INTRODUCTION TO EPIGRAPHY

Author

Dr.V.MANIKANDA SETHUPATHY,

Assistant Professor, { T } , Department of History,

Manonmaniam Sundaranar University,Tirunelveli – Tamil Nadu.

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

MANONMANIAM SUNDARANAR UNIVERSITY

TIRUNELVELI – TAMIL NADU -627 012.

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Unit – I

Introduction – Origin and Growth – Kinds of Inscriptions - Literary , Political , Religious, Memorial, Legal, Welfare , Social Status.

Objectives

- **To understand** the origin and growth of inscriptions in ancient India.
- **To identify** the various kinds of inscriptions and their purposes.
- **To analyse** how inscriptions reveal information about political, social, religious, and legal aspects of history.

Introduction

Epigraphy which simply means, the study of old inscriptions is a special branch of paleography. It is a branch of scholarship devoted to the study of written matter recorded on hard and durable material such as stone or metal. As many early civilizations have left behind many epigraphs, 'epigraphy is a prime tool in recovering much of the first hand record of antiquity'. The early cultures have used for epigraphy many materials like stone, metal., clay, terra-cotta. pottery, wood, papyrus, parchment etc., and techniques like cutting, carving, engraving casting, embossing, scratching, painting, drawing and so on. Subdisciplines may be included under the over-all canopy of epigraphy. A few among them are; numismatics papyrology, reading the palm leaves and so on.

Scope of Epigraphy –

Epigraphy is an important tool in archaeology, especially when studying **literate cultures**. As a branch of archaeology, the science of epigraphy helps us classify, read, and understand the writings found in inscriptions. These inscriptions are a major source for knowing how people lived in the past.

To understand any period's **political, social, economic, religious, and cultural** conditions, inscriptions provide the most reliable information. In fact, inscriptions are often described as the **backbone of Indian history and culture**.

Epigraphy is one of the most valuable sources for studying India's history from the time of **Ashoka (3rd century BCE)** to the **late medieval period**. By studying a large number of related inscriptions, historians can reconstruct not only political events but also the **social life, religion, administration, and economy** of a particular time, ruler, or region.

Nature of Epigraphs

Inscriptions are generally classified into **two major types**:

1. **Stone inscriptions**
2. **Copper-plate grants**

Most stone inscriptions are **donative** in nature. They are engraved on different parts of temples and other structures such as architectural members, sacrificial posts, victory pillars (dvaja-stambhas), boulders, pedestals of images, hero-stones, and sati-stones. The inscriptions of **Ashoka**, known as **edicts**, form a special category and mainly convey messages of **morality, righteousness, and piety**.

Copper-plate inscriptions usually record **land grants** given to learned individuals such as **Brahmanas, religious leaders, teachers, and institutions**. These copper plates serve as legal documents ensuring the rights and privileges granted to the recipients.

Epigraphy and Paleography

Paleography means study of ancient writing systems and deciphering. Epigraphy or the study of inscriptions has two fold approaches. One is ability to decipher the script and secondly to interpret the language and contents of the epigraph. This brings us to the field of Paleography and Linguistics. In Indian epigraphical studies Paleography occupies supreme place, since it is directly connected with the evolution and formation of letters. The earliest known system of writing in the Indian sub-continent is found on the seals used by the people of Indus Valley to about 2500 B.C to 1500 B.C. But this writing has not been deciphered successfully. After the Indus script till the period of Asoka, nothing is known about the system of writing but for the references to writing in religious literature like Vedas, puranas, Brahmanas and Upanishads. Further, the knowledge of writing at least among the elite over hundred years prior to the appearance of Asokan edicts cannot be denied as the edicts were engraved everywhere and they are meant to be read, understood and conveyed to everybody.

Kinds of Inscriptions

What is an Inscription?

Prashastis Simply put, any writing onto a solid surface, for instance, seals, copper plates, temple walls, metals, wooden tablets, gravestones/memorial stones, pillars, rock surfaces, bricks, sculptures, etc., is called an inscription. It is

a textual record, much closer to the evidence of literary genre, that is also simultaneously an archaeological artefact which constitutes a part of material culture of the time. Inscriptions have been a worldwide phenomenon throughout historical time and this is true for Indian subcontinent as well. Inscriptions are one of the most significant, authentic, reliable and credible historical sources For example, vast mine of information contained in epigraphs recording landgrants has been used extensively during last few decades leading to debate among scholars on whether post-Gupta period marked the advent of feudalism and if it was characterised by a feudal order. Study of inscriptions is known as epigraphy and that of writing used in inscriptions is called palaeography. An inscription differs from literary text as briefly mentioned in Introduction. Once etched, it doesn't undergo any interpolation unlike textual sources and remains relatively simpler, straightforward, tangible and more revealing, though as we shall see, there are instances of same site of an earlier inscription used for carving of later inscriptions. But, an inscription is not tampered with and we see it in the present in the form – more or less a finished form – in which it was produced in the past. Texts authored on soft materials like birch bark, palm leaf, etc. frequently required to be copied because old manuscripts became fragile and perishable with time. During copying, collating and recomposing they did get interpolated and even alterations and additions were made which is not the case with inscriptions. As contemporary records their value, thus, remains unimpeachable. Though not always accurately datable, character of their script can enable us ascertain their approximate dating. It is now historically known that after Ashoka, Brahmi script was adopted and put to use by rulers of succeeding times. Its individual letters underwent modification in centuries to follow and through this process other Indian scripts of regional/vernacular languages like Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, etc. developed. This modification of individual letters as a

historical phenomenon has made roughly possible to determine dating of a particular inscription in these scripts.

They are also free from ambiguities of texts like Puranas and Epics. In them we find precise, definite and lucid information that was considered historically important by writer/engraver or the one who commissioned, sanctioned, patronised and sponsored the inscription. Sometimes it may confirm and corroborate information stated in a textual source but on occasions when it does not it may be treated as a parallel source of information that could be more historically validated and authenticated. Another point of departure from literary texts is that they tend to be more overt regarding the source of their composition unlike Epics and Puranas, for example, which claim a divine authorship. Yet another difference is that epigraphs must have had a wider reach because they could be read or heard at sites of these inscriptions by larger populace than those who had access to literary texts.

Inscriptions are of various kinds:

1) Royal orders of ruling kings (raja-shasanas / dharma-shasanas / abhayashasanas)

They express, reflect and convey views, opinions and announcements of those in power and authority. They were generally situated on public places, addressing and catering to subjects of the state. Their spread is taken as an indicator of reigning king's domain as we will see with regard to Ashokan edicts. Likewise, Rudradaman's dominion over Saurashtra is evident in Junagarh inscription. An edict may also be announcement of a law issued in public interest. Edicts were usually composed by engravers instructed by scribes who

were directly dictated by the ruler about his royal declaration. Their intended audience would have naturally included royal court. They are mostly proclamations on governance but we also find other facts and aspects of their contemporary time chronicled along the process. Sites of large gatherings of people were selected. They were carved on rocks at such locations but we also find them on monolithic pillars and Ashokan pillars with his commandments accompanied by finely sculpted capitals are particularly noteworthy.

2) Prashastis/vijaya-shasanas/pratishtha-shasanas/sometimes also called poorvas

They are accounts and eulogies of kings. These inscriptions applaud their patrons and achievements of the patrons. In addition, as Thapar (2013: 341) informs us: Prashastis refer back to dynastic origins, involving deities and ancient rishis, as well as short genealogies, drawn possibly from the records now maintained in royal courts ... Conquests over kingdoms and over chiefdoms are listed. The latter seem to have been politically more important than is conceded by modern historians. Epigraphs of Kshaharatas, Shaka-Kshatraps and Kushanas adopt Indian names within two or three generations. These inscriptions register them being engaged in social and religious welfare activities. If Allahabad Pillar Inscription was not discovered the mighty Gupta monarch Samudragupta would have remained unknown and missing from pages of Indian history. Most of Gupta inscriptions provide details of chronology. This became a practice adopted by subsequent dynasties. Gupta epigraphs furnish an account of activities of their predecessors. In his Aihole (in Karnataka) inscription Chalukyan emperor Pulakeshin-II gives his dynastic genealogy and enlists his achievements. Similarly, Gwalior prashasti of raja Bhoja provides full description of his predecessors and their accomplishments and throws ample light on imperial Pratiharas.

3) Inscriptions can also be the voice of common folk. In this capacity they may be enlisted as following:

a) Votive Inscriptions (dana-shasanas)

Votive inscriptions registering gifts or donations in favour of religious establishments or installation and consecration of images for veneration, specific events, etc. Householders, monks and nuns wished to place on record their gifts or donations to Buddhist sangha, monastery or stupa for a variety of reasons and purposes like social recognition and praise, immortalisation of their act of charity and piety, etc. Intended audience of these epigraphs were people who visited the Buddhist site for worship, to pay their offerings, etc. It can be logically speculated that another factor behind these votive catalogues must have been to encourage and motivate these visitors too to make gifts and donations and inspire those who already did so to do so again. These inscriptions are found on numerous stupa sites, carved on its exterior surface where they could be easily and conveniently read by one and all. They were sometimes also engraved on its railings. The inscription, in most instances, records contribution towards construction of a part of the stupa or that particular part where we find the epigraph engraved. It may also simultaneously refer to reigning king and his rule, administration, policies, achievements, etc. However, it is argued that they were not always drafted with same care that official decrees were drafted with and, hence, might not always be historically accurate and infallible.

b) Copper-Plate Charters (tamra shasanas)

Several thousand inscriptions are recovered belonging to late centuries of first millennium CE in form of royal land-grants inscribed on copper-plates. These are donative epigraphs putting on record grants of land and other items to shrines, Brahmins, deserving officials or persons and other beneficiaries.

Donative inscriptions stating erection of a temple, flagstaff, etc. have been found in hundreds in Deccan and south India in early medieval period. They mostly inscribe details of the grant over two or more hand-sized plates of copper joined together by a ring passing through a hole on one side, like a stack of papers held together. The idea seems to be emulating birch-bark and palm-leaf manuscripts connected together through stringing the leaves. They are legal catalogues about rights and obligations on land. Though they throw light on sale and purchase (kraya-shasanas), gifts/donations of lands to temples, deities, Brahmin beneficiaries, etc., they also provide useful details. In this capacity they served a judicial or legal function. On matters and occasions of clash over ownership of a piece of land these tamra-shashanas were presented before deciding and settling authority. Additionally, they become good source of political, social and economic history. From them we are informed about grant of lands called agraharas to learned Brahmins of high repute and stature that were supposed to be exempted from all taxes. They are valuable tools for a historian as they tell us about contemporary events and common people. Many inscriptions contain useful information about genealogy, dynastic details and sometimes, names of even those kings who have been missed out in genealogies enlisted in literary texts. Land-grant records of Pallava, Chalukya and Chola period inform us about contemporary political structures, agricultural details and revenue systems .

c) Hero Stones

Inscriptions on memorials/hero stones (vijaya-shasanas), gravestones (viragals), sacrificial posts (yupa-shashanas), etc. sustaining memory of the hero, martyr, sati, etc.

d) Epigraphs

Epigraphs may have more uses and functions. They help to date sculptures on which they occur (pratima-shasanas) and tell us more about them. For example, the remarkable, imposing, impressive but headless statue of Kanishka could be identified because of his name being incised at its lower end.

Ashokan Edicts

Ashoka was not a well-known ruler till 1837 when James Prinsep – a civil servant in Bengal employed by East India Company – came across a Brahmi inscription mentioning a king called 'Devanampiya Piyadassi' (Beloved of the Gods). This was compared with Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) chronicle Mahavamsha and it was deduced that kingly figure of the inscription was indeed Ashoka. This was first in a series of marvelous historical discoveries in form of engravings incised on rocks and pillars credited to this great king. Ashokan inscriptions incised in different regnal years of his regime are earliest deciphered epigraphs known and available to us. They were royal decrees, mostly in his own words, pertaining to social, cultural and administrative matters addressed to nobility, officials or general populace.

They were composed in three languages – Prakrit, Greek and Aramaic – and four scripts – Brahmi1 , Kharoshti2 , Greek and Aramaic. He used Aramaic and Greek scripts in parts of his empire in present-day Afghanistan. It is a matter of fact that this was the region that was ceded by Seleucus Nicator to the Mauryas. Kharoshthi script was used in Gandharan3 region. Most of them were lettered in Prakrit language throughout his expansive empire that are located all over Indian subcontinent from beyond Indus river westwards till Mysore plateau in south.

There are 14 Major Rock Edicts, seven Pillar Edicts and some Minor Rock Inscriptions to his credit. Locations of his edicts (dhamma-lipis) which were majorly inscribed to advertise his policy of Dhamma allows us to estimate vast territorial spread of his empire.

Among other sites his Major Rock Edicts are found at:

- Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra in Pakistan
- Khalsi/Kalsi (Dehradun district, Uttarakhand)
- Girnar near Junagarh in Kathiawar (Gujarat)
- Sopara (Maharashtra)
- Dhauli near Bhubaneshwar (Odisha)
- Jaugada/Jugarh (Ganjam district, Odisha)

Large number of Ashokan Minor Rock Edicts are discovered in Karnataka at sites such as: 1) Brahmagiri 2) Siddapura (near Brahmagiri) 3) Jatinga-Rameshwara/Jatinga Rameshwar 4) Maski (Raichur district) Other Minor Rock Edicts are found at: 1) Rupnath (near Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh) 2) Sahasram (Shahabad district, Bihar) 3) Bairat (near Jaipur, Rajasthan).

Besides giving us fair idea about extent of his expansive jurisdiction the edicts were located on important trade-routes, some of them bordering peripheral zones, connecting road and river traffic. Many historians and their writings suggest access to and availability and procurement of raw materials as primary motivation and factor behind placing these royal charters carefully at these strategic locations, particularly for controlling the peninsula. However, it cannot be said with absolute assurance whether regions where his inscriptions aren't found were ruled in same way as those where they are found.

His royal proclamations also comment on people in borderlands of the empire which further confirms and corroborates outlining of his empire. They inform us that territory of Seleucid king Antiochus-II lay beyond his empire in north-west; Cholas, Cheras (the term used in his edicts is Keralaputras), Pandyas, Satyaputras and the island of Sri Lanka in south are also mentioned as dynasties and places outside the empire. Within the empire people of diverse origins and cultures find mention. For instance, Yavanas and Kambojas are spoken of in north-west. Furthermore, Bhojas, Pitinikas, Andhras, Pulindas living in parts of western India and Deccan are talked about. He distinguishes and demarcates conquered territories (vijita) and royal territories (rajavishaya) from bordering territories (pratyanta). They give us the impression that the empire towards east seems to have included north and south Bengal.

Thus, we naturally surmise that under Ashoka the Magadhan empire attained highest expansion, consolidation and control. But, we also get strong sense of a conscious attempt to end or at least avoid invasions leading to wars. Historians unanimously agree that extending and applying principle of non-violence to state policy was a unique experiment. However, there is debate, dispute and disagreement between one set of historians and another who idealise him as a benevolent fatherly figure concerned with welfare of his subjects as well as that of entire humanity. It is argued that this notion tends to overlook a deliberate attempt and 'doctrinal tool' to ideologically control an enormous kingdom which would, otherwise, perhaps, be difficult to control.

