

Report of the Salvage Digging at Kinalur, 2016-17

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Abstract

Discovery of the Kinalur site was quite accidental; local people engaged in digging pits for rainwater harvesting noticed unusual objects at the surface level at the Kinalur Estate. Our team with Krishnaraj of Archaeological Department made an exploration and recognized its archaeological potential. With permission from Kerala Archaeological Department, Industrial Department, Revenue Department, and the owner of the land, we conducted two successive excavations at the site (in 2016 & 2017), under the leadership of Dr. Selvakumar of Tamil University, Tanjore. A megalithic urn with carnelian beads and other allied objects, including iron implements, were unearthed from the site. Further exploration of the site yielded objects like microliths and Neolithic hand-axe and a vattezhuthu inscription from the nearby temple – all of which suggest continuous habitation in the region from Early Historic to Early Medieval periods.

Keywords: Kinalur, Gunavayil Nallur, Megalith, beads, black-and-redware, Iron Age, Mesolithic, Lunate.

1. Introduction

Kerala has very rich cultural heritage dating back to the prehistoric period. However, very limited research has been undertaken on the prehistory of Kerala by scholars. The megalithic burials are found all over Kerala and they are being destroyed day by day by various digging and development activities.

* The research team consisted of Faculty members of the Department of History, Govt. Arts and Science College, Kozhikkode (Academic coordinator of season I was Dr. P. Beena and season II Dr. Shihabudheen Punthala. Other members were Sri. Moideen Thottassery, Dr. P.J. Vincent, K.G. Mujeebrahiman, P. Sasi, Kala. K.K., Sreejith. K., Shyju Hendrik and Lukanual Hakkeem), expert team from Department of Archaeology (Mr. Sadhu & Mr. Ramesh), Dr. V. Selvakumar (Department of Epigraphy and Archaeology, Tamil University, Thanjavur), Ms. Srilatha Mohamed (Research scholar, Calicut University), Ms. Jaseera Majeed (Research Scholar, Department of Epigraphy and Archaeology, Tamil University, Thanjavur) and Mr. Mohamed A. (Photographer, Kozhikkode).

This report presents a preliminary report of the archaeological finds at the site of Kerala Industrial Development Centre Park, Karradi, Panangad Village, Kozhikode district. The materials collected at the site by Kerala State Archaeology Department need to be analysed for a detailed report. However, the finds from the site are sufficient to get a preliminary understanding for the archaeological potential of the site.

2. Background to the Study

The site of Kerala Industrial Development Centre Park, Karradi, Panangad Village, Kozhikode district revealed urn burials when rain water harvesting pits were dug in 2015. In 2016 the Arts and Science College, Calicut, with the permission and support of the Kerala State Archaeology Department, recovered the burials and dug a trench in the area disturbed by the rain water pits, as part of Archaeology Workshop to train the students in local history and archaeological research. Prof. M.G.S Narayanan inaugurated the workshop. The antiquities and artefacts collected from the site were handed over to the Department of Archaeology, Government of Kerala. A report of the digging and the cultural materials are presented here.



Fig.1. Prof. M.G.S. Narayanan at the workshop

3. Objectives

The objectives of the study are :

- 1) To reconstruct the local history of the region.
- 2) To understand the historical importance, and potential of the archaeological remains at the site, of Karradi.
- 3) To train the students in archaeological research methods.
- 4) Historical Background

Kinalur is a historically important village and a Vattezhuttu inscription has been found in the Puvembayi Kshetram by Prof. M.G.S Narayanan and this inscription mentions the name of the village as Kunavayil Nallur. This inscription is datable to 9th century CE.



Fig. 2. The Siva Temple, Puvambayi



Fig.3. Vattezhuthu Inscription from the Puvambayi Siva temple

5. Location and Description of the site

The site is located 6 km from Balusserry on the state Highway. Its geo-co-ordinates are $11^{\circ} 28' 38''$ N; $75^{\circ} 51' 43''$ in the north-western part of the Puvambayi village, within the Kerala Industrial Development Centre Park, Karradi, Panangad Village. The site is located near the area called Chattan vidu. It has branches of the High-range Mountains on the northern side. The hills that are visible to the north and northeast of the site are, from the west to east, viz., Kurikunnu, Kurumpoyil, Thalaiyadu and Kanthaladu. The site is covered with lemon grass plants and as a result the surface features are not clearly visible. The burials are visible only from the exposed pits dug for rainwater harvesting.



