

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WRITING THE HISTORY of a small minority community, let alone a displaced one, is an unrewarding task. Why would the history of just a few thousand people matter and to whom? Curiously enough and despite their small numbers throughout history, Malabar Jews ignited the imagination of travellers and story tellers in faraway lands for centuries, framing a millennium-old history as bitter rivalries between “Black” and “White” Jews. But for the descendants of Malabar Jews in Israel and Kerala, these (hi)stories are offensive and degrading, and as a woman of colour myself, I too felt uncomfortable with this historical depiction. That said, it was not my intention to correct the conventional historical narratives when I began studying the Malayalam language and Jewish Malayalam songs two decades back. Yet, the many discrepancies and incongruities in the stories told about this community prompted me to publish a few articles between 2013 and 2018, attempting to point out some glaring misconceptions. Rather than scholars, however, it was the third generation of Malabari Jewish migrants in Israel who noticed my work and began urging me to further explore their communal history, perceiving existing scholarship as biased and amateurish. As the linguistic, cultural, and material heritage of previous generations is fast fading, the sense of bitter loss is exacerbated. Many of us, descendants of Asian Jews in Israel, live with a sense of broken pasts, and I felt that in this context my academic skills could change the flawed narrative. This book is thus prompted by contacts with descendants of Kerala Jews in Israel, struggling to preserve their ancestral heritage, tangible and intangible alike. In this respect, I am first and foremost indebted to Meydad Eliyahu (Kallingal) and Yehoshua Eliyahu (Palliparambil) who were a source of ongoing encouragement and support in this unrewarding, and at times deeply unsettling, task. We co-authored an article on the lost material heritage of Kochi Jews (published in 2022), and I have since relied on some of the findings and insights that ensued during our joint work. There are many other community members and heritage preservation activists who kindly provided information and support over the years, in particular Miriam Dekel and Yosi Oran, tirelessly toiling to preserve and revive Jewish Malayalam language and culture in Israel. I am also greatly indebted to Abdullah Anjillath for prompting me to investigate the Jewish past of his community in Madayi in Kerala.

This study was at first intended to cover a much longer period, from 849 to 1954, but the volume of sources incorporated therein far exceeded my expectation when embarking on this task in 2017. By the time I reached the fourth chapter of this book, I came to realize that the source material to be explored requires more than one book, and so decided to narrow down the scope of the present book to the period between 849 and 1489. It is not only the volume of the sources relevant to this period, but also the diversity of the source languages, like Sanskrit and Malayalam, none of which I fully master, not even Hebrew which happens to be my native language. I may be judged as being reckless in attempting an analysis of such diverse sources in Indic languages, and even more reckless still to approach sources in languages that I have never formally studied like Arabic, Judeo-Arabic, and Aramaic, at times even daring to offer unconventional

readings and interpretations. I would have not done so if not for the ongoing support of colleagues who were kind enough to read some of the sources with me. For the most difficult texts analyzed in this book, the Payyaṇṇūrpāṭṭu and the biblical *pāṭṭu* I owe deep gratitude to T. B. Venugopala Panicker, whose multi-layered and diverse knowledge of Indic languages has been an inexhaustible resource for many years. I am similarly indebted to Ines Weinrich for her patience in reading Arabic texts with me related to or from Malabar, despite my rudimentary knowledge of the language. Weinrich was also kind enough to read the manuscript draft and point out some weak or unclear arguments. I do not often listen carefully enough to my colleagues' advice, so do bear in mind that errors in the translations are all mine.

Many of the primary and secondary sources used in this study are related to the Indian Ocean history of Muslims and Jews, where expertise in global history is indispensable. I am fortunate to have gained the support of colleagues who provided invaluable feedback on different aspects of the historical analysis. Gratitude is thus due to Menashe Anzi and Mahmood Kooria who read the manuscript and commented on my analysis of Jewish and Islamic texts in Hebrew/Aramaic and Arabic/Malayalam respectively, prompting sharper rigour and attention to details. I am equally indebted to Mehrdad and Natalie Shokoohy who taught me how to "read" buildings, objects, and landscapes, and encouraged me to incorporate such sources into the history of Kerala Jews. I hope to sustain these ongoing conversations and collaborations across disciplinary boundaries to continue telling the story of Malabar Jews in a future study on the periods following 1489. I am also indebted to the anonymous reviewer of this manuscript, whose sharp-pointed comments and helpful suggestions improved the manuscript and rescued me from some embarrassing mistakes and sloppy formulations related to Malayalam and Kerala's history.

Last but not least, thanks are also due to institutional support and encouragement. The book proposal was developed at the Center for Religious Studies in the Ruhr University Bochum, prompted by Alexandra Cuffel and Adam Knobler in 2017. The Center also generously supported an international workshop in Bochum in May 2017 (under the auspices of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg) in collaboration with Arabists and Indian Ocean historians, among them Rajan Gurukkal, whose keynote lecture on kinship and religious networks in medieval Malabar profoundly influenced my analysis. The University of Glasgow has supported my work since employing me in 2018, with several travel grants under the auspices of the College of Arts to continue the international collaborations with colleagues and community members between 2018 and 2019. The School of Critical Studies in Glasgow too generously supported several online activities undertaken between 2020 and 2022, from consultations with T. B. Venugopala Panicker, to the design of the maps by Edo Amin, a pleasure to work with on visualizing information.

There are many others along the way, community members, academic colleagues, and advanced students who contributed in different ways to developing the research underlying the present study. It is for the sake of brevity that I leave out their names, but I do credit in the footnotes each and everyone for generously sharing their knowledge and insights.