

Historical Significance of Recent Discovery of Tamils' Coins of the Period before 2000 Years in Sri Lanka

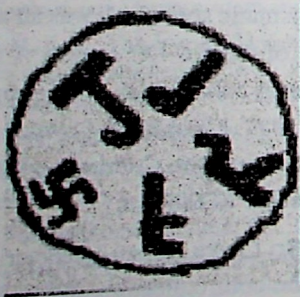
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Numismatic is one of the most reliable archaeological sources for the study of the ancient language, script, religion, art, settlement pattern, state formation, dynasty, king's name, territory and foreign relationship of a country or an ethnic group . Europeans had made use of it as the historical sources in the 18th century A.D. while it was deployed in India in the later 19th century and in Sri Lanka at the middle of the 20th century. In recent times there is spurt in historical research in Sri Lanka by employing the evidences, obtained through numismatic sources. It was an approach among scholars in those times to view all coins of the pre-13th century A.D. in Sri Lanka as received from India, especially the Tamil coins which were supposed to have been received from Tamil Nâpu (Preneps 1857, Elliot 1858, Loventhan 1888, Tracey 1888-94, Tufnel 1888-87, Eliiot 1858, Parker 1909, Codrington 1924). But this approach has to be re-evaluated. The reasons are as follows.

1. During my archaeological survey in Northern Sri Lanka, I have noted various type of Tamil coins which were preserved by the coin collectors. When I studied these coins in comparison with Tamil coins which were issued by the Tamil dynasties of South India the most of the Tamil coins are not found similar in shapes, symbols, style, dynasty emblem, technique and beauty.
2. Many coins issued in Tamil Nâpu from Sankam period to 17th century A.D. have been discovered in Northern Sri Lanka like Tamil Nâpu . But other types of Tamil Coins found in Northern Sri Lanka have not been found in Tamil Nâpu . If these Coins were issued by the Kings of Tamil Nâpu these Coins also would be discovered in Tamil Nâpu .

3. Recently clay tables of the above types of Tamil Coins have been discovered in North and South Sri Lanka. Had these Coins been minted in Tamil Nâpu there would not have been the need for the mould to be found in Sri Lanka.
4. Recently, many Brahmi inscribed coins which dated back to the period before the 2nd century A. D. were discovered at Akkurugoda in Southern and Kantarodai, Utuththurai and Punâkary in North Sri Lanka. As the personal names such as "Utiran", Tasapijan, "Mahasattan", Kapatikadalan and "Tisapurasadanâkarasan" inscribed in these coins end with the termination 'an' which refers to a male, in Tamil No such coins have been found in South India, particularly in Tamil Nâpu so far (Figure-1). Further, since the design, emblem carved, scripts and personal names of the coins entirely differ from the contemporary South Indian coin age, it can be claimed that these coins were issued by Tamil chieftains, merchants or prestigious men in society of ancient Sri Lanka.

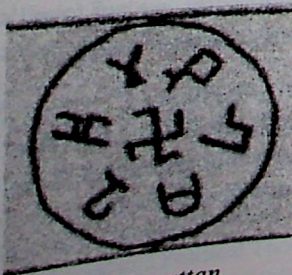
Ancient Tamil Coins Found at Akkurogoda in Southern Sri Lanka



Utiran



Tisapurasadanâkarasan



Mahasattan



Kapatikadalan

The present paper focuses on the , the name "Nâkabûmi " inscribed on the coin which was found at Uputthurai in Jaffna Peninsula which marks historical significance of ancient Sri Lankan Tamils. The coin measures 1.5 grams and its diameter is 0.7mm. On the obverse of the coin the Swastika along the brim-line, below it in the right side a lamp and left the moon, the sun and two fishes in horizontal position in the centre of the coin are inscribed. Below the fishes there are four Brahmi letters which are small and big size along the brim-line. On paleographic grounds it could be dated back to 1st or 2nd century A.D. The first two letters very clearly read as Nâka and the ensuing two as bûmi . It means the land of Nâka'. But Professor Y.S.Subbarayalu the eminent epigraphist of India and Dr.Rajavelu senior epigraphist of Indian archaeological survey read it as Nâkavam (sa). In spite of the difference in opinion, it is important to note that the name Nâkabûmi or Nâkavamsa may denote Nâka dynasty or Nâka country.



In most of the contemporary Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka and India except Tamil Nâþu the name Naga appears as Nâka in the coin, replacing Prakrit "ga" with Tamil "ka". Such usages were known in Tamil Nâþu also, (e.g. "Nâkan" in Alakarmalai Brahmi inscription:Mahadevan 1966.no.33). Sri Lankan Pâli literature also bears evidences of Nâka as Tamil name. The Mahâvamûa mentions the name of the husband of Tamiladevi as Ilanâka, meaning younger snake, who was a king. These are evidences of Tamil kings who issued coins.

