THE PRONUNCIATION TRADITION OF BIBLICAL HEBREW AMONG THE JEWS OF COCHIN: A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The small colony of Jews in Cochin in south-western India has attracted the attention of travellers and scholars since the beginning of Portuguese rule in that area (1502–1663), when the existence of a Jewish settlement there became known in the West. Almost all facets of the life of this community have been studied and published in numerous articles and books, except for their traditional pronunciation of Hebrew. This gap in our otherwise detailed knowledge of the Cochin Jews needs urgently to be filled, because this community with its unique features is rapidly disappearing in India and becoming assimilated in Israel too.

The arrival of Jews on the Malabar coast in South-west India has remained shrouded in mystery, in spite of the careful research that has been undertaken in an attempt to discover their origin. The study of the origin of the Cochin Jews and of the time of their arrival in India is greatly hampered by the fact that their history before the end of the first millennium CE is totally hidden behind folklore, legends and folk songs. Much has been done by the Cochinites themselves and by scholars around the world to strain historical clues from this heterogeneous material, nevertheless without producing many results. The following summary of the history of the Cochin Jews accords more or less with those who have dealt with the subject.¹

The Cochin Jews have preserved various old legends concerning the coming of their ancestors to the Malabar coast. The legends are far from being unanimous about the time of their arrival, which has led to the supposition that the Jews came in a number of different migratory waves. According to these legends the Jews came to Malabar coast in smaller or larger groups with the fleet of King Solomon, after the Assyrian conquest of the eighth century BCE, from the Babylonian exile, after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, from the Bar Kochba revolt against Rome in 132–135 CE, and from the persecutions of King Firuz of Persia at the end of the fifth century.

The first tangible evidence of the presence of Jews in the environs of Cochin are two small rectangular copper plates. On these plates there is written a deed in old Malayalam vattelutti script in which ‘King of Kings, Śri Bhāskara Ravi Varman’ confers certain privileges and the right of use of certain symbols of royalty on Joseph Rabban, the leader

¹ There is a good bibliography on the subject in Katz & Goldberg 1993. My summary is based mainly on that book.
of the Jews. According to this deed, to Joseph Rabban and his descendants was also granted the administration of an independent Jewish principality at Anjuvannam, which was a section of Cranganore, situated 18 miles to the north of Cochin. This Jewish principality in Cranganore (nowadays Kodungallur) was known in the medieval Jewish world by the name of Shingly. The dating of these copper plates has been problematic, and the datings given to them vary from the first to eleventh centuries CE.

According to the traditions of the Cochin Jews, Jewish life in Shingly was spiritually and commercially their first ‘golden age’ on Indian soil; the second comparable one came under the Dutch (1663–1795). However, internal quarrels within the Jewish community, and certain other unhappy factors led the Jews gradually to abandon Shingly within a few centuries before it was finally sacked by the Portuguese in 1565. The Jews dispersed from Shingly to the surrounding towns and villages, mainly to Chendamangalam, Parur, Mala, Ernakulam and Cochin. The Jewish community at Cochin became the leading Jewish community in the area, the first synagogue being built in Cochangadi, about a mile south of today’s Jew Town, in 1344. The famous Paradisi Synagogue (Mal. paradēsī ‘foreigner’) is the oldest synagogue still standing at Cochin; it was built in 1568, and today it is one of the most popular tourist sites in the city.

During Portuguese rule, which began in 1502, the Jews suffered many persecutions and their trade was hindered. However, during this time they finally established themselves at Cochin, and initiated their system of self-government, known as the mutaliyār system. The Jews had always enjoyed good relations with local rulers, and the Hindu maharaja helped to extricate them from many difficult situations caused by the Portuguese. From this period (c. 1520) there is the first documented account of the internal strife within the Cochin community between meyuḥāṣim and non-meyuḥāṣim. meyuḥāṣim claimed to have a pedigree of descent from ancient Israel and considered the non-meyuḥāṣim to be mešuḥrārim (manumitted slaves) or gerîm (proselytes) or their descendants. This strife had given rise to various kinds of religious discrimination on the part of the meyuḥāṣim, which troubled the community until the middle of the present century.²

When the Dutch superseded the Portuguese as overlords of Cochin in 1663, it meant for the Jews the beginning of a golden era, both commercially and culturally. Under the Dutch the Cochin Jews could establish contact and maintain relations with their coreligionists all over the Dutch empire, from Indonesia to New York. They received Jewish visitors and delegations from Europe, and close relations were forged between the Cochin Jews and the Jews of Amsterdam.

Under British rule, which began in 1797, Cochin was an autonomous ‘princely state’, which was nominally ruled by its maharaja under the guidance of the British resident in Cochin. However during British rule Cochin lost its position as an important port for Bombay, which led the Cochin Jews to direct their commercial activities mainly to domestic trade. During that time the Jews also began to pursue university education and various professions.

² For this complicated strife and its background, see Katz & Goldberg 1993: 126–160.
The gaining of Indian independence in 1947 was gladly welcomed by the Jews, and in the following year the birth of the State of Israel was a cause of great celebration among Indian Jewry. Although the Cochin Jews never suffered any form of antisemitism on the part of the local inhabitants, most of them were eager to move to Israel at the first opportunity. In 1948 there were 2,500 Cochin Jews, in 1970 there were only 290 left (Ben-Yaacob 1985: 261); today there are only 50 Jews in all of the communities of Cochin, Ernakulam and Parur, most of them of the age of 60 or older. In Israel the Cochin Jews have mainly established themselves in Rishon Le-Zion, Ashqelon and Kefar Hasidim near Haifa.

2. WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE COCHIN JEWS’ PRONUNCIATION TRADITION OF HEBREW?

As I have already mentioned, there is no lack of scientific articles and books which deal with the community of the Cochin Jews. What is lacking in that vast literature is a description of the pronunciation tradition of Hebrew of that community. Even the cantillation and the special prayer melodies, the ‘Shingly tunes’ of the Cochin Jews have been analyzed (Spector 1969), but with regard to their pronunciation tradition of Hebrew we have only some scattered remarks. Shlomo Morag (1971) has mentioned some peculiarities in the pronunciation of certain Hebrew consonants, among the Cochin Jews in his article “The Pronunciations of Hebrew” in the Encyclopaedia Judaica. Harviainen (1977: 114), Johnson (1985: 157–158) and Katz & Goldberg (1995: 174–175) have also noted the special ‘melody-motivated’ change in the Cochinite pronunciation of qames gadol.

3. RECORDINGS, INFORMANTS AND THE TRANSCRIPTIONS

In my analysis of the traditional pronunciation of biblical Hebrew of the Cochin Jews I have used recordings collected by Professor Tapani Harviainen in Israel in 1971. One of these recordings is a copy from the tape-archives of The Language Traditions Project of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. These recordings contained in total almost four hours of biblical passages and prayers recited by different informants, from among whom I chose my main informants: Rabbi Avraham Hay Avraham (aged 70) and his son Avraham Hay Hayyam (36), Yitshak Nissim (46) and Mordekay Eliyahu (who reads in the copy from The Hebrew University). The latter hails from Cochin, the others from Ernakulam. In the following I refer to them by abbreviations: AHA, AHH, YN and ME. My informants, especially AHA, could not speak modern Hebrew well, only in AHH’s reading I could discern some influence of modern Hebrew (e.g. he quite frequently realized n = [t]).

I have analyzed and transcribed the following passages of the Bible which were represented in the recordings: Psalm 113; Esther 1:1–15, 8:14b–16; Exodus 19:1–13. Psalm 113 has the advantage that it was recited by three different persons. A further advantage is that the readers used three different styles of biblical cantillation: ordinary,
festive, and glorification styles (cf. below). Esther 1:1–15 was recited by three different persons in festive style. As a representative example of a biblical passage recited in ordinary style I chose Exodus 19:1–13 recited by AHI. The above mentioned ‘advantage’ of having passages recited in different cantillation styles may demand some explanation, as if cantillation styles could affect the pronunciation. The enigmatical feature in the pronunciation tradition of the Cochin Jews is that the cantillation styles indeed affect the pronunciation. When a biblical passage is recited in ordinary style, the pronunciation of the Hebrew vowels is a typical ‘Sephardi’ one. But when this same passage is recited in festive or glorification style, the realization of Tiberian qames gadol and šewa na' changes from ordinary [a] and [e] to [o] and [a], not consistently, but nevertheless according to an obvious tradition, because different readers usually agree in the ordinary and special realizations of these vowel signs. According to my informants the festive and glorification styles are used in special services, and the latter style especially during the Great Festivals (pēsah, šavu'ōt, sukkōt) and also during the feast of simḥat torā. According to AHA qames gadol = [o] is not realized in texts recited during yom kippūr (Day of Atonement).

Characteristic of the glorification style is also that the reading tempo slows up, the melody becomes richer in nuances and the pronunciation becomes more careful.

Esther 8:14b–16 is an example of those sections of Esther where the reading tradition of that scroll requires a change in musical motives and reading tempo (Herzog 1971b, c. 1058). Among the Cochin Jews this is realized in such a way that the congregation recites these sections first and after that the reader repeats it. The reading tempo is very slow (in the above mentioned section 13 words per minute) and the melody changes to drawn out ‘singing’. A noteworthy fact concerning these sections and other biblical passages in my tapes, where the cantillation style was changed from the festive style to what I have called ‘glorification’ style was that the above-mentioned ‘special’ realizations of qames gadol [o] and šewa na' [a] tend to accumulate in passages and sections recited in the glorification style. From here on I shall indicate in *italics* every special or ‘festive’ qames gadol and šewa na'.

The mother tongue of the Cochin Jews is Malayalam, which belongs to the Dravidian family of languages, and it is the official language of the State of Kerala. I have familiarized myself with the phonology of this language by studying M. V. Sreedhar’s article *Phonology of the Cochin dialect of Malayalam* (1972), so that I could distinguish the influence of Malayalam on the pronunciation of Hebrew.
3.1. Transcriptions

3.1.1. Principles of transcription

\(\dd\) = a voiced dental fricative

\(\dd\dd\) = a voiced post-dental fricative

\(c\) = an unvoiced alveolar affricate

\(x\) = an unvoiced velar fricative

\(\chi\) = an unvoiced uvular fricative

\(^*\), etc. = an ultra-short vowel

\(a,a\) = a glide

\(ai\) = a diphthong

\(\acute{a}\) = a stressed vowel

\(\ddot{a}\) = a long stressed vowel

\(\ddot{a}\dddot{a}\) = an ultra-long unstressed vowel (due to melodic reading)

\(\dddot{a}\dddot{a}\) = an ultra-long stressed vowel (due to melodic reading)

\(o\) = a ‘festive’ qames gadol

\(a\) = a ‘festive’ šewa

3.1.2. Psalm 113

(reader: Rabbi Avraham Hay Avraham; festive melody).

(1) 'a:llelû yô:
    'allelû avdêi adonâi alle:lû eô šem adonâ:y
(2) yeî šem adonâ:y mevo:rá:x me.áj olâ:m
(3) mimmizráh šémeš 'ad mevo:.ô me.ullál šem 'adonâ:y
(4) râ:m al gol go.lm adonâi al aššamâim kevodô
(5) mî ka.adonâi elo.éinu ammagbi.i laša:bêô
(6) 'ammašpîlî lîrôô baššamâim uba.âres
(7) me.îmi me.afár dal me.ašpôt yarîm evyôn
(8) lehošîlî im nedibîm 'im nedibéi 'ammô
(9) mošîbî: akêrêô abbâ:.iô 'êm bâni:m semehô:
    'a:llelû yô:
3.1.3. Esther 1:1–15

