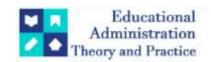
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Research Article



From Legend to Landmark: The Story of the Ten Malabar's Earliest Mosques

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the origins and historical narratives surrounding ten early mosques established along the Malabar Coast, tracing their connections to the legend of Cheraman Perumal and the missionary journeys of Malik ibn Dinar and his companions. Drawing on classical Arabic manuscripts such as Qissat Shakarwati Farmad, indigenous inscriptions, and colonial-era records, the paper explores how Islamic influence in Kerala was initiated through peaceful trade and religious propagation rather than conquest. The research highlights the geographic and historical context of ten coastal sites-Kodungallur, Kollam, Madayi, Barkur, Mangalore, Kasaragod, Kannur, Dharmadam, Koyilandy, and Chaliyam-where these early mosques were established, often correlating with major trade hubs of the medieval period. Each site is examined for architectural features, epigraphic evidence, and historical continuity. The paper also addresses scholarly debates over chronology and authenticity, noting the blend of legend and local history in Islamic historiography of South India. By integrating oral tradition, textual sources, and archaeological observations, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the Islamic heritage of Malabar and its integration into the broader Indian Ocean maritime cultural landscape.

Introduction

The spread of Muslim community from 7th to 11th century in Malabar, Roland E. Miller writes that "Islam grew as it began, peacefully and it grew steadily¹. The first four centuries of Mappila growth following the establishment of Islam in Kerala were marked by a calm forward movement. The peaceful contact and development stand in sharp contrast to the progress of Islam in north India. Commenting on the same Nafis Ahmad also writes that 'Islam has come to these region without any political help whatsoever and remained rooted in the soil for centuries away from the turmoil of Mahmud's invasion of India, and the struggle between the cross and crescent in the world of West². Prominent local historian K .M Panicker (1896-1963) also accredits this fact by stating that "Malabar was leading a comparatively happy though politically isolated life. In many her organization was primitive, but she had evolved a system in which trade flourished, different communities lived together without fraction and absolute religious toleration existed³.

The beginning of Islam and construction of mosques in Malabar is clouded in obscurity. The Indian sources dealing with the subject are so full of inconsistencies and contradictions that modern historians were able to reach widely divergent conclusions regarding the date and the manner in which Islam was introduced into Malabar and gave rise to the Muslim community known as Mapillas or Moplahs⁴. In the sources quoted by historians of South-West India recurs time and again the personality of a Hindu ruler of Kerala, named Cheruman Perumal, who became convinced of the truth of Islam, divided his country among several rulers, departed for Arabia with the intent of performing the *hajj* and died on his return journey. The date of these events is a matter of controversy. Some his- torians, following mainly the 16th century Arab writer Zayn al-Oin ai-Ma'bari, think that the events referred to above took place in the beginning of the 9th century A.D. But another anonymous Arabic manuscript, apparently written in Malabar, and entitled *Qissat Shakarwati Farmad*. It also known as "Tale of the Great Chera Ruler," is an Arabic manuscript that appears to be a key historical text. It is believed to be the most detailed and oldest version of the Cheraman Perumal legend, which describes how Islam was introduced to the Malabar Coast in southern India. The story centres on a Hindu king, Cheraman Perumal, who reportedly converted to Islam after encountering Prophet

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Muhammad and witnessing a miracle, such as the moon splitting. Upon returning, his followers are said to have built the first mosques in the region, marking the beginnings of the Muslim community in Kerala. The story further describes the king's return to Malabar, where his followers, including figures like Malik ibn Dinar and Malik ibn Habib, established the first mosques. Specific locations mentioned include Kodungallur(kalankallur), Kollam(Koolam), Madayi(heeli), Barkur(Fakanur), Mangalore (manjallur), Kasaragod (Kanarkooth), Kannur (Jurfathan), Dharmadom (Dharmafthan), Koyilandy (Phantharina), and Chaliyam(shaliyath), highlighting the spread of Islamic communities along the coast⁵. The story ends with the names of the ten mosques that were established. These were situated in the following cities: Kolam, Kalankallur, Shaliyat, Fandarina, Darmafatan, Jurfatan, Hayli, Kanjrakut, Manjalur, Fakkanur⁶. When we look at the places traditionally mentioned as the places where the first Muslim mosques were built in Malabar and compare them with examples of Muslim trade on the Malabar coast, a clear correlation becomes evident. These 10 sites correspond to Muslim trading centers on the Malabar Coast from the 12th century onwards. That is, these 10 places are the commercial centers that emerged as competing kingdoms centered on various port cities in Malabar after the unified Chera rule. During this period, Muslim maritime trade expanded dramatically, leading to what is known as the Asian maritime trade boom⁷.

