

Hero Stone Inscriptions in Dharmapuri District

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Abstract: The earliest sources of epigraphy in India are found in the undeciphered inscriptions of the Indus valley Civilization (Indus script) in Indus valley, which date back to the early 3rd millennium BC. Two other important archeological classes of symbols are Megalithic Graffiti marks and symbols on Punch-mark Coins, found from the 1st millennium BCE. But most scholars do not consider these to constitute fully linguistic scripts, and these symbols are not well understood. The earliest deciphered epigraphic inscriptions are the Edicts Ashoka of the 3rd century. More than 1, 00,000 inscriptions were collected by the Archaeological Survey of India and State Archaeological Departments in India. Out of them about 60,000 inscriptions were found in Tamil Nadu. But only about 10 percent of the inscriptions were in other languages such as Telugu, Kannada, Sanskrit and Marathi; the rest were in Tamil. Also according to the Sahitya Akademi, around 30,000 inscriptions in the Kannada language and script have been recovered so far.

Keywords: Megalithic, Graffiti marks. Inscription, Tamil brahmi script, Vediappan kovil, Varriyapperum.

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Introduction

The erection of memorials to the dead is an ancient custom and found all over the world. These memorials took different forms in different countries and times. In Tamil Nadu the custom of erecting memorials first introduced in the megalithic period. Even though there is no written document to assess this custom. But in Sangam literature it is clearly mentioned. From fifth century BC onwards the aim of constructing the sepulchral monuments developed in to hero stone cult. The practice of hero stone cult is noticed in the literature and more in the hero stone inscriptions. It helps to study the contemporary society, political history, the development of the script, language and evolution of iconography of the hero stone figures. In Dharmapuri District more than three hundred inscriptions

are copied and published by the Archaeological departments. The Archaeological Survey of India and the State Department of Tamilnadu are published these inscriptions. South Indian Inscription Volumes are published by the Archaeological Survey of India and Dharmapuri District Inscriptions Volume I and the Krishnagiri District Inscriptions are published by the State Department of Archaeology. Few inscriptions are discovered by Thonnam Historical Research Trust, Harur in Dharmapuri District.

They are mostly records of grants of villages or plots of cultivable lands to private individuals or public institutions by the members of the various South Indian royal dynasties. The grants range in date from the 10th century CE to the mid-19th century CE. A large number of them belong to the Cheras, the Cholas, the Pandiyas and the Vijayanagar kings. These plates are valuable epigraphically as they give us an insight into the social conditions of medieval South India and help fill chronological gaps to connect the history of the ruling dynasties.

Hero Stones in Sangam Literature

The basic theme connected with the memorial stones are cattle lifting and cattle retrieving in Tamil Nadu as well as Dharmapuri District. The earliest evidence on memorial stones found in Sangam literature. The Sangam literatures like the Tolkappiyam, Agananuru, Purananuru, malaipadukadam, Pattinapalai, etc. speak on memorial stone in a detailed manner. A close study of the megalithic monuments with the help of Sangam literature reveals that the custom of megalithic monuments developed in to hero stone cult or virakals around Dharmapuri District.

“வண்ணுனை யம்பின் விசையிட வீழ்ந்தோர்
எண்ணுவரம்பு அறியா உவல் இடும் பதுக்கை”

A cairn circle entombing cist burial raised for the man who died by charging an arrow of the enemies.

“வில்இட வீழ்ந்தோர் பதுக்கை”
“நல் மரே கடந்த நாணுடை மறவர்
பயெரும் பீடும் எழ்தி தொறும்
பீலி சூட்டிய கிறங்கு நிலை நடகல்
வலே ஊன்று பலகை வறற்று மானை கடக்கும்
மொழி பயெர் தளேம் தருமார் மன்னர்
உவல் இடும் பதுக்கை ஆள் உகும் பறந்தலை”

A cairn circle entombing cist burial having menhire painted with a figure of a hero who retrieved the cattle. In the nadukal the name of the hero is inscribed is also mentioned.

