

MUZIRIS

global hub of culture

INDIAN OCEAN TRADE

Kerala has occupied a distinctive place in the history of global economic and cultural exchange for more than two millennia. Its strategic position along the Malabar Coast connected the Indian subcontinent with the wider Indian Ocean world, linking South and Southeast Asia with the Arabian Peninsula, Africa and the Mediterranean. with distant regions.

From antiquity, commodities such as spices, medicines, precious stones, ornaments, metals, timber and other valuable goods moved through these networks. Among them, pepper and other spices were particularly important, contributing to Kerala's enduring identity as the "Land of Spices." The demand for Malabar spices attracted merchants and seafarers from different parts of the ancient world. Arab and other West Asian maritime networks connected the Malabar Coast with the Persian Gulf and beyond, while interactions with the Mediterranean world brought Kerala into a much wider system of long-distance exchange.

Over successive centuries, these maritime connections created a cosmopolitan environment in which goods, people, technologies, ideas and cultural traditions travelled across the Indian Ocean. Chinese, Arab and European trading networks became important components of this changing maritime landscape, while the arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch and British introduced new political and commercial phases that transformed established patterns of trade but preserved the importance of Kerala's ports and waterways.

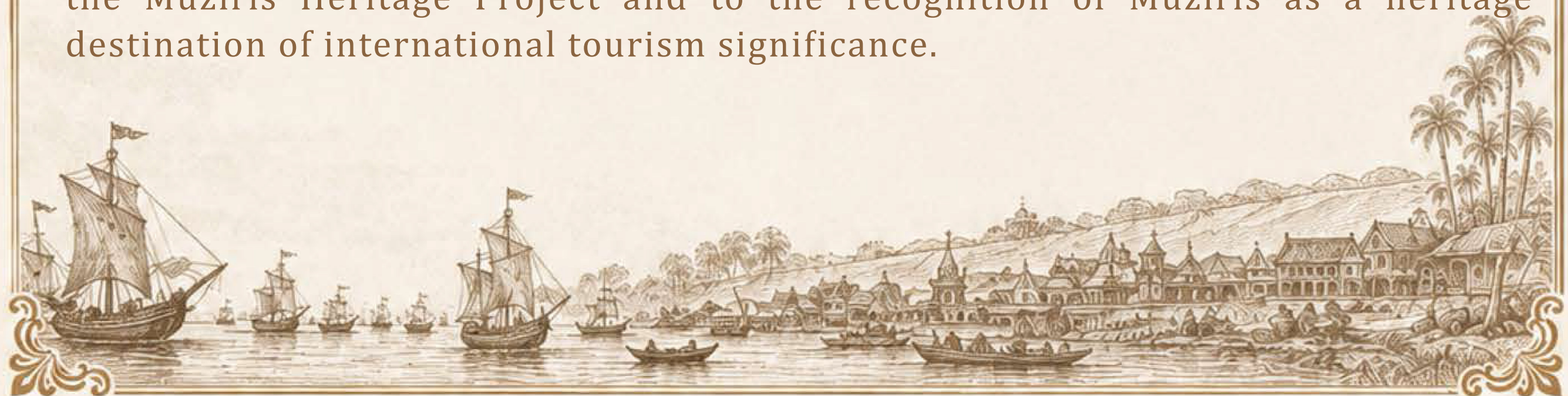


MUZIRIS; ANCIENT TRADE TOWN

Ancient Kerala, renowned as the spice coast of India, formed an important part of the maritime trade networks connecting South and Southeast Asia with Africa, the Arabian regions and Europe. At the heart of this ancient trading landscape was Muziris, remembered in classical and regional sources as a major port and emporium on the Malabar Coast. Generally associated with an ancient port complex that flourished from at least the Early Historic period, Muziris linked inland production centres with transoceanic trade networks and facilitated the movement of commodities to distant maritime markets. Its importance lay particularly in the long-distance spice trade, through which pepper and other products from the Malabar region were exchanged across the Indian Ocean. Muziris was therefore not an isolated commercial centre but part of a vast network in which merchants, ships, goods and cultural influences travelled over considerable distances.

