Jews and Mappilas of Kerala: A study of their history and selected song traditions

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DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation for evaluation, I, Mark Aranha, declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by the University of Cape Town will not infringe any third-party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any other qualification.

Signature: Date: February 10, 2020

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A note on transliteration and orthography

This research works across several languages and dialects. The state language of Kerala is Malayalam but the region is a melting pot of various cultures. As will be discussed in the following chapters, Mappila culture has roots in Tamil, Malayalam, Arabic, and Persian cultures, among others. The Jewish culture of Kerala also has its roots in a range of Diasporic communities, apart from its own mix of Judeo-Malayalam. Neither community uses a pure standardised version of Malayalam, and the local dialects, especially what has been called "Mappila Malayalam", can be very different from the standard pronunciations. The implementation of a transliteration standard such as ITRANS or ISO15919 prescribes a single pronunciation where many coexist and could amount to an unfair "sanskritisation" of the terms (Srinivas 1956; Staal 1963).

Even if an accurate transliteration was desirable, it would be difficult to keep this work readable. Malayalam alone has an intimidating 42 consonants and 15 vowels! For example, the ITRANS equivalents of Malayalam words *nercha* and *thangal* would be "nERcha" and "taÑÑal". The presence of Arabic and Hebrew terms further complicates matters (e.g., with glottal sounds), and here too, the local pronunciation differs from the standard language.

I have thus kept my orthography relatively open, while making an effort to maintain consistency. I have indicated long and short vowels using the ITRANS standard (See ITRANS 2012 "The Vowels") for the Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, Tamil, and Malayalam terms. The consonants in these languages are subject to variable pronunciation depending on the local dialects and so have not been standardised. Instead, I have used what can be described as popular convention, e.g., the use of "zh" in "Kozhikode" for the voiced retroflex approximant. The Arabic and Hebrew spellings have been taken from the sources as cited. Orthographical variants are indicated in the footnotes. Special exception has been made for important nouns such as the word "Mappila" (ITRANS: *MaappiLa*). Other exceptions are "nercha" and

"thangal". These spellings are accepted and used by Mappilas themselves, and further serve to make this work readable and search friendly.

The small ports and towns of Kerala have accumulated many different names due to their ancient history under various domestic and foreign rulers, and their interaction with cultures from Africa to Europe to China. Today's Kollam was written as Coulam by Barbosa in the 15th century, Hsiao Ko-lan by Ma Huan in the 15th century,[1] also variously as Quilon (most British sources), Coilon, Kowlam, and Coulao. Today's Kozhikode was known to Arabs as Qaliqut. The colonial version of this, Calicut, is used by Indians even today. There are too many such examples to list at the outset, but I will address all these in the footnotes. I have taken the liberty to use different names for a single place depending on the era and the source that I am talking about. For example, if I am talking about my field work in 2018, I may use "Kochi", but if I am talking about field recordings during British rule, I will use "Cochin".

[1] English transliteration from Ptak (1987:690).

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation restudies archival recordings relating to the Jews and Mappilas of Kerala while revisiting their historiography to gain fresh insights into the pre-colonial past of Malabar and its position in the Indian Ocean networks of exchange.

The Malabar coast of Kerala, India, contained an important cluster of nodes in the historical Indian Ocean trade network. Foreign traders and travellers found it a hospitable place to settle, leading to the emergence of several communities built on waves of migration over the centuries. The Jews and Mappilas of Kerala are two of these communities. Remarkably, their peaceful integration into Kerala society did not preclude the retention and development of their own distinct identity, language, and performance tradition.

This research comes under the project *Re-Centring AfroAsia: Musical and Human Migrations in the Precolonial Period 700–1500 AD*.[2] It contributes to a growing body of work on the history of pre-colonial globalisation that formed around the Indian Ocean. Trade and exchange along land routes such as the Silk Road were studied since 1877,[3] but up to the middle of the 20th century, studies of sea routes concentrated mostly on colonial expansion rather than maritime systems of exchange (Toussaint 1980:154). Fernand Braudel's ground-breaking 1949 publication *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II* was the first to treat the Mediterranean Sea as a dynamic organic system; one that integrates societies, civilisations, and geographies. The book embodied the spirit of "the *Annales* school" that

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[2] This project is centred at the University of Cape Town, and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. I will henceforth refer to this project by its shortened title, *Re-Centring AfroAsia*, or its abbreviation, *RAA*. The project website URL is http://afroasia.uct.ac.za

[3] See Tamara Chin's "The Invention of the Silk Road, 1877" for a chronology of the term "Silk Road" (2013:197).

revolutionised and revitalised the study of history itself (Trevor-Roper 1972).[4] The next few decades saw the setting up of university chairs of "ocean history" and the establishment of academic associations such as the International Commission for Maritime History in 1960, the Association of Historians of South-East Asia in 1961 (Toussaint 1980:153).

By 1985, KN Chaudhuri had extended Braudel's framework for the Mediterranean to the much larger Indian Ocean. This ancient ocean was criss-crossed for millennia by ships from all directions leading to "flows of capital and labour, skills and services, ideas and culture" (Bose 2006:3). Drawing from multiple disciplines, from mathematics to culinary arts, Chaudhuri sought to present a comparative pre-colonial experience of the various regions and civilisations that lived around it and interacted through it. Until that point it was difficult for scholars to imagine or express a perceptible unity across spaces and cultures as diverse as East Africa, the Arab world, the Indian subcontinent, China, and Southeast Asia. He utilised Braudel's theory of time, *la longue durée,* to tackle an entire millennium in the history of the Indian Ocean, showing similarities and continua over large swathes of time.

The studies that have sprouted around such ideas of the Indian Ocean reveal an interest in how the unravelling of such histories hold relevance in the contemporary. This dissertation locates itself in that historical framework with a view to understanding contemporary societies.

Music as an entry point

While the study of history through the archive is evolving, the aesthetic fields remain largely underutilised. In a 1974 UNESCO conference on the "Historical Relations across the Indian Ocean", J. de V. Allen expressed the importance of studying the Indian Ocean from beyond just documentary sources:

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[4] French historians Marc Bloch, Lucien Fèbvre, and Fernand Braudel are considered the founding fathers of the *Annales* school, so named for their periodical *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations*.

> Perhaps it may turn out that if the Indian Ocean history has a sound skeleton of documentary matter, it has an even more ample flesh and sinew of artefacts of various types which, if looked at overall and not piecemeal, will allow us to recognize that it has a quite different shape from what we have hitherto believed. Or, to put it another way, perhaps it will turn out that **"**cultural historians" in the broadest sense of that term, will have at least as important a part to play as their more orthodox "documentary" colleagues (1980:145-146).

There are ways in which cultural historians, anthropologists and ethnomusicologists combine historical information with cultural features and practices of communities that were part of historical migrations. Blench (2014) acknowledged that not all kinds of migratory activities leave material imprints in the archaeological record, and if one is to reconstruct a narrative of the movement of immaterial culture, traditional sources and methods do not suffice. He calls for "binding together very different classes of evidence and reaching conclusions with lower levels of certainty than can be expected from 'scientific' archaeology" (2014:677).

Music and cultural formations are dynamic structures, *à la* Chaudhuri (1985) and Braudel (1949), which can allow us to further investigate the pre-colonial past and enrich our understanding of it. Taking forward Braudel's ideas on a multidisciplinary approach to the history of the littoral, and Blench's approach to looking for and analysing musical evidence, this dissertation will examine the history and music of communities that represent the long migrations. An archival collection of field recordings by Arnold Bake in 1938 will serve as the basic musical material for this study.

A brief introduction to Kerala and its position in pre-colonial Indian Ocean trade

This study is based in Malabar. The Malabar coast has been visited by travellers and traders since antiquity, and in fact, owes this name to these visitors. Nainar writes that the name came from the port Kulam Mali as known to Arab travellers in the 12th century, and the Persian word "bar", meaning country (2011:58). Under British rule, the Malabar District was an administrative region on the southwest coast of India, starting at Cannanore in the north and

ending at the princely state of Cochin in the south (*ibid*).[5] Today, "Malabar" is not a formally defined region, but is understood by locals to designate the same area. It forms the northern half of the modern Indian state of Kerala – a fertile, green strip of land with coconut groves, rice paddies, rivers, and lagoons. It is bounded on the east by the Western Ghats, a mountain range, and by the Arabian Sea on the west.

It lies on the southwest side of the Indian peninsula which is neatly located right in the middle of the Indian Ocean. The seasonal winds known as the monsoon carried ships from North African and West Asian ports straight to the Malabar coast, and a few months later changed direction to facilitate the return journey. Instead of undertaking a longer, coast-hugging journey, these merchant ships could use the monsoon routes to cut across the Arabian Sea in a matter of 40 days.

Jews, Christians, and later Muslims, came in pursuit of trade – to buy teak, spices, textiles, and above all, black pepper. Black pepper was high value cargo owing to its great demand overseas, and the land of Malabar was the only known source. MGS Narayanan, the foremost historian on Kerala, says that "the history of Kerala is mostly the history of the wars and conflicts for gaining the monopoly over its pepper trade" (pers. comm., Jan 9, 2018). A network of rivers and deltas on the coastline allowed the emergence of protected inland harbours where the local rulers courted foreign merchants who brought the promise of trade and military assistance (Chakravarti 2019).

Before going into the migrations to and within Kerala, it will be useful to get a broad understanding of the important ports and the chronology of their changing importance until the establishment of European colonies. Malekandathil put forth the idea of a dynamic port-hierarchy in pre-modern Kerala, where at any given point in time, there were one or two

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[5] Most places had anglicised names during the British Raj. In Kerala, Kannur was Cannanore, Kochi was Cochin, Kozhikode was Calicut, Kollam was Quilon, and so on.

primary ports which the others served as satellite or feeder ports. This allowed the dominant ruler of that time to collect his share of taxes and tolls and control the flow of goods (Malekandathil 2010).

At the turn of the first millennium, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* describes Muziris[6] as the central pivot, fed by Tyndis (Ponnani), Naura (Cannanore or Kannur), Bakare (Purakkad) and others.[7] There is a vast lacuna in the evidence until the emergence of Quilon (Kollam) in the 9th century, but Malenkandathil does suggest that Ezhimala was possibly one of these important centres in this period.[8]

Kollam took over the pepper trade at this point, becoming the preferred stopover for Egyptian and West Asian merchants on their way to Canton or the Malay Peninsula, as well as traffic coming from the east (2010:81). The old ports of Kodungallur, Ezhimala (Dely in Portuguese accounts) and Panthalayini (Fandarina/Flandrina) became its feeder ports. Interestingly, there are varying degrees of evidence of Jewish settlements in each one of these places, and this will be discussed in a later chapter.

A number of events from the 12th to the 14th century combined to hand Calicut the dominant position on the Malabar coast. The port of Calicut was patronised by the Egyptian Karimi merchants from the 13th century onwards.[9] These are likely to be the *Paradesy* merchants that Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa wrote about. Cochin began to gain

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[6] I have refrained from using a modern name for Muziris because the Malabar coast has experienced significant geographical changes since the *Periplus* and the matter of its exact location is unresolved – it might be Kondungallur, or Pattanam, or another place that has not yet been excavated. It is "Muziris" in the *Periplus* but may also be referred to as Kodungallur, Cranganore, Crongolor, Muriyikkode, Muchiri, Mahodayapuram, or others, depending on the source.

[7] The names in parentheses are what are believed to be the current locations of these Greek mentions in the *Periplus*.

[8] Quilon was the name used by Europeans. Kollam is the local name and is still in use today.

[9] Goitein found mention of a regular "Al-Karim" boat to South India in the letters of the Cairo Geniza (1987:463).

commercial importance in the 15th century, especially after the entry of the Sephardi Jews. However, the port was subordinated by the Zamorin in Calicut and the Nasraani trade was handed over to the Calicut Muslim traders.[10] The Portuguese later exploited this tension between the two states to gain a foothold in Kerala by duping the maharaja of Cochin (Panikkar 1960:49-52). Cochin became the first capital of the "Estado da India" and the primary port under Portuguese and later Dutch occupation (Malekandathil 2010:85-87). As one would expect, the above chronology influenced the locations of the trading outposts and settlements of the mercantile classes of that time.

Migrations to the region

The majority of these were traders with small cargoes, sometimes agents of land-based merchants back home (Das Gupta & Pearson 1999:15). Some were larger traders with multiple ships, and there were even conglomerations and corporations of merchants acting together to cover vast regions across the oceans. The Karimi (or Al-Karimi) merchants who operated out of Egypt from the 11th to the 12th centuries were one such group. Multinational merchant guilds such as the *Anjuvannam* and the *Manigraamam* worked these routes all the way up to Southeast Asia (Subbarayulu 2009 & 2015).[11]

Whether Kerala was their final destination or a stopover on the way to trading ports in China and Indonesia, the timing of the monsoon meant that merchants had to spend several months in port cities such as Kollam, Muziris, Cochin and Calicut.[12] It made sense for them to set up commercial settlements and enter into alliances with local women. These alliances laid

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[10] "Zamorin" was the title of the most powerful monarch in Kerala from the 12th century to the early 19th century when the British took control. The royal title in the local language was "Samuuthiri". The earliest use of "Zamorin" is said to be in the writings of Ibn Battuta (Ayyar 1976:253). The *Nasraani* (usually spelled "Nasrani", meaning "of Nazarene") were the traditional Christian traders of Kerala.

[11] *Manigraamam* is more commonly spelled "Manigramam"

[12] Cochin and Calicut are today known as Kochi and Kozhikode, respectively.

the foundations for the emergence of communities like the Jews, the Saint Thomas Christians, and the Mappilas.

Jews & Mappilas

There are three main groups that might be considered for this study: The Mappilas (or Jonaka Mappilas, or Mappila Muslims), Cochinim (or Cochin Jews, or Jews of Kerala) and Nasraanis (or Syrian Christians, or Mar Thoma, or Saint Thomas Christians). The Mappilas are the Muslims of Kerala. This name is sometimes restricted to just the Muslims of northern Kerala (Ilias 2007:436), and sometimes to only the indigenous Muslims of the region, but this will be examined in detail later. They are possibly the first Muslim community in South Asia (Miller 2015). The Nasraanis are the native Christian population of Malabar.[13] They believe their community was started by St. Thomas the Apostle who converted their ancestors in Palayoor, Kerala in 52 CE, or by St Thomas of Cana in the fourth or sixth century CE (Fuller 1976:54).[14] The Mappilas and Nasraanis are thriving today, representing 26.56% and 18.38% of Kerala's population, respectively.[15] The Cochinim are the Jews of Kerala. Some of them believe they arrived in Kerala after the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 CE, others believe they were there from the time of King Solomon, i.e. 10th century BCE (Johnson 1995:27). They divided themselves into Paradesi and Malabari Jews, which in the past also corresponded to race-based terms "White Jews" and "Black Jews". Their numbers have been severely depleted by emigrations to Israel. There are no more than 30 Jews left in Kerala today. The Mappilas, Nasraanis and Cochinim have more in common with each other than just their mercantile roots.

Each adapted well to the Malabari culture, keeping their faith and identity intact. They spoke the local tongue, Malayalam, but with borrowed words from their own cultures and

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[13] Nasraani is more commonly spelled "Nasrani".
[14] St Thomas the Apostle is one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ.
[15] From Census 2011. See downloadable Excel sheets at http://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-01.html for population data by religion for Kerala.

liturgical languages, developing "religiolects" like Judeo-Malayalam, Arabi-Malayalam, and Garshuni-Malayalam (Gamliel 2016; Sutton 2015; Perczel 2010).[16] Each of these religiolects had a script based in the group's liturgical language – Hebrew, Arabic, and Syriac. All three groups incorporated aspects of local music, culture, ritual, and social constructs, even if it meant bending their own religious law, because these external displays were important to fitting into the caste hierarchy of Kerala. They still maintain oral traditions that link them to ancient times – the Kerala Jews to the destruction of the Second Temple, the Nasraanis to the time of St. Thomas the Apostle, and the Mappilas to the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

There have been studies that restrict their scope to primarily one of these groups, excluding the others. Roland E. Miller has written on the history and culture of the Mappilas – *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* (1976) and *Mappila Muslim Culture* (2015). Stephen Dale's *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier* (1980) and Gangadharan's *The Mappila Rebellion* (2008) discuss militancy in Mappila history. Hussain Randathani's *Mappila Muslims* (2006) provides a fresh history of the Mappilas with special attention to their Sufi heritage.

Nathan Katz has studied the Paradesi Jews and written several books and articles on them over the last few decades. His book with Ellen Goldberg, "The Last Jews of Cochin" (1993), has been cited in this work. Segal also published a history of the Jews of Kerala in 1993. Joan G. Roland's *The Jewish Communities of India* explored what it meant to be a Jew in India, looking at the three main Jewish communities in the country – the Bene Israel on the Konkan coast, the Jews of Kerala on the Malabar coast, and the Baghdadi Jews in West Bengal.

These scholars give us excellent details on their respective groups but rarely cross reference. Contemporary scholars such as Ophira Gamliel show that there are insights to be

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[16] A "religiolect" refers to a set of dialectical and linguistic variations of a spoken language, based on a different liturgical language, usually restricted to a religious community (Hary 2009).

gained by expanding one's scope to reveal the connections between these groups. This would ideally require a deep study of each group, as well as the larger Malabari society of the time. However, the requirements for a single scholar to conduct this study, in terms of time, disciplinary training, and language skill, are daunting. I thus chose two communities for this dissertation – the Jews of Kerala and the Mappilas. Music of both these communities is represented in the archival recordings of Arnold Bake, which I have used as an entry point. A more detailed note on Bake follows.

A background to Arnold Bake and the Bake collection

Arnold Adriaan Bake (1899-1963) was a Dutch ethnomusicologist and a recording pioneer. He was one of the first scholars to take a keen interest in South Asian music and performance traditions, and perhaps the first to go beyond merely the 'classical' traditions, to explore folk traditions in remote locations, small towns, temples, and monasteries. He made these journeys carrying state-of-the-art recording equipment which he operated himself. His media collection includes photographs, wax cylinders, open reel tape, 16mm film, and Tefiphon tapes (also referred to as Tefi-band).[17]

He travelled and worked with his wife Corrie (Cornelia Bake, *née* Timmers). The first of their four spells in India was from 1925-29, where he completed his doctorate research at Rabindranath Tagore's university, Visva Bharati, in Shantiniketan, translating the Sanskrit text *Sangiita Darpana*.[18] After receiving his PhD from Utrecht in 1930, he travelled again from 1931-34, this time to Nepal, Ladakh and some parts of South India (Clouter 2017; Jairazbhoy

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[17] Invented by Dr Karl Daniel's company, "Tefi Apparatebau" in 1936. Tefifon, Tefiphon and Teficord are three different devices. According to Nazir Jairazbhoy's video monograph "Bake Restudy 1984", Bake used a Tefiphon to record his audio (1991:4; Nair 2017). The Teficord was a playback-only device. (See RadioMuseum entry for the company "Tefi-Apparatebau"

[18] A late 16th century or early 17th century Sanskrit treatise on the art of music and dance by Chatura Damodara.

1984). In 1948, Bake took up a lectureship in Sanskrit at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His 1955-56 South Asian research centred in Nepal was undertaken during his fourth and final trip in the region (Jairazbhoy & Catlin-Jairazbhoy 1991:4-5).

It was on the third trip (1937-1946) that Bake collected field materials that opened up the academic study of both Jewish and Mappila music in Kerala. He travelled through Ceylon, South India and the west coast of India into what is now Pakistan, and thence to Kashmir, Ladakh, and Leh. This stay was his longest in South Asia (due in no small part to the Second World War). Bake recorded extensive material in Kerala on the first leg of this trip. In April 1938, he made Tefiphon recordings of songs of Kerala's Jews and Mappilas (Jairazbhoy & Catlin-Jairazbhoy 1991).

Jairazbhoy and Catlin: Restudying the Bake collection

In 1984, Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy and Amy Ruth Catlin travelled in Bake's footsteps to conduct research on his field materials of 1938-39. This was published in a DVD and monograph titled *Bake Restudy 1984* but excluded Bake's recordings of Mappilas. More restudies were conducted in 1991 and 1994 but were not published. While a proper restudy of Bake's Jewish recordings was conducted in 1984, only one of the 1994 DVDs (DVD 4, to be precise) addresses some of the Mappila recordings.[19]

Jairazbhoy had a personal connection with Bake, working as his research assistant at the School of Oriental and African Studies from 1956 to 1963. He took up a professorship at the UCLA Department of Music where, in 1988, he became founding chair of the Department of Ethnomusicology and Systematic Musicology. Jairazbhoy helped set up the Archives and

[19] Jairazbhoy and Catlin refer to their own work *Bake Restudy 1984,* as *Restudy*. I follow the same convention, except to add the year 1984 or 1994 to differentiate the two studies. See Appendix II for details on *Restudy 1994*.

Research Centre for Ethnomusicology (ARCE), now located in Gurugram, India (Armstrong & Rees 2009). This is where I accessed Bake's recordings for my study.

Amy Catlin is an adjunct professor of ethnomusicology at the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music. She studied Indian music at Wesleyan University as part of her PhD at Brown University and is now a veteran scholar of Indian folk and classical traditions. One of her many research undertakings is the restudy of Bake's recordings in India (UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music "Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy"). A collaboration with Mappila musicians in Kerala using her Restudy methodology is currently underway.

Bake did not leave behind organised notes so it was up to Jairazbhoy to sort his research into a workable archive. Both Jairazbhoy and Catlin have discussed Bake's nearly illegible handwriting (Nair 2017; Jairazbhoy 1991:33). To compound matters, Jairazbhoy's photocopy of the original Bake catalogue had faded to the point where it was unreadable. They hired Alistair Dick to type out a new catalogue in 1967 while copying the Tefi recordings to reel-to-reel magnetic tape. This re-typed catalogue is the one that is in use today at the ARCE and is now the only written information left to identify or refer to much of Bake's recordings.

Research method and challenges

How does one approximate the distant past, which is several centuries old, in the absence of clear-cut evidence? Audio recordings are mostly a twentieth century phenomenon but even in the last hundred years, there is only sparse archival data on the music of these communities that I could access. Arriving at audio source material has been a challenge. The 1938 archival recordings of Arnold Bake are probably the earliest recorded examples of the music of Jews and Mappilas in Kerala, and there has not been much since then. Johanna Spector made recordings of the Kerala Jews from the 1960s and 1970s, but her archive at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York was not available to me. As for Mappila recordings, there is plenty of Mappila music publicly available online, but as these are commercial releases (such

as film soundtracks) they are greatly affected by western instrumentation and arrangements. It is difficult to use them as a source for historical study.

Beginning a project like this is not easy, and also runs counter to established methodologies. Following Blench in combining different classes of evidence, I have used Bake's recordings as a base for the study, the restudies by Jairazbhoy and Catlin, and then combined studies from several other disciplines to build the context. First, the musical evidence has been fortified with a wide array of secondary literature including (but not limited to) the disciplines of social history, economic history, anthropology, musicology, religious studies, folklore studies, and linguistics. Secondly, underutilised oral sources and recent studies on the texts of traditional songs have been tapped. Thirdly, I undertook field work consisting of site visits, interviews with community leaders and performers, and interviews with experts on Kerala, the Jews, and Mappilas. Video was taken with my OnePlus 5T phone, and audio with a Sony ICD-UX560F Digital Voice Recorder. In the process, I have built a small archive of audio recordings, photographs, video recordings, and musical transcriptions to serve as a body of evidence. Finally, I have made an effort to be vigilant for and be conscious of past and current biases in all the above material.

There exist histories that are known, but there has not been enough work done on putting them together. The variety of genres of sources in use has required me to shift into their methodological frameworks simply to access them. The composite methodology in this dissertation is one that I have arrived at given the scarcity of the base material. The interdisciplinary approach is one of the implicit underlying concepts in *Re-centring AfroAsia* as well. A purely etic musicological study can only take one so far in the absence of a hermeneutic understanding. Allen's 1980 call for "cultural historians" was echoed by Mirsa Galib, whom I interviewed in Kondotty. He directed me towards the idea of the existence of

an unwritten "set of cultural cues" that guided the Mappila sense of music and song. With these ideas in mind, I have chosen some aspects of culture and history to discuss in each section.

For the music, I studied a selection of field recordings from the Bake collection representing Jews and Mappilas (See Appendix I "Selection of recordings under study"). These were taken in 1938 – before India's independence from British rule, and also before the formation of Israel. I also included material from restudies by Jairazbhoy and Catlin in 1984 and 1994. My field research followed a similar method to theirs, taking the recordings to musicians, singers, and other important members of the Jewish and Mappila communities in Kerala to see if they could shed some light on the material. I also conducted interviews and listening sessions with some of Kerala's leading historians and thinkers.

On the Mappila materials and field work

When I began my research on these recordings at the Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology (ARCE) in 2017, I tried to identify and procure as many samples of Bake's Mappila recordings as possible. The catalogue entries say "Moplah" as that was the anglicised term in Bake's time. I went through the catalogue at the ARCE looking for words in the titles that would indicate possible Muslim or Mappila content. I found most of the material in five reels numbered 30:39:84, 30:40:84, 30:43:84, 30:44:84, 30:45:84, and 30:46:84 – 33 items totalling around three hours of reel time.[20]

Bake did not leave behind any notes on these recordings, or if he did, they were not available at the archive. The ARCE only had an itemised catalogue, and it was indeed a challenge to identify which section of the reel or recording corresponded with which label. A good deal of time went into careful listening and demarcating lengths of audio that would

[20] These three hours of reel time contained various recordings including many items that were not performed by Mappilas. See Appendix I for a complete list of the recordings that I selected for this study.

correspond with the items in Bake catalogue. I did have access to Jairazbhoy and Catlin's individual diaries for their 1984 restudy, but that study did not cover any of Bake's Mappila zones. I needed to get to Kerala to make sense of the Mappila material.

On my first field visit to Kerala in January 2018 I was made aware of the existence of a second restudy by Jairazbhoy and Catlin conducted between 1991 and 1994 (referred to as *Restudy 1994*), which included some of Bake's Mappila trail.[21] Coincidentally, Amy Catlin visited the University of Calicut to repatriate her restudy only a week before I got there, and she left just before I arrived! She gave the University one copy of DVDs for their library and archives, and another copy went to Prof. PP Abdul Razak, who at that time was Head of Department, History at PSMO College, near Kozhikode (Calicut). Razak allowed me access to his copy, which is what I have worked on.

Like in her restudy, I took the recordings to the source – to experts and others in Malabar – and tried to get an understanding of what was being performed. Were there any clues in the lyrics? Perhaps a mention of historical figures or dates? Were the songs or melodies recognizable to Mappilas today? Were these related to performance art forms, religious festivals or ceremonies? Would I be lucky enough to record a contemporary performance of the tune? Jairazbhoy and Catlin also created a set of what they called *Restudy Pairs*. This was a selection of performances and recordings captured by Bake that they were also able to find on their visits. The *Restudy Pairs* DVD follows Bake's material with its contemporary counterparts.

I did not have any pre-existing contacts in the field during my first visit. A professor at the University of Calicut told me to go and find MN Karassery, who I was told, is the authority on Mappilas. This turned into a sort of theme for my first visit – I sought out, met and

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[21] See Appendix II for details on *Restudy 1994*.

interviewed experts, academics and historians. MGS Narayanan is perhaps the foremost historian on Kerala. MN Karassery is a famous Mappila literary scholar and thinker. PP Abdul Razak now heads the Department of History at the University of Calicut. VM Kutty is one of the most famous and celebrated Mappila singers. KK Muhammed Abdul Sathar heads the largest existing collection of Arabi Malayalam literature at the Moyinkutty Vaidyar Smarakam as the joint secretary there. All of these were celebrated authorities in their field. I accumulated a lot of knowledge but I did not experience much Mappila culture.

I was able to get a little closer to Mappila life on my second trip to Malabar in December that year. Biju Ibrahim, a documentary photographer and filmmaker, put me in touch with his friends in his hometown of Kondotty. I met a special group of friends - Mirsa Galib, Kutay Ashraf, Sakeer Bhai, Rafeeq, Sali, and others - who ensured I could fully utilise every day of my stay in Kondotty. Mirsa Galib invited me to stay with him at his ancestral home, which I later realised was the Kondotty *thangal's tharavaad*![2223] He was a descendant of the Kondotty *thangal* and was now staying there with his wife. Spending a few nights there, even cooking and eating there, was an immense honour.

Mirsa and his friends are also musicians and well-versed with *mappilapaattu*.[24] Their interest in the philosophy and history of Mappilas made for great conversations on its theory and practice. Apart from exchanging music and ideas with them, I also got to meet the Ferokabad Kolkali Sangham (a *kolkali* group) and Ali Kutty, a 71-year-old *vattappaattu*

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[22] *Thangal* (also spelled *tangal*) is an honorific used for the spiritual leaders of the Mappilas. Some of the *thangals* are considered saints, and some are also *sayyids,* i.e. those who claim descent from the Prophet. Gundert has listed it as "Your highness" (1872:442).
[23] *Tharavaad* (also spelled *tarawad, tharavad, tharavadu*) refers to an ancestral home in Kerala, usually associated with land-owning classes and nobility (Gundert 1872:434).
[24] *Mappilapaattu* literally translates to "Mappila songs" but is an umbrella term covering a diverse body of songs and literature in Mappila culture.

singer.[25] I was able to make a number of recordings of their performances and also get their expert opinion on the Bake recordings.

The actual experience of being in Kondotty for those few days, witnessing various performances and engaging Mappila musicians and practitioners in discussions about their art forms helped to contextualise a lot of the information I had acquired through interviews, listening and reading. Both field visits had an impact on my enquiry into the material.

On the Jewish materials and field work

Bake recorded seven "Jewish Community Songs" in Cochin (See Appendix I, ARCE 30:36:84), believed to be the earliest field recordings of the Jews of Kerala. Until Jairazbhoy and Catlin's restudy in 1984, very little was known about them. The restudy was conducted in Cochin but the investigation did not go beyond the Paradesi Jews in Mattancherry, Kochi.[26] Of course, between 1938 and 1984, several significant events had taken place that affected the restudy. India gained its independence from the British in 1947, and the state of Kerala came into existence in 1956. Names of many places changed in those 46 years. The state of Israel came into being in 1948, and between 1950 and 1984, most of the Malabari Jews had emigrated. Only a few Paradesi and Malabari families remained, and while the Paradesi synagogue received tourist attention, most of the Malabari synagogues fell into disrepair (Waronker 2010). I imagine this had a significant impact on the restudy of Jewish songs. I put together the field notes from the restudy with my own research, transcriptions, and field work with Malabari Jews to see what it could reveal.

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[25] *Kolkali* and *vattappaattu* are Mappila performance arts. See Chapter 3 for more.
[26] The Jews of Kerala were segregated into two broad groups. The Paradesi Jews functioned as an elite caste, and all other congregations were lumped together as Malabari Jews. Racial categories of "White", "Black", and sometimes "Brown" had come into use. This will be covered in the chapters to follow.

My field work with the Jews of Kerala in 2018 was mostly focused on Malabari Jews from Ernakulam and Chendamangalam. Around this time, the Malabari Kadavumbhaagam synagogue in Ernakulam was seeing a resurgence under the aegis of Elias Josephai. After meeting him and conducting my first round of interviews, I was extended an invitation to the Sefer Torah ceremony of one of the synagogues of Ernakulam. I eagerly accepted. This synagogue, like many Malabari synagogues had been mostly unused for decades since the community's emigration to Israel. My efforts to visit Israel did not bear fruit but senior members of the Cochini community in Israel came to attend this ceremony, giving me the chance to speak with them.

On transcriptions and textuality

I initially intended to transcribe the Bake recordings and conduct melodic analyses. However, as my familiarity with the people and archival material grew, it became clear that I needed to go beyond simply transcribing the music and laying out a melodic analysis. The act of transcription of these songs, orally transmitted for generations, to a European standard of notation, seemed increasingly reductive and futile. However, I have used transcriptions sparingly to illustrate points where required.

A point that came up during my discussions in Kondotty was that there was no textbook for Mappila tunes, or for the concept of the *ishal*,[27] and there was no rigid theory for musical composition. And yet, there seemed to be a clear consensus among all Malabaris that a Mappila tune is instantly identifiable as such. The music would come naturally to all who were raised in Mappila culture. At first this might seem paradoxical – if all Mappila tunes sound a certain way, could it mean that there must exist a codifiable theory to bind it together?

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[27] *Ishal* is a word that takes upon many meanings – song, tune, melody, poetic form. More on this in Chapter 3

It is the very orality here that enables flexibility, adaptability and inclusivity – the reasons for the survival and evolution of the various communities of Malabar. Once a system is codified and committed to text, it lays a foundation for uniformity and conformity, but this also makes it restrictive and brittle, vulnerable to aging and obsoletion. If the music must continue as a living tradition, it must happen through oral transmission.

The Bake collection is still an incredibly rich source of information, and I have considered not only the melodies therein, but dug deeper into the languages used, the genres, the art forms, the performance contexts, and more. In the following chapters, I will discuss aspects of the history, migrations, culture, and music of the Mappilas and the Jews of Kerala.

Outline

I have separated this dissertation into two sections – first the Mappilas, then the Jews. Chapter 2 introduces the Mappilas, and traces the spread of Islam in Kerala, taking up two examples – a "practical" Kondotty in the interior, and a "textual" Ponnani linked with a Hadhrami cosmopolis.[28] I also look into the nature of Islam in Kerala before the 20th century. Chapter 3 continues with the Mappilas, covering *mappilapaattu* and their performance art forms. I take up the enigmatic concept of the *ishal*. I also discuss the Mappila form of saint veneration, the *nercha*, a practice shared by the Jews. Chapter 4 introduces the Jews of Kerala with documentary evidence and oral tradition of their history in India. I go through the Jewish settlements in Kerala, examining the narratives, social formations, and racial constructs. In Chapter 5, I take a detailed look at Bake's seven recordings of Jewish songs, and also Jairazbhoy and Catlin's restudy. In combination with my field work, some themes emerge: the aesthetic value of melody and its use as a marker of identity, and a few clues to transoceanic

[28] These terms "practical" and "textual" come from my field work and will be made clearer in the chapter.

links with Jewish communities across the Indian Ocean. My field work led my choice of discussion points and is sewn into each chapter accordingly.

Chapter 2: Mappilas

Introduction

Mappilas are a community of Muslims in Kerala that some say is the earliest native Muslim community in India (Miller 2015). Their history goes back to social and mercantile interactions between Arab and Malabari people that far preceded the advent of Islam in the 7th century. In this section, I will look into the idea of the *Mappila*, when the concept seems to have come into use, and where it might have come from. Similarly, I will look at the entry of Islam into Kerala, the influence of Sufis in this process, and discuss their approaches using specific examples.

West Asians were already trading with South India centuries before the advent of Islam. Sassanid Persians came to buy spices farmed by the Christians of Malabar in the 3rd century CE (Malekandathil 2002). By the 5th century, there were settlements of Sassanid Nestorian Christians in Malabar (Wink 2002:48). Hourani believes the first Muslim Arabs may have reached the Malabar coast in the 7th century (1963:53). Islamic trade with Malabar (and India in general) saw a dramatic increase by the time of the Abbasid empire in the 8th and 9th centuries (Wink 2002:63).

From the 9th and 10th centuries we start getting epigraphic evidence of the presence of Arab traders, and by the 12th century we have a number of accounts from Arab geographers and writers, as well as letters recovered from the Cairo Geniza, implying regular trade and general familiarity with the entire western Indian coastline, including Malabar (MGS Naranayan 1972; Nainar 1942; Goitein 1974). Karimi merchants made their way from Cairo by the 13th century and Marakkaars from Tamil Nadu around the 15th century (Malekandathil 2003). The Portuguese arrived on the scene in 1498, at the peak of Islamic trade.

Arabs trading with Kerala came primarily from Yemen and the Hadramaut (mostly present day eastern Yemen), but also from Oman, Bahrain and the Hijaz (Koya 1976: 196).

Hadhrami migrations continued till at least the 18th century and brought Shafi'i Sunni Islam and Sufi *tariqats* (orders) that shaped the expression of Islam in Malabar. Most Muslims of continental India follow the *Hanafi madhab*, but the Mappilas of Malabar (and Lakshadweep and the Maldives) are almost all *Shafi'i*.[29] The *Shafi'i madhab* originated in Cairo but established itself in Yemen and the Hadramaut. It then spread across the Indian Ocean almost exclusively through Hadhrami migrations (Forbes 1981:62). It characterises the Hadhrami diaspora around the Indian Ocean, including in Malabar where they were particularly influential.

Coastal Mappilas were engaged in various occupations related to maritime mercantile activity around the ports. They provided support infrastructure linking the agricultural producers in the interior with foreign trade. Later, large numbers of Malabaris in the hinterlands came to accept Islam as well, influenced by travelling Sufis and home-grown missionaries.

Etymology

The word "Mappila" has been used in various contexts as a general term to refer to Muslims in Kerala, but scholars have put forward numerous etymologies. Qadir Hussain Khan compiled an early list of these rough attempts (Khan 1910). Most of them acknowledge the second half of the word as derived from the Tamil word *pillai* (colloquially often shortened to *pilla*), meaning "son". However, it is the first part of the word that has thrown up some divergent theories. Duncan proposed that it came from *Mahai* or the Yemeni port of Mocha, implying that these were the natives of Mocha (1799:28).[30] Hermann Gundert proposed a similar root, *maha*, meaning "great" (Khan 1910:14). William Logan's *Malabar Manual* agrees

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[29] There are four *madhabs* (schools of jurisprudence) in Sunni Islam – *Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i* and *Hanbali*. The most popular *madhab* is *Hanafi*, accounting for around half the world's Muslim population.

[30] To Duncan, *Mahai* was equivalent to Malabar.

with this definition (1951:191). His idea was that Mappila was an honorific used for the early Islamic traders, and probably for the other Semitic traders that came before them. Percy Badger believed it came from at least one of two Arabic words deriving from the root *falaha* (meaning "to till the soil") - *Muflih,* meaning "prosperous" or "victorious", and *fellah*. His theory was that it could have signified the commercially successful Mappilas or those who were occupied in agriculture, or both (Varthema *et al* 1970:123). Dale and Menon cite the epigraphist at the University of Calicut, MR Raghava Varier, whose theory is that it came from *maha* (great) and *pilla* (accountant) (1978:523).

One of the more likely etymologies is that Mappila is formed from the Tamil words for mother (*maa)* and son (*pillai*), and means "bridegroom" or "son-in-law", like the Tamil word *maappillai*. (Moore & Wigram 1905:418). The word *puthiyappla* is used for the Mappila groom in a wedding. It is a contraction of the Tamil word for new (*puthiya),* and *mappila*. This fits with the usage of Mappila for husband or bridegroom in various parts of South India (Sutton 2015:4). Gamliel told me the word is derived from Tamil words *maaman,* (maternal uncle) and *pillai*.[31] This explanation links to *marumakkathayam,* the matrilineal system of inheritance prevalent among various communities of Kerala, including the Mappilas.

Interestingly, it is the Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa, writing about the turn of the 16th century, who gives us possibly the earliest known use of the word: "Mapuler". Ibn Battuta (1349), Abdurazaq (1444), and Ma Huan (1451) all came to Kerala before Barbosa but make no mention of any "mappila". This is a good indicator that the term came into use in Kerala around the 15th century (Kunhali 1981:21). Kunhali believes that the word is related to the Arabic *Mawalladun,* referring to "Sayyid half-breeds", and relates this to the influx of Hadhramis in the 14th and 15th centuries (1981:22).

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[31] She later indicated this etymology comes from the linguist T.B. Venugopala Panicker.

However, one may consider that this is the same time that the Marrakayars and Makhdums migrate to Kerala from Tamil Nadu, where the word *maappillai* has an older history.

Mappilas of other faiths

The label was shared by several communities in Kerala, all of them seemingly arising from the relations between local women and foreign traders. Nasraani Mappilas were Christians, the word *Nasraani* coming from the Arabic name for Christians, possibly meaning Nazarenes. Juutha Mappilas were Jews, and Jonaka Mappilas were Muslims. While the Jewish descriptor *Juutha*[32] is quite straightforward, *Jonaka*[33] could have been derived from the Tamil word *Sonagam*, signifying Arabia (More 2004:13). Another source of this word could also have been the Sanskrit word *Yavana*, meaning Greek or Ionian. It is conceivable that the Arab traders replaced their *Yavana* Greek and Roman predecessors from centuries past not just on the sea routes but also in the minds of the Malabari people (Logan 1951:191). Unless otherwise mentioned, the word *Mappila* hereon will refer to Muslim Mappilas.

Examining the common portrayal of Mappilas as a racial and cultural hybrid

The Mappilas are often considered a product or a fusion of two cultures: "originally the descendants of Arab traders by the women of the country" (Moore & Wigram 1905: 8), "Arab fathers and Nair mothers" (Ahmed). This is an oversimplified idea and only useful with the recognition that it is just one historical aspect of a complex of constructs that changed over time.

In the 19th century, Logan and Thurston pointed out that the Mappila population was primarily growing due to the social benefits that Islam offered to oppressed castes in Kerala's

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[32] Also spelled *Juda* or *Juta* in some sources.
[33] Also spelled and pronounced *Jonaga*.

extremely stratified society. For example, the census data of 1871 and 1881 showed that over 40% of Cheramars in Malabar converted to Islam in a single decade (Logan 1951:196; Thurston 1909:456).[34]

Logan identified two broad racial groups of Muslims developing in Malabar – *Malayali Arabs* who carried Arab blood, and the *Mappilas*, who were converts from indigenous peoples. Barbosa (1480-1521) also distinguished between two kinds of Muslims (or as he called them, "Moors"). He described the *Pardesy* as prosperous, "white" merchants who "possessed wives and children" and carried out long distance trade, serving markets beyond the Red Sea (Barbosa 1866: 148).[35] In contrast, he likened the *Mapuler* to the Nairs in their appearance. In the hinterlands they were engaged in agriculture, but on the ports they ran most of the trade. He says they made up a fifth of the population. He mentions the presence of many mosques, as well as the easy conversion and acceptance of any "gentiles" (Hindus) who had committed a social offence.

We can see parallels and similarities in the accounts of Barbosa and Logan despite there being nearly three centuries between them. That being said, the Malayali Arabs are probably not the same group as the *Paradesy*. Many of the *Paradesy* that Barbosa mentioned were driven out of Malabar by the Portuguese in a sustained campaign of violence and brutality against foreign Muslim traders to secure the India spice trade. Later, the Hadhrami migrations brought a new group of Arabs into Malabar, forming the bulk of Logan's Malayali Arabs. Logan's

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[34] Cheramars were one of the so-called "untouchable" castes in Kerala.

[35] The word *paradesi* means *foreigner* in several Indian languages including Sanskrit and Tamil. In Kerala it was used for several non-native groups. There is usually a racial connotation to the word, implying "white" races such as in the case of Barbosa's *Paradesy* Muslims. However, while the Paradesi Jews of Cochin are generally fair-skinned, the Paradesi Brahmins (Tamil Brahmins in Kerala) would not necessarily have been (Hashik:162).

Mappilas (indigenous converts) and Barbosa's *Mapulers* (who he says looked like Nairs) seem to be the same groups, but they remain differentiated from the foreigners of the same faith.

