

Ancient Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu: Maritime Trade *

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The main aim of this short paper is to show how new archaeological and epigraphic evidence obtained from the exploratory 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 Sri Lanka in collaboration with the Archaeological Department of Sri Lanka,¹ throw much light on cultural and commercial relationships between South India and Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka had maintained close contacts since protohistoric times due to their geographical proximity. From the early period onwards, the South Indian mercantile communities like Vanijha, Sattu, Aiyavole, Nanadesis and Tisai Aiyirattu Ainurruvar and their medieval associated military communities like Virakkotiyar and Velaikkarar,² in different periods played an important role in the economic and political history of the island.³ Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with all the Dravidian communities involved in trade with Sri Lanka, and furthermore I have already dealt with this question in detail in the light of numismatic and literary evidence.⁴ So, I have made an attempt in this paper to highlight the activities of South Indian mercantile communities whose existence, in relation to early historic Sri Lanka, is relatively little-known. As we shall see later, recent archaeological discoveries place them in a different and important context.

A good number of inscriptions, written either in *Brāhmī* or Sinhalese or Tamil scripts, dealing directly with the south Indian shipping communities, have been brought to light by Senarath Paranavitana.⁵ The Indian and Sinhalese texts concerning political and economic aspects of these mariners are analysed to a certain extent by N. Wijesekara.⁶ Further to these data, as we shall see later, the numismatic and epigraphic discoveries made in the western and southern coasts of Sri Lanka and in South India in recent years enable us to re-evaluate the importance of cultural and trade relations between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. So, I shall confine myself to some observations which appear to me

* This is a further development of my recent article published in 2002.

¹ I am most grateful to Dr. W. Wijeyapala, Director General of Archaeology and Co-director of French Mission of Archaeological Co-operation in Sri Lanka for his unfailing help and collaboration.

² Apart from the epigraphic and literary evidence, the commercial activities of these South Indian communities are known to us through their coins found especially at Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and other ancient sites of the island, see O. Bopearachchi, 1993.

³ For further details see K. Indrapala, (1990), S. Pathmanathan, (1976, 1984, 1990, 1994).

⁴ O. Bopearachchi, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 1999.

⁵ S. Paranavitana, 1970 & 1983.

⁶ N. Wijesekara, 1952.

to be particularly significant in the light of archaeological evidence, i.e. ceramics, beads and coins and all the other relevant materials like intaglios, seals and sealings discovered either sporadically or in an archaeological context.

I have pointed out elsewhere⁷ that the most important characteristic of all the ancient ports of the western and southern coast 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 my investigations was the spatial distribution of ancient ports along the South Indian coasts. It is significant that ancient ports like Tondi, Muziris, Nelcynda, Korkai, Alangankulam, Kaveripattinam and Arikamedu (Pôduke) were situated either on the banks up the rivers (*perunturai*) or at the mouth of the rivers (*muṅ-turai*). For example, Muziris, Korkai, Alagankulam, Kaveripattinam are situated respectively on the rivers of the Periyar, the Tāmraparni, the Vaigai, and the Kāveri.⁸ As K. Karttunen has well observed, all the three ancient Tamil capitals were inland towns, but each had one or several marts on the coast.⁹

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 Aru river which linked the port to 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. In 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 seaports subjected to our investigations are all situated at the estuaries of rivers: Salavattota (Chilaw) at the Deduru-oya, Wattala at the Kelani Ganga, Kālalittha (Kalutara) at the Kalu Ganga, Bhīmatittha (Bentota) at the Bentota Ganga, Gimhatittha (Gintota) at the Gin-Ganga, Mahāvālukagāma (Weligama) at the Polwatta Ganga, Nilwalatittha (Matarā) at the Nilwala Ganga, Gothapabbata (Godavaya) at Walawe Ganga and Kirinda at the Kirindi Oya.

We 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 Uruvelapattna;¹⁰ at Nariyagama, on the left bank of Daduru Oya,¹¹ 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 Wattala¹² and at Ridiyagma on the left bank of the Walawe Ganga

⁷ O. Bopearachchi, 1999.

