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RESEARCH ARTICLE

HISTORY OF EARLY TAMIL NADU HISTORY THROUGH THE NUMISMATIC EVIDENCE

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Abstract

Numismatic evidence plays a crucial role in understanding the history of Tamil Nadu, just as it does in the study of the history of any region. Numismatics is the study of coins, and ancient coins can provide valuable insights into various aspects of a region's history, including its political, economic, social, and Cultural Revolution. Coins often bear inscriptions or dates, which can help historians, establish a chronology of rulers and dynasties in Tamil Nadu. By examining the sequence of rulers and the evolution of coinage, historians can construct a timeline of political and dynastic changes in the region. Numismatic evidence can reveal regional variations in coinage within Tamil Nadu. Different dynasties and local authorities may have issued their coinage, showcasing the diversity of power structures and coinage practices within the region.

Keywords: Chera, Chola, Pandiya, Pallavas

Introduction

In the realm of historical investigation, numismatics holds a place of significant importance alongside epigraphy, particularly when it comes to unravelling and establishing the intricate history of Tamil Nadu. It is the coins, more than anything else, that offer invaluable insights into the past. Among these numismatic treasures, the coins of the Moovendar dynasty issued during the Sangam period, as well as those from the reign of Pandyan kings, such as the renowned Peruvaluthi coin and the Chechian coin, stand as monumental contributions to our

understanding. The historical narrative and economic tapestry of Tamil Nadu can be unveiled through a careful study of the coins issued by the Chera, Chola, Pandiya kings, and also by examining the economic exchanges between Tamil Nadu and other states, as depicted in the coins from these regions. Additionally, foreign coins and seafarers' notes found within Tamil Nadu's boundaries offer glimpses into the barter systems and economic disparities that characterized ancient India. noteworthy that the transition from barter systems to standardized coinage marked a pivotal moment in the economic evolution of the subcontinent. These coins, fashioned from gold, silver,

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bronze, and iron, were tailored to suit the prevailing economic conditions and the requirements of the ruling authorities. As time progressed, they underwent refinement, reflecting the changing eras and cultures they served.

Tamil Coins of the Sangam Period: A Glimpse into Ancient Tamil Country

Coins, often regarded as silent witnesses to history, hold a unique position in understanding and defining historical periods. When we explore the realm of Tamil coins during the Sangam period, we delve into a fascinating chapter of ancient currency and civilization. Notably, there are no coins that precede the Sangam period, making this era a crucial milestone in Tamil numismatics. One of the noteworthy discoveries of this period pertains to the coins attributed to the Palam Pandya kings. These coins provide a valuable window into the past, offering insights into the economic and cultural dimensions of the time. These coins, unlike contemporary currency, were distinctive in shape - square and oblong, setting them apart as unique artifacts. On one side of these Palam Pandya coins, we find a prominent fish symbol, a striking representation of the maritime heritage and significance of fishing in the region. On the reverse side, one can observe an equally compelling symbol - an elephant or an ox. These symbols offer a glimpse into the multifaceted aspects of life during the Sangam period, where agriculture and trade were vital aspects of the economy. Dating these coins is a challenging yet crucial aspect of numismatic research. The coins from this period are estimated to have been in circulation from the fifth century AD to the second century AD. While these estimates offer a broad timeline, they are essential in contextualizing the historical narratives of the time.

The Sangam period coins have also been discovered at sites like *Kovalan Potal* in the *Palanganantham* area of Madurai, further confirming their existence and usage during this fascinating era. These coins serve as tangible links to a past where culture, commerce, and civilization thrived, and they are invaluable for historians, archaeologists, and enthusiasts alike in piecing together the puzzle of the Sangam period's rich history. The Tamil coins of the

Sangam period, particularly those attributed to the Pandya kings, are both intriguing artefacts and essential historical markers. Their unique shapes and symbols provide us with a vivid glimpse into the economic and cultural fabric of the time, contributing to our understanding of the rich tapestry of Tamil history.

Role of Coins to Construct the Tamils History

The unearthing of square copper coins from the 4th or 5th century BC in the 18th century provided a precious window into this enigmatic past. These coins, devoid of royal effigies, feature an elephant on the obverse and a bow and arrow on the reverse, and are widely attributed to Janapada groups. Remarkably, certain coins are ascribed to the further highlighting the multifaceted nature of numismatics in historical reconstruction. These coins, intricately engraved with clan symbols, offer insights into the socio-political landscape of their era. However, the tangible aspects such as the shape and weight of coins, like the fabled gold *kanam* and *kasu* coins mentioned in Sangha literature, remain shrouded in historical ambiguity. Exploring the archaeological treasure troves of Sangam Tamil Nadu, notably *Thavlechuram*, yields a trove of 127 gold coins, featuring denominations like *Kasu*, *Palankasu*, and *Matai*. These coins are adorned with Chola period inscriptions, marking significant historical milestones. Interestingly, the composition of coins found in different locations varies; some are crafted from alloys rather than pure gold. This divergence underscores the economic dynamism of the time, signifying the shifts in material wealth and resources that influenced coinage. Moreover, the transition from gold to copper coins in later Chola periods signifies the evolving economic landscape. Numismatics acts as a witness to this economic metamorphosis, enabling historians to trace the region's prosperity and monetary practices. It showcases the intricate interplay between politics, economy, and culture throughout Sangam Tamil Nadu's history, illuminating a path for historians to decipher the intricate narratives of this ancient civilization. In this way, numismatics serves as a valuable tool for understanding the complex historical establishment of Sangam Tamil Nadu.

