



Associazione San Rocco Italia  
COMITATO INTERNAZIONALE STORICO-SCIENTIFICO  
PER GLI STUDI SU SAN ROCCO E LA STORIA MEDIEVALE

## JOSEPH ROY

« CONFRATERNITY AND THE CULT OF RUKA. *RUKA NA SARATH* - RUKA THE PROMISED ONE »



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« LA CONFRATERNITA ED IL CULTO DI RUKA. *RUKA NA SARATH* - RUKA L'ELETTO »

Con questo saggio entriamo veramente in un mondo completamente diverso, una realtà lontana non solo geograficamente, ma distante anche nella cultura, nelle tradizioni, nel modello di vita. La popolosa India è oggi una delle grandi nazioni emergenti nell'ambito della politica e dell'economia internazionali, ma al suo interno molte cose *non* sono cambiate, sia nel senso della persistenza di contraddizioni ed ineguaglianze tanto stridenti quanto sconcertanti, sia nel senso del radicamento di straordinarie risorse umane ed etiche, che fanno di questo grande popolo un protagonista di eccezionale valore della storia del genere umano.

La ricchezza della religione e della cultura indiana è ben nota, ma è altrettanto noto come spesso l'immagine *occidentale* dell'India sia gravata da luoghi comuni, da pregiudizi e da vere e proprie falsificazioni; non di rado anche le più sperticate lodi della *spiritualità orientale* soggiacciono, al di là delle buone intenzioni, a deformazioni più o meno consapevoli. Certi studi presuntuosamente «scientifici», certe mode tanto superficiali quanto effimere, hanno purtroppo lasciato il segno; e pertanto, se vogliamo entrare nel nostro argomento, dobbiamo preliminarmente accettare il fatto che a parlare dell'India non sia l'ennesimo «esperto» europeo o americano, ma qualcuno che, teorie a parte, *viva* l'India nella sua realtà di tutti i giorni.

Il nostro collaboratore, Joseph Roy, è un sacerdote salesiano e svolge la sua attività nella scuola anglo-indiana di Vijayawada. Nella sua zona, il nostro Rocco è venerato (ebbene sì!) con il nome indiano di Ruka, e naturalmente, pur mantenendo le più classiche attribuzioni dell'antico pellegrino di Montpellier, ha assunto anche le caratteristiche tipiche di un venerabile *Ap Oth* locale: la sua figura è dunque quella di un «protettore» della povera gente, secondo l'etimologia e secondo le tradizioni più radicalmente indiane.

E' per questo che, per accedere alle prossime pagine, occorre sgombrare il campo da preconcetti, ed accettare di seguire il nostro Autore in una esposizione della figura del *Rocco indiano* che è integralmente calata, anche nel linguaggio, in un approccio che non è il nostro, ma che appunto si qualifica secondo coordinate culturali e descrittive rigorosamente *indiane*.

Il dr. Roy sta preparando un approfondito libro sull'argomento, e ci ha riservato un estratto dei suoi studi, che fotografa la visione tradizionale di Ruka tramandata nei secoli, come è stata recepita dagli indiani secondo la loro sensibilità ed il loro *humus* culturale, religioso e filosofico; ma è certamente suggestivo scoprire questa nuova versione della vita di san Rocco, che dal Ruka principe di Satavahana, detto anche Ruk o Rog (simbolo di salvezza), si evolve nell'*Arca dell'Alleanza* della storia ebraica, per poi approdare in tutto il mondo, Rog o Roch in terra francese, Ragnobertus in lingua latina, Rocco in Italia e Rock o Rocky nella tradizione inglese, fino addirittura al Kora siriano...



### JOSEPH ROY

#### « LA CONFRÉRIE ET LE CULTE DE RUKA. *RUKA NA SARATH* - RUKA L'ÉLU »

Avec cet essai, nous pénétrons dans un monde lointain non seulement géographiquement mais par la culture et le mode de vie: l'Inde, terre fascinante, berceau d'un peuple grand protagoniste de l'histoire de genre humain.

Notre correspondant Joseph Roy est un prêtre salésien qui exerce son activité auprès de l'école anglo-indienne de Vijayawada. Là St Roch est vénéré avec le nom indien de Ruka. Outre les traits de reconnaissance caractéristiques du pèlerin de Montpellier, il représente localement un vénérable *Ap Oth*, c'est-à-dire un «protecteur» des pauvres, selon l'étymologie et les traditions indiennes les plus typiques.