1. Mosque in Kalangallur (Kodungallur)

The Cheraman Masjid is said to be the very first mosque in India, built in 629 AD by Malik lbn Dinar. The Cheraman Juma Masjid, situated in Kodungallur, Thrissur district, Kerala, is a historically and culturally significant monument. According to legends, it was constructed in 629 CE by Malik Bin Dinar, a follower of Prophet Muhammad, under the patronage of Cheraman Perumal, a Chera king who reportedly converted to Islam after a spiritual experience. Kerala Vyasan Kunhikuttan Thampuran (1864-1913) is of the opinion that a defunct Buddha vihar was handed over to the nascent Muslims to establish a mosque there. Cheraman Juma Masjid also called as Cherman Perumal Masjid was the first in the series. Malik Bin Dinar was the first Ghazi of Cheraman Masjid. After a while, his relative Habib Bin Malik became the Ghazi at Cheraman Masjid. He established mosques in different parts of Kerala.

It is believed that this mosque was first renovated and reconstructed in the 11th century AD⁸. The mosque was constructed in Kerala's traditional style. Its Kerala-Islamic architectural style, with hanging lamps, supports early origins, though some scholars date it to the 14th–15th centuries based on structure. The old tombs at Cheraman Masjid are believed to be that of Habib Bin Malik and his wife Khumarriah.

2. Mosque in Koolam (Kollam)

According to the *Qissat Shakarwati Farmad*, Malik ibn Habib, a companion of Malik ibn Dinar, established a mosque in Kollam (referred to as "Kūlam" in Arabic sources) in 21 Hijra (circa 642 CE). This mosque is noted as the second mosque in Malabar, following the Cheraman Juma Masjid in Kodungallur. When he arrived at South Kollam, Habib and his family were received with honor by the South Kolathiri ruler (Thiruvithamkur Raja), who provided facilities for building a mosque⁹. Kollam was a major trading port, and the mosque's establishment aligns with the region's early Muslim settlements. Specific details about its architecture or current state are less documented, but it is part of the *Qissat* list. The mosque built by Malik bin Habib is now known as Jonakkapuram Mosque. A Muslim colony developed around the mosque, which likely led to the area being named Jonakkapuram, meaning 'home of Jonak Mappilas¹⁰. The mosque, known today as Old Valiyapalli at Jonakappuram The mosque was built on land measuring 50 rods (36 meters) from the east, 60 rods from the west, 40 rods from the south, and extending to the sea in the north, which was designated as *waqf* property. Hasan ibn Malik was appointed as the *qazi* of this mosque.

3. Mosque in Heeli (Madayi)

The Madayi Mosque, also referred to as Madayi Palli, Matayi or Pazhayangadi Mosque, making it one of the oldest mosques in Kerala. *The Tarikh Suhril Islam fi Malaibar* (history of the origin of Islam in Malabar), a centuries-old manuscript preserved at the renowned Madayi Mosque, believed to be one of the ten mosques constructed by Malik bin Dinar and completed by Malik bin Habib¹¹. The manuscript mentions that Malik bin Abdurrahman, the first Qazi of Madayi, married the daughter of Afifuddin Majuddin, who controlled the Madayi port. Zaynuddin's Tuhfatul Mujahideen mentions that the third mosque constructed by Malik bin Habib was at heeli Maravi (madayi)¹².

There are varying accounts regarding chronology of the construction of Madayi Mosque. Some sources suggest it was built in 1124 CE (AH 518) by Malik ibn Dinar, with a white marble block said to have been brought from Mecca, based on an inscription. Sewell first mentioned the Arabic inscription at Madayi Mosque in 1882 in his book 'List of the Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras, Volume 1'. He noted that Madayi is located 13.5 miles east-west of Kannur, featuring an ancient temple and a Muslim mosque with an Arabic inscription believed to date back to 518 AH (1124 AD)¹³. According to MGS, based on a copper plate inscription at Madayi Mosque, the mosque was built in AD 1124¹⁴. However, the Annual Report of South Indian Epigraphy (1928-29) mentions an inscription on a wooden plank on the mosque's entrance, which is believed to be related to its construction¹⁵. Local Historian Abdulla Anjilath notes that this inscription, found on a black wooden plank, dates back to the fifth year (AD 627) and includes the 18th verse of the Tawbah chapter from the Quran¹⁶. The mosque was built with support from the Kolathunad Raja, as per the king's letters. Located near the Kuppam

River. Local Hindu and Islamic legends affirm Malik ibn Dinar's role. The first qadi was Malik ibn 'Abdu Rahman.

