

Purim in Cochin in the Middle of the Sixteenth Century According to Lisbon's Inquisition Trials

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In memoriam of Professor P. M. Jussay, "my cultural" guide in Kerala's synagogues, and of the kind Mister Samuel H. Hallegua, "Warden of the Cochin Synagogue and Leader of the Paradesi Cochin Jews."

In 1557, the Jesuit priest D. Gonçalo da Silveira¹ spearheaded an inquiry against the New Christian population of the Portuguese city of Santa Cruz de Cochi, located in present-day Kerala. The investigation was a late answer to the concerns of many people—including St. Francis Xavier himself—about the existence of numerous Christians who were really Muslims and Jews within the Portuguese Asian Empire and the necessity of installing a local branch of the Holy Office to judge them as heretics.²

Establishing the Holy Office was the first step in creating the *Tribunal da Inquisição de Goa*, a Goa-based court whose jurisdiction would span from Mozambique to Macau. Officials created this tribunal on March 2, 1560.³ More than five years later, on December 16, 1565, Goa's civil government, headed by Viceroy D. Antão de Noronha, issued legislation forbidding Jews to profess Judaism openly within the *Estado da Índia* and outlawing them from living within Goa's walled perimeter. He banned them from entering Portuguese territory under the penalty of imprisonment, consignment to the galleys, and seizure and confiscation of their goods.⁴ The consequences of the viceroy's decrees were immediately visible in Goa. Urban spaces formerly inhabited by Jews stood vacant until the Augustinians and other Catholic religious orders took advantage of the empty areas and occupied them. The only vestige of the Goa's *Judiaria* (Jewish quarter) survived in the name of a street. Jew Street in the Monte Santo area ran toward the Mandovi riverfront.⁵

More to the south, in Kerala, the Jews of Hindu Cochin were forbidden to enter nearby Santa Cruz, Cochin's twin Portuguese city, where the Perumpadappu rajas would exact their "revenge" on their Portuguese allies. The raja Goda Varma offered his protection to the Jewish Community of Cranganor (Kodungallur). During the 1560s,⁶ its members suffered from an internal war partly instigated by the Portuguese. The newly arrived *Paradesi* or "foreign" Jews settled near Cochin's royal palace, where they erected the famous *Paradesi Synagogue* in 1568.⁷ The symbiosis had a *leit-motif*: the *Paradesi* Jews fueled a clandestine war against the *Estado da Índia* with the active support of Cochin's rajas, above all through their opposition to the Portuguese monopoly on the pepper trade, and to the proselytizing efforts led by the Jesuits.⁸

The main events presented here deal directly with the time before the first inquisitorial enquiries in Cochin. Paradoxically, the "vestige" that remains of that reality was preserved and transmitted through the pen of the "enemy"; the remaining depictions of the Jewish community exist thanks to the persistence of the inquisitors' efforts in annihilating what they considered to be a "Jewish heresy."

1. Living in Santa Cruz de Cochim in the Middle of the 16th Century

In the 1530s and 1540s, the New-Christians began establishing a community in Santa Cruz de Cochim, also known as *Cochim de Baixo*, Cochin's twin Portuguese city. They built their community on land that the local raja offered to the Portuguese as a reward for the assistance they gave him in the fight against his traditional foe, Calicut's zamorin.⁹ The New-Christians launched their settlement in Cochin because of the political, religious, and social environment in Portugal on the eve of the creation of the Inquisition. The promulgation of the Papal bull *Cum ad nihil magis*, dated from May 23, 1536, spurred the first wave of settlers. A second wave arrived in Kerala after the *Meditatio cordis* bull issued

on July 16, 1547, fully established the Inquisition's harshest elements. This definitive triumph of the severest model of the Inquisition in Portugal led to a renewed migratory surge to India. In 1549, more New-Christians disembarked at Cochin, where they soon mingled with the first wave established in the 1530s.¹⁰ Both waves were composed of Jews who converted to Christianity after the two Iberian General Expulsions of 1492 and of 1496, and of their descendants, who wanted to remain in Portugal's empire under the guise of a Christian identity.

Leonor Caldeira, the matriarch of a family of refugee Castilian Jews, was one of the most notorious migrants of the 1530s. Leonor's daughter, Clara Caldeira, married a fellow New-Christian, one Luís Rodrigues, a native of Lamego in the northern tract of Portugal; both also moved to India. Leonor Caldeira's two remaining offspring also made endogamous marriages: her son, Simão Nunes, married New-Christian Inês Lopes, and Leonor's daughter, Ana, wed New-Christians twice. After the death of her first husband, Bento Lopes, she married António Fernandes.¹¹