A Mappila scholar that I met in Kondotty in 2018, Ms. Soudath, also distinguished between indigenous Muslims and those with Arab lineage. To her, those with Arab blood, such as the *sayyids*, *thangals,* and Hadhramis, were not Mappilas; Mappilas did not have any Arab blood themselves. A significant factor in the spiritual authority of the *sayyids* is the belief that they come from the Prophet's bloodline.

Occupational patterns in Malabar were related to the geography (coastal towns vis-à-vis the hinterlands) but they were maintained by the caste structure that became even more rigid under British law. Even in the early 20th century, richer Mappilas on the coast dominated the overseas trade in pepper and spices. Away from the coasts, Mappilas were tenants working on coconut plantations or subsistence farmers (Menon 1994:5). They settled along rivers as they engaged in the river-borne trade that fed the coastal and international trade.

The roots of Islam in Kerala lie in the interactions and relations between West Asian traders and Malabari people. MGS Narayanan puts the entry of Malik ibn Dinar not before the 12th century, but Logan also reasoned that it would not have been possible for Malik ibn Dinar to have erected so many early mosques had Islam not already been familiar to the people of Malabar (Narayanan 1972:6; Logan 1951: 196).[36] The 15th century sees the movement of more Tamil Muslims into Kerala, and the emergence of the usage of "Mappila" for Malabari Muslims. The Paradesis or Malayali Arabs are still a distinct group, and later more groups enter Kerala such as the Dakhnis in the 17th century (Khan 1910:8). Sufi missionaries, saints and Hadhrami *sayyids* started moving into Kerala in the 14th century and this rapidly accelerated in

[36] Malik ibn Dinar is a legendary figure in Kerala history. Local tradition credits him with the building of the earliest mosques in the region. More on his contribution in the following section.

the 16th and 17th centuries, with Islam spreading beyond the ports and into the hinterlands. By the end of the 19th century, Mappilas were mostly indigenous converts from the interior. The 20th century saw a reformist movement to unite Kerala Muslims under a monolithic religious identity.

In terms of religious affiliations, most of the Mappilas followed the Ponnani *thangal*, a "pure Arab" (Khan 1910:12), who espoused a Shafi'i Sunni ideology. However, the teachings of all the Sufis and *thangals* were not uniform. For example, the Kondotty *thangal* was accused of being a Shia, and thus a heretic. Even though this dispute was settled, some Mappilas of Kondotty today still believe they have a different culture to Ponnani.[37] Also, any Dakhnis in Malabar would have been followers of the Hanafi *madhab*.[38]

The contemporary idea of sharply defined religion-based categories is a colonial one and should not be extended backwards into the early colonial and pre-colonial past. Rather than simply a general term for Muslims in Kerala, "Mappila" signified a caste group. In the Keralolpatti, it is listed as one of the 72 *kulas* (caste or clan)[39] of Kerala (PP Abdul Razak, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018).

It is important to keep these details in mind when trying to locate clues to the past in contemporary Mappila culture or any aspect of it, such as performance arts, poetry, and literature.

Spread of Islam

Unlike most of the subcontinent, which was accessible to West Asian armies via land routes, Kerala's introduction to Islam came with trade and commerce from across the seas.

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[37] See section on Kondotty in Chapter 2.
[38] The Dakhnis were foreign (mostly Muslim) immigrants into southern India and would not have been considered Mappilas. They were mostly concentrated in the Deccan plateau, north of Kerala, but some would have entered Kerala especially during the reign of the Mysore kings Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan.
[39] Written as *kula* or *kulam*.

Arab traders, already on these maritime routes for centuries, began to dominate the waters of the Indian Ocean by the 8th century. The first Muslim Arab fleet may have reached Indian waters as early as 636 CE (Hourani 1963:53). Arab ship building began only under the Umayyad Caliphate (after 661 CE), but both these events would have been almost contemporary to the birth of Islam itself (1963:57). These traders were known to take local wives, sometimes in a temporary *mut'ah* marriage similar to the local Nair *sambandham* relationship. Miller believes that when they did so, they were given the honorific *Mappila* (2015:26).[40]

Forbes also brings in the introduction of "Sankaran orthodoxy" as a factor.[41] Prior to Islam, he believes Arabs in Kerala would have been able to mix freely with the locals, but by the 8th century, "Sankaran emphasis on... ritual pollution" and Islamic dietary laws would have clashed with each other, introducing social boundaries and necessitating a parallel social infrastructure to cater to the foreign traders (1981:68).

Nevertheless, the Mappilas, or rather, their Malabari ancestors, are considered to be probably the first South Asian community to embrace Islam.

The Cheraman Perumal

The most commonly held tradition of Islam's entry into Kerala centres around the conversion of the Cheraman Perumal, the head of the Chera dynasty ruling in Kerala.[42] There are several versions of this story found in texts such as the 16th century *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin,*

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[40] In light of V Kunhali's observation that the label "Mappila" did not appear until the 15th century, it is possible that Miller's statement holds true only for the last 500 years or so. However, most historians seem to agree that early Muslim traders had children with Malabari women, forming the basis of this community.

[41] Named for Adi Shankara (788-820 CE) "from whose doctrines the main currents of modern Indian [Hindu] thought are derived." (*Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Shankara," accessed August 23, 2019, https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Shankara/65527.)

[42] Cheraman Perumal is the title of the king, not his name. This has been the cause of some confusion in interpreting and dating inscriptions and tradition. The Keralolpatti, a collection of legends about the origins of Kerala, mentions 25 Cheraman Perumals.

the 17th century *Keralolpatti* as well various oral traditions. According to the *Tuhfat*, a group of *faqirs* led by a *sheikh* landed on the shores of Kondungallur and were welcomed by the Cheraman Perumal. During their interaction, the *sheikh* narrated the miracle of the splitting of the moon and the Perumal responded that he had witnessed this himself. This convinced the Perumal to accept Islam and he decided to travel with them to Mecca on their return. He is said to have taken up the name Tajuddin. A "long time after", the king decided to return to Malabar with a party of missionaries to construct mosques in Kerala and spread the teachings of the Qur'an. He succumbed to an illness along the way but not before passing on a letter of authority and instructions to Malik ibn Dinar, an Arab from Basra, to continue the work he intended for Malabar (Ma'barī & Nainar 2006:35-38).[43]

While some stories date the Cheraman Perumal's conversion to the time of the Prophet, the author of the *Tuhfat*, Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum II, refutes this. He believes that the first appearance of Islam in Kerala must have been around 822 CE (Ma'barī & Nainar 2006:38). Gundert's *Keralolpatti* also mentions a Chera king who went to Mecca in 825 CE. MGS Narayanan, one of the foremost authorities on Kerala history and on the Perumals in particular, suggested that the Perumal's conversion may have happened even later, in 1122 CE.

> [The last Chera king, Cheraman Perumal] was said to have been converted to Islam and in his old age he went to Mecca. He wanted to revisit his old country but by that time he was sick, didn't keep good health. So he sent somebody... [Malik ibn Dinar]
>
> Malik ibn Dinar has left us a list of ten mosques… Out of these ten mosques, the Madayi mosque contained an inscription… which mentioned that that mosque was constructed in Hijra 518. The belief among Muslims was that it was constructed in the Prophet's time. That will not agree with this. But this inscription was there – I have seen this myself. But during the renovation recently, that plaque was taken away. I asked them to preserve it. They said they have preserved it, but only partly. Now you can see there, the writing "Hijra 5", not "518".
>
> This is a deliberate mischief in order to justify their belief that this mosque was constructed in the Prophet's time. If it is Hijra 5, it is his time. If it is Hijra 518, it is not. It will be equal to 1122 or 1123. So that is the real period of all these mosques.

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[43] Malik ibn Dinar may have been Persian, not from Basra (Randathani 2016:31).

> Luckily for us, when the old inscription was there, it has been copied in William Logan's Malabar Manual, Hijra 518, and also the equivalent 1122 or so. The equivalent is also given in Christian era. So to that extent we are safe, we have a secure record.
>
> MGS Narayanan, in conversation with author, Jan 9, 2018

Of course, here MGS Narayanan is only suggesting that the building of mosques and the subsequent acceleration of the spread of Islam happened in the 12th century.[44] The actual introduction of Islam into Kerala could still have happened much earlier and more organically, and it is mostly likely to have happened amongst the merchant communities.

Mappila historical accounts such as the *Tuhfat* testify to the existence of Malik ibn Dinar and several traditions date him to the mid-8th century. Despite this multitude of traditions around the Perumal and Malik ibn Dinar, archaeological evidence does not provide a definitive confirmation of any of them. What is known for certain is that Islam was brought to Malabar by traders and missionaries, not by conquering armies and rulers. Long standing relationships with West Asian traders made the transition easy, and it was supported by the local rulers who valued at least the economic prosperity and military favours that the foreign merchants brought with them, if not Islamic values themselves (Narayanan 1972).

Kerala's rulers (such as the Perumals and Zamorins) were heavily dependent on sea trade for their revenues and so did their best to protect their interests. The merchants realised that political stability was good for business, so they reciprocated by providing military and naval support to the rulers (Malekandathil 2007:263).[45] A mutually beneficial arrangement developed where foreigners were given land and labour in exchange for a share in their commerce. There is evidence that trading guilds were given administrative control over

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[44] "… advent of Islam at the close of the Chera period in the 12th century" (Narayanan 1972:5).

[45] Arabian warhorses were a sizeable import into the region (Anas Babu T 2016).

villages, and that foreign traders were assigned a Nair guard, a Chetty accountant, and other assistants (Narayanan 2002; Barbosa 1866:148).

The Zamorin who ruled from Calicut patronised the Arab merchants. He encouraged the local fishermen to raise their first-born sons as Muslim (Narayanan 1972:6). Barbosa's *Mapuler* caste running the trade on the ports indicates that by the 15th century, the indigenous converts to Islam had become an indispensable part of the trading process.

Thus, there were both political and economic factors behind the Mappilas flourishing on the ports. The hinterlands also saw an increase in the Mappila population but there it seems to have been primarily due to the influence of travelling Sufis.

Sufi influence

The influence of Sufi mystics has been downplayed by historians such as SM Mohammed Koya and RE Miller, however others such as Randathani and Nisar give it a more central role. SM Mohammad Koya sees merely "Sufi overtones" in the missionary work ascribed to Malik bin Dinar, while Randathani directly describes him as a "famous Sufi" (Koya 1983: 8).[46] They place the early roots of Malabar's Islam on the coast, and attribute it to Sufis like Dinar. MH Ilias shares Dale's view that Kondotty had the only known Sufi order in Malabar (Ilias 2007:449).

How are these contrary opinions to be reconciled? My view is that missionaries and Sufi orders were, in fact, the primary drivers of the spread of Islam in Malabar. However, the dominant orders developed an authority structure of *thangals, qazis,* and *musliyaars* that was based on "scriptural" and "textual" ideals. The content of some of these texts such as *Tasawwuf*

[46] Randathani, Hussain. "Composite Cultural Elements in the Western Coast of India. A study on the Persian Presence in the Mappila Culture". Unpublished paper. http://hussainrandathani.in/assets/admin/word/27505908.htm

and the *maalappaattu* show clearly Sufi roots.[47] [48] To scholars of Islam in India only looking for Persian signatures of Sufism such as *khanaqahs* (of which Kondotty had the only one), the evidence signalled a more orthodox Islamic presence rather than a Sufi one.

Mappilas in Kerala's ports were in direct and continuous contact with foreign Muslim traders, but those in the interior would not have had the same incentive or exposure to convert to Islam. Here, it was the Sufi mystics who travelled from hill to hill who would have been more likely to spark this change. Mingling with common people and propagating a practical faith and way of life, they provided an escape from the oppression of caste. Randathani lists various mentions of Sufis in Malabar from as early as 824 CE, with Sufi *tariqats* entering the region by the 12th century (Randathani 2016:36-37).

Some of these Sufi saints settled here to establish families of *thangals* who shaped and influenced local expressions of Islam. The Hadhrami Makhdums like Zainuddin I settled in Ponnani in the 14th century, bringing the Qadiriyya *tariqat* of Sheikh Muhyadhiin Abdul Qadir Jilani.[49] The Persian Muhammad Shah settled in Kondotty in the 18th century. He claimed to be from the Chishti and Qadiri *tariqats*. Sayyid Ahmed Jalaluddin of Bukhara (Uzbekistan) brought the Naqshabandi *tariqat* to Valapattanam in the 15th century. Sheikh Jifri of Hadhramaut started the Ba'Alawi *tariqat* in Calicut in 1748. The Valiya *thangals* at Mambaram and Malappuram in the interior of Malabar were Hadhrami *sayyids*, or descendants of the Prophet (Koya 1976:9; Randathani 2016:37-39). A Hadhrami or *sayyid* identity carried links to the origin of Islam. In Malabar, links to an ancient origin meant authenticity, legitimising

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[47] A text known as the *Tasawwuf* (lit. becoming a Sufi, or Sufism) was taught in the Ponnani *dars* schools. More on this in section on Ponanni.
[48] *Maalappaattu* were songs or poems in praise of holy men, often Sufi teachers or saints. More on this in the sections on *Mappilapaattu* and *Maalappaattu*.
[49] *Hadhrami* refers to the people of the Hadhramaut, now part of today's Yemen.

claims to higher status and authority. Even today, *thangals* are looked up to as political and spiritual leaders because of this lineage.

Between the 13th and 18th century, around 40 *sayyid* families established themselves in Malabar, each attached to one or more Sufi *tariqats*. A similar number of Ba'Alawi families came to Malabar as well. These Sufis were known for their willingness to mingle with oppressed and downtrodden people, although they never allowed their daughters to marry outside *sayyid* bloodlines (Randathani 2016: 44-46). Martin contradicts this view slightly by saying that the Hadhrami *sayyids,* in general, tried to "garner good positions for themselves through marital alliances" (1974:367). The immense popularity and repertoire of the *maalappaattu* genre, each praising miracles and saints of various *tariqats*, speaks to the influence of Sufis on the Mappilas.

The various *tariqats* and *thangals* fostered different local expressions of the faith. This can be illustrated by comparing two major centres of Islam – Ponnani on the coast and Kondotty in the interior.

Ponnani

Ponnani, located between Kozhikode to the north and Kochi to the south, has a trading history that possibly goes back to the first century CE.[50] It was already home to Arab and Muslim trading settlements well before the Makhdums arrived and was the Zamorin's second capital after Calicut.[51] These factors must have played a big part in the Makhdums' choice to establish their famous centre of learning here. Under their leadership, Ponnani was to become the "Little Makkah of Malabar".

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[50] It is suggested that Ponnani was the Tondi or Tyndis of the *Periplus* (Sastri:134).
[51] It had a mosque that was built by Malik bin Dinar's party, as well as the Thottangal Palli (mosque) which is dated to the 12th century (Randathani 2016:35, Kunnath 2015:77, Arafath 2018:29).

The Ma'bar coast runs along the southeast coast of the Indian peninsula, in today's state of Tamil Nadu. and this is where the Makhdums first arrived. This area was under the Chola dynasty from 300 BCE to 1279 CE. Kayal, one of its most ancient ports, similar to Kollam and Kodungallur, also had a history of Arab settlement and an early exposure to Islam. The Tamil Muslims that emerged here were known as *Labbai* and the vessel-owning traders often carried the title of *Marakkan* or *Marakkaar*, meaning "sailor" (Kunhali 2003:370). With the decline of the Cholas, the Marrakars turned to Calicut and the Zamorin for commercial expansion. The Makhdums were their spiritual advisors and moved with them.[52] So while their initial settlements may have been at Kayal and Kilakarai, they migrated inland to propagate their faith. Some remained in Tamil Nadu, going to Madurai, Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, and Nagore (Kunnath 2015:100-110).

Makhdum Zainuddin (of Tarim, Hadhramaut) studied under famous Sufi scholar Abu Bakr Sadiq al-Ma'bari at Nagore before moving to Kochi on the Malabar coast in the 15th century. He was a scholar of note and is credited with establishing the original mosque where the current Chembattapalli or Shafi'i Jami' Masjid now stands (Shokoohy 2003:241).[53] He is considered the founder of the Makhdum dynasty.

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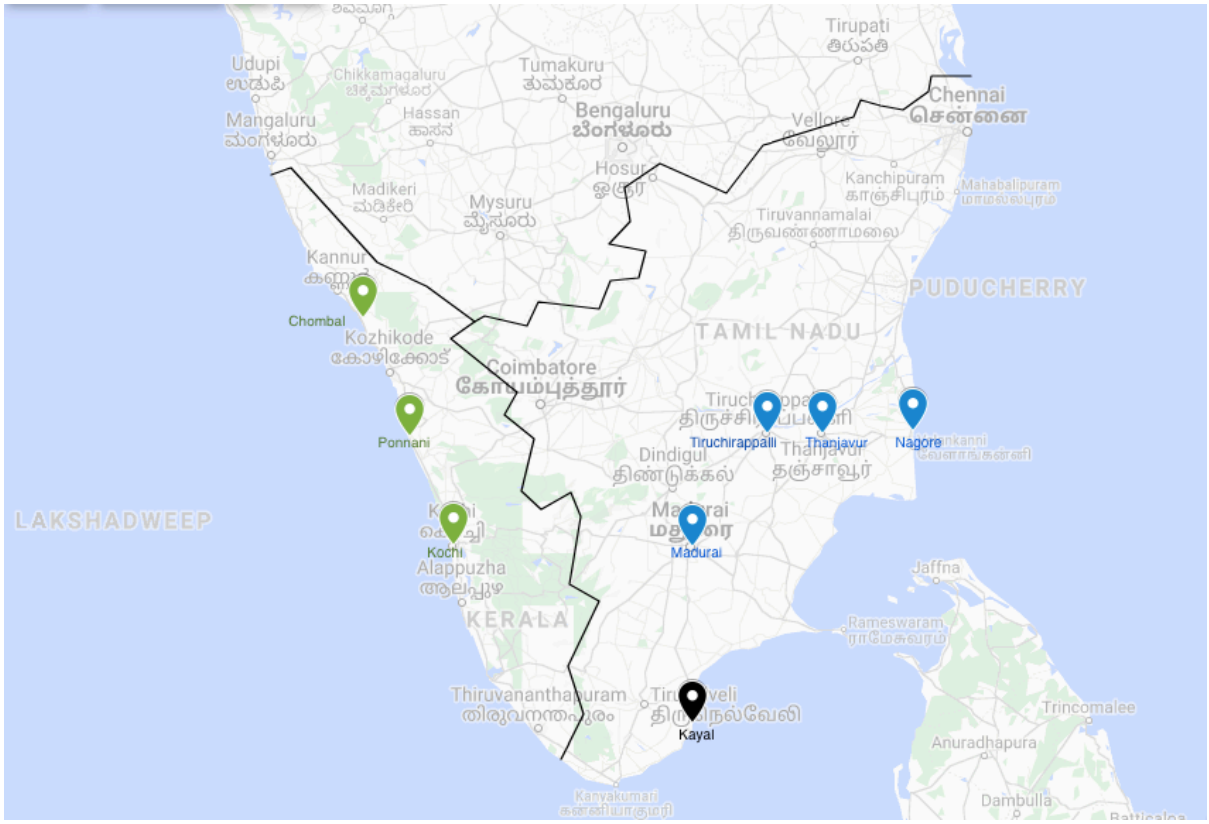
[52] See Randathani's "Persian Elements in South Indian culture" for more.

[53] Chembattapalli and Shafi'i Jami' being the Malayalam name and Arabic name respectively. Mosques in South India are known to have two names – one in Arabic and one in the local language (Shokoohy:361).



Map 1: Important locations for the Makhdums in Kerala and Tamil Nadu (modern state borders shown).

His two sons Ali-ibn-Ahmed al-Ma'bari and Ibrahim Ali-ibn-Ahmed al-Ma'bari became the *qazi*s (religious judges) in Kochi and Ponnani respectively (Arafath 2018:28). The position of *qazi* was a powerful one among the Malabari Mappilas. A *qazi* was more than just a community leader, interpreting religious texts and arbitrating independently of the Naayar rulers (Shokoohy 2003:391).[54]

Zainuddin b. Ali al-Ma'bari (aka Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum I, henceforth Makhdum I) was born to the elder son, Ali, in 1467.[55] He moved to Ponnani to study with his uncle Ibrahim at the age of 14, and then to Egypt and Arabia to for further studies. Ponnani was already

[54] *Qazi* may have several orthographical variants. E.g. *kazi, qadi, khasi*.
[55] Makhdum I's full name according to Shokoohy is Shaikh Zain al-Dīn Makhdum Abū Yaḥyaa (1998:391). Kooriadathodi gives us another name, Zayn al-Dīn al-Kabīr (the Senior) (2016:211).

becoming a spiritual centre for the Mappilas under Ibrahim, but this status was cemented with Makhdum I's return. He oversaw the re-building of the Valiya Juma Masjid and a madrasa, which laid the foundation for Ponnani's famous *dars* system of higher education (Kunnath 2015: 100-110, Shokoohy 2003:391).

The next generation of Makhdums again produced two *qazis*. Makhdum I's elder son Abdul Azeez al-Ma'bari al-Funnani, took up this position in Ponnani and the younger son, Sheikh Muhammed Ghazali, became the *qazi* in the nearby port of Chombal. Ghazali's son and author of the *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*, Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum al-Malibari al-Funnani (henceforth Makhdum II) was born in 1521.[56]

The first three Makhdum *thangals* in Ponnani – Zainuddin Makhdum I, Abdul Azeez and Zainuddin Makhdum II – made some of the most significant contributions to Mappila theology, history and literature.[57] These works helped shape Mappila thought and attitudes for centuries to come, especially inspiring the patriotism and fighting spirit that their colonial opponents had to contend with. They were also often written for the wider Islamic community, translated into multiple languages and published as far away as Egypt and Singapore.[58] This reminds us that a transoceanic knowledge network was well established at this time, and the Makhdums of Ponnani were active and important players in it. They may have been in Malabar for generations but their Hadhrami roots and command over the scriptures allowed them to wield power in this network.

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[56] According to Kooriadathodi, his name was Aḥmad Zayn al-Dīn, and he was later known as Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn al-Ṣaghīr (al-Ṣaghīr meaning "Junior", or "the Younger"). The name I have used is from his shrine in Ponnani.

[57] Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum I wrote the *Tahrid Ahlil Eman Ala jihadi Abdathi Sulban* which is recognised as the first written history of Malabar. His grandson Sheikh Zainuddin II's *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin* is a much more detailed source, dubbed "the foundation stone of Kerala history". A list of works can be found in Ammad Kunnath's thesis. (Kunnath 2015:100-110, 118).

[58] Makhdum II's *Fath al-Mu'in* was published in 1574 from Egypt, Singapore and Malabar (Kunnath 2015:110)

Kooriadathodi's "Cosmopolis of Law" describes an Islamic *textual longue durée* – interconnected texts spanning over a millennium, and a knowledge network of Shafi'i law and discourse across the Eastern Mediterranean and Indian Ocean. Within this expansive network, Makhdum II's *Fath al-Mu'in,* a treatise on *fiqh,* was a widely circulated and cited text, and was even studied and taught in Mecca (Kooriadathodi:205).[59] The Makhdum became a widely acknowledged authority and this drew even more students to Ponnani's *dars* schools. Students came from villages across Malabar and beyond: Prange notes students coming from from Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Java and Sumatra as well (2018:119).

Dars (meaning "class" in Arabic) was a system of secondary education in Islamic texts and scriptures as well as some secular subjects.[60] The *dars* was attached to a mosque, and in most cases, the mosque was both classroom and hostel to its students, possibly linked to the Kerala mosques' unique double-storeyed architecture. Studies could take up to 15 years but on completion, a graduate (or *vilakkatirikkal)* received the title of *musliyaar* and could be posted as a *qazi*. This system emerged in Ponnani in the 15th century under the leadership of the Makhdums and was responsible for the spread of Shafi'i Islam in Kerala (Hussain:32-37).

Ponnani thus developed a strong literary and theological tradition. It produced great scholars like Qazi Muhammad (d.1612), who composed the *Muhyadhiin Maala,* practically ubiquitous among Mappilas even in 19th century. The Arabi-Malayalam script itself is said to have been developed at Ponnani, and is also known as the Ponnani script (Randathani).[61]

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[59] *fiqh* may be loosely translated as Islamic law (Kooriadathodi:8)

[60] Most *darses* covered the *Qur'an*, *Hadith* (tradition), and *Fiqh* (law). However, at Ponnani, additional texts such as *Tafsir* (exegis) and *Tasawwuf* (mystic arts) were also taught. The secular subjects included Arabic literature and grammar, *Uqlaidis* (Euclidean geometry), *Tibb* (medicine), *Falsafah* (philosophy), *Mantiq* (logic), and *Hisab* (mathematics).

[61] Randathani, Hussain. "Trade and Culture: Indian Ocean Interaction on the Coast of Malabar in Medieval Period". Unpublished paper.

The Makhdums were considered among the most important Sunni *ulama* of Malabar (Arafath 2018).[62] They were close to the Zamorin rulers and must have enjoyed some political influence as well. The use of the word *ulama* is commonly applied to the arbiters of Sharia law, and often it was the *ulama* in the centre and the *Sufis* on the periphery. However, here the dominant group itself (the Makhdums) came from a Sufi order. When Kunhali notes that in Kerala, Sufism was subject to Shari'ath, this is what he is referring to (Kunhali 1981:vii).

Kondotty

Kondotty was an important centre of Sufi influence, albeit with some key differences. As it was an inland village, it had an agriculture-driven economy and was less exposed to overseas influences than the ports. Muhammad Shah, the first Kondotty *thangal*, came to the village in the early 18th century and was welcomed by the local *qazi,* which indicates that an Islamic religious infrastructure was already in place. However, Shah was to become extremely influential in the area, and brought a new brand of Islam to Malabar.

Unlike the majority of Kerala's *thangals*, he is said to have been of Persian descent. Born near today's Mumbai in 1687, he studied under the Shi'a Qadiriyya mystic Karam Ali in Awrang.[63] He wandered India as a Sufi, studied medicine, then travelled to Egypt, Syria, Mecca, and Palestine before he came to Malabar. His ship docked at Kochi, from where he travelled north over land – meditating, preaching, and gathering followers as he did so. According to legend, he was witnessed meditating on a hill in Areekode,[64] flanked by two tigers. He was visited by the local *qazi* and elders who invited him to the mosque. The *faqir,* as he was called, finally settled in Kondotty in 1717-18 (Randathani 2016).

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[62] In the Sunni context, *ulema* or *ulama* (pl., sing. *alim*) are men of knowledge, trained in the religious texts of the Qu'ran, Hadith, etc. (Esposito 2003:325).
[63] Aurangabad, Bihar in India.
[64] Also spelled Areacode.

Muhammad Shah was the only Sufi in Malabar to establish a *khanaqah* (2016:41). The *khanaqah* is a building that serves the *tariqat* in many ways: as a shelter, a *retreat*, a gathering place, and more. It is common across most of North India and even Tamil Nadu, but outside of Kondotty, the Kerala *thangals* conducted their teaching and practice in the mosque itself (Jan 2009:92, Randathani 2016:41, Nizami 1957). In Kondotty, the word for this was not *khanaqah,* but *takkiya*. Randathani has related this to the Arabic word *taqiyya* (2016:51). *Taqiyya* refers to precautionary dissimulation, or the concealment of one's religious beliefs in the face of persecution, and is usually associated with Imami Shi'ite practice (Kohlberg 1975: 395). The word *takiya* may also be associated with *tekke*, a Persian and Turkish word for *khanaqah* (Esposito 2003: 170, 318).

Shah was buried in the Kondotty *qubba* or *dargah*, across the road from his house in 1766. This became the centre of the annual Kondotty Aand Nercha, which is observed to this day (Arafath 2018:47-51, AKP:193).[65]

The Kondotty Nercha was an agricultural festival, with the *thangal's* followers bringing tributes of produce in various *varavus* (offertory processions) to honour their spiritual leader (Dale & Menon 1978). This *nercha* is known to be one of the most important *nerchas* in Malabar. Anas Edoli places the origins of this *nercha* around the 18th century, after the death of the first Kondotty *thangal* (pers. comm.). He also says that the idea of the *nercha* itself gained popularity with the Mappilas after the Kondotty nercha. Most of the other *nerchas* seem to have sprung up around the 18th and early 19th centuries (Edoli 2017:694). By the mid-19th century the Kondotty *nercha* was a major event – In 1868 it was attended by 8000 people (Razak 2007b:28).

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[65] A *nercha* is a complex of celebrations, offerings and rituals centred around a Sufi saint, usually conducted at his tomb or shrine. See section on *Nerchas* in Chapter 3. The appropriate ITRANS equivalent for this word would be "nERcha", but I am using "nercha" for the sake of readability.

Muhammad Shah called himself Sheikh Muhammad b. Ismail al Fan Waliyyil Qadiriyyil Chistiyyil Shafiyyi (Randathani 2016:49). This name suggests he claimed to be from both Qadiri and Chishti *tariqats*. "Shafiyyi" indicates that he claimed to adhere to the Shafi'i *madhab* of Sunni Islam.[66] However the Chishti practices such as *kuthu ratheeb* during the celebration of *Muharram,* and other rituals and customs followed in Kondotty showed Shia influences.

Outside of Kondotty, Mappilas considered themselves to be Shafi'i Sunnis, in keeping with the Hadhrami teachings that were popularised by Ponnani. The *ulama* thus criticised the "heretical" Shi'a practices in Kondotty, despite the Kondotty *thangals'* claim that they were Shafi'i Sunnis themselves.[67] This factional dispute came to be known as the *Ponnani-Kondotty Kaitarkkam*. Sheikh Jifri declared Muhammad Shah a "pseudo-Sufi", levelling allegations that included discouraging the Hajj, allowing men and women to mix freely, and consumption of intoxicants (Randathani 2016:51-53).

Fatwas and condemnation came not only from within Kerala (including Ponnani, Calicut, Thalassery, Nadapuram, and Veliyankode) but outside as well. *Ulama* from as far as Cairo, Hijaz, Medina, and Morocco weighed in on the issue (2016:57). The *Kaitarkkam* lasted several years. During this time there was a severe religious and social boycott of Kondotty, judicial cases were filed in religious courts, and several public debates ensued. In 1890, an agreement was reached between the Ponnani Makhdum and the *qazi* of the Kondotty *takiya*. The Shah and his people agreed to abstain from their past practices and adhere to the norms in the *shari'ath*. In exchange, the former Shiites were absorbed into the fold of the Shafi'is.

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[66] *Madhab* is a school of Islamic jurisprudence. Sunni Islam has four such schools – *Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki* and *Hanbali*.

[67] According to P Kunjain, the first Mappila Deputy Collector, the followers of the Kondotty *thangal* are Shi'as. They were known to prostrate themselves before him, and since this was forbidden by doctrine, Kunjain deemed them heretics (Thurston 1909:462).

Photograph 1: Kondotty thangal's Tharavaadu

"Textual Islam" vs "Practical Islam"

I spent a week in Kondotty during my field work and I had the honour of being invited to spend a few nights at the Kondotty *thangal's* ancestral home.[68] Mirsa Galib, a descendant of the *thangal*, now lives there with his wife. During our conversations he offered a general model of how Sufis worked in the Malabar hinterlands, but also highlighted some key differences between them.

[68] This is called a *tharavaadu,* but is no longer a matrilineal inheritance in their family.

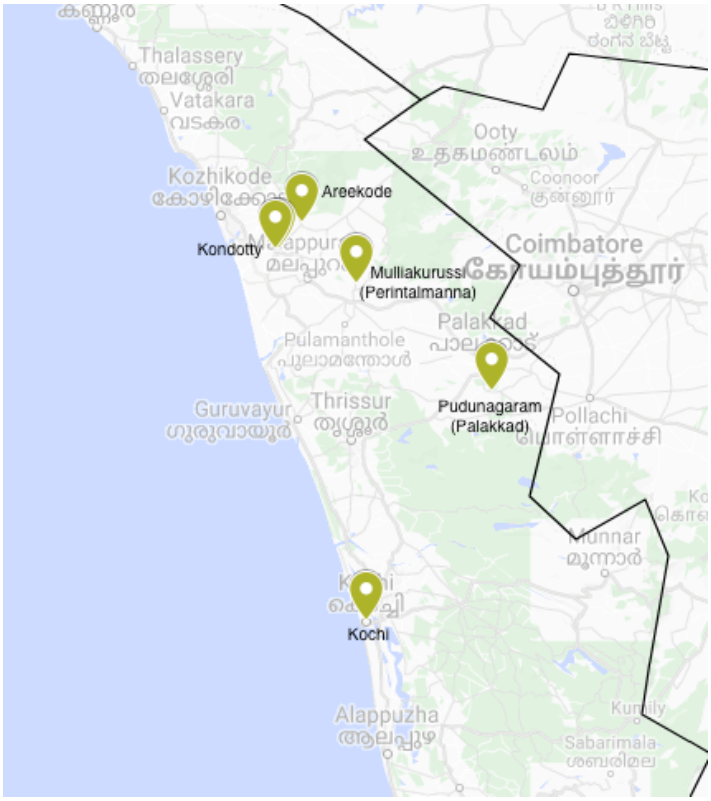

Figure 1: Sheikh Muhammad Shah's hill route

According to him, the Sufis did not all arrive on trade routes, and were not all linked to trade. Once they reached the shores of Malabar, they didn't necessarily follow the typical inland trade routes (which would have been along the river system). Some instead travelled over land, from hill to hill. He called these *hill routes*.

> …they stay on a hill for a while, they teach the people, then move to another place after some time.
>
> … Finally, somewhere they will die. Then people will start to praise him.
>
> …Then there will be a shrine. Actually this man [Kondotty *thangal*] first came to the top of a hill in Areekode, nearly 20 kilometres from here. From this people found out about him. First, he will give them *unani* medicines for their problems. That itself attracts people. Then they will say something about religious things. They won't give any strict instructions to people. We discussed this about textual Islam versus practicing Islam. This is the difference.
>
> [Ponnani] are giving importance to text... When we take into Kondotty side, we are not giving as much importance to texts. That difference is there. That's why Kondotty became a centre of this kind of a culture. Syncretic culture. Inclusive culture.
>
> Mirsa Galib, in conversation with author, Dec 12, 2018

Mirsa Galib refers to two differing modes of operation. What he calls "textual Islam" or "scriptural Islam" was propagated based on texts like the Hadith and Qu'ran brought by Sufis such as the Makhdums in Ponnani. The Makhdums clearly drew their spiritual authority from a strong literary and theological base. Their Hadhrami heritage served to strengthen their position and connections in the international Hadhrami network, as well as gave them a direct link to the land of the Prophet. Ponnani's teachings spread throughout Malabar via the *musliyaars* and *qazis* who graduated from the *dars* system.

While the *dars* system was criticised as rigid and dogmatic (Hussain 2010:36), Kondotty's version of Islam was less prescriptive. The Kondotty *thangals* were known to be well-versed in Islamic texts and Arabic and Persian poetry, but instead of enforcing a scriptural piety, seem to have discouraged daily prayers and making the pilgrimage to Mecca. Galib uses the term "practicing Islam", referring to a practical approach to life as a Mappila as opposed to an orthodox scriptural ideal that might be harder to follow. For example, for the agricultural population of Kondotty in the interior of Malabar, performing the Hajj would have been an impractical task. He speaks of the Sufi saint offering medicine for their ailments, offering solutions to everyday problems, before discussing spirituality. They came not just with Quranic teachings, but with a cultural package – *unani* medicine, music and the arts. Many things were brought by the Sufis – even coffee was introduced to India by a Sufi mystic.[69]

> Actually if we are getting any traces in Mappila music, any Hindustani traces, it is because of them.
> … and those who live on the coast, they have direct touch. They can just take a boat and go to Arabia. These fellows [Kondotty *thangals*] were going this way, by walk itself.
>
> Mirsa Galib, in conversation with author, Dec 12, 2018

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[69] This saint was Baba Budan, who brought coffee beans from Mocha, Yemen to Chikmagalur, Karnataka in the 16th century. For more, refer to Andrew Wilder's *The East India company book of coffee* (1995).

Sufis such as Muhammad Shah, who wandered other parts of India, brought with them what Galib calls "bags of culture". I asked him what he meant by this. He replied, "You see if you walk from here [Kondotty] to Delhi what happens.".

This mode of travel, travelling over land and mingling with people along the way, oriented the Sufi teachings towards a more practical way of life. It understood the advantage of adapting people's existing beliefs and rituals rather than replacing or erasing them entirely. Islam was introduced in the Malabar hinterlands almost within these pre-existing ritual frameworks, and it allowed converts to remain integrated with the larger society. The Sufi, meanwhile, could take the syncretised practices to his next destination.

The nature of Islam in Malabar before the 20th century

The terms "textual Islam" and "scriptural Islam" are also used by PP Abdul Razak to describe a normative practice of the faith rooted in texts such as the *Qu'ran*, *Hadith* and *fiqh*, enforced or fostered by religious authorities. He contrasts this with "popular Islam" – Mappila culture before it experienced a reformist movement in the early 20th century (Razak 2007b:17).

Beyond the "scribal elites"[70] and a small landed aristocracy,[71] Mappilas were traders, fishermen, feudal tenants, and other lay people of Malabar. They were relatively uninterested in theological debates, and preferred the (Qadiriyya) *Muhyadhiin Maala* to the *Qur'an*.

> To most of the Muslims of Kerala, these terms don't make any sense – Shia or Sunni. Even most of them, 90% of them, were not able to understand Arabic. They can read because it was mandatory on the part of the Muslims to read Qur'an, but they never understood Arabic language other than reading.
>
> PP Abdul Razak, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018

[70] (Arafath 2018:30)
[71] Such as the Keyi and Koya groups who don't necessarily consider themselves Mappilas.

Razak went as far as to say that there was "nothing Islamic" about Mappila life up to the 20th century (pers. comm.). He says they may have practiced *namaz*[72] but were not particular when it came to observing an Islamic life, and did not identify as "Muslim". The modern conception of a monolithic Muslim community did not exist, and was largely a product of the reformist movements. Dilip Menon wrote that Mappilas of interior Malabar "worshipped at local mosques, shrines to Muslim holy men, as well as a variety of shrines devoted to snakes, tribal deities and local divinities loosely within a 'Hindu' pantheon" (1994:7).

Mappilas were considered one of the caste groups of Kerala, listed among the 72 *kulams* in the *Keralolpatti*.[73] The word "Muslim" was never used for them – foreigners were named on ethnic (*turushka),* geographic (*yavana),* or cultural (*mlechha)* bases. Thapar extended this to "the people of India" in general, not just to Kerala (Thapar 1989:223). In a 1922 *thullal* (Malayalam literary form), the word used for Muslim is *bouddhar,* meaning "Buddhist" (PP Abdul Razak, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018).[74]

Kerala's indigenous peoples – Ezhavas, Tiyas, Cherumars, Nairs, and others – had their own festivals and ceremonies, and often these included Mappila participation. Razak highlighted how Mappila heroes featured in non-Islamic *theyyams,*[75] and special functions were reserved for indigenous non-Islamic caste groups in *nerchas*.

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[72] Daily prayers in Islam.
[73] *Keralolpatti* is a 17th century Malayalam extension of the much older *Kerala Mahatmayam,* and is a folk history of Malabar.
[74] *Jonaga Mappila* is the term for Muslim Mappilas, but *jonaga* refers to Arabs or Greeks. Tamil *sonaga/jonaga* and Sanskrit *yavana* are equivalents (Mohamad:41). The word is believed to have come from Greek *ionian*, dating back to when the sea trade was dominated by Greeks and Romans (Logan 1951:191). *Turushka* is used for Turks. *Mlechha* wkas a Sanskrit pejorative meaning "impure", used for foreigners and low castes.
[75] Ancient indigenous ritual worship performed by Dalits involving dance, music and elaborate costumes.

> So what does it mean? This is the liminality of these caste groups. Syncretic practices… and the boundaries were always blurred. Boundaries were being constructed only by the British people. British played a very major role in making the boundaries concrete.
>
> So a curious mixture of the exotic and the indigenous is what Mappila culture is. But once the reformist tendency or reformist movement began among the Mappila community, their main agenda was to purge out all these local accretions in the Muslim life. Secretions from the local communities. They began to shun it… call it un-Islamic. So they advised to the Muslim to set their lives according to the tenets of the Islamic scriptures. They were being brought into the track of textual Islam. From that of a popular religion, from a *communitas*, they were being brought into the structure of Islam. That was very bad in the context of pluralism in India.
>
> PP Abdul Razak, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018

The "local accretions" are what Razak also calls "little traditions" of Malabar Islam:

> Rather than the high traditions of High Islam, there are the little traditions of Malabar Islam. But they were brought to this high tradition after 1950, and they began to forget this cultural Islam, all the contributions of cultural Islam they had to ignore or erase on the basis of the argument that these are all against the true spirit of Islam – all these *maalappaattus*… all of the Mappila literature were being despised by the reformists as anti-Islamic. So such a rich cultural heritage Mappilas had, but Mappilas kept a distance away from that in the name of high Islam.
>
> PP Abdul Razak, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018

Nerchas, tomb worship, *ratheeb,* magic and witchcraft, *marumakkathayam* (Malabari matriliny), a caste-like social hierarchy – these traditions were considered un-Islamic and modern reformists sought to correct the situation. This led to the decline of these practices in the latter half of the 20th century.

A centre-periphery myth

The idea of viewing the Mappilas as Muslims on the periphery of an Arab-centric system needs to be discarded. As Arafath and Kooriathodi have described, the Hadhrami "Shafiite cosmopolis" was a dynamic universe "constantly reshaped by continuous transregional movements of Shafiite texts and scholars from various culture areas of Islam" (Arafath 2018:41). Rather than a centre-periphery model, the cosmopolis should be considered

an ocean-wide network with multiple nodes of influence. Malabar was one of these important nodes with its central geographical position, pepper trade, patron rulers, and the scripturally adept spiritual leaders.

Razak has given us a strong argument that Mappilas developed their own unique variant of Islam "rich, dynamic and flexible, and marked by a capacity to accommodate themselves to indigenous patterns of faith and worship", made possible by Malabar's ability to "forge links with the religions and peoples of a wider society" (2007:20). Instead of viewing Mappila culture as an inferior version of an orthodox Quranic ideal, Razak encourages a study of the eclectic religious life of Mappilas – "little traditions" rather than "high Islam". The Mappila arts – *maalas,* music, dances, performative traditions – flourished at the intersection of Sufi syncretism and the "assimilative dynamism" of Malabar society (Razak 2007a:909). Other faiths followed a similar pattern finding their feet in Malabar.

Kunhali discusses the problem that the early Sufi missionaries faced in India – "how the highly developed traditions of Middle Eastern mysticism could have been translated in terms meaningful to illiterate non-Muslims". To ease them into their new faith, new lyrics with Sufi themes were applied to the converts' favourite tunes, and sung at significant stages of life – birth, circumcision, ear-piercing, wedding (1981:xxix). Schimmel, who wrote extensively on Sufism and Islam in India, noted that "… for many centuries poetry was practically the only vehicle for influencing the illiterate masses", and that it shaped the Weltbild (worldview) of the masses (1971:202). When we speak of *mappilapaattu,* we refer to this large and diverse body of poetry and song.