Classical literary sources and foreign accounts refer to Muziris as a major inland port town from which goods were transported to distant parts of the world. In Indian sources, it appears under names such as Muciri, Mugarikkodu and Muchiripattanam, while foreign sources refer to it as Muziris. The Muziris is also mentioned in the Geography of Ptolemy, the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, Muziris Papyrus, and the writings of Pliny the Elder, which describe maritime connections between the Red Sea and the Malabar Coast and highlight the importance of seasonal monsoon winds. Early Tamil literature provides further references: Akananuru mentions Yavana vessels arriving on the Periyar, while Purananuru describes Muciri and its surrounding waterways. Other Tamil traditions refer to Roman ships arriving with gold and departing with pepper, pointing to sustained commercial interaction between the Malabar Coast and the western world.

Archaeological research has added an important material dimension to these textual references. Excavations and explorations in the Muziris region have revealed evidence of ancient settlement, craft production, maritime activity and long-distance exchange, transforming the area from a historically remembered port into a landscape that can be studied through material evidence. The archaeological record from Pattanam and Kottappuram is particularly significant because it demonstrates that the Muziris region formed part of a complex and internationally connected cultural landscape. This evidence has been central to the development of the Muziris Heritage Project and to the recognition of Muziris as a heritage destination of international tourism significance.



MUZIRIS HERITAGE PROJECT

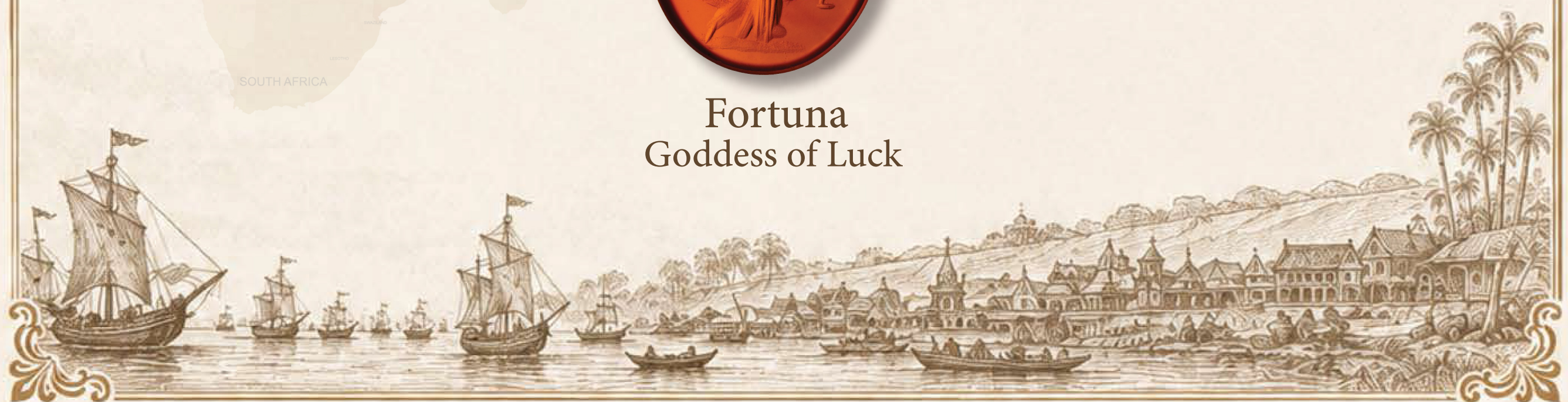
The Muziris Heritage Project is an initiative of the Government of Kerala, India, established to conserve, document, interpret and promote the historical and cultural heritage associated with the ancient Muziris region. Launched in 2009, the project brings together archaeology, conservation, museums, research, heritage interpretation and tourism within a broader cultural landscape approach. It extends across parts of Ernakulam and Thrissur districts and encompasses a network of historically significant sites, monuments, archaeological locations, waterways and living cultural traditions. Rather than presenting Muziris as a single archaeological monument, the project interprets the region as a connected heritage landscape shaped by centuries of interaction between people, places, waterways, trade and culture.

Conservation and research are important components of the project. Historical monuments and archaeological sites are documented and conserved, while museums and visitor facilities help communicate the region's heritage to a wider public. The discovery and interpretation of archaeological evidence, particularly from excavations at Pattanam and Kottappuram, provided a major impetus for the project's development. These discoveries have helped establish a stronger material basis for understanding the ancient port and its connections with the wider Indian Ocean world. The project also seeks to strengthen heritage tourism by creating opportunities for visitors to experience the archaeological, architectural, maritime and cultural dimensions of the Muziris landscape.

Today, Muziris offers an opportunity to experience heritage not merely as the remains of the past, but as a continuing cultural landscape. Its significance extends from archaeology and history to tourism, museums, education, research, creative industries and community-based heritage experiences. For international visitors and tourism professionals, Muziris represents an important example of how archaeological research can be connected with conservation, interpretation and sustainable cultural tourism.