The Cochin community grew in the 1540s with the second migratory wave. Its new members included Jácome de Olivares, who had served the royal bastard D. Jorge de Lencastre, duke of Coimbra, and his son, D. João, the future duke of Aveiro, in their Setúbal estates. Most probably, Lencastres decided to send Olivares to India to protect him from the Inquisition, since his mother was a New-Christian. In Cochin, Olivares married Maria Nunes, daughter of New-Christian Leonor Dias, who died around 1551-1552. Leonor Dias and her husband had come to India from Lisbon, which leads us to believe that they had been compelled to get baptized in Portugal between March and September of 1497.¹² Olivares brother-in-law, Diogo Vaz, an influential man and a great merchant, married Elvira Fernandes, a Goan New-Christian who had good relations with Leonor Caldeira. The New-Christians who arrived in 1549 from Portugal, as part of the later migration, also included the family of Manuel, a Lisbon native, and Maria Rodrigues, who was born in Oporto.¹³

The daily lives of Santa Cruz de Cochim's new residents revolved around its most important thoroughfare and main commercial axis, the *Rua Direita*. Manuel Rodrigues and Leonor Caldeira both had shops on this street. Rodrigues was a renowned tailor who sold every kind of textiles with the assistance of the African slaves who worked in his establishment. Caldeira had a shop in the home of her son-in-law, Luís Rodrigues. His wife, Clara, working with an African slave, helped Leonor Caldeira carry out several businesses, though she, too, traded especially in cloth. Rodrigues probably acquired the textiles during his business travels throughout Asia. Leonor's son, Simão Nunes, lived and carried out his trade in the same house in the *Rua Direita*, where he stored coral, seed pearls, and amber. These goods were sold only in a "tower since they were very expensive."¹⁴ Having a dwelling in the *Rua Direita* was a sign of wealth, a social manifestation of the commercial activity carried out for the community either by men who traveled to distant ports and countries to trade, or by their wives, relatives, and associates who sold the goods that the men brought to Cochim from distant places. They worked with the assistance of slaves who made up the domestic work force in the community's households and shops.

Other contemporary traders shared the Cochim community's commercial circuits. Take, for example, Jácome de Olivares, who was based in Cochin. His preferred destination was Malacca, in Malaysia, one of the major commercial axes that attracted Portuguese investment in Cochin. He built this solid trade route for himself after the government of Martim Afonso de Sousa (1542-1545) appointed him scrivener for the *Carreira de Maluco*, the long and hazardous maritime route from Malacca to the Moluccas Islands. Olivares further reinforced his trade link with Malacca by establishing his house in Cochin, since other members of his family, including his brother-in-law Diogo Vaz, also visited the Malay port frequently.

Jácome de Olivares used to sell pitch, porcelain, and *pau-da-China*¹⁵ in Santa Cruz de Cochim.¹⁶ The presence of porcelain and *pau-da-China*—both of which the New-Christian physician Garcia de Orta specifically mentions as merchandise transported aboard ships returning from Malacca¹⁷—reveals the geography of Olivares' commercial operations. He

sailed regularly to Malacca to exchange Gujarati textiles and, probably, cloth from Coromandel for Far Eastern merchandise. Fabrics, the most popular Indian goods,¹⁸ were indispensable to trade in the Moluccas, a commercial route that began and ended in Malacca.¹⁹

Thanks to the Inquisition's investigation of Leonor Caldeira's son-in-law Luís Rodrigues, we know the extent of the commerce these great Cochin entrepreneurs conducted. In the middle of the 16th century, Rodrigues used his ships to travel to Malacca, selling space aboard to fellow merchants. From there, he did business regularly with Pegu and Martaban, and he sailed to Ceylon. Occasionally, Rodrigues' ships would venture to other ports, such as Mergui on Tenasserim's coast, and return afterward to Pegu. Coromandel's coast was one of his favorite destinations, especially the ports of São Tomé [Mylapur] and Negapattinam. His ships also went regularly to the great ports in Bengal, perhaps Chittagong above all others, on their routes to Malacca and the Malay kingdom of Kedah. On their return voyages, his ships would call at Coromandel's ports and then travel through the shoals and to the lands of Ramanacor, that is, by the sand banks and island of Pamban. From there, his vessels would make their way to Cape Comorin.

Rodrigues diversified his investments geographically, so he also did business along Kerala's coast, particularly with Cannanore.²⁰ He traded a significant portion of his merchandise in Cochin. Often his mother-in-law and wife did the trading, especially since he was away frequently. They conducted business in his establishment in the *Rua Direita* or in the Hindu twin city of Cochin, called Cochim de Cima by Portuguese sources. Rodrigues himself mentioned in his proceedings that he dealt in horses on India's east coast. That reveals his connections in the equine trade from the Persian Gulf to India, where he probably sold horses to Vijayanagara.²¹

Besides being a profitable coastal trader, Rodrigues had a penchant for illicit traffic. The Inquisition accused him of selling artillery to the Jews of Cochim de Cima;²² and of offering, in Cannanore, a ship and a loan to Khoja Shams-ud-Din, a Muslim who wanted to travel to Mecca, the religious center of Catholicism's great enemy in the Indian Ocean.²³

