

# NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE ON CULTURAL AND COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ANCIENT SRI LANKA AND TAMIL NADU

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**T**he Island of Sri Lanka, because of its central position in the Indian Ocean, at a meeting point of sea routes between the east and west linking the shores of the Persian Gulf, Red Sea and India with Southeast Asia and the Far East, was a centre of commerce where different cultures and civilisations met and flourished. Its products of high export value such as precious stones, pearls, ivory, tortoise shell, elephants, valuable woods, textiles and especially spices (cloves, pepper and cinnamon) attracted merchants of all horizons. Furthermore, the island was gifted with numerous bays, natural harbours, estuaries and navigable rivers which facilitated both sea-borne and inland trade.

The main aim of this short paper is to show how new archaeological and epigraphical evidence obtained from the archaeological program on the organisation of maritime trade connected with the ancient ports on the western and southern coasts of Sri Lanka, launched by the French Mission of Archaeological Co-operation in collaboration with the Archaeological Department of Sri Lanka, throw much light on cultural and commercial relationships between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with all the shipping communities and maritime activities connected with ancient Sri Lanka. These aspects are discussed in detail in the final report of the French Archaeological Mission in Sri Lanka which will be out at the beginning of the next year in the series: *Archaeologies of the Indian Ocean* published by Brépols and the Maison de l'Orient. So, we shall confine ourselves to some observations which appear to us to be particularly significant in the light of archaeological evidence, by which we mean ceramics, beads, inscriptions and coins, discovered in recent years either sporadically or in an archaeological context.

The most important characteristic of all the ancient ports of the western and southern coasts and many others around the island is their geographical situation at the estuaries of rivers. The location of emporia along rivers must have facilitated transactions with the interior regions. The starting point of our investigations was the spatial distribution of ancient ports along the South Indian coasts. It is significant that ancient ports like Ponnāni, Muziris, Porakād, Kolkai, Kārikāl (Camara), Pōduke (Putucceri) were situated either on the banks or at the mouth of rivers, especially of the Ponnāni, the Achenkoil, the Tāmraparno, the Kāvaeri, the Ceñci. Arikamedu on the Ariyankuppam river, Kaveripatinam at the Kaveri river and Alagankulam on the Vaigai river are well known sites of this nature.

All the three Tamil capitals were inland towns, but each had one or several ports on the coast. For Karur, the capital city of Chera kings, situated at the Amaravathi river, a tributary of the Kaveri river, and for Uraiyur, the capital city of Chola kings, the main port was Kaveripatinam, also called Pumpuhar, on the Kaveri delta. For Madurai, the capital of Pandyas, a direct river connection along the Vaigai led to Saliyur (modern Alagankulam), near Rameswaram.

Like in India, the most important ancient capitals of Sri Lanka were inland, but each had one port on the coast. Manthai, the most active port in ancient Sri Lanka, is located close to the Aruvi Ari river which linked the port of the inland capital of Anuradhapura. Likewise, the geographical situation of the ancient capital of Polonnaruwa on the banks of the Mahavali river, which flows to the sea at Gokanna, is not a coincidence. Like the same way, Tissamaharama, Sri Lanka's ancient city in the south became so important in its glorious past because it was established along the higher ground on the left bank of the Kirindi Oya connecting to the ancient port site of Kirinda.

The following sea ports subjected to our investigations are all situated at the estuaries of rivers: Salavattota (Chilaw) at the Deduru-oya, Wattala at the Kelani Ganga, Kalalitha (Kalutara) at the Kalu Ganga, Bhimatittha (Bentota) at the Bentota Ganga, Gimhatittha (Gintota) at the Gin-Ganga, Mahavalukagama (Weligama) at the Polwatta Ganga, Nilwalatittha (Matara) at the Nilwala Ganga, Gothapabbata (Godavaya) at Walawe Ganga and Kirinda at the Kirindi Oya.