Other Important Inscriptions of Ancient India

Prayaga Prashasti

Composed by his court-poet Harisena/Harishena, Prayaga Prashasti, in prose and verse, is a retrospective glowing account about Samudragupta's

personality, personal qualities, greatness and glorious exploits. It also throws light on boundaries of Gupta empire at his time. It remains to this day chief historical source of his regime. As per the panegyric the people and places, some located in distant lands, overthrown and subjugated by Harishena's patron-king can be classified into following:

1) princes or emperors of Ganga-Yamuna doab4 whose territories were assimilated into Gupta dominion,

2) republics in present-day Punjab surviving on ruins of erstwhile Mauryan empire,

3) rulers of eastern Himalayan kingdoms and of some frontier provinces like present-day Nepal, Assam and Bengal who are said to have agreed paying tribute,

4) rajas of forest kingdoms (atavika rajyas) along Vindhyas5 in central India and Deccan6 who were forced into servitude,

5) twelve rulers in eastern Deccan and south India who were captured and vanquished (grahana) and then liberated/reinstated (moksha) on condition of paying homage. The weight of his arms reached and was felt as far as Kanchi7 where Pallavas were compelled to acknowledge and accept his suzerainty.

Junagarh Inscription

Junagadh/Girnar (in Gujarat) rock inscription reveals construction of an artificial reservoir/embankment called Sudarshana lake under Mauryas by provincial governor and brother-in-law of Chandragupta Maurya named Pushyagupta. The record credits Rudradaman, the Shaka ruler of Saurashtra8 with its thorough repair upon being severely and extensively damaged through

his provincial governor Suvishakha (c. 150 CE). There is special mention of huge sum of money invested by Rudradaman. However, it again burst in 457 CE owing to heavy rains and it was this time restored by Parnadatta (newly appointed governor of Saurashtra by later Gupta king Skandagupta) and Parnadatta's son Chakrapalita.

Hathigumpha Inscription

Another classic example of prashastis is autobiographical eulogy of king Kharavela who ruled in coastal and eastern part of Odisha during mid-first century BCE: the Hathigumpha (literally meaning 'Elephant Cave') rock epigraph in Udayagiri hills near Bhubaneshwar.

South Indian Inscriptions – Rewritten

The *South Indian Inscriptions* series contains inscriptions collected from the southern states, covering the major Dravidian languages—**Tamil, Kannada, and Telugu**. Each volume prints the inscriptions in the **original regional language** in which they were engraved. So far, **35 volumes** have been published, and a large number of them contain **Tamil inscriptions**. These records are extremely valuable for reconstructing the **regional histories** of South India.

In addition to these important volumes, the Epigraphy Branch has produced three special publications:

- Karandai Plates of Rajendra Chola I
- A Copper-plate Hoard of the Gupta Period from Bagh, Madhya Pradesh
- Epigraphs of Madhya Pradesh

The department has also compiled several reference works, such as:

- Topographical List of North Indian Inscriptions
- South Indian Inscriptions *(catalogues)*
- Dynastic List of Copper-plate Inscriptions
- Index to the Articles of Epigraphia Indica
- Subject Index of Inscriptions

The Epigraphy Branch, now functioning from **Mysuru**, serves the research needs of scholars from India and abroad. It is truly a **treasure-house of primary source material**, and along with its publications, it also maintains an excellent library accessible to researchers.

Stone inscriptions: The various tools used for copying the stone inscriptions are:

- Map-litho paper of 80 GSM thicknesses for taking estampage.
- Specially prepared ink, made by mixing together: Lamp black powder, Arabic gum,
- Water-proof drawing ink and water.
- Bent beating brush made up of horse hair, for pressing the paper into the writings engraved on the stone.
- Dabber made of leather in different sizes, for applying ink on to the paper.
- Wire brush and coir brush for cleaning the stone.
- Sponge.

• One bucket of water. Before copying, the stone on which the inscription is engraved is photographed and examined properly to identify the written and unwritten areas. Then the stone is cleaned properly with water using coir brush so that all the dust and soil particles are removed. Wire brush has to be used

only if necessary to remove any hard Chemical objects like cement, lime, etc. sticking to the stone. However usage of wire brush is to be avoided if the stone is in worn-out condition to prevent its defacing. After cleaning the stone has to be washed carefully with clean water. Then the Map-litho paper is dipped completely into a bucket of water and placed on the wet stone carefully and uniformly. While placing the paper, care should be taken that no air goes underneath it. With the help of bent beating brush the paper is beaten uniformly and carefully, so that it receives the impression of the letters. Beating of the paper should always start from the middle to the sides, so that no air gets underneath it. If air enters into the middle of the paper, it may cause it to fold and tear, which prevents from taking a good estampage. During this entire process care should be taken that the paper is wet and sticks uniformly to the stone. If it becomes dry then little water can be sprinkled wherever required. Then with the help of the dabber the ink is applied uniformly on the paper in a systematic way, so that it receives the exact copy of the inscription engraved on the stone. After taking estampage, it has to be carefully removed by folding slowly from top to bottom and placed to dry in a shade.

Copper plate inscriptions:

The technique of taking estampage of copper-plate inscriptions and the tools used are different from that of stone inscriptions. A list of these tools and technique of taking estampage is given below.

Tools:

The various tools used for copying inscription from a copper plate are:

- Map-litho paper of 80 GSM thicknesses.

- Black coloured printing ink. • Brass wire brush for cleaning.
- Citric acid for cleaning.
- Rubber roller for applying ink on the copper-plate.

Technique:

Before taking estampage of the copper-plate, its condition is to be noted and one should feel satisfied that it is not brittle and withstands the process of taking estampage. Then the copper-plate is photographed and if it is brittle, estampage is not taken and another photograph is obtained after applying chalk on the copper-plate, thereby highlighting the engraved portion. If on examination, the copper-plate is found to be rusted, it can be removed by soaking it in a bucket of water with a little solution of citric acid added to it.

For taking estampage of the copper-plate, ink is directly applied on it using rubber-roller. First place some amount of ink on a flat hard surface like a metal sheet or glass and spread the ink uniformly on to the rubber. Then place the copper plate on a flat surface with some papers underneath for support and rub the ink uniformly on it using rubber-roller. Care should be taken that the ink is applied not heavily and it does not enter into the engraved letters. The borders of the copper-plate should also be applied with ink. Next place the Map-8 litho paper on the copper-plate and apply little pressure. Then remove the paper carefully and allow the ink to dry. In this way the engraving on the copper-plate is copied on to the paper. However in this method the impression will be in negative and hence while reading it has to be done from the backside of the paper by holding it against the light.

Seals and Sealings

Seals and sealings are usually made of **terracotta**, which is fragile and easily breakable. Therefore, the normal method of taking an estampage (ink impression) on paper is **not used** for them. Instead, they are recorded by **photographing** them carefully, and each piece is **systematically numbered** for documentation.

Studying the seals **in situ** (in their original place of discovery) is also very helpful, as it allows for accurate **deciphering of the legends or writings** engraved on them.

Preservation of Inscriptions

It is very sad to note that even after more than hundred years since the establishment of the epigraphy branch, inscriptions do not as yet command from the public that respect and reverence which they deserve. The general attitude towards these store-houses of our history and culture has been either of utter indifference or disregard. Often inscriptions are neglected and more often they are disfigured by the vested interests and vandals. Not long back, the celebrated Asokan inscription on a boulder in Udegolam in Bellary district, Karnataka was reduced to ashes by the ignorant villagers. Inscribed stone slabs, not forming part of structures and lying loose in the villages and towns, stand the danger of being misused as washing slabs or stepping stones and many times they are used in place of bricks for constructing walls. Inscriptions that were copied till recently are no longer available in their original place because they were either displaced or they disappeared due to the white-washes which are so injudiciously laid over them. It is a painful experience of the epigraphists that the white-washes have to be scrapped off before a good copy of an inscription is taken. Equally baneful and injurious is the practice of burning oil lamps and applying sindoor

indiscriminately on the sculptured and inscribed portions of temples. These practices not only spoil the sculptures and inscriptions but also make it very difficult to copy the latter. Quarrying operations is yet another reason that destroys valuable inscriptions. Especially in Tamil Nadu many early Brahmi inscriptions are being lost because of this pernicious practice. It is yet another unfortunate thing that copper-plates containing valuable historical information are often melted for their sheer metal value. For effectively checking this evil practice all metal-smiths should be made known the immense cultural importance of these plates and the authorities. Agencies concerned should buy these plates paying adequate price. It is therefore, the bounded duty of every citizen to protect these engraved stone slabs, pillars, temple walls, etc., containing valuable inscriptions. The general public must realize that it is our common heritage, which needs to be preserved at all costs. Apart from educating people, local governing bodies and educational institutions should be encouraged to take steps to prevent destruction or misuse of these epigraphs and protect them as antiquities. The temple authorities should also be equally vigilant in preventing the public 9 from damaging temple walls, sculptures, paintings and inscriptions so that this rich cultural heritage could be preserved for the posterity.

Literary Inscriptions

Epigraphic materials have been widely used to reconstruct early Indian history. More than **one lakh inscriptions** have been discovered across the Indian subcontinent, and this number continues to grow as new inscriptions are found regularly.

Based on similarities in content, **Richard Salomon** has classified Indian inscriptions into **ten major categories:**

- **Royal Donative and Panegyric (Prasasti)**

– Inscriptions that praise kings and record the gifts or donations they made.

- **Land Grants (Copper-plate Charters)**

– Documents that mention the granting of land to individuals or institutions.

- **Private Donations**

– Records of contributions or offerings made by private persons.

- **Memorial Inscriptions**

– Inscriptions created to honor heroes, notable individuals, or significant events.

- **Label Inscriptions**

– Short inscriptions used to identify objects, sculptures, or buildings.

- **Pilgrims' and Travelers' Records**

– Notes or inscriptions left by pilgrims or travelers at sacred or important sites.

- **Cultic Inscriptions**

– Records connected to religious rituals, worship practices, or deities.

- **Literary Inscriptions**

– Inscriptions that include poems, verses, or other literary writings.

- **Seal Inscriptions**

– Writings on seals and sealings, usually used for authentication or official purposes.

- **Miscellaneous Inscriptions**

– Inscriptions that do not fit into any of the above categories.

Literary Inscriptions

Among the ten categories of inscriptions, the **literary category** has the **fewest examples**, yet it is extremely significant. The term *literary* indicates that the content is mainly **poetic or dramatic**, even though these works are engraved on **stone or walls** rather than written on manuscripts.

This group of inscriptions has preserved **unique dramas and poems**, many of which are not available in any other written form. A key question often asked is: **Why were dramas carved on stone?**

Among the known dramatic inscriptions, three major works stand out:

- **Lalitvigraharāja-nāṭaka** (Ajmer)
- **Harakeli-nāṭaka** (Ajmer)
- **Pārijātamañjarī-nāṭikā** or **Vijayaśrī-nāṭikā** (Dhar)

The *Pārijātamañjarī-nāṭikā* is particularly important because the poet refers to it as a *praśasti*—a eulogy—dedicated to the **Paramara king Arjunavarman** (early 13th century CE). The composer, who served as the king's **royal preceptor (rājaguru)**, intended to glorify his patron. Though it functions as a royal *praśasti*, it still qualifies as a **literary composition**, as the author himself describes it as a *nāṭikā* (a type of drama).Most of these dramatic inscriptions were created in the style of **prasastis**, which suggests that they were meant to be **recited or performed**, helping the public become aware of the achievements of their rulers.

Self Assessment Questions

1. What is an inscription, and how did inscriptions originate and develop in India?
2. How do literary inscriptions differ from political or religious inscriptions?
3. \What information can memorial inscriptions provide about historical events and notable individuals?
4. How do legal, welfare, and social status inscriptions reflect the society and governance of their time?

Unit : II

Evaluation of the script - Paleography – Pictography – Ideography – Phonography – Logography – Cuneiform – Graffiti – Brahmi - Vatteluthu – Grantha – Writing Materials.

Objectives

1. **To understand the evolution and types of writing systems**, including pictography, ideography, phonography, and logography.
2. **To study major scripts used in India and other regions**, such as Cuneiform, Graffiti, Brahmi, Vatteluthu, and Grantha.
3. **To examine the materials and methods used for writing**, including palm leaves, paper, and other ancient writing media.

Palaeography

Etymology

Borrowed from New Latin *palaeographia* "ancient writing," from *palaeo-* PALEO- + *-graphia* -GRAPHY

Palaeography is the study of old handwriting. This web tutorial will help you learn to read the handwriting found in documents written in English between 1500 and 1800.

At first glance, many documents written at this time look illegible to the modern reader. By reading the practical tips and working through the documents in the Tutorial in order of difficulty, you will find that it becomes much easier to read old handwriting.

I. Study of Scripts: Paleography

- Definition: The scientific study of ancient and historical handwriting and scripts (from the time before printing).
- **Core Tasks:**
    1. **Decipherment:** Reading and correctly interpreting the script, including abbreviations and special letter forms.
    2. **Dating:** Determining the approximate time period when a text was written.
    3. **Localization:** Identifying the place of origin (e.g., a specific country, region, or scriptorium).
- **Significance:** It is fundamental to history, literature, and religious studies, as it helps authenticate and analyze primary source manuscripts.

Evolution of Writing Systems

The following terms describe the historical progression of how symbols represent language, moving from meaning-based (semantic) to sound-based (phonetic).

1. Pictography (Picture Writing)

- **Basic Unit: Pictogram** (a symbol that resembles the object it represents).
- **Function:** Represents an object, concept, or event by **drawing a picture** of it.
- **Relation to Language:** Independent of spoken language. A picture of a fish means 'fish' regardless of what language the reader speaks.
- **Example:** A simple drawing of the sun.
- **Limitation:** Cannot express abstract ideas, grammatical elements, or new words effectively.

2. Ideography (Idea Writing)

- Basic Unit: Ideogram (a symbol that represents an abstract idea or concept).

- **Function:** Symbols become more conventional and abstract to represent **ideas** associated with the object.
- Relation to Language**:** Still largely independent of spoken language, but the meaning is inferred (e.g., combining two pictograms to form a new idea).
- Example: A symbol for "sun" combined with a symbol for "tree" might mean **"day"** or **"light."**
- **Note:** This stage is often viewed as a transition, as pure ideograms are difficult to maintain in a complete writing system.

3. Logography (Word Writing)

- **Basic Unit: Logogram** (a character representing a **word or morpheme**—a unit of meaning).
- **Function:** The symbol is directly linked to a specific word in a specific language.
- **Transition from Ideography:** Logographic systems are often *logosyllabic*, meaning characters are used not just for their meaning, but also for their *sound value* via the **Rebus Principle** (e.g., using a drawing of an "eye" to represent the first-person pronoun "I").
- **Example: Chinese characters** (Hanzi) are the best-known example.
- **Characteristics:** These systems typically require thousands of symbols.

4. Phonography (Sound Writing)

- **Basic Unit: Phonogram** (a character representing a **unit of sound**).
- **Function:** The symbols encode the sounds of the spoken language, detaching the script from the word's meaning. This allows for an efficient system to write any word.

- **Relation to Language:** Directly encodes the phonological structure of the language.
- **Main Types:**
    - **Syllabary:** Each symbol represents a whole syllable (e.g., Japanese Kana, Cherokee).
    - **Alphabet:** Each symbol (letter) represents a single phoneme (consonant or vowel) (e.g., Latin/Roman alphabet, Greek).

