

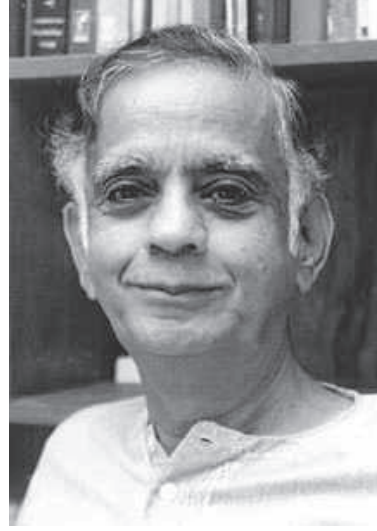
EARLY TAMIL EPIGRAPHY:
TAMIL-BRĀHMĪ INSCRIPTIONS

THE BOOK

This is Volume I of the revised and enlarged Second Edition of *Early Tamil Epigraphy*, first published in 2003. The Volume deals with Tamil-Brāhmī stone inscriptions discovered up to 2012. The main feature of the edition is that it is based on fresh *in situ* delineation and digitisation of the cave inscriptions included in the Corpus.

The work provides a detailed account of the discovery and decipherment of the inscriptions and relates their language and contents to early Tamil literature and society. Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions on pottery, coins, seals and rings, have also been utilised to present a more complete picture of early Tamil epigraphy. Two new sections deal with Prakrit inscriptions on pottery and other inscribed objects, and Sinhala-Prakrit pottery inscriptions, from Tamilnadu, which bring out the interaction of Tamil-Brāhmī with other contemporary languages and scripts of South India and Sri Lanka.

The study deals comprehensively with the epigraphy, language and contents of the inscriptions. The texts are given in transliteration with translation and extensive word by word commentary. The inscriptions are illustrated with direct photographs in colour, together with delineations and estampages for comparative study. Palaeography of Tamil-Brāhmī is described in detail with the help of letter charts. The special orthographic and grammatical features of the earliest Tamil inscriptions are also described. A glossary of inscriptional words and several classified word lists have been added to aid further research.



THE AUTHOR

IRAVATHAM MAHADEVAN (b. 1930) has published widely on Indian epigraphy, especially on the Indus and Brāhmī scripts. He was awarded the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship in 1970 for his research on the Indus script and the National Fellowship of the Indian Council of Historical Research in 1992 for his work on the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions.

His books, *The Indus Script: Texts, Concordance and Tables* (1977), and *Early Tamil Epigraphy* (2003) are recognised internationally as major source books for research in these fields.

He has received many awards including, more recently, the title *Tamil Chemmal* from the Madurai Kamaraj University (1995), the Copper Plaque of the Tamilnadu Archaeological Society (1998), the annual award of the Federations of Tamil Sangams of North America (2001), V. Chelvanayakam Award, Colombo (2004), the P.L. Gupta Medal of the Tamilnadu Numismatic Society (2006), the Madras Sanskrit College Centenary Award (2007), the Dravidian University Award for research publications in Dravidian languages (2008), Padma Sri by the President of India (2009), D. Litt degree (hon.) by the Tamil University, Thanjavur (2009), Tiruvalluvar Award by the Government of Tamilnadu (2010), and the Lifetime Literary Achievement Award by the Tamil Literary Academy, Canada (2010).

Iravatham Mahadevan joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1954 and retired voluntarily in 1980 to devote himself to academic pursuits. He lives in Chennai.

Early Tamil Epigraphy

From the Earliest Times to the Sixth Century C. E.

Revised & Enlarged Second Edition

Volume I

Tamil Brāhmī Inscriptions

Iravatham Mahadevan



Central Institute of Classical Tamil, Chennai

2020

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AMAZON KDP EDITION

ISBN: 979-86-98179-53-5
Pages: xlv, 727 p.
Size: 8.27 x 11.69 inches
Reprint: 2020

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EXCERPTS FROM REVIEWS OF *EARLY TAMIL EPIGRAPHY* (2003)

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This beautifully written book brilliantly conveys the thrill of scientific discovery and the excitement of academic research. It is very up to date and will be of value to specialists in epigraphy, archaeology, the history of Tamil and the Dravidian languages, and the political and religious history of India, but could also interest inquiring general readers.

R.E. Asher

It is only rarely that one comes across a study that marks, in the usual manner of description, 'a milestone' in the history of a discipline like epigraphy. In the last century, the 1960s saw a new awakening in the field of South Indian epigraphy and palaeography - owing to the efforts of one man, Iravatham Mahadevan, an administrator-turned-scholar. He created history by reviving interest in the earliest surviving and 'enigmatic' cave inscriptions of Tamilnadu in the Brahmi script which had defied all earlier attempts at successful decipherment and reading.

R. Champakalakshmi

The work is more than a milestone: as no further mile is to be expected, we have to make the conclusion that this could not be set aside. Author, printer and publisher deserve immense thanks.

Harry Falk

Publishing a scientifically organised and classified compilation of the data on the mysterious Harappan Script, Mahadevan had already become world renowned for the perfection achieved in the production of an epigraphic source book for researchers. The present volume, *Early Tamil Epigraphy*, is far more superior to that kind of a source book, for it embodies an exhaustive and systematic study of every aspect of the Tamil Brahmi script, with the most accurately deciphered inscriptional texts, blessed to remain long unchallenged in the domain of epigraphy. At the same time, it is not a study solely meant for experts. It is an eminently readable book attracting both the specialist and the general readership, thanks to its beautiful narrative structure enshrining the excitement of expedition, adventure, and discovery as well as intellectual curiosity about the cognitive sequences of successful decipherment besides clarity of thought and expression. Through his exhaustive study of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions that form quantitatively the smallest, temporally the most archaic, and intellectually the most challenging segment of the huge corpus of epigraphs in South India, Iravatham Mahadevan puts the region prominently in the world map of ancient scripts.

Rajan Gurukkal

Nothing has been written until now, on Tamil epigraphy, so rewarding and communicating, as this book is. It is a comprehensive, in-depth treatise, in which a multi-disciplinary learning of an awesome dimension is much in evidence. Mahadevan brings to bear upon this book, running to 719 pages, his rare insights, cool objectivity, immense patience, intense and rigorous scholarship, backed by a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit, Tamil and Prakrit.

Indira Parthasarathy

The problem of the principles and chronology of these (vowel notation) systems has occupied Mahadevan, among other, for decades, and the presentation of this issue in this volume represents the final and authoritative synthesis of his work.

Richard Salomon

Mahadevan's book is also a contribution to comparative Dravidian Linguistics, as well as historical Dravidian Linguistics. He has compared Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam, three south Dravidian languages. Through these Tamil inscriptions, he has been able to advance the antiquity of these three languages.

Alvapillai Veluppillai

முதற் பதிப்பின் (2003) திறனாய்வுகளிலிருந்து சில பகுதிகள்

தமிழ்நாட்டின் காலத்தால் முற்பட்ட அனைத்து பிராமி, வட்டெழுத்துக் கல்வெட்டுகளையும் ஆராய்ந்து, அவற்றின் காலத்தை நிர்ணயித்திருப்பதோடு அவை தரும் தரவுகளின் அடிப்படையில் தமிழ்நாட்டின் வரலாற்றையும், தமிழ் மொழியின் வளர்நிலைகளையும் 'Early Tamil Epigraphy from the Earliest Times to Sixth Century A.D.' எனும் 758 பக்க நூலின் வழி அழுத்தமாகப் பதிவு செய்திருக்கிறார் கல்வெட்டறிஞர் ஐராவதம் மகாதேவன். தமிழ்நாட்டிற்கு இது ஒரு வரலாற்றுக் கொடை மட்டுமன்று, அவரது வாழ்நாள் கொடையுமாகும்.

இரா. கலைக்கோவன் (R. Kalaikkovan)

மகாதேவனது ஆய்வின் பொழிப்புகளாக வரும் பகுதிகளுள், இலக்கிய வரலாற்று மாணவனுக்கு முக்கியமானது எழுத்தறிவு பற்றி அவர் கூறுவதே. தென்னிந்தியா முழுவதிலும் தமிழே உத்தியோகபூர்வ கல்வெட்டுகளுக்கான பிரதேச முதலாவது நிலைப்பட்ட மொழியாக விளங்குகிறது. தென்னிந்தியாவின் மேற்கேயுள்ள கர்நாடக, ஆந்திரப் பிரதேசங்களில் தோன்றிய முதற் கல்வெட்டுகளில் (கி. பி 4, 6) பிரதேச மொழிச் சொற்கள் இடம் பெற்றதற்கான சான்றுகள் இருப்பினும், எழுத்துப்பதிவு பிராகிருதத்திலேயே நடை பெறுகின்றது. ஆனால், கி. மு. 3ம் நூற்றாண்டின் இறுதியில் அல்லது கி. மு. 2ம் நூற்றாண்டின் தொடக்கத்தில் தமிழ்மொழியை பிராமி எழுத்துக்களால் எழுதும் வழக்கம் வந்துவிட்டது என்பதை மகாதேவன் ஒரு முக்கிய அம்சமாகக் கொள்கிறார்.

கா. சிவத்தம்பி (K. Sivathamby)

இந்த நூல் இனி வருங்காலத்தில் பழந்தமிழகம், தமிழ்மொழி, இலக்கியம் ஆகியவற்றின் வரலாற்றில் ஈடுபாடு உடையவர்கள் யாவரும் பயன்படுத்த வேண்டிய முக்கிய அடிப்படை நூல்களுள் ஒன்றாகத் திகழும் என்பதில் எந்தக் கருத்து வேறுபாடும் இருக்க முடியாது. ஆறாம் நூற்றாண்டு முடிய பொறிக்கப்பட்ட எல்லாத் தமிழ் பிராமி (பழந்தமிழ்) கல்வெட்டுகளுக்கும், தொடக்கநிலை வட்டெழுத்துக் கல்வெட்டுகளுக்கும் மைப்படிகளும் விளம்பல் படிகளும் (tracing) எடுக்கப்பட்டு இந்நூலில் அழகாகத் தரப்பட்டுள்ளன. பல ஆண்டுகள் மேற்கொண்ட கள ஆய்வுகளில் மிகுந்த முயற்சியுடனும் கவனத்துடனும் திரட்டப்பட்டவை இவை. அந்த வகையில் இந்நூல் அக்கல்வெட்டுகளுக்கு ஒரு நிலையான ஆவணக்காப்பாக அமைந்துள்ளது.

