

THE NAGARAM OF THE NANĀDESIS IN SRI LANKA¹

CIRCA A.D. 1000-1300

A noteworthy feature in the development of commercial activity in Sri Lanka during the period under consideration was the growth of commercial centres called *nagaram*. They were established and managed by the composite corporate commercial community of long-distance traders called Nanādesis, who were the most celebrated among the mercantile communities in the medieval kingdoms of Lower South Asia. In India they were settled in most parts of Karnāṭaka, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, where the market centres controlled by them and their associates developed into selfgoverning towns called *nagaram*, *erivirapattinam* and *dasamadip pattinam*. The Nanādesis were alternately referred to as Ayyāvole or the 500 Svāmis of Ayyāvolepura in Karnāṭaka and as the *Picai-ayirattu annurruvar* in the inscriptions of the Tamil country.² They appear to have formed a vast confederation of many groups of merchants, warriors and commodity producers. They were conceded the privilege of incorporating in their documents a *prasasti* or inscriptional preamble recording myths and legends poetically along with historical information pertaining to their origins, affiliations and activities. Their use of the literary form *prasasti*, which was generally reserved for kings and princes, testifies to their claims to high rank and social status, which they were accorded on account of their affluence and reinforced through their support for the values and institutions of Hinduism.

The Nanādesis and their associates are described in their inscriptions as the protectors of *Vira-Bananju dharmā*, 'the law of the noble merchants', embodied in 500 *Vira-sasanas* or edicts of heroes obtained from kings. They had the picture of a hill

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1. The word *nagaram* is generally used as a descriptive term indiscriminately in respect of all types of towns and cities. However, in this study it is applied exclusively to denote market towns or the commercial sectors of cities established and controlled by mercantile communities.
 2. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, 'The Chalukyas of Kalyāni and the Kalachuris of Kalyāni', *The Early History of the Deccan*, pts. I-VI, G. Yazdani, London, 1960, p. 433.

on their flag and were noted for their valour and spirit of adventure. They travelled by both land routes and water routes, penetrating all countries 'of the six continents'. They are said to have traded in 'magnificent elephants', 'horses of the finest breeds', large sapphires, moonstones, pearls, rubies, diamonds, lapis-lazuli, onyx, topaz, carbuncles, emeralds and other precious articles; and in cardamoms, cloves, bdellium, sandalwood, camphor, musk, saffron, *malegaja*, and other spices and perfumes. They sold these wholesale or hawked them about on their shoulders. Besides, they claim to have paid the *sunka* regularly, filled the royal treasury with gold and jewels, and replenished the armoury. They bestowed gifts on men of learning and religion fully conversant with the four *samayas* and the six *darśanas*. Associated with them were many classes of merchants, soldiers and others such as *gavaras*, *gatrigas*, *setṭis*, *setṭiguttas*, *aṅkakaras* *bīras*, *bīravaṅigas*, *gandīgas*, *gavūṇḍas* and *gavūṇḍasvāmīs*.³

'The Nānādesis then were a powerful autonomous corporation of merchants, whose activities apparently took little or no account of political boundaries. They visited all countries in the course of their trade, and everywhere they received recognition alike from the central government and from local agencies like the Village *sabhas*. They had their own mercenary army, doubtless for the protection of the merchandise in their warehouses and in transit'.⁴

The claims made in respect of their participation in international and sea-borne commerce is partially attested by evidence from inscriptions set up by the Nānādesis in Burma, Sumatra and particularly Sri Lanka. That the Nānādesis had an outpost in Burma is evident from a Tamil inscription from Pagan, which could be assigned to the twelfth century on palaeographic considerations. It records the construction of a hall, *maṅḍapa*, at a temple dedicated to Visnu and named after the Nānādesis, by a person called Kulasekhara Nambi of Makotaipattinam in Malaimandalam (Kerala).⁵ He also made provision for burning a perpetual

3. *ibid.*, p. 434.

4. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, 2nd revised edition, Madras, 1960, p. 597.

