women and children made their way south to warmer climates, only to run into opportunistic slave traders who would capture and sell them to ships, caravans, monks, temples or pornographers and pimps.

The problem was, as the saint figured out, that people engaged in sex for the sake of sex – to put it bluntly, sex was only a fuck and the more the better because its pleasure lasted but briefly. St. Thomas figured the insane quest for sensual gratification was the scourge of their society.

In this vein we see AofT starting off when the Lord teaches the newlyweds in Andrapolis (AofT 1:19ff) as if asking, “Hey, what are you about to do now? You hardly know one another but you are about to have sex - to get some blood on a cloth to show the people - and you will call that a consummation of your marriage! This is how you lay the foundation of your marriage? This is what your culture teaches you –and you follow like sheep? Moreover, on this foundation – what will you build? Is there not more to relationship and being soul mates than this? What about something new--what about ‘making love’. What about engaging in sexual congress for the sake of all your senses, for love and spiritual beauty--rather than duty or animalism? Sexual communion can be beautiful, it can be an expression of your love, which you do with your whole being--it can be a spiritual vehicle to join you to the Energies of God. Nevertheless, should you perform this duty now, tomorrow you have to act again as if you are ashamed of your body--what have you then done besides acting like an animal and conceiving a child? Does the world need another child? Do we not have enough destitute children on the streets desperately in need of care and love? And does your culture not say: ‘children amount to nothing, most are thieves, robbers, morons or cripples and bring only hardship...?’”

This is the foundation of AofT, staging the theme – the beginning of the teaching of sacred sensuality – which at its most basic form is the start of a human rights ethic and understanding that the passions are powerful forces which can be used for creating very beautiful positive environments, or it can be used to enslave, abuse and addict.

What is the Genre or style of AofT?

Xenophon writes AofT not as an historical work, not as an evangelical work, but indulges in the genre of the historical novel. Perhaps he always wanted to write a novel and therefore picked the style when he set out to write AofT, or, on the other hand, perhaps he chose the genre because it best suited the purpose of the book.

The reading public during the 1st century was less than one percent--in fact, few languages were written languages at the time (even today some Indian languages are not written). Books served mainly to educate the educated and less than one percent of people ever read a book.

Under these conditions, we find that successful teachers and scripture were those that could cast the great truths in brief lines of prose, in songs, or in stories.

Touching on the question of the purpose of AofT we must note that devotees of the 1st century needed to receive the Truth cast in mnemonic devices such as the above examples because they did not read (is it different now, 2000 years later?). The novel is a good mnemonic device because it tells a long story in so many scenes or short stories which are easily remembered and retold in an oral tradition. Xenophon creates a new genre, we think, that of the Spiritual Novel based on a true story.

The discerning reader will discover in AofT fair splashes of humour, suspense, and intrigue –yet, befitting the purpose of the work, not too much. We see characters develop in the story and we become witness to the development of an institution that would last at least another two millennia. Xenophon provides us with privileged insight to the interpersonal relationship between the celestial Saviour and the (very human) man Thomas. We are allowed an intimate view of the interpersonal relationship between Thomas and the third main ‘character’ of the novel –the evil disembodied spirits intent on living their desires through unsuspecting people.

Some of the things not discussed in AofT

A good listener is a good learner and the best counsellor. We need to learn how to truly listen to what is said--a task in its own--but we also must listen to the silences. Silences often speak louder than words. Silences may be accidents or omissions, but they hold important information. Silences often create a backdrop for a story set the scene. When watching a movie or play with no backdrop, we rely on the dialogue (or monologue) to paint a mental backdrop—without which we are unsettled and cannot ‘get into’ the play. Students of Scripture often find themselves in this uneasy position because they lack information--usually history, philosophy, or social context information.

AofT is not a historical work. If it were, it would have shared important information about the war, the death of the king, the new Kushan reign, and especially St. Thomas’ work with the Kushan officials. AofT is exceptionally silent about historical information, which we need to understand the Scripture.