எ. சுப்பராயலு (Y. Subbarayalu)

தவம் இருந்து பெற்ற அரிய கல்வெட்டு நூல். இந்த ஆராய்ச்சியில் அவர் (மகாதேவன்) தென்னகத்தில் பல பாகங்களிலும் உள்ள பாறைகளையும் மலைகளையும் குகைகளையும் நேரில் சென்று பார்த்து, அவற்றில் எழுதியுள்ள இரண்டாயிரம் வருடங்களுக்கு முற்பட்ட தமிழ் பிராமிக் கல்வெட்டுகளையும் வட்டெழுத்துக் கல்வெட்டுகளையும் கல்லிலிருந்து நேரடியாக விளம்பியும் ஒற்றுப்படி எடுத்தும் புகைப்படம் எடுத்தும் மீளாய்வு செய்து தொகுத்து இனந்தெரியாத அவற்றைப் படித்துப் புரிந்து அதிலிருந்து ஒரு புது வரலாற்றை எழுதியுள்ளார்.

கி. நாச்சிமுத்து (K. Nachimuthu)

*Dedicated to the sacred memory of
Kanthadai Vaidy Subrahmanya Aiyer (1875 - 1969)
whose pioneering studies laid the foundation for
the decipherment of the Tamil-Brāhmī script.*

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PREFACE

Tamil was formally accorded the status of a Classical language by the Government of India in 2004. The responsibility for preparing an action plan for the promotion of research in Classical Tamil was initially entrusted to the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore. During one of the discussions held in 2005 to formulate the schemes for inclusion in the action plan, I had suggested to Prof. Udaya Narayana Singh, Director, and Prof. K. Ramasamy, Deputy Director, CIIL, to take up the documentation of the earliest inscriptions in Tamil, employing the best available digital technology. The proposal was accepted which is the genesis of the present publication. It is my duty to thank the Director, CIIL and his colleagues for their invaluable help in initiating this project.

The Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT), Chennai, was established in 2007 to implement the Central plan schemes for promoting research in Classical Tamil. One of the first, and still the largest, projects implemented by CICT is the documentation of the earliest Tamil inscriptions and heritage monuments on HD Video and High Resolution still imagery, indexed, catalogued and held as a digital archive by CICT. Even as this long-term programme got under way, I was invited by CICT to prepare a revised edition of my book, *Early Tamil Epigraphy* (first published in 2003), dovetailing it with the ongoing documentation of Tamil-Brāhmī and Vaṭṭeḷuttu stone inscriptions. I need hardly add that I accepted the offer with alacrity as it would bring to fruition the project I had only dreamt about for long. I am thankful to the Director, CICT, for implementing the scheme for documentation of the earliest Tamil inscriptions and for including the revised edition of my book within its scope.

The CICT entrusted the execution of the project to the Centre for Plants, People and Ecosystems (CPPE), Chennai, a non-profit organisation working in this field. The CICT project team constituted by CPPE started the work in December 2007 and successfully completed most of the field work by the end of 2010. I am thankful to M. V. Bhaskar, Project Coordinator, and his colleagues for the efficient execution of the project.

I was happy to inaugurate the work at Mamandur, but could not participate in further field work due to health problems except once at Pulankurichi in 2010. The team led by Bhaskar completed the field work on its own with a copy of *Early Tamil Epigraphy* to serve as the guide to locate the caves and inscriptions.

I was shown the results of the photographic survey for verification of the *in situ* delineations, enlarged on the computer screen. I could hardly believe my eyes, looking at the amazingly clear photographs of the caves and the remarkable accuracy of the delineations. I could sense that it is not only the superior technology but also the total involvement of the team in the project, which produced such excellent results. I am proud to have been a member of the team, though working from only behind the scenes.

It has taken me more than two years (2010 - 12) to complete editing the present publication which includes only the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions. I must again thank Bhaskar for personally undertaking the laborious and time-consuming task of typesetting the revised edition afresh in Unicode.

I have received help from a large number of institutions and scholars for my research as acknowledged by me in the first edition of the book. I shall have to confine myself to thanking those who directly contributed to the making of the present, revised edition. My thanks are due to -

Prof. V.C. Kulandai Swamy, closely associated with the movement to secure Classical status for Tamil, for his constant encouragement and guidance.

Prof. R. Champakalakshmi, to whom I could always turn for guidance in any matter related to South Indian history and culture.

Dr. R. Krishnamurthy, the doyen of South Indian numismatics, for helping me with the selection of coins with Tamil-Brahmi legends discovered and deciphered by him.

Prof. P.R. Subramanian, for patiently answering my innumerable queries related to Tamil and Dravidian linguistics.

Prof. K. Rajan, for generously making available photographs of the Tamil-Brāhmī herostone inscriptions discovered by him, and of the pottery inscriptions from Kodumanal, Porunthal and other recent excavations led by him.

Dr. S. Vasanthi, Director, Tamilnadu State Department of Archaeology, for making available photographs of pottery inscriptions from the recent excavations by the Department.

Mr. G. Sundar, Director, Roja Muthiah Research Library, Chennai, for giving me access to rare publications in the holdings of the Library, and helping me to compile the enlarged bibliography in the present revised edition.

The present publication marks the culmination of my study of Tamil epigraphy extending over more than half a century (1958 - 2012). Looking back over this long period, I remember with gratitude Dr. C. Sivaramamurti, who initiated me into the discipline of epigraphy, Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, who suggested to me to take up the research on the cave inscriptions of Tamilnadu, and K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer, the founder of Tamil-Brāhmī epigraphy, whom I had the good fortune to meet in 1966 and receive his blessings for my successful decipherment of the Tamil-Brāhmī cave inscriptions of the Caṅkam Age at Mangulam and Pugalur. It is time to hand over the baton to younger scholars in the field.

Iravatham Mahadevan

Chennai

July 15, 2013

INTRODUCTION

Early Tamil Epigraphy: From the Earliest Times to Sixth Century A.D. (henceforth *ETE*) was first published in 2003, in separate but identical editions, by Cre-A, Chennai in India and the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, USA. The book has been well received by scholars and students alike, as indicated by the large number of reviews in academic publications in India and abroad, and by the fact that the Indian Edition was sold out within a year of its publication. Two seminars were held in 2004 on the progress in Tamil-Brāhmī studies and related areas, one by the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS), Chennai, and the other at the Tamil University, Thanjavur. An increasing number of publications on Tamil-Brāhmī have appeared in recent years in Tamil and English attesting to the heightened interest in this developing field. I am gratified that the main objectives of the book to provide reliable documentation and a definitive edition of the texts of the Tamil-Brāhmī cave inscriptions have been substantially fulfilled.

The Revised and Enlarged Second Edition is being published by the Central Institute for Classical Tamil (CICT), Chennai, an autonomous institution functioning under the Department of Culture, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi. The CICT is implementing an ambitious programme for the digitisation and preservation of Classical Tamil texts and survey of heritage monuments. One of the projects included in this larger programme is the documentation of Tamil-Brāhmī cave inscriptions. The CICT has entrusted the execution of the project to the Centre for Plans, People and Ecosystems (CPPE), Chennai. The technical details of the project and consequent improvement to the quality of documentation are described by M. V. Bhaskar, Project Co-ordinator, in his 'Report on the CICT Photographic Survey' included in this volume (pp. 123 - 136). The critically important feature of the project is replacing the Plates produced from the manual tracing of the inscriptions in *ETE* 2003, with *in situ* delineation and digitisation. A welcome bonus is that the current Edition has an electronic counterpart with many interactive features for the reader, facilitating an even closer study of the inscriptions (See Plates 1 - 96).

The present publication, Volume I of the Revised and Enlarged Second Edition, deals only with Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions including the newly discovered stone inscriptions (Nos. 90 - 96) and, selectively, other Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions on pottery, coins, seals and rings (Annexure A to Chapter 1). Two new Sections have been added dealing with Prakrit inscriptions on pottery and other inscribed objects and, Sinhala-Prakrit inscriptions on pottery, both from Tamilnadu (Annexures B & C to Chapter 1). I hope that the additions will lead to a wider and deeper perspective on early Tamil epigraphy and its interaction with other contemporary languages and scripts in South India and Sri Lanka.

This volume retains the basic format of *ETE* 2003 in the numbering of the Tamil-Brāhmī stone inscriptions in the Corpus and of the inscriptional words in the Commentary to maintain continuity and facilitate citation. Newly added Tamil-Brāhmī stone inscriptions are placed in the Addendum to the Corpus and allotted new Reference Numbers in continuation of those in *ETE* 2003.

Early Vaṭṭeluttu inscriptions included in *ETE* 2003 have been omitted from the present volume to provide more space for the additional material on Tamil-Brāhmī. Further, to do full justice to Vaṭṭeluttu will

need a separate volume. The proposed volume would also include more Early Vaṭṭeḷuttu inscriptions, especially the two long inscriptions from Pulankurichi and herostone inscriptions up to 6th century C.E., which could not be accommodated in *ETE* 2003. However, the brief account on the origin, evolution and decline of the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script included in the survey of early Tamil epigraphy has been retained in the present volume to provide the link between Tamil-Brāhmī and Vaṭṭeḷuttu scripts.

