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THE INDIAN VERSES OF ST. EPHREM THE SYRIAN

In reading the early traditions of St. Thomas in India and the translation of his relics to Edessa, it is natural to hope for early written evidence, and in this we are not disappointed. St. Ephrem, the great theologian of the Syrian Church, came to Edessa in 373 when his city of Nisibis surrendered to the Persians, and lived there until his repose in 383. The apostle's relics had arrived in Edessa at an earlier date, and in his forty-second Nisibene Hymn, St. Ephrem celebrates the victory of the apostle's martyrdom, the translation of St. Thomas' relics by a merchant of Edessa, and the subsequent outpouring of grace on the city.

Nisibene Hymn 42

1. The Evil One wailed, "Where now is there a place for me to flee from the righteous? I stirred up Death to slay the Apostles, that I might be safe from their blows. By their deaths now more exceedingly am I cruelly beaten. The Apostle whom I slew in India is before me in Edessa: he is here wholly, and also there. I went there, there was he: here and there I have found him and been grieved."

Refrain: Blessed is the might that dwells in the hallowed bones!

2. "The bones that the merchantman carried, or was it they that carried him? For lo! they made gain each of the other. But for me, what did they profit me? Yea, they profited each by each, while to me from both of them there was damage. O that one would show me that bag of Iscariot, for by it I acquired strength! The bag of Thomas has slain me, for the secret strength that dwells in it tortures me."
3. "Moses the Chosen carried the bones, in faith as for gain. And if he, a great prophet, believed that there is benefit in bones, the merchant did well to believe, and did well to call himself merchant. That merchant made gain, and waxed great and reigned. His storehouse has made me very poor: his storehouse has been opened in Edessa, and has enriched the great city with benefit."
4. "At this storehouse of treasure I was amazed, for small was its treasure at first; and though no man took from it, poor was the spring of its wealth. But when multitudes have come round it, and plundered it and carried off its riches, according as it is plundered, so much the more does its wealth increase. For a pent-up spring, if one seeks it out, when deeply pierced flows forth mightily and abounds." ✦