

Pilippatti Merchant Guild Inscription

Why in News?

Recently, the epigraphy division of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) deciphered a Chola-period merchant guild inscription found at Pilippatti village in Pudukkottai district in Tamilnadu.

- The team copied the inscription on **maplitho paper** using the estampage method.

Estampage is used in order to get an exact copy of an inscription. It is typically derived by applying wet paper onto the rock face, over which any ink material is wiped.

- **Time period** - It dates back to the *10th century*.
- **Installation** - It was probably installed during the *reign of either Parantaka Chola or Uttama Chola*.
- **Features** - It has various symbols including Ankush (sharp pointed hook then used to control elephants), Trishul and lamps.



- **Trade groups** - It mentions trade groups of various territorial divisions, including
 - Ainurruvars of Mangala Nadu, Puramalai Nadu, Poongundra Nadu, Manalur

- Nadu
- Virapattinam of Kodumbalur

*ASI team has also copied nearly 10 inscriptions from the walls of **Pilavaneswarar temple in Virachilai in Tirumayam** taluk. These 11th century inscriptions of Sundarapandiyan and Veerapandiyan mention donations given to the temple.*

Trade guilds

Guilds or Shreni, in Ancient India, was an association of traders, merchants, and artisans. Generally, a separate shreni existed for a particular group of persons engaged in the same vocation or activity.

- Traders founded guilds and called themselves as *sudesi, nanadesi, ainurruvar* and others.
- Several trade guilds flourished during the Chola period.
- Members of the trade guilds convened their meetings to make decisions and engraved them as inscriptions and installed them in public places.

Regional Trade Guilds in Tamil Landscape

- **Regional Trade guilds** - There are some stray occurrences like Vellarai Nigamaththor in the Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions.
- **Autonomous functioning** - From 9th century onwards, such trade guilds started functioning in a distinct manner.
 - Ayyapozhil Ainnurruvar (The 500 of Aihole)
 - Tisaiayirathu Ainnurruvar (The 500 of the 1000 directions)
 - Nanadesi (those of various countries)
 - Valanjiyar (Balijas or Banajigas)
 - Pathinenvishayaththar
 - Manigramathar

References

1. [The Hindu| Copying of Chola Trade Guild Inscriptions](#)
2. [Government of Tamil Nadu| Guild Inscriptions](#)