Working Paper
Series | 01

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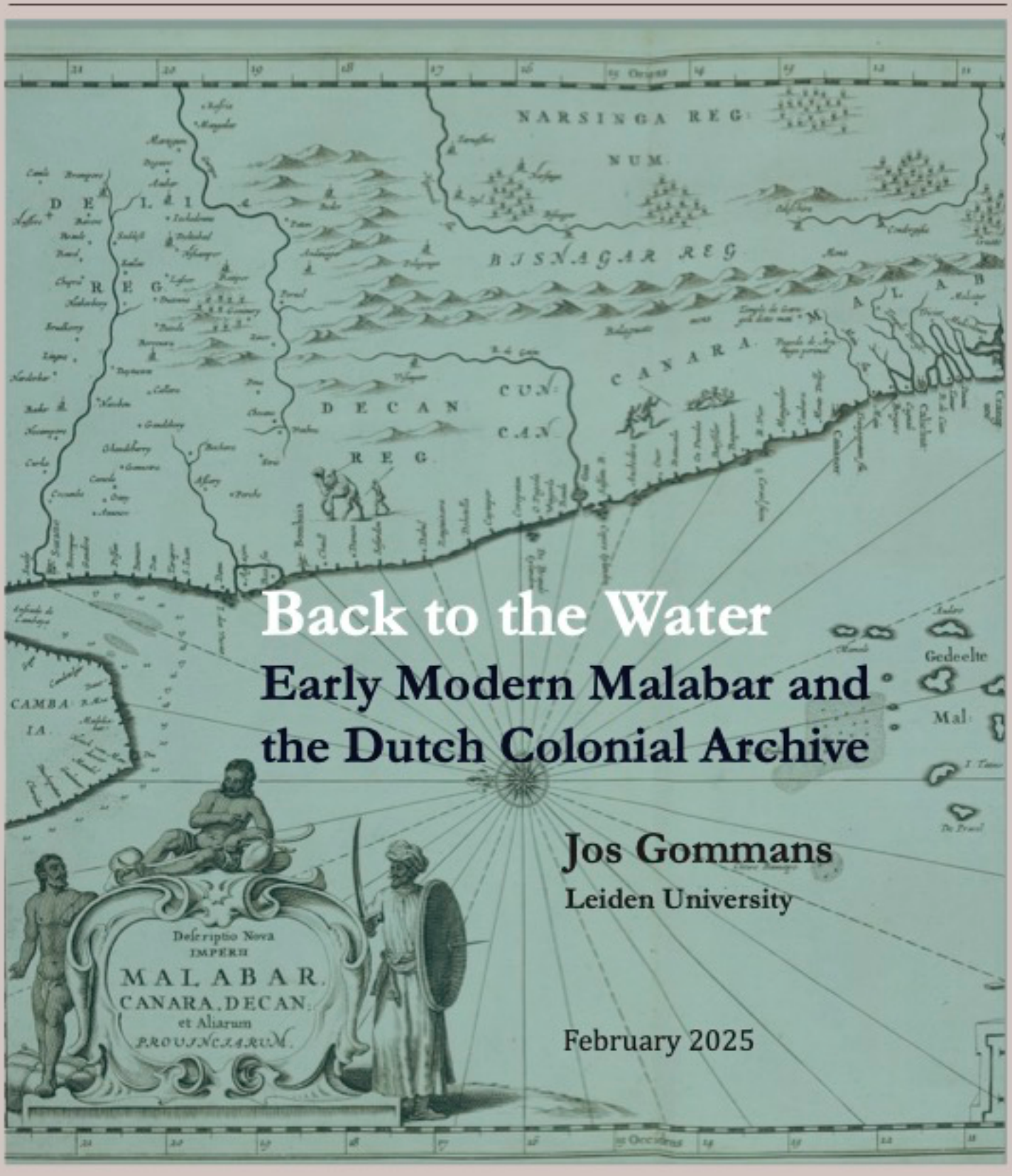

Back to the Water

Early Modern Malabar and the Dutch Colonial Archive

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February 2025

iSHORE
Institute for Social Sciences,
Humanities and Oceanic Research

Published in India in 2025
by Institute Social Sciences, Humanities and Oceanic Research,
Kozhikode, Kerala, 670036, India
www.ishorekerala.com

BACK TO THE WATER

Early Modern Malabar and the Dutch Colonial Archive[1]

JOS GOMMANS

> This Malabar Coast is one of the most pleasant and fertile in Asia, about 130 miles long, consisting of a large number of kingdoms – some of which important, others very insignificant – whose capitals are mainly located on the coast.
>
> The Malabaris are great lovers of poetry, rhyme, and singing, preserving the oldest histories of their country in verses that are 72 syllables long and very beautiful, which they usually sing daily to remember the fortunes of their country.
>
> François Valentyn[2]

At the launch of the Cosmos Malabaricus project, I would like to signal the potentialities of the vast Dutch archive for the early modern history of Malabar, the region that grosso modo overlaps

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[1] In 2021, together with Manjusha Kuruppath and Mahmood Kooria, the author initiated the *Cosmos Malabaricus* project in which Indian and Dutch historians work together to further exploit the archives of the Dutch East India Company for the early modern history of Malabar. The main partners in this project are Leiden University and the Kerala Council for Historical Research. This exploratory paper by an outsider of the field of Kerala Studies has profited immensely from conversations with colleagues and students from Kerala. In particular, I would like to thank Mahmood Kooria, A.G. Menon, Lennart Bes, Binu John, Fathima E.V., Manjusha Kuruppath, Renu Abraham, as well as the Cosmos Malabaricus fellows in Leiden, to have taken the trouble to read the text and share their comments with me. Naturally, any errors in this paper remain solely my responsibility.

[2] *Dese kust van Malabar, een der vermakelykste en vrugtbaarste van Oost-Indiën, en omtrent 130 mylen lang, bestaat uit een menigte van Koningrijken, waar onder zommige voorname, als ook enige zeer geringe zyn, welker voornaamste hoofdsteden sich mede meest aan strand vertoonen. (2) De Malabaaren zyn groote liefhebbers van de Dicht-, Rijm- en Zang-konst, bewarende de oudste Geschiedenissen van hun land in Verssen, die 72 syllaben lang, en echter fraei zyn, welke zy gewoonlyk dagelyx zingen, om zoo de gevallen van hun land te onthouden* (François Valentyn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën vervattende een naaukeurige en uitvoerige behandelinge van Nederlands mogentheyd in die gewesten* (Dordrecht en Amsterdam: Joannes van Braam en Gerard onder de Linden, 1724), Volume 5, Part 2, resp. 7, 13).

with the present-day South Indian state of Kerala.[3] Although we know a great deal already about the importance of Malabar for the Dutch Empire, we are still at a loss of integrating the Dutch presence in the history of the region itself. Hence, it is still not too late to follow the call of the late Dutch historian Jacob van Leur (1908-1942) who, more than seven decades ago, spurred historians to leave behind the perspective of "the cramped little European fortress, the stuffy factory and the armed ship on the roe" [*het gezichtspunt van de benauwde kleine Europeesche forteres, de bedompte loge en het gewapende schip op de ree*] to really disembark and move into the interior.[4]

Although Van Leur's call has been taken up by a few Dutch historians, Indian historians in particular have led the way. I am thinking of the pioneering work of Ashin Das Gupta on Malabar and Surat, Om Prakash on Bengal, and Sinnappah Arasaratnam on Coromandel. Their work was published between 1967 and 1986.[5] In their wake, the Dutch historians Hugo s'Jacob and Mark de Lannoy and, somewhat later, the Indian historians Anjana Singh and Binu John Mailaparambil wrote the first in-depth studies on Malabar that were extensively based on Dutch archival sources.[6] However, considering the wealth of the Dutch archival materials on this region, one can assert that the utilization of these resources for understanding early modern Malabar history has only just begun.

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[3] For what is now Kerala, the Dutch used the term Malabar, which was one of their administrative units in South Asia, first under Ceylon, since 1669 directly under Batavia. Although both Kerala and Malabar are historical terms, for the sake of convenience, I will primarily use the term Malabar unless a specific contemporary context requires the use of Kerala.

[4] Citation from J.C. van Leur, "Eenige aantekeeningen betreffende de mogelijkheid der 18e eeuw als categorie in de Indische geschiedschrijving", *Tijdschrift voor de Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 80 (1940) 544-567.

[5] Just to mention their most substantial contributions: Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) and idem, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, c. 1700-1750* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1979); Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1720* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Merchant, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[6] The first study that focuses on the early Dutch settlements in Malabar as based on the VOC archive, is M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofsz, *De vestiging der Nederlanders ter kuste Malabar* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1943). Hugo s'Jacob wrote extensively on the region and his work culminated in his monograph *The Rajas of Cochin 1663-1720: Kings, Chiefs and the Dutch East India Company* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2000); Mark de Lannoy, *The Kulasekhara Perumals of Travancore. History and State Formation in Travancore from 1671 to 1758* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, Leiden University, 1997); Anjana Singh, *Fort Cochin in Kerala, 1750–1830. The Social Condition of a Dutch Community in an Indian Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Binu John Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea. The Ali Rajas of Cannanore and the Political Economy of Malabar (1663–1723)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). The last three were all Leiden University PhD dissertations. Although an earlier generation of Kerala historians – the most important of which are K.M. Panikkar, T.I. Poonen, M.O. Koshy, and S. Krishna Iyer – wrote groundbreaking works on the period, they had much less access to the Dutch archives.

Meanwhile, some groundbreaking work on the South Indian Nayaka courts demonstrated the enormous potential of the Dutch archive when it could be brought together with indigenous sources. I am referring to the seminal *Symbols of Substance* of the mid-1990s in which Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, three scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds, combined literary sources in Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu with European sources in Portuguese, English, French, and indeed, Dutch.[7] By doing so, these three scholars uncovered a new, more exuberant kind of South Indian kingship away from Brahmanical values, bestowed with a new sensibility for conspicuous bodily consumption. Recently, the Dutch historian Lennart Bes, has taken up their example, also combining Indian and many more Dutch sources, to further sharpen and nuance the insights coming from *Symbols of Substance*.[8] Considering the relatively rich Dutch archive as well as the availability of many indigenous sources, it seems that Malabar too may expect to win a great deal from such an integrated approach. Besides, one can expect that the Dutch archive – as it was produced by an Asia-wide organisation, including southern Africa – will enable historians to also take account of the wider spatial dimension of the Malabar region, be it overseas across the Indian Ocean or overland across the Western Ghats with the rest of the Indian subcontinent.[9]

In this explorative paper I aim, firstly, to give a brief historical overview of early modern Malabar that entirely derives from the existing historiography written in European languages. Although there are various excellent studies on specific polities or communities, on commercial or agricultural developments, on literature or architecture and on many other more specific topics, what seems to be lacking is an integrated account of these developments, at least in English, at least for the early modern period. To be clear, the latter is taken very roughly from the early fifteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, without necessarily suggesting a sharp break with the previous, so-called medieval period or with the later British colonial period. Obviously, my overview here cannot fill in that gap but merely aims to sketch in broad strokes the historical

[7] Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Dean Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[8] Lennart Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara: Court Politics in Early Modern South India* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2022; Indian edition: New Delhi: Manohar 2023).

[9] A recent work in line with this "cultural turn" is V.V. Haridas, *Zamorins and the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan 2016) which follows in the footsteps of the work of K.V. Krishna Ayyar and makes very effective use of regional sources, in particular the *Kozhikodan Granthavari* which contains circa 70 volumes of palm leaf and 200 volumes of paper records in the former archives of the Zamorin, but dispenses with the Dutch archive.

scenery in which the Dutch operated and which their extensive reports must tell us about. Hence, my second objective is to briefly explore the potentialities of Dutch sources for a better understanding of Malabar's early modern history. So, I will start with a short discussion of Malabar's political economy, after which I will highlight the remarkable and simultaneous occurrence of a series of cultural renaissances that were patronized by increasingly prosperous little kingdoms and triggered by Malabar's intensifying interactions with the outside world. Only at the very end I will make a few closing remarks by looking through the Dutch archival window at these developments which are meant to help a new generation of historians working with the Dutch archive to set up a new research agenda.

MALABAR'S POLITICAL ECONOMY

Protected by the Western Ghats from the military inroads which regularly impacted most of the Indian subcontinent, the southwestern coastal region of Malabar witnessed a relatively unhindered development of its political-economic landscape. At the same time, due to the increasing global demand of Malabar products, more wealth entered the region, facilitating the further expansion of agriculture. Hence, at the end of our period the agrarian southern part of the region emerged as its economic powerhouse. More generally speaking, the combination of low political and high economic impact of the outside world on the region, generated an extremely fragmented political structure in which the heads of various extended political households operated as co-sharers of an increasingly wealthy realm.[10] Besides, the military means of the regional powers were too limited to conquer the region as a whole. It was only thanks to the mid-eighteenth-century military-fiscal reforms under Marthanda Varma of Travancore (r. 1729-1758) that a Malabar ruler for the first time in history managed to impose a relatively centralized administration on large parts of the region. Thus, also Malabar became part of an eighteenth-century South Asia that can be characterized as an age of regional centralization.

