

# THE TAMIL SLAB INSCRIPTION OF THE VĪRAKKOṬI AT BUDUMUTTAVA, NIKAWERATIYA URUBANIZATION AT MĀGALA.

The existence of stone inscriptions engraved in medieval Tamil characters at the Rajamahavihara, the Buddhist temple at Budumuttāva, has been known to epigraphists and archaeologists for quite a long time. Three of these epigraphs were recognized by E. Muller, who mentions them in his *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, though their contents were not within his comprehension.<sup>1</sup> They were later examined by H.C.P. Bell, whose brief notes on each of these were published in the Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon for 1911-12.<sup>2</sup>

In 1929, S. Paranavitana recopied them and his accounts of these inscriptions were recorded in the Epigraphical Summary published in *The Journal of Science* (G), Vol. II.<sup>3</sup> Two of these inscriptions, which are found on granite pillars supporting the superstructure of the hall of a shrine, were successfully deciphered, edited and published by him subsequently in *Epigraphia Zeylanica*.<sup>4</sup>

The two inscriptions edited by Paranavitana are dated in the eighth regnal year of Jayabāhu, successor to Vijayabāhu I (1055 - 1110) at Polonnaruwa and contain references to Mānābharāṇa I, his nephew and heir-apparent. One of these pillar inscriptions records the donations made by Cuntamalli, a Cōḷa prince and consort of Mānābharāṇa, to the Saiva shrine of *Vikramacalāmēka-īśvaram*. This inscription provides the interesting information that this particular shrine was at Mākal, otherwise called *Vikkīramacalāmēkapuram*.

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- <sup>1</sup>. He has made only the following observations about these inscriptions: "Three Tamil inscriptions on two pillars inside the temple and one large slab lying outside. On one of the pillars we read the words *kalinga makan*, "the son of the Kalinga (King)". E. Muller, *Ancient Inscriptions in Ceylon*, London (1883) p. 60.
  - <sup>2</sup>. Though H.C.P. Bell found the inscription to be "much damaged" he could recognize the words *Lokamata* and *Viramakalam*, which were, in his opinion, names of a goddess. H.C.P. Bell, *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, Annual Report 1911-1912 Colombo (1915) p. 115.
  - <sup>3</sup>. *The Ceylon Journal of Science*, Section G., Vol. II, ed. A.M. Hocart and S. Paranavitana, Colombo (1933) p. 117 (inscr. no. 475).
  - <sup>4</sup>. S. Paranavitana, "Two Tamil Pillar Inscriptions from Budumuttava", *Epigraphia Zeylanica* (EZ), Vol. 3, p. 302-312.

The second pillar inscription records a 'royal order' relating to the settlement of a dispute between artisans (Kammālar and washermen (Vaṇṇār) subsequent to an inquiry conducted by royal officers. These inscribed pillars seem to have been set up originally to support a hall attached to the Saiva shrine referred to in one of the inscriptions. Two polished figures of Sivalinga built into the walls of the Buddhist temple, where these inscriptions are found, and the uniform shape, size and workmanship of about a dozen rectangular pillars, including the ones bearing these inscriptions, which support the superstructure of the present Buddhist shrine, suggest that the architectural remains of the twelfth century Saiva shrine were used for the construction of parts of the Buddhist temple at Budumuttāva during the period of the Kandyan kings.

The contents of the third inscription - the one indited on a rectangular stone slab - found near the Bo-tree at the Rajamahavihara could not be read by S. Paranavitana. He remarks:

"Near the modern stupa there is a slab containing another Tamil inscription which is too weathered to admit of its being satisfactorily deciphered".<sup>5</sup>

After a preliminary examination of this slab in July 1986 we made the following observations on it:

"The present author's examination of the Tamil slab inscription at Budumuttāva has revealed that it records some transactions of the Aññūruvar and the military community allied to them. *Aññūruvanpaḷli*, *Patineṇpūmi* and *Vīramākālam* are some of the expressions recorded in that inscription which enables one to identify that epigraph as one set up by the Aññūruvar and the warriors in their service.

The most important detail in the inscription pertains to the *Aññūruvanpaḷli*, a Buddhist monastery named after the *Aññūruvar*. A major portion of the inscription is badly damaged on account of the fact that the stone slab had been used roughly for different purposes. The concluding portion of the inscription which consists of twenty-seven lines of writing could be deciphered if an estampage of it could be prepared. The slab is also of unusual interest on account of the

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 302. For what is readable of this inscription, together with a translation there of, see at the end of this article.

variety of symbols depicted on it."<sup>6</sup>

These impressions have been confirmed by the efforts made by A. Velupillai to decipher this inscription on the basis of an estampage prepared and supplied to him by H.M. Piyatissa Senanayake. Commenting on the present state of the inscription he says:

