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Textual Crossroads and Transregional Encounters  
Jewish Networks in Kerala 900s-1600s<sup>1</sup>

With love and admiration to the people of Kerala  
അതിജീവിക്കും കേരളം August 2018

ABSTRACT

A Hebrew letter sent from Cochin to Alexandria in ca. 1520 sought legal advice on intra-communal conflicts between a minority group of impoverished but “pure” Jews, who “out of jealousy and hatred” outcaste the majority of Cochin Jews on grounds of non-Jewish slave origins. Similar allegations are recorded much later in 1687 by a Dutch Jewish trader, Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva in his "Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim". This time the allegations are embedded in a legend of a lost Jewish kingdom in Cranganore (Kodungallur). The lost kingdom is mentioned in several Hebrew texts composed in Europe since the 1500s, contrasting it with Calicut. Recorded exclusively by European Jews and missionaries, the legend emerges as a narrative countering Arab-Muslim dominance over the Indian Ocean trade networks and acting upon the realignment of Jewish networks with the growing influence of Christian Europe in maritime South Asia. Centuries-old business partnerships with Arab Muslims and local Māppīla merchants are gradually suppressed in Cochin, giving way to new alliances with European—Jewish and Christian—traders. These new alliances are not merely reflected in narrations of an imagined Jewish history in Malabar, they are also shaped by the same narrations. The legends of a glorious Jewish past and unfortunate destruction are woven into interreligious textual networks across regions. By contextualizing these Hebrew texts in maritime Malabar, the paper presents a historical analysis of intra- and intercommunal conflicts and exchanges at the maritime crossroads of early modern Cochin.

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## TEXTUAL NETWORKS AND THE “HEBREW COSMOPOLIS”

The notion of a language cosmopolis was first formulated by Sheldon Pollock (1995) in relation to Sanskrit in South Asia. Pollock’s notion of the Sanskrit cosmopolis was extended to Arabic (Ricci 2011, 1–23) and to Pāli (Frasch 2017) in relation to literary production across vast regions in South and Southeast Asia, where Muslim and Buddhist communities sought social and political alliances with their co-religionists overseas. Mahmood Kooria (2016) extends Ronit Ricci’s notion of an Arabic cosmopolis based on the circulation of literary texts to the notion of a cosmopolis of legal texts connecting Muslim communities in South and Southeast Asia with West Asia and the Western Mediterranean. Admittedly, the notion of textual networks and language cosmopolis deserves more attention than I am able to give it here. For the present discussion I suggest that textual networks emerge through various media, not necessarily written, and in different genres, not necessarily literary or narrational. Moreover, the notion of an Arabic or a Sanskrit Cosmopolis is closely related to the notion of vernacularization (Pollock, 1998), a phenomenon that from a linguistic, rather than literary, point of view underlies the emergence of religiolects (Hary and Wein 2013).

Networking strategies relying on the circulation of texts and the emergence of religiolects (or cosmopolitan vernaculars) can be attributed to the Jewish diaspora in Malabar and its connections with Jews in West Asia and, from the early modern period onwards, with Jews in Europe. Admittedly, to speak of a Hebrew cosmopolis in South Asia is somewhat inadequate, though it is reasonable to consider Malabar as the easternmost outpost of a Eurasian Hebrew cosmopolis connected with the Jewish Diaspora in Asia and Europe through the Hebrew script and Jewish texts. While Hebrew literary and textual production over two millennia and across the world is well known and well-studied, the concept of Hebrew textual networks, let alone a “Hebrew Cosmopolis” is (to the best of my knowledge) unacknowledged in Jewish studies. However, applying these analytic categories—language cosmopolis and literary/textual networks—to Malabar Jewry is certainly in place. For the present discussion and for the sake of simplicity, I focus on Hebrew textual networks, as these are not only readily traceable in Jewish history in Malabar but are also telling of historical processes that contextualize Malabar Jews in Indian Ocean history and in the history of global trade.

Roughly speaking, the early modern period witnesses a shift in the Hebrew textual networks, at least as far as the evidence for the premodern period goes. Whereas the Hebrew sources produced in or in relation to Malabar before the sixteenth century are primarily of a documentary—rather than literary—nature, Hebrew and Jewish literature from or related to Malabar emerge in growing quantity and volume from the sixteenth century onwards. This Jewish literary production is of two major types, poetry in Hebrew and in Jewish Malayalam, and origin myths dealing with the origins of Jews in Kerala. Curiously enough, the origin myths, or pseudo-historical accounts, emerge first in the Western Mediterranean during the first decades of the sixteenth century, before being documented in Cochin in the late seventeenth century. Contrarily, the earliest Hebrew poems composed emerge in Cochin towards the end of the sixteenth century, and Jewish Malayalam poetry possibly preceding it by a few decades at least.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Hebrew and Jewish literature dealing with or composed in Malabar during the early sixteenth century constitutes textual crossroads between two types of transregional encounters of Malabar Jews with their coreligionists from overseas. The first type of transregional encounters is that between Malabar Jews and Arabic-speaking Jews and Muslims represented by legal and documentary texts. Contrarily, the second type is that between Malabar Jews and European Jews and Christians represented by pseudo-historical narratives. The emergence of Hebrew poetry is related to both types of transregional encounters, **a point to be discussed in the conclusion**, while Jewish Malayalam literature is, naturally, related to local regional networking strategies. For demonstrating the shift from the Arabic Jewish textual networks to the European, I focus below on two texts composed in Malabar as anchors, so to speak, in the wider Jewish textual networks demonstrating, in my opinion, the intersecting transregional encounters in sixteenth century Cochin.

The first anchoring text is a legal correspondence, the Cochin Responsum (Qastro 1783, Responsum 99), composed in Hebrew by an anonymous Jew in Cochin and sent to Alexandria sometime during the first decades of the sixteenth century (Segal, 1983, 230–32; cf. Fischel 1967, 232). The financial and legal matters it deals with can be traced back to eleventh century

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<sup>2</sup> The periodization of Hebrew texts and manuscripts is relatively straightforward and will be justified in the following sections. The periodization of Jewish Malayalam literature is based on linguistic and textual analysis evaluated against the history of Malayalam literature in general (Gamliel 2016, 505–7).

Jewish traders commuting between Aden and the Malabar Coast. The second anchoring text is in Portuguese dated 1687 and bearing the title *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim* (henceforth the *Notisias*). The *Notisias* was written by a Jewish trader from Amsterdam, Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva, who visited Cochin in November 1686. Though not composed in Hebrew, the origin myth included in it can be traced back to Hebrew literary production in Florence in 1503, as demonstrated below. The Cochin Responsum as a legal document signifies a watershed moment in the social history of Malabar Jews in particular and Jewish networks in Indian Ocean history in general. Contrarily, the *Notisias* is a pseudo-historical narrative that signifies the culmination of Judeo-Christian ideologies forged in the Western Mediterranean and in Europe. Historical records in Hebrew predating the Cochin Responsum demonstrate the largely legal and documentary nature of the use of Hebrew in maritime Malabar. The following section surveys the history of the use of Hebrew in premodern Malabar.

#### HEBREW IN PREMODERN MALABAR

The Hebrew script, even if not necessarily representing the Hebrew language, is attested in legal documents related to Malabar since the mid-ninth century. These documents, listed here in chronological order, are evidence for centuries-old transregional networks of Jews operating in maritime trade across the water of the Arabian Sea.

##### *849 Kollam (Quilon): Tariṣṣāppalli Inscription*

The Tariṣṣāppalli inscription is engraved in the *vatteluttu* script on copper plates, documenting a land grant (along with tenants) and regulating trade rights and land revenue benefits. The inscription concludes with signatures in Kufic (Arabic), Pahlavi (early middle Persian) and Hebrew (Judeo-Persian). It contains at least three terms in Early Middle Persian: the name of the main beneficiary, Maruvān Sapīr Íso, a Nestorian Christian; the name of the place granted, Tariṣṣāppalli, claimed unanimously by scholars to be the earliest church in India; and the name of a West Asian trade guild, Añcuvannam, known from other inscriptions found along the West Coast of South India.<sup>3</sup> Leaving aside the significance of this inscription to a broad set of

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<sup>3</sup> M. G. S. Narayanan (1972) was the first to introduce a text-based study of the inscription. Recently, a new study of the inscription with fresh insights and analysis was published by Raghava Varier and Kesavan Veluthat (2013). For

historical issues, its significance to the history of Jewish networks in Malabar is in its attestation of contacts between Persian Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians, Arabs (probably with a majority of Muslims), and Malayali Hindus (possibly also Jains) that constitute land owners, village officials and royal authorities. This inscription contains the earliest evidence for the use of the Hebrew script in the region. Notably, the language attested is not Hebrew, but rather Persian, or as Judaists would have it, a religiolect called Judeo-Persian (Borjian 2016, 239–61). The following centuries see a rise in using the Hebrew script in and about Malabar. However, the religiolect mostly used later on is Judeo-Arabic, namely, Arabic written in the Hebrew script. The Tariṣṣāppalli inscription is the only instance, to the best of my knowledge, of Judeo-Persian documented in Malabar.

*1100s-1200s Aden, Mangalore, Jurfattan (Kannanore)*

Letters in Judeo-Arabic dealing with Indian Ocean trade mention several places along the Malabar Coast from Surat in the Bay of Cambay to Kollam near the southernmost tip of the subcontinent (Goitein and Friedman 2008). The letters include Indian names and terms, and quite a few Dravidian words, mainly names of products, people, coins and measurement terms (Lambourn 2014; Gamliel 2018c). These documents attest to growing contacts between Arabic-speaking Jews and Indian traders and to various types of local people, mainly Malayalam and Tulu speakers, from upper-class officials to lower-class laborers and slaves (Ghosh 2002; Gamliel 2018b). As the script is Hebrew and the language is Arabic, these documents are significant for defining and analyzing the nature of the Hebrew textual networks of Jews engaged in Indian Ocean trade. Generally speaking, in this period the texts utilized in the Jewish networking system were dealing with practical and legal issues related to finance, travel and, to a certain extent, legal and interpersonal issues as well.

