

Two Arabic Epigraphs found from the Ancient Port at Ambalangoda, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The ancient port Ambalangoda is located in No 85 – Patabandimulla Grama Niladari Division (GND) of Ambalangoda Secretariat Division (SD), Galle District, Southern Province, Sri Lanka. Three groups; the Archaeology, Maritime Archaeology, and the Harbour Development Project have worked on the Maritime Archaeological activities in the Ambalangoda port from 1998 to 2012. The Ambalangoda harbor development project was carried out in 2007. While digging the sea bed they unearthed several types of artifacts, discovering 5 copper alloy plates, which were a remarkable find from the site.

A notable thing which can be seen is two Arabic epigraphy in the reverse of the copper plates number 2 (2007/SL/S/AMBA/02) and 5 (2007/SL/S/AMBA/05). The Translation of the Epigraphy is (Arabic) (منح له سيد) / عبد الرب / Manehe Lahu Sayyid Abdul Rabb) “Mr. Abdul Rabb Awarded to him”.

Ceylon was early known to the Arabs on account of its pearl-fisheries and trade in precious stones and spices; Arab merchants had formed commercial establishments there centuries before the rise of Islam. This Arabic letter had been written without dotting, it reveals an early era before Islam, because after Islam is introduced, dotting to Arabic was introduced to make it easy to recite the Holy Quran. Here this Arabic letter was written without dotting, its meaning is: “Mr. Abdul Rabb Awarded to him”, (منح له سيد عبد الرب), (Manehe Lahu Sayyid Abdul Rabb). Therefore, these Epigraphical evidences reveals the historical maritime relationships between Ceylon and Arabic countries.

Keywords: Ambalangoda Port, Maritime Archaeology, Copper plates, Arabic Epigraphy

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LOCATION

The ancient port Ambalangoda is located in No 85 – Patabandimulla Grama Niladari Division (GND) of Ambalangoda Secretariat Division (SD), Galle District, Southern Province (06 14 104 N – 080 03 127 E) and about 800 m along the Ambalangoda - fisheries harbor road and 200m to the North from the jetty of fisheries harbor



Figure 1: Location of the Ambalangoda port.

RESEARCH HISTORY

Three groups of Archaeology, Maritime Archaeology, and Harbour Development Project have intervened to the Maritime Archaeological activities in the Ambalangoda port from 1998 to 2012. Sri Lankan Maritime Archaeology researchers have carried out some researches on the Ambalangoda port, Somasiri Devendra in 2007 and 2013, Rasika Mutucumarana in 2013, Mahinda Karunarathna in 2016, 2017 and 2018 have published the information on this Arabic epigraphy in their research papers.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The great Chronicles *Mahavamsha* and *Sandesha kavviya* (messenger poems) had not mentioned about the activities of the ancient port at Ambalangoda. *Thisara Sandesaya* (1344-1359 AD) (Gunawardane, 2001 p. 1), *Parevi Sandesaya* (After 1415 AD) have described about the coastal areas of the Southern province near Ambalangoda in their poems. Kalutota, Maggona, Beruwala, Aluthgama, Kosgoda, Bentota, Welitota (Balapitiya), Madampamodara, Totagamuwa, Rathgama mentioned in Thisara and Parevi sandesayas (Jayatilake, 2002 pp. 97, 101, 102, 103, 104, 107, 108, 109, 113; Gunawardane, 2001 pp. 101, 103, 107, 108, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116). However, one notable thing is the name “Ambalangoda” has not mentioned in this *Sandesas*.

Portuguese, Dutch and English (1505-1948) records depicts the social, political, economic, religious relationships in the Ambalangoda port.