“நட்ட போலும் நடா நடகல்”

Another one poem of Agananuru mentioned as nadukal or memorial stone was raised in memory of the hero who died in cattle raid. The words like ‘Ezhuttudai nadukal’ (hero stone having inscription), ‘kur uli kuyindra koduma ezhuttu’ (memorial stone having figure made out of sharp chisel) etc. speak about the nature and content of memorial stones. The megalithic and memorial stones are found in same place in Dharmapuri District. A poem in Agananuru mentions the megalithic and memorials are found in close to each other. So it is clear, with the help of the field survey and literature that the megalithic burials are slowly developed into nadukal or memorial stones in latter period. The earliest Tamil grammar work Tolkappiyam, speaks of the rites performed during the erection of the memorial stones. The rites kachi, kalkol, nirpadai, nadukal, perumpadi and valltal are in one order. That the Tolkappiyam

does not mentioned the sculptural representation and inscription. But the custom of worshipping the ancestors and offering things periodically in memory of the dead is clearly represented. The worship of the hero stone with flowers and peacock plumes with shield and lance, offerings including liquor and slaughter of animals and worship are referred to in all Sangam works. The archaeological evidence is also goes back to the 3rd century BC. Recently three memorial stones were discovered near Theni and the name of the village is Pulimankombai. These three hero stone are having three inscriptions and the letters are in Tamil brahmi script. Hero figure is not carved inscription alone found. This is the earliest stage.

Hero Stones

Hero stones are memorial stones erected in memory of heroes who died in a battle field while defending kings, or defending the cattle or women in distress. This kind of hero stones is also identified in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. War memorial Hero stones are found all over Tamil Nadu, but fifty percent of the hero stones are identified in Dharmapuri district. Fifty percent of the hero stones found have no inscriptions on them, only figures were curved in these hero stones. Dharmapuri District hero stones alone discussed in this chapter. Hero stone inscriptions are important sources for the history of Dharmapuri district. There are many beautiful hero stones in Dharmapuri District. which depict war scenes with soldiers riding on horses and elephants. Some of them also have a fort wall etched in them. The most notable hero stones Tamil Nadu are housed in the State Department museum at Dharmapuri. Locally hero stones are called as “*Vediappan kovil*”, “*Vedan kovil*”, “*Krishnarappan kovil*”, “*Muniappan kovil*”, “*Iyanar appan kovil*”, “*Silaikal, Veeran kovil*” etc. Even though only few names like Vedyappan kovil, Muniappan kovil and Veeran kovil are frequently used names for the hero stones in Dharmapuri District. Normally large numbers of hero stones are found in Dharmapuri district when comparing other Districts. Normally One or two hero stones are identified in other Districts, but in Dharmapuri District more than ten to fifty hero stones are noticed in single place. The main hero stone is facing in the eastern direction and other stone houses are found around the main stone house. These kind of stone houses are noticed in many places. These hero stones are worshipped by the public even today also as Village deity.

Structure of the Hero Stone

Hero stones are housed in the stone house like structures. The stone house was constructed with the help of four stone slabs. Three slabs were erected in three directions and the Eastern side was open like entrance. A cap stone slab was placed on the top of the three erected stones. Now three sides were covered by the three slabs and the eastern direction was open like entrance. So the construction looks like a stone house. Out of three slabs the east facing stone slab containing the hero figure and the inscription. This kind of hero stone is called as VEDIAPPAN KOVIL.

Figures

In the stone house the hero figures are curved in bas-reliefs form. Hero is standing form with two hands. These two hands are having weapons like spear, bow and arrow, sword, shield and other hunting weapons. Hero is facing in the Eastern side or Northern side. Hero is placing his one leg in front side and another leg in the back side. So it looks like a fighting position or running position. On the basis of the Dharmapuri district hero stone figures, four development stages are identified by the archaeologists. In the first stage, the hero alone curved in the slab with inscription. The figure is curved and the projection of the hero figure is simple and the inscription is in vattaluthu character.