*1132-1149 Abraham ben Yijū's documents*

Among the Judeo-Arabic Geniza documents, those related to Abraham ben Yijū are of particular interest to Jewish history in premodern Malabar. Ben Yijū's network in the region was based to a large extent on kinship alliance through his Malayali consort Aśu, whose brother, referred to by

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studies on the trade guilds mentioned in the inscription, see Abraham 1986; Subbarayalu 2009. For a study of the inscription in comparison with Geniza documents, see Gamliel 2018c.

ben Yijū as Nāyar, was his business associate (Gamliel 2018b). Ben Yijū spent close to seventeen years in North Malabar, with his business activities extending from Mangalore in the Tulu-speaking region to Dahfattan, near Mt. Hīli (Eḷimala) (Goitein and Friedman 2008, 57). Several names mentioned in his business correspondences and documents reveal the supra-regional extent of his Indian connections, while his own biography demonstrates the extent of the transregional networking system he was involved in. Born in Tunisia, Ben Yijū migrated with his family to Egypt, and like many Jewish traders of his time, he based his Jewish and Muslim maritime trade partnerships in Aden, before establishing his Indian business network in Malabar.

Of particular interest to Ben Yijū's transregional networking strategies are the names of three merchants mentioned in passing in a letter addressed to him by his Yemenite Jewish business associate, Maḏmūn b. Ḥasan. The names are Kinābtī, Sūs (or, perhaps, Som) Siṭṭī and Yiṣḥaq al-Bānyān; the first name depicts a merchant from Cambay (Khambhāt), the second a Jain or a Hindu of the merchant caste Ceṭṭī (possibly a South Indian), and the third is combined of a Semitic name (Isaac) and a Hindu or Jain merchant caste name, later known as Bania (Habib 1990; Findly 1997, 289). This latter name obviously refers to a person born to a family (or a couple) of mixed Indo-Arab origins.

Documents as rich and informative as the Geniza letters have not emerged so far to account for the Jewish networks in Malabar between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, important albeit scarce evidence for the continuity of the use of the Hebrew script in Malabar exists attesting to an ongoing Jewish networking system in the region.

### *1269 Chendamangalam tombstone*

This tombstone is the oldest surviving Hebrew inscription on the Malabar Coast. It states as follows:

Blessed be the Judge of Truth, the Granite of Perfect Deeds. This grave is of Sarah Bat Israel. May God's Spirit guide us! 1581 according to the Era of Contracts (*minyān šəṭarot*), 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the month of Kislev (20/12/1269).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> All translations from Hebrew are mine unless otherwise mentioned.

ברוך דיין/ אמת הצור/ תמים פעלו / זה הקבר שרה/ בת ישראל/ רית בשנת [.] אתקפא לש' / כג] יומי] ביר[ח] / כסליו

The name engraved on the tombstone is of a woman, Sarah Bat Israel. She must have been important enough for her Jewish descendants to preserve her tombstone, the oldest Hebrew inscription in Malabar.<sup>5</sup> The importance attached to the commemoration of a matriarch as well as the appellation “daughter (*bat*) of Israel” highlights the likelihood of Sarah Bat Israel being a convert of a matrilineal household, with whom a thirteenth century Jewish merchant aligned in intermarriage to establish or to expand a trade community in Malabar, like Abraham Ben Yijū 137 years earlier. In the context of legal networks, the Chendamangalam tombstone is complementary to the deed of manumission used in the conversion of Aśu, Abraham Ben Yijū’s Nāyar consort (Gamliel 2018b), documented some 400 km up north along the coast. Both women are attested in legal documents in Hebrew, and both attest to conversion and intermarriage as instrumental in forging transregional alliances led by Jewish merchants.

#### *1344 Kaṭavumbhāgam Cochin Synagogue Inscription*

This inscription is currently attached to the compound wall of the Paradeśi synagogue in Cochin, though it was initially found at the etic of the Kaṭavumbhāgam Cochin synagogue (Bar-Giora 1958, 223). According to Sassoon (1930, 225), it belonged to a synagogue in Kochangady that was destroyed by Tipu Sultan, which Bar-Giora dates to 1789 (1958, 223). Bar-Giora, unlike Sassoon, assumes that the inscription must have belonged to the synagogue where it was found, namely, Kaṭavumbhāgam-Cochin (*ibid.*, 225 and fn. 61), an assumption that makes better sense in my opinion. Except for hearsay repeated by scholars, there is no concrete historical evidence for a synagogue by the name Kochangady ever constructed in Cochin, let alone destroyed by Tipu Sultan.<sup>6</sup> In any case, the inscription clearly attests the use of Hebrew in a legal document and, consequently, is evidence for Hebrew usage among Jews in premodern Malabar. The inscription reads as follows:

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For a high resolution image, see: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chendamangalam\\_Synagogue\\_05.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chendamangalam_Synagogue_05.jpg) (last accessed on 23/08/2018).

<sup>5</sup> Several scholars assume that the tombstone was brought from Kodungallur to Chendamangalam, though none provides any evidence for this assumption (Segal 1983, 229; Katz 2000, 37).

<sup>6</sup> According to Elieen W. Erlanson Macfarlane (1937, 7), the Kochangady synagogue was simply “dismantled”.

We did indeed build a temple for Thee,  
 A place for Thee to dwell in for eternity,<sup>7</sup>  
 In the year “let the honor of this abode be great” (1344),  
 The last from the first to creation today,  
 In the Third of Sabbath, Kislev Fifth (11/11), with God’s help, Amen.<sup>8</sup>

Notably, the era count used in this inscription adheres to the Jewish chronology starting at the year of creation (Anno Mundi), rather than the “Era of contracts” (Seleucid Era) as in the Chendamangalam inscription.

#### *1489 Tekkumbhāgam Cochin Synagogue Inscription*

This inscription is lost, but a transcription of a somewhat corrupt text, is found in Ha-Cohen (1889, 77) and in Sassoon (1932, 577). Since a coherent text cannot be reconstructed without consulting the original inscription, I offer here a tentative, rough translation:

The work was completed by Ya‘aqov Qasti’el Junior  
 On the second of the month of Iyar in the year [1489 CE]  
 If You will rebuild the wall around the Holy of Holies,  
 And increase Your mercy upon us,  
 He whose reputation rose up to the Holy of Holies,  
 And who was rewarded to proclaim that low pitch is followed by high pitch,  
 And that the innocent shall not be despised by the mighty.  
 Open the gates, so that the righteous, trustworthy nation will enter! [Isiah 26, 2]  
 The black on the white in memory of the destruction [of ancient Jerusalem],  
 Thus he left a blank spot in all new buildings  
 In commemoration of the destruction of [our] holy temple.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This is a slightly revised quote from I Kings, 8:13.

<sup>8</sup> בנה בנינו בית זבול לך מכון לשבתך/ עולמים שנת ג'ד'ו'ל' י'ה'י'ה' כ'ב'ו'ד' הבית/ הזה האחרון מן הראשון ליצירה היום/ בשלישי בשבת חמשה לכסלו בה"א

<sup>9</sup> This is the copy of the inscription as appears in Ha-Cohen (1889, 77) and in Sassoon (1932, 577):

ותשלם המלאכה על יד הצעיר יעקב קשטיאל/ ביום ב לירח אייר בשנת: אם ת'שוב ת'בנה גדר/ לדביר: והמון רחמיך עלינו תגביר: אשר עלה/ בשם בגבול בדביר: והיה בשכר ושה כי אחרי/ דרגא תביר: ולא ימאס תם אל כביר: פתחו שערים/ ויבוא גוי צדיק שומר אמונים שחור על הלבן/ זכר לחרבן עשה לו בהרת בכל בנין חדשות היא להנכרת (!) חרבן בית המקדש

Besides the poetic and somewhat incoherent content, the date of the inscription and the donor's name are clear. The inscription states that the “work”—the construction of the synagogue or its renovation—was completed by a Castilian Jew named Ya‘aqov in April 3 1489.<sup>10</sup> Notably, the Hebrew date is according to the Seleucid Era (Era of Contracts) as in the Chendamangalam tombstone and contrary to the earlier synagogue inscription of 1344. It is also interesting to note that the Castilian Jew is settled in Cochin at least a few years prior to the final wave of expulsion of Jews from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497) and, perhaps more importantly, prior to the arrival of the Portuguese to the Malabar Coast (1498). This is remarkable for the conventional notion reiterated in studies of Kerala Jews is that the Paradesi (the so-called White) Jewish community in Cochin originated in Sephardic Jews fleeing Spain to India via the Portuguese newly-found maritime route to Malabar, even as (or among) New Christians.

Additionally, Ya‘aqov Qasti‘el’s descendants are mentioned in various documents and records from Cochin and Parur all through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Upon examination of the records listing the names of Jews in Cochin since the seventeenth century, there is in fact not even a single family in the Paradesi community that can be traced back to Spain, except for the Qasti‘el family. Since they are attested in Kerala prior to the expulsion from Spain, the theory of the Sephardic origin of the “White Jews” is significantly weakened (Daniel and Johnson 1996, 10; Segal 1993, 21; cf. Tavim 2010). That the end of the fifteenth century saw the arrival of the Qasti‘els to Cochin is further supported by the list of households of Paradesi Jews in Cochin in 1686 recorded by Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva in his *Notisias* (see below). Two men by the name Qasti‘el are mentioned, with an editor note that their great-great-great-grandfather migrated from Spain. This means that the lineage goes five generations back. With the average life expectancy in sixteenth-century Cochin estimated for mature males at forty years of age (cf. Griffin 2008), the first Qasti‘el to settle in Malabar migrated sometime during the late fifteenth century. The date on the inscription is, therefore, reasonably plausible.

