
Iron Age Megalithic Burials of Perumba, Kuppam, Valapattanam and Pazhayangadi River Belts, Kannur District, North Kerala, India

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Abstract: Kerala is a region, opulent with archaeological relics of Iron Age period and a region in the peninsular India, which probably has got lesser attention from the archaeologists. Within the region itself comparing to the South and Central part of Kerala, the number of excavation and exploration are very few in North Kerala. The chief type of the archaeological remains in this region of the Iron Age period is the Megaliths. These remains includes various types like kodakkal, toppikkal, rock cut sepulcher, menhir, urn-burial, stone circle, cist, dolmens etc. This paper mainly focuses on the distribution pattern of the megalithic burials in the belts of Perumba, Kuppam Valapattanam and Pazhayangadi rivers in Kannur district of Kerala; which is quite diversified. The number of sites found in the Perumba river belt is higher than the belts of Kuppam, Valapattanam and Pazhayangadi rivers. The core settlement area of the region under discussion is Perumba river belt. The distribution of the rock-cut chamber, which is also high in the Perumba river belt than the other two, revealed the formation of technologically advanced human settlement in the slopes of the hillock. It also is an evidence of the development of agrarian settlements in the region.

Keywords: Megaliths, Rock Cut Sepulcher, Perumba, Kuppam, Valapattanam, Kannur, North Kerala

Introduction

Megaliths, the large stones erected in the memory of the dead ancestors, are the foremost material evidences to study the Iron Age period of the peninsular India in general and Kerala in particular. The major types of Megaliths explored and studied in the south India are Rock-cut chamber s, *Kodakkals* (umbrella stones), *Toppikkal* (hat stones), Dolmens, Cists, Urn burials, Menhirs, Stone circles etc. Among this, the Rock cut sepulchers, *Toppikkal* (hat stone) and *Kodakkals* (umbrella Stone) are very unique to Kerala and is mainly distributed in the Northern part (Srinivasan 1946:10, Satyamurty, 1992:2). The single and multi chambered rock cut sepulchers with port holes or pillars are only distributed towards the north of present Thrissur district. Generally all these types are mentioned as the megaliths, but some of them have no lithic association and

therefore all the burial monuments of the Iron Age are not megaliths (Leshnik 1974:1-2). Accordingly, the megalithic period has been generally termed as the Iron Age period in the later studies (Gurukkal & Varier, 1999: 101-156). There is disparity on the consensus regarding the chronology of the megaliths of Kerala. However, on the basis of the Porkkalam and Mangadu excavations, a period between 4th -3rd century B.C and 1st century A.D is so ascribed (Thapar 1952:6, Satyamurthy 1992:9). Unlike Tamil Nadu and Karnataka regions, so far no burial cum habitation sites have been reported or excavated from Kerala (Moorty: 1994:6-10). All the reported sites and unearthed assemblages of Iron Age in Kerala are from the burial context which however does not rule out the absence of settlement of the Megalithic people in the region. The wide distributions of megalithic burials and monuments themselves have represented the possible existence of Iron Age human settlement in the region.

Compared to central and southern part of Kerala, northern part is yet to get serious consideration from the archaeologists. The excavations at Chitrari and Naduvil in Kannur district (John, 1974: 383-386, John 1990, Poyil 2006: 94-95) and Ummichipoyil in Kasargode district (Ramamurti, 2002, Jayasree, 2008:13-29), are the only three excavations conducted in the north Kerala so far. No other systematic exploration and excavation have been conducted in the region. The stray findings of Roman gold coins from Kottayam Poyil and the remains of gold object from Naduvil are referred to as the two important findings from northern Kerala (Satyamurthy 1992: 13, 33, John, 1990, Poyil 2006:94-95). In this context, the present paper attempts to bring out some fresh insights on the pattern of megalithic burial distributions in the belts of Perumba, Kuppam Valapattanam and Pazhayangadi rivers of Kannur district, North Kerala.

Physiographic Setting

As a background to the distribution pattern of the burials sites it is important to highlight the rivers and physiographic settings of the region under consideration. Perumba River takes its origin from the dense forest and hill slopes of Western Ghats near Pekkunnu in Thaliparamba Taluk. The river, with length of about 25 miles, from its source, flows through the villages of Peringam, Kuttur, Mathamangalam and Kunnimangalam. Near the Ezhimala railway station, the river divides into two, and flows into the Arabian Sea. It has a total drainage area and catchment area of 110 sq.miles (Menon, 1972:11). Kuppam river has its origin in Pandinalkand Ghat reserve forest of Coorg district in Mysore State. It flows parallel to Valapattanam river in the south. The total length of the main river is about 44 miles. The catchment area of the river basin is 207 sq.miles.' (Menon, 1972:11-12). Kuppam river also known as Pazhayangadi river in the Pazhayangadi and Madayi area. The Valapattanam river takes its origin from the western slopes of the Western Ghats and flows into the Arabian sea at Valapattanam, about 6 miles north of Cannanore. The river has a total strength of about 70 miles, and after taking off at its origin, it flows through Brahmagiri Ghat Reserves in Mysore State and then through the valleys of Iritti, Edakkanam, Perumana, Irikkur, Kalyasseri and Valapattanam. It has a total drainage and catchment area of about 460 sq.miles. (Menon, 1972:11-12).