"The markings of twenty-eight lines can be recognized. But words and letters can be made out only in about twenty-two lines. The beginning of the inscription is unfortunately lost. Of the readable portion of twenty-two lines, the first eighteen cover the entire breadth of the slab while the last four lines are small. The last three lines can be made out fairly accurately. In every other line, some letters cannot be made out. So, the translation of the text is impossible".<sup>7</sup>

These remarks could be endorsed without reservations and it may be added on the basis of our personal observations that the initial portion of the inscription contained a brief version of the *prasasti* of the *Nānādesis* as suggested by the occurrence of the word *Vakshasthala* on the right side of a line on the upper part of the stone. In the inscripational preambles of the *Nānādesis* found in several parts of the island this particular expression is preceded by the words *Lakshmī alamkrta*. All these expressions taken together amount to their being a poetic description of the *Nānādesis* as those whose breasts were adorned by Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune. In an eulogy this is nothing but a figurative allusion to their prosperity.

A. Velupillai's attempt to decipher this inscription represents a major contribution towards the understanding of its contents. However, a closer scrutiny of the copy of the photograph of the inscription found in his paper reveals that the version of the decipherable portion of the text as given by him requires improvement and revision. Besides, some of the expressions and concepts recorded in that inscription deserve a much more detailed examination than has been attempted, especially on account their unusual significance. The present author, whose interest in this inscription was further stimulated by these considerations, made a second visit to the Rajamahavihara at Budumuttava in March 1993 in order to scrutinize the inscribed slab

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<sup>6</sup> S. Pathmanathan, "The Naragam of the Nanadesis in Medieval Sri Lanka, Circa A.D. 1000-1300", *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, University of Peradeniya, Vol. IX, Nos. 1 & 2 (1984; published in 1987), p. 125-126.

<sup>7</sup> A. Velupillai, "A Note on A Fragmentary Inscription of the Virokkoti from Budumuttava", *Journal of Tamil Studies, International Institute of Tamil Studies*, Madras (December 1987) p. 57-65.

again with the help of H.M. Piyatissa Senanayake.<sup>8</sup>

In recent years the slab inscription has been built into the structure of the wall of a newly constructed building and in its present state the edges of the slab remain covered with deposits of cement. Even before the slab was incorporated into the wall, the letters on the edges of its right and left sides were in such a state of damage as to be invisible. Besides, there are indications to suggest that the topmost portion of the slab, containing the initial portion of the text indited on it, was chopped off for some reason. As this stone slab, according to local tradition, was used as a base for grinding sand for constructional purposes, the top portion has been completely damaged. Only a few letters and words here and there could be recognized and little could be made out of them except for the references to the *Vīrakkoti*, *patinenpūmi* and the *Aññūruvar* and the indication that the text of the epigraph commenced with the *prasasti* of the *Nānādesis*.

Even the portion of the text engraved on the lower portion of the slab cannot be retrieved in its entirety on account of the damage on the edges of the stone, as stated earlier, and a damage in the form of a thick line descending from the top right side with a slant towards the left as it reaches the lower portion at the middle of the slab. The traces of some letters on almost all lines have been obliterated on account of this damage and because of this circumstance even the portion of the text indited on the lower portion cannot be satisfactorily deciphered. Yet, the words and expressions that could be deciphered are sufficient to provide an indication of the identity of those who set up the inscription and the purpose for which it was engraved.

This slab inscription deserves a serious and detailed investigation on account of several considerations. It is one of the longest among the inscriptions set up by the *Nanadesis* or their associates in the island. It records useful information on a variety of items not obtainable elsewhere. It provides insights into the development of Māgala, otherwise called *Vikrama Cālamēkapuram*, as an urban centre of some significance. The importance of this record is further enhanced by the consideration that it records information which enables one to determine precisely the functions of the *Vīrakkoti*, who are also referred to in many other epigraphic records from several places in Sri Lanka. The last but by no means the least important consideration is the fact that it contains the

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<sup>8</sup>. In March 1993, accompanied by H.M. Piyatissa Senanayake the present author visited the site and examined the inscribed stone once again. An estampage of the inscription prepared by Piyatissa senanayake on this occasion has been found to be very useful for the present study. We acknowledge our indebtedness to Revd. Thamburambuwe Sumanajoti, the Viharadhipati, for the courtesy of granting permission for these purposes and for providing some useful information about the inscribed slab. We would also like to record our appreciation of the support and encouragement given to us by the inmates of the monastery.

representations of the figures of a number of weapons depicted in a manner not found elsewhere in Sri Lanka and also probably not even in South India.

That the slab inscription is a medieval monument of Māgala is suggested by its present location as well as the testimony of the monks of the Rajamahavihara. Its present location may provide an indication that it was removed from its original site some where in the vicinity of the Buddhist temple when materials including the architectural remains of earlier buildings were gathered for its construction. The monks attached to the Rajamahavihara informed us that this stone slab was in fact removed from its original location close to two mounds in a coconut grove adjacent to the canal, which is at a distance of approximately 400 yards from the Rajamahavihara. There is, therefore, no reason to doubt that the communities whose activities are recorded in this inscription were established at Māgala.

