

Investigation of Ancient Pre-colonial Monuments in Jaffna, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

One of the most difficult aspects of understanding Jaffna's history and archaeology is the peninsula's general lack of pre-colonial monumental structures. Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, two ancient Sri Lankan cities, are surrounded by temples and stupas. These monuments date to the pre-colonial period. These historic landmarks can still be seen today. These are remarkable pieces of evidence for understanding ancient monuments and history. Even though Jaffna was once a prominent ancient trade center, no pre-colonial structures or monuments have been discovered in the region. Although temples and buildings have been mentioned numerous times throughout history, no monuments have been found. There were no previews of the study that addressed the question of why Jaffna lacked Kingdom monuments, particularly pre-colonial associated architectural structures. The purpose of this inquiry is to identify the number of pre-colonial monuments that are still in Jaffna. The second objective is to understand why Jaffna is missing kingdom-related structures like those seen in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. The thesis does not discuss the European invasion of Jaffna or its aftermath. The study was conducted in the form of a survey, with data gathered from the Archaeology Department, Jaffna, Sri Lanka. In addition, the research utilized archival material from ancient period literatures, Portuguese references, travelers' notes, and archaeological records. The Portuguese heritage monuments and pre-colonial monuments were mapped using GIS. The analysis has revealed that the evidence from the Five Buildings is from the Portuguese period. The other eleven are pre-colonial monuments. It is clear that several of the pre-colonial monuments were altered throughout the years until the end of the Dutch period. Prior to the Dutch period, Jaffna had four periods of monuments: ancient, Chola, Jaffna Kingdom, and Portuguese. More study should be conducted to explore the structure of pre-colonial monuments utilizing ground penetrating radar.

Keywords: *Pre-colonial, Jaffna, monuments, Historical notes, Archaeological Evidence*

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Introduction

Jaffna is located centrally on what has been termed the 'Maritime Silk Route' between the Western and East Asian worlds. The archaeological materials discovered within the Jaffna peninsula indicate that people have lived and worked here for many centuries. One of the great challenges of understanding the history and archaeology of Jaffna is the general absence of pre-colonial monumental structures within the peninsula. Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, two ancient Sri Lankan cities, are surrounded by temples and stupas. These monuments date back to the pre-colonial period. These historic landmarks can still be seen today. These are remarkable pieces of evidence for understanding ancient monuments and history. Even though Jaffna was once a prominent ancient trade center, no pre-colonial structures or monuments have been discovered in the region. Although temples and buildings have been mentioned numerous times throughout history, no monuments have been found. But the European documents make some reference to pre-colonial structures. Jaffna was under the domination (rule) of the Europeans between 1619 and 1796 (Phillipus 1958). A Portuguese general was acclaimed as the destructor of 50 temples (Da Trinitade, 1972). Between 1622 and 1624, the ancient Kandaswamy Temple at the 'Muthirai Junction' near the Yamuna-ári (a pond) was destroyed by the Portuguese and a Catholic Church was built at this site (Phillipus 1958). The Portuguese commander de Oliveira was responsible for the demolition of hundreds of Hindu temples in Jaffna and stripping them of priceless treasures (Phillipus, 1958). According to the records they left behind, they destroyed Hindu temples in order to loot priceless artworks, and they used the stones and columns from the Jaffna Hindu temples and buildings to construct their churches, forts, and other structures.

Some academics published inscriptions found in colonial forts in Sri Lanka's north and east, presenting facts about rulers and temple donations. For example, a stone used at Fort Hammenhiel, built by the Portuguese in the mid-17th century, has a Chola inscription about Mantai. Another Chola inscription in a stone slab found at the Jaffna Fort mentions a lamp, goats, and cows donated to the Nallur Hindu temple (Indrapala 1971). Granite columns from a Hindu temple are found in the Kruys Kerk Church within the Jaffna Fort; some of these have engravings of a lotus flower (Coningham 2019). Similarly, three Chola inscriptions discovered at Trincomalee Fort relate to Hindu temples (Gunasingam 1979). This provides irrefutable evidence for the destruction of the Hindu temples and the use of the building materials to construct their forts and churches. Furthermore, the 15th century inscription of Parakramabahu found on a stone slab in the building at Main Street, Jaffna (Indrapala 1971), and the Portuguese residence at Paranki Street are the remains of a Hindu temple belonging to the regnal period of the Jaffna kings. These are proof that the Hindu temples from which these stones were taken were destroyed.

The names of the temples, the names of the gods, and who built the temples have already been written down on palm leaves. Mayilvakanapulavar authored the printed book *Yaalpana Vaipava Maalai*. It is about Jaffna's history, and he gathered notes from Jaffna's

history that were written on palm leaves in the past. The history of the present-day Hindu temples is found in the palm-leaf manuscripts, Yaalpana Vaipava Maalai and Kailaya Maalai (Mayilvaganap Pulavar 1999). All the temples prior to this were destroyed by the Portuguese with the intent of propagating their own brand of Christianity. Even the temples of the later period were built during the Dutch and British periods (Thurairasa 2007). But the temple's tanks show ancient traditional architectural patterns in their construction. For example, Thunaivi Sivan Kovil tank and Chavakachcheri Varivaneswarar Temple's well.