I am happy to report that the delineations reproduced in the present volume have confirmed the accuracy of the earlier tracings in *ETE* 2003 with but a single exception. The first two letters in an inscription (No. 27) which were earlier traced as a 'single broken letter *mā*', have now been corrected as *ū ta* in the personal name *Uttira-antai*. There are some other minor variations like, for example, the addition of the medial vowel marker *-ā* (No. 24), the suffix *-i* (No. 48), and the *pulli* (No. 68), which do not, however, materially alter the readings or interpretations. There are also a few cases (Nos. 10 & 15) of letters missing, wholly or partly, due to disintegration of the rock surface by natural or manmade causes. Each such variation, however minor, between the earlier tracings and the present delineations, has been recorded in the footnotes under the respective inscriptions in the Corpus.

There are also a few instances of modified interpretation of words in the Tamil-Brāhmī texts in the Corpus. These changes have been discussed in detail in the Commentary on the respective inscriptions. The more significant revisions are briefly noticed below (Reference Numbers to the inscriptions in brackets):

piṇa(v)u (3) 'drip ledge'.

tāraṇi (44) 'drip ledge' (loanword from Indo-Aryan).

iv-kunra- (60) 'this hill'; cf. *iv-mūla-u-kai-y* (90) 'this cave'.

kuṇā- (89) A place name now identified with Trikkāṇā (*Tiru-k-kuṇā*) in Kerala, known in ancient times as Kuṇavāyil. The identification leads to a re-examination of the probable date of *Cilappatikāram* from an epigraphical perspective (pp. 190 - 193).

The newly added Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions include four on herostones (Nos. 91 - 94), marking a major turning point in the history of early Tamil epigraphy. K. Rajan and his colleagues in the Tamil University, Thanjavur, discovered the inscribed herostones in 2006 in megalithic urn-burial fields in two villages in the upper Vaigai valley. This important discovery extends the Tamil-Brāhmī period into the late megalithic age linking the latter with the succeeding early historical period attested in the Tamil Caṅkam poetry. The inscriptions, especially the one (No. 93) mentioning a cattle raid (*ā-kōḷ*), corroborate the vivid accounts of erecting herostones in *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam anthologies. It is significant that the language of the Tamil-Brāhmī herostone inscriptions has no Prakrit element and the contents do not reveal any association with Jainism.

The newly discovered Early Tamil-Brāhmī inscription (No. 95) in a cave on the Samanarmalai hill at Kilkuyilkudi near Madurai is also of exceptional interest. The location forms part of the extensive complex of caves marking the earliest settlement of Jaina monks in the Pāṇṭiya country. Samanarmalai is also associated with the famous Jaina monastery (no longer extant) at Tirukkāṭṭāmpaḷḷi, which was considered to be the central seat of authority for the Jains of the Tamil country (p. 172).

Yet another interesting Tamil-Brāhmī inscription (No. 96) from Edakal in Kerala, was discovered most recently (2012) by M. R. Raghava Varier. This is a brief label inscription affixed to an anthropomorphic figure forming part of the prehistoric rock art in the cave. I have read the inscription as *i palama* ‘this (is) ancient’, and identified it as the earliest known inscription in Malayalam, dated in the 4th or 5th century C.E.

Among the newly discovered Tamil-Brāhmī pottery inscriptions included in the present volume (Catalogue AI, Chapter 1), the most significant are those from the recent excavations at Pattanam in Kerala, identified with Muciri, the ancient seaport of the Cēra rulers and main entrepôt for trade with the West in classical times. Kodumanal (ancient Koṭumaṇam) in Tamilnadu continues to be a veritable cornucopia of Tamil-Brāhmī pottery inscriptions, yielding hundreds in each session of excavation, but represented in this volume only by a few examples for want of space. The extraordinarily high numbers of Tamil-Brāhmī pottery inscriptions offer the most conclusive evidence for widespread and popular literacy in the Tamil society of the Caṅkam Age.

More Tamil-Brāhmī pottery inscriptions have been found from recent excavations outside India. Pride of place among them must be given to the inscription reading *tiraḷi muri* ‘written agreement (by) the assembly’ found at Tissamaharama in southern Sri Lanka, which has been assigned to 200 B.C.E. (No. 20, Catalogue AI, Chapter 1). The evidence it provides for the existence of a trade guild of Sri Lankan Tamil merchants at this site known for its prolific yield of gemstones, is noteworthy. Perhaps it is this trade guild which issued the lead coins or tokens with Tamil-Brāhmī legends found earlier near this site (Nos. 7 - 10, Catalogue AII, Chapter 1). Other ancient sites abroad which have yielded Tamil-Brāhmī pottery inscriptions from recent excavations are Quseir al-khadim and Berenike on the Red Sea Coast of Egypt, Oman in the Southern Arabian Peninsula and Thailand in South East Asia (Catalogue AI), providing new evidence for the extensive maritime trade by the Tamils of the Caṅkam Age.

Special mention must also be made of the discovery of a gold ring at Karur with a Prakrit legend assigned to 1st century B.C.E. on palaeographic evidence (Fig. 5.2A, p.212). The most remarkable feature of the legend on the ring is the occurrence of the special *-ā* medial vowel marker, the diagnostic feature of the Bhattiprolu script, for the first time outside the Stupa site in Andhra Pradesh. The unexpected find coming more than a century after the discovery of the casket inscriptions at Bhattiprolu offers good evidence for the connection between the earlier TB-I orthographic convention of Early Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions and the later orthographic convention of the Bhattiprolu script (see discussion pp. 266 - 269).

Even as the manuscript of the present volume was getting ready for the press, more discoveries of Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions have been reported including yet another caveside inscription from Tirupparankunram, another herostone inscription at Porpanaikottai near Pudukkottai and further quantities of Tamil-Brāhmī pottery inscriptions from the inexhaustible trenches at Kodumanal. It has not been possible to include these recent discoveries in the present volume. I hope *Early Tamil Epigraphy* will develop into an open-ended, multi-volume series, arranged thematically and updated periodically, to keep abreast of the ever increasing number of discoveries in this field.

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3	Mangulam - 3	17	Varichiyur - 3
4	Mangulam - 4	18	VIII Vikkiramangalam - 1
5	Mangulam - 5	19	Vikkiramangalam - 2
6	Mangulam - 6	20	Vikkiramangalam - 3
7	II Arittapatti - 1	21	Vikkiramangalam - 4
8	III Tiruvadavur - 1	22	Vikkiramangalam - 5
9	Tiruvadavur - 2	23	Vikkiramangalam - 6
10	IV Kilavalavu	24	IX Mettuppatti - 1
11	V Kongarpuliyankulam - 1	25	Mettuppatti - 2
12	Kongarpuliyankulam - 2	26	Mettuppatti - 3
13	Kongarpuliyankulam - 3	27	Mettuppatti - 4
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LIST OF PLATES

Early Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions (1 - 59)

Inscr. No.	Site	Inscr. No.	Site
1	I Mangulam - 1	27	IX Mettuppatti - 4
2	Mangulam - 2	28	Mettuppatti - 5
3	Mangulam - 3	29	Mettuppatti - 6
4	Mangulam - 4	30	Mettuppatti - 7
5	Mangulam - 5	31	Mettuppatti - 8
6	Mangulam - 6	32	Mettuppatti - 9
7	II Arittapatti - 1	33	Mettuppatti - 10
8	III Tiruvadavur - 1	34	X Karungalakkudi
9	Tiruvadavur - 2	35	XI Mudalaikulam
10	IV Kilavalavu	36	XII Alagarmalai - 1
11	V Kongarpuliyankulam - 1	37	Alagarmalai - 2
12	Kongarpuliyankulam - 2	38	Alagarmalai - 3
13	Kongarpuliyankulam - 3	39	Alagarmalai - 4
14	VI Marukaltalai	40	Alagarmalai - 5
15	VII Varichiyur - 1	41	Alagarmalai - 6
16	Varichiyur - 2	42	Alagarmalai - 7
17	Varichiyur - 3	43	Alagarmalai - 8
18	VIII Vikkiramangalam - 1	44	Alagarmalai - 9
19	Vikkiramangalam - 2	45	Alagarmalai - 10
20	Vikkiramangalam - 3	46	Alagarmalai - 11
21	Vikkiramangalam - 4	47	Alagarmalai - 12
22	Vikkiramangalam - 5	48	Alagarmalai - 13
23	Vikkiramangalam - 6	49	XIII Sittannavasal
24	IX Mettuppatti - 1	50	XIV Aiyarmalai
25	Mettuppatti - 2	51	XV Tirumalai - 1
26	Mettuppatti - 3	52	Tirumalai - 2

Inscr. No.	Site		Inscr. No.	Site		
53	XVI	Tirupparankunram - 1	460	76	XXIII Tondur	508
54		Tirupparankunram - 2	462	77	XXIV Kudumiyamalai	510
55		Tirupparankunram - 3	464	78	XXV Tiruchirapalli	512
56	XVII	Muttuppatti - 1	466	79	XXVI Edakal - 1	514
57		Muttuppatti - 2	468	80	Edakal - 2	516
58		Muttuppatti - 3	470	81	Edakal - 3	518
59	XVIII	Jambai	472	82	Edakal - 4	520
				83	XXVII Nekanurpatti	522
				84	XXVIII Ammankoyilpatti	524
				85	XXIX Arachalur - 1	526
				86	Arachalur - 2	528
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61	XX	Pugalur - 1	478	88	XXX Mannarkoil - 1	534
62		Pugalur - 2	480	89	Mannarkoil - 2	536
63		Pugalur - 3	482	90	II Arittapatti - 2	538
64		Pugalur - 4	484	91	XXXI Pulimankombai - 1	540
65		Pugalur - 5	486	92	Pulimankombai - 2	542
66		Pugalur - 6	488	93	Pulimankombai - 3	544
67		Pugalur - 7	490	94	XXXII Thathappatti	546
68		Pugalur - 8	492	95	XXXIII Kilkuyilkudi	548
69		Pugalur - 9	494	96	XXVI Edakal - 5	550
70		Pugalur - 10	496			
71		Pugalur - 11	498			
72		Pugalur - 12	500			
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ABBREVIATIONS