⁸ In his excellent study, J. Deloche (1980) has discussed in detail the role of ancient ports, situated beside rivers or lagoons on the coast of Tamilnadu. See also R. Nagaswamy (1991).

⁹ K. Karttunen, 1995, p. 85.

¹⁰ For the explorations conducted in the area around Giribawa, see O. Bopearachchi, 1999, p. 16.

¹¹ For the excavations conducted at the village of Nariyagama, 1998, see O. Bopearachchi, 1999, p. 8.

¹² Concerning the sondages in summer 1997, at the village of Pilapitiya close to Kelaniya, see O. Bopearachchi, 1999, pp. 10-13.

which flows to the sea at the ancient sea port of Gothapabbata.¹³ Although not each and every discovery made in our excavations is discussed here, the importance of major findings will be highlighted in relation to cross-cultural relationships between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

Let us now look at the archaeological evidence on cultural and trade relationships between Sri Lanka and South India during the proto-historic and early historic periods. Proto-historic Sri Lanka was more closely linked with South India. In the excavations conducted at Gedige in 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.¹⁴

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 shoulder portion of the Black and Red Ware attested from his excavations at Kodumanal in Tamil Nadu and from our explorations and excavations at Ridiyagama and Kelaniya in Sri Lanka. The moon symbol which takes the form of the Brāhmī *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, Ridiyagama and Kelaniya. 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 Anuradhpura.¹⁵

Various scholars have classified these symbols as potter's marks, owner's marks or as clan marks.¹⁶ K. Rajan identified the graffiti marks attested in the megalithic burials at Kodumanal as clan symbols, but he made it clear, based on statistical analyses, that graffiti found in the habitation had other meanings as well.¹⁷ 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 Lankan and Tamil Nadu sites enable us to suppose without much of a risk there was a continuous cultural and trade contact between these two regions. It is

¹³ For the results of the explorations and excavations at Ridiyagama, from 1993 to 1996, see O. Bopearachchi, 1999, pp. 13-16.

¹⁴ See S. Daraniyagala, 1972, 1986, 1992 for excavations at Gedige, Anuradhapura; V. Begley, 1970 for Pomparippu; V. Begley, 1967 for Kantarodai; and H.-J. Weisshaar, 1992, for Ibbankatuwa.

¹⁵ See S. Daraniyagala, 1972, p. 123-4 2 for excavations at Gedige, Anuradhapura.

¹⁶ S. Seneviratne (1984) identified a few of these symbols as clan or family symbols.

¹⁷ K. Rajan, 1997, pp. 79-80.

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, du Département des Science de la Terre de l'Eau et de l'Espace de l'Université Montpellier II Sciences, shows very clearly, in spite of the distance of more than two hundred kilometres which separate the two sites, the homogeneity of the pottery as far as the characteristic mineral inclusions are concerned.

The possibility of one production centre in time and space seems to have come to light thanks to the X-ray diffractometer analysis done by Indian and Australian specialists, on samples of so-called Rouletted Ware from various Indian, Sri Lanka and South-East Asian sites.¹⁸

As we know, Vimala Begley¹⁹ contested the hypothesis put forward by Mortimer Wheeler²⁰ 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 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.²¹ 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".²²

It is also interesting to note that the occurrence of the Rouletted Ware during the terminal phase of the NBP period (c. 250 B.C.) at Chanraketugarh,²³ Sisupalgarh,²⁴ Alagankulam²⁵ Arikamedu²⁶ and Anuradhapura²⁷ 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 B.C. with 68% probability, obtained from the context 9 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

¹⁸ See I.W. Ardika, et al. 1993 ; V.D. Gogte, 1997.

¹⁹ V. Begley, 1988.

²⁰ R.E.M. Wheeler et al. 1946.

²¹ S.U. Deraniyagala, 1992, p. 712.

²² V.D. Gogte, 1997, p. 83.

²³ V.D. Gogte, 1997, p. 80-2.

²⁴ B.B. Lal, 1949.