THE ARTIFACTS FOUND FROM THE INVESTIGATIONS IN THE PORT

THE ARTIFACTS FOUND IN 1988

Most of the artifacts had been found by the private persons. On 14th May 1998, a maritime archaeology team (Department of Archaeology and volunteers) had carried out a preliminary investigation in the port (Jayatilaka, Gihan; Nerina de Silva, 1998 p. 1; Maritime Archaeology in Ancient port at Ambalangoda, 2016 p. 32). According to the eyewitnesses, the timbers lie parallel to the shore. However, the team did not unearth the position of the wreck. Most of the artifacts found from the site had sold to the local dealers. The team gathered the information about the artifacts through interviews with eyewitnesses. The locals brought out various artifacts from their house and allowed to be photographed and recorded. 21 artifacts under 8 categories (A-H) were recorded by the group (Jayatilaka, Gihan; Nerina de Silva, 1998 pp. 1-5; Maritime Archaeology in Ancient port at Ambalangoda, 2016 p. 32) (Table No 1).

Group	Artifact	Description
A	Wooden plank	Reddish brown, in poor condition, wood working details (grooves and cuts), iron square section remains, 400 cm in length, 23 cm in width and 10 cm in thickness.
B	B1 Grinding stone	More or less rectangular, curved corners concave upper surface, 40 cm in length.
	B2 Rim and shoulder of a large copper alloy vessel	Diameter of rim 30 cm
	B 3 Porcelain fragments and grey-green glazed bowl shard	Blue and white
	B4 Cowry shells	Probably <i>Cyprae moneta</i> (New name- <i>Monetaria moneta</i>) of two colours, one yellow tinted and the other brown and white
	B5 Small coconuts	Whole and some pieces, 5-7 cm
	B6 A piece of rope	Short, length of twisted bundles of fiber. About 15 cm in length and diameter is 3 cm

C	C1 Perforated plate	Copper alloy, probably a bowl of a strainer spoon. About 12 cm in diameter.
D	D1 Tong like instrument with ivory handle	Iron, the two arms of the tongs were slightly curved in cross section, have groove and dot decorations. The ivory handle which has started splitting and its surface length of tongs 15 cm, length of handle 7 cm.
	D2 Iron socketed tool	Tapering to a blunt tip, round socket, square (cross section) staff, length 20 cm, diameter of socket 3 cm
	D3 Lead alloy?	Cylindrical, with projection at the top, black patina, crudely tooled surface, height 8 cm, diameter about 7 cm
	D 4 Wheeled shaped plate metal object	Copper alloy, with 3 or possibly 4 equidistant spokes, joined centrally by hub. The detail of which are obscured by concretions, a tiny perforation in a pin are present along its circumference, Diameter about 14.4 cm
	D5 Cannon ball	Diameter about 7 cm
	D6 Blue and white porcelain cup	Floral decoration in outer surface and a flower on the inner base
E	E1 Quern stone	Possibly of gneisses or granite, large central preparation and small preparation near edge, diameter about 45 cm. diameter of central preparation 10 cm, diameter of edge preparation 2 cm,
F	F1 Cannon ball	Diameter about 7 cm
	F2 two shells	Possibly <i>Conus aulicus</i> , reddish brown in colour with white pyramidal patterns
	F3 Perforated iron plate	Raised / corrugated areas
G	G1 wheel shaped object	Copper alloy (similar to D4), but slightly larger and thicker, central square perforation lined with a copper colour metal, pegs and perforations are visible along the circumference, diameter about 16 cm, thickness about 4 mm
	G2 two cannon balls	Diameter about 7 cm
H	H1 Blue and white porcelain lid with knob handle	Incomplete

Table. 1 (After G Jayatilake & Nerina de Silva, 1998)



Figure 2: Some artifacts found in 1998 - Photo courtesy of Nerina de Silva, 1998.

THE ARTIFACTS FOUND IN 2007

The Ambalangoda harbor development project was carried out in 2007. Several types of artifacts emerged while digging the sea bed of the port. Cowry shells (*Monetaria moneta*), copper plates and ceramics are some examples of the artifacts. Two Arabic inscriptions can be seen in two copper plates.

THE ARTIFACTS FOUND IN 2012

The Maritime Archaeology Unit (MAU) of the Central Cultural Fund (CCF) has explored and excavated the site (Grid No 5 & 9 / 10 m x 10 m) from 1st of March to 10th of April 2012 to unearth more archaeological objects that belong to the ship wreck. Unfortunately, the team did not find any object from the site (Ambalangoda Exploration & Excavation Report – 2012, 2012 p. 5).