Indeed, despite its relative isolation from the landside, even in the earlier days, Malabar often shared its history with other parts of the subcontinent. This goes, for example, for the India-wide process of Sanskritisation which by the end of the first millennium, also started to affect the socio-political structure of Malabar. It was also in this period, i.e. from the ninth to the twelfth century, that Kerala historians, following the lead of P.N. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai (1904-1973),

[10] This is largely based on the illuminating analysis of the Travancore situation by K.N. Ganesh in "The Process of State Formation in Travancore", *Studies in History* 6,1 (1990) 15-33.

uncovered the existence of what appeared to have been a true empire: the so-called Chera or Kulasekhara Empire of Mahodayapuram.[11] Using such ostentatious titles like *Mahodayapura Parameshvara* or *Keraladhinatha*, its rulers claimed the overlordship of the Kerala region as a whole. But as later historians such as Raghava Varier, Kesavan Veluthat and Rajan Gurukkal have convincingly demonstrated, compared to its counterparts on the subcontinent, the reach of this empire of the "Cheraman Perumals" (Perumal is the common Tamil epithet meaning "the great one") remained limited to its capital Makotai or Mahodayapuram near Kodungallur. Instead, they stress that this empire was a rather loosely knit federation which oversaw 32 Brahman agrarian settlements (*sanketams*) that emerged in close alliance with the rise of a class of big landlords supported by extensive political households (*svarupams*) and militias. In return for giving patronage and protection, these Nayar landlords (*natuvazhis* and *desavazhis*) acquired Kshatriya status from certain Brahmans.[12] It is also claimed by Kunjan Pillai that, at this very stage, Malabar's famed matrilineal succession system (*marumakkathayam*) was invented to facilitate intermarriage between these two groups, thus taking prestige from the Brahmans but keeping them out of a succession that resided in the sister of the ruler and her (adopted) son.[13]

Thanks to what can be conceived as a condominium of Brahmans and Nayars, by the twelfth century the Brahman settlements had grown into large agrarian corporations and temple complexes with considerable immunity from the temporal powers. As a result, after the fall of the Chera Empire, it appears as if the combination of wealthy temples and mighty *svarupams* left no room for powerful overarching polities to emerge. At the same time, legends about Kerala's golden past were used to legitimise the new political and agricultural equilibrium at the regional level. Hence, we see the construction of the legendary chronicle of Kerala history, the *Keralolpatti*, which contains the story of the turbulent god Parasurama who had flung his battle-axe far out into the sea to make the waters recede and create the land of Kerala to be bestowed on the Brahmans. In addition, it tells the story of how the last Perumal partitioned his realm among his

[11] He wrote primarily in Malayalam. His ideas are repeated in A. Sreedhara Menon's *Survey of Kerala History* (1967).

[12] Hence these *svarupams* are based on the organization of many small territorial units over which a powerful matrilineal joint family exercises its political and judicial authority. In this study, *svarupam* is the basic political unit of Malabar's early modern political landscape (see also M.R. Raghana Varier, "State as *Svarūpam*: An Introductory Essay", in R. Champakalakshi, Keshavan Veluthat and T.R. Venugopulan (eds), *State and Society in Pre-modern South India* (Thrissur: Cosmobooks, 2002) 120-130).

[13] This all too brief survey of Malabar history builds on the ccontributions of K.N. Ganesh, P.M. Rajan Gurukkal, M.G.S. Narayanan, Kesavan Veluthat, and M.R. Raghava Varier in P.J. Cherian (ed.), *Perspectives on Kerala History, The Second Millennium, Kerala State Gazetteer*, *Volume II, Part II* (Thiruvananthapuram: Government of Kerala, 1999) 1-123.

near relatives and dependents before leaving for Mecca to embrace Islam.[14] In this way the *Keralolpatti* tradition not only rationalized the position of the Brahmans as big landholders but also that of the main Nayar (or Nair) chieftains who all derived their authority from the supposed donation of the last Chera Perumal.[15] In due course, the four most acclaimed powers of the region, each claiming its own special place under the Perumal's dispensation, from south to north, became Venad (Travancore), Kochi (Cochin), Kozhikode (Calicut) and Kannur.[16] Far from being centralized, though, these states remained rather patchy polities in which the main Nayar *svarupams* continued to jockey for power and status, be it at the various local courts or as councillors/custodians of temples. Temples were crucial for acknowledging a chief of a *svarupam* though the latter's participation in the temple's rituals and festivals supervised by Brahmans.[17]

Even the *svarupams* themselves were divided among matrilineal descent groups or *tavazhis.* The elite members of the household were allotted overlapping rights over the resources within the

[14] *Kēraḷōlpatti by Gundert*, translated by T. Mahdava Menon (Thiruvananthapuram: International School of Dravidian Linguistics, 2003) – earlier edition at Mangalore: Basel Mission Press, 1868. For a local tradition, see M. R. Raghava Varier (ed.), *Keralolpatti Granthavari: The Kolattunad Traditions* (Malayalam) (Calicut: Calicut University, 1984). The *Kerala-pazhama* is an anonymous Malayalam text that originates from the sixteenth century written as a continuation of the *Keralolpatti* as it describes the first three decades of Portuguese-Calicut encounters (*Kēraḷa-Paṛama or History of Malabar from A.D. 1498-1631* [sic], translated by Hermann Gundert (Mangalore: Basel Mission Press, 1868) and *Kerala Pazhama: Antiquity of Kerala*, translated by T. Madhava Menon (Thiruvananthapur: International School of Dravidian Linguistics, 2003).

[15] Following the British colonial surveys like the *Malabar Manual* (1887) by William Logan, P. Sundaram Pillai (1855-1897) was one of the first Kerala historians who distanced himself from these legend-based histories in his *Some Early Sovereigns of Travancore* (1894) which was also exploited for the *Travancore State Manual* by V. Nagam Aiya (1906). In the case of Kochi, Shungoonny Menon's son K.P. Padmanabha Menon criticized the historical parts of C. Achyuta Menon's *Cochin State Manual* (1911) when writing his two-volume *Kochirajya Caritram* (1912). About a decade later he used Jacobus Canter Visscher's eighteenth-century letters to write the four volume *History of Kerala* (1924). Later Kerala historians found themselves in an increasingly favourable position to profit from the increasing archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic information that was published in new series like the *Travancore Archaeological Series* (1910-1938) or the *Rama Varma Research Institute Bulletin* (1925-) culminating in the work of M.G.S. Narayanan (from 1972 onward, see his 2013 *Perumals of Kerala*) who also incorporated into his systematic analysis the eleventh-century *kavya* work *Mushika-vamsha* by the Chera court poet Athula as well as various bhakti hymns and plays which so far had remained outside the historian's interest.

[16] Not surprisingly, these four polities are indeed the main players in early modern Malabar and as such they will be used as convenient labels despite the fact that they were also locally known by their *svarupam* names: Kochi as Perumpadappu Svarupam, Kozhikode as Nediyiruppu Svarupam and Kannur as Kolathunadu.

[17] As elsewhere in India, temples incorporated tantra as an integral part of their rites, festivals, and plays (Gavin Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 171, 209). The way in which tantric forms of worship are integral to daily ritual practices of ritual magic is minutely prescribed in the fifteenth-century *Tantrasamuccaya* of Cenasnambudri. See also the early twentieth-century collection of such materials by Kottarathil Sankunni (1855-1937), in his eight-volume *Garland of Legends* (T.C. Narayan*, Lore and Legends of Kerala: Selections from Kottarathil Sankunni's Aithihyamala* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

region which carried shared dues from lands, tolls from trade, privileges in temples etc. Although there was no central organisation for the collection of dues, during the sixteenth century, the role of accountants and intermediary landlords became more prominent in managing these rights, thus opening a new arena of conflict over their access. Indeed, according to K.N. Ganesh this period was characterized by the rise of an intermediate group of landlords-*cum*-accountants who managed the collection of dues from the tenants for the hereditary landholders (i.e. holders of *janmam*) consisting of Brahmans, temples, and *natuvazhi* chiefs. This is also revealed in the further localization of legal codes and customary rights that showed up following the clearing of more forested areas (along the coast and the Western Ghats), primarily meant to increase the production of cash crops like coconut, areca-nut, ginger, and pepper. With a few exceptions, such as the riverine lowlands surrounding the so-called Palakkad (Palghat) Gap, the eastern gateway to Malabar, the North by and large lacked the space/conditions for massive agricultural expansion, which in the long run, may have contributed to the relative demise of Kozhikode and the rise of Kochi and, in particular, Travancore during the eighteenth century.[18]

All this seems to have been facilitated by the growth of the cash economy following the increase of global maritime trade. This was stimulated by various financial incentives that were part of the growth of land mortgages. Although the temples, Brahman landlords and segments of the ruling *svarupams* held customary land ownership, the intermediate landholders-*cum*-accountants were more and more able to lay their hands on it through mortgage. The traditional landlords attempted to keep their hold on resources by staging great temple festivals and by imposing their will by using their militia more frequently, thus stimulating a further militarisation of the countryside.[19]

MALABAR RENAISSANCE

The combination of increasing wealth and political fragmentation conditioned the emergence of a rich vernacular literary tradition in Malayalam. It had started earlier during the first centuries

[18] This last sentence is my own preliminary observation. At the moment we lack a longue-durée geographical analysis of the region.

[19] K.N. Ganesh, "Ownership and Control of Land in Medieval Kerala: *Janmam-Kanam* relations during the 16th-18th Centuries", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 28,3 (1991) 299-321. Recently, Abilash Malayil, elaborated on Ganesh's findings by analysing the creation of a substantial class of parvenue landowners as well as an equally significant social class of sharecroppers and wage-earners. According to Malayil, their emergence characterised the Malabar early modern experience (Abilash Malayil, "Commercialisation and Landed Proprietorship on the Malabar Coast in the Eighteenth Century", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 60,1 (2023) 5-36).

after 1000 CE through authors who, on the one hand, started to create distance with the dominant Tamil tradition, but on the other hand, emphatically embraced the high Sanskrit tradition of epics, Puranas, and philosophical treatises. Indeed, as elsewhere on the subcontinent, Sankritisation entailed vernacularisation and vice versa.[20] This is most prominently shown in the fourteenth-century *Lilatilakam* (Garland of the Sacred Shade). It is a Sanskrit text that sought to authorize and regularize the production of Manipravalam, sometimes also called Middle Malayalam: a hybrid amalgamation between the spoken tongue of Malabar and classical Sanskrit (*kavya*).[21] Manipravalam, literary means "pearls and coral" after the image of this language as stringing together the different gems of local language forms with those of Sanskrit. According to Rich Freeman, the project of Manipravalam urged the rejection of eastern Tamil grammatical and phonetic features in favour of local speech alternatives, while simultaneously legislating the massive introduction of Sanskrit vocabulary and literary forms. In other words, the *Lilatilakam* represents a Sanskrit declaration of linguistic independence of Manipravalam against Tamil. Interestingly, the political context in which this happened is one of those rare imperial moments in Malabar's history, during the first quarter of the fourteenth century, when King Ravivarman of Travancore claimed – albeit theoretical – suzerainty over South India after gaining a victory over the Pandyas and the Cholas.[22]

Apart from the wide variety of Manipravalam works, the *Lilatilakam* itself mentions an altogether different literary genre called Pattu which is more Tamil-oriented. The two most important examples that later scholars considered suitable of this genre are the fourteenth-century *Ramacaritam* and the thirteenth-century *Tirunizhalmala*. Although both works have a background in Vaishnava *bhakti*, their theme is very different; whereas the first is a local reworking of the *Ramayana*, the latter is primarily about rituals of tantric exorcism performed by specialists called Malayans at the Krishna temple of Aranmula.[23]

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[20] Sheldon Pollock *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[21] For a recent discussion of the role of Prakrit as a literary precedent in this process, see Sivan Goren-Arzony,"Sweet, Sweet Language: Prakrit and Maṇipravāḷam in Premodern Kerala", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 58, 1 (2021) 7-27.

[22] Arulala Perumal inscription of Ravivarman of Kerala, edited and translated by E. Hultsch. *Epigraphia Indica* 4 [1896-97] (1979) 17; 145-48. This "Bhoja of the South" wrote a play (*Pradyumnabhyudaya*) himself.

[23] Cezary Galewicz, "A Jar of Pure Poetry over the Head of a Polluted God: One the Cultural Economy of *Tirunilalmāla*", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 59,4 (2022) 447-470.

Looking at the social implications of Manipravalam, it is often used in a context that highlights excessive male eroticism regarding non-Brahman courtesans. This is explained with reference to the Brahmans' marriage rules that allowed only the eldest son to wed and reproduce within his caste. This led to regular sexual relationships of junior Brahman sons with women of the matrilineal Nayar castes of kings and chiefs, giving birth to their successors. From this point of view, Manipravalam can indeed be seen as another manifestation of that grand alliance between groups of Brahmans and Nayar landlords, as mentioned earlier.[24] Indeed, for the entire spectrum of courtly literature, we see that the classical Sanskrit tradition fed into the various literary vernaculars in the form of commentaries and digests, particularly on ritual and its ancillary disciplines like astrology, iconology and architecture, as well as in guides to the complex social rituals of the Nambudiri Brahmans. Something similar can be said about the script. Vattezhuttu, the script that was used not only in Tamil and Pattu but also in the earliest, tenth-to-thirteenth-century inscriptions in so-called Old Malayalam, became increasingly replaced by *Grantha,* the script already used for writing Sanskrit and Manipravalam.[25] Later, after our period, Grantha was replaced by Aryaezhuttu to write Modern Malayalam.