The region under discussion can broadly be divided into three geographical areas - highlands, midlands and lowlands. The highland region comprises mainly of mountains. The midland region, lying between the mountains and the low lands, is made up of undulating hills and valleys. This is an area of intense agricultural activity. The lowland is comparatively narrow and comprises of rivers, deltas and seashore. Geologically the area is mainly comprised of crystalline rocks of Archean group and consisting of charnockites, laterite and alluvium. The soil comprised of hard laterite in the mountain areas and hillocks, soft laterite in the hillock slopes and plains and riverine alluvium in the river valleys. (Panda, Sukumar, 2010:76-83). The high concentration of Iron Age burials that refers to this paper are found from the hillocks and its slopes of the midland.

Early Attempts

The colonial government under Madras Presidency has made the pioneer attempt to document megalithic sites of North Kerala (Babington, 1823:324-330, Sewell 1882:241-43). William Logan excavated a rock-cut chamber at Banglamotta paramba and Trichambaram near Thalipparamba in Kannur district and unearthed typical megalithic assemblages including pots and iron implements (Logan, 1887 [2000]:181-83). Robert Sewell's "List of the Antiquarian remains in the presidency of Madras" has also furnished a taluk wise distribution list of Iron Age burials. This is the only available comprehensive list of the archaeological sites of Malabar, which is very much useful to conduct further field explorations. The list prepared by Sewell is very much useful to conduct field research either for the relocation of the listed sites or for the discovery of new sites. Interestingly most of the sites found recently are located in the adjacent or surrounding areas of the reported sites. For instance, a cluster of megaliths including umbrella stone, urn burials, and rock-cut chambers are found at Karivellur region which is near to the menhir and dolmens reported by Sewell. However, no serious attempt has been done to update the archaeological finds after Sewell.

Methodology

The region under discussion is not touched by the archaeologist after colonial times. Benglamottapparamba and Naduvil are the only excavated sites so far in the area under discussion. Many of the surveyed sites were accidentally brought to the limelight by the local people during construction works or such other related activities. The documentation of such finds is often limited to press releases in the regional Newspapers. The discovery will be celebrated by the locals for few days and later the site would be discarded forever. Sometimes, on account of the curiosity, the finds from such sites are kept under private hands for few days and later ignored or destroyed. None of them come to the archaeological records of Kerala. Unfortunately no serious attempts have been initiated to document such sites. A region wise reporting of such discoveries in order to comprehend the pattern of burial distribution is urgently required.

Two methods have been used for the documentation; a village to village survey on the

basis of Sewell's report is the first method. In most cases the megaliths are found as clusters. Therefore the first attempt was to relocate the reported site from the area. Then try to collect local information regarding the similar finds from the surroundings in the past years. The second method is the collection of local information regarding the discovery of the monuments. Due to negligence sometimes locating the site is difficult so the only source would be interviewing persons who were at the site at the time of discovery and thus collect maximum information. Further we can enrich the database by approaching more people associated with the discovery through their more memories of the same. This method has been applied for the documentation of about twelve sites in the region under discussion. Such information is only used for understanding the pattern of distribution. Therefore the importance is only given to the site/location and not to the details regarding the burial goods.

In the field study, regarding the surviving monuments, two kinds of documentation has been pursued. The features of the monuments and the geographical peculiarities of the site have been primarily documented. In this stage the measurements of all parts of monument, photography, drawings, sketches, illustrations of monuments and artifacts, etc have been done. In the second stage, the geo-cultural setting of the monument site including the nature of topography, types of vegetation, availability of water and such other natural resources, the description of other cultural spaces in the nearby area etc has been be documented.

Megalithic Sites at Perumba, Kuppam, Valapattanam, and Pazhayangadi River Belts

Since the region is thickly populated, the extensive excavations may not be possible. The entire landscape is under private hands and therefore the preservation of the site after excavation or salvaging explorations will not be practical. Thus, the only possible thing will be a systematic explorations and its scientific documentation. The following part furnishes the updates of the archaeological remains of the aforesaid river belts. As mentioned earlier, thirty four megalithic sites have been noticed and documented from the present Kannur district (Fig. 1, Table 1).

They include mainly rock cut chambers, multiple hood stone circles, umbrella stones and urn burials. The rock- cut chambers in the hard laterite surfaces are the major megalithic monument type found. They have decorated doors or door jambs, finished circular ground surface, dome size finished roof, pot holes at the top of the roof or pillar at the center and in certain occasion stone platforms. There is a stone platform in a rock cut sepulcher at Sreekantapuram. Chambers with square type doors are generally found and such sepulchers are found at Mathil (Figs. 2&3), Mathamangalam, Ezhumvayal, Kunneru (Fig.4), Althatta, Mavicheri, Sreekantapuram, Kannapuram, Echilamvayal, and Purathukavu. A rock cut sepulcher with arch type door found at Ezhilode has shown that such style of construction was also familiar to the megalithic people (Fig. 5). Most of the chambers have port holes at the top of the roof and often they were covered with a laterite stopper. Such well decorated port holes and stoppers