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<sup>10</sup> Bar-Giora (1958, 228 and fn. 91), apparently erroneously, dates this inscription to 1687, in reference to Sassoon (see previous footnote), who explicitly gives the date 1489 (let alone that the date 1800 Seleucid Era can only be matched with 1489 AD). He is also wrong in stating that Ya‘aqov Qasti‘el who is mentioned in the inscription was from 1687, for the three Qasti‘els that lived in Cochin at the time are known by their names: Elia, David, and Shemtob (the latter moved to Parur). Therefore, it is highly likely that the mentioned Ya‘aqov Qasti‘el belonged to a much earlier generation.

Besides these few Hebrew verses in inscriptions, premodern Malabar Jewry produced texts that were primarily of a documentary (administrative or legal) nature. One exception, though, is the often-quoted reference to Kerala Jews in the travelogue of Benjamin of Tudela (ca. twelfth century), who is unlikely to have actually met them or even visit the region. However, his reference to Jews in Kollam, even if originating in hearsay or some maritime traders' stories, can be corroborated by documentary Geniza, as Kollam is a port town visited by Jewish traders of his time. Besides Benjamin of Tudela, there are no literary references directly referring to Malabar in medieval Hebrew literature.<sup>11</sup>

These synagogue inscriptions of the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries performed at least two administrative functions: 1) recording the date of construction, and 2) specifying the transregional affiliation by era chronology—Anno Mundi versus Seleucid Era. While Jewish communities in the Islamic world retained the Seleucid Era count until the sixteenth century, Anno mundi count was replacing it much earlier in European Jewish communities. Particularly Yemenite Jews continued using Seleucid Era as late as the twentieth century (Goldberg 2000, 275–6; Tobi 2002, 299 fn. 9). Interestingly, the earlier inscription represents a shift to Anno Mundi calendar, while the Qasti'el inscription shifts back to the Yemenite Seleucid Era. It is only in the early seventeenth century that the Anno Mundi count is again favoured, in a synagogue inscription in Parur ascribed to a descendant of the Qasti'el family (1616). This stands in contrast to legal affiliation with Egypt and Yemen, already attested as early as the twelfth century (cf. Goitein and Friedman 2008, 633–4; Gamliel 2018b, 220–1), and reiterated by the Cochin Responsum of the early sixteenth century in addressing the Rabbinate in Alexandria and associating Yemen as one of the places of origin for Kerala Jews.

Notably, the 1344 inscription contains the earliest attempt at literary style in paraphrasing Biblical verses. This attempt to literalize is developed further, until its culmination in the Parur inscription with the acrostic signed by the poet Eliyahu Ha-'Adani ("Elijah the Adenite"). Thus, in 1616 a full-fledged Hebrew culture, an amalgamation of Sephardic, Yemenite, and Egyptian administrative, legal, and literary traditions, was rooted and engraved in stone. But the documented history of the Yemenite/Egyptian Jewish networks in the Malabar Coast is soon to be forgotten, leaving only traces in legends. The prestige of Yemenite Jewry, probably resulting from medieval Jewish maritime trade in the region, fades out by the late seventeenth century, giving way to a somewhat blurred Sephardic "identity" of "white" Jews constructed against a local, "slave-descendant", "black" Jewish identity (cf. Schorsch 2014). The earliest document attesting this process is the Cochin Responsum.

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<sup>11</sup> There are general and stereotypical references to India in Medieval Hebrew literature, but nothing that can prove Jewish presence in or direct contacts with Malabar (see Melamed 2006; cf. Weinstein 2000).

## THE COCHIN RESPONSUM

The Cochin Responsum is undated, though it can be safely estimated to have been composed sometime between the 1520s and the 1560s.<sup>12</sup> This Hebrew text is of the documentary text (of the legal type); it marks the turn from Jewish alliances embedded in Arab-Muslim maritime trade networks to business enterprises and transregional partnerships embedded in the emerging Portuguese Estado and, later on, the European East Indies companies. The document explicates a social and legal dispute between two parties of Jews in Cochin, a minority of self-proclaimed Jews of pedigree (*məyuhāsīm*) as opposed to a majority of Jews, labelled as descendants of slaves. The fact that it was sent to Alexandria shows that at the time, Egyptian Jewry was still considered as a legal authority, which, alongside Yemenite Jewry, had been the traditional authoritative affiliation for Malabar Jews.

Though the author of the Cochin Responsum is anonymous, it is plausible that he was an Arabic speaker. This can be deduced from his reference to Persia by its Arabic name, *al-‘Agām* (‘l’g’m). Considering the affiliation of the author of the document with Egyptian Jewry and with Arabic language, it is sensible to locate this document at the heart of the centuries-old Arab-Jewish networks in Malabar. For the purpose of the present discussion, a translation of an excerpt of the text is offered as follows:

A query from India from the Island Cochi (*qwy*), where there are some nine-hundred householders; one hundred Jews of pedigree (*məyuhāsīm*) and roots and the rest are sons of slaves and slave-girls, wealthy, observant and givers of charity. Those of pedigree do not marry them calling them slaves, and they endlessly quarrel over the issue. Those wealthy ones called slaves are mixed; some of them came there as merchants from Turkey (*twgrmh*), from the Land of Aden and Yemen, and from Persia (*al-‘Agām*) and

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<sup>12</sup> B. J. Segal (1983, 231–2) roughly dates it to the 1520s, while Walter J. Fischel (1967, 232) estimates the 1540s as the probable time of composition. The responsum was published in *Ohale Ya‘aqov* (Leghorn 1783), a collection of responsa addressed to and answered by Rabbi Ya‘aqov Qastro (1525–1610). His reply appears along with the text, stating that the same responsum was already sent to and answered in the past by his predecessor Rabbi David Salomon Ibn Zimra (ca. 1479–1573), who was the chief rabbi of Alexandria between the 1520s and the 1560s. Hence, the responsum must have been sent from Cochin sometime between the 1520s and the 1560s.

they bought slave-girls and had sons and daughters born to them [...].<sup>13</sup> And all those partly idol worshippers intermarried, preserved the religion of Israel [Judaism] and became a large community, *scholars of Torah, wealthy and related to the royalty and the government*. They are the *main negotiators for the merchants*. The Jews of pedigree are, on the contrary, *few and poor, so they label the others offspring of slaves due to jealousy and hatred*, and there is no one who can inquire whether [the others] are indeed slaves.<sup>14</sup>

The author of the Cochin Responsum voices a dilemma; on the one hand, he acknowledges the doubts regarding the legality of ad-hoc conversions. On the other hand, he doubts the motives of the so-called Jews of pedigree, speculating that they resent the others due to an inferior position in the local social, economic and political milieu of Cochin at the time. The author also adds that those labelled as slave descendants are the main negotiators for the merchants, suggestive of his own implicit socioeconomic interest, perhaps extending to his target audience in Egypt.

The bone of contention from the “legal” perspective is clear: the Jews of pedigree refuse to marry those whom they label as slave descendants. In other words, they deny the legitimacy of conversions of local women networking with West Asian Jewish traders, as domestic workers or as free women belonging to local trading communities. Inter-marriage with women converts has its antecedences in the cases of Abraham Ben Yijū’s consort Aśu, and Sarah Bat Israel, whose tombstone remains as a silent witness to the thirteenth-century matriarch’s social status. For sure, Jewish traders, as was customary all through the long-distance trade history, cohabitated low-class women (Friedman 1986, 292–6; Frenkel 2011). However, the high social, economic, and political status of their descendants as described in the Cochin Responsum cannot be but the result of kinship alliances, at least to some extent, with matrilineal upper-class families.

#### HEBREW POETRY

Literature is an important tool in networking strategies within localities and across regions, languages, and religions, as demonstrated by Pollock (1995, 1998), Ricci (2010, 2011), and others. For the sake of brevity and clarity, I am obliged to leave out of the present discussion a detailed historical and literary survey of Malabar Jewish poetic production, and to focus on the

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<sup>13</sup> At this point, the author describes various circumstances of ad-hoc conversions and mixed origins, which are left out for the sake of brevity.

<sup>14</sup> Castro 1783, responsum 99; my emphasis.

implications of indigenous Hebrew poetry on the transregional crossroads between Jewish Malabar, Muslim West Asia, and Christian Europe.

The century and a half following the Cochin Responsum sees a growing production of Jewish literature in both Hebrew and Malayalam. In the context of networking strategies, the evolution of Jewish Malayalam literature can be compared to the evolution of Arabic Malayalam literature, though its emergence probably predates the latter.<sup>15</sup> Both Arabic Malayalam and Jewish Malayalam literatures emerge during the period of growing contacts with European traders and missionaries. The vernacularization of the Arabic and Hebrew textual traditions can be attributed to sociopolitical concerns for inclusiveness within the Malayalam-speaking regional identity. In the case of Malabar Jewry, the concern for transregional connectivity is evident by the increased production of Hebrew poetry during the sixteenth century following the emergence of Jewish Malayalam literature (and probably reshaping it as well). Hebrew poetry must have been produced in Cochin prior to the sixteenth century as is evident in the poetically stylized verses engraved on the stone inscriptions predating the sixteenth century. Though it is difficult to assess the extent of indigenous Hebrew poetry before the 1600s, I believe it was rather limited in scope at the time. To the best of my knowledge, no Hebrew poems other than those inscribed on the synagogue inscriptions survived from the period preceding the sixteenth century.