THE ARABIC EPIGRAPHY FOUND FROM THE PORT AT AMBALANGODA

The Ambalangoda harbour development project was carried out in 2007 while digging the sea bed unearthed several types of artifacts. Discovering 5 copper alloy plates were a remarkable finding of the site (Table No 2). A notable thing which can be seen is two epigraphy in the reverse of the copper plates number 2 (2007/SL/S/AMBA/02) and 5 (2007/SL/S/AMBA/05).

THE COPPER ALLOY PLATES

Copper Plate No	Registration Number in Maritime Archaeology Museum, Galle	Photograph	Description
1	2007/SL/S/AMBA/01	Fig. 3 2007/SL/S/AMBA/01 	thickness 1.38 cm, radius 30 cm, width 60 mm, weight 3.952 kg complete
2	2007/SL/S/AMBA/02 (With two pieces)	Fig. 4 2007/SL/S/AMBA/02 	Thickness 1.21 mm, Radius 29 cm, Width 14.5, Weight 697.3 g Two fragments Can be seen an epigraphy in the reverse Epigraphy : Length 71.68mm, Depth of letters 1 mm, Length of a letter 10.68667 mm,
3	2007/SL/S/AMBA/03	Fig. 5 2007/SL/S/AMBA/03	Thickness 1.58 mm, Radius 14cm, Width 28cm, Heights 686.2 g. Complete but broken

			
4	2007/SL/S/AMBA/04	Fig. 6 2007/SL/S/AMBA/04 	Thickness 1.41 mm, radius 15.5 cm, width 31 cm, weight 420.5 g, incomplete
5	2007/SL/S/AMBA/05 (With four pieces)	Fig. 7 2007/SL/S/AMBA/05 	Thickness 0.75 mm, Weight 285.4 g Incomplete Four fragments Can be seen an epigraphy in the reverse Length 71.68mm, Depth of letters 1 mm, Length of a letter 10.68667 mm,

Table. 2 Copper alloy plates.

EPIGRAPHY ON COPPER ALLOY PLATES

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE EPIGRAPHY

This epigraphy is very small, 71.68mm in length, 1 mm in depth of the letters and, 10.68667 mm in Length of a letter. Thickness is 1.21 mm, Radius 29 cm, Width 14.5 and Weight 697.3 g (copper plate 2- Fig. 4) and Thickness 0.75 mm, Weight 285.4 g (copper plate 5 - Fig. 7).

The plate has fragmented into two parts, probably, when it was under the sea bed or when digging the sea bed by the high pressure water dredger. There are no decorations in the obverse and the reverse of the plate. The five plates have been made of the copper alloy. This plate with epigraphy were deteriorated. It is covered by the brownish or blackish “patina”. This plates conserved in 2014 before being displayed in the Maritime Archaeology Museum in Galle.

EPIGRAPHY 1

Figs. 4 & 8 copper Alloy plate with Epigraphy 1

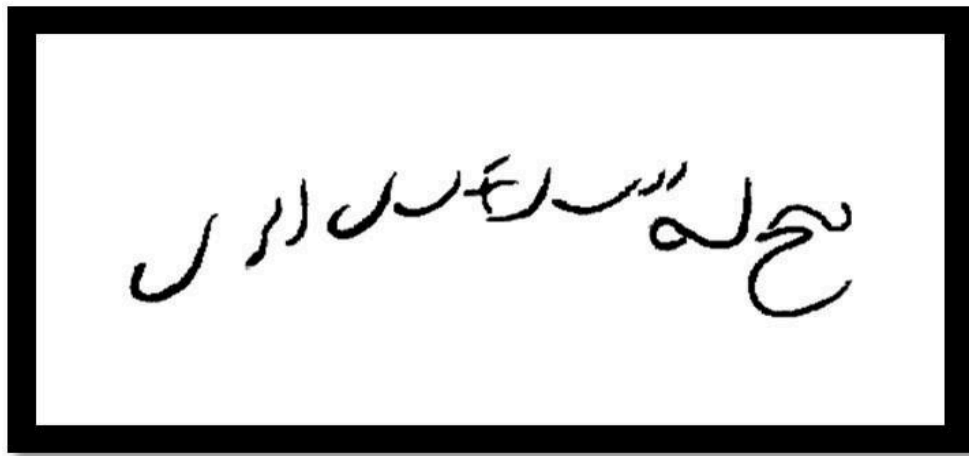


Figure 9: Epigraphy 1.

