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A Jewish Qur'an: An Eighteenth-Century Hebrew Qur'an Translation in Its Indian Context

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Abstract: This essay places the Washington Library of Congress Heb. Ms 183, a Hebrew Qur'an translation from eighteenth-century Cochin, in its South Indian context. After pointing out important general differences between early modern European and South Asian inter-religious cultures and attitudes to translation, this essay analyzes three salient differences between Ms 183 and its Dutch source. Then, the essay scrutinizes three relevant and interrelated contexts: the eighteenth-century Indian diplomatic culture of owning and exchanging scriptural translations; the social position of Muslims and Jews as 'guests' and diplomatic brokers; and the rise of Muslim military power in Malabar. On this basis, I argue that this Hebrew Qur'an translation was intended to be cultural-diplomatic capital for Jewish diplomats dealing with Muslim rulers, indicating that not only rulers translated the scriptures of their subjects but also subjects those of their rulers. In addition, by showing how the Mysorean rulers implemented Islamic reforms and how Jewish practices were attuned to majoritarian religious practices, the essay suggests that Ms 183 was also meant to serve Jewish religious purposes, making this manuscript possibly a rare instance of using non-Jewish religious scriptures for Jewish religious practice.

Keywords: Jewish history; Jewish-Muslim relations; translation; Jewish translation; Hebrew Qur'an translation; religious scripture; Judaism in India; Qur'an translation; inter-religious relations



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1. Introduction

1.1. Early Modern Hebrew Qur'an Translations

Of the four still existing manuscripts of Hebrew Qur'an translations that were made before Hermann Reckendorff's 1857 Hebrew translation directly from the Arabic, two, both from the seventeenth century, have a European provenance.¹ The two others, Library of Congress Washington LC Heb. Ms 183, the focus of this essay, and British Museum Ms. Or. 6636, although also translations of European Qur'an translations, are from eighteenth-century India.²

Our knowledge of early modern European Jewish uses of the Qur'an, of European Jewish translations into other languages such as Spanish, and of the better-researched European Christian translations of the Qur'an, reveals much about why European Jews were interested in translating the Qur'an.³ Translated in a period when the Ottoman Empire and to a lesser extent the Kingdom of Morocco had replaced the medieval 'Moor' as the representative of Islam, these Qur'an translations served several purposes similar to those behind the better-researched Christian Qur'an translations.⁴ The first of these purposes was to polemicize against Muslims or opponents closer to home, who were, in the case of Christian translations, Jews or other Christian denominations while Jewish translations often targeted Christian 'idolatry'.⁵ Translating the Qur'an was also an endeavor of the rising European scholarship and learned culture (Elmarsafy 2020, pp. 542–44). Christian European scholars desired to explore the Islamic world, and also hoped that understanding this text, which they believed to have been written in a language and a culture closely related to that of the Bible, would contribute to a better understanding of the biblical text

and to developing the most correct version it (Loop 2019, p. 32). Early modern European Jews, in contrast, did not regard the Qur'anic text as a source for better understanding their own scriptures, yet also had a learned interest in other cultures, and the translation of scriptures was part of the early modern Jewish cultural absorption of other cultures through translation.⁶ Lastly, early modern Qur'an translations, of which the first, André du Ryer's 1647 French translation, was the (indirect) source of Ms 183, answered the need for practical knowledge about trade and diplomacy with Muslims, chiefly in the Ottoman Empire, where also one of Judaism's most notorious messiahs, Sabbatai Tsevi, converted to Islam.⁷

1.2. The Indian Hebrew Qur'ans

Thus, while our knowledge of the historical context of the European Qur'an translations gives a good sense of why they were made, this is not the case with the Hebrew Qur'ans from contemporary India. The British Museum Ms. Or. 6636 has not been analyzed and no more is known about it than that it is—like the three European Hebrew Qur'an translations—based on the 1547 Italian edition of Robert of Ketton's 1142–1143 Latin Qur'an translation; that it was written on paper of Dutch origin that was the same type as that used for a part of Ms 183; and that in 1905 it was donated to the British Museum by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In fact, only through pointing out these last details did Myron Weinstein, about whom more below, convincingly argue that the manuscript hails from India—others have argued for a European provenance.⁸ We do not know which Indian Jewish community made or acquired it.⁹

Although more is known about the provenance of Washington Library LC 183 (previously Ms 99) than the other Qur'an translation from India, the question why it was made has not been satisfactorily answered. A detailed study by Washington Library librarian Myron Weinstein from 1971 proved that the 259-leaf and 18.5 by 12.5-sized well-preserved manuscript was made in Cochin (Kochi) in Malabar (today part of Kerala) by a member of Cochin's Jewish community, David Cohen, who under the name of Frederik Scheffer from Berlin was employed by the Dutch East India Company, and whose scribal product, Weinstein wrote, was not professional yet in its lettering not "totally displeasing" (Weinstein 1971, pp. 22, 37). Ms 183, Weinstein found out, is a copy of the now lost Hebrew translation by a Dutch Jewish convert to Christianity, Leopold Immanuel Jacob van Dort, who translated it from Hendrik Glazemaker's 1657 Dutch *Mahomets Alkoran*, itself a translation from Du Ryer's French translation from the Arabic.¹⁰ Weinstein also concluded, without a good basis, as I will show, that Van Dort made the translation in 1757 and Cohen his copy Ms 183 soon after that (Weinstein 1971, pp. 39–40, 51, n. 89).

One stop on the itinerary of Ms 183 from Cochin to Washington, Weinstein discovered, was Persia. In 1831, the missionary, Jewish convert, and booklover Joseph Wolff spent two months in Meshed, where he encountered Jews who practiced Sufism together with the local Muslim Sufis. In the house of one of these Jewish Sufis, Mullah Meshiakh, Wolff saw a Hebrew translation of the Qur'an, whose title, assumedly also written in Hebrew, he cited as:

The Law of the Ishmaelites, called Koran, translated from the Arabic into French, by Durier, and from the French into Dutch, by Glosenmacher, and I, Immanuel Jacob Medart, have now translated it into the holy language, written here at Kogen, by David, the son of Isaac Cohen of Berlin (Wolff 1837, p. 94).

The Hebrew Qur'an that Wolff saw in the house of this Persian Jewish Sufi, Weinstein established, is Ms 183, which apparently had lost this identifying information that Weinstein later would use to identify its provenance, during its century-long journey to Washington. There, in 1932, the book dealer Israel Perlstein from New York, who had bought various Russian imperial collections from the Soviets—Perlstein's son claimed his father had bought the manuscript in Kiev—donated it to the Library of Congress, suggesting the manuscript might have come to the United States from Ukraine.¹¹

The few explanations offered by Weinstein and others of the motivations behind the making of Ms 183 reflect what is known of European motivations, Christian and Jewish. Weinstein himself suggested that Ezekiel Rahabi (1694–1771), who was a merchant, diplomat, and the Dutch East India Company’s main representative in Cochin, had commissioned Cohen to make the copy.¹² Pointing out that Rahabi was also involved in translations of other religious scriptures, Weinstein—despite also observing the neutral language of the translation—projected the European polemical tradition on this Indian context and claimed that Rahabi intended to polemicize against other religions.¹³ Another author, Moshe Hillel, attributed the project not to a desire to polemicize, but, reminiscent of European scholarly motivations in the age of colonial expansion and the encounter with new cultures, to Rahabi’s interest “in the histories of the different religions” of the region.¹⁴ Likewise, Naser Basal, who explained Ms 183 with the motivations of the translator Van Dort rather than those of Rahabi or Cohen, understood the project to be an early Enlightenment endeavor, suggesting that it was Van Dort’s ambition as a Jewish intellectual “to broaden the scope of his culture through an acquaintance with another faith, another religion”.¹⁵

1.3. Approach, Argument, and Structure of This Essay

The fact that the manuscript itself is mostly a European product—a French translation in turn translated into Dutch, then into Hebrew by a Dutch- and German-educated translator, and then copied by a German copyist—and that there are no sources about the exact circumstances in which Ms 183 was made, makes it impossible to establish why Ms 183 was made based on an analysis of only the manuscript. Yet, instead of projecting knowledge of early modern European Qur’an translation on contemporary South India, as has been done heretofore, this essay will use the broader contexts of eighteenth-century South Asian use of scriptural translation, the role of Malabarian Jews as brokers, and the ascendance of Muslim power in Malabar to explain the making of Ms 183. Based on these contexts, I propose that the manuscript was created to serve as diplomatic–cultural capital during the rise of Muslim military power resulting in Muslim Mysore vying with the British for hegemony over Malabar until the collapse of Mysorean power in Malabar in 1792, and which included the 1766 conquest of Cochin by Hyder Ali of Mysore and Cochin’s subsequent recognition of Mysore as its overlord, thus making Cochin’s Jews the indirect subjects of a Muslim empire. In addition, by analyzing both how Cochini Judaism interacted with majoritarian religions and how the Mysorean rulers embarked on religious reforms, I will in addition suggest that this Qur’an translation, which seemed to have particularly fitted with certain Islamic customs, could have been meant to serve in adapting local Jewish customs to a changing religious context.

This context-based approach takes as its premise that the making of Ms 183 was to serve the interests of Cochin’s (entire) Jewish community. This means that this essay will not explore another not less plausible type of explanation of why Ms 183 was made, namely that a small party in Cochin with other interests than those of its entire Jewish community was responsible for Ms 183. Muslims or Jewish converts to Islam could have commissioned a translation for the religious use of converts who did not know Arabic, or for mission among Jews; it might have been Jewish Sufis desiring the Qur’anic text in the language of their own religious tradition, which would explain the manuscript’s ownership by Persian Jewish Sufis in the 1830s; lastly, and similar to Basal’s suggestion about Van Dort’s motivations, it could have been the private scholarly interest of Cohen or someone who commissioned him to copy Van Dort’s manuscript, reflecting European interests in religious scriptures and translations. The discovery of new sources, in particular in the Indian archives, which I was not able to consult, might therefore lead to a different conclusion.

This essay is constructed to analyze one by one the different contexts that, brought together, form the basis of my thesis that Ms 183 was made to serve as diplomatic–cultural capital during the emergence of Muslim political–military power and Mysore’s conquest of Malabar, followed by my suggestion that a Qur’an translation might also have been part of the attunement of Malabarian Judaism to its religious majoritarian environment. I

will begin, in Section 2, by showing how the differences between early modern Indian and European inter-religious and translation cultures make the projection of various European motivations by previous authors highly problematic. Then, in Section 3, with the caveat that Ms 183 is mostly a European product and not an unmediated Indian translation, I will analyze what the differences between this Hebrew Qur'an and its Dutch original might reveal about the Indian Jewish intentions behind Ms 183. Moving to the wider context, in Section 4 I will show how in eighteenth-century India, scriptural translation served as what I will call "diplomatic-cultural capital". Then, in Section 5, I will describe the social roles of the Muslim and Jewish communities of Malabar as 'guests' and 'brokers', protected communities whose leaders served as mediators between various military, religious, and commercial parties, followed by, in Section 6, an analysis of the militarization of Malabar's Muslim Mappila community and the conquest of Malabar by the Muslim Mysorean rulers Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. Section 7 will show that the Jewish leaders Rahabi and Surgun had already established early diplomatic ties with the Mysorean leaders, whom they correctly expected to be their future sovereigns.

Having established that Ms 183 was probably made as diplomatic and cultural capital during the rise and supremacy of Muslim military power in Malabar, I will dedicate the last two sections of the paper to exploring the possibility that the Hebrew Qur'an also was meant to serve Jewish religious purposes, in other words that this Hebrew Qur'an was also meant to be *religious* capital. For this I will first, in Section 8, show how Cochin's Jews, representative of Jewish custom elsewhere as well, attuned their religious practices and application of religious laws to the (religious) environment they lived in. Section 9 shows how in particular Jewish attention to Islam was important for this: The Mysorean rulers were not only privileging Islam in their young empire, turning it into its majoritarian religion, but also increasingly conceiving military and political conflicts as a struggle between on the one hand, Islam and on the other, Christianity and Hinduism. In addition, having cut the umbilical cord with the Sunni Moghul empire, the Mysorean rulers were pursuing their own kind of Islam.

1.4. *The Copy, Not the Translation as Subject; Dating the Manuscript*

Before analyzing the differences between Ms 183 and its Dutch original, however, two issues need to be addressed. The first is my choice to focus on the reason why Ms 183, Cohen's copy, was made rather than what motivated the original translator Van Dort. The second concerns the dating of Ms 183.

To begin with the issue of the original translator, Van Dort. It is important to separate the reasons behind Van Dort's original translation from those behind David Cohen's Ms 183, something that, for instance, Basal did not. Although Van Dort could very well have made his translation in Cochin and have done so at the request of the Jews of Cochin, this is not certain. In fact, it is possible that this fascinating character had made his translation even before he arrived in South Asia to work at the Dutch seminary in Colombo, Ceylon.¹⁶ Thus, a quest for reasons why Van Dort translated the Qur'an might bring us back to Europe rather than the Indian context in which this essay is interested. My concern here, therefore, is not the reasons behind Van Dort's translation or the (European) way Van Dort translated the Qur'an, but the local, Indian, context in which Cohen made Ms 183.