Tamil literary works (in Tamil alphabetical order)

<i>Aka.</i>	<i>Akanānūru</i>	<i>Nālaṭi.</i>	<i>Nālaṭiyār</i>
<i>Aruṅkala.</i>	<i>Aruṅkalacceppu</i>	<i>Nālāyira.</i>	<i>Nālāyira Tivviyappirapantam</i>
<i>Araneri.</i>	<i>Aranericcāram</i>	<i>Nīla.</i>	<i>Nīlakēci</i>
<i>Āciriya.</i>	<i>Āciriya Nikaṇṭu</i>	<i>Nīli.</i>	<i>Nīli Yatcakāṇam</i>
<i>Iraku.</i>	<i>Irakuvammicam</i>	<i>Paṭṭina.</i>	<i>Paṭṭinappālai</i>
<i>Irāma.</i>	<i>Irāmanāṭakakkīrttanai</i>	<i>Patir.</i>	<i>Patirruppattu</i>
<i>Irai.</i>	<i>Iraiyaṇār Akapporuḷ Urai</i>	<i>Pari.</i>	<i>Paripāṭal</i>
<i>Iṇiya.</i>	<i>Iṇiyavai Nārpātu</i>	<i>Pari. Ti.</i>	<i>Paripāṭal Tirattu</i>
<i>Aiṅk.</i>	<i>Aiṅkurunūru</i>	<i>Piṅkala.</i>	<i>Piṅkala Nikaṇṭu</i>
<i>Kampa.</i>	<i>Kamparāmāyaṇam</i>	<i>Pura.</i>	<i>Puranānūru</i>
<i>Kayā.</i>	<i>Kayātara Nikaṇṭu</i>	<i>Pura. Ti</i>	<i>Purattirattu</i>
<i>Kallātam</i>		<i>Purapporuḷ.</i>	<i>Purapporuḷ Veṅpāmālai</i>
<i>Kali.</i>	<i>Kalittokai</i>	<i>Periya.</i>	<i>Periyapurāṇam</i>
<i>Kuraḷ</i>	<i>Tirukkuraḷ</i>	<i>Peruṅ.</i>	<i>Peruṅkatai</i>
<i>Kurun.</i>	<i>Kuruntokai</i>	<i>Perumpāṇ.</i>	<i>Perumpāṇārruppaṭai</i>
<i>Kōṇēri. Upatēca.</i>	<i>Upatēcakkāṇṭam</i> (by <i>Kōṇēriyappa Nāvalar</i>)	<i>Maṇi.</i>	<i>Maṇimēkalai</i>
<i>Cilap.</i>	<i>Cilappatikāram</i>	<i>Matu.</i>	<i>Maturaikkāñci</i>
<i>Cirupāṇ.</i>	<i>Cirupāṇārruppaṭai</i>	<i>Malai.</i>	<i>Malaiapaṭukaṭām</i>
<i>Cīvaka.</i>	<i>Cīvakacintāmaṇi</i>	<i>Mullai.</i>	<i>Mullaippāṭtu</i>
<i>Cūṭā.</i>	<i>Cūṭāmaṇi Nikaṇṭu</i>	<i>Yāpp. Virutti</i>	<i>Yāpparuṅkala Virutti</i>
<i>Ñāna. Upatēca.</i>	<i>Upatēcakkāṇṭam</i> (by <i>Ñāṇavarōtayar</i>)	<i>Vāla. Koṅkumaṇṭala.</i>	<i>Koṅkumaṇṭala Catakam</i> (by <i>Vālacuntarakkaviṅar</i>)
<i>Tiruvā.</i>	<i>Tiruvācakam</i>	<i>Villi.</i>	<i>Villi Pāratam</i>
<i>Tiru. ulā</i>	<i>Tiruvārūr Ulā</i>	<i>Vīra.</i>	<i>Vīracōḷiyam</i>
<i>Tivā.</i>	<i>Cēntaṇ Tivākaram Nikaṇṭu</i>	comm.	commentary/commentator
<i>Tēvā.</i>	<i>Tēvāram</i>	<i>Aṭiyār.</i>	<i>Aṭiyārkkunallār</i>
<i>Tol.</i>	<i>Tolkāppiyam</i>	<i>ḷam.</i>	<i>ḷampūraṇar</i>
<i>(Eḷu., Col., Poruḷ.)</i>	<i>(Eḷuttatikāram, Cōllatikāram,</i> <i>Poruḷatikāram)</i>	<i>Caṅkara.</i>	<i>Caṅkaranamaccivāyar</i>
<i>Narr.</i>	<i>Narriṇai</i>	<i>Cēṇā.</i>	<i>Cēṇāvaraiyar</i>
<i>Nann.</i>	<i>Nannūl</i>	<i>Nacc.</i>	<i>Nacciṅārkkiniyar</i>
		<i>Mayilai.</i>	<i>Mayilainātar</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

Reference Works (Details in Bibliography)

AMD	<i>An Illustrated Ardha-Magadhi Dictionary</i>
ARE	<i>Annual Reports on South Indian/Indian Epigraphy</i>
<i>Bhārhut Inscrs.</i>	<i>Brāhmī Inscriptions from Bhārhut (CII II. 2)</i>
CDIAL	<i>A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages</i> (R.L. Turner, 1966)
CII	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum</i> (I - III. Listed by titles in Bibliography)
CIPK	<i>Caṅka Ilakkiya Poruṭ Kaḷaṅciyam</i>
CNR	C. Narayana Rao 1938-39
DEDR	<i>A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary</i> . 2 nd rev. edn. (D. prefixed to entries)
DPL	<i>A Dictionary of the Pāli Language</i> (R.C. Childers)
EI	<i>Epigraphia Indica</i>
<i>Epi. Car.</i>	<i>Epigraphia Carnatica</i>
ETE	<i>Early Tamil Epigraphy</i> . Iravatham Mahadevan 2003
EZ	<i>Epigraphia Zeylanica</i>
HKS	H. Krishna Sastri 1919
HTS	<i>History of Tamil Nadu: Sangam Age (Political)</i>
IAR	<i>Indian Archaeology: A Review</i>
IM	I. Mahadevan 1968 (<i>Corpus of the Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions 1966</i>)
<i>Ind. Epi. Gl.</i>	<i>Indian Epigraphical Glossary</i>
IPS	<i>Inscriptions (Texts) of the Pudukkottai State</i>
IPS(E)	<i>Inscriptions in the Pudukkottai State (translated into English)</i>
Kittel	<i>A Kannada-English Dictionary</i> (ed. F. Kittel)
KVS	K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer 1924
KZ	Kamil Zvelebil 1964 (1966)
<i>Lüders List</i>	<i>A List of Brāhmī inscriptions from the earliest times to about A.D. 400 with the exception of those of Asoka</i> (Appendix to EI X)
Malala.	<i>A Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names</i> (ed. G.P. Malalasekara)
MASI	Memoirs of the Archaeological Society of India
MSV	Mayilai Seeni Venkataswamy 1981
MW	<i>A Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> (ed. Monier Williams)
<i>Pallava Inscrs.</i>	<i>Inscriptions of the Pallavas</i> 1988
<i>Pallavar Ceppēṭukaḷ</i>	<i>Pallavar Ceppēṭukaḷ muppatu</i>
<i>Pāṅṅiyar Ceppēṭukaḷ</i>	<i>Pāṅṅiyar Ceppēṭukaḷ pattu</i>

Reference Works (contd.)

<i>PED</i>	<i>A Pāli-English Dictionary (Pāli Text Society)</i>
<i>Peru. Aka.</i>	<i>Peruñcol Akarāti</i>
<i>PPTI</i>	<i>Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index</i>
<i>PSM</i>	<i>Pāia-Sadda-Mahaṇṇavo (A Comprehensive Prakrit-Hindi Dictionary)</i>
Pulankurichi Inscrs.	Y. Subbarayalu and M.R. Raghava Varier 1991
RN	R. Nagaswamy 1972
RPS	R. Panneerselvam 1967
<i>SII</i>	<i>South Indian Inscriptions</i>
<i>SITI</i>	<i>South Indian Temple Inscriptions</i>
<i>TAS</i>	<i>Travancore Archaeological Series</i>
<i>TBK</i>	<i>Tamiḷ-Pirāmi [Tamiḷ-Brāhmī] Kalveṭṭukaḷ</i>
<i>TL</i>	<i>Tamil Lexicon</i>
<i>TVM</i>	T.V. Mahalingam 1967

Periodicals

<i>AI</i>	<i>Ancient India</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AO</i>	<i>Acta Orientalia</i>
<i>Āvaṇam</i>	Periodical of the Tamilnadu Archaeological Society
<i>BDCRI</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Deccan College (Postgraduate) Research Institute</i>
<i>Bucherbesprechungen</i>	
<i>CAJ</i>	<i>Cambridge Archaeological Journal</i>
<i>Damilica</i>	Published by the Tamilnadu State Department of Archaeology (No. 1: 1970; No. 2: 1973)
<i>DLA News</i>	Newsletter of the Dravidian Linguistic Association
<i>Dr. Studies</i>	<i>Dravidian Studies</i>
<i>IA</i>	<i>Indian Antiquary</i>
<i>IIA</i>	<i>Indo-Iranian Journal</i>
<i>IJDL</i>	<i>International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics</i>
<i>IL</i>	<i>Indian Linguistics</i>
<i>JAAP</i>	<i>Journal of Archaeology in Andhra Pradesh</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JASB</i>	<i>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay</i>

Periodicals (contd.)

