By the first century AD., long before the fast moving ships and motors were in existence trade between long distances were still carried out using traditional means of transportations. Two different species of camel became the most important beasts of burden - the single-humped Arabian camel (found in north Africa, the Middle East, and India) and the double-humped Bactrian camel (found in central Asia, and Mongolia). Both are well adapted to desert conditions long distance travel since they stored large amounts of fat in their humps. They could go very far before being serviced. It is probable that they were first domesticated in Arabia. By about 1000 BC caravans of camels were bringing precious goods up the west coast of Arabia, linking India with Egypt, Phoenicia and Mesopotamia. Thus by the fifth century BC long stretches of commercial land routes were very well established.
The Silk Road (1 - 6)

One of them was the Silk Route, because the main trade item along this route was the much coveted Silk from China. The term “Silk Route” was coined by the nineteenth-century German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen. Despite the name, much more than silk was transported. This route ran from Xi'an in China to the Mediterranean port cities of Antioch and Tyre. An extensive network of roads connected India with various points on these trading routes. This ancient route stretched from Byzantium on the Mediterranean coast to the Chinese capital, Changan (modern Xian) - almost 5,000 miles long. The Silk Road was defined by a series of caravan stops across Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia to the oasis cities of Central Asia, including Merv, Bukhara and Samarkand. It was not a one line route and was intertwined with diverging and converging subpaths reuniting in the thousand-mile Gansu Corridor--wedged between the Gobi Desert and the Quilian Mountains--before coming to the Yellow River and separating again into many branches in China.
It extended by land trails even to Burma (Myanmar) and Southeast Asia. The western Silk Road passed through central Asia to the Indus Valley. Going directly to the seacoast along the Indus River or detouring through the city of Mathura, it connected with the Roman world by sea. These land routes were pestered with roving bandits which required the traders to travel with protection. The traders often came to agreement with local war lords for protection in exchange for goods. Very few traders traveled all the way through the journey. The trade involved several intermediate relay trades from one group to another till it reached the destination. Goods that moved great distances therefore changed hands as in a relay, many times, and often took over an year in transit.

It was a very a slow movement whereby the traders were well known in the townships and markets along the route, as they often stayed for several months in the relay stops. As a result the interaction was more than commercial. They also exchanged religious and social ideas and often made family relations and were involved in the physical and spiritual affairs of people en route. Thus the missionary religions used these routes traveling from city to city. The earliest religion that used the commercial routes for this purpose was Budhism. When Budhism became a missionary religion, the Itinerant monks and teachers traveled from India to promote the religion along these routes with the protection and company of traders. Gnostic Manichaen traveled along this route during his forty years of missionary activity. Seekers from other countries took the hazardous journey to India and Syria to seek instruction from a learned masters.
From the silk route foundation we have this map (31) showing the intricate network of trade routes from West to East.

The Spice Route (7)

While animal transport was the only means in the land, trading canoes and boats and ships were common in the sea. Sea routes were faster and cheaper while it required much detailed organizational planning. The major sea route of commercial importance was the Spice route that connected Africa and Rome to the Spice Capital of the world viz. Malabar coast and from there to the east to China and Japan. Adventurous sailors
often ventured long distances on simple canoes in small groups. Even today, fishermen travel in these simple boats from the Malabar Coast to the Arabian Coast.

(35) Banglapedia. Gives these various forms of boats extensively used from olden times for water transport within India. Romans used more sophisticated ships for commerce,
(36) Model of Shipping and Trading vessel of the Mediterranean 1-3 centuries BC

The Spice Routes
The combined network of sea and criss-crossing land routes provided ample opportunities for the missionaries of various religious groups to reach far and wide. Look at the following figure which gives the detailed routes done using computer networking published by Dr T. Matthew Ciolek of Australian National University.

Even at the Biblical time, King Solomon and King Hiram of Tyre, built a fleet at Elath and Eziongeber and travelled to Ophir for exotic treasures like gold, silver, sandalwood,
precious stones, ivory, apes and peacocks.. The location of this port of Ophir is still not established. But the German Indologist Professor Christian Lassen (42) thinks it is the port of Abhira in the province of Gujarat in India. Sir Emerson Tennent, and Max Muller agree with Christian Lassen. In the Septuagint. this word “Ophir” is rendered "Sophir," and "Sofir" is the Coptic name for India, (43)

Wikipedia internet Encyclopedia gives the following interesting events.

