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Tamil Inscriptions and Developments of Tamil Paleography - Special Reference To Villupuram

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the paleography of Tamil Nadu through graffiti and epigraphical sources, focusing on Villupuram, a prominent district with a rich history and culture. Paleography is an ancient writing system found in meager antiquities, but it could be the rudimentary writing style of the people in India, particularly Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has vast archaeological and epigraphical sources, which researchers have explored through excavations and exploration. Villupuram has the potential to have an ancient writing system that evolved from archaeological excavations by the department and individuals. Writing style originated from graffiti and epigraphical forms in ancient India, particularly Tamil Nadu. Literary sources have authenticated these letters, highlighting the importance of understanding the ancient writing system in Tamil Nadu. The study of ancient Tamil scripts shows that the Vatteluttu script, a rounded cursive form used in inscriptions, evolved from the Tamil-Brahmi script in the third century BCE. Inscriptions demonstrating the evolution of the old Tamil script can be found throughout the Villupuram area, especially in Jambai, Thondur, Neganurpatti, and Thirunathar Kundru.

Keywords: *Tamili, Tamil Brahmi, Epigraphy, graffiti, Pottery, Paleography, Vatteluttu.*

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Introduction

Villupuram is the prominent places having the enormous history and culture, which depicted by the sources. Earlier, it was conjoined by the other nearby districts namely Villupuram and Kallakurichi and renowned as South Arcot District. While known the history through the sources. Paleography is the ancient writing system which seen from ancient antiquities in very meager scale. However, this could be the rudimentary writing style of the people in India, especially Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has enormous archaeological sources and epigraphical sources. These are revealing

through excavations and exploration by the researchers. Villupuram is having the great potential of ancient writing system that evolved the Archaeological excavation by the Department also the individuals. Writing style is originated from graffiti form and epigraphical form in ancient India, particularly Tamil Nadu. Moreover, these letters are authenticating by the literary sources. This article has focused to reveal the paleography of Tamil through graffiti and epigraphical sources.

Early Historic

The letters were found in pots, caves and mountain walls referred to as Early Historic. Given the historical resources, the evolution of the letters and scripts is known as the Sangam Age. This period, which lasted from 500 BCE to 500 CE, is also known as the Indo-Roman period or the Megalithic Age in Tamil Nadu. The earliest stage of history can be divided into three parts. The first part covered the prehistory from pre history to 1st century BCE. The second part covered the first century BCE to 3rd century CE. The third part covered the 6th century BC to 6th century AD. The first two parts of the early history correspond to the Indo- Roman maritime trade. The third part of the history corresponds to the after the Sangam Age.

Each of these epochs had a distinct development. The earliest stage of history can be divided into three parts. The first part covered the prehistory from prehistory to 1st century BCE. The second part covered the first century BCE to 3rd century CE. The third part covered the 6th century BCE to 6th century CE. The first two parts of the early history correspond to the Indo-Roman maritime trade. The third part of the history corresponds to the after the Sangam Age. The earliest stage of history can be divided into three parts. The first part covered the prehistory from prehistory to 1st century BC. The second part covered the first century BCE to 3rd century CE. The third part covered the 6th century BCE to 6th century CE. The first two parts of the early history correspond to the Indo-Roman maritime trade. The third part of the history corresponds to the after the Sangam Age.

Origin and Chronology of Tamili

The question concerning the origin and antiquity of the Tamili script has been examined and debated by several scholars and epigraphists. Edward Thomas, a distinguished scholar, argued that the Brahmi script had its origins among the Dravidian people (Edward Thomas, 1883). His view was subsequently supported and further developed by the noted epigraphist T. N. Subrahmanyam. According to Subrahmanyam, the Tamili script was originally devised by the Tamil people to represent the phonetic and linguistic characteristics of the Tamil language (Subrahmanyam, 1955).

Subrahmanyam also proposed that the early form of Prakrit may have developed through interaction with or influence from Dravidian linguistic traditions in South India. In his interpretation, such linguistic developments could have contributed to the creation of a language that was more widely understood across different regions of the Indian subcontinent.

The origin and development of the Tamili script were later investigated by several scholars, including Dr. K. V. Ramesh, Dr. M. D. Sampath, Natana Kasinathan, and Dr. S. Rajavelu. Based on their studies, these scholars were inclined to assign an earlier date to the Tamili script and suggested that it may have been in use in the Tamil region before the widespread appearance of Asokan Brahmi. They proposed a tentative chronology extending to approximately the fifth or sixth century BCE.