C'est pour cette raison que nous suggérons à nos lecteurs de se laisser porter librement et sans préjugés par l'histoire de ce St Roch indien, racontée avec le rythme et les mots de son lieu de culte afin de s'imprégner de la sensibilité culturelle, philosophique et religieuse de la grande Inde.



### JOSEPH ROY

#### « CONFRATERNITY AND THE CULT OF RUKA. *RUKA NA SARATH* - RUKA THE PROMISED ONE »

Our correspondent from India, Joseph Roy, is a salesian religious operating in the area of Vijayawada, in which St. Roch is venerated under the name of Ruka, recognizable by the typical characteristics of the pilgrim of Montpellier, but transformed in a local venerable *Ap Oth*, «protector» of the poor. In the following pages, to be read avoiding the average occidental preconceived ideas, we'll be able to meet the *Indian Roch*, expression of tradition, of sensibility and of the cultural-religious *humus* of the population of India.



### JOSEPH ROY

#### « COFRADÍA Y EL CULTO DE RUKA. *RUKA NA SARATH* - RUKA EL ELEGIDO »

Con este ensayo, penetramos en un mundo lejano no solo geográficamente sino también por la cultura y el modo de vida: la India, tierra fascinante, cuna de un gran pueblo. Nuestro corresponsal Joseph Roy es un sacerdote salesiano de la escuela anglo-india de Vijayawada; allí S. Roque es venerado con el nombre de Ruka. Además de los rasgos de característicos del peregrino de Montpellier, es representado localmente como un venerable *Ap Oth*, es decir un protector de los pobres según las tradiciones indias. Se deben leer estas páginas sin prejuicios, con la disponibilidad par comprender una versión diferente de la vida de S. Roque.



## JOSEPH ROY

« CONFRATERNITY AND THE CULT OF RUKA.  
RUKA NA SARATH - RUKA THE PROMISED ONE »

### 1. The Confraternity and the Promise of the Ap Oth.

The *Ap Oth Vaka* who was the legitimate ruler of *Vaka Ur* had made a vow and the "*Oth Ur Sank Ur*" was indeed the promise of the *Ap Oth*. They had all the credentials and they could be trusted upon. "*Oth Ur Sank Ur*" - "*Darsanakar*" was the Confraternity which was considered to be the custodians of the *Ur* of the *Ap Oth*. Who were they? They were the "*Ur Vaka Ana Satru*". They considered the present regime as enemies of the *Ap Oth* as they declared in coded language that the present ruler (*Ur Vaka Ana*) was an enemy (*Satru*) of the *Ap Oth*. "*Oth Aras Ana Vaka Ur*" in reverse would be "*Ur Vaka Ana Satru*". This would also indicate that "*Thiruch*" or *Thiruchanallur* had become a land of battle and therefore was unsafe.

### 2. The Confraternity and the Cult of Ruka.

The Cult of Ruka was probably begun by the Confraternity in Voghera where Ruka was buried. But the "Confraternity" seemed to have its origin in "*Vaka Ur*" as this name would signify. It stood for "*Vaka Ana Ap Ur Oth Isu Oth*" or "*Ur Ana Thurp Ank*". This term revealed "*Kanaporath Ana Ur*" (the land of the *Ap Oth* in a secret place) as well as "*Vaka Ana Ur-Ap Oth Ana Ur*" (meaning: *Ur Ana-Desa* is *Ur Ana - Vaka*). The "Confraternity" was known in *Vaka Ur* as "*Darsanakar*" (*Oth Ur- Sank Ur*) which signified "*Ur Vaka Ana Sarath*" or «the promise of the ruler». "*Darsanakar*" revealed "*Thiruchi-nagar*" or "*Thiruchinapalli*" in the Tamil Country pointing to its fall in the year 610 A.D. This group was active in a place called *Mukundapuram* in *Vaka Ur*. It was in *Mukundapuram* that the Cult of Ruka had been most prevalent as the secret home of the "*Ap Oth*" was situated some where in this area.