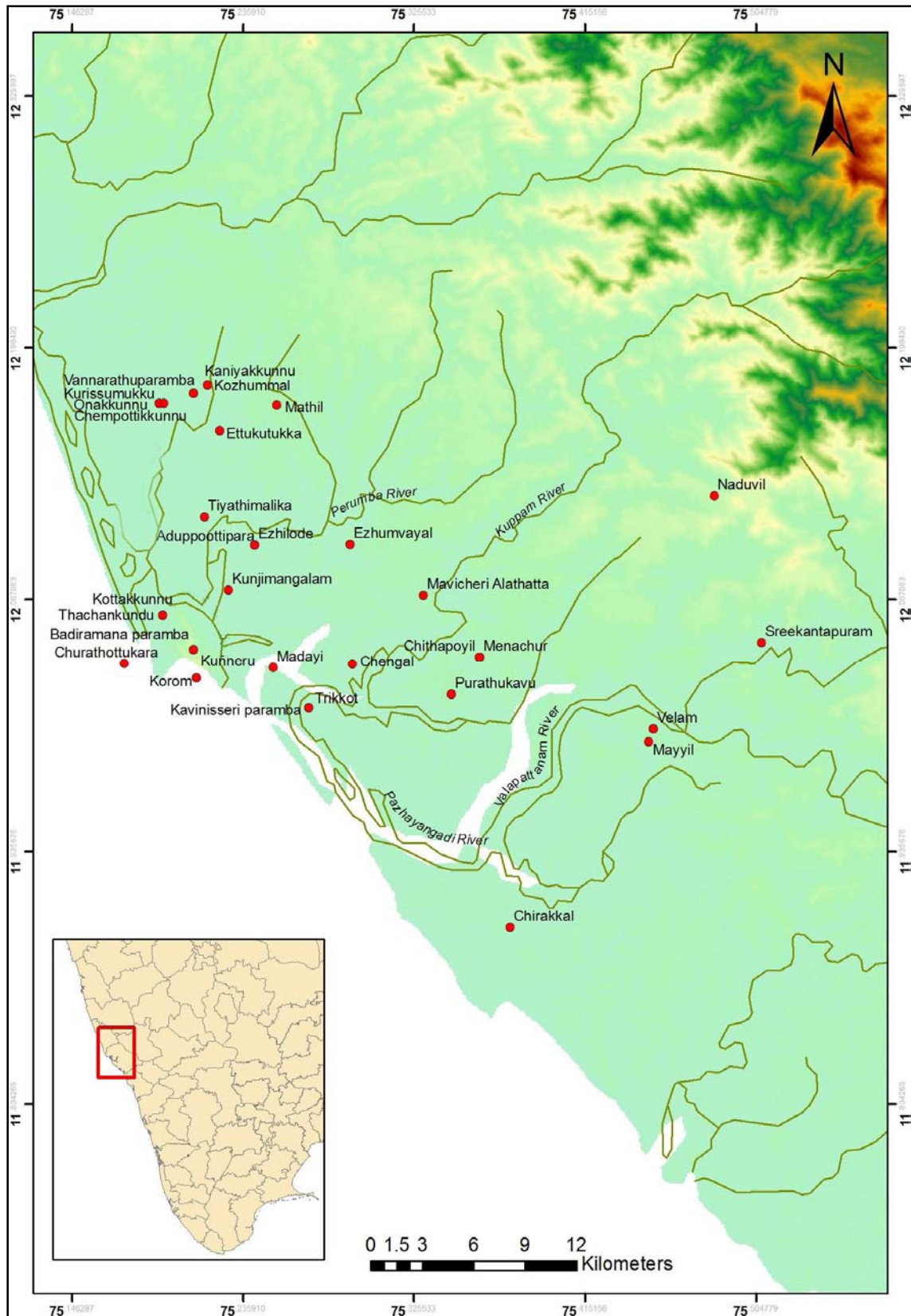


Fig. 1. The Distributon of Iron Age Megaliths in the Perumba, Kuppam Valapattanam and Pazhayangadi River belts

Table 1: Distribution of Megaliths in the Perumba, Kuppam, Valapattanam and Pazhayangadi river belts

Sl. No.	Site Name and Co-ordinates	Monument Type / Features	Artifacts	Topology	Location (Nearest Town)
1	Ezhilode 12°05'43.52" N 75° 14'31.35"E	Rock-cut-sepulchers- Single chamber with Four legged Jars, port hole-Arch shaped Black; Wares, door-finished roof. Out Black Lid & Bases of Three caves, first one is recently explored.	B.R.W, Red Wares, Four legged Jars, Wares, Karat Vayal- Kuppam River Belt	Hard laterite hillock slope, near to a wet paddy field named (Payyannur)	Near Mariamman Ezhilode- (Payyannur)
2	Korom 12°06'57.06" N 75° 12'42.04"E	Rock-cut-sepulcher- Single chamber with Black and Red square pillar at the colours-center- entrance part is damaged-finished roof.	About nine pots in Black and Red	Laterite hillock slope- end at a wet paddy field- Perumba River office- Belt Municipality- (Payyannur)	Paramba, Korom Village Payyannur
3	Korom 12°06'57.06" N 75° 12'42.04"E	Urn Burial, with laterite Small Pots lid		Hillock slopes- non- productive- Perumba River Belt	In the slope of Karakkunnu, near Paramba- (Payyannur)
4	Churathottukara 12°02'00.68" N 75° 10'25.42"E	Rock-cut-sepulcher-- Multi-chamber with decorated door jambs	-	Hillock slopes- non-productive- Perumba River Belt.	It was transformed in a Siva temple- Inside the confined area under Ezhimala Naval Accademy (Payyannur)
5	Tachankundu 12°03'32.00" N 75° 11'38.13"E	Rock-cut-sepulcher-Single chamber with port hole and decorated door jamb	-	Hillock slopes- non-productive- Perumba River Belt.	Near Ramanthali High School, Under Ezhimala Naval Accademy (Payyannur)