JCHS	<i>Journal of the Centre for Heritage Studies</i>
JESI (SIE)	<i>Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India</i> (Alternative title: <i>Studies in Indian Epigraphy</i>)
JIAS	<i>Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies</i>
JIH	<i>Journal of Indian History</i>
<i>Jinamanjari</i>	<i>Journal in Jaina Studies</i>
JMU	<i>Journal of the Madras University</i>
JOR	<i>Journal of Oriental Research</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Tamil Studies</i>
<i>Kalvettu</i>	Periodical of the Tamilnadu State Department of Archaeology
<i>Language</i>	
ME	<i>Man and Environment</i>
MI	<i>Man in India</i>
NC	<i>The Numismatic Chronicle</i>
NIA	<i>New Indian Antiquary</i>
OLZ	<i>Orientalistische Literatur Zeitung</i>
PILC JDS	<i>Pondicherry Institute of Language and Culture, Journal of Dravidian Studies</i>
<i>Purātattva</i>	Periodical of the Indian Archaeological Society
QJMS	<i>Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society</i>
SH	<i>Studies in History</i>
SSIC	<i>Studies in South Indian Coins</i>
<i>Ta. Ci.</i>	<i>Tamil Civilization</i>
TASSI	<i>Transactions of the Archaeological Society of Southern India</i>
TBR	<i>The Book Review</i>
TC	<i>Tamil Culture</i>
THES	<i>Times Higher Education Supplement</i>
TS	<i>Tamil Studies</i>
<i>Varalāru</i>	Periodical of the Rajamanikkanar Centre for Historical Research

Other Abbreviations

Languages

AMg.	Ardhamagadhi
Dr.	Dravidian
Go.	Gondi
IA	Indo-Aryan
Ka.	Kannada
LT	Literary Tamil
Ma.	Malayalam
MIA	Middle Indo-Aryan
Pali	
PDr.	Proto-Dravidian
Pkt.	Prakrit
Sinh.	Sinhala
Skt.	Sanskrit
Ta.	Tamil
Te.	Telugu
To.	Toda
Tu.	Tulu

fem.	feminine
intj.	interjection
masc.	masculine
N.	Personal name
n.	noun
num.	numerical, numeral
obl.	oblique
P.	Place name
pl.	plural
PNG	person-number-gender
ppl.	participle, participial
pron.	pronoun, pronominal
prox.	proximate
sing.	singular
SOV	subject-object-verb
V	vowel
v.	verb

Grammatical

adj.	adjective
C	consonant
CV	syllable (consonant + vowel)
demonstr.	demonstrative

Epigraphical

cent.	century
inscr(s).	inscription(s), inscriptional
L.	Line
Ta.Br.	Tamil-Brāhmī
TB I & II	Tamil-Brāhmī orthographic systems

Institutions

ASI	Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi
CICT	Central Institute of Classical Tamil, Chennai
CIIL	Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore
CPPE	Centre for Plants, People and Ecosystems, Chennai
DCPRI	Deccan College (Postgraduate) Research Institute, Pune
DE	Office of the Director of Epigraphy, ASI, Mysore
DLA	Dravidian Linguistic Association, Thiruvananthapuram
ICHR	Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi
IITS	Internanational Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai
ISDL	International School of Dravidian Linguistics, Thiruvananthapuram
KSP	Kannada Sahitya Parishat, Bangalore
PILC	Pondicherry Institute of Linguistics and Culture
TNSA	Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, Chennai

SCHEME OF TRANSLITERATION AND DIACRITICAL MARKS

Tamil

Vowels : *a ā i ī u ū e ē ai o ō au ḥ*
 அ ஆ இ ஈ உ ஊ எ ஏ ஐ ஒ ஓ ஔ ஶ

Consonants: *k ṅ c ñ ṭ ṇ t n p m y r l v ḷ ḻ ṛ ṅ*
 க ங ச ஞ த ண த ந ப ம ய ர ல வ ள ழ ஶ ள ள

Sanskrit

Vowels : *a ā i ī u ū ṛi ē ai ō au ṁ ḥ*
 अ आ इ ई उ ऊ ऋ ए ऐ ओ औ अं अः

Consonants: *k kh g gh ṅ c ch j jh ñ ṭ ṭh ḍ ḍh ṇ*
 क ख ग घ ङ च छ ज झ ञ ट ठ ड ढ ण
t th d dh n p ph b bh m y r l v ś sh s h
 त थ द ध न प फ ब भ म य र ल व श ष स ह

Notes on transliteration

1. These are the two basic schemes of transliteration for the Dravidian and Indo-Aryan languages. See also Palaeographic Charts 1 (Brāhmī) and 2 (Tamil-Brāhmī). *ē* and *ō* are also employed in transliterating Indo-Aryan to be consistent with Dravidian.
2. The Brāhmī letters *dh* and *s* which occur marginally in Early Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions are represented by **ḍ** (bold) and *ṣ* respectively in transcription of the texts in the Tamil script
3. The rare Asokan Brāhmī *ḍ* is referred to in the discussion on the origin of *ḷ* (see also Palaeographic Chart 3).
4. Diacritical marks are not added to modern place names and Indian words commonly used in English.
5. Capital letters are not used in transliterated words printed in italics except for bibliographical references.

Note on nomenclature of scripts

See Section 5.1 for the nomenclature of Brāhmī and related scripts as adopted in this work.

TABLE OF CONVENTIONAL SYMBOLS

- [] Letters read doubtfully.
- [*] Letters not in the original; restored or supplied by the author.
- [|*] A full stop not in the original; added by the author.
- | Line divider occurring in the original.
- \$ Represents a symbol in the original (see Fig. 5.11 for illustrations).
- . . . Three dots indicate a lost passage with one or more letters.
- () (i) A letter not in the original added when the inscriptional words from the Corpus are cited elsewhere.
(ii) Words added by way of elucidation (in translation).
- (?) Meaning or interpretation of the preceding word is uncertain.
- = Used to separate external sandhi (e.g. *ariti + iṅ > ariti=ṅ*).
- The hyphen is used
(i) before a full vowel in medial position (e.g., *kuv-an*);
(ii) to separate the paragogic suffixes *i*, *iy*, *y*, *-yi* and *y-i* from the stems (e.g., *siri-y-i*);
(iii) to separate a doubled consonant or a glide before external sandhi (e.g., *cel-l=irumporai*, *kō-v=ātāṅ*);
(iv) to separate segments of some compounds (e.g., *poṅ-vāṅikan*);
(v) to indicate an incomplete word at the end of a line.
The hyphen is not used in transcription of the texts in the Tamil script.
- * Indicates a reconstructed linguistic form or one which is not attested.
- < Derived from
- > Becomes, changes into.

Notes on Reference Numbers

- Reference Numbers for inscriptions (in bold) follow the order of inscriptions in the Corpus. Tamil-Brāhmī stone inscriptions are numbered **1 - 96**. For further details, see Introduction to the Corpus.
- Reference Numbers for inscriptional words follow the order of headwords in the Commentary. Each word is allotted a Reference Number comprising the inscription number and the word number separated by a dot. Minimal lexical segments of inscriptional words are indicated by alphabetical suffixes **a**, **b**, **c**, etc., for further analysis (e.g.) **poṅ-vāṅikan** (69.2) has two segments, **poṅ** (69.2.a) and **vāṅikan** (69.2.b). For further details, see Introduction to the Commentary.

PART ONE

EARLY TAMIL INSCRIPTIONS

1. Discovery
2. Decipherment
3. Language
4. Polity

1

DISCOVERY

Discoveries of note are not of daily occurrence. Nor is the importance of such cognizable at first sight. In the field of research, where one has almost literally to grope in darkness feeling every step he takes, one cannot hit at the true worth of the finds before bestowing sufficient time, labour and thought, which they necessarily demand, not only of one, but of many heads.¹

1.1 Introduction

Until the commencement of the 20th century the earliest known inscriptions in Tamil were those of the Pallavas in the Tamil script from the 7th century and those of the Pāṇṭiyas in the Vaṭṭeluttu script from the 8th century C.E..² The existence of two scripts for the language was a puzzle, though their ultimate descent from the Brāhmī script could be inferred by comparative studies.³ Even more puzzling was the complete absence of earlier written records in Tamil, even though the earliest literary works pictured a great civilisation going back at least two thousand years.⁴ These puzzles were solved only when the cave inscriptions in Tamil in a script closely resembling that of the Asokan edicts were discovered in the southern districts of Tamilnadu around the turn of the 20th century.

Subrahmanya Aiyer's classic paper of 1924, which laid the foundation for what we now call Tamil-Brāhmī epigraphy, begins with a survey of the cave inscriptions discovered up to that time.⁵ His listing, though in chronological order, begins not with the earliest discoveries at Mangulam (1882) or Edakal (1894) or even Kilavalavu (1903) by one of his colleagues, but with Marukaltalai (1906), the fourth of the caves to be discovered with similar inscriptions, apparently because this was the first site where the script was recognised as Brāhmī closely resembling the Asokan alphabet. With the benefit of hindsight, we can now make a chronological survey of the discoveries of the cave inscriptions from the beginning. The uneven course of discoveries, sometimes coming up fast with heightened excitement and at other times slowing down with waning interest, may be studied in five stages.

- (1) Earliest discoveries (1882 – 1903).
- (2) A flood of discoveries (1906 – 1918).
- (3) Waning interest and random discoveries (1926 – 1960).
- (4) Revival of interest: fresh copying of inscriptions (1961 – 1980).
- (5) Recent discoveries (1981 – 2012).

1. K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer 1924: p. 275.

2. T.N. Subramanian 1938 (1996 reprint): p. 19; 1957: p. 1505.

3. T.A. Gopinatha Rao 1908, *TAS I* (1988 reprint): pp. 299 – 344, 395 – 431. T.N. Subramanian 1938 (1996 reprint): Tables. C. Sivaramamurti 1952: charts.

