



# A Study based on Three Significant Inscriptions from Thrissur District of Central Kerala

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**Abstract:** Kerala hosts a wealth of inscriptions, many of which remain preserved in archives. Among the most significant collections is T. Gopinath Rao's *Travancore Archaeological Series* (TAS), a comprehensive compilation of stone inscriptions from the Travancore region. This study focuses on three inscriptions discovered at a small temple near Thazhekkad and one published inscription situated at Thazhekkad Church, in Thrissur district, of which represent distinct periods. Two inscriptions, in the Vattezhuth script, dates to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century CE, while the other, in the Grantha script, is from the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE. This article analyses these inscriptions, situating them in the historical context of the temple and their relevance to a nearby 12<sup>th</sup>-century church inscription also documented in TAS.

## INTRODUCTION

The historical region of *Mahodayapuram*, encompassing Thazhekkad, holds great significance in South India. Situated near *Muziris* (*Muchiri*), an ancient hub of maritime trade during the First Chera Dynasty, *Mahodayapuram*'s history is rich but underexplored. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea describes *Muziris* as a bustling trade centre located along a river, a fact corroborated by archaeological and literary evidence.

Modern Irinjalakuda, once part of this region, was known as *Sangamagrama* in medieval times. This name appears in many classical works in Malayalam or Sanskrit and is associated with the legendary mathematician *Sangamagrama Madhava*, often regarded as the father of modern mathematics. Madhava's contributions include the discovery of the power series, advancements in trigonometry, and precise calculations of  $\pi$ . His ancestral home, Irinjadappally Mana, is situated near Irinjalakuda (Kalletumkara) Railway Station, 8 kilometers east of Irinjalakuda. The temple discussed in this study is located on the premises of this *Mana*.

This study was initiated during an investigation into Madhava's historical legacy. Two inscriptions discovered within the temple premises form the core of this research. The study also references a verse from Madhava's *Venvaroha* that hints at his residence, strengthening the connection between the inscriptions and the region's historical prominence.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The church inscription of Thazhekkad included in TAS and dated to 1024 CE, records a royal decree by King Rajasimha permitting the construction of a church and a market. It mentions merchants Iravi Kothan and Chathan Vadukan of Makotair town, indicating a thriving Christian settlement in the area during the period. Over time, however, Thazhekkad and its surrounding regions lost their significance due to two major events:

1. Shift of the Chera Capital: The *Chera* capital moved from *Mahodayapuram* to *Venad* following *Chola* invasions, and many more reasons, reduced the importance of the region.
2. The Great Flood of 1341: This catastrophic flood changed the path of the *Nanthiyar* River, and led to the decline of the *Kodungallur* port, a key commercial centre since ancient times.

These factors contributed to the region's marginalization, eroding its historical prominence and the legacy of Madhava's home.

## ANALYSIS OF INSCRIPTIONS

### 1. Vattezhuth Inscription (12th Century CE)

The Vattezhuth inscription, measuring 40 cm in height and 1 foot in length, comprises four lines of text. Discovered on the premises of Irinjadappally Mana, it documents the construction of the temple's sanctum sanctorum and foundation. Although the inscription's final portion is missing, it has been dated to the 12th century CE by the epigraphist. However, another epigraphist Professor Pavithran T., has suggested a possible earlier date, attributing the script to the reign of *King Sthanu Ravi* in the 9th century CE. This claim, though significant, remains unpublished and open to further scrutiny.

The text of the Vattezhuth inscription reveals not only the architectural practices of the period but also the administrative and cultural background. The use of Vattezhuth script, predominantly employed in Kerala for centuries, underlines its prominence as a medium of official and ceremonial communication. This inscription also serves as a testament to the patronage of temple construction by local rulers and elites, reflecting the socio-political dynamics of the era.

### 2. Grantha Inscription (17th Century CE)

The Grantha inscription records the construction of a *mandapam* (a typical elevated space inside the temple) by Narayanan Namboothiri of *Irinjadappilly Mana*. It features *Vattezhuth* numbering on the *mandapam*'s wooden roofing panels, used to guide their assemblage. Astronomical references such as '*Kanni*' (Virgo), '*Vyazham*' (Jupiter), and '*Makara*' (Capricorn) are inscribed, providing historical markers for dating the structure. These references highlight the integration of astronomical knowledge into temple construction and regional cultural practices.

The Grantha script used in this inscription indicates the linguistic diversity of the region and the adaptability of its scholars and craftsmen. Grantha script was often employed to write Sanskrit, which was the liturgical and scholarly language of the time. The presence of astronomical notations further aligns with the advanced astronomical traditions of Kerala, illustrated by figures like Madhava and his successors.

## THAZHEKAD INSCRIPTION

This 6-foot-high, 4.5-foot-wide inscription, documented in TAS (Vol. 8, p. 33), remains a cornerstone of Christianity's history in Kerala. Translated by T. A. Joseph and recently studied further by Dr. Arunmohan, it details *King Rajasimha*'s decree allowing the establishment of a church and market. The repeated mention of merchants *Iravi Kothan* and *Chathan Vadukan* in other inscriptions highlights their prominence in the regional economy.