After the eighth century A.D. onwards the hero stones containing hero figure with the auspicious things were also depicted in the hero stones. Kendi, (spouted pot) Chimil, Mirror, Linga shape figure are some of the auspicious materials. All these materials are shown below the hero's leg or bottom of the inscriptions. Inscriptions are carved near the figure or top of the hero figure. Few hero stones are having the carvings like Thorna ornaments on the top of the hero figure. During the Chola period the hero stone figures are divided into two parts. Hero is fighting with another one hero in one part and the cattle are found in the lower part of the hero stone. Above this another one panel is also found. In that panel three figures are shown. Two Apsaras or Deva kanniyar (lady figures) are standing with the hero figure. It represented that the dead hero is flying to the heaven with the two Apsaras. Between these two panels inscription is engraved. This is the second type of the hero stones found in Dharmapuri District.

Third type of the hero stone figures is also noticed in the Dharmapuri District. In this type three panels are found in a single hero stone. Lower most panel is fighting scene. Hero is standing and fighting with another hero who is standing before him, with the help of the sword or bow and arrow. Sometimes cattle and auspicious materials are also engraved in this panel. Second panel is the Apsaras panel. In this panel two Deva kanniyar or Apsaras are shown in flying position with hero who lost his life in the battle. Normally hero is standing in the centre of the Apsaras. Mostly it looks like flying position to the heaven. Third panel is the heaven panel. In this panel heaven figures are represented. Linga figure, Sun, Moon, Nandi etc. are found with the hero in standing and in worshipping position. After the death, the hero who lost the life for the public or for the village or for save the cattle is reached the heaven or Devaloga. This is the main theme of the hero stone. The inscriptions are not found in the same slab. Separate stone slab is erected near the hero stone to engrave the inscription.

Purpose of Erecting Memorial Stones

As stated earlier, the hero stone cult is evolved from the ancient megalithic cult. The development of the hero stone cult is not a uniform development. For example in Pennaiyar basin, this practice is continued for a very long period. In other regions of Tamil Nadu, the erection of hero stone is limited to a few instances. Due to the agriculture, trade and urbanisation the megalithic monuments are disturbed. Only the remote areas where the cattle rearing continued as their main subsistence, the legacy of megalithic cult continued in the form of a memorial stones. Most of the early memorials were the result for the cattle, between two neighboring clans who were involving in the cattle lifting and retrieving. Besides the cattle raids, some other memorials were raised for other causes in Dharmapuri District. With the help of inscription it is easy to identify the purpose of the erection of memorial stone. In uninscribed memorials, the sculpture reflects or conveys the purpose of erection. An attempt is made here to identify the salient features of various memorial stones.

Cattle Raids

The majority of the early vatteluttu hero stone is raised for the hero who died in cattle retrieved. The following phrases used in the Inscriptions help to understand its nature and purpose. "Toru konda podu pattan", "Toru konda gnanru pattan", all meaning those who died at the time of cattle raid but whether the dead person was defender or raider, is not clear from the phrase. According to R.Nagaswamy, based on some circumstantial evidence one may infer that these phrases stand for cattle retriever only. The phrase "toru meettu pattar", "Toru iduvittu pattar" clearly indicate the hero who died at the time of retrieving the cattle.

Kadirampatti Hero Stone

Dharmapuri District, Harur taluk, Kadirampatti village lies on the bank of the river Tenpennai. Two hero stone inscriptions were identified by the State Department of Archaeology. The hero stone is housed in the stone house construction and it is facing in the Eastern side. But now these two hero stones were shifted to a new temple near the road which connects the Kadirampatti village with Morappur. The name of the temple is called as Vediappan kovil. It records the Heroic death of Earn son of Puravar Petrandan Kompuligan while capturing the cattle. The king has been identified with Pallava king Mahendravarman I and the equivalent date is given as A.D.597. The word Petrandan means 'one who posses cattle in large number'. In this inscription the name Adhiyaman is mentioned. It shows that the Adhiyaman ruler ruled in this area and Karimanglam is in Koovur nadu also identified. Script of the two inscriptions is given below. Second inscription registers the death of two brothers who were involved in the capture of cattle of Karimanglam in Koovur nadu. These two inscriptions are in Tamil and Grantha script.

