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RESEARCH ARTICLE

### COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTIONS

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#### Abstract

The Copper Plate Inscriptions of India are historical legal records inscribed on copper plates of the Indian subcontinent. South India, a land flooded with Temple towns, mysterious, myth, and the beauty is also called the land of inscriptions. Majority of the epigraphs found in India are situated in the southern states, with Tamil Nadu having the maximum number of inscriptions. Copperplate inscriptions in Tamil are copperplate records of grants of villages, Grant dates range from the 10th century AD to his mid-19th century. Most of the grants belong to the Chalukya, Chola and Vijayanagar kings. These plates are of great epigraphic value, as they provide insight into the social conditions of medieval South India.

#### Introduction

Indian copper plate inscriptions (tamarashasana), usually record grants of land or lists of royal lineages carrying the royal seal, a profusion of which have been found in South India. Originally inscriptions were recorded on palm leaves, but when the records were legal documents such as title-deeds they were etched on a cave or temple wall, or more commonly, on copper plates which were then secreted in a safe place such as within the walls or foundation of a temple, or hidden in stone caches in fields. Plates could be used more than once, as when a canceled grant

was over-struck with a new inscription. These records were probably in use from the first millennium.

Copper plate charters recording religious land grants were widely prevalent in early medieval India. Such land grants were normally tax-free and permanent in nature. They were to be enjoyed by the recipient from generation to generation. That is the reason why such land grants used to be engraved on copper plate charters. In Sanskrit, copper plates are known variously as tamrasasana, tamra-paṭṭa, tamra-paṭṭika etc. Often only the term sasana is used to refer to the gift village. Banabhatta in his Kadambari also used the term in the same sense. Often we find that the gift villages had such sasanas on their boundaries.

297

### ***The emergence of the Copper plate charters***

The inscriptions of the Satavahanas refer to pattika thereby indicating the prevalence of copper plate charters for recording land grants. Unfortunately none of them has come down to us. In Cave no.3 at Nasik three inscriptions have a format similar to the copper plates. These inscriptions might be copies of actual pattikas issued by the Satavahana kings and they were written by the recipients of the gifts on the cave walls to proclaim the donation of the rulers.

The earliest copper plate charters in India are found in areas like eastern Deccan, western Deccan, central India and Kathiawad in the 4th century. They reveal the existence of some kind of a model or format for drafting such records since certain concepts and terminologies appear as common in them. As for instance, the phrases signifying various types of parihas (privileges) like a-raṭṭa-saṁviveyika (freedom of the gift land from administrative control), a-parampara-go-balivarda (free from the supply of bullocks), in the Basim copper plate of Vākāṭaka Vindhyaśakti and a-raṭṭa-saṁvinayikaṁ, a-parampara-balivaḍhaṁ etc. in the Mayidavolu copper plate of Pallava Sivaskandavarman are similar. Again both the Vakataka and Pallava grants begin with dṛiṣṭam/ dīṭham (seen), a number of Vedic sacrifices have been enumerated in the grants of both of the families at the beginning and so on. Besides, the Mayidavolu copper plate clearly refers to the concept of granting parihas together with Brahmadeya to the brahmanas. The Basim copper plate refers to the grant of land in perpetuity (a candadisa-kalako) and also to the grant of parihas. That religious grants made to the brahmanas should be tax-free, accompanied with parihas or certain privileges and should be made in perpetuity is a concept that we first come across in the Arthasastra.

### ***Indian Copper Plate Inscriptions***

The Copper Plate Inscriptions of India are historical legal records inscribed on copper plates of the Indian subcontinent. Donation inscriptions engraved on copper plates, often joined by a ring containing the seal of the donor, were legal documents registering the act of donation. Presumably, it was

required to be submitted when necessary to prove a claim of ownership or title. The retrievability of copper plates was probably crucial in newly settled lands. Detailed information on land title and taxation available from these copper plate grants.

### ***South India Copper Plate Inscriptions***

South India, a land flooded with Temple towns, mysterious, myth, and the beauty is also called the land of inscriptions. Majority of the epigraphs found in India are situated in the southern states, with Tamil Nadu having the maximum number of inscriptions. These inscriptions are of two types-the lithic inscriptions which are found carved on temple walls and those found inscribed on sheets of copper-plates. While the lithic type is very numerous, the copper-plate records are not as plentiful. However, this paucity is more than made up by the fact that these copper-plate inscriptions are replete with historical facts and together with the stone records, have benefited the historians and archaeologists. This has led in retracing the history of the numerous ruling houses which were left untouched over the periods.