Fortuna
Goddess of Luck



THE RESEARCH AT PATTANAM

Excavations carried out at Pattanam since 2007 by the Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR) have revealed the global significance of what is now an otherwise ordinary village in Ernakulam district. Located approximately 4 km east of the Arabian Sea coast and about 25 km from Kochi, Pattanam is an archaeological mound preserving evidence of a long history extending back approximately 3,000 years, from around 1000 BCE. Most excavated objects belong to the Early Historic period, broadly from the 3rd century BCE to the 5th century CE. The nature and distribution of the finds suggest that Pattanam was probably one of the major centres associated with the ancient port of Muziris, or Muciri Pattinam, referred to in classical Tamil, Greek and Latin sources. The excavations have provided important evidence for understanding the settlement history, craft production, maritime connections and international interactions of the Muziris region.

The archaeological evidence from Pattanam demonstrates the participation of the Indian subcontinent in extensive Indian Ocean networks. Architectural remains and associated finds including well-made fired bricks, toilet features, roofing tiles, ring wells and the spatial organisation of structures indicate an organised settlement and urban forms of life approximately 2,000 years ago. The industrial character of Pattanam is further demonstrated by evidence of specialised technologies and craft activities, including metallurgy, lapidary industries involving the cutting, polishing and engraving of gems and other stones, and terracotta production. These discoveries point to a community engaged not only in trade but also in production and technological activity.

Continuing research at Pattanam is therefore significant not only for reconstructing the history of Muziris but also for understanding the role of the Indian subcontinent in ancient global trade. The site provides visitors with an opportunity to encounter the material evidence behind the historical memory of Muziris and to understand how archaeology can illuminate connections between distant regions of the ancient world.



0 10 mm

Intaglio Leaping Lion



0 10 cm

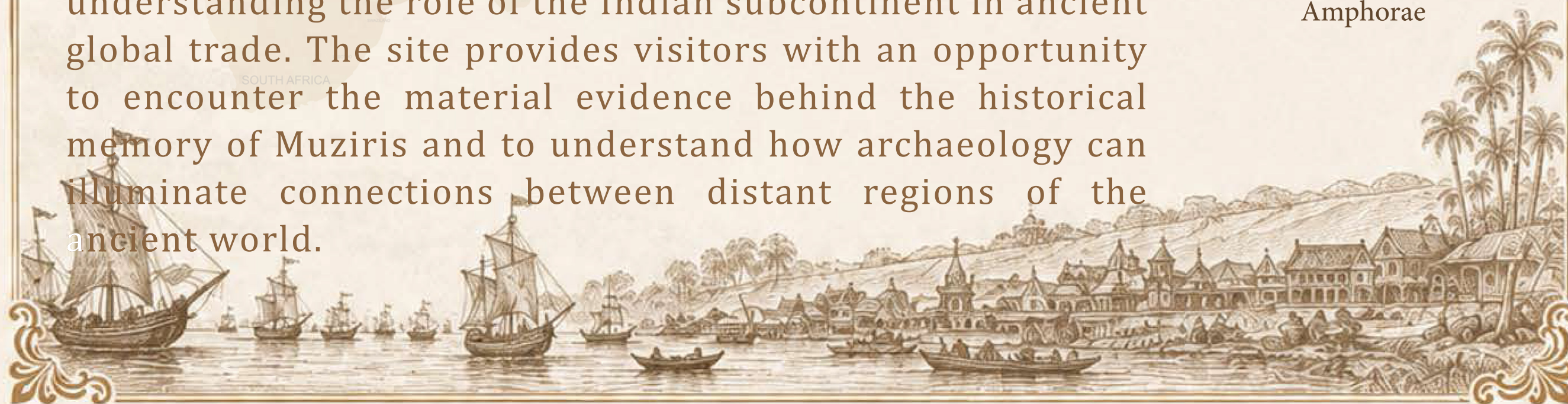
Corer tiles with Lion face



Copper Ring



Amphorae



RESEARCH AT KOTTAPPURAM FORT

Kottappuram Fort, historically known as Cranganoor Fort, is located south of Kodungallur in Thrissur District, Kerala. Its strategic position, close to the Arabian Sea and connected to an extensive network of inland waterways, made it an important centre for communication, trade, surveillance and defence. These waterways provided access to the Arabian Sea in the west, Aluva and Angamaly in the east, Chettuva and Ponnani in the north, and Kochi in the south, demonstrating the importance of water-based connections between the coastal region and its inland hinterland.