Jaffna-related literature describes how Hindu priests protected the sacred statue against the Portuguese. Inscriptions and statues bear witness to the temple's history. The statues that Hindu priests threw into temple tanks to protect them from the Portuguese (Kunayasa 1987). Now they are considerable evidence to understand Jaffna's history. Researchers have started to address the need for more study in this area. According to Pushparatnam (2014), the Colonial Fort is linked to a pre-colonial ancient harbor connection. Coningham et al. (2021) discussed the significance of the finding of a rich pre-colonial past after the post-disaster archaeological excavation inside Jaffna Fort: 'If Jaffna's history was condensed into a single day, the colonial period would only start three minutes before midnight'.

To date, no research has been conducted that has studied pre-colonial monuments in Jaffna, nor has any study specifically explored the location of pre-colonial monuments. According to the study, the evidence from the five buildings dates from the Portuguese era (figure 2). The remaining eleven are pre-colonial structures (figure 1). Several pre-colonial monuments were clearly changed throughout the years until the end of the Dutch rule. There are buildings in Jaffna from four times before the Dutch: The Ancient, the Chola, the Jaffna Kingdom, and the Portuguese.

Result and Discussion

Ancient remains are Kantharodai Stupas and Delft Dagaba. When Paul Pieris excavated Kantarodai for the first time in 1917, there were no stupas found at Kantarodai. All he found were circular bases. The foundations on this site are made of coral (Thiagarajah 2016). This is one of the oldest architectural remains discovered in Jaffna. A destroyed Dagaba in Delft is believed to be ancient due to the discovery of a brahmi four-letter fragment on a coral slab at the stupa's base.

The Chola period remains, the Krimalai Naguleswarar Temple tank, the old temple in Delft and the Varivaneswarar temple's well in Chavakachcheri. The Naguleswaram temple is the oldest temple in Jaffna. According to a popular legend, this temple was built in the 8th century A.D. (Thurairasa 2007). This temple was built by Ukkirasingan, who also married a Chola princess (Pushparatnam 2014). However, the Portuguese destroyed this temple. Even though the holy water pond tank stones were originally left there, they are polished limestone. When it is considered for scientific investigation, it will be useful to know the timeframe. The old Hindu temple at Delft was constructed with coral stones

that are plentiful in the area. The "Karpakkirakam" and "Antaralam" each measured 5 feet long and 5 feet wide. We don't know the exact date, but this basement must date from the 10th to 12th centuries A.D. (Pushparatnam 2014). The Sivan temple (Varivaneswarar) at Chavakachcheri, Jaffna. Its holy water well is located near the town bus stop. During the construction of the new courts in 2012, four statues and many bricks were discovered. Art historians who examined these four statues indicated that they were made between the 12th and 13th centuries A.D. Pushparatnam (2014) This temple may have been destroyed during the Portuguese or Dutch periods. The discovery of terracotta brick and limestone during reconstruction work throughout the majority of the city indicates that the temple is a large structure. Above, this construction dates from between the 10th and 13th century A.D.

The tanks of the Jaffna Kingdom, as well as inscriptions on temples, provide additional evidence that helps to trace the pre-colonial monuments. Two Tamil inscriptions were found at Karunakara Pillaiyar temple, dating from the 15th and 16th centuries A.D. The inscriptions contain information about the temple's donations as well as the temple's name, "Karuakara Piayyaar" (Krishnarajah 1998). The Civan temple at Tunaivi found an inscription in Granta script dating from the 15th and 16th centuries A.D. The inscription shows that the temple belongs to "Perakesvaran. Kalviyankadu chopper plates Thus, this dates from the period of the Jaffna kingdom (Pushparatnam 2014). The Temple of Cattanatar and Puthavarayar's tanks Several statues of Hindu gods were recently discovered near the temple (Krishnarajah 1998). It is questionable whether these statues date from the 10th and 13th centuries A.D. or the 14th and 16th centuries A.D. Some scholars believe that these statues date from the Cola period rather than the Jaffna kingdom period. Based on the stone and other remains, the Selvavinayakar temple's tank is considered to be from the Jaffna Kingdom period (Pushparatnam 2014). Koppay sankily's fort belongs to the Jaffna kingdom period (Gnanaparakasar 1917). The evidence of bricks, stone, and a basement exists. Manthirimanai, Cakiliya Tppu and Yamua Tank are considered Jaffna kindoms buildings, but current architecture shows that they were built during the Dutch period. But the Jaffna Royal buildings are mentioned in Portuguese notes.