Apparently beyond court and temple, folk-like songs (also *pattu*) flourished.[26] These were popular adaptations of Sanskrit epics and Puranic myths. One important author was the late-sixteenth-century bhakti poet Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan.[27] He recomposed the Sanskritic *Ramayana* as a nearly modern Malayalam parrot-song (*kilippattu*) known as the *Adhyatma*

[24] "In Kerala, that alliance was connubial, it was reproductive, it entailed a sexual politics of power and knowledge, and Manipravalam was its outcome." (Rich Freeman, "Caught in Translation: Ideologies of Literary Language in Kerala's Maṇipravāḷam", in Vincenzo Vergiani (ed.), *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-Cultural Fertilisation: Sanskrit and Tamil in Medieval India* (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2013) 31, 35). For the emergence of Malayalam, see the various studies of Rich Freeman, "Rubies and Coral: The Lapidary Crafting of Language in Kerala", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57,1 (1998) 38-65; "Genre and Society: The Literary Culture of Pre-Modern Kerala", in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 437-500; "The Literature of Hinduism in Malayalam", in Gavin Flood (ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2003) 159-180; "Caught in Translation: Ideologies of Literary Language in Kerala's Maṇipravāḷam", in Vincenzo Vergiani (ed.) *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-Cultural Fertilisation: Sanskrit and Tamil in Medieval India* (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2013) 199-239.

[25] A. Sreedhara Menon, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala* (Kottayam: DC Books, 1978) 189. *Vattezhuttu* continued to be used, though, in its more oblong version called *Kolezhuttu*. For an interesting Dutch mirror on these developments, based on the Indian contributions to the *Hortus Malabaricus*, see A. Govindankutty, "Some Observations on Seventeenth-Century Malayalam", *Indo-Iranian Journal* 25 (1983) 241-273.

[26] As *pattu* literally means "song", these more popular folk-songs should not be confused with the earlier-mentioned Pattu genre of the *Ramacaritam* and the *Tirunizhalmala*.

[27] C. Achyuta Menon, *Ežuttacan and his Age* (Madras: University of Madras, 1940).

Ramayanam which became the best reproduced manuscript in the Malabar region, possibly even stimulating the emergence of Christian and Jewish *pattu* genres.[28]

Meanwhile, going back to the courts and temples, it was not only the Sanskritic vernacular genres that flourished, but also Sanskrit itself continued to have a parallel life of its own. So apart from about 200 Malayalam works, 150 Sanskrit titles were produced in the early modern period.[29] Among the most influential political works in Sanskrit is an annotation of the *kavya* work of Bharavi's sixth-century *Kiratarjuniyam*, describing an episode of the *Mahabharata* where Arjuna and Lord Shiva fight each other, the latter in the guise of a *kirata*, or "mountain-dwelling hunter".[30] Another work that was taught in the houses of the Nayar chiefs is the *Vyavaharamala* written by Mazhamangalam Narayanan Nambuthiri assigned to the sixteenth century.[31] Following the example of King Ravivarman, who supposedly wrote the famous Sanskrit drama *Pradyumnabhyudaya* (The Felicity of Pradyumna) for the stage at the Padmanabhaswamy temple, it seems that also other rulers wrote Sanskrit works themselves.[32] We know that Manaveda, the Zamorin of Kozhikode (1585-1658), produced the *Krishnanattam*, a dance drama presenting the story of Krishna in eight plays that became strongly associated with the rise of the Guruvayur temple as the leading centre of the Krishna cult.[33] Apart from such literary works, between the thirteenth and seventeenth century Malabar produced an enormous number of works in sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, political science, medicine as well as in the more occult

[28] For similar Christian and Jewish *pattu*, see respectively István Perczel, "Syriac Christianity in India", in Daniel King (ed), *The Syriac World* (London and New York: Routledge 2018) 653-697, and Ophira Gamliel, "Jewish Malayalam in Southern India", in Benjamin Hary and Sarah Bunin Benor (eds), *Languages in Jewish Communities, Past and Present* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2018) 357-79, and "Jewish Malayalam", in Aaron Rubin and Lily Kahn (eds), *Handbook of Jewish Languages* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 503-516.

[29] N.M. Namboodiri, "Cultural Traditions in Medieval Kerala", in P.J. Cherian (ed.), *Perspectives on Kerala History, The Second Millennium, Kerala State Gazetteer*, *Volume II, Part II* (Thiruvananthapuram: Government of Kerala, 1999) 265-327.

[30] See Indira Visvanathan Peterson, *Design and Rhetoric in the Sanskrit Court Epic: The Kiratarjuniya of Bharavi* (Albany: Suny Press, 2003).

[31] For a critical view on the way later Nambudiris during colonial rule have claimed a dominant position in Kerala history as practitioners and protectors of *acharam* (customary ritual practice), see K.N. Sunandan, *Caste, Knowledge and Power: Ways of Knowing in Twentieth Century Malabar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[32] For a recent translation, see *The "Pradyumnabhyudaya" of Ravivarman: A New Sanskrit Text of the Trivandrum Edition and English Translation*. Translated with an Introduction by Christopher R. Austin (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019).

[33] Its rise is also reflected in the Bhakti song *Vasudevapattu* by the poet Poonthanam Nambudiri (1547-1640). See G. Sudev Krishna Sharman and Maciej Karasinski-Sroka, "The Song of Vāsudeva: Some Remarks on a Recently Rediscovered Manuscript of Vāsudēvappāṭṭu, a Devotional Work ascribed to Pūntānam", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 49,1 (2021) 105-128. See also Vaidyanathan, *Śrī Krishna: The Lord of Guruvayur* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1992).

branches.[34] This golden period in Malabar literature and science is inconceivable without the patronage of increasingly wealthy courts and temples.

Although starting earlier through oral accounts, it seems that it was also during the early modern period that Malabar's historiographical genre comes fully into its own; interestingly, also the written versions of the already mentioned *Keralolpatti* date from the same period. European travellers in the region were deeply impressed by the way everything of courtly interest was systematically registered on palm leaves.[35] Indeed, it seems that there was an increasing tendency at *svarupams* and temples alike to keep records of major events in so-called *granthavaris.* For example, in the early eighteenth century, the Padmanabhaswamy temple of Thiruvananthapuram produced the *Kshetrakaryam Curuna* and the *Rajyakaryam Curuna*: a collection of recovered and copied documents relating to the monetary obligations of the Venad kings to the temple. It is part of the huge *Matilakam Records*, a collection of circa 3000 bundels (*curunas*) of palm leaves going back to the fourteenth century, partly transcribed on paper, dealing with the day-to-day happenings relating to politics and revenue collection of the temple.[36] The writing of *granthavaris* continued deep into the nineteenth century, still informing the English-language court-history *History of Travancore* (1878) by P. Shungoonny Menon. Very much like the grand Purana genre, *granthavaris* often started with mythical origin stories turning more sober and realistic when approaching the present.[37]

[34] For an overview of these developments, see the maybe controversial but definitely fascinating works of the Indian born African scholar George Gheverghese Joseph, *The Crest of the Peacock: Non-European Roots of Mathematics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and *A Passage to Infinity: Medieval Indian Mathematics from Kerala and its Impact* (New Delhi: Sage 2009). According to Joseph, Malabar mathematicians anticipated the works of Wallis, James Gregory, Taylor, Newton and Leibniz by 200 years.

[35] Sebastian Prange, "The Pagan King Replies: An Indian Perspective on the Portuguese Arrival in India", *Itinerario* 41,1 (2017) 151-173. Prange refers to the accounts of Duarte Barbosa and François Pyrard de Laval on Kozhikode.

[36] Held in the Central Archives in Thiruvananthapuram. The transcribed parts were used in a Malayalam publication by Mahakavi Ulloor in 1941 (with brief English summaries), in the appendix of T.K. Velu Pillai's *Travancore State Manual* (1940), and more recently by S. Uma Maheswari, also in Malayalam.

[37] One translated court *granthavari* is one on for the Perumbadappu *svarupam* of Kochi. It was first published in 1916 and in 1973 also with an English translation by S. Raimon (*A Translation of a Record-Grandhavari in The State Archives* (Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala State Archives Department, Government of Kerala, 2005). Apart from those already mentioned, other published *granthavari* materials have been produced at the educational trust of Vallathol Vidyapeetham at Sukapuram (Edappal) including S. Rajendu's editing the *granthavaris* of the *Arangottu Swaroopam and of the Tirumanamkunnus Temple* (Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeetham, 2016) and *Sthānārōhaṇam Caṭaṅṅukal* (Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeetham, 2004), being the first part of the Kozhikkodan Granthavari or Palace Records of the Zamorins of Kozhikkode compiled and edited with an introductory study by Dr M.R. Raghava Varier. Also earlier, the *Vanjeri Grandhavari*, edited by M.G.S. Narayanan (Calicut: Calicut University, Historical Series, 1, 1987) as discussed in Donald R. Davis Jr. "Recovering the Indigenous Legal

In retrospect, from about the thirteenth to the seventeenth century the various regional courts and temples of Malabar were able to stage a true renaissance in which the existing literary Sanskrit cosmopolis was revived through the process Malayalam vernacularisation; the latter also impacting that cosmopolis. As we will see in the following paragraph, the same mechanism of global and local interaction affected the other religious communities in Malabar, giving rise to not just one, but many more Malabar renaissances.[38] Let us start, though, with a brief description of the changing commercial landscape of the region which had such a tremendous influence on these other communities.

HOUSES BY THE SEA

The phrase "Houses by the Sea" is taken from Dilip Menon's insightful 1999 article.[39] It concisely suggests two important observations. Firstly, when dealing with the state in early modern Malabar, we should not think of well-demarcated, centralized states, but rather of extensive, mutually entangled households of, and even within the *svarupams*. Secondly, that during our period in particular, these households increasingly turned to the sea and its spectacularly growing commercial prospects. Of course, Malabar's maritime orientation was not at all a purely early modern phenomenon. State-formation in Malabar had always been closely linked to the shifting maritime networks of commerce in the Indian Ocean.[40] From the early centuries of the common era, Malabar pepper had attracted foreign traders who made Muziris (near Kodungallur) an

Traditions of India: Classical Hindu Law in Practice in Late Medieval Kerala", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 27 (1999) 159-213. Pertaining to this same region to the south of Kozhikode is K.K.N. Kurup (ed.), *Kavalappara Papers* (Calicut: University of Calicut 1987), i.e. also a collection of records of the Nayar household that ruled the village Kavalappara in the Valluvanad region. The Kavalappara chief had held sway over the locality with his five thousand Nayar warriors, extensive landed property and the entailing aristocratic privileges and dignities approved by the Raja of Palakkad/Palghat. Finally, a yet rarely used collection of *granthavaris* and other source material from Kerala is part of the so-called Mackenzie collection (see the abstracts in T.V. Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts: Summaries of the Historical Manuscripts in the Mackenzie Collection, Volume 1* (Tamil and Malayalam) (Madras: Manorama Press, 1972) 282-341.

[38] The term renaissance here is more multidimensional and culturally fluid than the one that was traditionally used for the Italian experience. See Jyotsna G. Singh's preface and introduction to her edited, *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion, 1500-1700* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2021) xix, xxix.

[39] Dilip M. Menon, "Houses by the Sea: State-Formation Experiments in Malabar, 1760-1800", *Economic and Political Weekly* 34 (July 17-23, 1999) 1995-2003.

[40] The following survey builds primarily on Genevieve Bouchon, *'Regent of the Sea': Cannanore's Response to Portuguese Expansion, 1507-1528* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Pius Malekandathil, "Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study om the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of Their Trade, 1000-1800", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, 2-3 (2007) 259-286.

important hub of Roman trade through the Red Sea, probably also bringing the first Jewish and (St. Thomas) Christian immigrants to the region. Interestingly, though, Muziris seems to have remained a somewhat isolated cosmopolitan enclave as historians have so far failed to associate it with political developments in its hinterland.

Although Sassanid merchants from Persia continued the trade in the Arabian Seas, a new commercial wave started in the ninth century with the arrival of more and more Christian, Jewish and Muslim-Arab merchants as well as the emergence of the indigenous Manigramam and Anjuvannam merchant guilds. Not surprisingly, these commercial developments coincided with the advent of the Chera Empire. The main commercial centre became Quilon (Kurakkeni Kollam) which, based on its pepper wealth, connected the long-distance trade that stretched from the Mediterranean to the South China Sea. Even after the decline of the Cheras, these maritime contacts continued, even expanded further, and stimulated the smaller *svarupams* in the interior to move their capitals closer to the coast. As shown in the fascinating study of Guanmian Xu, the rise of Kozhikode (Calicut) as a major interregional commercial hub was partly the result of a rising demand for pepper in Mongol-ruled China. This not only triggered Chinese shipping to Malabar, but also enabled Kozhikode to exchange commodities from East and Southeast Asia for horses from the Persian Gulf.[41] The commercial and diplomatic connections between Malabar and China reached a peak during the Ming maritime expeditions (1405-1433) led by Admiral Zheng He (1371-1433) which, according to Tansen Sen, not only resulted in tremendous increase in the circulation of people, goods and animals across the Indian Ocean but also created new platforms for cosmopolitan discourse.[42] So after these "long" first, ninth, and fourteenth centuries, the long sixteenth century turned out to be another prosperous age of commerce for Malabar, this time sparked by the expanding pepper market that followed the opening of the Cape route to Europe.

Meanwhile, it appears that in Malabar there developed a community-based division of the commercial networks as Jewish and Christian traders had started their operations in the South (increasingly moving from Kollam to Kochi) and Muslim traders tended to concentrate their activities in the North, primarily in Kozhikode and Kolathunad. Although these communities

[41] Guanmian Xu, "Pepper to Sea Cucumbers: Chinese Gustatory Revolution in Global History, 900-1840" (PhD dissertation, Leiden University, 2021).