In regard to the dating of Ms 183, Weinstein's assumption, adopted also by Hillel and Basal, that Van Dort made his translation in 1757 and Cohen Ms 183 soon after, would render my claim implausible that in particular the prospect of becoming subjects of Mysore's Muslim ruler was a central reason behind the making of Ms 183, for Mysore became the realistic candidate for becoming Malabar's future overlord only from the mid-1760s on.¹⁷

However, dating Van Dort's translation to exactly 1757 is unwarranted and, more importantly, so is Weinstein's claim that Cohen must have made Ms 183 soon after. Weinstein's assumption that Van Dort made his translation in 1757 in Cochin is based not only on the premise that Van Dort made the translation in Cochin, but also on Van Dort's own

dating to 1757 of what he claimed to be a translation he had made in Cochin of ancient Jewish chronicles owned by a prominent community member.¹⁸ There are however no grounds to assume that Van Dort could only have translated the Qur'an in Cochin, and, moreover, these ancient chronicles were probably a forgery by Van Dort and its dating and placement in Cochin thus a ruse to make it seem authentic, for when a fascinated European scholar made inquiries about the original, Cochini Jews stated they were unaware of the existence of such a text (Eichhorn 1789, vol. 2, p. 568; Margoliouth 1847, vol. 1, p. 27). The only certainty is that Van Dort could not have made his translation after 1761, when he died in Colombo.¹⁹

More critical for the purposes of this article than the date of Van Dort's translation is the problem of Weinstein's assumption that Cohen made Ms 183 in or shortly after 1757, the date Weinstein believed Van Dort made his translation. In his article, Weinstein reported that the Dutch paper expert Hendrick Voorn examined "the manuscript briefly on a stop in Washington", and this authorized Weinstein "to state that the proposed dating [1757] is consistent with the evidence of the paper". Yet, the two types of paper used for the manuscript were used until into the nineteenth century, or, in the case of one of them, at least until 1765.²⁰ It seems therefore that Voorn confirmed that 1757 was indeed a possible date rather than the precise year, because it fell into the period of its paper's use.

Weinstein's assumption that Ms 183 is from 1757 or shortly thereafter should therefore be rejected and instead a longer period should be taken into account. More importantly, since Cohen appeared in records from Malabar until 1778, and until a new analysis of the manuscript paper's watermarks might establish a more precise date, we must assume that Ms 183 could have been made not in the late 1750s but at any time between Van Dort's arrival in South Asia in 1755, and until decades later. In short, Cohen copied Ms 183 in a period during which the guns and sabers of two ambitious Muslim rulers came to dominate Malabar.

2. Early Modern South India vs. Early Modern Europe

The claims that Ms 183 was a polemical project against Islam or driven by curiosity about the exotic Muslim Other are projections of the early-modern European situation rather than reflecting the South Indian context of Malabar of the second half of the eighteenth century. In particular, two general differences between early modern Europe and India are important: the nature of interreligious relations and cultures of translation.

2.1. Inter-Religious Relations

The way religious communities interacted and attitudes to the religious scriptures of others was in Ms 183's Indian context different from that in which the European Qur'an translations were made. In Malabar, Muslims and Jews had lived side by side for centuries and operated in the same trading networks, and Muslim rulers were part of the Indian geo-political fabric rather than as in Western Europe being distant and exotic diplomatic and trade partners. Indian Jews were therefore intimately familiar with Muslims and their religious traditions.

This coexistence was mostly harmonious. Cochin's Jews still remembered the Muslim attacks of 1524 that had led to the end of the Jewish community of Cranganore immediately north of Cochin, and which they remembered as the Jewish kingdom of Shingly.²¹ However, there is no evidence of any animosity between Jews and Muslims in mid-eighteenth-century Cochin. Likewise, although polemical literature existed in India, there was no Jewish-Muslim polemical culture. Religious polemics had been stimulated by Akbar the Great (1542–1605), not just to allow Islam to compete with other religions but also to weaken the power of the ulama.²² Polemics, as I will also show in Section 4, were as well used by Christian missionaries from Europe. Polemical works also could be found in abundance in the library of Tipu Sultan of Mysore (1751–1799), who as will be discussed later developed a great antipathy to Christians and Hindus during his struggle for domination with the English and their Hindu allies. Yet, Tipu's library contained only one book on Judaism,

namely Moinadeen of Herat's *History of the Jews*, and I have not found any evidence elsewhere of Jewish-Muslim polemics in that period (Stewart 1809, p. 7).

Neither were South Asian inter-religious relations characterized by religious exclusivist practices in the way they were in Europe. While recent scholarship of early modern Europe has discovered that there were concrete forms of practical toleration that involved, for instance, arrangements for intermarriage or the sharing of ritual space, this became a rarity in the eighteenth century and, moreover, was a far cry from the extent of religion-sharing in early modern India (Kaplan 2007). There, Christians, Muslims, and Hindus alike frequented the graves of Sufi saints, including that of the Jewish Sufi Sarmad the Jew in Delhi, for healing.²³ Likewise, in Cochin itself, the grave of the (Jewish) kabbalist Nehemiah ben Abraham Motha, reputed to cure sterility among other conditions, was also frequented by non-Jews (Segal 1993, p. 23). Another example is how Muslim soldiers serving in the region's many armies were known among all religious communities for their healing powers, and it is also possible that the medicine Rahabi sent to Tipu Sultan's father Hyder Ali of Mysore (c. 1720–1781), and which I will discuss later, was 'Jewish' medicine.²⁴ The Mysorean rulers also consulted both Muslim and Hindu astrologers (Brittlebank 1997, p. 48). Hindu rulers sponsored the building of mosques and Muslim rulers that of Hindu temples, and each recognized the efficacy of the rituals of the other and shared the same concept of superhuman power that Alan Strathern identified as the "mana" of immanent forms of religion (Brittlebank 1997, p. 44; Strathern 2019, p. 37). Hyder and Tipu, for instance, turned to the (Hindu) Sringeri Swami to pray for their success in war.²⁵ Another example is that on the day of his death in battle, Tipu had ordered a Brahmin ritual, to counter, unsuccessfully as it would turn out, a bad omen (Sil 2005, vol. 39, no.1, p. 77).

2.2. Translation Cultures

The second important difference between early modern Europe and South India is the way in which in these cultures, translation and in particular the translation of religious scripture was conceived. In recent years, publication projects such as those of Marilyn Gaddis Rose (2000), Theo Hermans (2006, 2014), and Hephzibah Israel (2022) have done much to challenge Western-centric notions of translations, and so have edited volumes centered on specific parts of Asia, such as Eva Hung and July Wakabayashi on East Asia (Hung and Wakabayashi 2005) and Ronit Ricci and Jan van der Putten on Southeast and South Asia (Ricci and Van der Putten 2011).

Ricci and Van der Putten, for instance, have pointed out that South and South Asian cultures have traditionally been more multilingual than European ones, and have had strong oral traditions in addition to written traditions, both of which impacted the way translation is conceived (Ricci and Van der Putten 2011, p. 2). For instance, if the source language remains present, a written translation tends not to substitute the "original" text, which, as canonical Bible translations such as the Latin Vulgate and in the early modern period Protestant Bible translations illustrate, was what characterized scriptural translation in the European tradition (Zadeh 2011, p. 19). Instead, these translations continued to coexist with the source text.

Another example is the argument made by both Harish Trivedi and G. Gopinathan that the Western dominant notion of translation as striving for equivalence did not exist in (Hindu) India before the nineteenth century. Instead, as Trivedi has argued, Indians created repetitions, creative rewritings, transformations into other forms, expansions, abridgments, and borrowings, leaving much creative space for the "translator".²⁶ Also (Muslim) South Asian Qur'an translations, at least until the twentieth century, reflect this notion that translation was not a matter of equivalence, for they often served as commentaries rather than attempts to make an exact equivalent of the Arabic original.²⁷ As Travis Zadeh has written in his history of Persian Qur'an translations—for Muslim India belonged to the Persian cultural realm—these were not "designed to be autonomous and independent. They succeed in conveying the meaning of Qur'an while guarding the sacredness of the Arabic".²⁸

3. Ms 183 as a Source for Islamic Belief and Local Practice

One way of establishing Cochini Jewish interest in a Hebrew Qur'an is to look at differences between Ms 183 and Glazemaker's Dutch Qur'an translation. There are, however, several problems with this approach, and these are also the reasons why this essay focuses primarily on the military, political, and religious context of Ms 183 rather than the manuscript itself. First, Ms 183 is not an unmediated translation of Glazemaker. It is a copy of Van Dort's translation (and possibly even a copy of a copy), and, since no manuscript of Van Dort's own translation exists, it is impossible to know with certainty who was responsible for these differences. Comparing Ms 183 with Glazemaker would therefore be of little use if it was Van Dort who made them for reasons unrelated to Cochin; for instance, if he made the translation before his arrival in South Asia or if these changes were related to his own European training and attitudes towards translation rather than those of the Jews of Cochin.²⁹

In this section, and with that important caveat, I will nevertheless explore the possibility that these changes, namely three salient differences between Ms 183 and Glazemaker, *do* reflect the interests of Cochin's Jews either because Cochini Jews were behind these changes or because they had commissioned Van Dort to make the translation with specific instructions. If these changes were made for local Jewish reasons, they can shed light on Malabarian Jewish interest in a Hebrew Qur'an translation.

3.1. Corrections

The first of these differences is that Ms 183 "corrects" Glazemaker's chapter numbering to fit the traditional Islamic surah counting. Whereas Glazemaker does not include in his numbering the first surah, the 'fatiha', and instead numbers surah 2 (the Cow) as the first unit, Ms 183 makes the fatiha the first chapter (below I will discuss the Hebrew terminology), which more accurately reflects Islamic traditions. This either means that Van Dort or Cochini Jews were familiar with the Qur'an or that Muslims were involved in the translation, such as the "Moorish priest Seijda Alewij" or the translator "Make Kamid" in Cochin who in 1759 translated for the Dutch a letter from the king of Jeddah.³⁰ The latter option would place the Cochin Qur'an in the Indian translation tradition in which members of the translated scripture's religious community were often involved in the translation.

3.2. A Non-Polemical Translation

The second difference between Ms 183 and its source Glazemaker is that Ms 183 leaves out elements hostile towards Islam and its prophet, making Weinstein's contention that Ms 183 was meant to polemicize against Islam doubtful. While Persian and Arabic glosses on the last folios of the manuscript do polemicize against Islam, for instance by inserting that the Jews are God's chosen people, these date from the nineteenth century. In contrast, the tone of the translation itself is, as Weinstein himself also observed, "informative rather than abusive" (Weinstein 1971, p. 23). This is also the case with the language of the paratexts translated from Glazemaker. Although the translation, as Moshe Hillel has noted, refers to the New Testament, the "evangelion" as (עִוֵן כִּלְיוֹן), "sin of destruction", no such language is used in regard to Islam, its sacred scripture, and prophet (Hillel 2017/2018, p. 128, n. 195). Neither does Ms 183 make any attempt to denounce Mohammed as a false prophet, or, at least, to moderate laudatory descriptions of him throughout the Qur'anic text or the paratexts. For example, the eloquent translation—despite Weinstein's characterization of the translation as "frequently ungrammatical or worse" and failing in its attempt to create "a biblical style" (Weinstein 1971, p. 24)—of the last surah's powerful unitarian message is not accompanied by any claim that, for example, this message has been taken from Judaism or somehow inferior to the monotheistic message in the Jewish scriptures.

Another indication that polemical intent does not lie behind the making of Ms 183 is that of the six paratexts printed in Glazemaker's book, the Cochin manuscript leaves out the three most polemical ones. The first text that the Hebrew translation omits is the short preface that Glazemaker in turn had translated from Du Ryer (who himself subsequently

left it out of his later editions). This preface calls the Qur'an, among others, "ridiculous" and introduces Mohammed as a false prophet who invented the Qur'anic revelations himself (Du Ryer and Glazemaker (1734, pp. i, ii)). The second paratext in Glazemaker but absent in the Hebrew manuscript is a collection of Christian authors and a Jewish midrash that Glazemaker translated from the work of the Dutch Arabist Erpenius's *Historia Saracena* (1625), who himself had collected it from older sources (Du Ryer and Glazemaker 1734, pp. 477–506; Basal 2021, p. 131). This text provides slanderous biographical claims about the prophet, for instance that his mother was a Jewish prostitute (Du Ryer and Glazemaker 1734, p. 480). The third text that the Cochin Qur'an does not translate is a text that in the Islamic tradition is known as the "Book of One Thousand Questions", and in the Christian West as the "Doctrina Mahumet", namely the debate between Mohammed and the Jew Abdallah ibn Salam, a text that Robert of Ketton already had appended to his translation many centuries before.³¹

If the intent of Ms 183 had been to collect ammunition to polemicize against Islam, a clear denunciation or ad hominem claims about its prophet evoking associations with *Toledot Yeshu* would have been logical ingredients for a polemical Qur'an translation. A Jewish polemical translator might also have translated the debate between the prophet and the Jew to expose Islamic mission to Jews. This, clearly, was not the case, and polemical intent can thus be dismissed.

