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Royal Death Taboos: Kingdoms Stopped and Fishing Banned Under Pain of Death

Royal mourning stopped daily life across the kingdom. Visscher noted that for the first twelve days after a Rajah died, subjects tore their hair and let their beards grow. All business stopped throughout the country, including buying and selling food. In Travancore, public offices and shops shut and business halted for three days. Umbrellas could not enter the fort. People could not marry or celebrate with music and display for a full year. Most remarkably, fishing stopped. Around 1503, Duarte Barbosa wrote that during the thirteen days of mourning for a King of Calicut, no one could eat meat or fish. He wrote, “nor may any one fish under pain of death”. Ludovico di Varthema similarly documented an eight-day fishing ban at Calicut. Francis Day recorded a three-day ban in Cochin. As late as 1780, the King of Travancore banned fishing in the river at Anjengo after his mother’s death. He acted out of fear that fishermen might catch and kill a fish into which the departed royal soul had moved.