

The letter in question was brought home from Tartary by Friar Thomas of Tolentino, who had already for some years been you proceed further to the south there is a certain island in the Indian Ocean of considerable size, where the people use both circumcision and baptism. And if it were but more pertinent to our subject it would be a very curious story to tell about that island, how I got there, as well as about the circumstances of the people, their manners and mode of living, their customs and laws and strange system of government." That the Socotran Christians practised circumcision is alleged also by Maffei, in his Indian History, in noticing the transactions of Albuquerque at Socotra, and this with others of their practices leads him to connect them distinctly with the Abyssinian church in which a kind of circumcision is well known to have been maintained. They had sunk into an almost savage state; but retained the practice of annual fasts, daily prayers (which he alleges were in Hebrew?), and veneration for the cross, which they all wore round the neck. Marco Polo perhaps considered them as Nestorians, and this also is asserted by Nicolo Conti, who spent two months on the island in the first half of the fifteenth century. In the beginning of the sixteenth Barbosa speaks of their nominal profession of Christianity as still maintained, though in great ignorance and without baptism. That some faint traces of their former Christianity lingered even to the middle of the seventeenth century we learn from the Travels of Father Vincenzo Maria, who was sent from Rome in that age to reconcile the differences of the Malabar Christians with the Roman hierarchy, a work containing many interesting particulars, and which might be worth the attention of the Hakluyt Society were it not so lengthy. He says the people still retained a Christian profession, though having no true knowledge of the faith. They had in his day but a jumble of doctrines and observances; worshipping and sacrificing to the moon; *circumcising*, abominating wine and pork. They had churches which they called *Moquame* [Ar. Maqám locus, statio], dark, low, and dirty, the walls of which they anointed daily with butter. On the altar they had a cross, and one candle in a candlestick. For the cross they retained a singular but ignorant reverence, carrying it in their processions. Three times in the day and three times in the night they were assembled in their churches by the striking on a piece of timber in lieu of a bell, and in their worship burned much incense and fragrant wood. The priests were called *Odambo*, were elected and consecrated by the people, and were changed every year. They dressed like the rest of the people, being distinguished only by a cross full of eyes, upon the breast. These priests were also the judges of the people. There was a fast of sixty days observed annually, beginning with the new moon of April, during which they abstained from meat, milk, and fish, eating only raw vegetables and dried dates. Of baptism and the other sacraments they had lost all knowledge, and their marriages were very lax. There were two apparently distinct races on the island, one of negroes with crisp hair; the other less black, of better aspect, and with straight hair;—the first living on dates, butter, and