(reader: Yitshak Nissim; festive melody)³

(1) va:îi: bi:mê: 'ahašverô:š hû: 'ahašverôš 'amoléx mehôdu ve.âd kûš šéva ve'êrî:m ume.ô: medînô:

(2) bayo:mi:m ho:hê:m kešêveô 'ammélex 'ahašverô:š â:l kissê malxûôô ašê:r bešûsân habirô:


(4) be.ar'ôôô: eô ôôster kevôd malxûôô: ve.eô yekâ:r tîf'ê:reô gedûllaôô yâmim rabîm šâmôni:m umâ.âô yô:m

(5) uvimô:ô ayômîm ho.ê:lle 'o:sô: amê:lex lexôl ha'âm hanimce.îm bešûsân habirâ lemigadôl ve.âd katân mištê šîv'ôô yâmim baxacâr gi'nô:ô bitân hamê:lex

(6) xû:r karpás uôxêleô 'a:xû:z bexavlêi bûs ve.argamâ:n al gelîlêi késef ve.amudêi šêš mitôô zahâv vaxêsef al rîcpâô bâhât vaše:š vêdâ:r vesoxâ:reô

(7) vehašôko:ô bixléi zôho:w vexêlim mikêlim shônîm veyêin malxûô rê:v kyâ:ô hamê:lex

(8) vehašêtîyô: kaddâô ein 'onê:s kî xen yisâd hamê:lex al kol râv beîô la.asôô kirô:n 'î:s voî':ô

(9) gam wašôi hamalkô: ô:сто mištê našîm beîô amalxûô ašê:r lamê:lex 'ahašverô:š

(10) bayôm haševî'i: ketôv lev hamê:lex bayâ:.in 'amâ:r limhumân bizôô xarvonô bigôô va.avagôâ zëôôr vexarkôs šîv'ôô asarisî:m hameša:rôi:m eô penêî amê:lex ahašverô:š

(11) laho:vî: eô wašôi hamalkô: lîfnêi hamê:lex bexêôer malxûôô lehar'ôô ha'amim vehasarîm eô yofyâ kî tovâ:ô mar'ê: î

(12) vatêma.ên hamalkô wašôi: lavô bidvár hamê:lex ašêr beyâd asarisîm vayikcôôf hamê:lex me.ô:ô vahamaôô: bo.arâ bô:

(13) vayômer hamê:lex lakâxamîm yôdêi ha.itîm kî xen devâr hamê:lex livénéi kol yodê:y dâ:iô vâdi:n

(14) vehakaron 'elâ:v karšéna šeôôa:r 'adma:ôô: tarôsi merês marsenâ memuxân šîv'ôô sarêî parás umadâ:y ro.êi penêî amêlex hayoşvî:m riônô bammalxûôô

(15) kedâô mâ la.asôô ôô hamalkô wašôi al ašêr lô asôô eô ma.amâr hamê:lex ahašverôôs beyâ:ôd hasarisî:m

³ According to YN, this particular melody was used in the Kaṭavum bhâgam synagogue in Emakulam.
The words pronounced differently by Mordekay Eliyahu in Esther 1:1–15:
Verse 1: šéba (vs. YN: šéva)
Verse 2: kešébeõ (kešéveõ)
Verse 3: va’abádáv (va’avadáv)
Verse 4: kebód (kevóõ)
Verse 5: šib’át (šiv’áõ)
Verse 6: behabléi (hexavléi)
Verse 7: záhav (zóhov)
Verse 10: hašebi’í, hasorisi:m, hamešo:rõi:m (haševí’í; asarísí:m, hameša:rõi:m)
Verse 11: la’ó:bí, tobá:õ (laho:vít; tová:õ)
Verse 12: hamalká, labó, bidbár, asorísím, ba’ará (hamalkó, lavó, bidvár, asarisím, bo.ará)
Verse 14: vehakarób, šib’áõ (vehakaróv, Šiv’áõ)
Verse 15: hasorisi:m (hasarisí:m)

3.1.4. Esther 8:14b–16
(reader: Mordekay Eliyahu; glorification melody)

(14b) vehaddá:õ nittenâ: bešu:šâ:n habbi:rõ:
twa:argomõ:n vaho:’í:r šu:šâ:n caha:lõ: wa:so:me:xõ:

3.1.5. Exodus 19:1–13
(reader: Avraham Hay Hayyam; ordinary melody)

(1) bahò:õdê:õ hašeliši: lecět bëné yisra.é:le me’è:re:c micrâ:yim bayòm
hadé báː:u: midbár siná:y
(2) vayis’û me:roidî:m vayabó:.u: midbâ:r sináį vaya:hanú bammibidbár
vayi:hán šam yisra.é:le nè:ge:ed a:á:r
(3) mošé ’alá el ha:elo:him vayí:xrá ’elá:v adonáį min a:á:r lemór kò:
segullà: mikó:l ha:ammi:m ki lí: kol ha:á:re:s
’asér tedabbé:r bené yisra.é:le
4. THE REALIZATIONS OF HEBREW CONSONANTS AND VOWELS

4.1. The Laryngeals י נ ק

K = complete loss [ø] or ['] (glottal stop) are equally common at the beginning of a word, e.g. [aše:r] רָשׁ, [ʾa:xû:z] אֶכְסִי (Esther 1:2,6). In the middle of a word after a vowelless consonant, it retains its full consonantal value ['], e.g. [tifʾê:reð] תְרֶפֶּה (Esther 1:4), rarely [ø] in this position, e.g. [lirôô] לָרְו (Psalm 113:6). Between vowels it is usually reduced to a glide, e.g. [uba.âres] עֶבֶר (Psalm 113:6).