Their conclusions were based on several types of evidence, including palaeographical and orthographical characteristics, linguistic features, the structure and simplicity of the letter forms, and archaeological discoveries. In particular, pottery fragments bearing Tamili inscriptions, recovered from different occupational layers at excavated sites in Tamil Nadu, have been considered important evidence in discussions concerning the chronology of the script.

According to this line of interpretation, the basic symbols associated with the Tamili writing system may have been adapted to accommodate the phonetic requirements of Prakrit. Additional signs were subsequently developed to represent sounds, particularly the varga consonants, that were not naturally required in the Tamil phonetic system. Such modifications have been associated with the adaptation and development of writing systems during the early historic period, possibly around the fourth century BCE.

Iravatham Mahadevan's Theory on The Date of Tamili

A different interpretation regarding the origin and date of the Tamili script was proposed by the eminent epigraphist Iravatham Mahadevan. Mahadevan argued that the Tamili script developed from Mauryan Brahmi and placed its emergence in Tamil Nadu around the second century BCE.

According to his theory, the script was introduced into the Tamil region primarily through the activities of Jain monks who migrated from northern India (Mahadevan, 2003).

To support this interpretation, Mahadevan referred to traditions concerning the migration of Jain ascetics towards southern India. A later Kannada literary tradition recounts that Chandragupta Maurya, the ruler of Magadha, travelled south with his teacher Bhadrabahu during a period of severe famine in Magadha. According to this tradition, they eventually settled at Sravanabelagola in present-day Karnataka.

The Jain community subsequently established its presence in Karnataka, and the spread of Jainism in the southern regions has traditionally been associated with these movements. Mahadevan further connected the transmission of Jain religious traditions to the southward movement of Jain monks. According to the traditional account cited in this context, Visakha Muni, a disciple associated with Bhadrabahu, travelled further south along with other Jain ascetics and entered the region of ancient Tamilagam. Mahadevan's interpretation suggests that these Jain monks played a significant role in

introducing and disseminating the Brahmi-based writing tradition in Tamil Nadu.

Thus, the chronology and origin of the Tamil script remain subjects of scholarly debate. While one group of scholars argues for an indigenous and earlier development of the script in the Tamil region, dating its beginnings to approximately the fifth or sixth century BCE, Iravatham Mahadevan proposed a later origin connected with the spread of Mauryan Brahmi and Jain influence, particularly around the second century BCE. These contrasting interpretations continue to form an important part of the academic discussion on the evolution and chronology of the Tamil script.

Early Historic Sites

The earliest stage of history can be divided into three parts. The first part covered the prehistory from pre-history to 1st century BCE. The second part covered the first century BCE to 3rd century CE. The third part covered the 6th century BCE to 6th century CE. The first two parts of the early history correspond to the Indo- Roman maritime trade. The third part of the history corresponds to the after the Sangam Age.

Tamil Brahmi Inscription Found in Villupuram Region

S.No	Name	Taluk	District	Nature	Date
1	Jambai	Thirukovilur	Villupuram (Kallakuruch)	Tamil- Brahmi inscription, Jain beds	4th century BCE
2	Thondur	Gingee	Villupuram	Tamil- Brahmi inscription, Jain beds	3rd century BCE
3	Nekanurpatti	Gingee	Villupuram	Tamil- Brahmi inscription, Jain beds	2nd century CE
4	Thirunatharkundru	Gingee	Villupuram	Tamil- Brahmi to Vatteluthu Inscription (transition period)	4th century CE
5	Veedur	Tindivanam	Villupuram	Tamil- Brahmi Inscription (Pottery Inscriptions)	1st century CE

The period between the time of the prehistory and the time of the Sangam was very important for human history. He may have learned about the hunting and gathering, the permanent settlement, the agriculture, the writing system, etc. These changes were shown at the excavation sites of Villupuram. Therefore, Villupuram can be considered as the museum of the transition from the prehistory to the time of the Pallavas. The same period also saw the emergence of the kingship. The

region of Tamil Nadu was ruled for a long time by the kings and the royals. We used to know history only from literary graffiti marks and the sacred songs. Some legends were born in the place and some migrated from there. The period of the imperial kingship extended in Tamil Nadu and the Cholas, the Pallavas, the Satahanas, the early Cholas, the Kalabhras, and the legends that lived before 9th century ruled the region for a while.

Paleography of Tamil

The Tamil-Brahmi (Tamizh Brahmi) is the earliest written source of the ancient Tamil people. This record has possessed many valuable messages of Tamil Country and the people, particularly the period of Sangam (or literary age). The date of Tamil can be deduced from the palaeography of Tamil Brahmi. The simple and rudimentary form of letters found in cave inscriptions and pottery inscriptions, which is almost certainly earlier than the standard form of Ahsokan Brahmi.