The church inscription provides critical insights into the early Christian communities of Kerala, their integration into the socio-economic fabric, and the state's endorsement of religious pluralism. The mention of a market highlights the economic dimension of these settlements, suggesting that they were not just religious enclaves but vibrant hubs of commerce and cultural exchange.

## DISCUSSION

The inscriptions analysed in this study provide valuable insights into the socio-political and cultural landscape of medieval Kerala. While the Vattezhuth inscription reflects the architectural and linguistic expansions of the 12th century, the Grantha inscription illustrates the region's continuity of temple culture into the 17th century. The Thazhekkad inscription offers a glimpse into Kerala's pluralistic heritage, highlighting the coexistence of diverse communities.

The use of Vattezhuth and Grantha scripts across different periods signifies the evolution of scriptural traditions in Kerala. Vattezhuth, deeply rooted in the region's cultural identity, gradually gave way to scripts like Grantha, reflecting broader linguistic and cultural shifts. The inclusion of astronomical references in the Grantha inscription further underscores the intersection of science and spirituality in temple construction, a hallmark of Kerala's intellectual heritage.

Additionally, the socio-economic significance of the inscriptions cannot be overlooked. The Thazhekkad church inscription, for instance, sheds light on the role of trade and merchant guilds in shaping the region's history. The involvement of prominent figures like *Iravi Kothan* and *Chathan Vadukan* points to a well-organized network of commerce that connected Kerala to the international world.

## CONCLUSION

These inscriptions, though not directly linked to Madhava, hold historical importance as they originate from a region associated with his legacy. The Vattezhuth inscription, in particular, is crucial for understanding the evolution of this script in Kerala. Further research by epigraphists is essential to uncover additional insights and authenticate these documents. Preserving these inscriptions is vital for reconstructing the historical and cultural narrative of central Kerala.

The findings of this study highlight the need for continued exploration and documentation of Kerala's epigraphic heritage. By situating these inscriptions within their broader historical and cultural contexts, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the region's multifaceted legacy. The inscriptions serve as windows into a past where trade, religion, and intellectual pursuits coexisted harmoniously, offering lessons for the present and future.

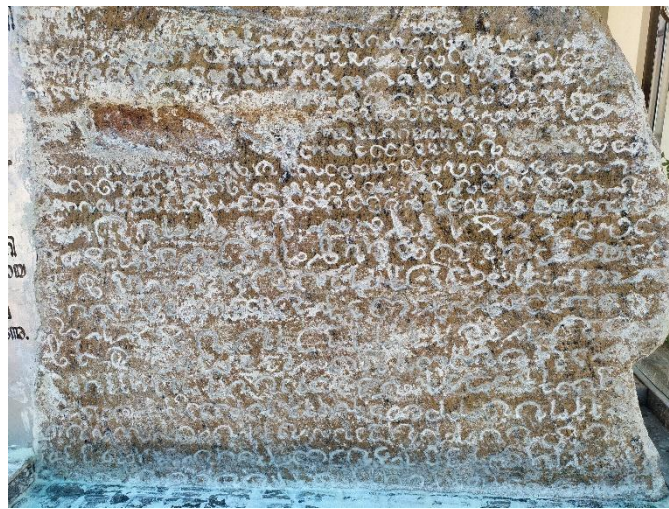


Figure 1. Vattezhuth Inscription of 11<sup>th</sup> C.E.

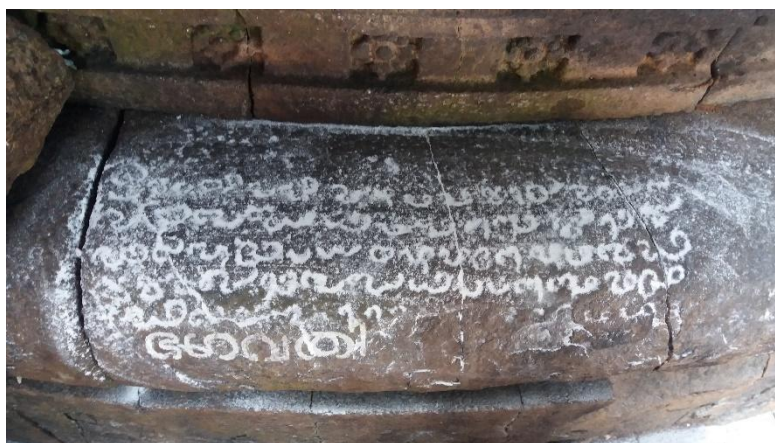


Figure 2. Vattezhuth Inscription of 12<sup>th</sup> C.E.



Figure 3. Grantha Inscription of 17<sup>th</sup> C.E.

#### References

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