Chapter 3: *Mappilapaattu* and Mappila Art Forms

Mappilapaattu, literally translated as "Mappila songs", is a broad genre of folk songs and poems composed and performed by Mappilas. It is performed in various Mappila art forms, each with their corresponding combinations of instrumentalists, singers, storytellers and dancers, and in the context of various rituals and festivals. Meant to soothe, entertain and inspire, there is a *mappilapaattu* for practically every occasion in Mappila life. There are harvest songs, wedding songs, love songs, songs about voyages and separation, boat pulling songs, war songs, songs about Muslim heroes fighting their European antagonists (AKP:311; VM Kutty, pers. comm. January 2018).

Arabi-Malayalam

Ten to twelve centuries ago, when the Mappila community was still emerging, Malayalam culture itself was still in its formative stages (Miller 2015:27). The Malayalam script was not fully developed,[76] and in any case it was the domain of the brahmins, inaccessible to the other caste groups in Kerala. As for Sanskrit, the Mappilas probably had very little interest in it. It was not a language of commerce and thus of little use to them (Miller 2015:317).

On the other hand, Arabic and its various localised versions were probably the *lingua francas* of the Indian Ocean after the advent of Islam (Pearson 2009:26). The early Mappila community spoke the local dialects of Kerala (including variants of Old Tamil) but being in constant contact with the foreign traders around the warehouses and harbours, and at the same time studying the Arabic script to read the Qu'ran, they naturally developed the language that became Arabi-Malayalam.

[76] The early Dravidian scripts were *Vattezhuthu* and *Kolezhuthu*.

The grammar and syntax of the Mappila language was based in Malayalam and Dravidian languages. The Arabic script was modified with additional letters and a diacritical system to accommodate Malayalam phonemes. A heavy influence of Tamil can be seen in early Mappila literature. The irrelevance of Sanskrit meant that Old Tamil words could be expected to survive in Mappila's adaptation of Malayalam, but the Tamil influence was further strengthened by the flow of Sufis who came from Tamil ports such as Kayalpattanam.[77] It absorbed additional vocabulary from Arabic, Urdu and Persian (Kuzhiyan 2015:92).

Interestingly, the *Muhyadhiin Maala,* which is considered to be the first *mappilapaattu* and thus the first book of Arabi-Malayalam verse, may have actually predated the first Malayalam book of verse, *Adyathama Ramayanam* (Datta 1988:1251).[78]

The *mappilapaattu* repertoire represents the songs and music of the Mappila but what is often overlooked is that it is also their body of literature. It has thus not been fully exploited as a written source in studying the history of Kerala and the Mappilas. *Mappilapaattu* has often been neglected and even disparaged in studies on Indian Islam as well as on Malayalam literature (Sutton 2015:8-17). Even literary scholars in Kerala are prone to relegating this living tradition to folklore studies because it is not composed in the "standard" or "classical" Malayalam (Gamliel 2009:40). Another significant reason for its exclusion from scholarly work is the typical bias against popular songs and oral tradition vis-à-vis conventionally accepted evidence like archaeological findings and written accounts. While *mappilapaattu* is said to have begun from at least the early 17th century, the first Arabi-Malayalam printing press was established only in 1867 (Razak 2007b: 174).

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[77] I have not encountered many peer reviewed papers that stress the flow of Sufi teachers and practitioners from Kayalpattanam but the works of Randathani as well as my own experience and conversations with Mappilas in Malabar indicate a definite sense of heritage that can be traced to Tamil ports.

[78] The *Adyathama Ramayanam* is a Malayalam retelling of the great epic *Ramayana*, in the form of a *kilipaattu,* or *parrot song*.

Original sources are not easy to come by. I did have the opportunity to see some *mappilapaattu* manuscripts in beautiful Arabi-Malayalam calligraphy during a visit to the house of the famed Mappila singer VM Kutty. Sutton writes that many such private collections exist, but few are made available for study.

Figure 2: 'Ith athruppamaya kuppippatt avunnu' – An example of a mappilapaattu in Arabi-Malayalam. From the private collection of VM Kutty.

I also visited the library at the Mahakavi Moyinkutty Vaidyar Smarakam in Kondotty which has a collection of rare printed Arabi-Malayalam texts. However, to be able to access these texts a scholar would need to be well-versed in not just the modern Malayalam language, but also Arabic, Old Malayalam, Tamil, and the unique variant of the Arabic script. This is not a common combination of language skills. In addition, most studies on Indian Islam focus on

Persian and Urdu as found throughout the rest of the sub-continent. Sutton believes that "an Orientalist textual bias still influences much of the work done on Islam in India, making it easy to focus on north India, where Persian and Urdu literary cultures flourished and there is an abundance of written literary sources." (2015:14).

The language of famed Mappila poet Moyinkutty Vaidyar (1852-1892) is difficult to follow even for today's Mappilas.

> It's a very complicated one. Sanskrit will be there, Telugu will be there, Kannada will be there, everything will be mixed. As a modern man, I can't understand. It's very difficult. For all languages are mixed in his language.
>
> …So now there is standardised Arabi and standardised Malayalam. That is being used. Earlier some unique Arabi-Malayalam was there. That flavour is being lost and these standardised words and standardised Malayalam words are being used.
>
> Mirsa Galib, in conversation with author, Dec 10, 2018

The following sections will provide an overview of the different genres of *mappilapaattu,* and contextualise them with Mappila performance art forms and the occasions they are performed in. I will also add my findings on the Bake recordings, Jairazbhoy and Catlin's restudy of 1994, and my own research and recordings as illustrations.

A survey of Mappilapaattu genres

Most traditional *mappilapaattu* are written in the Arabi-Malayalam language. Abdurahiman KP's 2004 thesis at the University of Calicut provides a lot of information on Mappila culture and performance arts. I have used his categories as a basic framework within which to discuss my field work and findings.[79] He says the songs are "composed in Arabic rhymes with most of the words in Arabic, Persian and the old form of Malayalam, namely *Chenthamizh*." He also mentions the inclusion of some words of *Manipravaalam*, an old Indian language combining Tamil and Sanskrit (2004:309, 311).

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[79] I have used an abbreviated form "AKP" for the in-text citations.

The Mappilas may have inherited some Arab rhythms and styles as some of them descended from the Arabs and others interacted with visiting West Asian traders and visitors over the centuries. Instruments like the Arab *duff* were directly adopted into Mappila performances and the instrument is played in Kerala to this day. The oldest known *mappilapaattu* was written in 1607 by Qazi Muhammad (d.1660)[80] and it is called the *Muhyadhiin Maala*.[81] It was composed as an ode to Sufi saint Muhyadhiin Abdul Qadir Jilani. *Maala* literally means necklace or garland,[82] and this *paattu* became the template for an entire genre of poetic hagiographies and odes to saints among the Mappilas. While many of the well-known *paattu* were written by outstanding poets and singers, *mappilapaattu* is still a tradition of the people. Any layman, regardless of his social status, was free to compose his own *mappilapaattu* (AKP:320). *Mappilapaattu* thus encompassed compositions by erudite scholars as well as ordinary Mappila folk. Songs were often transmitted orally, and may have absorbed modifications and embellishments along the way.

Mappilapaattu expressed Muslim subject matter but it manifested in a form more Indic than Arab. Sutton says "the poetic and grammatical features clearly reflect a larger literary heritage that extends beyond religious divisions." (2015:8).

The timing of the *Muhyadhiin Maala* in 1607 also coincides with the peak of the *bhakti* movement and seems to be Qazi Muhammad's response to the great devotional writings that were emerging from his Hindu contemporaries (Sutton 2015:20).[83]

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[80] *Qazi* is a title for a learned Islamic scholar also spelled as *Khazi* or *Qadi*. His full name was *Qazi Muhammad ibn Abd al Aziz* (AKP:313).
[81] There are innumerable variations to how this is spelled. AKP spells it as *Mohiyyudheen mala*. Other scholars have written it as *Muhiyudheen maala*.
[82] The act of garlanding is a ubiquitous Indian or Hindu ritual or symbol of respect. It is performed in various contexts such as to welcome guests or worship gods in temples.
[83] The *bhakti* movement was a large-scale Hindu devotional revolution that revived ancient Vedic traditions.

Mappilapaattu has several sub-genres. Apart from the *maalapaattu* ("necklace" or "garland" mytho-hagiographical songs of praise), there are *padappaattu* (war songs), *kissapaattu* (songs of stories), *kalyaanapaattu* (wedding songs), *madhpaattu* (songs of praise), *kessupaattu* (myths and fables), and *kathupaattu* (letter songs). The different genres of *mappilapaattu* are often linked with a specific Mappila art form or a particular *nercha*,[84] but many are sung and performed without a special occasion.

Maalapaattu

The earliest dated *mappilapaattu*, the *Muhyadhiin Maala,* was a *maalapaattu,* making this the oldest genre of Mappila literature and Mappila song. *Maalapaattu* are songs of devotion and praise dedicated to saints and heroes. Some historians consider these songs an extension of the *maalai* tradition of devotional songs composed by *pulavars* in Tamil Nadu (Nisar 2014:14).[85] The *maalai* genre was picked up later even by Tamil Christians.

Maalas are often sung at *nerchas* to invoke the blessings or powers of the saint or sheikh to whom the *nercha* is dedicated. For this reason, they were also called *nerchapaattu* (Razak 2007b:181). However, *maalas* were not limited to *nerchas*.

The *Muhyadhiin Maala* was and continues to be the most popular *maala*. A tribute to the life and miracles of Sufi saint Abdul Qadir Jilani, it was practically a part of the Mappila household's daily liturgy. When the printing press was finally embraced by Islamic communities in the 19th century, it was one of the most published books with hundreds of editions (2007:182). Unsurprisingly, the *Qadiriyya tariqat* was also the most popular order of Sufism in Malabar.

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[84] Annual celebrations in honour of saints and martyrs. See section on *Nerchas* in Chapter 3.
[85] Traditionally, a *pulavar* is a Tamil poet and living archive of the documents of a Chola clan (Gunasekaran: 25)

Maalas were the ideal vehicle for the propagation of Sufi Islam. Stories of saints were sung, and thus more easily memorised. The language was accessible, allowing oral transmission of the message across caste boundaries. Early adopters of Islam could thus easily follow the saint's spiritual journey. Sufi rituals followed a familiar pre-existing framework of similar rituals already present in the local Kerala communities, so the inclusion of the *maalas* in *nerchas* and other rituals was a natural process (Nisar 2014:15).

There are hundreds of *maalas* in the Mappila repertoire. The *Rifa'i maala* is the story of Shaykh Rifa'i and is sung to protect houses from snakes. *Badar maala* celebrates the bravery and exploits of the Muslim soldiers during the Battle of *Badr* in 624 CE. The famous *Mambaram nercha* has its own *Mambaram maala,* celebrating the *Mambaram thangals*.

Some of the prominent *maalas*, like the *Badar maala, Nafeesath maala*, and the *Manjukulam maala* contained an *iravu*[86] for an easy delivery of a child. This tells us that the *maalas* were likely sung by women as well as men (Razak 2007b:181).

I received an interesting interpretation of the *maala* concept in my conversation with Mirsa Galib and his friends in Kondotty. Mirsa Galib, Ashraf, Sakeer and Rafeeq frequently perform mappilapaattu and offered me their understanding of these songs. According to Mirsa Galib, the structure of the poetry itself resembles a *maala*, or necklace. The lines are organised into couplets, which are like the "stones" or links of the "chain" (Session with Mirsa, Sakeer, Kutay, Rafeeq and Sali). So not only is the *maala* a metaphorical garland of the *sheikh* or *thangal*, but it is also constructed like a garland.

They sang the opening lines of the *Muhyadhiin Maala* – a tune called "Allah Thiruperum".

Video Link:
Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Mappilapattu 1". YouTube video. Performed by Sakeer Bhai, Rafeek. Dec 11, 2018. https://youtu.be/MGKG95G3tHo

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[86] (Malayalam) A prayer of intercession.

Padappaattu

This is a genre of war songs popularised by the most well-known Mappila poet, Moyinkutty Vaidyar, who wrote in the 19th century. The most famous example of this is his *Badr padappaattu*, written about the Battle of Badr. *Padappaattu* often contain historical details and are considered to be "the true narration of wars" (AKP:316). The *Malappuram padappaattu*, also by Moyinkutty Vaidyar, was about a battle between the Mappilas and the Nairs of a local ruler, Paranambi (AKP:315). This is the main theme of the Malappuram *nercha*. Fawcett provided his translation of these two *padappaattu* (1901:505-508). They begin with invocations of *shahids* (martyrs), and go on to describe the fortunes and graces that await those who fall in battle.

The *padappaattu* form the bulk of the *Mappilapaattu* repertoire. This fact has been used to spread the stereotype of a violent religious fanatic by colonial writers (such as Innes & Fawcett) and even some contemporary historians such as Dale. As discussed earlier, this prevented the treatment of these texts and songs as legitimate literature.

Kissapaattu

The word *kissa* comes from the Arabic word *qissa*, meaning "fable". *Qissa* is an old genre of stories and epics dating back to pre-Islamic Persia and can be found thriving in today's Punjab in the north of India and Pakistan. The same genre also travelled to Kerala via the early sea routes. In the Punjab, *qissa* went beyond religious stories to epic tales of romance and tragedy. However, in Kerala, *kissa* remains about the lives of "prophets, companions of Prophet Muhammad and other historic persons" (AKP:316). Some, like *Daniel Nabi Kissapaattu, Adam Nabi, Isa Nabi Kissapaattu* and *Ibrahim Nabi*,[87] are based on Koranic figures. *Tajul Umr* is the story of Queen Bilkis, the Queen of Sheba.

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[87] *Nabi* is the Arabic word for prophet

Kissapaattu are often sung in the Mappila art form *Paadipparachil* in which teams of a singer and a storyteller perform together to entertain the audience – one sings a verse and the other explains the story to the audience. The performance of a single *kissa* may take several nights to complete.

Kalyaanapaattu

The term is used to describe all kinds of wedding songs, and given the elaborate nature of Indian weddings, there are plenty of occasions for different types of *kalyaanapaattu*.[88] *Mylanchipaattu* is a song about the bridal tradition of applying *henna* on her arms and legs.[89] This tradition is not restricted to Mappilas and is a common wedding ritual across regions and religions in the Indian subcontinent. *Ammaayipaattu* are songs about the mother-in-law's treatment of the groom and describe the lavishness of the wedding, from the bridal decorations to the dishes at the wedding feast (AKP:318). *Oppanapaattu* and *vattappaattu* are important types of *kalyaanapaattu* and are explored further in the next section on Mappila performance art forms.

Kessupaattu

Kessupaattu are songs of Mappila fiction and mythology. Moyinkutty Vaidyar's *Badarul Munir Husnul Jamal* is a popular story that has been translated into English. *Kessupaattu* songs have been written on various Mappilas legends about calamities, accidents, hunting, cattle racing and more (AKP:319). *Pakshipaattu* extols the virtues of Ali, who fights for the Prophet against Ifrit, the leader of the *Jinns*.[90] In the story, a bird is accused of adultery by her mate but Ali fights for her and helps her reconcile with her husband.

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[88] AKP spells it as *Kalliyanapaattu*. *Kalyaanam* is Tamil for wedding.
[89] *Henna* is a natural reddish dye obtained from the Mylanchi plant (*Lawsonia inermis*).
[90] *Pakshi* is the Sanskrit word for bird.

In my interview with professor PP Abdul Razak, he singled out the *pakshipaattu* as an example of the inclusivity of the Mappilas. While they are considered Sunnis, they still hold Shia themes and stories like the *pakshipaattu* close to their heart (pers. comm., Jan 8, 2018).

Kathupaattu

These are letter songs, i.e. letters written to distant loved ones, entirely in verse. Razak describes them as "most popular", although this is popularity is more a phenomenon of the 20th century (pers. comm., Jan 8, 2018). Moyinkutty Vaidyar wrote the first one in the 19th century and thereafter several poets added to the genre. The most common theme of these letters is longing and separation.

Mariakuttiyudepaattu is a well-known *kathupaattu* about a woman who writes to her jailed husband, assuring him of her fidelity. VM Kutty chose to sing this song for me as an example of a *mappilapaattu*.

The most famous *kathupaattu* is the *Dubaipaattu* or *Dubai kathu,* written and composed by SA Jameel in 1976.[91] Again it was wives writing to their husbands who went to the Gulf on work. This is a relatively recent genre, with *Dubaipaattu* gaining popularity in the 1970s.

> The husband normally in the initial stage… can't come back to the wife for five years. Such a long separation. So it is in the background of the separation that the wife sings for her husband, depicting all her woes. That became very popular among those sections who have someone in the Gulf.
>
> PP Abdul Razak, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018

The songs detail the "agonies, difficulties, miseries, and sorrows" of the newly-wedded bride, but the melodies that seemed plaintive to me were termed "attractive" in my interviews. These songs, Jameel's in particular, became so popular that it caused hundreds of Malyali

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[91] The full title is *Ethrayum bahumanappetta ente priya bharthavu vayikkuvan* (Oh my dear respected husband).

pravaasis[92] to abandon their jobs in the Gulf and return to spend time with their loved ones in Kerala (KK Mohammed Abdul Sathar, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018).

Sarkeetpaattu

Literally meaning "journey songs", Razak describes these as travelogues in verse. (Interview, Jan 8, 2018).

Kappapaattu and other mystic songs

The *Kappapaattu* deserves a mention as a special example of the mystic songs of Mappilapaattu. Written by Kunjayan Musaliyar[93], it is an allegorical, philosophical poem that likens the body of a man to that of a *kappal,* or ship. The ship's journey through rocks and stormy seas are a metaphor for the dangers and temptations of Satan in the life of a man. The use of the ship metaphor highlights the importance of the sea in Mappila life. Razak believes that this was a master narrative that informed the composition of boat songs and *Sabinapaattu* (a genre of boat songs) by later poets (pers. comm., Jan 8, 2018).

Other mystic songs that come from Sufi traditions include the *Kuppipaattu* & *Kurathipaattu*. The *kuppipaattu* compares the human body and its spirit to a bottle with a lamp inside (Mirsa Galib, pers. comm., Dec 10, 2018). *Kurathipaattu* are songs about palmists (KK Mohammed Abdul Sathar and VM Kutty, pers. comm., Jan 8, 2018).

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[92] *Pravaasi* is the Malayalam (and Sanskrit) term for a member of a diasporic community.
[93] Alternatively spelled Kunjayeen, Kunhanyan or Kunhai Musliyar.

Ishal and the signature sound of Mappilapaattu

Almost everyone I interviewed in Kerala agreed that a Mappila tune is instantly recognisable to any Malayali. When I enquired further, trying to isolate the unique identifiers of the Mappilapaattu sound, there were two common answers. One was the presence of Mappila words from the Arabi-Malayalam language, and the other was the *ishal*.[94]

> Arabi-Malayalam is unique to the Mappilas so the presence of certain words immediately signifies a Mappila song. [Kondotty]. *Pirisham* means… *love*. Etymologically, *Piriyudha* means "intertwined" in Malayalam. …*Piriyudha,* that word is there. That's also from here only. It may be the root of *pirisham*. Then *churukku* is there. Instead of *beauty* we will use *churukku*. Then *urumaal* – instead of *kerchief* we use *urumaal*.
>
> Mirsa Galib, pers. comm.

But it seems that in recent years there has been a shift away from this unique but now antiquated language.

> There is a modernisation in Mappila Malayalam. Language itself is modernised. Now they are trying to somewhat standardise the Malayalam in *Mappilapaattu* also. What happens, again what makes the difference [between *mappilapaattu* and other Kerala folk songs], that question comes. Language is changed… tune is making difference.
>
> Mirsa Galib, in conversation with author, Dec 10, 2018.

Despite the replacement of Mappila words with a modern Malayalam vocabulary, Mappilapaattu remains just as identifiable. This is because of the *ishal*. All my sources indicate that the *ishal* is intimately connected with *mappilapaattu,* but a consensus on its exact meaning is elusive.

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[94] Alternatively spelled *ishal, ishel,* or *iṣal*.

Contemporary definitions: Melodic and metric

There are seemingly both melodic and metric aspects to the *ishal*. Razak and MN Karassery both described it to me as a "way of singing", or "the tune" (In conversation with author, January 2018). The famed Mappila singer VM Kutty and Professor Sathar of the Maha Kavi Moyinkutty Vaidyar Smarakam also identified it as the tune, but did not give me specifics on melody (pers. comm., Jan 12, 2018).

The *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* defines it as the "metric structure" of Mappila song texts. It links the term to the Arabic word *asl*, meaning "principle". According to the article, these metres can vary depending on the number and order of long and short syllables in a line, with over a hundred different types of *ishals* in use. Some of these are combinations of other metres (Groesbeck & Palackal 1998:973). Abdurahiman KP too uses it as a unit of poetic metre – "He used as much as 120 *Ishal* (metres) in this poetry" (2004:315). Sutton uses a combined definition "tunes/meters/rhythms" in her dissertation on Mappila poetry (Sutton 2015:41).[95]

Sutton discusses longer *paattu* containing different *ishals*. These usually correspond to multiple cantos or sections within the *paattu* that are each sung in a unique melody (Sutton 2015: 95, 263).

Often when a song is presented, the *ishal* is stated below the title. However, this must be differentiated from a closely related term: *riithi*. On some occasions, like the "day of the Prophet", madrasas give out song sheets for people to sing. Rather than musical notation or a raga, they instead indicate a well-known traditional song. The lyrics are to be sung to the tune of that song. This is the *riithi,* and it is often an *ishal* itself.

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[95] Sutton draws heavily from lyricist Hassan Nediyanadu's Malayalam language work *Mappila pattinte verukal thedi*. The title translates to *Searching for the roots of Mappila songs*. The book is not available in English.

Discussing *ishals* in Kondotty

I was able to discuss *mappilapaattu* and *ishals* at length with Mirsa Ghalib, Sakeer Bhai, Rafeeq and Kutay Ashraf, who were also kind enough to perform several *ishals* for me. *Mappilapaattu* are usually referenced by the first line of the song. "Allah Thiruperum" comes from the opening lines of the famous *Muhyadhiin Maala*. "Bismi hamthum swalaathum" is a devotional or *bhakti* song performed during *kolkali* or *nerchas*. "Mahiyil Maha" is a love song from Moyinkutty Vaidyar's epic "Badar Munir Husnul Jamal".

Video links:
Allah Thiruperum https://youtu.be/MGKG95G3tHo[96]
Mahiyil Maha https://youtu.be/A9CxKtzFWXI [97]

Mirsa Galib described several facets to the concept of the *ishal*. He highlights a mood, a loose relationship with ragas, and "cultural cues".

> … Every Mappila song comes under some raga, but in which way it is connected to raga, and what is the speciality of this song, is mainly belonging to the mood of the song. On the basis of a particular mood we can judge if it is a Mappila song.
>
> … Each raga has some particular mood also. That mood can be comparable to *ishal*.
>
> –Mirsa Galib, in conversation with author, Dec 10, 2018

Sali, one of the interviewees in Kondotty, said the *ishal* was entirely a metric concept, not related to the tune. Mirsa Galib explained it as "how to count a poem or how to count a text… whatever the tune we can sing". An excerpt from our discussion:

> **MG:** It's a metre. Poetically.
> **MA:** Understood. So it's to do with syllables? Can you give me some examples?
> **MG:** How many words comes in two lines. According to that *thongal,*[98] *ishal thongal,* is [decided].

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[96] Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Mappilapattu 1" YouTube video. Performed by Rafeeq and Sakeer Bhai. Dec 11, 2018. https://youtu.be/MGKG95G3tHo
[97] Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Mappilapattu 2" YouTube video. Performed by Ashraf, Rafeeq and Sakeer Bhai. Dec 11, 2018. https://youtu.be/A9CxKtzFWXI
[98] Could also be spelled *thonkal*.

MA: What is *thongal?*
MG: *Thongal* is the name of an *ishal*. *Ishal Thongal* is decided by how many words comes in two lines.
MA: Is it words or syllables?
MG: It's words, not syllables.
MA: So, it can be three short words or three long words?
MG: Yeah. Then how it is divided only an expert can do.

They proceeded to perform this *ishal thongal* in two different moods – happy and sad. The happy version was in an even four-beat cycle, or *aadi taalam*,[99] sung in *Raag Bhairavi*.[100] The pitch was high and sung in a loud voice. In the sad version, the pitch and volume dropped to a sombre level and the rhythmic cycle shifted to a seven-beat pattern, or *ruupak taalam*.[101] The raga, or rather the set of notes being used, was unchanged, but the rhythmic structure shifted and the phrasing and resolutions were different. Some lines were sung from the octave above and descend into the main range used for most of the song.

Video links:
Ishal Thongal https://youtu.be/_fmJFH_d-DA [102]
Kolkali rendition (like the "happy mood") https://youtu.be/9vV6KFKbHhs [103]
Udane Kazhuthente (like the "sad mood") https://youtu.be/0PzuLnkIiLo [104]

So here I was presented with two "moods" of the same *ishal*. They sounded very different despite being in the same scale.

Mood we have to understand in a cultural way, not in a happy or sad way. What situation that mood is creating, there we have to count, I think.

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[99] The *taalam* system's best equivalent of a 4/4 time signature.
[100] Roughly the Indian equivalent of the Phrygian mode. It is must be noted that they use the Hindustani name for the raga rather than the South Indian Carnatic name.
[101] A seven beat cycle in Hindustani music, an equivalent of a 7/8 time signature. This is interesting because they referenced Hindustani (North Indian classical) tradition rather than the South Indian Carnatic tradition where *ruupak* is a 6 or 3 beat cycle.
[102] Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Mappilapattu 4" YouTube video. Performed by Mirsa, Ashraf, Rafeeq and Sakeer Bhai. Dec 11, 2018. https://youtu.be/_fmJFH_d-DA
[103] Postlove. 2018. "Ferokabad Kolkali Sangam #2". YouTube video. Performed by Ferokabad Kolkali Sangam. Dec 16, 2018. https://youtu.be/9vV6KFKbHhs
[104] MRL. 2015. "Udane Kazhuthente | Vadakara Krishnadas & Vilayil Faseela" YouTube vide. Jun 22, 2015. https://youtu.be/0PzuLnkIiLo

> … this tune, as we already said, is a set of *swaras,* but what is the combination of *swaras*? We don't know what the actual combination is… It can be anything, but some cultural understanding will be there.
>
> … in ragas you find out particular *swaras – Sa Re Ga –* but when it is in *ishal,* it is combination of *swaras*. And there is no written thing, in which *ishal* which *swaras* will come. But if we hear one set, we can get it because it is there in our culture. We can understand that *ishal*.
>
> … *Swara* [musical notes] is not there. Set of cues is there, highly connected with the culture, with cultural expression. That makes an *ishal*. It's not related to *swara*. If *swara* is there we can compose again and again but only if someone is there in the culture, he can compose a *mappilapaattu*. Because it is a set of cues, set of *swaras*.
>
> –Mirsa Galib, in conversation with author, Dec 10, 2018

So, from these quotes, I infer the following:

First, *ishals* can be compared to ragas in that they have an emotional aspect or a mood, but unlike a raga that is generally associated with a fixed mood or emotional essence, *ishals* can be performed in different moods. This seems to affect both melodic choice as well as the rhythmic cycle.

Second, the *ishals* are certainly associated with tunes, and are thus obviously comprised of notes. In this way, we could relate them to a scale or a raga, which are defined fully or partially by a certain set of notes, but this alone is not what makes an *ishal*. There are certain "ways of singing" that are a cultural expression and seem to have been developed and fostered among Mappila communities for centuries. Further studies could be undertaken here to compare Mappila songs with the songs of indigenous non-Muslim groups in Kerala to see if there are connections. For example, songs used in *kolkali* could be compared with non-Islamic *kolattam* songs. Mirsa Galib and Sakeer Bhai discuss:

> **MG:** You can get the notes, that's not a problem. But…
> **SB:** *Usme koi* note *nahiin*. *Yeh* tune *ko pura kehta hai*. [There are no notes in it. This is what we call the tune as a whole]
> **MG:** You can't count it in separate way, note by note.
> **SB:** *Puura* tune *ko kehta hai ishal*. [The tune as a whole is called an *ishal*]

To compose a new *mappilapaattu,* one needs to intimately know and connect with Mappila culture, the way of life and the existing body of songs. Mirsa Galib talks about a *set of cultural cues* that are important, not merely the notes of a scale. The tunes, melodies and songs cannot be disentangled from the cultural context in which they exist.

I picked up other information in Kondotty that pointed to the existence of a strong theory of *ishal* as a purely metric poetic concept, supporting Sali's definition. Sutton also points out that some *ishals* were derived from various sources including Arabic metres such as *hazaj, kamil* and *ramal,* although she mostly treats the *ishal* as a tune or style of singing (Sutton 2015:53).

However, the popular perception of *ishal* seems to be related to the tune or *way of singing* and the *cultural cues* mentioned earlier. For the purposes of a purely academic, musicological, or anthropological study, these could possibly be better understood with an in-depth study.

I can provide one possible example of *cultural cues* carried in the *ishal*. This came up when I compared recordings of melodies sung to me on by Prof. Razak and VM Kutty. Razak was demonstrating the *Thashriif oppana* (in the *Thashriifinte ishal*), which is a wedding song, and VM Kutty sang a few lines of the ear-boring ceremony that is performed on a baby Mappila girl.[105] The melodies and phrasing were almost identical. Did this correspond to any significant links between the two ceremonies? It turns out that the *Kaattukuthu Kalyaanam* (ear boring ceremony)[106] and the wedding ceremony, are celebrated on much the same lines, with the ear boring ceremony including a "sumptuous feast" for relatives, and women bringing "breads, sweets and presentations" (AKP:60). The fact that the word *kalyaanam,* meaning "wedding",

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[105] See Appendix III: List of Field Recordings for these examples. Use the CD attached to access these recordings.

[106] *Kaattu* means ear; *kutthu* means piercing; *kalyaanam* means wedding.

appears in the name of the ear boring ceremony also indicates that these two events are linked, one perhaps being a precursor to the other. Similar melodies being used in the songs completes the picture.

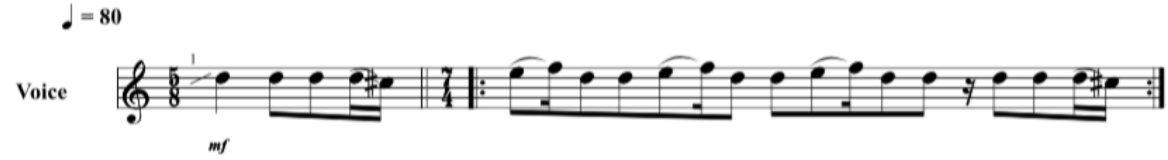

Figure 3: Kaattukuthu Kalyaanam (Earring ceremony) as sung by VM Kutty

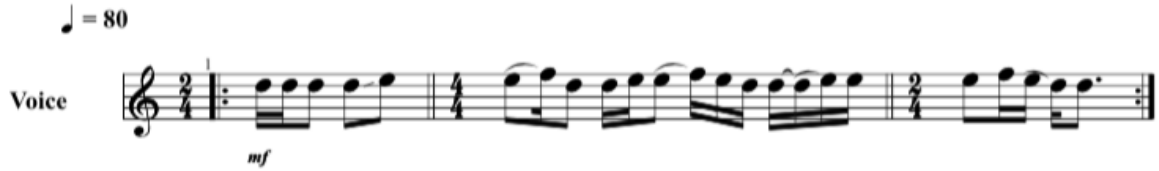

Figure 4: Thashriif Oppana (in Thashriifinte Ishal) as sung by PP Abdul Razak

Earlier concepts and Tamil origins

Another interesting idea that came up in my discussions in Kerala was that *ishal* was the original name for *mappilapaattu* itself. There may not be a way to verify this but it is entirely plausible. It ties in with the theories of writers such as Randathani who believe that the Mappila culture of today was heavily derived from Tamil culture, specifically Arab-Tamil and Tamil Muslim culture. Randathani traces the word *ishal* to the Tamil word *izhal* which means "beauty",[107] but also sometimes "music".[108] Sutton also references some definitions which relate to the same Tamil word.[109] She also found a definition that related *ishal* to the Tamil *virutham* (Sutton 2015:51). Interestingly, *viruthams* are also an important part of *vattappaattu*,

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[107] Also found as "ezhal". For use as "beauty", see Tirukkural 407 (Tamil original and English translation from http://www.ytamizh.com/thirukural/kural-407/)
[108] (Nandhivarman:610) (https://www.academia.edu/36871322/TRANSLATIONS_OF_SANGAM_TAMIL_CLASSICS_IN_FOREIGN_LANGUAGES-_IN_NETWORLD)
[109] Sutton uses the spelling "iyal".

which I have been told does not contain *ishals*.[110] The prevalence of these terms are further clues to the Tamil influence on *Mappilapaattukal*.[111]

The meaning of *mappilapaattu* flows from the understanding of the *Mappila* as a *Malabar Muslim*. We don't know exactly when this identity formation took place, but it is accepted that Islamic groups were already a part of Malabari society before modern Malayalam developed.[112] It is possible that early Mappilas spoke dialects closer to Old Tamil.[113] The earliest surviving documents in a language that can be considered a form of Malayalam are the royal copperplate inscriptions of Vazhapalli (832 CE) and Tharisapalli (849 CE), and the latter are coincidentally also the first epigraphic evidence of Muslims in Kerala.

Miller writes that the Mappilas emerged out of a fusion of two distinct cultures that were themselves in their formative stages (2015:27). We can imagine the linguistic, cultural and societal evolution of the Mappilas (and their ancestors) parallel to that of the rest of Malabar's, retaining a greater influence of Old Tamil, Arabic and Persian than other Malabari groups did.[114] Along with a flow of Sufi mystics and missionaries from Tamil ports such as Kayal over the centuries, this would explain the strong presence of Tamil terms and features found in Mappila art forms – *viruthams* in *vattappaattu, kaluttu* in *mappilapaattu,* etc.

When the first Mappilapaattu arrived in the 17th century, it contained a lot of Old Tamil, Arabic and Persian words. The fact that the *Muhyadhiin Maala* became the prototypical *mappilapaattu* tells us that the language was accessible to its audience. *Ishals* might well have

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[110] See section on *Vattappaattu* in Chapter 3.
[111] *Mappilapaattukal* refers to the art of performing *mappilapaattu*. The suffix *kal* comes from *kala,* meaning "art".
[112] Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan (d.1575 CE) is considered the father of modern Malayalam.
[113] Old Tamil refers to the language used in Tamil Sangam literature. The Sangam period is 5th century BCE to 3rd century CE. Classical Tamil is also referred to as *Chenthamil*. This is differentiated from ungrammatical or spoken Tamil which is called *Kodum Tamil*.
[114] As pointed out earlier, Sanskrit was not of great importance to them as it was a scriptural language, the domain of the Brahmins, and not a language of commerce.

existed before *mappilapaattu,* and *ishal* could have been the popular term for Mappila tunes before the emergence of the textual tradition in Ponnani where erudite poets and scholars such as Qazi Muhammad began composing technical poems in the *bhakti* mould.

There doesn't seem to be a definite textbook or set of rules around the composition of *ishals*. Sutton discussed the existence of "proper" poetic techniques in the composition of *mappilapaattu*, and where *ishal* might fall in that context. These rules and techniques aren't formally codified but since Mappila poets such as Moyinkutty Vaidyar were well schooled in various literary forms, there is an understanding that particular techniques of *praasam* (rhyme schemes) ought to be used. The Mappila poet Cherussery Kunjamu Musliyar regretted his inability to use techniques such as *kaluttu* and *kambi,* but instead was able to "combine an *ishal's* form with meaning" (Sutton 2015:51).[115] Poets have come up with their own *ishals,* and also used and borrowed melody and metre from folk tunes, Tamil poetry and Arabic poetry, and even combined existing *ishals* to form new ones. I believe this has allowed *mappilapaattu* to remain fluid and dynamic, and accessible to all. It explains the curious coexistence of a classical canon composed by virtuosos, alongside popular and improvised folk tunes, all under the same umbrella term of *mappilapaattu*.

[115] *kaluttu* is a Malayalam poetic technique that uses second letter repetition, i.e. the second letter of the first line is repeated in subsequent stanzas. *Kambi* is first letter repetition. (Sutton 2015:50)

Mappila Performance Art Forms

The Mappila population for at least the last hundred years, has been mostly made up of Dravidian converts to Islam. Although they accepted Islam they stuck with their performative traditions and adapted them to their new faith rather that replacing them with entirely Islamic art forms (MN Karassery, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018). These art forms are of various types – storytelling, singing and dancing groups, dances with claps, dances with stick percussion, percussion performances and even martial arts. Most of these have songs or poems from the *mappilapaattu* repertoire associated with them, and are often related to the religious life of the Mappilas.

MN Karassery gave me a list of ten important Mappila art forms: *Oppana, Kolkali, Duffmuttu, Aravanamuttu, Ratheeb, Kuthuratheeb, Muttumvili, Paadipparaya, Vattappaat,* and *Aanungalude Oppana*.[116] These performance arts carry information that could be relevant to our discussion on migration. In some cases, the songs, dances, rituals and material culture indicate possible Arab or Persian influence, some have equivalents in other Islamic communities along the Indian Ocean trade routes, and in some cases point they back to origins in indigenous rituals, festivals and art forms. This section explores the forms mentioned above and a few more from Abdurahiman KP (AKP).

Oppana

Oppana is one of the most important Mappila art forms. It is performed by women, usually at weddings where they sing, clap and dance around the bride. This is one of the popular genres of competitive dancing in Kerala today, and while women now dance to pre-recorded *oppanapaattu* or songs taken from movies, this traditionally involved them singing the songs as well.

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[116] These spellings are as told to me by MN Karassery.

There are several theories on the origin of the word *oppana*. One opinion links it to the Arabic word *hafna,* meaning "to put the palms together", in reference to the clapping that accompanies the songs (Randathani 2016:65). It is most likely derived from the Tamil word *oppanai* meaning beautification, adornment or decoration.[117] Some have suggested it refers to bridal make-up but it is possible it also refers to the decoration of the bride in general, including heavy jewellery and henna patterns (AKP:367). Groesbeck & Palackal suggest it means "proximity, sitting together" (1998:973).

A signature feature of *oppana* is clapping. One of the few archival songs that MN Karassery was willing to comment on featured claps and he identified it as an *oppana paattu* because of that (pers. comm., Jan 8, 2018). I found that in many of the examples online, the claps are performed on three beats of a four beat cycle (i.e. with a rest on the last beat).

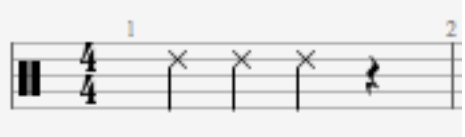

Figure 5: A Mappila clapping rhythm especially common in oppana and vattappaattu

The performers may also sing *oppanapaattu,* i.e. songs composed specifically for the *oppana* performance. The songs are sung by a lead singer whose lines are repeated by the rest of the group. The swaying dance is performed by 10 to 15 women. They move in a circle, in either direction around the bride, sometimes bending down to one side.

There are three styles of *oppana:* the "prolonged style" *oppanachaayal*, the "quick style" *oppana murukkam*, and the "fast style" *oppana ida murukkam* (AKP:318). *Chaayal* (slanting) and *murukkam* (tightening) refer to slow and fast tempos, respectively (Groesbeck

[117] From the Tamil Lexicon (https://dsalsrv04.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/tamil-lex_query.py?qs=%E0%AE%92%E0%AE%AA%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%AA%E0%AE%A9%E0%AF%88&searchhws=yes . Accessed Nov 7, 2018)

& Palackal 1998:973). *Oppanapaattu* lyrics can be themed on the life of the Prophet (such as in *Adimuthal puranam*), historical events, or even on Tamil *pulavar* poetry (AKP:368).[118]

The male version of *oppana* is called *Aanungalude Oppana*.[119] Abdurahiman describes a male variant of *oppana* called *Thashriif Oppana*, which is performed for the groom by five to twenty men who do not dance, but are seated. The singing troupe is divided into "front" singers called *munpaattukar* who are led by a single lead singer called a *moopan,* and "back" singers called *pinpaattukar*. The lead singer sings the *oppanachaayal* first, and this is repeated by the rest. This part does not have any clapping. The front singers then sing the *oppana murukkam*, this time repeated by the back singers with clapping. They then go back to the *oppanachaayal* and repeat (AKP: 369).

Razak told me that the *Thashriif oppana* was the first *oppana*, and the *model oppana*, or the song that *oppanas* are modelled on. As many later *oppanas* were composed in this style, this was called *Thashriifinte ishal*. An example of this *ishal* can be found here:

> MRL. 2015. "Thashirifum | Vilayil Faseela" YouTube video. Performed by Vilayil Faseela. May 30, 2015. https://youtu.be/hjZo6SJ4b0M

The Bake recordings contain some examples of *oppana*.[120] Bake 38.7 "Opani patu - conversation of the Prophet with the King of Damascus." was instantly identified as *oppana* by Ali Kutty despite being sung by a male voice and there being no clapping involved. This probably means this is an example of *oppanachaayal*. Bake 39.7 "Song about Paradise - Moplah women." is an example of *oppana* as well. Razak was able to identify this song as a *Thirukalyaanapaattu*. This literally translates to "holy wedding song", and refers to the wedding of the Prophet Mohammed.

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[118] Traditionally, a Tamil poet and living archive of the documents of a Chola clan (Gunasekaran: 25)
[119] *Aanungalude* is the Malayalam word for *male*.
[120] See Appendix I for Bake's index.

We came across this song when we were going through the DVDs that Amy Catlin gave him. DVD 4 of Catlin & Jairazbhoy's *Restudy 1994*[121] pairs Bake's silent video footage of Mappila women clapping and singing with audio from Bake 39.7 "Song about Paradise - Moplah women".[122] Bake's brief footage shows 5 Mappila women (identifiable by their attire), standing in line, clapping and performing a song. Razak was also able to translate the chant. An excerpt from the listening session with Razak:

> **Razak:** [Listening to Bake 39.7] This is the repetition of the same verse!
> *Sugamulla suvarkkangal*
> *Sugamulla suvarkkangal*
> *Maazhikke cheeravarnam*
> *Tha kiru thaanam thaa*
> *Tha kiru thaanam thaa*
>
> This a rhythm, *Tha kiru thanam thaa,* nothing meaningful. Just a rhythm. Then the first line *Sugamulla suvarkkangal* is the "bliss of paradise", the "pleasure of paradise". Just that line repeating again and again.
>
> … I think it is related to the marriage of the Prophet in heaven. After death, these people believe that the Prophet will be marrying. *Thirukalyaanapaattu* means holy wedding song of Prophet Mohammed.

Rhythmic syllables like *tha kiru thaanam thaa* are common in the songs in Kerala, not just Mappila music. In the Bake recordings they seem to come up in songs where actual percussion is absent, and these rhythmic syllables are perhaps sung to fulfil the role of those instruments.

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[121] Prof. Razak gave me access to his personal copy of the unpublished DVDs prepared by Dr Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy: "Kerala Bake Restudy Items 1938-1991-1994 (Five Edited Dvds/Files for Repatriation to Univ of Calicut and Professor Abdul Razak, PSMO College", hereafter referred to as *Restudy 1994*. See Appendix II.