The correlated testimony of the three inscriptions at Budumuttava provides an indication of the nature of the town of Māgala and its social and cultural institutions in the Polonnaruwa period and particularly during the twelfth century. One of the pillar inscriptions states that Mākal had the alternate name *Vikkirama Cālāmeke-puram*. The fact that this name ends with the suffix *puram* may be conceded to be of some significance. As the expression *pura(m)* is generally applied to the names of towns and cities, it may be assumed that *Vikkirama Cālāmeke-puram* had reached a state of development so as to be reckoned as a town during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The slab inscription suggests that its growth was at least partially due to the development of marketing centres of considerable significance in that locality.

The name Māgala (Mahagalla in Pali) was applied not only to the large tank at Nikaweratiya but also to a locality in its proximity. The modern village of Budumuttāva occupies an area that was included in the unit known as Māgala in medieval times. Māgala has been a flourishing agricultural settlement from the early centuries of the Christian era and the principal source of its prosperity was the Mahāgalla tank said to have been constructed by Mahāsenā.<sup>9</sup> That there was a Buddhist establishment around Budumuttāva during the Anuradhapura period is suggested by two headless dolomite images of the Buddha datable to the 8th or the 9th century and presently found within the premises of the Rajamahavihara.

That Māgala was an area of some strategic importance is suggested by some notices in the Pali chronicle. When Sanghatissa secured the throne at Anuradhapura, his rival Moggallana is said to have occupied Mahagalla and fortified it with a view to advancing towards the north against the ruler of Anuradhapura.<sup>10</sup> Later, in the eleventh century, Mahāgalla was one among the many strongholds occupied by the Cōlas in

<sup>9</sup>. *Mahavamsa* trans. into English by Wilhelm Geiger, London (1964) 37:49.

<sup>10</sup>. *Culavamsa*, 44:13.

Dakkhinadesa.<sup>11</sup>

During the second quarter of the twelfth century the activities of Parakramabahu I provided some impetus for further development in the area. When he was ruling over Dakkhinadesa for some years until 1153 A.D. Parakramabahu constructed a dam on the confluence of two rivers, SaṅkaVaḍḍhamānaka and Kumbhīlavāna at the locality of Sūkharanijjhara.<sup>12</sup> From there water was diverted to the Māgala tank by means of a canal. Besides, large tracts of land between the tank and the site of the dam were brought under cultivation.

Māgala derived its importance on account of political, military and economic considerations. Owing to its central agricultural hinterland it had developed over a long period of time as a local centre of authority and cultural activities. Besides, occasionally in different periods it had served as a military outpost. The slab inscription indicates that it had attained another dimension, at least during the period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, by developing as a major marketing centre. The establishment of the *Aññūruvar* and their associates at Māgala suggests that it had become one of the major centres of commercial activity in Dakkhinadesa.

The development of Māgala as an urban centre with a commercial orientation was not an isolated phenomenon. It was one among several such centres which had a wide distribution in the island. Most of such towns were linked to the arteries of seaborne commerce in which the *Nānādesis* and their associates had played a significant role during the period under consideration. It may be recalled that the *Nānādesis* otherwise called *Aññūruvar* in local inscriptions had established a Nagaram in the environs of Pāṇḍuvasnuvara as suggested by the references to *Nanateciya-pattinam* and *pattinappātai* in the inscription from Detiyaymulla.<sup>13</sup> They were also established at two other places-Galtenpitiya and Ataragalla-within Dakkhinadesa.<sup>14</sup> The reference to the *Aññūruvanpalli* in the slab inscription and the influence exerted by their associates, the *Vīrakkoti*, over the locality suggest that the *Nānādesis* had their commercial establishments at Māgala on a durable basis with adequate arrangements for their security.

<sup>11</sup>. *ibid.* 58:42 - 43.

<sup>12</sup>. These rivers are identified with Hakvatuna Oya and Kimbulavana Oya respectively. *Culavamsa*, 68:32 -35.

<sup>13</sup>. S. Pathmanathan, "The Nagaram of the Nanadesis in Medieval Sri Lanka, Circa A.D. 1000 - 1300", *The Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities*, Vol. IX, Nos. 1 & 2, p. 122 - 163.

<sup>14</sup>. *ibid.*

The slab inscription mentions of two religious institutions which were supported and maintained by the *Aññūruvar* and their associates, the *Vīrakkoti*. The *Aññūruvanpalli* referred to in this epigraph seems to have been a Buddhist temple established or restored and maintained by the mercantile community called *Aññūruvar*. The association of *Aññūruvar* with some Buddhist institutions in the island is known also from some other inscriptions. An undated epigraph from Polonnaruwa which could be assigned to the early eleventh century on paleographic considerations mentions a Buddhist temple or monastery at a settlement of the *Aññūruvar* (*Aññūruvarpati palli*) in that city.<sup>15</sup> As there is reason to believe that *Māgala* was the site of an ancient Buddhist establishment it would appear that the *Aññūruvar* were involved in its restoration and maintenance. It could also, perhaps, be argued that the support extended by the *Aññūruvar* to Buddhism in this manner was motivated by a desire to encourage local traders who bought commodities to their markets at *Māgala* from its hinterland.