3.3. Conveying (Local) Islamic Practice

The third conclusion to be drawn from comparing Ms 183 and Glazemaker is that Ms 183 is focused on Muslim practices, whereas Glazemaker's translation prioritizes "the content rather than the form of the text", to use Ziad Elmarsafy's characterization of the tradition of Western Qur'an translations (Elmarsafy 2009, p. 431). At first sight, one could perceive it merely as a Jewish lens through which Glazemaker's *Mahomets Alkoran* became what Wolff translated from Hebrew as the "Law of the Ismaelites" (probably the Hebrew "torat ha-ishmaelim"), its paratext *De godsdienst der Turken* ("the religion of the Turks"), the plural "minhage ha-ishmailim" ("customs of the Ismaelites"), and its surahs "parashot", after the traditional Jewish weekly Torah reading portions. But, the choice to use "parashah" rather than terms such as "perek" (chapter) for the Qur'an's chapters suggests its makers' interest in Islamic practice.

Another indication of the focus on practice is an additional division of the Qur'anic text in Ms 183 that is absent in Glazemaker. This additional division splits the text in 30 parts ("chelek"). Weinstein already suggested this might have been inspired by the traditional Islamic "juz" (meaning "parts") tradition dividing the Qur'anic text into thirty parts of a not fixed yet roughly equal length to allow Muslims to read the entire Qur'an over the month of Ramadan (Weinstein 1971, p. 24). Juz were also used in South India in the second half of the eighteenth century, and the Mysorean ruler Tipu Sultan owned six thirty-leafed Qur'ans, showing that under his reign, juz were important.³²

What is remarkable about the Cochin Qur'an's juz division, something that Weinstein also noticed, is that in contrast to customary juz divisions, these juz are of very different lengths.³³ Such an uncommon division can be explained in two different ways, both of which suggest that ritual knowledge was important for the makers of Ms 183. The first possibility is that Van Dort or Cohen were requested to add the traditional juz division to the text but, not truly interested in finding out the actual juz division, randomly divided up the text into 30 parts. The fact that the translated paratexts from Glazemaker constitute the first part rather than that the first juz begins with the first surah, is an argument for this. A second possibility is that the Cochin Qur'an followed an existing local tradition, and a closer study of eighteenth-century South Asian Qur'ans could reveal whether such a new division was one of the religious innovations, to be discussed in more detail later, of the Muslim Mysore rulers, in particular of Tipu Sultan, who also introduced a new Islamic counting that began with the year of the Prophet's first revelation, and a calendar that included Hindu months.³⁴ Whichever was the case, either a translator or copyist taking

a lazy shortcut or an unknown local juz division, these are indications that the Cochin Qur'an was to serve as a practical guidebook about—probably local—Islamic customs.

4. Scripture Translations as Cultural and Diplomatic Capital

Having established that Ms 183 was made to inform about the Qur'an and Islam, in particular about (local) Islamic practice, rather to polemicize, we turn now to the culture of scriptural translation and of owning translated scriptures in eighteenth-century India, arguing that a project to translate the Qur'an into Hebrew fits well in the eighteenth-century Indian culture of scriptural translation and the ownership of translated scriptures.

C.A. Bayly has described how, beginning with the Moghul rulers, an Indian culture of knowledge gathering developed that was fueled by both utilitarian motivations such as political control and taxation, and also the esoteric pursuit of knowledge itself, including knowledge about other religions. This culture of knowledge emphasized knowledge of classical scriptures, while the later Moghuls also developed an interest in the folklore of other religious traditions (Bayly 1996, p. 24). An illuminating example of how eighteenth-century Indians were interested in translations of religious scriptures of other religious traditions and how this differed from the interest in scriptural translations of European missionaries, concerns two reports about the same person in *Der Königlich-Dänischen Missionarien aus Ost-Indien* ("The Royal Danish missionaries from East India"), which I also will use as a source informing about Ezekiel Rahabi's interest in religious scriptures.

4.1. Book Lovers

In May 1743, the missionaries from the Danish mission in Tranquebar (Tharangambadi) reported to have received a letter from "one of our Christians in Magadewapadtnam".³⁵ According to the letter, a visiting military commander, a "Liwa", from Arcadu had noticed at the house of the local military commander the Arabic translation of the New Testament that the missionary had given the commander, and had "developed a great desire to have one as well".³⁶ The letter therefore asked the Tranquebar mission if they could also send the Liwa a copy of the Arabic New Testament (Francken 1747, vol. 5, p. 1691). This was done and soon a grateful letter written in Persian arrived, stating that the Liwa:

could not sufficiently express how the Arabic New Testament they had been sent to him had been dear to him. He reads in it, he writes, day and night with great joy, and will read more because it made for him the story of hanabi [the prophet] so new as if he was born today, and he would proclaim all this to his fellow believers (Francken 1747, p. 1694).

In addition to describing the religious benefit reading the book had given him, the Liwa also expressed great desire to continue the friendship and to meet in person, "and requests us therefore to send more books in the Persian or Arabic language, in particular the Psalms of David" (Francken 1747, p. 1694).

The second report about the Liwa from Arcadu, two months after the first, is from the missionary Kiernander who belonged to the English mission to Cuddalore.³⁷ Kiernander wrote that during an official visit, the Liwa paid his respects also at the missionary's house. Because the Muslim only understood Arabic, Kiernander showed him the Arabic New Testament, in which the official "read quite a while, and by all appearances with great attention". Through the man's servant, who spoke some Malabaran, Kiernander understood that the book greatly pleased his visitor, and that he would return with an interpreter the next morning. The man indeed returned the next morning, requested again to look at the New Testament, and a conversation ensued about the Sermon on the Mount and the identity of Jesus. In addition, the man, supported by his servant's remarks about his master's character, spoke about himself and his life story and by doing so displayed his upright character. After this, the Liwa requested if he could borrow the book. The missionary decided instead to give him the book, and the grateful recipient promised that when he would arrive in the camp of the Nizam (of Hyderabad), to which he was to

travel soon, he would show it and read some of it to the Nizzam, “who is a great lover of good books”.

These two reports each reveal much about the Indian cultural attitudes towards religious scriptures of the eighteenth century and the difference from those of the European missionaries. While the missionaries hoped that reading the Christian scriptures and discussing them with other Muslims would bring this Muslim and his fellow believers to the Christian religion, this was not the motivation of the man from Arcadu. The Liwa was a book lover and described the Nizzam of Hyderabad as also belonging to that category. Unless the reports are highly inaccurate and refer to the same event, the Liwa even managed to acquire a second Arabic New Testament while feigning it was his first encounter with it.

In addition to objects for collection, the Liwa regarded the Arabic New Testament as having religious value. While the missionaries took the Liwa’s fascination with the New Testament as a sign that the truth of the Christian religion was dawning on their correspondent, the Liwa’s own words suggest that to him, the religious scriptures of others deepened understanding of one’s own faith.

Third, the way the Liwa expressed the desire to speak with the missionaries about scripture, perhaps in part a pragmatic means to motivate the missionaries to send him more books, seems, rather than polemical, driven by what today would be called inter-religious dialogue, namely a cultured conversation between leaders—political, military, and religious—in which religious ideas are being exchanged for the enrichment of both sides.

4.2. Rahabi as a Book Lover

As the Liwa from Arcadu, Eliezer Rahabi also received Christian scriptures from the Danish missionaries, and this invites us to look forward to the next section on the particular social role of minority leaders in Malabar as brokers, and expanding the Indian class of the scripturally literate beyond that of the indigenous ruling class to include brokers such as Isaac Surgun and Eliezer Rabahi.³⁸ While of Surgun not more is known than that he knew many languages including Arabic, Rahabi surely fitted very much into the Indian scholarly tradition of using scriptural translations as diplomatic capital. Cochin’s Dutch governor Moens characterized Rahabi as “a diligent student of everything that concerned his nation” whose interests exceeded the bounds of Jewish history (Moens 1908, p. 105; Fischel 1962, vol. 30, p. 56), and the English traveler Edward Ives wrote that he was “a lover of science and understands astronomy”.³⁹ The Danish missionary Kleinknecht described him as “ein gelehrter Jude” who knew many languages (Fischel 1962, p. 52), and the *Königlich-Dänischen Missionarien* describes him with exactly the same terms as the Liwa used for the Nizzam, namely as a “lover of books”, reporting that he owned a Bible in seven languages, namely Hebrew, Samaritan, Chaldean, Syrian, Arabic, Greek, and Latin (the author of this report suspected this was the *Biblia Poligotta Anglicana*), as well as having a Bible in Tamil (Francken 1747, pp. 1277–78). In addition, Rahabi owned Hebrew translations of the Epistle to the Hebrews and, with rabbinical notes, of the first half of the Gospel of Luke.⁴⁰

The last two, the Hebrew Epistle to the Hebrews and the first half of Luke, Rahabi had received from the missionaries in Tranquebar in 1742 and 1743, who also had sent him the missionary work *Licht am Abend, Wodurch die Juden zur Annehmung der christlichen Wahrheit zubereitet werden* (“Light in the evening: through which the Jews are prepared for the acceptance of the Christian truth”⁴¹). Like the Liwa from Arcadu, Rahabi also wanted to correspond with the missionaries, and asked them if he could do so in Hebrew. Rahabi’s purpose was to exchange ideas rather than convert, for he shared with them his disagreement with the trinitarian claims made in *Licht am Abend* (Francken 1747, p. 1278). In addition, and here again the similarity with the Liwa’s behavior is striking, Rahabi expressed the hope to “receive something in Hebrew from Europe:” Also for Rahabi, the missionaries were contacts through which he could collect books (Francken 1747, p. 1278).

The correspondence between Rahabi and the missionaries is also revealing about the knowledge of Arabic among Cochin’s Jews and perhaps also about their relationship with

the local Muslims. Rahabi wrote to the missionaries that “the Arabic translation of Grotius had been too hard for him to understand”, which must have been Hugo Grotius’s Christian apologetic *De Veritate* translated by Edward Pococke into Arabic, which in book 5 and 6 “refutes” Judaism and Islam, respectively.⁴² This shows that Rahabi had a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic but not good enough for reading more complicated texts, and also that, since the missionaries had reported on Cochin’s Jews that “three or four can understand and speak Arabic but not read it”, this must have been missionary material sent not to Cochin’s Jews but to Muslims, and these, apparently, shared the book with or gave it to Rahabi (Francken 1747, p. 1277).

But Rahabi did not only collect translations of religious works. He also produced them. The Letter to the Hebrews and the part of Luke that Rahabi received from the Danish missionaries—either on his request or on a missionary’s initiative—became part of a translation of the New Testament. According to the biblicist Franz Delitzsch, who himself would also author a Hebrew New Testament translation, Rahabi had begun this translation himself before 1741, namely from the Syriac New Testament, after which he included the translations sent to him and had a German translator from Frankfurt complete the translation, this time from Luther’s German Bible translation (Delitzsch 1876, vol. 13; Delitzsch 1870, pp. 103–9, there p. 106).

Like Ms 183, which as described used some negative polemical language when referring to Christianity, Rahabi’s New Testament translation also uses some of the same negative language, such as און גליון, and adds critical remarks, in addition to several, as the Jewish convert to Christianity Delitzsch did not fail to point out, positive comments in the margins of the later translated New Testament texts (Delitzsch 1870, p. 103; Delitzsch 1876, pp. 187–88). This text, in addition to some other anti-Christian polemical material that the Cochini Jews had in their possession such as a Hebrew translation of Saul Levi Morteira’s polemic “Questions of a priest from Rouen and my answers to them” (Hillel 2017/2018, p. 39), suggests that for relations with Christians there was no such respectful diplomatic decorum. Here, we should particularly think of the European colonial powers and the European missionaries with their very different tradition of interreligious relations rather than Malabar’s ancient Syrian Christian community.

In addition to Christianity, Rahabi was also interested in Hinduism. Rahabi’s great-grandson claimed that Rahabi, who reportedly spoke Tamil and Warugish (Telugu) but could not write it, had himself authored a Hebrew description, of which still several manuscripts exist, of South Asian brahman beliefs and practices, called *Torat goyim arayot* (תורת גוים עריות), which is hard to translate but is hardly complementary, meaning something like “the teachings of the gentiles of incest”, perhaps suggesting an incestuous origin of the Indian peoples.⁴³ Despite the title, the text is an informative account of Hindu myths and brahman ritual practices, and contains also descriptions of the Hindu calendar, stars, and a list of the 28 kings of Malabar.

5. Jews and Muslims in Eighteenth-Century Malabar as Guests and Brokers

So why did Jewish leaders such as Rahabi need scriptural translation as diplomatic capital? Were the Jews of Malabar a military player or have political power in the region? This section will show that they were a non-military minority that served as so-called brokers, namely as political and mercantile intermediators. Malabar’s Muslims traditionally held a similar social position, and both communities’ social identities as a minorities and brokers will be discussed this section, after which I will discuss how in the period Ms 183 was made, Malabar’s Muslim community transitioned to being a militarizing minority, finally becoming the dominant religious community of Malabar.