[122] The DVD notes say it is Bake 39.4, but this is an error. Bake 39.4 is where the Pollangode Estate recordings begin, but Bake 39.4 and 39.5 are recordings of male "coolees"(sic) performing "kolatam"[kolkali] and other songs. The recordings with women are in Bake 39.7 and 39.8, and the recording used in the film is Bake 39.7. See Appendix II where I have reproduced the DVD notes.

Catlin and Jairazbhoy recorded video footage of a group of Mappila women singing "the same song" however while the clapping, phrasing and melody match, the lyrics are different.

They also identified the clapping pattern in their notes, described simply as "clapping xxx-".[123] This pattern is very common across several *mappilapaattu* genres and occurs frequently in the Bake recordings. Catlin and Jairazbhoy recorded five young girls re-enacting a bridal scene, singing and dancing an *oppana paattu* called "*Mangala*".[124] This also featured the same clapping pattern. The song contained two distinct repetitive melodies, one of which also occurs in my recordings of the Ferokabad Kolkali Sangham (See "Aane Maadanapuu Kaani Thenale" in Appendix III). This should be an example of an *ishal,* specifically *Ishal Thongal* (the happy mood).[125]

Kolkali

Kolkali, or "stick play", is another famous Mappila art form. Performers holding sticks (*kol)* dance in a circle, and strike each others' sticks in rhythm. A leader in the group, the *gurukkal,* sings a *mappilapaattu* and the others repeat each line after him.

> In Kerala the so-called upper castes don't have this play. For the lower castes it is there. For the Pulaya, that is the Dalit. They have got *kolkali*. And the Ezhava, that is the Tiyya. OBC.[126] They have got *kolkali*. That is known as Tiyya *kolkali*. And Mappilas have got *kolkali* – it is known as Mappila kolkali.
>
> *Kolkali* comes from the Mappila's Dravidian roots. Despite their conversion to Islam, they still kept their performative arts, and *kolkali* is one of the prominent art forms that survived.
>
> MN Karassery, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018.

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[123] This phrase "xxx-" refers to the Mappila clapping rhythm in Figure 5. See Appendix II.
[124] *Mangala* is a Malayalam word for wedding.
[125] According to demonstration. More information in appendix - Session with Mirsa, Sakeer, Kutay, Rafeeq and Sali
[126] OBC (Other Backward Classes) is a legal term used for a collective of socially and educationally backward groups in India.

While often performed during the festival of Onam, *kolkali* is also seen in as part of a *varavu,* or offertory procession, during a *nercha*. Competitive *kolkali* events are popular today as well.

Video example of *kolkali* from Kondotty Nercha 2018:

Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Nercha 2018 – Kolkali". YouTube video. Recorded by Biju Ibrahim. Nov 26, 2018. https://youtu.be/ejETRo86UKc

During my field visit to Kerala in December 2018, I spent an evening with the Ferokabad Kolkali Sangham, a *kolkali* troupe based in Feroke, near Maalappuram and Kondotty. The sixteen members were all men, and most of them had other day jobs. The group was led by two "masters" or *gurukkals*.[127]

Photograph 2: Ferokabad Kolkali Sangham. Photograph by Mark Aranha, December 2018.

[127] Also found as *kurikkal* and *gurikkal*.

Abdul Jaleel Gurukkal (also known as Kunji Koya) was the senior-most member, and did most of the singing. He led the singing, standing in the centre of the group, while the other performers weaved in complex, hypnotic paths around him.[128] The other two *gurukkals* were Azhar Gurukkal and Sarju Gurukkal. They moved with the rest of the performers, striking their sticks, but would shout out instructions in a syncopated rhythm. These instructions, called *vaithari,*[129] communicated the *taalam* and coordinated the group's movements, sometimes telling them to move forwards or backwards, or to break away into separate circles or return to the larger group. The syllables used in the kolkali *vaithari* are from the "language of the fishermen" (Nazeer, pers. comm.). I have transcribed a *vaithari* count-off below.[130]

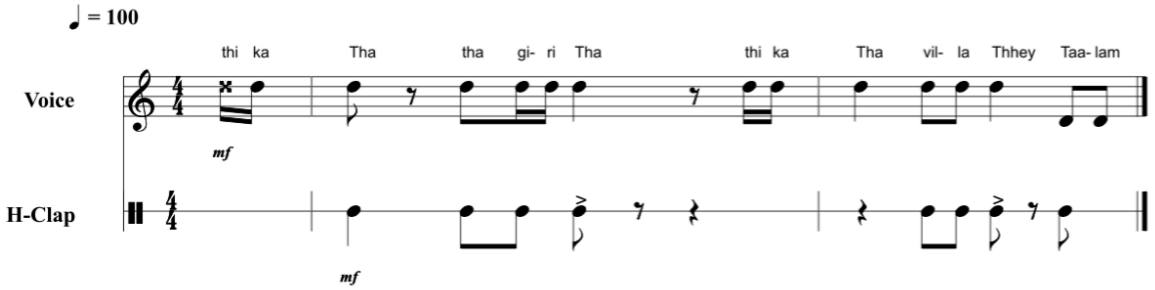

Figure 6: Sample vaithari count-off from Kondotty. Recorded Dec 10, 2018.

Despite the complexity of the choreography, and the sometimes frightening pace of the dance, the *kolkali* performers strike their sticks at a consistent rhythm, never missing a beat, singing effortlessly and retaining complete dynamic control. The synchronization is so remarkable that it would be hard to tell from an audio recording whether they were still or moving, or whether there were five pairs of sticks or 15.

Bake recorded similar *kolkali* songs in his recordings 39.3 "Four Islamic kolatam songs by fishermen of the village" (in Parapanangadi) and 39.4 "Moplah coolies singing Kolatam"

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[128] It may not have been literally "hypnotic"; however, the performance did leave me breathless. See the video recording provided on the CD.
[129] Also, *vythari* or *vaythari*.
[130] The audio recording for this is "An Example of *Vaithari*". See Appendix III.

(in Pollangode Estate). Judging from these 13 minutes of *kolkali* recorded 81 years ago, the format has remained virtually unchanged. The same features are present in both my recordings as well as those of Bake:

a) a *konnakol*-like count off at the beginning of most performances;[131]

b) a call and response form of singing with lead singers and a chorus that repeats the line;

c) repeated melodic lines occasionally featuring the typical *gamakas* found in Kerala;[132]

d) repetitive stick percussion patterns, mostly just even 16th notes;

e) *vaithari*, the choreographic instructions shouted by the *gurukkals* in a tight syncopated rhythm over the melody;

f) dramatic climaxes with raised voices and raised tempos, sometimes abandoning the melody altogether in favour of a loud call and response (heightened speech).

Audio recordings miss the intense choreographic and visual aspect of the performance, but Bake did take some stills and video of Mappila *kolkali*. DVD 4 of the *Restudy 1994* set contains two still photographs and about 18 seconds of silent video taken by Bake, paired with excerpts from his audio recordings playing in the background. The audio is from Bake 39.3 "Four Islamic kolatam songs by fishermen of the village" recorded in Parapanangadi. The visuals show an outdoor *kolkali* performance of eleven or twelve Mappilas, surrounded by around a hundred local people. There were two chairs, one for his wife Corry Bake and another presumably for Arnold Bake himself who must have been behind the camera, taking the pictures. The second still is presumably of the *kolkali* performers, but the framing of the photograph captures them only from the neck down, putting the focus on their attire and the *kolkali* sticks.

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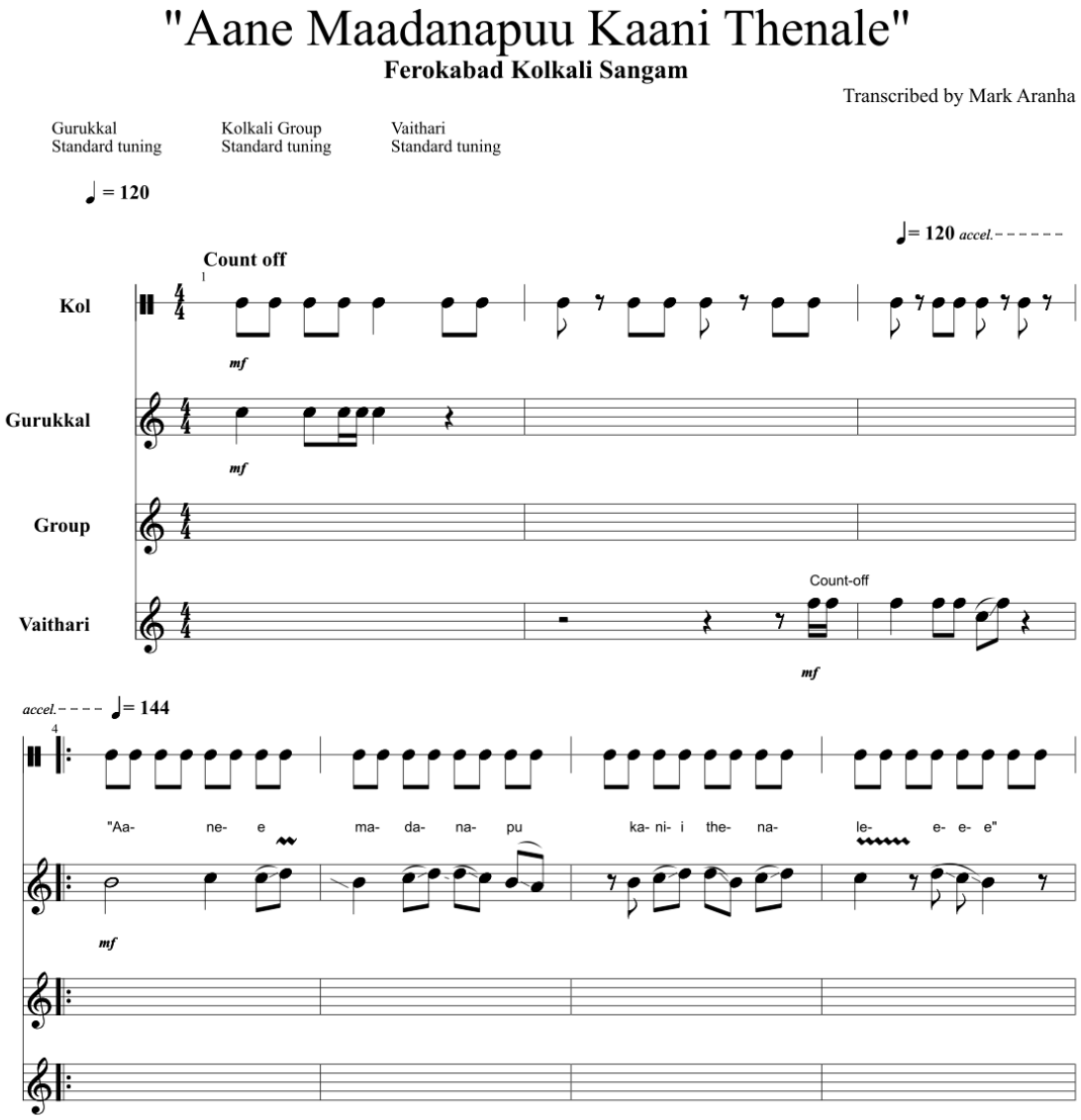
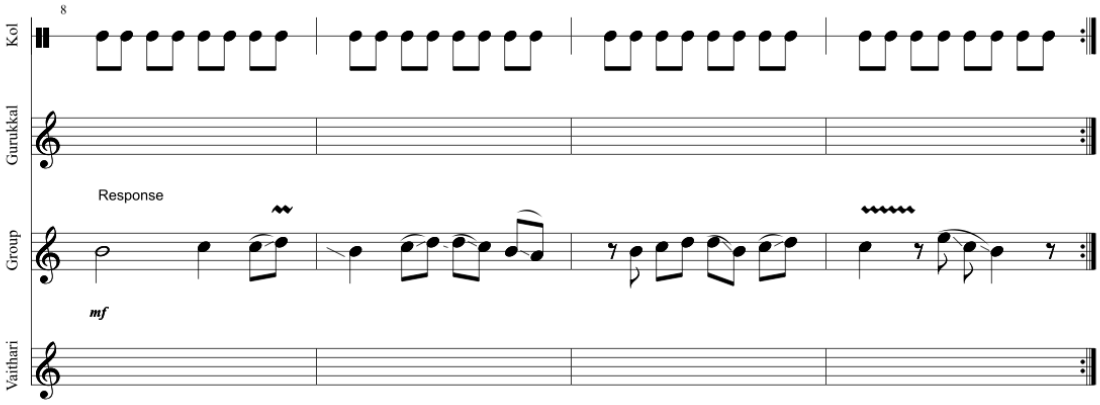
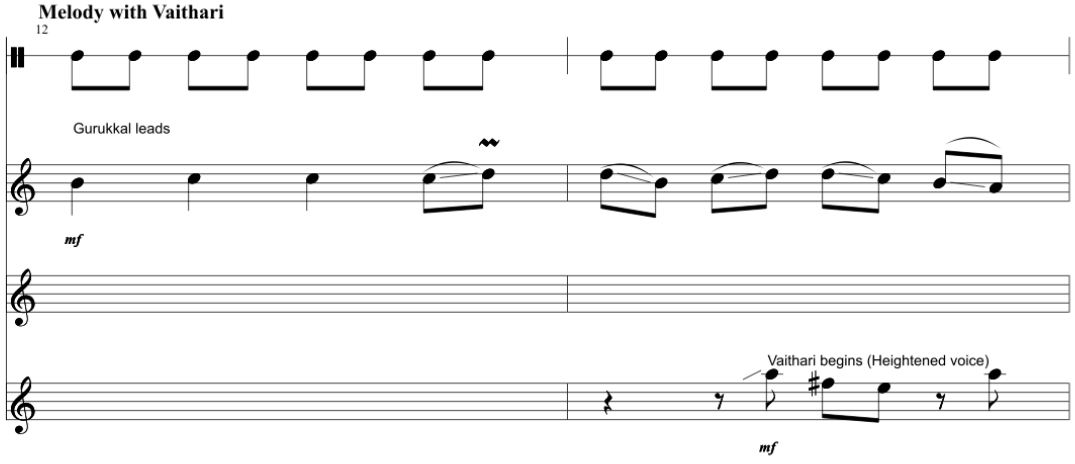
[131] *Konnakol* is a South Indian system of rhythm using spoken syllables.
[132] *Gamakas* are a form of melodic ornamentation in Indian vocal music.

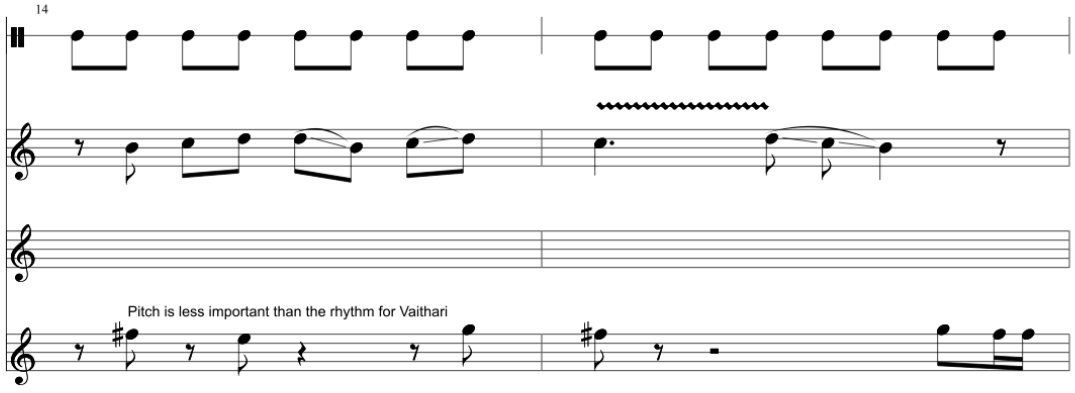
Catlin and Jairazbhoy follow Bake's video with one of their own from 1994. Coincidentally, I have a recording from my field research of the Ferokabad Kolkali Sangham performing the same song (See Appendix III for the audio and video recordings). I was told that the title of this song is "Aane Maadanapuu Kaani Thenale" (Ashraf, pers. comm.). The following is a transcription of selections of the performance demonstrating the main melody, the syncopation with the *vaithari*, and the ending.

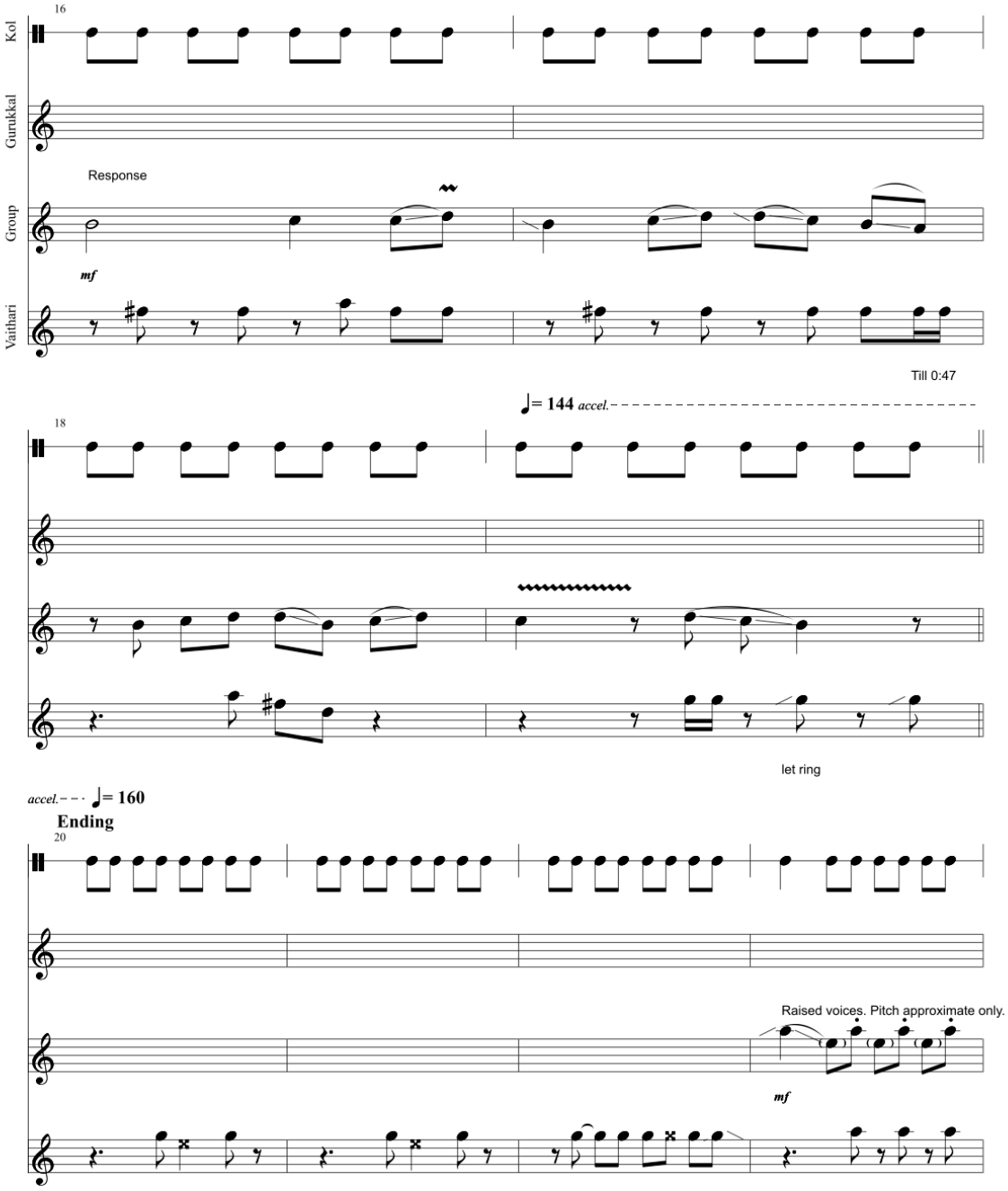


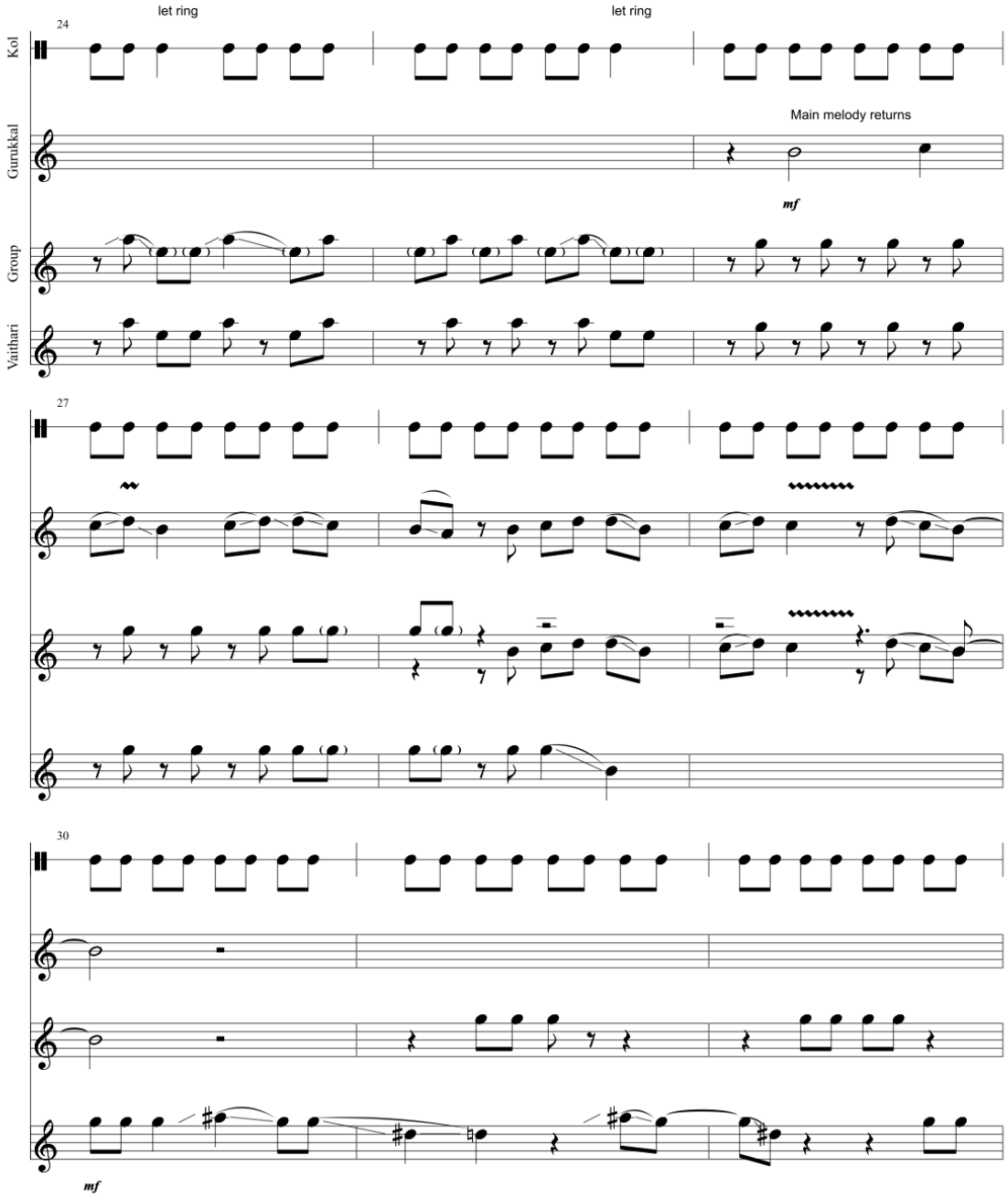


Melody with Vaithari






16
Kol
Gurukkal
Response
Group
mf
Vaithari
Till 0:47
♩= 144 accel.
18
let ring
accel. ♩= 160
Ending
20
Raised voices. Pitch approximate only.
mf


let ring
let ring
24
Kol
Gurukkal
Main melody returns
mf
Group
Vaithari
27
30
mf

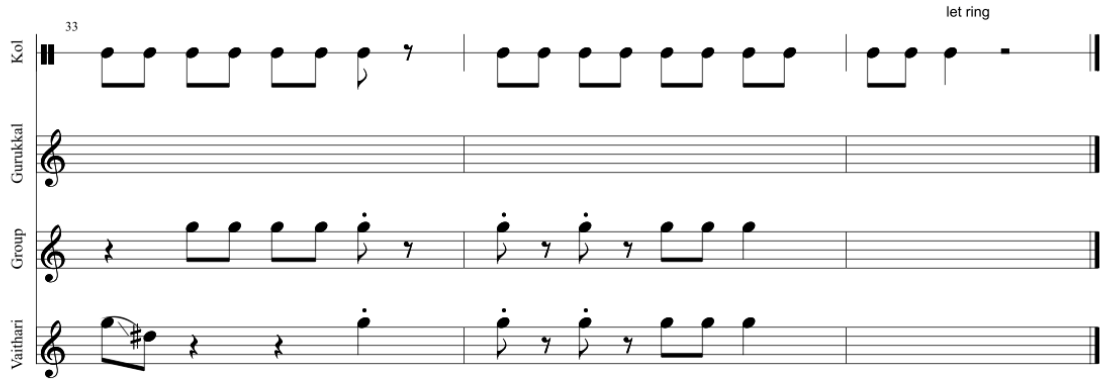


Figure 7: Transcription of Kolkali performance

In the *Restudy 1994* kolkali video, the focus is on the donut-shaped rattle or bell at the base of the *kolkali* stick. The stick itself is called a *kol* and the rattle is called a *chilambu*. C*hilambu,* in the most general use of the term, usually refers to an anklet or bracelet that makes a jangling sound. It is usually a hollow metal tube with beads inside. The *chilambu* is usually worn by men performing rituals in a *theyyam*. *Theyyams* are ancient festival rituals that have been practiced by various caste groups in Malabar, celebrating ancestral spirits and various deities. Mappilas do not have *theyyams,* but they do have *nerchas,* which share similar ideas. Mappila *kolkali* incorporates the *chilambu,* but instead of being worn on the foot of the dancer in a *theyyam,* it features at the base of the *kol*.

Like *chilambu, vaithari* is another term associated with *kolkali* that is also related to other art forms in south India. A temple musician from Kerala told me that to him, *vaithari* is the spoken *konnakol* or rhythmic syllables used to fill spaces in temple arts such as *thaayamaka* and other *chenda* drum performances.

Bake's recordings of *kolkali* were labelled *kolatam,* not *kolkali*. This terminology hasn't been addressed in Catlin and Jairazbhoy's *Restudy 1994* either. *Kolatam* or *kolattam* is an art form found in Tamil Nadu, and the neighbouring Telugu-speaking states of Telangana and

Andhra Pradesh. While these dances might seem similar on the surface, they are not the same. Sticks are not always used in *kolattam*, the songs are not the same as Mappila *kolkali*, and the choreography is quite different from *kolkali*. More importantly, there seems to be a general acceptance that Mappilas have a cultural ownership of the term *kolkali*. Razak, as well as the Mappila *kolkali* practitioners that I met, also clarified that under no circumstances is Mappila *kolkali* ever called *kolattam*. These two terms are still associated with each other in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu, but in Kerala the meaning is quite fixed.

These common terms and similarities with other art forms demonstrate MN Karassery's point:

> We get *kolkali* among Dalits, Ezhavas and Muslims. What's the difference of the *kolkali* of Muslims? There is the difference of songs. Because in other songs they are praying to Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu, something like that. Songs of Muslims are praising Mohammad, they are praising Allah, they are praising the Holy Wars of Prophet, they are describing the beauty of their own ladies.
>
> Mappilas are converts, and the descendants of converts. They have converted from so-called lower castes. Those castes have got some traditional professional art forms. Muslims have converted these art forms also. They have given some particular steps, particular tunes, particular themes. They have converted their prayer from Vishnu to Allah. This is the grammar of Mappila art forms, especially that of their music.
>
> MN Karassery, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018.

Thus, *kolkali* is a Mappila art that has been developed from indigenous art forms, and although the *kolkali paattu* mostly carry Islamic or Sufi lyrical themes, they do not reflect a strong Arabian influence in how they are performed.

Duffmuttu

Duffmuttu is one of the Mappila arts that does exhibit an Arabian influence. I did not get a chance to record any such examples but I was told that the songs sung in this form are

entirely in Arabic, not Malayalam (Mirsa Galib, pers. comm.). The *duff*[133] is a single-headed frame drum and the word *muttu* means "to strike". In *duffmuttu* or *duffkali,* men stand in rows facing each other, beat the *duff* in time, and sing in a call and response format. The performers may dance as well but could also perform seated, their upper bodies swaying with the music. It is a typical Mappila art form and is performed at weddings, *uroos*[134] ceremonies at mosques, during *ratheeb,* or at competitive *duffmuttu* events.

The Garland Encyclopaedia entry on *duffmuttu* says it's an instrument of Arab origin (Groesbeck & Palackal 1998: 974). The single-headed frame drum is an extremely old and widespread instrument, found from West Africa to the Maghreb the east of North Africa, the Arab world, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent and beyond. The name has a number of variations including *duff/daff* (Arabic), *tof* (Hebrew), *def* (Turkey/Iran), and several others (Doubleday 1999:102). These terms have been etymologically linked with Babylonian-Assyrian *adapu,* and Aramaic-Hebrew *toph* (Farmer 1929, via Doubleday 1999:109).

There are Biblical mentions of this instrument as well as ancient artefacts from Mesopotamia (dated to 3000 BCE) and Palestine (dated to 1000 BCE). There are mentions of women playing the *duff* in the lifetime of Prophet Mohammed, and this points to a tradition that precedes Islam. Despite a long history of women performing *duff* in West and Central Asia, Mappila women usually do not participate in *duffmuttu* (Doubleday 1999:102; AKP:362).

The *duff* came to North India via the Persians, but it is believed to have been introduced to Kerala via the Lakshadweep islands,[135] where the majority of the population today is Muslim

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[133] Also spelled *daf*, *daff,* and sometimes *dubh or dub*. See Doubleday (1999) for more.
[134] From the Arabic word *urs*, referring to the death of a saint or one intimate with Allah.
[135] Formerly known as the Laccadives or Laccadive Islands.

(Praveen 2014). While the direction of spread between Malabar and Lakshadweep is debatable, *duffmuttu* can today be found in both regions.

An important part of the *duffmuttu* is the Arabic *bayth*.[136] A *bayth* is a line of Arabic poetry, but the word has also been used to refer to the recitation of poetry, or the poems themselves[137]. The *bayths* can also be thought of as hymns (Nisar 2014:11). The metre of this *bayth* dictates when the *duff* is to be struck.

Duffmuttu is often performed during a form of *ratheeb* called *duff ratheeb*. The performers start seated, chant the *bayth* after the leader, and strike the *duff,* swaying and turning from side to side. They start slow but work up to a high volume and tempo and may even get up on their feet. Just before they reach the climax, they go back down to a slow tempo and repeat the cycle.

Video example of Duffmuttu:

The Indian Telegram. 2016. "visuals from the duffmuttu competititon at the kalolsavam at stage 2". YouTube video. Jan 20, 2016. *https://youtu.be/tifP3Crrz3Q*

Arabanamuttu / Aravanamuttu

The *arabana*[138] is a larger frame drum than the *duff,* about 8-10 inches in diameter, compared with the 6 inch diameter of the latter (AKP:363). The art form is closely related to *duffmuttu*. There are two variants*: Ratheeb muttu,* and *kalimuttu*.

While the *arabana* is only an accompanying instrument in the *ratheeb muttu, kalimuttu* puts the spotlight on the *arabana*. The performer is not restricted in how or when he can strike his instrument: he may beat it with his elbow, forehead, jaw or any part of the body he wants.

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[136] Also spelled *byth*, *beit*, or *bayth,* it literally means "house".
[137] An example of this is found in AKP:361.
[138] Also spelled *aravana*.

The songs are usually shorter and both singing and percussion are performed by the same artist (AKP:366).

Duffmuttu and *Arabanamuttu* are two art forms where the influence of Arab and Sufi culture is more apparent. The instruments used, the *bayth,* and the ritual of the *ratheeb* are found in several Sufi-influenced communities around Asia and Africa.

Video example of *Arabanamuttu* from Kondotty *Nercha* 2018:

Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Nercha 2018 - Aravana muttu". YouTube video. Recorded by Biju Ibrahim. Nov 26, 2018. https://youtu.be/OIp6BSck4OI

Kuthu Ratheeb

Ratheeb is a Sufi mystical ritual where devotees in an induced trance carry out acts of self-harm while chanting a *dhikr*[139] in the belief that the *baraka* (grace) of their *sheikh* or saint will give them protection from this physical pain. The *adhkar*[140] is led by a member of the *hadra*[141] and repeated by the rest of the congregation. The group may also play *duff* or *arabana* along with the *adhkar* (Nisar 2014:10).

In my interview with MN Karassery, he specifically mentioned *Kuthu Ratheeb*. In this, the participants stab themselves with various sharp object, often a knife or *dubbus*. The word *kuthu* itself means *to pierce* in Malayalam. Karassery says that even though they are hurt, they pretend to not feel the effects of their injuries (pers. comm., Jan 8, 2018). Their belief is that since they have received the blessings of their saints, they will have protection. This protection is also supposed to work against disease, and so the ritual is performed in the event of an epidemic, but could also be done for a single incident like a snake-bite, or a house blessing.

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[139] Short prayers or phrases for chanting in praise or worship. Also spelled *zikr* or *dikr,* (Arabic: ذِكْر)
[140] Plural of *dhikr*
[141] Congregation

Ratheeb comes from the influence of Sufi *tariqas* which are said to have been active in Kerala since the 12th century. The *Ratheebs* themselves gained popularity by the 15th century (Nisar 2014:9-10). *Kuthu Ratheeb* comes from the Rifa'i *tariqat*, which originated in 12th century Iraq with the saint Sheikh Ahmed Kabeer Al Rifa'i, who is invoked at these *ratheebs*. A Rifa'i Sheikh is supposed to have stayed at the court of the Arakkal Palace in the 17th century and brought the Rifa'i Ratheeb to Kerala (Nisar 2014: 11).

This ritual is found in other coastal Islamic communities along the Indian Ocean trade routes (Zanzibar and Aceh, for example) and seems to have been carried and propagated among the Hadhrami and Yemeni diaspora (Jeppie 2018:35; Riddell 2001:170).

Video examples
Ratheeb muttu with *arabana* from Kondotty *Nercha* 2018:
Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Nercha 2018 - Ratheeb muttu with aravana". YouTube video. Recorded by Biju Ibrahim. Nov 26, 2018. https://youtu.be/XC0JDsUNw1I

Kuthu Ratheeb with *duff*:
Muneer P. 2013. "kuth ratheeb new 2013". YouTube video. Feb 28, 2013. https://youtu.be/Vz9NaiGf4IU

Vattappaattu

Vattappaattu is a performance of wedding songs like *kalyaanapaattu*[142] and *puthiyaplapaattu*[143], and involves eight to ten male singers and local instruments like the *kaimani, kolambi*, and wooden clappers. The singers perform at several different stages of the wedding, climaxing with a singing competition with singers from the bride's side (AKP: 356).

Some sources say that *vattappaattu* is the male equivalent of *oppana*. Razak mentioned that *Vattappaattu* bears similarities to *oppana: "Oppana* is performed both by men and women but almost similar is this *vattappaattu* where men alone perform. Songs and the clappings are

[142] See earlier section on *Kalyaanapaattu*.
[143] *Puthiyapla* or *puthiyappila* is a contraction of the words *puthiya* (new) and *mappila*, and refers to the bridegroom. *Puthiyaplapaattu* are songs for the groom.

almost similar to that of *oppana*. So… if you compare both you won't see much difference." (PP Abdul Razak, in discussion with author, Dec 10, 2018).

Vattappaattu is a dying art in Kerala and there are few practitioners left. I was able to get some precious time with Ali Kutty, a 71-year-old *vattappaattu* singer from Kondotty, and I played some of the Bake recordings for him. I also recorded him singing 28 examples of *mappilapaattu,* including various types of *vattappaattu*.

Ali Kutty talked about the different songs sung at a Mappila wedding. He started at the bride's house, where *Thashriif* is sung.[144] From there, the wedding party proceeds to the groom's house and along the way they sing *vainiilam* songs.[145] *Vattappaattu* begins once they reach the groom's house. Ali Kutty pointed out that while *oppana* and *vainiilam* don't use any instruments, *vattappaattu* uses the harmonium and tabla. These instruments don't come from a Kerala or an orthodox Islamic tradition. Rather, their use reflects a Sufi influence, possibly from other Sufi centres in India. Ali Kutty clarified that these are modern instruments, and before the tabla, they used to use a pot-like instrument called a *kolambi*.

The first stage of *vattappaattu* is *munajaath*.[146] According to Ali Kutty, Bake 37.3 "Moplahs singing praise of Prophet. (Tamil, Malayali, Arabic)" is an example of this. The *virutham* comes next. Ali Kutty identified Bake 38.2 "Origin of the Moplah Kings of Cherur" as a *virutham*. Outside of the Mappila context, a *virutham* is a verse-form which is sung as an improvisation based on a *raga,* usually featured in theatric genres and Carnatic concerts as a prelude to Hindu *bhakti* or devotional tunes.[147]

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[144] *Oppana*, as discussed earlier.
[145] A Mappila word, meaning "along the road" or "all the way". It comes from the phrase *vazhi neelam*. *Vazhi* means "way", and *neelam* means "length".
[146] "Whisper prayers" or intimate conversations with God (Kugle:176). Also spelled *munajat*. See https://duas.mobi/munajat
[147] Another definition is provided in Randathani's writings on the contribution of Tamil Muslims to *Mappilapaattu*.

I enquired about the competitive aspect of *vattappaattu* and received the following response: "They have to sing from the same book. Based on the composers, authors. Somebody is singing one particular composer's song, the other troupe also has to sing from that same composer, another song. Like that the competition goes." (Mirsa Galib, in discussion with author, Dec 11, 2018).

Ali Kutty performed several songs from his repertoire. This included *oppana* songs that were not performed in *Vattappaattu* and a *mawluud* song that was not considered *mappilapaattu* because it was in Arabic, not Malayalam or Tamil. There were examples of *munajaath, virutham* and *qawwaali,* and the languages ranged from Tamil to Arabi-Malayalam, modern Malayalam and an Urdu that even I, a Hindi speaker, could understand.[148]

When I asked Ali Kutty about which *ishals* he was singing, he said that *ishals* are related to *mappilapaattu,* not *vattappaattu*. I was not entirely sure what to make of that because according to some, *vattappaattu* involves the singing of different types of *mappilapaattu*. One possibility is that *vattappaattu* includes songs outside the *mappilapaattu* genre such as those mentioned above. An excerpt from my interview transcript:

> **MG:** [translating for Ali Kutty] In *vattappaattu* there is no *ishal*. *Ishal* is completely related to *mappilapaattu*.
> **MA:** Is *vattappaattu* not *mappilapaattu*?
> **MG:** It's one kind of understanding. Most of the *vattappaattu* are in Tamil.

> The Tamil metre is of different divisions called *pavu*s (spreading) - *venpavu*, *kalippavu*, *vanchippavu* and *ashariyappavu*. Sometimes *pavu* is also called as *virutham* (metre). Every *pavu* is again sub-divided into *thura*, *tazhisha* and *virutham*. *Virutham* is the basic metre of Mappila songs. The *pulavars* not only borrowed the dravida *viruthams* but also brought their own ones like *mattu virutham*, *vazhi virutham*, *kappu virutham*, *talar virutham*, *chayal virutham*, *thudar virutham*, *cheru virutham* etc.
>
> (Iqbal, Koppilan. 2008. *Vattappaattu*. Kondotty: Moyin Kutty Vaidyar Smarakam:22 – via Randathani, Hussain. "Tamil traditions of Mappila songs")

[148] Hindustani is a language found across large areas of North India. Hindi and Urdu are considered to be two variants or registers of this language.

After revisiting Prof Sathar's opinion on *vattappaattu*, this made more sense. *Vattappaattu* seems heavily related to Tamil culture, or at least the *vattappaattu* captured in the Bake recordings does. Nazeer (from the Ferokabad Kolkali group) also confirmed that *ishals* are not related to *vattappaattu* and that *vattappaattu* is an "ancient form of singing" (pers. comm. via text message).

Paadipparachil

Paadipparachil[149] is a form of storytelling performed by a duo of a singer and a learned storyteller. This usually takes place at night outside a mosque. The singer performs *kissapaattu* which the storyteller explains to the people, entertaining them along the way. The storyteller must be well versed in the Qu'ran and poetry to interpret the story and recreate the experience. The *kissapaattu* can take up to ten days to complete (AKP:358). Many of the popular songs in this art come from the poetry of Moyinkutty Vaidyar.

Rafeeq and Sakeer performed one of these songs for me: "Mahiyil Maha" from Moyinkutty Vaidyar's *Badar Munir Husnul Jamal*. I also have an audio recording of VM Kutty singing a few lines from the same poem.

Video link:
Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Mappilapaattu 2". YouTube video. Performed by Rafeek and Sakeer Bhai. Dec 10, 2018. https://youtu.be/A9CxKtzFWXI

Chiinimutt / Muttum Viliyum

Chiinimutt, or *muttum viliyum,* or *muttumvili,*[150] is a musical art form performed either at a *nercha* or a Mappila wedding. It involves three instruments - a *chiini* (reed aerophone similar to a *shehnai*[151] or oboe), a *murash* or *murasu* (small cylindrical drum, 8"

[149] MN Karassery called it *Paadipparaya*.
[150] MN Karassery called it *Muttumvili*.
[151] A double reed instrument, popular in southern India.

circumference), and an *otta* (a larger cylindrical drum, 12" circumference). This ensemble is very similar to the *panchavaadyam,* a traditional Kerala Hindu temple five-instrument ensemble of which has two more percussion instruments. *Panchavaadyam* is a much larger group, however, with up to 60 performers, and the music itself is very different from *chiinimutt*. In *chiinimutt* the musicians play melodies from the more modern *mappilapaattu* repertoire, although there are traditional *muttum viliyum* compositions that were made specifically for this art form (Satheesh 2019; AKP:358-9).

Video examples of *chiinimutt* performed at the Kondotty *Nercha* 2018

Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Nercha 2018 - Cheenimutt / Muttum Viliyam". YouTube video. Recorded by Biju Ibrahim. Nov 26, 2018. https://youtu.be/4JPj8ugigFE

Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Nercha 2018 - Cheenimutt". YouTube video. Recorded by Biju Ibrahim. Nov 26, 2018. https://youtu.be/lhKMDnarPeg

Postlove. 2018. "Kondotty Nercha 2018 – Cheenimutt at night". YouTube video. Recorded by Biju Ibrahim. Nov 26, 2018. https://youtu.be/ktQobWBonpk

Kalaripayattu

Kalaripayattu, sometimes simply referred to as *kalari,* is a martial art form indigenous to Kerala and one of the oldest in the country. *Kalaripayattu* is said to have remained relatively unchanged since the 12th century (Zarilli 1979:114). It has always been closely associated with the Nairs of Kerala. Duarte Barbosa made reference to the training in flexibility, agility, dance, and weapons that was given to children of the Nairs of Kerala from the age of seven (Barbosa 1866:128).

The Mappilas were often soldiers and many were converted from Naayar castes. It appears that they did not abandon their traditional training in martial arts. Other art forms in South India have been influenced by *kalaripayattu,* including the dance form *kathakali* and the art of *kolkali* (Kerala Tourism "Types of Kolkali Popular in Kerala..." 2019).