[42] Tansen Sen, "The Impact of Zheng He's Expeditions on Indian Ocean Interactions", *Bulletin of SOAS* 79, 3 (2016) 609-636, there 623.

mostly operated under the patronage of coastal polities-*cum*-households, during the sixteenth century Muslim merchants managed to carve out their own little kingdom based in Kannur (Cannanore) but also expanding over the Maldives. The overall result was a roughly tripartite symbiosis between (a) often foreign (*paradesi*) merchants like the Al-Karimis from Mamluk Egypt or the Kelings from Coromandel taking care of the long-distance trade, (b) regional traders like the Marakkar Muslims and Chetties taking care of the coastal trade between Coromandel and Malabar, and (c) local traders like the Mappila Muslims taking care of the connections with the main production centres and more local markets in the interior. Part of the latter layer were the St. Thomas Christians who served as important producers and suppliers of spices in the interior.[43]

Fig.1: Mishkal Mosque in Kozhikode, named after its founder, the fourteenth-century trader Nakhuda Mithqali. Photograph Jos Gommans.

[43] Primarily in the Kochi hinterland, from south to north: Erumely, Kanjirapally, Erattupetta and Chalakudy.

From the sixteenth century onward, the Portuguese trade – that is the private trade of Portuguese *casados* supported by the official Estado da India – tried to break into this system from the top-down, thus not only fighting the Muslim long-distance merchants at the top, but at the same time also seeking the collaboration of the networks lower down the system. Two and a half decades after the Portuguese tried to impose their dominance over the long-distance connections through aggressive protection racketeering, Kunjali Marakkar merchants, who had gradually moved into the long-distance trade themselves, shifted their base from Kochi to Kozhikode to build a powerful alliance with the Zamorin at Kozhikode and the Ottomans against the Portuguese. Meanwhile, the raja of Kochi – since 1503 under the aggressive gaze of a Portuguese fort and an increasing wealthy *casado* community – managed to consolidate his position through strengthening his alliance with Jewish and Iberian New-Christian traders, obviously with a keen eye on expanding Kochi's hold on interregional trade.

Coming to the arrival of the VOC, after their successful military operations in the early 1660s, the VOC took possession of the most important Portuguese forts – Kodungallur (Cranganore) and Kollam in 1661; Kochi and Kannur in 1663 – making Kochi the dominant political force in the region, only to be replaced by Travancore after the battle of Colachel in 1741. The Dutch set up numerous smaller factories along the coast and started to maintain close diplomatic contacts with the various smaller *svarupam* courts in the interior. From their regional headquarters in Kochi, VOC-power erased the existing *casado* network but continued to rely on the Jewish community as well as on the Marakkar Muslims and St. Thomas Christians in the interior for the supply of pepper.[44] The groups that also profited from Dutch patronage were the originally foreign but long-time established trading families in the region: Gawda Saraswat Brahmans from the Konkan, especially the family network of Baba Prabhu, and the Tamil Brahman Pattars from Coromandel.[45] Meanwhile, apart from the ongoing competition of various Asian merchants and Portuguese *casados*, the French (primarily at Mahé), the Danish (primarily at Kozhikode), but in particular the English East India Company (primarily at Thalassery (Tellicherry) and Varkala (Anjengo)) operated as the main European rivals to the spice monopoly that the Dutch tried to

[44] E.g. during the mid eighteenth century in the polities of Vadakkumkur and Tekkumkur under the leadership of Thachil Mathu Tharakan.

[45] s'Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin*. For the global connections of this network, see A.J.R. Russell-Wood, "A Brazilian Commercial Presence beyond the Cape of Good Hope, 16th-19th Centuries", in P. Malekandathil and J. Mohammed, *The Portuguese Indian Ocean and European Bridgeheads: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. K.S. Mathew* (Tellicherry, 2001) 191-211.

impose on the region.[46] At mid-century, it was not yet the operations of the English East India Company but the expansion of the new, more centralized state of Travancore which imposed its own pepper monopoly in 1743, as well as the military operations of Mysore in the North, that opened an entirely new phase in the commercial history of the region.

As the balance of Malabar's state-system moved towards the coast, the coastal states competed with the European forces over the spice trade. For both the Portuguese and the Dutch it was crucial to keep in touch with the *svarupams* that controlled the spice-producing hinterlands. Pius Malekandhatil gives us a brief but telling overview of the way the Portuguese tried to achieve this. First of all, they often operated on behalf of the Kochi raja in trying to expand his reach into the interior by claiming territories or temple patronage.[47] The Portuguese also paid annuities to the rulers of the *svarupams* along the various spices supply lines.[48] But perhaps the most important instrument to keep a hold on the hinterland was to interfere in the succession and adoption policies of the *svarupams*. In all this, the Europeans participated in an already existing power game. For example, in 1658, the Perumpadappu *svarupam* of Kochi adopted princes from the Vettathu *svarupam* of Tanur as a strategy of extending its area of influence up to the doors of Kozhikode. In fact, adoption was often used as a strategic device to support or alter the existing power balance in a *svarupam*. In the event of an adoption, what the adopting *svarupam* received was not merely one or two princes but also the territorial control and the political linkages of the adopted *svarupam*.[49] Hence, also for the VOC, whether or not representing the Kochi king, Malabar's

[46] K.K.N. Kurup, *History of the Tellicherry Factory, 1683-1794* (Calicut: Sandhya Publications, 1985); Bonaventure Swai, "East India Company and Moplah Merchants of Tellicherry: 1694-1800", *Social Scientist* 8,1 (1979) 58-70; Bonaventure Swai, "From Kolattunad to Chirakkal: British Merchant Capital and the Hinterland of Tellicherry, 1694-1766", *Studies in History* 1,1 (1985) 87-110; Leena More, "Early Indian Resistance to Colonialism in South Kerala", in K.S. Mathew (ed.), *Maritime Malabar and the Europeans 1500-1962* (Kolkata: Hope India Publications/Greenwich Millennium, 2003) 339-363; K.K.N. Kurup and E. Ismail (eds), *The Keyis of Malabar: A Cultural Study* (Calicut: Malabar Institute for Research and Development, 2008); Santosh Abraham, "The Keyi Mappila Muslim Merchants of Tellichery and the Making of Coastal Cosmopolitanism on the Malabar Coast", *Asian Review of World Histories* 5 (2017) 145-162. Published primary sources: *Records of Fort St. George, Tellicherry Consultations*, 20 vols (1725-1751) (Madras: Madras Government, 1932-); *Records of St. George, Anjengo Consultations*, 2 vols (1744-1750) (Madras: Madras Government, 1935-); Scaria Zacharia (ed.), *Thalassery Rekhakal* (Kottayam: DC Books, 1996).

[47] The latter as in the mid-sixteenth-century cases of the Cranganore and Vaduthala temples, against respectively the Cranganore and Vadakkumkur *svarupams*, both supported by Kozhikode. In addition, the Portuguese propped the position of the Kochi raja as the custodian of temples (*Koviladhikarikal* – the full title of the Cochin raja being: *Perumpadappu Gangadhara Vira Kerala Trikkovil Adhikarikal*).

[48] Including Cochin, Tekkumkur, Vadakkumkur, Alangadu, Diamper, Parur, Porcad (Purakkadu) and the Karta of Alwaye.

[49] Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2010) 82-109.

unique system of matrilineal succession and adoption offered a convenient instrument of political interference and control. Indeed, for the historian of today, the intimate reports of the VOC's manipulations of that system offers a unique opportunity to come to a much better understanding of the system's wider political ramifications.

MULTIPLE MALABAR RENAISSANCES

The commercial networks were not only closely entangled with the regional political economy but also with the cultural and religious developments in the region. Traditionally, it was through the courts and temples that part of the commercial profits coming from the coast was reinvested into agricultural expansion in the interior. And as we have seen already, increasing wealth also made these courts and temples important patrons of what we have discussed as a vernacular Malabar renaissance of the Sanskrit cosmopolis. But since overseas trade was dominated by Muslim, Christian and Jewish networks, one wonders if something similar happened with regard to the cultural developments surrounding mosques, churches, and synagogues? In other words, to what extent, Muslims, Christians, and Jews also experienced cultural renaissances of their own during this period of intensive global contact?

If we look at the history of the Muslim community in Malabar, it has been subjected to strong polarizing tendencies, between mutually exclusive conflict on the one hand and happy syncretism on the other.[50] At the same time, recent work has uncovered the often-neglected Malabar agency in the making of Islamic law which has too often been studied from a exclusively Middle Eastern perspective.[51] So far, the discussion has focussed on the "narrating of community" informed by both local and global forces. This has involved a renewed interrogation of sources that were previously ignored for being mythical but are now seen as a quite crucial as these very sources retell the past in order to accommodate new groups and new situations.[52] A crucial but controversial

[50] Enseng Ho, "Custom and Conversion in Malabar: Zayn al-Din al-Malibari's *Gift of the Mujahidin: Some Accounts of the Portuguese*", in Barbara D. Metcalf (ed.), *Islam in South Asia in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 403-408.

[51] Mahmood Kooria, *Islamic Law in Circulation: Shāfi'i Texts across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[52] Scott Kugle and Roxani Eleni Margariti, "Narrating Community: The *Qiṣṣat Shakarwatī Farmaḍ* and Accounts of Origin in Kerala and around the Indian Ocean", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 60,4 (2017) 337-380. For the Mappilas, see also Ronald E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study of Islamic Trends* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1976); A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: The History and Culture* (Trivandrum: Sandhaya Publications, 1989); Ronald E. Miller, *Mappila Muslim Culture: How a Historic Muslim Community in India has blended Tradition and Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).

source in the history of the Muslim community in Malabar is the late-sixteenth-century *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin* or *Gift of the Strugglers for Jihad* by Zayn al-Din al-Maʿbari.[53] This source has been interpreted in various, sometimes quite contradictory ways. Some scholars see it as part of a long-standing culture of martyrdom and as such as an early demonstration of popular Mappila resistance to colonial power. Others point out that it cannot be claimed by the Mappilas at all and that it should be placed in the particular historical context of the sixteenth century. In this view, the author of the *Tuhfat* belonged to the Marakkar merchant elites that were tied to various Islamic courts, including that of Kozhikode, aimed at building a military alliance against the Portuguese.[54]

Like the *Keralolpati*, it seems that the *Tuhfat* is part of a much wider library of texts selectively used by authors for their own purpose. For example, we know that the *Tuhfat* partly builds on the earlier *Qissat Shakarwati Farmad* and that it was translated in Malayalam on a palm leaf or *ola* as the *Kerala Varttamanam* or *News of Kerala,* also known as the Wye manuscript. In fact, the transmission of these texts across Malabar's communities strongly suggests cross-cultural and cross-linguistic interactions.[55]

The *Tuhfat* as an expression of "narrating community" points to processes that were quite similar in other religious communities in Malabar. As we have seen already in the case of the Brahmans, a community's origin is personified in a heroic figure who is projected back into the remote past to be close to a divine source of authority. In the case of the Christian community that role is played by St. Thomas, that famous disciple of Jesus. For the Muslim community, we find the converted

[53] Two Arabic versions: *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin fi-baʿd akhbar al-Burtughaliyyin*, ed. Hamza Chelakodan (Calicut: Maktabat al-Huda, 1996) and *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin fi-baʿd akhbar al-Burtughaliyyin*, ed. Amin Tawfiq al-Tayyibi (ed.) (Tripoli: Kuliyyat al Daʿwa al-Islamiyya, 1987). Translations by M.J. Rowlandson, *Tohfut-ul-Mujahideen: An Historical Work in the Arabic Language* (London: The Oriental Translations Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1833) and by S.M.H. Nainar, *Tuhfat Al-Mujahidin: A Historical Epic of the Sixteenth Century*, (Selangor, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2009).

[54] See e.g. Stephen Frederic Dale, *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Mappilas of Malabar, 1498-1922* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Yohanan Friedmann, "Qiṣṣat Shakarwatī Farmaḍ: A Tradition concerning the Introduction of Islam to Malabar", *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975) 233-245; Ayal Amer, "The Rise of Jihādic Sentiments and the Writing of History in Sixteenth-Century Kerala", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 53,3 (2016) 297-319; Mahmood Kooria, "An Abode of Islam under a Hindu King: Circuitous Imagination of Kingdoms among Muslims of Sixteenth-Century Malabar", *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies* 1 (2017) 89-109; Meia Walravens, "Multiple Audiences of a History from Sixteenth-Century Malabar: Zayn al-Dīn al-Maʿbarī's *Gift of the Strugglers for Jihad*", *South Asian Studies* 35,2 (2019) 226-236.

[55] Mahmood Kooria, "Does the Pagan King Reply? Malayalam Documents on the Portuguese Arrival in India", *Itinerario*, 43,3 (2019) 423-442.

king Cheraman Perumal, in his case associated with the prophet Muhammad, to play a similar role as he enabled the historically attested figure of Malik b. Dinar and his family to spread Islam and establish a Muslim community in Malabar. Such origin stories demonstrate to the community that it springs from a mingling of distant and local origins: in this case, an indigenous king converting to a foreign creed.[56]

As we have suggested already, such a mechanism of glocalization also generated the Malabar vernaculars. Just as in the case of Manipravalam, Jewish-Malayalam, Arabi-Malayalam and Syriac-Malayalam – the latter better known as Garshuni Malayalam – were products of a "Polyglossic Malabar" which had characterized the region for centuries but now finds its highpoint in the early modern period when the global entanglements of these regional communities reached their peak. As much as Sanskrit was instrumental in the making of Manipravalam, Arabic and Syriac (both as languages and its related scripts) were crucial for the making of Islamic and Christian vernaculars – its authors often having multiple language capacities.[57] Hence, we should not be surprised that we even see overlapping developments across the various communities. For example, the Pattu style of the martial parrot-songs so popular in the region also appear in the *patapattu* war songs of the Muslim Mappilas, but this time using the freshly-emerging language and script of Arabi-Malayalam.[58] Other such examples include the Rabban Pattu of the Malabar Jews and the Margamkali Pattu of the Syrian Christians, all of which provide useful historical insights into how the self-perception of these communities during this early modern period was created by blending local and global elements.