Kottappuram is a protected monument, declared as such by the Travancore Archaeology Department in 1909. Historical records indicate that the Portuguese constructed the fort in 1523 CE. It was captured and modified by the Dutch in 1663 and later acquired by the Travancore Kingdom with the permission of the British East India Company. In 1789, the fort was attacked and largely demolished by the forces of Tipu Sultan.

Archaeological research at Kottappuram has expanded our understanding of the site beyond its surviving fortifications. Excavations conducted by the Department of Archaeology have revealed evidence of earlier cultural activity and suggest that the region was connected to extensive long-distance trade networks. Material remains indicate commercial and cultural interactions involving China, the Arab world, Europe and regions of the Gangetic basin, placing Kottappuram within wider maritime and inland exchange networks of the Indian Ocean. Kottappuram Fort therefore provides an important historical and archaeological perspective on trade, maritime connectivity, cultural interaction, political transformation and the continuity of the Muziris cultural landscape from the ancient period through the colonial era.



Unearthed Skeleton
Period : 1560



THE ERA OF
AWAKENING

THIS PERIOD MARKED THE RISE OF THE SPICE ROUTES, AS EXPEDITIONS AND EMPIRES OPENED PATHWAYS FOR EXCHANGE. FROM HIPPALUS' DISCOVERY OF THE SEA ROUTE TO INDIA TO ST. THOMAS' ARRIVAL IN MUZIRIS, THESE JOURNEYS SET IN MOTION THE BEGINNINGS OF A GLOBAL NETWORK.



323 BC

Seleucid Empire, carved out of the remains of the Alexandrian Empire, controls a network of trade with India which had previously existed under the influence of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty.

247 BC

Parthian Empire (247 BC - 224 AD) located on the trade route between the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean Basin and Han Empire of China becomes an important place in the circulation of spices.

114 BC

Spices from the Malabar Coast taken to Antioch, Alexandria and other places through the Silk Route.



52 AD

St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, arrives in Muziris from Jerusalem. The St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Church at Palayur, in Thrissur district is believed to have established by him.



60 AD

Peripplus of Erythraean Sea, a manuscript documenting the navigation and tradition opportunities from Roman-Egyptian ports, mentions Muziris, Naura (present day Kannur), Tyndis (Ponnani) and Nelcinda (Kollam).



1512 BC

Pharaoic Age - Spices from the East used in the burial chambers of Egypt. Material evidence for this found in the wall of relief of the Dayr Al Bahri funerary monument of the Pharaonic, Queen Hatshepsut (1512 BC-1482 BC)

700 BC

The Incense Route serves as a channel for trade in commodities like Arabian frankincense, myrrh, Indian spices etc.

305 BC

The Greek Ptolemaic dynasty explores trading opportunities with India. According to the historian Strabo, the volume of commerce was low compared to later Indian-Roman trade. Port of Alexandria becomes the major staging point for the Spice trade (northern Silk route)



206 BC

Ian Dynasty (206 BC - 9 AD) links the East and West trade routes. The route that they used subsequently turns

100 BC

Hippalus, Greek navigator discovers a direct route from the Red Sea to India.

27 BC

The reign of Augustus (27 BC - 15 AD) sees the emergence of frequent and direct trade between Rome and India. Roman historian Pliny describes the trade with India as a considerable drain on the income of Rome.

79 AD

Pliny the Elder in his 37-volume magnum opus, Naturalis Historia refers to the port of Muziris as the first emporium of India, where "cargoes are brought in and carried out by light boats."

100 AD

The Aksumite empire (100 AD - 940 AD) plays an important role in trade and commerce between India and the Roman Empire. The Kingdom of Axum, home of the legendary Queen of Sheba pioneered the Red Sea Route.



THE ERA OF
EXPLORATION

THIS ERA, MARKED BY THE EMERGENCE OF ARABS AND ETHIOPIANS IN SPICE TRADING WAS ALSO SIGNIFICANT DUE TO THE VISITS OF MARCO POLO, IBN BATUTA AND ZHENG HE, WHO INTRODUCED THE CHINESE FISHING NETS TO VISITING KERALA.

200
AD

Muziris Papyrus agreement is signed. It documented a contract involving an Alexandrian merchant importer and a financier regarding cargoes, especially of pepper and spices from Muziris, near present-day Kodungallur in Kerala.