Two Hebrew poets are known to have been active in Cochin of the mid-sixteenth century. One is Nāmya Motta, or Neḥemya the Elder, and the other is Eliyahu Ha-‘Adani, or Elijah the Adenite.<sup>16</sup> The poems of Nāmya Motta have become so popular, that they are still performed during Jewish holidays even in the synagogues and homes of Malayali Jews in Israel. Moreover,

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<sup>15</sup> For Jewish Malayalam literature in Malayalam texts and Hebrew translations, see Zacharia and Gamliel 2005. The reason for evaluating the emergence of Jewish Malayalam literature as predating Arabic Malayalam literature is based on the style and language of a relatively large collection of songs composed in the Old Malayalam *pāṭṭa* style (Gamliel 2018a, 56–8). A comparative analysis of both Jewish and Arabic Malayalam literature in view of Syriac Malayalam literature is currently underway in collaboration with István Perczel and Radu Mustață. We might derive a better evaluation of the periods of composition once dated compositions of the literatures in the Semitic religiolects are compared to each other and to contemporaneous *maṇipravālam* and Malayalam compositions.

<sup>16</sup> Motta is derived from Malayalam *muttaṅ*, ‘an old man’ (മുത്തൻ). Nāmya is the Malayalam pronunciation of the Hebrew name Neḥemya. Interestingly, a Malayalam form of the name Eliyahu Ha-‘Adani is unknown to ethnographers.

Nāmya Motta was elevated to the status of a saint, though it is unclear when exactly. Currently, his tomb is the only surviving remnant of a once extensive Jewish cemetery in Cochin. A stupa-like structure was built over it, including a stylized inscription praising him as a divine mystic who died in 1616 (Sassoon 1932, 547). The letters inscribed on the inscription protrude out of the stone, rather than engraved into it as those engraved on the synagogue inscriptions. Remarkably, the famous synagogue inscription from Parur dated to the same year, 1616, has the letters engraved in the stone. This difference in scribal style suggests that the tomb inscription postdates the actual date of burial, perhaps by more than a century. A material examination of sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth-centuries Hebrew inscriptions from Kerala might reveal the historical layers underlying the stylistic features of the grave-shrine and, consequently, shed light on the process that turned a poet's grave into a saint shrine.

Nāmya Motta's contemporary Eliyahu Ha-'Adani too left a rich poetic legacy in the repertoire of Kerala Jews, including the poem constituting the Parur synagogue inscription of 1616, the year in which Nāmya Motta died. Though Ha-'Adani was not elevated to the position of a saint, a collection of his poems is the earliest printed book belonging to the Cochin Jewish tradition. The book was printed in Amsterdam in 1688 (see below), and it thus signifies the advent of a new type of Jewish textual networks between Cochin and Amsterdam with printing books being at its core. The importance of the printed-text network can be substantiated by the correspondence between a Yemenite Rabbi Yiḥya Ṣālah (1713–1805) and David Raḥabi, the leader (*mutaliyār*) of the Paradeśi Jews in Cochin at the time. Rabbi Ṣālah corresponded for five years (1779–1784) with Raḥabi seeking his assistance in printing his essays in Amsterdam. The essays remained in a manuscript form, apparently because David Raḥabi failed to keep his promise to send the manuscript to the publisher in Amsterdam (Ratzabi 1989), to the dismay of Rabbi Ṣālah. This incident poignantly points at the dramatic effects that the shift in transregional alliances had on the lives of individuals during the time. The Yemenite scholar expected the Cochini trader to help him in connecting with the center of print technology in Amsterdam and with the Jewish community there. The lack of interest on the part of the Cochini trader speaks volumes of the dwindling influence of Yemenite Jewry in the transregional networks between West Asia and Malabar during the seventeenth century.

Jewish cultural life in Cochin during the Portuguese period seems to have fared well, with new synagogues built or old ones being renovated, Hebrew poetry composed, as well as Jewish Malayalam literature. Yemenite Jewry had the most direct influence over the Jews of Kerala during that time, as is evident by the creative activity of the two Yemenite poets and by other historical visitors from Yemen to Cochin, such as the merchant-traveler Zacharia al-Dahari, who mentions Sephardic Jews in mid-sixteenth century Cochin (Schorsch 2014, 66). It is likely, though, that the mention of Sephardic Jews is for poetic reasons, as the text al-Dahari composed is metrical and rhyming, namely, of the poetic, rather than the documentary, genre.

It is during the Dutch period that evidence for a drastic change in the textual networks emerges, depictive of a new type of alliance based on origin myths and on contacts with European Jewish merchants and Christian missionaries. Though the earliest text of this sort is composed in Portuguese (rather than Hebrew), it is based on an account told by Cochin Jews. Therefore, I turn to it first for tracing the history of Jewish networks in Malabar.

#### NOTISIAS DOS JUDEOS DE COCHIM

In 1686, a Dutch Jewish merchant by the name Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva traveled to Surat on a business trip. His ancestors settled in Amsterdam after the expulsion of Jews from Portugal in 1497, and his family became rich and influential. One of them was deeply involved in the messianic movement of the mystic Shabbatai Zevi (Kaplan 1995, 242–3), an involvement that is echoed in questions about Shabbatai Zevi that Pereyra de Paiva poses before the Cochin Jews (Pereyra de Paiva 1923 [1687], 9). Pereyra de Paiva traveled to Surat along with two other merchants for trading in gems. They proceeded to Cochin on the invitation of the Dutch governor Gelmer Vosburgh and stayed in his house for a few days in late November. They met with Paradeši Jews in Cochin and paid a visit to the Malabari Jews in Ernakulam, on the other side of the backwaters separating Cochin from the mainland. Pereyra de Paiva wrote an emotional narrative describing the visit and the Jews of Cochin, and reproducing the story he had heard from them about their origin in Kerala. He refers to his Jewish hosts in Cochin as “Our Brethern”, whom he lists in detail for their names and ancestry. Based on the list, it is clear that his hosts were the Paradeši Jews of Cochin. He contrasts them with the Jews of all other communities (nine synagogues), whom he refers to by the term “Malabaree”. The stories he

recorded in the Notisias are telling in regard of the early modern alliances between Jews in Malabar and European Jews and Christian traders and missionaries.

The Notisias is often quoted for being the earliest reference to (and “translation” of) the famous Jewish Copper Plates and for the lists of Jewish householders of the Paradesi community on the one hand, and of all other communities of the Malabar Jews on the other hand. Pereyra de Paiva’s list of twenty-three Paradesi households is detailed; he names the male family heads, the country of origin of their ancestors (often grandfather or great grandfather), and marks twelve families as *branco*, literally, “white”. Strangely enough, the list of *brancos* is a mixture of families from West Asia, a family from Germany, and a family originating in Kerala. Those unmarked as *branco* are of the same mixture, including members of the Qasti’el family. Clearly, the label *branco* has nothing to do with ethnicity, and, consequently, is unrelated to color or to Jewish pedigree (cf. Segal 1983, 237; Schorsch 2014, 71–2). To complicate the matter even further, the communities of Malabaree Jews too are marked; there are *acomodada*, “wealthy”, communities as opposed to *pobre*, “poor”, and three communities unmarked as either (Pereyra de Paiva 1923 [1687], 7). Apparently, the Portuguese Jewish merchants hosted by the Dutch governor were more interested in the socioeconomic status of the local Jews than in their ethnicity or “color”, an issue that was of Portuguese concerns (Tavim 2010) and that later came to permeate reports on and studies of Kerala Jews to this day.<sup>17</sup> When precisely Jews begin to be self-differentiated on the basis of color in Kerala is unclear. It is however clear that the label “*branco*” does not denote race or ethnicity in the Notisias.

The interest of the Dutch Jewish merchant in the socioeconomic conditions of Malabar Jewry is closely intertwined with an eagerness to incorporate the history of the community in messianic Judeo-Christian history replete with traditions of the ten lost tribes and forgotten Jewish kingdoms. The story recorded by Pereyra de Paiva addresses such concerns. More importantly, it points at geopolitical alliances and rivalries while labelling the majority of Malabar Jewry as an estranged Other. That “othering” is presented under the same pretext given in the Cochin

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<sup>17</sup> Examples for studies focusing on the black-white Jewish distinction are Mandelbaum 1975; Segal 1983; Schorsch 2014. Contrarily, Kerala Jews define their communal identities based on their synagogue community affiliation, except for the Paradesi, a term reserved in early modern Kerala to foreign, itinerant merchants, mostly from West Asia, similar to the distinction between Paradesi and Māppiḷa among Muslims of Malabar (Dale 1980, 23–4).

Responsum: Jewish pedigree contrasted with slave origins. Whereas in the Cochin Responsum the slave labelling is formulated as a legal query, in the Notisias it is presented as a pseudo-historical narrative. Below are narrational excerpts from the Notisias demonstrating the pseudo-historical dimension of the slave labelling.<sup>18</sup>

The origins of these Malabarees arose from the fact that the Jews of Cranganore had great wealth including a number of slaves. One among them who was learned in the law, powerful and respected, taught Judaism to twenty-five of his slaves and gave them liberty and one synagogue. After sometime, the masters of these slaves died and were reduced in numbers; the slaves united with their equals and were increased in the manner seen today (Fegueirdo 1968, 34).

This narration strikingly contrasts with the Cochin Responsum, where the so-called “slave descendants” are not only numerically superior, but also excel in their financial and political status. Whereas the Cochin Responsum attributes the allegations against the “slave descendants” to “jealousy and hatred”, the Notisias attributes the conflict to decline in offspring, hinting that the root cause for decline is the difficulty to find prestigious “equals” to “unite” with.

The narration then proceeds to tell a fantastic story regarding the origins of those “Jews of Cranganore”, beginning with exile and captivity, and culminating in claims of a golden era, when Jews had their own king, Joseph Rabban. On their way to glory and sovereignty, the Jews are patronized by a mighty king, the famous Cheramāṇ Perumāḷ.