N = [ḥ] (unvoiced laryngeal fricative), e.g. [haʾâm] חָאָם (Esther 1:5). There is notable consistency with what is said above about the pronunciation of 'aleph at the beginning of a word and between vowels, e.g. [amedinô:ð] אֶמְדִּינוֹ (ʾammélex) אֶמְדִּינוֹ (Esther 1:3,2), [be:emâ:] בְּהֵמָּ (Exodus 19:13), [me:ullâl] מֵעְלַל (Psalm 113:3). Sometimes [ø] at the end of a closed syllable, with the lengthening of the preceding vowel, e.g. [ti:yû] תִּיּוּ (Exodus 19:6). He mappicatum (נ) is not pronounced, e.g. [yofyd] יָופְיָד (Esther 1:11).

Y = ['] and complete loss are common at the beginning of a word, e.g. [ʾasî:ti:] יֵסִיַּ (Exodus 19:4), [avadî] יָבָד (Psalm 113:1), and the first-mentioned realization also inside a word, e.g. [šivʾâdô] שִּבְּאָדּ (Esther 1:14), in this position complete loss is rare, e.g. [yodi] יָדִי (Esther 1:13). Between vowels it tends to be reduced to a glide as 'aleph, e.g. [la.asôô] לאֶסֶי (Esther 1:8).
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4.2. The Velars \p, \t, \d, \n
\p = [x] (unvoiced velar fricative), e.g. [baxacå:ɾ] ðe:ri (Esther 1:5). Even more commonly it tends to be realized as [h], e.g. [vahamadô:ɾ] ðe:ri (Esther 1:12). Once there is complete loss at the end of a closed syllable: [và:ðå:v] ðe:ri (Exodus 19:8).
\t = [k] (unvoiced velar stop), e.g. [ka:donáï] ðe:ri (Psalm 113:5).
\d = [x], e.g. [vevibbe:sù:] ðe:ri (Exodus 19:10). This consonant retains always its full phonetic value.
\n\p = [k], e.g. [vehaškô:ɾ] ðe:ri (Esther 1:7). Sometimes, mostly in postvocalic position [x] (unvoiced uvular fricative, see Morag 1971: c. 1133), this realization was fairly often heard in the reading of AHA, e.g. [mêximí] ðe:ri (Psalm 113:7).

4.3. The Palatals \s, \z, \j, \l

\s, \z = [g] (voiced palatal stop), e.g. [go.im] ðe:ri (Psalm 113:4), [nê:ge:d] ðe:ri (Exodus 19:2).
\j = [y] (voiced palatal semi-vowel), e.g. [visra:ĩ:] ðe:ri (Exodus 19:6), it is sometimes reduced to a glide of [a] or [o] or complete loss in the following combination: vowel + yod + hireq, e.g. [ba:yâ:in] ðe:ri (Esther 1:10), [go.im] ðe:ri (Psalm 113:4), [ba:samâim] ðe:ri (Psalm 113:6).
\l = [s] (unvoiced palato-alveolar sibilant), e.g. [mošé:] ðe:ri (Exodus 19:9).

4.4. The Alveolars \s, \r, \z, \t, \d, \l, \n
\s = [z] (voiced alveolar sibilant), e.g. [zeô:ɾ] ðe:ri (Esther 1:10). Sometimes it is realized intervocally as [d] (voiced dental fricative). I could not discern any system in this realization, e.g. [hadê] ðe:ri (Exodus 19:1).\n\r = [l] (voiced alveolar lateral), e.g. [älälê] ðe:ri (Psalm 113:1).
\z = [n] (voiced alveolar nasal), e.g. [na:im] ðe:ri (Esther 1:9).
\t = [s] (unvoiced alveolar sibilant), e.g. [parâs] ðe:ri (Esther 1:3).
\d = [ç] (unvoiced alveolar affricate), e.g. [miçrá:yin] ðe:ri (Exodus 19:1), sometimes, without a phonetic explanation [s], e.g. [lemisrä:yin] ðe:ri (Exodus 19:4).

This last mentioned realization is common in Hebrew words, which the Cochin Jews use in their vernacular language, e.g. [massa] ðe:ri (Katz & Goldberg 1993: 203).

4. Its pronunciation is rather weak, sometimes the friction is hardly audible.
5. In the Malayalam sound system there is no sound corresponding to it. According to AHA, \p which does not have dagê should be realized as [x] I heard it also in the spoken Hebrew of YN, e.g. [pasúx] ðe:ri. Cf. on this same post-vocalic realization of \p in the pronunciation tradition of the Aleppo community in Katz 1981: 10.
6. It seems to be an interference from the Malayalam sound system.
4.5. The Dentals ז, ח, כ, ג, ד

ז and ח = [d] (voiced dental stop), e.g. [dá:d] דאד (Esther 1:13, 15). Sometimes, without a phonetic explanation ז is realized [d] (voiced dental fricative), e.g. [ve:ád] וה א (Psalm 113: 2, 4).

ח = [t] (unvoiced dental stop), e.g. [katán] כatan (Esther 1:5).

ג = [θ] (voiced post-dental fricative), e.g. [malxút] מלחמת (Esther 1:7). Only rarely has it plosive realization, e.g. [me.aspót] משהות (Psalm 113:7).

4.6. The Labials ב, ב, ה, ה, ז, כ

ב = [b] (voiced bilabial stop), e.g. [bayóm] בָּיוֹם (Esther 1:10).

ב = [v] (voiced labiodental fricative), e.g. [ya.a:ços] יאַוּס (Exodus 19:3); however, the most striking 'Malayalamism' in the Cochinite pronunciation of Hebrew is the occasional plosive [ב] realization of ב, e.g. [nedibím] נדיבים (Psalm 113:8).

ר = [v] (voiced labio-dental fricative), e.g. [civva:hú:] כיווה (Exodus 19:7). [ו] is sometimes substituted for it at the beginning of a word, when [א] follows, e.g. [wa:sti] ושטי (Esther 1:9; 8:15).8

ד = [m] (voiced bilabial nasal), e.g. [yamím] ימים (Esther 1:4).

ד = [p] (unvoiced bilabial stop), e.g. [penéi] פֶּנֶי (Esther 1:14).

