

# 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 *vaṭṭeluttū* script in which 'King of Kings, Śrī Bhāskara Ravi Varman' confers certain privileges and the right of use of certain symbols of royalty on Joseph Rabban, the leader

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Paradesi Synagogue (Mal. *paradēśi* '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 *meyuḥasīm* and non-*meyuḥasīm*. *meyuḥasīm* claimed to have a pedigree of descent from ancient Israel and considered the non-*meyuḥasīm* to be *mešuh̄rarīm* (manumitted slaves) or *gerīm* (proselytes) or their descendants. This strife had given rise to various kinds of religious discrimination on the part of the *meyuḥasīm*, which troubled the community until the middle of the present century.<sup>2</sup>

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 co-religionists 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 *qameš 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 Ḥay Avraham (aged 70) and his son Avraham Ḥay Ḥayyam (36), Yitṣṣhak Nissim (46) and Mordeḳay 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: AḤA, AḤḤ, YN and ME. My informants, especially AḤA, could not speak modern Hebrew well, only in AḤḤ's reading I could discern some influence of modern Hebrew (e.g. he quite frequently realized  $\text{ṣ} = [\text{t}]$ ).

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 AḤḤ. 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 *qameṣ gadol* and *šewa na<sup>c</sup>* 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 (*pésah*, *šavu<sup>c</sup>ot*, *sukkōt*) and also during the feast of *simḥat torā*. According to AḤA *qameṣ 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 *qameṣ gadol* [o] and *šewa na<sup>c</sup>* [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’ *qameṣ gadol* and *šewa na<sup>c</sup>*.

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

**ḏ** = a voiced dental fricative

**ḥ** = a voiced post-dental fricative

**c** = an unvoiced alveolar affricate

**x** = an unvoiced velar fricative

**χ** = an unvoiced uvular fricative

**ˆ**, etc. = an ultra-short vowel

**a.a** = a glide

**ai** = a diphthong

**á** = a stressed vowel

**â** = a long stressed vowel

**a:** = an ultra-long unstressed vowel (due to melodic reading)

**â:** = an ultra-long stressed vowel (due to melodic reading)

**o** = a 'festive' *qameš gadol*

**a** = a 'festive' *šewa na<sup>c</sup>*

#### 3.1.2. Psalm 113

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

- (1) 'a:llelû yô:  
'allelû avd*é*i adoná*i* alle:lû eḥ šem adoná:y
- (2) yei šem adoná:y mevo:râ:x me.attâ ve.áḏ olâ:m
- (3) mimmizrâh šémeš 'ad mevo:ô me.ullál šem 'adoná:y
- (4) râ:m al gol go.îm adoná*i* al aššamâim kevodô
- (5) mî ka.adoná*i* elo.éinu ammagbi.î laša:bêḥ
- (6) 'ammašpilî lirôḥ baššamâim uba.âres
- (7) meχimî me.afár dal me.ašpôt yarîm evyôn
- (8) lehošivî im nedibîm 'im nedib*é*i 'ammô
- (9) mošibî: akêreḥ abbâ:iḥ 'em banî:m semehô:  
'a:llelû yô:

3.1.3. *Esther 1:1–15*(reader: Yitshak Nissim; festive melody)<sup>3</sup>

- (1) va:i.î: bi:mê: 'ahašve:rô:š hû: 'ahašverôš 'amoléx mehódu ve.ád kûš šéva ve'esrí:m ume.ô: medinô:
- (2) bayo:mî:m ho:hê:m kešéveð 'ammélex 'ahašverô:š â:l kissê malxuðô ašê:r bešušan habirô:
- (3) bišnáð šalô:š lemoxô: 'o:sô: mištê: la:xól saróv va'avadáv heil parás umadái hapartemím vesarê: amedinô:ð lafonô:v
- (4) be.ar'oðô: eð óšer kevód malxuðô: ve.éð yekâ:r tif'ê:reð gedullaðo yamím rabím šamonî:m uma.âð yô:m
- (5) uvimlô:ð ayomím ho.ê:lle 'o:sô: amê:lex lexól ha'am hanimce.îm bešušan habirâ lemigadol ve.ád katán mištê šiv'âð yamím baxacâr ginâ:ð bitâ:n hamê:lex
- (6) xû:r karpás uðxéleð 'a:xû:z bexavléi bús ve.argamá:n al geliléi késef ve.amudéi šeš mitóð zahâv vaxêsef al ricpáð bahát vašê:š vedâ:r vesoxâ:reð
- (7) vebaškô:ð bixléi zðhov vexelím mikelím šoním veyéin malxûð rá:v kyâ:d hamê:lex
- (8) vebašetiyô: kaddáð ein 'onê:s kí xen yisád hamélex al kol rav bejð ô la.asôð kircô:n 'î:š vo'î:š
- (9) gam wašti hamalkô: ô:sto mištê naším bejð amalxúð ašê:r lamélex 'ahašverô:š
- (10) bayôm haševi'î: ketóv lev hamélex bayâ:.in 'amá:r limhumán bizðá xarvonâ bigðá va.avagðá zeðár vexarkás šiv'âð asarisî:m hameša:rðî:m eð penéi amélex ahašverô:š
- (11) laho:vî: eð wašti hamalkô: lifnéi hamélex bexéðer malxúð lehar'óð ha'amím vehasarím eð yofyâ kí tovâ:ð mar'ê: î
- (12) vatema.ên hamalkô wašti: lavô bidvár hamélex ašér beyád asarisím vayikcóf hamélex me.ô:d vahamaðô: bo.arâ bô:
- (13) vayômer hamê:lex lahaxamím yodéi ha.itím kí xen devár hamélex lifnéi kol yod'ê:y dá:ð vadî:n
- (14) vehakaróv 'elâ:v karšêna šeðâ:r 'adma:ðâ: taršiš merés marsená memuxán šiv'âð saréi parás umadá:y ro.éi penéi amélex hayošvî:m rišonâ bammalxû:ð
- (15) kedáð mâ la.asô:ð bamalkâ wašti al ašér lô asðâ eð ma.amár hamélex ahašverôš beyâ:d hasarisî:m

<sup>3</sup> According to YN, this particular melody was used in the *Kaṭavum bhāgam* synagogue in Emakulam.

The words pronounced differently by Mordeķay Eliyahu in Esther 1:1–15:

Verse 1: **šéba** (vs. YN: *šéva*)

Verse 2: **kešébeð** (*kešéveð*)

Verse 3: **va'abadáv** (*va'avadáv*)

Verse 4: **kebód** (*kevód*)

Verse 5: **šib'át** (*šiv'âð*)

Verse 6: **behabléi** (*bexavléi*)

Verse 7: **záhav** (*zôhov*)

Verse 10: **hašebi'î:, hasorisî:m, hamešo:rôî:m** (*haševi'î:, asarisî:m, hameša:rôî:m*)

Verse 11: **la'o:bî:, tobâ:ð** (*laho:vî:, tovâ:ð*)

Verse 12: **hamalkâ, labô, bidbâr, aso:risîm, ba'arâ** (*hamalkô, lavô, bidvár, asarisîm, bo.arâ*)

Verse 14: **vehakarób, šib'áð** (*vehakaróv, šiv'âð*)

Verse 15: **hasorisî:m** (*hasarisî:m*)

### 3.1.4. Esther 8:14b–16

(reader: Mordeķay Eliyahu; glorification melody)

(14b) **vehaddâ:ð nittenâ: bešu:šâ:n habbi:rô:**

(15) **umorde:xâ:y yocô: milifnê: hamê:le:xe: bile:vû:š male:xú:ð<sup>e</sup>  
taxê:le:ðe: vo:hû:r wa:tê:re:ð zo:hô:v ga:ðo:lô: wa:ðaxe:rî:x bú:c<sup>e</sup>  
wa:.argomô:n vaho:'î:r šu:šâ:n caha:lô: wa:so:me:xô:**

(16) **layehu:dî:m ho:yðð: o:rô: wa:simxô: veso:sô:n vi:kô:r**

### 3.1.5. Exodus 19:1–13

(reader: Avraham Ḥay Ḥayyam; ordinary melody)

(1) **baho:dê:š hašelišî: lecêt bené yisra.él<sup>e</sup> me'ê:re:c micrâ:yim bayôm  
hadê bâ:.u: midbâr sinâ:y**

(2) **vayis'û me:rfidî:m vayabô:.u: midbâ:r sinâi vaya:hanû bammidbâr  
vayi:hán šam yisra.ê:l nê:ge:d a.â:r**

(3) **mošê 'alâ el ha:elohîm vayiχrâ 'elâ:v adonâi min a.â:r lemôr kô:  
tomâr levîið ya.a:χôv vetagê:d livnê:y yisra.ê:l**