Sl. No.	Site Name and Co-ordinates	Monument Type / Features	Artifacts	Topology	Location (Nearest Town)
6	Kottakkunnu 12°03'32.00" N 75° 11'38.13"E	Rock-cut-sepulcher-Multi chamber - decorated door jamb	-	Hillock slopes- non productive- Perumba River Belt	Under Ezhimala Naval Accademy (Payyannur)
7	Kurissumukku 12°10'10.25" N 75° 11'30.74"E	Rock-cut-sepulcher- Single chamber with port hole- -finished roof. decorated door jamb	-	Laterite hillock slope- pastoral tracts-fresh water channels & pond- very close to wet paddy land Perumba River Belt	In the slope of Onakkunnu, near Pramancheri Kavu, Kunneru, Ramanthali Village (Payyannur)
8	Badiramana Paramba 12°02'27.68" N 75° 12'35.98"E	Rock-cut-sepulcher- Single chamber with port hole- -finished roof- decorated door jamb.	Two small pots in Red, Black colours- 3 four Legged Jar	Laterite hillock slope- pastoral tracts- very close to wet paddy land Perumba River Belt	In the Eastern slope of Ezhimala- near Parokavu, Kunneru, Ramanthali Village (Payyannur)
9	Tiyattimalika 12°06'37.10" N 75° 12'56.81"E	Rock-cut-sepulchers- single chambers with port hole- decorated door jamb- -finished roof.	-	Non-productive laterite hillock - adjacent to the wet paddy land Perumba River Belt	Echilamvayal, Kunneru, Payyannur Municipality (Payyannur)
10	Onakkunnu 12°10'10.25" N 75° 11'30.74"E	Rock-cut-sepulchers- single chambers with port hole and decorated door jamb.	-	Non-productive laterite hillock near to a narrow wet paddy land Perumba River Belt	Near Karivellur School- Karivellur Peralam panjayat (Karivellur)

Sl. No.	Site Name and Co-ordinates	Monument Type / Features	Artifacts	Topology	Location (Nearest Town)
11	Kaniyakunnu 12°10'28.96" N 75° 12'36.11"E	<i>Urn Burial</i>	-	Hillock Perumba River Belt	Near Karivellur School- Karivellur Peralam panjayat (Karivellur)
12	Vannarathu paramba 12°10'28.96" N 75° 12'36.11"E	<i>Rock-cut-sepulchers- single chambers with port hole- decorated door jamb.</i>	-	Hillock Perumba River Belt	Near Puttur A.L.P.School Karivellur Peralam Panjayat (Karivellur)
13	Chempottikunnu 12°10'10.38" N 75° 11'39.35"E	<i>Umbrella Stones- out of five,two are intact in nature- four stone slabs are placed as part of clinostat & each have rough mushroom type orthostat.</i>	-	A garden land in the valley of Chempotti hillock- very close to the wet paddy field, Kozhummal Vayal, Perumba River Belt	At Perikamana paramba- Kozhummal region- Karivellur Peralam Panjayat (Karivellur)
14	Chengal 12°02'00.00" N 75° 17'36.11"E	<i>Rock-cut-sepulcher- single chamber with port hole decorated door jamb,</i>	-	Hillock slope Pazhayangadi river belt	Ezhom (Pazhayangadi)
15	Trikkott 12°00'37.95" N 75° 16'13.56"E	<i>Rock-cut-sepulcher- single chamber with port hole decorated door jamb</i>	-	Hillock slope Pazhayangadi river belt	Cherukunnu (Pazhayangadi)
16	Menachur 12°02'13.32" N 75° 21'36.14"E	<i>Rock-cut-sepulcher- double chamber with decorated door jamb and passage</i>	-	Laterite plateau- pastoral tracts- less occupied area- Kuppam river belt	Near Menachur Kavu (Talipparamba)
17	Chithapoyil 12°02'13.21" N 75° 21'35.80"E	<i>Rock-cut-sepulcher- single chamber with port hole decorated door jamb</i>	<i>Small Black pots, red pots, legged jar, iron fragments</i>	Laterite plateau- pastoral tracts-recent settlement Kuppam river belt	Near Talipparamba

Sl. No.	Site Name and Co-ordinates	Monument Type / Features	Artifacts	Topology	Location (Nearest Town)
18	Ezhumvayal 12°05'44.80" N 75° 17'32.08"E	Five Rock-cut-sepulchers- single chambers with port hole decorated door jamb. Two of them are not opened.	<i>Pots & terracotta lamp from one cave</i>	Laterite plateau-pastoral tracts-recent settlement Kadannappalli Panappuzha river belt (Kuppam)	Kadannappalli Panappuzha Panjayat. (Talipparamba)
19	Naduvil 12°07'16.57" N 75° 28'59.34"E	Multiple Stone Circle- about fourteen decorated stone blocks. Out of three circles one was explored earlier.	A bronze vase and unidentified bronze equipment, iron sword, dagger, trident, knives, chisel, iron saucer lamp, iron tripod, a crystal bead, a quartz bead, earthen vases, ring stands and pots (K J John 1990, Poyil 2006:94-95)	Laterite hillock- near to eastern mountain. Chapparapadavu Kuppam river belt	Nentravattam, Near Naduvil town (Talipparamba)
20	Sreekantapuram 12°02'40.69" N 75° 30'28.88"E	Rock-cut-sepulcher-single chambers with round pillar at the center & a stone platform in the north eastern side of the cave- the entrance portion still remain unopened.	<i>About 22 pots in red & black colour, each pot had lid, iron chisel or spear head, bone fragments.</i>	Small hillock slope- near to the wet paddy field Valapattanam River belt	Alex nagar Sreekandapuram, (Talipparamba)