ד = [θ] (unvoiced labio-dental fricative), e.g. [me.afár] מֶעְאוֹר (Psalm 113:7); although [θ], like [ו], is a 'foreign' sound to the speaker of Malayalam, in my material did I hear the substitution of [p] for it only once by AHH in Joshua 1:5 [lepá:né:xá:] לְפָנֶה (Esther 1:14).

The regularity of this realization demonstrates that Shlomo Morag (1971: c. 1132) is right when he includes this reading tradition among those traditions which have preserved the fricative realization of ז.

This sound being the nearest equivalent of [ו], which is non-existent in the Cochin dialect of Malayalam.

I have at my disposal a cassette recorded by Ms. Hanna Harviainen in Cochin in 1995, where Syrian Christians of the city of Cochin read passages from the New Testament in Syriac. In their reading the substitution of [p] for [θ] is more common, e.g. [leKBa:] אָפָה, [vežá:lipa] זָהַלַפ, (Mark 9:1). The Jews and Syrian Christians in Cochin have, interestingly, similar and comparable linguistic settings, both have Malayalam as their mother tongue and closely-related Semitic languages as their liturgical language. Nowadays, however, among the Syrian Christians in this area, Syriac is increasingly being displaced in the liturgy by standard Malayalam (Asher & Simpson 1994: 552). I am planning to acquire more recordings of the recitation of biblical texts by the Syrian Christians and to make a description of their pronunciation tradition of Syriac. This in turn will yield interesting comparative material with regard to the pronunciation tradition of Hebrew among the Cochin Jews.
4.7. Dageš forte

*Dageš forte* = [C, CC] with varying consistency, e.g. [ʼamoléx] יַּלְמִלֵךְ, [ʼammélex] יַּלְמִיל (Esther 1:1, 2). Nevertheless there is an obvious weakening process of the gemination taking place in this pronunciation tradition. This manifests itself in numerous cases where the gemination is not realized, e.g. [mikelim] בָּלְמֵל (Esther 1:7), [dibér] בָּר (Exodus 19:8), etc. The ongoing process in this respect is especially manifested in words where the consonant following the article has *šewa*; often in these cases, even though there is no gemination, the *šewa* is still pronounced, e.g. [mikuṣelîm] בָּלְמֵל (Esther 1:7), [dibêr] בָּר (Exodus 19:8), etc. It seems that this pronunciation tradition stands at the mid-point of the process: *[haddebarim] > [haddebarim] > *haddebarim*.

4.8. The vowels

Šureq- qibbuš = [u] (rounded, close back vowel), there is no discernible plene-defective distinction, e.g. [gedullaðô] וה違う (Esther 1:4), [segullá:] יַּלְמִיל (Exodus 19:5).

*Holem* = [o] (rounded, close-mid back vowel), there is no discernible plene-defective distinction, e.g. [samô:a] וה nuôi, [ungô:a] יַּלְמִיל (Exodus 19:5, 12).

Qames gadol = [a] (open front vowel), e.g. [dal] בָּר (Psalm 113:7). When certain recitation melodies are used, it is sometimes realized as [o] (rounded, close-mid back vowel), e.g. [zôhov] בָּר (Esther 1:7), see below chapter 6.

Qames gaṭan = [o] (rounded, close-mid back vowel), e.g. [lemolxô:] יַּלְמִיל (Esther 1:3).

Patah = [a] (open front vowel), e.g. [bedabberî:] והבָּר (Exodus 19:9), i.e. there is no distinction between *patah* and *qames gadol*.

Šere = [e] (open-mid front vowel), e.g. [yerê:d] בָּר (Exodus 19:11).

Šere male = [ei], e.g. [heîl] בָּר (Esther 1:3). A less common realization is [e], e.g. [dibrê] בָּר (Exodus 19:8).

Segol = [e] (open-mid front vowel), e.g. [šémeš] והס (Psalm 113:3), there is no discernible plene-defective distinction, e.g. [elê:xa:] יַּלְמִיל (Exodus 19:9), [dêra:xê:xa:] יַּלְמִיל (Joshua 1:8).

Hireq = [i] (close front vowel), e.g. [viyitém] והיִיטָם (Exodus 19:5), there is no discernible plene-defective distinction, e.g. [vexelim] יַּלְמִיל (Esther 1:7), [va avî] יַּלְמִיל (Exodus 19:4).

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10 In Psalm 113 AHA realized all consonants that have *dageš forte* as doubled consonants. In Malayalam which is the mother tongue of the Cochin Jews, the gemination of certain consonants is phonemic, this fact has for its part supported the preservation of gemination in this language tradition.
Sewa na’ = [e] (open-mid front vowel), at the beginning of a word, e.g. [semehd:] (Psalms 113:9). In the middle of a word Sewa is ‘mobile’ after Sewa quiescens and after a geminated consonant, e.g. [hanimece:im] (Esther 1:5), [vechibe:se:u:] (Exodus 19:10). Sometimes the gemination is not realized, but the Sewa is still pronounced, e.g. [ha:sele:si] (Exodus 19:11). Sewa after a ‘long vowel’ is not pronounced, e.g. [ha:sele:si] (Esther 1:6, 14; 9:20), [me:rdif:di:m] (Exodus 19:2). In other positions complete loss of Sewa na’ is rare, e.g. [sfar:di:m] (Esther 1:22).

When an exceptionally drawn-out recitation melody is used, the normally unpronounced Sewa na’ are ‘revived’, e.g. [bile:ve:u:] (Esther 8:15), and at the end of a word there is a tendency to pronounce a helping vowel, e.g. [taxe:le:de:] (Esther 8:15); these ‘melodic helping vowels’ even have ultra-long realizations.

When certain recitation melodies are used, a Sewa at the beginning of a word is sometimes pronounced [a] (open front vowel), e.g. [afo:me:u:] (Esther 1:3), [ga:do:le:] (Esther 8:15). (On this melody-motivated ‘festive’ [a] realization, see below chapter 7.)