Type of Script	What the Symbol Represents	Key Characteristic	Examples
Pictography	Object/Concept by resemblance	Visually recognizable; independent of language.	Early cave drawings, simple signage.
Ideography	Abstract idea or concept	Conventionalized symbols for abstract meaning.	Modern mathematical symbols.
Logography	A whole **word** or **morpheme**	Tied to a specific language; requires thousands of characters.	Chinese (Hanzi), Egyptian Hieroglyphs (in part).

Type of Script	What the Symbol Represents	Key Characteristic	Examples
Phonography	A unit of **sound** (syllable or phoneme)	Highly efficient; few symbols needed; directly represents speech.	English/Latin Alphabet, Japanese Kana.

Indus Script

Sumeria and Egypt were the two great Bronze Age centres in the Near East. There was a third great Bronze Age centre in the Indus valley in India. Here too a picture-writing developed. This civilisation has left behind only very brief inscriptions on its seals that their decipherment is an enigmatic problem. So far 2000-odd seals are recovered with inscriptions ranging from single character to 20 characters. There are more than 500 signs. Many of them seem to be compounds of two or more other signs. While tackling the problem of this script two methods are adopted; one, to trace it to Egyptian or Sumerian script and two, to find us connection with Brahmi, a later Indian script. There is no agreement among scholars whether they are ideograms or phonograms or logogram.

Another problem of Indus civilization is its script, which defies the attempts of scholars to decipher it. This script appears on a large number of steatite 'seals from various sites. Many think that it is a stylised pictogram. It is to be noted that unlike in Mesopotamia this script is found in one stage only and

did not develop any further. As a result of this we are unable (1) to trace its origin and evolution from the pictographic to the Ideographic or phonetic stages and (ii) to trace its further evolution to any of the scripts of India. The script did not degenerate into a conventional form as in the case of Babylonian cuneiform. In other words, it stopped in a sort of hieroglyphic stage.

Origin Of Brahmi Script

The inscriptions of Asoka are in Brahmi script except in the Northwest, where Kharoshti was used. The discovery and decipherment of the Asokan Inscription constitute a thrilling chapter in. modern Indian paleography. The script of Asoka had remained lost to India for more than a millennium. Fahien and Hieun Tsang, two great Chinese scholars could neither read these inscriptions nor get any local scholars who could read them. They recorded wrong readings based on guess work or hearsay information. Later, in the 14th century Firoz Shah Tughlak evinced great interest in these pillars from Meerut and Topia (U.P) to Delhi. Inspite of his best efforts he could find none to decipher the script. Akbar, in the 16th century evinced similar interest on these Inscriptions but to no effect.

The foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal inspired scholars to engage in the study of India's past in all its aspects. Besides many literary works, like the Vedas and the epics, the inscriptions also drew the attention of the Western scholars associated with this society. The later began in 1785 when Charles Wilkins read the Bodal pillar inscription of Narayana Pala of Bengal. The same year Pandit Radhakant Sharma read the Delhi-Topia pillar inscription of Visaladeva, a Chahamana king of 12th century. Being comparatively recent in date they were read with less difficulty. Again Charles Wilkins and Col. James Tod were able to decipher many of the letters of the Gupta script. In 1834 Cap.

Troger read part of the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta. Or. Mill was more successful in this regard and he read completely the Bitari pillar inscription of Skanda Gupta. It was James Princep who deciphered successfully the Delhi, Kashmir, Eran Sanchi, Amaravati and Girnar inscriptions of the Guptas.

The greater and real challenge to the scholars was the Brahmi script, in which the Asoka inscriptions had been written. The credit of this great achievement' must go to James Princep. In 1834-35 he had the stampages of several Asokan signs in them resembled those of the Gupta script. He separated the medial signs and consonants and compared them with the Gupta characters. Thus he fixed the sound values of many of the Brahmi letters and classified them under vargas or phonetic classes. Still many letters remained unidentified. In 1837 he collected the stampages of the short inscription on the Sanchi railings and analyzed them. At the end of all these inscriptions he found two letters being common, preceded by sa, the Prakrit suffix meaning 'of. So he could easily conjecture that the word preceding sa must be a proper name and that following it must be an equivalent of 'gift' or 'dedication'. This last word could easily be guessed; It had only two letters the first letter was marked with the medial sign for e and the second with the sign for anusvara (am). The word was danam. Thus da and na were deciphered. Still a few more letters could not be read. Buhier found out e. va, and la and Grierson found ha in Gaya.

Decipherment of Brahmi and Kharoshti

Bühler was able to publish a complete list of **Brahmi characters** thanks to the combined efforts of earlier scholars. The decipherment of the **Kharoshti script**, however, proved easier because many **Greek, Saka, and Kushan coins**

found in Northwest India carried **bilingual legends**—one in Greek and the other in Kharoshti.

In the early stages, **James Prinsep** mistakenly believed that the language of the Kharoshti inscriptions was **Pahlavi**, which slowed progress. The breakthrough came when **Charles Masson**, during his archaeological work in Afghanistan, recognized that the labels were actually in **Prakrit**. He began by identifying the Prakrit equivalents of the Greek texts on bilingual coins and then successfully read the Kharoshti legends. His work confirmed that some coins belonged to rulers like **Menander** and **Apollodotus**.

Following Masson, scholars such as **Prinsep, Norris, and Cunningham** contributed further to deciphering many unidentified Kharoshti characters. As a result, even the longer **Kharoshti inscriptions of Ashoka** were eventually read, and Bühler prepared a systematic table of the Kharoshti alphabet as well.

Since **1837**, when Prinsep first deciphered the Ashokan Brahmi inscriptions, numerous Western and Indian scholars have explored the **origin of the Indian alphabet** from various perspectives, producing a vast body of research. Many theories were highly speculative, and the origin of Brahmi remains a topic of debate. Even the **name of the ancient Indian script** is not without controversy.

Texts like the **Lalitavistara** (6th century CE), a Buddhist work, list **64 scripts**, with Brahmi at the top. The **Samavayanga Sutta** (1st century CE), a Jain Prakrit text, lists **18 scripts**, again with Brahmi heading the list. The script is thought to be named *Brahmi* because Brahmins, Buddhists, and Jains believed that **Brahma, the Creator**, had created this script.

Evolution of the Tamil Scripts

The history of the **Tamil script** does not go as far back as the history of the **Tamil language**. It is a common misconception that language and script are the same or that they develop together. In reality, **languages emerge first**, and **scripts are developed or adopted much later**. Even today, many languages exist without a written script.

The earliest Tamil records are written in **Brahmi**, and the modern Tamil script is derived from the **Grantha script**. Bühler used the term **Dravidian Brahmi** for the form of Brahmi found in Tamil Nadu, a term that first appears in the *Lalitavistara*, a 6th-century CE Buddhist text.
R. Nagaswamy preferred the term **Damili**, found in the *Samavayanga Sutta*, a 1st-centuryCEJainPrakrittext.
Later, **I. Mahadevan** introduced the widely accepted term **Tamil-Brahmi**.

Some scholars made bold hypotheses. T. K. Subramaniam suggested that **Brahmi was originally a Tamil script**, later adopted by Prakrit—a language he believed evolved from both Dravidian and Aryan elements. However, T. V. Mahalingam argued that this theory cannot be accepted based on the evidence available today.

In Tamil Nadu, the **cave inscriptions** are the earliest written Tamil records. They are in **Brahmi script** and mainly found in the regions of **Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli, Tiruchy, and Coimbatore**. These inscriptions are usually short—one or two lines—carved on cave beds or on the brow of the cave. The caves were used by **Buddhist or Jain monks**, and the inscriptions typically record **donations made by devotees**.

A major scholarly debate surrounds the **dating of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions**:

- **T. V. Mahalingam** proposed staggered dates from the **3rd century BCE to the 4th century CE**.
- **I. Mahadevan** suggested a modified range from the **2nd century BCE to the 6th century CE**, based on paleographic development.
- Both scholars relied mainly on palaeography and did not incorporate other fields such as archaeology or numismatics.
- **K. V. Soundararajan**, recognizing this gap, proposed a later date range—from the **1st or 2nd century CE to the 4th or 5th century CE**.

The debate continues, but these studies help us trace the fascinating evolution of the Tamil script over centuries.

After these Brahmi records the inscriptions found in Tamilnadu are written in one or more of the following three scripts: the Grantha, the Tamil and the Vatteluttu. Scholars agree that these three evolved by stages from the Brahmi. Grantha was developed in the Tamil country to write Sanskrit. By Tamil script' we mean the present Tamil script which was developed from the Grantha, in the 7th century to write Tamil. It was in vogue only in the northern part of Tamil country till the Imperial Cholas spread it all over it. Vatteluttu, so called due to its more cursive lines, was yet another script to write Tamil. This was in vogue since the middle of the 6th century A.D. and up to the end of 10th century in the Pandyan region and some part of the Kongu region. However in Kerala it continued till the end of 18th century, When Malayalam began to incorporate more and more Sanskrit words.

Vatteluttu Script

Its evolution too may be divided into four major stages: (i) Archaic variety (c. 400-550 A.D). (ii) Early variety, (c. 550-950 A.D.), (iii) Middle variety (950-1350: The early records of the Cholas in the Pandya country are in this variety. It continued in Kerala and (iv) Later variety (In Kerala from c. 1350-1800). After the Introduction of the printing press the Tamil script has acquired its modern form. Its evolution is a continuous process, because the Government of Tamilnadu has recommended some changes which have come to force. Thus alphabet has its own origin in India through the ages, are to change in shape, style and phonetics. This lesson also reveals the strenuous efforts to decipher the scripts.

Granthā Script

Granthā is an ancient **South Indian script** used mainly to write **Sanskrit** in the Tamil-speaking region. It played a major role in preserving Sanskrit literature in Tamil Nadu.

Origin and Development

- The Grantha script evolved from the **Brahmi script** around the **5th century CE**.
- It was widely used during the **Pallava, Chola, and Pandya** periods.
- Sanskrit works, temple inscriptions, Vedic texts, and religious manuscripts were commonly written in Grantha.

Features of Grantha Script

- Used to write **Sanskrit**, while Tamil script was used for Tamil language.
- Contains **more consonants** than Tamil because Sanskrit has more sound variations.
- Includes **vowel signs**, **consonant clusters**, and **ligatures** similar to Devanagari.
- Rounded style, especially in palm-leaf manuscripts, because straight lines risked tearing the leaves.

Types of Grantha Script

1. **Pallava Grantha (Early Grantha)**
    - Used during Pallava rule (4th–7th century CE) in temple inscriptions.
2. **Chola Grantha (Middle Grantha)**
    - More refined; seen in Chola copper plates and temple walls.
3. **Modern Grantha**
    - Still used by priests to write Vedic texts, mantras, and ritual guides.

Importance of Grantha Script

- Helped preserve thousands of **Sanskrit works** in South India.
- Used for **Prasastis (eulogies)**, **donative inscriptions**, and **temple records**.
- Played a bridge role between **Tamil** and **Sanskrit** cultural traditions.
- Important source for **epigraphy and paleography**.

Writing Materials

The materials for writing inscriptions are many and varied. Their selection depends mainly on two factors. They are (1) Nature of the documents (2) Availability of suitable materials. Copper and Stone are the most common material in India for writing inscriptions. However they are not the only ones. These materials are of two categories – Metals and other substances than metal. During pre historic period man used to draw paintings on the surface of the rock shelters or on the rock boulders whatever he saw, whatever he thoughts which was depicted on the paintings. They are known as prehistoric paintings. For which he uses natural colour which was available in plenty in the tree leaves and in the mineral stones. It is known as pictograph or Picture writing. This is the beginning stage of the invention of script. Some time, the pre historic man engraved with the sharpened stone and chiselled the rock surface for the drawing. It is known as petro glyphs. In India, Pre historic paintings have been noticed in Bhimbetka of Madhya Pradesh . The associate findings of this place suggest that these paintings belong to Mesolithic period. Many petro glyphs chiselling have also been found in India.

Writing Materials in the World – Mesopotamia

The **Sumerians of Mesopotamia**, one of the earliest urban civilizations (c. **3100 BCE**), were pioneers in developing a writing system. They used **clay** as their primary writing material because it was easily available in their region.

To write, they used a **reed stylus** cut with a **rectangular tip**. When this stylus was pressed onto soft, wet clay, it produced **wedge-shaped marks**. This

script came to be known as **Cuneiform**, a term derived from the Latin word *cuneus*, meaning "wedge."

After writing, the clay tablets were **dried in the sun**, becoming hard. However, these tablets were **heavy and fragile**, making it difficult to send written messages across long distances.

India

Paper was introduced only in 11th century CE in India. Before that the Bhurj bark and palm leaves were known and used by the Indians. Palm leaf is the most common material widely used for writing in Ancient India. It is known as Tāḷa patra or Tada-patra. In India, the use of Palm leaves in vogue till recent past. The large-leaved palm trees (Borassus flabelliformis, Corypha umbraculifera and C.taliera – botanical names) are originally indigenous in South India. In south India, the palm trees are grown abundantly. In the Coastal area of Malabar, a type of palm leaves is grown. They used this as writing material. Brich-bark was more popular in northern India. Particularly the use of Brich- bark was prevalent in Punjab and Kashmir regions.

Bhurjapatra (Brich-bark)

As stated earlier, In India to the north of Vindhya, a kind of writing material namely Bhurjbark were used around 600 BCE. It is taken from a tree Bhurja tree (Baaetula Bhojpattr). The inner bark of the tree is used for writing purpose. It is a kind of wood available in Northern and Central India. They prepared this as a paper by putting oil and polish them to make hard and smooth. This was used by the Indians at the time of invasion of Alexander, the Great. Later on widely used by the Buddhist monks and particularly it is referred

to as Lekhana i.e., writing material. Documents are generally referred to as Bhurja in the name of the material. Alberuni refers to the length and width of this Bhurja used in North India. The brick-bark was cut into sizes of corresponding to the shape of the palm- leaves. Thus shows that though in North India brick-bark was more popular, the use for palm leaf was also known by the people of North India. The use of Bhurja patra as writing material is still continued by the pandits in some part of Kashmir valley. Bhurja patra was widely used in North western India then it spread to Central, Eastern and Western part of India. This was replaced by Copper plate in the later stage. The Taxila copper plate belonging to the first century C.E., is also shaped after a palm-leaf. The Bhurja patra found in Stūpas in Afghanistan now at Dhammapada in Khotan region is the earliest known writing documents we have at present. It is in Kharoshthi script. Bhakshaali Manuscript is another kind of document written in this material which is also earliest document.

Leaves

Leaves were also used for writing. The Buddhist Jātaka s refer to the use of paṇṇa (leaves) as a writing material and these were most probably palm-leaves. It is most common material for writing by the Buddhist monks. According to the Chinese pilgrims Yuan Chuwang, the Buddhist tradition was preserved in the leaves. We do not get the evidence which tree leaves used for this purpose. Probably it could be Palm leaves, the tada or tāḷa patra.It is otherwise known as tāḷa or tāḷi (Corypha Umbraculifera).In south India the use of Palm leaves is common.

Palm leaves

Palm- leaf manuscripts are widely used in South India until 18th century C.E. It is not possible to preserve Palm leaves in the hot and humid climate region. Hence most of the early documents in palm leaves were the recopies of earlier ones. But in the cold and dry climate, old palm leaves can be preserved. Some parts of North India the old palm leaves records have been found. The earliest specimen of palm leaf record belongs to century C.E obtained from Central Asia. It is a fragmentary portion of a Sanskrit drama. The manuscripts of the Prajna-paramita hridayasutra and Ushnisa vijayadharini now preserved in the Hori-uzie monastery in Japan appears to have been written in Central India in the 6th century C.E. Some of the South Indian manuscripts written in the Grantha characters of the eleventh century and in the Tamil script of the thirteenth century C.E. have also been recovered from the monasteries in Tibet. The photo state copies of the same are now preserved in the K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute at Patna.