The Tamil-Brahmi script at Jambai has put all speculation to rest, as the epigraph reads: the abode given by "Athiyā Neduman Anci, the Satyaputo." (See picture No. 3 on Plates). The Jambai inscription of Adiyaman Nedumanji must belong to the second century A.D. In that inscription, Adiyaman is referred to as Sathyaputo, and the title is spelled exactly the same way as in the second rock-cut inscription of Asoka at Girnar. The letter shape is similar to Asokan edicts but not to the well-known legend on Satavahana King's coin from the second century A.D. In Marungur, Tamil Brahmi is found in the potsherds on the burial site. Also, it gives the inscription of two letters reading "a-m." The urn burials, broken in nature, had the inscription, which also contained the buried bones. Perhaps this site has been identified by Tamil-Brahmi letters on the grave sites.

The potsherds with Tamil Brahmi writing could be placed in three distinct urns. The urns were not the only burial artifacts (pottery) that were observed. It had five Tamil Brahmi letters: "a-ti-y(a)-ka-n." This could be read as "Atiykan" in Tamil, but the front position was horrifying consonant. The potsherd was made up of four Tamil Brahmi letters, similar to "a-m." Others have graffiti marks that look like Indus script. The final portion having the three letters "ma-la-a" and "major portion" was omitted. The sources are paleontologically dated to the first century B.C. This could be the major source of Tamil letters in the graffiti version found in the Cauvery Delta.

In Villupuram taluk, there is reference to Vatteluttu inscriptions (the transformation of Tamil Brahmi script). However, the nearby region of Villupuram has a large amount of the same. Due to the hills absence, the early inscriptions were not found in this region. But the Villupuram District, next to

Villupuram, traced Vatteluttu inscriptions from Thriunatharkundru, Arasalapuram, Paraiyanpattu, Neganurpatti, Onkur, Thumbur, Pakkam, Eduthavainattam, Melsirunagalur, Kalsirunagalure, and Sendiyampakkam.

Several settlements grew up in Tamil Nadu during the archaic period, particularly in hilly areas. But the plains like South Arcot District (especially Villupuram) were remarkable. Perhaps the coastal sites on the Coromandel Coast (present day Bay of Bengal) are limited. The archaeology excavations and explorations depicted coastal cities like Arikamedu, Uraiyur, Kaveripattinam, Vasavasamudram, Algankulam, and Karaikadu. The geographical and physiographic advantages that provided great opportunity to Villupuram flourished from prehistoric to modern times. The artifacts are identified in the place of Karaikadu and reveal the significance of trade and commerce flourishing, which looks a lot like Arikamedu.

As evidenced by archaeological sites, these prehistoric men are the ancestors of modern men. Villupuram has the antiquities to know about human transmission, skills, a writing system, and foreign trade. The Sangam age premises in this region revealed the significance of early rulers, which matched literary sources and coins relatively well. The Malayans' history revealed that they were dominated in this region by Kovalur. There are few sources depicting the Satavahanas in this region, but given the impression that their territory extended all over India, these sources are not very reliable. Pallavas from Kanchipuram ruled Thondaimandalam, which stretched all the way to Villupuram, while the Thiruppadiripuliyur and Thirunavukkarasar were related to MahendraVarma I. Finally, the Pallavas lost their territories, while later, the Cholas rose to power in the South Arcot District for many years.

Pottery Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu has yielded a significant number of pottery inscriptions containing Tamil or Tamil-Brahmi characters. Archaeological excavations conducted at nearly 35 sites have produced pottery fragments bearing short Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions. Many of these archaeological sites are associated with the Sangam Age and the Early Historic period of Tamil Nadu.

Approximately 1,200 inscribed pottery fragments have been reported from various archaeological sites, including Kīlāḍi in the Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu. These inscriptions generally consist of personal names, individual letters, or short labels written on pottery vessels. The occurrence of personal names on earthenware indicates that pottery was marked for purposes such as identification, ownership, or other forms of everyday use.

The discovery of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions on pottery from different regions of Tamil Nadu provides important archaeological evidence for the spread and use of writing among ancient Tamil communities. Such inscriptions are particularly valuable because they represent material evidence of written communication beyond literary and religious contexts.