Inscription

1. கஃவிசஃ மகநேந்திர பரஃம
2. ற்கு ஏழாவது கஃவஃர் நாட்டஃ
3. க் காரிமங்கலங் கங்கதி ஃ
4. ரசை ரஃடஃ
5. புரவ(ர்)
6. பஃற்றாண்டாண்
7. டான் கஃ
8. ம் புளி
9. கண் மக
10. கண் ஏறன்
11. தஃறஃக் கஃ
12. ளஃட் பட்
13. டான் கல

Inscription

1. சயெ பகமற்(கஃ) ஏழாவது கஃவஃர்
2. நாட்டஃ காரிமங்கலந்து தஃறஃக் கஃண்ட
3. றுகுளவர்மக்கள் நீல ணுதி
4. ஊடம் பிறஞ் திருவந் கல்

It is generally believed that the cattle raids took place between the two distant regions. About 180 inscriptions were recorded so far in Dharmapuri District. Out of it more than 75 percent of the hero stones are erected for the cattle raids and retrieved.

Protecting the Nadu

The political condition of the Dharmapuri District is totally different from other region in the time of Pallava rulers. Though the memorial stones refer the Pallava ruler, they were not directly involved in

this area. They were interested only in maintaining the territorial integrity rather than interfering in the social life of the society. It is clearly identified from the number of cattle raids that took place between the local leaders within a single territorial division, namely Nadu. The memorial stones are closely associated with the local people.

Pappampadi (Irulapatti)

The Pappampadi hero stone inscriptions are the earliest Vatteluttu inscriptions in Dharmapuri District. Pappampadi is a small village in Harur Taluk of Dharmapuri District. There are two hero stones and these two hero stones are worshipped by the local people as Vediappan kovil. Vediappan kovil at a distance of one km. on the Southern side of the Anna Road leading to Pappampadi from Puddupatti. The inscriptions are in Vatteluttu script, and it is dated 4th century A.D. The first inscription states that the hero stone was set up in memory of Vinaperanathi who was ruled over Visiya mangalam, son of Ulamunukan and a servant of Vanaparuma-araisar. The second part of the inscription refers to the hero stone set up in memory of a certain Korrandai Kodan, a servant of Vinaperanathi. Second hero stone is also worshipped in the same place. It is also having an inscription and the figure of the Hero. It is also in Vatteluttu script, and it contains five lines. It records the death of Vanaparumaraisar when Gangaraisar who was ruling over Thagadur nadu attacked by the enemies. This is the first inscription which mentioned Thagadur nadu in Dharmapuri District. Script of the inscription is given below.

Inscription

I	II
1. வாணபரம	1. விண்ணப்பரே
2. அரசைரு சே	2. னாதி சவேகன்
3. வகன் உழ	3. கொற்றந்தை கோட
4. முணுகண் மக	4. ன் கல்.
5. ன் விசய ம	
6. ங்கல மாண்	
7. ட விண்ணபே	
8. ரனோதி கல்.	

Inscription

1. கோவிசயை விண்ணபரமற்கு நான்காவ
2. து (தகடூரு) நாடாளும் கங்கரசைரு
3. மலே வந்த தண்டத்தோடூ எ
4. (றி)ந்து பட்ட வாணபரமரசைரு
- 5...

Fight with Wild Animals

The phrases like pandri kutti pattan, puli kuthi pattan and kudirai kuthi pattan respectively the hero who died while killing a boar, tiger and horse. These memorials were found respectively at Yatra seerana halli, Sellampati, Kadaththur and Navalai. A hero stone was found in Yara seerana halli a small village in Dharmapuri District. It is erected in 1067 A.D. and the inscription is in Tamil script.