5. E. Hultzsch, 'A Vaishnava Inscription from Pagan', *Epigraphia Indica*, No. 27, p. 187-189.

lamp at the same shrine, which is described as being situated at the town of Arivaṭṭanapuram, otherwise called Bukkam. Their active participation in the overseas trade of the time is also suggested by the Tamil inscription from Loboē-Toewa in Sumatra, which is dated in the year 1010 of the Saka era (A.D. 1078) and was set up by the *Ticai-Āyirattu Annurruvar*.⁶

The largest number of inscriptions and other archaeological artefacts, left behind by the Nanadesis and their associates in any region outside the kingdoms of South India, is to be found in Sri Lanka, where information pertaining to them has been steadily accumulating in recent years. All contemporary epigraphic notices on mercantile communities found in the island pertain exclusively to the Nanadesis or their associates, and this is in itself of considerable significance as providing a sufficient indication of the degree of importance attached to them in the island's trade. There are in all not less than twenty inscriptions which record the activities of the Nanadesis or their associates, and all of them except the one from Kalutara could be assigned to the eleventh and twelfth centuries on the basis of their contents and palaeography.⁷ Among these, two inscriptions, those from Anuradhapura and Anaulundava near Polonnaruwa, are in Sinhalese, while all the rest are in Tamil. The Sinhalese inscription from Anuradhapura, which belongs to the reign of Queen Lilavati,⁸ refers to the Nanadesis and their customs-post, while the other Sinhalese

6. *The Cōlas*, p. 596.

7. The palaeography exhibits features characteristic of developments since the fourteenth century. The text records the grant of fields made by a certain king to the temple of Kāli, founded by the *Annurruvar*. The temple may have been established long before the inscription was set up and the evidence from the epigraph cannot by itself provide any basis for the claim that the *Annurruvar* community flourished at the time when the inscription was set up. For the text of the inscription see A. Velupillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, (CTI), pt. I, Peradeniya, 1971, p. 45.

8. D.M. de Z. Wickremasinghe, 'The Slab Inscription marked D/8 of Queen Lilavati', *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, (EZ), vol. I, p. 177-182.

inscription which is fragmentary contains only the initial portion of their *prasasti* and does not add to our knowledge about the Nanādesis except for testifying to the fact of their presence in the environs of Polonnaruwa.⁹

There are about ten Tamil inscriptions which record the activities of the Annūrruvar, otherwise called Nanādesis. There are five inscriptions among them which incorporate the preamble or *prasasti*. Four of them, namely those from Vahalkada, Padaviya, Viharehinna and Detiyamulla specifically refer to the paṭṭinam of the Nanādesis.¹⁰

The inscriptions from the first three of these sites are of considerable historical importance as they record the transactions of the corporate institution of the *nagaram*. The preambles of these inscriptions, which are of modest proportions compared to those incorporated in some of the South Indian inscriptions of the Nanādesis, provides useful insights about the composite character of the corporate organization dominated by the Nanādesis and their commercial activities. Besides, they record valuable information pertaining to the administration and activities of corporate institution of the *nagaram*, which could, if properly interpreted, throw considerable light on an aspect of the history of the period which has remained obscure.

In the recent past the archaeological materials pertaining to the Nanādesis have been steadily accumulating and these add considerably to knowledge about that mercantile community. The present author's examination of the Tamil slab-inscription at Budumuttāva has revealed that it records some transactions of the Annūrruvar and a military community allied to them.¹¹ *Annūrruvanpalli*, *pattinenpumi* and *Vīramakālam* are some of the expres-

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9. D.M. de Z. Wickremasinghe, 'Polonnaruwa: Ānālundāva Slab Inscription', *EZ*, vol. II, No. 38, p. 235-236.
10. *CTI*, pt. I, p. 53-57; *CTI*, pt. II, Peradeniya, 1972, p.16.
11. The author visited the site in response to the requests made over a long period of time by Piyatissa Senanayake, Assistant Lecturer, Department of Archaeology, University of Peradeniya. He and Piyasena Gamlath, Assistant Librarian, University of Peradeniya, accompanied me to the site and made all arrangements for the examination of the inscribed slab. I am deeply grateful to both of them.

sions recorded in that inscription, which enable one to identify that epigraph as one set up by Annurruvar and the warriors in their service. The most important detail in the inscription pertains to the Annuruvuvan palli, a Buddhist monastery named after the Annurruvar. 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 variety of symbols depicted on it.