EPIGRAPHY 2

Fig. 7 & 10 Copper Alloy plate with Epigraphy 2



Figure 10: Epigraphy 2.

II. TRANSLATION OF THE EPIGRAPHY

The period between the fourth and sixth centuries A.D. is generally considered to be a period of decline for the trade of Arabia.

The Arabic alphabet has 28 letters, all representing consonants, and is written from right to left. Twenty-two of the letters are those of the Semitic alphabet from which it descended, modified only in letter form, and the remaining six letters represent sounds not used in the languages written in the earlier alphabet.

It is a Southern Central Semitic language spoken in a large area including North Africa, most of the Arabian Peninsula and other parts of the Middle East.

Arabic is a language of the Quran and is the religious language of all Muslims. Literary Arabic usually called Classical Arabic, is essentially the form of the language found in the Quran, with some modifications necessary for its use in modern times; it is uniform throughout the Arab world. Colloquial Arabic includes numerous spoken dialects, some of which are mutually unintelligible (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, vol: 1, page: 508, 509, 510 15th Edition, 2005, U.S.A).

Ceylon was earlier known to the Arabs on account of its pearl-fisheries and trade in precious stones and spices, and Arab merchants had formed commercial establishments there centuries before the rise of Islam (Abid; Page 838). This Arabic letter had been written without dottings, it reveals the early era before Islam (before 7th Century A.D.), because after introducing Islam, dotting to Arabic was introduced to make it easy to recite the Holy Quran.

TRANSLATION OF THE EPIGRAPHY

EPIGRAPHY 1

Arabic (منح له سيد عبد الرب) / (Manehe Lahu Sayyid Abdul Rabb)

English “Mr. Abdul Rabb Awarded to him” (Figs. 8 - 9)

EPIGRAPHY 2

Arabic (منح له سيد عبد الرب) / (Manehe Lahu Sayyid Abdul Rabb)

English “Mr. Abdul Rabb Awarded to him” (Figs. 9 & 10).

This first epigraphy similar to the second epigraphy

Here these Arabic letters were written without dotting. The meaning of this epigraphy is: “Mr. Abdul Rabb Awarded to him”, (منح له سيد عبد الرب), (*Manehe Lahu Sayyid Abdul Rabb*). Early Arabic writing had been included without dots. As these Arabic letters have been written without dotting, it reveals the early era before Islam. After introducing Islam, dotting to Arabic was introduced to make it easy to recite the Holy Quran. The dots found today in Arabic writing were one of the first innovations that came after the spread of Islam.

These dots make it clear what consonant is to be pronounced. Before the dots, people read the text without any dots. They could do this through their experience. Arabic Writing has been using dots since the dotting system was first invented by Abu al-Aswad Al-Du’ali (603–688 A.D) to prevent grammatical errors. He was a close companion of fourth Khaliphah Ali bin Abi Talib and grammarian. He was the first to place dots on Arabic letters and the first to write on Arabic linguistics.

EARLIEST ARABIC EPIGRAPHY EVER FOUND FROM SRI LANKA

History of the Arabic epigraphy that discovered from Sri Lanka is going back to 9th to 16 century AD (Shukri, 1990, p. 205) but newly discovered above two epigraphs was written in before the Islam (before 7th Century A.D.). According to the above reasons these epigraphs are the earliest (oldest) Arabic epigraphs that ever found from Sri Lanka.