Sri Lanka-French Archaeological Program obtained positive results from the excavations and explorations conducted at Giribawa on the left bank of the Kala Oya, which flows to the sea at Uruvelaptina; at Nariyagama, on the left bank of Daduru Oya, which flows to the sea at the ancient port of Salavattota; at the village of Pilapitiya, on the right bank of the Kelani Ganga, about seven kilometres from the ancient sea port of Wattala; at Diyagama, on the right bank of the Kalu Ganga which joins the sea at the ancient sea port of Kalalitha; and at Ridiyagama on the left bank of the Walawe Ganga which flows to the sea at the ancient sea port of Gothapabbata.

Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka had maintained close contacts since prehistoric times due to their geographical proximity. From the early period onwards, the South Indian mercantile and military communities, like Cholas, Pandyas, Cheras, Virakkotiyar,

Nanadesis and Velaikkarar, in different periods played an important role in the economic and political history of the island.

Let us now look at the archaeological evidence on cultural and trade relationships between Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu during the proto-historic and early historic periods. Proto-historic Sri Lanka was more closely linked with South India. In the excavations conducted by our predecessors at Gedige at Anuradhapura, Pomparippu, Kantarodai and Ibbankatuwa, substantial quantities of potsherds were found which parallel the Iron Age and early historical wares of South India, such as Megalithic Black and Red Ware and the Rouletted Ware.

The excavations conducted by us in 1997, at the village of Pilapitiya close to Kelaniya, also yielded early historic Black and Red Ware. We were also able to collect, not only at Ridiyagama, but also along the Walawe Ganga, large quantities of early megalithic Black and Red Ware, some of which were engraved with early historic symbols. K. Rajan from the Tamil University of Thanjavur and I undertook a comparative study on these post-firing graffiti marks usually found on the neck portion of the Black and Red Ware attested from his excavations at Kodumanal in Tamil Nadu and from our surface explorations and excavations at Ridiyagama in Sri Lanka. The moon symbol which takes the form of the Brahmi *akshara ma* occurs individually or in composite form on the potsherds collected from both sites. The symbol composed of one vertical line at the centre and two oblique lines on its side meeting at a point on the top serving as a basic element also appears in more elaborate forms with additional strokes. The ladder like symbol, in simple or composite form, is attested in Kodumanal and Ridiyagama. The swastika symbol is found in both sites individually or in various composite forms with arms branched out. It goes without saying that most of these graffiti marks are also attested on the Black and Red Ware fragments found in the Gedige Excavations at Anuradhapura by Siran Deraniyagala.

Various scholars have classified these symbols as potter's marks, owner's marks or as clan marks. The limited excavations and lack of proper documentation still elude in understanding the true meaning that stands behind these signs. However, occurrence of the same individual or composite graffiti marks both in Sri Lanka and in Tamil Nadu sites enable us to suppose without much of a risk that either the pottery were exported from one region to the other or potters of the same clan based on different regions produced them locally. It is interesting to note here that the petrographic analysis done on thin-sectioning of Black and Red Ware samples collected from our excavations at Ridiyagama and Kelaniya, carried out by Jean-Louis Reille, of the Department of Sciences of the University of Montpellier II, shows very clearly, that in spite of the distance of more than two hundred kilometres which separates the two sites, the homogeneity of the pottery as far as the characteristic mineral inclusions are concerned. We do not exclude the possibility that Black and Red Ware was exported from a South Indian production centre to Sri Lanka.

It is in this context that we can discuss the possibility of one production centre in time and space which seems to have come to light thanks to the X-ray diffractometer analysis done by Indian and Australian specialists, on samples of so-called Roulette Ware from various Indian, Sri Lankan and South-East Asian sites.