The reverse of the coin is represented with a fish emblem in vertical position in

the centre, left side the Swastika along the brim-line and below the fish there are three Brahmi letters. This could be read as Polam. It means in Tamil gold, gold coin, beauty and highest. There are many evidences in Tamil literature and inscriptions of South India that the term Polam has been related with coin usage since Sankam period (Kurumtokai .310:1 Polampasu panditkacu, Akananuru.293:7, 315:12 Polamchei kinkini kacu, Polamcheikacu). But there are no evidences in Sankam age coins and contemporary Brahmi inscriptions of Tamil Nâpu . At the same time the name Polam mention in the Prakrit Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka as Pola means man of great society , great man or hero like Tamil meaning (Paranavithana 1970. no.216).

From the above evidences it is clear that the coin found at Uttuthurai was issued by the Nâka chieftain who ruled in Northern Sri Lanka. But because of this it can't be said that all chieftains who ruled here were Tamils. Just as Tamil chieftains ruled in Southern Sri Lanka, Sinhala chieftains also could have ruled in Northern Sri Lanka. However the name Nâkabûmi or Nâkavamsa inscribed on the above coin needs to be examined to find out its significance and relevance in the ancient history of Sri Lankan Tamils.

As the Northern Sri Lanka is concerned the contemporary historical sources show that it has been an individual entity since very ancient time. Mahâvamûa (VII:54) mentions that when Lord Buddha came to Sri Lanka in the 6th century B.C. he settled disputes between two Nâka kings in Nâkadipa. Though the arrival of the Buddha is said to be a myth the Mahâvamûa, which was written in 6th century A.D. mentions that Nâka kings ruled Northern Sri Lanka. The four Brahmi inscriptions which were found in Periyapuliyankulam in Northern Sri Lanka belonging to 2nd century B.C. speak of the Nâka chieftains (Paranavithana 1970.nos 338-341). There is the reference to NâkaNâkar in the Brahmi inscriptions belonging to 2nd century B.C. (Epigraphia Zelanica VII: no.82). Professor Ragupathy (1991) refers to this and says that it could be Kantarodai. Nicholas (1982:81) refers to another inscription of 9th century A.D. and feels that it could be a place near Vavuniya. There is also the opinion that "Nâkatipoj" as mentioned by Greek pilgrim Tolamy (1st century A.D.) and the Nâkadipa referred to in the Mahâvamûa are identical. A gold plate inscription of 3rd century A.D. discovered at Vallipuram in Jaffna peninsula also speaks about

Nâkadipa (Paranavitana 1983:79-80). The Tamil history work such as Cilappatikâram (21:29) and Ma?imçkalai (24:54-7) which belong to slightly latter period, refer to this region as Nâka Nâpu (Rasanayagam 1926). There are many evidences to show that this region was called as Nâkadipa, Nâka Nâpu, Uraka and Uthtiradeœa even during the medieval times. Pâli text says that Srinâka made efforts to capture Nâka Nâpu with the help of the Tamil army. Mana a Sinhala king who was scared of king Kattathadda who became king in 7th century A.D. with the support of the Tamil, sought asylum in Nâka Nâpu and went to Tamil Nâpu (Cûlavamûa 47:2-7) Cûlavamûa mentions that in the 10th century A.D. a South Indian king invaded Nâkadipa (53:12-6). There are also many evidences both in Sri Lanka and South India which bear testimony to the fact that Parântaka Chôla 1 conquered Nâka Nâpu during this period (South Indian Inscription 553 of 1920). Pâ?dya inscription of 1262 says that king Virapâ?dya conquered Nâka Nâpu that was under the rule of Œêvaka king (Puthukôppai Inscriptions. 239, no.366).

In South Indian tradition there was a custom to relate to the name of a of dynasties or regions alone in coins and inscriptions (Subbarayalu Mitchener 1998:160-61). In ancient Tamil Nâpu , the name of countries such as Chola Nâpu , Céra Nâpu , Pâ?dya Nâpu and Koñgu Nâpu can be identified with the dynasty names of the respective rulers. The North of Sri Lanka was called Nâgadipa in Pâli and Nâka Nâpu in Tamil following the rule of Nâka kings in the 6th century B.C. Viewed against the above background, the Nâka bûmi or Nâkavamsa inscribed in above the coin may denote not only Nâka dynasty but also Nâka Nâpu .

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Utirañ



Tasapijan



Mahasatan



Kapatikajapaan



Tisapurasadanakaranan