The expressions *aññūruvanpalli-illāta pērum cāti*, "having bestowed a name that was not *Aññūruvanpalli*", as found in the slab-inscription may probably suggest that the original name was changed into another by the *Vīrakkoti* by the time this inscription had been engraved. The inscription records that the *Vīrakkoti* had made an endowment to this institution in the form of money (*paṇam*) and lamps (*Vilakken.....*). Besides, they claim to have made arrangements for the incorporation of a fraternity of monks at this institution (*Caṅkam Amaittuk Kututtōm*).

The existence of a Hindu temple dedicated to the worship of the Mother Goddess, *Paramesvaṛī* - the tutelary deity of the *Nānādesis* - at *Māgala* during the period when they were established there is suggested by the expressions *Paramatta lōkamātāvai Vīramākālamenu pēr cāti*, found in the slab inscription. These expressions translate : 'having named the supreme Goddess as *Vīramākālam*'. Idiomatically these expressions have the connotation that either the image of the Supreme Goddess, the presiding deity of a temple or a temple dedicated to the worship of the Supreme Goddess was named *Vīramākālam* after the name of a group of Warriors. The validity of such an explanation is confirmed by the reference to the *Aññūruvanpalli* in the same inscription. Just as a Buddhist temple was named *Aññūruvanpalli* after the name of a community of merchants, the *Aññūruvar*, the name of a military community, allied them, *Vīramākālam*, could have been applied to a temple of the Mother Goddess. It is also noteworthy that there are many instances where temples and images of deities enshrined in temples have been named after kings, and mercantile or military communities.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>. *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, pt. II. ed. A. Velupillai, Peradeniya, (1972) p. 9-12.

<sup>16</sup>. *Rājarājesvaram*, *Rājendracōlesvaram*, *Tribhuvanavīra-īsvaram* and *Uyyakkontan tirumalai* are some of the temples named after the titles or epithets of kings. There are some epigraphic notices on temples called *Aññūruvan īsvaram* and *Vanniśvaram* named respectively after the mercantile community of *Aññūruvar* and the military community of *Vanniyar*.

An alternate interpretation of these expressions is also possible because of the different connotations attached to the words *pēr catti* as found in epigraphic usage. A corresponding expression *tiruṇamam cāttiyatu*, 'having named', is employed to convey an altogether different idea in the Tamil slab inscription from Palamottai, which records an endowment made by a Brahmin widow to a Saiva shrine at the Brahmadeya of Kantalāy.<sup>17</sup>

The endowments and the performance of specific duties attached to them were placed under the custody of a regiment of the Vēlaikkāṟar. The phrases '... Valankai Vēlaikkāṟan enru tiruṇamam cāttiyatu' as found in this inscription were intended to convey the idea that endowments made by the Brahmin widow were registered in the name of the Vēlaikkāṟar and placed under their custody. The expressions *Paramatta lōkamātāvai Vīramākālam - enru per catti* as found in the slab inscription from Budumuttāva may have been employed to describe a similar arrangement. It could also, therefore, be assumed that the military unit called *Vīramākālam* at Māgala assumed a custodial relationship in respect of a temple of the Mother Goddess. Nevertheless, it is significant that the inscription contains information relating to a temple of the Mother Goddess and that a military unit called *Vīramākālam* was closely associated with it. Whether the *Aṇṇūṟṟuvan palli* and the temple of the Mother Goddess were located at the site of the mounds found in the vicinity of the canal, from where the slab inscription is said to have been removed to its present location, is a matter that requires archaeological excavations in the future.

The description of Durgā or Paramesvarī, the favourite deity of the *Nānādesis*, as *Paramatta lōkamātā* is of unusual significance and reminiscent of the ideas of Advaita Vedānta advanced by Sankara.<sup>18</sup> Such a description of the Mother Goddess is not encountered in other inscriptions in the island. Etymologically the Tamil expression *paramatta* could be explained as one derived from *paramārtha*, which connotes 'the highest or whole truth', 'spiritual knowledge', 'an excellent or the most exalted object' and 'reality in the true sense of the word'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>. S. Paranavitana, "A Tamil Slab Inscription from Palamottai", *EZ*, Vol. 4, p. 191-196.

<sup>18</sup>. The reading *Vīramatta Lōkamāta* as given by A. Velupillai is obviously incorrect. What he has constructed as *Vīra* is in fact *para*. There is no trace of any sign representing the medial *i* over the first letter. The second letter could be clearly identified as *ra*. Besides, as an expression *vīramatta* has no meaning. It is not possible that those who drafted the text of the inscription would have used an expression which did not convey any meaning.