Jews, particularly those of Iberian origin, were great trading partners of the New-Christians in the Hindu city of Cochin. Extant documents infer that the Jews were also the city's greatest merchants. Aside from having an economic advantage, the Jews and New-Christians shared a common Hispanic language and a certain ethnic identity. The two communities interacted frequently. New-Christians customarily went into the Hindu half of Cochin to sell their merchandise to the Jews, who in turn visited them in the Portuguese half of town to do business in their houses and establishments. The Jews traveled aboard New Christians' ships and closely associated with them in their coastal trade. For instance, several witnesses swore that Jácome de Olivares traded his goods simultaneously in Lower and Upper Cochin; and we know that "many merchants and Jews of cap" visited his house.²⁴

2. Living in Cochim de Cima in the Middle of the 16th Century

According to Portuguese documents, who were the Jews who lived in Cochin in the middle of the 16th century? The first information, dating from the beginning of that century, indicates that they were an indiscriminate group that did not have written religious sources. Thus, they eagerly received 13 Bibles sent from Lisbon. The books probably originated in Portuguese synagogues that were emptied after the general expulsion of 1496.²⁵ Documents from the factory of Cochin, dated 1516-1517 and 1530-1531, reveal that the Jewish population in Portuguese Cochin included not only local Jews, but also of Jews from nearby Cranganor (Kodungalur) or faraway Pune, in the Maharashtra. Their names were Dem, Chenare, Palune, and Hy. The man from Pune was named Hy and, in the Mughal Empire, he most likely would have been categorized as a resident "White Jew." White Jews sold merchandise to Cochin's factory and Portuguese shipyard. The goods included bags, food, nails, planks, and the like.²⁶ Unfortunately, these sources do not refer to the Jews' physical appearance, but they offer some other data that point to a certain predominance of Malabari

Jews in Kerala, mostly living around Kodungallur. One of the most interesting images we have of the *Judeus malabares* is in the *Código Português da Biblioteca Casanatense*, which depicts them as being as dark as the other Kerala residents it describes.²⁷ Inquisitorial sources also reveal the existence in Cochin of "Black" (*Pretos*) or "Malabari" (*Malabares*) Jews. Though the Malabaris had their own rabbis, they were mostly poor, small-scale merchants who sold pepper and sandals door to door. Given their poverty, the New-Christians usually gave them alms.²⁸

The New-Christians' most important partnerships in Cochin were with the so-called "White Jews" (*Judeus brancos*). Most of these people probably were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 15th century or were descendants of those refugees. The "White Jews" reached India either by way of Egypt and the Red Sea or via Hormuz and the Persian Gulf, and settled in Kerala, most of them around Kodungallur. In time, some fled to nearby Cochin, which was becoming a rising international trade center just as the port in Kodungallur was declining. Some White Jews were distinctly Portuguese, such as one man whom Leonor Caldeira identified as a White Jew who came from Castelo de Vide, a small southern town on the border between Portugal and Spain. Isaac Sul, who came to Cochin from the port of Setúbal, in Portugal's Estremadura, also was a White Jew.

Scholars can trace these people's Iberian origins through their surnames, as was the case with Moisés and Isaac Real and the members of the Narbona family. Thanks to the Inquisition processes, we know the origins of some of the White Jews. In 1560, the New-Christian Simão Nunes, while in Lisbon, referred to two "White Jews" from Turkey—Isaac and Abraão Mayor—who had told him in Cochin that the Messiah was yet to come.²⁹ In 1559, Jesuit Father Melchior Nunes Barreto reported from Cochin on the continuous arrival of "White Jews" from Turkey.³⁰ Josué Cohen, who lived in Upper Cochin, came from Turkey. The Inquisitors arrested him because they thought he was a Christian apostate.³¹ And Cochin resident Isaac do Cairo, who served the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* as an intelligence agent (1535-1570), was born in Cairo, then a provincial capital of the Ottoman Empire.³²

The Portuguese sources refer to all of these "White Jews" as wealthy men. One of them, called Jacob, was the *regedor* (minister) of Cochin's raja. One of his tasks was to collect and supply pepper for the Portuguese Crown factory. In his proceedings, New-Christian Luís Rodrigues told the Inquisitors that he frequently went to Cochim de Cima because "the healthiest merchants of the land, and those with the bigger fortunes" lived there.³³ We know that other Jews, including Isaac Sul, known as the "Red-Haired," did business with New-Christian Jácome de Olivares at his house in the *Rua Direita*.³⁴

Moisés Real, "a new merchant [who trades] in all India," according to New-Christian Simão Nunes, rented two establishments in the Portuguese side of Cochin, one on its main street and the other in the vicar's house. We found Nunes among Real's commercial partners.³⁵ As mentioned, some of the "White Jews" traveled aboard ships owned by New-Christians, thus participating in the inter-Asiatic private trade of "The Shadow Portuguese Empire." For example, we know that Isaac do Cairo traveled to Bengal accompanied by his daughter and another "White Jew."³⁶ Isaac was probably the Jew whom Luís Rodrigues took with him from Malacca to Ceylon, since we know that he had business with the "old king of Ceylon"—Buvaneka Bahu, the king of Kotte.³⁷ Jácome de Olivares also had a Jewish partner in his trade with Malacca, a man named "Abraão" who lived in Cochin.³⁸ Together with Jews from Hormuz, the Cochin Jews established in Malacca one of Asia's easternmost Sephardic communities, one with its own rabbi.³⁹