As we know, Vimala Begley contested the hypothesis put forward by Mortimer Wheeler according to which Rouletted Ware found at Arikamedu was an import from the Roman World. Begley treated Rouletted Ware as a regional product and not an import, though the technique of decoration could have been acquired from the classical world at some point of time. Siran Deraniyagala suggested, in 1992, that one could postulate that the Rouletted Ware had its origins in the medium-fine Grey Ware and that its characteristic gun-metal lustre reflected technical inputs from the Northern Black Polished Ware tradition of the Gangetic Valley. Having analysed representative samples from India, Sri Lanka and South-East Asia. by XRD, Vishwas Gogte arrived at the same conclusion: "It is therefore highly suggestive that not only was RW produced in the Ganga Plain but also that the painted circular decorations of the PGW period gradually developed into the beautiful indented concentric patterns in the NBP period, contrary to the view that the technique was influenced by the Classical or Imperial Roman worlds."

It is also interesting to note that the occurrence of the Rouletted Ware during the terminal phase of the NBP period (c. 250 BC) at Chandraketugarh, Sisupalgarh, Alagankulam, Arikamedu and Anuradhapura suggests the evolution of the Rouletted Ware from the Northern Black Polished Ware. This chronology is further confirmed by the calibrated dating by c. 14 between 250 to 185 BC with 69% probability, obtained from the context of our own excavations at Kelaniya which yielded fragments of Rouletted Ware.

According to Vishwas Gogte, the Rouletted Ware samples from Indian, Sri Lanka and South East Asia subjected to XRD analysis, contain minerals identical to those of Rouletted Ware and clay from Chandraketugarh, the famous port situated in the Gangetic delta. Likewise, he concluded that the Chandraketugarh-Tamluk region was the source of the Rouletted Ware found in other Indian sites, Sri Lanka and South-East Asia.

Although the analyses on Rouletted Ware are still in an initial stage, we begin to understand the patterns of trade routes developed through the Megalithic period onwards between the east coast of India and Sri Lanka. The exports of Northern Black Polished Ware followed by Rouletted Ware may have reached the island of Lanka through these trade routes. The Pali chronicles bear witness to historical events connecting the Gange's ports and Sri Lanka, such as the arrival of Vijaya, the introduction of Buddhism, horse traders etc. Traders who left the Gange's ports may have practised the coastal navigation before reaching the ports of Sri Lanka. So, the ports like Kaveripatinam, Arikamedu, Alagankulam in South India may have been frequently visited by these traders.

As we know, around ninety Indian sites spread in most parts of South India have revealed the rouletted ware. The maximum number of finds are, not surprisingly, from Andhra and Tamilnadu region. Several discs made using broken rouletted ware were unearthed from Tissamaharama. The excavations conducted by us at Kelaniya yielded several fragments of imported Rouletted Ware; similar to the ones found in the South Indian coasts. This was the first time in Sri Lankan history, that a site situated in the western Wet Zone, away from the capitals of the Sinhalese kings in the northern Dry Zone, yielded archaeological material which can be dated with certainty back to the fourth and third centuries BC. It is also interesting to note that like in Alagankulam, the Indian sea port closest to Sri Lanka, the excavations at Kelaniya revealed three out of five major types of rouletted ware, such as greyish pink ware (grey slip inside, brown to sepia outside). Similar types of Rouletted Ware are also attested in the coast and also in Sri Lanka indicating a well-established communication network linking the entire east coast of India with Sri Lanka. The result of our own excavations and explorations on the western and southern coasts of Sri Lanka, show that not only the north, but also the west and south of the island, should be included in the communication network.

Apart from ceramics, beads and coins found in the south of India and Sri Lanka highlight the close communication networks linking both countries. Hundreds of beads made of crystal, glass, stone, ivory, bone, shell, clay and above all semi-precious and precious stones were found at Ridiyagama and Kelaniya. Among the beads of semi-precious and precious stones, carnelian, lapis lazuli, rock crystals, agate, amethysts were found in hundreds.

The discovery of unperforated beads together with fragments of semi-precious stones confirms beyond doubt the existence of a bead making industry at Ridiyagama, Tissamaharama and Giribawa. The agate bead with the metal rod used for perforation, still seen stuck in the cavity, is further proof that beads were cut, polished and perforated at the site of Tissamaharama. The most fascinating discovery with this regard was made at Pabalugala at Giribawa. The presence at Giribawa of raw glass, unfinished beads, remains of melting furnaces and alumina sand source at the proximity enable us to think to this site as a glass-producing workshop.