In the year 4130 (370 CE) [...] there arrived on the Coast of Malabar 70–80,000 souls (Israelites) from Mayorca, whereto their forefathers were carried as captives [...] this multitude found favour in the eyes of the king Cheram Perumal (his kingdom extended from Goa to Colombo) [...] he gave to Joseph Rabban the city of Cranganore (this city is 4 leagues from Cochin). They settled down with 15,000 souls of royal descent with their king in Cranaganore; famous Rabbis, men with means and others settled down in

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<sup>18</sup> All the excerpts from the Notisias are translated by Fegueirdo 1968.

Madayi, Peryapatnam,<sup>19</sup> and Cherigandaram,<sup>20</sup> and in the last named place, the tomb of Rabbi Samuel Ha-Levi is seen even today (Feguierdo 1968, 38).

As is typical of Jewish origin myths, the history of Cochin Jews as narrated in the *Notisias* begins with exile and captivity. Less typically, though, the narration proceeds to praise a gentile king, who gave the Jewish refugees the city of Cranganore not only to settle in but also to rule over it. That king is so mighty that he rules from Goa to Colombo, parallel the southeastern coastlines of the Arabian Sea all dotted with port towns that were, at the time, hubs of international long-distance trade *en route* Southeast Asia.

The king-patron of the Jews, according to the *Notisias*, is a character well known from Islamic traditions as the Hindu king who converted to Islam and ordered to divide his country into twelve parts and to build a mosque in each region, including Madayi and Kodungallur. This tradition definitely predates the *Notisias*, and it is highly likely to have been appropriated by Cochin Jews, with some adjustments.<sup>21</sup> The adjustments are important; the Jewish version drops out the motif of conversion in relation to the king. Conversion in the socioeconomic context of Cochin Jews is reserved for “slaves” for reasons partially due to Jewish inheritance and lineage laws (Gamliel 2018b, 210–21). Therefore, in the context of the Cochin Jews’ origin myth and against the backdrop of the Cochin Responsum, conversion would be unbecoming of a king. Nevertheless, perhaps to complement for distancing royalty from Jewishness, the Cochin Jewish origin myth creates a Jewish king, whose kingdom is destined to be destroyed brutally by internal dissent, almost like the legendary Jerusalem.

Importantly, besides Cranganore, other towns are mentioned, with Chendamangalam the only one to have a visible relic for a Jewish past (the 1269 tombstone of Sarah Bat Israel).

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<sup>19</sup> Periyapattanam

<sup>20</sup> Chendamangalam

<sup>21</sup> The origin myth of Malabar Muslims attributing the advent of Islam to the region under the patronage of Cheramān Perumāḷ is attested for its popularity in Zainuddin Makhdam’s *Tuḥfat al-Mujāhidīn* (Nainar 2006) believed to have been composed no later than 1583 (Friedman 1975), close to a century earlier than the *Notisias*. The *Tuḥfa*, as well as the Muslim origin myth, both claim that Jews and Christians were settled in Malabar before the Muslims. Christians too attribute the advent of Christianity to the region to the same Ceramān Perumāḷ in their origin myths. The treatment of the intertextual affinities between the three traditions of origin and the variations and versions within each is a matter for a future study.

Contrarily, while Jews are known to inhabit Kodungallur and Madayi in the past, no evidence of a Jewish synagogue ever being built in those towns is available.<sup>22</sup> According to the *Notisias*, it is in Chendamangalam that a tombstone stands as witness to the Glorious Jewish past personified by the famous Sephardic poet, Rabbi Šmu'el Ha-Levi, who is allegedly buried there. Ironically, the only historical tombstone found in Chendamangalam is of a woman, most probably a convert woman, as stated above. It is this tombstone that the *Notisias* must be referring to, obviously without the author actually visiting the place and reading the inscription. As for Periyapattanam, to the best of my knowledge, the *Notisias* is the only Jewish text that even mentions it as a dwelling place of Jews. Periyapattanam is better known as a Muslim maritime trade town. It is located on the eastern coast of South India, in a region better known from Arab-Muslim medieval history by the name Ma'abar. While Ma'abar, or Tamilnadu, is known to the Arab Jews of the Geniza period, it was considered a less appealing destination than the port towns of the Malabar Coast. Notably, also Mallorca, the *Notisias*' professed origin of Cranganore Jews, is unknown to have had any significance in Jewish history, nor a memory of a Jewish settlement there.

Similarly, Kodungallur is not mentioned even once as a port of destination in the Geniza records published so far (Goitein and Friedman 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2013). If indeed there was a Jewish settlement there in medieval times, it must have been insignificant as it is of no concern for medieval Jewish traders. Even the often-quoted travelogue by Benjamin of Tudela seems to be ignorant of Kudungallur, while mentioning Kollam and the cities around it as the seat of some hundred Jews (Gamliel 2018a, 61). Moreover, no material or textual evidence exists to substantiate the claims for an important Jewish community ever settled there, besides a faint memory of a Jewish population implicit in a reference to a Jewish pond (*jūtakkulam*).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The assumption that the attributives Tekkumbhāgam and Kaṭavumbhāgam of two synagogues in Cochin and two in Ernakulam is often cited as proof to the historical location of two Kodungallur synagogues before the “exile” from the place (Bar-Giora 1958, 214; Johnson 1975, 146–47; Segal 1993, 20). As far as I can see, this might simply be an anachronism based on the origin myth. Other explanations should, and could, be suggested (Daniel and Johnson 1995, 129; Gamliel 2018a, 68–9).

<sup>23</sup> One might argue that the famous Jewish copper plates are evidence that there were Jews living in Kodungallur. However, the copper plates as transcribed and translated by M. G. S. Narayanan (1972) contain no evidence for the

Interestingly, a faded memory of a Jewish pond, or *jūtakkūlam*, exists also among the people currently residing in Madayi. The so-called Jewish pond is a large, rectangular reservoir carved into the laterite stone ground of the Madayi plateau (*māṭāyippara*), some 12 km southeast of Ezhimala. This “Jewish pond” is quite remarkable, as it seems to be an abandoned quarry, whose function was possibly transformed to serve as a water tank for cattle. The size and shape of the pond rule out the possibility that it was used as a *miqveh*, a pool constructed to serve for the Jewish purification bath. Moreover, Malabar Jews had no need in an artificial *miqveh*, for the regulations permit using an open water source such as the sea or rivers, so abundant in Malabar. Kesavan Veluthat suggested that the term might be derived from *jūtakkālam*, “Jewish neighborhood”.<sup>24</sup> Unlike Kodungallur, Madayi is situated in a region amply mentioned in the Geniza records (e.g. Jurfatan, Dahfatan). Furthermore, the name of Madayi still exists among some families of Kerala Jews in Israel. It also appears on a notebook of Jewish Malayalam songs dated to 1876, and starting with a series of biblical ballads in the Old Malayalam *pāṭṭa* style, resembling the Payyannūrpāṭṭa (Gamliel 2018a, 56–8; cf. Zacharia and Antony 1996). Taking all these bits and pieces of evidence into account, it seems plausible that indeed Jews settled in that area at some point in history and to some extent. Compared with and weighed against the evidence cited in reference to Kodungallur, both places seem to have had Jews inhabiting them sometime in the past. Notably, the case of Madayi is better supported by textual evidence found in the Geniza, while Kodungallur is better supported by evidence from the Portuguese period onward (cf. Tavim 2010).

Besides the mixture of facts and fiction in the Notisias, the immediate association that comes to mind upon reading the list of localities is of a map of international trade connections beginning with the Iberian Peninsula, covering all the Malabar Coast and beyond (from Goa to Colombo) and reaching as far as the easternmost outpost, Periyapattanam, towards

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beneficiary being a Jew (e.g. by a Hebrew signature as in the Kollam copper plates). Neither does the inscription grant land to the West Asian merchant to settle in. Moreover, the town mentioned in the inscription is Muiyirikkōṭa (Muziris), which albeit being associated with Kodungallur its identification has not been firmly established so far (Selvakumar 2006, 426–30).

<sup>24</sup> In a personal communication, 20/04/2017; compare with *jūtakkambōlam*, “Jewish Bazaar”, a term still used by Jewish Malayalam speakers in Israel to denote their old residence quarters in Ernakulam, Parur, and Chendamangalam.

Southeast Asia. This region, we should recall, was taken over by the Dutch from the Portuguese just a few decades prior to the visit reported in the *Notisias*. And here lies the gist of the matter, as becomes evident toward the conclusion of the origin myth: there is a “good” king, favoring the Jews, there are good and “pure” Jewish refugee-migrants since the late biblical period (ca. 70 CE, after the destruction of the second Jewish temple), there is a Jewish king, and, finally, there is a “bad” king responsible for the decline of the Jewish kingdom.

The *Notisias* proceeds at this point to narrate family feuds within the royal house of Joseph Rabban, culminating in royal fratricide and in rivalry over the Jewish throne, which is followed by the ultimate destruction of the town sacked by the “bad” king, the Zamorin (Fuguierdo 1968, 38–9). What follows these events, according to the *Notisias*, is a destructive internal dissent:

Since this event [the murder of the last Jewish king], the throne became a bone of contention between two parties until both asked for help from the Zamorin, the King of Calicut. At this time, the Malabaree Jews became bold and demanded marital union with the daughters and granddaughters of their masters. The masters resented the impudence of their slaves and rejected their demand. This enraged the slaves and they also appealed to the Zamorin advising him to pretend to support one party against the other or cheat both. They also promised to show the weakest parts of the place. The Zamorin attacked the town on a Sabbath midnight when the innocent people were all asleep. The Zamorin sacked the town and caused great destruction (*ibid*, 39).