**House of Ptolemy**

“Posidonius (ca. 135 BC - 51 BC ), and later Strabo reports that a shipwrecked Indian sailor was discovered, half-dead, by coast guards on the Red Sea, and was brought to the Egyptian King Physkon in 118 BC. The sailor said he was the sole survivor of a ship and that he had sailed from India. The sailor promised to guide any of the King’s navigators on a voyage to India. So a Greek sailor, Eudoxus of Kyzicus (himself an envoy from Greece to Ptolemy VIII), was appointed to that mission. Poseidonius recounted two direct journeys to India. The first in 118 BC, guided by the Indian sailor, proved successful. From Berenice Harbor to Muziris below Calicut took 70 days. Eudoxus returned with a cargo of aromatics and precious stones.

The second, under the sole guidance of Eudoxus, occurred in 116 BC, just after the death of Ptolemy VIII and during the reign of Cleopatra III, his wife and queen.
Roman connection

Nomadic Arabs and ancient Phoenicians are said to be among the first to come to Kerala for spice trade. The Arabs as the middle men gained control of the trade by 600 B.C. They transported pepper, cinnamon, Cardomom, ginger, incense, perfumes and oils from the East through the Persian Gulf to Arabia. Southern Arabia became the great spice emporium of the ancient world even though it was only a middle point in the actual spice transport.

Since the port of Aden controlled the trade route, Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar in 26 BC commissioned his prefect in Egypt, Aelius Gallus, to capture the port of Aden in Arabia Felix, but this was not successful. The Romans were however able to open sea routes to India through the Red Sea bypassing war-torn areas and diminishing the role of Persians and Arabs. Greek writer, Nicolaus of Damascus records an Indian delegation from Pandion (Pandyan?) visiting Emperor Augustus in 13 BC at Antioch.

Pliny complained that the Indian luxury trade was depleting the Roman treasury to the extent of 50 million sesterces annually. The Roman Senate even contemplated banning the use of Indian cotton in the clothing, Toga that Roman citizens wore, because it was so expensive to import.

The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (9)(10) written in the 1st century AD, lists a series of ports along the Indian coast, including Muziris (Cranganore), Colchi (Korkai), Poduca, and Sopatma. Sometime in the early half of the first century Hippalus, determined the
patterns of the Indian monsoons which reduced the time of going from Arabia to Muziris to 40 days taking advantage of the monsoon winds.

Dr. Vincent: translates the relevant portion of Perplus as follows: “The whole navigation, such as it has been described from Adan in Arabia Felix and Kanè to the ports of India, was performed formerly in small vessels, by adhering to the shore and following the indention of the coast. Hippalus was the pilot who first discovered the direct course across the ocean, by observing the position of the ports and the general appearance of the sea. At the season when the annual winds peculiar to our climate settle in the north, and blow for a continuance upon our coast from the Mediterranean, in the Indian ocean the wind is constantly to the south west. This wind has in those seas obtained the name of Hippalus, from the pilot who first attempted the passage by means of it to the east.”

By 24 B.C. at least 120 ships set sail annually to Muziris – that is one ship every three days. Ships and fleets had become so large that they were "agitating the white foam," according to Strabo the geographe. The book also references the port of Kodungallur (anglicised to Cranganore, and also known as Muziris or Shinkli), in present day Kerala on India’s West coast. Pliny refers to this port as primum emporium Indiae. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea also mentions many inland trading centres in India, which were connected to the sea ports at Barugaza, Souppara, Kalliena, Semulla, Mandagora, Palaepatmai, Meliziegara and Buzantion and several other ports on the west coast. However, these sites are only vaguely known and only a few explorations were carried out for locating the ancient port sites.”
The names themselves are not indicative of the positions since they represent the foreign attempt to pronounce Dravidian names.

**Three major ports**

Three major ports can be identified (11)

“The first (sailing east) was Barbarike, in the Indus estuary. This was a Parthian port, the Parthians then controlling Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Exports included turquoise and lapis lazuli (Huntingford 1980:42). The lapis lazuli would have come from Badakshan in northern Afghanistan, while turquoise was likely from the region of modern Meshhed in Iran.