Sl. No.	Site Name and Co-ordinates	Monument Type / Features	Artifacts	Topology	Location (Nearest Town)
21	Kavinisseri Paramba 12°00'37.95" N 75° 16'13.56"E	Three Rock-cut-sepulchers- single chambers with port hole decorated door	-	Hillock slopes- garden land- Pazhayangadi – Kuppam river belt	Chundayil, Village, Cherukunnu Panjayat- (Cherukunnu)
22	Aduppoottippara 12°05'43.52" N 75° 14'31.35"E	Umbrella Stone- four stone blocks are placed as part of clinostat & mushroom type stone as orthostat	-	Laterite plateau- graze land/ pastoral tracts- Perumba river belt	Cheruthazham Panjayat, Ezhilode (Payyannur)
23	Kunjimangalam 12°04'19.17" N 75° 13'42.23"E	Rock-cut-sepulchers- single chambers with port hole decorated door	-	Laterite plateau- graze land/ pastoral tracts- Perumba river belt	In the Kunjimangalam High school compound Kunjimangalam Panjayat- (Payyannur)
24	Chirakkal 11°54'35.93" N 75° 13'42.35"E	Rock-cut-sepulcher- double chambers - decorated door	-	In the slopes of a small hillocks – non productive region- Valapattanam river belt	Near railway tracts Chirakkal (Kannur)
25	Mathil 12°10'06.16" N 75° 15'13.14"E	Rock-cut-sepulchers- single chambers with port hole decorated door	-	In the slope of a hillock and on a granite garden land very close to wet land Perumba river belt	Near Mathil town, Mathil Panjayat. (Payyannur)
26	Ettukudukka 12°09'18.60" N 75° 13'25.41"E	Rock-cut-sepulcher- double chamber with transected walls with door- finished roof- door was disturbed.	-	In the slope of a hillock and on a granite plateau. Fresh water ponds- Perumba river belt	Alappadamba Panchayath, 12km to the east of Payyannur

Sl. No.	Site Name and Co-ordinates	Monument Type / Features	Artifacts	Topology	Location (Nearest Town)
27	Velam 11°59'58.08" N 75° 27'04.08"E	Umbrella stone- huge orthostat tilted- four stone blocks as clinostat in dilapidated condition	-	In a garden land very close to Velam <i>vayal</i> (Wet land paddy field) Valapattanam river belt	At Kundyeri Paramba- east of the Velam Maha Ganapathi temple- Mayyil panjayat, (Mayyil)
28	Velam 11°59'58.08" N 75° 27'04.08"E	<i>Urn burials</i>	-	From the garden land near to the wet region - Valapattanam river belt	At Chekkyat Paramba- near Velam Maha Ganapathi temple- Mayyil panjayat, (Mayyil)
29	Velam 11°59'58.08" N 75° 27'04.08"E	<i>Two Rock-cut-sepulchers- single chambers with port hole-decorated door jamb</i>	-	From the garden land near to the wet region - Valapattanam river belt	At Parappuram & Kizhakke Veetu Valappu, north of Mayyil town- Mayyil panjayat, (Mayyil)
30	Mayyil 11°59'34.00" N 75° 26'55.60"E	<i>Rock-cut-sepulchers- single chambers with square pillar and a stone slab -laterit door.</i>	<i>Iron age burial pots in large quantity iron objects & bone fragments</i>	Small laterite hillock slope- near to the narrow wet region between two small mountain- Valapattanam river belt	In a road named as <i>Guharoad</i> (cave road) near Chekkyat kavu & Mayyil Vishnu temple, Mayyil panjayat, Mayyil town (Mayyil)

Sl. No.	Site Name and Co-ordinates	Monument Type / Features	Artifacts	Topology	Location (Nearest Town)
31	Mavicheri Alathatta 12°04'09.52" N 75° 19'49.92"E	Rock-cut-sepulchers- single chambers with port hole decorated door.	2 Black and 1 red bowls, 1 red ware, a red bowl kept above the red pot as lid- Black pot with decorations- iron objects	Hillock – laterite plateau- grazing land- fresh water natural ponds – about four rock cut caves in the same hillock – wet land (Kadambur vayal) spread in the south eastern valley of hillock Kuppam river belt	In the Chittarthat paramba, Kutiyeri village, Pariyaram Panjayat. (Talipparamba)
32	Purathukavu 12°01'02.53" N 75° 20'42.69"E	Clusters of Rock- cut chamber	-	Kuttikkol –Kuppam river belt	Ariyil, near. Govt. Model Residential School Pattuvam, Talipparamba Taluk
33	Purathukavu 12°01'02.53" N 75° 20'42.69"E	Stone circle with 36 stone slabs	-	Kuttikkol –Kuppam river belt	Ariyil, near. Govt. Model Residential School Pattuvam, Talipparamba Taluk
34	Kozummal 12°10'43.97" N 75° 13'02.53"E	Stone Circle	-	Perumba river belt	Near Karivellur

The italicized words in the table indicate that the information is gathered orally from the locals