²⁵ R. Nagaswamy, 1991.

²⁶ V. Begley, 1988; V. Begley et al. 1996, pp. 115-285.

²⁷ S.U. Deraniyagala, 1992, pp. 712-3.

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.²⁸

The analyses of Rouletted Ware are still in an initial stage and some scholars do not completely share Gogte's hypothesis. K. Rajan is of the opinion that the amount of Rouletted Ware found in Tamil Nadu particularly in Alagankulam suggests that this ware would not have been produced in Chandraketugarh-Tamluk region alone. At Alagankulam more than two meter cultural deposit yielding Rouletted Ware covering a phase more than a century was found. If Rouletted Ware was continuously imported from Chandraketugarh-Tamluk region over a century as suggested by Gogte then other cultural material definitely would have come from that region. In contrast to that Alagankulam yielded quite a number of Roman artefacts, *Brāhmī* script of Sri Lankan origin, but not of the Chandraketugarh-Tamluk region. Therefore further collaborative evidence is necessary before coming to any conclusion.²⁹ Whether there might have been one or many producing centres, 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. So, 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.³⁰ The maximum number of finds is, not surprisingly, from Andhra and Tamilnadu region. Several discs made using broken rouletted Ware were unearthed from Tissamaharama.³¹ 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, 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 as in Alagankulam,³² the Indian sea port closest to Sri Lanka, the excavations at Kelaniya revealed three out of five major types of Rouletted Ware,³³ such as greyish pink Ware (grey slip inside, brown to sepia outside), greyish pink Ware (black slip inside, brown slip outside) and grey Ware (black slip inside and outside). Similar

²⁸ V.D. Gogte, 1997, p. 80-2, also see V.D. Gogte, in H.-J. Weisshaar, H. Roth & W. Wijeyapala, 2001, p. 198-202,

²⁹ Personal communication.

³⁰ S. Suresh, 1993.

³¹ The excavations conducted by Sri Lankan and German archaeologists under H.-J. Weisshaar & W. Wijeyapala (1993) at Akurugoda (Tissamaharama), yielded not only early historic Black and Red Ware, but also several fragments of Rouletted Ware, see V.D. Gogte, dans H.-J. Weisshaar, H. Roth & W. Wijeyapala, 2001, p. 198-202. As a result of clandestine diggings at Akurugoda and Minihagodana in Tissamaharama an unprecedented number of engraved disks made of Rouletted Ware were found; see O. Boppearachchi & R.M. Wickremesinhe, 1999, pp. 118-9.

³² Cf. R. Nagaswamy, 1991 and N. Kasinathan, 1992.

³³ Cf. S. Gurumurthy, 1981, p. 300.

types of Rouletted Ware are also attested in the Arikamedu excavations.³⁴ The Rouletted Ware is known to occur throughout the Coromandel coast and also in Sri Lanka indicating a well-established communication network linking the entire East coast of India with Sri Lanka. The results 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 South 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 semiprecious and precious stones, were found at Ridiyagama and Kelaniya. Among the beads of semiprecious 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 with corundum tip (missing) used for perforation, still seen stuck in the cavity, is one further proof that beads were cut, polished and perforated at the site of Tissamaharama.³⁵ 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 of 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 (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, Anuradahapura, 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.³⁶

The bead making industry at Arikamedu was large and productive.³⁷ 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,³⁸ have been reported in small quantities in the so-called Arretine and post-

³⁴ See for example, V. Begley et al., 1996, p. 243.

³⁵ see O. Bopearachchi & R.M. Wickremesinhe, 1999, p. 129, no. P. 34; pl. 36, P. 34.

³⁶ See R. Nagaswamy, 1991 for different varieties of beads from Alagankulam, and for beads of similar type see O. Bopearachchi, 1999, pp. 16-7; and from Tissamaharama, O. Bopearachchi & R.M. Wickremesinhe, 1999, pp. 126-31.

³⁷ P. Francis, 1987, p. 29.

³⁸ O. Bopearachchi, 1999, pp. 16-7.