The bronze seal of the Nanādesis from Hambantota is one of the most sensational archaeological finds of antiquarian and historical interest in the island in recent years.¹² The seal is a solid-cast bronze of twelve ounces in weight and is 4.5 cm in height. It appears to be a miniature representation of 'the holy hill', the figure of which is said to have been painted on the flags of the Nanādesis. The seal designed at the bottom of the base of the bronze contains the figure of Durga flanked on either side by a female. The representations of the canopy and pouch are also prominently displayed on the top portion of the seal. The inscribed label on the surface of its pedestal contains the expression *Nanādesin sakai*, which may be translated as 'the friends, allies or companions of the Nanādesis'. It is therefore evident that the seal was used as an instrument of authentication or authorisation by the Nanādesis in an area over which they exercised administrative jurisdiction, and such an area could only have been one that was encompassed by a *nagarāram*. The seal, which could have been used for stamping receipts for the payment of tolls, or cloth and packs of commodities taken into the market areas controlled by the Nanādesis, provides fresh insights about the activities of the *nagarāram* of the Nanādesis. Two miniature bronze images of Hindu deities, brought to light by archaeological excavations at Padaviya and the Jetavanarama complex, Anuradhapura, are among the most recent finds per-

12. Information relating to its discovery was supplied to the author by Mr. M.H. Sirisoma, Deputy Archaeological Commissioner, who extended his courtesy by giving permission for a close examination of the object. Matters pertaining to the seal will be examined in the sequel.

taining to the activities of the Nanādesis. The expression Nanādesis, found inscribed in the form of a label on the pedestal of both these bronzes, suggest that they were donated by members of that corporate mercantile community.¹³

In his account of 'The South Indian Mercantile Communities in Ceylon Circa 1000-1200 A.D.', K. Indrapala clearly recognized the existence of a mercantile town called Virapattinam at Vahalkada.

'The records of the Ainnūrruvar refer to their declaring certain towns as EriVirapattinam. From the context, there is little doubt that these were market towns, probably protected by the EriVirar. But it must be admitted that there is a lack of clarity as to the nature of these towns. That the South Indian mercantile communities created such towns in Ceylon, too is known from the Vahalkada inscription. At Vahalkada there was a town named Kattaneri, which was declared a Nanateciya Virapattinam. Possibly such towns were also set up in the other places where records of these mercantile communities have been discovered. We do not know how these towns were organized but from South Indian records we find that each such town had an official called Paṭṭana-svami (Lord of the town) at its head.¹⁴

Some of the basic assumptions underlying these observations are based on an imperfect and inadequate knowledge of matters pertaining to the market towns and they require clarification and revision in the light of subsequent studies on the *nagarāṃ* by Kenneth Hall. Besides, it could no more be a matter of speculation that there were possibly other towns set up by the Ayyavole in the island beside the one at Vahalkada. Inscriptions attest

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13. The information about these two finds was supplied to the author by Mr. M.H. Sirisoma and Dr. Hema Ratnayake, Director of the Cultural Triangle Project, Anuradhapura.
14. K. Indrapala, 'South Indian Mercantile Communities in Ceylon, Circa 950-1250', *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, New Series, vol. I, No. 2, July-December 1971, p. 107-108.

to the existence of such towns also at Padaviya, Viharehinna and Panduvas-nuvara during this period. Moreover, as will be seen subsequently, some of the references in the slab inscription of the Velaikkaras from Polonnaruwa suggests the existence of a *nagaram* in that city when the text of that inscription was formulated. These *nagaram* towns were not placed under the protection of any group of persons called *erivirar*. The expression *erivirar* means 'heroes of the road' and was applied to mercantile communities, presumably in recognition of their spirit of adventure and enterprise in the realm of commerce.¹⁵ There is no more a lack of clarity as to the nature of the towns set up by the *Nanadesis* in the areas of their operations. It is also incorrect and misleading to assert that each of such mercantile towns, which were referred to as variously as *nagaram*, *managaram*, *dasamadipattinam* or *erivirapattinam* had an official called *paṭṭanasvamin* (Lord of the town) as its head. It was clearly so in a few cases, but a large majority of the *nagarams*, as could be gleaned from epigraphic evidence, were under corporate management and had governing councils, which adopted the committee formula as in the case of the assemblies called *ur* and *sabha*.

