

## **Archaeological and Ethnographic Field Visit to the Kongu Region<sup>1</sup> by the Pattanam Excavation team**

Dates: 23/05/2012- 24/05/2012

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**Site 1: Kodumanal** (N11<sup>0</sup> 6.42' ; E77<sup>0</sup>30.51' (Rajan 2004) )

Type: Iron Age/ Early Historic habitation/ industrial *cum* burial site

Etymology: The word Kodumanal comes from *Kodu manam*, meaning good/ ancient/ early smell. Kodumanam is mentioned in the *Patittupathu*

The village of Kodumanal, in the Erode District of Tamila Nadu, lies in the semi- arid zone on the Northern bank of river Noyyal (Etymology: *Noy-* fine sand), a tributary to Kaveri and about 20km West of Chennimalai. Kodumanal is an Iron Age habitation *cum* burial site and was studied previously by V.N Srinivasa Desikan (1961), S. Raju (1970) and Nagaswamy. The site was excavated in four seasons during the years 1985, 1989 and 1999 (Director of excavations Dr. Y. Subrayalu) by the Department of Epigraphy. and Archaeology, Tamil University, Tanjavur in association with the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, Madras University and the Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department. Forty-eight trenches were laid in the habitation area and 13 megalithic burials were opened in the cemetery area. For details on the previous seasons of excavations, see Rajan (1994).

The present season of excavations are conducted by the Pondicherry Central University (Director of excavations Dr. K. Rajan). When the Pattanam team visited the site the

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<sup>1</sup> The notes are on the basis of the observations made by Dr. Rajan and the research team from the Pondicherry University working at Kodumanal, Tamil Nadu.

excavations were drawing to a close and the excavators had left key features and artefacts *in situ* for the benefit of the visitors. The habitation mound covers an area of 50 acres.



*Fig 1: Trenches 2012, Kodumanal habitation mound*

The river Noyyal is to the South of the habitation area and the trenches are laid at a distance of about 100-200 meters from the river. Kodumanal is ideally located in close proximity to different raw material sources that have contributed to its functioning as a multi- industrial site. Looking from the trenches to the south, on the opposite bank of the river, the hillock of Padiyur can be seen to the left and Arasam palayam can be seen to the right side. Padiyur is a beryl mine and is currently protected by the Geological Survey of India (GSI). It is inaccessible to the public. Arasamplayam is a source of quartz. The source of Iron ore is also close by. The ore is granite based magnetite ore. The method of steel manufacturing practiced here is decarburisation. From the surface, pieces of slag and tuyere could be identified. Buchanan (1807) has mentioned about the Iron manufacture in the area. In addition to these, a variety of non- local materials is found from the site. These include carnelian, lapis lazuli, copper, gold and silver.



*Fig 2: Quartz crystals in situ, Kodumanal 2012*

This season in the habitation area, four trenches (see fig 1) (N 11<sup>0</sup>06.645' E 77<sup>0</sup>31.360') were laid separated by baulks. The total deposit is of one meter and has three different floor levels. The trenches, Dr. Rajan explained, gave evidences of quartz working and shell working and remains of a furnace fixed with clay were found. Pieces of quartz (worked ?) could be seen close to the surface level. (see fig 2). A cluster of conch shells mixed with bangle pieces of conch were also unearthed (see fig 3).

The ceramic types found include Russet Coated Painted Ware (RCPW) (see fig 4.a) and Black and Red Ware (BRW) . The ceramics are in excellent condition of preservation, possibly due to the relative lack of disturbance and lower water content



*Fig 3: Conch shell cluster in situ, Kodumanal 2012*



*Fig 4: a. RCPW sherd, b. sherd with graffiti, Kodumanal 2012*

in the soil. A large number of sherds have graffiti marks on them (see fig 4.b)

A total of 105 sherds with Brahmi script were recovered this season (see fig 5). These are personal names inscribed on the shoulder of the pots. In cases where the style of writing is cursive, which Dr. Rajan opined, must belong to *circa.* 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. This seems to be the style of writing found on a pottery sherd at Pattanam ( PT12, SHS 12857). One of the sherds read as *sabhamantai/sabhamakatai*. This is the first instance of *sabha* from a potsherd. This is a large amount in comparison to a total of 117 Brahmi inscribed sherds from all the previous seasons of excavation. All are post firing inscriptions.