References of using palm leaves

Sculptures of India some Gods and Goddess have palm leaves on their hands as pusthaka.Many paintings of medieval period the palm leaves are shown as documentary evidence or writing material.

In the Chola paintings at Brihadisvara temple at Thanjavur, the story of Sundarar is narrated. In which all the people are having palm leaves in their hands by checking the document is authentic one or not supplied by Sivan in the form of an old man. In the innumerable inscriptions of South India the reference of using palm leaves as writing material are mentioned. Before engraving either on the wall or on the copper plate the oral order of the king was

written in Palm leaves. The king appointed the royal writer for this purpose and he was referred to as ōlai nāyagam in Tamil. These documents have been preserved in the documents office by certain pattolai, an officer in charge. He placed the palm leaf manuscript placing wooden plates on both sides, strings together with a rope and finally covered with silk cloths. Hence he was called as paṭṭōlai. The documents were kept in the office it was known as āvaṇakilari. Common people also used this palm leaves as their writing materials. The people who contested in the election used the palm leaf as a ballot paper and writing their names on the leaves. Palm leaves are widely used in South India from time immemorial. They used various types of stylish as pen and they had the capacity to write on the palm leaves.

Preparation of Palm Leaves

Palm leaves were carefully prepared to ensure **flexibility**, **durability**, and **long-term preservation**. Two types of palm trees were commonly used:

1. **Kūndal panai**
2. **Country palm tree**

These trees grow abundantly in the **southern regions of Tamil Nadu**.

The preparation process involved several steps:

- The leaves were **first dried** under the sun.
- They were then **boiled or soaked in water** to make them soft.
- After soaking, they were **dried again** thoroughly.
- The dried leaves were **polished** using a smooth stone or a conch shell to create an even writing surface.

- Finally, the leaves were **cut to required sizes**, usually **1 to 3 feet in length** and **1 to 4 inches in width.**

In **North India**, writing was done with **ink on palm leaves**, but in **South India**, a **stylus** was used to inscribe letters. After writing, the leaves were **smeared with soot or powdered charcoal** so that the letters became clearly visible.

Each palm leaf was **punched with a hole**, generally in the middle, though sometimes on the left side. A **string** (called *sūtra* or *sarayantraka*) was passed through this hole to tie the bundle of leaves together. Longer palm leaves occasionally had **two holes**, one on each side, for better binding.

Other Permanent Writing Materials – Stones

Stone has been one of the most important and durable writing materials in India. A large number of inscriptions are engraved on **stone slabs**, **dressed stones**, **pillars**, and **temple walls**. Hero stones (*virakal*) are also carved in stone. Because of its durability, stone served as a medium for writing for thousands of years.

The use of stone as a writing surface in India dates back to **prehistoric times**. Many **petroglyphs** carved on hill surfaces belong to this early phase. Stone became a permanent writing material nearly **2500 years ago**. In South India, a significant portion of temple inscriptions is found engraved on the **walls of stone temples**. Temples served as **social and religious centres**, and were regarded as **archives** preserving day-to-day transactions, especially donations made to temples.

During early historical times, kings excavated **rock-cut caves** and recorded donation details on **pillars**, **lintels**, and **walls**. During the **Pallava period**,

numerous inscriptions were engraved on pillars of rock-cut temples and early brick temples. Inscriptions were also carved on separate stone slabs, which were installed inside temple complexes or sometimes in village public spaces.

In some temples of South India, stone slabs containing inscriptions were reused as **pavement stones**, **floor slabs**, or even as **ceiling stones** during later renovations. For example, in **Tiruvottriyur near Chennai**, many early inscriptions are now found on the temple floor, and at the **Kailasanatha Temple in Kanchipuram**, old inscribed slabs were reused in the roof. Renovators in later periods did not recognize their historical value, although ancient builders carefully preserved such records.

Inscriptions were also engraved on **rock surfaces, boulders, and hill slopes**. The **rock edicts of Ashoka** are a major example. The famous **musical inscription at Kudumiyanmalai** in Tamil Nadu is engraved on an open rock surface. Since rocks provide large areas, many inscriptions belonging to different dynasties are found at the same site. For instance, **Girnar rock** carries Ashoka's edicts (3rd century BCE) as well as an inscription of the **Kshatrapa king Rudradaman** (150 CE). Numerous **Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions** have also been found together on rock beds and cave surfaces in Tamil Nadu.

This category also includes inscriptions found on **stone pedestals of sculptures**, **hero stones**, and **pillars**. The famous **Pillar Edicts of Ashoka** and the **Allahabad Pillar Inscription** are notable examples.

Metals

Gold: Buddhist Jātaka stories mention that wealthy merchants were used Gold plates as writing material. Many yantras or magical designs with inscriptions

were made in Gold. A gold plate with a votive inscription in Kharoshthi has been discovered in the Buddhist Stūpa at Gangu near Taxila.

Silver : The use of silver as writing material is known in India from early centuries of Common Era. This metal is not so costly as gold. A short inscription on silver has been recovered from the Buddhist Stūpa at Bhaṭṭiprōlu in the Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh is note worthy to mention. The Batavia Silver plate inscription of Nayaks of Thanjavur is another important record incised on silver plate. This record mentions the grant of Nagapattinam to the Dutch East India Company by the last Nayaka ruler Viyaragava nayakkar. Ekoji, the first Maratha king of Thanjavur also issued a silver plate inscription to Dutch company in the year 1676.

Brass: Brass was seldom used for writing independent inscriptions, even though many brass statues have label inscriptions on their pedestals or on the back side of the statues. The votive brass image at Gaya is fine example of this variety. An inscribed seal-ring in brass bearing inscription of Gupta period is note worthy to mention. In some Jaina temples at Abu have brass plates with religious formulas inscribed thereon.

Bronze: This metal like brass was rarely used for independent writing. Some bronze seals have legends in kharoshthi, Brahmi and Greek. Some bronze images in Tamil nadu bear the label inscriptions on their pedestal. Nagapattinam Buddhist bronzes are note worthy of this kind.

Copper: Copper is also most important writing material- Several copper plates have been discovered in India. When the king issued some royal order, first it was written on the palm leaves and then to Copper plates and to stone. It is referred to in the inscriptions too as “kallilum (stone) sempilum ezuthik

kolga". (Order should be written both on stone as well as copper plates). The largest number of inscriptions incised on metal is one sheets of copper of varying sizes and number. They range in size from about 2 ½ inches by 17/8 inches in the case of a small and very early record. The Sohgaura copper plate considered to be the earliest copper plate in India which has the above size. In South India, the copper plates more or less looks like a palm leafs and vary in size, while in North India birch bark was the model of copper plate. In the later period, Vijayanagara issued copper plates which are the model of birch bark.

The number of plates required depended on the content of the document. In some cases a single plate was used; and it was inscribed some times on only one side of it, sometimes on both. The biggest copper plate records so far discovered belong to the Chola period in Tamil country. The Larger Leiden grant of Rajaraja I have twenty one plates with four hundred and forty three lines of writing. The Tiruvalangadu plates of Rajendra I consists of thirty one sheets which, together with the massive ring, weigh 7,980 tolas, containing eight hundred and sixteen lines of writing. The Karandai copper plates issued by the Rajendra I contains fifty five plates. Recently, the Department of State Archaeology of Tamil nadu recovered a copper plate of the Cholas at Tiruvindalur, a village in Nagapattinam District of Tamil nadu. This is the largest copper plate in India so far found in India. It consists of eighty five sheets strung together with a copper ring with a seal.

The plates of the set measure, almost uniformly forty four cm in length and twenty one cm in breadth. If a grant contains more plates than one, they are used to be strung. Many numbers of Copper plates of the Pallavas consist of many plates attached with a ring and seal. Though inscriptions on copper plates are common, inscriptions have been incised on copper vessels and other utensils

also, an inscription on Tamil language of Chitramēḷi periyanāṭṭār found engraved on the copper plough with an emblem of that agricultural organization. A casket in the form of a miniature Stūpa with a harmika and umbrella of a conventional shape made of copper with an inscription in the Kharoshthi inscription has been found from Kurram near Peshawar.

Iron Iron is used mostly for making weapons, implements. It was very rarely used as a writing material. The iron pillar at Meharauli (near the Qutub Minar-Delhi) is the best example of this type. This iron pillar has the inscription of the king Chandra. The column measuring 23 feet 8 inches is estimated to weigh more than six tones. Persian inscription of Akbar found at Dhar iron pillar contains the personal names in Nagari and Persian characters are another example of this type.

Other materials

Inscriptions were incised on various other materials like crystals, wooden pillars, tablets, earthenware, brick and terracotta, conch tortoise shell and ivory plaques.

Crystal:

Inscriptions on crystals are very rare. Crystal is a hard material and also not easily available. A hexagonal piece of crystal with an inscription has been found in Bhaṭṭiprōlu in the District of Krishna of Andhra Pradesh. On all the ix faces of this crystal are seen the scratches of letters. This is the votive offering.

Bricks:

Inscriptions on Bricks have been reported abundantly in North India. Bricks were commonly used for writing purposes in Mesopotamia and other parts of Western Asia. In the state of Uttarapradesh, there is place Bhitari where we get an inscription of Gupta period. It records the name of the king "Sri Kumaraguptasya". At Gopalpur in the Gorakhpur District some brick tablets have been found bearing Buddhist Sutras. In the excavations at Jagatgam on the valley of Yamuna, large number of inscribed bricks has been reported. They belonged to 3 rd century C.E., on palaeographical grounds.

Clay and Terra-cotta:

Clay and Terra cotta inscriptions are found abundantly in India. The clay tablets are mostly votive offerings to the Buddhist faith. At Sunnet in the Ludhiana District of Punjab have the names of Gods Sankara and Narayana. The clay seals also found abundantly in the excavations of Andhra, Orissa and other parts of northern India. In the excavations at Basar in the Muzaffarpur District of West Bengal more than one thousand and one hundred clay seals have been recovered. These seals are mostly related officials and guilds, corporations and private individuals. A clay seal of Buddha Gupta found in Nalanda. The seals in terracotta of the Maukhari king Sarvavarman found in the same place at Nalanda. A clay seal bearing the name Kōvēta is found in Srilanka in the recent times.

Potteries:

Potteries bearing inscriptions largely found in the early Historic sites in Tamil nadu. Nearly 25 excavated sites in Tamil nadu have potteries with Tamil

brahmi inscriptions of individual names. At Kodumanal, a place in Erode District of Tamil nadu alone we have nearly 600 and odd pot shreds yielded Tamil Brahmi letters. Most of the sites related to Sangam period invariably yielded inscriptions on the potteries which show the literacy of the Tamils of the early Common Era. Uraiyur, Vallam, Arikamedu, Kiladi, Alagankulam, Kanchipuram, Karur, Korkai, Teriruveli, Kaveripumpattinam, Porur are some of the places where we get inscriptions on Potteries.Vattamanu, Nagarjunakonda and Amaravathi, Salikundam, Nanduru are some of the Buddhist sites yielded Brahmi letters on the potteries. Besides, Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions on potteries have also been found in the excavations at Quasir-al-quatham, Bernike, and Kor-ori in the Red sea area. It shows that the ancientTamils went up to Mediterranean regions through sea trade and their maritime contacts were attested by foreign scholars and Tamil literature of the early Common Era.

Wood

Although wood is not considered a long-lasting or durable writing material, inscriptions carved on wood are occasionally found in India. A Brahmi inscription from the **2nd century CE**, belonging to the Western Kshatrapas, mentions the use of a **wooden writing board.** Another early example is a Brahmi inscription engraved on a **wooden rib** of the *Bhaja Chaitya.*

Buddhist literature, especially the **Vinayapitaka**, frequently refers to the use of wood as a writing material in ancient times, which is historically significant. Wooden boards, known as **phalaka**, were commonly used in early India for writing letters. People wrote on these boards using **chalk (pāṇḍulēkha)**.

Thus, even though wood is perishable, it played an important role as a writing surface in the early historical period.

Conch and Ivory

Inscriptions engraved on **conch shells** and **ivory plaques** are extremely rare in India. A notable example is a **white conch** bearing a Brahmi inscription discovered during excavations at **Salihundam**. An **inscribed ivory seal** belonging to the **Mauryan period** has been unearthed at **Rupar** in Punjab. Excavations at **Kausambi** and **Besnagar** have also yielded ivory inscriptions.

Inscriptions on Pottery

` Pottery was another medium used for writing. At **Kodumanal**, a Tamil–Brahmi inscription has been found on a potsherd, providing important evidence for early Tamil writing traditions.

Other Rare Materials

`A few inscriptions on **glass objects** have been reported from excavations in **Patna**. **Carnelian**, a semi-precious stone, was also used—some seals issued by **Vishnuvarman of Malaysia** were engraved on carnelian. Occasionally, **bone** was used as a writing material in ancient India.

Cotton Cloth:

Cotton cloth was also served as writing material in ancient time. It is variously referred to as paṭa, paṭika or kārpāsika-paṭa. The earliest epigraphical reference to paṭa as writing material is recorded from Nasik inscription of Satavāhana period. According to Brunel and Rice, the traders of Karnataka used to have cotton cloth for writing their accounts. It is referred to as Kanata which was covered with a paste of tamarind-seed. Marwari merchants of Tamil nadu used cloth for keeping their accounts. Old records on cotton have been kept in

Sringeri matha in damage condition. Like paper cotton is also easy to damage by moisture and moths.

Paper:

Paper was first used by the Chinese in 11th century C.E. This was introduced to India during the time of Muslims in this century. But Nearchos, the Greek writer who has been with India during Alexander invention to India mentions that Indians knew the art of preparing paper from Cotton. The earliest manuscript on paper was discovered from Kashgar in Central Asia. It belongs to Gupta period of 5th century C.E but it travelled to such a far of place around 14th century C.E. The hand- made paper replaced by machine papers; the Mōḍi letters of Marathas are written in papers in 18th and 19th century.

Leather:

In ancient times leather was used as a writing material in Western Asia, Egypt and Europe. It is believed that some of the Buddhist works have been written on the skins of animals including Vāsavadattā of Subandhu. However no leather manuscript is recovered in India so far.

Ink:

Some kind of ink has been used by Indians for writing on the Birch-bark and cotton cloth. The word mashi or masi used for ink appeared in Grihyasūtras. The earliest specimen of writing with ink is found on the inner side of the lid of the relic vessel from a Stūpa at Andher of 3rd or 2nd century BCE. Different kinds of inks were used; still black was the most common. Coloured inks also were used. Red was also most common while yellow was sometimes used in manuscripts.

Self Assessment Question

1. What is paleography, and how does it help in understanding ancient writings?
2. Differentiate between pictography, ideography, phonography, and logography.
3. What is Cuneiform, and where was it primarily used?
4. Describe the significance of Brahmi, Vatteluthu, and Grantha scripts in Indian history.
5. Which materials were commonly used for writing in ancient India, and why were they important?

