



Public Talk

Dr Ophira Gamliel

University of Glasgow

Disconnected Histories

Muslims and Jews between Malabar (South India) and the Arab World, 1500s-1800s

Wednesday, 10 November, 6pm

The lecture is hosted by the Institut für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft and the Institut für Jüdische Studien. All are invited.

Venue:

Institut für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft, 2nd floor, RS 225
Schlaunstraße 2, 48143 Münster

Participation is only possible in compliance with 3G regulations.

Further information:

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<https://www.uni-muenster.de/ArabistikIslam/aktuelles/>

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The presentation takes Malabar as a case study for investigating the history of disconnections brought about by colonialism since the early modern period. Malabar, or the southwestern coast of India, was a central hub for the Indian Ocean trade networks dominated by Arabs from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries. Arabic-speaking Jews were an integral part of the Muslim networks, as Shelomo Dov Goitein and Mordechai Akiva Friedman demonstrated in their monumental work on the India traders' documents found in the Cairo Geniza (India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza 'India Book', Leiden 2008). The arrival of the Portuguese in Malabar in 1498 signifies a watershed moment in the connected histories of Malabar and the Arab-Muslim world, affecting also the small Jewish communities in and around the medieval port town of Cochin, and effectively erasing their centuries-old history of connections with the Jews of the Arab world and beyond.

The disconnected history of Malabar Jews is embedded in a larger history of disconnections, as Malabar and its Muslim communities became increasingly withdrawn from the Indian Ocean maritime trade networks once dominated by Arabs. Arguably, these historical disconnections affected by colonialism and orientalism result in academic disciplinary compartmentalisation of the sociocultural histories of the trade diasporas of Jews and Muslims in Malabar, not only in relation to their connected histories in the precolonial period, but also in relation to the disconnections and their sociocultural impact later on. The past decade saw an increase in studies aiming at the history of Islamic networks in the Indian Ocean. However, the Arabic and Arabic-Malayalam archives of Malabar remain largely unexplored. The presentation will demonstrate the implications of exploring and studying these archives on the sociocultural histories of connections and disconnections between Malabar Muslims and their coreligionists in the Arab world, and the impact of this exploration on studying the history of Indian Ocean Jews.

Ophira Gamliel is a lecturer in South Asian Religions at the University of Glasgow. She specialises on Malayalam language and literature, and Kerala culture, history, and society. Her book *A Linguistic Survey of the Malayalam Language in Its Own Terms* has been published in 2020 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz). She published several articles on the history Kerala Jews in the context of Indian Ocean maritime trade in premodern and early modern times. She is currently managing a project of digitisation of Arabic manuscripts in north Kerala under the auspices of the Endangered Archives Programme at the British Library (EAP1390: <http://www.eap.bl.uk/project/EAP1390>, see also <https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP1228>).