This is an inscription of Chola king Rajendran II, the details of date given here, 4th year A.D. 1067. It records Vichi kamoondan son of Macha kamundan lost his life after killing the boar. Kadathur is a small town which is in Dharmapuri District and about 25 km from Dharmapuri Town. A North facing hero stone is having the hero figure and the Inscription. Inscription is in Tamil and Grantha scripts. This hero stone was erected in the Hoysala king Vira Ramanathan period, in the year A.D.1287. It records the heroic death of Anbilai-Perumal son of Arodan Irulan-Perumal who was an administrator of Kadathur Nadu. In the fight with the tiger hero lost his life. The fight against the tiger is sculptured below the inscription. So the inscription is inscribed on the top of the hero stone. One hero stone identified in Kanappanur near Harur. Which in the Vediappan kovil near the village? Hero is holding bow and arrow in his hands. A vatteluttuinscription is inscribed above the hero and below the hero. The inscription is not clear. Kandavanathi-arisar was the ruler of the Puramalai nadu in 8th century A.D. Vettakkiyar came to fight with the king in Koodul which is in Thagdur nadu. A servant named (*Sevagan*) Vangach-Chadiyan and his son Telianior opposed and killed an elephant. The sevant also lost his life. In memory of the servant this hero stone was erected.

Other Memorials

Another one important hero stone inscription was found in Mathikon-palayam which is a part of the Dharmapuri Town. Now it is exhibited in the State Archaeological museum at Dharmapuri. The hero figure is very interesting to see and the inscription found in his left side. It is in Tamil script and 29 lines are inscribed in this stone. All the letters are beautifully curved to see. Arimiriya-Mavali-vanarayar was the ruler of Ganga nadu, Puramalai nadu, Koovur nadu and Thagadur nadu. A Nolamba king who entered and captured the Thagadur nadu in the 10th century. In the war Arimiriya-Mavali-vanarayar died on that time one Sankaran Kuttaiyar gave asylum to his wife who was pregnant on that time. After a male child was born, Sankaran Kuttaiyar sent his forces to Thagadur and captured the lost country after driving away the forces of Nulamban. In that attack one Nagandi chirukuttiyar lost his life and in his memory the hero stone was put up there.

Another one hero stone is also found in kukkadapatti near Harur in Dharmapuri District. The hero is depicted with two hands and the hands are holding bow and spear. It is also in Vatteluttucharacter and four lines are engraved in the slab. It is also erected in 7th century A.D. in the time of Pallava king Esvara parumar. It records the death of a servant Kanna-Maran son of Paramatayar in battle with the Western Ganga army. It was erected in the memory of Kanna-Maran.

Simavishnu

Five inscriptions of Pallava king Simavishnu are copied in Dharmapuri District. Four of them are identified in Krishnagiri District and one in Dharmapuri District. It is in Dinnahalli village near Harur Taluk, Dharmapuri District. It is also called as Vediappan kovil. Here hero stone facing in the Eastern side and the Inscription is inscribed above the hero figure. Hero is holding sword and shield in his two hands. The inscription is in Vatteluttu script and the record issued in his 27th year. (600 A.D.) It stated that the Makkal of Gangadi-araiyar of Alappai of Kovur nadu went along Singavinna-parumar to the battle field. In that war one hero named Nandikkattiyar lost his life. In memory of the hero this memorial stone was erected. In this inscription the term Makkal is mentioned. In a number of Inscriptions the term such as Perumakkal, Varriyapperumakkal occur where the word Makkal may be taken to mean members. However the hero stone inscriptions from the Chengam and Dharmapuri area refer to Ilamakkal, makkal both singular and plural contexts.

Mahendravarman I

Nine hero stone inscriptions of Mahindra varman I were published. Out of nine two inscriptions are identified in Dharmapuri District and other inscriptions were in Krishnagiri District. Two inscriptions of Mahindra varman I was found Mondukuli near Harur. One is issued in his 14th regnal year and the inscription is in Vatteluttuscript. The hero is standing with holding bow and dagger in his hands. Thorana decoration was also carved in the top of the stone. Records the death Porkovunaru the makkal (soldier) of Kadikavin-anchunar, while making a raid on Naripalli against Ponmodanar, the Makkal of Viravannaraiser. Second inscription was issued in his 15th regnal year and it is also in vatteluttucharacter. It records the death of Pulikkalauntenani-Sattar a savager of Porkovanar of Korramangalam in Puramalai nadu, when the latter attached the village Naripalli against Ponmadanar.