AofT is not a biography of the saint. If it were we would have learned about the man’s most fascinating life starting as an apprentice in Wayism when he was a teenager, his work with Yusaf (the Lord’s father) in the exciting cities of Sepphoris (an hour’s walk from the tiny village of Nazareth) and those in Anatolia. There would be so much to learn about his time spent with the Lord in Palestine and his association with the fascinating and dynamic Magadhalene. Perhaps we would have learned why he and The Magadhalene were singled out by the Lord for deeper esoteric teaching He did not share with others. In addition, of course, we would have learned volumes about the fascinating accounts of his work among the various Indian tribes and among Buddhist reformers.

AofT is not ALL the Acts of Thomas but is an account of some acts the saint performed in northern India. Again, touching on the purpose of AofT, perhaps AofT is Xenophon's attempt at a summary of the spiritual challenges faced by the saint and the communities in India as Wayism developed into a religion among them. While the battle between good and bad is humanity's main theme and purpose for incarnation, in the AofT the battle of opposing forces are concentrated on liberating sex and sensuality from cultures that encourage the abuse thereof and enslavement to its most basic forms. AofT marks the beginning of the sacred sensuality teaching that The Magadhalene picks up from where Thomas left off. She would continue to develop it into a grand school of thought that enveloped the teaching of kundalini, the chakras, the kama sutras, and rekindle the mother goddess and consciousness of God as Mother and Father and set the course for improved human rights and care of children.

Other things AofT are silent about are the physical suffering the saint endured. We hear nothing of the extremely cold and treacherous winters in the Karakoram and Himalayan areas, or about those hostile and primitive tribes in the jungles, or the extreme heat of the south, the troubles with communication in a country with a thousand languages –all things the saint had to endure for almost two decades.

The story of AofT leaves some important questions unanswered. For the sake of economy and a foretaste to encourage further investigation, we provide only a few such questions and risk to postulate some answers below:

- Why did Lord Yesu send Thomas and not The Magadhalene (a native Indian) to India?
 - *One practical reason is that she was a female. There were only three places free women in society could hold in those days –married and in the household, the brothel, or destitute in widowhood. Even Buddhism did not allow women as monks (nuns) and both Buddhism and Hinduism taught that a woman could not go to heaven and spirituality is not for them to dabble in. Women could only work among women, and it was very foolish to work with married women because they were possessions of their husbands and any attempt to consider her unhappiness would be tantamount to theft or damaging the owner's goods.*
- Why did King Gondophares search for an architect in Baghdad when he was surrounded by some of the best schools of architecture, art, and science in the world?
 - *Yes, certainly a slap in the face, and the king would suffer for it. However, he probably had good reason. Takshashila was almost destroyed by the earthquake of the year 30, being six years before Thomas arrived there. It is possible that the newcomer king looked around at the new buildings that went up but came down again in the quake –all built according to the latest technology. He bought Thomas five years after the earthquake and probably considered proposals and presentations from local experts, and probably surveyed their work during that time. He must have decided to get outside help because he did not trust, or did not like local expertise.*
- Why did King Gondophares and his royal brother actually minister with St. Thomas as civil devotees – this is probably a first in the history of spirituality?

- *We do not know the answer to this question for sure, except that we know both brothers served Senior Council at one time or another after they served St. Thomas. Senior Council members have always been spiritual leaders and Teachers par excellence, there is no other way. This is the reason why Wayism has never been a state religion –because a secular ruler could never appoint, or cause to be appointed, a person in his favour to serve Senior Council.*
- **Why did King Gondophares not take action against king Misdeas for executing Thomas – or did he?**
 - *Let's consider some of the known facts. King Misdeas acts entirely within his powers and civil right when he executes the troublemaker. After being extraordinarily patient with an unpleasant foreigner who cuckolded his royal best friend, and who then set out to cuckold him and also steal his peace, his wife, and mess with his household, and turns the chief of defence against him—he executes the troublemaker. Misdeas, although a small king in a small kingdom, enjoys the favour of powerful rulers in Persia and Rome, and owes no local ruler or nobody an explanation for his justified (almost belated) deed. Why then the sudden turnaround in attitude –going about burying Thomas in the Royal Tomb, erecting a temple for the church and allowing Wayism to get a good foothold in his kingdom? Was it only an attack of conscience, an attack from Tertia, or something else? We know he never did truly walk in The Way and was therefore not committed spiritually. We also know that Siphor, his military executive feared the wrath of the king and had to flee for his life. Was there another pressure on him to be a good boy –an external political pressure perhaps? Well, another thing is that Gondophares was a member of Senior Council. He was probably a better person than most, and definitely knew things that we do not. Whichever way – Takshashila continued to exist for hundreds of years after that incident and even today stands its ground against Mohammedan desolation –but Khotan ceased to exist more than a millennium ago and is buried under infertile sand –truly a sad thing to see. In fact, we do not know the answer, but sometimes it is nice to play guessing games.*
 - *Having considered the above, it needs to be reiterated that students of Scripture need to know their history. King Gondophares was not around when king Misdeas executed the saint in 62CE –he died, most probably in the year 47. Therefore, Gondophares probably did not put pressure, threat, or retribution on Misdeas. The Suren reign over the Kashmir Jammu states was no more. The Surens (Gondophares' dynasty) were defeated by their western neighbour, the Kushans under king Kajula Kadphises from the Yeuh Chi (Kushan) tribe of China, in the year 50. Gad was made a vassal king of the Arachosia province under Kushan suffrage, where the church grew strong and prospered for many years –but by the year 60 Gad was dead and his sons and nephews continued as vassal rulers of an ever-shrinking area west of the Indus and south to the sea. Therefore, by the time Misdeas executed St. Thomas in 62, King Vima Taktu; the second Kushan emperor was already in power (since 60 CE) and was pushing his empire south to Delhi. St. Thomas*