Next was Barugaza (modern Broach, Gujarat, India), at the mouth of the Narmada River. There the Romans bought onyx stones and murrhine ware. .....

The third port was Muziris (sometimes, but I think incorrectly identified with Craganore, Kerala) on the southwest coast of India. From there were exported transparent stones of all kinds (Huntingford translated "precious" stones, but the Greek is diafanhs, "translucent"), diamonds, sapphires and pearls (Huntingford 1908:52). These were products of the South Indian gem industry, hitherto little explored or understood.” (32)

Muziris is now identified with Pattanam (12)

In between Barugaza and Muziris was Sapora – the modern day Bombay Port. (13) “The *Periplus* of the Erythraean Sea mentions many Early Historic sites in Western India as inland trading centres, which were connected to the sea ports
Land and Sea-routes of the Early Christian Missionaries to India - M.M.Ninan

at Barugaza, Souppara, Kalliena, Semulla, Mandagora, Palaepatmai, Meliziegara and Buzantion and several other ports on the west coast. However, these sites are only vaguely known” (14)

The Peutinger Table one of the early Roman maps give the following sections of the map (15)

Ganges River (Upper Right); Muziris (Lower Right); Scythia (Lower Left); Taprobane (Sri Lanka) Island at Bottom   Map produced around AD 300 by Ptolemy.
Damirice (Damirike) found on top stands for Dravid or Tamil. The Dravidian area extended beyond Ganges in those times (41). Near Muziris is the “Temple Augusti” (Temple of the Great God?)

We can see that the map is only meant for guidance and is not in any way in scale. But it is the view of the Roman sailors as they visualized their journey.

Arikamedu (the archaeological name) and Virampattinum (the modern village and nearly the ancient name) were known as Poduca. (16) in modern Pondichery (17).

In this figure we have Carura regia (Karur, the capital) Upper right and Muziris emporium (modern on the) Lower left
In this figure we have: Punnata which is famed for beryl and Carura regia Cerothothri which is Karur, capital of the Chera Kingdom.

In The Project Gutenberg EBook of Robert Kerr's “General History and Collection of Voyages and Travels”, Volume 18, by William Stevenson (18) we have a detailed description of cities of Indian continents known to the ancient world.

“Before describing Baragaza, however, the author of the Periplus mentions two places on the Indus, which were frequented for the purposes of commerce: the first near the mouth of the river, called Barbarike; and the other higher up, called Minagara: the latter was the capital of a kingdom which extended as far as Barogaza. ..... the imports were brass, sandal-wood; timber, of what kind is not specified; horn, ebony; this is the first port the trade of which included ebony and sandal-wood: frankincense was imported from Kane. The exports to Arabia and Baragaza were purple cloth for the natives; wine, a large quantity of dates, gold, slaves, and pearls of an inferior quality.
The first place in India to which the merchants of Egypt, while they followed the ancient course of navigation by coasting, were accustomed to trade, was Patala on the Indus; ..... The goods imported into Patala were woollen cloth of a slight fabric, linen, woven in chequer work, some precious stones, and some kind of aromatics unknown in India, probably the produce of Africa or Arabia; coral, storax, glass vessels of various descriptions, some plate, money, and wine. From Patala, the Egyptian merchants brought spices, gems of different kinds, particularly sapphires, silk stuffs, silk thread, cotton cloths, and pepper. As Patala is not mentioned in the Periplus, it is probable it was abandoned for Baragaza, a far more considerable mart on the same coast, and most probably Baroche on the Nerbuddah. ....The whole arrangement of this place was correspondent to this extensive commerce, for the author informs us, that such was the despatch in transacting business, that a cargo could be entirely landed and sold, and a new cargo obtained and put on board in the space of three days.

From Baragaza the author proceeds to a description of the coast of the Decan, which, as we have already mentioned, is remarkable for its accuracy, as well as for its first mentioning the appellation Decan. At the distance of twenty days' journey to the south lies Plithana, and ten days' journey to the east of this is Tagara, both marts of great consequence, and the latter the capital of the country. From these are brought down, through difficult roads, several articles to Baragaza, particularly onyx stones from Plithana, and cottons and muslin from Tagara ....