4. The editions of U.Ve. Swaminathaiyar of the earliest Tamil literary works of the Caṅkam Age began to appear from 1887. The historical data contained in works like *Puranānūru* (1894) and *Patirruppattu* (1904) opened up a new world and led to a radical reassessment of the antiquity and historicity of Tamil civilisation.

5. K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer 1924: pp. 275 – 278.

The Corpus of inscriptions, which forms the core of the present study, includes 96 Tamil-Brāhmī stone inscriptions in this Edition. I have discussed the more important discoveries in each period in somewhat greater detail, bringing up the story to the present, anticipating the process of decipherment dealt with in the next chapter.

1.2 Earliest discoveries (1882 – 1903)

1.2.1 Mangulam: Pāṇṭiya inscriptions of the Caṅkam Age

The cave inscriptions at Mangulam near Madurai were first noticed in 1882 by Robert Sewell who recorded the following observation about the site:

Mauncolum [Mangulam]: 12 miles north-east of Madura [Madurai] and 6 miles west of Melur. A mile east of the village is a small hill called Karugumalai [Kalugumalai] in which is a cave with inscriptions. There is also a rock which the natives call *Pañchapāṇḍavar paḍukkai* or the beds of the Five Pāṇḍavas.¹

The stone beds on the Kalugumalai hill at Mangulam were also noticed by Francis² in 1906. The cave inscriptions at this site were rediscovered by Subrahmanya Aiyer³ in the same year.

(i) Confusion over the name of the site

While Sewell and Francis had recorded that the Kalugumalai hill is in the Mangulam village, the next report in *ARE* 1906–07 stated that the hill belonged "partly to Arittapatti and partly to Mangulam". However, according to Krishna Sastri, the cave inscriptions are "nearly 3 to 4 miles away from the [Arittapatti] village and belong properly to a smaller village named Mangulam".⁴ In spite of such clear documentation, the site was inexplicably called 'Arittapatti' in *ARE* 1906–07 and the subsequent Annual Reports and this name was adopted by Krishna Sastri⁵ himself and by Subrahmanya Aiyer⁶ and others⁷ following their lead. It was only in 1966 that the original name Mangulam was restored to the site.⁸ By this time however, the eastern hamlet of Mangulam called Meenakshipuram had become a separate revenue village and the name of the site was again changed adding to the confusion.⁹ Considering the long association of Mangulam with the now famous cave inscriptions at this site, the name has been retained in this study.¹⁰ Incidentally, another cave with two Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions was discovered later at Arittapatti itself.¹¹

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1. R. Sewell 1882: Vol.I, p. 294.
 2. W. Francis 1906: Vol. I, p. 278.
 3. *ARE* 1906–07: Paragraph 3. K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer 1924: p. 276.
 4. H. Krishna Sastri 1919: p. 336.
 5. H. Krishna Sastri 1919: p. 336.
 6. K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer 1924: p. 289.
 7. e.g., T.V. Mahalingam 1967: p. 201.
 8. Iravatham Mahadevan, *Corpus of the Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions 1966* : Nos. 1–6.
 9. The new name Meenakshipuram for the site was first proposed in R. Nagaswamy 1972.
 10. In ancient times, Kalugumalai was most probably included in the village of Veḷḷarai mentioned in two of the cave inscriptions on this hill (*ARE* 462 and 463–464 /1906 = Corpus: 6 & 3 respectively. The place may be identified with the village of Veḷḷari-p-patti to the south of the hill (V. Vedachalam, personal communication).
 11. The inscriptions are included in Corpus: 7 & 90.

(ii) *Mix-up of estampages*

There are four caves on the Kalugumalai hill (Fig. 1.1), three of them at a higher level spread from south to north, and the fourth one at a lower level. The inscriptions in the upper caves are engraved on the brow of the boulders, and the one in the lower cave on its rear wall. The upper southern cave called the 'kitchen' has the longest inscription (*ARE* 465/06) of the site. The upper middle cave called the *palli-k-kūṭam* 'school' has two short inscriptions (461 & 462). The upper northern cave has a long inscription engraved in two segments (463 – 464) with only a small gap in between. The lower cave has another long inscription (460).¹

Krishna Sastri mixed up the estampages from two different caves in his readings, interposing the two short inscriptions (461 & 462) in between the two segments of the longer inscription (463 – 464).² Subrahmanya Aiyer also followed this scrambled order in his readings.³ Not surprisingly, neither reading makes much sense. Other epigraphists, relying on the earlier readings without visiting the caves themselves, have made the same mistake.⁴ It was only in 1966 that the correct order of reading was restored on the basis of my study of the inscriptions *in situ*.⁵

(iii) *The 'forgotten' inscription of Mangulam*

The longest inscription at Mangulam,⁶ which also happens to be the earliest and historically one of the most significant of the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions, was totally forgotten after its rediscovery in 1906 and was not heard of again for the next sixty years and its estampage has never been published.⁷

I visited the Mangulam caves for the first time in November 1965. The bright winter sun had lit up the facade of the upper southern cave (Fig. 1.2) and the long one-line inscription on the brow of the boulder caught my eye. It was weather-worn and looked more like bruising on the rock than engraving, but was otherwise undamaged. The bold and legible letters were clearly visible to the naked eye. As I spelled out *ne-ṭu-ñ-ca-li-ya-ṇ* (*neṭuñceliyan*) and *va-lu-t-ti-y* (*valuti*), I realised with astonishment that I was indeed looking at an inscription of a Pāṇṭiya king of the Caṅkam Age not reported earlier. However, I found out later that I had only rediscovered the long-forgotten inscription at Mangulam, which had till then existed only as a catalogue number (*ARE* 465/1906).

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1. The following is the correspondence between the serial numbers of the inscriptions of 1906 in *ARE* 1906–07 and those in the present Corpus (in bold): 460 = **2**; 461 = **5**; 462 = **6**; 463 & 464 = **3**; 465 = **1**. Estampages of only three inscriptions (460, 462 and the first segment of 463 & 464) have been published in *ARE* 1917–18: Pl. facing p. 6. Another inscription was discovered later in the upper southern cave (*ARE* B.242/1963–64 = **4**).
 2. H. Krishna Sastri 1919: No. IV B–E at p. 338.
 3. K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer 1924: No. IV A–C at p. 292.
 4. e.g., T.V. Mahalingam 1967: pp. 201–211.
 5. *Corpus of the Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions* 1966: Nos. 3, 5 and 6 corresponding to the same serial numbers in the present Corpus.
 6. *ARE* 465/1906 = Corpus: **1**.
 7. See Pl.1. The Plates (Nos. 1–96) face the corresponding inscriptions in Part Three (Corpus of Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions) in this Edition.



Fig. 1.1. Mangulam : general view of the Kalugumalai hill, east face.



Fig. 1.2. Mangulam : cave with the 'forgotten' inscription of Netuñceliyan.

During the same visit, I discovered that the name *neṭiñcaliyaṅ* (*neṭuñceliyaṅ*) also occurs in the long inscription¹ in the lower cave at the site. It is strange but true that the incorrect reading of a single letter (*li*) as *t̥hi* by Krishna Sastri² and as *ri* by Subrahmanya Aiyer³ resulted in their failure to recognise the famous name and the historical significance of the record.⁴ Both inscriptions, illustrated with tracings directly made from the stone, were published by me in 1966.⁵

The two cave inscriptions of *Neṭuñceliyaṅ* at Mangulam are the oldest historical records in Tamil discovered so far.⁶ Their archaic linguistic and palaeographic features indicate a date around the 2nd century B.C.E. The inscriptions record the gift of a monastery to Nanta-siri Kuvan, a senior Jaina monk. These are the earliest known Jaina inscriptions of South India and among the oldest of the kind in the country. Recent explorations by the Tamilnadu State Department of Archaeology have revealed the remains of brick structures outside the lower cave, and a large number of stone beds inside the cave.⁷ Short, painted inscriptions from a later period have been found more recently on the ceiling of a cave at Mangulam.⁸

1.2.2 *Edakal: Cēra inscriptions of the Caṅkam Age*

Edakal hill, about 6 km. south-west of Sultan's Battery (Sultan Bathery) in Wynad District, Kerala, is near the junction of the present states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu. The hill is about 1500 ft. above the local ground level and 4000 ft. above the mean sea level. On the western slope of the hill near the summit is a large cave whose walls are covered with prehistoric carvings, among which a few inscriptions of later times are found (Fig. 1.3).

The cave was discovered in 1894 by Fawcett, the Superintendent of Police, Malabar District. He visited the cave several times more in the next two years and made careful drawings and took photographs of the rock carvings and inscriptions. He transmitted the photographs to Hultzsch, the Government Epigraphist, for his comments on the inscriptions. Hultzsch made immediate arrangements for taking

1. *ARE* 460/1906 = Corpus: 2. See also Pl. 2.

2. H. Krishna Sastri 1919: pp. 337–338.

3. K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer 1924: pp. 289–292.

4. In May 1966, I called on the veteran epigraphist, K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer, to apprise him of my findings at Mangulam and Pugalur and seek his blessings. In the course of our discussion that day, I asked him about the 'forgotten' inscription at Mangulam. He recalled that when he visited the site in August 1906, there was a large beehive on the brow of the cave very near the inscription, which made it hazardous to take a closer look or make copies. As the estampage made available later was too illegible, the study was not pursued further.

5. *Corpus of the Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions 1966*: Nos. 1 & 2 = Corpus: 1 & 2.

6. In the course of three lectures in the Seminar on Archaeology at Madurai University (I. Mahadevan 1970a: pp. 12–13), I referred to these two inscriptions. T.P. Meenakshisundaran, then Vice-Chancellor of the University, proposed that an expedition be organised the very next day to see the inscriptions at Mangulam, hardly an hour's drive from the city. The expedition was led by R. Nagaswamy, Director of Archaeology, Tamilnadu, and included, besides myself, many archaeologists, epigraphists and linguists who were participating in the Seminar. The expedition proved to be a success as both the inscriptions were clearly visible and could be read without difficulty.