5.1. Malabar’s Jews and Muslims

Much has been written on the history of the Jews in Malabar, not least on Cochin’s Jewish community’s caste-like division into the “white Jews” and the “black Jews”, the latter being manumitted slaves, converts, and their offspring.⁴⁴ Additionally, quite a few

versions of Malabar's Jewish community's earliest history exist. In a letter from 1768 to the Boaz brothers in Amsterdam, Rahabi claimed that Malabar's Jews were the descendants of Jews who had fled the Roman destruction of Jerusalem's temple (Koder 1949, vol. 15, p. 1). According to different versions reported by the English traveler Alexander Hamilton, Cochin's Jews were from the tribe of Menasseh and arrived around the time of Nebuchadnezzar (Francken 1747, p. 778). The Chronicles of Cochin, which, as discussed above, Van Dort probably authored himself but claimed they were translations of manuscripts he found in Cochin, made the community even more ancient by presenting them as the direct descendants of the exiles from the fall of the Kingdom of Israel—in other words, they belonged to the Lost Tribes of Israel (Margoliouth 1847, vol. 1, p. 28). The boldest claim was transmitted by a missionary who claimed Cochin's Jews had been in India since Solomon's days. More likely than these "myths of origin" linking Cochin's Jews to biblical history is that Jews arrived on the Indian West coast through the Arab maritime trade networks that connected India to the Islamic heartlands. The earliest evidence of this are mid-ninth century copper plates containing a charter granting the Jews of Kodungallur protection as a guest community, and which the Malabar Jews themselves remembered as a Jewish kingdom called Shingly (Gamliel 2018, vol. 55, no. 1, p. 55).

In the middle of the eighteenth century, Jews were not centered in a single place in Malabar. For instance, Isaac Surgun, a wealthy trader fluent in many languages among which were Arabic, Portuguese, and Hebrew, and who also had a second residence in Cochin, lived in Calicut (today's Kozhikode), Cochin's traditional enemy not far north of Cochin (Segal 1993, pp. 59–60; Fischel 1967b, vol. 126, no. 1). Nevertheless, Malabar's Jewish center was Cochin, whose Jewish community flourished under the protection of the Dutch East India Company that had held Cochin's fortress since 1663, and the Rajah of Cochin.

Muslims, namely Arab traders, their children with local women, converts, and those who descended from these categories, were an old religious community like Malabar's Jews, called Mappilas.⁴⁵ Cochin's Muslim community was relatively insignificant, and Malabar's most important Mappila community could be found in Calicut, ruled by the Hindu Zamorin, and in Cannanore (Kannur) further north, where the Dutch held a fortress between 1662 and 1770. Calicut's Muslims, the Dutch Protestant minister Visscher wrote in 1723, were "almost the masters of the place. The chief merchant there is always attended by a large suite of his compatriots, who are armed with sword and shield, in imitation of the pomp and parade of the native princes".⁴⁶ In contrast to Calicut, Cannanore had also a Muslim ruler. As Visscher wrote:

The most powerful of the Moors [in Malabar], who may be regarded almost as an independent prince, resides at Cannanore. He is entitled Ali Rajah, king of the islands, being the lawful sovereign of all the Laccadives which were ceded to him by Colastri. Being descended from the ancient house of Colastri [the Kolathiris], he is indeed a scion of the royal family, but having embraced Mahometanism, he forfeited his right of succession to the kingdom in Malabar. But he has sufficient territories in his possession [...] (Visscher and Drury 1862, p. 119).

5.2. Guests and Brokers

Jews and Muslims were old communities in Malabar that were protected by their mostly Hindu rulers. An early Dutch visitor in Cochin in 1583–84, J.H. van Linschoten, observed how among "the Malabars":

there dwelleth many divers Moors that believe in Mahomet, and many Jews, that are very rich, and they live freely without being hindered or impeached for their religion, as also the Mahometans [...]; the Brahmans likewise [...] have their Idols and houses of Devils, which they call Pagodes. These three nations do severally hold and maintain their laws and ceremonies by themselves, and live friendly and quietly together keeping good policy and justice, each nation being

of the king's counsel [. . .] so that when any occasion of importance is offered, then all those three nations assemble themselves together, wherein the king putteth his trust (Segal 1993, pp. 27–28).

Despite his use of language that today would be regarded as prejudiced, Van Linschoten's description was accurate. Jews and Muslims could practice their religions unhindered, and their interests were officially represented at the courts of the rulers under whose sovereignty they lived.

This South Asian cosmopolis entailed a complex patronage and pluralistic religious system characterized by Wilson Chacko Jacob and others with "hospitality". In this system, local rulers protected and honored "guest communities", namely Syrian Christians, Jews, and Muslims. They did not live in walled-off confessional islands, but, to quote Jacob, "bore multiple spatial, temporal, and linguistic codes grafted onto local forms of kinship, caste, and power" (Jacob 2019, introduction). In other words, they were permanent guests well-integrated into the Malabarian socio-political world.

Van Linschoten's remarks about the king's confidence in the assemblies of the different religious communities also shows that the Jews and Mappilas of Malabar were not "guests" in the sense that they were expected not to participate in politics. As Gagan Sood has described their socio-political role, they:

formed a sub-elite class that cut across religions, ethnicities and polities. They were collectively mobile and literate, and purposefully engaged in activities marked by large distances and long silences. Prominent among their activities were trade, finance, pilgrimage, study, news-gathering, translation, brokerage and transport, all of which were undertaken for a variety of motives, not least livelihood, piety, status, curiosity and adventure (Sood 2016, p. xi, see also pp. 217–19).

Through this mobility and the connectedness that resulted from it, as well as their very position as guests rather than belonging to any local ruling class, this merchant class had a remarkable social role (Sood 2016, p. 17). Well-connected through "a broad spectrum of associations—family households, spiritual fraternities, ethnic communities, trading diasporas, contractual partnerships" (Sood 2016, p. 17), they frequently served as intermediating parties, as "brokers" or "in-betweens", mediating, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam has written, "where the two other parties—the principals of the transaction, if one will, and who may be individuals or larger entities—are themselves incapable of completing it in the absence of mediation" (Subrahmanyam 2009, p. 430).

It was in this useful position of broker that the Dutch employed a local insider with a profound knowledge of the complex local political–religious situation to handle their interests. Ezekiel Rahabi served as the Dutch East India Company's chief officer for close to half a century until his death in 1771, succeeding his own father who had fulfilled the same function since 1680 before him (Fischel 1962, p. 45; Weinstein 2002, vol. 5, pp. 46–49). After Ezekiel's death, his son David occupied the position shared with three others until he died in 1789 or 1790 (Segal 1993, pp. 57–59). While an appointed Dutch governor was the political and military leader of the Dutch presence in Cochin, Rahabi, in addition to his financial role (including that as a lender to the Dutch), functioned as a broker through which those engaged with the Dutch—in trade, militarily, or both—could indirectly communicate with the Dutch and vice versa. One can therefore find in the records of the Dutch East India company parallel correspondence, namely letters written directly between the Dutch commander of Cochin and local rulers, and letters written about the same time and on the same subjects between these leaders and Rahabi, who then submitted that correspondence to the Dutch. Although he was an official of the Dutch East India company, he also brokered for others, in particular for the Rajah of Cochin, in whose jurisdiction Cochin's Jews resided.

This mediation mostly concerned mercantile–political matters but could also deal with religious issues. An example of the latter is a meeting held in the "conference hall" (*conferentie zaal*) of Rahabi's residence—a regular site for diplomatic encounters—in March

1765, attended by the Dutch commander Breekpot and two other Dutch officials, a small group of nobles, the rajah of Cranganore, and a prince, presumably also from Cranganore, called Cartamana. While at this meeting primarily business and diplomatic issues were discussed; however, at the end of the meeting, a sensitive issue was brought up by the prince and the rajah, namely that they “could no longer bear” to see, all week long, cows being brought (cow hides were one of the Dutch export products) to the city, which was “a case that is entirely against the points of their beliefs”.⁴⁷

Thus, these guests, these brokers, such as Rahabi, were because of their status as both insider and non-interested party, combined with their skills and knowledge of language, culture, and local politics of both parties they mediated for, highly useful in the role of mediator and diplomat.

6. Muslims of Malabar in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century: From Guests to a Military Factor

Thus far, I have discussed the meaning of several salient characteristics of Ms 183, the eighteenth-century Indian diplomatic culture of scripture translation, and the social position of Malabar’s Muslim and Jewish communities as guests and (their leaders) as brokers. These three together make it possible that Malabar’s Jews translated the Qur’an to be capital in their diplomatic work. This section will show that in the period Ms 183 was made there was, in addition, a quite specific and dramatic, reason why the translation of particularly Islam’s sacred scripture was relevant. This was the rise of Muslim military power and the Jewish prospect of becoming subject to a new form of Islamic rule that generated an immediate Jewish diplomatic and religious need for a Qur’an translation.

6.1. First Half of the Eighteenth Century: From Guests to a Military Factor

Although traditionally a flourishing community, the arrival of the European colonial powers had brought misfortune to Malabar’s Muslims. The European East India companies successfully competed with the ancient Arab maritime trading network, and while Malabar’s Jewish trade activity was able and allowed to adapt to the new situation, many Muslim traders shared the fate of the Arab trade network (Gamliel 2018, p. 55). Although Ali Rajah, the “prince” of Cannanore above, in addition to having “considerable traffic with Mocha, Persia, Surat and other places”, also traded with the Dutch East India Company, namely in cardamon and turmeric, this did not reflect the general situation of Malabar’s Mappilas (Visscher and Drury 1862, p. 119). The colonial powers, including the Dutch who worked with the local Jews, did not embrace the Mappila community of Muslim traders while the Portuguese even actively persecuted them.⁴⁸ As a result, the hospitable attitude of the local Hindu rulers who traded with these East India companies also cooled towards them, and tension between the Mappilas and Hindus ensued (Jacob 2019, chapter 1; Robinson 2015, p. 247). Meanwhile, in 1723, Visscher could still describe how Calicut’s Muslim community flourished, Muslim–Zamorin relations had become severely strained by the middle of the century, resulting in revolts in 1745 and 1750.⁴⁹

Caught, as Francis Robinson has written, “between the hammer of European pressure and anvil of Hindu society”, Malabar’s Muslims reacted by “developing a tradition of holy war and martyrdom” (Robinson 2015, p. 247). Muslim traditional respect for local authority suffered in favor of solidarity with Muslims elsewhere, for instance when Calicut’s Muslims supported Cannanore’s Ali Rajah rather than their own rulers when a conflict between the two states broke out (Dale 1980, p. 65). Their militarization, which included the development of martial poetry, turned them into a military–political power in Malabar, which also aligned well with the increasing recruitment of non-traditional soldiers by South Indian rulers such the rajah of Travancore, who were intent on building strong states.⁵⁰

The Dutch military reports from Cochin from the beginning of the second half of the century acknowledge this new military role of Malabar’s Muslims. When Calicut’s Zamorin invaded Dutch and Cochin’s possessions in 1754, a secret Dutch report expressed the hope that a Muslim rebellion would keep the hands of the Zamorin tied.⁵¹ When peace was

made with the Zamorin in 1758, however, the Dutch governor decided that the Muslims of Cranganore immediately north of Cochin were to be treated “in a lukewarm manner” because of their (hostile) “engagement with the Zamorin”.⁵² In this period, the Dutch also frequently reported on military aggression by Adi Rajah, the Muslim ruler of Cannanore, and by Muslim pirates who conspired with Adi Rajah and the English, threatening war with the Dutch.⁵³

The language used in these reports shows that the military behavior of these Muslims was not accepted by an order that was marked by war but nevertheless had rules. In January 1759, for instance, the Dutch received a copy of an Arabic letter from the king of Jeddah to Adi Rajah, complaining that the latter had seized the precious content of one of the king’s ships that also carried the Jewish merchant “Safatij”, adding that Adi Rajah had also done a “great injustice” to the Sultan of the Maldives.⁵⁴ The letter was accompanied by a request to the Dutch authorities of Cochin to refuse Adi Rajah any help and to arrest his ships if they came to Cochin.⁵⁵ Likewise, in a harsh letter to Adi Rajah sent a month later, Cochin’s commander De Jong reproached him of having broken agreements about pepper, admonishing him that “your behavior towards your own subjects and strangers is beneath the dignity invested in you”, and referring to the “robbery” and “violence” towards the ship of Jeddah’s king. De Jong concluded his letter to Adi Rajah that his addressee apparently “does not desire to conform anymore to the rules of law and fairness, which are the foremost gems and supports of those who rule over people and are responsible for their security and wellbeing”.⁵⁶

The letter apparently failed to impress Adi Rajah, and a Dutch report from July that year reports on the rumor that Adi Rajah was conspiring with the new ruler of Colastri to conquer Cannanore’s Dutch fortress.⁵⁷ The means to do so was also reported, namely by mobilizing “the Moors” in Colastri.⁵⁸ Observing that “the behavior of this Moorish regent has become more and more worrisome”, and suspecting that Adi Rajah with the help of the English also conspired against Colastri, the Dutch decided to deny the rajah “the continuation of the company’s friendship and protection, and if the situation comes to that, it should not be regarded as a problem to rid ourselves of this regent, for having him as a neighbor is dangerous, for his bazaar has become a gathering place of all sorts of criminals and adventurers who seek their advantage from disturbances and revolutions”.⁵⁹

6.2. *The Rise of Muslim Mysore and Conquest of Cochin in the Second Half of the Century*

But the worsening trade situation and relations with Hindu rulers was not the only contributing factor to the militarization of Malabar’s Muslims. They, including Adi Rajah and the Muslim pirates, were also emboldened by the rise of Hyder Ali, a gifted military Muslim commander of neighboring Mysore who had usurped the power of Mysore’s Hindu rulers.⁶⁰ When in 1754, the rajah of Travancore was unable to repress a widespread revolt against him he appealed for help to Hyder. While the threat of Hyder was sufficient to quell the rebellion and Travancore withdrew its request, Travancore’s appeal to Hyder might have sealed Malabar’s fate as the future conquest of the Mysorean conqueror, and by the end of the century, “Mysorean influence had tipped the balance in favor of the Mappilas” (Robinson 2015, pp. 247–48). The long Muslim demise that had begun with the Portuguese expansion in Malabar in the sixteenth century had been reversed.