Importantly, a historical reference to violent riots in Kodungallur’s market town between Jews and Muslims in 1524 appears in the late-sixteenth century Arabic treatise *Tuḥfat al-Mujāhidīn* (1583) by Zainuddīn Makhdūm (Nainar 2006). However, the Zamorin and his Muslim allies were in fact targeting the local ruler and his Christian allies who were collaborating with the Portuguese in their attempts to monopolize the pepper trade (Malekandathil 2001, 242–43). There is no evidence that the Zamorin had anything to do with Jews, whereas there is evidence that Cochin Jews were involved in the trade networks of the Portuguese at the time (*Ibid.*). Clearly, the conflation of historical facts and fanciful story-telling is at play in the *Notisias*; rather than attempting to prove or refute the narrative, the challenge is to evaluate the underlying

agenda of the story-tellers and their audience, a Portuguese Jewish merchant networking with the Dutch governor.

The mention of the “bad” Zamorin as opposed to a “good” patron king suggests that the perspective of the story-tellers is historically aligned with that of the Portuguese. The motif of a lost Jewish kingdom against this backdrop shows that the story is rooted in Hebrew textual networks that began to circulate elsewhere, away from Malabar. A similar story of a “bad” Zamorin contrasted with a “good” gentile king and a long forgotten Jewish kingdom emerges some 170 years *earlier* in the town of Florence, Italy. Remarkably, in the *Notisias*, this Jewish kingdom is Cranganore, whereas in the Hebrew texts produced in Italy, the kingdom is called Shingly. This name becomes associated with Cranganore and embraced by Paradesí Jews only later, sometime after the *Notisias* and before it appears in print in mid-eighteenth century Amsterdam (Qasti’el 1756, 1).

#### THE MESSIANIC YOHANAN ALEMANO, FLORENCE 1498–1503

The story of Shingly, a Jewish kingdom in Malabar, is first attested in notebooks written between 1498 and 1503 by an Italian Jewish scholar, Yohanan Alemanno (Lelli 2011). Alemanno lived in an age saturated with messianic aspirations among both Jews and Christians. Like many Jewish and Christian intellectuals of his time, he was concerned with the contingency of the arrival of the Messiah. Jews and Christians in Europe at the time shared common tropes regarding the anticipated Messianic era, among them the myths of the ten lost tribes, and of isolated and hidden Jewish or Christian kingdoms beyond the frontiers of the familiar world, somewhere in Ethiopia, or India. Fabrizio Lelli (2011, 192–5) ties these tropes to the Age of Discoveries and to the growing knowledge of the world geography. He views Alemanno’s messianic fervor as directly related to commercial interests bearing on his own social position under the patronage of Jewish businessmen in Florence and serving as a tutor for their children.

According to Lelli, Alemanno’s knowledge of Jews in distant lands as well as of the geographical discoveries of those lands relied on a mixture of traditional accounts (such as Benjamin of Tudela’s travelogue) and contemporaneous oral or written accounts provided by his Italian counterparts mainly from Palestine (*ibid.*, 197). What is striking about Alemanno’s accounts of Malabar is the recurring motif of a “good” king in favor of the Jews as opposed to the “bad” king

perceived as hostile. This motif seems to have been transposed over a century and a half to the story told in the *Notisias*, hence the assumption that the *Notisias* records a tradition that rather than originating in Malabar it was adapted by the Jews hosting Pereyra de Paiva. Arguably, the origins of the pseudo-historical accounts of Cochin Jews, as well as their adaptation and circulation, constitute networking strategies of Jews and Christians interested in Indian Ocean maritime trade, which by the early 1600s was firmly dominated by Arab Muslims.

Alemanó's account of Jews in Malabar attests the shift from Arab Jewish-Muslim trade networks to European Jewish-Christian alliances. This becomes apparent as one reads the two accounts, of which abstracts are given below. The first is presented as an eyewitness account, and the second is presented as a first-hand account by the Jews of Shingly, descendants of the Biblical Israelite exiles by the Assyrian king (2 Kings 17, 6), at long last discovered at the easternmost frontier of the newly-carved Portuguese trade routes. The narration, starting with the Portuguese discovery of the Indian Ocean maritime routes, is titled as "good news from a distant land that the seed of Israel has not perished". What follows is a brief itinerary from Africa to the Persian Gulf, toward the Indian Ocean (*yam hodu*). The translation below is an excerpt of the text that follows (omitted phrases are marked by three dots in brackets):

When they [the Portuguese] travelled across the Indian Ocean, they found places full of Ishmaelites (Muslims). One is a big city called Calicut (*Qlygwty*) and its ruler is very great. Another nearby kingdom is called Cochin (*Qwgyn*). Near Cochin there's a country extending 15-days walk. It is all populated by Jews. The king is called Joseph and his capital is called Shingly. [...] They are black and white like the Indians [...] and they are free of all tax. They are of the tribes of Judea and Benjamin [...]. All the pepper comes from that country. The Jews gather and sell it mostly in Cochin and especially to four mighty Ishmaelite merchants, who are settled there and who pay taxes to the king so that no man could buy from the Jews except for them in Cochin. And they sell it to the Portuguese.

In this excerpt, the Indian Ocean routes are depicted as a discovery of the Portuguese, and yet, they abound in Muslim (Ishmaelite) populations. One of those Muslim places is Calicut, ruled by a mighty king whose name or religious affiliation remains unmentioned. Note the uncommon spelling of the name Calicut with a /g/ instead of /q/ or /k/. This spelling reflects the Yemenite

pronunciation of /q/ (cf. Morag 1963, 18–19).<sup>25</sup> The neighboring kingdom is Cochin, whose name is spelled as in the Cochin Responsum discussed above, except for an additional /n/, probably reflecting the Portuguese pronunciation of the name with a nasal sound added to the final vowel. The narration proceeds to describe the Jewish kingdom, Shingly, populated by Jews (tribes of Judea and Benjamin) and ruled by a king, whose name, Joseph, connotes the Messianic aspirations of Alemano.<sup>26</sup>

This narration is the earliest to categorize Jews into groups of color, black and white, though the narrator echoes an earlier account by Benjamin of Tudela in stating that the Jews are like the Indians, suggesting that the Indians too are differentiated by color. The account ends with the most important piece of news: the Jews of Shingly are pepper merchants, but no one can buy it directly from them; there are four Muslim traders, tax-payers to the king of Cochin, who buy all the pepper from the Jews. This information, above all, reflects the Portuguese frustration in monopolizing the pepper trade in Malabar (Frenz 2003, 68–70; cf. Malekandathil 2001, 241–3; Tavim 2010, 9–10). The Portuguese geopolitical interest becomes even more apparent in the section immediately following:

All this was told by the above-mentioned Portuguese [Jew], Hayim Franco, who talked with two Rabbis who boarded the ship [...] with a venerable Jew, one of the servants of King Joseph, a messenger sent to the four Ishmaelite pepper merchants, to deposit 10,000 ducats with the shipmaster for ensuring that this Hayim will return to the ship after meeting King Joseph. But Hayim refused, for he feared for his life, and he did not talk to them being afraid of the ship master.

Arthur Lesley (2002) presents this text as a first-hand witness account of the Jews of the kingdom of Shingly, and as external evidence supporting the various legends recorded (and even prompted) solely by European Jews and Christian missionaries from the late seventeenth century onwards (Gamliel 2018a). This is a somewhat naïve assumption; Alemano's text is anything but

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<sup>25</sup> The spelling *qlygwty*' might reflect an actual pronunciation Qaligutin. A thorough examination of the various spellings of Calicut (and other place names in Malabar) in Arabic and Hebrew might provide linguistic evidence for the routes of geographical knowledge exchange from the medieval to the early modern.

<sup>26</sup> According to Jewish traditions, the messiah is a son of David, whose arrival is to be introduced by a son of Joseph (see Lelli 2011, 195 fn. 13).

a first-hand account. The account must have been transmitted via a series of people along the routes that extended from the Portuguese ship to the Eastern Mediterranean until finally reaching Florence, where Alemano was relentlessly searching for signs heralding the Messiah. Whether a Hayim Franco did indeed sail to Malabar aboard a Portuguese ship cannot be verified. However, this account probably relies on historical occurrences involving Portuguese Jews (*besides* New Christians) in the Portuguese international networking strategies (Tavim 2009). Besides, even according to this account, Franco did not come into direct contact with the Jews of Cochin (or Shingly, as it is called in the story). While the preceding account provides various details about the “Shingly” Jews (some of them are obviously fanciful), the “first-hand witness” avoided any contact with them fearing for his life. Why was Hayim Franco afraid of the shipmaster? The narration remains silent on the reason. It is clear though that there was *no* direct interaction between that Hayim Franco and the “Shingly” Jews. Under these circumstances, how can this be a first-hand witness of the kingdom of Shingly? It may very well be an appropriation of a hearsay account, elaborated with imaginative details to fit into the messianic ideology of the author, Yohanan Alemano.

Notwithstanding the shaky and less than reliable evidence that Alemano’s account provides, it provides an important geopolitical perspective; the “Shingly” Jews operate in a negotiation zone demarcated by the Muslim merchants of Cochin on the one hand and by the seafaring Portuguese on the other hand. Rather than “proving” that any Jewish kingdom or a self-governed city ever existed in Malabar, let alone in the early modern period, the account reveals the networking strategies adapted by Mediterranean Jews to align with the emerging Portuguese maritime power seeking domination over Indian Ocean trade, and soon to be followed by other European trade companies.

Similarly, a supposedly first-hand account of the Jews of Shingly is found in a record attributed to one Rabbi Moshe b. Aba Mori, possibly a Yemenite Jew (Mori is a common term used by Yemenite Jews to denote a Torah teacher of children). This time, the account is addressed in the first person, in the voice of the “Shingly Jews” themselves.

Before the destruction of the first temple during the time of king Yerov’am Ben Nabat, nine tribes had settled in Kush (Ethiopia). We who are settled in the land of Shingly are of the tribe of Judea and Benjamin. After the destruction of the second temple, Shmu’el

Ha-Levi, Israelites, and *kohens* (priests) came like primordial water to the land of Malibar and the name of their city is Shingly.