(4) **'atê:m re.iðê:m 'ašê:r 'asî:ti: lemisrâ:yim va:.e:ssâ: 'eðxêm 'al  
kanfê:y neša:rî:m va'avî 'eðxê:m 'elâ:y**

(5) **ve.atâ: im šamô:.a: tišme:.û: beχolí šmartêm eð be:riði vi:yitêm lí  
segullâ: mikól ha.a:mmî:m kí lí: kol ha.â:re:s**

(6) **ve.atê:m ti:yû lí: mamlê:xe:ð ko:hanî:m vegô:i χadôš e:llê 'debarî:m  
'ašêr tedabbê:r benêi yisra.ê:l**

- (7) **vayavô: mošê: vayiḡrâ: lediknê:y ha:â:m vaya:sê:m lifne:yhém 'êð**  
kol hadeba:rî:m ha.ê:lle: ašê:r civva:hû: ado:nâ:y
- (8) **ya.a:nû: kol ha'â:m ya:dáv vayô:mru: kô:l ašér dibêr ado:nâ:y**  
na.a:sê: vayâ:še:b mošê: et dibrê a.â:m 'el ado:nâ:y
- (9) **vayô:me:r ado:nâ:y el mošê: hinnê: a:noxî: bâ: elê:xa: be.âv e:.anân**  
ba.a:bû:r yišmâ: a.âm bedabberî: immâx vegám bexâ ya.a:mi:nû:  
le.o:lâ:m vayegêd mošê: 'et divrê ha.â:m 'el ado:nâ:y
- (10) **vayo:mê:r adonâ:y el mošê lê:x 'el ha'â:m veḡiddaštâ:m hayô:m**  
umahâ:r vexibbe:sû: simlo:tâ:m
- (11) **ve.ayû nexo:nîm 'elayôm hašeli:šî: kî: bayôm hašeli:šî: yerê:d**  
adonâ:y le.einêi kol ha'â:m 'al hâ:r si:nâ:y
- (12) **vehigbaltâ: eð ha.â:m sabî:v lemô:r išša:mrû: laxê:m a:lôt ba.âr**  
ungô.a beḡasê:hu: kol hanogê.a ba.â:r mô:ð yumô:ð
- (13) **lô tigâ: bô: yâ:d ki saḡô:l yissaḡê:l 'ô yarô iyyarê 'im be.e:mâ: 'im**  
'iš lô yih'yê: bimšô:x hayo:bê:l hê:mma: ya.a:lû: ba.â:r

#### 4. THE REALIZATIONS OF HEBREW CONSONANTS AND VOWELS

##### 4.1. The Laryngeals ע, ה, ח, א

א = complete loss [ø] or [ʔ] (glottal stop) are equally common at the beginning of a word, e.g. [ašê:r] אֲשֶׁר, [ʔa:xû:z] וְיִצְחָק (Esther 1:2,6). In the middle of a word after a vowelless consonant, it retains its full consonantal value [ʔ], e.g. [tif'ê:reð] תִּפְעֵרֶם (Esther 1:4), rarely [ø] in this position, e.g. [lirôð] לִרְאוֹת (Psalm 113:6). Between vowels it is usually reduced to a glide, e.g. [uba.âres] וּבְאֵרֶס (Psalm 113:6).

ה = [h] (unvoiced laryngeal fricative), e.g. [ha'âm] חַמָּה (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] אֲמַדִּינֹת, [ʔammélex] אֲמַלְלֵךְ (Esther 1:3,2), [be.e:mâ:] בְּעַמְמָה (Exodus 19:13), [me.ullál] מְעַלְלֵל (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* (ח) is not pronounced, e.g. [yofyâ] יוֹפְיָא (Esther 1:11).

ע = [ʔ] and complete loss are common at the beginning of a word, e.g. [ʔasî:ti:] אֲשִׁיתִי (Exodus 19:4), [avdéi] אֲבַדְעִי (Psalm 113:1), and the first-mentioned realization also inside a word, e.g. [šiv'áð] שִׁיבְעָת (Esther 1:14), in this position complete loss is rare, e.g. [yodéi] יוֹדְעִי (Esther 1:13). Between vowels it tends to be reduced to a glide as 'aleph, e.g. [la.asôð] לְעֶשׂוֹת (Esther 1:8).