Video example of Mappila *kalari*

Sajan PP. 2016. "Muslim men performing Kalaripayattu". YouTube video. Dec 22, 2016. https://youtu.be/QbKNC6qRDVM

Nerchas and folk festivals

A *nercha* is an annual celebration of the life of a saint or martyr, sometimes held on the anniversary of his death, and at the location of his tomb or shrine, known as the *dargah* or *maqam*. Translated as "vows" or "the act of taking a vow", the devotee makes an offering at the *maqam* in exchange for the blessings or intercession of the *sheikh*[152] or *shahid*[153] on their behalf (Dale & Menon 1978: 526; AKP: 322).

Mappilas do not believe that their martyrs are truly dead, but that they are with Allah. They are not considered gods themselves, but they are close to God and so can intercede or "recommend" prayers to God (MN Karassery, pers. comm.).

The orthodox or reformist view that picked up with the *Salafi* movement in the 20th century is that these *nerchas* are un-Islamic. They also do not find a place in the Islamic calendar of holidays. MN Karassery says the *nercha* is not an Islamic or Arabic phenomenon, but unique to Kerala. While the veneration of Muslim (especially Sufi) saints does exist in several regions and traditions outside Kerala, in the *nerchas* it happens "within ritual frameworks derived from the worship of folk deities in Kerala." (Dale & Menon 1978:523).

Dale and Menon believe the *nerchas* have come from indigenous folk precedents and find similarities with the *velas* (indigenous festivals) and *puurams* (Brahminic festivals)[154] celebrated by non-Muslims in Kerala. They point to the fact that like their non-Islamic counterparts, the *nerchas* are mostly seasonal, and are linked with the harvest. The way the ceremonies take place also follows a similar format – the *varavus*,[155] and the musical and

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[152] Saint or teacher in the Sufi context (from Arabic).
[153] Martyr (from Arabic).
[154] More commonly spelled "pooram" or "puram".
[155] Literally "arrivals", these are offerings given by the devotees, mostly in cash (AKP:326).

theatrical performances. The use of fireworks and processions of elephants in particular do not derive from Islamic tradition.

All the main religious groups in Kerala have a form of these festivals where the graves are visited, spirits are worshipped, and intercession and miracles are sought. This includes Jews as well. Several kinds of performance arts may be found at these festivals.

Syncretism in *nerchas*

The *nerchas* typify the syncretism, inclusivity and adaptation seen across Kerala. The Brahmins took the indigenous *velam* or *vela* and dedicated the rituals to their deities to construct their *puurams*. The Mappilas seem to have adapted features of both the *velas* and *puurams*, using the rituals of *varavus* and performances to venerate their *sheikhs* and *shahids*.

While the *nerchas* are…

> …centred around Sufi *dargahs*, Sufi tombs; Vela*s* and *puurams* are centred around annual festivals connected with *kavus,* the local shrines, where these goddesses and gods are being worshipped. The problem is that most of the rituals connected with the *nerchas* are adaptations of the *puurams*. There are offertory *varavus*. Then the flag hoisting. Exhibition of the caparisoned elephants.[156] Fireworks. All these are almost identical - similar to both *puurams* as well as *velas*.
>
> PP Abdul Razak, in conversation with author, Dec 10, 2018

Despite conversion to Islam, the Muslims of Kerala kept their indigenous culture and performative traditions, or in some cases modified them to suit their new faith. It meant that the roles of non-Muslim social groups remained in tact.

> …almost all divergent communities [participated] in both items – non-Muslims participated in Muslim *nerchas* as well as the Muslims participated in many of these *puurams*. Similarly, in *theyyams*[157] there are some characters from Muslim communities – *Kappiriya*. Muslim characters among the *theyyam* heroes. So there were so many such sacred spaces that were being shared by different communities. Shared sacred spaces.
>
> PP Abdul Razak, in conversation with author, Dec 10, 2018.

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[156] Elephants dressed in gold or ceremonial ornaments.
[157] Christian counterparts of the *nerchas*.

Some *nerchas* have specific functions that must be performed by specific non-Muslim castes, such as *Dalits*[158] carrying and igniting the ceremonial cannons in Kondotty, or the same group carrying a bread basket in *varavu* for the Malappuram *nercha*. Special roles for oppressed caste groups exist even in the Hindu *puurams*. Musical performances in the *varavus* are often carried out by Hindu temple musicians.

Velas are celebrated by indigenous or Hindu communities in *kavus* – sacred groves, where spirits are supposed to reside. The deities or spirits are represented by trees in the *kavu* (Anupama 2009:3). This has been compared to the beliefs surrounding some of the *nerchas* (AKP:332). In the Theruvathpalli *nercha,* the leaves of a tree are supposed to turn sweet at night and acquire curative powers. This concept of the plant having a medicinal effect not on its own, but because it houses a spirit, seems to come from indigenous beliefs. Again, the oil used to clean the cannons fired in the Kondotty *nercha* is supposed to cure diseases, similar to some oils from Hindu temples.

The way the *nerchas* are conducted shows us a few different aspects of the Mappila's approach to life. Many of them have a secular tone to them, some celebrate their martyrs and militant heritage, and others celebrate the lives and miracles of their saints.

A sampling of *nerchas*

There are a few *nerchas* active today. Some of the important ones are Kondotty *Aand nercha*, Appavanibham *nercha*, Pattambi *nercha*, Theruvath Palli *nercha* and Mamburam *nercha*. The Kondotty *Aand nercha* is a four-day celebration in honour of the Kondotty *thangal,* Sheikh Muhammad Shah, who came to Kondotty in the 18th century. During his

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[158] A generic term for so-called "untouchable" castes. In many sources, the word *Harijan* is used instead.

lifetime, the people's offerings of agricultural produce used to fulfil the dual function of religious and feudal tribute. The tributes continued after he died and a *nercha* developed at his tomb, with offertory processions called *varavus*. The *varavu* is the "real stage for all kinds of art forms… With each procession, you will get *duffmuttu, aravanamuttu, kolkali,* everything. That is the stage for all art forms at once" (MN Karassery, pers. comm., Jan 8, 2018). The *nercha,* like many festivals in Kerala, is celebrated by Muslim and non-Muslim members alike.

In 2018, this *nercha* took place at the *dargah* of on the 22nd of November and my friend Biju Ibrahim provided me some videos and pictures, including *varavus,* various Mappila arts (like *ratheeb, kolkali, and cheenimuttu*) and an example of *chavittu kali* performed by non-Muslim Dalit artists.[159]

> Kondotty Aand Nercha 2018 YouTube playlist:
> https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuue36H-YJepH7N4z9jE6dpMlvEYB9hS8

The Pattambi *nercha* is known for its secular nature. It celebrates Aloor Valiya Pookunjikoya *thangal*, the Aloor *thangal* who took in and employed Tipu Sultan's defeated soldiers. This festival also has a colourful *varavu* with a procession of elephants, fireworks, and various Mappila art forms (AKP:327). There are also Hindu art forms like the traditional ensembles of *panchavaadyam* and *thaayamaka*.[160]

Like the Pattambi *nercha,* the Theruvath Palli *nercha* is also considered to be a symbol of communal harmony. *Kalaripayattu* is one of the art forms performed here.

The Malappuram *Nercha* is dedicated to 44 Mappila *shahids (*martyrs) who died fighting the Naayars of a local chieftain, the Paranambi. The story goes that the Mappilas were

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[159] "Dalit" is a collective term for oppressed castes in India, often currently or formerly "untouchable".

[160] *Panchavaadyam* is a temple orchestra of up to 60 performers. There are four different percussion instruments and one wind instrument involved. *Thaayamaka* is a solo percussion artform performed on the *chenda,* a Kerala drum. (https://www.keralatourism.org/event/palakkad-pattambi-nercha/28 Accessed Oct 30, 2018)

originally feudal tenants of the Paranambi but came into conflict with him. A battle ensued between the Paranambi's Naayar warriors and the Mappilas. The Mappilas took refuge in a mosque but lost the battle and the mosque was burnt down (APK:328, Dale & Menon 1978:533-4). The celebrations lasted 40 days, and there were several *varavus* which resembled the simpler *velas* rather than the more flamboyant *puurams* (APK:328).

This *nercha* hasn't been celebrated since 1985 but a *varavu* continues to be held in honour of the Hindu goldsmith, Angadithalakkal Kunhelu, who aided the Mappilas against the Paranambi family. Thus, the town still uses the occasion to celebrate communal amity between the Mappilas and their Hindu neighbours (Das 2015).

The Appani *nercha,* also called the Appa Vanibha *nercha,* or the Appavanibham *nercha,* celebrates the life of Sheikh Mamukoya. People come to this tomb to receive healing via the blessings of this saint. Razak explains:

> …if you are having some problem with your hand, then in the shape of a hand you made a *pathiri* or a cake of rice flour and then offer it to the *maqam*. If you have a problem with your eye, then you offer an *appa*m [rice pancake] in the shape of an eye. This is why it gets this name.
>
> PP Abdul Razak, in conversation with author, Jan 8, 2018

The Kuttayi *nercha* has so many Brahminical symbols that it has been described as an Islamic *puuram*. Kuttayi is a fishing village near the sea, not an agricultural village like Kondotty. The story behind this *nercha* is not very clear, the focus of the *nercha* being an unnamed Sufi saint. It involves a procession of caparisoned elephants whose riders perform movements with colourful parasols, reminiscent of the parasol competitions in the *puuram* held in the nearby town of Thrissur.

A Jewish *nercha*

There also exists a Jewish *nercha*. It is held at the tomb of 17th century Jewish mystic Nehemiah Mota in Mattancherry. Nehemiah Mota may have lived around 1570-1615 (Segal 1983:233). He has been described as a Yemenite by Segal and others, but some of Walerstein's sources also suggested possible origins in Iraq, Turkey, Palestine, and Morocco (1987:166). Gamliel treats him as an indigenous Hebrew poet (2009:242, f.n.). Walerstein explores the roots of the name "Mota", but there are innumerable variants to his first name (Naamia, Nomi, Namya, Namiya, Nehemiah), and his surname (Mota, Motta, Mootha, Muttan). *Muttan* in particular, could be the local word for "old man" or "grandfather" (Menon 2011). He is believed to have married an Indian woman from Parur, and spent most of his life there before coming to Cochin, where he died.

Walerstein notes that while the Cochinim see him as a holy man and a spiritual leader, they mostly stop short of associating any supernatural powers with him. However, Christians, Muslims, Jews and others light candles and make offerings at his tomb praying for fertility, easy childbirth, or other favours and miracles (Rabinowitz 1952:125; Menon 2011). As is typical of Kerala, a holy man's tomb is sacred to members of all faiths. Segal specifies that the he is "venerated by the Black Jews of Cochin" (1983:233); Walerstein writes that he is a patron saint of the Malabari Jews, and accepted as one of their caste (1987:158). Both agree that the Paradesi Jews do not participate in this.[161] However, Bala Menon mentions that the maintenance costs of the tomb are today borne by a member of the Paradesi congregation (2011).

Mota was known as a Kabbalist and mystic, and he compiled a book of songs and hymns used by Malabari Jews to this day. This book is called the *Shir Kolas*.[162] My informants

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[161] See Chapter 4 for more on Paradesi and Malabari Jews.
[162] *Shir* is Hebrew for chant or song; The origin or meaning of *kolas* is unknown.

tell me many of the hymns in the *Shir Kolas* are unique to the Cochinim. Songs like *Ma Navu,* which is sung at every Cochini celebration, are a core element of the Cochini cultural heritage (Walerstein 1987:279).

In my interviews with Malabari Jews from Israel, I found them more familiar with the term *neder* than *nercha*. *Neder* is a Hebrew term for a vow or pledge often made in exchange for the fulfilment of a request to God. It often involves the distribution of food. This is all in keeping with the spirit of a *nercha*. In the case of Mota, the Jews celebrate by sharing "*kalapomb (*rice pancakes*),* chicken and strong alcoholic beverages" (Walerstein 1987:162, 170). This *kalapomb* is likely to be *kallu appam*, or rice pancakes with toddy (palm wine).

Segal describes Nehemiah Mota's *nercha* ceremony as a "*hillula",* referencing the Moroccan tradition of saint veneration called *hillulot*.[163] It is an interesting comparison because the Moroccan *hillulot* have much in common with Kerala's *nerchas*. The *hillulah* is a mass visitation to the grave of a Jewish saint or martyr where pilgrims and petitioners light candles at the grave on special days (Ben-Ami 1998:94). They undergo rituals of self-purification before making their offering, and they make similar prayers to those at the *nerchas* – curing illnesses, finding a bride or groom, or financial relief. Like Kerala's festivals, the saint's graces could be transferred to objects. Water or oils from the ceremony could be used as ointments; ornaments hung on a tomb could be used as talismans or amulets (1998:97). Oils from Hindu temples and oils from the cannons in Kondotty are also used in a similar way.

As in the case of Kerala's *nerchas,* the *hillulot* could be attended and observed by people outside of the core faith. Arab Muslims in Morocco are known to be just as well-versed in singing the hymns of Jewish saints (Jochsberger & Tlalim 1994). *Piyyutim* (sung prayers)

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[163] *Hillulah* is the singular form, *hillulot* or *hillulat* the plural.

are composed in honour of the saints, in similar fashion to the Mappilas' *maalapaattu* and *nerchapaattu*.

It is telling that such similar ritual patterns exist across boundaries of faith, and across such large spaces. If the *nerchas* are based on the ancient, indigenous *velas,* there are also considerable intersections with the *hillulot* traditions of the Moroccan Jews, and as well with the Sufi *urs* tradtion. There is undoubtedly a significant role played by the travelling mystics as carriers of these traditions, but it is not possible to say whether they were the first to perform them.

On Bake's Mappila Recordings

It seems that a lot of the Bake recordings (at least 8) in my sample are various stages of *vattappaattu – munajaath* (Bake 37.3), *virutham* (Bake 38.2, 34.1) and *vattappaattu* (Bake 38.4, 38.5, 38.6, 38.1). These have been confirmed by both VM Kutty and Ali Kutty. The format of many of the recordings involves a lead male vocal followed by chorus of men replying with a melismatic "Aa" or "Nallah".[164] This was also identified as a *vattappaattu* style of singing.

The language of these recordings is indecipherable to even these two expert singers because, they say, it is mostly Old Tamil.[165] VM Kutty believes that Tamil *pulavars* or poets need to be consulted to understand the songs in the Bake's recordings. He tried to put me in touch with a Tamil author but that lead did not work out and I was unable to visit him. This connection could probably be pursued in another study, and would strengthen and further illuminate the connection between the Tamil and Mappila centres of Islam.

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[164] Melisma refers to the singing of a single syllable across multiple notes.
[165] This may not necessarily conform to the formal definition of Old Tamil, but it is at least old enough or different enough to be incomprehensible to even their experienced ears. Bake 37.2 is an example of this.

It makes sense that Bake would record and encounter these *vattappaattu* singers because they would naturally possess the largest repertoire of songs. All the identified *vattappaattu* are listed as recorded in Malappuram, Mambaram, or "Malappuram (Mambaram)". Even the Bake recording labelled "Malappuram Naca" (here, *naca* probably means *nercha*) was identified as a *vattappaattu*. It seems Bake was unable to record Mappila women in Malappuram and Mambaram. We can't be sure if this was due to local social attitudes or not. The example of *oppana* that he does have from "Malappuram (Mambaram)" is also a male *oppana*, probably *oppanachaayal*.

At least one example of women singing *oppana* was confirmed. This was the same clip from Pollangode Estate used in Restudy 1994, which Razak more specifically identified as *thirukalyaanapaattu*. The *kolkali* examples were more obvious – Bake's use of the term "kolatam" was also addressed. There is a difference between the *kolkali* performances recorded in Parapanangadi and Pollangode Estate – the former were much closer to the kind of *kolkali* I recorded in Kondotty, and Razak instantly identified it as the *kolkali* of "fishing folk of the Mappilas". Bake also included that detail in the title.

Unfortunately, I had limited time with my respondents and I was unable to get around to some interesting recordings:

Bake 40.6 "Laccadivian song about Prophet and spread of Isam (arabic). By blind singer, Saiyad Ismail (vakil) Khira of Kalpeni" could have been interesting because one of my respondents identified some of the Bake recordings as *doli*, a genre performed in Lakshadweep (formerly known as the Laccadive islands).

Bake 40.7 "Boatlanding song" recorded in Calicut could link to the Khalasis, or ship-breakers, in Beypore.[166] I was unable to cover that area during my field work. I imagine that

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[166] *Khalasis* are known as ship-breakers, but they also sailed, built and repaired vessels. Beypore was a major ship-building centre in the past.

again could be a project in itself. This community of Mappilas lived on the coast and worked on ships – their songs might possibly have the richest content regarding foreign interactions with Malabaris.

Possible connections with Lakshadweep

One of the respondents who hosted the *kolkali* performance for me in December 2018 said that many of the recordings were in the Maldivian dialect Mahl, and identified more than one piece of music as *doli,* or *dolipaattu,* an art form found in Lakshadweep. To him, these recordings were closer to Lakshadweep than Malabari Mappila art forms.

Lakshadweep is a coralline archipelago and a protected union territory of India. These islands, located off the Malabar coast, were well known to pre-colonial sailors, finding mention in ancient Western documents like the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea,* and also in the even older Jataka tales that describe the spread of Buddhism in the 6th century BCE (Mustak et al. 2019). The dominant religion here is Shafi'i Sunni Islam, pointing to a strong Hadhrami influence (Forbes 1981:60).

Mahl is a dialect of Dhivehi, the Maldivian language, and is understood to be closer to Sri Lankan Sinhala than Malayalam (Kulikov 2014: 201). Apart from the Maldives, it is only spoken on one island in Lakshadweep – Minicoy. This island is ethnographically more similar to the Maldives than Lakshadweep as it used to be under the Maldivian kingdom in the 14th century (Sudarsen 1979:864). I was unable to find any specialists in this language to verify whether this was indeed Mahl or *dolipaattu*.

I conducted a brief survey of *dolipaattu* videos on YouTube and it seems that *dolipaattu* and *vattappaattu* are closely related. Both are performed by seated singing male groups, both involve a lead singer and chorus, melismatic responses, and are related to wedding ceremonies.

I was able to hear references to the Qadiriyya *tariqat* in some *dolipaattu*.[167] There are clear differences in the percussion - both in terms of instrumentation and the rhythmic patterns that are played. The *doli* examples did not have the clapping pattern that Jairazbhoy described as "xxx-". The *doli* melodies that I came across also did not match any of the *vattappaattu* examples in the Bake recordings. I don't want to speculate on connections between these art forms given the paucity of data at the moment, but this is certainly worth exploring.

[167] I don't know the language but invocations of Abdul Qadir Jilani are clearly discernable.

Chapter 4: Jews of Kerala

Introduction

According to local tradition, the Malabar coast of southwest India has been home to Jewish communities for 2000 years. They found a place for themselves in the local social structure, and in contrast to the typical Diasporic experience, lived in relative peace and prosperity almost through the entire period. They were welcomed and patronised by the kings of Kerala not only for their commerce, but also for their military power and diplomatic skills.

The Cochinim, also known as the Cochin Jews or Jews of Kerala,[168] adapted to the Malabari culture, while also remarkably managing to keep their Jewish identity through the centuries. They spoke Malayalam, the local tongue, but also developed a hybrid language, Judeo-Malayalam. Aspects of brahmanism and Hindu culture were absorbed and incorporated into their way of life, even some that did not necessarily follow Jewish law, such as racial and caste-like divisions. They developed a local Cochini Jewish rite (or *minhag*), with their own hymns and *piyyutim,*[169] and also secular Jewish Malayalam songs that were sung at weddings and social gatherings.

Several accounts over the past millennium have indicated the existence of flourishing Jewish communities in Kerala. However, with the entry of the Europeans, written and oral narratives began to be constructed in favour of the foreigners.

Jewish communities in Kerala were not a single homogenous group, nor even a binary group as commonly presented. They rarely faced any anti-Semitic sentiment from the local

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[168] Cochinim (sing. Cochini) is what most of the Jews of Kerala identify as today. Problems in using the name "Cochin Jews" have been raised recently (Johnson 2019). The usage of "Cochin" will be addressed later as well.
[169] *Piyyutim* (sing. *Piyyut*) are Jewish prayer songs.

population, but in mirroring their brahmin and Naayar neighbours, stratified their own societies.

The division between the Paradesi (or "White Jews") and the Malabari (or "Black Jews") not only caused suffering amongst the Jews of Kerala but has also affected how they are perceived and understood. My field research, which included interviews with Malabari Jewish community leaders, was thus aimed primarily at capturing a Malabari voice. My intention is to contribute to a balancing process wherein the Malabari voice will also find an equal place in the written history of the Jews of Kerala. While Paradesi narratives have enjoyed the greater share of scholarly attention, there are comparatively few works that quote Malabari oral narratives whilst also naming their source. This chapter will use primary and secondary historical sources, accounts of oral tradition, folk songs, and my field interviews, to examine the history of the Jews of Kerala in the region, the waves of migrations, various evidence of their settlements, and some of the complexities in this historiography.

Ancient and medieval links between Jews and India

The earliest textual reference to Indo-Judaic mercantile relations goes back to the 10th century BCE: Cargos carried on the ships of King Solomon (960-922 BCE) are believed to be of Indian origin. The biblical Book of Kings speaks of cargoes of *qophim* (apes, *kapi* in Sanskrit), *tukiyyim* (peacocks, *takai* in Tamil), and *algum* or *almug* (sandalwood, *valgu* in Tamil and Sanskrit) from the land of Ophir (Segal 1993:4). Recently, Bar-Ilan has linked this to Souphir near Mumbai in India (2015). Excavations in the ruins of Ur in Babylon (over 5000 years ago) revealed large beams of teak, believed to be of Indian, and according to some, Malabar origin (Panikkar 1960). Ibn Khordadbeh wrote about Jewish merchants called Radanites (or Radhaniyya*)* who traded between France and China via India during the 9th

century, crossing "Sind" and "India" on the way (Rabinowitz 1945:252).[170] Epigraphical evidence of Jewish settlements and involvement in the India trade is established in the 9th century Kollam copper plates, and the 11th century Jewish copperplates (Narayanan 1972). The Cairo Geniza letters provide details of pre-colonial trade and exchange between India (including Malabar) and Arabic-speaking Jews from the 12th century (Goitein 1975). One of these correspondences is by a Jewish trader who may have taken an Indian wife in Mangalore, just north of Malabar (Gamliel 2018b).

Oral traditions of Jews in India

Historians have not come to a clear consensus on exactly when the first Jews settled in India. There are two possibly ancient Jewish communities of India: The Bene Israel around Mumbai and the Konkan coast, and the "Cochin Jews" along the Malabar coast. There is a third large community of Indian Jews settled around Kolkata, called Baghdadi Jews (as most of them came from Iraq), but their migration to the subcontinent happened only in the 18th century.

Estimates of the arrival of the Bene Israel, believed to have been shipwrecked just north of the Malabar coast, are widely divergent – ranging from around 175 BCE according to Kehimkar (1937:6-12), the 8th century BCE according to Shellim Samuel (Roland 1998, Samuel 1963), to between the 5th and 6th century CE as per BJ Israel (1963:4). The Bene Israel have no dateable epigraphic evidence of the period, and accounts of their history before the colonial period rely on oral tradition. This dissertation will only discuss the Jews of Kerala.

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[170] The exact meaning of "Sind" and "India" in this context would not necessarily map on to the same regions today. The account mentions sea routes to South India (Segal 1993:5), and though it is likely that the Malabar coast was one of the destinations, neither Malabar nor Kerala are specifically named.

Some Cochinim hold that they entered Kerala at the beginning of the 1st century CE.[171] One of my Malabari respondents believes that the Jews regularly went to India during Solomon's time to buy spices and "*basilicum*".[172] Some of them stayed back and formed the first Jewish community in India (pers. comm.). When St. Thomas the Apostle is said to have arrived in Kerala around 50 CE, it is claimed that there was already a Jewish settlement there. According to local Christian tradition, he was invited to a wedding at the court of the king of Cranganore.[173] There, he a sang a Hebrew bridal song, and this was recognised by a flute girl from the local Jewish community. St. Thomas went back with her to the Jewish quarter and took up residence there (Rabinowitz 1952:106).[174] It is said that some Jews were baptised by him (Koder & Hallegua 1984:2), 40 Jews according to Rabinowitz.[175]

Another theory says that they fled to India following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and were welcomed in Muziris, the most prominent port at the time (1984:3). This is portrayed in a series of paintings by SS Krishna in 1968 installed in the Paradesi synagogue depicting their origin narrative.[176] One of the paintings shows the original silver trumpets from the Second Temple of Jerusalem brought to Shingly, a remembered construct of a Jewish "ur-settlement" or point of origin (Katz 2000:14).

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[171] From Paradesi accounts like Koder & Hallegua's *Kerala and her Jews*, as well as my interviews with Malabari elders.
[172] He specifically mentioned *basilicum* and *tulsi* (a kind of basil in India).
[173] Cranganore is the colonial name for Kodungallur.
[174] Also see the PM Jussay blog - http://pmjussay.tripod.com/id21.html.
[175] The implication is that some of Malabar's Christians have Jewish ancestry.
[176] *Paradesi* is a word used across India for foreigners (usually white or fair-skinned). The Paradesi synagogue is in Mattancherry, Kochi.

One of my Malabari respondents notes that the Gemara mentions a "Rabbi Yudah Induyee", which he believes is a reference to Jews of India.[177] [178] The Gemara is dated between 200 and 500 CE.

Re-examining Jewish histories and their settlements in Kerala

This section will look at two broad groups of sources to map Jewish settlements in Kerala. The first is what has mostly been considered the conventional historiography of the Jews of Kerala. This shows us the commonly known and discussed Jewish settlements clustered around Cochin-Ernakulam area, most obviously marked by the synagogues there.

The second group of sources includes historical sources such as Visscher's letters (Menon 1929), some recent work on songs and folklore (Johnson; Gamliel; Zacharia; Zakriya), and my field interviews with members of the Malabari Jewish community. Once mapped, this shows us a more varied picture, with an interesting cluster in the North Malabar region, along with a possible pre-modern settlement in Kollam to the south.

The idea of re-mapping and revisiting settlement patterns of the Jews comes from the work of Ophira Gamliel who, following the work of Ruby Daniel, Barbara C. Johnson and Scaria Zacharia, has undertaken the most in-depth linguistic studies into Cochini song texts, and is the foremost expert on Judeo-Malayalam. I have also referenced writing by Ashis Nandy on the layered identities of "Cochin", and its narratives that link back to an ancient mythical "Cranganore" (2002:172). PT Nair (1975) is one of the few scholars who wrote on Jews of

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[177] Also written as Rabbi Yehudah Hinduyi, described as an Indian convert to Judaism (Wald et al 2017:225)

[178] *Gemara* means "learn" in Hebrew and comes from the Aramaic word meaning "tradition". The Mishna (Jewish law) and the Gemara (rabbinic commentary on its interpretation) together make the Talmud. (For more on this see https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mishna and https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gemara)

Chendamangalam and Parur, and his work stands apart for its tacit acknowledgement that not all Kerala's Jews need to be related to Cochin.

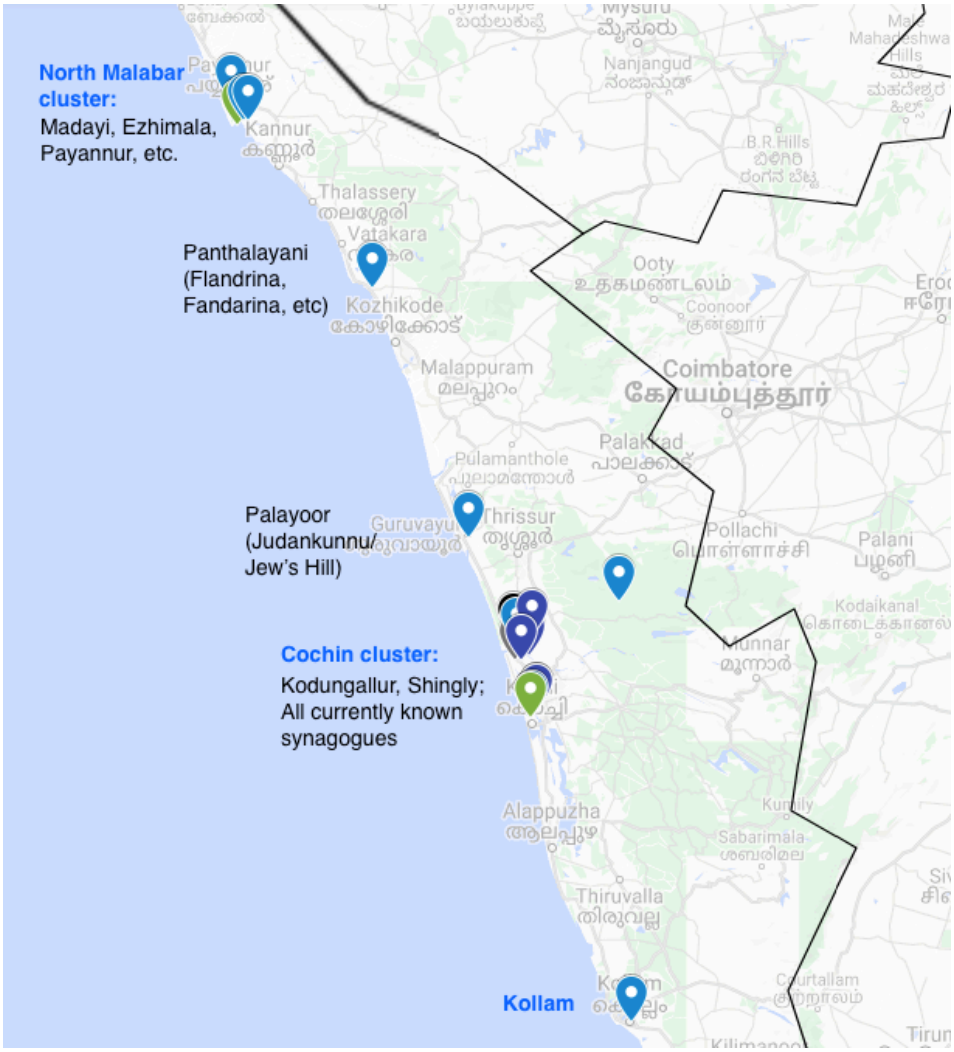
For historiography, I have used sources like JB Segal (1983, 1993), WJ Fischel (1967), H Yule (1870), and KP Padmanabha Menon (1929) who have put together histories of Kerala and its Jews. Also consulted are those who have done work on primary sources such as MGS Narayanan (1972, 2002), SD Goitein (1974), Barbara C. Johnson (2004, 2009), and Ophira Gamliel (2005, 2009, 2016, 2019). Descriptions of Cochini culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries from census reports of that period is supplemented with anthropological work such as that of David Mandelbaum (1939), Louis Rabinowitz (1952), Strizower (1962), and others. I have been unable to access work in the Hebrew language, such as David Sassoon's *Ohel David* (1932) and Bar-Giora's *Source Material* (1958).

The blogs of Thoufeeq Zakriya and PM Jussay contain stories, translations and interpretations of Cochini songs and folklore. Very little work has been published on melodies. Israel J Ross followed Johanna Spector's ethnomusicological work, and few of their articles were available to me. Spector's extensive archives at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York are mostly un-digitised and were also largely inaccessible.

I have used some books by Cochinim on their own history. SS Koder and Fiona Hallegua (1984) convey the Paradesi narrative, AB Salem (1929) wrote on the Paradesi synagogue, and AI Simon on the significance of Cochini Jewish songs, but again coloured by Paradesi narratives. Ruby Daniel's autobiographical work is a nuanced look into migrations and changes the Cochinim experienced during the 20th century.

What is grossly underrepresented in this entire body of literature is the Malabari voice. Since the arrival of the Paradesi Jews, and the Dutch "discovery" of this "exotic" community in the 17th century (Schorsch 2004), the oral history of all Jews of Kerala was represented mainly by Paradesi sources. This started with a letter from Paradesi leader David Rahabi to the

Portuguese Sephardim in Amsterdam in 1676 (Fischel 1967:233), then the famous report of Mosseh Pereira de Paiva in 1686 and continued through to scholars like Anquetil du Perron (1757-58), Mandelbaum in the 1930s and even Nathan Katz in the 1990s. Malabari Jews such as Elias Josephai have expressed their unhappiness at being left out or misrepresented in these narratives. Perhaps only PT Nair's 1975 article "Jews of Cĕnnamañgalam and Paṟavūr" captures some Malabari narratives. My field interviews with Malabari elders Elias "Babu" Josephai, Joseph "Yosi" Oran and Eliyahu Dekel are presented as a small step towards correcting this imbalance.



Map 2: Mapped traces of Jewish settlements in Kerala. Source: Google Maps 2019.

Shingly

> Cranganore, known as Muzhiris to the Greeks and Shingly to the Jews, was the only seaport in India known to the outside world.
>
> (Koder & Hallegua, *Kerala and Her Jews,* 1984:1)

> Unless you are talking to historians, everything began at Cranganore.
>
> (Ashis Nandy, *Time Warps,* 2002:172)

There is a strong thread running through the origin narratives of various communities of Malabar linking each one back to an ancient origin, founding their claims of authenticity (and thus superiority), granting them the right to wield authority and power. Often, this origin narrative takes us back to one place in particular: Kodungallur.[179]

The Mar Thoma Christians believed that Thomas the Apostle landed there and baptised the first Christians in the region. The Mappilas hold that the last Chera king converted to Islam and instructed Malik bin Dinar to establish the Cheraman Juma Masjid in Kodungallur in the 7th century – which would make it one of the oldest mosques in South Asia. Even the origins of the local royal families (such as the Zamorins and maharajas of Cochin) are linked to the families of the Cheraman Perumal and Kodungallur. This place is the source of their authenticity and it is no different with the Jews (Nandy 2002:172-174).

They believe that Shingly was the original settlement of Jews in Malabar (Koder & Hallegua 1984:1). To them, it was their name for Kondungallur. Others believe Shingly was the name of the Jewish quarter, or even a Jewish kingdom, within or near Kondungallur. According to PT Nair, the name Shingly comes from a corruption of Thiruvanchikulam, and was located at the current town of Kottapuram near Kodungallur (1975:489).

Yule put together an argument using different historical accounts to locate Shingly at Kondungallur (1870:345). Odoric of Pordenone (1286-1331) mentioned a Jewish colony

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[179] Likely the same port known to the ancient Greeks as Muziris, named in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. European colonists used the name Cranganore.

between Cyngilin and Flandrina.[180] 14th century geographer and historian Abu'l Fida corroborates the existence of a town called Jangali or Chinkali in the region. Barbosa mentions Jews living in Crongolor (Kodungallur), alongside Hindus, and Christians "of the doctrine of Saint Thomas" in the 15th century (1866:154).

Joseph Rabban and the copperplates

Of all the associations of Jews with Shingly, the most significant and most tangible connection comes from the 11th century inscription known as the Jewish copperplates. Here, Joseph Rabban, the leader of the Anjuvannam, is formally honoured with 72 aristocratic rights and privileges by the Chera king seated in Muyirikkodu.[181] MGS Narayanan, who made the most significant contributions towards the translation, interpretation and dating of the copperplates, has pointed out that the Malayalamised form of his name in the plates is *Issuppu Irappan*, and that his name may have been Yusuf Rabban rather than the anglicised form in use today (Narayanan 2002:67). Regardless of the form of the name, the current view is that Joseph Rabban was a powerful Jewish merchant.

Narayanan has dated this inscription to around 1000 CE, during the reign of Bhaskar Ravi Varma (1972:25). The writing is in the local language and in the Vattezhuttu script, with Malayalamised names. This suggests that the Jews were familiar with the language and had probably been there for a long time already (2002:68).

While the Anjuvannam was previously thought to be a town or principality, it is now known to have been a merchant guild. Other mentions of *hamjamana, hunjaman* and *hamyamana* have turned up in inscriptions on the Konkan coast as well as in 9th century Java

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[180] Cyngilin seems to be the same place others have called Chinkali, Shingly, Shingoli, or similar names; Flandrina is probably today's Panthalayini, the port in Kerala where Vasco da Gama may have first landed.

[181] Muyirikkodu and Muziris are equated with Kodungallur. I have used Muyirikkodu here as this is the name used in the inscription.

(Subbarayulu 2012:165). Subbarayulu tells us that this was a body of merchants that operated along the entire Indian Ocean from Arabia to Java, and that it included a diverse group of West Asian traders – Jews, Muslims, and Zoroastrians, of Arab and Persian descent.

Interestingly, an Urdu word very similar to Anjuavannam – *anjuman,* is in common use today among Zoroastrian (Parsee) communities in India. It means a meeting, assembly or gathering, and comes from a root word *najm* meaning "star".[182] *Anjuman,* in a sense, means a group of stars, perhaps a constellation – a crucial navigational concept, making for a poetic name for a guild of maritime merchants.

These royal copperplates turned Joseph Rabban into a legendary figure. Local folklore remembers him as symbol of Jewish prosperity (a powerful merchant commanding a fleet of ships), power (a Jewish Prince), and even masculinity (the ideal groom). The Anjuvannam was, until recently, misconstrued as a territory or village (Narayanan 2002). This interpretation made Joseph Rabban the ruler of that territory. Most narratives of Cochini history, such as those of Koder & Hallegua, talk about Joseph Rabban and the Anjuvannam in these terms. Ophira Gamliel questions whether there even existed a significant Jewish community in "Shingly" during Joseph Rabban's time, arguing that (since the Anjuvannam was not a territory, but a trade guild) there was no grant of land to Joseph Rabban. She instead points us towards Kollam and the *Tarsapalli* copperplates of 849 CE as more credible evidence of a Jewish settlement (Gamliel 2018a).

Even though the *Tarsapalli* copperplates are held by the Syrian Christians as proof of their antiquity in Kerala, the Hebrew signatures here speak to an important (yet underplayed) Jewish presence in Kollam that pre-dates the Jewish copperplates in Muyirikkodu.

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[182] From the online Oxford Living Dictionary (Urdu-English)
anjuman: https://ur.oxforddictionaries.com/translate/urdu-english/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%86
najm: https://ur.oxforddictionaries.com/translate/urdu-english/%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%85

Nevertheless, from at least 1000 to 1565 CE, we have continuous evidence and travellers' accounts of Jewish presence around the Muziris-Kondungallur-Shingly area. Shingly represented a coastal haven for Jews and Jewish merchants till the advent of the Portuguese in the 15th century. In the absence of access to Jerusalem, it took on spiritual significance and was second only to the biblical promised land – a "Little Jerusalem" (Katz & Goldberg 1993:5). The community even observed a tradition of being buried with a handful of Shingly sand in their coffins (Koder & Hallegua 1984:1).

After the flooding of the river Periyar in 1341 and the resulting changes to the coastline, trading began to shift from Kodungallur to other ports such as Cochin and Calicut (Malekandathil 2010). The paintings in the Paradesi synagogue show Joseph Azar, the last descendant of Joseph Rabban, swimming to Cochin with his wife on his back. Katz has pointed out that Azar was also a royal Himyarite name (Katz & Goldberg 1993:6).[183] Yemeni connections cropped up several times in my research, but more on that later.

The Jewish settlements that survived the silting up of the harbour were attacked (along with the rest of Kodungallur) by the Portuguese in 1504, 1524 and 1565 (1993: 62,64). This again drew parallels with the Holy Land. By the 16th century, the exodus was complete.[184] Koder's account that no Jew may stay beyond sunset in Kodungallur underscores the traumatic nature of their exit.

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[183] Himyar is modern Yemen. The monarchs converted to Judaism in the 4th century and ruled till the 6th century CE (Lecker 1995).

[184] There are even some accounts of Tipu Sultan driving Jews out of Kodungallur (Nandy 2002:159, 169; Bezalel Eliahu, pers. comm., Jan 16, 2020), which would have been in the 18th century. However, there is no credible historical source to support the occurrence of any such event.

Cochin

Even though they may have lost Shingly, Kerala's Jews were welcomed once again by an Indian king – the maharaja of Cochin. The first Jews may have arrived reached Cochin in 1344, which is when the Kochangadi synagogue was built (Katz & Goldberg 1993:62). This synagogue does not exist anymore, but its foundation stone is present in a wall of the Paradesi synagogue in Mattancherry. In his analysis of Visscher's letters, Menon calculates that a Jewish migration to Cochin could have happened in 1471 (1929:517).

The entry of the Paradesi Jews

Sephardi Jews migrated to Cochin from the 16th to the 18th centuries (1929:51), significantly altering the course of history for the Jews of Kerala.[185] The Portuguese and Spanish inquisitions of the 15th and 16th centuries had led to the mass exodus of Sephardi Jews,[186] many of whom left with their gold and slaves. The Malabar coast had gained a reputation as a warm and hospitable place for Jews, making it an ideal destination for those who could make the voyage. The maharaja of Cochin used the opportunity to make powerful allies in his bid to keep pace with the Zamorin. He gave his new Jewish guests land to build a synagogue adjacent to his own palace and temple in 1565. The recipients of this land were Samuel Castil (a Castilian Jew), David Belilia, Ephraim Salah and Joseph Levy (1929:519).[187] These were the leaders of the community that was to be known as the Paradesi Jews, and the synagogue they built was the Paradesi Synagogue in Mattancherry. It was the beginning of a close relationship with the Cochin royalty that lasted nearly four centuries. The last maharaja

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[185] *Sephardi* comes from the Hebrew word for Spain, *sepharad*.
[186] 1512 according to Pereira de Paiva's report (Pereira de Paiva:8).
[187] The spellings for these names vary in different sources, e.g. Segal uses Levi, Sala, Castiel.

of Cochin paid tribute to these Jews in an emotional speech at the Paradesi synagogue in 1949.[188]

Photograph 3: Entrance to the Paradesi synagogue entrance (left) and the clock tower (centre), Jew Street, Mattancherry. Photograph by Mark Aranha, January 2018.

The word *Paradesi* (as opposed to *desi*, meaning "of the land"), is a common word reserved for foreigners, especially the fair-skinned variety. They were not unlike the Muslim *Paradesy*[189] traders in Barbosa's 15th century account of Calicut who were also fair-skinned, prosperous merchants who came from the west. Their diplomatic and commercial connections

[188] The transcript may be found in several sources, including Koder and Hallegua's *Kerala and her Jews*, and Strizower's *Exotic Jewish Communities* (p.98-100).
[189] I am using the spelling from Barbosa's book "Paradesy" to differentiate these Muslim traders from the Paradesi Jews. The *Paradesy* were most likely comprised of West Asian Muslims and the Al Karimi merchants of Cairo.

brought their Kerala patrons revenue and power. As this small group of privileged Jews became known as the Paradesi Jews, all other Jews were lumped together as Malabari Jews.[190]

The *Paradesy* in Calicut were viciously targeted by the Portuguese in their quest for a monopoly over the India trade and were almost completely driven out, but the Paradesi Jews of Cochin managed to survive under the protection of the maharaja, himself effectively a subject of the Portuguese occupation.