The historical information relating to the *nagaram* towns in the Tamil country, which had remained scattered, has been collected, correlated and analysed by Kenneth Hall in his monograph, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas*. In that work the *nagaram* is aptly described both as a physically defined area, that is, a commercial district, inhabited by mercantile communities, and as a self-governing institution which administered such an area and its market place.¹⁶ Inscriptions recording the activities of the *nagaram* indicate a definite pattern in the distribution of these towns throughout the entire Tamil country during Chola times. There was a maximum of one *nagaram* per each unit of polity called *nadu*. It is relevant to state here the observations of Kenneth Hall:

'Using those inscriptions which make clear references to the existence of a *nagaram* at a specified place,

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15. The name *Vira valanciyar* applied to one of the mercantile communities and the description of the *Nanadesis* as 'those who traversed the eighteen countries, *patinenpums erintarai*, in some inscriptions suggest that the term '*vira*, 'heroic', and *eri*, 'subdue to conquer' could be used in relation to the characteristics and activities of the mercantile groups.
16. Kenneth Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1980, p. 52, 104.

one definite pattern of distribution becomes perceptible: that there was a maximum of one *nagaram* per *nādu* in Cola times. If as has been argued in recent studies of regional administration under the Colas, the *nādu* was the most important regional political unit during these times, then I may argue that it is more than a coincidence that there was only one *nagaram* per *nādu*.¹⁷

But, unlike in the units called *nādu*, there were sometimes many *nagarams* in some of the principal cities which were centres of dynastic power and intense commercial activity. At Tanjavur, for instance, there were four *nagarams* outside the walls of the city. They were those of Nittanotapperunteru, Mummucicolapperunteru, Virasikhamanipperunteru and Tribhuvanamidevip-perankati.¹⁸ All the *nagarams* were not of a uniform size; some were small and occupied the commercial area of a settlement, while some others were large and consisted of several quarters. The *nagaram* of Tiruvorriyur, Chingleput comprised of at least three quarters: Jayasingakula Kalapperunteru, the residence of Caliya; Tribhuvanāsundarap-perunteru, the residence of the shepherds; and Narpattennayirap-perunteru, the residence of sculptors and artisans.¹⁹ But each of the *nagarams* of Tanjavur, as seen earlier, was associated with only one of the big streets of that city. It should also be noted that, while the *nagaram* constituted the town of a settlement in an agricultural hinterland, in big cities it occupied one of the commercial sectors only. Another consideration that has to be noticed here is the tradition of classifying the *nagarams* into two categories, the larger and more prominent ones being distinguished from the rest by the designation *mānagaram* 'the great *nagaram*'.²⁰ The *nagarams* of Kancipuram and Mamallapuram were described as *managaram* from the

17. *ibid.*, p. 124.

18. *ibid.*, p. 53-54.

19. *ibid.*, p. 53.

20. Kattuceṃmalapākkam (Aranvāyal, Chingleput) and the *mānagaram* of Śivapuram (South Arcot) are two other such units referred to in contemporary inscriptions. *Trade and Statecraft under the Colas*, p. 51, 219, 221.

period of the Pallavas onwards. It is also significant that such a distinction between the two categories is encountered in the Tamil inscriptions set up in the island during the twelfth century.²¹

As the *nagarams* in Sri Lanka were also established by the *Nanadesis* and their associates, they could be expected to have exhibited some of the basic characteristics of their contemporary Indian counterparts. Such towns as did exist in the island have to be identified in order to describe their principal characteristics as self-governing institutions and centres of market-oriented exchange of commodities.

Nanāteciya Virāpattinam at Vahalkada

That there was a *Virāpattinam* at Vahalkada is indicated by an inscription of the *Nanadesis* from that locality.²² The epigraph is undated and has no reference to any reigning king. Its preamble is a shorter version of that usually found in Kannada and Tamil inscriptions in India and is formulated in such a manner as to reflect the local situation. The palaeography of the record represents a stage of development intermediate between the Chola inscriptions in the island and those of the reigns of Parakramabāhu I (1153-1186) and Nissankamalla (1187-1196). It may therefore be assigned to the early years of the twelfth century, although stylistically it has closer affinities with the inscriptions of the late eleventh century.