Unit-III

Dating System – Eras – Saka Era – Kali Era- Vikrama Era – Kollam Era

Objectives

1. **To understand the concept of historical dating and the importance of different eras in chronology.**
2. **To study major Indian chronological systems**, including the Saka Era, Kali Era, Vikrama Era, and Kollam Era.
3. **To analyze how these dating systems are used in inscriptions and historical records to reconstruct timelines**

Era	Epoch (Start Year)	Association	Primary Use
Saka	78 CE	King Kanishka / Victory over Shakas	Indian National Calendar, Astronomy
Vikrama	57 BCE	King Vikramaditya	Nepal (Official), North/West India (Lunar Calendar)
Kali	3102 BCE	Start of the Kali Yuga	Ancient Hindu Astronomy, Cosmology
Kollam	825 CE	Founding/Reform in Kerala	Kerala (Regional Solar Calendar)

Saka Era

The Saka era was probably established by King Maeus around the second Century A.D. The Shakas who were also known as the Indo-Scythians were a group of Iranian nomadic people who invaded India by destroying the Indo-Greeks in North-West India.

- The Shakas brought the larger part of the country under their control.
- The most famous Shaka ruler in India was Rudradaman who ruled from 130 A.D to 150 A.D.

- There were five branches of Shakas who settled and established rule in different regions of North and North-Western parts of the Indian subcontinent.

- The Saka era came to an end with the defeat of the last Shaka ruler, Rudrasimha III by Chandragupta-II of the Gupta dynasty.

Origin of Saka Era

- In and around the 2nd century B.C, the central Asian nomadic people called 'Yueh-chi' or 'Yuezhi' pushed the Shakas out of their homes and forced them to invade India from the north western border of present day China. The descendants in later times came to be known as Kushana.

- The Shakas invaded Parthia and Bactria and they defeated the Parthian King. This encouraged them to move further into India.

- Maeus was the first to establish the Indo-Scythian rule in India.

• The Shakas were divided into 5 distinctive branches and they established the rule by settling in North and North-Western parts of the Indian subcontinent.

• The five branches of the Shakas settled in the following places,

♣ Afghanistan

♣ Punjab with Taxila as capital

♣ Mathura ♣ Western India

♣ Upper Deccan with Ujian as their capital.

• Among all these distinctive branches of Shakas the Central and Western Indian branches reached prominence and managed to rule India longer than other Shaka rulers.

Important Rulers Of Saka Era

King Maues was also called King Moga.

- ❖ He takes the credit to be the earliest Shaka or Indo-Scynthian ruler in India and he established the Shaka rule over Gandhara region which is the present day Afghanistan and Pakistan region.
- ❖ King Moga made Sirkap (in present day Punjab,Pakistan) as his capital.
- ❖ He led many failed invasions against the Indo-Greeks beyond the Jhelum river.
- ❖ He issued a great number of copper coins and comparatively fewer silver coins during his reign.

- The languages used in his coins were Greek and Kharosthi script.
- The coins also bear the images and symbols of Indian deities of Buddhist and Hindu religion.
- The famous Taxila copper plate belongs to Shaka King Moga's inscriptions and it contains precise information written in Kharosthi script.
- Maues was succeeded by his son Azezs the first.
- Azes – I was the one who actually put an end to Indo-Greek rule in India
- . • He defeated the Graeco-Indian king Hippostratos after a prolonged struggle and added the remnants to the Shaka Empire.
- He started the Azes era in 58 BC which coincides with the famous Vikrama Era in India.

Azilises And Azes II

The successor of Azes-I was Azilises and he was succeeded by Azes-II.

- Some coins were issued jointly by Aziliases and Azez-II.
- Azes-II is considered to be the last great ruler of the Shaka dynasty of this era after they lost to the Kushan Empire.

Nahapana

- The Shaka Empire once again rose to prominence under King Nahapana.
- His mention in various inscriptions of Maharashtra and Satavahans stands proof to his prominence in the central and western satrap regions.

- He is the instigator of one of the two great Shaka Kshatrapa dynasties in North and NorthWestern India called 'Kshaharatas dynasty'.
- Later he was defeated by king Gautamiputra Satakarni of Satavahana dynasty.

Chashtana

Nahapana was succeeded by King Chashtana.

- Western Kshatrapas or Satraps were ruled over by the Shaka King Chashtana with Ujjain as his capital.
- Ptolemy praised and referred to him as 'Testenes' or 'Tiasthenes'.
- Following Nahapana he was instigator of the other great dynasty in North and North-Western India called 'Bhadramukhas dynasty'.

Rudradaman I

Rudradaman I is the grandson of Shaka king Nahapana.

- He is considered to be the greatest and most illustrious ruler of all Shaka Rulers.
- He made his capital Ujjain a great cultural and educational center.
- He assumed the title 'Makakshatrapa' after being crowned as the King.
- Rudradaman I is known as the reformer of Sanskrit arts and literature.
- He is also the first ruler to issue a long inscription written in Sanskrit which was usually written in Prakrit during this period.
- His most known contribution is the repair work of Sudarshana lake located in Kathiawar district built by Chandragupta Maurya.
- He built the Junagarh rock inscription and according to this inscription he reigned over the vast Western satrap dynasty which includes

Kathiawar, Narmada valley, Konkan and parts of Malwa(except Pune and Nasik) and also Gujarat.

- ❖ He had converted to Hinduism after being married to a Hindu woman.
- ❖ He reclaimed most of the territories lost under the Nahapana rule lost to Satavahanas through conquest.
- ❖ Though he fought numerous wars with the Satavahanas, he also established and maintained a marital relationship with them by marrying his daughter to Vashishtiputra Satakarni, King of Satavahana Dynasty.
- ❖ The Greek writer Yavanasvera lived and translated one of the first books of Indian Astrology 'Yavanajataka' ('Sayings of Greeks') from Greek to Sanskrit under his regime.

Decline Of Saka Era

- ❖ The downfall of the Shaka empire in Gandara region (north western Pakistan) started during the reign of Azes-II after a defeat from the Kushan Empire.
- ❖ Another major blow to the Shaka supremacy in the Indian subcontinent came from the ruler of Satavahana Empire, Gautamiputra Satakarni. Finally the Shakas were wiped off and made to shrink into a small regional kingdom by ChandraguptaII of Gupta Empire who defeated the last of the Shaka rulers of western satrap region, Rudrasimha III.

Self Assessment Questions

1) **What is the purpose of a historical dating system, and why are eras important in chronology?**
2) **Explain the origin and significance of the Saka Era.**
3) **What is the Kali Era, and in what contexts was it used?**

Unit -VI

Eminent Epigraphists – James's Princip – George Buhler – J.F. Fleet – James Burgess – H. Krishna Sastri – V.Venkaya – B.L. Rice Robert Sewell – E.Hultzen – K.V.Raman – Iravatham Mahadevan

Objectives

1. **To learn about the contributions of key epigraphists** in the study and interpretation of Indian inscriptions.
2. **To understand the methods and approaches** used by scholars like James Prinsep, George Bühler, J.F. Fleet, and others in deciphering ancient scripts.
3. **To evaluate the impact of modern epigraphists**, such as Iravatham Mahadevan and K. V. Raman, on reconstructing India's historical and cultural past.

James Prinsep

James Prinsep FRS (20 August 1799 – 22 April 1840) was an English scholar, orientalist and antiquary. He was the founding editor of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* and is best remembered for deciphering the Kharosthi and Brahmi scripts of ancient India. He studied, documented and illustrated many aspects of numismatics, metallurgy, meteorology apart from pursuing his career in India as an assay master at the mint in Benares.

Early life

James Prinsep was the seventh son and the tenth child of John Prinsep (1746–1830) and his wife, Sophia Elizabeth Auriol (1760–1850). John Prinsep went to India in 1771 with almost no money and became a successful indigo planter. He returned to England in 1787 with a fortune of £40,000 and established himself as an East India merchant. He moved to Clifton in 1809 after incurring losses. His connections helped him find work for all his sons and several members of the Prinsep family rose to high positions in India. John Prinsep later became a member of parliament. James initially went to study in a school in Clifton run by a Mr. Bullock but learnt more at home from his older siblings. He showed a talent for detailed drawing and mechanical invention and this made him study architecture under the gifted but eccentric Augustus Pugin. His eyesight however declined due to an infection and he was unable to take up architecture as a profession. His father knew of an opening in the assay department at the mint in India and sent him to train in chemistry at Guy's Hospital and later as an apprentice to Robert Bingley, assay master at the Royal Mint in London (1818–19).

Career in India

Prinsep found a position as an assay master at the Calcutta mint and reached Calcutta along with his brother Henry Thoby on 15 September 1819. Within a year at Calcutta, he was sent by his superior, the eminent orientalist Horace Hayman Wilson, to work as assay master at the Benares mint. He stayed at Benares until the closure of that mint in 1830. He then moved back to Calcutta as deputy assay master, and when Wilson resigned in 1832, he was made assay master (overruling Wilson's nominee for that position, James Atkinson) at the new silver mint designed in Greek revival style by Major W. N. Forbes.

His work as assay master led him to conduct many scientific studies. He worked on means for measuring high temperatures in furnaces accurately. The publication of his technique in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* in 1828 led to his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society. He suggested the possibility of visual pyrometric measurement using a calibrated series of mica plates as well as using the thermal expansion of platinum but considered that a practical approach was to use calibrated combinations of platinum, gold and silver alloys placed in a cupel or crucible and observe their melting. He also described a pyrometer that measured the expansion of a small amount of air held within a gold bulb. In 1833 he called for reforms to Indian weights and measures and advocated a uniform coinage based on the new silver rupee of the East India Company.

Architecture

James Prinsep continued to take an interest in architecture at Benares. Regaining his eyesight, he studied and illustrated temple architecture, designed the new mint building at Benares as well as a church. In 1822 he conducted a survey of Benares and produced an accurate map at the scale of 8 inches to a mile. This map was lithographed in England. He also painted a series of water colours of monuments and festivities in Benares which were sent to London in 1829 and published between 1830 and 1834 as *Benares Illustrated, in a Series of Drawings*. He helped design an arched tunnel to drain stagnant lakes and improve the sanitation of the densely populated areas of Benares and built a stone bridge over the Karamansa river. He helped restore the minarets of Aurangzeb which were in a state of collapse. When he moved to Calcutta, he offered to help complete a canal that had been planned by his brother Thomas but left incomplete by the latter's death in 1830. Thomas's canal linked the River Hooghly with branches of the Ganges further to the east.

Asiatic Society of Bengal

In 1829, Captain James D. Herbert started a serial called *Gleanings in Science*. Captain Herbert, however, was posted as Astronomer to the King of Oudh in 1830, leaving the journal to the editorship of James Prinsep, who was himself the primary contributor to it. In 1832 he succeeded H. H. Wilson as secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and suggested that the Society should take over *Gleanings in Science* and produce the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*. Prinsep became the founding editor of this journal and contributed articles on chemistry, mineralogy, numismatics and on the study of Indian antiquities. He was also very interested in meteorology and the tabulation of observations and the analysis of weather data from across the country. He worked on the calibration of instruments to measure humidity and atmospheric pressure.[5] He continued to edit the journal until his illness in 1838 which led to his leaving India and subsequently his death. Many of the plates in the journal were illustrated by him.

Numismatist

Coins were Prinsep's first interest. He interpreted coins from Bactria and Kushan as well as Indian series coins, including "punch-marked" ones from the Gupta series. Prinsep suggested that there were three stages; the punch-marked, the die-struck, and the cast coins. Prinsep also reported upon the native punch-marked coinage, noting that they were better known in eastern India.

Brahmi script philologist

As a result of Prinsep's work as an editor of the Asiatic Society's journal, coins and copies of inscriptions were transmitted to him from all over India, to

be deciphered, translated, and published. The decipherment of Brahmi became the focus of European scholarly attention in the early 19th century during East India Company rule in India, in particular in the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta. Brahmi was deciphered by Prinsep, who was then the secretary of the Society, in a series of scholarly articles published in the Society's journal between 1836 and 1838.[20][21][22][23] His breakthroughs built on the epigraphic work of Christian Lassen, Edwin Norris, H. H. Wilson and Alexander Cunningham, among others. The edicts in Brahmi script mentioned a King *Devanampriya Piyadasi* which Prinsep initially assumed was a Sri Lankan king. He was then able to associate this title with Ashoka on the basis of Pali script from Sri Lanka communicated to him by George Turnour. These scripts were found on the pillars at Delhi and Allahabad and on rock inscriptions from both sides of India, and also the Kharosthi script in the coins and inscriptions of the north-west. The idea of *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, a collection of Indian epigraphy, was first suggested by Prinsep and the work was formally begun by Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1877. His studies on inscriptions helped in the establishment of date of Indian dynasties based on references to Antiochus and other Greeks. Prinsep's research and writing were not confined to India. Prinsep also delved into the early history of Afghanistan, producing several works that touched on archaeological finds in that country. Many of the collections were sent by Alexander Burnes. After James Prinsep's death, his brother Henry Thoby Prinsep published in 1844 a volume exploring the numismatist's work on collections made from Afghanistan.

Death and legacy

Prinsep literally worked himself to death. From 1838 he began to suffer from recurrent headaches and sickness. It was initially thought to be related to a

liver (bilious) condition and he was forced to get away from his studies and left for England in November 1838 aboard the *Herefordshire*. He arrived in England in poor condition and did not recover. He died on 22 April 1840 in his sister Sophia Haldimand's home at 31 Belgrave Square of a "softening of the brain". A genus of plant *Prinsepia* was named after him by the botanist John Forbes Royle in 1839 in appreciation of his work.

News of his death reached India and several memorials were commissioned. A bust at the Asiatic Society was to be made by Francis Chantrey but was finished by Henry Weekes. Prinsep Ghat, a Palladian porch on the bank of the Hooghly River designed by W. Fitzgerald in 1843, was erected in his memory by the citizens of Calcutta. Part of his original collection of ancient coins and artefacts from the Indian subcontinent is now in the British Museum, London.

GEORG BUEHLER - German Indologist 1837-1898

Georg Buehler spent almost half of his academic career in India. He collected manuscripts and deciphered inscriptions. He also wrote on Indian law. His contributions in this field have become standard works.

Johann Georg Buehler, son of a clergyman, was born on 19.7.1837 at Borstel near Nienburg, Hannover. He studied Greek, Latin, Sanskrit[|], Zend, German, Persian, Armenian, Arabic, archaeology and philosophy at Goettingen University. His Sanskrit[|]guru[|], T. Benfey, considered him to be his most promising student. Buehler obtained a doctorate in 1858 for his thesis on Greek linguistics. From 1859 to 1862 he stayed in London as a private tutor. Later he

was assistant to the librarian of Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle. After a brief term at the Goettingen University library, he was nominated Professor of Oriental languages at Elphinstone College, Bombay, in 1863. Here he taught Sanskrit, Prakrit, comparative linguistics and Latin. He also studied Sanskrit with a pundit and was soon able to speak this language fluently. He was sent on a research tour to Southern Maratha and Kanara country in the cool seasons of 1866-69. In 1868, he was promoted to the post of Educational Inspector of Gujarat and Officer in Charge of search for Sanskrit manuscripts in Bombay Presidency. On account of ill health he was pensioned in 1880. After recovery, he accepted a professorship of Indian philology and archaeology in Wien in the same year. He held this post until his death on 8.4.1898.

The first articles written by Buehler related to comparative philology and Vedic mythology. While in England, he compiled an index to Max Mueller 's "History of Indian Literature."