4. Mosque in Fakanur or Makanur (Barkur)

The mosque in question is likely located in Barkur, a town in Udupi district, Karnataka, known for its historical significance as the ancient capital of the Alupa kingdom. Historical narratives suggest that Barkur was home to one of the oldest mosques in the Indian subcontinent, established around the 7th century AD, specifically in 643 AD, as part of the missionary efforts of Malik Ibn Dinar and his companions.

After constructing the Madayi mosque, Malik bin Habib built another mosque and conducted religious propagation at Barkur (Baduker), located 130 km north of Mangalore. The mosque's construction was completed on 22 AH. His son Ibrahim ibn malik was appointed as the Qazi of the mosque. The mosque's dimensions were recorded as 80 units to the west, 77 unit to the right (south), and 50 unit to the left (north) by Asharikol¹⁷. Attributed to Malik ibn Dinar's mission, established to serve Muslim traders in the northern Malabar region. Fakanur is often identified with areas near Mangalore, which was part of the broader Malabar trade network. The mosque's exact location and current status are unclear due to historical shifts in place names.

5. Mosque in Manjalur (Mangalore)

The mosque in question is likely the Zeenath Baksh Masjid, also known as *Beliye Palli* or Juma Masjid, located in the Mangalore, Karnataka. Historical narratives suggest it was constructed around 644 AD, making it one of the oldest mosques in India and the oldest in Karnataka. This mosque was built near the Bandar port, close to Mangalore. The local rulers allocated 60 units of land on all four sides for the mosque. Musa bin Malik was appointed as the Qazi. His grandson, Nuruddin Nasiruddin Misri, was appointed as the Shahbandar there¹⁸. Traditional account this sacred Masjid, was established by the Holy men of Arabia, who were said to be Kith and Kin of "Sahabas" (Associates) of "Prophet Hazarath Mohammad Rasulallah". Mangalore's inclusion reflects the legend's reach beyond modern Kerala into areas historically tied to Malabar's trade routes. The mosque's identification is debated due to multiple historic mosques in the region. This mosque in Manjalur was later rebuilt by Tipu Sultan, while retaining the old mosque.

6. Mosque in Kanjarkuttu (Kasaragod)

The Malik Dinar Mosque in Thalangara, Kasaragod, is one of the ten mosques built by Malik bin Dinar and Malik bin Habib for Islamic propagation in Malabar. An Arabic inscription related to its construction is preserved here, located above the inner door of the entrance, featuring three lines. Sharaf ibn Malik, his maternal uncle Malik Dinar, and his nephew Malik Habib, along with others, arrived in Kasaragod and built a mosque at Thalangara on Monday, 13th Rajab 22 AH (643 AD). Malik ibn Ahmad was appointed as the Qazi. An inscription also mentions that the mosque was renovated in 1223 AH (AD 1808)¹⁹. The manuscript of Muhammad bin Malik discovered at Madayi Mosque records the year and month of the mosque's construction in Kasaragod as 22 AH, Rajab (643 AD), which matches the information mentioned in the earlier inscription. Built by Malik ibn Dinar's group, possibly Malik ibn Habib, to serve the Muslim community in Kasaragod. Kasaragod, part of the Ezhimala kingdom, was a trade center. The mosque is linked to Malik ibn Dinar's death at nearby Thalangara, where he is believed to be buried.

7. Mosque in Jarfattan (Kannur)

Jurfathan or Srikandapuram is a historically significant area associated with Malik bin Dinar's mosque construction in Malabar. Established by Malik ibn Dinar's mission, named in the *Qissat* as a site for early Islamic worship. The exact location of Jarfattan is uncertain, and possibly corresponding to Sreekandapuram, a coastal area in Kannur. In the Indian Atlas, it is known by the name Surokandapuram²⁰. It reflects the spread of mosques along trade routes. According to William Logan's findings, Perumal Udaya Varma was appointed as the ruler of Vadakku (North) with Chuzhali and Nerpatt Kaimals as vassal lords under Kolathiri. Perumal Udaya Varma was granted a decree stating that if he returned, he would be the junior king, otherwise, the kingdom would be his rightful inheritance²¹. Malik bin Habib built the mosque at Srikandapuram based on the decree written by Perumal to Chirakkal Swaroopam. The mosque's construction was completed in 22 AH (AD 643), and Umar bin Malik was appointed as the Qazi of the mosque.