Tamil-Brahmi Inscribed Pottery at Veedur

The discovery of Tamil-Brahmi inscribed pottery at Veedur provides further evidence for the use of writing in ancient Tamil society. The presence of inscriptions on ordinary pottery vessels suggests that writing was not confined exclusively to royal courts, religious institutions, or learned sections of society. Instead, the practice of marking pottery with letters and personal names indicates the possible use of writing in various aspects of daily life.

The rich literary heritage of the Tamil people, together with archaeological evidence, demonstrates the long-standing tradition of literacy and written communication in the Tamil region. Inscriptions found on pottery, seals, rings, coins, and hero stones collectively reveal the existence and development of a well-established writing tradition in ancient Tamil Nadu.

The occurrence of personal names and other short inscriptions on pottery is particularly significant. These inscriptions suggest that individuals and local communities used written symbols for practical purposes, including the identification of persons or objects. Such evidence has been discovered not only in major urban and trade centres but also in smaller and relatively remote settlements.

Tamil-Brahmi inscribed pottery has been reported from nearly 28 archaeological sites through both

systematic excavations and archaeological explorations. The widespread geographical distribution of these inscribed pottery fragments indicates that knowledge of writing had extended across different parts of ancient Tamil Nadu. Therefore, pottery inscriptions constitute an important source for understanding the development and dissemination of literacy in early Tamil society. Together with inscriptions found on other archaeological objects, they provide valuable evidence for the widespread presence of the Tamil writing tradition and its role in the social, cultural, and economic life of the ancient Tamil people. In the Villupuram district, for the first time, two inscribed potteries with Tamil Brahmi inscriptions were found during surface at the time of exploration in the Veedur village, which is a significant discovery. The inscriptions on those pot fragments were written in Tamil Brahmi “Norapala” and “Pasi”. The characters found on these fragments match those found in various regions such as Porundhal, Athichanallur, Azhagankulam, Kiladi and Kodumanal. This suggests that the Tamil Brahmi script could date back to almost 2000 years old. This indicates that the people who lived in this region were an educated society with literacy.

Scientific Dates

Recent scientific dating obtained from archaeological excavations at Porunthal, Kodumanal, and Kīlāḍi has contributed significantly to the ongoing discussion regarding the chronology of the Tamil script. The results from these excavated sites have provided archaeological and scientific evidence that is relevant to the palaeographical dating of early Tamil inscriptions. Prof. K. Rajan conducted archaeological excavations at Porunthal in 2009. The site is located near Palani in Tamil Nadu and forms an important archaeological location in the Kongu region. The excavation produced several significant cultural materials, including pottery, ring stands, and organic remains that could be subjected to scientific dating.

Radiometric dates obtained from samples recovered during the excavation provided important chronological evidence for the early historic cultural deposits at Porunthal. A series of scientific dates obtained from laboratories in the United

States indicated an early chronological framework for the archaeological context in which inscribed materials were discovered. One of the most significant results was obtained through Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) dating of paddy grains recovered from the excavation. According to Prof. Rajan, the AMS date obtained from the Porunthal paddy sample was approximately 520 BCE (Rajan, 2015). This scientific date has played an important role in discussions concerning the antiquity of the Tamil or Tamil-Brahmi script.

paddy grains were recovered from the same archaeological context as a pottery ring stand bearing an inscription. The inscription has been read as *vayara* and is written in Tamil characters. The association of the organic sample with the inscribed archaeological material has therefore been considered significant in establishing the chronological context of the inscription. From a palaeographical perspective, the characters found on the Porunthal inscribed object have been assigned to the second developmental stage of the Tamil script. The scientific dating of the associated archaeological context, together with palaeographical analysis of the letter forms, has strengthened arguments for an earlier chronology of

the script. Thus, the evidence obtained from Porunthal, along with discoveries and scientific dates from Kodumanal and Kīlāḍi, represents an important development in the study of the origin and chronological evolution of the Tamil script. These archaeological findings continue to contribute to scholarly discussions concerning the antiquity, development, and palaeographical classification of early Tamil writing.

Conclusion

Tamil is the classical language believed the root language for other Dravidian languages. The origin and growth of languages of Tamil was in archaic period in Tamil Nadu. The Archaeological sources like graffiti and epigraphical exhibited the genesis of the writing system of Tamil Nadu, especially in Villupuram region. Earliest version of Tamil has been renowned as *tamili* are identified in and around places of Villupuram, may reveal the proper evidence of growth of tamil language. Indeed, these sources are symbolizing the historical importance of Villupuram through the sources. Thus, the paleographical evidences proved that the inhabitants are happened more ancient; also know that the people are intellectuals.

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