Hatef patah = [a] (open front vowel), e.g. [va’avadav] (Esther 1:3). All hatefs, as the above discussed Sewa na’ are pronounced as short vowels.

Hatef segol = [e] (open-mid front vowel), e.g. [elo:eu] (Psalms 113:5).

Hatef qames = [o] (rounded, close-mid back vowel), e.g. [hoda:si:m] (Esther 2:12). A qames preceding a hatef qames has the typical ‘Sephardi’ realization [a], e.g. [na:ami] (Ruth 1:2).

Stress. The Cochin Jews adhere admirably to the Tiberian rules of stress distribution. The vowel length is mostly dependent on the melodic reading not on the location of stress, or on morphological considerations. The fact that in Malayalam as a general rule the stress is on the first syllable is betrayed only rarely in their reading, e.g. [zohov] (Esther 1:7).

The vowel system of this reading tradition of Hebrew is identical to that of the so-called Sephardi traditions, i.e. there are the five vowel qualities: a, e, i, o and u, and the realization of qames as [a] in the combination qames + laryngeal + hatef qames (cf. above), is a rule also in this tradition. However, the origin of the ‘festive’ realizations of qames gadol and Sewa na’ has to be sought in another realm of traditions.

11 The Sewa na’ in these kind of cases is also not read in the tradition of the Aleppo community, cf. Katz 1981: 57. And under certain condition also in the tradition of the Baghldi community, cf. Morag 1977: 71.
5. THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPOKEN LANGUAGE ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF HEBREW

The standard knowledge of Hebrew among the Cochin Jews has been exceptionally high in the case of everyone—men, women, and children. This community never experienced a shortage of Torah readers in the public services. As in the most Orthodox communities, Jewish education in Cochin begins at the age of three, and two or three years later a boy has his first public reading of the haphtara. In addition to the bar mitzva, most of the men of Cochin have also attained so-called ‘lay chazzan ordination’, which requires mastery of the entire, elaborate Cochin minhag (system of religious observances, see Katz & Goldberg 1993: 240-243). Because of this profound education the influence of the Malayalam vernacular on Hebrew has remained minor.

A comparison between the sound systems of Hebrew and the Cochin dialect of Malayalam (Forssström 1995: 41-46) indicates that there are five consonantal sounds in Hebrew which do not have equivalents in Malayalam, viz. ['], [v], [z], [x] and [f]. The most striking malayalamisms are heard in the pronunciations of [v] and [z], which are sometimes substituted by [b] and [d] respectively; the best preserved of these five is [f]; only once did I hear it substituted by [p]. In all, this reading tradition of biblical Hebrew too has admirably ‘resisted’ the constant onslaughts of the Malayalam sound system.12

This becomes even more obvious when we observe the pronunciation of Hebrew words which the Cochin Jews use in their vernacular, i.e. outside the strict rules of the tradition, e.g. [seliyot] נָלִיָּתוֹ (the name of certain prayers, see Katz & Goldberg 1993: 169). The occasional realization of Hebrew [s] as [z] is one of the hallmarks of Cochinité ‘sweet-sounding’ Hebrew (ibid.: 201); this may be a reflex of the older pronunciation of this consonant. The [c] realization of it on the other hand seems to belong to ‘Sephardic imports’ in this reading tradition.


The only systematic trait in this phenomenon is that it tends to accumulate in passages and sections recited in glorification style, and that it is occasionally present in festive style and totally absent in ordinary style. In my recordings I have almost the whole book of Esther recited in festive style, except for four sections in it which are recited in glorification style, viz. (2:3b-5, 22b-23, 7:9b-10, 8:14b-16. As for the last mentioned section, see the transcription in chapter 3.1.4). When the reader recited in festive style, there were only occasional ‘festive’ qemasîm. But when the recitation style changed into glorification style, these sections were first recited by the congregation, and when they had finished, the reader recited the same section once more. The melody was changed to drawn out

12 Cf. the similar observations made by Shlomo Morag (1963: 271) on the reading tradition of the Jews of Yemen.
\textit{Jarmo Forsström}

'singing', and the reading tempo slowed down from the average 72 to 13 words per minute, and almost every \textit{qames\textsuperscript{g} gadol} in these sections was pronounced [o]. My informants in the recordings, when asked, could not give any plausible reason for this 'festive pronunciation', even AHA (rabbi) could only say: 'Our fathers had it this way'. In my sample text recited in ordinary style (Exodus 19:1–13) there is one 'exception which proves the rule' in verse 12, viz. [\textit{yumô:ò}] .ends\textsubscript{y}, which was the sole instance in the ordinary style texts in the whole recorded material. Probably the immediately preceding infinitive absolute [\textit{mô:ò}] .ends is the cause of this 'exception'. In this connection it is worth mentioning also the two cases in which ME, when he was reading the book of Esther in festive style, realized \textit{patah} as [o]: [\textit{veyiô'appôk}] .ends, [\textit{tobbâtô}] .ends (Esther 5:10, 8:2).

As in the performance of prayer and cantillation melodies in the synagogue, a certain amount of individual freedom (see Herzog 1971a: c. 1103) is also allowed in the 'festive pronunciation'. As I have mentioned above in chapter 3, I had certain passages in my recordings which were recited by different readers and also with different cantillation styles. I have, for instance, Psalm 113 recited by three different readers (AHA, YN and Nehemya Nehemya), who recited it in ordinary, festive and glorification styles. When the Psalm was recited in ordinary style, there were no occurrences of 'festive' \textit{qames}. In the recitations of AHA and YN in festive style, they gave the 'festive realization' to exactly the same \textit{qenasim} (three occurrences, cf. the transcription above in chapter 3.1.2). YN also recited this Psalm in glorification style and added to these three occurrences one additional festive \textit{qames} [\textit{abbonî:m}] .ends (Psalm 113:9). I also have Esther 1:1–15 recited by two different readers (YN and ME) in festive style and they were not as unanimous as the previous readers: in three words where YN gives 'festive' realization to \textit{qames} ME does not, and in four cases where ME gives 'festive' realization to \textit{qames} YN does not agree (i.e. pronounces it [a], cf. the transcription and the list of words in which ME's pronunciation differs from that of YN, chapter 3.1.3).