476
AD

Spice trade between the Western Roman Empire and Malabar takes a dip as Emperor Romulus Augustus of the Western Roman Empire gets deposed by Odoacer.

849
AD

Iharsapalli plates, a copper-plate grant issued by the King of Quilon to the Christians in Malabar. The inscription describes the gift of land to the Teresa Church near Quilon to the Christians led by Mar Sappir Iso.

1292
AD



Italian traveler, Marco Polo who was in Chinese service under Kublai Khan visits Kollam and Malabar Coast, as a Chinese Mandarin.

224
AD

Sasanian empire (224 AD - 651 AD), the last Iranian empire before the rise of Islam, established trade relations with India for the transit of spices, which Sasanian customs imposed taxes upon, and were re-exported from the Empire to Europe.

700
AD

Spice trade through the Red Sea suffers a great setback. The rise of Islam closes off the overland caravan routes through Egypt and the Suez, and sunders the European trade community from Axum and India

1250
AD

Egypt flourishes as a centre of Islamic scholarship during the Mamluk sultanate (1250 AD to 1517 AD) and becomes a crossroad on the spice trade route among the civilisations of Afro-Eurasia.

1342
AD



Ibn Batuta reaches the Malabar Coast. He describes Kozhikode as 'one of the great ports of the district of Malabar' where 'merchants of all parts of the world are found'.

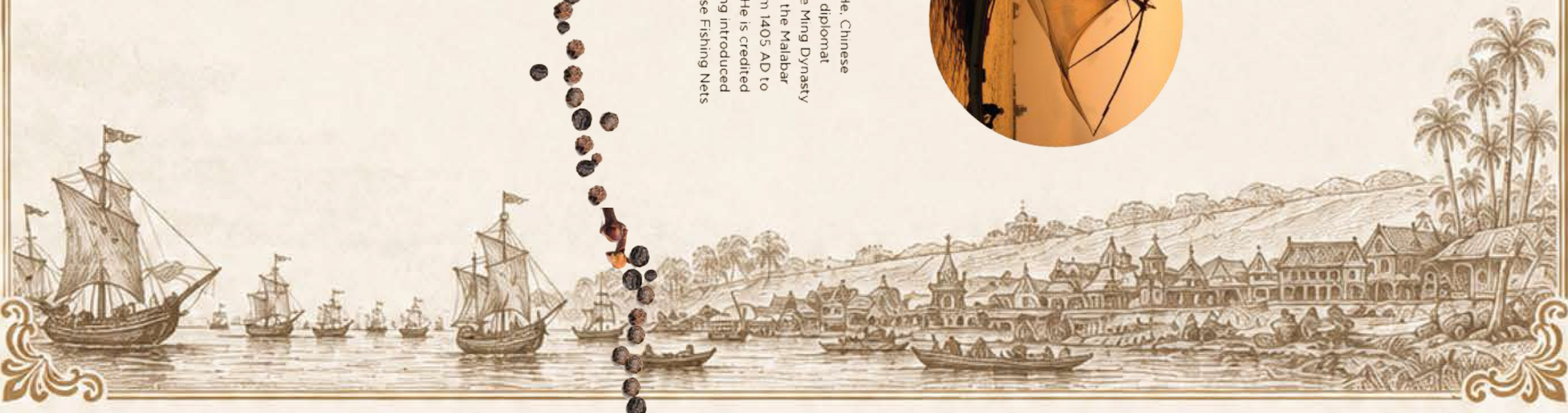
1405
AD



Zheng He, Chinese admiral & diplomat during the Ming Dynasty frequents the Malabar Coast from 1405 AD to 1433 AD. He is credited with having introduced the Chinese Fishing Nets in Cochin.

1348
AD

John de Marignoli of Florence trades with Thomas Christians in Quilon.



THE ERA OF
DISCOVERY

THE DISCOVERY OF THE SEA ROUTE,
THE HISTORIC JOURNEYS OF
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AND VASCO
DA GAMA AND THE ARRIVAL
PORTUGUESE, THE FIRST EUROPEAN
POWER IN KERALA MADE THIS ERA
TRULY MOMENTOUS FOR KERALA.



1492
AD

Christopher
Columbus sets sail
for Asia across the
Atlantic Ocean.
Instead of finding
India, he lands on
an island in the
Bahamas.

1500
AD

Captain Major Pedro
Alvares Cabral
reaches Calicut having
made a diversion and
discovering Brazil.