Symbols and inscriptions of coins

Like the Pandyar coins, Cherar coins are also available along with North Indian stamps, with Cherar symbols of their bows and arrows engraved on them. Often one side of the Cheras' coins features their clan symbol, an arrow with a tinned bow. On the other side there are symbols like elephant, bow with arrow, trident, fish, river etc. Among the kings of the Sangam era, the Cheras were the ones who issued the most coins in their names. Cherar coins are mostly found in Karur and Amaravati river basins. A few are also available in Thanjavur, Madurai, Thirukkoilur, Madikeri (Karunadagam). Prathipattu is the best source book to know about Cheras. It refers to two-way inheritance. One is a legacy of Imayavaramban Neduncheraladan, his younger brother Palyanaichchelkelu Kuttuvan, his people Kalangaikanni Narmudicheral, Kadapirach Kotiya Senguttuvan and Adukotpat Cheralathan. Imayavaramba is said to be Uthyancherai, the father of Neduncheralada. So this way can be considered as the planning way. Another line was Selvakatungo Vaziyathan, his son Peruncheral Paruporai, Kuttuvan Irumporai. They are mentioned as Irumporai, son of Guttuvan Irumporai. Selvak Katungo Vaziyathan's father was Anthuvanseral Irumporai. So they can be said to belong to Porayan or Anthuvan Cheral. Looking at the kings mentioned in other literature along with these people, Cheras, Cheran, Cheralathan, Gothai, Kuttuvan, Irumporai are mentioned. However, if we look at the available coins (Kollipurai, Kollirumpurai) Kuttuvan Gothai, Makkotai) "Porai", Gothai" are mentioned. Looking at the script, the letters Kollipurai and Kollirumpurai in the coin and Chellirumpurai in the Bukulur Tamil Brahmi inscription seem to be similar in time. Therefore, it is acceptable that the king who engraved the inscription and issued the coin was the same king. Airavatham Mahadevan predicts the period to be 2nd century AD. So based on all the data the period of these coins can be estimated as 2nd century AD. He has identified himself as Ilangatungon who sang Marutham has effectively studied Sangam literature. Gurunathan Mandaram Porayan Katungo and Kocheraman Yanikatsei Mantaracheral Irumporai was a king Selvak Katungo who belonged to the era of Vaziyathan. He clearly explains that his name Mandaruncheral Irumporai is equated with

Anthuvancheral Irumporai and Mandaram Porayan Katungon with Katungoven and Selvakatungo Vaziyathan. He also claims that he is Selvakatungo's brother or guardian and puts literary evidence to confirm it. Also, according to the three traditions mentioned in the inscriptions, Kalura explains that the descendant (son) of Mandaruncheral Irumporai was Perungadungo who sang Bala and his son Ilangadungo who sang Marutham. King Mandaruncheral Irusurai also conquered Kollimalai. Therefore, it is clear beyond doubt that Mandaruncheral Irumporai was the king who issued this coin and also the king who engraved the inscription.

Age of Early Chola Coins

Early Chola coins are ancient coins that were issued during the rule of the Early Chola dynasty, which was a prominent South Indian dynasty that existed from around the 3rd century BCE to the 9th century CE. These coins provide valuable insights into the economic and political history of the Chola dynasty and the broader region of South India. Early Chola coins were typically made of copper and are known as "copper kasu" in Tamil. Some gold and silver coins were also issued, but they were relatively rare.

The designs on Early Chola coins were relatively simple. They often featured various symbols, including the Chola tiger emblem, which was a prominent motif. The tiger represented the royal emblem of the Chola dynasty and symbolized the power and authority of the Chola kings. Many Early Chola coins were inscribed with legends in Tamil script. These inscriptions typically included the name of the ruling Chola king and sometimes the title or epithets associated with the ruler. Early Chola coins were often rectangular or square in shape. The inscriptions and motifs were impressed onto these metal pieces, making them recognizable as Chola coins. Chola coins came in various denominations, with different weight standards. Some coins were quite small, while others were larger and more valuable. These variations allowed for different types of transactions.

The Chola dynasty was a major maritime and trading power in South India, and their coins played a significant role in facilitating trade within the region

and with foreign merchants. It's important to note that the design and features of Chola coins evolved over the centuries as the dynasty's influence and power expanded. Later Chola coins, from the Medieval and Later Chola periods, exhibited more intricate designs and inscriptions. Early Chola coins are not only important historical artefacts but also valuable for numismatists and historians studying the history of South India. They provide essential evidence for understanding the economic and political history of the region during the Chola dynasty's early phase.