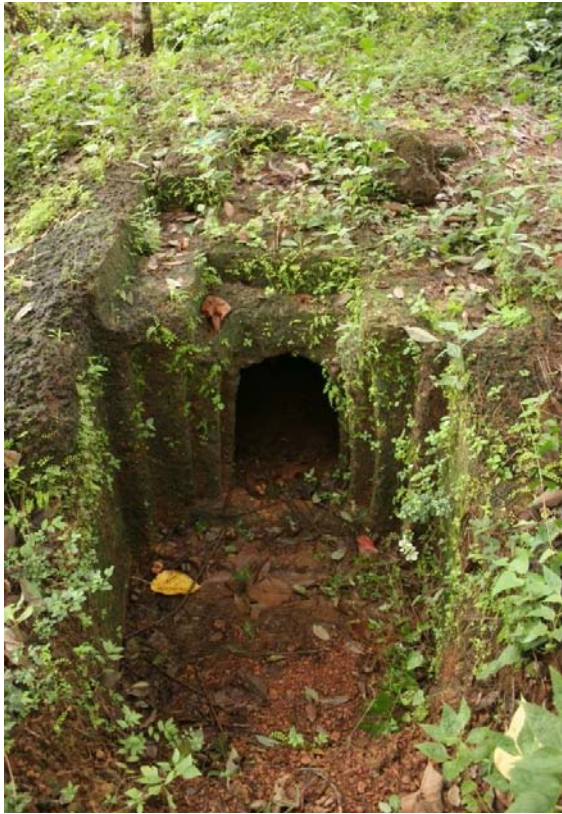


Figure 2: Rock cut chamber at Mathil



Figure 3: Rock cut chamber at Mathil



Figure 4: Rock cut chamber, Kunneru



Figure 5: Rock cut chamber, Ezhilode

were found from Ezhilode, Alathatta Mavicheri (Figs. 6&7) and Ezhumvayal (Figs. 8&9). The entrance of the chambers perhaps was closed with a square stone slab. That kind of well finished laterite slabs were found in association with the single chambered rock cut sepulchers at Alathatta Mavicheri and Ezhumvayal. The pillared chamber was another important monument type from the region. A destroyed rock-cut chamber with a square pillar at the center discovered from Korom, near Payyannur and a round pillared chamber from Sreekantapuram near Talipparamba. Similarly a double chamber rock cut sepulcher was also found at Menachur near Talipparamba.



Figure 6: Port hole, Alathatta Mavicheri



Figure 7: Stopper, Alathatta Mavicheri



Figure 8: Port hole, Ezhumvayal



Figure 9: Stopper, Ezhumvayal

Most of these sepulchers have long passage in front of the entrance, which roughly ranges from 1 meter to 5 meter length and 1 meter to 2.50 meter width. The width of the passage varies according to the size of the entrance of the sepulchers. The disparities of the structure and size of burials have revealed that the megalithic builders had some kind of priority or concerns to the dead according to their social status or power.

Another significant burial monument of the region under study is the multiple hood stone circles. A multiple hood stone circle was found at Kozhummal near Karivellur. Similarly a cluster of huge stone circle and rock cut sepulcher inside the circle is reported from the Nenthravattam at Naduvil, near Talipparamba (Fig. 10). A huge stone circle was also found at Purathukavu at Pattuvam in Talipparamba Taluk. This stone circle is not in perfect alignment and it is made of with 36 dressed laterite stone slabs. It has about 13.55 and 10.85 length in the east west and north south direction respectively. Three slabs are misplaced.

Umbrella stones with massive mushroom type orthostat made of a single laterite stone block and the clinostat made of three or four laterite slabs at the bottom is the other type that was found at Chempottikunnu (Fig. 11) Adupputippara (Fig. 12), and Velam

(Fig. 13). Along with these monuments, local information brings forth the discovery of urn burials from Korom and Velam.



**Figure 10: Hood Stone circle,
Naduvil**



**Figure11: Umbrella Stone,
Badiramanaparamba**



**Figure 12: Umbrella Stone,
Aduppoottipara**



**Figure 13: Umbrella Stone,
Velam**

Most of these burials were accidentally discovered and excavated by the local people and owing to their ignorance on the value of the artifacts or due to their wild enthusiasm for finding the treasures, all these materials were destroyed. Then the only surviving information regarding the find is memories. But in the archaeological survey such memories cannot be used in a proper way. Many of reliable information have been given by the locals. For instance, the discovery of bone powder probably of an extended human burial, along with a number of pots including Black and Red Ware, red slipped leg jars, with lids or stands etc from a rock-cut chamber at Sreekantapuram, two small pots in Red, Black colours, four Legged Jars from the rock-cut chamber s at Badiramanaparamba Kunneru etc. But none of these material remains were preserved. However, these kinds of information are also useful for making a distribution map of the Iron Age Megaliths of the region.

A few pottery and terracotta objects were collected from Ezhilode. It includes Black and Red Ware, red slipped legged jars (Figs.14&15). A bronze vase and unidentified bronze equipment, iron sword, dagger, trident, knives, chisel, iron saucer lamp, iron

tripod, a crystal bead, a quartz bead, earthen vases, ring stands and pots were unearthed from Naduvil (John,1990, Poyil, 2006:94-95). Rock- cut chamber of Alathatta Mavicheri is also yielded a large quantity of Black and Red Ware, red slipped legged jars black wares and ritual pots and terracotta objects (Figs.16&17).



Figure 14: Burial Pottery, Ezhilode



Figure 15: Burial Pottery, Ezhilode



Figure 16: Black and Red Ware Sherds, Alathatta Mavicheri



Figure 17: Black and Red Ware Sherds, Alathatta Mavicheri

The availability of water was the crucial factor in the selection of settlement sites (Moorti, 1994:11). The distribution of the megaliths in the river belt or the banks of rivulets has shown such preferences of the early settlers. The ponds or water bodies either natural or artificial were found in a very close proximity to the rock- cut chamber s. The square ponds with dressed sloping steps are found at Ettukudukka(12°09'18.60" N 75° 13'25.41"E) (Figs. 18&19), Madayi (12°01'52.79" N 75° 15'06.29"E) (Figs. 20&21) and Kunneru (12°02'27.68" N 75° 12'35.98"E). There is a square well or pond without steps at the laterite plateau of Ezhumvayal (12°05'44.80" N 75° 17'32.08"E). Such features are also found at Alathatta Mavicheri, Echulikkunnu, and Menachur Kavu. The ponds must have been used for the daily requirements of people and animal livestock of the region.