had no relationship with Vima Taktu but he had met Kajula Kadphises, under whose patronage the Lotus Sutra was written and the cult of the Lord as Lord Avalokitesvara started.

- *Now, if we had to rephrase the question, we could therefore ask, “Did not King Vima Taktu punish Misdeas for executing St. Thomas?” Let’s briefly examine the situation. King Vima Taktu was on the throne for only two years before the death of St. Thomas. He never met St. Thomas and by that time, he had not yet met +Xenophon. Vima Taktu was a patron of Senior Council during later years but never served it officially –his son King Wima Kadphises followed The Way from 80CE. Therefore, the king had no particular interest in Wayism and he did not know the leaders personally, and probably did not care to know anything about them at the time. We guess the answer to our question is that even if the Kushan king did in fact act against Misdeas on behalf of Wayist pleas to his court—it would be an impersonal and very light reprimand at most. It is possible that Misdeas learned of St. Thomas’ influence among the Kushan after the execution and acted cautiously just in case. By the year 78, the new Kushan king Kanishka would annex Khotan and Yarkand; and Misdeas and his kingdom ended, but Wayism continued to prosper there. Nevertheless, we cannot answer the question but it is still profitable to look into these questions because intelligent children in our communities will (we hope) eventually ask us to explain.*

What is the purpose of AofT, and who is its audience?

The book is not titled –Thomas Judas Didymos saint and apostle of The Way: - a biography, but rather more humbly, Acts of Thomas the Apostle. From the title the book appears to be an account of acts of St. Thomas.

One seeming sub-purpose, or dual purpose, of the book is to provide us insight to the early history of the church in India –early, from the author’s point of view. As a forty-five year old man, Xenophon probably looked back to his 18th year when he met the saint shortly after the Church started in India. He notes how the younger generation of devotees, hundreds or perhaps thousands of them, are not appreciative of the history of the movement. After all, three kings have been and gone, a war in between, and a new national ethic was in place. It is twenty-five years since the great earthquake and the new city is built, with modern things, and is expanding. The kingdom is overrun with foreigners from China and hordes of new languages and faces are all about. The great Gondophares and the dear Suren family are all forgotten and pushed aside to make place for modern things. Their dear friend, father, brother, and most excellent Teacher Thomas is almost an unknown entity as the congregations grow in his absence (he is ministering in the south). And the idea to write the Acts of Thomas comes to Xenophon’s mind and heart.

The book, Acts of Yesu our Lord and Saviour, recorded by Siphor, already circulated widely and was available in various languages. Many youngsters in the Church probably

thought that the Church had been around north India since the Lord passed through there. An Acts of Thomas would be a good compliment to that history to show how Wayism became a religion.