1503
AD

The Portuguese build the
Pallipuram Fort, the oldest
existing European fort in



St Francis
CSI Church
built in Fort Kochi.

The ruler of Kochi grants
permission to the
Portuguese to build Fort
Emmanuel near the
waterfront of the Arabian
Sea to protect their
commercial interests.

1502
AD

The Portuguese become the
first Europeans to establish a
trading centre in Tangasseri in
Quilon and the area soon
becomes a major centre for the
pepper trade. It today houses
the ruins of Portuguese and
Dutch forts and 18th century
churches.

Portuguese
navigator Vasco
da Gama lands in
Calicut (via Cape
of Good Hope).

1498
AD



1442
AD

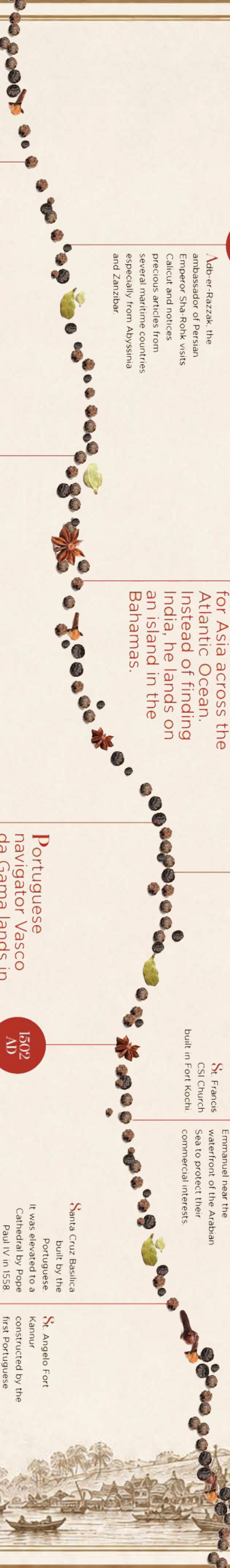
Adb-er-Razzak, the
ambassador of Persian
Emperor Sha Rohk visits
Calicut and notices
precious articles from
several maritime countries
especially from Abyssinia
and Zanzibar.

1458
AD

The Ottoman Turks seize
Constantinople, the
headquarters of the Eastern
Roman Empire. Land route to
India and other spice
producing areas in the East
become extremely difficult for
the West Europeans. Spain and
America sent explorers sailing
around the continent of Africa
in an attempt to reach Asia.

1428
AD

Prince Henry the
Navigator of Portugal
acquires the works and
maps of Mario Polo and
comes to a conclusion that
there could be an easy
access to India from the
southernmost parts of
Africa.



1505
AD

Santa Cruz Basilica
built by the
Portuguese.
It was elevated to a
Cathedral by Pope
Paul IV in 1558.

St. Angelo Fort
Kannur
constructed by the
first Portuguese
Viceroy, Don
Francisco de
Almeida.

THE ERA OF
CONCORD

THIS ERA SAW THE ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST ENGLISHMAN TO KERALA AS WELL AS THE PORTUGUESE BEING OUSTED BY THE DUTCH EAST INDIA COMPANY, WHO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE CONFLICTS BETWEEN LOCAL PRINCIPALITIES TO GAIN CONTROL OF THE TRADE,

1513
AD

Peace treaty between the Portuguese (Alfonso de Albuquerque) & New Zamorin King of Calicut.

1524
AD

Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama dies in Kochi and his body buried in the St. Francis Church.

Vasco da Gama nominated as Portuguese viceroy in India. Relations between the Zamorin King and Portuguese strain further more.

1536
AD

Portuguese issues orders to set up a fortress in Cranganore.

1545
AD



The Mattancherry Palace built and gifted by the Portuguese as a present to the Raja of Cochin. Renovated in 1663 by the Dutch, it later came to be known as the Dutch Palace.

1568
AD

Paradesi Synagogue constructed on the land, adjacent to the Mattancherry Palace.



1596
AD

Itinerario, written by Jan Huygen van Linschoten, a Dutch merchant, trader and historian, help the English and Dutch learn about the navigational routes to the East Indies.

1602
AD

United Dutch East India Company established.

1604
AD

The VOC or Dutch East India Company arrives in Calicut in October.

1605
AD

The Church of Our Lady of Hope, also known as "Nossa Senhora Da Esperanca" built by the Portuguese. This Roman Catholic church is one of the oldest churches in India.



1614
AD

The Infant Jesus Cathedral, a Roman Catholic church built by the Portuguese at Tangasseri in Quilon.