When Buehler was professor at Elphinstone College, Bombay he found that Sanskrit texts for the use of students were needed. F. Kielhorn and Buehler were, therefore, appointed as editors and the Bomaby Sanskrit Series was started by them. Buehler edited some books of the *Panchatantra* and the first part of the *Dasakumaracharita* in this series.

Buehler's travels in search of manuscripts began in 1866 and occupied him for years to come. A report of the Department of Public Instruction of the Bombay Presidency says: "By conversing fluently in the Sanskrit language with *Brahman Shastris* at the various places he visited, he succeeded to a great extent in inspiring confidence and in allaying the prejudices of persons who were at first unwilling to show their sacred volumes to an European." Buehler was the

first foreigner to be allowed to examine the library at Jaisalmer in Rajasthan. There, he found Jain manuscripts and secular literature. He was very happy to note the great antiquity of his discoveries. These scripts later formed the basis of the work done by A. Weber, H. Jacobi and E. Leumann.

The general results of Buehler's search for manuscripts are found in numerous Government Reports and Catalogues, e.g., in his "Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts contained in the private Libraries of Guzerat, Kathiawad, Kachch, Sind and Khandes", published between 1871 and 1873 in the Annual Reports of the Royal Asiatic Society and in the Journal of the German Oriental Society. Buehler's *Detailed Report on a Tour in Search of Sanskrit Manuscripts in Kashmir, Rajputana and Central India,* Bombay 1877, gave details about hitherto unknown authors and their works. Among them was Ksemendra, the Kashmir poet and polyhistorian whose works are important for the study of the history of literature and the epics.

Buehler, being interested in history, set out to find chronological data in inscriptions. His results were published in the *Indian Antiquary, Epigraphia Indica,* and other journals. In a paper *Die indischen Inschriften und das Alter der indischen Kunstpoesie* ("Indian Inscriptions and the Age of *Kavya* Literature") in the Proceedings of the Vienna Academy, 1890, he showed that inscriptions proved *Kavya* literature to be older than had hitherto been assumed by Western scholars. Buehler argued that *Kavya* literature must have developed before the beginning of the Christian era.

Buehler also contributed to the history of religions. He submitted a paper *Die indische Sekte der Jaina* to the Vienna Academy, 1887. In the article *Ueber das Leben des Jaina Moenchs Hemachandra*[9], 1889, he gave an

account of Jain monk Hemchandra who was also a grammarian and lexicographer. The main aim of Buehler's occupation with epigraphy was to study the political history of India and he spent much time and patience in the decipherment of the edicts of King Ashoka . He edited the *Vikramankadevacharita,* a chronicle composed by the Jaina Bilhana in the Bombay Sanskrit Series. He discussed *Rajatarangini,* the chronicles of the kings of Kashmir. His plan of writing a complete history of India could not be carried out on account of his early death.

Buehler wrote an essay *On the Origin of the Indian Brahmi Alphabet.* Its revised edition, 1898, contained two appendices on the origin of the Karoshthi alphabet and the letter-numerals of Brahmi. He contributed a treatise on Indian palaeography to the "Encyclopedia of Indo-Aryan Research."

Indian Law was the second field of studies in which Buehler did pioneering work. Together with Judge Sir Raymond West he published the *Digest of Hindu Law of Inheritance, Partition and Adoption,* third edition, 1884. In 1868 and 1871 he published a critical edition of the *Aphorisms of the Sacred Laws of the Hindus* by Apastamba. *The Sacred Laws of the Aryas,* vol. II and vol. XIV of Max Mueller's "Sacred Books of the East", was based on manuscripts which Buehler himself had discovered. It contains the translation of the legal *Sutras* of Apastamba, Vasishtha, Gautama, and Baudhayana. *The Laws of Manu,* vol. XXV of the SBE, contains, besides the translation, Buehler's extracts from commentaries and discussions on the development of legal literature and the relationship between the *Manavadharmashastra* and the Epics.

Buehler later taught Sanskrit at Wien University and wrote a grammar for the use of students *Leitfaden fuer den Elementarkurs des Sanskrit,* 1883,

which is still used today (latest reprint in 1989). Its translation was entitled "Sanskrit Primer", Boston 1886. Buehler was co-founder of the Oriental Institute of Wien University. He initiated the Wien Oriental Journal too. The last years of his life were devoted to editing the "Encyclopedia of Indo-Aryan Research." Buehler planned the work, enlisted collaborators and was general editor,J. Jolly wrote his obituary in "Encyclopedia of Indo-Aryan Research", 1899 and appended a bibliography of Buehler's works.

John Faithfull Fleet

John Faithfull Fleet C.I.E (1847 – 21 February 1917) was an English civil servant with the Indian Civil Service and became known as a historian, epigraphist and linguist. His research in Indian epigraphy and history, conducted in India over a thirty-year period, is published in books including *Pali, Sanskrit and Old Canarese Inscriptions*, *The Dynasties of the Kanarese Districts of The Bombay Presidency from the earliest historical times to the Musalman Conquest*, and *The Inscriptions of The Early Gupta Kings and their Successors*. He was a regular contributor to works journals covering Indian history. His published well-regarded works on inscriptions in the Sanskrit, Pali and Kannada languages and on the history of dynasties such as the Guptas, Kadambas, Aulikaras, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas and Seunas

Early life

Fleet was born to John George Fleet, a London wholesale sugar dealer,[2] and Esther Faithfull of Headley, Surrey, England, in 1847. He was educated at the Merchant Taylors' School in London.[1] His five brothers included Vice-Admiral Henry Louis Fleet (born 1851-1923), Rutland Barrington (1853–1922), a star in Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and actor

Duncan Fleet (born 1860, date of death unknown). He also had two sisters.[3] His aunt, Emily Faithfull, was an activist and dramatic reader.

Early career and interests

Fleet was appointed to the Indian Civil Service (ICS) in the year 1865, and to prepare himself for this, he studied Sanskrit at University College London. In 1867, he moved to the Bombay Presidency (then a British province in western India) and soon held the posts of Assistant Collector and then Magistrate, Educational Inspector, in the Southern Division (1872), Assistant Political Agent in Kolhapur and the Southern Maratha Country (1875), and Collector and Magistrate (1882) Meanwhile, he continued with his interest in Sanskrit and the inscriptions that were abundant on stone and copper plate in the Bombay Presidency. He began publishing articles about the inscriptions in the mid-1860s. His studies soon led him to study another language, Kannada, both in its ancient and modern forms.

Eminence

Fleet was soon establishing a reputation through his papers on the epigraphy and history of Southern India in fora such as the Bombay Asiatic Society and *The Indian Antiquary*, founded in 1872 (he later edited it from the 14th to 20th editions (1885–92)). He also published his works on the *Pali, Sanskrit and old Canarese Inscriptions* for the India Office in 1878. Fleet became the first epigraphist of the Government of India when such a post was created in 1883. After three years as the epigraphist, he was appointed as the Collector and Magistrate of Sholapur in 1886.

One of his greatest works was on the hitherto uncharted Gupta period. *The Inscriptions of The Early Gupta Kings and their Successors* (1889), forming the third volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionarum*

Indicum, was a well-regarded example of his scholarship. Meanwhile, his civil service career progressed. He was appointed the Senior Collector in 1889, Commissioner of the Southern Divisions in 1891, and also Central Divisions in 1892. He was made the Commissioner of Customs in 1893.[1]

Retirement and death

Fleet retired from the ICS in 1897 and returned to England to settle in Ealing. He was now able to devote his full time to his epigraphical studies and continued with his valuable contributions to the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland and *Epigraphia Indica*. In 1906, he became the Honorary Secretary of the Society and was awarded its "gold medal" in 1912.

Before his death in 1917 at age 69, he published the *Ballads of the Peasantry* with its music in the *Indian Antiquary*

1. Major Contributor to Indian Epigraphy

- Fleet was one of the earliest scholars to systematically study **Sanskrit and Prakrit inscriptions**.
- He deciphered, edited, translated, and published numerous inscriptions from various regions of India.
- He set high standards for epigraphical methodology.

2. Work in *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum (CII)*

- He authored **Volume III** of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, which contains:
    - **Records of the Gupta Empire**
    - Inscriptions of Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, Chandragupta II, Kumara Gupta, Skanda Gupta, etc.

- His study of the **Allahabad Pillar Inscription (Prayaga Prashasti)** of Samudragupta became a landmark in Indian historiography.

James Burgess

James Burgess (14 August 1832[1] – 3 October 1916), was the founder of *The Indian Antiquary* in 1872[2] and an important archaeologist of India in the 19th century.

Life

Burgess was born on 14 August 1832 in Kirkmahoe, Dumfriesshire. He was educated at Dumfries and then the University of Glasgow and the University of Edinburgh. He did educational work in Calcutta, 1856 and Bombay, 1861, and was Secretary of the Bombay Geographical Society 1868–73. He was Head of the Archaeological Survey, Western India, 1873, and of South India, 1881. From 1886 to 1889 he was Director General, Archaeological Survey of India.

In 1881 the University of Edinburgh awarded him an honorary Doctor of Letters (LLD).

He retired to Edinburgh around 1892.

He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1894. He won its Keith Medal for 1897–99, and served as their Vice President 1908 to 1914.[5]

He died on 3 October 1916, at 22 Seton Place in Edinburgh.

Rao Bahadur Hosakote Krishna Sastri

Rao Bahadur Hosakote Krishna Sastri (1870–1928) was a prominent Indian **epigraphist** and archaeologist who worked with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Here is a summary of his biography and key contributions:

Key Facts

- **Full Name:** Rao Bahadur Hosakote Krishna Sastri (often referred to as H. Krishna Sastri)
- **Born:** September 16, 1870, in Hosakote, Mysore Kingdom (present-day Karnataka).
- **Died:** February 8, 1928, in Bangalore, Mysore Kingdom.
- **Occupation:** Archaeologist and Epigraphist.
- **Title:** He was awarded the title of **Rao Bahadur** (and earlier, Rao Sahib in 1911).

Career and Contributions

He made significant contributions to the study of ancient Indian inscriptions and iconography, primarily through his work with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

- **Epigraphy Work:** He is particularly known for his expertise in deciphering and interpreting inscriptions.
    - **Ashoka's Brahmi Inscriptions:** He did important work on the Brahmi inscriptions of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, notably at **Maski**.

    - **Pallava Inscriptions:** He extensively studied and deciphered inscriptions of the Pallava dynasty, including those at Mahabalipuram.
    - **Tamil-Brahmi:** He was a pioneer in deciphering Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions, co-authoring a 1919 paper where Tamil words were identified in the Brahmi inscription at Mangulam.
- **Editor of *Epigraphia Indica*:** He edited Volumes XVII, XVIII, and XIX of the prestigious journal ***Epigraphia Indica***, which is a major source for Indian inscriptions.
- **Authored *South Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses*:** This is one of his most notable publications (published in 1916). The book was written to serve as a popular handbook providing information about the images commonly seen in temples and museums in Southern India, drawing on various local chronicles and *Agamas*.

His dedicated work helped illuminate aspects of South Indian history, especially in the areas of dynastic rule, administration, and religious art and architecture.

Rai Bahadur V. Venkayya

Rai Bahadur V.Venkayya, born in 1864 in the lineage of the illustrious scholar Appaya Dikshita of the 16th century, was one of the pioneering epigraphists of India and an expert in deciphering inscriptions etched on stone in the temples of South India, as well as the copper-plate inscriptions. He also deciphered the writing (legends) on coins. Trained in epigraphy by Dr. E. Hultzsch, the famous German epigraphist, he was the first Indian Epigraphist to the Government of India. In the words of John H. Marshall, Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India from 1902 to 1928, 'From first to last, his

life in the Archaeological Department was one of assiduous labour and devotion to duty and his work throughout was characterised by sound scholarship.

As a boy, he had studied the Vedas and ancillary scriptures from his father, Appa Sitarama Ayyar, a profound Vedic scholar – a learning that was to stand him in good stead later in life. Venkayya's schooling was in Chittoor, where he did extremely well despite dire financial straits, and went on to join the Madras Christian College (MCC). Staying in a hostel in Madras, he again felt the pangs of poverty, but bore all this with fortitude, writing in his diary, ` I cannot altogether forget the humiliating position which I occupied both at Chittoor, when I was preparing for my Matric examination and at the Student's Home, Madras. Perhaps, but for the pinching poverty throughout the period of my education, I might not have made much progress. In fact, poverty has been my best friend'. He subsequently joined the Free Church Mission High School (Anderson School) in Kanchipuram in 1885 and remitted money back home to educate his siblings. He made good use of his stay in Kanchipuram to visit the glorious temples in this ancient town.

In 1886, he went to Mamallapuram to see the famed Pallava monuments and sculptures, and what a visit that turned out to be! It was at this seaport of the Pallavas that Venkayya met E.Hultzsch, the illustrious scholar and first Chief Epigraphist of the Archaeological Survey of India, who was committed to collecting South Indian inscriptions and was immersed in this work in Mamallapuram. Venkayya, seeing what the German was doing, offered to help him. Hultzsch, dazzled by the young scholar's mastery of languages, knowledge and willingness to help, decided to induct Venkayya into the Epigraphy Department of the Archaeological Survey of India. While working in this department, Venkayya became proficient in copying inscriptions, taking precise impressions of them, analyzing their contents and interpreting the results. He

painstakingly deciphered the temple inscriptions of South India, which yielded many original insights. His hard work in chronicling these inscriptions have been the inspiration for many a budding scholar in later years.

Venkayya took charge as the Officiating Government Epigraphist in May 1903, and set a record by visiting about fifty two sites and copying approximately eight hundred new inscriptions, as recorded by John Marshall, the Director General of Archaeology in his Annual Report of Indian Epigraphy in 1903-1904. An important inscription which he copied was a Pallava record of the reign of King Dantivarman datable to the 8th century C.E. from the Parthasarathi Swami temple, Thiruvallikeni (Triplicane) in Madras. Among the many Chola epigraphs studied by him, special mention must be made of the famous 11th century Thiruvalangadu copper-plate inscription of Rajendra Chola I. He also copied many inscriptions from the historic village of Uttiramerur and published the important ones which throw much light on village administration of the Chola times. For his immense contribution to the field of epigraphy and Indology in general, the British Government honoured him with the title 'Rai Bahadur'.

Venkayya wrote a very large number of articles on various aspects of South Indian history, including the contribution of kings to irrigation by endowing the villages and towns with artificial lakes, tanks and irrigation channels. He wrote an article on 'Irrigation in South India' and gave a long list of all the tanks mentioned in the Pallava, Chola, Pandya and Vijayanagara inscriptions.

The book on Rai Bahadur V.Venkayya has a valuable foreword by eminent archaeologist, Padma Bhushan Dr R. Nagaswamy, Former Vice Chancellor, Kanchipuram University and Former First Director of Archaeology, Tamil Nadu Government. The author is V. Venkayya's great granddaughter

Sunitha Madhavan, a double gold medallist from the University of Madras, who was Professor and Head, Department of Economics, Meenakshi College, Chennai. She has painstakingly collected all the information about this scholar from various sources including his diary, correspondences, journal articles, epigraphy reports, coin collections, newspaper articles and many more. This volume provides an insight into the life and achievements of Rai Bahadur Venkayya, whose legacy has, and still continues to inspire many a historian and archaeologist.

Benjamin Lewis Rice (B. L. Rice) and **Robert Sewell** were two prominent British officials who made significant contributions to the fields of Indian history, archaeology, and epigraphy (the study of inscriptions) while working in colonial India.