In 1757, Hyder briefly invaded Calicut, using as legitimation that the ruler of Palghat had requested his military support (Rajendran 1978, no. 39, p. 613). In the years following, as can be gleaned from the Dutch sources, Hyder Ali’s influence in Malabar rapidly rose. In 1762, the year he had become the “undisputed ruler” of Mysore, Hyder requested the Dutch to support the rajah of Cochin against the Zamorin aggression, noting that also he himself “was going to assist” Cochin, which J. van Lohuizen, who in 1961 in great detail analyzed the Dutch East India company’s documents from that period, read as a declaration that Malabar was now in his sphere of influence (Van Lohuizen 1961, p. 22). In 1763, Hyder conquered the capital of the Ikkeri state, causing the Dutch to scramble to

find out everything about Hyder Ali and his future designs (Van Lohuizen 1961, p. 23). By 1765, Travancore and Calicut feared Hyder more than each other, and signed a treaty, which, however, failed to deter the “Eastern Fredrick”, as European soldiers serving Hyder called him (Van Lohuizen 1961, p. 52). In the year following, Mysore’s ruler launched a large-scale invasion into Malabar.

Although Van Lohuizen claimed that in 1766, the Dutch still considered Hyder “as a ruler who occasionally would give some trouble”, they soon realized that he was a serious contender for the domination of Malabar when, this time under the pretext to protect Adi Rajah, he invaded Malabar with a great force (Van Lohuizen 1961, p. 83). In the “secret resolution” of 21 April 1766, Cochin commander Cornelis Breekman announced to those present that “the notorious Nabab Ader Alij Khan has with a great army of 40,000 men and a great fleet descended from the Canaredan coast to Malabar”, conquered several kingdoms, and arrived in Calicut.⁶¹ His invading army was soon joined by a local force of 8000 local Muslims (Miller 1976, p. 87). Despite Hyder’s friendly overtures to the Dutch, they wrote that “the Nabab [Hyder Ali] intends to continue his victories southwards, and that if their fortune is not better, also the kings of Cochin and Travancore will suffer the same fate as that of the already vanquished kings of Malabar”.⁶² And this indeed happened. Later in that year 1766, the rajah of Cochin, was forced to recognize Hyder as his souverain and to pay a yearly tribute. Thus, second to the god of their ancestors, Hyder had, for the time being, become Cochin’s Jews’ highest overlord.

From Hyder’s invasion in 1766 until the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam, when Hyder’s son Tipu was forced to cede to the British his control over Malabar, the remaining two powers in Malabar, vying also for dominance of South India, were the Mysoreans and the English who in the remainder of the century fought four wars, namely between 1767 and 1769, 1780 and 1784, 1790 and 1792 (ending Mysore’s domination of Malabar), and 1798 and 1799.

7. Malabar’s Jews and the Rise of Muslim Military Power

7.1. *Rahabi and Surgun’s Diplomacy between the Dutch and Mysore*

In this period of the rise of Mysore’s power in Malabar resulting in Mysore’s subdual of Cochin and the fading of Dutch power and commitment, the Jews Rahabi and Surgun mediated between the Dutch and the Mysorean rulers.⁶³ In the 1766 report, Breekman states that from conquered Calicut, Hyder had sent missives not only to him, but also to Ezekiel Rahabi, and of these, copies were kept in the Dutch records.⁶⁴ In addition, Rahabi had also received a local report from Isaac Surgun, who was in Calicut when Hyder arrived there.⁶⁵ In the letters to the Dutch commander, Hyder Ali formally announced his arrival in Calicut and declared not to have any intention to harm the Dutch trade.⁶⁶ Hyder’s letter to Rahabi is more personal, containing a personal invitation and the promise, based on Rahabi’s good reputation, to appoint him to deal on behalf of Hyder with “the trade of the whole land”.⁶⁷ In the letter from Isaac Surgun (to which Hyder Ali also referred in his own letter, which means that Surgun had sent the letter on behalf of Hyder), Surgun complements Hyder Ali’s good character and reports that he had discussed with Hyder Rahabi’s physical inability to travel and had suggested to the conqueror that one of Rahabi’s sons should travel instead. Surgun and Hyder Ali’s letters also show that Rahabi and Hyder had been in contact before, because Surgun referred to a medicine that Rahabi had earlier sent to Hyder Ali, and Hyder Ali reports on his good health.⁶⁸

7.2. *Jewish Diplomacy for Jewish Interests*

In his analysis of the Dutch situation in Malabar from 1785 to the Dutch departure from Cochin in 1795, Holden Furber has argued that, faced with the Mysorean military might, Cochin’s Rajah, the Dutch, Travancore, and Cochin Jews needed each other (Furber 1948, pp. 245–46). This is clearly false: by the period analyzed by Furber, Cochin’s Jews had already for decades witnessed the decline in willingness and capacity of both

Cochin and the Dutch to provide Cochin's Jews with protection and the expectation of future patronage.

The weakness of Cochin and the Dutch was already apparent in 1754, in a dramatic incident during Cochin's revolt against Travancore. The year before, Rahabi had brokered a humiliating peace for the Dutch with Travancore and the Dutch were bound by the treaty not to attack Travancoran troops. Following that, the Travancorans invaded the territory of the Dutch traditional ally and neighbor, the Rajah of Cochin, on whose territory Cochin's Jews lived.⁶⁹ According to a Dutch record of 8 March 1754, during the resistance of the Rajah of Cochin, allied with other Malabar kingdoms, Rahabi and several other prominent Jews had been forced to flee with their possessions into the Dutch fortress because "they feared not only Travancore but also the Cochin 'nairros' [nobles] who steal and plunder everywhere these days".⁷⁰

A decade later, Cochin was forced to recognize Mysore as its overlord, while the Dutch attitude towards Mysore, with which Rahabi and Surgun had developed a diplomatic relationship, was problematic and thus created a conflict of interest in the Jewish–Dutch relationship. The documents of the Dutch East India company show that throughout his conflict with English-backed Travancore, Hyder continued to make overtures to the Dutch, in whom he saw a potential ally against the English. Meanwhile, the Dutch, as a secret missive not long before Cochin's surrender in 1766 shows, had indeed considered proposing an alliance with Hyder if he would conquer the Rajah of Cochin's territories; when that did happen, they nevertheless refused to commit to either Mysore or to local allies such as English-backed Travancore (Van Lohuizen 1961, p. 32). In addition, they increasingly considered withdrawing their military presence, which had become more costly than rewarding, from Malabar (Van Lohuizen 1961, p. 66). This continuing ambivalence of the Dutch, combined with, as Van Lohuizen analyzed, a series of Dutch diplomatic mishaps, increasingly frustrated both Hyder and Tipu.

Because the Dutch were only lukewarmly committed to holding on to their possessions on the Malabar Coast and, as the events of 1754 show, nor had Cochin's Rajah proven to be a dependable protector, we can thus assume that, contra Furber's assumption that all Malabarian parties had shared the same anti-Mysorean interest, the brokerage role that Rahabi and Surgun played from the beginning of the Mysorean invasion between the Mysoreans and on the other side the Dutch and Cochin was also meant to forge a relationship between Malabar's Jews and what could become their future sovereign, patron, and protector. This explains why, already before Hyder made his overtures to the Dutch, Rahabi had established a personal relationship with Hyder or, if it was Hyder's initiative, Hyder had sought out this eminent member of Malabar's Jewish community for brokerage in return for a promise of protection and, in the specific case of Rahabi, the appointment as Hyder's chief trade agent in Malabar. Thus, the interests of these Jews whose home was Malabar diverged from those of the Dutch, who were considering leaving the Malabarian coast. This was even more clearly the case with Surgun, who was brokering for the Dutch but also fostering a personal relationship with Hyder to serve his own interests in Calicut. As a result, the Dutch always made sure that Surgun never went on a diplomatic mission on their behalf without the accompaniment of Dutch officials (Van Lohuizen 1961, pp. 81, 88).

Neither did the English become a viable alternative for the Dutch and Cochin. Although the Rahabis remained the Dutch's trade agent (after Ezekiel's death the office was divided among four different agents, one of whom was his son David) rather than accepting Hyder's offer, the fact that there were only very few communications with the British shows that Cochin's Jews did not try to cement a future with Mysore's main opponent, the British, while, after Ezekiel Rahabi's death, Surgun continued to serve the Dutch as a diplomat with the Mysoreans.⁷¹

This orientation towards Mysore rather than the British reflected a more general attitude in Malabar. Despite the common descriptions of the turmoil and suffering that Hyder and Tipu inflicted upon Malabar, Mysorean rule was not unpopular.⁷² Hyder and Tipu's subjects benefitted from their policy to replace the tax-collecting nobles who stood

between them and their subjects by an efficient bureaucracy of an independent professional staff (Misra 2003, vol. 23, no. 3, p. 136). This explains that even in 1797, five years after Tipu's power had been broken at the treaty of Seringapatam, Sir John Shore, the Governor General of Bengal, reported that the Rajah of Cochin was still corresponding with Tipu, conceding that "we may fairly presume that the Rajahs of Malabar, particularly those of the North, are not yet thoroughly reconciled to the control of the British authority" (Brittlebank 1997, p. 90).

Moreover, although, as I will discuss below, Hyder and especially Tipu introduced a more dominant form of Islam, both were kings in the Indian tradition who, as shown before, recognized the validity and efficacy of other religions. In contrast, the widespread antisemitic reactions in Britain to the 1753 Jewish Naturalization Act suggested (incorrectly, as British control would become defined by "divide and rule") a different future under the British. If Hillel is correct, the pseudepigraphic "Words of Gad the Seer" was a direct response to this British antisemitism, and this also explains the anti-Christian elements in Ms 183 and in Rahabi's New Testament (Hillel 2017/2018, p. 145).

Thus, Rahabi and Surgun had developed a relationship with the Mysorean leader before they acted as brokers between Hyder and the Dutch, and Hyder displayed confidence in Rahabi by explicitly offering him the role as his chief trade officer in Malabar. This, combined with the vivid evidence of the weakening position of the rajah of Cochin and of the Dutch in Malabar and the lack of overtures to the other great power, the British, shows that they considered Mysorean rule of Malabar as a very realistic and, despite Furber's argument, not an undesirable prospect.

8. Adaptation and Inter-Religiosity: Malabar's Judaism in Flux

The three contexts brought together, namely the South Asian use of scriptural translation as diplomatic and cultural capital, the role of Jews as broker-diplomats, and the rise and domination of Muslim military power, coupled with Ms 183's particularities and what we know of Jewish diplomacy with Mysore, makes the explanation that Ms 183 was intended as diplomatic and cultural capital for Malabar's Jewish contact with Mysore's Muslim leaders quite plausible.

In the last part of this essay, I will suggest an additional possibility why Cochin's Jews desired a Qur'an translation, similar to the reason why the Liwa from Arcadu considered the translated scriptures of others as of religious value for his own tradition. It is possible that translating the Qur'an into Hebrew might have penetrated deeper into Jewish-Muslim relations than being a pragmatic tool for diplomatic etiquette and civilized conversation. In other words, it perhaps also served a Jewish *religious* purpose. To explore this option, I will first analyze the ways in which Cochini's Jews used the majoritarian religious culture to practice their own, and then, in the section following, show the significance of Hyder and especially Tipu's religious reforms.

In his report to his successor in 1781, the Dutch governor Adriaan Moens had little to complement on the state of the religion of Cochin's Jews, claiming that they were "regarding their religion generally ignorant and sloppy; they neither know the Talmud, nor the Kabbalah, nor the books of the Masorettes, and can therefore regarded rather as Karaim or Karaites, as most Asian Jews". The religious books they had, Moens emphasized, were only recently acquired: "The sefer torah, or the books of Moses, that can be found in the different synagogues here, are all modern manuscripts on parchment and brown leather, and it appears that there has not even been here a copy of any antiquity of a part or the whole of the Old Testament" (Moens 1908, p. 109).