*Fig 5: Sherd with Tamil Brahmi script, Kodumanal 2012*

The burial area is to the East and North of the habitation area and has a spread of 100 acres. Dr. Rajan is of the opinion that the earlier burials must have been located in the eastern part and it later spread to the South.



*Fig 6: Megalith XV, Kodumanal 2012*

This season a transepted cist (Megalith XV) (N 11006.771' E77031.492') was excavated by the team see (fig 6). Dr. Rajan suggested that the common pattern found in the case of transepted cists in the area is for the South-facing chamber to have a keyhole shaped port hole and the North facing ones to have round shaped and the east facing chambers to have a trapezium shaped port hole. (See fig 7). In the North- West corner of Megalith XV, a sword was found kept in a crossed position along with an arrowhead. Each of the chambers was originally covered with individual capstones.



*Fig 7: Port holes, Megalith XV, Kodumanal 2012*

Megalith XV yielded Carnelian and Onyx (?) beads. The commonest type of carnelian beads found from the site is disk-shaped etched carnelian beads. The most common pattern of etching is to give a border of short parallel-etched lines. A few beads of barrel and cylindrical shapes are also found.



*Fig 8: Worked quartz from Kodumanal*

**Site 2: Arasampalayam** (N11<sup>0</sup>03.548' E77<sup>0</sup>31.431'")

Type: Raw material source: Quartz

Arasampalayam is a quartz mining site. Large quartz boulders can be seen on the surface. Subsurface quartz formations could also have been exploited. In association with the quartz formation, semi- vertical pinkish feldspar (see fig 8) layers as well as sheets of black mica is also found.



*Fig : Quartz and feldspar formations, Arasampalayam*

**Date: 24/05/2012**

Arachallur and Pugalur are two sites visited which have cave inscriptions in rock shelters. The rock shelters often have beds carved into granite donated to Jain monks. These are believed to be from *circa* 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE. These are usually near a perennial source of water. Tamil Brahmi inscriptions, in most cases pertaining to the donation, are seen in association. 127 inscriptions have so far been identified from rock shelters. For further reading see Mahadevan (2003).





*Fig 9: Evolution of Tamil Brahmi script, Archaeological Museum, Karur*

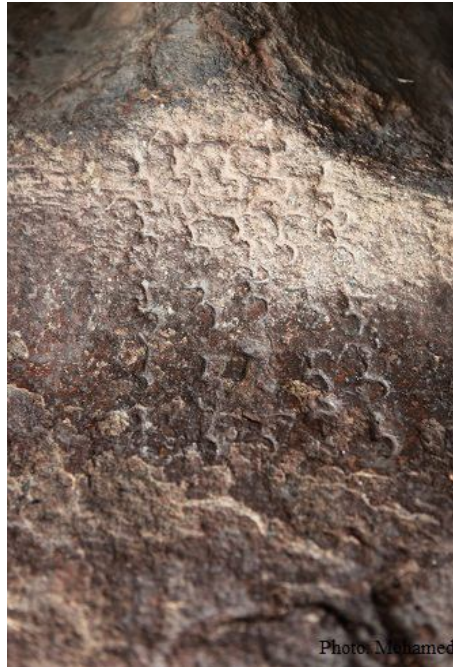
Most of these inscriptions date from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to 3<sup>rd</sup> Century CE. The dating of the inscriptions are based on the stylistic changes. The early form of Tamil Brahmi is more angular in nature and progressively becomes cursive. (see fig 9) The vertical lines that go up in the earlier style also come down or curve down in the later periods. All the 127 inscriptions have Jain associations even though they do not explicitly propagate Jain philosophy. They are mostly names of the donors and their place names. The donors include specialist traders of ploughshare, gemstone, textiles etc.

**Site 3: Arachallur** (N 11<sup>o</sup>10.248' E77<sup>o</sup>41.546)

Type: Rock shelter

Etymology: village of *aram* (dharma: jain association)

The rock shelter at Arachallur has rock beds donated to Jain monks. The opening of the shelter faces west. Near to it on the upper side on the north west direction is a perennial pond. Such a pond is called a *pali*.



*Fig 10: Musical notations in Tamil Brahmi, Arachallur*

One of the inscriptions is a musical notation and is the only one of its kind. (see fig 10 ). The second inscriptions (see fig 11) in the cave talks of the donation of the rock bed made by devan *catan*. *Cat* means caravan. (*eluthum unarthan maniyavannakkan catan*). Arachallur script is cursive in nature (*circa*. 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE style).