Pandiya Age coins

The Pandya dynasty, which ruled in the southern part of India, particularly in the Tamil Nadu region, issued various coins throughout their history. The earliest Pandya coins can be traced back to around the 4th century BCE and are significant in the numismatic history of South India. These coins provide insights into the economic and political aspects of the region during their rule. The early Pandya coins were typically made of copper or alloyed with other metals. These coins were predominantly copper, and some might have had silver or gold plating. The design of these coins often featured various symbols, including the bow and arrow, fish, and different types of animals. These symbols could be seen on the obverse (the front) of the coin. The design and inscriptions on Pandya coins evolved over time, reflecting the changing political dynamics and rulers of the dynasty. Different rulers introduced their own coinage, each with its distinct features. It's important to note that the Pandya dynasty, like many ancient dynasties, saw changes in their coinage over the centuries. The Pandya dynasty existed for a significant period, and their coinage can be a valuable source of historical information for researchers and numismatists interested in the region's history.

The suburbs (ports) of the Pandyan country, such as Korkai and later, the old backwaters, hold a rich historical significance. Akanagar (also known as Konagar) has historical roots tracing back to the late Madurai period. Gonagar was a territory ruled by a king, and following his demise, the prince had been actively involved in assisting the kingdom. Notably, the sea near Korkai yielded a substantial number of

pearls, transforming the area into a center for pearl harvesting and trade. The port of Korkai was bustling with activity, hosting numerous ships belonging to the Yavanas and Arabs, various types of boats, canoes, and the distinctive "ambis" and "navais" of the Pandyas. The Yavanas were known to exchange gold coins and gold bars for valuable commodities like pearls, pepper, and sandalwood. Coins that were issued by the Pandyas are not only prevalent in places like Madurai and Korkai but also extend to regions like Sri Lanka. Recent findings, as reported by the Mysore Archaeological Research Department, reveal the discovery of numerous coins from the Pandiya in the Mysore region. Furthermore, coins from the Three Crowned Kings are also abundant. Nevertheless, among the coins found today, the Pandyan coins stand out as the most ancient.

The Pandyan dynasty holds the distinction of being pioneers in coinage, possibly minting coins as early as the first century A.D. However, the coins issued by the Pandyas during the fifth century are particularly widespread and well-documented. It's worth noting that coins from the Cherar and Chola dynasties are notably absent in records until the tenth century, emphasizing the early prominence of Pandyan coinage. Recent discoveries, like the Karigalan coins in Kaveripoompattinam, continue to unveil the historical wealth of this region.

Southeast Asian countries

The ancient Tamils did not have sea trade only with the Malayas. They also had maritime trade relations with the lower countries like China, Malaysia, Java, and North Bornea. Chola coins have been found in Thailand and China, and Chola connections with East Asian countries have been confirmed. Historians have also been able to trace Tamil Country's connection with their respective countries through the coins of Phoenician kings and Sasanian kings found in Tamil Country. It is known that ancient Tamil Country had sea trade relations with Thailand in Southeast Asia centuries before the birth of Christ. Carnelian beads, glass beads, carnelian seals etc. belonging to India have been found there. A copper coin of the Chola king has also been found. Through this, it seems that the ancient Tamils were engaged in sea trade with the country.

Tamil Country also played a major role in the maritime trade between East Asian countries and Rome. It is said that they used to purchase many goods from countries like China, Malaysia, and Java and exported them to western countries.

Conclusion

In the field of numismatics, a human figure has now been identified for the first time on a Sangam Chola coin. That is what this article is about. Starting from the 4th century and till 1867 AD, various kings who ruled Tamil Country issued their coins. Among these are From the 4th century AD. The coins that circulated in Tamil Country during the Sangam period up to the 3rd century are known as 'Sanga period Tamil coins'. These coins were mostly made of copper and were square in shape. Rare silver coins and circular coins are also available. Circular coins from Coins issued in the 1st-3rd century AD are considered to be late Sangam period coins. These coins always bear the government emblem of the governments that issued them on one side, i.e. tiger in Chola coins, fish in Pandya coins and bow in Chera coins. Other symbols are found on the other side. Thus in the coins of the Sangam period, one of the main symbols engraved on the reverse side is the elephant. All the coins of the Sangam period found elephants engraved on them. These elephants are seen alone or with horses, mangal symbols, guard trees etc. In this case, 10 years ago found a coin with a fairly clear image, which has a white umbrella over the elephant and *Srivatsa* symbol below the umbrella. In particular, the coins of Moovendar stamps issued during the Sangam period, the coins of the Pandyan kings such as the Peruvaluthi coin and the Chechiyan coin are the major contributors. The history and economy of Tamil Country can be known through the coins issued by Cera, Chola, Pandiya kings, and the economic imbalances of India through the coins of other state kings found in Tamil Country. Coins of foreign kings and seafarers' notes found in Tamil Country can predict the barter systems

and economic imbalances of ancient India. After the end of the barter system, coins were accepted as a proper medium of exchange. Coins like gold, silver, bronze and iron were introduced according to the economic condition of the respective ruler. They refined it over time and designed it to suit their respective eras.

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