This inscription, engraved in two parts, separately in two different slabs of stone, records information of the utmost importance relating to the *Nanadesis* and the *nagaram* in the island. It records that a *Nanāteciya Virāpattinam* was established at the site of Kattaneri by the *Picai Ayirattannaurruvar*. This *Virāpattinam* is said to have fallen on evil days in consequence of an indemnity paid to a certain Kuttipperuman. As the Cettis

21. The *Virāpattinams* of Padaviya and Viharehinna are referred to respectively as *nagaram* and *managaram* in the inscriptions found there.

22. *CTI*, pt. I, p. 54.

of 'the eighteen lands' and the *Virakkoti* made an appeal that this town should not be allowed to suffer eclipse or dissolution, (*patinenpumi nattuc cettikalum Virakkotiyomum ippattinam alivupatalakatenru pin muraiyitta makkalum*) a group of nineteen individuals, each of whom is named and described with titles and designations, took steps to re-establish the town. In connexion with that work wooden planks and stone slabs were set up. It was also decided to waive the taxes on the shops in the streets of the town. The persons involved in this undertaking are said to have had rank, privileges and honour appropriate to their status (*pitum Cirutum ayavum utaiyam nam*).

An important detail recorded in the inscription pertains to the circumstances that caused instability to the town. It is specifically stated that this resulted from the payment of an indemnity by the *Virapattinam* to a certain Kuttiperuman (*Kuttipperumanukkut tantam iruttut talarci pattamaiyin*).²³ The expression Kuttiperuman could be interpreted in two ways: it could either be an epithet of Siva, conceived in Hindu religious ideology as the Cosmic dancer, or the personal name of an individual. But the fact that Kuttiperuman is described as an enemy of the *Nanadesis* (*tecippakai*) and the consideration that a contribution made to a Shrine of Siva could not have been considered as a fine or indemnity, *tantam*, precludes the possibility of Siva being referred to as Kuttiperuman in this instance. Kuttiperuman, 'the enemy of the *Nanadesis*', ought to have been a warrior chief who induced the *Virapattinam* to pay a ransom by a demonstration of force. The fact that the *Virapattinam*, which had in its service armed retainers in considerable numbers, had to acquiesce in such a situation suggests that Kuttiperuman was one who wielded considerable power.

The state of anarchy and uncertainty which prevailed after the reign of Vijayabahu I (1055-1110) provided the setting for such a development. Commenting on the conditions in the island under the successors of Vijayabahu, the *Culavamsa* records:

23. The word *talarci* in line 34 of this inscription has been deciphered as *tanraci* by Velupillai. As *tanraci* makes no sense in the Tamil language, the correct reading should be *talarci*, a colloquial form of *talarcci*, which has the connotation of instability, infirmity and decay.

'The officers belonging to the retinue of the monarchs on both sides who were established on the frontiers, fought with each other continually. By setting fire to many flourishing villages and market towns, by piercing tanks filled with water, by destroying every where the weirs on the canals and by hewing down all useful trees like the coconut palm and others, they so devastated the kingdom that it was impossible to trace even the sites of old villages. And even the rulers did evil to the people letting their retainers plunder the towns and commit highway robbery'.²⁴

The foregoing account provides sufficient indication of the fact that warriors in the service of Vikramabāhu (1110-1132) and his cousins had indulged in looting of towns and villages and that in such acts of cupidity they were left unrestrained by the rulers. Kuttipperuman, 'the foe of the *Nānādesis*', was presumably one such warrior who had dispossessed the *Virapattinam* of its wealth. His extortion was so heavy as to have strained its resources and shaken the *Virapattinam*. Yet, the fact that it found itself capable of survival and re-adjustment provides an indication of the strength of its organization. The origins of the *Virapattinam* at Vahalkada cannot be traced from extant sources of information. It may be assumed that it was set up by the *Nānādesis* during the eleventh century, when they extended their activities into the island, and such an impression seems to gain some support from the fact that it had flourished in a developed form before the inscription recording some details about it was set up.

Ayyampolil pattinam of Padaviya

Another mercantile town, established and controlled by the *Nānādesis*, was the *Ayyampolil pattinam* at Padaviya, about which some information is recorded in two inscriptions set up by the *Nānādesis* and which have been recovered from the architectural remains of the medieval monuments of Padaviya.²⁵ Both inscriptions are undated but could be assigned on palaeographic considerations to the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. These inscriptions seem to record the interaction between the

24. *Cūlavamsa (CV)*, ed. and trans. Wilhelm Geiger, 61: 63-67.