In recent years there have been a series of excavations at the early historical sites of Andhra-Tamilnadu. Beads constitute an important class of finds in most of the South Indian sites. These sites include Amaravati, Dhulikatta, Kotalingala, Peddabankur and Yeleswaram (in Andhra Pradesh), Arikamedu (Pondicherry), Kanchipuram, Appukallu, Tiruvamathur, Karaikadu, Mallapadi, Perur, Kodumanal, Karur, Uraiyur and Alagankulam (in Tamilnadu). Some of these sites, especially the Tamilnadu sites, have yielded coins (both Roman and indigenous), ceramics and especially beads similar to those reported from Manthai, Anuradhapura, Kelaniya, Ridiyagama, Tissamaharama and other early sites of Sri Lanka. The beads from Ridiyagama are very similar, in colour and shape,

to the types recovered from four major sites of South India viz. Arikamedu, Karaikadu, Uraiyur and Alagankulam.

The bead making industry at Arikamedu was large and productive. The majority of the beads found here are spheroid or pear-shaped, similar to those from Ridiyagama. Lug-collared beads, identical to the ones from Ridiyagama, have been reported in small quantities in the so-called Arretine and post-Arretine periods of Arikamedu i.e. from the first century BC to the end of the second century AD.

The small scale excavations conducted at Karaikadu, the coastal site situated 40 km south of Arikamedu, have revealed large quantities of finished and semi-finished stone glass beads in association with a large brick structure dated to the first century AD. According to the excavators, this structure may have been used for the production of beads. Monochrome drawn glass tubes, like the ones from Ridiyagama and Giribawa, have been unearthed in large number both at Arikamedu and Karaikadu. These tubes were meant to be made into beads annealing them, smooth and round. Some of these tubes are believed to be the prototypes of the collared beads. Likewise Alagankulam, the extensive site on the mouth of the River Vaigai, is strategically located close to Sri Lanka.

Bernard Gratuze and Laure Dussubieux of the Centre Ernest Babelon (CNRS – Orleans) carried out a large research program dealing with ancient glass in the Indian Ocean. The aim of this project is to determine the composition of glass objects so as to have a better understanding of ancient technology and trade exchanges. Glass samples from a large number of sites (glass workshop and consumption sites) were analysed, especially Arikamedu, Kodumanal, Alagankulam in Tamilnadu and Giribawa, Ridiyagama and Kelaniya in Sri Lanka. Two analytical methods were used: LA-ICP-MS (Laser Ablation – Induced Coupled Plasma – Mass Spectrometry) and FNAA (Fast Neutrons Activation Analysis). These methods enable to measure with a great sensitivity between 30 and 50 elements without causing the destruction of the sample. The samples are mainly small monochrome beads obtained by the drawn method. A minority of disc-shaped beads, collar beads, moulded beads were analysed as well. Each site under the investigations yielded several glass types, three out of them seem to have more largely diffused through Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

The most important (by the number of specimens identified) is a glass type which is the result of the melt of an aluminous sand and of a soda flux taken from mineral deposit. Copper was used to give a red, an orange or a turquoise blue colour to the glass. Tin acts as a white opacifying agent when oxidised and as a yellow one when combined with lead. This glass type is widely spread through Sri Lanka and South India even if very few specimens are known in Arikamedu. A second glass type is potash like. Pure potash ashes or saltpetre was used as fluxing agent and melted with high silica sand. Most of the potash glass samples are dark blue (this colour is due to cobalt), purple (due to manganese) and aqua-blue (likely due to the accidental presence of iron). Arikamedu yielded a big number of potash beads. Although the production site of this

potash glass is still unknown judging from the important number of potash glass finds excavated in Arikamedu, enable us to suppose that it was a glass-producing workshop. The third glass type has close levels in soda and potash. It means that a mixed fluxing agent was used. The levels of alumina and of lime are similar too. This glass is red and owes its colour to big amounts of cuprite (copper oxide, detected by X-ray diffraction). Only disc-shaped beads are included in this group. Such beads were found in Ridiyagama, Kelaniya, Alagankulam and Kodumanal.

