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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN POOMPUHAR

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu has enormous towns and cities, which glorified during the ancient period, reflects the habitual life of people. These cities are mentioned in the ancient literatures which authenticated by the archaeological findings. On the path, Puhar could be the prominent city has major historical and archaeological importance in the history of Tamil Nadu. The ancient city of Puhar was destroyed by the sea around 300 B.C., Marine archaeologists from the National Institute of Oceanography have established that this could have been the effects of sediment erosion and periodic tsunamis. Such a tsunami had mentioned on Manimekalai, a Tamil literary work. The earliest reference to puhar can be founded in the old Sangam era epics as well as the Periplus of the Eythraean sea, the travelogue by an anonymous merchant penned during the 1st century CE. The town was built on the north banks of the river Kaveri. The market place was known as *Naalangadi* during the day and as *allangadi* by night. This article deals to exhibit the importance of Archaeological sites in Poompuhar, and also reveals the significance of the town in Ancient period.

Key words: Naalangadi, Allangadi, Archaeological sites, Oceanography, Poompuhar, Ancient literature.

Introduction

Till even a hundred years ago any connection between the sleepy little town of puhar in the Nagapattinam Districts of Tamil Nadu and the exotic city of poompuhar described in the sangam era epics

was brushed aside as a flight of fancy. Today after many rounds of painstaking excavations historians are slowly piecing together the connections and making out lines between legend and history as the story of this 2000 year old port comes alive. The earliest reference to puhar can be founded in the old Sangam era epics as well as the Periplus of the Eythraean sea, the

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travelogue by an anonymous merchant penned during the 1st century CE.

It has now been established by marine archaeological research (conducted by the National institute of marine archaeology, Goa) that much of the town was washed away by progressive erosion and floods. In the 1960s and 1970s, archaeological researches were conducted under the leadership of the noted archaeologist K. V. Soundararajan. Submerged wharves and several meter lengths of pier walls excavated in recent times have corroborated the literary references to Poompuhar. It was rebuilt several times after that. Ancient Pottery dating back to the 4th century BCE have been discovered off shore by marine archaeologists east of this town.

The general plan of the city of Puhar is described in considerable detail in the fifth book of Silappathikaram. The town was built on the north banks of the river Kaveri. The town had two distinct districts, **Maruvurpakkam** near the sea and **Pattinappakkam** to its west. These two villages were separated by a stretch of gardens and orchards where daily markets were held under the shades of the trees. The market place was known as Naalangadi during the day and as allangadi by night.

Maruvurpakkam

The district of maruvurpakkam was near the beach and had several terraced mansions and warehoused with windows shaped like the eyes of the deer. Maruvurpakkam being close to the shore and hence to the shipyard was naturally preferred by the many overseas travellers, merchants and yavanas (Greeks).

Maruvurpakkam was inhabited by the fisher folk. The town had several warehouses. Weavers, silk merchants, vendors, fish and meat seller s, potters, grain merchants, jewellers and diamond makers lived in Maruvurppakkam.

Pattinappakkam

The King and nobles, rich traders, physicians, astrologers, members of the king's army, court dancers occupied Pattinappakkam. The five Manrams - Vellidai Manram, Elanchi

Manram, Nedankal manram, Poothachathukkam and Pavaimanram were located in Pattinappakkam. Gardens like Elavanthikaicholai, Uyyanam, Chanpathivanam, Uvavanam, and Kaveravanam added beauty to the town.

The city of Poompuhar is a very ancient one. Legends relate how great Muchukunda Chola once led his troops to guard the kingdom of Lord Indra, Amaravati, in the battle against some powerful demons, who were in possession of very destructive weapons. The king and his soldiers held guard without sleeping for 3600 years and as a matter of gratitude Lord Indra ordered his chief engineer Vishwakarma to build the city on the same lines of Amaravati. He also presented the king with a Sivalingam that he personally worshipped. The great Tamil work Silappathikaram says that in Puhar ships creaked with wealth from all 7 continents, that the Devas in guise of humans came and worshipped in its temples and that the nights were so bright that even a small grain of white lentil dropped in the beach sand could be spotted by naked eye.

Descriptions on Tamil Works

A Purananuru poem says that big ships entered the port of Puhar without slacking sail, and poured out onto the beach precious merchandise brought from overseas. In the extensive markets of Puhar there were many tall mansions surrounded by platforms reached by high ladders. These mansions had many apartments and were provided with doorways, great and small, and with wide hallways and corridors. In all parts of the town there were flags flying of various kinds and shapes. Pattinappaalai, a poem that describes the ancient Puhar very vividly, was written by the poet Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanaar is part of the Ten Idylls anthology and was sung in praise of Karikala Chola, a first-century BCE Chola king.

Trade and Commerce

Pattinappaalai also gives an idealized description of the merchants plying their trade in Puhar

They shunned murder, and put aside theft, pleased the gods by fire offerings,...they regarded others rights as scrupulously as their own, they took nothing more than was due to them and never gave less than was due from them. Trading thus in many articles of merchandise,

they enjoyed an ancient heritage of prosperity and lived in close proximity to one another.

The ancient city of Puhar was destroyed by the sea around 300 BC. Marine archaeologists from the National Institute of Oceanography have established that this could have been the effects of sediment erosion and periodic tsunamis. Such a tsunami is mentioned in the Tamil poem Manimekhalai, which relates that the town Kaveripattinam or Puhar was swallowed up by the sea. This event is supported by archaeological finds of submerged ruins off the coast of modern Poompuhar. The town of Kaveripattinam is believed to have disappeared around 300 BC due to this tsunami.

The ancient Tamil poem Manimekalai by the poet Seethalai Saathanar is set in the town of Kaveripattanam. Ancient ruins of a 4th-5th-century Buddhist monastery, a Buddha statue, and a Buddhapada (footprint of the Buddha) were found in another section of the ancient city, now at Pallavanesvaram. Also some claim that Manimekalai attained Mukti there.

Conclusion

A beautiful building of great sculptural value has been built as Silappathikara Art Gallery. Scenes from Silappadikaram, the Epic of the land have been given lively shapes in stones on the walls of the Gallery. These sculptures carved by the sculptors of Mamallapuram Art College remain the treasure house of Tamil Culture. Masilamani Nathar Koil, Tarangambadi Though heavily eroded by the sea in a number of places, this temple built in 1305 by Maravarma Kulasekara Pandiyan, still manages to

impress all the tourists to Poompuhar with its architectural richness.

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