#### 4.2. The Velars ק, כ, פ, ח

ח = [x] (unvoiced velar fricative),<sup>4</sup> e.g. [baxacâr] בַּחצָר (Esther 1:5). Even more commonly it tends to be realized as [h], e.g. [vahamaðô:] וַחמָרוֹ (Esther 1:12). Once there is complete loss at the end of a closed syllable: [ya:dáv] יָדָוֹ (Exodus 19:8).

כּ = [k] (unvoiced velar stop), e.g. [ka.adonái] כִּי אֲדוֹנָי (Psalm 113:5).

ק = [x], e.g. [vexibbe:sû:] וְכִבְּסֵי (Exodus 19:10). This consonant retains always its full phonetic value.

פּ = [k], e.g. [vehaškô:ð] וְהַשְׁקוֹת (Esther 1:7). Sometimes, mostly in postvocalic position [χ] (unvoiced uvular fricative, see Morag 1971: c. 1133), this realization was fairly often heard in the reading of אַחַא, e.g. [meximî] מְקִימֵי (Psalm 113:7).<sup>5</sup>

#### 4.3. The Palatals שׁ, י, ג, ג׳

ג, ג׳ = [g] (voiced palatal stop), e.g. [go.ím] גוֹיִם (Psalm 113:4), [nê:ge:d] נֶגֶד (Exodus 19:2).

י׳ = [y] (voiced palatal semi-vowel), e.g. [yisra.ê:l] יִשְׂרָאֵל (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. [bayâ:.in] בַּיָּיִן (Esther 1:10), [go.ím] גוֹיִם (Psalm 113:4), [baššamâim] בַּשְּׂמַיִם (Psalm 113:6).

שׁ = [š] (unvoiced palato-alveolar sibilant), e.g. [mošê:] מוֹשֶׁה (Exodus 19:9).

#### 4.4. The Alveolars ז, ל, ג, נ, ס, צ, ר, שׂ

ז = [z] (voiced alveolar sibilant), e.g. [zeðár] זֶהָר (Esther 1:10). Sometimes it is realized intervocalically as [d] (voiced dental fricative). I could not discern any system in this realization, e.g. [hadê] הָדָה (Exodus 19:1).<sup>6</sup>

ל = [l] (voiced alveolar lateral), e.g. [ʾallelú] הַלְלֵנוּ (Psalm 113:1).

נ = [n] (voiced alveolar nasal), e.g. [naším] נָשִׁים (Esther 1:9).

ס = [s] (unvoiced alveolar sibilant), e.g. [parás] פָּרָס (Esther 1:3).

צ = [c] (unvoiced alveolar affricate), e.g. [micrá:yim] מִצְרָיִם (Exodus 19:1), sometimes, without a phonetic explanation [s], e.g. [lemisrá:yim] לְמִצְרָיִם (Exodus 19:4).

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

<sup>4</sup> Its pronunciation is rather weak, sometimes the friction is hardly audible.

<sup>5</sup> In the Malayalam sound system there is no sound corresponding to it. According to אַחַא, פּ which does not have *dageš* should be realized as [χ] I heard it also in the spoken Hebrew of YN, e.g. [pasúχ] פִּסְטִי. Cf. on this same post-vocalic realization of פּ in the pronunciation tradition of the Aleppo community in Katz 1981: 10.

<sup>6</sup> It seems to be an interference from the Malayalam sound system.

ך = [r] (voiced apicoalveolar trill), e.g. [xû:r] חור (Esther 1:6).

ש = [s] (unvoiced alveolar sibilant), e.g. [saréi] שרי (Esther 1:14).

#### 4.5. The Dentals ת, ד, ט, ז, נ

ד and ט = [d] (voiced dental stop), e.g. [dâ:ð] דת, [beyá:d] ביד (Esther 1:13, 15). Sometimes, without a phonetic explanation ד is realized [ð] (voiced dental fricative), e.g. [ve.ád] עד, [kevodô] כבודו (Psalm 113: 2, 4).

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

ת = [t], e.g. [tedabbê:r] תדבר (Exodus 19:6).

נ = [ð] (voiced post-dental fricative),<sup>7</sup> e.g. [malxûð] מלכות (Esther 1:7). Only rarely has it plosive realization, e.g. [me.əspôt] משפחה (Psalm 113:7).