<sup>19</sup>. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary* (1899: Reprint 1976) Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, p. 588.



*Paramārtha* and its Prakrit form *Paramattha* are common to both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The word *Paramārtha* sometimes occurs as a personal name. For instance, Paramartha was the name of a reputed monk of Ujjain, who was a disciple of Guṇamati and translated his monumental treatise *Lakṣaṇānusāra Sāstra* and a large number of other Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Chinese.<sup>20</sup> There are many Pali texts which have names with *Paramattha* as the first component.<sup>21</sup> In Hindu thought, the word *Paramārtha* is usually applied in connection with the concept of the qualityless (*nirguṇa*) transcendent Absolute Brahman, a state higher than that of *Īśvara*.<sup>22</sup> The description of the Mother Goddess as *Paramatta Lōkamāta* in an epigraph set up by the associates of the Nānādesis suggests that there were among them and their associates persons influenced by the Advaita school of Vedānta.

Another religious institution at Māgala in the twelfth century was the Saiva Shrine called *Vikkirama-calāmēka-īśvaram* referred to in one of the pillar-inscriptions from Budumutāva. As there are indications to suggest that merchants were closely associated with the foundation and/or maintenance of Saiva shrines in the eleventh century, at such localities as Mantai and Padaviya, it is not unlikely that the *Nānādesis* were associated with the establishment and maintenance of the Saiva temple dedicated to Siva at Māgala.<sup>23</sup> The endowment made to this temple by Cuntamalli, a consort of the ruler Mānābharaṇa, consisted of a lamp and ten gold coins. Her concern for this shrine located at considerable distance from the establishments of the royal court probably suggest that *Vikkirama-Calāmēka-īśvaram* was significant both as a centre of religious tradition and as an architectural monument of imposing proportions. The square, solid granite pillars of about ten feet in height and a large number of granite blocks which had been removed from the site of its remains and built into the parts of the Rajamahavihara suggest that the twelfth century Saiva shrine was a stone structure of relatively large proportions by local standards, involving the investment of resources in considerable measure. Such an impression implies a remarkable degree of prosperity

<sup>20</sup>. *The Classical Age*, ed. R.C. Mayumdar, Bharata Vidya Bhavan, Bombay (Second Impression 1962) p. 390, 611.

<sup>21</sup>. *Paramatthajotika*, *Paramattha dīpa*, *Paramattha hindu*, *Paramattha mānjusa* and *Paramatthavinicchaya* are such texts. *Paramārtha Saptati* was one of the Sanskrit texts composed by Vasubandhu.

<sup>22</sup>. The compartmentalisation of reality into *Paramārtha* (ultimate) and *Vyavahārika* (relative or practical) in Advaita is severely criticised by Ramanuja.

<sup>23</sup>. The participation of the *Nānādesis* in the establishment and maintenance of Siva devale No. I, which was known as *Iravikula Mānikka-īśvaram* during the period of its existence, is attested by a few inscriptions from Padaviya. In the early eleventh century three mercantile groups had accepted deposits of money for burning in perpetuity lamps at the shrine of Tiriviramiśvaram at Māntai.

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among those of the locality where it was established and maintained.

While his consort, Cuntamalli, gave expression to her religious piety by making an endowment to the Saiva temple at Magala, Manabharana the ruler of Dakkhinadesa, demonstrated at Magala his concern for stability and the effectiveness of his authority as the custodian of customary laws in his capacity as ruler.

One of the pillar inscriptions at Budumuttāva indicates that some degree of social tension had prevailed at Magala at an occasion owing to an inter-caste dispute between the artisans (*Kammālar*) and Washermen (*Vañṇār*). The refusal of the Washermen to perform some services in connection with funeral rites of the artisans was the cause of the dispute. The matter had become so serious that it had to be referred to the ruler Manabharana on whose instance the case was examined by a group of five royal officers (*pañca pradhānikal*). After having investigated the customary practices concerning the issue, they decided that the artisans were entitled to the services of the washermen, who were obliged to provide head cloth (*mukattiṭṭu*), foot cloth (*koṭasalu*) and cloth for spreading on the ground (*pāvātai*) at funeral processions.<sup>24</sup>

Their decision was drafted in the form of a royal order and caused to be inscribed on stone by Mākkalīnkam Kaṇavati, one of the five principal dignitaries serving under Mānābharana.<sup>25</sup> The engraving of a royal order meant to be read and adhered to by the public and the parties to the dispute in particular, on a pillar at a temple at Māgala suggests that the two communities involved in the dispute were local residents who were in some capacity associated with the temple. It could also be inferred that the inquiry on matters relating to the dispute were conducted by the king's officers from a hall of the temple.