Indeed, looking at the St. Thomas Christians (also Syrian or Mappila Christian) community, it also experienced something like a cultural-literary renaissance of its own against the backdrop of

[56] The best historical survey on the Malabar Muslim community in this period is Sebastian Prange, *Monsoon Islam: Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[57] P.K. Yasser Arafath, "Polyglossic Malabar: Arabi-Malayalam and the Muhiyuddinmale in the Age of Transition (1600s-1750s)", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 30,3 (2020) 517-539; Istvan Perczel, "Garshuni Malayalam: A Witness to an Early Stage of Indian Christian Literature", *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 17,2 (2014) 263-323; and the works of Ophira Gamliel mentioned earlier and "Jewish Malayalam", *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics* 38,1 (2009) 147-175.

[58] *Patappattu*, edited with an introduction by S. Paramesvara Aiyar (Travancore: Authority of the Government, 1924). See also Mahmood Kooria, "*Paṭappāṭṭu*, a Malayalam War-Song on the Portuguese-Dutch Battle in Cochin", in Mahmood Kooria and Michael Pearson (eds), *Malabar in the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism in a Maritime Historical Region* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018) 141-171. See also the hero stories associated with martial arts or *Kalari*, in K.S. Mathew, *Society in Medieval Malabar: A Study based on Vadakkan Pattukal* (New Delhi: Jaffe Books, 1979).

increasing global contacts.[59] From the start, the community derived its origins from West Asian migration, whether directly premised on the arrival of St. Thomas in the first century or that of Thomas of Kana in the ninth century. In due course, there developed two distinct communities, the Northists (Vatakkumbhagar) and the Southists (Tekkumbhagar), both developing their identities in interaction with the global Church and the other local communities. Both had a relatively high standing in the region's complicated caste structure being close to the dominant Nayar caste of land-holding warriors. However, the more numerous Northists integrated into the surrounding society, the Southists were until recently strictly endogamous and eager to preserve their Semitic blood. While their churches and clergy were strictly separated, both belonged to the (Syrian) Church of the East.

The liturgical language of the Church was Syriac which, due to its links to Middle Eastern antiquity, for the Christians in India achieved a classical status comparable to Sanskrit. It seems that the Church contacts with the Middle East intensified during the fifteenth and sixteenth century and that bishops coming from the Church of the East were bringing with them their own Syriac books, which were held in high esteem and copied for the Indian community.[60] Hence, when the Portuguese arrived in India, they encountered a revitalized Church and a blossoming Syriac culture. Most probably, this was facilitated by a prosperous community which engaged in the production and the marketing of pepper, primarily in the hills of the interior.[61] Initially, after

[59] The following is based primarily on Perczel, "Syriac Christianity in India"; idem, "Accommodationist Strategies on the Malabar Coast: Competition or Complementarity?" in Ines G. Županov and Pierre Antoine Fabre (eds), *Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World* (Leiden: Brill, 2018) 191-232, and Ines G. Županov, "Antiquissima Christianità: Indian Religion or Idolaty?", *Journal of Early Modern History* 24 (2020) 471-498. Other works on the Syrian Christians during the early modern period include: Leslie Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); Joseph Thekkedat, *History of Christianity in India, Vol.2: From the Middle of the Sixteenth Century to the End of the Seventeenth Century (1542-1700)* (Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1988); J.P.M. van der Ploeg, *The Christians of St. Thomas in South India and their Syriac Manuscripts* (Rome/Bangalore: Centre for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies/Dhamaram Publications, 1983); Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslim and Christians in South Indian Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[60] Since 1551 the Church of the East became split between an autonomous "Nestorian" branch, centered at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and a "Chaldean" branch that accepted Roman jurisdiction. Earlier, already, there had developed a split within the Eastern Church between the Miaphysite family of Churches, including the Syrian Orthodox or Jacobite Church, and the Church of the East. Although most Indian communities resorted under the latter, Jacobite bishops also continued to interact with the region.

[61] Antony Vallavanthara, *India in 1500 AD: The Narratives of Joseph the Indian* (Mannanam: Research Institute for Studies in History, 1984) and István Perczel, "Cosmopolitismes de la Mer d'Arabie: Les chrétiens de saint Thomas face à l'expansion Portugaise", in Corinne Lefèvre, Ines Županov and Jorge Flores (eds), *Collection Puruṣārtha 33*: *Cosmopolitismes en Asie du Sud: Sources, itinéraires, langues (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Science Sociales, 2015)

the arrival of the Portuguese, there developed an open dialogue between the European and Indian branches of a universally conceived Christianity. In due course, though, in the context of their increasing persecution of Syrian Christians, the Portuguese assisted by the Franciscans and (from the mid sixteenth century) the Jesuits started to impose their authority by Latinising the liturgy in accordance with the Counter-Reformatory Council of Trent (1545-1563).

As in the case of the Muslim community, increasing global entanglements among the Christians not only caused literary efflorescence but at the same time, also generated an increasing tension between syncretic accommodation and purifying reform.[62] For example, the "happy reunion" of European and Indian Christians in Malabar informed the making of the famous Jesuit missionary policy of *accommodatio*. Although this allowed for a top-down missionary approach that tried to achieve conversion through the existing caste hierarchy, it also increased the friction between Latinised religious dogmas and existing social customs *in situ*. When classical Syriac was accepted as the sacred and literary language of the mission, there arose a fierce controversy amongst the various Christian groups in the region. From their new seminary of Vaipincotta in Chennamangalam, the Jesuits, under the leadership of the Catalonian Francisco Ros S.J. (1559-1624), started to create a new Tridentine Catholic literature in Syriac and Malayalam, which was destined to replace the local scriptures deemed to be "Nestorian". Very much like his companion Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) in Madurai, Ros became a champion of *accommodatio* which in his case engendered the creation of a huge quantity of new Catholic Syriac literature.[63] Yet many St. Thomas Christians, whilst being open to the Jesuits and their accommodationist strategies, clung to their cultural heritage and created a religious blend of their own in which Syriac remained an important South Indian lingua franca.[64]

143-69.

[62] For these Muslim tensions, see e.g. M.H. Ilias, Mappila Muslims and the Cultural Content of Trading Arab Diaspora on the Malabar Coast", *Asian Journal of Social Science* 35 (2007) 434-456; P.K. Yasser Arafath, "Malabar Ulema in the Shafiite Cosmopolis: Fitna, Piety and Resistance in the Age of Fasad", *The Medieval History Journal* 21,1 (2018) 25-68. See also V. Kunhali, *Sufism in Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends* (London: Sangam Books, 1992).

[63] See also recently: *De Syrorum Orientalium Erroribus Auctore P. Francisco Ros S.I.: A Latin-Syriac Treatise from Early Modern Malabar (1586)*, edited by Antony Merchery S.J. (Gorgias Press, 2021). An example of this is the poetry of Alexander of the Port or Kadavil Chandi Kattanar (1588-1673), see István Perczel, "Alexander of the Port / Kadavil Chandy Kattanar: A Syriac Poet and Discipline of the Jesuits in Seventeenth-Century India", *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 14 (2014) 30-49 and Radu Mustaţă, "Entangled Literary Genres in Syriac from Malabar in the Aftermath of the Synod of Diamper (1599)", *Entangled Religions* 11 (2022), DOI:10.46586/er.11.2022.9901

[64] Perczel, "Syriac Christianity in India", 682. I. Perczel, "Classical Syriac as a Modern *Lingua Franca* in South India between 1600 and 2006," *Modern Syriac Literature, ARAM Periodical* 21 (2009) 289–321.

It appears that the Jesuit position prevailed following the 1599 Synod of Diamper (Udayamperur) when, under Archbishop Augustinian Aleixo de Meneses of Goa, both Indian and Syrian customs were condemned in a centralist urge to impose dogmatic and ritual unity. Thus, the East Syriac Biblical canon and liturgical books had to be corrected based on Latin texts and heretical "Nestorian" books were to be burnt. In reality, though, the production of Syriac texts continued.[65] Those St. Thomas Christians who detested Portuguese interference, whether in their rites or in their pepper-trade, withdrew further into the interior and settled beyond the power of the Portuguese Padroado in Angamaly, which became the seat of the independent Syrian Church under bishop Mar Abraham (d. 1597). In 1653, the split was confirmed by the Oath of the Coonan Cross in which many St. Thomas Christians followed their archdeacon Mar Thoma I (term 1653-1670) in revolting openly against the centralizing Portuguese-Jesuit policies, appealing to the Chaldean patriarch for support.[66] After the revolt, in the late 1650s, concerns about the Portuguese Padroado even grew within Catholic circles when Pope Alexander VII asked his own Propaganda Fide (founded in 1622) to rescue the Malabar mission by sending several Discalced Carmelites to seek reconciliation between the parties.[67] Later during that century, the Carmelites continued their missionary operations under the blind consent of the Dutch, not in the least

[65] The massive results of this Syriac renaissance have only recently come to light through the SRITE project which surveyed, digitized, and catalogued of over 1200 of manuscripts in Syriac and Garshuni Malayalam. Among the collections accessed are the largest and most important collections known in Kerala, such as the Chaldean Syrian collection in Thrissur, the Konat collection in Pampakuda, and the collection of Saint Joseph's Monastery in Mannanam. The collected material amounts to 347,293 files, corresponding to 228,895 manuscript pages. Among the digitized material there are 1176 Syriac and Malayalam Garshuni manuscripts, 67 Malayalam paper manuscripts, over 60,000 palm leaf documents arranged in 629 bundles, 29 Malayalam literary palm leaf documents (*granthas*) and thousands of archival documents shedding light on the history, the political relations, and the daily life of the communities. The cataloguing of this material is progressing. For the results and follow-ups of the project, see https://cems.ceu.edu/digitization-syriac-manuscripts-southern-india. Between 2015 and 2021 SRITE became part of a collaborative project between Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany, and CEU funded by an ERC grant and directed by Alexandra Cuffel of Ruhr University: "Jews and Christians in the East: Strategies of Interaction between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean".

[66] Hence in 1665 Mar Thoma was consecrated by the Jacobite missionary Mar Gregorius who was sent to the region by Syrian Orthodox Patriarch in Antioch.

[67] See the published works of Giuseppe di Santa Maria Sebastiani (1623-1689), *Prima speditione all' Indie Orientali* (Rome 1666) about the first mission in 1656-1659 and *Seconda speditione all' Indie Orientali* (Rome 1672) about the second mission in 1660-1665. See also the informative account of Vincenzo Maria di Santa Catarina da Siena (d. 1679) who accompanied Sebastiani during the first mission: *Il viaggio all' Indie Orientali* (Rome, 1672). Vincenzo met the Kolattiri raja twice and collected six ancient texts of the mirror-for-princes genre translated in Portuguese by Francisco Garcia, the archbishop of Cranganore. In 1660 these translations were brought to Rome by Giacinto de Magistris and presented to Daniello Bartoli, the historian of the Jesuit Order (see J. Wicki S.J., *O homem das trinta e duas perfeições e outras histórias* (Lisbon, 1958). See also Laetitia Sprij, "Karmelietenkennis uit Kerala: Circulerende natuurkennis in het zeventiende-eeuwse karmelietenreisverslag *Il Viaggio all'Indie Orientali*" (BA thesis, Leiden University, 2025).

because the knowledge — both botanical and political — of the Carmelite Father Matthew of St. Joseph was key to the making of the *Hortus Malabaricus* and Dutch rule under the Dutch commander Hendrik van Reede tot Drakenstein.[68]

Interestingly, the Dutch East India Company played a stimulating role in generating a fourth Malabar renaissance, this time under the Jewish community of Malabar. Here again, it was a renaissance that was triggered by increasing global interaction, in this case between the "White" (*paradesi*) Jewish community of Kochi and the Jewish community of Amsterdam.

Fig. 2: Basilica of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Joseph and St. Joseph Carmelite Monastery at Varapuzha. According to a plaquette at the place, it was founded by Father Matthew of St. Joseph after obtaining permission from "his friend" Hendrik Adriaan van Reede. Photograph: Jos Gommans.

[68] For a fascinating recent evaluation, see Daniel Margocsy, "Authorship Debates in the *Hortus Malabaricus:* Matthew of Saint Joseph and Christianity on the Malabar Coast", in Minakshi Menon (ed), *Hortus Malabaricus* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, forthcoming).

Before coming to that period, we should be aware that like the Christians, the Jews in Malabar derived their origin from two waves of migration, one during Roman times and one during the centuries after the rise of Islam. The first moment became linked to the destruction of the second temple of Jerusalem (68 CE), the second moment with a 1000 CE Tamil charter in Vattezhuttu script by Bhaskara Ravivarman to Joseph Rabban. In both cases, Jewish migration was linked to stories about a place called Shingly, probably at or near Kodungallur, granted to them by a local king who gave them land for building synagogues and coconut estates. Interestingly, there is also a link with the Cheraman Perumal story, as the latter is told to have granted them material rights and invested their leader, Joseph Rabban, with the symbolic trappings of royalty. It seems that after the flood of 1341, the Jews moved from Shingly to Kochi where they built their first synagogue in 1344 and their leaders or *mudaliars* became the Kochi raja's closest and most trusted advisors.[69] Other communities sprung up in Malah, Cranganore, Parur, Ernakulam, and Chendamangalam. Later, under Portuguese rule, Sefardic Jews and New Christians arrived from the Mediterranean. In due course, the Jews came to be divided in so-called White and Black Jews, the latter were either the descendants of mixed marriages between Jews and Hindus or descendants of Hindus who had converted to Judaism. Whatever the precise boundary lines between the two groups, the Kochi community that emerged in this period was very cosmopolitan as Malabar Jews could trace their origin from places as far apart as Germany, Spain, Damascus, Aleppo, Safed, Jerusalem, Turkey, Persia, Iraq and Marocco.[70]

Under the Portuguese the Jews seems to have continued their position but with the arrival of the Dutch they were blamed of collaboration with the latter and in 1662 their synagogue, including all of the Torah scrolls, holy books, and historical records were destroyed. Under the Dutch, the Jews experienced another flowering of commerce and culture, the latter partly as a result of their contacts with the Jewish community in the Dutch Republic.[71] For example, in 1686, the Kochi Jews received a delegation from Amsterdam led by the Portuguese *reconverso* Moses Pereyra de

[69] See, however, the recent revisionism on this issue in Ophira Gamliel, *Judaism in South India, 849–1489: Relocating Malabar Jewry* (Amsterdam: ARC Humanities Press, 2023).