#### 4.6. The Labials פ, ב, ו, מ, נ

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

ב = [v] (voiced labiodental fricative), e.g. [ya.a:χôv] יצא (Exodus 19:3); however, the most striking ‘Malayalamism’ in the Cochinite pronunciation of Hebrew is the occasional plosive [b] realization of ב, e.g. [nedibîm] נדיבים (Psalm 113:8).

ו = [v] (voiced labio-dental fricative), e.g. [civva:hû:] צוה (Exodus 19:7). [w] is sometimes substituted for it at the beginning of a word, when [a] follows, e.g. [waštî] ושתה, [wa:tê:re:ð] וצרת (Esther 1:9; 8:15).<sup>8</sup>

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

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

פ = [f] (unvoiced labio-dental fricative), e.g. [me.afár] מעפר (Psalm 113:7), although [f], like [v], is a ‘foreign’ sound to the speaker of Malayalam, in my material did I hear the substitution of [p] for it only once by AHĤ in Joshua 1:5 [lepa:nê:xa:] לפניו.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 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 ת.

<sup>8</sup> This sound being the nearest equivalent of [v], which is non-existent in the Cochin dialect of Malayalam.

<sup>9</sup> 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 [f] is more common, e.g. [leké:pa:] לכאפא, [vestáhlap<sup>e</sup>] ואשתחלה (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,<sup>10</sup> e.g. [’**amoléx**] אַמֹּלֶךְ (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**] מִכְלִים (Esther 1:7), [**dibêr**] דִּבֶּר (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. [**vehašetiyo:**] וְהַשְׁתִּיחוּ (Esther 1:8), [**hadeba:ri:m**] הַדְּבַרִּים (Exodus 19:7). It seems that this pronunciation tradition stands at the mid-point of the process: \*[haddebarim] > [hadebarim] > \*[hadbarim].

#### 4.8. The vowels

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

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

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

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

*Pataḥ* = [a] (open front vowel), e.g. [**bedabberi:**] בְּדַבְּרֵי (Exodus 19:9), i.e. there is no distinction between *pataḥ* and *qameš gadol*.

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

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

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

*Hireq* = [i] (close front vowel), e.g. [**vi:yitém**] וְיִיטְּמוּ (Exodus 19:5), there is no discernible plene-defective distinction, e.g. [**vexelîm**] וְכִלִּים (Esther 1:7), [**va’avî**] וְאָבִי (Exodus 19:4).

<sup>10</sup> In Psalm 113 אַחַא realized all consonants that have *dageš forte* as doubled consonants. In Malayalam which is the mother tongue of the Cochín Jews, the gemination of certain consonants is phonemic, this fact has for its part supported the preservation of gemination in this language tradition.

*Šewa na<sup>c</sup>* = [e] (open-mid front vowel), at the beginning of a word, e.g. [semehô:] שֶׁמֶחֶן (Psalm 113:9). In the middle of a word *šewa* is ‘mobile’ after *šewa quiescens* and after a geminated consonant, e.g. [hanimce.îm] חַנִּמְצֵיִם (Esther 1: 5), [vexibbe:sû:] וְכִבְדֵּנוּ (Exodus 19:10). Sometimes the gemination is not realized, but the *šewa* is still pronounced, e.g. [hašelišî:] הַשְּׁלִישִׁי (Exodus 19:1). *Šewa* after a ‘long vowel’ is not pronounced, e.g. [ricpáð] רִצְפָּת, [hayošví:m] הַיְיֹשְׁבִים, [veharxokî:m] וְהַרְחוּקִים (Esther 1:6, 14; 9:20), [me:rfidî:m] מְרִפְיָדִים (Exodus 19:2).<sup>11</sup> In other positions complete loss of *šewa na<sup>c</sup>* is rare, e.g. [sfari:m] סְפָרִים (Esther 1:22).

When an exceptionally drawn-out recitation melody is used, the normally unpronounced *šewa’îm* are ‘revived’, e.g. [bile:vû:š] בְּלִבוֹשׁ (Esther 8:15), and at the end of a word there is a tendency to pronounce a helping vowel, e.g. [taxê:le:ðe:] תְּכַלֶּה (Esther 8:15); these ‘melodic helping vowels’ even have ultra-long realizations.

When certain recitation melodies are used, a *šewa* at the beginning of a word is sometimes pronounced [a] (open front vowel), e.g. [lafonô:v] לְפָנָיו (Esther 1:3), [ga:do:lô:] גְּדוֹלָה (Esther 8:15). (On this melody-motivated ‘festive’ [a] realization, see below chapter 7.)

