

THE  
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FOR



**British India and its Dependencies.**

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## ORIGIN OF THE NAMES OF DIFFERENT COUNTRIES IN THE EAST-INDIES.

The early Persian navigators considered all the countries of Hind and Sind, taken together, as divided into three parts. The first, Guzerat, bounded to the west by Gazna, Multan and Mackhan; the second, that which we call *Malabar*, is situated to the east, or rather to the southward of Guzerat, and is named by the Arabs *Beled-ul-sul-sul*, or the country of pepper; the third, and most eastern, is called *Mabar*, which in Arabic means the passage; by some persons it is supposed to mean the Gulf of Bengal, from Cape Comorin to Acheen Head, on the coast of Sumatra. The first of these, Guzerat, is probably derived from the Persian or Arabic word *gezeret*, an island, or rather a peninsular, being situated at the entrance of the Persian Gulf; the early Persian navigators were most likely to give it this name. The word *Malabar* is not known but by adaptation to the names of the western peninsula of India; this, however, seems also to be derived from the same persons, who, after having made the Malabar coast, proceeded further eastward, where they fell in with the Malays at Sumatra, on the eastern side of the Gulf of Bengal, and have therefore given one name to all those countries, denominating them *Malia-bar*, or the countries of the Malays. In the Persian language *bar* signifies country, as *Zengebar*, the country of the Zenges; so *Mali-bar* is probably the country of the Malays. Edrissi remarks, that the inhabitants of Comer, by which perhaps is meant Cape Comorian, are Malays, and that they practice piracy in brigantines of sixty cubits long, which carry one hundred and fifty men each; but this description of their life bears a much stronger resemblance to the Malays, than to the natives either of the Malabar or the Coromandel Coast, or those of the adjacent islands. The Malays still continue to practise piracy in their well known prows, which the natives of the latter countries have never done. This is a strong presumptive proof that the early Persian navigation confounded the natives of the eastern, and perhaps the western side of the peninsula of India, with the inhabitants of

Malacca or Sumatra, and called them altogether *Malai*, with the adjunct of *bar*, to describe all the countries from the present Malabar coast to China. It may perhaps be objected, that the distance of Sumatra from the peninsula is too great to admit of such a mistake; but the geography of these countries appears, from another very striking circumstance, to have been rather hastily settled by the Persians, whose information of the eastern seas must have been very erroneous. They place a very considerable island to the eastward of Cape Comorin, in the way to China, called *Sila*; to which must be added the Hindoo word *dive*, an island, which makes *Siladive*, or the island of Sila. This it will be allowed might easily have been corrupted to *Sila-dive*, the true name of the island of Ceylon. Very little doubt, I think, can be entertained of this etymology.

But Abd-ul-Mawall, according to Harbelot, places *Sila* near China: fortunately, however, there is no island of a similar name in the China Seas, and therefore, in this case, we will venture to suppose that Abd-ul-Mawal, hearing that *Sila*, or *Silan* (now Ceylon), was to the eastward of Cape Comorin, has, on hearsay testimony only, ventured to carry it still farther east towards China; for cinnamon, which is the produce of this island only, and not cultivated in China or elsewhere, is called by the Persians *Dai Cheen*, and by the Arabs *Dai Sena*, China-pepper, which is a strong proof that both these nations formerly considered Ceylon, where only it is produced, as situated in, or at least very near, China; and if they could fall into such an egregious error in the one instance, it is almost certain they were equally mistaken in the other. The word *Mabar*, a passage, which describes the Persian, or rather Arabian division of India, is probably still preserved in the word *Manar*: the letters *d* and *n* are easily mistaken in writing the Persian or Arabic languages, particularly if the unaccritical mark be omitted. The Gulf or Bay of Manar is situated between the east side of the peninsula of India and Ceylon.