The province of Canara, -called by the author of the Periplus - Limurike, follows in his description the pirate coast; after Limurike, he describes Pandion, corresponding with
what is at present called Malabar Proper; this is succeeded by Paralia and Comari, and
the description of the west coast of India is terminated by the pearl fishery and Ceylon.
There were several small ports in Limurike frequented by the country ships; but the only
mart frequented by vessels from Egypt was Muziris. It was likewise a great resort of
native vessels from Ariake or Concan. The articles imported were nearly the same as
those at Baragaza, but the exports from it were more numerous and valuable: this
seems to have arisen from its lying nearer to the eastern and richer parts of India. The
principal exports were, pearls in great abundance and extraordinary beauty; a variety of
silk stuffs; rich perfumes; tortoise-shell; different kinds of transparent gems, especially
diamonds; and pepper in large quantities, and of the best quality.

The ports to the south of Nelkundah are described in a cursory manner in the Periplus;
they were frequented principally by the country ships, which carried on a lucrative trade
between them and the ports in the north of India. ..... island of Trapobane, or Ceylon,
..... the eastern ports in the Bay of Bengal, .....to the Ganges and the Golden
Chersonese, ..... 

..... the account of the countries beyond Cape Comorin being entirely drawn from
report, .....: the Gangetic muslins are praised as the finest manufacture of the sort, and
Gangetic spikenard is also noticed; the other articles of traffic in the ports on the
Ganges were betel and pearls. Thina is also mentioned as a city, in the interior of a
country immediately under the north, at a certain point where the sea terminates “
Early Buddhist missions used the silk route extensively and the message went as far as China. (33) Wikipedia gives a series of maps showing these Buddhist expansion routes:

Buddhist proselytism at the time of king Ashoka (260–218 BC).
Though it does not indicate the exact routes, it is evident that missionaries from India did undertake extensive long distance tours even as early as third century BC.

The International Area Studies of Berkeley University (19) gives a series of ancient maps through the centuries bringing to the forefront the importance of trade routes and highways crisscrossing throughout Asia, especially in India and China.

Herodotus, the Greek historian, traveled throughout the Mediterranean world. This map shows his knowledge of Indian people, the Indus River, and the Indian Ocean which was called the Erythraean Sea. It dates to approximately 450 B.C. Herodotus had traveled extensively throughout the Mediterranean and collected information about Asia.

Strabo’s extraordinary writings in the seventeen-volume encyclopedia Geography (18 A.D.) contained all the known information about the human, animal and physical world.
I have dwelt extensively on the possible routes and cities of the ancient world that led to the Indian continent and have shown that even the interior areas of India was well known to the foreigners as exotic materials were traded in markets which were not
available elsewhere in the world. With this we can take up the matter of the missionary journeys of St. Thomas the Apostle of Jesus.

Our resources are essentially contained in the second century writing attributed to Bardesanes the Syrian poet called “Acts of Thomas”. It is not written as a history but as a story with traditional exaggerations and with poetic imaginations complete with talking serpents.

In almost complete support to the book there is a time honored tradition in Malabar which is handed down to us from generation to generation in the form of the songs of the Nazranis as Margom Kali. The other tradition comes from Veeradian pattu which is performed by a Hindu Caste on Christian festivals and is their heritage.

Another written document is the Thomma Parvam written by Thomas Ramban in 1601 for use in the Niranam church. This Thomas Ramban is a descendant of one of the first Brahmin convert to Christianity christened as Ramban Thomas during St. Thomas' visit. The story is handed down through generations until it was written down in 1601.

According to the Acts of Thomas story, Thomas was sold to Habban, the merchant ambassador of the Kingdom of Taxila of the King Gondaphores. According to the story they took the sea route to India and landed in a port called Sandruk Mahosa. Here Habban was received by the local King. They attended the wedding of the King’s daughter. We cannot really identify the port Sandruk Mahosa in any ancient maps. We cannot even confirm that it was in India. St. Francis Xavier, who landed at Socotra on his way to India about AD 1545, declared that the natives of these islands render
special honours to the apostle St. Thomas, claiming they to be the descendents of Christians begotten to Jesus Christ through that Apostle in these countries. We may guess that this must have been Sandruk Mahosa of Bardesan. From there he must have proceeded to Malabar Coast.