1616
AD

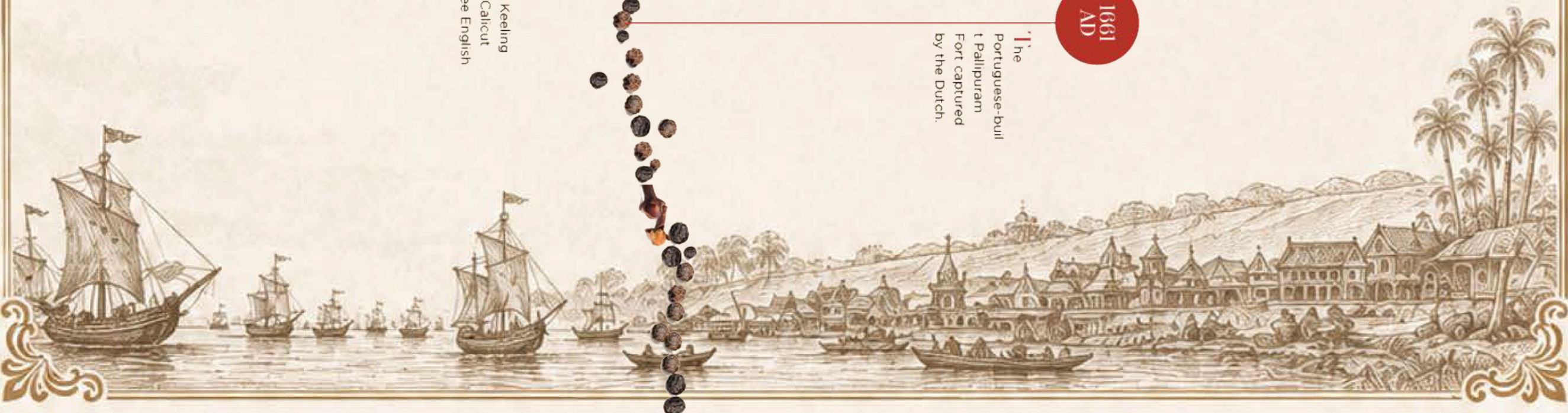
The first Danish East India Company established.

1661
AD

The Portuguese-built Fort Pallipuram captured by the Dutch.

1615
AD

Captain Keeling reaches Calicut with three English ships.



THE ERA OF
CHANGE

THIS ERA WITNESSED THE RISE
AND ECLIPSE OF DUTCH POWER
IN MALABAR, AS WELL AS THE
DANES AND THE FRENCH MAKING
THEIR PRESENCE FELT ON
KERALA'S COMMERCIAL MAP.

1664
AD

The French
East India
company is
established.

1670
AD

French opens
factories
at Ballapattam and
Tellicherry.

1685
AD

David Hall built by VOC
to accommodate
military personnel. The
hall named after David
Koder, a Jewish
businessman, is today
an art gallery.



1699
AD

English Fort in
Anjengo completed. It
served as the first
signalling station for
ships arriving from
England and was the
East India Company's
first permanent post
on the Malabar Coast.

1719
AD

French
establishes
trading post in
Calicut

1721
AD

French opens
factory in Mahe and
subsequently
settles there

1724
AD

Dutch cemetery
consecrated. The epitaphs
and tombs, numbering 104,
carry the authentic records
of hundreds of people of
Dutch and British nationality.



1744
AD

Bolgatty Palace built by
Dutch traders. One of the
oldest existing Dutch
palaces outside Holland.
it served as the
Governor's palace for the
commander of Dutch
Malabar and was leased
to the British in 1909.



1752
AD

Danes establish a
factory at Calicut

1762
AD

A new port
established in
Alleppey. Port of
Cochin loses
importance
which strikes a
blow to the
Dutch.



THE ERA OF
NEW BEGINNINGS

THE BRITISH SUPREMACY IN KERALA, WHICH STARTED BY THE MID SEVENTEENTH CENTURY CONTINUED AND NATIVE RULERS AND PRINCIPALITIES WERE KEPT UNDER ITS SWAY. MAKING THIS ERA MEMORABLE FOR KERALA WAS A GERMAN MISSIONARY NAMED HERMANN GUNDERT WHO MADE IMMENSE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYALAM LANGUAGE.