However, the amount of surveyed megalithic sites has revealed the need and possibility for the detailed archeological explorations in the region. The current field study helps to generate certain archaeological knowledge on the distribution pattern of the burial sites and also to produce few insights on the early human occupation.



Figure 18: General View of Pond, Ettukudukka



Figure 19: Dressed Sloping steps of Pond, Ettukudukka



Figure 20: General View of Pond, Mayid



Figure 21: Dressed Sloping steps of Pond, Mayid

Discussion: Pattern of Burial Distribution

The major burial types found in the region are rock cut sepulchers. The region under study is a laterite dominated area and the monuments are only found in the slopes of the hard laterite hillock slopes.

Figure 22 shows the burial distribution in the Valapattanam, Kuppam, Perumba and Pazhayangadi, river belts. The number of sites distributed in the Perumba river belt is higher than the Kuppam, Valapattanam and Pazhayangadi rivers. It shows that Perumba river belt is the foremost area of human settlements in the Iron Age period. Figure 23 shows that the distribution of rock cut sepulchers is much higher than the other burial types. They are found in the laterite plateau as clusters and in dispersed contexts. Figure 24 shows that the distribution of rock cut chamber is varied in the aforesaid river belts. The largest quantity is found in the Perumba river belt, followed by Kuppam and almost equal numbers of sites are distributed in the Valapattanam and Pazhayangadi river belts. The density of the burial sites shows that the Perumba river belt was one of the core centers of the early human occupation in the region. The rock-cut chambers are just not like an ordinary pit burial. It requires more skilled labour support and it represents the habitation of a kind of advanced settlement in the region.

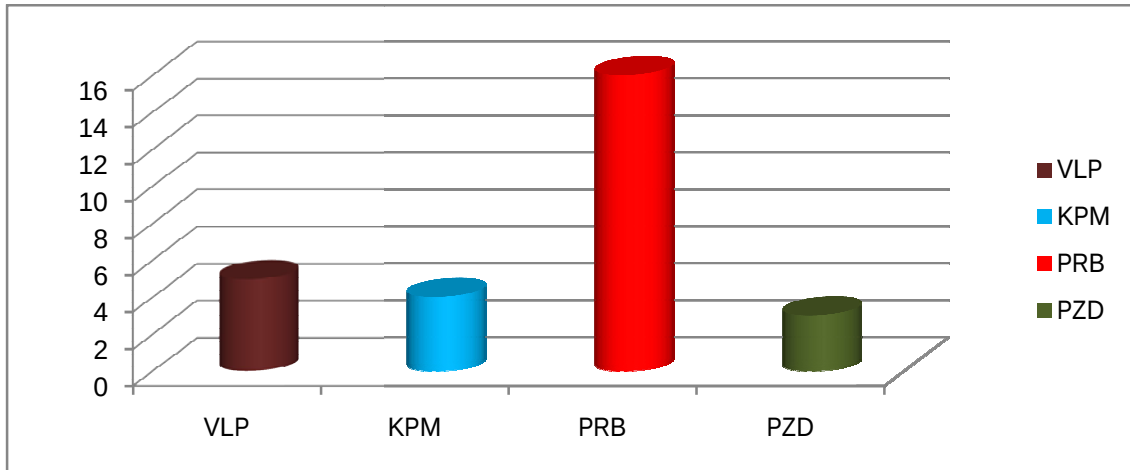


Figure 22: Distribution of Iron Age burial sites in the Valapattanam (VLP), Kuppam (KPM), Perumba (PRB) and Pazhayangadi (PZD) river belts

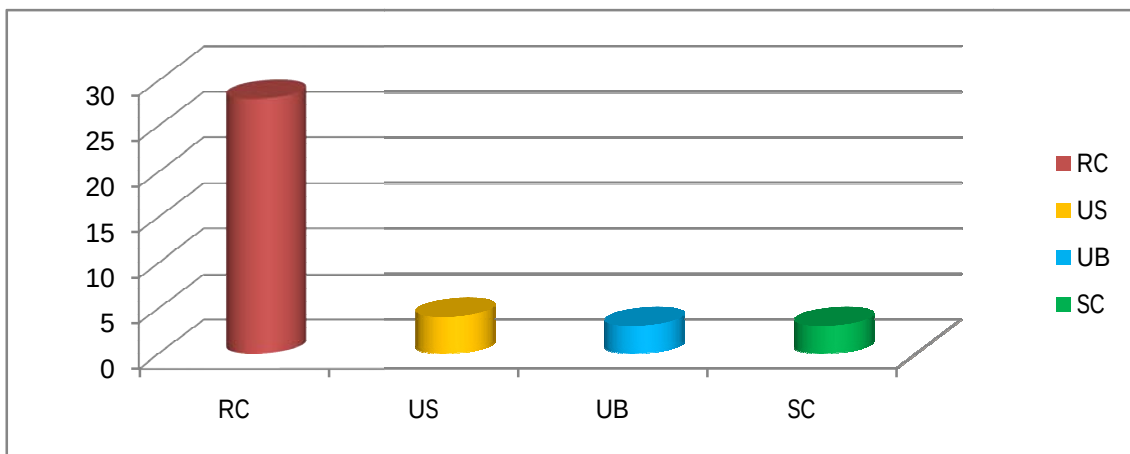


Figure 23: Distribution of rock cut sepulchers (RC), umbrella stones (US), urn burials (UB) and stone circles (SC) in the study area