7. *Tamiḷ Pirāmi [Tamil-Brāhmī] Kalvetṭukaḷ (TBK)* 2006: Fig 6.

8. D. Dayalan 2009.

estampages of the inscriptions and published a brief note (without illustrations) on the discovery.¹ He also forwarded the estampages with his detailed comments on the inscriptions to Fawcett who incorporated them along with his own drawings and photographs in the paper published by him in 1901.² Hultsch identified four inscriptions at Edakal as in "cave characters" (the older name for the Southern Brāhmī script).³ He read two of them, one each in Sanskrit⁴ and Tamil,⁵ and assigned them to about the end of the 5th century C.E. He declared that the other two inscriptions⁶ were "unintelligible" to him, but "decidedly archaic".

(i) *Inscriptions neglected and lost*

One would have expected that the announcement by Hultsch of the discovery of inscriptions in 'cave characters' not known till then to occur in the Tamil country (including the Kerala region) would have aroused the curiosity of other investigators to examine the unread inscriptions. What happened thereafter is an incredible story of long neglect and the eventual loss of the two earliest inscriptions at Edakal.⁷ During the next century, that is, between 1897 when Hultsch had the estampages taken and 1995–96 when our team visited Edakal, there is no record of any attempt to read the inscriptions. In course of time, the inscriptions fell into total oblivion as there is virtually no mention of them in any later epigraphical publications.⁸

The rediscovery of the Edakal cave inscriptions came about accidentally. I was attending a seminar on epigraphy held in March 1995 in the University of Kerala at Thiruvananthapuram. There I saw exhibited enlarged photographs of Hultsch's 1897 estampages of the Edakal inscriptions (taken from the 1985 reprint of *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XXX). None of the epigraphists from Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu who were participating in the seminar had heard of these inscriptions. The photographs clearly showed that two of the inscriptions were in the Tamil-Brāhmī script of ca. 3rd century C.E. Both commence with the Tamil word *kō* 'king, chieftain' and one of them ends with the alveolar *ṇ* available only in Tamil-Brāhmī.⁹

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1. Madras Government Orders Nos. 1062 & 1063, Public, 10th August 1897, Paragraph 14; Nos. 120–123/1897 (in *ARE* 1896–97). cf. one-volume reprint of *ARE* 1887–1905 (1986).
 2. F. Fawcett 1901 (reprint 1985). See also Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier 1999: pp. 85–95, 191–197.
 3. *ARE* 120–123/1897 corresponding to estampages 1–4 in Fawcett 1901 (Pl. facing p. 412). No. 120 is a Sanskrit inscription. Nos. 121 & 122 are Tamil inscriptions in the Early Vaṭṭeḷuttu script not included in this Edition. No. 123 is actually a pair of short inscriptions engraved in one line, but separated by a natural cleft in the rock. They are included in the *Corpus*: 81 & 82.
 4. *ARE* 120/1897.
 5. *ARE* 121/1897.
 6. *ARE* 122 & 123/1897.
 7. *ARE* 123/1897.
 8. The only exceptions are: *SIIVI* (1928): Nos. 74–77 = *ARE* 120–123/1897 without the texts or illustrations. The Sanskrit inscription at Edakal as read by Hultsch was republished in the *Corpus of the Kadamba Inscriptions*: No. 50.
 9. *ARE* 123/1897 = estampage No. 4 in Fawcett 1901 = *Corpus*: 81 & 82.

The unexpected discovery of the occurrence of Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions in Kerala led to organising an expedition to the Edakal cave in October 1995 and again in February 1996.¹ During our first visit to the cave, we copied the Sanskrit inscription and the two Early Vaṭṭeluttu inscriptions, all deeply engraved on the south rock wall of the cave and still in an excellent state of preservation. But in spite of intensive search we could not locate the pair of Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions reported to be engraved on the north rock wall of the cave. We had to discontinue the search as it was getting late and we had to reach the plains before darkness fell. A second visit was organised by the team in February 1996 and this time, we were equipped with exact measurements based on Fawcett's photographs of 1894–96. We were able to locate the spot² where the inscriptions ought to have been, but found, to our dismay, that they had been totally obliterated by the mindless vandalism of tourists who had incised their names over them on the soft rock.³ At present, the only source for these two inscriptions is the excellent reproduction of Hultzsch's 1897 estampage in Fawcett 1901.⁴

(ii) *New discoveries at Edakal*

The proverbial silver lining in the dark cloud appeared in the form of the discovery, as a result of our intensive search in February 1996, of two more Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions⁵ on the north rock wall of the cave, which had earlier escaped the attention of Fawcett. All the four short Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions appear to be contemporary and may be assigned to ca. 3rd century C.E. on palaeographic grounds. The occurrence of the expression *kaṭummiputa cēra* in one of the newly discovered inscriptions⁶ proves that these are records of the times of the Cēra dynasty of the Caṅkam Age.

Yet another Tamil-Brāhmī inscription has been discovered by M.R. Raghava Varier quite recently in the Edakal cave.⁷ The inscription may be dated to late 4th or early 5th century C.E. on palaeographic grounds. The inscription was engraved apparently by a casual visitor to the cave near a tall anthropomorphic figure of the pre-historic period (see Pl. 96). The brief inscription reads, *i palama* 'this (is) ancient'. The reference is to the pre-historic figure.⁸ This is by far the earliest Malayalam inscription discovered and

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1. The members of the team which visited the cave were, Rajan Gurukkal and M.R. Raghava Varier from the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, S. Swaminathan from the Directorate of Epigraphy, ASI, Mysore, and A. Seetharaman, Thanjavur, besides myself.
 2. See Fig. 1.3 in the present volume reproducing the photograph in Pl. VI: Fig. 1 in Fawcett 1901. The Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions are visible at top left. They are no longer extant.
 3. The vandalism had started right from the discovery of the cave. Hultzsch noted, "To the right of the second line, [photograph] No. 1. shows the signature of a certain C. Kannan in modern Malayalam characters". Fawcett added dryly, "In reference to the above remarks, I may note that the C. Kannan was the work of one of my own men" (Fawcett 1901 : p. 412). Mercifully, the said C. Kannan did not engrave his name over the inscriptions, a fate which later befell *ARE* 123/1897 (estampage No. 4 in Fawcett 1901).
 4. Reprinted in Pl. 81 & 82 in this Edition.
 5. Corpus: 79 & 80. The inscriptions were discovered by S. Swaminathan of our team.
 6. Corpus: 80.
 7. *The Hindu*, February 9, 2012.
 8. See Corpus: 96 and Commentary thereon for details.

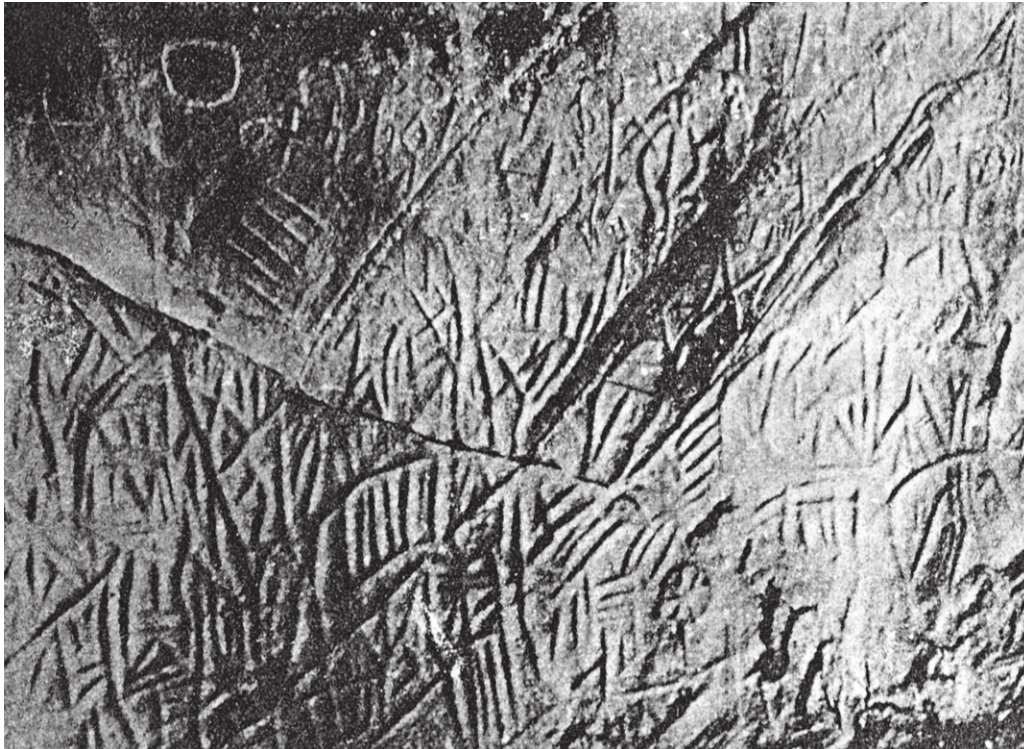


Fig. 1.3. Edakal : cave with prehistoric rock carvings. Photograph taken in 1894–96.
The Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions (top left) are no longer extant.