B. L. Rice (1837–1927)

Benjamin Lewis Rice (B. L. Rice) was a British historian, archaeologist, and educationist known primarily for his pioneering work in the **Kingdom of Mysore** (modern-day Karnataka).

Biographical Facts

- **Born:** July 17, 1837, in **Bangalore**, Mysore State, India.
- **Died:** July 10, 1927, in Harrow, London, England.
- **Career:** He was the Principal of Bangalore High School (later Central College), served in the **Mysore Civil Service** as Inspector of Schools, and held the post of Director of Public Instruction.
- **Designation:** He was appointed the **first Director of the Mysore State Archaeology Department** in 1884.

- **Title:** Due to his immense contribution to epigraphy, he is often eulogized as **"Shasanapitamaha"** (Grandsire of Epigraphy) or **"Purathathva Pitamaha"** (Grandsire of Archaeology).

Major Contributions

- ***Epigraphia Carnatica*:** His most monumental work is the multi-volume *Epigraphia Carnatica*, which compiles and translates approximately **9,000 inscriptions** he discovered in the Old Mysore area. This series is a crucial primary source for the history of Karnataka.
- **Gazetteers:** He was appointed to compile the official gazetteers for **Mysore and Coorg Province**, publishing them in three parts in 1876.
- **Ashokan Edicts:** He is credited with discovering **Ashokan Edicts** and Roman coins in parts of Karnataka.
- **Education:** He introduced the **'hobli school system'** to extend education to common people in the state.

Robert Sewell (1845–1925)

Robert Sewell was a British civil servant, historian, and archaeologist who worked in the **Madras Presidency** (covering large parts of South India).

Biographical Facts

- **Born:** June 4, 1845, in Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight, England.
- **Died:** December 30, 1925, in London, England.
- **Career:** He served in the civil service of the Madras Presidency as an Assistant Collector and Magistrate, a Sub-Collector and Joint Magistrate, and later as a **District and Sessions Judge**. He was also the **Keeper of the Madras Record Office**.

- **Archaeology:** He was involved in the Archaeological Survey in South India, including work at the Buddhist stupa at **Amaravati** in 1877.

Major Contributions

- ***A Forgotten Empire (Vijayanagar)***: His most famous work, published in 1900, is a seminal study on the **Vijayanagara Empire**. The book provided an outline of the dynasty and included translations of the accounts of two 16th-century Portuguese visitors to the city, Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz.
- **Epigraphy and Chronology:** Sewell was noted for his special interests in **epigraphy, archaeology, and chronology**. He pioneered the systematic study of Vijayanagara history and compiled useful mathematical tables for converting Hindu and Muhammadan dates to A.D. dates in his book *The Indian Calendar* (1896).
- **Archaeological Lists:** He authored publications like *Lists of Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras* (1882–84), which was a major resource for documenting ancient inscriptions and remains in the region.

(E. Hultzsch)

Dr. **Eugen Julius Theodor Hultzsch** (E. Hultzsch) (1857–1927) was a German **Indologist** and epigraphist who played a foundational role in the systematic study of ancient Indian inscriptions, particularly those found in South India and the edicts of Emperor Ashoka.

Major Contributions to Indian History

Hultzsch's appointment in 1886 marked the beginning of modern, systematic epigraphical research in India.

1. Deciphering the Inscriptions of Ashoka

His most enduring legacy is his definitive work on the inscriptions of the Mauryan Emperor **Ashoka** (Aśoka).

- He edited and published a critical edition, **"Inscriptions of Aśoka,"** as Volume I of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (New Edition, 1925).
- This work established a standard text and translation for the major and minor rock edicts, pillar edicts, and cave inscriptions, which remains a key reference for historians today.

2. Pioneer of South Indian Epigraphy

Hultzsch was the first government epigraphist and focused heavily on documenting the vast number of inscriptions in the Madras Presidency.

- ***South-Indian Inscriptions***: He initiated and edited the monumental series, ***South-Indian Inscriptions*** (SII), publishing the first three volumes. This series is an indispensable primary source for the history of the Pallava, Chola, and Vijayanagara dynasties.
- **Key Temple Inscriptions**: He is credited with the initial decipherment and publication of inscriptions at historically significant sites:
    - **Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram)**: He deciphered the archaic inscriptions on the **Pancha Rathas** and correctly identified the titles (*birudas*) with the Pallava monarch **Narasimhavarman I**.
    - **Brihadeeswarar Temple, Thanjavur**: He extensively documented and translated the numerous Chola inscriptions of **Raja Raja I** found on the walls of this great temple.
- **Methodology**: He pioneered the rigorous use of inscriptions—dating monuments based on epigraphs carved into their surfaces—a method that became the backbone of ancient Indian historiography.

3. Editor of Epigraphia Indica

He served as the editor for several volumes of the prestigious journal *Epigraphia Indica* (Volumes 3 to 8, and part of 9), a major platform for publishing newly discovered and deciphered Indian inscriptions.

Hultzsch's work, often carried out with his able Indian assistant **Valaiyattur Venkayya** (who later succeeded him), moved the study of South Indian history from speculation to a foundation built on solid, documented primary sources.

K. V. Raman – Biography

Dr. K. V. Raman (1934–2010) was a distinguished **Indian archaeologist, epigraphist, art historian, and professor** who made significant contributions to the study of **South Indian history, temple architecture, and epigraphy**. He is widely respected for his academic work on Tamil Nadu's heritage and Indian art.

Early Life and Education

- Born in **1934** in Tamil Nadu.
- Completed higher studies in **History and Archaeology**.
- Earned a doctorate for his research in South Indian archaeology.

Academic and Professional Career

- Served as a **Professor and Head of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Madras**.
- Played a key role in developing archaeology as a scientific discipline in Tamil Nadu.

- Trained many students who later became leading archaeologists and historians.

Major Contributions

- **Temple Art and Architecture:**
  - Specialised in South Indian temple architecture, especially **Pallava**, **Chola**, and **Pandya** styles.
  - His research on temples helped in understanding their cultural, religious and historical significance.
- **Epigraphy:**
  - Studied, interpreted, and published many inscriptions of Tamil Nadu.
  - Contributed to the field through accurate readings and historical analysis of Chola and Pandya epigraphs.
- **Archaeological Research:**
  - Conducted several excavations and field studies in Tamil Nadu.
  - Contributed to the scientific study of sites such as Kanchipuram and other early historic centres.
- **Publications:**
  - His book **"Sri Varadarajaswami Temple, Kanchi"** is a major reference work.
  - Authored many research articles on South Indian art, iconography, archaeology, and temple history.

Positions and Recognition

- Served in various academic committees in India and abroad.
- Recognised as an authority in **South Indian archaeology and art history**.

- His works are widely used by students and researchers even today.

Legacy

- Remembered as one of the **finest scholars of South Indian art and archaeology**.
- Helped shape the study of Tamil epigraphy and temple architecture in the 20th century.
- Left behind a strong intellectual tradition through his students and publications.

Iravatham Mahadevan

Iravatham Mahadevan (2 October 1930 – 26 November 2018) was an Indian epigraphist and civil servant, known for his decipherment of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions and for his expertise on the epigraphy of the Indus Valley Civilisation.

Early life

Iravatham Mahadevan was born on 2 October 1930 in Thanjavur district in British India into a smartha Tamil Brahmin family. Mahadevan had his schooling in the town of Tiruchirapalli and graduated in Chemistry from the Vivekananda College, Chennai and law from the Madras Law College. Mahadevan successfully passed the Indian Administrative Service examinations held in 1953 and was allotted to the Madras cadre.

Civil service

Mahadevan worked as an Assistant Collector in Coimbatore district and Sub-Collector at Pollachi. In 1958, Mahadevan was transferred to Delhi as Assistant

Financial Adviser in India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry serving from 1958 to 1961. In 1961, Mahadevan was posted to Madras as Deputy Secretary in Government of Tamil Nadu's Industries Department and served as Director of Handlooms and Textiles Department from 1962 to 1966. Mahadevan voluntarily retired from the civil service in 1980.

Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions

According to an interview given to an e-journal *Varalaaru*, Mahadevan revealed that he started researching the Tamil-Brahmi script following a casual suggestion by Indian historian K. A. Nilakanta Sastri during a meeting in 1961.

There are several caves in Tamil Nadu with inscriptions in the Brahmi script. K. V. Subrahmanya Aiyar says they are in Tamil. It is an unsolved problem. Can you give it a shot?

Earlier, during his stint in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Delhi in 1958–61, Mahadevan had become acquainted with the noted epigraphist and art historian C. Sivaramamurti who was then working as a curator at the Indian Museum next block. Sivaramamurti initiated him into the basics of South Indian epigraphy.

Mahadevan first published his study of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions at Pugalur in 1965 following those of Mangulam, the next year. In the same year, Mahadevan presented his paper on Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions in Madras which was later published as the book *Corpus of the Tamil-Brahmi Inscriptions*. After a brief period of research with the Indus script, Mahadevan resumed his work on Tamil-Brahmi in 1992 with active support from the Tamil Nadu Archaeological Department. In 2003, he published a revised edition of the 1966 book which has since acquired the status of a classic.

Indus script

Mahadevan started his research on the Indus script following a brush with W. W. Hunter's book on the Indus Script at India's Central Secretariat Library in Delhi. In 1970, Mahadevan was offered the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship to do his doctoral research on the Indus Script. Mahadevan continued his research even after his fellowship ended and published his first book *Indus Script: Concordance and Tables* in 1977. Following a break from 1991 to 2003 to complete his research on Tamil epigraphy, Mahadevan resumed his studies again in 2003.

Gregory Possehl called Mahadevan a "careful, methodical worker, taking care to spell out his assumptions and methods. ... 'Tentative conclusions' and 'working hypotheses' are more his style than set ideas and fait accompli".

Significant contributions

Iravatham Mahadevan's *The Indus Script: Texts, Concordance and Tables* (1977) is the only openly available corpus of the Indus Script. He wrote over 40 papers to further the Dravidian hypothesis of the Indus Script and argues for a continuity between the written records of Indus and the oral transmissions from the Rig Veda. He was instrumental in firmly establishing the view of K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer that the writings found in the caves of Tamil Nadu in a script similar to Brahmi are a variant of Brahmi, which Mahadevan calls Tamil Brahmi, and in ascertaining that the language of the script is indeed Tamil. Mahadevan went on to read the names and titles of several generations of Pandiya and Chera kings in Tamil Brahmi writings, all corroborated in early Tamil literature.

Awards and honours

Iravatham Mahadevan was awarded the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship in 1970 for his research in Indus script and the National Fellowship of the Indian Council of Historical Research in 1992 for his work on Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions.

In 1998, he was elected the president of the Annual Congress of the Epigraphical Society of India and in 2001 he became the general president of the Indian History Congress. He received the Padma Shri award from the Government of India in 2009 for arts. He was conferred the Tolkappiyar award for lifetime achievement in classical Tamil by the Government of India for the year 2009–2010.

He was conferred the Campbell Medal by the Asiatic Society of Mumbai, formerly the Royal Asiatic Society, in November 2014.

A bronze bust of Mahadevan was created by artist G. Chandrasekaran and placed at the Roja Muthiah Research Library.

- *Corpus of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions* (1966)
- *The Indus Script: Texts, Concordance and Tables* (1977)
- *Early Tamil Epigraphy: From the Earliest Times to the Sixth Century A.D.* (Harvard Oriental Series, 62) (2003)
- *Early Tamil Epigraphy: Tamil-Brahmi Inscriptions*. Revised and Enlarged Second Edition: Volume 1 (Central Institute of Classical Tamil) (2014)
- *Akam and Puram : 'Address' Signs of the Indus Script* (2010)
- *Dravidian Proof of the Indus Script via the Rig Veda: A Case Study* (2014)

- *Toponyms, Directions and Tribal Names in the Indus Script* (Archaeopress) (2017)

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Who was James Prinsep, and what was his major contribution to Indian epigraphy?
2. Explain the role of George Bühler and J.F. Fleet in the study of Indian inscriptions.
3. What contributions did James Burgess and H. Krishna Sastri make to South Indian epigraphy?
4. Describe the significance of B.L. Rice, Robert Sewell, and E. Hultzen in documenting inscriptions.
5. How have modern epigraphists like K. V. Raman and Iravatham Mahadevan advanced the understanding of ancient Indian scripts and languages?

Unit -V

Inscriptions – Uttaramerur – Manur – Kanyakumari Copper plates - Kurram – Velvikudi – Estampage Traning

Objectives

1. **To study important inscriptions** such as the Uttaramerur, Manur, Kanya kumari Copper Plates, Kurram, and Velvikudi, and their historical significance.
2. **To understand the political, social, and administrative information** recorded in these inscriptions.
3. **To learn the technique of estampage** for accurate recording and preservation of inscriptions.

Inscriptions – Uttaramerur

Uttaramerur Uttaramerur, is an insignificant village at present located in Uttaramerur Taluk of Kanchipuram District in Tamil nadu. In the historical period of the Pallavas and the medieval Cholas it played a vital role in Local village administration. The village Uttaramerur is situated 26 Kms to the south east of Kanchipuram, the Headquarter of the District. The antiquity of the village goes back to Iron Age. The megalithic tomb in the vicinity of the paddy field located on the north western side of the village attest the village was once a flourishing place of Early historic settlement around 5th century B.C.E. The village Uttaramerur has many historical temples. Nearly 100 inscriptions have been copied from this village which was engraved on the walls of the temples.

The inscriptions throw more light on the sociopolitical economic aspects of this village.

The name Uttaramerur or Uttaramallur is the derivation of its location and its environment. The word uttara meaning north; meru denotes a hill or mountain. However there is no hill or mountain is located in the vicinity of the village. The name could be derived from the Pallava's or Bana king's title. The Bana kings generally adorned their title ending with meru. For example, Jayameru or Prabhumeru, these names might have been influenced by the Pallavas, and named the village as Uttaramerur. The earliest inscription of this village belongs to Pallava Nandivarman II. In the inscriptions of Pallavas, the village is referred to as Uttarameru Chaturvedimangalam, a settlement occupied by the learned Brahmins who were well versed in four Vedas. The name of the village suggested that the village was flourished during the time of Pallavas around 6th -7th century C.E. However as its megalithic association clearly suggest that the settlement in this place have been started during the early historic period around 5th century B.C.E.

Temples of the village Uttaramerur

Though the village has innumerable temples of historical period, but seven major temples played a major role in temple and village administrations as well as religious activities in the past. They are

1.Vaikuntha Perumal

2. Sundaravarada Perumal temple

3. Subrahmanya temple,

4. Kailsanatha temple,

5.Kolambesvara temple.

6.Madari Amman temple

7. Irattaittali –Isvara temple. Besides, the village housed with many village deities.

Planned village according to vāstu The village was formed with vāstu. Each and every street in the village runs towards east- west orientation and crosses. through north south direction. On the western side of the village large irrigational tank is located. The channels runs from west to east ward direction and feeding water to the agricultural fields in the village. From one of the inscriptions found engraved on the walls of the Sundaravarada Perumal temple reveals the fact the village has formed with the guidelines prescribed in the vāstu and Mānasāstra. All the cardinal points of the village invariably occupied by Digpālas (Cardinal deities) and other village deities like Durga,Saptamātrika etc. Other brahmanical temples occupied in the center of the village. The village was formed with well planned. One of the inscriptions describes that the best among those who know the science of architecture is he who has thoroughly learnt that science and knows also the essential features of the decorative art. The same inscription mentions the name of the architect Paramesvara and his ability in architectural science in the Village Uttaramerur.