3. Between Santa Cruz de Cochim and Cochim de Cima: The New Synagogue

The notion of ethnic unity based on a common socioreligious past, including the possibility of easy communication since they shared the same Iberian languages, led New-Christians and Jews alike to be openly complicit in business terms and on a socioreligious level. We know through the Inquisition's records that both New-Christians and Jews made use, on

special occasions, of a specific common language dominated by words of Castilian origin. One such occasion was the funeral ceremony, where they sang songs with common themes in Spanish lyrics and in oral Sephardic poetry. For instance, one such song was intoned during the funeral of one of Leonor Caldeira's granddaughters, dead at the age of ten: "Todas juão a pee my amor bueno, juos en cuello y las ervas a crescer y la terra vas comer las palomas a bolar my amor bueno." ["All are fasting in vain, my good love, their fasts in (their) throats (stuck shall stay), as the grass will grow up (from your grave), (While) you shall eat earth, the doves shall proceed to fly, my good love"].⁴⁰

The Jews and the New-Christians joined together at other times as well, not just at mournful ceremonies. Abraão, Jacob, and Moisés Real talked with members of Elvira Rodrigues' family in a special room at her house.⁴¹ Some witnesses denounced the fact that some of Cochin's "White Jews" visited Diogo Vaz at his home, together with other New-Christians, to observe the Shabbat and to read the "books of the Law of Moses" in Hebrew and in "other languages." The witnesses mentioned specifically the presence at such ceremonies of Moisés Real, Isaac do Cairo, the "Red-Haired," and a member of the Narbona family.⁴² Conviviality was reciprocal, as the Jews of Cochim de Cima also received the New-Christians at their houses, where "all" read the Bible. They fasted at the house of the "Red-Haired," who lived in front of Cochin's synagogue.⁴³ After all, the New-Christians had a clear definition of the ethnical boundaries of the two groups, since they designated the other Portuguese as *goys*. For example, Rodrigo Álvares accused Diogo Vaz and Jácome de Olivares of calling our "*goy*" to all the Old-Christians—"and in [using] the plural *gois*." Rodrigo Álvares' Inquisition testimony identified these as words of dishonor in the "Jewish language."⁴⁴

The distribution of alms showed another form of interethnic solidarity. The New-Christians regularly gave money to poor Jews, both to "White" Jews⁴⁵ and to "Black" Jews. New-Christians were great patrons of Cochin's Synagogue. They collected alms for the construction of the "New Synagogue" in a special crimson velvet bourse and donated oil for its lamps.⁴⁶ During Simão Nunes' trial the Inquisitors were able to get a glimpse of the money donated by certain New-Christians in the 1550s: "the old confectioner and her daughter [Leonor and Clara Caldeira] and Luís Rodrigues and Simão Nunes and his wife and someone [else], all together gave four hundred *pardaus* of alms to the synagogue which is being erected now."⁴⁷

Which "New Synagogue" is this? It is the one later called in Malayalam *Kadavumbagham*, that is, "of the Margin," constructed between 1544 and 1550.⁴⁸ In 1558, accusation witness Guiomar Fernandes said she had entered "inside the new *esnoga* of the White Jews."⁴⁹ In the process against Jácome de Olivares, Guiomar specified that the New-Christians had given donations for the *esnoga*'s construction.⁵⁰ Isaac do Cairo's daughter, Maria Raposa, who had converted to Christianity, also said that some of Cochin's New-Christians had contributed money for the building of the "big new *esnoga* that was made in Cochin."⁵¹ A year before, the Jesuit father Melchior Carneiro accused the New-Christians not only of entering Cochin's synagogue, but also of helping in "its construction."⁵² This was probably the synagogue described by the Jesuit father Diogo da Silveira in his letter to his "Brothers of the Company in Portugal," which he wrote during his sojourn in Cochin in 1556:

The house is full of lamps and in the middle there is a tabernacle where the rabbis seat to pray, and it is a kind of altar where the Hebrew books of Moses are placed in great veneration; and they open the books there and start to recite them in Hebrew language, [and to the ceremony] come the rich and the poor people [alike], all very well dressed (those who can afford), in *grã* [carmine] and silk. [See n.54.]