Fig. 4. A view of the Burial Site with the hills in the background

6. Surface Finds

The surface finds from the site include microliths, a few black and red ware pottery, and a cluster of iron slag in the north-eastern part of the area near a playground. The finds are found mostly on the eastern half of the site; other areas could not be inspected since the grass growth obstructed the surface survey. These plants need to be cleared for completely surveying and understanding the potential of the area.

Urns

Several urn burials are exposed in the pits dug for rainwater harvesting. They suggest that these were occupied by Iron Age Early Historic people.

Iron Slag

The remains of iron slag prove that iron smelting was undertaken near to this location. However, chronology of the iron smelting evidence is not clear, as no clear associated ceramics could be identified. Further research is required at this location.



Fig.5. Locality with a large cluster of Iron slag: evidence for iron smelting

7. Trench KNL I

A trench named KNL I was excavated in 2016 to understand and document the presence of the burials from a datum context and hence a trench was laid to finally cover an area of 4 m north-south and 3 m east-west.

Three urns were found within the trench and another urn was exposed on the eastern section of the trench. The urns were found from more than 20 cm from the surface.



Fig. 6. Close-up View of Urn I in a disturbed pit

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Fig. 7. Urn Burials in the early stage of exposure

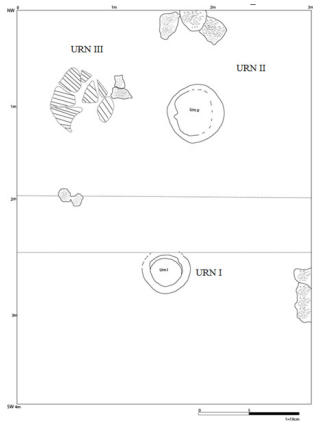


Fig. 8. Plan of the excavated Burials in 2016



Fig 9. A view of three urn burials from Kinalur



Fig. 10. A close-up View of Urn I



Fig. 11. A View of the Burials at Kinalur



Fig. 12. A view of the Urn burials from Kinalur



Fig. 13. A black and red ware bowl from the Urn Burial

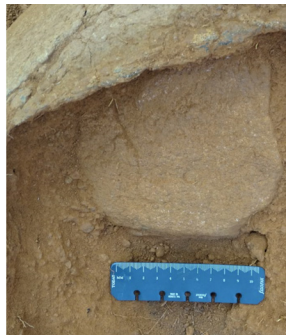


Fig.14. A Stone placed inside an urn burial

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Fig. 15. Etched Carnelian Beads found in Urn Burial, Kinalur Site

One of the urn found in the southern part of the trench (urn I) was disturbed and the capstone on the top was found inside. Urn II has another jar placed on top as a lid. Another urn (urn III) had stone slab placed on top as capstone and the capstone was broken and appeared in several fragments because of the pressure of the top soil.

The urns produced black and red ware bowls and one urn produced 4 etched carnelian beads. No iron objects were found inside the urn burials. Over all these urn burials are similar to the burials found in Kerala and they can be broadly dated to the Iron Age-Early Historic period (1000 BCE to 500 CE), based on the material culture but detailed scientific study is necessary to date these burials.

An important find from the excavation are the microliths made of quartz and they clearly belong to the Mesolithic context. The microliths are found on the surface and they are also found along with the soil found in and around the urn burials and they point that the site is disturbed. However, some of the undisturbed soil horizon produces microliths in original contexts. From the section observed from the nearby plots it is certain that they are found in the red soil sediments on top of the laterite rock formations. Hence their original Mesolithic context cannot be suspected. Because of erosional activities and later disturbances they are found on all sediments of the site. They need to be excavated from undisturbed context.

They could be dated to the Early to Mid-Holocene, more particularly to the period from 8000 BCE to 1000 BCE. The objects collected included chips, cores, flakes, retouched flakes, points, and a lunate. These chips and implements are of Mesolithic age and they predate the Iron Age evidence. One of the microliths, a backed lunate with working edge place the microliths close to the geometric microlithic context; however un-disturbed deposit needs to be excavated to further classify the nature of the prehistoric industries present in this area.



Fig. 16. Microlithic and Lithic Artifacts from Kinalur site



Fig. 17. A Lunate from Kinalur site

8. Cultural period

From the materials collected from the site and their preliminary analysis on the site, it can be deduced that two cultural periods are evidenced at this site – Period I Mesolithic Culture and Period II Iron Age-Early Historic Culture.