ARABS IN SRI LANKA

Early travellers of the various parts of the world have been mentioned about Muslims (Arabians/ Mussalmans / Moor) and their activities in the Island of Sri Lanka. Roman Historian Pliny (45AD), Greek businessman and traveler Cosmos (545 AD), Arab Historian Al Balazuri (875 AD), Arab traveler Ibn Shahry (9th Century AD), Arab trader and explorer Soleyman (850 AD), Arabian Geographer Edirisi (1154 AD), Venetian traveler Marco Polo (1293 AD), Chinese visitor Count Marignolli (1329-1349 AD), Ibn Batuta (1344 AD), Chinese Admiral and traveler Ching Ho or Zhen Ho (1405-1410 AD) (Vamadevan, 1990, pp. 1-4) are some examples for that.

First Arabs came to Sri Lanka in 6th century AD (Vamadevan, 1990, p. 5). Probably The copper alloy plates with Arabic letters also belongs to this period.

Islam began in 7th century Ad, before 600 years of the Christianity. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Islam (Anon., 2019). Very soon after the birth of Islam in

Arabia (7th century AD), this religion was embraced by the Persians, who along with the Arabs can be considered the earliest Muslim traders in the Indian ocean and they adapted the Arabic language as well (Kiribabune, 1986, p. 89) (Dewaraja, 1990, p. 191).

Arab or other wise, were new to the trade of the Indian ocean at the time of birth of Islam. However, with the spread of Islam among them, the “Muslim trader” gained a new identity, and a fresh dynamism entered east - west relations (Kiribabune, 1986, p. 89).

The location and relative importance of many trade centers were to a large extent determined by the wind system of the Indian ocean. For instance, it was not possible to travel from the Persian Gulf to Sumatra with the help of a single monsoon wind. Therefore, ships had to break journey on the Indian or Sri Lankan coasts. The availability of merchandise, safe harbors, food, fresh water and the wherewithal for preparing of ships were other consideration in the choice of ports (Kiribabune, 1986, p. 93).

Persian and Arab ships were built of wooden planks held together with coir ropes. These were not strong enough to withstand really long voyages. Marco Polo, writing as late as the fourteenth century says, “their ships are very bad, and many of them founder because they are not fastened with iron nails but stitched together with thread mad of coconut husks....this makes it risky...and you can take my word for it that many of them sink, because the Indian ocean is very stormy” (Kiribabune, 1986, p. 93).

Therefore, most trading communities tried to concentrate on just one segment of the East- West maritime routes. During the period immediately preceding the seventh century AD. Persian shipping stopped at Sri Lanka as a rule although a few reach China (Kiribabune, 1986, pp. 93-94).

The name Serendip or Serendib is one of the many ancient names of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), derived from the name used by the early Muslim traders. The Arabs called it ‘Sangeldep’ an Arabicized word probably for ‘Singaldeep’ meaning Island of Sinhala, which corrupted to Serendip (Vamadevan, 1990, p. 5) But according to Sirima Kiribabune, Sarandib the name given to Sri Lanka by ninth century Arab writers mean “the land of rubies” and gems provided one of the major attractions as far as the Muslim trader was concerned (Kiribabune, 1986, p. 98).

The Persian merchants came to Ceylon also called “Lion Country” and “Island of Rubbies” where they purchased gems (Bopearachchi, 1998, p. 10). A Buddhist monk Vajrabodhi sailed from Ceylon in 717 AD by the voyage with thirty five Persian ship and arrived at Palembang (Bopearachchi,

1998, p. 10) As H. Hasan correctly sum up the situation of the Persian and Arabian navigation in the Indian ocean during the 8th century era (Bopearachchi, 1998, p. 10).

Muslims formed their settlements at Trincomalee, Jaffna, Mannar, Puttalam, Colombo, Beruwala and Galle in 8th Century A.D. As the Port of Makalla was the best known to Sinhalese, the new comers were christened 'Marakkal' and the Tamills called them 'Chonahar' meaning the people of Arabia (Vamadevan, 1990, p. 6)

In the 9th Century, the bays of Sri Lanka such as Beruwala, Galle and Puttalam, attracted Moor traders to establish depots. They inter - married with the Sinhala and Tamil women and settled down permanently in the Island. That they were recognized by the Sinhala kings is seen from the fact they were bestowed with honorific titles and ranks (Eg ; Raja Vaidya Muhandiram Palkumbura Vaiddiyathilaka Gopal Mudiyansele Segu Mahamadu Udayar) which are used even to this day (Vamadevan, 1990, p. 6).