The slab inscription at Budumuttāva provides the indication that the group of people called *Virakkoṭi* were included in the composite population of Māgala during the period under consideration. The text of this inscription was undoubtedly drafted by the *Virakkoṭi* as they are referred to therein in the first person plural as *Vīrakkotiṭṭōm*, "we of the Vīrakkoti". The *Virakkoṭi* are referred to also in some other inscriptions of the Polonnaruwa period and in some of them they are closely associated with the *Nānādesis*.

In the Tamil slab inscription from Vahalkada they figure prominently as the

<sup>24</sup> EZ, Vol. 3, p. 302 - 312.

<sup>25</sup> The slab inscription at Vahalkada was set up by the *Vīrakkoti* as they describe themselves therein as *Vīrakkotiṭṭōm* in the first person plural. There is also a conventional reference to rank, honour and privileges as evident from the expressions *ṭṭiṭṭu cīrumāy vantatāka*. Moreover, they are also described as *patinenpūmi Vīrakkoti* as in the slab inscription from Budumuttava. *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, pt. 2 ed. A. Velupillai, Peradeniya (1972) p. 14.

close associates of the *Nānādesis* and as a group invested with certain responsibilities connected with the maintenance of the *Vīrapattinam*.<sup>26</sup> In these two inscriptions the *Virakkoti* are described as those who were endowed with rank, honour and privileges (*pitum cirimayavum*). It is also noteworthy that the slab inscription from Budumuttāva describes them in similar terms (*pitun cirumaya*). The *Vīrakkoti* were, therefore, a group of people who held a position of high rank among the communities of people associated with the *Nānādesis*. The aforementioned inscriptions, however, do not reveal the manner in which the *Vīrakkoti* attained a status invested with rank and honour. There has been some speculation about the *Vīrakkoti* in contemporary Sri Lankan writings. K. Indrapala, for instance says:

"The *Vīrakkoti* or *Vīrakkotiyar* were another mercantile community found in Ceylon about the twelfth century. They are recorded in the Vahalkada inscription to have associated themselves with the Cettis in taking certain steps to protect a town. In May 1969, another Tamil inscription of the *Vīrakkoti* was discovered at Illakatta Eba near Chilaw. In this record, they are referred to as the *patinenpūmi* *Virakkoti*. They are mentioned in a few South Indian inscriptions too, but do not seem to have been a prominent trading body".<sup>27</sup>

Indrapala's contention that the *Vīrakkoti*, were a mercantile community is, as will be seen later, unfounded. That 'the *Vīrakkoti* were presumably a military corporation or a community given to martial pursuits' is the opinion expressed with some hesitation by A. Velupillai.<sup>28</sup> Our examination of the epigraphic notices on the *Vīrakkoti* suggests that they were in fact a military community.

In a literal sense the word *Vīrakkoti* could be interpreted as 'the banner of heroism'. It is in this sense that this word is used in the inscriptional preamble of the Cōḷa King Vīrarajendra (1062-69).<sup>29</sup> In the traditions of the Cōḷa monarchy 'the banner of heroism' is associated with their peculiar conceptions of heroic kingship, and was

<sup>26</sup>. *ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>27</sup>. K. Indrapala "Some Medieval Mercantile Communities of South India and Ceylon", *Journal of Tamil Studies*, Vol. II, No. 2, International Institute of Tamil Studies, Madras (1970) p. 1 - 15.

<sup>28</sup>. Curiously in one instance he says: 'This inscription mentions in many places the name of *Vīrakkoti*, a medieval mercantile community'. A. Velupillai, 'A Note on A Fragmentary Tamil Inscription of the *Virakkoti* from Budumuttava', *Journal of Tamil Studies* (December 1987) p. 58.

<sup>29</sup>. T.V. Catāciva Pantārattār, *Pīrkālac Cōḷar Varalāru* University of Annamalai (1974) p. 58.

prominently displayed in ceremonial martial parades conducted in the celebrations of Victories in war. This suggests that the expression *Vīrakkoti* had close connections with Chivalry, martial prowess and the military profession.

The impression that the *Vīrakkoti* were warriors is confirmed by the contents of the slab inscription at Budumuttāva. There are references in this epigraph to the *tantiram* (army) and the *Vīramākālam* in connection with the *Vīrakkoti*. The *Vīramakalam* referred to in this epigraph was not a name of Kali as suggested by A. Velupillai but that of a military unit is confirmed by the evidence from the *Kantapurānam*.<sup>30</sup> An entire section, the *Mākālar Varu patalam* in the *Acura Kāṇṭam* of that work contains a description of *Vīramākālar*, an invincible valiant warrior who terrorized the Asuras guarding the consort of Indra while she was in captivity. While focusing on the relevance of the account of *Kantapurānam* for an elucidation of the word 'Vīramakalam' it should as a matter of caution, be noted here that this *puranam* is elevating to the plane of the gods matters relating to worldly affairs in respect of the *Vīramākālar*. In the *Kantapurānam* the form *Vīramākālar* appears as one with an honorific singular termination. The word *Vīramākālar* as found in this text could be explained as one which denotes a person who belonged to a group called *Vīramākālam*. That such a group was a military unit is clear from the descriptions found in this work.