There after they continued their journey in India. They reached the Kingdom of Gundaphorus

According to the Malabar Traditions, Apostle Thomas landed in Cranganoor (Kodungallur, Muziris) and took part in the wedding of Chera King and proceeded to the courts of Gondophorus in North India. If this is to be in concordance with the Acts of Thomas story Sandruk Mahosa must have been in Malabar the city of Cheras.
The King Gondophorus

This King was a mystery figure until recently. No one knew of a King by that name or a Kingdom corresponding to the description given in the tradition. However excavations in both east and west of Indus has unearthed coins and inscriptions which made it clear that Gundaphorus was indeed a historical figure and that he belonged to the Parthian Dynasty from Takshasila (Taxila). On the obverse of the coin is the figure of King Gondophorus with his name inscribed clearly. On the reverse is the figure of Shiva with his trident and with the clear inscription in Greek “Maharaja- rajaraja-samahata- dramia-devavrata- Gundaphorasa.”
The date of his reign is clearly marked in the Takth-i-Bahi stones kept in Lahore museum which is 17 inches long and 14 1/2 inches wide and states: "In the twenty-sixth year of the great King Gudaphoara, in the year three and one hundred, in the month of Vaishakh, on the fifth day" This places his ascension to the Kingdom as AD 19 and the year 103 corresponds to AD 46. Further evidence indicates that this King had a brother named Gad.

This kingdom was over run by several invasions and the churches established in the Northern India vanished with the Parthian Empire without a trace. The Christian community seems to have gone underground with a strong vow of silence in the face of massacre and severe persecutions. Even today there is an underground Christian Sanyasi group who surfaces whenever there is a need to help the missions. Sadhu Sunder Singh reports that he had been taken care of by these secret sects on one of his Himalayan journeys.
After ordaining one Xantippus (Xenophon) as deacon to the churches in North India St. Thomas traveled throughout India and converted many to Christianity. Among them are the names of: King of Mazdai, a noble lady by name Mygdonia, Tertia the queen of Mazdai and many others. He was martyred in the mountains of Mylapore.
Missionary Activities of Thomas

According to Thomma Parvom the visit of St. Thomas in Kerala lasted only a few days in the first instant. During this period and that too was among the Jewish settlers. Thoma Parvom takes up the mission only after this second visit and does not deal with the period between Thomas’ leaving Taxila and reaching Malabar Coast.
These traditions suggest two possible entry points to Thomas. If Sandruk Mahesa was not indeed in Chera Kingdom, it must have been one of the islands off the Indian coast, and Thomas must have landed in Barbarike and proceeded to Gundaphores. When the Kingdom was over ran by the Kushans he must have taken the ship and probably stopped over at Barygoza and Sapore. These areas had Christian presence as supported by the Pantaneus. Then he landed in Kodungallur. However the Thoma Parvom declares unequivocally that Thomas proceeded to Taxila from Malabar. Hence the possibility is that Thomans took the 40 day travel from Aden and landed in Kodungallur first. He stays for a few days there, attended the wedding of the Cheraman’s Daughter and proceeded to Taxila. After his mission in the North India he made a second visit to Kerala when he established the traditional seven and a half churches.

The BBC has an article on the theory that the town of Pattanam in Kerala could be the location of the ancient port of Muziris.

Savism and Vaishanavism grew out of Christianity as a Gnostic syncretic movement which assimilated and replaced Buddhism, Jainism and Vedism to a great extent. Therefore if we look at the positions of the twelve Jyotir Lingas and their distribution we could trace exactly the major part of the ministry of St.Thomas and of the early Christian Missions of the time.

There is a Sanskrit shloka that lists the twelve jyotirlinga temples. (21)
It is not very difficult to see that the places of Jyotirlinga centers dense around the Indo Parthian Empire around which Thomas stayed according to Ramban Pattu for around 10 years. The density is inversely proportional to the distance from Taxila. This must have been around AD 52 to 62. I cannot place the dates exactly since our understanding of the date of Gondaphores cannot be placed exactly. Thomas must have returned to Malabar cost around AD 62. From AD 62 to 72 Thoma Parvom describes Thomas’ ministry centered around Mylapore where his Head quarters probably was the Kapaleswara Siva Temple. He made constant journey between these two areas. Kapaleswara translates into Calvary the place of Skull.