Moens' words show how he misunderstood the way Cochini Judaism interacted with the outside world. Cochini Judaism in the second half of the eighteenth century was not emerging from a state of darkness of heresy and ignorance, coming into the light of normative Judaism. Instead, as reflects the Jewish tradition worldwide, it had its local religious traditions and, as Jewish traditions elsewhere, ever adapted itself to new conditions requiring new religious responses. While Rahabi, as his 1768 letter to the

book printer and seller Tubia Boaz in the Dutch Republic shows, had been laboring to complete what Cochini Jews possessed in canonical Jewish religious works, this did not mean that Cochini Jewry intended to abandon its own religious traditions for the sake of “normative Jewry”.⁷³

Already a century before, in 1687/8, following the visit of Dutch Jews to Cochin famously reported in Moses Pereyra de Paiva’s *Noticias dos Judeos de Cochim*, the Amsterdam printer Uri ben Aharon ha-Levi printed Elijah Adeni’s *Seder Azharot*, which were liturgical poems according to the Cochini rite.⁷⁴ A second Cochini religious work, the manuscript of which had been sent by Ezekiel Rahabi to Tuvia Boaz, was printed by Proops in Amsterdam in 1768/9. This was a prayer book “according to the minhag of the people of Shingly”, which interestingly also contained a section on the conversion of slaves and other gentiles (*Sefer tefilot 1768/1769*). Thus, the book shipments from Boaz to Rahabi—one of which, by the way, was lost in the naval hostilities during the Mysorean war—contained both religious works the Jews from Cochin lacked, as well as printed versions of their own minhag.⁷⁵

This local practice and development of Cochini Judaism did not exclude interest in other religions. On the contrary, whereas polemics and heresiology, as I discussed before, seemed not to have played a significant role in Cochin, in contrast to the Western tradition, knowledge of other religious traditions was also important for the practice of Judaism in other ways. First, knowledge of neighborly religious rites was needed to correctly observe Jewish rites. For instance, the posthumously printed book of David Rahabi, one of Ezekiel’s sons, called *Ohel David* (“David’s tent”, printed in Amsterdam in 1791), describes in detail how to use the local Christian, Muslim, and Hindu calendars to determine the Jewish religious calendar (*Rahabi 1790/1791*). Calendrical reforms such as those by Tipu Sultan in 1784 discussed in the next section, were therefore of direct relevance for the correct observance of Jewish commandments, and one passage in *Ohel David*, which described the traditional Muslim months rather than Tipu Sultan’s new months based on the Hindu calendar, hints at such change, writing: “And know that first they determined the months according to the following but afterward agreed to count according to the calculation [. . .]” (*Rahabi 1790/1791*, f. 16r).

Another way of Jewish religious attunement to majoritarian religions is expressed by the principle “de-malkhuta dina” (“the law of the kingdom is the law”). Jewish legal decisions have in practice always taken into consideration laws of the governments under which Jews lived, laws that Jews could regard as binding (*Novak and Lagrone 2011*, pp. 47–51). Since, as I have shown, scriptural translations were in India regarded as points of contact between the different religious communities and the analysis of Ms 183 above has demonstrated that the translation was oriented to Islamic practice, Cochin’s Jews probably conceived the Qur’an as the fundament of Islamic jurisprudence.

Third, customs belonging to the other local religious communities were important for the construction of local Jewish customs (“minhagim ha-makom”) like the ones described in the Cochini books printed in Amsterdam.⁷⁶ Local Jewish minhagim are in part derived from non-Jewish religious practices (such as those for instance described in *Torat arayot ha-goyim*), provided these are not in contradiction to the Jewish tradition and spirit.⁷⁷ Nathan Katz and Ellen Goldberg, for whom the religious others of Indian Jews were Hindus alone, have described how Cochini Jews deliberately and carefully developed their minhagim in relation to Hindu practices, which, as they state, “were not uncritically and unconsciously incorporated into their minhag, but were judiciously weighed against the standard of Jewish law (Halakha) before being accepted and Judaized”⁷⁸. Ms 183’s translation of Glazemaker’s “religion of the Turks” into “the minhagim of the Ishmaelites” should therefore perhaps be read literally: for Cochin’s Jews, Ms 183 was a source of Islamic customs for the local Jewish minhag.

9. Making Mysore’s Islamic Identity

If Hyder and his son Tipu had been ruling like traditional Sunni Muslim Moghul emperors who mostly refrained from interfering in the religious lives of their non-Muslim

subjects, the discussion of Jewish religious interaction with majoritarian traditions would not be relevant, because Cochin's Jews' immediate non-Jewish religious outside world and direct ruler was Hindu. However, in this section I will show that the Mysorean rulers, Tipu more than Hyder, increased the role of an innovated form of Islam in the territories of their new empire, thus potentially changing the religious character of their conquered territories, including Cochin. This, as I will argue, implies that an additional motivation behind Ms 183 could have been the Jewish *religious* adaptation to a new politico-religious situation.

9.1. A Successor Empire

Mid-eighteenth-century India was a time of chaos and opportunity, of, in Gagan Sood's words, a "wide array of prospective futures" (Sood 2016, p. 7). The death of emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 had led to the Moghul Empire practically splitting in two, with the Nizam of Hyderabad, a traditional Moghul appointee whom we encountered above as an avid book collector, gaining control over (and soon after losing it again to others) much of the parts of central and the south of India that, like Mysore, had recognized the Empire's domination (Sil 2005, p. 79). During the rest of the century, the power of the Moghul Empire further disintegrated, and after the Seven Years War that ended the French colonial dream in India, the emperor had virtually become a stipendiary of British power (Van Lohuizen 1961, p. 1). Gradually, his traditional right to confer to or withhold legitimacy from rulers and would-be rulers on the continent also lost its force (Brittlebank 1997, pp. 61, 73–74). The result was a power vacuum and room for experiments of sovereignty.

Those who grasped the opportunity to fill the power vacuum are commonly called the "successor regimes" (Sood 2016, p. 7). These successors varied from members of the traditional Moghul hierarchy, such as Hyderabad's Nizam, who discarded their imperial obedience, to newcomers such as the British and military leaders such Hyder and his son, who themselves had usurped the power from Mysore's traditional Hindu ruling house and its powerful prime minister (Sood 2016, pp. 7–11). A side effect of this change, also as the result of an influx of Shi'a scholars from the collapsed Safavid empire, was that in the successor regimes the traditional dominance of Sunni Islam waned and Shi'a influence came to compete with that of the Sunnis (Robinson 1997, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 159–60; Khodamoradi 2022, pp. 147–50).

Hyder, in scholarly literature variously called a "parvenu" (Brittlebank 1997, p. 26), "usurper", "upstart warrior-king" (Misra 2003, p. 136), whose rule was "illegitimate" (Sil 2005, p. 47), did receive—until the emperor revoked them when the English were at war with Hyder—several titles from the emperor (Brittlebank 1997, p. 63). Hyder was able to acquire this imperial recognition by, for instance, maintaining the Hindu royal house that had traditionally reigned Mysore as nominal figure heads of state, by not indicating on his coins the beginning of his rule, which would have been conceived as a claim to kingship, and by mostly—but not entirely—abstaining from adopting titles that were in breach of imperial etiquette (Brittlebank 1997, pp. 67, 75). Nevertheless, by issuing new coins and introducing new weights and measures, Hyder did embark on the path to independence from imperial authority, and after Moghul power had waned even more, Hyder's son Tipu threw off the appearance of seeking imperial recognition (Brittlebank 1997, p. 66). On the coins Tipu minted in 1786, the emperor's name was absent, and he ignored the imperial protests that followed (Brittlebank 1997, p. 68; Sil 2005, p. 75). Moreover, Tipu had the traditional sermon in the mosque read in his own name rather than traditionally in that of the emperor, and sent out diplomatic missions to the Ottoman court and Paris.⁷⁹

9.2. Mysore's Religious Rule

Whether they ambioned universal kingship or not is still a matter of scholarly debate, but the upstart rulers of Mysore cast off most of imperial authority, which leads us to the question of the religious nature of their rule.⁸⁰ Did Hyder and Tipu, who claimed direct descent from the Quraish through both Hyder's paternal and maternal ancestors, intend to be traditional Indian rulers, acknowledging the sacred power of religious practices, sites

and objects of all religious traditions? (Brittlebank 1997, p. 79) And if they did emphasize their Muslim identity, did they strive for a Muslim rule that, like that of Akbar the Great and some of his successors, was characterized by religious universalism? Or did they aspire a form of Islamic rule more characteristic of the Islamic heartlands, where Islam tolerated but also placed other religious traditions in a submissive state? And did they continue the Moghul Sunni tradition, or did they embrace the newcomer Shi'ism?

Eighteenth-century Indian kingship was cognizant, in addition to the religious efficacy of the *mana* of others discussed in the introduction, of all the religious communities and sites under its sovereignty. Part of governance, a king's duty as well as source of his power, was the control over and patronage of important religious sites of the different religious communities.⁸¹ During the reign of Tipu, however, one can see a marked shift to emphasizing the Muslim identity of Mysore's ruler's reign. While his Muslim identity was more important to the European colonizers than it was to Indians (Brittlebank 2016, p. 12), and while he did not ignore a ruler's need to preserve the sacred geography of the lands under his domain, Tipu islamized his expanding domain by renaming towns with Islamic names and shifting the court's language to Persian.⁸² He also introduced a new Muslim calendar that started in the year Muhammad declared his prophethood in 609 CE rather than the traditional hijra of 622 CE—a sign not only of Islamization but also of establishing an independent Islamic identity. Moreover, in many towns he built mosques and appointed Muslim clergy, while Hindu deities disappeared from Tipu's coins.⁸³

What did this gradual process of Islamization, most pronounced under Tipu's rule, entail, and what were its consequences for the other religious communities under the political domination of Mysore? What could Cochin's Jews expect from Tipu Sultan the Muslim ruler? To answer this question, we need first to go back in time to the two Islamic traditions of the Moghul rulers, namely Akbar's religious universalism and a more traditional Islamic model characteristic of that of the Islamic heartlands that is mostly identified with his descendant Aurangzeb (Miller 2015, p. 56).

Emperor Akbar the Great famously reformed the Sunni Muslim empire that his grandfather Babur had founded by, among other actions, abolishing the religious tax for non-Muslims and appointing non-Muslims to the empire's administrative offices. Akbar also initiated a project in which scholars from different religious communities translated the Qur'an and other religious scriptures, the New Testament and the Upanishads, into Persian. The aims of this project were not only pragmatic, namely to better control the subjected population, but also to further the ideal of universal religion to which Akbar was committed.⁸⁴ Akbar's religiously tolerant attitudes as well as the intellectual tradition that a ruler should be familiar with the religious scriptures of others, which I discussed in the section on the Indian culture of scriptural translation, continued to exist after his death. Best known is Akbar's great-grandson Dara Shukoh (1615–1659), son of emperor Jahan, who tried to imitate his illustrious ancestor's religious universalism by, for instance, also commissioning new translation projects of scriptures, and he himself translated the Upanishads into Persian (Miller 2015, p. 55). Notably, his spiritual advisor was the "naked fakir", the Jewish Sufi Mohammed Sa'id or Sa'id Sarmad, whose grave I mentioned in the introduction (Fischel 1948, pp. 159–73). A similar commitment to religious universalism characterized also the reign of Nadir Shah (1688–1747), the Safavid (Shi'a) Shah who after his successful invasion of India in 1739, while claiming that "if God is One, religion must be one", commissioned the translation of the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the Gospels into Persian (Fischel 1948, pp. 174–75).

But after the execution of Dara Shukoh's by his brother Aurangzeb (1618–1707), the last emperor before the empire's decline, no Moghul emperor followed its ideology, and it was Aurangzeb who came to be seen as the representative of a governance model that focused on its Islamic identity (Miller 2015, p. 55). A more Islamic model of governance like that of Aurangzeb also prevailed in Mysore, and for that reason Tipu has often been called "the Aurangzeb of the South" (Sil 2005, p. 78). Hyder and Tipu's centralization of

their bureaucracy made the religious nature of their state even more consequential to their subjects (Misra 2003, p. 136).