The Messianic overtones of this excerpt are clear. It is also clear that the account underlines the “Shingly” Jews as part and parcel of the wider Jewish Diaspora, descendants of the tribes of Judea and Benjamin, even though they migrated “before the destruction of the first temple”.

Notably, this short excerpt also mentions a name that is repeated by the “Cranganore” Jews in the *Notisias*, Shmu’el Ha-Levi, who is supposed to be buried in Chendamangalam. Rather than historical facts, this detail shows above all that the legends of a Jewish Kingdom and of ancient lost Jews circulated around the Mediterranean all through the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, until they finally reached “back home” to the Jews actually settled on the Malabar Coast. The Paradeśi Jews in Cochin simply echoed the legend, eager to provide the rich European merchant, well networked with the Dutch VOC, precisely what he was yearning to hear. Interestingly, they do not mention Shingly at all. The place they refer to is Cranganore, a place that stands not only at the center of origin myths of diverse communities (possibly since the time of the Cilappatikāram), but also one of the strongholds of Portuguese pepper trade (Frenz 2003, 68–70).

The Judeo-Christian Messianic networks engendered references to Malabar in several other Hebrew texts that deserve more attention than I am able to give at the moment. Before concluding, one last piece of textual evidence that is perhaps best exemplifying the geopolitical alliance with the Portuguese is found in the journal (*sippur*) of the messianic self-appointed diplomat, David Ha-Re’uveni.

#### THE MESSIANIC DAVID HA-RE’UVENI, LISBON 1525

David Ha-Re’uveni was a dubious character, who appeared in Italy in the early 1520s with a mission to align with the Portuguese against the Muslims and conquer Jeddah, a strategic node in the Indian Ocean port-town network. By this, he sought to have Jews and Christians collaborating on influencing the anticipated arrival of the Messiah. Ha-Re’uveni presented himself as the brother of a king called Joseph, ruling over a sovereign Jewish kingdom called Ḥabor equipped with military forces and located three to ten days journey from Jeddah. Ha-Re’uveni presented himself and the Jews living in his imaginary Arabian-Jewish kingdom as

descendants of the ten lost tribes, a key term related to messianic aspirations. Moreover, he sought to convince the king of Portugal to align with Ḥabor as well as with the kingdom of Prester John, another key term connoting Judeo-Christian messianic aspirations. Ha-Re'uvani managed to convince the Pope in Rome to recommend him for an interview with King Manuel I, which indeed was granted in 1525 (Benmelech 2011, 35–6). It is during that interview that Ha-Re'uvani mentions Calicut and Shingly, of which he hears from the captain of a Portuguese ship:

Thereafter they served different kinds of sweets, various matters [unclear], and they removed the tablecloth and [cleared] the table. The king stood by the table, and the barbers were greeting him, and all the people bowed down [before him]. Then the king entered followed by the queen, and I followed him in with my servants and with an Arab speaker. As for the captain who was captured in India, they brought him before the king that day. I was standing before the king. The captain was standing before the king. The king asked him: "The land of India and Calicut—are there Jews there?" The captain replied: "There are so many Jews that they cannot be numbered. They are in Shingoli, ten-day walking distance from Calicut. Then he told the king many awesome, important, and great things about the Jews who are in Shinogli. The king asked further, "Have you heard whether the Jews have kings?" And he replied to the king that the Jews have, and are ruled over by, kings. And the servants before me, and the Jews, as well as the Arabic speaker—they heard all these things and they told [i.e. translated for] me.<sup>27</sup>

Ha-Re'uvani was an Arabic speaker (Benmelech 2011, 35), therefore he mentions an Arabic-speaking companion, evidently his interpreter at the Portuguese court. Notably, there were also Jews at the court, who could also speak directly with the Arab-speaking Jew, possibly in Hebrew.

<sup>27</sup> The Hebrew text is in Cahana 1922, 73–4:

ואחרי כן נתנו מיני מתוקים, עניינים הרבה, ואח"כ הסירו המפות והשלחן. ועמד המלך על רגליו בשלחן, והגלחים מברכים אותו, ומשתחווים כל העם. ואח"כ נכנס המלך לפני המלכה אשתו ונכנסתי אני אחרי עם המשרתים שלי ועם בעל לשון ערב. והשרים הגדולים נכנסו גם כן אחרי לפני המלכה. ואת הקאפיטאניא שהיה תפוס מאינדיאה הביאו אותו לפני המלך ביום ההוא. ואני עומד לפני המלך. ועמד הקאפיטאניא בפני המלך. ושאל אותו המלך בפני ואמר לו: ארץ אינדיא וקאליקוט אם יש יהודים שם?" והשיב הקאפיטאניא אל המלך: "יש יהודים רבים אשר לא יספרו מרוב בשינגולי רחוק מקאליקוט מהלך עשרה ימים". ודבר למלך דברים נוראים נכבדים וגדולים מאת היהודים אשר הם בשינגולי. ושאל לו המלך גם כן: "אם שמעת שיש ליהודים מלכים?" והשיב למלך כי יש עליהם ולהם מלכים. והמשרתים אשר היו בפני, היהודים וגם בעל לשון ערב, שמעו כל אלה הדברים, והם דברו לי הכל.

Recall that Ha-Re'uvei was negotiating an imaginary Jewish geopolitical power between the Arab-Muslim world and Christian Europe, which retained loose and, at the same time, continuous contacts with the "South Asian Frontier", to use Stephen Dale's expression, of the Muslim world (Dale 1980). In many respects, the Malabar Coast was the easternmost frontier for Arabic speaking Jews, from Yemen, to Persia, Turkey, and Alexandria, as attested in the Cochin Responsum. But Ha-Re'uvei first hears of Shingly and the Jewish kingdom in India, from a captain captured in India,<sup>28</sup> which is contrasted here with Calicut, the trade emporium that the Portuguese at the time were striving to take over, by either diplomacy or by force (cf. Subrahmanyam 2012, 99). This is the same Calicut that Alemano's accounts contrast with Cochin, that place populated by Ishmaelites, hostile to a place that is not only populated by Jews but also governed by them, the mythical Shingly.

As with Alemano, Ha-Re'uvei's journal is written at a time of geopolitical transformations and new models of Judeo-Christian interactions, such as the Hebraist Renaissance in Italy (Lelli 2011), wherefrom Ha-Re'uvei sets forth on his mission. Benmelech (2011, 47–8) explains the mission of Ha-Re'uvei as "historical messianism":

The arena where the messianic drama is to take place according to this conception is in historical and geopolitical reality, and the approach or advancement of redemption will be accomplished by creating a historical and political situation to serve as background for the messianic event, and by shaping it according to the messianic scenario. [...] Martin Jacobs recently claimed that historical events such as rivalry between Christian Europe and the Muslim Ottoman Empire, and the struggle over the spice trade in particular, fed Jewish messianic hopes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and that Ha-Re'uvei's story is an expression of a Jewish perspective on this power struggle. I suggest that Ha-Re'uvei's activities reflect an attempt to affect and design the historical events, and not merely passively watch and interpret them.

Viewed from the Malabar Coast, I would argue, messianic hopes meant an alliance with the emerging dominance of Christian Europe over maritime trade in the Indian Ocean, and the

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<sup>28</sup> In which language did he speak? Clearly it was not Arabic, as the interpreter translated the conversation for Ha-Re'uvei. Being a captive from India, the captain is labelled as foreign to the Portuguese, so he was probably not a Portuguese either. He might have been an Indian or a Turk, therefore.

growing interest of European Jews in the imaginary glorious Jewish kingdom meant much more than a Jewish interpretation of power struggles between super powers; it meant an active involvement in forming religion-based alliances, a new type of network, that the Arab Jew David Ha-Re'uveni was striving to align with, albeit in an eccentric and haphazard manner that finally led to his incarceration and execution.

To conclude, the Notisias account of a lost Jewish kingdom in Kodungallur aka Cranganore echoes a Judeo-Christian messianic ideology. The fact that its earliest record appears in a late-seventeenth century account of a Portuguese Jewish merchant hosted by the Dutch governor of Cochin speaks volumes. Following the Notisias several accounts in Hebrew and in various European languages were circulating among missionaries and Jewish scholars, with sincere attempts to verify the historical facts supposedly expressed in the story in its various incarnations. It is not my intention here to refute the origin myth as a fanciful story and nothing more, but rather to relocate its historical origins in the early modern Western Mediterranean. Consequently, its emergence as the origin myth of Paradesi Jews in late-seventeenth century Cochin is evidence for an attempt, clearly a successful one, to align with the Judeo-Christian ideology as a networking strategy in the international trade arena. David Ha-Re'uveni first hears of Shingly at the court of the Portuguese king, with whom he tries to forge an alliance against Muslims, who are perceived in the various versions of the origin myth, whether in Italy or in Cochin, as hostile rivals to Jews and to their patron king in Cochin. It should come as no surprise therefore, that soon after the Notisias begins to be circulated in Europe the messianic ideology finds its expression among Cochin Jews as well.

#### THE MESSIANIC AGE IN COCHIN

In 1692, six years after Pereyra de Paiva visits Cochin, an anonymous poet composes a Jewish Malayalam song referring to the Hebrew year, 5452 from creation (Anno Mundi), cited in Malayalam numerical words occupying the first two lines of the song (Gamliel 2009, 437–8). Contrarily to the information provided in the Notisias, stating that Cochin Jews have not heard of Shabbatai Zevi, the song contains a typical messianic message in what later becomes a recurring “redemption motif” in Jewish Malayalam literature (*ibid.*, 213–22). It is difficult to tell whether this is the earliest occurrence of the “redemption motif” in Jewish Malayalam literature, but it is clear that around the time of the composition of the Notisias, messianism was already introduced

in Cochin. The song was probably intended to be performed in a life-cycle event, for the third verse describes a ceremonious drinking of wine by two named individuals, “Give the wine of the well-preserved fruit to David. When he drinks it, join in Meir son of Abraham”.<sup>29</sup> The verb “join in” (*kūtt-*) suggests that the event in question is a Bar Mizva, for in Jewish Malayalam it is called “joining in the quorum” (*miniyān kūttalā*) (Gamliel 2013, 143). The third line mentions a “man born on the day the temple was destroyed”,<sup>30</sup> namely, the Ninth of Ab. With the Hebrew year mentioned in the previous verse, the date would be 22 July 1692, probably referring to the person “joining in [the quorum]”, Meir son of Abraham, mentioned in the third verse.