"The leader of the hosts of the warriors of Cāttan (Aiyānār)", "The hero among heroes", "the most terrible among fierce warriors", "the one who spells death to the lord of death' (*Kālanukkum Kālan*) and "the one who is unsurpassed in swordsmanship" are some of the descriptions about *Vīramākālar* in the *Kantapurānam*.<sup>31</sup> Its author seems to have based his description of the *Vīramākālar* on local traditions relating to a group of warriors known collectively by that name and reputed on account of their chivalry and heroism in Medieval South India.

The reference to *mākālat tantiram* in the slab inscription is of unusual significance. Although the word *tantiram* has a number of connotations, whenever it

<sup>30</sup>. His failure to identify the *Vīramākālam* has led to much futile speculation. He observes: 'The Mother Earth riding a heroic bull has been designated as *Vīramākālam* - and then *Paramesvarī* and *Vīramākālam* are identified. The goddess *Kali* is a folk deity, very popular with the masses. In order to raise her to the conception of the Supreme Goddess, she had to be given the epithets, *Vīra*, 'heroic' and *mā* (great). In this way *Vīramākāli* becomes a deity of the Great tradition of Hinduism. There is a *Vīramākāli* temple in Jaffna, said to have been worshipped by the Tamil kings of Jaffna four or five centuries ago. It is not known why this inscription refers to the Supreme Goddess as *Vīramākālam* and not as *Vīramākāli*.

<sup>31</sup>. *Kantapurānam* Ed. Arumuka Nāvalar, Vittiyanupalana Yantiracalai, Madras (9th impression 1958) p. 307, vv. 4, 12.

occurs in association with words and expressions connected with warriors in literary and epigraphic notices it has to be construed as synonymous with the Tamil word *paṭai* meaning an army. It may also be noted here that the Vēlaikkārar describe themselves as the members of the *Mahātantiram*, '*Mahātantirattōm*', in their slab inscription at Polonnaruwa. Besides, that inscription also employs the term *paṭai* meaning 'army' with reference to the subdivisions of the *Mahātantiram*. On account of these considerations the word *tantiram* found in the inscription at Budumuttāva may be construed as one that denotes an army unit. The *Mākālattantiram* may, therefore, be defined as an army designated by the name *mākālam*. This particular military unit is in one instance referred to as *Vīramākālam*.<sup>32</sup> The *Vīrakkoti* who had set up the slab inscription and are referred to several times therein appear to have belonged to the army (*tantiram*) called *Vīramākālam*.

The faint traces of the *prasasti* of the *Nānādesis* found in the slab inscription, the reference to *Aññūruvanpaḷli*, the description of the Virakkoti as *Patinenpūmi* Vīrakkoti and as "the children of Paramesvari" are strong indications showing that the *Vīrakkoti* were established at Māgala as associates of the *Nānādesis*. As in the case of other groups associated with the *Nānādesis* the *Vīrakkoti* also appear to have adopted the traditions of the *Nānādesis* in respect of the tutelary deity, the use of the *prasasti* and the descriptive epithets including of the expression *patinenpūmi*, 'of the eighteen countries'. The *Vīrakkoti* had as their primary function the protection of the mercantile communities, their dependents and establishments. Besides, they appear to have enjoyed considerable authority and influence over the settlements of the mercantile communities and to have been deeply involved in their affairs. Their military function and the authority they exercised in matters concerning the mercantile establishment seems to have provided the basis for their claim to rank, honour and privilege. In the present state of knowledge it would appear that the influence exerted by the *Vīrakkoti* at Māgala was the most conspicuous of the urban centres in the island.

The slab inscription at Budumuttāva deserves our attention also on account of the symbols represented on it. Below the inscribed portion of the slab are to be found the representations of seven objects, namely, a sword-case, a money bag (*pacum pai*), a long knife, a bow and arrow, a sabre and a weapon referred to a *Kōlam* in Tamil found in Sri Lanka and South India. Some of these items are depicted also on some of the inscribed slabs set up by the *Nānādesis* or their associates at other localities in the

<sup>32</sup>. *Vīramākālar* is wrongly defined in some dictionaries as the leaders of the armies of Jains. This error is found in the dictionaries of Miron Winslow and Fabriciuss. The *Kantapurāṇam* records the tradition that they were leaders of the armies of Cātān. Aiyānar was probably their favourite deity. Dr. Winslow's *Tamil and English Dictionary*, p. 955, *A Dictionary of Tamil and English* based on Johann Philip Fabriciuss' "Malabar - English Dictionary" (Third edition, revised and enlarged, Tranquebar (1933) p. 894; *Tamil Lexicon*, University of Madras, Vol. VI, p. 3758.

island. In the inscribed stone slab at Vahalkada the money bag is the only symbol depicted. A variety of figures including those of a pair of lamps, a spread out umbrella, a sword and a long knife are found on the inscribed slab recording some arrangements relating to a *Vīrapattinam* of the *Nānādesis* at Viharehinna. The representations of a sword, a knife, bow and an arrow are depicted at the bottom of the inscribed slab of the *Nanadesis* found at Detiyamulla. Yet, there is no other inscription in Sri Lanka which contains the representations of so many weapons as the one at Budumuttāva.