The port Ambalangoda where discovered the copper alloy plates with Arabic epigraphs located nearby Beruwala harbor (distance 32 KM) and above Muslim settlement. Probably, Ambalangoda port also was popular port among Arabs in the ancient time. According to Rasika Mutucumarana, An Arab vessel might have followed a trade route across the Arabian sea to the Arab community in Beruwala before changing course westward, this vessel sank before this westward journey (Somasiri, Devendra; Rasika Mutucumarana, 2013, p. 63). But newly found epigraphs are written in before the 7th Century A.D.

The baobab trees (*Adansonia digitata*) which grows along the near Manthai (Mannar) and Delft Island of Jaffna peninsula. These particular trees are ingenious to East Africa and it is believed that they were introduced to Sri Lanka in the wake of Arab trade (Kiribabune, 1986, p. 97).

In or about the 9th century Sri Pada in Sri Lanka became associated with Adam's fall from Paradise. Having left the Malabar coast Adam's peak was the next land mark which Muslim navigators looked out for. To them, it was also sacred mountain with the foot print of Adam. The legend, according to the Muslim sources, is that Adam, cast away from paradise, placed one foot on the mountain and the other foot on the sea (Kiribabune, 1986, p. 98) (Dewaraja, 1990, p. 193).

The Arab coins of the eighth and ninth centuries which are found in the coin collections of the British and Colombo museums (Kiribabune, 1986, p. 98).

There is a fragmentary inscription, written in Arabic on a rock surface at Adam's peak. The document simply records an invocation for the blessing of the Prophet (Kiribabune, 1986, p. 105).

Moving on the fourteenth century we have one of the most informative and authentic accounts of the Sri Lanka - Muslim connections from the writing of Ibn Batuta. This inveterate traveler, who calls himself a pilgrim arrived in Sri Lanka in about 1344 AD. the highlight of his visit was the pilgrimage to Adam's peak (Kiribabune, 1986, p. 105).

The relationship already established between Iran and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in Pre- Islamic days was further strengthened both commercially and culturally (Imam, 1990, p. 173).

An Arabic inscription ascribed to the 13th century, found in the Bhagavalena, below the summit of Sri Pada is interesting as a memorial of Muslim pilgrims to the Peak (Dewaraja, 1990, p. 194). The Arabic inscription which is fragmentary states, "Muhammed, may God bless him ...the father of Mankind" (Dewaraja, 1990, p. 194).

Alexander Johnstone records how in the 12th and 13th centuries the Muslims has established an island wide network of agents and sub agents so as to collect all the marketable products of the country for export. They had their agents at each port to send them the produce of hinterland. Thus from Trincomalee they collected the rice and indigo from the Eastern Province; from Jaffna the Chaya root (which is red dye), wood of the black Palmyra used for rafters and chank shells used for ceremonial purposes in the temples; from Kudiramalei pearls; from Putlam arecanut and betel leaves ebony, satin and calamander wood for furniture and sappan wood which produce a deep orange dye; from Colombo cinnamon and precious stones; from Beruwla coconut oil and coir and from Galle ivory and elephant (Dewaraja, 1990, pp. 194-195). Coconut coir and coconuts have unearthed from the Ambalangoda port (located nearby Beruwala port) as Underwater Archaeological evidence. According to the above clues Ambalangoda possible wreck belongs to the Arab traders. However, According to Somasiri Devendra; from the information collected it was likely that it was an Indian or Sri Lankan ship engaged in the India - Sri Lanka- Maldives trade, and quite possibly a Jaffna "toni" (Devendra, 2007, p. 277) (Somasiri, Devendra; Rasika Mutucumarana, 2013, p. 63).