1795
AD

Dutch surrenders
their possessions in
Malabar to the
English

1808
AD

The Old Harbour House
constructed in Kochi by tea
brokers Carrott Moran &
Company. It later became the
residence of the officials of the
tea broking firm and now has
been converted to a heritage
hotel



1838
AD

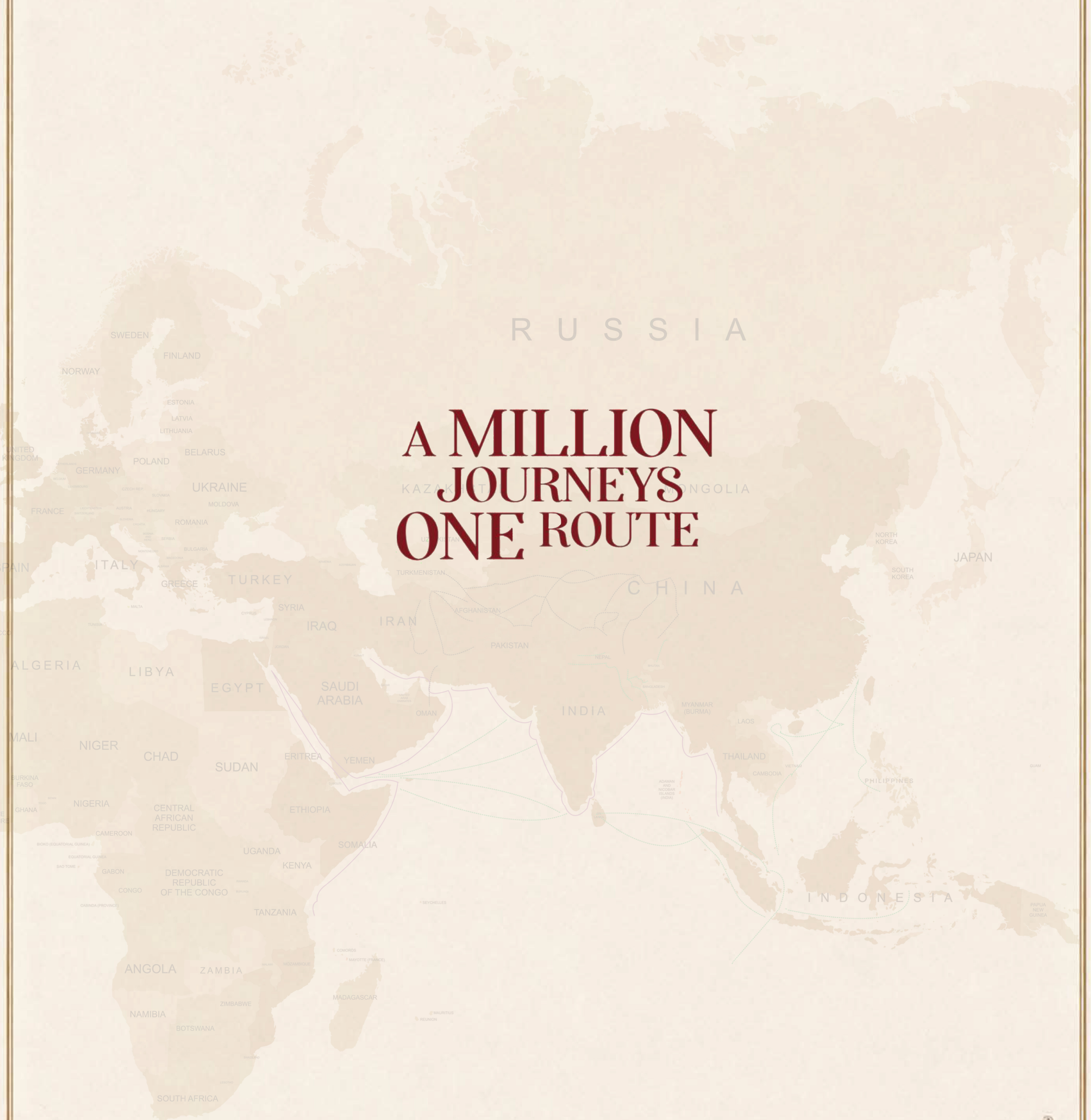
Rev. Dr. Hermann Gundert,
A German missionary,
scholar, and linguist
reaches Kerala. Gundert
compiled a Malayalam
grammar book, a
Malayalam-English
dictionary and helped
translate the Bible into
Malayalam.



1845
AD

Danish possessions in India
sold to the English. (The
British supremacy in Kerala,
which started by the mid
seventeenth century lasted
for the next 200 years until
India's independence in 1947)





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