These copper-plate inscriptions, issued by almost all the major dynasties and also some of the vassal chieftains, have been accidentally discovered at various times and in different places. The farmers found it lay beneath the earth and discovered while ploughing their fields. The copper-plate inscriptions have sometimes been found stored in rooms locked centuries ago and never opened, and also sometimes in old abandoned houses. Fascinating as they seem, these copper-plate inscriptions are broad sheets of copper, held together by a thick ring and crowned by the seal of the dynasty which issued it. The discovery and decipherment of these epigraphs serves as a matter of great exhilaration to historians and students of epigraphy.

The copper-plate inscriptions usually give detailed information about the grant of land to temples or to scholars noted for their intellectual capabilities by the ruling king. They were meant to be a record given to the donee and to the donee's family for safekeeping.

The copperplate inscriptions are written according to a prescribed format. Starting with one or more verses in Sanskrit in praise of deities, they go on to give the lineage of the king who issued this record and then describe the grant in detail such as the name of the village or the land in the village which was donated, the name of the donee and some details about the donee's family.

Even the name of the copyist who engraved the inscriptions have not been left out, nor the names of the officials and helpers who assessed the land and actually participated in the entire proceedings. While the first part of the inscription is usually in Sanskrit, the second portion, giving the details of the grant is normally in the language of the area in which it is issued, such as Tamil, Telugu or Kannada.

These copper-plate inscriptions as a rule conclude with imprecise verses with a curse on all those who may, in future, dare to take away or tamper with the gift or grant given to the donees.

### ***Tamil copper-plate inscriptions***

Copperplate inscriptions in Tamil are copperplate records of grants of villages, plots of arable land, or other privileges to individuals or public institutions by members of various dynasties in South India. The study of these inscriptions is of particular importance in reconstructing the history of Tamil Nadu. Grant dates range from the 10th century AD to his mid-19th century. Most of the grants belong to the Chalukya, Chola and Vijayanagar kings. These plates are of great epigraphic value, as they provide insight into the social conditions of medieval South India. They also help fill chronological gaps in the relevant history of the ruling dynasties. For example, the Palantaka Chola's Leiden Subsidy (so called because it is preserved in the Leiden Museum in Holland) and the Parakesari Uttama Chola Subsidy are among the most important but the most useful parts, That is, the genealogy part. The latter plate appears to have been lost. Vijaynagar Tamil Copper Plate Inscription in Dharmeshwara Temple at Kondalahari, Hoskote Unlike neighboring states where early inscriptions

were written in Sanskrit and Prakrit, early inscriptions in Tamil Nadu also used Tamil in addition to some Prakrit. Although Tamil has extant texts within the Dravidian language, it is difficult to date the language and texts precisely. Indian literary works were preserved either by palm-leaf manuscripts (meaning repeated copying and recopying) or by oral tradition, so direct dating was not possible. However, external chronicles and internal linguistic evidence indicate that the extant work was probably compiled between the 4th century BC and the 3rd century AD. Tamil inscription evidence begins with a 3rd century BC rock inscription written in Tamil Brahmi, an adaptation of the Brahmi script. The oldest extant literary text is the Tolkapyaam, a work on poetics and grammar that describes the language of the Classical period, and dates from the 5th century BC to the 2nd century AD.

### ***Grants***

One of the most important historical documents in the Indian subcontinent is the records of royal grants inscribed on copper plates (Tamla Shasan or Tamra Patra. Tamra is in Sanskrit and some other Indian languages. means copper). Copper doesn't rust or corrode, so it's practically permanent. A collection of archaeological documents from copperplates and petroglyphs has been compiled and published by the Archaeological Survey of India over the past century. The approximate dimensions of the copper plate are 93/4 inch long x 31/4 inch high x 1/10 (~1/16) inch thick. The earliest copperplate, known as the Sogaura Copperplate, is a Maurya record that mentions hunger relief efforts. This is one of the few pre-Ashoka Brahmi inscriptions of him in India.

### ***Conclusion***

To sum up, the growing practice of issuing copper plate inscription from the 4th century onwards definitely brought in changes in polity, economy and society. But the impact of such changes was always area-specific and to be studied in the background of the geographical and cultural set-up of the area-concerned.

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