

Trilingual Inscription of Galle and Tamil Maritime Trade Communities: Reveal from the Tamil Inscriptions found in the East and Southeast Asia

Ranasinghe, Gamini

Department of History and Archaeology, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda

Introduction

The study focuses on the trilingual inscription of Galle and bilingual inscriptions which were found in Southeast and East Asia. This is related to the Tamil maritime merchant communities and their status, political relations, cultural influence and revival from the early Pallava Dynasty to the late Chola Dynasty. There are numbers of historical documents which recorded activities of Tamil merchant trade associations in the above region but here we are concentrating concerning only on the ninth inscription found in the Tamil language.

Methodology

The evidence for this research depends on the previous research on various topics which is relating to the objective inscriptions done by Admiral Zheng He and Tamil maritime trade organizations using participation observation in China and Sri Lanka for the study of inscriptions and ancient settlements.

Archaeological Remains

The trilingual inscription of Galle was erected by Zheng He for the Ming Court of China by using three languages such as Chinese, Tamil and Persian. This is a very valuable treasure for the study of Sino-Sri Lanka maritime relations in the Kotte era. The inscriptions has been examined by Paranavithana (1939); Luciano (1954); Nagel, Chandima and Yuanlei, (.....) and recently Ranasinghe (2013) on various aspects. According to the reading, Admiral Zheng He offered numbers of offerings to the god of Devinuwara. Although the inscription was erected in the Sinhala area, the second portion of the inscription has been acquired by the Tamil language. It is an academic

question as to why the Ming Court gave more attentions to the Tamil language for their official writing.



Galle trilingual inscription

Kings of Pallava and Chola Dynasties spread their political and navel power over South India, Southeast and East Asia. The coast of Malabar became busy and main international maritime exchange center in the Indian Ocean. Then attention of the merchants of South India was given to the Southeast Asia and China than ever before because of the invasion of the Muslim merchants to their traditional network. Based on the strong maritime trade system of Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties, Tamil trade communities made ties with China and Southeast Asia by way of diplomatic and trade, and then they were spread along the maritime route between China and South India. As the result of the well established Tamil trade communities, their influence can be seen on language, culture and religion in the settled areas.

Ninth of Tamil inscriptions were recorded in the Southeast and East Asian coastal areas that dated from later period of Pallava to end of the Chola. The Table 1 presents several of bilingual inscriptions that corroborate power and status of the Tamil maritime merchants.

Table 1: Bilingual Inscriptions

Country	Time	Place	Languages
Thailand	3-2 cen. BC	Wat Klong	Early Brahmin script-
Thailand	9 cen. AD	Takuapa	Tamil

W. Sumatra	1088 AD	Lobok Tua	Tamil
N. Sumatra	12 cen. AD	Neusu Aceh	Tamil
N. Sumatra	13 cen. AD	Porlak Dolok	Tamil and old Sumatra
Thailand	1261 AD	Nakhom si	Tamil
Upper Myanmar	1279 AD	Pagan	Tamil and Sanskrit
China	1281 AD	Quanzhou	Tamil and Chinese
W. Sumatra	14 cen. AD	Batu Bapahat	Tamil and Sanskrit
Sri Lanka	15 cen. AD	Galle	Tamil, Chinese and Persian

The first Tamil inscription was discovered in the Wat Klong Thom, west coast peninsular of Thailand. Two words ('Parumapatan kal-Master Goldsmith') scribed in a small stone that used as goldsmith's touchstone for the produce of jewelry.



Wat Klong inscription

The second Tamil inscription recorded is the Khau Pra-Narai that is located on the Takupa River of Thailand. The inscription depicts the early Tamil language that dated to nine century AD. The description talks about the construction of a tank by the merchant group named Manigramam (a Tamil merchant association). Hindu stone figures and small structures which might be associated with religious activities made by merchant groups in Thailand were discovered from the place where inscription was found (Sastri 1949).



Takua Pa Inscription

The inscription of Lobo Tuwa was found in the port of Lobo Tua in the West coast of Sumatra, dated 1088AD (Boeles 1966). It is believed to have been issued during the reign of Kulottunga Chola (Abraham 1988). Purpose of the inscription was to note the grant by Annurruvar South Indian merchant association in the West Sumatra. Neusu Aceh inscription was located in the Kreung River in Northern Sumatra. Trading regulations, collection of royal fees and taxes were included in the inscription which is dated back to twelfth century AD. The merchant groups of Ainnurruvar were specially engaged in a number of Hindu constructions in South India as well as Sri Lanka (Subbarayalu, 2002). A Tamil and Sanskrit bilingual inscription named Nakhom Si was found in the east coast of Thailand that was dated back to 1261AD. The text of both languages was highly damaged but recorded that River Ganges and offered gift Brahmanas by Danma seanapathi. In the Pagan, upper Myanmar recorded Tamil and Sanskrit bilingual inscription which represents the late thirteen-century AD. The reason for the inscription was to offer gifts to the Vishnu temple by a south Indian merchant association named Nanadesi. Two bilingual inscriptions were discovered in Sumatra, one was named Batu Bapahat which means *Gramma Suravasa* (village) and brings evidence of Tamil settlements in West Sumatra in the late thirteen century (Subbarayalu, 1994). The next one, Porlak Dolok, Tamil and old Javanese inscription was found in North Sumatra dating back to thirteen century AD.

The bilingual inscription of Tamil and Chinese was found in Quanzhou of China that was erected by Siva to the Yuan emperor in 1281AD. Maritime trade was well established in the era of Yuan Dynasty of China. Even maritime trade bureau was re-established in

1278 AD at Quanzhou and there was a favorable trade environment for the foreign merchant groups.



Bilingual Inscription in Quanzhou

Conclusion

According to the historical and archaeological evidences, Tamil merchant groups spread and settled between South India and China along the maritime trade sea route with the Chola and Pallava's enthusiastic background. Several of bilingual inscriptions found in Southeast Asia represents the settlements and level of adapting to the mass culture in the Asian region. The favorable environment for the maritime trade that was made available by Yuan Dynasty highly influenced the foreign merchant groups to make their settlements in China. Specially, Tamil merchant groups were able to make linkages with political authority of Yuan Dynasty and continue their relationship with Ming Dynasty too. They have sent a number of diplomatic missions to China and provided assistance for the maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. As a result of this strong relationship, Tamil language was included in the inscriptions of Quanzhou in Yuan Dynasty and the inscription of Galle in Ming Dynasty of China. This depicted their ability to influence political authority in China.

Key Words: Galle Inscription; Maritime Trade; Tamil Trade Communities

Reference:

- Abhram, M.(1988). *Two medieval merchant guilds of South India*. Delhi: Manohar.
- Boeles, J.J.(1966). A note on the Tamil relation with South Thailand and the identification of Potolemy's Tacola. *JSS, vol.liv*,

part 2.

- Luciano, P.(1954). Some Chinese text concerning Ceylon. *The Ceylon historical journal*, 3(3),
- Paranavitana, S.(1939). The Tamil inscription on the Galle trilingual slab. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, 3(35),
- Ranasinghe G. (2013). *Maritime cultural interaction between Sri Lanka and China based on archaeological artifacts of both countries*. PhD thesis, Xiamen University, China.
- Sastri N.(1949). *Foreign not of South India*. Madras:
- Subbarayalu, Y.(1994). Tamil inscription in Sumatra. *Aranan*,
- Subbarayalu, Y.(2002). Ainnuurravar: A supra-local organization of south indian and sri lankan merchants. (Ed.), N. Karashima *Testimony of Inscriptions and Ceramic-shreds*, Tokyo: University of Tokyo.