*Fig 11: Tamil Brahmi inscription, Arachallur*

The term *maniyavannakkan* refers to gemstone tester.

#### **Site 4: Pugalur**

Type: Rock shelter

Pugalur, to the southern bank of river Amaravati is near Karur, believed to be the early Chera capital. The Rock shelters in Pugalur, are protected by the state department of archaeology and are on the sides of a hillock. At present on the top of the hillock is a modern temple.



*Fig 12: Rock beds, Pugalur*

Inscription 1: (N 11<sup>0</sup>04.447' E77<sup>0</sup>59.960'') *Karur ponvanikan nantiyadithanam* : bed dominated by Karur gold trader nanti.

Inscription 2: (N 11<sup>0</sup>04.456'' E 77<sup>0</sup>59.961)

*ta avanan yaattoor* (place)

*senkayapan orai*

(name) (shelter)

*ko aatan sel irumporai*

(king)(cheralan)

*mahan perunkadukon*

(son)

*mahan iramkadumkon*

*mahan iranko*

*ahe arutha kal aal* (?)

The inscription refers to donation of the rock bed by Cheran Ilanko and narrates his



geneology (see fig 13).



*Fig 13: Tamil Brahmi inscription, Pugalur*

Inscription 3 : is in a cave facing east. (details to be looked at )

**Site 4: Karattu palayam** (N10054.582' E77043.724')

Type: Iron Age burial site

Etymology: Karattu (small mound)

Karattu palayam (see fig 14) is an Iron Age burial complex with hundreds of cairn circle monuments. Some of the monuments have a stone circle of larger boulders surrounding the cairn packing. The circle stones are of granite and quartz. The cairn packing is of smaller boulders of granite and *chunnambukal* (lime stone). There is a water source near the site, towards north from the GPS point. The site has not been excavated so far.



*Fig 14: Cairn Circle, Karattu palayam*

**Site 5: Kangayam 1 (N 10<sup>0</sup>59.487' E77034.140')**

Type: Archaeological Mound

This is an unexcavated archaeological mound. Quartz pieces and pieces of Iron slag were found on the surface

**Site 6: Kangayam 2**

Type: Modern bead making workshop

Gemstone cutting is a traditional occupation in the Kongu region. For further reading on the subject see Athiyamman and Rajan (2004). The team visited a site of manufacture and polishing of stone beads. This is a home based industry run by two individuals in partnership. In the duration of the visit Babu, one of the partner demonstrated how moonstone inlays are made.



*Fig 15: Bead making, Kangayam*

The raw material used are blocks of moon stone (gray/red/white) purchased in blocks of about 20 \*20\*20cms. This does not appear to be a preset size. Babu explained that gem stone- cutting and polishing is a traditional occupation and that the use of electricity is a recent innovation. The basic machinery has remained the same over the years. The machine is a simple one that allows a series of wheels to be put on a peg and turned. (See fig 15) These act as polishers. The same machine also has facility to apply mechanical force to break the raw material into pieces of a desired size. The raw material is first broken into rectangular pieces almost double the size of the intended inlay. The rough out of the inlay is obtained by smoothing of the corners and edges on a turning wheel. Five wheels are used in a series to shape out and polish a single bead. These wheels can be of stone or metal. To attain lustre a green powder obtained from the market is applied on to the surface of the last wheel. Once the rough out of the inlay is obtained, it is fixed on to a pencil- sized reed using *arrak* (glue) before further polishing is done.(see fig 16) This is for convenience. Once the rounded side is smoothed, the bead is loosened from the end of the reed and the smoothed side is fixed on to it so that the flat side can be polished. Once the polishing is done the bead is washed in

warm water detergent. On an average a single bead requires 25-40 minutes of labour. They are sold at around Rs. 150 per bead



*Fig 16: Beads fixed on to reed for polishing, Kangayam*

Babu said that at present the beads thus manufactured are mostly exported to Rajasthan. At the house of the second partner, finished beads are stored and are sold to visitors. The beads were kept in the prayer hall in this Muslim household and hence the visitors were asked to leave their shoes outside the threshold of the house. At the threshold, a man was seen cutting the raw material manually. He said that these raw materials are from the Karur region and the villagers regularly bring them. The finished beads include apart from moon stone, other semi-precious stones like amethyst, aquamarine and so on that are very highly priced.

### **Further Reading**

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The Pattanam Excavation Team with Dr. K. Rajan and Mr. Ramesh

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