Narasimaha Varman I

Only one hero stone inscription of Narasimaha varman I was noticed in Puthanatham near Harur in Dharmapuri Disretct. The hero stone is on the bank of the Kattaru rover and it was issued his 10thregnal year. It records the death of Mudiappovanar the chief of Sennadaipukkudan in Mikonrai-nadu while capturing cattle.

Ichchugaraparumar

In Kukkadaippatti village near Harur one hero stone was found in the Muthu Vedyappan kovil. This temple is in the southern side of the village. The hero figure is shown on the horse in riding pose. His two hands are holding shield and spear. The inscription is in Vatteluttuscript and the letters are very deep. Pallava king Ichchuvava parumar was the kingof Thagadur region in 7th century A.D. This hero stone inscription records the death of a Navinna-tiranar who was the servant of Kandavannati-arisar. In the war between Kandavannati-arisar and the army of the Western Gangas (*Melganga-Padi*) the servant lost his life. In memory of the servant this hero stone was erected.

Ganga

Gangas were also Karnataka rulers in the 4th century A.D. and they extended their territory up Tamil nadu. More than ten inscriptions were collected in Dharmapuri District.

Sripurusa Parumar (726-788)

Ganga king Siripurusa parumar was the famous king in the Ganga dynasty. In this hero stone the figure is not found and the same time the inscription is also damaged. Few lines of the vatteluttuinscription is copied. It records the death of Virach chenadiyaru in a fight with the army of Vettuva Ilavaraier. Second hero stone is also in the same Vedyappan kovil. The slab is broken into four pieces. It records one Cheruppachchadaiyan died ina cattle raid on Malavur when Pirundaviyar was ruling over Puramalai nadu. Third inscription of Siripurusa varmar was collected in Muthanur, near Harur in Dharmapuri District. It is in Tamil script and issued in the 16th regnal year. The hero is having bow and sword in his hands and the inscription is inscribed on the top of the slab. In this inscription his name is mentioned as sripurasavarmar and the script is Tamil. Amaradakkiyar was ruling the Puramalai nadu in the 8th century A.D. Kamaiyanar captured the cattle of Magankorramangalam village in Velala nadu and one Varumach chattanar, a servant of Amaradakkiyar was killed in the battle. In memory of Varumach chattanar this hero stone was erected. One interesting inscription was noticed in Palavadi near Dharmapuri District. Bow and dagger were shown in his two hands and the inscription is in

Vatteluttuscript. It records the death of Nochchi-sattan while rescuing the cattle of Pagarrur from the thieves. (arunkalvar) It also states that the Perumbana–Mutaraisar was ruling over Ganga nadu.

Kattanai Parumar

Ten inscriptions of the king Kattanai parumar was so far collected in Thagadur region. But only two are identified in Dharmapuri District. The Kailavaram hero stone is called as Koottanduai Vediappan kovil. The hero is in standing pose with two hands and the hands are holding a bow and sward. In the eight century A.D. Kanthavanathi ruling Puramalai nadu and one Aruadikkiyar raids the cattle. In that time Paiya chathanar a servant of Amarrakkiyar lost his life. In memory of the sevant this hero stone was erected in Kailavaram.

Nolumbas

The Nolumbas were ruler of the Karnatakaregionbetween 8th century to 11th century A.D. They conquered Thagadur nadu in the 8th century A.D. and the Thagadur nadu was included with the Nolumbapadi. It is believed that the Nolumbas were decedent of Pallava clan, so they calling them as Nolamba pallavas. Two types of Inscriptions were collected from the Nolumbas rulers. They are hero stone inscriptions and Temple inscriptions. Three kings are the powerful rulers in Thagadur region. More than twenty inscriptions were collected in this District. But the hero stone inscriptions alone discussed here. Four hero stone inscriptions were collected in this District.