“There is also reason to believe that St. Thomas Church stands on the ruins of a Jain Neminathaswami temple and a Hindu Shiva temple which had a Nataraja shrine
attached. The epigraphical data for the existence of the Jain temple on this site is recorded in Jain Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu by A. Ekambaranath and C.K. Sivaprakasham (Research Foundation for Jainology, Madras, 1987). The evidence for the existence of the Shiva temple, which may be the original Kapaleeswara Temple on the Mylapore beach that got eroded by the sea, is compiled in an excellent Tamil-language book called *Indiavil Saint Thomas Kattukkadai (The Saint Thomas Myth in India)* by Ved Prakash (R.A.F.R., Madras, 1989) “ (23, 24)

There is therefore no doubt that St.Thomas was indeed associated with the Kapaleeswara Siva Temple.

During the period Thomas went as far as China. (25) A.C. Moule in his book: *Christians in China before 1550*, mentions a tradition that St. Thomas visited China. Both the Latin writers in the medieval period Francis Xavier, de Cruz and de Gouveia, de Burros and Syrian writer Ebed Jesus mentions this tradition also. This follows the Spice Route to the mouth of Ganges and then overland to China.
There is also a tradition that during this period Thomas actually went back to Ephesus to be at the death bed of Mary, the mother of Jesus who was with John. From China to Ephesus, Thomas might have traveled along the Silk route.

On returning from China his ministry was around Mylapore in the Dravidian area until his death in c. AD 72.

**Internal Travel Modes within India**

It is interesting to note that we take long distance travel as a matter of fact because we are familiar with the modern day transportation system which are fast and easy. However in the first century AD the modes of transportation on land were limited to animals. While Camels were the standard mode of transport for desert areas, within the rugged interiors people relied on bullocks, horses and elephants. Though chariots were
used within the cities by the kings, bullock carts must have been the standard form. Palaquins were also used.

(38) A traditional bullock cart and flat bottomed ferry boat are still used for local transport along the Indus River near the ancient site of Mohenjodaro, Sindh, in Pakistan.
Internal Travel Routes within India

Mohen Jodero Harappa civilization had elaborate road systems. The University of Pennsylvania Department of History Studies (28) shows the development of the road system of India.

These routes were ancient that goes back to centuries before the Christian Era. These are probably the routes taken by the Aryans until they reached Sri Lanka by the 7c BC.
Their next figure gives the Pre-Mauryan Indian routes according to the Buddhist sources. Maurya’s ruled most of India except the southern tip around the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BC.

This is the Mauryan Network according to the Greek sources and archaeological studies.
These are the trade routes at the time St. Thomas entered India according to literary sources and must be taken as the most probable route of Thomas in his ministry.

(22) One of the main areas of his work was in PumPuhur city (Kaveripumpattinam or Kaveripattinam), where a great Christian community was in existence till the third century. This community was famed for their honesty similar to the MahaBali community in Malabar Area. Poompuhar is a town in Thanjavur district in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It was once a flourishing ancient port city known as Kaveripattinam, which for a while served as the capital of the Chola kings. A Purananuru poem says that big ships entered the post of Puhar without slacking sail, and poured out on the beach, precious merchandise brought from overseas. In the extensive markets of Puhar there were many tall mansions surrounded by platforms reached by high ladders. These mansions had many apartments and were provided with doorways, great and small, and with wide hallways and corridors. Epics of Silappathikaram and Manimekalai, and later Tamil literatures refer to this city. Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (Periplus Maris Erythraei) contain the references to Kaveripoompattinam. Ptolemy and Pliny also mention Poompuhar in their writings.

Pattinappalai also gives an idealised description of the merchants plying their trade in Puhar (16) “They shunned murder, and put aside theft, pleased the gods by fire offerings,…they regarded others rights as scrupulously as their own, they took nothing more than was due to them and never gave less that was due from them. Trading thus in many articles of merchandise, they enjoyed an ancient heritage of prosperity and lived in close proximity to one another. “ Later during the third century persecution on
Christians led some 72 families from Kavery pupattanam to leave the city in a ship and took refuge in the safe haven for Christians of the Period viz. Kollam.