25. *CTI*, pt. I, p. 54-55; *CTI*, pt. II, p. 19-20.

Virapattinam and Hindu religious institutions. They provide the interesting information that the *Ayyampolil pattinam* was also called a *nagaram*, as could be seen clearly from the expressions '*innakarai aranukku tecikalakki*' and '*i(n)nakaram irantam mitturu kanappattaiyarum*', 'the members of the second army allied to this *nagaram*'.²⁶

The expression *nakarai aranukku tecikalakki* 'having dedicated the *nagaram* as (Nana) desis in the service of (the temple of) Siva', is of considerable significance as providing an indication of the character of the *nagaram* and the nature of the relationship it had entered into with a Saivite temple. An important consideration that arises from a scrutiny of this expression is the identification of the *nagaram* with the Nana-desis, *teci* being an abbreviated form of the name *Nanadesi*. It presupposes that the *nagaram* in this instance was established and controlled by the *Nanadesis*. As the *nagaram* is said to have been dedicated to the service of Siva, it would appear that the *nagaram* assumed the role of a custodian over the temple, its community and endowments just as the *Velaikkarar* had done in relation to some religious institutions in several localities in several localities in the island during the Polonnaruwa period. The *nagaram* in this particular instance may be presumed to have undertaken the responsibility of protecting the temple and its institutions. It is also of significance that this particular epigraph was found among the remains of Siva Devale No. I at Padaviya, which may be identified as those of the temple which was originally named *Iravikulā manikka-īśvaram* after one of the epithets of the Chola King, *Rajarāja I*. The arrangements regarding this undertaking were made by a congregation comprising three categories of people, namely, some prominent merchants who are mentioned by name, the *nakaravar* and warriors (*aṅkakkaran*).

The second inscription from Padaviya, the text of which could only be partially deciphered on account of its worn out condition and of its letters being engraved too closely to enable recognition, also records some transactions undertaken by the *nagaram* in connexion with the religious institution.²⁷ That some icons were made and granted by them to a temple is clear from the

26. *CTI*, pt. I, p. 55; *CTI*, pt. II, p. 19.

27. *CTI*, pt. II, p. 19-20.

expressions *Vikkirakañ Ceytu Katuttōm*. An important detail recorded in the inscription relates to the *tavalam* or periodically designated market. A *tavalam* was organized by the *nagaram* and it was called *Vikkirama katikait tavalam* of *Ayyampolil pattinam*. The reference to money collected from the *tavalam* and invested with the *pattinam* seems to suggest that there were arrangements for collecting tolls levied on traders for the facilities provided to them by the *nagaram*.

The origins of the *nagaram* at Padaviya could be traced from the early years of the eleventh century, when the *Nanadesis* are known to have secured a foothold there. When Padaviya was under Chola occupation, it developed as a military outpost and commercial centre of considerable importance. The Saivite shrine of *Iravikula manikkaisvaram* was established and supported by Chola officials, warriors and merchants. The inscription dated in the 27th year of Rajaraja I, which records the donations made by many individuals, mentions of a *Nanadesi* merchant called *Konnāvil Venkatan*. It is said therein that he made a gift of two bronze bells.

A one-line inscription found among the remains of Siva Devale No. I at Padaviya, which records the name of a merchant who laid a foundation stone of the shrine, provides further evidence about the presence of the *Nanadesis* there. This particular merchant is described as *Teciyayattunai Cetti*.²⁸ This inscription provides an indication of the fact that the long-distance traders called *Nanadesi Ticaiyayiravar Annurruvar* were among the founders and benefactors of the temple of *Iravikula manikka isvaram*. Their close interactions and association with Chola officials and warriors is of considerable significance and it may be assumed that these traders played an important role in the organization and regulation of commercial activity in that locality in the period subsequent to the Chola conquest.

A Managaram at Viharehinna

The inscription of the *Nanadesis* from Viharehinna is of the utmost importance as it records some steps taken in connexion with the foundation of a *managaram*.²⁹ There is no indication in the

28. *ibid.*, p. 24.