*Ḥatef pataḥ* = [a] (open front vowel), e.g. [va’avadáv] וַעֲבָדָיו (Esther 1:3). All *ḥatefs*, as the above discussed *šewa na<sup>c</sup>* are pronounced as short vowels.

*Ḥatef segol* = [e] (open-mid front vowel), e.g. [elo.éinu] אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Psalm 113:5).

*Ḥatef qameṣ* = [o] (rounded, close-mid back vowel), e.g. [hodašîm] הִדְרָשִׁים (Esther 2:12). A *qameṣ* preceding a *ḥatef qameṣ* has the typical ‘Sephardi’ realization [a], e.g. [na.omî] נַעֲמִי (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. [zôh<sup>h</sup>ov] זֹהָב (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 *qameṣ* as [a] in the combination *qameṣ* + laryngeal + *ḥatef qameṣ* (cf. above), is a rule also in this tradition. However, the origin of the ‘festive’ realizations of *qameṣ gadol* and *šewa na<sup>c</sup>* has to be sought in another realm of traditions.

<sup>11</sup> The *šewa* of ך 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 Baghdadi 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 *haptara*. 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 (Forsström 1995: 41–46) indicates that there are five consonantal sounds in Hebrew which do not have equivalents in Malayalam, viz. [ʔ], [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.<sup>12</sup> 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] סְלִיּוֹת (the name of certain prayers, see Katz & Goldberg 1993: 169). The occasional realization of Hebrew ז as [s] is one of the hallmarks of Cochinite ‘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 ‘Sephardi imports’ in this reading tradition.

## 6. THE MELODY-MOTIVATED PRONUNCIATION OF QAMEŞ GADOL AS [o]

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’ *qemašîm*. 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

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the similar observations made by Shlomo Morag (1963: 271) on the reading tradition of the Jews of Yemen.

'singing', and the reading tempo slowed down from the average 72 to 13 words per minute, and almost every *qameš 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 AḤA (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. [y<sup>u</sup>mô:ð] תָּזַח, which was the sole instance in the ordinary style texts in the whole recorded material. Probably the immediately preceding infinitive absolute [mô:ð] מִזַּח 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 *pataḥ* as [o]: [veyið'appôk] קִצְצִי, [tobbâtô] תִּבְעָתוֹ (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 (AḤA, YN and Neḥemya Neḥemya), who recited it in ordinary, festive and glorification styles. When the Psalm was recited in ordinary style, there were no occurrences of 'festive' *qameš*. In the recitations of AḤA and YN in festive style, they gave the 'festive realization' to exactly the same *qemašim* (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 *qameš* [abbonî:m] מִיִּזְכֹּרֵי (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 *qameš* ME does not, and in four cases where ME gives 'festive' realization to *qameš* 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 *qameš 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 *qameš gadol* is [â].<sup>13</sup> 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-

<sup>13</sup> Shlomo Morag (1963: 100) defines the Yemenite pronunciation more closely. According to him, most of the Yemenite communities (including Aden) realize the *qameš* as a rounded lower-mid back vowel [o], which in the vicinity of the laryngeals and the emphatic consonants approaches to [â].

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 *qemašim* and *šewa'îm* in prayers, as the festive and glorification melodies have in the recitation of biblical texts. I give here the transliteration of *Arešet Šefatenu* by Johanna Spector.<sup>14</sup> The indication of the 'festive' realizations in italics is by me:

**areshet safotenu dazia o horahamon hu yerahem olenu  
veyishma veyaazin viyakshiv vayaane lkhoh tefilotenu ulkhoh  
tefilat tekinat amo kol bet yisroel veyifkedenu beraamim  
uverotson mile lonu veyaaane 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 *qameš 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 Salih and taught the Cochinites the tunes of their country?' (Spector 1969: 250).

In the case of *qameš 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 *ôm* syllable', which represents Brahman and has been considered sacrosanct in Hinduism for about three millennia. This *ôm* syllable is realized in the liturgy as a drawn out [o-o-o]. Most reminiscent of the Jewish 'festive' *qameš* is the substitution of the last vowel and following consonant(s) by this *ôm* 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 *ôm* was included in the order of worship in certain hymns and blessings.<sup>15</sup>

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.

