

Archaeological Excavations in Tamil Nadu with Special Reference to Keezhadi - A Review

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
ASH-2020-08013244

Volume: 8

Issue: 1

Month: July

Year: 2020

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 20.05.2020

Accepted: 19.06.2020

Published: 02.07.2020

Citation:

Ramaswamy, T.
“Archaeological
Excavations in Tamil Nadu
with Special Reference to
Keezhadi – A Review.”
*Shanlax International
Journal of Arts, Sciences
and Humanities*, vol. 8,
no. 1, 2020, pp. 200–202.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v8i1.3244>



This work is licensed
under a Creative Commons
Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0
International License

T. Ramaswamy

*Former Professor and Head, Department of Ancient History, School of Historical Studies
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India*

Abstract

Excavations – part of Archaeological studies – youngest discipline – Accidental findings – Antiques – Survey – Artifacts- Explorations – Mortimer Wheeler – Sir John Marshall – Bishop Caldwell – Excavations – Adichanallur- Arikamedu – Kaveripumpatnam - Kodumanal - Sangam Age – Literature – Roman Coins and potteries –contact with Rome

Keywords: Excavations, C14 Dating, Stratigraphy, ASI, Potteries, Shells, Burial site, Ring wells, Water Pipes, Furnace, Spindles, Cotton industry and Terracotta objects

Archaeology is the youngest discipline in the age-old history of mankind. It was first recognized by the Europeans during the 18th century. The accidental findings were regarded as antiques and appreciated them to the extent of keeping them in their homes. Following the footsteps of the Europeans, the British colonial administration ventured into the survey and also for the collection of artifacts in India. Based on the surface findings decision for excavation is being taken for further study. It became an inevitable part of historical research, and it is being reconstructed periodically through the incorporation of available new materials. Beginning from the 20th century, several excavations were conducted by the Government of British India. The most significant excavation first discovered is in 1921 at the modern site of Harappa situated in the province of West Punjab in Pakistan. These discoveries proved that the Indus or Harappan civilization did not suddenly raise or fall from heaven but was preceded by a culture or cultures which boasted of certain elements of indigenous civilisation, which revised the earliest Indian Culture as Dravidian. Thus the scope of the excavation expands from place to place covering Punjab, Haryana, Sindh, Gujarat, and Rajasthan and later extended up to the southern part of India, including Tamil Nadu.

Ever since the establishment of the Department of Archaeology by the Government of India in 1861, several activities relating to the protection of Ancient Monuments and estampages of inscriptions were undertaken and brought to right under the leadership of Sir John Marshall and Mortimer Wheeler. The efforts of these archaeologists gained momentum in Tamil Nadu under the initiative of the missionary scholars, the notable among them was Bishop Caldwell. It is more than 100 years since Alexander Rea conducted the first excavation at Adichanallur in the present district of Tuticorin in 1920. This place is famous and popular as an urn-burial site. The Archaeological Survey of India and the State Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu, excavated this site time and again and brought to light the burial practices of the ancient Tamils. It was a proud moment for the Tamils, which the Government of India, declared to set up a museum at Adichanallur at the beginning of 2020.

One of the earliest excavations in South India is Arikamedu near Pondicherry, next only to Adichanallur. This site was extensively excavated by the French scholar Jouveau Dubreuil along with Sir Mortimer Wheeler, the Director-General, Archaeological Survey of India in 1944. The discovery of Roman Arretine and Rouletted ware and Roman coins gave a first definite datum line to the South Indian Archaeology. They brought to light evidence of a Roman trade center having existed at about the 1st century AD. The materials available in the excavations are directly connected with the literature of the Sangam age in Tamil Nadu. References found in the literature may further be compared with materials found in the different excavations before arriving at any concrete results. The excavated artifacts may help to correct the one-sided picture of any culture in India. Interest in the material cultures of the ancient people widened in recent years through the excavations. A well made out of fourteen terracotta rings was discovered here. The other artifacts were small beads, and semi-precious stones and an amphora fragmented Jar.

Another important port-town, Kaveripatnam, is located on the east coast of Thanjavur. The excavations conducted here had disclosed the funerary cultures associated with megaliths in the Iron Age. The villages surrounding Kaveripatnam through light on the wharf at Kilaiyur, Inlet sluice at Vanagiri, Vihara at Pallavaneswaram is indicating a well-developed commercial, religious and cultural center of international repute. The occurrence of glass, Agate, Carnelian, Jasper, coral, and seashells are attesting the existence of a brisk local industry dating between 3rd C.B.C to 3rd C.A.D. In addition to the above sites, several places were excavated over time. They were Tirukampuliyur, Alagarai, Uraiyur, Sanur, Kanchipuram, Kunnattur and Pallavaram.