[70] Jonathan Schorsch, "Mosseh Pereyra de Paiva: An Amsterdam Portuguese Jewish Merchant Abroad in the Seventeenth Century", in Yosef Kaplan (ed.), *The Dutch Intersection: The Jews and the Netherlands in Modern History* (Leiden: Brill 2008) 63-86.

[71] In Europe more generally, the far-off Jews of Africa and Asia were linked with the old Messianic expectation that the Messiah would appear when the ten lost tribes would return to the land of Israel (Fabrizio Lelli, "The Role of Renaissance Geographical Discoveries in Yohanan Alemano's Messianic Thought", in Ilana Zinguer, Abaraham Melamed and Zur Shalev (eds), *Hebrew Aspects of the Renaissance: Sources and Encounters* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) 192-210).

Paiva. De Paiva arranged for the Kochi Jews to obtain replacements for their Torah scrolls and holy books, and the Jews arranged to have their own traditions enshrined in *mahzorim* (festival prayer books) published by Proops, the well-known Dutch Hebrew press. The Jews also narrated their history to De Paiva, who published their account in Portuguese.

The most prominent Jewish group in Kochi was the Rahabi family. Their fame was due, in part, to their prominence in trade and diplomacy, and to the many authors and scholars in the family. David Rahabi was the head of the family at the time of De Paiva's visit and was also very influential with the royal family. David's son, Ezekiel, assumed his father's role as the Jewish agent for the Dutch East India Company and at the same time accepted the role of prime minister to the raja. Ezekiel towered over the Malabarí pepper trade. His home became a salon for the high and mighty of Kochi and beyond, and he was considered one of the best-informed people of his day, with a wealth of information about commodity prices, currency fluctuations, troop and naval movements, and the lines of succession in Europe's royal families. He undertook a number of diplomatic missions on behalf of both the raja and the Dutch, negotiating peace accords among rival states. As a philanthropist, he supported the local communities even building a church at Cranganore and a Carmelite centre in Travancore. He commanded a fleet of sailing ships that plied the waters from the Red Sea to the South China Sea.

Ezekiel's son, David, continued the family's patronage of Jewish culture and in 1798 wrote a survey about the historical traditions of the Kochi Jews. All in all, regional Jews consider the Dutch period a "second golden age" (after that of Shingly) which saw a flourishing of literature and mysticism when Hebrew songs and poems were composed by such poets as Eliahu Adeni, the kabbalist Nehemiah Mota, Levi Belilah, Ephraim Saala, Solomon B. Nissim, and Joseph Zakkai. Their songs became part of the unique syncretic Kochi observances or *minhag* and were anthologized in later liturgical books, along with the songs of such Sephardi liturgists as Judah Halevi, Moses ibn Ezra, Solomon ibn Gabirol and Israel Najara.[72]

[72] Based primarily on Walter J. Fischel, "The Exploration of the Jewish Antiquities of Cochin on the Malabar Coast", Journal of the American Oriental Society, 87,3 (1967) 230-248; André Wink, "The Jewish Diaspora in India: Eighth to Thirteenth Centuries", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 24,4 (1987) 349-366; Ophira Gamliel, "Back from Shingly: Revisiting the Premodern History of Jews in Kerala", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 55,1 (2018) 53-76 and Nathan Katz, "Kochi", in Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (eds) *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2nd ed), vol. 12 (Macmillan Reference, 2007) 247-250.

POTENTIALITIES OF THE DUTCH ARCHIVES FOR MALABAR HISTORY

Looking back at the historical developments in Malabar, it seems that we can speak of an early modern period in which intensifying global connections sparked various, simultaneous renaissances patronized by increasingly wealthy little kingdoms by the sea. The freshly entering Europeans were both participants and spoilsports of a sort. More so than the Dutch, the Portuguese have a negative reputation for using excessive violence in the region, especially against their Muslim commercial and religious competitors. Like in other parts of the Indian Ocean, the Dutch capitalized on this rivalry to establish their own exploitative empire, often substituting, or augmenting the existing intra-Asian network of Catholic enemies, employing similar or even more violent methods. I should emphasize that the Dutch presence in Malabar was much more than that of a trading company merely managing factories but actually involved imposing political and military control over port-cities as well as their main feeder markets and production centres in the interior. Besides, it was through the Kochi king that the Dutch became deeply involved in the politics of the regional courts about which they wrote lengthy reports. In this final section of this paper, I will briefly explore the potentialities of the VOC archive for a better understanding of the various developments mentioned above.

THE COMPANY'S PAPER TRAIL

Let me start with some basic information about the organisation of the VOC archives as kept at the National Archives in The Hague and the Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai. From the outset, the VOC based its operations in Asia on a systematic collection of all information that was deemed relevant for its commercial and political activities. Different from their European competitors, the VOC in Asia clung to its trading monopolies, especially in spices. As such, even in places like Malabar where a monopoly could not be imposed, the VOC continued to stress the importance of bureaucratic regulation and registration instead of simply giving away the Asian country trade to its servants. For the VOC, top-down control automatically implied the systematic gathering of information from the bottom-up. For each region, the required information not only included the Company's own position and that of its main European rivals, but also the region's topography, government, commercial conditions, and natural resources.[73]

[73] For a succinct discussion of the VOC tradition of reporting more generally, see Guido van Meersbergen and Frank Birkenholz, "Writing that Travels: The Dutch East India Company's Paper-based Information Management", in Aske Laursen Brock, Guido van Meersbergen and Edmond Smith (eds), *Trading Companies and Travel Knowledge in the Early Modern*

It should also be kept in mind that the information that the VOC produced on Malabar repeats itself over and over again on different scales. In other words, information from the factories was reiterated on each level of the paper hierarchy, each time in a more comprehensive manner. Starting at the regional headquarters at Cochin, information about events in Malabar would be reported in (1a) the *Dagregister* (Diary) and (1b) the *Inlands Dagregister* (Indigenous Diary) dealing more specifically with the events at the various local courts. The most important data would also be passed on in (2) various letters and reports about local events considered relevant for the Malabar *Commandeur* (Commander) and Council who would discuss them in (3) *Resoluties* (Proceedings) and summarize them in (4a) letters to the Governor-General and Council in Batavia as well as, albeit less frequently, in (4b) separate direct letters to the directors, the *Heren XVII* (the Gentleman XVII) in the Netherlands. So now and then, at the end of his term, an outgoing commander would write a (5) *Memorie van Overgave* (Memorandum of Transfer), an extensive briefing for his successor on the state-of-affairs in Malabar.[74] Arriving in Batavia, all information would be discussed in the (6) *Batavia Resoluties*, summarised in (7) the *Batavia Dagregister*, and in (8) the *Generale Missiven* (General Letters) sent to the Gentlemen XVII.[75] One can find all this Asian paperwork in the most voluminous, richest and, therefore, most consulted single series in The Hague: the so-called *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* (OBP, i.e. the Letters and Papers Received) of the Amsterdam Chamber. More or less the same paperwork ended up in the Zeeland Chamber and as such it offers the researcher a complete shadow archive of the OBP although Zeeland may have documents that are missing in the OBP, and vice-versa.[76]

World (Routledge: London and New York, 2022) 43-70.

[74] The seventeenth-century *Memories* are published and analysed in H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala 1663-1701: De memories en instructies betreffende het commandement Malabar van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976). Apart from the 1677 memorandum of Van Reede, seven eighteenth-century memorandums were edited by P. Groot and A.J. van der Burg and published in *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government, Dutch Records* from 1908 to 1910. Two of these memorandums – J.V. Stein van Gollenesse (1743) and Adriaan Moens (1781) – are translated in English in I.C.S. Galletti, A.J. van der Burg and P. Groot (eds), *The Dutch in Malabar*, *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government, Dutch Records, Vol. 13* (Madras, 1911).

[75] Since the *Generale Missiven* are published and made digitally accessible through the Huygens Institute at https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/generalemissiven. The *Batavia Dagregister* has been published for most of the seventeenth century and together with the unpublished eighteenth-century part is available online at the sejarah-nusantara website of the National Archives of Indonesia ANRI at https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/daily_journals/.

[76] Like the Republic itself, the VOC had a federal structure that was based on six regional Chambers (*Kamers*) of which Amsterdam and to a lesser extent Zeeland were the most important. In line with earlier archival practice, the label OBP only covers the paper-trail for the Amsterdam Chamber. Only the archive of the Zeeland Chamber is in size comparable to the Amsterdam Chamber and as such is largely overlapping with the Amsterdam materials albeit much less consulted for research. Both

Now, moving to the Dutch Republic and taking the other direction: the Gentlemen XVII would make their own summary of all received information in the so-called (9) *Haags Verbaal* (The Hague Account). Based on this, they could make a decision that was reported in the (10) *Resoluties* of the Gentlemen XVII. Next, this decision was passed on to Batavia through (11) letters or instructions that were mentioned in (6) the *Batavia Resoluties*, again passed on in (12) letters to the Malabar Commander to be found in Batavia's *Uitgaand Brievenboek* (Outgoing Letterbook). This entire paper trail from Malabar to Batavia to the Netherlands and back, can be followed through the VOC-archive in the National Archives in The Hague.[77]

Fig. 3: The VOC-archive in the Tamil Nadu Archives Chennai before and after the Dutch Record Project of 2010-2011 which aimed at preservation and digitization. Photographs Lennart Bes.

Perhaps the ultimate product of the VOC's technocratic data management is the massive *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie* (Description of the East India Company) collected and written around 1700 by the experienced Company secretary Pieter van Dam. In order to avoid the risk of data overflow, it provided the directors with a true panopticon on one century of Company activities as well as a trustworthy dataset on which to build frugal policies for the future. For Malabar too, the *Beschryvinge* contains a succinct overview of the situation at the end of the

Chambers have been digitized recently by the Globalise project (https://globalise.huygens.knaw.nl/), making the OBP label less relevant.

[77] For a much more detailed description of the VOC archive in The Hague, see Jos Gommans, Lennart Bes and Gijs Kruijtzer, *Dutch Sources on South Asia, c. 1600-1825. Volume 1: Bibliography and Archival Guide to the National Archives at The Hague* (The Netherlands) (Delhi: Manohar 2001). Available online at https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.14.97/invnr/8ED.

seventeenth century as based on Van Dam's study of earlier reports on the region.[78] Together with the *Memories van Overgave*, Van Dam's survey represents the quintessence of the technocratic ethos under the VOC that persisted deep into the nineteenth century under Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia.

In addition to the materials in The Hague, the quite substantial remains of the physical archive of the VOC establishment (*kantoor*) in Malabar itself is kept as "Dutch Records" in the Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai and contains primarily eighteenth-century materials. Although it considerably overlaps with VOC archive at the National Archives in The Hague, it also contains documents that were deemed too much of local interest, including a great deal of legal materials, to be sent to either Batavia or the Netherlands.[79]

A DUTCH WINDOW ON MALABAR COURTS, RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND MARKETS

Now, having described the basic logic and logistics of the huge Dutch paper trail on Malabar, to what extent it can offer us a view on the multiple Malabar renaissances of this period and what was the role of the Dutch East India Company itself in sustaining or destroying the regional communities that patronized these renaissances? Except for the Jewish case, most of the examples of cultural efflorescence mentioned so far pertain to the pre-Dutch period. Is it possible that these renaissances were nipped in the bud by the Dutch, or that we simply lack information about this period as only very few historians have had full access to the Dutch archive? In the remaining part of this article, I would like to discuss a research strategy that aims at an integrated analysis of the

[78] Pieter van Dam, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, 4 parts, 7 vols, eds W.F. Stapel and C.W.Th. Baron van Boetzelaer van Asperen en Dubbeldam (The Hague: Rijksgeschiedkundige Publikatiën, Grote Serie, 63, 68, 74, 76, 83, 87, 96, 1927–1954); made accessible online by the Huygens Institute at: https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/vandam/.

[79] See the published inventory of these Dutch Records by P. de Groot, *Catalogus van Hollandsche handschriften, brieven, en officieele stukken*; *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government, No.6 Dutch Records* (Madras: 1909) but for a more recent description, see the Malabar section in Lennart Bes and Gijs Kruijtzer, *Dutch Sources on South Asia, c. 1600-1825. Volume 3: Archival Guide to Repositories Outside The Netherlands* (Delhi: Manohar 2014). About half of these records have been digitized and made available through the National Archives in The Hague. For a detailed report, see Lennart Bes, "Hundreds of Rosetta Stones and Other Patient Papers: The Dutch Records at the Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai (Madras)", *Itinerario*, 27,1 (2003) 93-112 and Bes and Kruijtzer, *Dutch Sources on South Asia, Vol. 3*, 536-538. The only remaining Dutch archival materials kept in present-day Kochi can be found at the Regional Archives Ernakulam and contain circa 120 documents probably coming from the archives of the Kochi kings and private collections (Lennart Bes, "Gold-Leaf Flattery, Calcuttan Dust, and a Brand New Flagpole: Five Little-Known VOC Collections in Asia on India and Ceylon", *Itinerario* 36,1 (2012) 91-106).

political history of early modern Malabar in which historians are advised to look more in particular at the tripartite interface between Malabar's courts, religious institutions, and markets.