The Dutch were aided by the Jews when they came to challenge the Portuguese in the 17th century. The Portuguese responded by burning the synagogue with its holy books and scrolls in 1661. The Jews were forced to go into hiding (Katz & Goldberg 1993:88). Their "chronicle of events", the *Sefer Ayashar,* was also lost (Salem 2011:30).

The Portuguese were defeated in the 1665, and the Paradesi Jews, along with the rest of Cochin, returned to a "second golden age" under the Dutch (Katz & Goldberg 1993).[191] Do Katz & Goldberg mean the first "golden age" was that of Shingly? Perhaps. However, this specific terminology of a "golden age" is often used in the histories of Sephardi Jews,[192] and it is a subtle clue that Katz and Goldberg view the "Cochin Jews" as an offshoot of the Sephardim. In doing so, they undermine the existence of the Malabari Jews who not only migrated to Kerala earlier, but far outnumbered their Paradesi counterparts throughout history.

In any case, this idea of prosperity applied primarily to the Paradesi Jews of Cochin. They looked to build new connections via the Dutch empire from Indonesia to New York. In addition, they also received support from the Jewish community in Amsterdam in the form of

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[190] This echoes Barbosa's 15th century distinction between *Paradesy* and *Mapuler* and Logan's 19th century distinction between the Malayali Arabs and native Mappilas.
[191] The "second golden age" from chapter 5 of *The Last Jews of Cochin* (Katz & Goldberg 1993).
[192] See https://www.jewishhistory.org/golden-age-in-spain/

prayer books, religious texts, and Torah scrolls (Segal 1993:44). This new "golden age" also marked the beginning of a European-style racial divide among the Jews of Kerala.

Cochinim

Today, the Jews of Kerala are often collectively known as Cochin Jews, *Cochini* or *Cochinim*.[193] A common misconception is that they are all from the port city of Kochi, also known as Cochin. When people speak of "Cochin Jews", it can sometimes be unclear whom they are really referring to – Jews from Kochi as distinct from Jews of Ernakulam and other towns, or all the Jews of Kerala as a single unit. What about the ancient Jews in Kollam? Or North Malabar? Barbara Johnson's use of quotation marks ("Cochin" Jews) hinted at this issue (Johnson 2009:2). Ten years hence, she unpacked the problems in using this nomenclature, choosing to collectively refer to Kerala's Jews as the Jews of Kerala (Johnson 2019). The fact that the Paradesi Jews occupied prime territory next door to the maharaja of Cochin while simultaneously enjoying positions of political power has surely played its part in the use of this term, but first we need to look at the idea of "Cochin" itself.

Layers of "Cochin"

The very use of "Cochin" often requires clarification. For most of the colonial period, right up to 1949, Cochin was not just a port city, but rather a kingdom or princely state (the Perumpadappu Svaruupam), under the rule of the maharaja of Cochin. Many of the places where we have evidence of Jewish settlements came under the kingdom of Cochin, including all extant synagogues (See Cochin cluster in Map 5). Kodungallur too, which was one of the primary ports of the Chera rulers till the 12th century, was allied to the maharaja of Cochin as

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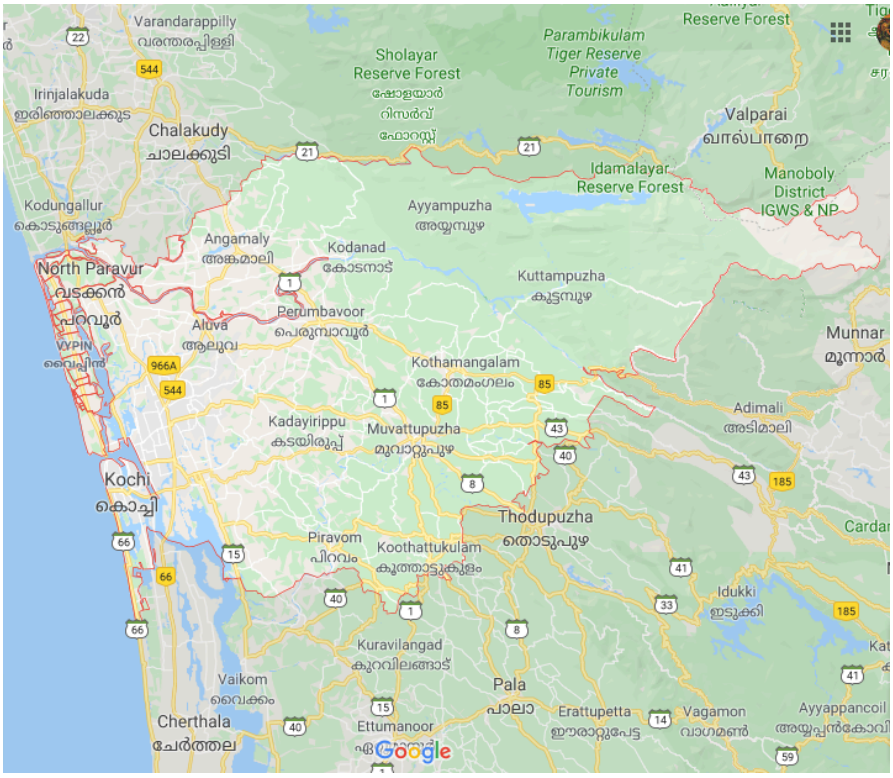
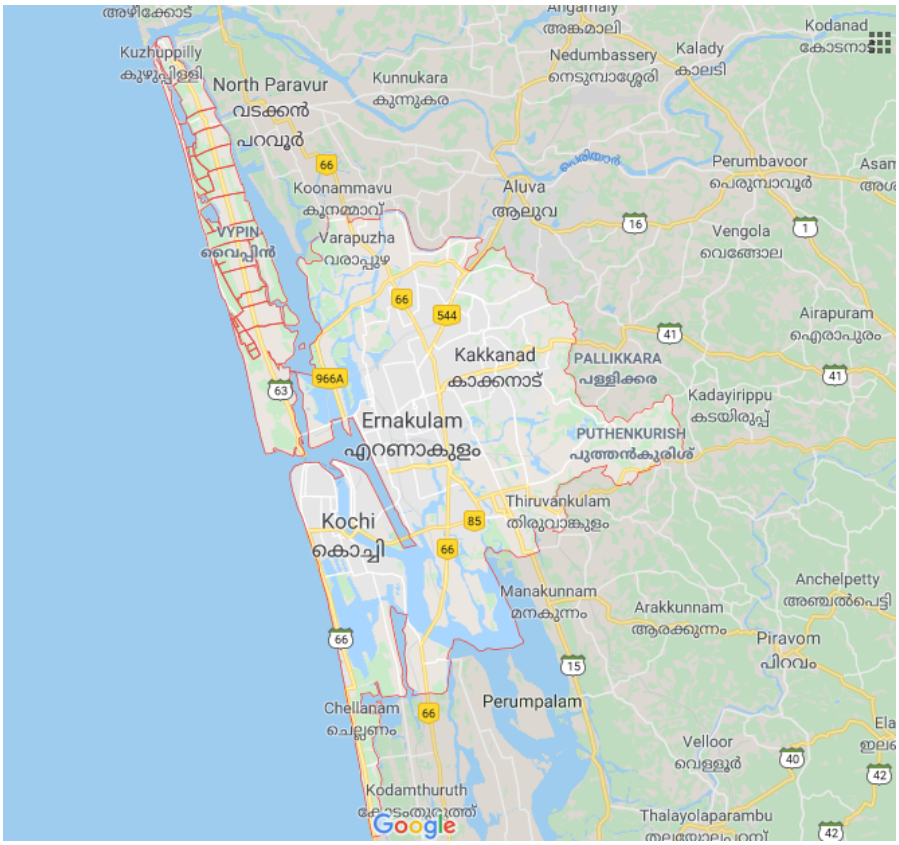
[193] Also *Kochini* or *Kochinim*; *Cochinim* is the Hebrew plural of *Cochini* (lit. "of Cochin").

well as the Zamorin in Calicut. Barbosa says it belonged to Calicut, but the king of Cochin also had "some rights in this place" (Barbosa 1866:154).

Today, "Cochin" could take on several meanings depending on whom you are speaking to – the island port of Kochi, the northern part of the island called Fort Kochi, the western part of the island called Mattancherry, or even as large an area as the "twin cities" of Kochi and Ernakulam, including the islands of Vypin, Willingdon and others. The irony is that technically speaking, the city of Kochi comes under the district of Ernakulam. "Ernakulam" also refers to the mainland part of the city of Kochi, and even more confusingly, contains the Cochin International Airport!



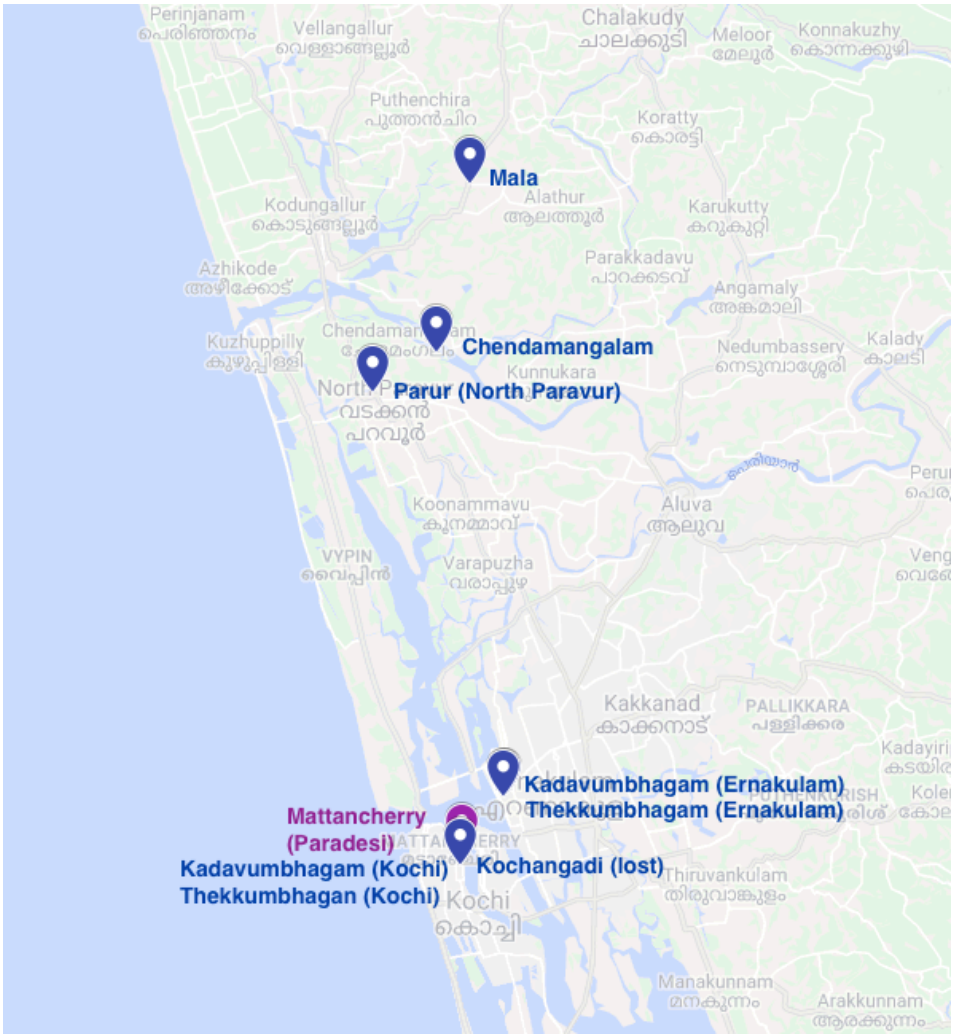
Map 3: Ernakulam district. Source: Google Maps 2019.



Map 4: The city of Kochi. Source: Google Maps 2019.

Synagogues in the Cochin region

The religious and social life of the Jews of Kerala revolved around the synagogue, and we can reliably use synagogues as markers of Jewish settlements. The Paradesi Jewish settlement is built around their synagogue in Jew Town in Mattancherry, Kochi. Kochi also had at least three other synagogues – the Kadavumbhaagam Synagogue, the Thekkumbhaagam synagogue, and the now lost Kochangadi Synagogue. Ernakulam, the mainland part of the city of Kochi, also has two synagogues named Kadavumbhaagam and Thekkumbhaagam.



Map 5: Cochin cluster. All known locations of synagogues in Kerala. Source: Google Maps 2019.

The other known synagogues of Kerala – Parur (North Paravur), Mala, Chendamangalam – and several lost synagogues (such as those of Shingly), were all outside

the city of Kochi. Despite being outside the city of Kochi, most of these came under the kingdom of Cochin (See Map 5: Cochin cluster).

There are traces of the existence of other Jewish communities much further north, in Madayi and Payyannur.[194] While these will be discussed, evidence of their synagogues has not been found yet.

Before going on to the other Jewish settlements in Kerala, I will examine the Paradesi Jewish narrative, their relationship with ruling powers, racial constructs among the Jews, and how these affected the portrayal of the Kerala Jews in the literature.

Paradesi narratives

Gamliel describes how since the beginning of the colonial period, the Paradesi Jews have been meticulously constructing their identity and historical narrative to support their high caste status (2009:56; 2018a).[195] Evidence such as the copperplates was preserved, and various records and historiographical materials were published via their transoceanic contacts, such as de Paiva's *Noticias*.

Mosseh Pereira de Paiva, a Sephardi Jew from Amsterdam, was one of the first colonial writers to document these Jews, and he named them *Judios delos Cochin,* or Jews of Cochin, in the title of his report.[196] De Paiva's *Noticias* became the entry point for European historiography of this exotic community of Jews in the Orient. It can be argued that this is the point where a bias begins to form in the literature on the Jews of Kerala.

De Paiva was heavily influenced by his interaction with the Paradesi Jews of that time. They were in possession of the copperplates of Joseph Rabban and presented these to him as

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[194] Payyannur may also be found written as Payanur, Payyanur, and Payyanoor.
[195] (See also Katz & Goldberg 1990)
[196] The complete title was *Relacions delas Noticias delos Judios delos Cochin*.

undeniable proof of their authenticity, their lineage back to Joseph Rabban, and their ancient origin in Shingly.

Cochin as the natural successor to Kodungallur

The idea of Cochin as the natural successor to Kodungallur cuts across religious groups. Ashis Nandy's *Time Warps* explores the "mythic entity" of Cochin, a "collection of superstitions, stereotypes, and surviving symbols of a lost 'golden' age." (2002:171), contrasting it with the geographical or historical Cochins. The same catastrophic events of 1341 that led to death of the harbour at Kodungallur,[197] changed the coastline, throwing up the Vypin island and the new natural harbour of Kochi. Nandy says Cochin is "the rebirth of that dead, ancient, cultural 'capital' of Kerala… Cranganore is the clue to Cochin's *karmic* past." (2002:173).

So, while the identity of the Paradesi Jews and the "Cochin Jews" was constructed in Cochin, it was very important that it linked back to Kodungallur. In the Paradesi history by Koder and Hallegua, *Kerala and Her Jews,* the story of the community begins in Kodungallur at the advent of the Christian era. After brief references to Jewish settlements in Flandrina (Panthalayani), Calicut, and Kollam, the story moves the Jews straight to Cochin in 1471. This chronology excludes the Malabari Jews, their congregations in Chendamangalam, Parur, Ernakulam, and Mala, and all other places mentioned in Malabari oral histories.

If the Sephardi Jews arrived in Cochin only in the 16th century, they could not have been related to Joseph Rabban. They resolve this with a claim that their community entered into some kind of alliance with the "original" families who came from Kodungallur (Strizower 1962). These Kodungallur families were perhaps the ones called *myuchasim,*[198] meaning "of

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[197] Variously referred to as "oceanic convulsions" (Nandy 2002:172), "the great flood" (Malekandathil 2007:268), the "silting up" of the harbour (Samuel 1963:24).
[198] Also found as *meyuhasin* (Schorsh 2008), *meychasim,* or other variants.

lineage". Again, the link back to Kodungallur was critical to their status. When the racial construct of White Jews was documented by de Paiva, the label "Blancos" was assigned to these families regardless of whether they actually were fair-skinned or not.

A history of Jewish Whiteness in Malabar

Schorsch traces the usage of the word *white* as a legal term designating a race-based social category in the Western world and its colonies. He describes a number of instances grouped around the 17th century, from Virginia (USA) to Barbados to Cochin. In the case of Cochin, he attributes this to the entry of Dutch Sephardic visitors, especially after de Paiva's 1686 document *Relacion delas Noticias delos Judios de Cochin* (2004:204).

Pre-colonial accounts

Benjamin of Tudela (1130-1173) noted one hundred Jews in Chulam (Kollam), of the same "black colour" as the other inhabitants. He notes that they had knowledge of the Talmud, the Pentateuch and Jewish law (1840:140-141). It is important to note that Benjamin of Tudela used the term "Kushite" to denote black Africans. Here, his use of "black colour" indicated that they were dark-skinned like the rest of the local Malabari population. Some scholars like Gamliel (2018a) and Schorsch (2008:65) have pointed out that it is unlikely that Benjamin of Tudela visited Kollam himself.[199]

Skin colour and race are not mentioned in the other pre-colonial accounts of Jews on the coast of Kerala (Schorsch 2004:205). This includes a number of different sources including Goitein's 12th century letters of Jewish traders retrieved from the Cairo Geniza, Odoric of

[199] Schorsch says he probably incorporated other travellers' accounts, while Gamliel points to the fantastical descriptions of the area and customs that were beyond the realms of possibility.

Pordenone (13th century Franciscan friar), and 14th century travellers Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo.

Barbosa, who travelled across Malabar in the late 15th century, mentions Jewish "natives of the country" living in Cochin (1866:156). This is not an explicit reference to colour, but he clearly sees them as natives, not foreign Jews. This kind of reference was also made by a Yemeni poet al-Dahri around the 16th century, distinguishing between two groups: converted descendants of Kushites and Canaanites on one hand, and Sephardim on the other (Schorsch 2008:66).

Early colonial accounts

As Europeans came in contact with these Jews, opinions and remarks on their colour seem to become almost obligatory. Schorsch takes us through a range of sources starting from the early 1500s (2008:66-68). JB Segal points out that like de Paiva, foreign visitors (especially Europeans) would meet the Paradesi Jews rather than the Malabaris (1993:28). There were several reasons for this. It was easier for Europeans to communicate with the Paradesi Jews as they were descended from European families (thus racially familiar), and also spoke Portuguese and Dutch. The Paradesi *mudaliyaars,* or leaders, were the king's counsellors and ambassadors (Menon *et al* 1929: 521-523).[200] Their proximity to the maharaja of Cochin meant that they were more likely to meet with important merchants and dignitaries.

The Malabari Jews on the other hand may not have known foreign languages apart from Hebrew. Being similar in appearance to other Malabari communities would have made it hard for them to be identified, although this can hardly be an excuse for the exclusion of their voice from foreign accounts. Segal suggests that they could have been the Cochin king's fearsome Jewish fighters described by the Portuguese (Segal 1993:29).

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[200] *Mudaliyaar* (more commonly spelled "mudaliar" or "mudaliyar") is a variant of the Mappila's *musliyaar* discussed in previous chapters.

Menasseh ben Israel, in his efforts to convince Cromwell of the benefits of allowing Jews into England, wrote in 1652:

> These in Indian in Cochin have 4 Synagogues, one part of these Jews being there of a white colour, and 3 of a tawny; these being most favoured by the King (Wolf 1901:85).

Segal interprets this to mean that the latter (tawny) Jews had a close relationship with the maharaja, but I believe this sentence only means the Jewish community as a whole was favoured by the king. The statement was part of Menasseh's argument that Jews around the world are valued by the local kings and rulers.

However, this line makes it clear that during Menasseh ben Israel's time (mid 17th century), it was the four synagogues on the island of Cochin alone that were known to Europe.[201] Any other Jewish congregations, whether Mala, Parur, Chendamangalam, or even nearby Ernakulam, were unknown or not worthy of mention to them.

Whiteness in de Paiva's Noticias

Pereira de Paiva's *Noticias* included a register of Jewish households in Cochin with the heads of families, notably marking some with "B" for *Blancos,* or "Whites". The Paradesis included Jews from various ethnic backgrounds. Some, including the *mudaliyaar* ("Medulhar" in *Noticias*) were of European origin – German and Spanish. Others had roots in Jerusalem, Xiras (Persia), Turkey, Damascus and Aleppo. Some were from "the first families"[202] of Kondungallur. The application of the *blanco* label is interesting. It excluded some members of European descent and was given to some with West Asian heritage, but included all members

[201] The synagogues being Paradesi, Kadavumbhaagam, Thekkumbhaagam, and Kochangadi.
[202] "p[ras] familias", or shorthand for *primeiras familias* is used.

descended from Kodungallur. See Figure 8 below.[203] It is not clear how this label was given or by whom.

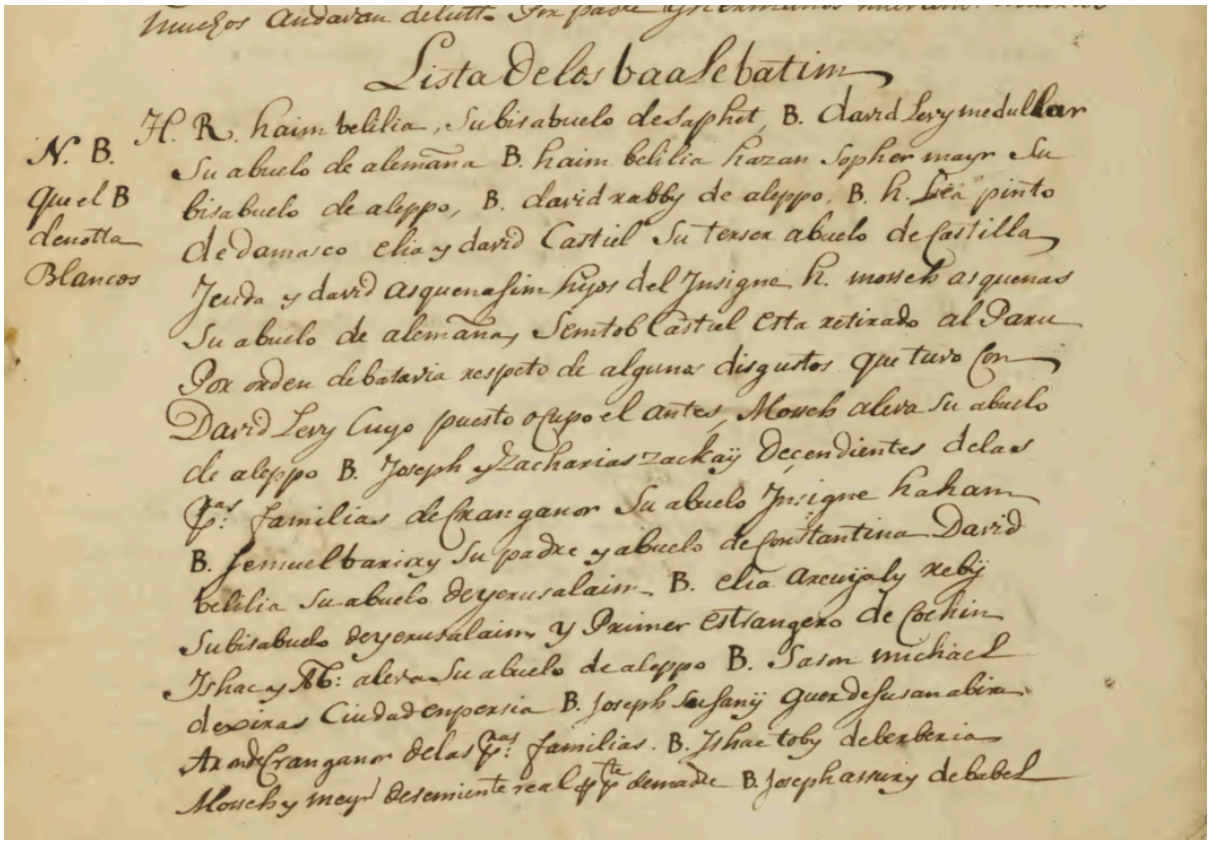

Figure 8: Mosseh Pereira de Paiva's list of baalebatim or "heads of households" (Pereira de Paiva 16--:3)

Schorsch underlines the discrepancy between this inconsistent labelling and the narrative that the Paradesis had kept "pure" bloodlines. de Paiva took great pains to clarify that any change in their skin colour was attributed to the Indian sun, and not due to mixing with their Malabari neighbours (2008:74).

Caste between Cochin and Amsterdam

This document, once published, provided another layer in the foundation of the Paradesi construction of their whiteness, Jewishness, and purity. These notions of purity not only fit

[203] The first publication of Pereira de Paiva's manuscript was made in Portuguese in Amsterdam in 1687. I have used an electronic version with no restriction on rights that was made available via Columbia University Libraries in 2015.

very well with the prevalent caste system in Kerala but also matched the ideas being used in Sephardic communities in Amsterdam.

Amsterdam of the 1640s saw the exclusion and restriction of the rights of slaves and black *gerim* (converts). Schorsch tells us *mulatto* (pejorative for racially mixed) and black women were restricted from sections of the synagogue. "Circumcised Negro Jews" were not allowed to read the Torah or allowed to perform rites in the synagogue (2004:195). Mixing was not allowed in the cemeteries either (2004:196). The Paradesi treatment of the *meshuchrarim*[204] and the other Jewish congregations was remarkably similar, as we can see in Strizower's anecdotes and interviews.

Racism was rife among the European Christians as well, and a Catholic decree of 1622 declared that converts needed to be three generations removed from "the Ethiopian trunk" to wear the habit (2004:199). Segal has cited a letter (preceding the arrival of de Paiva) from David Rahabi (of the Paradesi congregation) to Amsterdam, saying that most of the Jews in Cochin were "black like Ethiopians" (1993:53). There is an apparent similarity in the actions and language employed by the Paradesi and Dutch Jews – perhaps an attempt by the former to mirror their European counterparts in the hopes of acceptance and assimilation.

The labels of Black and White appear to have their origin in these attempts of the Paradesis to connect with the Sephardi Jewish communities in Europe – an imported construct of race quite different from the foreigner-native implications of Paradesi-Malabari.

Paradesi influence on modern scholarship

Even in 20th century scholarship, it is difficult to find work on the Malabari Jews, interviews, or any mentions of their names. On closer inspection, I noticed that whenever

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[204] *Meshuchrarim* literally translates to "manumitted slaves". Some writers like Mandelbaum and Katz describe them as a separate category from the "Black" and "White Jews" (Mandelbaum calls them "Brown Jews") but Ruby Daniel, herself from this group, does not agree (Mandelbaum 1939; Katz & Goldberg 1993; Daniel 1995; Roland 2007).

scholars went to Cochin to conduct research on the Jews, they were usually received by the Koder family of the Paradesi Jews.

The Koders are Iraqi (Baghdadi) Jews who came to Cochin in the 19th century. They quickly integrated into the Paradesi community, marrying into the Rahabi and Hallegua families (Zetlaoui 2000). Samuel Shabdai Koder (1908-1994) was the son of Shabdai Samuel Koder, the first patriarch or founder of this clan. Samuel Shabdai Koder, better known as SS Koder or Satto to his friends, was cited as a primary source in almost every 20th century study on the Cochin Jews. He also authored several books and histories of the Jews. The Koder family were the leaders of the Paradesi congregation, and unofficially retained their royally conferred title of *mudaliyaar*.

Mandelbaum visited Cochin in 1937, just before Arnold Bake's visit in 1938. Louis Rabinowitz visited in the early 50s and Strizower in the 60s. All of these were hosted by SS Koder. Koder's son-in-law Sammy Hallegua also features in recordings by Johanna Spector in the 1960s, and later, in Jairazbhoy and Catlin's restudy of 1984. Nathan Katz stayed in Cochin for a year with a keen focus on the Paradesi Jewish community, but produced hardly any work on the Malabaris.

On the other side, there are practically no primary sources from the Malabari Jewish community, except for Elias Josephai, who has been the subject of a few interviews and documentaries since the turn of the millennium.

Malabari narratives / Kadavumbhaagam and Thekkumbhaagam

Ernakulam and the island of Kochi each have a Kadavumbhaagam synagogue and a Thekkumbhaagam synagogue.[205] Cochin's Kadavumbhaagam synagogue was built in Mattancherry between 1539-44 by Paradesi *mudaliyaar* Barukh Joseph Levi.[206] After the Paradesi synagogue came up in the same area, it is said to have gradually became a "Malabari" (or non-Paradesi) synagogue.

Kadavu means "landing place" (Daniel 1995:129) or "riverbank" (Gamliel 2018a:22), and *bhaagam* means "side". Kadavumbhaagam is sometimes called the Riverside Synagogue. *Thekkumbhaagam* means "south side". However, the Kadavumbhaagam synagogues are not particularly close to a river, and the meaning of "south side" does not seem to make sense for either of the Thekkumbhaagam synagogues in Ernakulam or Kochi.[207]

Elias "Babu" Josephai, managing trustee of the Kadavumbhaagam Synagogue in Ernakulam, told me that these were the names of two synagogues in the original settlement in Kodungallur where their names may have carried a more literal meaning. Dekel said "When we were living in Kodungallur, Shingly, both synagogues were on this side of the river and the other. They were named Thekkumbhaagam and Kadavumbhaagam.". Yosi Oran refers to an early Jewish community in Pallur.[208] Here, there were two synagogues near a river – Kadavumbhaagam near the riverbank, and Thekkumbhaagam to the south of the river (pers. comm.)

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[205] There are several orthographical variants to these names. Kadavumbagam and Kadavumbhagam are popular for the former, and Tekkumbagam, Tekkumbhagam, Thekkumbhagam for the latter.

[206] This term is very similar to the title used by learned Mappila scholars and leaders - *musaliyar*

[207] Gamliel points out similarities with the Christians of Kerala. An endogamous subgroup, the Knaanaya Christians, were called *thekkumbhaagar* (southists) and the other Saint Thomas Christians were called *vadakkumbhaagar* (northists) (2018a:21). Also see Swiderski (1988).

[208] Pallur (also called Palayoor) is not to be confused with Parur (also called North Paravur) or Payyannur.

Yosi Oran also spoke about Thekkumbhaagam and Kadavumbhaagam congregations:

> At Pallur, they had Thekkumbhaagam, Kadavumbhaagam near a river.[209] Thekkumbhaagam [as in] *thekkum-vadakkam* [south-north]… West… (laughs) I'm not getting the Malayalam words. However, like they lived there, they did the same here [in Ernakulam]. The Thekkumbhaagam on one side, *Kadavumbhaagam* on one side. The *pallis* were near each other… but Thekkumbhaagam group [gestures to the left] and Kadavumbhaagam group [gestures to the right]. It was the same in Kochi – a Thekkumbhaagam group and a Kadavumbhaagam group.
>
> Joseph Oran, in conversation with author, Dec 7, 2018

In Yosi Oran's story, Tipu Sultan used a tunnel from Mysore to Kodungallur, and plundered the area, killing all the women and children.[210] "*Kolu odichu* – he "broke the stick". The Jews had to flee. They decided to live in separate settlements to save the community in case an attack like this recurred, so they moved to five different areas – Chendamangalam, North Paravur, Mala, Kochi, and Ernakulam." (Joseph Oran, pers. comm.).

Dekel also spoke of attacks by Muslims on the Jews in 1218 CE. He believes it started as a war over money, not religion. And a century later, after the flood changed the harbour of Kodungallur, the Jews left for Ernakulam, Chendamangalam, Mala and North Paravur.

Waronker cites a similar narrative that the original Kadavumbhaagam in Kodungallur was abandoned with the arrival of "Moor" traders who took the trade from the Jews in the 12th century. These Jews moved to Ernakulam in 1154 CE, and built the Kadavumbhaagam synagogue in 1200 CE (Sassoon 1932:880, via Waronker 2010).

Elias went further and said that Kadavumbhaagam was originally a Baghdadi Jewish community and Thekkumbhaagam was originally Yemeni. The congregations adopted these names and when they had to leave Kodungallur, they built new synagogues with the same

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[209] VV: *Kadavu* means "port side". *Kadavumbhaagam* is Riverside.
[210] Anachronism. However, there are very interesting legends of entire armies coming through secret tunnels to utilise the element of surprise. See Hilbert 2019.

names. Elias himself claims Baghdadi heritage. Johanna Spector has also noted the tradition that the Jews of Kerala came from Yemen and Babylonia (1972:25).

Elias speaks of attacks by the "Moors" in 1165, after which the Jewish congregations decided to allow intermarriage and to avoid segregation in the interest of preservation of the community. He said that the Baghdadi Kadavumbhaagam congregation used to be a "little fair" and the Yemeni Thekkumbhaagam a "little dark", but now that difference is no longer there. Elias suggests that maybe this is why there are no Kadavumbhaagam and Thekkumbhaagam synagogues outside of Kochi and Ernakulam:

> In Paravur, there is no Thekkumbhaagam or Kadavumbhaagam. Chendamangalam was the first place, asylum after Muziris. Then they moved to Paravur, they made Jew Town in Paravur. From there they moved again to… a section of peace-loving people after a fight between the brothers… a small section of peace-loving people moved to Malha, later called Mala. Elder son moved to Ernakulam. Younger son moved to *Mattana cheri* – where the maharaja gave the *mattana*. *Cheri* is given as a *mattana*.[211]
>
> Elias Josephai, in conversation with author, January 2018

This "fight between the brothers" is the story of Aaron Azar and his younger brother Joseph Azar, the last descendants of Joseph Rabban. There are several versions, one of which is quoted in Katz and Goldberg's book (1993:57). Elias here describes the migration from North Paravur to Mala, Ernakulam and Kochi. Joseph Azar, the younger brother, is said to be the founder of what became the Paradesi congregation (also see Koder & Hallegua 1984:6). Elias continued:

> There also they made Kadavumbhaagam – a replica of the synagogue which was built in Muziris. Thekkumbhaagam and Kadavumbhaagam. *Thekkum* means south, but it's situated north of the Kadavumbhaagam synagogue. That shows that it is a replica of the synagogue.

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[211] *Cheri* could mean several things, including a village street (Gundert 1872), or a piece of dirt or land (via my Malayalam translator). *Mattana* is a grant or gift (Hebrew). This is one of several etymologies for "Mattancherry".

On the building of Kadavumbhaagam and Thekkumbhaagam synagogues on the island of Kochi, Dekel points to the Paradesis' segregation.

> The people who are talking about two synagogues – Kadavumbhaagam and Thekkumbhaagam – in Mattanchery in Cochin, Mr. Koder built for their workers who came from here [Ernakulam].
>
> For example, the sister of my mother who married here with somebody, they went to live there. He was working as a clerk there, but he, Koder, didn't allow them to get into the Paradesi synagogue. For this, he built them two other synagogues.
>
> Eliyahu Dekel, in conversation with author, Dec 7, 2018

Segal writes that the Malabari synagogues in Kochi were established by Paradesi *mudaliyaars* (1993:49), but it is unlikely that the Paradesis built the original structures considering the date of their arrival in Cochin.

Kadavumbhaagam Ernakulam

The formation of Israel in 1948 was welcomed by Jews all over the world, including those of India. The Jews of Kerala began to emigrate the 1950s. By 1975 there were only 150 left in the state, a third of those in Cochin (Nair 1975:479-480). A *minyan* of ten men is required to hold a prayer service in a synagogue, and most congregations could no longer achieve this. Most of the Malabari synagogues began to be vacated or locked up.

Elias Josephai took up the management of the Kadavumbhaagam synagogue in 1979. He saved the building by opening a nursery and aquarium on the premises called "Cochin Blossom". I first met Elias Josephai and his wife Ofera at their shop in the Kadavumbhaagam Ernakulam in January 2018. Elias very generously spent several hours with me over the next few days discussing the Jewish community, history and songs. I even got to spend one Shabbath evening with him and his family where we had a Cochini Jewish meal and sang prayers and songs.

This Kadavumbhaagam synagogue does not have documents to support its history but Elias told me it was first built in 1200 CE. The present structure came up in 1700 CE but the benches we were sitting on were 800 years old! Since its closure in 1972, they had only had three prayer services. Elias had undertaken the restoration of the synagogue, and work was still in progress during my first visit.

Photograph 4: The original benches of the synagogue (dated to 1200 CE by Elias Josephai). Photograph by Mark Aranha, January 2018.

Photograph 5: Kadavumbhaagam Synagogue, Ernakulam. Photograph by Mark Aranha, January 2018.

In December 2018, I went back to Ernakulam for an historic ceremony – the installation of a new Torah scroll in Kadavumbhaagam, donated by the Cochini community in Israel. For the first time in 46 years, this synagogue would have a full house and its own Torah scroll. This gave me the opportunity to meet some of the community elders from Israel who could tell me about life in Kerala before they emigrated, and also a chance to record some Malabari tunes.

The Sefer Torah ceremony was a special one. The Torah was taken in a grand procession through Ernakulam's crowded Market Road. The procession kicked off with ensembles of Rajasthani drummers and Kerala *chenda* drummers. Members of the Jewish group took turns holding the heavy ornate case, flanked by others holding up a *chuppah,* all of them singing Cochini tunes.[212] Flower girls threw petals to guide their path. The procession

[212] A *chuppah* is a canopy usually used in Jewish weddings. Also spelled *hupah*.

eventually reached the synagogue where there were prayers and speeches by several guests, including a Hindu holy man and a Christian priest, underscoring the spirit of interfaith harmony in Kerala.

Photograph 6: Chenda drummers at the Sefer Torah procession. Photograph by Mark Aranha. December 2018.

Photograph 7: Sefer Torah procession. Photograph by Biju Ibrahim. December 2018.

Photograph 8: Sefer Torah ceremony in Kadavumbhaagam synagogue. Photograph by Biju Ibrahim. December 2018.

Photograph 9: Yosi Oran reads the Torah from the bema. Elias Josephai in foreground. Photograph by Biju Ibrahim. December 2018.

Palayoor (Pallur)

Thoufeek Zakriya, an amateur historian, has written on various traditions of the Jews of Kerala. He pieces together mentions of the Jews' first landing at Palayoor[213] in a number of Jewish Malayalam songs (Zakriya 2014). There is no archaeological evidence to support a pre-Kodungallur Jewish settlement in Malabar, but nonetheless, the "Song of Mala Synagogue" has the line:

> Kalur azhinjavar Kodungallur vannathe
> (They arrived at Pallur and came to Kodungallur)[214]
>
> (Zacharia and Gamliel 2005:46)

---

[213] Also found written as Palloor, Palur, Paalur, Paalyur. Not to be confused with Parur (North Paravur), Payyannur or Pazhangadi.

[214] Translation by Dr Scaria Zacharia. Some believe that the *Kalur* in the song was meant to be Palur. (See more on Thoufeek Zakriya's blog *Jews of Palur*)

"*Palotu palam taruven* (Parrot Song)" from the audio CD *Oh, Lovely Parrot!* recorded by Barbara Johnson contains another reference to Pallur. The English translation by Scaria Zacharia goes:

> Nearby the seashore of Palur…
> The bird saw the short palm trees there…
> Nearby the seashore of Palur…
> There the bird went and bathed
>
> (Johnson 2004, trans. by Zacharia)

It is written in the style of a *kilipaattu* or parrot song, a genre found across Malabar communities including the Mappilas.[215] According to Scaria Zacharia, the parrot in this song is a metaphor for the first Jewish settlers in Malabar.

There is a "Jew's Hill" or *judankunnu* in Palayoor, which lies on the coast, between Madayi to the north and Kochi to the south. This *judankunnu* is said to have been the site of a Jewish synagogue, but today is on the grounds of a Syrian Orthodox Christian church (Nair 1975:489).[216]

Eliyahu Dekel believes that this ancient synagogue may have been built in 350 BCE. Yosi Oran also spoke of the first Jewish settlements in Kodungallur and Pallur. He spoke about attacks on Jewish community in Palayoor but Dekel suggested that many Jews here must have been converted to other faiths, especially Christianity.

> And the Jews were there [in Palayoor]. Thomas arrived after the Jews did. When he first arrived in 52CE, you could not convert local people into Christians. You should be first converted to Jew, then to Christianity. You know the miracle he did?
>
> … [St Thomas proposed:] "If the water will fall [to the ground], it means I'm a liar. If it doesn't fall, you believe in my God. He threw the water into the air, and it stayed there. In each place he worked a miracle. Many people believed in his miracles and I

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[215] The early 17th century Malayalam retelling of the epic *Ramayana*, named *Adhyatama Ramayana,* is also a *kilipaattu*.
[216] See "Arthat St. Mary'S Cathedral, Kunnamkulam". 2019. *mosc.in*. http://mosc.in/pilgrimcentres/1407-2.

> believe that many Jews became Christian. He worked from 52 to 76 [CE] when he was killed in Tamil Nadu. There are many stories.
>
> Eliyahu Dekel, in conversation with author, Dec 7, 2018

Local Christian tradition holds that the St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Church was established by Thomas the Apostle himself, and the miracle that Dekel describes is well known to Mar Thoma Christians. The continued existence of a *judankunnu* in this traditional stronghold of Syrian Christians speaks to the popular belief that this area was once occupied by Jews.

Chendamangalam

As can be seen in the oral histories given by Dekel, Oran and Elias Josephai, this is considered one of the oldest Jewish settlements left in Malabar. Its synagogue was first built in 1420 in a grant by the local king, the Villarvattam Raja (Nair 1975:494). The current structure in Kottayil Kovilakam was built in 1614, and is in close proximity with a Hindu temple, a church and a mosque (Katz & Goldberg 1993:73). A board outside the synagogue summarises this coexistence in sonic terms – "*Shanku, Bangu, Kombu, Mani*". According to this board, *Shanku* is the conch shell of the temple, *bangu* is mosque's loudspeaker amplifying the call of "*Alla-hu-Akbar*", *kombu* is the Jewish shofar horn, and *mani* is the church bell.

Photograph 10: Ornate woodworked heikhal (holy ark), Chendamangalam. Photograph by Mark Aranha, January 2018.

A number of old gravestones are arranged outside the synagogue. One of them is the oldest dated Jewish gravestone in the country – that of Sara Beth Israel (or Sarah bat Israel) who died in 1269 CE. This supports the tradition that this community migrated here from Kondungallur in the 13th century, perhaps carrying this tombstone with them. There is also a possibility that this community was here earlier, and that this tombstone is just one that happens to carry a date. As Eliyahu Dekel comments: "My father, we are from Chendamangalam… all his family, a big family. Until now they have a grave with a nice big tomb. You know the Jewish bury everybody. But that time among our tradition, we didn't put nice big tomb[stones]." (in conversation with author, Dec 7, 2018).

Photograph 11: Jewish gravestone and close-up of inscription – Sarah bat Israel, d.1269. Chendamangalam. Photograph by Mark Aranha, January 2018.

A chance meeting in Chendamangalam

I had not expected to meet any Jews in Chendamangalam. There were no Jews living there at the time Katz wrote his book (1993), nor even in time of PT Nair's 1975 paper on Jews of Chendamangalam. However, at the Chendamangalam synagogue I was informed of the presence of Bezalel Eliahu, who owns a house on his ancestral property here. He emigrated to Israel in 1955 but now spends two to three months in this house every year. Eliahu is a distinguished Malabari Cochini who received several awards from both the Indian and the Israeli governments for his pioneering contributions as an floricultural scientist.[217] I managed to get a short meeting with him.