The excavation at Keezhadi is being viewed on the backdrop of the previous excavations conducted through the Tamil country with special reference to Adichanallur in Tuticorin district, Arikamedu, in Pondicherry, Kaveripatnam in Thanjavur district and Kodumanal in the Erode district. These excavations have similarities with one another and hence opted for comparison and analysis. The small village Keezhadi lies in the Sivaganga district, which is closely

bordering the district of Madurai. The Archaeological Survey of India had started explorations on the banks of the river Vaigai during 2015 and decided that the small hamlets on both sides of the river bank surface had the vestiges of the Sangam age. So the officers of the Archaeological Survey of India decided to take up Keezhadi immediately for excavation in 2015 itself. The team excavated more than 40 trenches and brought to light several Vestiges of the Sangam age. They are broadly classified as Terracotta Figurines, ivory objects, quartz, shell objects, metal objects, and so on.

The excavation was continuing by the same team in 2016, and more than 5000 artifacts obtained altogether are similar to the artifacts collected as in the previous year. The terracotta figurine includes Black and Red ware, Arretine ware, Rouletted ware, and beads. As potteries play a crucial role in the cultural sequence of the period, its occurrence in the excavation is carefully studied. They were mostly wheel made and burnt, and particularly the potteries were burnt topsy-turvy mode, and the final product is called Black and Red ware. More than 50 potteries of such type bear Tamil Brahmi script inscribed on them in addition to these several beads made out of clay, past time playing objects like chess, and its boards and dices are found in the excavations. Circular clay burnt structures of different types were used to raise well for the storage purpose were found in the excavations as in the case of previous excavations at Kaveripatnam, Uraiyur, Mangalam, and Arikamedu. A typical water pipe for both inlet and outlet were made out of clay is also seen here. This water pipe was used for drawing water for multipurpose from outside and provision also made to send them outside after use. These are probably serving largely for coloring and dyeing the cotton fabrics. A simple furnace made out of clay was used for the exit of industrial carbon waste was also found here. The extensive use of bricks, terracotta figurines, and other mud made articles indicate the existence of brick industries and their related manufacturing units in and around this area.

It seems that weaving was very popular during this period. The existence of a spinning wheel made out of ivory and the presences of spindles for the manufacturing of yarn attest to the brisk functioning

of the textile industries. This is confirmed by the Sangam literature. During the early centuries of the Christian era. The Tamil country beginning from the earliest historical period, had a long and strong spinning tradition is also attested by the references found in Purananaru and Manimekalai. The coloring and dyeing industries found here is also effectively prove the existence of the great tradition.

Another important aspect of the social life of the Tamils was the ornaments. It was made out of different precious stones, semi-precious stones, Quartz, Shells, and Ivory and beads made out of the mud. It seems that the bead industry was flourishing and popular among the local people during this period. Keezhadi is very close to the sea might have been responsible for the proliferation of the shell bangle industry in this area. Cutting the Ivory and precious stones into different sized and putting holes in them for the required purpose is demonstrated by the presence of large quantities of vestiges.

Most of the South Indian excavations throw light on the Roman coins and Potteries of Arretine ware and Rouletted type ware, which were the Hallmark product of Rome. The Tamil country under the Sangam age have the trade conduct with Rome is established by the exchange of goods between the Tamil country and Rome. Ivory was largely exported along with sandal and other incense articles to Rome and imported costly pottery wares. As mentioned above, the Tamil country had the unique benefit of the favorable balance of trade as it had abundant gold coin found in all the excavated sites of South India. Almost all the artifacts and vestiges available in the different excavations as above reflect the flourishing weaving industry, Wheel made pottery industry, metal industry, and the ornamental industry, and so on. Excavation is the only source of study which

helps to build the authentic history of common people under a different period of history. The civilization that flourished in Keezhadi was not suddenly come to stay there. Still, it was the gradual development of human life that culminated in the level of an advanced life has indicated above. Based on the available artifacts and their testing in the laboratory under Carbon-14, the earliest date is assigned to 200 BC. This falls under the Sangam age.

References

- Aiyappan, A. *Historic Relics from Arikamedu*, The Hindu, 1941.
- Annual Report 1902-03*, Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India, 1904.
- Bagley, Vimala. *The Ancient Port of Arikamedu: New Excavations and Researches, 1989 – 1992*, Center for History and Archeology, French School of the Far East, 1996.
- Nagaswamy, R. "Excavations at Korkai District Tirunelveli." *Damilica*, vol. 1, 1970, pp. 50-54.
- Raman, K.V. *Excavations at Pampuhar*, 2nd World Tamil Conference, 1968, pp. 238-240.
- Rao, S.R. "Kaveripatnam Excavations." *Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India*, 1969, pp. 163-165.
- Sankalia, H.D. *The Prehistory and Protohistory of India and Pakistan*, Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, 1974.
- Sridhar, TS. *Kodumanal Excavation*, Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2011.
- The author's Personal observation in the course of the excavation at Keezhadi forms the major reference to this article.

Author Details

Prof. T.Ramaswamy, Former Professor and Head, Department of Ancient History, School of Historical Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India