Fig. 1.4. Kilavalavu : cave with Tamil-Brāhmī inscription.
(Note the post-holes above the drip ledge. The pillars are recent structures.)

the only one in the Brāhmī script.¹ The Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions from the Edakal cave have now been read and are included in 79 – 82 & 96 in the present Corpus.²

1.2.3 Kilavalavu: the earliest reference to Tondi on the east coast

In 1903, Venkoba Rao discovered an inscription in "archaic characters" in a cave on the rocky outcrop at Kilavalavu, a small village about 38 km. north-east of Madurai (Fig. 1.4).³ Even though the inscription is engraved in bold and legible characters and is reasonably well-preserved, it could not be read and its significance was not recognised until much later after many similar inscriptions had come to light. Neither Venkayya⁴ nor Krishna Sastri⁵ refers to it in the Annual Reports on the discovery of the cave inscriptions up to 1909. It was only in 1910, seven years after the discovery, that the Kilavalavu cave and its inscription find a mention in Krishna Sastri's report.⁶ Even thereafter, the estampage of the inscription was not included in the large number of photographs of the cave inscriptions published in the Annual Reports during 1911 – 18.⁷ The correct reading of this inscription has eluded the investigators until recently probably because of the unusual manner in which it is engraved.⁸ The present Corpus includes the most recent direct reading from the stone and the interpretation based on it.⁹ The inscription is notable for the earliest reference to the port of Tondi on the east coast.¹⁰

1.3 A flood of discoveries (1906 – 1918)

The cave inscriptions at Mettuppatti, a village 40 km. north-west of Madurai, were first reported by Francis in 1906.¹¹ In the same year, L.A. Cammiade, a Deputy Collector, discovered a cave inscription at Marukaltalai¹² near Tirunelveli and Subrahmanya Aiyer discovered another at Anaimalai¹³ near Madurai. The cave inscriptions at Mangulam¹⁴ and Mettuppatti¹⁵ were rediscovered by Subrahmanya Aiyer in 1906 and Venkayya in 1908 respectively. Unlike at Edakal and Kilavalavu, the newly discovered cave inscriptions were immediately recognised as written in the Brāhmī script.¹⁶ The unexpected occurrence

1. Iravatham Mahadevan. 2012a.

2. See the detailed report on the expedition to the Edakal cave (I. Mahadevan 1999: pp. 1 – 19.)

3. ARE 135 / 1903 = SII VIII: No. 422 = Corpus: 10. He also discovered another inscription in similar characters in this cave. Krishna Sastri makes a passing reference to it as "much damaged" (ARE 1909 – 10: Paragraph 4). I have not been able to locate this inscription which seems to be completely eroded as it was engraved probably above the drip ledge.

4. V. Venkayya 1907 & 1908.

5. H. Krishna Sastri 1909.

6. H. Krishna Sastri 1910.

7. The estampage was first published in T.V. Mahalingam 1967: Pl. 7.

8. The inscription is engraved from right to left and with most (but not all) of the characters turned upside down. See Section 5.8 (Direction of writing) for discussion on this peculiar feature found at Kilavalavu and a few other caves.

9. A revised version of my earlier attempt (1966) is included in Corpus: 10.

10. It is a matter of regret that due to indiscriminate quarrying nearby, the first letter in *tonṭi* is not at present fully preserved. It can however be seen in old photographs and estampages. See Pl. 10.

11. W. Francis 1906: Vol. I, pp. 294 – 295.

12. ARE 407 / 1906.

13. ARE 457 / 1906.

14. ARE 460 – 465 / 1906.

15. ARE 45 (a) – (e) / 1908.

16. V. Venkayya 1907 & 1908.



Fig. 1.5. Alagarmalai : general view of the hill.



Fig. 1.6. Alagarmalai : cave with Tamil-Brahmī inscriptions.

of Brāhmī inscriptions in the Tamil country aroused great interest and, as a result of vigorous search, no less than 39 inscriptions from 12 caves were found in quick succession from the southern Districts of Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli.¹ The list of inscriptions copied each year was published in the *ARE*² along with description of the caves and other interesting features associated with them.³ During this period, photographs of estampages of most of the cave inscriptions discovered up to 1918 were also published in the *ARE* from time to time.⁴ Among the inscriptions discovered during this extraordinarily productive period,⁵ the most significant ones are, besides the two Pāṇṭiya inscriptions from Mangulam mentioned earlier, those from Alagarmalai which record the gifts of merchants from Madurai and another from Sittannavasal providing interesting evidence for early contacts with the Jains of Karnataka.

1.3.1 *Alagarmalai: endowment by merchants from Madurai*

The cave at Alagarmalai, about 20 km. north-east of Madurai, is located at a considerable height on the hill range and can be reached only after a stiff climb (Fig. 1.5).⁶ The cave is spacious and has a number of stone beds carved on the rocky floor and a deep pool in one corner. The ceiling of the cave is quite high and it is very difficult to read or copy the inscriptions engraved at an inaccessible height on the brow of the cave. The inscriptions were copied only in 1910, two years after they were discovered, when a high wooden scaffolding was erected with the help of the village headman.⁷ After a long interval, the Alagarmalai inscriptions were copied again by the ASI in 1963–64 when two more inscriptions were noticed on the brow of the cave.⁸

The importance of the Alagarmalai inscriptions was not recognised for a long time after the discovery as the estampages of the weather-worn inscriptions are mostly illegible,⁹ and their photographs published in the *ARE*¹⁰ are too small in size to show much detail. The attempts by Krishna Sastri¹¹ and Subrahmanya Aiyer¹² to edit the inscriptions from estampages were not successful.

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1. Marukaltalai, Anaimalai and Mangulam (1906); Varichiyur, Mettuppatti, Tirupparankunram and Alagarmalai (1908); Kunnakkudi (1909); Kongarpuliyankulam and Muttuppatti (1910); Karungalakkudi (1911) and Sittannavasal (1914) including additional inscriptions discovered at Alagarmalai (1910) and Mettuppatti (1917–18).
 2. See *ARE* for the respective years for details of the location of the inscriptions.
 3. V. Venkayya 1907 & 1908. H. Krishna Sastri 1909, 1910, 1912, 1915 & 1918.
 4. *ARE* 1911–12, 1914–15 and 1917–18.
 5. Varichiyur was discovered by L. Vibert, Additional District Magistrate, Madurai, and Karungalakkudi by the Collector of Madurai (whose name is not recorded in the *ARE*). Sittannavasal was discovered by Radhakrishna Aiyar of the Pudukkottai Educational Service. The other inscriptions found during this period (after 1908) were discovered by officers working under the Government Epigraphist.
 6. For an account of the discovery of the Alagarmalai cave and its features, see H. Krishna Sastri, 1909 & 1910. The inscriptions are numbered *ARE* 334/1908 and 70–79/1910.
 7. H. Krishna Sastri 1910.
 8. *ARE* 244 & 245/1963–64. Both had been copied earlier also in 1910, but not included in the Annual Report.
 9. The Alagarmalai estampages copied in 1963–64 by the ASI are included in Pl. 36–48.
 10. *ARE* 1911–12: Pl. facing p. 50; *ARE* 1917–18: Pl. facing p. 6.
 11. H. Krishna Sastri 1919: pp. 344–346. However, he could offer no interpretation of the texts.
 12. K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer 1924: p. 299. He confined himself to the reading of a few disjointed expressions.



Fig. 1.7. Sittannavasal: general view of the cave.



Fig. 1.8. Sittannavasal: stone bed with inscribed edges.

The Alagarmalai inscriptions were copied again by two successive teams led by me, once in 1965 and again in 1992, from specially built steel scaffolding, each time securing better copies than what were available before. The earlier readings were published in 1966¹ and the further improved readings are included in this volume.²

The Alagarmalai cave (Fig. 1.6) has 13 Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions, the largest number from a single site. One of the inscriptions is engraved on a stone bed on the floor and the others on the brow of the cave. The inscriptions may be assigned to ca. 1st century B.C.E. on palaeographic evidence. They record the endowments made by a group of merchants and other donors, all from Madurai. The merchants are identified as traders in salt, sugar, ploughshare and textiles. One of the donors is a goldsmith. Among the others are an accountant (described as the 'chief of scribes'), a Jaina nun and probably a Pāṇṭiya prince. The Alagarmalai inscriptions provide important evidence for the support extended to the Jaina monasteries by the merchant communities in this period.

1.3.2 *Sittannavasal: abode of a Jaina nun from Karnataka*

One of the better-known early cave inscriptions in Tamilnadu is at Sittannavasal in Pudukkottai District. A large natural cave locally known as Ēḷaṭippaṭṭam (Fig. 1.7) is situated near the summit along the eastern face of the hill.³ Inside the cave is a large and smoothly polished stone bed. A Tamil-Brāhmī inscription is deeply engraved along two adjacent edges of the bed (Fig. 1.8). As the stone bed is inside the cave and the characters of the inscription have been carefully smoothed, this is the best preserved of the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions discovered so far.⁴

There are 16 more stone beds in this cave, some of them bearing later inscriptions in Tamil characters of ca. 8th century C.E. These beds are not so well-made and some of them are damaged. A study *in situ* has shown that the centrally located and exceptionally well-made stone bed with the Tamil-Brāhmī inscription was fashioned much earlier and remained the only one in the cave for centuries until the other stone beds with inscriptions in the Tamil script were added in the early medieval period.

The well-preserved and easily accessible Tamil-Brāhmī cave inscription at Sittannavasal has received attention from many scholars. Krishna Sastri made two attempts to read the inscription;⁵ but neither was successful as he could not suggest any plausible interpretation of his own readings. Subrahmanya Aiyer's reading produced the first broadly correct interpretation of the inscription, even though he misread some of the letters occurring in proper names.⁶

As some of the expressions like *erumināṭu* in the inscription appeared to indicate contacts with Karnataka, I felt that it should be re-examined by an interdisciplinary team with expertise in Tamil and Kannada epigraphy. At my invitation, M.D. Sampath, then Chief Epigraphist, ASI, joined our team which visited

1. *Corpus of the Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions 1966*: Nos. 30 – 44.

2. *Corpus*: 36 – 48.

3. For a description of the cave and its features, see H. Krishna Sastri in *ARE* 1914 – 15: Paragraphs 1 & 2.

4. *ARE* 388 A / 1914 = *Corpus*: 49. See the excellent reproduction of the estampage in *ARE* 1914 – 15: Pl. I.

5. H. Krishna Sastri 1915 & 1919. See also Section 2.3.

6. K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer 1924: pp. 296 – 299.