He told me that he was not the best person to discuss Jewish songs or music. However, he was willing to discuss other matters about Chendamangalam. In 1950, when the emigration started, there were 250 Jews here. Now his family is the only one. His work as a floriculturist

[217] More details at http://www.indianjews.org/en/articles-en/87-bezalel-eliahu-bio-brief

took him all over India and Israel for decades. He returned to build a house in Chendamangalam at the request of former president Dr APJ Kalam (pers. comm., Jan 16, 2018).

> The first Jews came, according to our grandparents, they came from Yemen – from Port Aden – to find spices. That way they landed somewhere on the Malabar coast. Later, they established a village of Jews in Kodungallur; that was in a port. Years passed. Once Tipu Sultan went… He destroyed all the villages. All have run away from there. Later they came back to the same place and started once again. Many years later, the Portuguese came. They totally destroyed the area. That time they all dispersed to Cochin, Chennamangalam,[218] Mala, and all these places.
>
> Bezalel Eliahu, in conversation with author, Jan 16, 2018

This anachronistic memory of Tipu Sultan attacking the Jews at Kondungallur is also brought up in Ashis Nandy's *Time Warps* (2002). There are no records of such an event taking place. Tipu reigned in the 18th century, by which time most of the Jewish migrations out of Kodungallur had already happened. However, it is possible that there were attacks on the Jewish settlements there. Mentions of such attacks have come up in the accounts of all the Jewish elders that I interviewed.

North Paravur: A visit to the Parur synagogue

Signs of a once-thriving Jewish settlement can still be seen in North Paravur. Two pillars mark the entrance of Jew Street, with a marketplace close by, and several houses that used to belong to Jewish families. The synagogue on Jew Street was recently restored under the Government of Kerala's Muziris Heritage Project and like the one at Chendamangalam today, functions as a kind of museum, with informative installations and videos.[219] This act of restoration and reocognition by the government is a relatively recent effort. Yosi Oran lamented the unfair treatment of the important Malabari Jewish property, synagogues and cemeteries

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[218] He uses the pronunciation *Chennamangalam*, not *Chendamangalam*.
[219] See https://www.muzirisheritage.org/ for the Muziris Heritage Project.

meted out by the government in past decades. He recalled the presence of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at the Paradesi synagogue's quartercentenary celebrations in 1968, and that no such honour or importance had been given to the Malabari synagogues that were allowed to "rot away" (pers. comm.).

Photograph 12: Jew Street, North Paravur. Pillars seen at the beginning of the road. Photograph by Mark Aranha, January 2018

An excavation around the synagogue revealed foundations of a much older structure, dated to 1164 CE, making this the oldest known synagogue in India. I spoke with Nixon, who works with the museum here. He gave me some very interesting information. The excavation threw up several finds, including a cache of Roman coins which are currently with the department of conservation. The current structure was rebuilt in 1586 CE, re-using the stones of the 12th century structure (Nixon, pers. comm., Dec 7, 2108)

Photograph 13: Excavation showing original foundation of Paravur synagogue. Photograph by Mark Aranha. January 2018.

Photograph 14: Stone carving in excavated fragment. Photograph by Mark Aranha, January 2018.

Like other synagogues in Kerala, this one also has a second *bema*. The *bema* is the platform or pulpit from where the Torah is read, and while most synagogues around the world

only have one, Kerala's synagogues have a second *bema* upstairs for reading the Torah to the women of the congregation who sit there, behind a screen.

Photograph 15: Paravur synagogue. The second bema (for the women) is on the upper level.

The upper storey has a room for what Nixon called holy studies, "like catechism". Beyond that was a very interesting looking room, built to look and feel like the inside of a boat. From the outside of the synagogue, one can clearly make out the use of wooden pieces that look very much like ship ribs. The entire structure of the synagogue mimics the look of a wooden boat.

Nixon pointed out the heavy influence of "Kerala architecture" here. The woodworked *hekhal*, the *bema,* the oil lamps, and of course the peculiar boat-like features. He said that the oldest traditional homes in the area are built to resemble ships.

Apart from Nixon's observation on old homes, there are architectural similarities with some of Kerala's old wooden mosques, both in terms of structure and purpose. The upper storeys of Kerala's mosques were known to be used for *dars* instruction and housing of students.[220] Pictures of old mosques such as the Thazhathangady Juma Masjid show us a very similar interior structure to the Parur synagogue's "boat" room.

Photograph 16: Boat-like room in the upper storey of the Paravur synagogue. Photograph by Mark Aranha, January 2018.

[220] For more on the *dars* system of education see section on Ponnani in Chapter 2.

Photograph 17: The outside of the boat-room, flanked by pillars and wooden ship-ribs supporting it. Photographs by Mark Aranha, January 2018.

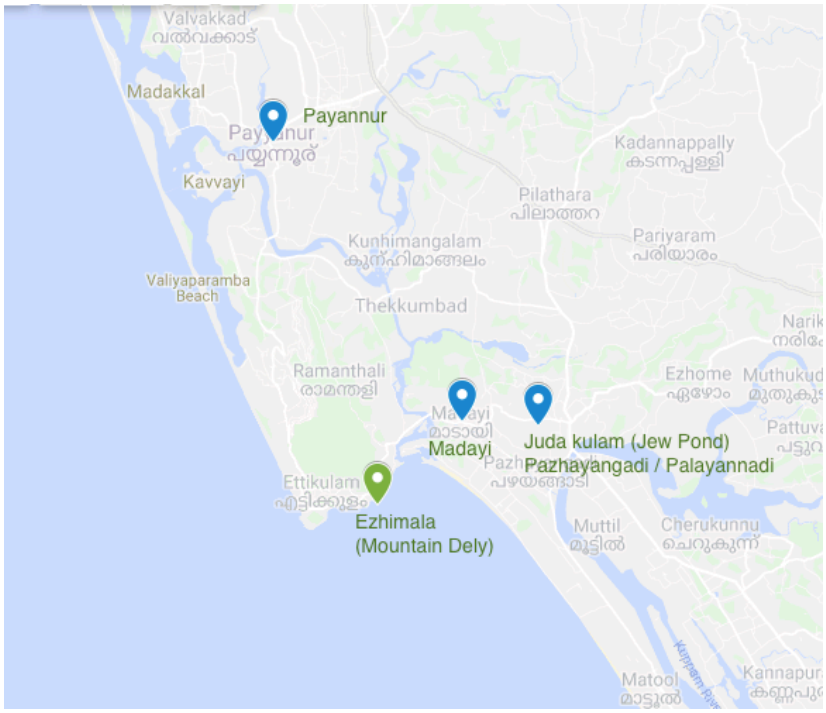
North Malabar cluster: Madayi, Ezhimala, Payyannur, and Pazhayangadi

Barbosa mentions three Jewish settlements in Malabar. Two of these are well documented – Cochin and Crongolor (Kodungallur). The third, which no longer has a Jewish presence today, is in a town he calls Marave, near Mountain Dely. He notes that these Jews lived alongside communities of Christians and Muslims, and also that they were "of the language of the country since it is a long time since they dwelt in this place" (Barbosa 1866:149). MGS Narayanan clarified that Barbosa's Mountain Dely is nothing but today's Ezhimala (also Ibn Battuta's Hili), and Marave is most probably today's Madayi.[221] This place falls under what Barbosa called the Kingdom of Dely, which was ruled by a "Moorish king" (1866:99). Makhdum II's *Tuhfat* corroborates this, saying that the Kolattiri Raja (of Cannanore or Kannur) ruled over Heli-Marawi.[222]

Visscher's letters from Malabar also mention Jewish settlements in Cannanore itself, as well as Nagorne, Malai, and Porivarem – all this well before the time of Joseph Rabban and the copperplates (Menon, Krishna, & Visscher 1929:51). This is not a commonly cited mention

[221] Madayi also appears in Arab and Portuguese accounts as Mazare, Marawi and Marabia.
[222] The Kolattiri Rajas or Alirajas of Arakkal were the only royal Muslim dynasty of Kerala.

of Jewish communities, perhaps because the place names are ambiguous and Visscher is obviously drawing from oral tradition told to him. However, Malai could well be Madayi or Ezhimala, and Porivarem could easily be Pariyaram, also in the area.[223] In the context of the other accounts we have, it is worth considering Visscher's note. PT Nair also notes the tradition of "de-tribalised" Jews in Payyannur (near Madayi), as well as Christians who claim to be descended from Jews (1975:489).



Map 6: North Malabar cluster of Jewish settlements

Linguistic support for a North Malabar Jewish settlement

Gamliel has produced a compelling argument for this often overlooked Jewish North Malabar cluster based on her analysis of old ballads in Malayalam (Gamliel 2018a), as well as her pioneering work on Jewish women's Malayalam songs (Gamliel 2009; Zacharia and

[223] Nagorne might be Nagore in Tamil Nadu. Porivarem could also be Poruvazhy near Kollam.

Gamliel 2005). Her research on Jewish Malayalam songs is based on 36 hand-written notebooks of song lyrics preserved by Jewish women. The majority of these books are from the Paradesi and Kadavumbhaagam Kochi congregations (Gamliel 2009:48).

She found rare stylistic peculiarities in the poetic devices used in some Jewish Malayalam songs that do not occur elsewhere after the 15th century in non-Jewish Malayalam sources. These are: *etuka,* or second syllable rhymes; *mona,* or first phoneme rhymes; and Dravidianised Sanskrit loanwords. They have been found in Jewish *paattu* that retell biblical tales, but also in the 14th century Old Malayalam book *Raamacharitam*, in 15th century ballads like *Payyannurpaattu,* and nowhere else (2018a:6-8).[224] Gamliel suggests that these Jewish songs could have been composed in that period.

The *Ballad of Payyannur* (which is not a Jewish song) mentions the Anjuvannam and Manigraamam, which we know had strong Jewish links (Gamliel 2018a; Nair 1975:489). Furthermore, Gamliel points out that the oldest notebook of Jewish Malayalam songs, dated to 1876, belonged to an Abigail Madayi. Even though Abigail Madayi was from a congregation in Cochin, her name obviously suggests her family came from Madayi (2018a:8). It was common for immigrants in Cochin to carry their place of origin in their name, as can be seen from de Paiva's *Noticias*.

This adds to the above evidence from Nair, Visscher, and Barbosa that there were Jewish settlements in North Malabar, and while some like Abigail Madayi's ancestors moved south to Cochin, others may have converted to other religions like Christianity.

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[224] Gamliel's article has provided sources for a dating the *Raamacharitam* to the 14th century. The same work has also been dated to the 12th century (Paniker 1994:129) and the 13th century (Anu 2015:23; Madhava Menon 2002:464).

Kollam

Kollam, in the kingdom of Venad and further south of Cochin, was the site of the *Tarsappali* copperplates. This royal charter is the earliest verifiable evidence of a Jewish presence in India.

In these plates, Ayyan Adikal, the governor of Venad, grants 72 rights and privileges to Mar Sapir Iso, the founder of the *palli* at Tarsa in Kollam (the capital of Venad).[225] MGS Narayanan dates these plates to 849CE, based on the regnal year of Sthanu Ravi, the Chera king mentioned in the inscription. The Anjuvannam and Manigraamam were given joint custody of the *palli,* including the powers to execute their own judgements and redressals, and to levy taxes and fines (2002:72).

This inscription features the signatures of witnesses in Kufic, Hebrew and Pahlavi scripts. The language and names of the witnesses indicate a mixed group of West Asian traders – Jews, Arab Muslims, and others – holding positions of influence in 9th century Kollam (Subbarayulu 2009:160, Narayanan 1972:37). Subbarayulu states that members of the Anjuvannam and Manigraamam were the occupants of this *palli* (2009:160).

The Manigraamam features in a number of other inscriptions in the interior of the Indian peninsula, whereas the Anjuvannam is restricted only to coastal towns, implying that the former was an indigenous merchant guild and the latter was not. Subbarayulu traces literary and epigraphic evidence of the Manigraamam's activities throughout south India from as early as the 5th century. By the 9th century, it is found mentioned in a Tamil inscription in Takua Pa, Thailand, and is clearly collaborating with foreign guilds such as the Anjuvannam. (Subbarayulu 2015:23-25).

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[225] In Kerala today, *palli* means a (non-Hindu) place of worship – usually a church, mosque or synagogue. However, there are doubts of its meaning at the time of the inscription. Was it a church, a settlement, or something else?

Similar to Joseph Rabban for the Jews, Mar Sapir Iso became a legendary figure for the Syrian Christian communities. The Manigraamam and Anjuvannam were associated exclusively with the Christians and Jews respectively. However, considering all the inscriptional evidence collected from around the Indian Ocean, the currently accepted view is that both these groups were diverse guilds where traders cooperated and collaborated commercially, unhindered by their religious differences. It is interesting to note that this interfaith collaboration on the Indian Ocean occurred concurrently with the violence between Jews, Muslims and Christians in Europe.

The next report of Jews in Kollam dates to the 12th century (Asher 1840:140). This brief account by Benjamin of Tudela was corroborated by Marco Polo in the 13th century, where he found Jews "who retain their proper language" in the kingdom of Kollam (Venad).

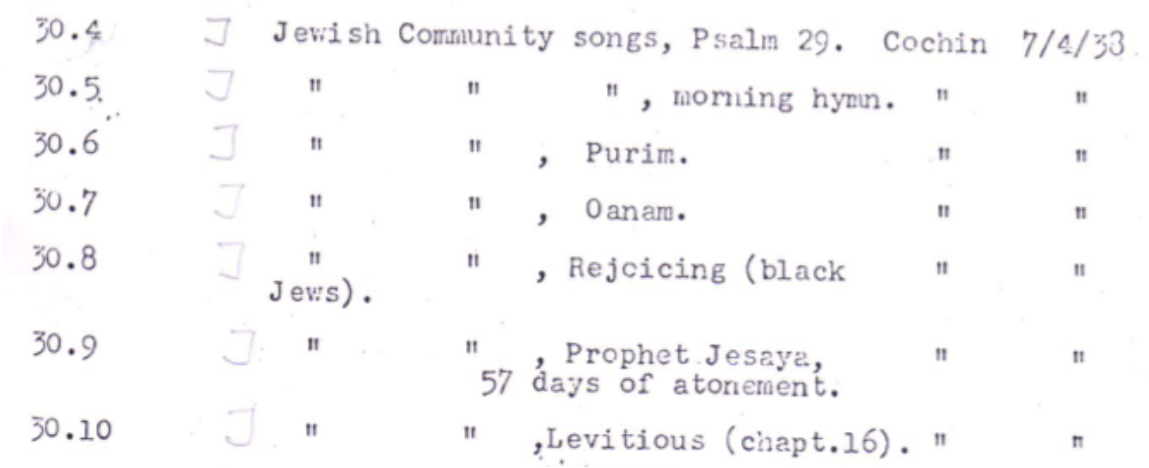
Kollam was one of the primary ports of the Malabar coast till the 13th century, also serving as an essential midpoint to the Arab-China trade. After the decline of this transoceanic route, it became a secondary port to Cochin and Calicut (Malekandathil 2010). A migration (or conversion) of the Jewish merchants away from Kollam may have happened around the 13th century. The group found by Ibn Battuta in "Kunja-Kari" in the 14th century could have been this group that moved away from Kollam but retained their ties to the same king.

Ibn Battuta's account of 1324 CE notes a place called Kunja-Kari at the top of a hill, inhabited by Jews. He says the Jews have a governor of their own, although he pays a tax to the king of Kollam (Ibn Battuta 1953:238). Many scholars including Katz and Jussay equate this place with Chendamangalam. The only doubt is whether the kingdom of Kollam extended as far north as Chendamangalam in the 14th century. KP Padmanabha Menon believes it could have been so, but suggests that alternatively this could have been the same colony in the vicinity of Kollam noted by Benjamin of Tudela 200 years earlier (Menon *et al* 1929:516).

There are as yet no known synagogues or other archaeological traces of Jews in Kollam.

Chapter 5: A look at Jewish music through Bake's Recordings

On April 7, 1938, Bake recorded seven songs of Jews in Cochin.[226] The Tefi catalogue contains the only information he left behind on these recordings. As found in Alistair Dick's 1967 version of the catalogue, the three headings on top of each typed page are "Tape No", "Description" and "Place and date".



30.4	J	Jewish Community songs, Psalm 29.		Cochin	7/4/38
30.5	J	"	"	" , morning hymn.	" "
30.6	J	"	"	, Purim.	" "
30.7	J	"	"	, Oanam.	" "
30.8	J	"	"	, Rejcicing (black Jews).	" "
30.9	J	"	"	, Prophet Jesaya, 57 days of atonement.	" "
30.10	J	"	"	,Levitious (chapt.16).	" "

Figure 9: Details of Jewish recordings from Bake's catalogue as obtained from ARCE Gurugram

There are some minor typographical errors that need to be pointed out:

i. 30.9 refers to Isaiah:57, which is one of the passages from the Bible sung on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It should read "Prophet Jesaya, 57. Day of Atonement."

ii. 30.10 should read "Leviticus ", and not "Levitious"

The only clearly non-Jewish title here is in item 30.7. This is examined below.

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[226] See Appendix I. The recordings of the Cochin Jews are from ARCE 30:36:84.

The Restudy of 1984

On March 29, 1984, Catlin and Jairazbhoy visited the Paradesi synagogue in Cochin, looking to research Bake's Jewish recordings. Interestingly, they kept their own individual research diaries during this study. I was able to obtain copies of these unpublished diaries from the ARCE.[227] Having two separate accounts of the events was useful for me as they rarely overlap, recalling different details.

Marcia Walerstein, then a folklore student at UCLA, had put them in touch with SS Koder. They also met first cousins Joseph "Johnny" Hallegua and Samuel "Sammy" Hallegua (who was Koder's son-in-law), both prominent members of the congregation there. They played the recordings for them and also for other Jews they could find, and noted down their observations. The Koders and Halleguas provided them with some information on each of Bake's recordings, including some of their memories of when Bake visited Cochin (NAJ 1984). They also recorded a few songs sung by members of the Paradesi community.

Jairazbhoy and Catlin categorised this meeting with the Jews as "Event 41". The six recordings they made are numbered Item 1-6, and also referred to as Item 41.1, 41.2 and so on. (ACJ 1984). Their recordings may be found on tape 214 in collection 1 (ARCE 1:214:084) at the ARCE, Gurugram.

At the time of Bake's visit, Johnny was ten years old and Sammy was only seven, but they still remembered some details. Koder, born in 1908, was 30 years old and had himself arranged some of the womenfolk for Bake to record (NAJ 1984:90).

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[227] I use "ACJ 1984" and "NAJ 1984" to refer to these diaries in the in-text citations.

Bake 30.4 - Jewish Community songs, Psalm 29

Samuel Hallegua recognised and confirmed the psalm being sung. He was even able to point out the text as "A Psalm of David", found on page 155 of *Book of Prayer, According to the Custom of Spanish and Portuguese Jews* (ACJ 1984:48). The Hebrew name is *Mizmor L'David,* as can be found in the text. When this recording was played back to Satu Koder, he started singing along, showing obvious familiarity with the tune.

This psalm was known as the "Storm Psalm", and it was sung when putting the scroll back in the ark. The women singing were identified as Ruby Hallegua, Hannah Roby and Rebecca Simon (ACJ 1984:50). As part of their restudy, Jairazbhoy and Catlin recorded Samuel Hallegua singing his version of this psalm as Item 41.1 (ACJ 1984:47-49).

I have found several melodies of this *mizmor* (psalm) online, but I have yet to come across one that sounds like these renditions. Notably, the ones I found were all sung much faster.

Bake 30.5 - Jewish Community songs, morning prayer

Samuel Hallegua identified this hymn as "Abarekh eth shem hashem (Bakashah)", one of the hymns sung during the early morning services in the 30 days leading up to the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah. Hallegua said the singer was Benjamin "Bin-i-amku" Simon, and he was certain because Benjamin had been his teacher and the *chazzan* at his wedding (ACJ 1984:48,50). Jairazbhoy questions this statement, pointing out that Benjamin's daughter "could not make a positive identification, while another lady there categorically denied it" (NAJ 1984:90).

From Catlin's notes we learn that Koder's wife Gladys and their daughters, Lily Koder and Mrs. Ashkenazy. It must be assumed that Catlin failed to mention Benjamin's daughter because she does say that "one of the ladies present" claimed the voice was that of her father's, though adding a disclaimer: "but he has a sharp voice".

The Sephardic Pizmonim Project lists this particular song in the *Sephardi Siddur Bakkashot, 1601* (Sephardi order of *Bakkashot*) as "Abarekh Et Shem Hashem".[228] It may be found in the *Sefer Shir Ushaha Hallel Vezimra* (Catton 1964:459), a collection of *bakkashot* and *pizmonim* "composed within the last fifty to hundred years" (Shelemay 1998:138-43).[229] The compilation of the SUHV started in 1959 by Syrian Jews in Brooklyn, New York. Mark Kligman has written on the use of *maqamat*[230] in the Syrian Jewish liturgy (2008).

According to Chabad, the word *bakkashah* or *baqashah* refers to a plea or prayer where one beseeches God for what one does not have.[231] The term is usually associated with a genre of *pizmonim* (para-liturgical poems) found in the Sephardi/Mizrahi[232] traditions around the Mediterranean Sea, and is not common in other modern Jewish communities (Seroussi 1986; Kligman 2011:146).

The origins of the *bakkashot* are traced to 16th-century mystic Isaac ben Solomon Luria Ashkenazi in Safed, and the poetry and musicality of Rabbi Israel Najara (Nulman 1996:81). The spread of Lurianic Kabbalah took this practice to North Africa, Italy, the Balkans, and Turkey (Fenton 1975, in Seroussi 1986).[233] Two of these traditions are known to exist in Israel today – the Syrian (Aleppo), and Moroccan (1986:34). Now we can add the Cochinim to that list.

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[228] A recent recording of this, sung by the son of one of my informants, can be found here https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/he/Song/Pages/song.aspx?songid=461#5,52,4645,1393

[229] *Shir Ushaha Hallel Vezimra* is also known as the SUHV or the SUHV Red Book.

[230] A collective name for a set of vast melodic traditions from across West Asia and North Africa.

[231] Plural *bakkashot* or *baqashot*. Also see article by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on Chabad.org. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4453/jewish/Teshuvah-Tefilla-and-Tzedakah.htm

[232] Mizrahi (pl. Mizrahim) is a term for "Eastern Jews", and refers to Jews native to West Asia and North Africa. It includes Iraqi, Kurd, Syrian, Persian, Yemeni and Georgian Jews.

[233] Kabbalah is a school of thought in Jewish mysticism; Lurianic Kabbalah is named for its founder, Isaac ben Solomon Luria Ashkenazi.

Eliyahu Dekel is particularly fond of *bakkashot*, and sang an example for me titled "Ma L'Cha Yitzri". He said: "We call it *bakkashot*. It is the request of the morning. Specially we, all the family, wake up in the morning and we sing this. About twenty people which we have in the house until now. I know that everybody loves these songs. I call these 'soul songs'" (Eliyahu Dekel, in conversation with author, Dec 7, 2018).

Dekel's family performed *bakkashot* as a vigil as Seroussi described in the Moroccan tradition – to rise "in the middle of the night to pray and praise God with sacred songs of mystical content" (1986:33-34). Dekel's description of these songs as "soul songs" recalls the Kabbalistic origins of the *bakkashot*. The most common *bakkashah* is "Yedid Nefesh", meaning "beloved of the soul".

Bake 30.6 - Jewish Community songs, Purim

Samuel Hallegua knew this song well. Not only did he identify this as "Today is Purim", a tune composed by his grandfather, Isaac Elias Hallegua, but he also sang it for Jairazbhoy to record.[234] IE Hallegua (1862-1941) was a rabbi and *paytan,*[235] and he is known to have composed "dozens" of Hebrew songs, including one called "Today is Purim" (Weil 2009:328). I was unable to get text or audio versions of IE Hallegua's songs.

Samuel Hallegua praised the singer's voice, but said that the tune should not be sung so sadly – it should sound merry. He could not identify the voice but said he must be from one of the other congregations of Cochin, which at the time would have been either Kadavumbhaagam, Thekkumbhaagam (ACJ 1984:48,50).

Hallegua translated some of the lyrics for Jairazbhoy:

Today is Purim, Purim for us
Drink, get drunk, my brother

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[234] Item 41.3 on ARCE tape 1:214:84
[235] From Hebrew. A specialist liturgical poet and singer (Seroussi:36)

Rejoice today, for God has worked a great miracle for us (ACJ 1984:50)

Bake 30.7 - Jewish Community songs, Oanam

Onam is a major annual harvest festival in Kerala. While it has its origins in Kerala Hindu tradition, the celebrations are often tied to Malayali cultural identity and are enthusiastically carried out by Malayalis around the world, regardless of their religion.

The word "Hoshana" is clearly discernible in the women's singing, and Catlin notes that this is not an Onam song (1984:48). There is a possibility that Bake's original notes read something like "Oshana", and this was erroneously transcribed as "Oanam" to the new catalogue. However, it would be worth investigating whether this song could also have been sung on the festival of Onam.

Eliyahu Dekel, a Malabari Jew, told me that as devout Jews it would be impossible to celebrate or sing a song of another religion's festival. He rules out the existence of a Jewish *Onam* song, especially among the Malabaris. He believes the title is a mistake.

Hallegua told Catlin that the women in this recording are "definitely not from this synagogue" (1984:48), i.e. not Paradesi. The Paradesi women voiced the same opinion in a separate interview (ACJ 1984:49). The restudy does have a performance of this song by JE Cohen of the Paradesi congregation (Item 41.4, ARCE number 1:214:84).

The other two congregations of Cochin might have already moved to Israel and it seems like Jairazbhoy and Catlin interviewed only Paradesi Jews. This leaves some room for a possibility that this was an Onam song that the Paradesis of 1984 were not aware of. In the context of the long association of the Paradesis with the royal family of Cochin, it is possible that they joined in the Onam celebrations with songs from their own tradition. It must be kept in mind that in 1938, Mattancherry came under the Kingdom of Cochin, and the Paradesi synagogue was adjacent to the king's palace and temple.

Catlin found that this song was sung for the festival Hoshana Rabbah. Hoshana Rabbah is the seventh day and last day of Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles. There are similarities between Sukkot and Onam in that they are both harvest festivals and take place at roughly the same time of the year. Just as Onam is one of the biggest festivals of Kerala, Sukkot is the most "important event of the year" among both Malabaris and Paradesis (Thomas 1931:44). Sankara Menon also observes that the Feast of Tabernacles is "observed with more pomp and ceremony than other feasts" (1903:68).

Katz and Goldberg describe the Hoshana prayer on Hoshana Rabbah as a "doleful… particularly moving, plaintive tune" (1993:179). This description matches the slow, drawn-out melody in Bake's recording.

Bake 30.8 - Jewish Community songs, Rejoicing (black Jews)

Samuel Hallegua was only able to "tentatively" confirm this song as "Rejoicing". He could tell that the singing style was from Ernakulam, but nothing else. Catlin and Jairazbhoy also interviewed Johnny Hallegua (Sammy Hallegua's first cousin and also brother-in-law). He remembered the singer and identified him as Abrahamu, a short and bald man from the Kadavumbagam Synagogue in Cochin. Johnny also recalls that his voice broke because he took the song in too high a pitch (ACJ 1984:50; NAJ 1984:91). This is evident in the recording.

In one of the most exciting moments of my field work, I was able to find someone to positively identify this tune. During my first interview with Elias Josephai, a Malabari Jew and managing trustee of the Kadavumbagam Synagogue in Ernakulam, he suggested that we contact Cochini scholar Yosi Oran, who now lives in Moshav Taoz in Israel.

Elias described Oran as *dati,* meaning that he was a religious, learned Jew. He called him via WhatsApp and I played the songs for him. Incredibly, Yosi Oran started singing along with this song! This was significant for a number of reasons: Jairazbhoy wrote that all items

except one (this one) were easily identified (NAJ 1984:91). I have also played this recording for several other experts and scholars with no success. Finally, this particular melody stands out among Bake's Jewish recordings as it switches modes.[236]

Oren primarily speaks Hebrew and Malayalam so Elias translated for me. He explained that the song was asking the Almighty why the Messiah, the son of David, has not come yet. "*Moshiach ben David* why it is so late? Please send him to us. Please hear my request. Please send us the liberator." Elias continued: "It is from centuries back. The song is done from centuries back. Because we were in the bondage, in exile. All those times, when we were in the bondage, we sing this song, praying to the Almighty, send *moshiach* to liberate us. That is the request we are singing." (in conversation with author, Jan 16, 2018).

I enquired further. Where did this song originate? Cochin? Or Yemen, perhaps? Oran was very clear that it was not from Kerala, but from the Sephardim. Elias translated, "Spain. The ancestors… From Spain it came." Oran also said the song came to them in the 15th century.

If this song was asking why the Messiah still hasn't come, why was it titled "Rejoicing"? Elias gave me more information the next day. The title "Rejoicing" is related to Simchat Torah, which literally means "the Joy of the Torah", or "Rejoicing in the Torah". An excerpt from my interview with Elias (EJ):

> **EJ:** "Rejoicing" was *Simchat Torah,* day of rejoicement [sic].
> **MA:** And you sing this…
> **EJ:** For the *hakafah,*[237] when the *pheri* is there, when the *sefer* is taken around the synagogue and we sing this song with rejoicing, "Please deliver our *Moshiach!"*

Elias drops a subtle reference to the *pheri,* a Hindu equivalent of the *hakafah*. *Hakafah* means encirclement or orbit, and on the occasion of Simchat Torah, refers to when the Torah

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[236] See section on transcriptions later in this chapter.
[237] *Hakafah* (pl. *Hakafot*) means to encircle or orbit. It usually refers to the Torah procession where the scrolls are carried around the sanctuary.

scrolls are taken out of the ark and passed around the synagogue as the congregation sings. *Pheri, phera,* or *parikrama* are Sanskrit-based words for the same concept – ritual orbit or moving round an object of devotion in reverence. This is not to say that the *hakafah* was called a *pheri* in Kerala, but there is an acknowledgement that these parallel concepts exist in Jewish and Hindu cultures.

According to Paradesi tradition, the liturgy for the afternoon *hakafot* in Simchat Torah was entirely composed in Cranganore (Katz & Goldberg 1993:186). Oran indicated that this was a Sephardi tune from the 1500s. Bake's title of "Rejoicing (black Jews)" perhaps suggests that this recording was a melody that only the "black Jews" sang, or maybe it was only to indicate that this was sung by a member of that congregation.

Bake 30.9 - Jewish Community songs, Prophet Jesaya 57, Day of Atonement[238]

Catlin adds that this was sung as part of the morning service. This was recorded in Ernakulam. There is no mention of the singer or the composer. Samuel Hallegua provided some information on melodies: The tune is the same one that is used in Cochin, but the Ernakulam version has one additional lower note at the end of each line. He adds that some singers in Cochin do this as well, and that there are more "niceties" in the Cochin style.[239] Johnny Hallegua added that the extra lower note was a sixth (ACJ 1984:50). Unfortunately, I do not have a sample of the Paradesi version that they spoke of, so a comparison is not possible. But it is apparent that melody was an important component of identity for the Jews.

I noticed that even among the Malabari Jews I encountered, there were different ways of singing. Eliyahu Dekel has an excellent singing voice and a distinctive melodic style. He says that he learned how to sing from his father, who lived in Chendamangalam before

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[238] As described earlier, the title has been corrected. The original title can be seen in Figure 9.
[239] By the "Cochin style", I believe he means the Paradesi style.

emigrating to Israel. He went on to describe how the Cochinim used melody to distinguish themselves from each other.

> In each place, even here, you are influenced from where you are living. Even here in two synagogues, I want to show you that I'm different from you. Why do you have two synagogues? Because you are divided among the property and many other things and you want to show that I'm better than you. If I heard a good song, I want to finish with this. And if you are the father, your son heard it. And the other father, he wants to show the way he finishes it.
>
> Eliyahu Dekel, in conversation with author, Dec 7, 2018

Elias Josephai told me this song was a *haftarah*, which is read after the *parashah* on Shabbath. He said: "The whole year is divided into chapters. That *haftarah* is being read after the *parashah*… The tune what you have given is a common Shabbath, not festival Shabbath." (in conversation with author, Jan 16, 2018).

I learned that a text may be sung to different melodies depending on whether it is a feast day or a regular day. According to Elias, even though "Days of Atonement" is written in the title of the recording, this particular melody was for a regular Shabbath, not Yom Kippur.

Bake #30.10 - Jewish Community songs, Leviticus (Chapter 16)[240]

The text for the song is given in the title, albeit misspelled. Hallegua confirmed that as in most Jewish traditions, Leviticus 16 is read during the morning service on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 16 prescribes the obligations of the priests on Yom Kippur, the sacrifice of the bull, and the ritual of the scapegoat. It is interesting that this text was chosen because Katz and other writers have specifically remarked on the fact that the Cochinim did not actually indulge in the ritual killing of a bull. The ritual killing of a chicken used to be practiced but Katz said it was stopped on ethical grounds in the 1940s or 1950s (1993:176). The Census

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[240] As described earlier, the title has been corrected. The original title can be seen in Figure 9.

Report of 1901 also mentions that killing of a kid and sprinkling of its blood on the door posts during the feast of Pesach (Passover) is not done in Cochin (1903:167).

Mandelbaum remarked on the *malqut,* or ceremonial lashing, on Yom Kippur. By 1937, the Paradesis had done away with it, but the Malabaris, who were far more orthodox, still practiced it (1939:442, 459). The Malayalam term for it was *thukka adi* (deserved hits or strikes). The Cochinim observe Yom Kippur as a day of fast (Menon 1903:168).

Summary and Observations

Bake recorded these Jews in 1938, before Israel was formed. At this time, most of the known synagogues in Kerala were still functioning, their congregations intact. So even though all the Cochin Jew recordings are labelled "Cochin", did Bake conduct these recordings in the synagogues of Cochin alone? The catalogue entries above and below the Jewish recordings are labelled "Ernakulam", implying that he knew the difference between the two places. It is possible that his itinerary did not take him beyond the island of Kochi.

Bake's Index	Bake's Item title	Performer(s)	Composer / Origin	Occasion / Misc Notes
30.4	Psalm 29	Mixed chorus: Ruby Hallegua, Hannah Roby, Rebecca Simon. Men unidentified.	N/A	Putting the scroll back into the ark
30.5	Morning hymn	Benjamin "Bin-i-amku" Simon	N/A	*Bakashah*; Early morning hymn leading up to Rosh Hashanah. Original title "Abarekh eth shem hashem"
30.6	Purim	Male solo; Non-Paradesi Jew from Cochin	IE Hallegua	Purim. Original title is "Today is Purim"
30.7	Oanam	Women and/or children; Non-Paradesi	N/A	Hoshana Rabbah, part of Sukkot (a harvest festival like Onam)
30.8	Rejoicing (Black Jews)	Abrahamu from Kadavumbhaagam Cochin? Ernakulam style.	Sephardi tune from 1500s?	*Hakafah* on Simchat Torah, or when gathered at supper. Title "La Ma" or "Ishmael".
30.9	Prophet Jesaya, 57 days of atonement	Unidentified man; "From Ernakulam"	N/A	*Haftarah* on regular Shabbath, not festival Shabbath (Josephai); "day of atonement" is Yom Kippur.
30.10	Levitious (chapt. 16)	Unidentified man; Probably non-Paradesi	N/A	Morning service on Yom Kippur (Hallegua)

Table 1: A summary of the information gathered on Bake's Cochin Jew recordings

However, Catlin speculated that he attended a service where a "safir" (Sefer Torah scroll) was being donated to a "temple" (synagogue), and that Bake 30.8-10 (the three non-Paradesi tunes) were recorded by members of that congregation (1984:50).[241] It is unclear if this non-Paradesi congregation was from Kochi or Ernakulam, as some of the *Restudy 1984* respondents identified an Ernakulam style or simply said it was recorded in Ernakulam. Further, Yosi Oran was very familiar with the tune despite not being from Kochi.

Nevertheless, it is clear that both Paradesi and Malabari are represented in this small selection of recordings. There are at least three of each, with Bake 30.7 neither claimed by the Paradesis in *Restudy 1984*, nor by the Malabari Jews I interviewed in 2018.

It appears that some thought went into the selection of these tunes. All seven recordings are in Hebrew, and the theme seems to be important feast days and the Cochini Jewish *minhag* (rite). Bake's seven recordings neatly sample songs from Purim, Yom Kippur, Hoshana Rabbah/Sukkot (or Onam), a *haftarah*, and a *bakkashah* from Rosh Hashanah. The songs are mostly male solos but women are represented in two items.

Jewish Malayalam songs are conspicuous by their absence. The existence of these songs and their close association with the women of the community is recognised by several scholars. The texts of around 300 of them have been studied in depth by Ophira Gamliel and Scaria Zacharia (2005). Johanna Spector also noted the existence of these songs (1985:20). We can only speculate on why Malayalam songs were not represented in Bake's set.

When asked about old songs, Yosi Oran said "Our mothers used to sing them mostly in Malayalam. I don't know much, but women used to sit and write them in Malayalam. The

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[241] Coincidentally, my second field visit to Ernakulam and Cochin was also to attend a Sefer Torah ceremony.

Bible's story, Joseph Rabban's story.". Oran sang one line as an example. Unfortunately, my translator said it was in Old Malayalam and unfamiliar to him.[242]

Instrumentation

All Bake's recordings were performed *a capella*. Johanna Spector also noted the absence of musical instruments among the Kerala Jews. She suggested it could have been the result of caste associations because the performance of musical instruments in Kerala, especially in a religious context, was left to certain "lower" castes (1985:19). However, Kerala is not the only place where this idea could have come from.

Eastern Jewish communities have varying views on the use of instruments. Yemeni Jews believe that there was a ban on musical instruments after the destruction of the Temple. However, the use of a metal tray as percussion was allowed asn they did not consider it a musical instrument (Shai 2000:90; Jochsberger & Tlalim 1992).

The *motreb* of Iran, who were often Judeo-Persian musicians and instrument makers, were associated with *najasat,* or uncleanness, and were thus considered among the lowest echelons of society (Houman 2012).

Melody: Aesthetic value and identity

Melodic aesthetics are valued in the music of the Cochinim. Eliyahu Dekel and Samuel Hallegua both spoke of how it is used to distinguish one synagogue's style from another, and indeed demonstrate superiority over another.

Elias Josephai and Samuel Hallegua show us contrasting ideas of Paradesi and Malabari aesthetics. Samuel Hallegua suggested that his grandfather's song "Today is Purim" should

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[242] I have included the recording of this line in the CD. See Appendix III.

have sounded more "merry" (ACJ 1984:50), and the slower rendition in Bake's recording was probably reminiscent of the Malabari style.

Elias Josephai sang two versions of a Yom Kippur song composed by a *hakham* of Parur. His Malabari version was sung slower and more deliberately – the uneven meter dictated by the syllables of the text. Ross has described such cantillation as "logogenic", where the metre is led by the text (1979:88). Elias's Paradesi version was sung at a brisk tempo, with the syllables squashed into 4/4 time. He explained: "Our tune is a little... you can hear, more beautiful. Little stretched out… The original is always original. You understand? Copies cannot… you cannot get the hundred percent out of the copy. Right?".

Dekel narrated a story about how the melodies of *mussafin* became a matter of dispute.[243]

> We have a nice story about when you pray, in these books we pray, we call it *mussaf*. And almost a hundred of maybe a thousand years, we sang it one way. Then 150 years ago, some people arrived from Europe and they said no, we should pray in another version. That caused in the Cochin Jewry a fight for almost five years, and they prayed in two shifts. One started at 6 and finished at 8, and the other started at 8 and finished at 10. But because those fellows said the other version, these fellows continued the prayer in his version. About these things they were fighting among the people. All this among the religious.
>
> Also about Shingly. I was in Koder House in Israel and I see how they sing their songs. I said listen, your songs you take from us!
>
> Eliyahu Dekel, in conversation with author, Dec 7, 2018

Yosi Oran also spoke about differences in song traditions among the Cochinim:

> There are no differences between Thekkumbhaagam and Kadavumbhaagam. Paradesis… came from Portugal, so their songs were different. They came here, took some from here, learned some from there, because of that…

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[243] *Mussaf* (pl. *Mussafin*)– Additional prayers on Sabbath or special days (See https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/939953/jewish/Laws-of-the-Musaf-Prayers.htm)

> In their book, in Ladino,[244] there are songs like "Padre Padre". That's Ladino. That's the Sephardim's language, not our language. They mixed it from here and there, a bit from us, a bit from there. Ours is different. [Between] Kochi-Mala, Kochi-Ernakulam, there is not much difference in songs.

When I asked him how Cochini melodies differed from other Jewish traditions in Israel, he stressed smaller steps in the melody and a smaller ambitus or range. Elias Josephai had also mentioned difficulty singing the high and low pitches of Ashkenazi music.

> Cochin melodies usually varies just 1 and a half tones.[245] Israeli ones have high and low pitches, with more variations. In music, we call it tone. [Sings an example of Cochin song "Ma Navu"]. There are some exceptions, but it's mostly like this. [Gestures with his hands to show large intervallic jumps in other Jewish music, but close movement and small intervals in Cochini songs]. Smooth, slowly-slowly.
>
> Joseph Oran, in conversation with author, Dec 7, 2018

Bakkashot and transoceanic links

Even without a text, the melody alone indicates an identity. This can be seen in the practice of *bakkashot* and *pizmonim*, where the use of Arab and Turkish *maqamat* was the subject of rabbinic discussion and debate for nearly a thousand years (Kligman 2008:69-70).

Morocco

I have not come across any analysis of the *bakkashot* among the Cochinim, but judging from Bake's example and my interview with Eliyahu Dekel, this practice is prevalent among both Paradesi and Malabari Jews. This is suggestive of links with Syrian, Moroccan or perhaps Iraqi Jews (Seroussi 1986; Nulman 1996; Kligman 2008). There is textual and anecdotal support for this. *Noticias* documents the presence of Jews from Aleppo and Jerusalem among the Paradesis (de Paiva 1687:8). Elias Josephai told me about Kadavumbhaagam's links with Baghdadi Jews, and also how he felt at home during the Moroccan service in Yeruham.

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[244] A Latin-derived language spoken by the Sephardim; Also called Judeo-Spanish.
[245] Translator's note: May not be the formal definition of a whole tone. He may mean an interval of a third, or three scale degrees.

> … Moroccans, I experienced, more or less same. Similar to ours. I was in Yeruham [Israel] in Moroccan synagogue. I could follow everything… when the prayer goes on, we are the same. More or less same tune I can follow. [Also] when I was in Yemeni synagogue.
>
> My sister's son-in-law is from Morocco. I have been there for … my sister's grandson's *brit milah*. I found it was very similar. The rituals are the same and the tunes are the same.
>
> So I make it a point wherever it is. And I want to know the tune. What is the difference. Not academic or anything, just for curiosity's sake. I found Moroccans are more similar to Cochini tunes. Not all, but some of them.
>
> For example, *brit milah*. The prayer is exactly same. And Shabbat prayer, exactly same. Here and there, there is little difference, but more or less same. I've been there in the Moroccan synagogue in Yerucham. So I found I could follow, I could catch everything. Because it's the same way. Even the morning prayer, it's the same.
>
> Elias Josephai, in conversation with author, Jan 16, 2018

The *bakkashot* has its origins in Lurianic Kabbalah, and spread along with the teachings of Jewish mystics from Safed, today in Israel (Nulman 1996:81). The texts are sung to particular *maqamat*,[246] similar to cantillation of the Qur'an (al Faruqi 1987:9). The main *maqamat,* such as *bayyat/bayat, sikah/sigah, saba/sabah* and *rast,* are common to both. Further, Fenton has also demonstrated the parallels between Sufi and Kabbalah through the role of circumambulation (*tawaf* and *hakafah,* respectively) in their rituals (Fenton 1975).