Arretine periods of Arikamedu i.e. from the first century BC to the end of the second century AD.

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 Tamil Nadu 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, the important number of potash glass finds excavated in Arikamedu enables us to suppose that it was a glass producing workshop. The third glass type has close levels in soda and in 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 Tamil merchants in the early phase of Sri Lanka's history is numerous.³⁹ A recent study undertaken by I. Mahadevan has revealed the existence of a number of inscribed potsherds in the Prakrit (old Sinhalese) language written in the *Brāhmī* script, found at or near ancient sea ports along the east coast of India.⁴⁰ The seven inscribed potsherds published by Mahadevan, bearing Prakrit *Brāhmī* script were reported from ancient trade centres like Kodumanal, Arikamedu and Alagankulam.⁴¹ 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 *Brāhmī* script.⁴² Although only one of them has a complete word: Vēḷān, a masculine personal name in Tamil, other sherds bear just one or two characteristic Tamil-*Brāhmī* letters: ḷ, ḻ, ṛ, ṇ. As I. Mahadevan correctly pointed out these are the first examples of inscribed sherds in Tamil ever attested in Sri Lanka.⁴³ These inscriptions have been assigned on palaeographic grounds tentatively to about 2nd 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.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the coins labelled as Lakshmi plaques depicting the goddess Lakshmi, 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 in land around 250 km west of Kaveripatinam on the way to Chera country.

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. Hary Falk 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 coins.⁴⁵ 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 comparability with any type of coinage in the world.

Among the 44 coins that we have deciphered, two coins bear Tamil names. Coin no. A. 21 of our catalogue depicts on the obverse a floral design and on the reverse the legend in *Brāhmī* which we have deciphered as: 𑀧 𑀲 𑀭

³⁹ See for example, S. Paranavitana, 1970: lxxxix-xc, n° 94, n° 356, n° 480:

⁴⁰ I. Mahadevan, 1996 a & b.

⁴¹ Two other inscribed objects, a seal and a sealing were reported from Bengal (cf. I. Mahadevan, 1996b).

⁴² P. Pushparatnam, 1990.

⁴³ I. Mahadevan, 1996a, pp. 290-1.

⁴⁴ O. Bopearachchi, 1993, pp. 83-4.

⁴⁵ O. Bopearachchi & R.M. Wickremesinhe, 1999 and O. Bopearachchi, H. Falk & R. Wickremesinhe, 2000.

ūtiraṇa. Swastika 卐.⁴⁶ We concluded: “This coin is of utmost importance in that it presents us a personal name in a clear Tamil nominative form with an *akṣara* *ṇa* ண, representing an alveolar nasal, which is not found in Ceylonese *Brāhmī* rock inscriptions, but which is well-known from South Indian inscriptions in Tamil *Brāhmī*, and now also from two of our coins (here and no. A. 37 below)”.⁴⁷ I. Mahadevan, the foremost authority on Tamil *Brāhmī*, in a recent article, accepting our initial reading added: “The authors have correctly identified the Tamil alveolar nasal *ṇ* here and point out that <in Tamil texts, this character terminates proper names>. However the legend is *ū ti rā ṇa* which has to be read in accordance with the conventions of Early Tamil *Brāhmī*, as <Uttiraṇ>, a personal name in Tamil”.⁴⁸ He further developed his arguments pointing out: “The name Uttiraṇ is derived from Uttiram, the Tamil name for the asterism Uttara Phalguni. The name Uttiraṇ occurs in a Tamil *Brāhmī* pottery inscription from Arikamedu”.⁴⁹

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 *Brāhmī*, and tentatively proposed the following reading: ? λ ? ρ ξ ε ρ . ? (*ta*)*sapijana*, and concluded: “The reading is not absolutely clear, but the final *ṇa* makes it clear that here again a Tamil proper name is found in the nominative, as in no. A. 21”.⁵⁰ I. Mahadevan, proposed the following revised reading: *t[i*] sa pi tā ṇa*. <Tissa Piṭṭaṇ, a personal name partly in Prakrit and Tamil. Tissa is one of the most commonly used names in early inscriptions. As the name of parumakas it occurs 32 times.⁵¹ Representing Skt. *tiṣya* it again is the name of an auspicious asterism, known as a royal name from the time of *devānaṃpiya tissa* onwards.⁵² Regarding the Tamil name Piṭṭaṇ, Mahadevan has underlined that it is attested in Sangam literature and also in a Tamil *Brāhmī* inscription from Kongarpuliyankulam exactly as on our coin.⁵³