Silveira also said that the floors of "the house" were well covered with straw mats. He said that the Jews there followed the precepts concerning ablution and noted, particularly, how they removed their shoes upon entering into the synagogue—a rule still observed today in India.⁵³ However, he mentioned the name of only two rabbis: Abraão and Ismael.⁵⁴

According to the Jesuit letters and to information provided by witnesses of the Inquisition processes, we can know for certain that we are in face of one of the oldest "images" of the synagogue later called *Kadavumbagham*. The "White Jews" abandoned the *Kadavumbagham* synagogue to use the new *Paradesi* synagogue, built in 1568, and a few years later, the Malabari Jews occupied it.⁵⁵ Situated more to the south than the *Paradesi* synagogue, *Kadavumbagham* was constructed at a time when Cochin's rajas lived in Calvathy, just north of Mattancherry, where the so-called "Dutch Palace" would be built (actually the Portuguese offered to build the new royal palace).⁵⁶

The "New Synagogue," *Kadavumbagham*, symbolized the social position held by the contemporary "White Jews" in the context of their relations with the Portuguese Empire and the rajas. The Jews built the "New Synagogue," in a location convenient to their community that was also easily reached by the New-Christians living in Portuguese Santa Cruz de Cochim, since they had social and economical relations with the Jews of Cochin. At the time, Cochin was one of India's most important markets and a hub of regional and international trade routes.⁵⁷

We have also data on the visits New-Christians made to the synagogue. These visits were easy to accomplish since no ramparts existed around Portuguese Santa Cruz de Cochim until the early 1600s, when a wall with a small gate was built, thus preventing any secret contact with the Jews of Cochim de Cima.⁵⁸ Before the wall was erected, New-Christian Maria Rodrigues described how she and her husband visited Moisés Real at his house in Cochim de Cima simply by crossing a nearby palm grove.⁵⁹ Guiomar Fernandes also witnessed how easily the New-Christian women of *Santa Cruz* visited the "New Synagogue." Guiomar had been in the synagogue with a sister-in-law of Moisés Real, and his mother-in-law, along with other women, all "dressed and covered with a shawl and cloth." In the synagogue, Guiomar saw how "many other respectful [women] living in the *Rua Direita* also went there." Two of the women covered their heads in shawls—as was their usage, and they didn't want to uncover them. The mother-in-law of Moisés Real revealed their identity: the two women were New-Christians Leonor Caldeira and her daughter, Clara.⁶⁰ During Maria Rodrigues' trial, one of the witnesses, a Bengali slave woman named Hilária, described how the New-Christians went to the synagogue to kiss a big book—that is, the Torah, something they eagerly searched with their hands.⁶¹

Other behaviors prove these "religious" encounters between Cochin's New-Christians and its Jews. For instance, the New-Christians sent animals to be killed in Hindu Cochin according to Jewish Law. They sang a special song when the meat was *teréfah*. As Luís Rodrigues' wife sung: "Mother, what a good veal, if was not *trefa*, we could eat it."⁶² Due to Jewish dietary precepts, Cochin's Jews also sent a Jewish boy to carry plucked fowls to the New-Christians of Santa Cruz.⁶³

Cochin's rabbis made a drink out of water and white raisins. It was a poor substitute for kosher wine, but India's climate made it impossible to have real wine. All the Jews consumed it, and the New-Christians distributed it.⁶⁴ The New-Christians⁶⁵ or the Mattancherry Jews,⁶⁶ including the local rabbi,⁶⁷ prepared kosher bread. After the festival of Purim, they had the habit of eating meat prepared according to the Jewish Law—"they eat cow, mouton and chicken"—said Cristóvão Raposo.⁶⁸ They maintained the Iberian tradition of preparing *adafina*. This ragout, made with cow or chicken meat, cooked with grains, oil, cloves and cinnamon,⁶⁹ was concocted within a pan tied with a cloth. "It cooks and dissolves during the night, and this is made for the Shabbat."⁷⁰ The *adafina* was cooked before feast days, mostly the Shabbat, or after someone died, and it could be made by the rabbi.⁷¹ On fast days, as on Shabbat, Jews could not prepare food, so the *adafina* was prepared in advance. A witness in the process of Maria Rodrigues said: "And when they fast they don't eat all day through, only once at night, and they eat roasted chicken and eggs."⁷² The observation of Jewish dietetic rules was so important to these New-Christians that one of them, Luís Rodrigues, was accused of carrying a Malabari Jew aboard his ships to cook kosher food for him during his travels.⁷³

Like the Jews of Hindu Cochin, the New-Christians of Santa Cruz observed the Jewish religious calendar. They complied with the Shabbat "after the stars appeared," said a witness.⁷⁴ According to other witnesses, the New-Christians took baths and dressed in clean clothes before Friday's dinner. They also lit candles and prayed. Some New-Christians had the habit of making those ceremonies in a hidden place. For instance, the family of Leonor Caldeira used a tower in their house.⁷⁵ Others preferred to light candles at Mattancherry, and fraternize with the other Jews in the synagogue.⁷⁶

The main Jewish festivities frequently denounced in the Inquisition processes were Yom Kippur, Sukkoth, Purim—though never designated as such—and Pesah. Yom Kippur was known as the September fast, during which time the Jews went "without eating, while by night [they ate]"—as Luís Rodrigues told the Inquisitors.⁷⁷