Leaving aside the speculations regarding the circumstances implied by the song, the redemption motif is evident albeit scattered between lines and only loosely resembling what later becomes a constantly repeated verse of redemption in more or less fixed formulaic expressions. Thus, the first line of the second verse is a condensed prayer for redemption, “scatter the unholy nation, and redeem the holy nation”,<sup>31</sup> alluding to the anticipated gathering of the scattered Jews, including the “ten lost tribes”. The third line of the second verse mentions Gog and Magog, a term closely linked to the notion of apocalypse and, as a consequence, the messianic era: “surrender Gog and Magog in the hands of King David”.<sup>32</sup>

The fact that this song is dated to the end of the seventeenth century, and that it mentions names of, most probably, community members present at the occasion of composition, makes it historically significant to the evolution of messianic ideology among Malabar Jewry. Interestingly, a milestone in the formation of textual networks connected to European Jews is reached four years earlier—the printing of Eliyahu Ha-‘Adani’s collection of Hebrew poems in

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<sup>29</sup> All translations from Malayalam are mine. കാർത്തുവെച്ച പഴത്തിന്റെ യായിൻ (wine, Hebrew)/ ദാവീദിന്റെ കൈവിൽ കൊടുക്കവെണം// അപ്പാൾ അതു കുടിക്കുന്ന നെരത്തു/ അബ്രാഹാമിന്റെ മകൻ മെയിർന കൂട്ടണം//

<sup>30</sup> അഴിഞ്ഞ മീകദാശിന്റെ നാളിൽ പെറുന്ന പുരുഗന പെരയവെണം

<sup>31</sup> അശ്രുധമായ ഗൊലത്തിന ചെതരെയും വെണം/ ശുദ്ധമായ ഗുലത്തിന മീതുവെണം// (The verb മീഴ്-, and its Jewish Malayalam variant മീത്- is the Malayalam verb used for translating the Hebrew word *ge’ulah*, namely, redemption of Israel.)

<sup>32</sup> ഗൊഗുമാകൊഗിന വഴങ്ങണം/ അരശൻ ദാവീദിന്റെ കൈമേലും//

Amsterdam (1688).<sup>33</sup> The last page of this publication bears an image of a ship sailing towards a bulky cloud on the top right, with the sails fully blown as if to push the ship eastwards. The image is possibly a printer's mark (*typographorum emblemata*), stamped at the end of the book, though it is unclear whether it contains letters as would be expected of a printer's mark. In any case, the image highlights the close affinities between the circulation of Hebrew texts and the aspirations to board the VOC ships sailing eastward.

Similarly, another dated song, the Ten Songs of Solomon, gives the year 1761, and contains the redemption motif. The song has ten verses, each of which, except for the last one, refers to a biblical poem or poetic verse and to the biblical character that composed it, from Adam to King Solomon (Gamliel 2009, 464–67). The tenth verse anticipates the arrival of the Messiah:

The tenth is the song that the Jewish nation is ordained to sing.  
Five thousand and five hundred and twenty one [years] have elapsed.  
Bring the Messiah! Gather the people from the scattered directions!  
Order and bring the Messiah for hearing the songs!<sup>34</sup>

This year too is the fourth year after printing in Amsterdam a collection of Hebrew poems compiled by David Qasti'el (1757).<sup>35</sup> The printed text is the earliest source from Cochin where

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<sup>33</sup> The first page reads: “Anthology of *'azharot* (Hebrew sacred poems) according to the custom of the people of the land of India of the holy congregation in Cochin [performed] at the second day of the *'atzeret* festival (the last day of the High Holidays) sent to us by the scholar Rabbi Levi Belilya from whose hand the excellent young man Mosseh Pereyra, may God protect him and keep him alive, took [them] for print. Here, the Holy Congregation of Amsterdam, [they] were printed by the legislator, the excellent gentleman, the scholar and rabbi, the honorable teacher our master rabbi, Aharon Ha-Levi, at his house, Tuesday, first of the month of Adar II, [5]448 Anno Mundi.”

סדר אזהרות לרבי אליה העדני כמנהג אנשי ארץ הודו בק"ק קוגין ביום שני חג עצרת אשר שלח אלינו החכם רבי לוי בליליא ועל ידו החזיק  
הבחור הנעלה משם פרייר יצ"ו להדפיסם. פה ק"ק אמשטירלדאם נדפסו על ידי המחוקק הגביר הנעלה החכ"ר אורי כמהר"ר אהרן הלוי  
זלצה"ה בביתו יום ג' א' דר"ח אדר שני תמ"ח לפ"ק.

<sup>34</sup> പത്താമത പാട്ടുവാൻ കല്പന ആയൊരി ജൂതർ ഗോലമ്പും ഇതൊന്നും/ കാലമെ കഴിഞ്ഞട്ടു അയ്യായിരത്തുമ്മെ അഞ്ഞൂറിരുപതു  
ഒന്നും// മാത്യു വരഞ്ഞെന്നം ഗോലത്തിന കൂട്ടെന്നം ചിതറിയ ദിക്കകളിന/ കല്പിച്ച മാത്യുന വരഞ്ഞെന്നം പാട്ടുകൾ കെൾപ്പാൻ  
തന്ന//

<sup>35</sup> The first page reads: “Prayers, praises, and poems for the days of Simḥat Torah, weddings, circumcision of male boys, and slaves and converts, and purificatory bath [for slaves and converts], for Purim festival days, for the High Holidays, and the Day of Atonement—all are collected and gathered according to the custom of the people of

the name Shingly is mentioned, possibly reflecting the adaptation to the Hebrew repertoire of Cochin Jews a poem composed by a Turkish poet called Nissim Ben Sanji (Gamliel 2018a, 63–4). With this, a process of diffusion of ideas and trends originating in Christian Europe of the early modern period reaches its culmination: Jewish Malayalam messianism and the adaptation of the term Shingly by the community in Cochin.

## CONCLUSION

This paper surveyed documents and texts of a small-scale “Hebrew Cosmopolis” embedded in Indian Ocean maritime trade networks since the ninth century and up to the eighteenth century. This rather brief survey of sources, though far from being exhaustive in relation to sources from the sixteenth century onwards, treated sources in Hebrew and Jewish languages affiliated with Jewish history in the Indian Ocean as strategic tools of networking across regions and communities. It showed that whereas in the premodern period networking texts had a legal or documentary character, the early modern period introduced a new model of networking strategy relying on the circulation of messianic texts and Judeo-Christian tropes.

A close reading of selected sources from both periods shows historical continuities as well as shifts and transformations. Thus, the legal and documentary character of Hebrew and Jewish sources of the premodern period continues well into the early modern period, while at the same time messianic traditions begin to circulate in the Eastern Mediterranean involving Malabar and its Jews in their geopolitical orientation. By the late seventeenth century, these Judeo-Christian messianic alliances emerge in Cochin, voiced by the Paradesi informants of Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva. Similarly, the contacts with Jews in the Arab world, especially in Yemen, that were established in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, persist onto the sixteenth and seventeenth

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Shingly, may God protect and redeem them, and the holy congregation in Cochin, may God protect and redeem them, printed in Amsterdam at the home of the brothers: the venerable Rabbi Yosef, the venerable Rabbi Ya’aqov, and the venerable Rabbi Avraham, may God protect and redeem them, sons of the late venerable Rabbi Shlomo Props, a Cohen, blessed be his memory, sellers and printers of books [1757].”

תפלות שבחות ושירים לימי שמחה תורה וחופת חתנים ולזמן מילת זכרים וסדר מילה וטבילת עבדים וגרים ולשמחת ימי הפורים ויום תרועה תקיעה ושברים ולסליחת עון ביום הכפורים המה יחד מצומדים ומחוברים כפי מנהגי אנשי שינגילי יצ"ו וקהל קדוש בקוגין השם ישמרם ויצילם נדפס באמשטרדם בבית האחים כהר"ר יוסף, כהר"ר יעקב וכהר"ר אברהם יצ"ו בני המנוח כהר"ר שלמה פרופס כ"ץ זצ"ל מוכרי ומדפיסי ספרים.

centuries, as evidenced by the Cochin Responsum and by the literary creativity of Nāmya Motta and Eliyahu Ha-'Adani. But these older legalistic and administrative alliances with Jews of the Islamic world shift and reorient first towards Sephardic Jewry, relying, on the one hand, on actual historical contacts formed before the arrival of the Portuguese, while, on the other hand, forging imaginary connections to the Iberian Peninsula by claiming Mallorcan origins and contacts with famous Sephardic poets and scholars.

By the late eighteenth century, the Paradeśi community is well connected with Jews in Western Europe, and its leaders continue to interact with Judeo-Christian messianic networks through the production and circulation of texts such as the apocalyptic text *The Words of Gad the Prophet* (cf. Bar-Ilan 2007). The textual networks of that later period remain to be examined in future studies. It is, however, reasonable to conclude at this stage that textual networks were connecting Jews in Malabar to Jews in the West since the ninth century CE, and that an older system of legal and administrative connection embodied in the Hebrew language and script was gradually replaced by textual connections of a literary character, poetic or legendary. Whereas the older system was typical of Jewish networks connected with Jews in the Islamic world, the early modern and modern systems were oriented towards European Jews and aligned with Judeo-Christian messianic ideology as well as shared financial and geopolitical interests.

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