The Galle Trilingual slab inscription (now in the National Museum, Colombo) set up by the Chinese captain, Cheng Ho in 1410 AD. is inscribed in Persian Tamil and Chinese. The document which contains list of offerings to the deities of the Buddhists, Hindu and Muslims is clear evidence of the size and importance of the Muslim merchant community in Galle (Dewaraja, 1990, p. 195).

Dutch and early British records refer to Muslim as “Coast moors” or as opposed to the “Ceylon moors” who were there descendants of the early Arab colonists who intermarried Sinhala and Tamil women and settled permanently in the Island (Dewaraja, 1990, p. 197).

ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS IN SRI LANKA

Nearly 26 Arabic (Kufic) inscriptions brought to light in this country since 1827, belong to a period from 10th century AD to almost the commencement of European activities in the region of South Asia in the 16th century (Shukri, 1990, p. 199)

This Arabic inscription have been found from Galle, Beruwala, Pomparippu, Mannar, Trincomalee, Puttalam- Anuradhapura road, Kurunagala - Puttalm Road, Balangoda cave and Adam’s peak rock inscription (Shukri, 1990, p. 199)

Notable thing is newly found epigraphs are written in before 7th Century A.D. (before the Islam). They are the earliest Arabic epigraphs that ever found from Sri Lanka.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ARABIC INSCRIPTION OF SRI LANKA

To discern the importance of the Arabic inscription discovered in Sri Lanka it is useful and necessary to understand the commercial and trading activities, the cultural trends and the fluctuating political fortunes in the region of South Asia in which we immediately find ourselves against the background of the entire region stretching from Canton and Celebes in the Far East and the Persian Gulf region, South Arabia, and the Eastern coast of Africa on the west (Shukri, 1990, p. 202)

Most of the Arab epigraphic evidence which is the subject of this study belongs to materials erected over the dead, as such they are tomb inscriptions (Shukri, 1990, p. 203). Since the 7th century AD. the need for inscribing on stone (lithic), or on metals became less necessary with the appearance of paper and soon this paper industry became indigenous (Shukri, 1990, p. 203).

Most of the earliest inscriptions so far discovered, and associated with the littoral of this island Sri Lanka; numbering nearly 6 (3 in Mannar district, 1 in Puttalam district, 2 in Trincomalee district and 1 from Colombo) are unmistakably Kufic (Shukri, 1990, p. 204).

History of the Arabic epigraphy that discovered from Sri Lanka is going back to 9th to 16 century AD (Shukri, 1990, p. 205) but newly discovered epigraphs was written in before the Islam (before 7th Century A.D.) Arabs have had a history, a language and a script and literary tradition long before

the 7th century AD., when Islam was revealed to the world. Arabic as a language of the kindred group of Semitic languages goes back to antiquity to the Phoenicians and beyond (Shukri, 1990, p. 203).

SUMMARY

According to the morphological characteristics of the Arabic epigraphs that found from Ambalangoda port are going back to before the 7th Century AD (before the Islam). The History of the Arabic epigraphy that discovered from Sri Lanka is going back to 9th to 16 century AD, However, newly discovered epigraphs was written in before the 7th Century A.D (603–688 A.D). There for, they are the earliest (oldest) Arabic epigraphs that ever found from Sri Lanka. The artifacts that unearthed with the copper alloy plates with Arabic epigraphs depicts the clues for as an Arab ship and Arab trade in the Island of Sri Lanka before the 7th Century A.D.

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Biography



Mahinda Karunarathna

Mahinda Karunarathna is working as an Archaeologist and also a Development Officer for the Exploration and Underwater Archaeology Section of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka. He obtained archaeology special degree from the Department of Archaeology, University of Peradeniya and obtained a PG Diploma in Architectural Conservation of Monuments and Sites from the University of Moratuwa.

He obtained his Master of Science in Archaeology Degree from the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology (PGIAR), University of Kelaniya and also completed the PG Diploma in Museology in the PGIAR. He worked as a visiting lecturer on Archaeology in Buddhassrawaka Bhikshu University, Anuradhapura. He

worked 12 years in archaeology field (8 years in underwater archaeology field) and he published over 50 research papers on Maritime Archaeology and related subjects in local and international symposiums.