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> Hansen 1986: 242–244. I am indebted to Professor Asko Parpola, who informed me about this.

## 7. THE MELODY-MOTIVATED PRONUNCIATION OF ŠEWA NA<sup>◌</sup> 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 Šefatenu* 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 na<sup>◌</sup>* 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 na<sup>◌</sup>* = [a] (28 occurrences) are at the *beginning* of a word and often in those words which also have a ‘festive’ *qameš*, e.g. [la:xól saróv] לְכָל-לְשׁוֹנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, [šamonî:m] שְׁמוֹנֵים עָרָב, [laho:vî:] לְהַוִּיחַ, [vaho:’î:r] וְהָעִיר (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.âð] וַאֲנִי (Esther 1:4), [ubahagî.a] (Esther 2:12).<sup>16</sup> As with ‘festive’ *qemašîm* 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 na<sup>◌</sup>*. The result is that they agree completely.

The realization of *šewa na<sup>◌</sup>* 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 na<sup>◌</sup>* 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 na<sup>◌</sup>* of the Cochîn Jews. However, we have evidence of *šewa na<sup>◌</sup>* = [a] only at the beginning of a word in two important grammatical treatises of the Jews of Yemen, i.e. *Maḥbéret at-tîgân* (التيجان = the crowns (of the Torah)) *ha-’ivrît* and *Maḥbéret at-tîgân ha-’aravît*, which were written, according to Shlomo Morag, no later than the twelfth century.<sup>17</sup> According to the first-mentioned treatise, the Hebrew *maḥbéret*, every *šewa* at the beginning of a word which is not followed by *š*, *ṣ*, *ṣ*, *ḏ* or *ḥ* is pronounced as *pataḥ*. The Arabic *maḥbéret* 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

<sup>16</sup> In these words the *šureq* has no *ga’yâ* and usually in such cases the following *šewa* is not pronounced, cf. e.g. Morag 1977: 77. If *šureq* has *ga’yâ* 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 *ga’yâ* before a *šewa* in Esther 9:24, and there the *šewa* has an ultra-short realization: [ul<sup>e</sup>.abbedô:m].

<sup>17</sup> Morag 1963, p. 13. According to Ilan Eldar they are Yemenite abridgements of the Judeo-Arabic treatise *Hidâyat al-Qâri*, 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*<sup>◌</sup>, which is not followed by א, ה, ו, ע or ך, is pronounced always as a *pataḥ ḥaṭuḥ* (ultrashort [a]) regardless of the timbre of the vowel in the following syllable, e.g. בְּרֵאשִׁית, כְּכֹלֹת, שְׁמַע, זְכוּר, and if the *šewa* has a *ga'yâ* (secondary tone) it is pronounced as a full *pataḥ*, e.g. אֲמַתְךָ (Psalm 119:142), יְדִבְרֶנּוּ (145:21)'. According to Morag (1963: 161, 166), these rules have preserved an old tradition which differentiated between the realizations of *šewa na*<sup>◌</sup> 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*<sup>◌</sup> as [a] is not confined to a *šewa* at the beginning of a word only (see Eldar 1994: 143–145).

The melody-motivated *šewa na*<sup>◌</sup> = [a] realization of the Cochin Jews, as the pronunciation of *šewa na*<sup>◌</sup> 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 *Maḥbéret*, although it *seems* that this peculiarity has never been a living reality in the pronunciation tradition of the Jews of Yemen.<sup>18</sup> However, I consider it more probable that the scattered 'festive' realizations of *šewa na*<sup>◌</sup> (and *qameṣ gadol*) constitute a relic of older pronunciation tradition which may have been followed in Yemen, at least in certain regions, and which influenced the rules of the *Maḥbarôt*. 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.'<sup>19</sup> 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 צ [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 פ as [x], which competes with its indigenous version [h]. The present realizations of א and ע could also have developed on the ground of the Malayalam sound system.

<sup>18</sup> This rule is only one example of many others, where the rules of the *Maḥbarôt* are contradictory to the living tradition of the Jews of Yemen. See Morag 1963, p. לג-לד.

<sup>19</sup> 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, פ = [ð], ש = [s] and פ = [h]. These may be reflexes of Yemenite and/or certain Oriental 'Sephardi' pronunciations. The melody-motivated 'festive' *gameš* 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 *ôm* syllable recitations on glorification style and Shingly tunes and on the preservation of the 'festive' *gameš*.

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