Beads made of glass have been recovered from stratified layers in our excavations at Kelaniya ranging in date from the second century BC to the third century AD. It is now clear that most of the beads collected in our excavations or from our surface explorations at Ridiyagama, Kelaniya and Giribawa are also attested in all the important settlement sites of South India. The conclusion to be drawn from this discovery is that they belonged to the same trade network.

The epigraphic and literary evidence for the active role played by the Tamil merchants in the early phase of Sri Lanka's history is numerous. The earliest references to *Damilas* in the *Mahavamsa*, is in connection with Sena and Guttika, who described as *assanavika*, i.e. traders who came in ships bringing horses for sale from South India. The inscription in early Brahmi script on a boulder in the area to the north-west of the ancient Abhayagiri Dagaba at Anuradhapura, records that the terrace (*Pasade*) was of the Tamil householders (*gahapatikana*) and was made by Samana, the Tamil, of Ilubarata. The record states that the Tamil ship-captain (*Navika-Karavaha asane*) was entitled to the seat of honour and probably was the leader of the Damela householders. Two Brahmi inscriptions from Periya-Puliyankulama, are both of the same personage, a Tamil merchant named Visaka, referred to as a householder (*gapati*). Perhaps the most evocative inscription in this context is the one from Kuduivil in the Ampari District. As Paranavitana (1970: xc) correctly observed; "Dighavapi, given as the place of residence of these brothers, was a seat of royalty in Rohana, second in importance to Mahagama only, and the place might well have attracted merchants from foreign countries who practised their own customs."

A recent study undertaken by I. Mahadevan has revealed the existence of a number of inscribed potsherds in the Sinhala-Prakrit (old Sinhalese) language written in the Brahmi script, found at or near ancient sea ports along the east coast of India. The seven inscribed potsherds published by Mahadevan, bearing Sinhala-Prakrit Brahmi script were reported from ancient trade centres like Kodumanal, Arikamedu and Alagankulam. According to palaeographic and linguistic features, these inscriptions can be dated from second century BC to first century AD.

The surface exploration carried out by P. Pushparatnam in the Poonagri region of the Jaffna Peninsula in northern Sri Lanka yielded more than a hundred inscribed sherds with fragmentary Tamil inscriptions in the Tamil Brahmi script. Although only one

of them has a complete word: Velan, a masculine personal name in Tamil, other sherds bear just one or two characteristic Tamil-Brahmi letters: l, l, r, n. As I. Mahadevan correctly pointed out these are the first examples of inscribed sherds in Tamil ever attested in Sri Lanka. These inscriptions have been assigned on palaeographic grounds tentatively to about 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC pending excavations of the site.

A large number of coins of the South Indian dynasties belonging to the historical period, were found in the island. Apart from the coins already published by Codrington, a number of new series of Pandya coins have been attested in recent years. The Sri Lanka-British Excavations at Salgaha Watta in the ancient citadel of Anuradhapura brought to light some interesting coins of the South Indian dynasties. The most noteworthy specimen found in this period is the Pandya inspired multi-type coin. This coin is the only known specimen of this type depicting a *caitya* surmounted by a *chatra*, recalling the earliest type of stupa in India and Sri Lanka. The next local coinage of the island dates from the resumption of independence in 28 BC from the Pandya occupation. The new series of multi-type copper coins bears a prominent elephant symbol. The coins labelled as elephant and swastika, horse and swastika, lion and swastika, tree and swastika and especially Lakshmi plaques depicting the goddess Lakshmi seated or standing, belong to the category of local issues. Some of these coins certainly struck in Sri Lanka were found in the coastal regions of South India. Significantly a Lakshmi plaque of Sri Lanka was recovered from the river bed of Amaravathi, near Karur, a city situated more than two hundred kilometres from Kaveripatinam.