Another sub-purpose we postulate is that Xenophon and Siphor's respective places in the organisation needed to be justified, perhaps to the royal court or to the new initiates. Xenophon introduces himself in the third chapter, probably written during a time when Senior Council did not enjoy royal support - such a time could for instance be between the years 60 and 63 when St. Thomas was not in the country (he was with Misdeas) and a new king came to power. Later, Xenophon meets with Siphor and learns the detail of Thomas' passing and of the northern diocese. Xenophon and Siphor, being the only two +Teachers of the area are therefore brought into AofT, shown to be ordained and placed in positions of authority in the Church. We know about two other +Teachers in the south, outside of the influence of the Kushan, but they are not mentioned—probably because Siphor and Xenophon considered the purpose of AofT to be restricted to their context only because they did not have first hand information about the ministry in the other areas. Other areas could write their own Acts of Thomas, for their area.

Another aim of AofT is evident in the common theme of almost every chapter—being the most important purpose of the book. We think Xenophon created a new genre, or he learned from the Hindu culture, and writes his AofT as a Spiritual Novel based on a true story. And the theme, which weaves throughout, is the inner battle between good and bad—on one hand the inner battle between one's dharma and one's will (he starts off with Thomas' reluctance); and on the other hand the battle caused by passions gone wrong and the demons it creates and the suffering it brings. In bringing remedy to their afflicted society, sex and sensuality need to be liberated from the domain of vulgar men and made holy, beautiful, and sacred.

Conclusion

The main question postulated by the essay is, 'does AofT have a problem with sex, and does it interfere even in a marriage?' We believe the student armed with knowledge, enough to facilitate a correct reading of the book will discover that AofT speaks for itself in answer to the question. The discerning student will see that St. Thomas does not go about telling all married couples to stop having sex and neither does he tell unmarried people not to have sex. The list of people in AofT who were not told to stop having "this filthy intercourse" outnumber those characters who are part of the main theme, for example: Abban, the king and queen of Andrapolis, the flutist (semi-nude dancer) who joined the movement, King Gondophares and his wives, king Gad and his concubines, the multitude of families who received material help from Thomas (using Gondophares' money), and the hundreds of other characters the saint met throughout the story.

One should not consider the theme of AofT as the only acts of Thomas, or as a pattern of Thomas' work, or even as Thomas' main works. St. Thomas worked with many royal households throughout his life and he made great contributions to societies consisting of married couples, single women, young men, and children. No one would have tolerated a frenzied fanatic going about denouncing sex under all circumstances—he would not have

lasted forty years in India if he were like that at all. However, the one thing that really annoyed the man of God was indiscriminate sex for the sake of sex. Thomas (and The Magadhalene) was taught by the Lord that the senses are to be used to sense the presence of God in everything –and if we live like that then God is closer to us than our own hand, and we are never far from God-consciousness. Split a piece of wood and you will find God there, in smoke, water, the decomposing mud where the lotus is rooted –everywhere. How much more so shall we sense the presence of Tau in a kindred spirit, in touching another soul, in joining another in sensual ecstasy –together reaching beyond the abilities of mind into the Void and the Breast of our Mother where eternity begins and ends and time ceases in enveloped in love. Sex was no small matter for the saint, and it was a holy thing, an occasion where the Saviour and all that are at one with God will be present – a veritable sacrament.

There were at least eight forms of marriage in the mid-east and in the India of St. Thomas. Never did he or our Lord comment on any form of marriage, or one being better than another, or whether to be married or not. It is true that Christianity is following an errant route in this matter but Church of the East; drawing from St. Thomas, never had opinions in this regard. Christianity preaches celibacy for clergy and monogamy for all people –yet its Word of God preaches monogamy for clergy and accepts polygamy for all men (Timothy). St. Thomas worked among monogamous cultures but most were polygamous and polyamorous and a few were matriarchal polygamous and polyamorous societies – and never do we have a comment on the ethical validity of these relationships. However, the thing that got the saint off was infidelity and abuse. Whichever way one’s relationship is structured–be it casual, committed, heterosexual or homosexual or bisexual, monogamous, polyamorous, with male concubines or female concubines, that did not matter because morals rules are made by societies –the things that matter are the spiritual aspects of one’s deeper experiences and infidelity is a sin (sin=aiming to miss the mark) and leads to destructive things that hurt, and soul aches –and above all, infidelity is a bad character trait that works against healthy spirituality.

Acts of Thomas is not against sex; on the contrary, it is very much for sex -but it is vehemently against insensible sex.

END

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