To start with the *courts*, the VOC-archives on Malabar contain a vast amount of material that is unique for the Malabar establishment: the already mentioned *Inlands Dagregister* (also *Inheems Dagregister*) which offers the minutest of detail about the happenings at the various *svarupam* courts. In these documents Dutch officials show particular interest in moments of succession, sometimes interfering with military force, mostly trying to manipulate different lineages and factions dealing with pivotal moments of initiation and adoption.[80] In studying these accounts, the historian should be aware of the significance of Malabar as *penn-malayalam*: the "kingdom of women". The most well-known case is provided by the House of Attingal – well-attested by the Dutch archive. Its members derived their status as descendants of the Kolathiri House of Kannur and as such they were considered the only suitable *ranis* to be adopted at the court of Travancore. Designed as a miniature version of the northern Kolathiri country, Attingal itself was a state within the state ruled by its senior female, who was installed after being blessed by the warrior goddess Tiruvirattukkavu Bhagavathi at the Attingal temple. Although just a minor centre, its nodal function in the matrilineal set-up of the region as a whole would make Attingal an extremely rewarding choice for research, the more so since both the Dutch and the English (at Anjengo) experienced some very close encounters with these ranis.[81]

Obviously, the centrality of Cochin for Dutch rule would warrant a focus on the developments in that kingdom. It is clear, though, that like the other *svarupams*, Cochin was far from a centralized polity as it experienced almost ongoing factionalism between its main lineages (Mutta – Chazhur – Vettatu) involving ever changing factions of officials like the Paliyath Achan, the Nayar gentry, and upcoming Konkani and Pattar merchant-princes like Perimbala or Canaga Pattar. At the same time, Kochi (and thus the VOC) struggled to gain a hold on its so-called dependent sub-polities of Parur, Alangadu, Vadakkumkur and Purrakad. Nevertheless, by

[80] An *enanger* relationship provides a man (*appan*) from another *svarupam* who initiates girls when reaching sexual maturity in a ritual called *tali-kettu* (from adorning the girl with a small piece of gold on the thread or *tali*). For example, the Cranganore ruler performed the *tali-kettu* ritual on the princesses of the house of the Zamorin. See s'Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin*, 6, 10.

[81] See also the evocative bestseller *The Ivory Throne: Chronicles of the House of Travancore* (Noida: Harper Collins, 2015) by Manu S. Pillai and for the British involvements there: P.K. Leena, "Rani of Attingal and the English in Travancore", Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 46 (1985) 364-372; also as seen within the wider setting of the English East India Company: Philip J. Stern, *The Company State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 121-141.

following the tense relationship between king and Company there, we will gain deeper insights of its changing social dynamics following Kochi's attempts to gain tighter fiscal and commercial control of its hinterland as well as to improve its ritual stature. It also would be very interesting to see to what extent the Dutch involvement with the Kochi ruler actually changed the idea of that ruler as a "king", including the symbolic paraphernalia attached to such a position.[82] The main challenge in taking a courtly view is to link the Dutch materials with the historiographical genre of *granthavaris* of which much still needs to be accessed and even traced throughout Kerala's scattered private and temple collections. A first promising step in that direction could be an investigation into the collections of treaties and contracts between the VOC and various Malabar rulers and other parties for which we have both Dutch and Malayalam versions and would give us not only new insights in the basic linguistic and political levels, but also about the degree of diplomatic and legal commensurability between the two sides.[83]

In addition, as in the case of Geertz's famous Theatre-State model, we should keep in mind that power was to serve ritual and not necessarily the other way round. This brings us to the courts' interface with the worlds of *religious institutions*: temples, mosques, churches, and synagogues. Even more so than in the case of the courts, we should be aware that we are dealing with the biased views of Dutch observers who often did not fully understand what they were seeing and also mostly simply tried to rationalize their own dealings to their superiors in Batavia and Amsterdam and, perhaps more importantly, also to themselves. In the rare case of more perceptive commanders like Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein (1636-1691), we see a proclivity to

[82] E.g. Bayly suggests that during the eighteenth century, both Travancore *and* Cochin "were transforming the region's loosely structured chiefdoms into powerful warrior kingdoms" (Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 273). The richness of Dutch correspondence with Malabar rulers should be complemented of course with other such European correspondence as e.g. the English materials on Kottayam in the so-called Palassi Rekhakal in the Talasseri Rekhakaḷ to be found at the university library of Tübingen, used and translated by Margret Frenz in her *Vom Herrscher zum Untertan: Spannungsverhältnis zwischen lokaler Herrschaftsstruktur und der Kolonialverwaltung in Malabar zo Beginn der Britischen Herrschaft (1790-1905)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000).

[83] A collection of Dutch and Malayalam treaties, sometimes with partial English translation, is available at the Ernakulam Regional Archives. Apart from other official correspondence on paper, it also contains Malayalam palm leaves containing treaties and correspondence between Cochin and the VOC. See the Malabar section in Bes and Kruijtzer, *Dutch Sources on South Asia, Vol. 3.* Obviously, the Ernakulam materials could be compared to other such materials in other archives, primarily in the OBP for the Malabar establishment which contains a section on indigenous correspondence (*correspondentie met inheemsen*). Most treaties are published in J.E. Heeres and F.W. Stapel (eds), *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlando-Indicum. Verzameling van politieke contracten en verdere verdragen door de Nederlanders in het Oosten*, 6 vols (The Hague, 1907-55), also online at https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/corpusdiplomaticum/. The Malayalam collection at the British Library contains two unique originals in gold and silver of treaties between the VOC and the Zamorin from 1691 and 1710. Finally, the Arsip National in Jakarta also stores a few treaties for the period 1661-1771 (Acc No. 3607).

claim expert understanding of the local society by a profound study of its history and customs. Knowing his Greek Classics, for Van Reede Malabar provided a harmonious blend of a monarchy, republic, and democracy in which the Company needed to maintain the equilibrium between king and nobility. Taking the history of his own country as a model and as a kind tropical Stadtholder, Van Reede managed to fix this equilibrium in the 1663 Union of Mouton which primarily ensured the "freedoms and rights" of the Nayar "counts and barons" against the centralizing encroachments of the king and his new portfolio-capitalist friends.[84]

Interestingly, even when discussing for-him-more-exotic temples, Van Reede remains quite confident about his fatherlandic model when he compares the Malabar temples to free cities or cities of refuge.

> A temple is like a city of refuge where all refugees, for whatever crimes, are not to be prosecuted. Temple lands are so abundant and widely used in these areas that there are few hamlets where they cannot be found. These are under spiritual overseers who live quiet and peaceful lives in the temples inside these grounds. These places also enjoy great advantages because they are in the best and most favourable places in the whole country. Some are several miles in circumference, not marked by walls or ramparts, but by certain signs. This creates a large influx of people who settle there for the great freedoms they provide.[85]

For Van Reede, it was thanks to their prosperity and liberty that temples, like European free cities, attracted crowds of people. Interestingly, with this telling comparison Van Reede implicitly dismisses that one element – freedom – as an exclusive phenomenon of the European city. Indeed, it is very well possible that it was not the city, but the temple – and one may add, the mosque, the synagogue, and the church – that served as the prime cultural stage of the cultural renaissances

[84] See Jos Gommans, "South Asian Cosmopolitanism and the Dutch Microcosmos in Seventeenth-Century Cochin (Kerala)", in Catia Antunes and Jos Gommans (eds), *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions*, 1600-2000 (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2015) 3-26.

[85] *Coota is zoveel als een vrijstadt, alwaar alle vluchtelingen, 't zij om wat voor misdaden, niet mogen worden vervolgt en diergelijcke landtschappen sijn in dese gewesten soo overvloedigh ende overal in gebruyck, datter weynich gehuchten sijn daer men die niet en vint. Doch deselve staan meerendeels onder geestelijcke opsienders, die met haare tempels daarbinnen een stil ende gerust leven leggen ende dewijl dese plaatsen soo groote voordeelen genieten, soo sijn die oock gelegen op de beste en vermaackelijckste oirden van het gantsche landt, waarvan sommige verscheyde mijlen in haren omtreck begrijpen, sonder met mueren, wallen off eenich beschuttingh beslooten te wesen, als alleen door seeckere teeckenen ende hieruyt ontstaat een grooten toeloop van volck, die om d' groote vrijheeden haar aldaar te neder setten*. (s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*, 120; my translation).

described before. Hence, this suggests that these institutions should be at the front of our attention. But to what extent, the content of the Dutch materials does warrant such a focus?

To answer the question, I like to stress once again that the most fruitful approach would be to focus on situations where there is maximum overlap of European and indigenous sources. One such intersectional example would be temple festivals like the Mamankam festival at the Nava Mukunda Temple in Tirunavaya [near Ponnani] which happened every 12 years and attracted a multitude of pilgrims from all over Malabar. The last Chera Perumal had conferred the ruler of Valluvanatu the right to manage the Mamankam fair and also assigned the Tirumandhamkunnattu Bhagavati to him as his guardian deity. In the sixteenth century, though, the Mamankam tradition was claimed by the ruler of Kozhikode supported militarily by the Muslim merchant-residents of that city. Interestingly, the politics surrounding this fair provides wonderful possibilities for research as it is covered by both European (in particular Dutch) and Malayalam sources.[86] For the Company, it was mostly the close involvement of political patronage and custody that made the reports about the developments at temples, with all their dynastic entanglements, so important, as in the case of the Padmanabhaswamy temple involving Travancore and Attingal or the Sree Vallabha Temple in Tiruvalla (*Trivolaij*), which the Dutch considered "the jewel in the Kochi crown", although its custody was also claimed by the Tekkumkur *svarupam*.[87]

One of the things that may emerge from both temple- and *svarupam*-based studies is a clearer view on the social dynamics that relate to the rise of new intermediate groups and how this affected the relationship between Brahmans and Nayars or between landholders and their tenants. Dutch reports also tell us a great deal about Nambudiri Brahmans, who not only resided in temples to

[86] See the published sources edited by N.M. Nampoothiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal* (Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeetham, 2005) and *Samoothiri Caritrarthile Kanappurangal* (Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeetham, 1987). This and the Taippuyam festival, the latter happening the year before the Mamankam, is also well-covered in Haridas, *Zamorins*.

[87] In the case of the Padmanabhaswamy Temple, an interesting case is the late-seventeenth-century revolt raised by a coalition of landlords against the imposition of rents by the temple authorities, which is covered by both VOC- and EIC-sources and the Matilakam Malayalam records of the temple (see K.N. Ganesh, "Agrarian Society in Kerala (1500-1800)", in P.J. Cherian (ed.), *Perspectives on Kerala History, The Second Millennium, Kerala State Gazetteer*, Volume II, Part II (Thiruvananthapuram: Government of Kerala, 1999) 163-4.). For a Dutch report about this conflict, see s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala,* 225, 308. For the Thiruvalla case, see the Memorandum of Magnus Wichelman (1701), in s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*, 370. The Kochi king's main temple, however, appears to have been the Sree Poornathrayeesa Temple at Thrippunithura (*Terpaneture*) which also is well-covered by Dutch materials. Another focal point could be the Krishna temple at Guruvayur (i.e. NW of Thrissur) which was reportedly destroyed by the Dutch in 1716.

Fig.4: Sree Vallabha Temple in Tiruvalla. Photograph Jos Gommans.

find the leisure engaging in "heathen wisdom, star-gazing and natural sciences" (*heydense weysheyt, sterrekijckerij ende natuerlijcke wetenschappen*) but also served as important advisors at the local courts.[88] As for the social history of the region, the legal documents coming for the Dutch Court of Justice in Cochin should be sourced more seriously as its myriad court cases contain a wealth of information on people's social background. Just recently, the Court of Justice has been very fruitfully mined as a terrific source for the history of the enslaved population of Kochi. Slavery is an important topic in and of itself as it provides fascinating micro-histories from the point of view of subalterns. Taken together these trials can also tell a history at the macro level about the relationship between colonial slavery and bonded labour and as such would fill an important gap in Malabar's social history of caste.[89] Such locally informed studies would also help to enrich the history of slavery more generally and to relief it from its ongoing Eurocentric-*cum*-Atlantic bias. Even more so, following the lives of enslaved people would uncover a so far hidden diaspora of

[88] s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*, 98 (Memorandum Van Reede)

[89] Although the Dutch in Malabar were much less involved in land-management as in Sri Lanka, the recent study of Nadeera Rupesinghe, *Lawmaking in Dutch Sri Lanka: Navigating Pluralities in a Colonial Society* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2023) shows some of the potential of this material. The same goes for the recent work on slavery in Malabar, see Alexander Geelen, Bram van den Hout, Merve Tosun, Mike de Windt, and Matthias van Rossum, "On the Run: Runaway Slaves and Their Social Networks in Eighteenth Century Cochin," *Journal of Social History* 54, 1 (2020) 66–87, and also their *Testimonies of Enslavement: Sources on Slavery from the Indian Ocean World* (London: Bloomsbury 2020).

Malabari peoples stretching from the Cape to Indonesia, as also suggested by the frequent occurrence of the name "Van Malabar" among the (formerly) enslaved inhabitants of Batavia and other Dutch settlements.