The calendar of holidays was well defined, and Jews or influential New-Christians transmitted it to the community. For example, José de Narbona, a Jew, told Luís Rodrigues that, "[Yom Kippur] was a good fast to have one sins forgiven by God."⁷⁸ Master Fernando, who later would "die at sea," taught Leonor Caldeira to observe this fast day.⁷⁹

We have insights about the Sukkoth celebration thanks to the processes of Manuel and Maria Rodrigues. On St. Matthew's day, September 21, some New-Christians of Cochin de Baixo, including Maria Rodrigues, visited Moisés Real's home in Cochin de Cima. Real "had his house all covered with palm branches, and in this fashion the Jews celebrate the Festival of Booths." Inside the booth, which was lit by an oil candle, Jews and New-Christians ate a yellowish, unsalted food. The synagogue was thronged with tired people, including New-Christians.⁸⁰

We will leave the description of the Purim Festival in Cochin for later, and instead, center for now on the Pesah celebrations. The processes of Grácia Lopes and Maria Nunes enlighten us about its festivities. According to a Malabari slave witness, the New-Christians used to celebrate the Passover together inside one of their houses, where they fasted, eating only after a star had appeared in the sky. It was a time when they would eat rice, curry, and fish in newly bought dishes. Also during the Passover, they took special baths, and wore new clothes and new caps. At six o'clock in the afternoon, they went to the garden, read, prayed, and lowered their heads (this probably describes the Kabbalat Shabbat).⁸¹ Another slave said they made unleavened bread for the occasion. And according to the Gujarati slave Guiomar, the New-Christians also ate chicken and its gibles.⁸²

The descriptions of Shabbat, Sukkoth, and Pesah celebrations in India coincide largely with what was imputed to the New-Christians in Portugal,⁸³ rituals that the Jews also observed until their expulsion in 1496,⁸⁴ though with some different nuances, especially alimentary, thus authenticating the evidence given during these processes.⁸⁵

4. Cochin's Purim in the 16th Century⁸⁶

Thanks to four people who were familiar with Cochin's New-Christian milieu, we have good insights about Purim festivities. The first witness was the daughter of Isaac do Cairo, the Christian convert Maria Raposa. The second was Maria's cousin, Cristóvão Raposo, also a converted Jew. The remaining two witnesses were male slaves of Moisés Real's, so they give us fair knowledge of what was happening inside the homes of Cochin's Jews. One slave was a Malabari called Duarte, and the other was a Bengali named Joane. We also have a "character" witness, the Genoese Bernaldino, whose testimony "consolidated" the evidence offered by the previous four deponents, who had "lower social rank" since they were New-Christians or slaves.

The witnesses began by stating that the offenses against Christ were said during a special period of time set according to Jewish celebrations. It began on the day of "Mordechai's Fast," meaning the first day of Purim, a date commemorated a few days after Lent, though witnesses' testimony about its starting point differed. Maria Raposa said Purim started after the arrival of ships from Malacca, but her cousin Cristóvão Raposo said the festival began 10 or 20 days before those vessels landed. The slaves also said the

celebration was initiated before the ships anchored, preceding their arrival by 15 to 20 days. Traditionally, in Hasmonean times, the celebration fell on the 14th day of the month of Adar, known as "Mordechai's Day." So, we can ask if Cochin's Jews had a tendency to mention only Mordechai's name instead of the name "Purim," which is never mentioned.⁸⁷

The Jews began the Purim celebration by returning to a format used by other Jewish communities. Following biblical precepts, they celebrated Mordechai's Fast in honor of the Jews' liberation from Persian rule thanks to the intervention of Queen Esther.⁸⁸ The witnesses attested that on the said day, the New-Christians and the Jews alike ridiculed the figure of Christ. In the Purim festivities, the figure whom Jews "exorcize" is normally Haman, the Achaemenid adviser who wished to obliterate the Jews. According to the witnesses, the celebrants in Cochin performed the "exorcism" inside the synagogue using Christ as the target. At home, Jews and New-Christians wrote several insulting statements, most of the time saying that Christ's birth was not divine—"which means [he was the] son of the Devil and son of Mary"—according to Maria Raposa. Then, inside the synagogue, they smashed the papers using stones. Cristóvão Raposo added that the Jews called Jesus Christ by the name "Isa" instead of Christ and that they wrote his name on a paper, stating that he had been born of Mary, a poor, unmarried woman, and so was the fruit of sin. Besides stating that Mary was not a virgin, and considering Isa to be of human nature, they called him "son of Haman, which means son of the Demon." The witnesses said the festivities continued joyfully, since for the Jews it was an occasion to commemorate their survival from persecution.

We know that in some Sephardic communities, a figure representing Haman was built, and then hanged and dragged through the streets.⁸⁹ In Cochim de Cima, Purim acquired a special characteristic, assimilating the malefic character of Haman into the figure of Jesus Christ. On that day, Cochin's Jews made a puppet with *olas* (i.e., palm leaves). For its body, they used a *lenho* made of soft palm wood "all painted as [if] it was a man," as cited by Maria Raposa. The Malabari slave Duarte testified that it looked like a man with his arms extended, as if he were crucified. Joane, the Bengali slave, said the figure was made of different materials. He gave the most detailed description of the "puppet": "They made a figure of straw with the face and visage of a man, and they put it on a log tied by its legs, and its waist, and by the neck, with its arms extended as if it was crucified." [See n.86.]