### 3. Death of Ruka on the 16th of August 1376.

Confusion and uncertainty prevailed among the hagiographers and historians as regard to the chronology of Ruka. When was he born and when did he die? No one seemed to be certain as different dates were seen proposed. As regard to the first, Francesco Diedo the Venetian Jurist was the most reliable source because he was closer to Ruka in time. In order to solve the confusion as regard to the date of his death, one should

scrutinize his very title given in *Vaka Ur* as "*Stapaka Punyalan Rokos*" or "*Isu Oth (Ap) Vaka- Ap Ana Illu Ana Ur Vaka Isu*". *Isu Oth* is *Ana Ur* or 100. "*Stapa*" would be in reverse order as "*Ap Oth Isu Oth*" (*Ap Oth Ana Ur*) which would be «Ten-Hundreds». This would mean that the hundreds were arranged in reverse order. *Ap Oth Isu Oth* (10x100) + *Ka* + *Isu Vaka Ur* or *Saka* (half) of 6. *Isu Oth* + *Ka* + *Saka* - *Aru* would be 1300. *Ap Ana Illu Ana Ur* would be "*Ap Onnu 7*" - "*Onnu 6*" i.e., at the place of ten there would be only (one) seven which would make it 70 and at the place of one there would be only (one) six which would make the total to 76.

Therefore "*Stapaka-Punyalan-Rokos*" would reveal the year of the death of Ruka as Thirteen Hundred and 76 (1376). It could be believed that he died on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August since his commemoration was held on that day. The term "*Stapaka Punyalan Rokos*" would also identify Ruka as *Vaka Aras (Rex) - Ur Ana - Lanka - Ap Oth*. The wrong translation of "*Ur Ana Lanka Ap Oth*" would be "*Lankapathi Ravana*". Adding some insult by the *Apara Mani (Brahmana) Iranus*, to the great *Ap Oth* would make it sound as "*Lankapathi Ravana Rakshasa*". Ruka was called *Stapaka Punyalan* because he was established or born as a Saint (*Punyalan*) on the day of his death.

#### 4. Festivals Connected with Ruka.

The Month of Chingam (Lion) was dedicated to the ruler who was called "*Maha Bali*" whose feast was traditionally celebrated as "*Tiruvonam*". This festival coincided with the feast of the Bishop of Maguelone in France which was in the month of August. After the death of Ruka, the festival of *Tiruvonam* gained added significance for the Christians of *Vaka Ur* because Ruka was remembered as the "*Maha Bali*" who used to come back from *Pathalam (Ap Oth Illu Ma)* to see his people. But after the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries who considered all these as 'heathen practices immersed in superstitions' the celebration of *Tiruvonam* for the Christian communities in this area was shifted to the first of January which was the beginning of the year in the Roman Calendar.

Accordingly, the feast of Ruka as the *Maha Bali* was celebrated in *Vaka Ur* on the first of January. It was probably because of this change that the feast of the Bishop of Maguelone in France, too was shifted to the month of January. Probably this celebration did not have any religious significance in the beginning. The liturgical practices commemorating the feast of Ruka started later. Since the mother of Ruka or "*Ruka Matha Franca*" who was known as "*Kottramuthy*" lived in a place which was named after her, and her tomb was considered as "*Ma Kapela*" it had become a place of prayer where people used to gather daily.

The liturgical practices or the cult of Ruka began in this place. So also the commemoration of Ruka as the *Maha Bali* on the first of January too came in place. On the other hand the commemoration of "*Ruka Matha Franca*" was shifted to another place in *Mukundapuram* which was named "*Koratty*" or "*Oth Ruka*". "*Ruka Matha Franca*" was known there as "*Koratti Muthy*".

## 5. Tiruvonam of Mahabali in the Month of Chingam.

The commemoration of the legendary *Mahabali* as the ruler of *Vaka Ur* was continued to be celebrated in the month of *Chingam*. After the death of the most lovable "*Mahabali*", who was the *Satavahana* Prince Ruka, his admirers continued to celebrate the feast of the king as "*Tiruvonam*" in commemoration of this "*Satavahana*" prince "*Vaka Oth Ruka*". Since it was celebrated in the beginning of the old calendar year which was the first of the month of *Chingam*, it was shifted to the first of January, the beginning of the new year according to the Roman Calendar.