Period I: Mesolithic/Microlithic

The Mesolithic Cultural period represents the earliest cultural phase at this site, as revealed by the preliminary study of the stratigraphy and material culture. There may be earlier evidence than the Mesolithic but proper context has to be identified. Microlithic or tiny artifacts were by the prehistoric period about in the Holocene context and also in the Later Pleistocene context. Based on the chronology of microliths found in southern part of India and also the C-14 date from Tenmala obtained by P.Rajendran the microliths at this site could be dated between 8000 BCE and 1000 BCE. However it needs to be substantiated through scientific dating process. Similar Microlithic implements were found at Chovvayur, Peruvattur and a few other sites of Kerala.

The Mesolithic people at Kinalur used mostly quartz as raw material for their tools. The tools include scrapers, flakes, lunates, points

and borers. The people who lived during the Mesolithic period are called hunter-gatherers and they were nomadic people who hunted wild animals and gathered fruits and roots available in the forests. They did not seem to have the knowledge of pottery and they used containers made of wood and leaves. They did not have the knowledge of iron or any other metal. The flakes and artifacts from Karradi site reveal their fine lithic working skills and workmanship. They have collected the raw material carefully and flaked them carefully to make the necessary implements. These Mesolithic population can be called the earliest group to occupy the entire stretch of Kerala from the hills to the coastal region and they experimented with their environment and led a life closer to the nature.

Period II: Iron Age-Early Historic

The Iron Age is represented by megalithic urn burials and these people had a different way of life from the Mesolithic period. The people of Iron Age Early Historic period led a sedentary or semi-sedentary life and had created village-like settlements. They had marked a separate burial area. Probably the dead people were cremated or laid to the natural elements and the burials were made by collecting and placing a few bones inside. But often the burials are commemorative without any mortal remains of the dead. Probably these burials were created sometime after death – as a ritual. These people used varieties of pottery such as black ware and black and red ware and etched carnelian bead garlands as mala. Carnelian is a red colour material and resembles coral, and these beads have designs in white colour. The carnelian material is not locally available in Kerala and probably these people obtained them from North India, Deccan or Gujarat region. This evidence clearly proves that these people had trade relations with far off regions. These people might have practiced cultivation and animal domestication, although direct evidence is lacking, it could be deduced from the references in the Sangam texts. These people used iron, but no iron object was found in the burials from the 2016 season. This cultural period could be dated to ca. 3000 BCE to 500 C.E. Further studies are needed to understand the chronology and context of this culture.

The place name of the village Gunavayil Nallur reveals that it was a settlement of Early Historic or Sangam Age. The site name reveals that it is located as an entrance on the east. The trade route from the east perhaps from Waynad and Karnataka reached this part of Kerala via this area around Kinalur. The Medieval period route connect-

ing the ports of Calicut and Pantalayini Kollam with Karnataka and Mysore plateau must have crossed this village. Therefore the evidence from this region beyond doubt highlights the historical importance of the region.

9. Summary of the Finds

1. The salvage excavations pointed out that people were living in the region around Kinalur from the Mesolithic period.
2. The urn burials revealed that this area had a large settlement of people during the Iron Age
3. Overall, the burial site is relatively better preserved than other sites of Kerala and this site needs to be preserved for future.
4. The site has evidence for early history of Kerala and more detailed and scientific studies are necessary to better understand the culture of this region.
5. The site is historically important for understanding the local and regional history of Kerala

10. Recommendations

1. The preliminary study indicates that this area is archaeologically and historically important. The site had extensive megalithic burials and more importantly has evidence for Mesolithic or microlithic human occupation.
2. The site needs to be extensively excavated and some of the burial area needs to be preserved to facilitate future research and to train college and school students. advanced scientific methods may help to understand the culture in a better manner. The area should be protected and preserved.
3. A megalithic park may be created at this site, after detailed survey and excavations, for Total Station survey and dating of materials in a scientific manner.
4. All or part of the site that has burials may be preserved for future
5. In order to facilitate these efforts an Institution called “Kerala Institute for Archaeological Studies and Research on the model of Institute of Archaeology, New Delhi may be established with the following infra-structural and academic facilities.
 - a. Museum
 - b. Library
 - c. Two lecture Halls
 - d. One Conference hall with multimedia Interface
 - e. Two Guest Rooms
 - f. Certificate and Diploma Courses in Archaeology
 - g. A Total Area of 10 acres may be set apart for this venture.