The nearest Jewish communities where the pronunciation of \textit{qames\textsuperscript{g} gadol} is comparable to the 'festive pronunciation' of the Cochin Jews are found in some Persian-speaking communities and in the majority of the Jewish communities of Yemen. In these communities the regular pronunciation of \textit{qames\textsuperscript{g} gadol} is [\textit{a}].\footnote{Shlomo Morag (1963: 100) defines the Yemenite pronunciation more closely. According to him, most of the Yemenite communities (including Aden) realize the \textit{qames} as a rounded lower-mid back vowel [o], which in the vicinity of the laryngeals and the emphatic consonants approaches to [a].} The Cochin Jews had age-old connections with the Jews of Yemen, especially with the community of Aden (Katz & Goldberg 1993: 99).

This melody-motivated 'festive pronunciation' of the Cochin Jews is as far as I know unique in the whole Jewish world. Johanna Spector says, in her study of the Shingly prayer tunes of the Cochin Jews, that individuals who are learned or who have a beautiful voice or both of these qualities, can influence a community through the synagogue. As an example she mentions the Jews of Iran, who were influenced this way by the Baghdadi musical tradition, which eventually superseded the original Persian tradition almost completely. According to Spector (1969: 247–251), the religious music (cantilla-
tion of the Bible and prayer-song, especially the ‘Shingly tunes’) of the Cochin Jews shows strong traces of Yemenite and Babylonian (Kurdish) styles and hardly any European-Sephardic influence. The Shingly tunes have the same effect on the pronunciation of certain qemasim and shewa’im in prayers, as the festive and glorification melodies have in the recitation of biblical texts. I give here the transliteration of Arešet Sefatenu by Johanna Spector.  

\[ \text{arešet safotenu dazi o horahamon hu yerahem olenu veyiyshma veyaanid vayaanik yisroel veiyane venishma teruotenu veimru omen} \]

The age-old relations of the Cochin Jews with the Yemenite Jews seem to present themselves as a plausible explanation for the origin of the ‘festive pronunciation’ of qames gadol (and šewa na’). As Johanna Spector has put it in the case of Shingly tunes: ‘Is it ancient heritage or the influence of Yemenite individuals who came and settled here like Eliyahu Adni or Salah and taught the Cochinis the tunes of their country?’ (Spector 1969: 250).

In the case of qames gadol = [o] there is also one ‘domestic’ reason which may have supported its survival in the ‘festive’ pronunciation of the Cochin Jews. In the Hindu liturgy there is a so-called ‘sacred ŏm syllable’, which represents Brahman and has been considered sacrosanct in Hinduism for about three millennia. This ŏm syllable is realized in the liturgy as a drawn out [o-o-o]. Most reminiscent of the Jewish ‘festive’ qames is the substitution of the last vowel and following consonant(s) by this ŕm syllable in every verse of the Rig-Veda recited by a Hotar priest in nowadays rare śrauta rituals (Parpola 1981: 195, 201). I think that it is not too far-fetched to postulate interreligious influence in this respect, because the influence of the local Hindu context has also been detected in other aspects of the minhag of the Cochin Jews (Katz & Goldberg 1993: 51). The Jews must have become familiar with these sounds even though they do not enter the Hindu shrines. This is the case even today in the Paradesi synagogue in Cochin, where the Jews hear the music and prayers from the nearby Hindu temple (ibid.: 65). As an interesting contemporary example of this kind of interreligious influence is the indigenization process of ‘The Church of South India’ (Protestant). In accordance with this trend, the United Theological College in Bangalore held ‘Experimental Worship Services used in celebrating some Indian Festivals’ during the years 1971–1973. Among other things the sacred syllable ŕm was included in the order of worship in certain hymns and blessings.  

This domestic influence may in its part explain the ‘protracted o-o-o’ typical of Shingly tunes (and of the glorification style!) which Spector (1969: 250) speculated as possibly having its origin in Kerala, or else being an indigenous Jewish development in Cochin.

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14 Spector 1969: 263–264. This prayer is recited with a Shingly tune. In her work J. S. does not pay any attention to the peculiarities of pronunciation.

15 Hansen 1986: 242–244. I am indebted to Professor Asko Parpola, who informed me about this.
7. THE MELODY-MOTIVATED PRONUNCIATION OF ŞEWA NAʿ AS [a]

As far as I know, this feature in the Cochinite pronunciation of Hebrew has remained unnoticed, even by those who have noticed the pronunciation of qameš gadol as [o]. Although it appears in the transcription of Arešet Sefatenu by Johanna Spector, she does not make any comment on it, in the same way as she does not say anything about qameš gadol = [o]. This pronunciation of šewa naʿ as [a] has turned out to be the most important clue as to the probable origin of these melody-motivated ‘festive’ pronunciations.

In almost the whole book of Esther (1:1–4:5, 5:10–9:31) recited by ME, which I have at my disposal, all the cases of šewa naʿ = [a] (28 occurrences) are at the beginning of a word and often in those words which also have a ‘festive’ qameš, e.g. [la:xol saròv] יָאָשֶׁר, [šamonim:] שָׂמֹנִים, [laho:vi:] לָהוֹוִים, [vahor:i:r] וַהוֹרִיר (Esther 1:3, 4, 11; 8:15). There were also two cases where a šewa after initial šureq (i.e. waw copulativum), was pronounced [a], e.g. [uma:Ôô] וּמַעַה (Esther 1:4), [ubahagi.a] עַבָּהַגִּי (Esther 2:12). As with ‘festive’ qemasîm so also ‘festive’ šewa‘îm tended to accumulate in passages which were recited in glorification style (cf. the transcription of Esther 8:14b–16 in chapter 3.1.4). I compared the readings of ME and YN in Esther 1:1–15 as to their agreement in the ‘festive’ realizations of šewa naʿ. The result is that they agree completely.