## 6. The Feast on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August.

In Europe the feast of Ruka as the healer man and protector from Plagues and Epidemics continued to be celebrated on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, the day of his death. As a coincidence the Feast of *Tiruvonam* also occurs some time in the month of August as it coincides with the month of *Chingam*. But the feast of Bishop Rokon would be celebrated in the month of January as it was shifted from the original date which was the 16<sup>th</sup> of August. Originally August 16 was dedicated to the memory of the Bishop of Maguelonne until this date was set apart for the remembrance of the Healer man of Europe. The feast of Ruka as Bishop Rokon of Autun (*Ruka Ana*) fell in the month of January.

## 7. Stapaka Punyalan Remembered on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January.

Ruka was known to the people of *Vaka Ur* as the "*Sthapaka*" Punyalan "*Rokos*" which indicated that he was a "*Satavahana prince*". He was considered as the protector from Epidemics which in *Aram Ma* would be "*Ap Vaka Ur Isu Oth - Ma Oth Isu Oth Ana*" (*Pakarcha Vyadhi-Madhyasthan*) which signified

The Healer of Epidemics  
"*Kurisu Oth Ma Oth Ana-Ur Ana*".  
*Kurisu Vedam Oth Ana Ur Ana*  
*Ana Ur Anth Ma Oth Vaka Aras (Kurisu)*  
*Kurisu Vedam Oth - Isu Oth Ana*  
*Kurisu Vedam-Oth Sadhana.*

Blessing with the Cross was the only cure for any deadly epidemics or *Pakarcha Vyadhi!* That was what people believed. The image of Ruka which was venerated by the people of *Vaka Ur* was the perfect imitation of the Fresco which survived the burning fire. It was that of an elderly Bishop of around 70 years age with beard and fully attired in his traditional Ecclesiastical vests. It also depicted all the hieroglyphic signs associated with Ruka, including the Dog, Gregio and the boy, *Vaka Och*. This

was a sufficient indication for the fact that Bishop Rokon and «Santi Rochi» were one and the same person who was also known as *Oth Ruka* or *Vaka Oth Ruka*.

## 8. The Lord of the New Year.

There could be seen some justification in renaming the beginning of the Roman year as January after the coming of Jesus. January or *Isu Ana Ur* would be "*Oth Asis*" or "*Ap Oth Isu*", meaning «Jesus, God of our faith». Since the first month in the Vaka Calendar was dedicated to the "*Ap Oth*", the real ruler who was actually God, and was celebrated as "*Tiruvonam*" or the «Feast of the King» the same concept could have been applied even in the case of January although many were unaware of it. Since Ruka was *Vaka Aras* it would also have been fully justified to celebrate his feast on the first of January, which was the beginning of the Roman year instead of *Chingam*, the Month of the King as in the Vaka Calendar.

## 9. Devotion to Ruka in Vaka Ur.

Devotion to Ruka in *Vaka Ur* was not something which was introduced after his death. It was a continuation of the Festival of *Tiruvonam*, the feast of the Ruler of Vaka as Ruka was considered as the *Maha Bali Ruka*. But originally this festival of *Tiruvonam* was celebrated in the month of *Chingam* (*Simham*). Considering the fact that Ruka was not only the *Maha Bali* of *Tiruvonam* but also *Stapaka Punyalan* a man signed by the sign of the Cross which signified that he was a universal king at the service of God, whose prayers and intercession had miraculously saved Europe from the Black Plague and other Epidemics, the people wanted to make the festival of *Tiruvonam* more meaningful and universal in character. The month of *Chingam* was known only in *Vaka Ur* while the Roman Calendar had been accepted all through out the world. Therefore the feast which was celebrated in honour of Ruka the *Maha Bali*, was shifted to the first of January. However the usual *Tiruvonam* in memory of the legendary *Maha Bali* was continued to be celebrated in the Month of *Chingam*. Still as the Portuguese had noticed and the Franciscan Missionaries had testified, the celebration of the feast of Ruka was very much similar to the celebration of *Tiruvonam*, which according them was immersed in unliturgical and superstitious practices.

## 10. Assertion of the Holiness of Ruka.

*Vaka Ur* was constanly afflicted by Epidemics such as the deadly Smallpox. This had occasionally taken the lives of many. People had no option other than to depend entirely for the mercy of God. Several superstitious practices such as propitiation of the Mother Goddess too had crept in. This epidemic had struck *Rukamatha Ur* (*Kottra*

*Muthy*) also. The family of *Ruka Matha (Kottramuthy)* had taken great responsibility with the assistance of the *Oth Ur Sank Ur (Darsanakar)* to assist the afflicted as well as to bury the dead.