The age of the mosque Jarfattan is determined by three inscribed stones (Meezan stones) at the nearby Mecca Masjid. One inscription belongs to Umar bin Muhammad Malik, the first Qazi of Srikandapuram, and another belongs to Atiyub bin Hathi. The inscription reads: 'In the name of Allah, the most merciful. Here lies Ali bin Hani, may Allah's blessings and mercy be upon him. Rabi'ul Aakhir, 74 AH (693 AD)²². The circular inscription on the handle of a sword used for Friday prayers, discovered at Srikandapuram's Malik Dinar Mosque, built by Malik bin Habib, has been deciphered differently by two historians. Dr. M.R. RaghavaVarier reads it as 964 Kollam Era corresponding to 124 AH (AD 1789), while Dr. T. Pavithran reads it as 790 AH (AD 1615)²³.

8. Mosque in Darmafattan (Dharmadam)

Dharmadom was historically known as Dharmapattanam and was an active Buddhist area, later influenced by Arab traders who called it Darmaftan. The Dharmadam mosque, referred to as "Dahfattan" in the *Qissat*

Shakarwati Farmad, is one of the ten mosques attributed to Malik ibn Dinar's mission, believed to have begun around 629–643 CE, though historians often date these structures to later centuries between 11th–14th century, due to architectural and epigraphic evidence. The legend suggests that Malik ibn Dinar, along with followers like Saraf ibn Malik, Malik ibn Habib, and their families, established these mosques with the permission of local chieftains, as per Cheraman Perumal's letters. The Dharmadam mosque would have served Arab merchants and early Muslim converts, reflecting Kerala's role as an Islamic frontier.

It is recorded that the Dharmadam mosque was constructed for the Muslims by the Islamic ancestor of King Koyin. But it is seen in many records that the Dharmadam mosque was built by the Kohinoor prince who went to Makkah with Cheraman Perumal²⁴. When investigating which mosques were first built in North Kerala, the description that Malik Dinar and his team landed at Dharmadam has to be taken into account. The Cheraman Perumal legend is a mix of oral tradition and hagiography, with debated historicity. When Cheraman Perumal was going to Makkah, he had went to Darmadam and met his sister Sridevi²⁵. Hussain Ibn Malik, son of Malik Bin Dinar's younger brother, met Sridevi at Dharmadam and gave Perumal's letter. He was the Qadi of the mosque built at Dharmadam. Scholars like E. Ismail and M.H. Ilias suggest the Dharmadam mosque may date to the 11th–14th century, not 629 CE, due to architectural styles and the absence of early Muslim settlements.

9. Mosque in Fandarina (Pantalayani Kollam)

The mosque in Fandarina²⁶, also known as Pantalayani Kollam or Koyilandy, is a historically significant site on the Malabar Coast of Kerala, India. Referred to as the Parappally Mosque, atop a small hill called Mayyith Kunnu near the beach. Built by Malik ibn Dinar's group, serving the Muslim trading community in Pantalayani Kollam. It mentioned in the William Logan in his Malabar Manual. He argued that the second masjid in Kerala built by Malik Ibn Dinar and his companions at Panthalayani Kollam or the northern Kollam based on the local mapila manuscript²⁷.

Pantalayani was the capital of the King of Kollam in Payyanadu²⁸. This northern Kollam king was a Samantha or vassal of Kolathiri, who was directly related to Perumal. It was only in the 12th century that the land north of Kozhikode, including Pantalayani and Taliparamb temple, was handed over to the Kolathiri to Samuthiri of Calicut. When Cheraman Perumal left the country, this place was not under the control of the Zamorin anyway. And the territories does not include any of the mosques first established by the Arab traveler's under Zamorins of Calicut²⁹. A legend exists regarding the construction of the mosque at Pandalayani Kollam. The daughter of the native was bitten by a snake and became unconscious. Malik bin Dinar and his companions who were camping at Pantalayani Hill to help her recovered, and the child was cured. As a reward for that the native ruler land granted to build a Mosque³⁰.