The most important discovery made in recent years, to confirm beyond any doubt the existence of Tamil traders on Sri Lankan soil, came from the southern coast of Sri Lanka. Harry Falk, R.M. Wickremesinghe and I recently published a group of locally issued inscribed coins, hitherto unknown in a Sri Lankan context, which can be dated at least to a thousand years before the already known inscribed coin. On the basis of the palaeography, these coins can be fixed without much of a risk between the second century BC and the second century AD. The biggest obstacle we had to face when deciphering the legends on these new coins was the lack of comparisons with any type of coinage in the world.

The other important characteristic of these coins is that they are all made of lead. Apart from some specimens of cast "Lakshmi Plaques" and few other varieties found in Sri Lankan soil, especially in Tissamaharama, there is no other evidence to show that lead coins were struck or cast abundantly in the island. As lead is not a native product of Sri Lanka, it must have been brought probably from India or South-East Asia. Though not common, lead coins are also attested in India, especially in the South. It is interesting to note that several large sized lead coins of the Sangam period have been found in recent years especially in the Amaravati river bed near Karur. One of these coins belongs to the Chera dynasty, and six of them to the Sangam age Cholas. Lead has been reported to have been found in Rajasthan and Bihar, but Myanmar (Burma)

seems to be endowed with large deposits of lead. According to R. Krishnamurthy it may be possible that in ancient times also lead could have come to the Chola country through the port of Kaveripatinam. The close maritime trade contacts Sri Lanka had with the east coast of South India and especially with Arikamedu on the Ariyankuppam river, Kaveripatinam at the Kaveri river and Alagankulam on the Vaigai river are known. It is not excluded that lead was brought to the southern coast of Sri Lanka, from India, through the same maritime route. The lead ingots from Tissamaharama, some of which we have catalogued in our recent book are also attested in Khuan Luk Pat Krabi Province of Southern Thailand.

Among the 44 coins that we have deciphered, we have identified with certainty, two coins bearing Tamil names. Coin No. A. 21 of our catalogue (cf. O. Bopearachchi & R.M. Wickremesinha, *Ruhuna. An Ancient Civilisation Re-visited. Numismatic and Archaeological Evidence on Inland and Maritime Trade*, Colombo, 1999) depicts on the obverse a floral design and on the reverse the legend in Brahmi which we have deciphered as: (Brahmi letters) *utirana*. Swastika (figure of swastika). We concluded: "This coin is of utmost importance in that it presents us a personal name in a clear Tamil nominative form with an *aksara na* (Brahmi letter), representing an alveolar nasal, which is not found in Ceylonese Brahmi rock inscriptions, but which is well-known from South Indian inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi, and now also from two of our coins (here and No. A/ 37 below)." I. Mahadevan, the foremost authority on Tamil Brahmi, in a recent article, accepting our initial reading added (see "Ancient Tamil coins from Sri Lanka", *Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies*, Special Issue March 2000, pp.147-156) "The authors have correctly identified the Tamil alveolar nasal *n* here and point out that in Tamil texts, this character terminates proper names. However the legend is *û ti rã na* which has to be read in accordance with the conventions of Early Tamil Brahmi, as *Uttiran*, a personal name in Tamil." He further developed his arguments pointing out: "The name *Uttiran* is derived from *Uttiram*, the Tamil name for the asterism *Uttara Phalugni*. The name *Uttiran* occurs in a Tamil Brahmi pottery inscription from Arikamedu."

Our second coin is No. A. 37 with a wheel design composed of four spokes on the obverse. We had a lot of difficulties in deciphering the legend in Brahmi, and concluded: "The reading is not absolutely clear, but the final *na* makes it clear that here again a Tamil proper name is found in the nominative, as in No. A. 21". I. Mahadevan proposed the following revised reading: *Tissa Pittan*, a personal name partly in Prakrit and Tamil. As we have underlined in our article, *Tissa* is one of the most commonly used names in early inscriptions. As the name of *parumakas* it occurs 32 times (Paranavitana, 1970, p. lxxxiv). Representing Skt. *tisya* it again is the name of an auspicious asterism, known as a royal name from the time of *Devanampiya Tissa* onwards. Regarding the Tamil name *Pittan*, Mahadevan has underlined that it is attested in Sangam literature and also in a Tamil Brahmi inscription from Kongarpuliyankulam exactly as on our coin.