### **11. A Fresco Tested in Fire.**

There was a family which preserved an Oil Painting in that area. One day during the epidemics of Smallpox their house got fire and everything in the house was engulfed in the flames. But to everyone's surprise an oil painting which they had hung on the wall miraculously remained untouched by the raging fire. People considered it as a miracle happening in front of their own eyes. This miraculous Oil Painting was that of an elderly person fully attired as a Bishop. It was brought to the *Ma Kapela* of *Kottra Muthy* which was already a place of prayer without realizing that the Fresco was that of Ruka Son of the holy *Paranki Och*. People placed it there with devotion for veneration. This action was criticized by a section of society which feared that this could lead to some superstition among the people and confuse the purpose of the age-old practice of praying at the tomb of the *Muthy*.

### **12. The Interceder Himself Coming to the Devotees.**

When the people sought the advice of the priest in the church he decided to send the Oil painting to the headquarters of the Church seeking their opinion. In the mean time the epidemic of Small Pox had been spreading in the region and the people who regularly prayed in the *Ma Kapela* of *Kottramuthy* got the Oil Painting back to the place. They made a beautiful *Pandal* around the *Ma Kapela* so that more people could come and pray. The people seemed to have prayed intensely in front of the image for nine days seeking the intercession of the Holy man without knowing that he was actually the time tested Healer man the powerful protector from Black Plague and other deadly Epidemics in Europe. As the prayers had been intensified the Epidemic of Small Pox had slowly begun to abate. And on the 9<sup>th</sup> day the people had taken the miraculous oil painting in a procession throughout the area. It was said that wherever the image had entered the Epidemic had completely disappeared.

### **13. The Devotion to Ruka as Vaka Aras.**

This image which was unscathed in the raging fire was later named as *Stapaka Punyalan Rokos*. In this image Ruka was attired like a Bishop wearing an ecclesiastical hat as it was the practice in the Oriental Churches. The feast of the *Maha Bali* on the first of January was celebrated as the Feast of *Stapaka Punyalan Rockos*. When the Portuguese missionaries arrived they were dismayed by the pagan practices of the

local people in front of a saint who according to them could be Roch of Montpellier. The Missionaries were said to have purified the liturgy which according to them was intertwined with superstitious practices. People had come to the realization that the image which they had been venerating was that of Ruka, whom they considered as the *Maha Bali* of *Vaka Ur*, the *Vaka Aras*.

#### 14. The Feast of the Vehicles.

The celebration of the festival of Ruka the *Satavahana* Ruler *Maha Bali* is marked by the festival of the vehicles. Hundreds of motor vehicles are lined up in order to add an earthen flavor to this feast. People even from distant places bring their decorated vehicles to take part in this festival. All the vehicles are blessed on that day. The feast of the *Satavahana* prince Ruka is considered as the feast of «Hundred vehicles» or "*Sata* (100) - *Vahana* (vehicle)".

#### 15. «Ruka Nas Rathu» as the Mysterious Symbols would reveal.

Soon after this miraculous incident which protected the people from the epidemics of Smallpox the priest in the Church had sent the image to the Headquarters of the Church for verification requesting them to get a statue made imitating the image in the Oil painting. It was done. After some delay the priest also seemed to have got the information that the image was that of Ruka who was called Rockos whose prayers and intercession were sought during the Black Plague and other deadly epidemics by the people all over Europe. This Oil Painting was said to have contained several hieroglyphics such as a pot hanging on a cross, the figure of a watermelon, the figure of a coconut, a dog standing with a loaf of bread in its mouth, the figure of a small boy, the figure of an angel holding the image, the figure of a conch or shell, the mark of *Swasthika* at the bottom of the image, figures of toys such as the elephant and the lion. As Ruka was the fulfillment of the promise of the *Ap Oth Vaka* as "*Ruka Na Sarath*" it would also reveal the fact "*Ruka Nas Rathu*" as Ruka would be indestructible. *Vaka Oth Ruka* the *Satavahana* Ruler who was *Vaka Aras* would indeed reestablish his rule .

JOSEPH ROY

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