Many stone inscriptions can be seen near the mosque. The graveyard is known as Mayyat Hill. Very old graves and remains are found there. One of the inscription on Mizan stones mentioned the Ali ibn Abdurahiman passed away in hijra 166³¹. The Kozhikode District Gazetteer also states that the Pantalayani Mosque was built on the model of the Makkah Mosque and its copper-covered roof was greeted with respect by the Arabian travelers passing that way³². The pandalai mosque was completed on 21st Shawwal 122 Hijri and the area of the said mosque on the sea shore was 70 kolas (metr) to the east and west, 25 kolas (metr) to the south and 25 kolas (metr) to the north. Malik bin Dinar appointed his son Zainuddin bin Malik as Kazi here.

10. Mosque in shaliyath (Chaliyam)

The first Muslim mosque in Kozhikode was built on the banks of the river at Chaliyam in the month of Shaban 122 AH. The mosque in Chaliyam, primarily identified as the Puzhakkara Masjid, is believed to be one of the founding mosques of Kerala, established during the era of Malik Dinar in the 7th century. It is also stated in Rihlath al Muluk³³ that the mosque in Chaliyam was built by Jahfar bin Sulaiman³⁴. And according to Thuhfathul Mujahiddien, The mosque's historical association with Malik Dinar is significant, with traditions suggesting it was established under the guidance of Taqy ud-Din, the qazi of the mosque³⁵. Research suggests that Chaliyam is among the locations where early mosques were built, as per the *Qissat Shakarwati Farmad*, a traditional account³⁶. This document claims that mosques, including one in Chaliyam, were constructed during the time of Malik Dinar, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, making them among the oldest in the Indian subcontinent. The construction of mosque related to the conversion to Islam. It is said that due to the efforts of Malik Bin Habib, four prominent families, Mamatharayan Illam, Puzhakkara Illam, Emasarayan Illam, and Pokkakkala Illam, embraced Islam here, leading to the construction of the Chaliyam mosque³⁷. The chronology was the major debate on the construction of mosque in Chaliyam. The mosque is often described as one of ten early mosque in Malabar, dating to the 7th century CE, based on oral traditions and

described as one of ten early mosque in Malabar, dating to the 7th century CE, based on oral traditions and religious accounts. These narratives based on the legend of Cheraman Perumal and Malik ibn Dinar's missionary activities. Historians and archaeologists are assumed of the 7th-century origin due to the lack of contemporary records or architectural evidence from that period. The architectural style of surviving mosques in Kerala, including Chaliyam's, often resembles 13th–15th-century structures, with features like tiled roofs and wooden elements typical of later Kerala-Islamic architecture. Some scholars suggest a later construction or reconstruction, possibly between the 13th and 14th centuries. The 14th-century traveller Ibn Battuta visited Chaliyam around 1342 CE and described it as a "fine city" known for its weaving industry³⁸. His mention of the settlement, though not explicitly of the mosque, supports Chaliyam's prominence as a Muslim hub by the 14th

century, suggesting the mosque's existence by then. An inscription from the nearby Kannamkulangara Mosque in Chaliyam, Kozhikode district, records a reconstruction in 1335 CE (AH 756), indicating active mosque-building or renovation in the region during this period. This provides indirect evidence that the Chaliyam Mosque may have been established or refurbished around the same time.

Conlusion

The arrival of Malik Dinar and the construction of mosques are considered significant events in the history of Mappila Muslims in Malabar. Alongside Malik Dinar, those who arrived in the region are believed to have included Sharaf ibn Malik, Malik ibn Habib, 9 sons, 5 daughters, and 22 Islamic scholars. This information is documented in the Madayi Mosque's records and in books such as 'Mappilas of Malabar' by Dewan Gopalan Nair and Sheikh Zainuddin. They traveled in two groups, one led by Thakiyuddin, reaching Kayalpatnam and conducting their mission in coastal Tamil Nadu, including Madurai and Nagapattinam, alongside Arab traders According to traditional beliefs, Malik Dinar and Malik bin Habib's mosque construction, religious propagation, and establishment of Muslim settlements occurred in the 7th century.

End note

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³³ Rihlath al Muluk" appears to be an ancient Arabic history book that records the early spread of Islam in India, especially in Thengapattanam, a region in Tamil Naduand headquarters of Syed Ubaithath Kazhi, a religious leader, being located there during the 7th century. Written by Umar bin Suhrawardi.