Other Missions through Spice Route

In the later years Christian Missions such as Bardesanes, Panteneus, Antiochian Missions etc took more or less the same route from the west to the Indian Coast. However while the Malabar Coast was in constant contact with the historical Catholic churches in the Middle East and West, the Inner Indian Churches were taken over by the Gnostic influx both along the sea and the land.

(26) Pantaneus visited India about AD 180 and there he found a Gospel of Matthew written in Hebrew language, left with the Christians there by St. Bartholomew. This is mentioned by Eusebius, and by Jerome in one of his letters. Pantaneus is reported to be the first Principal of the Catechetical School in Alexandria and was the teacher of Clement. He was sent to India in order to counter the rising Gnostic heresies of the time. His visit is significant because it establishes the fact that there were Christian Communes in various parts of India and they were in conflict with the Persian Gnostics. It also indicates that the Alexandrian Church was in contact with the Indian Churches. His appearance in Kalyan near Bombay and the presence of a Christian Community which claims descend from Bartholomew again is noteworthy in that it indicates constant missionary contact of the World Churches with Indian Churches. They must have taken the obvious spice route.
(27) Later Knai Thoma, a rich international merchant from Cana of Syria in Persia, brought a colony of 400 Syrian Christians consisting of 72 families belonging to 7 clans. One tradition says that they came with instructions from the Patriarch of Antioch, Mor Yusthedius, to the Malabar coast of India. Another tradition says that these migrants left Persia because of the onset of persecution on Christians and Gnostics. Mor Joseph and Knai Thoma landed in Kodungalloor (Cranganoore) in 345 AD. The group included men, women, children, priests, deacons and their bishop Mor Joseph of Urfa (Uraha/Edessa). The names of the seven clans were: Bagi, Belkuth, Hadai, Kujalig, Koja, Mugmuth, and Thegmuth. This must have been the beginning of Persian influence in Malabar Christianity. But not all who came with Knai Thoma were Christians. Some of them were Gnostics. There are documents which refer to some of the immigrants as Manigramakar. (Mani also means pearl and it is possible that these were pearl traders also. Since this exodus was soon after the execution of Mani in Persia it most likely refer to the Manichaen group) A second Syrian immigration took place around 823 AD. Mar Sapor and Mar Prot are the two saints who led this immigration. Thus we can see that the major impact of missionary travel were through the spice route, which was in existence since the beginning of the Christian era.

In fact all Christian Missions came into India through the sea - Through the Spice Route, rather than the land based Silk Route, simply because it was faster, easier and safer. Even the Colonial powers and later Christian Missions that followed the colonization followed the same route.
Gnostic Christians followed closely the Apostolic path all over the world. The Prince of Gnostic Christianity was Manichaen, who developed the syncretic religion including Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity. He initiated several missionary journeys throughout the Euro Asian continent. One of Mani’s first mission was to the Kushan Empire in northwestern India. Several religious painting in Bamiyan are attributed to him. He is believed to have lived and taught in India for a long time travelling far and wide reaching as far as Kerala. He is said to have confronted Bardesan in the Ayroor and Ranni area. He is said to have sailed to the Indus valley area of India around AD 240 and converted a Buddhist King, the Turan Shah of India. Later he sent his father and a disciple named Thomas to India to continue his mission. Mani’s ministry extended to over forty years.

9) The spread of Manichaeism (300–AD 500).

By 300 A.D, a village in Tamil Nadu was known as Mani-grama, or Mani’s Town. Mani’s Head Quarters was Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu where later myth made him to be the younger brother of Ganesa (Ganesha is a representation of Word became Flesh – incarnate God) and came to be worshipped as Bala Subra Manyam (Young Emanation Pearl (Mani)) with Peacock as his vehicle. I have mentioned Mani’s mission because that was the major reason for the early Christian Churches of India to become Gnostics which eventually emerged as the Hinduism of today. A direct similar event is currently taking place in America where Gnostics are calling themselves as New Age Movement which is the major heretic movement within the Christian Churches there.
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