Kottarapatti

Nolamba's period hero stone inscription was identified in Kottarapatti village near Harur Taluk of Dharmapuri District. Front portion of the hero stone was broken and few letters were also damaged. So the main theme of this inscription is not found. But the name Nolamba was clear. Hero found in the stone is having bow and dagger in his hands. The Aiyappadevar period memorial stone inscription of 9th century found at Sellampatti. The hero is in standing position with two hands and the hands are holding bow and sward. Below the figure one pot and a lamp are depicted. Inscription was found on the top of the hero figure. States that the Aiyappadevan was ruling over the country Pirudipati son of Ganganuman and Sivamaraiyan son of Nolumban fought at Maravakundru. In that battle it is stated Kudal Manikkam servant of Mavalivanarayar fought and died on behalf of Sivamaraiyyan. The hero's elder son Madevan erected a hero stone in memory of his deceased father.

Banas

Banas are the feudatory rulers of the Pallava kings. They settled in Kolar region in Andhra Pradesh. Two Bana ruler inscriptions are identified and published. Pallava and Ganga period inscriptions also mentioned about the Bana rulers. One inscription found at Pappampadi Vedyappan kovil near Harur in Dharmapuri District. This inscription is the earliest hero stone inscription found in Dharmapuri District. It is already discussed in the previous pages. Another one inscription of the Banas collected in Kurampatti village near Harur in Dharmapuri District. Local people called this hero stone temple as Muri Vediappan kovil. The hero carved in the hero stone is in standing pose with two hands. Bow and sward are shown in his two hands. Auspicious thing like Kendi (spouted pot) was shown near the hero figure. Land was donated to the hero who lost his life in the war is registered in the village Kurumpatti. This village is near Harur in Dharmapuri District. The name of the hero stone is Muri Vedyappan kovil which is in the Kulandi garden near the village. This inscription was copied by the

State Department of Archaeology and published in the book. It is in Vatteluttuscript and the hero is holding the sword and bow in his two hands. An arrow is piercing in his body is noticed. It was erected in the time of the Bana king Mavalivanako who ruled in Puramalai nadu in 8th century A.D. It records the sanction of nittor-patti land (land to the relatives of the diseased soldiers) consisting of six Seru lands under tank irrigation for the merit of Talan grandson of (magan-magan) Peruvanayan. Talan was the servant of Pulaiymannar, the ruler of Puramalai nadu.

Cholas

The chola king Vijayala cholan founded the later chola dynasty in Thanjavur region. Rajaraja cholan I conquered Thagadur region and the Thagadur region was renamed as Nigarili chola mandalam. Four hero stone inscriptions are collected in this District. They are Kerkodahalli, Menachi, Ettra seerana halli and Parigam. The Chola king Rajendra Chola I memorial stone of 11th (A.D.1032) century noticed in Kerkodahalli near Harur in Dharmapuri District. This memorial stone is also called as Vedyappan kovil. It is just like a Dolmen shape in construction. Three stone slabs are erected in three sides and one slab placed above stones as cap stone. This type of stone house is having entrance in the Eastern side. The sculptural representation of the hero is standing pose with two hands. Sword and bow are shown in his two hands. Cattle figures are represented on both sides of the hero. Hero is in standing pose found in the lower panel and the Apsaras or Deva kanniyar are in the upper panel to identify the Deva logam or Heaven. It records the erection of a hero-stone by Palidevan in memory of his father Pappaiyan, son of Annayan and the Marugan of Vesalipperaiyar. The hero fought and died in the battle of Pagalappalli of Puramalai nadu in Nulambapadi alias Nigarili Chola mandalam was destroyed. The inscription is in Tamil script.