I. Mahadevan has also identified two more coins that we have published, and correctly interpreted the names of Tamil origin. The first is No. A. 17 of our book, depicting a cock running to right on the obverse. Mahadevan suggested that it looks to him as if the coin-mould has not been reversed and hence the true reading has to be obtained from the mirror-reflection of the coin-legend, starting from the 3 o' clock position and proceeding in the clockwise direction. He reads it as: *ma la c[ã] ta a na*. He then pointed out that both *Mallan* and *Cattan* occur as personal names in a Tamil Brahmi inscription. The next coin from our book that I. Mahadevan deciphered as a Tamil personal name is No. A. 20. Like many other coins from Tissamaharama this coin has on the obverse a floral design. Deciphering the legend in Brahmi we admitted that our reading of the name is more than uncertain. I. Mahadevan's revised reading is: *ka pa ti ka ta la a na*. Mahadevan then pointed out that "Kapati Katalan" is a personal name in Tamil with a prefixed title in Sinhala Prakrit: "The title *gapati* (var. *gapiti*) in Sinh. Pkt. is derived from Pali *gahapati* <Skt. 'householder' a title borne by merchants and others." Mahadevan then shows that the change *g- > k -* in the title betrays Tamil influence. As far as the Tamil name "Katalan" is concerned, he correctly draws the attention to references in Sangam literature and in an early Tamil Brahmi inscription from Mangulam.

These inscribed coins subjected to our research are so far only attested in the area of Tissamaharama. To our knowledge they are not so far attested in Anuradhapura, the oldest capital city of the ancient kings of Sri Lanka. We would not be surprised if such coins surface there one day. However, the discovery of coin moulds at Akurugoda, far away from the central political and administrative centres like Anuradhapura, is conclusive evidence that the coins in question were locally produced. Majima (No. A. 5), Tissa (Nos. A. 9-12, & 43) and Naga (Nos. A. 24, 30-32 & 44) are well known names of Sri Lankan kings, but we have no valid reason to believe that they were issued by the same kings. The absence of the title *raja* or *maharaja* on these coins is significant in this context. Instead of the title *raja*, we find titles such as *gapati* 'householder' (Nos. A. 7 & 8) or *barata* 'lord' (No. A. 1). Many other coins are even without titles (e.g. A. 6, 9, 10), as if ordinary people issued some of these coins. It seems that local rulers, lords, householders and even individuals were involved in these monetary activities. The finding of coins issued by lords and householders as well as individuals on the one hand and on the other, the discovery of coin moulds, money boxes and hoards at the same site make us to think that monetary transactions were particularly developed in these areas. The issuing of coins in their own names written in their own script in Tamil account for the fact that Sinhalese and Tamil merchants were actively involved in trade in the Southern coast of Sri Lanka. It is also significant that these evidence come from the ancient Ruhuna, considered by the historians as the bastion of Sinhalese race and culture.

Recent discoveries in Tamilnadu of Sinhala Prakrit inscriptions on poetry from the port cities of Arikamedu, Alagankulam and Kaverippumpattinam on the east coast and, further inland, at Kodumanal, provide evidence for the presence of Sinhalese traders in Tamilnadu in the same period when Tamil traders were active at Anuradhapura and Tissamaharama in Sri Lanka. The new discoveries add to the growing body of evidence attesting to the close cultural, social, religious and commercial intercourse between Sri Lanka and Tamilnadu in the early Historical Period.

Archaeology has no frontiers. I have attempted here, without any preconceived ideology, to show the function of archaeological material in a particular society in a given space of time.

### For further reading:

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