These changes were gradual, and the most important shifts took place during Tipu's reign. As stated above, Hyder still placed Hindu gods on his coins, while Tipu did away with them. Both acted aggressively towards members of non-Muslim communities, but Hyder's aggression seemed to have been strategically rather than religiously motivated.⁸⁵ In contrast to his pragmatic father, Tipu seems to have regarded political and military opposition by non-Muslims as a politico-religious problem. As Brittlebank has pointed out, even though Tipu also appointed non-Muslim officials and patronaged the institutions and sites of non-Muslim religious communities, these were, rather than expressions of a "tolerant and benevolent nature", part of the traditional syncretistic South Indian beliefs, modes of governance, and means to gain legitimacy (Brittlebank 1997, p. 9). Increasingly threatened by the British who would ultimately subdue him, Tipu came to harbor a deep-seated hostility to the political power of other religious communities (Brittlebank 1997, p. 27). He was reputed to have a great aversion to Hindus, the religious identity of most of his military opponents, and in one of the dreams noted in his dream diary, he converted (Hindu) idols so that also "the unbelievers would also enter the fold of Islam" (Sil 2005, p. 75; Husain 1957, pp. 92–93). In Malabar, he was remembered as a "Brahman-killer and despoiler of south Indian temples" (Brittlebank 1997, p. 126). In 1790, he had all Hindus in Calicut converted to Islam, and claimed to consider this as a jihad (Sil 2005, p. 76). Christians were particularly targeted, not, as J.B.P. More has pointed out, because Tipu resented Christianity itself, but because he framed his war against the English as a war against the Nazarenes, the Christians, who he was to cast out of India, and several of his dreams are about that jihad against the English *kafirs* (Husain 1957, pp. 84–85, 88; More 2003, vol. 14, no. 3). Also, a look at the content of Tipu's library confirms the image of a ruler who regarded his military conflicts as conflicts between India's powerful religious communities. While containing a wide variety of works because it was in part composed of loot from other libraries, those works composed under his patronage tended to be intolerant of Hindus and of Christians, by for instance emphasizing that non-Muslim subjects should be kept under restraints and works about mission to Hindus and Christians.⁸⁶

A second religious shift that took place during the ascendance of Muslim-ruled Mysore is the emergence of Shi'a Islam at the court of the Mysorean rulers. As noted, Shi'a works figured prominently in Tipu's library, and in Hyder's reign Shi'a Islam was also a rising presence. Hyder's attitude towards Sunni-Shi'a competition appears mostly to have been pragmatic, for when an armed conflict broke out between Shi'as and Sunnis, he brokered between the two and chided them for the conflict (Kirmani and Miles 1842, pp. 483–84). But it was not for sectarian reasons Hyder and Tipu seemed to have been attracted to the figure of Ali. According to a story about Hyder's court, an anecdote was recounted in the presence of both Sunnis and Shi'as about how a Sunni traveler's horse had become stuck in the mud. After invoking Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman had remained without effect, the name of Ali caused the horse to plunge out of the mud, upon which the enraged horse rider cut off the horse's legs, exclaiming "O horse, thou art become a heretic!" Upon hearing the story, Hyder smiled and said: "A wonderful fool this man must have been! Did he not know that he who was the strongest brought the horse out of the mire!" (Kirmani and Miles 1842, pp. 484–85, citations from 485). Strength, not sectarian truth, mattered to Hyder. Tipu is also reported to have held Ali "in great veneration", but Brittlebank has argued that this should not be read as a sign that Tipu was gravitating towards Shi'ism, because Ali is also an important character in the Sunni tradition. Instead, she suggested that Tipu's attraction to Ali should be explained with the traditional belief that Ali was the founder of most Sufi orders and with Ali's martial character (Brittlebank 1997, pp. 43–44).

In short, the Mysorean rulers developed a strategy to do away with some—but not all—of the traditional religious commitments of Indian kingship and of recognition of the Moghul Empire. They introduced Islamic religious innovations that were to symbolize their own imperial claims, such as the introduction of a new calendar and a shift towards Shi'a

Islam—whether based on Ali’s martial character or association with Sufism. In addition, Tipu Sultan came to regard Hindus and Christians as his politico-religious opponents, polemicized against them, forcefully converted Hindus and Christians, and islamicized his conquered territories.

10. Concluding: A Jewish Qur’an

Placing Ms 183 in several contexts that distinguish the eighteenth-century South Asian world in which the Jews of Cochin lived from that of the contemporaneous European context which previous analyses had projected on it, this essay has offered the thesis that this Hebrew Qur’an translation was meant to be cultural diplomatic capital. In Europe, polemics—also an inherent potentiality of the Western notion of translation as substituting the original—played a significant role in Jewish and Christian interest in Qur’an translation, while interest in the Qur’an was also fueled by the desire to acquire more knowledge about an exotic religion. In India, in contrast, Jews and Muslims had been living side by side for centuries in a culture where inter-religious relations were not marked by exclusivism, and translation had a different, less polemical role, one of which was its use for cultural and diplomatic capital. The fact that Ms 183 was created in a time that Malabarian Jewish leaders, of whom Rahabi also collected scriptural translations (and in the case of Arayot ha-goyim “translations” of oral traditions), conducted high-level diplomacy with a Muslim-ruled successor empire that had set its sights on Malabar, makes it likely that also Ms 183 was made for such a purpose, in this case not for rulers to engage with their subjects but subjects to engage with rulers, making these brokers also brokers of language.

Through showing in the last two sections how Cochini Judaism interacted with majoritarian religions and how Hyder and, more so, Tipu islamicized their budding empire, I offer an additional reason for the making of Ms 183. The unique South Asian inter-religious role of scripture translation as well as Ms 183’s focus on the liturgical function of the Qur’an, is perhaps evidence that Ms 183 was also made to help in attuning Cochini Jewish practice to a changing religious environment.

In this essay, Ms 183 is therefore a *Jewish Qur’an* in two senses. It was Jewish diplomatic capital in the political and military turmoil of Malabar in the second half of the eighteenth century, when Islam became a military and political factor and, through the invasion of Muslim Mysore, for several decades Malabar’s Jews’ overlord. It might also have been a Jewish Qur’an in the sense that it represented new politico-religious circumstances of direct relevance to the application of Jewish law and the development of local Jewish customs.

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Notes

- 1 These are Bodleian Ms. Michael 113 and Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences SP IOS B 155. Ms 113: https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/169698, accessed on 5 September 2023. At the time of the submission of this manuscript this link referred to the wrong manuscript but will be corrected. Ms 113 is described in [Neubauer and Cowley \(1886, p. 759, no. 2207–2201\)](#). Neubauer suggests it is from the seventeenth century. Of SP IOS B 155 I have accessed its (digitally accessible) copy in the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem, namely F 53708. ([https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990000842550205171/NLI#\\$FL56519349](https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990000842550205171/NLI#$FL56519349), accessed on 5 September 2023). This manuscript is dated 1653. Of this manuscript also a twentieth-century copy exists, namely SP IOS B 234, which I have accessed also in the Jewish National Library: F 53361 ([https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001762740205171/NLI#\\$FL56699192](https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001762740205171/NLI#$FL56699192), accessed on 5 September 2023). Paudici mistakenly regards B 234 and B 155 as one single manuscript: [Aleida Paudice \(2014, p. 462\)](#).
- 2 Washington Library of Congress Ms 183 (formerly MS Hebr. 99), digitally accessible through <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018757801>, accessed on 5 September 2023, and British Library Or 6636, digitally accessible through http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Or_6636, accessed on 5 September 2023.
- 3 On a seventeenth-century Jewish Spanish translation, see: [den Boer and Tommasino \(2014, vol. 35, no. 2\)](#).
- 4 For an overview of early modern European Christian Qur'an translations, see [Burman \(2015\)](#). For a good discussion of European Christian motivations behind Qur'an translations, albeit with a focus on England and France, see [Elmarsafy \(2009, vol. 3, no. 3\)](#).
- 5 Polemicizing against Islam was the traditional use of Qur'an translations, and even the greater neutrality of early modern translations was often based on the conviction that, to quote Jan Loop, "Muslims can only effectively be refuted and possibly converted on the basis of an accurate understanding of their faith". [Loop \(2019, p. 24\)](#). Opponents were often identified with Islam. See e.g., about Luther's attack on Islam as an attack on Roman Catholicism: [Hamilton \(2008, p. 4\)](#). For Catholic (negative) identifications of Protestantism with Islam: [Loop \(2019, pp. 20–22\)](#). On the use of the Qur'an as an ally, see for instance Christians against Jews: [Szpiech \(2013, vol. 34\)](#). Protestants against Catholics: [Elmarsafy \(2009, p. 431\)](#). Jews against Christians, with the examples of Isaac Orobio the Castro, Abraham Gómez Silveira, and Leon of Modena: [den Boer and Tommasino \(2014, pp. 482–83\)](#). [Adelman \(2012, vol. 26, pp. 134–36\)](#).
- 6 [Lazarus-Yafeh \(1999, vol. 19–20, p. 210\)](#). On the rise of early modern European Jewish translations in general, namely as motivated by the aim to strengthen Jewish religiosity, reclaim 'lost' or 'stolen' Jewish knowledge, and to guard Jewish cultural borders, see [Idelson-Shein \(2021, vol. 86, no. 4\)](#). Next year will also appear her *Between the Bridge and the Barricade: Jewish Translation in Early Modern Europe* (University of Pennsylvania Press). On early modern Jewish translation as the secularization of Hebrew, see [Seidman \(2022, p. 342\)](#).
- 7 [Loop \(2019, p. 31\)](#). On the importance of Ottoman military power, trade, and Shabbatai Zevi, see [den Boer and Tommasino \(2014, p. 481\)](#).
- 8 [Weinstein \(1971, vol. 10, no. 1/2, pp. 21–22\)](#). Weinstein refutes there the claim of the Encyclopedia Judaica that it hails from the sixteenth century, and the Margoliouth catalogue, which dates it to the seventeenth century. Also Paudice recently stated it is a sixteenth-century European text: [Paudice \(2014, p. 642\)](#).
- 9 The fact that Dutch paper was used does not help much to narrow down the possible origin to areas where there was Dutch colonial presence—Surat, Malabar, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Coromandel coast, or Bengal, since Dutch paper was also used by others.
- 10 [Weinstein \(1971, pp. 22–24\)](#). The origin of the copy of Glazemaker that Van Dort used is unknown, but Dutch Jews did own copies of Glazemaker's translation: [den Boer and Tommasino \(2014, p. 482\)](#). This essay uses the last edition of Glazemaker: [Du Ryer and Glazemaker \(1734\)](#).
- 11 [Library of Congress \(1932, pp. 215–16\)](#). Perlstein's son: [Weinstein \(1971, pp. 46–47, n. 37\)](#). Russian collection: https://findingaids.loc.gov/exist_collections/ead3pdf/mss/2009/ms009207.pdf, accessed on 5 September 2023, and [Pliguzov and Smith \(1996, vol. 55, no. 5, pp. 102–3\)](#).
- 12 The sources, Dutch and later English, variously spell his name as Rabbij, Rabbijn, Rahabbi, Rahbi, Rhaby, Rahaby, Rabby.
- 13 While making this claim, Weinstein also admitted that "there is no internal evidence" for it. [Weinstein \(1971, p. 40\)](#).
- 14 My translation from Hebrew. [Hillel \(2017/2018, p. 58\)](#).
- 15 [Basal \(2021, vol. 180, no. 1, p. 121\)](#). Basal offered this argument earlier for early modern Hebrew Qur'an translations in general: [Basal \(2012, p. 99\)](#). I am also looking forward to a forthcoming article about Ms 183 by Mascha van Dort.
- 16 Van Dort arrived in South Asia in 1755. He was a passenger on the ship the *Kievitsheuvel*, which arrived from the Dutch Republic by way of Cape the Good Hope on 4 March of that year. The date of his departure: NL HaNA 1.04.02: 5264, front cover. F. 441r lists his name and that of his wife. On Van Dort's life before his arrival in Asia, see [Van Dort \(2021\)](#). Interesting is also Moshe Hillel's speculative claim that Van Dort was driven by a deep hostility to the religion he had converted to in Europe, and composed several Hebrew texts he claimed to have copied or translated from ancient Hebrew manuscripts. [Hillel \(2017/2018\)](#).
- 17 Weinstein offers even precise dates: "arriving, apparently, sometime after June and leaving sometime before the New Year", [Weinstein \(1971, p. 40\)](#). For this, however, he gives no sources. He refers to [Fischel \(1967a, vol. 87, no. 3, p. 241\)](#).