Another one hero stone of Rajendra Cholan I 12th regnal year (A.D.1024) is collected in Menach near Harur in Dharmapuri District. The bas relief of the hero is in standing pose and holding bow and sword in his tow hands. The inscriptions slab is broken in to two pieces. So Puramalai nadu and Iraman son of peraiyan alone is visible. Third inscriptions of Rajendra cholan II was identified in Parigam near Dharmapuri. The hero stone is found in the South side of the village. It is facing in the Eastern side. Hero is standing with bow and sword in his two hands. Above the hero another panel of sculpture is engraved. Two Apsaras and the hero are shown in standing pose. The inscription is in Tamil script and the donation was issued in 1131 A.D. A tax free land was donated by the Ur and Uraligal near the village as Nittorpatti to one Virasola Vanarayan, a hero who died in rescuing the cattle. So it was erected in memory of the hero Virasola Vanarayan.

Hoysalas

A Kadattur memorial stone belonging to the 13th century A.D. was raised in memory of the hero Anbilaip-Perumal. This inscription was inscribed during the Hoyasla king of Vira Ramnatha in his 33rd regnal year. It is now in stone house form, facing in the eastern side in chandipettai of Gandhipuram. The inscription is in Tamil and Grantha sceirpt. The fight between the tiger and the hero is sculptured below the inscription. Tiger is facing the hero and the hero's hand is in the tiger mouth. It states that the heroic death of Anbilaip-Perumal son of Arodan Irulan-Perumal who was an administrator of Kadattur nadu. (Nattu Nayagam seyvan) The hero killed a tiger and that time he also lost his life. In memory of the hero it was erect. A majority of the early phase memorial stones, nearly 90% of them was found near or in association with megalithic burials clearly established their relation and transformation. Most of them are facing eastern side. An important fact to be noted here is that most of them are still under worship in the name of Vedyappan, Muniappan, Aiyanar appan and Krishnarappan. These memorial

stones were sometime removed from the original place. But the later memorial stones are collected in one place. Within Tamil nadu the hero stone inscriptions up to the middle of the 8th century, are all in vatteluttu script of Tamil language. On the other such hero stones are also identified in Karnataka and Andhra area. The transformation from using of Vatteluttuscript to Tamil script took place sometime in the late 8th century AD. The Tamil script was introduced first in Pennaiyar basin.

Sculptures in the Hero Stones

The memorial stones are generally made of a rectangular slab with an inscription and sculpture portrayed in bas-relief. Three or four rectangular slabs are erected in three sides and it is roofed by the fourth one slab as cap stone on the top. It looks like a dolmen like shrine. The bas-relief of the hero holding bow and arrow or bow and sword or bow and shield. Sculptures depicted on early memorials with Vatteluttuscript were generally in half relief. They were shown just as emerging out. Sometimes they are shown by a line engraving as one found at Panaikulam which is now housed in Dharmapuri museum. The hero mostly holds either shield or bow in his left hand and sword in his right hand. The body of the hero is shown facing north. In the early memorials the hero generally wears under garments. In the later period upper garments are also introduced. Opposite to the hero, enemy soldiers were also depicted but comparatively smaller in size. Cattle were also represented at the base of the panel to indicate the cattle raid. At the base of the hero stone one Cimil or small casket, kendi or a pitcher for water, or Poornaghata, or Mirror etc. are depicted on either side of the hero.

Development of the Script

In Tamil Nadu, early inscriptions are found in four scripts namely Tamil-Brahmi, Vatteluttu, Tamil and Grantha scripts. The first three scripts were used to write Tamil language whereas the Grantha was used to write Sanskrit language. The earliest hero stone inscriptions in Puliman kombai near Theni were in Tamil Brahmi script. In the later period Vatteluttu script was used to inscriptions. Hero stone inscription as well as Temple inscriptions was also used to write in vatteluttu script. One of the most important contributions of the memorial stone is of the palaeography. It helps to trace the development of the Tamil-Brahmi script in to Vatteluttu. The Tamil-Brahmi script was in practice between 3rd -4th century BC and in the 4th -5th century AD it was also found in pottery, stone and metal. For more than seven hundred years there was no any evolution in this script. But from the 4th-5th century onwards it shows some development in this script is called as Vatteluttu. The Vatteluttuscript only having the development sources in Tamil Nadu. But the other two scripts Grantha and Tamil are used in the 7th century AD.

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