The representation of many weapons on a stone slab on which the text recording the activities of the *Vīrakkoti* is engraved also confirms the explanation that they were a military community organized on a corporate basis like the *Veḷaikkārar* at Polonnaruwa. The inclusion of the figure of a money bag among the objects carved on the stone slab suggests that the *Vīrakkoti* were affiliated to the *Nānādesis* and were settled at Māgala in that capacity.

In conclusion it may be stated that Māgala otherwise called *Vikkirama catāmēkapuram* in the twelfth century had attained the status of a town of considerable significance supporting a composite population on account of commercial prosperity. As a focal point of commercial intersection, cultural activities and inter-cultural communication it had attained a level of development that was surpassed only by Panduvasnuwara in the whole of Dakkhinadesa. It was linked to the arteries of internal and international trade through the agencies of the *Nānādesis* whose establishments in that town were protected and maintained by the military units of the *Vīrakkoti*.

In this town there were three temples, of which the *Āṅṅūrruvanpalli* and a shrine of the Mother-Goddess were under the custody of the *Vīrakkoti*. The archaeological remains of these two institutions perhaps lie buried in the two mounds found on a strip of land adjacent to the canal approximately 400 yards away from the *Rajamahavihara*, from where the slab inscription is said to have been removed to its present location.

Text of the Inscription

1. ....(Bhuvanāśraya)
2. ....parama.....Vakshsthala .....
3. ....Ayyappoḷipura .....
4. Paramesvarikku makkaḷ ..... mākalāna Vikkīrama calā
5. mēka (purattu)<sup>33</sup> Vīrakkotiḍ (r) makkaḷ patineṅpūmi  
Vīrakoṭi
6. nānkaḷ cīrappu ceya Vantatena paramatta .....
7. .... aram Vīrakoṭiyar aṅṅūruvarkku (Kaṅakkum)
8. ....
9. ....Koṅtatalum atai kuttuvitta paṭi
10. yālum intapūmi viṭuttamaiyālum .....
11. ....
12. ....taṅṅūruvan paṭṭinattu mākalat tantirattu<sup>34</sup> vīra (koṭiyar)
13. (kku) Katti vaittamaiyal marṅum vīrakoṭiyarai
14. Ākkuvittamaiyālum patineṅpūmi yaṅṅū
15. rruvar paramatta lōkamātavai Vīramākālam - enru pēr cātti
16. namaiyālum paramesvarikkum aṅṅūruvan palli-illāta pēruṅ
17. cātti nānkaḷ unnakkatava paṅamum vetti viḷakkeṅ .....
18. .... yōm paṅam unṅalakku vīrakoṭiyarkku varu .....
19. .... nāl pōka kaṅṅu corittu ivvutaikkumē naṭai āka
20. itakkatavitāka amaittuk kuṭuttōm patineṅpūmi
21. Vīrakoṭiyōm pituṅ cīrumāy patineṅpūmi vīra
22. koṭiyōm can (ka)ṅ amaittuk
23. kuṭuttōm patineṅpūmi
24. Vīrakoṭiyōm Ara
25. Maravarṅka manatāka.

<sup>33</sup>. The expressions *mākalāna Vikkīrama Calāmēka...* are clearly recognizable on the inscribed slab.

<sup>34</sup>. The words following the expression are not clearly recognizable on account damage.



Translation

11. 3.4 The Vīrakkoti of the eighteen lands who are the children of Paramesvarī of Ayyappōḷil ..... We the Vīrakkoti of the eighteen lands, the Vīrakkoti of Makal otherwise called Vikkīrama Calāmēka (puram) have accepted responsibility for the custody of the temple of the Supreme Goddess from the Aṅṅūrūvar.
11. 12-13 The Vīrakkoti of the army of ..... mākalam of the Aṅṅūrūvan pattiṅam who were engaged for (this) service ..... having given the tolls from this locality the limits of which have been defined.
11. 14-25 Having bestowed the name Vīramākalam on (the temple of) the Supreme Mother Goddess of the Aṅṅūrūvar, and having conferred (on another temple) a name other than that of Aṅṅūrūvan palli, we, the Vīrakkoti have made a grant of money from our resources and an endowment of (eighty) lamps with arrangements for daily services and regular feeding.

We, the Vīrakkoti of the eighteen lands, who are endowed with rank, honour and authority, have made arrangements for the incorporation of the Sangha (at a temple). This charitable act of the Vīrakkoti of the eighteen lands shall never be abandoned. Let this be (always) borne in mind.

S. PATHMANATHAN