- 18 There are a few Dutch records that Weinstein was not aware of that place him in Cochin. In late 1756, his employers in Colombo complained that he had not returned from his trip to Cochin as he had promised (NL HaNA 1.04.02 2880, f. 706r. A record from Cochin from 14 January 1761, when a record from Cochin states he had arrived there (assumedly from Columbo): NL HaNA 1.04.02 3015, f. 2147v–r.
- 19 On his death in Ceylon: NL HaNA 1.04.02 6325, no pagination (scan 11).
- 20 Weinstein states the two kinds of paper that were used for the manuscript had watermarks of Van der Ley and, respectively, Lubertus van Gerrevink. There are two different Van der Ley papermakers, and one of these ceased printing paper in 1765, while two others continued to print until into the nineteenth century. Gerrevink printed until 1819. Churchill (1935, pp. 14, 16).
- 21 On Muslim violence see Segal (1993, pp. 19, 46).
- 22 On polemics against Hinduism, see Zadeh (2011, p. 34). On the weakening of the ulama: Strathern (2019, p. 147).
- 23 Bayly (1989, p. 72). On Sarmand, see: Fischel (1948, vol. 18, p. 173). Katz (2000, vol. 47).
- 24 On Muslim healers in Indian armies: Bayly (1989, p. 99).
- 25 Brittlebank (1997, p. 129). On Tipu's patronage of the swami see Simmons (2020, pp. 67–71).
- 26 Gopinathan (2006). Trivedi (2006). For a criticism, arguing that translation of equivalence *did* exist in Indian Hindu culture, see Friedlander (2011).
- 27 Venjara (2018). Tschacher (2011). This represents a wider, transhistorical Islamic tradition that allows Qur'an translation when the outcome is regarded as interpretation rather than the Qur'an itself: Boulaouali (2021, vol. 19).
- 28 Zadeh (2011, p. 20). Zadeh also makes the important argument that the idea that Islam forbids translating the Qur'an is a Western myth based on the Western notion of translation as substitution. For a genealogy of this myth see Zadeh (2011, pp. 6–9).
- 29 Van Dort was, among others, trained as an orientalist at the University of Leipzig. For his European career see Van Dort (2021). While Van Dort's attitudes towards translation are beyond the scope of this project, it is interesting to mention that he referred to his translations with the word 'ne-etak' (קניטק), which means 'copied' rather than translated. Hillel (Hillel 2017/2018, p. 296).
- 30 On the Muslim translators from Cochin: NL HaNA 1.04.02.2961, f. 645v. All translations from the Dutch are mine.
- 31 Du Ryer and Glazemaker (1734, pp. 518–47). On 'Doctrina Mahumet' see: Cecini et al. (2021). The work was also known in South Asia: Ricci (2010, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 11–12).
- 32 The inventory of Tipu's library mentions lists 7 of the 44 Qur'ans in Tipu's possession as 30-leaf Qur'ans and one as a 30-volume Qur'an. The library also had a Qur'an in 60 parts and one in 15 volumes, as well as 35 single volumes that each contain one of more surahs. Stewart (1809, pp. 166–67). 30-leaf or 30-volume Qur'ans were not uncommon in India, and, in addition, juz divisions were often marked. See for instance the early modern Indian Qur'ans described in Bayani et al. (1999, pp. 171–256).
- 33 For instance, whereas surah 2 is usually part of the first three juz because it is the longest surah of the Qur'an, in Ms 183 it is together with the fatihah the second chelek, with a length of 21 pages. Chelek 15, for example, is in contrast only 3 pages long, containing surahs 20–21.
- 34 I have corresponded with experts on Islam and Islam in South Asia who deserve thanks for sharing their knowledge or helping me further: Sohaib Beg, Majid Daneshgar, Annabel Gallop, Wilson Chacko Jacob, Mahmood Kooria, Francis Robinson, and Edwin Wieringa. While none knew of the existence of South Asian juz divisions as uneven as in Ms 183 (Dr. Daneshgar pointed out that there tend to be small differences in length but that, on the whole, juz are roughly similar in size), they did not exclude the possibility that these might have existed, and Dr. Kooria pointed at the existence of manuscripts in Kerala that might supply the answer. Dr. Daneshgar, who himself spoke with several other specialists, suggested also this might be a division made particular by Jews, and pointed out that there have been also other divisions, such as one of 28 parts (4 times seven).
- 35 Probably Mahadevapattinam 90 km southwest of Tranquebar.
- 36 The translations from the German are mine. The German source gives the title of the official as 'Lewway', which assumably is derived from the Arabic 'liwā', denoting a high military rank. Arcadu is not far West of Pondicherry/Puducherry. 25 km to the South of Puducherry.
- 37 Surgun's name, meaning "the Syrian", is also spelled, among others, 'Surion', 'Surison', 'Surian', 'Suriano', and 'Surition'.
- 38 Ives (1773, p. 193). Rahabi had composed several tracts on astronomy: Fischel (1962, p. 58).
- 40 It is beyond the scope of this article to catalogue the presence of other manuscripts in Cochin, among which the pseudepigraphical book of the biblical seer Gad and letter of Yohanan ben Zakkai. One these, in strong disagreement, see Bar-Ilan (1972, vol. 52). Bar-Ilan (2015). Trautner-Kromann (1993, vol. 11). Hillel (2017/2018).
- 41 Francken (1747, pp. 1278, 1694, 1802). The book had been published in Hebrew, Yiddish and German. They likely sent Rahabi the Hebrew 1728 version: [Müller] Kimhi (1728).
- 42 Francken (1747, p. 1278). On the Arabic translation of *De Veritate* see Toomer (2012, vol. 33, no. 1).
- 43 Rahabi's knowledge of local languages: Francken (1747, p. 1277). *Torat goyim arayot*: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Ms. 10616. Accessed at the Jewish National Library F 4723: [https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000178830/NLI#\\$FL16827588](https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000178830/NLI#$FL16827588), accessed on 5 September 2023. On its ownership by Rahabi's grandson: Jelinek (1873, vol. 5, p. xlv).

- 44 The most important of these is: [Segal \(1993\)](#). For the most recent overview, see [Kunnappilly \(2022\)](#).
- 45 Contemporary Arabic Malabar records alleged that there had already been contact between the prophet Mohammed and Malabar rulers. [Visscher and Drury \(1862, p. 121\)](#). On the origins and rise of Malabar's Mappila community see: [Miller \(1976\)](#). [Dale \(1980\)](#). [Miller \(2015, pp. 25–30\)](#). On Mappila history in the Cochin area see [Miller \(2015, pp. 43–44\)](#). While predominantly used to refer to Muslims, the term Mappila also referred to Christian 'guests' (naasrani mappilas) and the Jews (juutha or jonaka mappilas): [More \(2004, p. 13\)](#). [Jacob \(2019, Introduction\)](#)
- 46 [Visscher and Drury \(1862, p. 118; on p. 119, 1722 is referred to as the previous year\)](#).
- 47 NL HaNA 1.04.02 3147 f. 1071 v-r, 1072r, 1073r. A second example of the important of religious etiquette concerns Rahabi himself, whose religious practices the Dutch and others learned to respect. For instance, as Fischel reports, Rahabi took oaths "according to the Jewish custom", and planned diplomatic encounters between Rahabi and local rulers were both in 1737 and 1743 postponed because of the Jewish holidays, whereas about another diplomatic trip was reported that "he rested en route because it was Saturday. [Fischel \(1962, p. 53\)](#). See for more examples [Segal \(1993, p. 57\)](#).
- 48 See for instance description of Portuguese atrocities in [Visscher and Drury \(1862, pp. 120–21\)](#).
- 49 [Dale \(1980, p. 63\)](#). [Ayyar \(1999, p. 239\)](#). In Calicut another cause for a cooling of the Zamorin's enthusiasm for the Arab traders was, so Jacob writes, Calicut being "caught between two state-building projects" of Travancore and Mysore. [Jacob \(2019, chp. 1\)](#).
- 50 [Robinson \(2015, p. 247\)](#). [Dale \(1980, p. 67\)](#). They also became more prominent as soldiers in local armies, such as that of Travancore. [Bayly \(1989, p. 98\)](#). Also Jews served as soldiers: [Katz and Goldberg \(1990, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 207\)](#).
- 51 NL HaNA 1.04.02 2844 f. [304].
- 52 NL HaNA 1.04.02 2929, f. 155. The Zamorin had sent as his envoy to Cranganore Rahabi: NL HaNA 1.04.02 f. [124].
- 53 E.g. NL HaNA 1.04.02 2928, f. 30r. For an earlier report that suggests that not only Adi Rajah but also the Zamorin supported pirates see NL HaNA 1.04.02 2877 f. 138v. On agreements with pirates see NL HaNA 1.04.02 2928 f. 78r.
- 54 NL HaNA 1.04.02 2961 f. 641r, 642v, 643r, 644v.
- 55 NL HaNA 1.04.02 2961, f. 642v–r.
- 56 NL HaNA 1.04.02 2961, f. 646v–r.
- 57 British behind it: NL HaNA 1.04.02 2961, f. 369v.
- 58 NL HaNA 1.04.02 2961, f. 368v.
- 59 NL HaNA 1.04.02 2961 f. 369 v–r.
- 60 Spelled alternatively as 'Haidar', 'Haider', 'Ader', 'Hydur', a.o.; and Ali as, for instance, 'Alij'.
- 61 NL HaNA 1.04.02 3177, f. 407r–408v.
- 62 NL HaNA 1.04.02 3177, f. 408v.
- 63 On Surgun's role as mediator in the Dutch-Mysore conflict: [Fischel \(1967b, vol. 126, no. 1\)](#).
- 64 NL HaNA 1.04.02 3177 f. 409v–r.
- 65 NL HaNA 1.04.02 3177, f. 410r–412v.
- 66 NL HaNA 1.04.02 3177, f. 408v–409v.
- 67 NL HaNA 1.04.02 3177, f. 409r.
- 68 NL HaNA 1.04.02 3177, f. 410r and 411v. On the importance of exchange of gifts among Indian sovereigns see [Brittlebank \(1997, pp. 92–97\)](#).
- 69 On Rahabi's diplomatic role in that agreement: [Ayyar \(1999, pp. 234–35\)](#).
- 70 NL HaNA 1.04.02 2834, f. 129r.; 1.04.02 2844, f. (104).
- 71 For Rahabi's contact with the British, see [Weinstein \(2002, pp. 50–51\)](#). On Surgun's diplomacy, see [Segal \(1993, pp. 59–61\)](#).
- 72 For an example of the negative depiction of Mysore's role in Malabar, see [Segal \(1993, p. 59\)](#).
- 73 There, he wrote: "We have copies of the Babylonian Talmud, which have been supplied from Amsterdam and Venesia [Venice]. We have not seen copies of the Jerusalem Talmud with the exception of Extracts from En Yakob. We possess philosophical and other works, old and new. As regards to your next query regarding the book we consult, I beg to inform your Eminence that our authority for all decisions is based on the work *Beth Joseph* of Shulchan Aruch. Some of our decisions are according to the rulings of Rabbi Mises Isserles. Regarding the schools we maintain, I beg to inform your Eminence that we have a few schools, the teachers of which are maintained by the community. The students, after familiarising themselves with the Halachah and Rashi, processed to the study or the Talmud under the guidance of the minister of the Congregation [. . .] [Koder \(1949, vol. 15, p. 4\)](#). Rahabi's efforts also extended beyond Cochin, for he worked also with the Bene Israel in Konkan region north of Malabar: [Segal \(1993, p. 58\)](#).
- 74 On Pereyra de Paiva's trip in 1686 and *Notisias dos Judeos de Cochim*, see: [Schorsch \(2008\)](#). [Adani \(1687/1688\)](#).
- 75 On the lost shipment: [Segal \(1993, p. 242\)](#). Jewish printing arrived in Cochin only in the nineteenth century: [Sabin Hill \(1999\)](#).
- 76 See on local minhag: [Roth \(1986, pp. 205, 228\)](#). Roth's discussion of extralegal sources (such as scientific or economic knowledge) is also relevant, showing how knowledge that is not traditional Jewish is used for halakhah: 231–304.

- 77 Customs of gentiles that were rejected are called ‘huqqat ha-goyim’ (statues of the gentiles).
- 78 Katz and Goldberg (2005, p. 14). See also: Katz (1995, vol. 42, no. 2). Katz and Goldberg (1990). Good examples of Cochin minhag, often showing Hindu influence, can be found in: Weil (2002). Johnson (1995).
- 79 Sil (2005, p. 75). Other political powers also had to weigh whether to recognize Hyder and Tipu’s legitimacy. While Dutch documents and the letters from Rahabi and Surgun from the 1760s already addressed Hyder with *nabab*, the title denoting an imperial governor that Mysore’s rajah Krishnaraja Wadiyar II had bestowed on him in 1758, others, such as the British, the Marathas (who were another successor regime) and the nawab of Arcot continued to merely call him Hyder Naik (‘naik’ is a lower rank of governor) until well into the 1780s. Brittlebank (1997, p. 76).
- 80 Michael Fischer has argued that Hyder and Tipu merely aimed for ‘limited sovereignty’, as has called the form of sovereignty that acknowledged a higher authority such as the emperor. He argued that Tipu’s embassy to the Turkish sultan was meant to receive Abdul Hamid I’s recognition, and that Tipu therefore did not claim universal kingship himself. Kate Brittlebank has argued that Tipu did strive for universal kingship, pointing out for instance that after his embassy to Istanbul, Tipu did not insert the Ottoman sultan’s name in his coins or in the mosque sermon, and that he collected rarities from all over the world, an activity symbolizing universal kingship. Brittlebank (1997, pp. 114–15, 118).
- 81 Brittlebank (1997, p. 44). Control over ritual was not only politically expedient but also regarded as necessary for religious (immanent) power.
- 82 Islamization: Brittlebank (1997, p. 130). Sil (2005, p. 75).
- 83 Husain (1957, pp. 17–21). On the coins: Brittlebank (1997, p. 67).
- 84 Much has been written on Akbar’s religious universalism. For a recent contextualization of Akbar’s religious views see Gommans and Huseini (2022).
- 85 For instance, after his conquest of Colastri in Malabar, Hyder had imposed a strict discipline on his troops to treat the population well. Only when a Colastri prince who had surrendered earlier launched a surprise assault killing more than a hundred of Hyder’s soldiers, he had all Colastri’s nairs (Hindu nobles and military) murdered. Van Lohuizen (1961, p. 30).
- 86 Stewart (1809, e.g., pp. v, 46, 50, 53). The rest of the library contained a wide ideological array of books, from a work that tries to reconcile Hindu polytheism with Islamic unitarianism dedicated to Darah Shokuh to a great number of Sufi works, including one about Muhammed’s ascent to heaven, the aforementioned Moinadeen of Herat’s *History of the Jews*, to many Shi’a religious works. Ehrlich (2020, vol. 43, no. 3).

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