Maria Raposa, Duarte, and Joane specifically mentioned the way that the Jews placed the figure on pieces of timber in their backyards and only tied it later. According to Cristóvão Raposo, the image was initially sculpted on a log, but later, fearing any Portuguese intervention, Cochin's Jews used only straw. Only in Parur, which was distant enough from Portuguese interference and which had rulers who kept their independence from the *Estado da Índia*, did the Jews carve the image in wood. We know from the Inquisition trials that all the people at home—including women, children, and servants—threw stones, sticks, and mud at the figure's face, besides spiting and beating it with brooms. Some even slapped the puppet, threw it down, stabbed it with lances, beat it with guns, whipped it with ropes, and threw canes at it, and some even bit it. The beating with brooms was mostly carried out by women and children, and all was done in a boisterous ambiance—"with loud laughs and with big festivities and fun, and with many other mockeries, and also playing with small tubes"—said Maria Raposa. The culminating act was burning the puppet along with the paper where the insults were written. At dusk, the participants bathed, changed into clean clothes, and dined on a kosher meal with meat from animals sacrificed according to Jewish rules—a festivity "of eating and drinking"—as Cristóvão Raposo characterized it—that extended all through the night. In a radical change from the past, the clean clothes and kosher food "cleansed" the community from its contact with the polluted figure.

This was a particularly popular festival as celebrated in most Jewish homes. The list is impressive: Moisés Real, the Narbona family, Jacob "minister of the raja who collects pepper to Our Lord the King [of Portugal]," Abraão "The White," Sobola Sem, Samuel Chunar, Isaac "The White," Abraão "The Black," Mardoqueu, Isaac Sul "The Red Haired," the

Rabbi Moisés, a son-in-law of Moisés Real, and Rabbi Salomão, a "Malabari Jew." It was commemorated "generally at the home of other Jews, 'White' as [well as] 'Blacks,'" according to the Bengali slave Joane. The processes often referred to the name of Isaac do Cairo, in whose house even the New-Christians Diogo Vaz and Jácome de Olivares came to celebrate Purim. Isaac's daughter, Maria Raposa, described how these New-Christians "helped to throw stones against the crucified [figure] in a way similar to the Jews, [shouting] all the other injuries and blasphemies which the Jews have said as is stated above."

According to Fr. António de Gouveia O.S.A., the Portuguese managed to repress some aspects of Purim's celebration in Parur. Thanks to this Augustinian friar, we have a small reference about Parur's Purim in the late 1500s: at Easter time, the Parur Jews made a figure of Christ and exorcised it "with the infernal hate inherited from their ancestors all that the Holy Evangelists told us they [the Jews] did against Our Lord Jesus Christ, from His prison till His Crucifixion...."⁹⁰

Information exists about this kind of "exorcism" happening at other festivities, but without the climax described during the Purim festival. For example, Simão Nunes had a tower in his house, closer to "Haven," where he and his family kept a crucifix, in order to whip it, hang it, and put it in a basin full of dirt.⁹¹ During the inquisitorial process of the New-Christian Manuel Rodrigues, known as "O Boquinhos," it was revealed that he arrested an African slave during Lent to flog him 12 times each day; but on the Pesah, Rodrigues gave him new clothes and caressed him, with the objective of preventing the slave from denouncing his master's earlier flogging.⁹²

How are we to interpret this behavior?

For comparison's sake, we can check what was occurring in India against what was happening in Portugal. Based on a study made by Maria do Carmo Teixeira Pinto about the Inquisition visits, a picture emerges of New-Christians being accused of dancing and playing French guitars on Maundy Thursday and of being absent from the processions taking place that day. They also vituperated the figure of Christ and, sometimes, even scourged the crucifix and repeatedly said they still waited for the Messiah.⁹³ Based on one *Livro de Denúncias da Inquisição do Porto* and on a process of Évora's Inquisition, Maria José P. Ferro Tavares presents several examples of New-Christians being accused of whipping the crucifix and of not believing in the virginity of Mary.⁹⁴

However, we can cast some doubts on this type of accusation. Are we facing "accusation models" instead of real cases? As is known, these accusative prototypes have appeared since ancient times, as exemplified in the famous case of the Santo Niño of La Guardia, which had a major impact within the Iberian Peninsula.⁹⁵ We could also be facing other medieval European *topoi* against the Jews, who were always pointed to as the "carnal enemies" of Christianity, best exemplified in their denial of the central dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary, a theocratic symbol of the Triumphant Church.⁹⁶ As we shall see later, we can point out the same pattern in the question of attacks against Christ's image.