Coming to the role of *markets*, we know that the Dutch archive is the archive of a trading company and as such it provides an enormous amount of very detailed information on Malabar's markets whether feeder markets in the interior or the major ports trading with markets in the wider Indian Ocean. For most of the eighteenth century, the OBP series contain a nearly complete set of shipping lists for Kochi providing detailed information on Kochi's maritime connections. Indeed, as can be gleaned from the previous section, some of the best work that has been published on Dutch Malabar is about the way the Dutch tried to do business with various portfolio-capitalists who specialized in connecting courts with markets.

More so than the court and the religious institutions, the market was the meeting place par excellence of the various trading communities of Malabar. It was through the market, that the commercial-*cum*-religious networks linked Malabar to the outside world and, as we have seen, had not only commercial repercussions but also had a bearing on the ways these communities perceived themselves. Here the crucial intersection of source materials can be sought in the collaboration with other running projects that deal more specifically with the efflorescence of Malayalam in its interaction with the so-called classical literary traditions in Sanskrit, Arabic, Syriac, and Hebrew.[90]

The role of the Dutch window on these cultural-intellectual developments may seem limited at first, but we should keep in mind that, at least for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many of the new Malabar contacts with the outside world happened under close Dutch surveillance. Especially the Christian and Jewish communities attracted the close administrative attention of the Dutch and the potentialities of the Dutch archives for this topic have yet to be explored but considering the considerable attention this receives in the few published *Memories van Overgave* of Dutch commanders, it seems much more is in store in the unpublished archives.

[90] See SRITE (in an earlier footnote) and the new Anglo-German research project "Hindu-Muslim-Jewish Origin Legends in Circulation between the Malabar Coast and the Mediterranean, 1400s-1800s".

One interesting case in point is the language school that the Dutch established in the mid-1660s at the request of the local community of St. Thomas Christians in Tekkumkur. We know that under the patronage of the local raja there were Dutch schoolmasters teaching Dutch and Latin to the local youth as well as Brahmans teaching Sanskrit and Malayalam to young Company servants who were to become a breed of loyal interpreters.[91] Of course, there is Van Reede's *Hortus Malabaricus* which has already been extensively studied and provides an astonishing example of a truly cosmopolitan project in which the Dutchman was merely coordinating the work of foreign and local experts.[92]

Fig. 5: Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein and the Malabar physician Itti Achudan working on the Hortus Malabaricus at the Kerala Museum, Edapally Kochi. Photograph Jos Gommans.

[91] The two names that we have are Harmen van Hasencamp and Christoffel Kirghbergh. See s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*, 76 (i.e. Memorandum Godske), 164 (Memorandum Van Reede). See also "Alphabeth der Samscortamsche Mallabaarsche taal", a survey (1 volume, 13 folios) of the Malayalam script used for writing Sanskrit, with a short Malayalam vocabulary and explanations, by Harman van Hasencamp for Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein, 1660s (Bodleian Library Oxford: MS. Ind. Misc. c. 5).

[92] J. Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein (1636-1691) and Hortus Malabaricus* (Rotterdam and Boston: A.A. Balkema, 1986) and Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

Less spectacular but still very useful examples come from the second half of eighteenth century when we encounter other such moments of Indo-Dutch cultural engagement with the activities of the two "Enlightened" Dutch commanders Julius Valentijn Stein van Gollenesse (r. 1734-1742) and Adriaan Moens (r. 1770-1780); the first compiling an extensive Malabar Glossary (*Malabaars Woordenboek*, i.e. literally "dictionary"), the latter communicating about Malabar novelties with armchair-scholars in the so-called Republic of Letters and with traveller-scholars like Anquetil-Duperron.[93] Especially the gazetteer-like character of the *Malabaars Woordenboek* warrants an English-language publication.

DUTCH IMPACT

Although this paper aims to stress the significance of the VOC archive as a window on Malabar history, what about the impact of the VOC itself on that history? Obviously, its immediate influence was at its strongest in Kochi where it bolstered its alliance with the local ruler, although Kochi did not centralize to the extent of its southern counterpart, Travancore under Martanda Varma (1729-1758). Although far from superior, Dutch military power on land was strong enough to defend the Kochi realm against the territorial encroachments of Kozhikode and Travancore but eventually the Dutch succumbed to the latter after the battle of Colachel (1741). Travancore's ascendancy was facilitated by its modern army, outfitted with English weaponry and trained by VOC deserters like Eustachius de Lannoy. It should be emphasized that the frugal VOC administrators in the Dutch Republic never aimed for extensive conquests in Malabar, considering such endeavours financially unsustainable, particularly in a region where attempts to establish a complete monopoly on pepper trade had proven quite early already utterly unrealistic. For the Gentlemen XVII it must have been very clear that although they were able to turn Kochi into a kind of Indian Ternate, Malabar was never to be an Indian Maluku.

As for the Dutch influence on trade, it seems that the VOC may have supported certain Brahman and Christian groups that acted as intermediaries between markets and production centres, but overall, its strict adherence to monopolistic practices undermined Kochi's role as a regional trading

[93] Stein van Gollenesse's glossary was published with numerous mistakes by Ph.S. van Ronkel, "De eerste Europeesche Tamilspraakkunst en het eerste Malabaarsche Glossarium", *Medeelingen der Nederlandsche Academie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde*, n.s. dl. V, nr 11 (1942) 543-598. The original can be found in the Malabar letters of 1744 (NA, VOC 2601, ff. 161-191). Two other important surveys are the *dubashi* Cornelis van Meeckeren's encyclopaedic account from 1734 contained in the British Library and the anonymous "Notitie van de heijdensche geslagten die op Mallabaar werden gevonden" from 1778 (In NA VOC 3589, 893-907).

hub. Elsewhere in Malabar, trade largely persisted or expanded independently of Dutch commercial operations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, save for localized exceptions such as the Jewish community in Kochi.

Similarly, the cultural impact of Dutch presence in Malabar appears limited, notwithstanding initiatives like the Dutch school in Kottayam and the *Hortus Malabaricus*. Unlike other colonial enterprises in Asia, the Dutch lacked a civilizing mission; their Protestant ministers focused primarily on serving the Indo-Dutch community rather than engaging in extensive local conversions. The VOC's tolerant stance towards a Roman Catholicism that was not under Portuguese authority as well as its favourable treatment of Syrian Christians, pivotal in pepper production, underscore its pragmatic approach in the region. An interesting aspect that only recently received more scholarly attention is the VOC's role as an enslaving machinery which not only led to the spread of Malabar slaves across the Dutch possessions in the Indian Ocean but may also have affected the practice of already existing practices of bonded labour with possible repercussions on the social fabric (including caste) of the region.

In sum, it seems that the Dutch presence in Malabar did not herald significant transformative changes. Instead, it functioned as a freezing force: until at least the mid eighteenth century preserving existing socio-political dynamics, in which no single polity or commercial entity emerged as dominant within the Malabar region. Interestingly, the Dutch experience in Malabar – characterized by the bolstering of regional states through fiscal centralization and military support and/or rivalry, collaboration with Brahman and other intermediary groups, the increasing circulation of people and ideas – foreshadows the remarkably parallel British experience in India a century or so later. But like the other parts of this exploratory survey, this is merely a first impression and remains open for further research, utilizing the full gamut of both Indian and European sources.[94]

BACK TO THE WATER

Travelling across Malabar today by using its increasingly congested roads, one tends to forget how the region used to be a logistical paradise. Of course, it was a paradise that could only but frustrate

[94] For a recent survey of the Dutch Empire as a whole, see Pieter Emmer and Jos Gommans, *The Dutch Overseas Empire, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Its Coda (pp. 400-418) discusses the Dutch impact on Asia, Africa and the Americas more widely.

ongoing Dutch attempts to impose their monopoly on the region. Just one quick look at one of these meticulously detailed Dutch maps of the period, shows how all was conveniently connected by a very dense and extensive web of waterways that deeply penetrated the interior provided by Malabar's endless backwaters and rivers.[95] Indeed, it is this very web of waterways, smoothly connecting the ocean to the interior, that determined Malabar's longue-durée geopolitics of a scattered political landscape, a cosmopolitan culture, and a strong orientation towards trade. Indeed, in my view, we can only reconstruct Malabar's early modern history if we physically and imaginatively return to the waters – both the high seas of Indian Ocean and the backwaters in the interior – that once connected and encompassed Malabar's manifold courts, religious institutions, and markets. By focusing on this tripartite nexus, one also has the best chance that the vast Dutch materials intersect with indigenous source materials and, thus, to arrive at a balanced understanding of what seems to be such an important moment in the development of Malabar's multiple identities as expressed in its various incipient vernaculars. Of course, all this will be tremendously enhanced by the new technologies to access a now almost fully digitized VOC archives.[96] And although these technologies may ease the consultation of these archives, a comprehensive historical understanding of the period will continue to require an integrated approach to Malabar's history in which the perspectives of both the European archives and Malabar's abundant indigenous sources, on both political-economic and cultural-religious developments, need to be combined.

[95] Jos Gommans, Jeroen Bos and Gijs Kruijtzer, *Grote atlas van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie / Comprehensive Atlas of the Dutch United East India Company, Deel VI: Voor-Indië, Perzië en het Arabisch Schiereiland / Part VI: India, Persia and the Arabian Peninsula* (Voorburg: Asia Maior / Atlas Maior Publishers, 2010). Now also available online: https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.14.97/invnr/11.6/.

[96] See https://globalise.huygens.knaw.nl/.

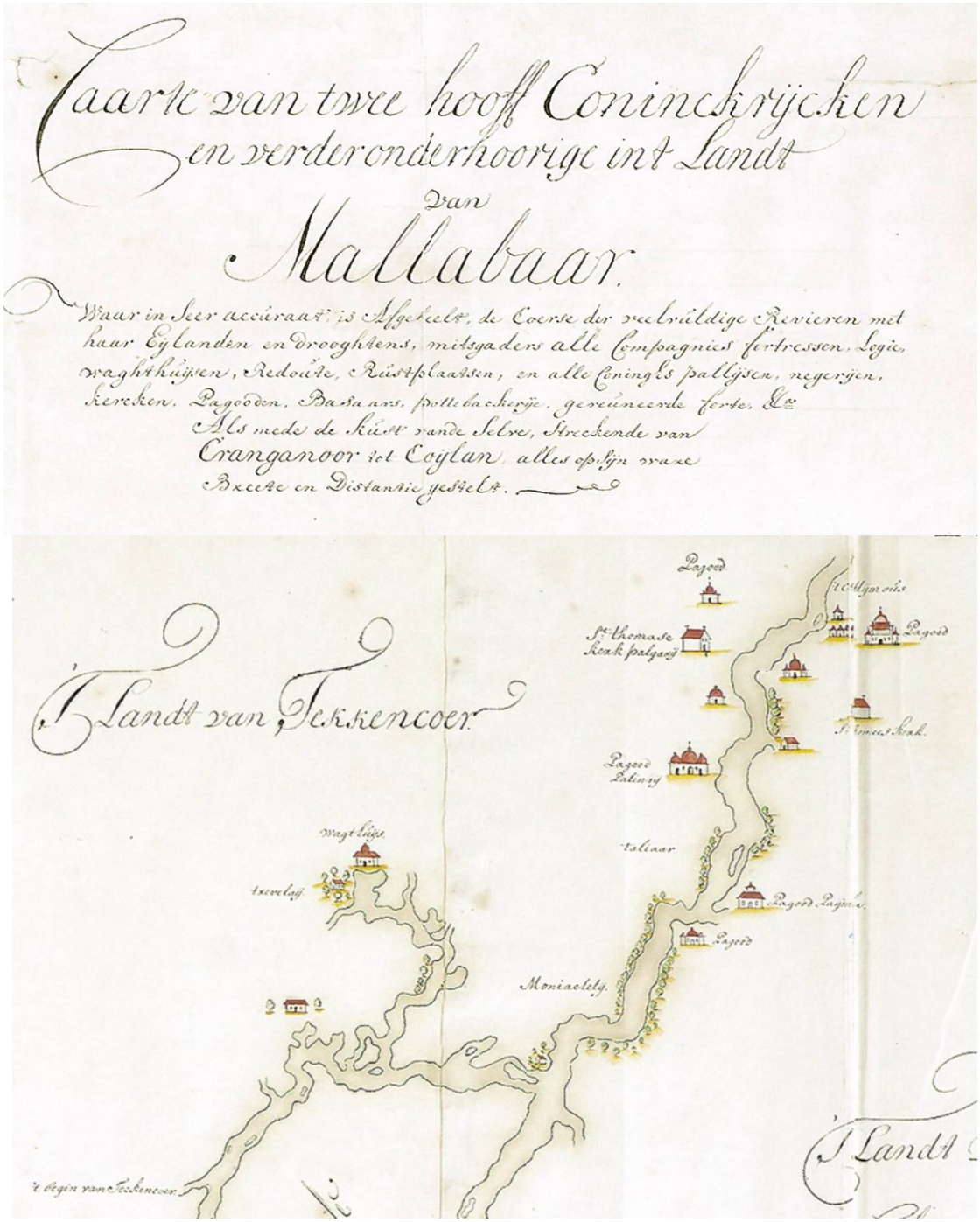

Fig.6: Detail of the "Map of two main kingdoms and other dependencies in the country of Malabar" drawn by Pieter Gijsbert Noodt in ca 1720 showing the little kingdom of Tekkumkur. Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum Amsterdam: A. 2444 (01). The map (above) tells us that it is a map "Wherein very accurately depicted are the courses of the numerous rivers with their islands and drylands, as well as all forts, offices, guardhouses, redoubts, and resting places of the Company, as well as royal palaces, towns, churches, temples, bazaars, pottery workshops, ruined forts, etc."