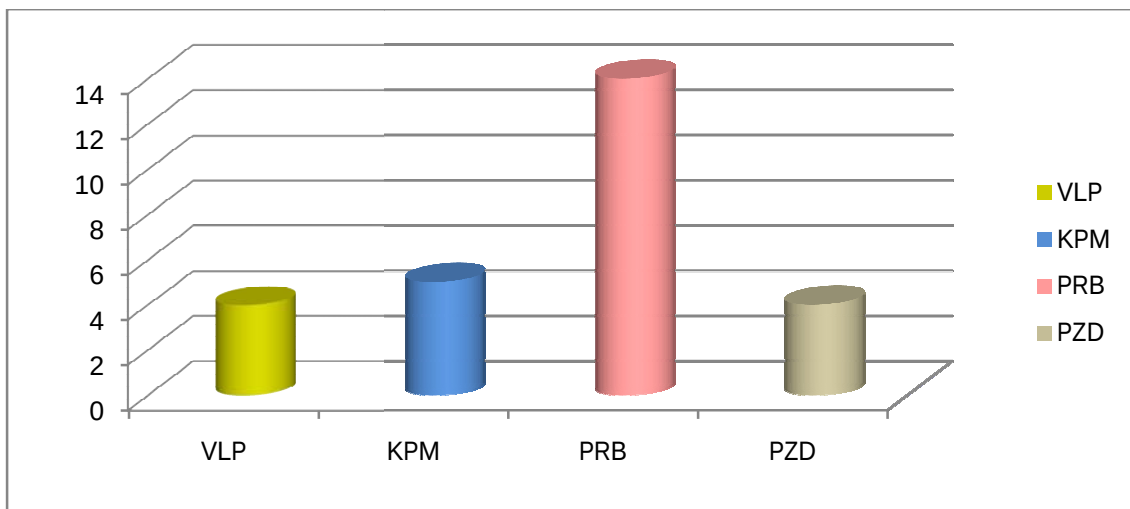


Figure 24: Distribution of rock-cut chambers in the in the Valapattanam (VLP), Kuppam (KPM), Perumba (PRB) and Pazhayangadi (PZD) river belts

Besides, the surveyed burial sites have also shown certain patterns as follows:

1. The megalithic monuments are invariably found to occur on high rocky grounds unfit for cultivation (Sastri 2009:7). They are mainly distributed in the hillocks, hillock slopes and laterite table land of the region under discussion. They are located in the proximity of the water courses. Owing to the deprivation of soil deposits in the surface these plots become un-productive in nature. The seasonal monsoon washes out the terrain each time and therefore the soil deposition process is not happened regularly. Thus major cultivation was not possible and consequently the plot became a graze land.
2. The rock- cut chambers and stone circles are generally found in the hard laterite hillock slopes and the laterite plateau. The entrance of the rock- cut chamber is often faced towards the productive plots spread in the valley of the hillock. Mostly the clusters of the rock cut sepulchers are spread over in a single plot. It shows that the contemporary people had separate spaces for the dead, probably in the nearby areas of their settlements.
3. The existence of the burials itself is a sign of the historical continuity of the region. They have been getting an auspicious space in the settlement area and normally the settlers of the region do not attempt to disturb the monument either due to the fear or the obeisance to the ancestors. That is the reason behind the existence of such monuments even now in different parts of Kerala. However it also represents the historical continuity of the settlements in the area. The region, where the megalithic burials are found, has witnessed the continuous settlements. The evidences of later settlements like inscriptions, structural remains of the temples and sacred grooves, dwelling sites etc have been found in the nearby area of the burial sites. Eramam, Ramanthali, Kunneru, Ezhimala, Kannapuram, Maniyur, etc in Kannur district, where the megaliths, inscriptions and the remains of the second phase temple architectures are found (Narayanan,1972:, Rajesh,2011:101-214), are the good examples for these cultural continuity.
4. The splendid monolithic monuments and the unearthed burial goods represent the possible development of various skilled occupational groups who were developed in the background of the emerging surplus of the society. The megalithic period witnessed population increase and the emergence of specialized craft groups which facilitated the interaction between various production units (Mohanty and Selvakumar 2002:313-351).
5. The grave goods point to a primarily hunting and food gathering society which was gradually shifted to sedentary agriculture (Gurukkal 1992:16-17). This period was the beginning phase of agriculture. But the irrigated agriculture became prominent in the post megalithic period (Gurukkal 1992:17, Mohanty and Selvakumar 2002:331).

6. The copper or bronze finds, especially from Naduvil, are also significant as they point towards the accessibility of the alloy technology to the contemporary society on the one hand and on the other they are the crucial traces of the exchange systems developed in the region. Since copper and lead are not available locally they must have brought from outside. Copper and bronze (copper lead alloy) objects have been unearthed from the various burial contexts in Kerala, though less in number (Rajendran and Iyyer, 22(2):61-66, John, 1982:148-154, Gurukkal: 2009, Rajesh, 2014:25). A number of lead scrolls and copper objects were unearthed from the early historic habitation context at Pattanam, which proved that these object were part of the maritime trade (Cherian et.al:2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2014).

Conclusion

The above discussion helps us to prove that, in the three river belts under discussion, the majority number of megalithic burials of Iron Age are found in the belt of Perumba river. Among the different types of megaliths, the distribution of rock cut chamber in the region is extremely high and such unique types are found only in the north Kerala, where the laterite terrain is plenty. The distribution pattern of rock cut chambers in the area under study has further highlights the fact that the Perumba river belt had a far more technologically advanced human occupation than the Kuppam, Valapattanam and Pazhayangadi river belts during Iron Age phase. The magnificent megalithic monument types represent the formation of an agrarian society with a surplus produce rather than a semi nomadic pastoral group. However there is hardly any or no single evidence found on the habitation or habitation cum burial site from the region.

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