I. Mahadevan has also identified two more coins that we have published, and correctly interpreted the names as of Tamil origin. The first is no. A. 17 depicting a cock running to right on the obverse.⁵⁴ We read the Legend in *Brāhmī*: ॐ ८ ८ ८ ८ ८ *mahacita apo*, /*mahācitta appo*/, “Of Mahācitta”, Skt. **mahācitta- ātmanas*, admitting the greatest difficulties we had to decipher it. 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 30 clock position and proceeding in the clockwise direction. He reads it as: *ma la c[ā] ta a ṇa*.⁵⁵ He then pointed

⁴⁶ O. Bopparachchi & R.M. Wickremesinhe, 1999, p. 56, no. 21.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ I. Mahadevan, 2000, p. 152.

⁴⁹ I. Mahadevan, 1996a, fig. 5.30 et p. 315.

⁵⁰ O. Bopparachchi & R.M. Wickremesinhe, 1999, p. 59, no. A. 37.

⁵¹ S. Paranavitana, 1970, p. lxxxiv.

⁵² O. Bopparachchi & R.M. Wickremesinhe, 1999, p. 53.

⁵³ I. Mahadevan, 2000, p. 153.

⁵⁴ O. Bopparachchi & R.M. Wickremesinhe, 1999, no. A. 17, p. 54-5.

⁵⁵ I. Mahadevan, 2000, p. 153.

out that both *Mallaṅ* and *Cāttaṅ* occur as personal names in a Tamil *Brāhmī* inscription.⁵⁶ 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 *Brāhmī*: + 𑀓 𑀣 + 𑀧 𑀢 𑀓. ?*kapatikajaha apo*. Divider 𑀓, /?*kapatikajaha apo*/, “Of ?Kapatikaja”, we admitted that our reading of the name is more than uncertain.⁵⁷ I. Mahadevan’s revised reading is: *ka pā ti ka ṭā la a ṇa*. Mahadevan then pointed out that “Kapati Kaṭalan” is a personal name in Tamil with a prefixed title in Sinhala Prakrit: “The title *gapati* (var. *gapiti*) in Sinh. Pkt. is derived from Pāli *gahapati* <Skt. *grhapati* ‘householder’ a title borne by merchants and others”.⁵⁸ Mahadevan then shows that the change g- > k - in the title betrays Tamil influence. As far as the Tamil name *Kaṭalan* is concerned, he correctly draws the attention to references in Sangam literature and in an early Tamil *Brāhmī* inscription from Mangulam.⁵⁹

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,⁶⁰ 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),⁶¹ 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 such 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 hoards⁶² at the same site make us 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 on the Southern coast of Sri Lanka.

As I. Mahadevan⁶³ himself emphasised, in his remarkable article, recent discoveries in Tamilnadu of Sinhala Prakrit inscriptions on pottery from the

⁵⁶ I. Mahadevan, 2000, p. 153.

⁵⁷ O. Bopearachchi & R.M. Wickremesinha, 1999, no. A. 20, p. 55.

⁵⁸ I. Mahadevan, 2000, p. 154.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 153.

⁶⁰ O. Bopearachchi & R.M. Wickremesinha, 1999, no. B. 1, p. 61.

⁶¹ These numbers correspond to the catalogue of the book: O. Bopearachchi & R.M. Wickremesinha, 1999, pp. 51-60.

⁶² *Ibidem.* for coin moulds: pp. 61, 110-1; for money boxes and hoards: p. 98.

⁶³ I. Mahadevan, 2000, p. 154.

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 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 material culture in a given society.

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