The realization of šewa naʿ as [a] (a lower-mid unrounded back vowel) is regular in some Persian-speaking communities, as well as the Aramaic-speaking communities of Persian Azerbaijan. Under certain conditions this is also the realization of šewa naʿ in the Yemenite community and in the Aramaic-speaking communities of western Kurdistan (Morag 1971: cc. 1137–1138). But there is no living pronunciation tradition of Hebrew in which this realization is confined to the beginning of a word only, as is the ‘festive’ šewa naʿ of the Cochin Jews. However, we have evidence of šewa naʿ = [a] only at the beginning of a word in two important grammatical treatises of the Jews of Yemen, i.e. Mahbêret at-īgān (אֵּיגָּנָ֥ן = the crowns (of the Torah)) ha-‘ivrî and Mahbêret at-īgān ha-‘aravî, which were written, according to Shlomo Morag, no later than the twelfth century. According to the first-mentioned treatise, the Hebrew mahbêret, every šewa at the beginning of a word which is not followed by ְהָא or ְּא is pronounced as pataḥ. The Arabic mahbêret does not state explicitly that in the above-mentioned conditions this is the pronunciation of a šewa only at the beginning of a word, but it is implied by the

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16 In these words the šureq has no gaʿyā and usually in such cases the following šewa is not pronounced, cf. e.g. Morag 1971: 77. If šureq has gaʿyā the following šewa is often pronounced in the tradition of the Yemenite Jews, cf. Morag 1963: 145–146. In my recordings I have one case of initial šureq with gaʿyā before a šewa in Esther 9:24, and there the šewa has an ultra-short realization: [uf³,ahbedō:m].

17 Morag 1963, p. 27. According to Ilan Eldar they are Yemenite abridgements of the Judeo-Arabic treatise Hiddîyat al-Qārî, which was written in the first half of the eleventh century probably in Palestine. For details, see Eldar 1994: 15–16.
examples cited there: ‘Every šewa na', which is not followed by š, n, 7, or ' is pronounced always as a patah haṭuf (ultrashort [']) regardless of the timbre of the vowel in the following syllable, e.g. נְמַדְרִי, שֵׁמָה, כֵּסָלָה, and if the šewa has a ga'yî (secondary tone) it is pronounced as a full patah, e.g. בָּעַר נָו (Psalm 119:142), מֵעָרִי (145:21). According to Morag (1963: 161, 166), these rules have preserved an old tradition which differentiated between the realizations of šewa na' at the beginning and inside a word. But it is obvious that this differentiation does not belong to the realm of Tiberian tradition, where it is made clear that the basic realization of šewa na' as ['] is not confined to a šewa at the beginning of a word only (see Eldar 1994: 143–145).

The melody-motivated šewa na' = [a] realization of the Cochin Jews, as the pronunciation of šewa na' in general, does not follow the Tiberian rule that when it precedes one of the 'gutturals', it should be realized as the vowel of that guttural, a rule which is meticulously followed in the pronunciation tradition of the Yemenite Jews.

The pronunciation of word initial šewa as [a] may betray the influence of the Hebrew Mahbérêt, although it seems that this peculiarity has never been a living reality in the pronunciation tradition of the Jews of Yemen. However, I consider it more probable that the scattered ‘festive’ realizations of šewa na' (and qames gadol) constitute a relic of an older pronunciation tradition which may have been followed in Yemen, at least in certain regions, and which influenced the rules of the Mahbarôt. This pronunciation tradition has left its traces in the tradition of the Cochin Jews through the channel of their age-old connections with the Yemenite Jews. These ‘petrified relics’ of the prestigious Yemenite tradition have been deemed worthy to solemnize the recitation of texts on festive occasions.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The German traveller Balthazar Springer saw Sephardi Jews in Cochin as early as 1506, noting them to be ‘a foreign element among the pagan population of the city of Cochin’. Later under Dutch rule, the ties with European Sephardi communities were only strengthened so that the influence of the ‘Sephardi’ pronunciation of Hebrew on that of Cochin Jews was a matter of course. The ‘Sephardi’ adstratum in this pronunciation tradition is first of all heard in its vowel system (cf. above chapter 4.8). On the consonantal level it becomes evident in the pronunciation of ס [c], the indigenous version of which seems to have been [s], which occurs now and then in the pronunciation of the Cochin Jews. The weakening process of the gemination is best interpreted to be a ‘Sephardism’ too, because it is not supported by the Malayalam sound system (cf. above chapter 4.7). A probable ‘Sephardism’ is also heard in the pronunciation of ה as [x], which competes with its indigenous version [h]. The present realizations of ס and פ could also have developed on the ground of the Malayalam sound system.

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18 This rule is only one example of many others, where the rules of the Mahbarôt are contradictory to the living tradition of the Jews of Yemen. See Morag 1963, p. 165–75.

19 Katz & Goldberg 1993: 63. Springer did not recognize the dusky indigenous Jews.
The older stratum in the pronunciation tradition of the Cochin Jews seems to be represented by the gemination, \( \overset{\ddot{}}{\text{n}} = [\delta] \), \( \overset{\ddot{}}{\text{s}} = [s] \) and \( \overset{\ddot{}}{\text{m}} = [h] \). These may be reflexes of Yemenite and/or certain Oriental ‘Sephardi’ pronunciations. The melody-motivated ‘festive’ qames and šewa seem also to belong to the older stratum, because they cannot be explained on the ground of the Malayalam sound system, or ‘Sephardic’ influence. The ‘festive’ šewa being the sole clue to the possibility that this language tradition’s old features go back to an extinct Yemenite pronunciation tradition of Hebrew. To the influence of the local Hindu context on the Hebrew language tradition of the Cochin Jews may probably be ascribed the influence of the Vedic ōm syllable recitations on glorification style and Shingly tunes and on the preservation of the ‘festive’ qames.

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