In the case of events in Cochin, however, there is some alternative information. The abuse against Christian images is, perhaps, an echo of the existing rivalry between the three local "foreign" communities—the Jews, the St. Thomas Christians, and the Moplah (*Mâppila*)—who shared a similar socioeconomic position among Malabar's Hindu kingdoms, since their main professional activity also was commerce. For example, we know from a letter written by the Italian Jesuit father Giacomo Fenizio that in 1558 the local Christians in Cochin had appealed to the Jesuits to intercede with the raja in order to get permission to parade before the other *Paradesis* in the "Mahamakhan" festival, celebrated in full splendor.⁹⁷ The resonance of such rivalry also can be seen in a legend that was divulged by the late P. M. Jussay, who was connected with Parur's Jews, who teased the local Christians by publicly offering incense on an altar in a mocking imitation of Christian worship.⁹⁸

Though the three *Paradesi* communities have coexisted more or less peacefully until today, there were outbursts of symbolic confrontation. In 1952, during South African Rabbi

Louis Rabinowitz's visit to Cochin, a group of intoxicated Jews took advantage of the Purim Festival to burn an image of the Virgin kept in a nearby church, as the drunken party identified it with the malevolent Haman.⁹⁹ In Parur during the "British Raj," according to P. M. Jussay, the local St. Thomas Christians had the habit of marching with a noisy band, which enthusiastically played its drums in front of the synagogue throughout Jewish celebration. The Jewish complaints, and the pressure of India's viceroy, Lord Reading (1921-1926), led the maharajah to order the construction of two pillars to bar all traffic in Jew Street.¹⁰⁰ These pillars still stand today in the Parur synagogue's street as a reminder of the "eruv" (the limits beyond which no one could carry anything on the Shabbat), but the iron chain once used to bar processions no longer exists. The same souvenir survived in Cochin, where in the 17th century there were two similar stone pillars closed by an iron chain.¹⁰¹

However, the identification of the figure used during Purim with the image of the crucified Christ, as it appears in the Inquisition processes, is far more complex.

To Herman Prins Salomon, the focus on the "body of Christ" is an evocation of Haman and his 10 dead sons and, more probably, it is a parody made by Cochin's Jews on the designation of Jesus Christ as the "Son of Man," whose rendering in Portuguese ("Filho do Homem") sounds a bit like "son of Haman." Also, according to Salomon, the blasphemies the Jews supposedly taunted against Jesus were, actually, an evocation of the name of Haman's 10 sons. All the other descriptions that appear in the inquisitorial trials were mere inventions other witnesses made due to similarities between Purim activities and the invocations connected with Christian symbolism. Salomon based his arguments on the *Codex Theodosianus* (published between 429 and 438). In 16, 8, 1-29, it contains information regarding the burning of an image similar to the Holy Cross by the Jews in "Haman day." Salomon also based his arguments on Al-Biruni's book, *Chronology of Ancient Nations* (c. 1023), where it is written that Esther asked the Achaemenid monarch to crucify Haman in the same tree he had made for Mordechai. Thus, during the Purim Festival, the Jews made figures they beat and burned, reviving the burning of Haman. Salomon also pushes forward the hypothesis that the parody was not observed in Medieval Europe simply because the Church had banned it.¹⁰² Once again, we could be facing a fiction that was "constructed" by the witnesses or the inquisitors. In the alternative, we could be facing another accusative model that was applied by the Inquisition throughout the trials. A possible explanation for the use of "Isa"—the name given to Jesus according to Cristóvão Raposo's testimony—is that it probably is not associated with Jesus at all, but with the name of one of Haman sons, either "Arisai" or "Haridai."¹⁰³

Ever since the Middle Ages, popular imagery tends to ascribe to the Jews the "role" of people who commit Deicide, as shown in the iconography of the synagogue as a blind woman, armed with a lance, and reporting the supposed flagellation and crucifixion of Christ by the Jews.¹⁰⁴ We can ask if this topic was "fabricated" (for example, the reinterpretation of the Purim Festival given by the converted witnesses—Jews and slaves) or if it reflects the influence religious "actors," like proselytizing priests and inquisitors exercised in the testimony given by the witnesses.

Furthermore, we can ask if we are to take the information provided by the witnesses literally. Did they really think that the Jews, in fact, identified Haman with Jesus?

In April 1995, in Mattancherry, we questioned Mr. S. H. Hallegua, the "Warden of Cochin's Synagogue." He remembered how, in his youth, the Malabari Jews used to make a sort of puppet, which they dragged through the streets of the Jewish quarter. Describing Purim performed in Cochin, Galia Hacco says: "Moreover, there was the thrill of making an effigy of the cruel Haman, the enemy in the *Book of Esther*, and burning it in a bonfire."¹⁰⁵ In a complementary description, Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg give interesting clues regarding the identification of the diabolical Haman. According to Katz and Goldberg, Haman has been identified with different oppressors of the Jews. So, depending on what events were current outside India, Hitler and Nasser were used as substitute names for Haman.¹⁰⁶