Two of the four songs that Eliyahu Dekel sang for me are *bakkashot*. I found both of them - "Mah L'Cha Yitzri" and "Elohe Oz Tehilati" in the Morrocan list of *bakkashot* in an online collection "NusachDB" (Braunstein 2014).[247] He said: "Most of the songs in our tradition… I think only one or two other section in Israel sing all these songs. This was sung

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[246] Examples of this are available at http://www.sephardichazzanut.com/Bakashot.htm and http://www.pizmonim.org/section.php?maqam=Baqashot

[247] See Appendix III. I have included the recording of Dekel singing his melody for "Mah L'Cha Yitzri".

here all the time. All of what I sung you, these were sung here. They are special." (in conversation with author, Dec 7, 2018).

It is not inconceivable that in the same period that various Sufi tariqats spread to Malabar, Jewish mystics and rabbis also made their way to the region, carrying knowledge, stories, melodies and *maqamat*. We already know of the 17th century rabbi Nehemiah Mota, who compiled the *Shir Kolas*, the most important Cochini songbook. Mota is venerated with a *nercha* at his grave, similar to the Mappila tradition and quite unorthodox for Jews in Israel. Even the Paradesi Jews do not observe this *nercha*. He is considered by many to have come from Yemen, though some sources also link him to Morocco, Palestine or Turkey (Walerstein 1987:166). The Malayali *nercha's* similarities to the Moroccan tradition of *hillulot* have been explored in the previous section on *nerchas*. This is likely an important clue that these two regions enjoyed considerable cultural exchange.

Yemen

Johanna Spector (1972) outlined a general typology of Jewish cantillation in which she separated North African, Yemeni, Babylonian, and Sephardi cantillation. The melody of biblical cantillation is indicated in the texts by cantillation signs called neumes or *ta'ame hammiqra*. However, the way these neumes are sung depends on the local Jewish tradition. Spector's Babylonian included Baghdadi, Syrian, and Iranian styles, which she found to be quite similar. Sephardi cantillation was deemed to be similar to the Spanish-Portuguese style, which is natural considering the migrations after the Expulsion in 1492.

Spector found a similarity in Cochin neumes with the Yemeni neume *sof pasuq*, which is found at the end of a verse (1972:26; 1985:10). The Yemeni *sof pasuq* is sung with a melisma over a number of ornamental pitches and comes to rest at a "finalis" note, pausing to allow the Aramaic reading to begin (Ben Shalom et al 2014).

Johanna Spector noted that the Cochini songs in the synagogue are sung in Hebrew or Aramaic (1985:20).[248] I asked Yosi Oran about Aramaic songs.

> Ah, Aramaic! Yes, I've learned Aramaic. You need to know Aramaic to read Gemara.[249] You read that and then translate it to Hebrew... I don't know any Aramaic songs. When they pray, there are some letters from Aramaic, some from Hebrew. It's a bit mixed but I don't know any songs.
>
> Joseph Oran, in conversation with the author, Dec 7, 2018

There are hints of Yemeni origins in the oral history of the Malabari Jews. In my interviews, Bezalel Eliahu spoke of the Yemeni roots of the Chendamangalam Jewish community and Elias Josephai said that the Thekkumbhaagam congregation was originally Yemeni. Segal also found a Yemeni manuscript of 1678 CE that mentions that a certain Rabbi Mordecai is to send several scrolls, phylacteries and *mezuzot* to "the men of Cochin, who are the black Jews" (1983:235). Katz also mentioned that Azar, the family name of the last descendants of Joseph Rabban, was also a royal Himyarite name (1993:6).[250]

Another possible link is in the description of Jewish dress and appearance in the Census report of 1901: "…their locks brought down in front of the ears distinguish them from the other sections of the population." (Menon 1903:67). These locks, which are generally known in Hebrew as *payot,* are often associated with Hasidic Jews or Yemenite Jews (who call them *simonim,* meaning "signs"). The Hasidic Jews are known for their roots in Lurianic Kabbalah and attach mystical meaning to the *payot*.

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[248] I noted that she also recorded Samuel Hallegua singing an Aramaic song. The source on the Jewish Theological Seminary website is no longer available.
[249] From the Aramaic word meaning "tradition". The Mishna (Jewish law) and the Gemara (rabbinic commentary on its interpretation) together make the Talmud. (See https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mishna and https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gemara)
[250] Himyar was an ancient kingdom in today's Yemen.

Transcriptions

Bake's recordings agree with the general description of Cochini tunes as given by my respondents. The melodies move linearly in conjunct or step motion. None of the recordings demonstrate a range more than an octave, and most of the melody is usually concentrated within a fifth. In this regard, they are quite similar to the Mappila examples. Some of the tunes have a repeating form, like 30.5 and 30.6. Others, like 30.7, are meandering and while some motivic markers are present, the melody and metre may not conform to a strict number of measures. I have used multiple time signature changes in places to allow new lines to begin on a new measure.

As shown in the previous section, the first three or four recordings can be considered to be sourced from the Paradesi congregation and the latter recordings from non-Paradesi sources. The difference in vocal style is perceptible. For example, Bake 30.4-30.7 show much "straighter" melodies, with fewer or lighter ornaments, while Bake 30.8-30.10 show more frequent ornaments. The recordings 30.8 and 30.10 are the only two to show modal change during the song.

In 30.8, there is some ambiguity on the third degree (mostly minor, but bordering on a major third) in the first section. I have indicated this with a question mark ("?") above the concerned notes in the opening measures. The second section shifts into a higher register, and when it descends to resolve, it uses a major third. In 30.10, there are several notes that seem to be from a microtonal scale. The first four recordings in this set (from 30.4 to 30.7), which are more likely to be Paradesi, do not exhibit strong microtonal notes. There is also a difference in the second degree during ascent and descent: a minor second is used during the descent to mark the end of a verse.

Bake's Index	Item title	Approximate Tonal Centre	Range[251]	On Mode and Melodic motion	On Time and Rhythm
30.4	Psalm 29	F	minor 6th (D to Bb)	Ionian, but does not ever resolve to the root. Hangs on 2nd and 7th. Conjunct motion (by adjacent steps).	Quarter note pulse with some bars of odd meter.
30.5	Morning hymn	Gb	minor 7th (Eb to Db)	Ionian. Conjunct motion. Lines come to rest on root.	Rhythmic motif present.
30.6	Purim	Gb	minor 6th (Eb to Cb)	Ionian. Conjunct motion with occasional 3rds.	Quarter note pulse. Swung, sometimes displaced, triplet rhythm.
30.7	Oanam	Gb	minor 7th (Eb to Db)	Ionian, but avoids resolution by hanging on 2nd	Rubato, almost free time. Slow and drawn-out
30.8	Rejoicing (Black Jews)	Bb	major 7th (Bb to A)	First part is first 6 notes of Bb Aeolian in conjunct motion. Second part modulates with a large leap to Bb Mixolydian b6; resolves in Bb major.	Slow. Changes in subdivision, and displaced melodic fragments towards the end.
30.9	Prophet Jesaya, 57 days of atonement	Gb	minor 6th (Eb to Cb)	Ionian. Conjunct motion with occasional 3rds. Three-note linear motifs across the tune. Verses end with descending motif.	Changes in subdivision and rhythmic displacement of the melodic fragments.
30.10	Levitious (chapt. 16)	Ab	Octave (Eb to Eb)	Similar to Phrygian, but contains several ambiguous notes that could be considered from outside the chromatic scale. Mostly conjunct motion, with several intervallic leaps.	

Table 2: Transcription notes on Bake 30.4-30.10

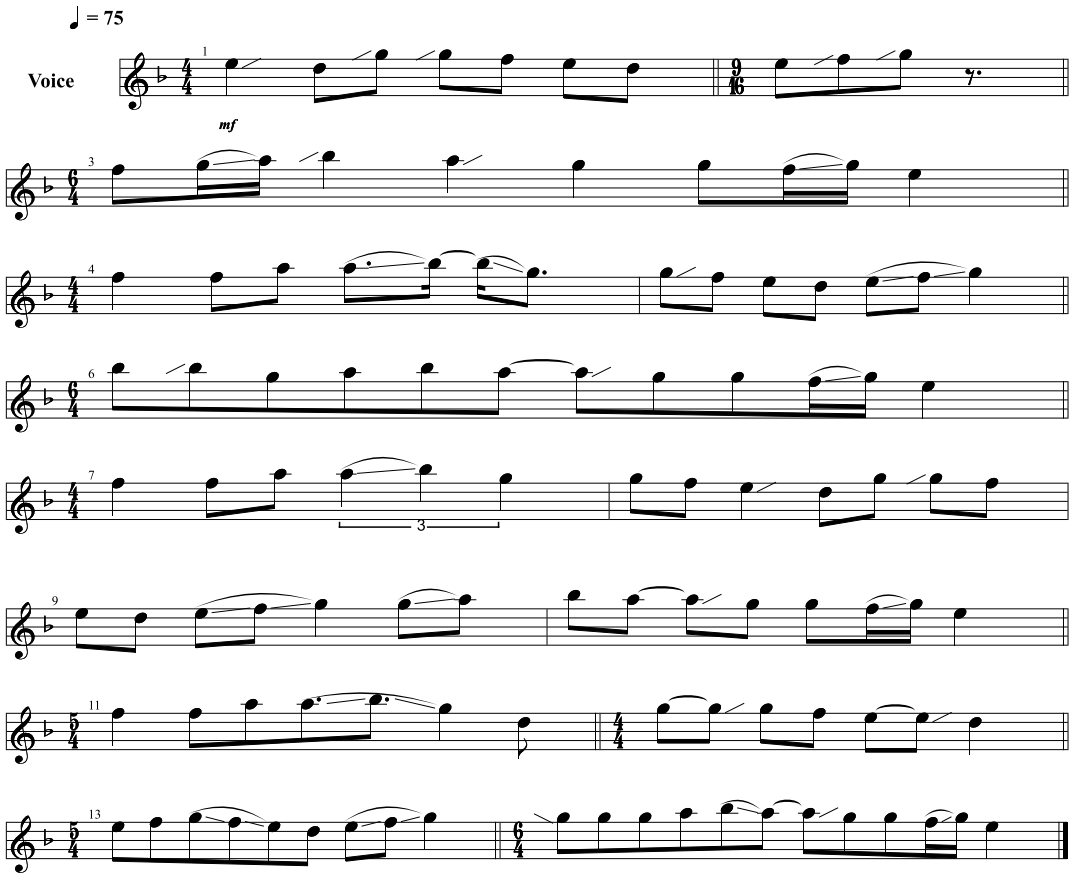
[251] I have used "b" instead of "♭" for kerning consistency.

Bake 30.4 - Psalm 29

Bake Cochin Jews

Transcribed by Mark Aranha

Standard tuning

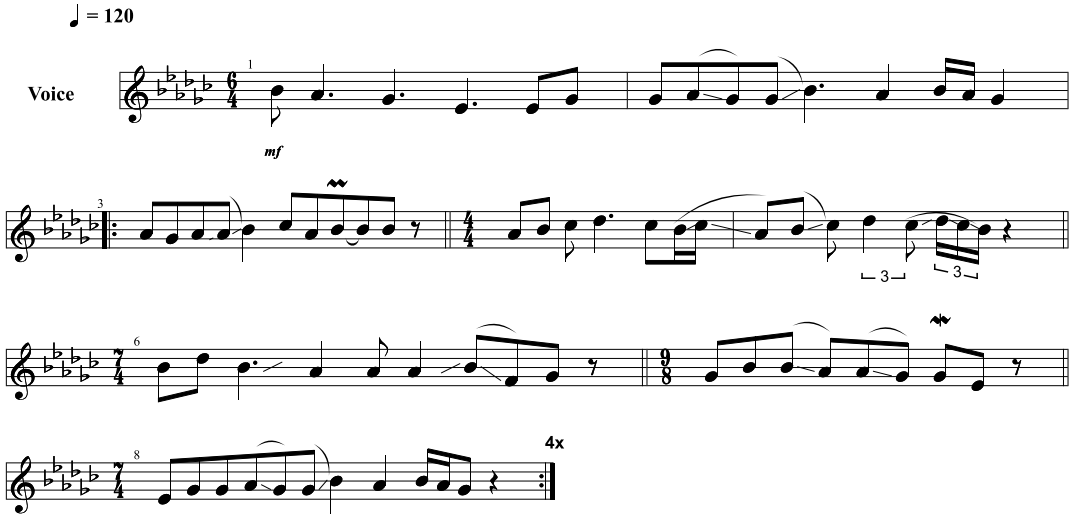


Bake 30.5 - Morning Hymn

Bake Cochin Jews

Transcribed by Mark Aranha

Standard tuning

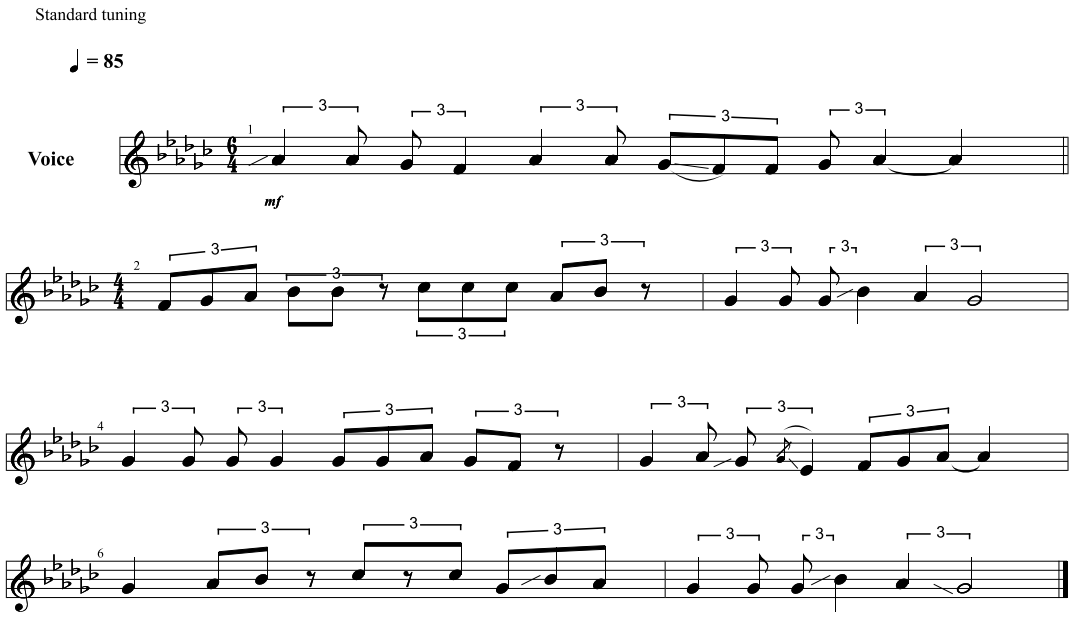


Bake 30.6 - Purim

Bake Cochin Jews

Transcribed by Mark Aranha

Standard tuning



Bake 30.7 - Oanam

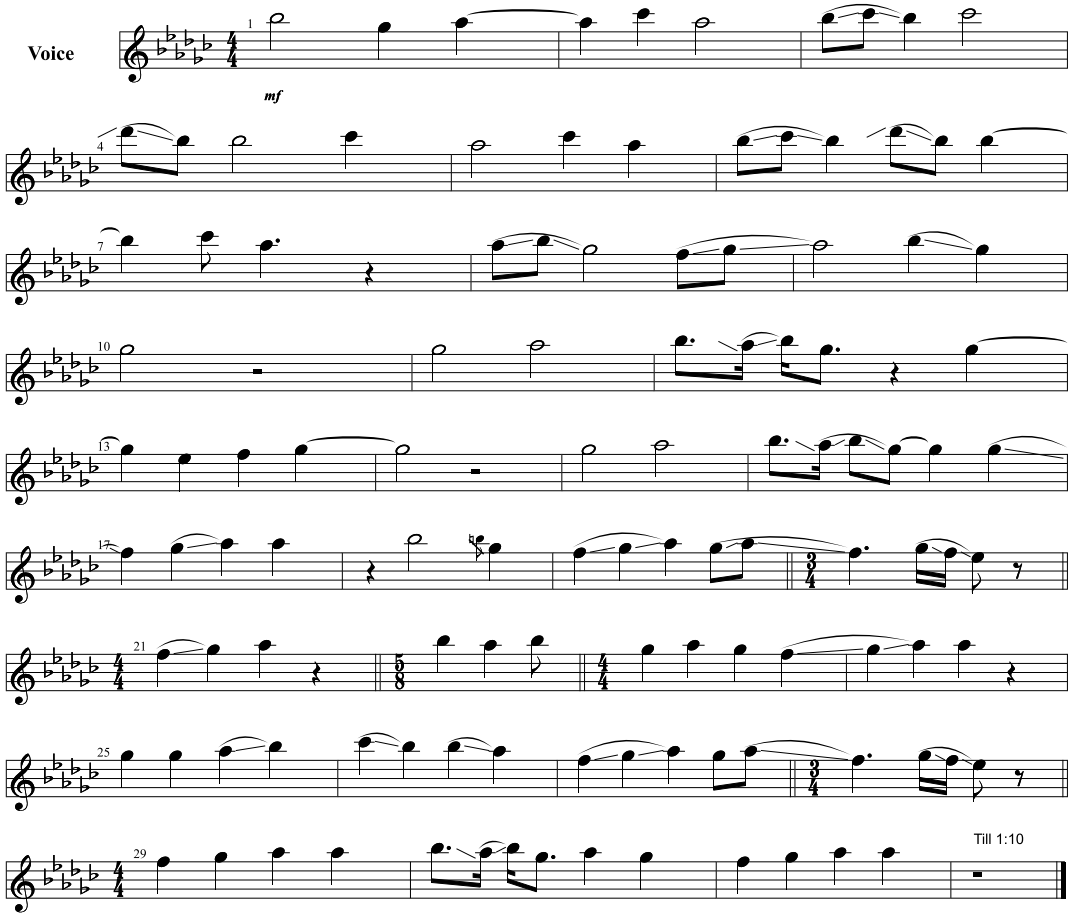
"Oshana"

Bake Cochin Jews

Transcribed by Mark Aranha

Standard tuning

♩ = 108

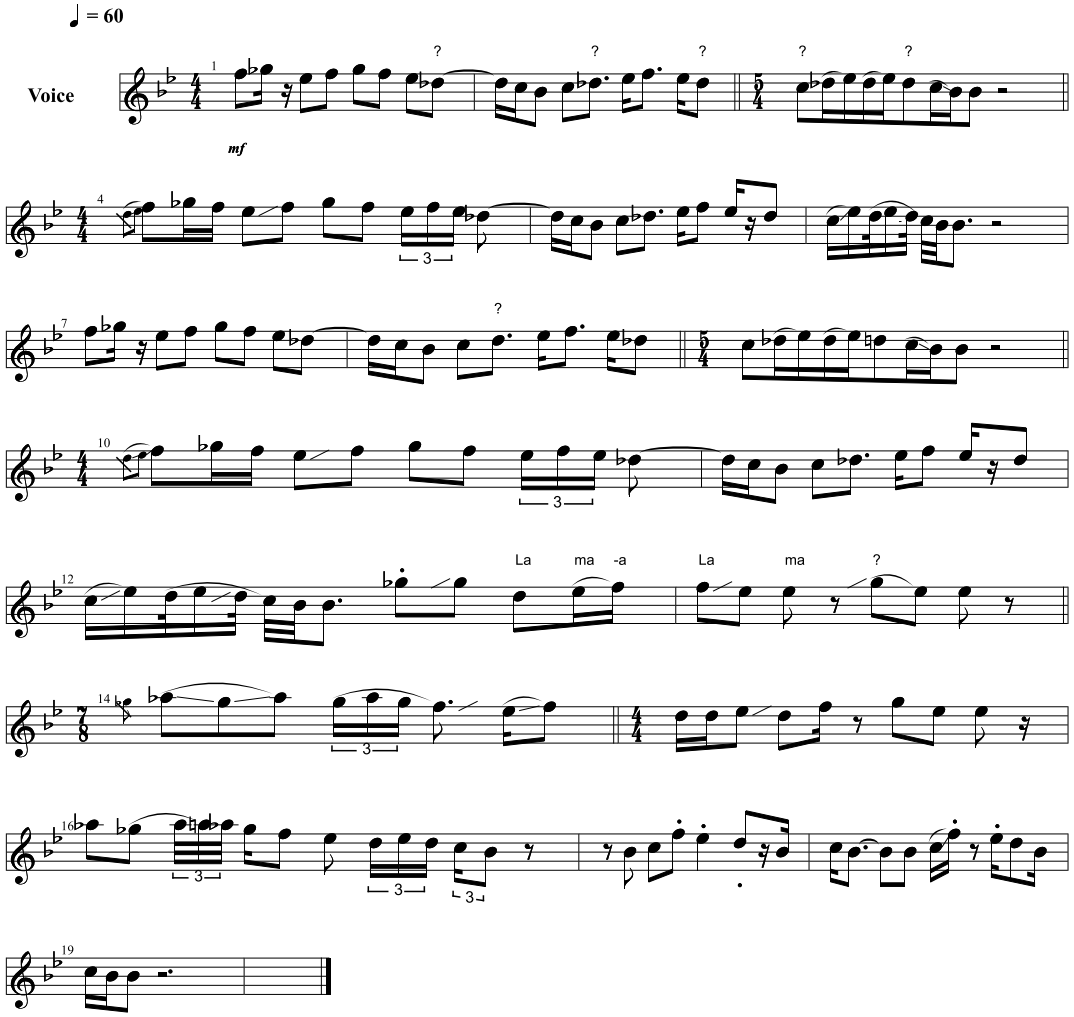


Bake 30.8 - Rejoicing (Black Jews)

Bake Cochin Jews

Transcribed by Mark Aranha

Standard tuning

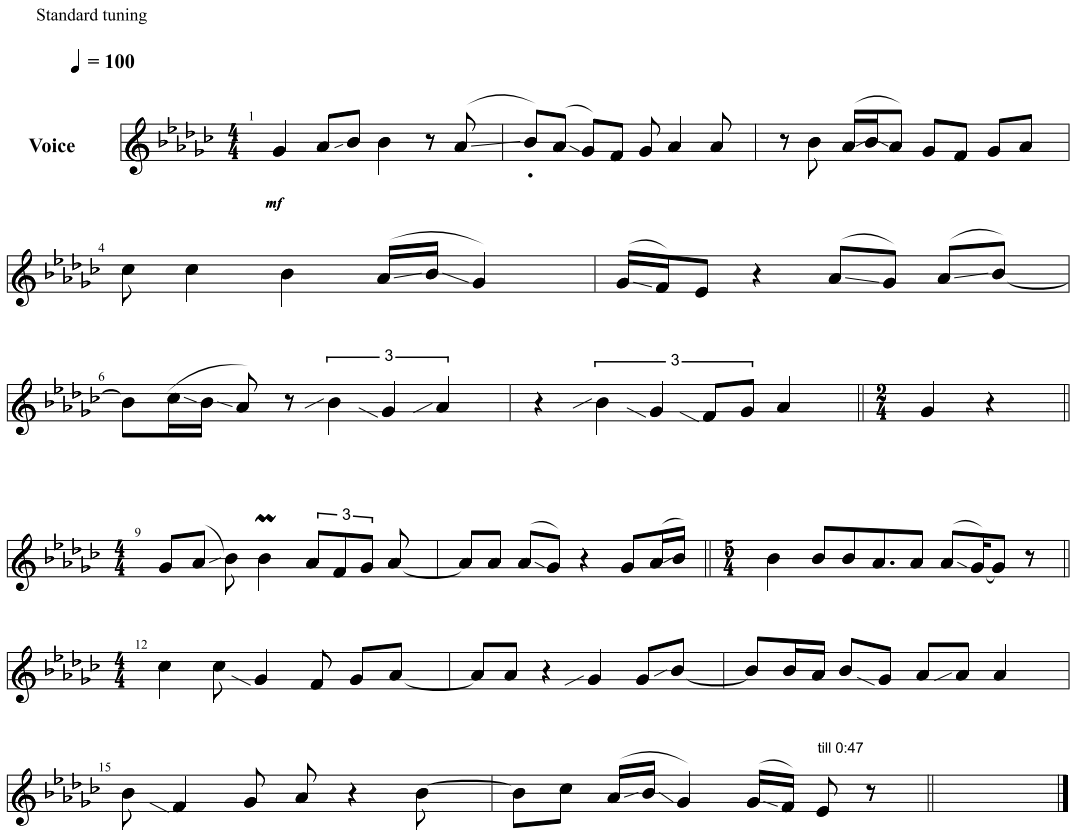


Bake 30.9 - Prophet Jesaya, 57 Days of Atonement

"Prophet Jesaya:57. Day of Atonement"

Bake Cochin Jews

Transcribed by Mark Aranha



Bake 30.10 - Levitious (chapt. 16)

"Leviticus (Chapter 16)"

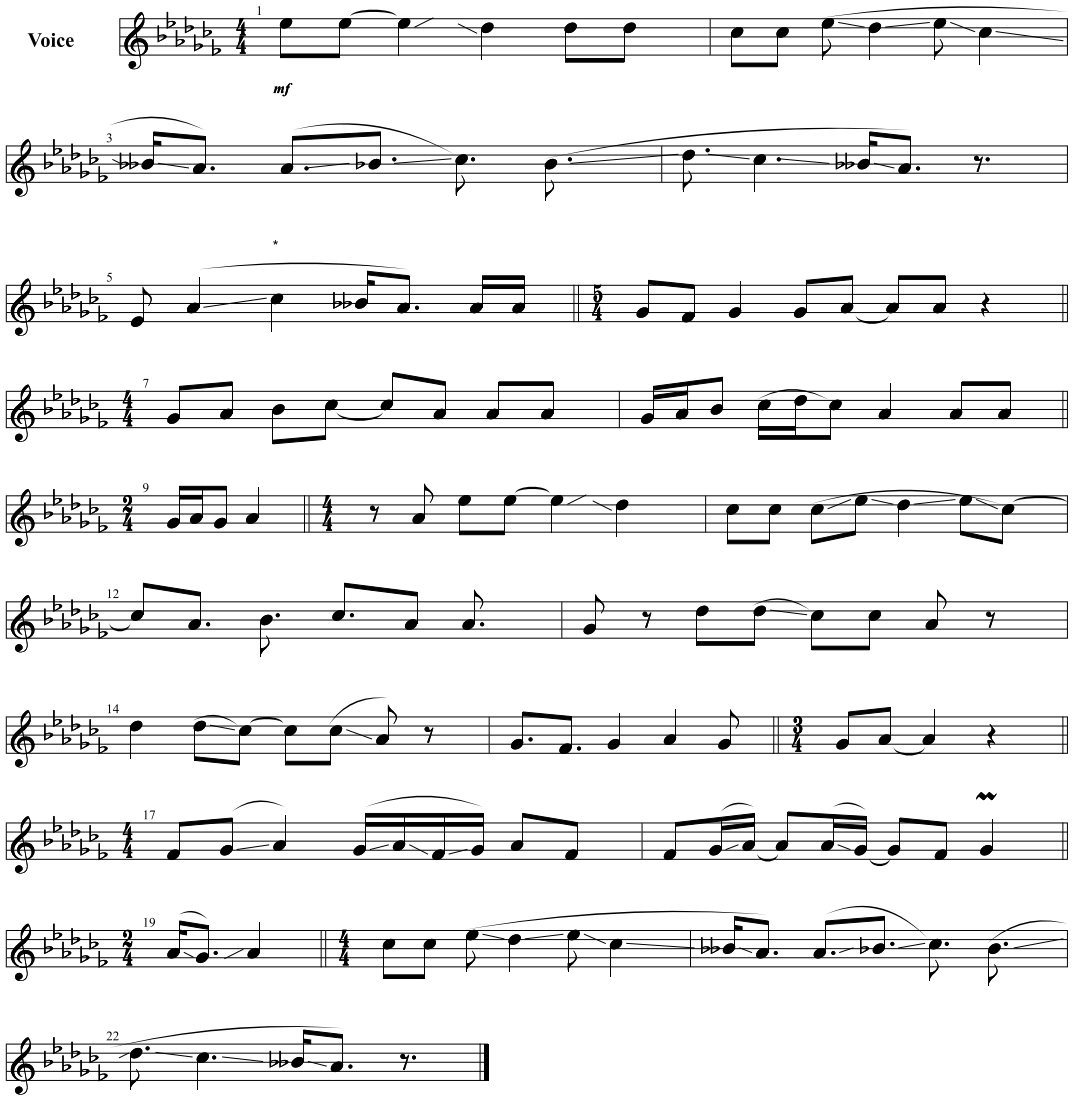
Bake Cochin Jews

Transcribed by Mark Aranha

Standard tuning

♩ = 120

Voice



Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Jews and Mappilas of Kerala each had their own individual paths in the history of Malabar, but there also existed considerable intersections that are apparent in their cultural heritage. Twentieth-century reform movements in both groups obscured the past they shared with the larger community of Malabar, which was characterised by MGS Narayanan's "cultural symbiosis" (1972).

Shared and borrowed cultural practices are fading among both communities, making Bake's recordings in 1938 all the more important. Taking these recordings back to the communities, restudying them, and repatriating them like Amy Catlin has done, enriches our collective understanding of the past.

My restudy of the selection of Bake's archive highlights the Tamil influences in Mappila culture. Many of the Mappila recordings seem to be various stages of the old art form of *vattappaattu*. The idea of the *ishal* – which could have been the original term for Mappila songs, possibly predating the concept of the Mappila as is understood today – seems of Tamil origin. The complex language used in the *Muhyadhiin Mala* was still familiar enough to the Mappilas for it to become the most popular *mappilapaattu,* and even in Bake's Mappila recordings, almost all my expert respondents identified Tamil and old Malayalam words. Combining these traces with the history of migrations of the Makhdums of Ponnani and the Marakkaars, it becomes clear that Mappila culture is historically greatly indebted to Tamil culture.

The introduction of Islam to Kerala may have happened via trading communities, but the Sufi *tariqats* are barely ever credited for their massive role in the growth of the Mappila community.[252] The Makhdums, who followed the Qadiriyya *tariqat,* turned Ponnani into an

[252] Notable exceptions are the works of PP Abdul Razak, V Kunhali, and Hussain Randathani.

internationally renowned centre of learning, forcing us to question centre-periphery models of conceptualising the medieval Indian Ocean as a "Muslim lake". Their schools fostered an elite scribal tradition, educating many of the *qazis* and *musliyaars* who went on to lead local Mappila communities in Malabar and beyond. Sufis travelled and lived among the oppressed castes, bringing them medicine, prayer, and songs. They carried with them their "bags of culture", adapting local traditions to their teachings, leading to the development of Mappila performing arts. Different Sufi *tariqats* brought different teachings, as a result of which local rites could vary, Kondotty being a case in point.

Nerchas, the rituals and ceremonies of saint veneration, were modelled on indigenous ritual frameworks of the Dravidian *velas*, in similar fashion to the *puurams* among the upper castes. Saint Thomas Christians and even Jews participated in *nerchas*, and one Jewish *nercha* for a Kabbalist rabbi is known to exist even today. While the links with local traditions were made by Dale and Menon, scholars of the Jewish diaspora related the tradition with the Moroccan *hillulot,* opening up connections all the way from North Africa to South India, and further linking Sufi and Kabbalist traditions across the Indian Ocean. If the Makhdums of Ponnani were active participants of a transoceanic textual cosmopolis, the Jews were not far behind. During the same period, the Paradesi Jews were in correspondence with Sephardic Jews in Amsterdam, and there is also evidence of the Malabari Jews receiving scrolls from the Jews of Yemen.

Since their arrival in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Paradesi Jews of Cochin dominated their more ancient counterparts in Kerala, collectively known as the Malabari Jews. The Paradesis first gained favour with the local ruler, later with the Dutch and British, and then even the early governments of independent India when many Malabari families emigrated to Israel. They attempted to connect to their Dutch counterparts by transplanting a false racial binary – Black Jews and White Jews – in Malabar. The documentation of the Jews of Kerala

by Western scholars always favoured the Paradesis and their community leaders, barely ever representing the voice of the Malabari Jews. Few published works made efforts to overcome the racial bias and language barrier, resulting in an overall skew in the literature. I interviewed senior Malabari Jews from both Kerala and Israel, and recorded their stories as a small contribution to correcting this imbalance.

While I have not published the interviews in full, I have used excerpts from these, along with evidence from historical sources and song texts, to re-examine settlements of the Jews of Kerala and present some of their narratives. The Paradesis focus on the connections between Kondungallur and Kochi, but my Malabari sources speak of events in Pallur, Parur, Chendamangalam, Mala, Ernakulam, in addition to Kochi. They also recognise that the Kadavumbhaagam and Thekkumbhaagam congregations originally came from two different ethnic identities – Baghdadi and Yemeni.

Arnold Bake recorded only seven Jewish tunes in Kochi, but he managed to represent both Malabari as well as Paradesi groups. Jairazbhoy and Catlin, hosted by the Paradesi Koder family, restudied some of these recordings. I extended their work in Ernakulam, confirming one of Bake's Malabari Jewish recordings and adding further insight on the significance of this corpus.

I also recorded a few more songs sung by Yael and Eliyahu Dekel, and Elias Josephai, including two *bakkashot* that I found in Morrocan and Sephardic lists of the genre. Dekel believes that the songs he sung for me are part of an old tradition among the Kerala Jews. This implies an old connection with the Mizrahim. He sang a *Havdalah* tune also performed at the *nercha* or *neder* of Nehemiah Mota. Natives of the Malabar region agree that they can instantly recognise a Mappila song by its tune, or "way of singing". This idea of the Mappila *ishal* is not completely alien to the Jews either: they use melody (or melodic variation) as a marker of identity.

My field work and study of the Bake materials have revealed connections between the Kerala Jews and Mizrahi communities such as the Yemenite Jews and Moroccan Jews. These connections warrant focused research. In fact, when viewed together with Mappila traditions such as *nerchas,* the regions and communities seem even more intertwined. Sadly, the rich tapestry of performing arts developed around these *nerchas* is fading away as the syncretic nature of *nerchas* is frowned upon by orthodox religious authorities moving towards monolithic conceptions of their faith.

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Appendix I: Selection of recordings under study

From the Arnold Bake collection at the Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology (ARCE), Gurugram:

ARCE Index	Tape No. (Bake's Index)	Description	Place	Date
30:39:84	33.9	Birth of the Prophet and subsequent events.	Mambaram	19/4/38
30:40:84	34.1	Praise of the Prophet (voice, bulbul-tarang and tabla)	"	"
"	34.2	Vannam	"	"
"	34.3	In praise of Mambaram Thayal (Saint)	"	"
"	34.4	Oanavelu kottu (bow orchestra)	Trichur	10/4/38
"	34.5	Dakku etakka	"	"
"	34.6	[unclear] …Gita Govinda in Malayali	"	"
"	34.7	Astapadi, Khamboj raga. (34.6-7 sung by Gopala Marar, drum by Achyuta Marar.)	"	"
30:43:84	37.1	Malyali song about Hejra (blind singer with "vina").	Malappuram	19/4/38
"	37.2	Group of Moplahs singing about the Prophet (Malayali & Arabic)	"	"
"	37.3	Moplahs singing praise of Prophet	"	"
"	37.4	Marriage song- erection of the marriage pandal.	"	"
"	37.5	Marriage song- when bridegroom enters the pandal.	"	"
30:44:84	38.1	Opani patu (Catalogue of the Prophets).	Mambaram	19/4/38
"	38.2	Origin of the Moplah Kings of Cherur.	"	"
"	38.3	Names of the Prophet and incidents at his birth (in Arabic).	"	"
"	38.4	Song about Malappuram Naca (festival) (Channans?).	Mallapuram (Mambaram)	19/4/38
"	38.5	Moral discourse. (sadupadesha)	"	"
"	38.6	Ballad about the battle of Badar (of the Prophet Muhammad).	"	"
"	38.7	Opani patu - conversation of the Prophet with the King of Damascus.	"	"
30:45:84	39.1	Koran fragment.	"	"
"	39.2	Koran fragment - introductory speech at marriage.	"	"
"	39.3	Four Islamic kolatam songs by fishermen of the village.	Parapanangadi	"
"	39.4	Moplah coolees singing Kolatam.	Pollangode Estate.	20/4/38
"	39.5	Four coolies singing in pairs.	"	"
"	39.6	Song about the Prophet Muhammad.	"	"
"	39.7	Song about Paradise - Moplah women.	"	"
"	39.8	Song about Prophet Muhammad. "	"	"
30:46:84	40.1	Cherimes: Prayer for health of Master.	"	"
"	40.2	Aranadan Hillfolk - cry.	"	"
"	40.3	" " " . Three men singing with trance-like dance	"	"
"	40.4	Moplah description of woman.	"	"
"	40.5	Krishna song by Hindu tapper.	"	"
"	40.6	Laccadivian song about Prophet and spread of Isam (arabic). By blind singer, Saiyad Ismail (vakil) Khira of Kalpeni.	Calicut	22/4/38
"	40.7	Boatlanding song.	"	"

30:36:84	30.4	Jewish Community Songs, Psalm 29.				Cochin	7/4/38
“	30.5	“	“	“	, morning hymn.	“	“
“	30.6	“	“	“	, Purim.	“	“
“	30.7	“	“	“	, Oanam.	“	“
“	30.8	“	“	“	, Rejoicing (black Jews)	“	“
“	30.9	“	“	“	, Prophet Jesaya, 57 days of atonement.	“	“
“	30.10	“	“	“	, Levitious (chapt. 16).	“	“

From *Bake Restudy 1984* by NA Jairazbhoy and AR Catlin, at ARCE, Gurugram.

ARCE Collection	**Restudy Index**	**Description**	**Place**	**Date**
1:214:84	41.1	Psalm 29 (Samuel Hallegua)	Cochin	29/3/84
“	41.2	Morning Prayer (Samuel Hallegua)	Cochin	29/3/84
“	41.3	Purim (Samuel Hallegua)	Cochin	29/3/84
“	41.4	Osanna (JE Cohen)	Cochin	29/3/84
“	41.5	Aramaic Shingli Tune (Samuel Hallegua)	Cochin	29/3/84
“	41.6	Torah Melody from Pentateuch (Samuel Hallegua)	Cochin	29/3/84

Appendix II: Materials from Restudy 1994

Catlin-Jairazbhoy, Amy. 1994. "DVD 4. Pullangode Estate: Moplahs, Aranadhans". DVD video, in *Kerala Bake Restudy Items 1938-1991-1994 (Five Edited Dvds/Files for Repatriation to Univ of Calicut and Professor Abdul Razak, PSMO College*. Courtesy Prof. PP Abdul Razak, University of Calicut.

The following is the text description of the video in DVD 4:

DVD 4. Pullangode Estate: Moplahs, Aranadhans

0:00 5 Moplah women still, film with Tefi audio 39.4

Sign: Pullangode Estate, Pullangode Rubber Products

0:40 Aspinwall photo, current manager with Amy,

0:47 driving through rubber plantation trees, collect sap (silent)

1:25 Playback session 1991: Bake Tefi 39.4 Leader-chorus, clapping xxx-.

Amy and Nazir outdoors with Moplah women and men.

Still of Amy clapping for Moplah women.

1:45 Six Moplah women sing and clap same song in front of Manager's mansion

2:45 Five Moplah girls sing, clap, dance *filmi* (?) version of *oppana* wedding song for young bride (possibly based on film *Angadi*?).

Five girls lead the bride, sing and clap "*mangala*".

3:06 Schoolmistress sings solo while reading lyrics from paper, as girls dance.

3:30 Girls enact Islamic praying song, while teacher continues to sing

3:50 Girls resume dance and clapping song, while teacher continues to sing.

4:27 Bake still of Moplah men dancing in front of Pullangode Manager's mansion; Mrs. Bake in chair watches.

4:33 still of eight Moplah men in white shirts, six in long bordered *mundus*, two in plaid mundus, all holding *chilambu* pair on one hand. Upright drum on floor in center.

Moplah men in white *mundus* and turbans do circular stick dance (Bake footage) while singing (Tefi 39.4 under: "Moplah coolees singing Kolatam. Pollangode Estate 20/4/38").

5:00 N91: closeup of *chilambu*; Amy asks "*Chilambu*?" Moplah men nod and agree, shake *chilambu*.

5:17 Moplah men dance and sing while playing *chilambu*.

5:45 In minimal light from jeep headlights, Amy stands next to Aranadan couple, holding TCD5 playback cassette. After playback Bake Tefi 40.2 ("Aranadhan Hillfolk – cry), Amy says "They say that is the first song we just listened to, now let's listen to the second song". Playback Bake Tefi 40.3 (Aranadhan Hllfolk cry. Three men singing with trance-like dance), Aranadhan. Cut to:

6:22 Aranadhan woman and man begin singing in unison, then melodic lines diverge, woman in lower range. Woman sings along with man, some heterophony, man's body begins trembling, puts clasped hands on his head, woman's voice lower register, she trembles.

Cut to:

7:35 Woman stops singing, man trembles violently, shouts, metal bells on man's body jingle, as assistant holds him with both hands, woman holds him with her left hand.

8:05 Man stretches arms to side, shaking becomes slower, man hops on each foot, stretching other leg forward.

Appendix III: List of Field Recordings

Dekel, Eliyahu. 2018. "Mah L'Cha Yitzri". Audio recording. Recorded by Mark Aranha. December 2018. Ernakulam.

Ferokabad Kolkali Sangham. 2018. "Aane Maadanapuu Kaani Thenale". Audio recording. Recorded by Mark Aranha. December 2018. Kondotty.

Ferokabad Kolkali Sangham. 2018. "Aane Maadanapuu Kaani Thenale". Video recording. Recorded by Mark Aranha. December 2018. Kondotty.

Ferokabad Kolkali Sangham. 2018. "An Example of *Vaithari*". Audio recording. Recorded by Mark Aranha. December 2018. Kondotty.

Kutty, VM. 2018. "Kaattukuthu Kalyaanam (Earring Ceremony)". Audio recording. Recorded by Mark Aranha. January 2018. Kondotty.

Oran, Joseph. 2018. "Old Malayalam Song about Joseph, Menashe, and Ephraim". Audio recording. Recorded by Mark Aranha. December 2018. Ernakulam.

Razak, PP Abdul. 2018. "Thashriif Oppana". Audio recording. Recorded by Mark Aranha. December 2018. Kozhikode.

Note on Archival and Field Material

Appendices I and II to my thesis contain details of archival audio and video recordings that I have cited and used in my research. Appendix III contains details of my personal field recordings during my field research.
These files are too large to be uploaded here but they will be available on the CDs provided to the UCT Humanities office.

These files are also available at the following link:
https://my.pcloud.com/publink/show?code=kZPoIWkZ1etEvF4oY0Ysxy5I4uoJ6FLW7Hdk

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