For example, "The capital at Nallur was enclosed by a mud-stone wall, within which were the place cog king, the residences of the officers, soldiers' quarters etc., The capital was bounded on the north by Chaddanatheswar kovil, on the east by Veyuluvantha pillaiyar Kovil, on the south by Kaila Vinayagar kovil and on the west by the Veerama Kali Kovil" (De Queyroz 1930). "Walking up and down in the large hall, which served as a fencing school, The king had a large audience hall., It was an evening fair, the king used to see the fair through the many windows of his places which was close by" (Da Trinitade 1972).

This fair was held as the Mutturai cantai in the present Nallur area. The form cantai is still retained. This location fits in with the ancient site of the Kandaswamy Temple by the Yamunari (now neglected) and the ruins of places in Sankilittoppu and

Pandarakulattadi. The arched gateway (now in ruins) and the dilapidated buildings in front of it at Sankilittoppu. Nallur was the capital city, complete with royal palaces and temples (Da Trinitade 1972). However, those ruins are seen to be Dutch remains. So, it would be possible that after the Jaffna kingdom period, the Portuguese and Dutch modified and used their administrative work.

Notables are the Portuguese ruins of the fort at Kankesanturai (figure 3) and the church at Atchuvely (figure 5). The fort built at Kayts (figure 4) by the Portuguese in 1629 and abandoned in 1651 was not as popular as the Hammenhiel Fort. There are conflicting opinions among researchers as to whether this fort was originally built by the Portuguese or the Dutch. Several of the forts originally built by the Portuguese have been altered or re-built by the Dutch. It is proven In 2018, the Central Cultural Fund, the Universities of Jaffna and Kelaniya (Sri Lanka), and the University of Durham collaborated on a GPR and drone survey of the forts in Jaffna and Delft. They were found at the Dutch Jaffna Fort, a half-circular bastion, and the ruins of a Portuguese church at the center of the fort were exposed (Coningham 2019). Based on the GPR survey of the fort in Delft, the report indicates that there were superficial ruins of the port buildings belonging to the Dutch. There were earlier buildings which may not be of Dutch origin. It was recommended that only a proper archaeological excavation can answer this query (Davis 2019).

When the Portuguese arrived in Ceylon (an earlier name for Sri Lanka), there were three kingdoms at Kotte, Kandy, and Jaffna. Until Kandy was captured by the British in 1815, Kandy functioned as an independent kingdom under the king of Kandy. Due to food shortages and disease, arid-zone capitals moved southwest. The Portuguese invasion happened when the fort became the capital. After the conquest of Kotte kingdom (The site of the Kotte is currently in the Colombo area), destroyed the earlier buildings and built their churches and a fort. None of the earlier buildings are seen today in the Colombo region.

The Portuguese had a policy of totally annihilating the cultural heritage of the people they captured and ruled (De Queyroz 1995). There are several instances of this happening. For example, Goa in India has a larger area than Jaffna. This was one of the cities throughout history during the kingdoms of Vathapi Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Kalyani Chalukyas, and the Vijayanagar Empire. But the Portuguese, when they captured Goa, razed all these buildings to the ground and built their fort and churches (Shastri 1978).

Conclusion

It was in the populous regions that the Portuguese undertook their cultural devastation of the native people. The people were moved away from capitals such as Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa to Kotte, and the Portuguese never had a strong interest in those areas. All of those locations were dense forests. As a result, the cultural heritage and ancient buildings in this area are still present. Due to their aim of spreading religion, the Portuguese exercised and dominated the area where the people lived. The Portuguese destroyed all of Jaffna's ancient buildings, temples, and cultural edifices after the conquest of the Jaffna kingdom. All that remains today in Jaffna are buildings from and after the Dutch period.

The buildings we see today are the alterations or modifications of the Portuguese buildings by the Dutch, who succeeded them. At present, eleven pre-colonial monuments exist in Jaffna. A systematic, scientific archaeological excavation and analysis could bring to light information not only about the Portuguese's buildings but the structural constructs and artefacts of the Jaffna Kingdom and beyond.

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Photo Credits

The site images were produced by S.Nilagini from the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka. The spatial location mapping (ArcGIS 10.8) was created by P.Thunendran, Spatial Information Science and Engineering, University of Maine, USA

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Figures

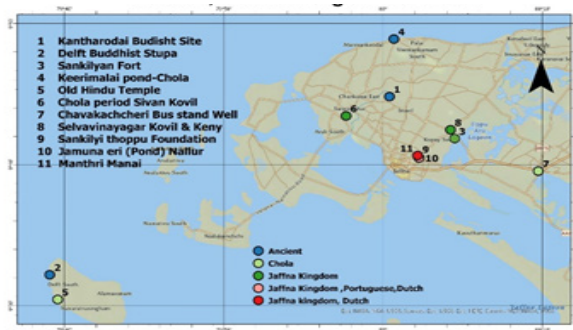


Figure 1 : Pre-colonial structures



Figure 2: five buildings dates from the Portugueseera



Figure 3: Portuguese ruins of the fort at Kankesanturai



Figure 4: The fort built at Kayts



Figure 5: Ruins of the church at Atchvely