Inscriptions

Nearly hundred inscriptions have been reported from various temples at Uttaramerur. The Sundaravaradaperumal temple and Vaikuntha Perumal temple were the main temples of the village and located in the centre place of the village. On the western side of the village there is a huge irrigational tank which is a major water source for the agricultural lands of the area. The village

was surrounded by paddy fields which are being irrigated by the above tank through several channels. This irrigational tank was recorded in the inscriptions as Vairamega Tataka (tank) in inscriptions. The inscriptions of this place unfold the history of the village and the growth of temples as well as the several irrigational reforms agricultural activities and village administration and various forms of reforms. The early inscription of this place belonged to Nandivarman II records the channel known as Paramesvaravathi. The assembly of Uttarameruchaturvedimangalam gave 4 putti of land as archanabhoga (temple pujas) to the temple of Tiruppulivana Mahadeva, a neighbouring village. The land was entrusted to a Brahmin who was well versed in Vedas and good conduct and make offerings and pujas thrice in the temple. The inscriptions of the village Uttaramerur records the activities of the village assembly known as Sabha and its members consisting of Brahmins. They were referred to as Perunkuri perumakkal. (The elders of the village assembly).

Election System and Village Assembly The village was once enjoyed its autonomy that was reflected in two inscriptions of the Vishnu temple namely Vaikuntha Perumal temple which is located on the centre of the village at present very near to Bus stand. On a high platform of the Vaikuntaperumal temple a small sanctum sanatorium with a front ardhamanda and open pillared mandapa is seen. This temple was once played a major rule in South India's Local administration. The platform was once a people assembly hall to make significant resolutions related to village administration.

Like Uttaramerur, many South Indian villages had their own autonomous body known as sabha or ur to rule and fulfill the village affairs. There are Places like Manur (in Tirunelveli District), Tiruninravur,(near Chennai) Kaveripakkam(in vellore District) Tribhuvanai, Bagur (in Pondicherry division) Palayasivaram (near Chengleput). The sabha is the local administrative

body which consists of Brahmins and the village while urar is the assembly of agricultural community of the village. It looks after the village administration. Plenty of inscriptions of Pallava and Chola period in Tamil nadu speak about the function of village assembly. However an Uttaramerur inscription is a unique one to focus more light on the election system, the qualifications, disqualification of members and functions of the local bodies of the village assembly around 1000 C.E.

Election procedure and Committee members

The pot-tickets should be collected by going from one street (cheri) to another street. Tickets should be drawn by a boy who could not recognized forms and relatives of his own so that there should be one person for each of the twelve cheris. The twelve persons thus chosen should constitute the Annual Committee; twelve pot tickets should be chosen from the pot for Garden committee; the remaining six members should be chosen in the same method for the Tank committee. Thus the three committees consist of thirty members. The above three classes of committees that have been formed by drawing thirty pot-tickets should after doing the work of the committees for full three hundred and sixty days, retire. The fresh committees to be formed after their retirement should also be similarly chosen by writing pot-tickets and drawing them in the manner detailed in the palm-leaf containing the regulation. The near relatives of those that have functioned in the Committees should not have their names written for pot-tickets. Election procedure and Committee members The pot-tickets should be collected by going from one street (cheri) to another street. Tickets should be drawn by a boy who could not recognized forms and relatives of his own so that there should be one person for each of the twelve cheris. The twelve persons thus chosen should constitute the Annual Committee; twelve pot tickets should be chosen from the pot for Garden committee; the remaining six

members should be chosen in the same method for the Tank committee. Thus the three committees consist of thirty members. The above three classes of committees that have been formed by drawing thirty pot-tickets should after doing the work of the committees for full three hundred and sixty days, retire. The fresh committees to be formed after their retirement should also be similarly chosen by writing pot-tickets and drawing them in the manner detailed in the palm-leaf containing the regulation. The near relatives of those that have functioned in the Committees should not have their names written for pot-tickets.

End Portion of the first inscription

In the above manner from the 12th year of the king's rule, till the moon and sun endure, the committees should always be constituted by the pot-ticket system only. The village elders obeyed the order of the king and made all the above resolutions in the village and this was done in the presence of the king's representative Tattanur Muvendavelan.

Second inscription

The second inscription is issued by the same king in his 14th regnal year of his rule (921 C.E.). This inscription is more or less provides same information on election system with some modification in the qualifications and age limit of the candidates. The regulations referred to in this inscription are not only applicable to the members of the assembly of uttarameru-Chaturvedimangalam but also to the individual who is said to have been ordered by the king to remain with the assembly. The village elders as usual received the royal order of the king to contact election in the village. Certain Somasiperumal was acted as king's representative in this occasion. They constituted the regulation to set up committees through pot- ticket system.

Qualifications of members prescribed in the second inscription The members if he wants to contest in the election of local Assembly - 1. Land and House Property- (wealth) Member should have more than quarter veli of tax paying land in the village on his own. He should have his own house in his own plot. Even if a candidate possessing one eighth of veli of land along with the knowledge in one veda and one of the four bhasyas by expounding them to others is eligible to contest in the election.

Educational qualification

Those who were well versed in Mandra-brahmana and know it as to teach it to others. The member if he wants to contest in the election he should have experts in Vedas, Sastras and in executing business, he should have righteously earned his wealth. Those, who were earned his wealth in a good and honest way and also pure in mind, could contest in election.

Disqualification

Those who were served in any of the committees for the last three years and have not submitted their accounts and all their relatives mentioned in the following classes. The relatives of the defaulter; the sons of the younger and elder sister of defaulter's mother and all their relatives like sons, sons of the younger, elder brothers and sisters, children of defaulter's mother, sons of defaulter's paternal aunt and maternal uncle, the uterine brother of defaulter's mother, The uterine brother of defaulter's father. Defaulter's father in law, uterine brother of defaulter's wife the husband of defaulter's sisters and her children were prohibited to contest election.

Those, who have committed any one of the five great sins in their life time, fool hardy person and Thief. One who have taken forbidden dishes of any

kind (public property) and pure by performing expiation; one who have committed sins and become pure by performing expiatory ceremonies; one who is guilty of incest and has become pure by performing expiatory ceremonies .All these thus specified should not contest in the election till their life time.

Mode of Election

An earthen pot with cloth tightened on the mouth of the pot has been taken from street to street to collect the pot tickets in the village. Those who are having the above qualifications they have right to write their names and placed it. Finally the Ballet box (Pot) which contains written palm leaves have been taken to the public In front of the mandapa all the people of the village assembled The eldest in the village, the temple priests of the village, young people in the village and the representative of central Government who contested the election assembled and they call a boy who cannot distinguish forms and procedure should be pick the palm leaf ticket one by one. This was handed over to an eldest man, before receiving the palm leaf, the eldest man has to show his both hands that he did not possessed any leaf with him. He read out the name of the committee member which is already written in the palm leaf and checked by another eldest personThis was again checked by younger people in the group. In this way all the members of the village have been elected for the committeeTotally 30 members have been elected in this way. The elected members should work for three years. They have to work for 365 days in one full year. Totally they were for three years. Totally 30 members have been elected in this way. Among the thirty men thus chosen through pot ticket system, those who had previously been in the Garden committee and on the Tank committee, those who are advanced in learning and those who are advanced in age shall be chosen for the Annual committee. Of the rest, of the rest, twelve persons should be taken for the Garden committee and the remaining six should

be placed in Tank committee. In the same manner, two more committees have also been constituted and 12 members have been appointed through pot-ticket system each 6 members for Gold committee and 6 members for Panchavarya committee.

Finance officer or Accountant of the village One committee member who possesses honest earnings should write the village accounts should act as Accountant or Arbitrator of the village committee. No accountant should be appointed to the office again before he submits his accounts and his assets to the public during his service in the office. Before contesting as an accountant in the village administration, he should declare his accounts.

Uttaramerur inscriptions provide a first kind of information regarding the election system qualifications of the candidate, mode of election and nature of work of the members of the elected body in the world around 1000 years back. This is the earliest evidences of local self-government through democratic form of Panchayat raj so far known in the history or election system in the world. The election procedure, qualification and disqualification prescribed are outstanding and remarkable one. Even the present democratic system is failed to prescribe this kind of procedure and the qualification of candidates who contested in 9 the election. The democratic kind of election system for the first time recorded in the inscriptions of South India.

The **Manur Inscription** is a historically significant inscription found in the village of **Manur** near Tirunelveli in the southern part of Tamil Nadu, India. It is a crucial primary source for understanding the local governance structure in the **Pandya Kingdom** before the Chola period.

It is often discussed alongside the famous Uthiramerur Inscriptions of the Chola period, as both detail the rules of village administration.

Manur Inscription

Feature	Detail
Location	Ambalavana Swami Temple, Manur, Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu.
Dynasty	**Pandyas** (First Pandya Empire).
King	**Māranjadaiyan** (identified with **Parantaka Varaguna Varman I**).
Date	8th or 9th Century CE. Specifically, the inscription is dated in the **35th regnal year** of Māranjadaiyan (c. 800 CE).
Script/Language	Vatteluttu (an early Tamil script) and some Grantha/Sanskrit.

Significance and Content

The inscription is a **royal order** that records the **resolution passed by the *Mahasabha*** (the great assembly) of the *Brahmadeya* village of Mananilainallur (the ancient name of Manur).

The content of the inscription outlines the qualifications and rules governing the **village assembly** (*Sabha*), giving a rare insight into the ancient system of local administration and the **judiciary**:

- **Membership Qualifications:** It specifies the rules and qualifications for the members of the *Sabha* and its various **committees** (*vāriyams*).
    - Members had to be residents of the village and shareholding Brahmins.

    - They were required to be **well-versed in the *Mantrabrūhmaṇa*** (Vedic texts).
    - They needed to be of **good conduct** (*ācāra*) and have high moral character.
- **The Elected Judiciary:** It is particularly famous for detailing the rules governing the appointment of **judges**.
    - It mentions a committee or judicial body within the *Sabha* that was mandated to rely **exclusively on written evidence** and ensure impeccable character among its judges.
- **Penalties:** The inscription also outlines penalties for those who transgressed the rules, ensuring accountability and adherence to the established regulations.

Manur and Uthiramerur

While the **Uthiramerur Inscription** (Chola period, c. 920 CE) is famous for its detailed **election rules** based on the *Kudavolai* (pot-ticket) system, the **Manur Inscription** (Pandya period, c. 800 CE) is historically significant for showing that organized, rule-based **village administration was already established in South India** well before the Cholas, particularly in the Pandya territory, with a strong emphasis on **judicial and administrative qualifications**.

Kanyakumari Inscription

The Kanyakumari district, situated at the southernmost tip of India, is an archaeological treasure trove containing hundreds of **inscriptions** that span over a thousand years, dating from the 9th century CE onwards. These inscriptions are crucial for understanding the political, social, and cultural history

of the region, which was a contested territory among the **Cheras (Venad/Travancore), Pandyas, and Cholas**.

Major Inscriptions and Their Significance

1. The Kanyakumari Inscription of Vira Rajendra Chola

This is one of the most famous inscriptions from the region, found in the **Bhagavathi Amman Temple** (Kumari Amman Temple) at Cape Comorin itself, and is often published in the *Epigraphia Indica* and the *Travancore Archaeological Series*.

- **Dynasty: Chola**
- **King: Vira Rajendra Chola** (r. 1063–1070 CE).
- **Significance:** It serves as a vital historical record, providing details about the Chola king's military exploits and conquests. It is believed to mention the defeat and killing of the **Pallava King Aparajita** by an earlier Chola monarch, **Aditya I**. More generally, it details grants and arrangements made for the maintenance of the temple.

2. The Huzur Plates of Kollam (Parthivapuram Inscription)

These copper plate grants, found near Parthasarathy Temple (Parthivapuram) in the Kanyakumari district, are exceptionally detailed and historically valuable.

- **Dynasty: Ay Kingdom** (a local power subordinate to the Pandyas/Cheras).
- **King: Karunandadakkan** (c. 857 or 869 CE).
- **Significance:**

- **Temple and School:** It records the construction and consecration of the **Vishnu temple** (Parthasarathy Temple) and the establishment of a large **Vedic *Salai*** (boarding school) for 95 students at the site. This demonstrates royal patronage for education and religious study in the 9th century CE.
- **Earliest Kollam Era Record:** A later inscription (c. 923 CE) found near the same temple is considered by some scholars to be the **earliest known record dated in the Kollam Era**, a dating system widely used in the Kerala region.
- **Language/Script:** The inscriptions are bilingual (Sanskrit and Tamil) and written in the **Grantha** and **Vatteluttu** scripts.

3. Inscriptions at Suchindram (Thanumalayan Temple)

The **Thanumalayan Temple** (Suchindram Temple), a famous shrine dedicated to the Trinity (Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma), contains over 100 inscriptions from various dynasties.

- **Dynasty:** Pandyas, Cholas, and later **Venad/Travancore Kings**.
- **Significance:** The records detail land grants, endowments for special festivals, and the maintenance of temple services. They illustrate the **cultural blending** of Tamil and Kerala traditions in the region and show the temple's continuous importance under different rulers.

4. Thirunandikkarai Cave Temple Inscriptions

- **Dynasty: Ay King Vikramaditya Varaguna** and later **Raja Raja Chola I**.
- **Significance:** These inscriptions, dating from the 9th century CE, reflect the district's complex religious history, documenting the presence and

patronage of both **Jainism** and later the conversion of the area to Hindu (Shaivite) worship during the Chola period.

Historical Importance

The inscriptions of Kanyakumari are vital for:

1. **Dynastic History:** They help establish the chronology and political boundaries of the **Pandyas, Cholas, and the Ay rulers** in this southernmost region, which often changed hands due to ongoing conflicts.
2. **Socio-Economic Life:** They provide detailed information on **trade guilds** (e.g., mention of *Manigramattar*), land administration, taxation, and the economic role of temples as major institutions.
3. **Religious Synthesis:** They confirm the historical presence of **Jainism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism, and Shaivism** in the area, often documented through grants made by kings to these diverse religious centers.

Kurram Copper Plate Inscription

1. Discovery

- The **Kurram Copper Plate** was discovered in **Kurram**, located in present-day Andhra Pradesh.
- It is an important epigraphic source for early South Indian history.

2. Issuing Authority

- The inscription belongs to the **Pallava period**.

- It was issued during the reign of **Pallava king Simhavishnu** (6th century CE) or sometimes associated with **Mahendravarman I** (depending on interpretation).

3. Language & Script

- Written in **Prakrit** with a mixture of **Sanskrit**.
- Script used is **Brahmi**, particularly **Southern Brahmi**.

4. Content / Significance

- It records a **land grant** made by the Pallava king to Brahmins.
- One of the **earliest Pallava copper plate grants**.
- Helps historians understand:
    - Early **Pallava genealogy**
    - **Administrative practices** (land grants, brahmadeya)
    - Spread of **Brahmanical settlements** in the Pallava territory

5. Historical Importance

- Proves that **Pallavas were ruling Andhra region** even before their strong emergence in Tamil Nadu.
- Shows that copper plate grants were a well-established administrative tradition.
- Provides valuable information on **titles and achievements** of early Pallava rulers.

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