29. *CTI*, pt. I, p. 55-57.

inscription of its location but it may be presumed that the inscription was originally set up at a site within the limits of the *managaram*, which was probably located somewhere near Viharehinna, from where this inscription has been found. The epigraph is undated and does not record any information which could provide a clue to its chronology. In such a circumstance it has to be dated only on the basis of palaeographic considerations, on account of which it may be assigned to the late twelfth century. Although considerable portions of the text are incomprehensible on account of its archaic style and unusual construction, which are probably representative of a Malayalam dialect, some important details pertaining to the transaction could be obtained from an interpretation of some of the key phrases. That a *managaram* was established by the *Nanadesis* is evident from the expression *i manakaram atiyittatarakkavum*. It would appear that a certain *Nayaka menavar*, who performed many services, was remunerated with a thousand *kanam* of grain. The *managaram* had employed warriors in its service. As a certain *Senapati* *Virakan*, otherwise called *Piran Cattan*, was disinclined to remain in service, a person called *Kankana natavar* was engaged and invested with rank and honour.

The most striking information recorded in the inscription pertains to the incorporation of certain traders into the *Virapattinam*. Some persons, who were engaged by the *Nanadesis* in commercial operations and were receiving daily wages for their services, were relieved of that position and incorporated into the *Virapattinam* (*Yantantenrutai Virapattinattukku vaippa*) and this seems to have been solemnized ceremonially by presenting them with (a special type of) sandals (*patukai talaiyittu*). Some houses are said to have been bought with money from the joint stock of the group (*potu akiya kacu kututtu vitukonṭamaiyil*) and presumably given to them. The merchant *Cettis* 'who traversed the eighteen lands' are said to have been conferred a special designated group-name (*iṅṅanam catti kulappeyarittu*) and some privileges. The inscription also seems to refer to the collection of tolls and dues (*pakkal parralum*) and the acquisition of political authority and administrative jurisdiction, presumably by the *Virapattinam* over the areas included within its limits (*paritai mel aracu peruvatakavum*). Some of the matters relating to this *Virapattinam* could be clarified and elucidated further, if a more successful attempt is made to decipher the relevant inscription and scrutinize its contents more thoroughly.

The existence of another *nagaram* called *Nanāteciya paṭṭinam*, in the environs of Panduvasnuvara, which was the capital city of the principality of Dakkhinadesa in the twelfth century, is shown by an inscription of the *Nanadesis*.³⁰ This particular inscription has come to light from Detiyamulla in the Giritalana Korale, a division of the Devamadi Hatpattu in the Kurunegala District. A *paṭṭinappatai*, 'a roadway to the town' or 'streets of the town' is referred to in the inscription. Besides, a *Nanāteciya paṭṭinam* also is referred to therein, but the details pertaining to it cannot be gathered as much of the text of the inscription cannot be deciphered on account of its badly worn-out condition

A nagaram in Polonnaruwa

A re-examination of the references to the *Valañceyar* and the *Nagarattar* in the slab inscription of the *Velaikkaras* from Polonnaruwa suggests that there was a *nagaram* established by the *Nanadesis* in the environs of that city. Epigraphists and historians, who have edited or commented upon the contents of the inscription, have explained the word *nagarattar* occurring in it as being the name of a mercantile community. In doing so they were only applying to the word a connotation which is attached to it in modern usage, and understandably their explanation has hitherto found general acceptance, and this was especially so because much of the details pertaining to the *nagaram* were unknown till recently.

S. Paranavitana, who edited the inscription concerned in *Epigraphia Indica*, makes the following observations in relation to the *nagarattar*:

'The Nagarattars, who are mentioned in this inscription along with the Valañjiyars, were also an influential community of merchants, who, at a time that we are speaking of, had their mercantile establishments not only over South India and Ceylon, but also in Burma and other parts of Further India. The Nagarattars comprised within their ranks another class of merchant called Nanadesa. The Valañjiyar and the Nagarattars are at present represented by the Banajiga and Nagartta communities of the Kanarese country'.³¹

30. *CTI*, pt. II, p. 15-18.

31. S. Paranavitana, *The Polonnaruwa Slab Inscription of Vijaya-bahu*, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVII.

The basic assumption underlying these observations are false and the ideas associated with them require some clarification. Paranjitana's assertion that the Nagarattar "had their mercantile establishments also in Burma and other parts of Further India" is unfounded and misleading. It arises from his confusion of the *Nanadesis* with the *Nagarattar*. It may be observed that the *Nagarattar* are nowhere referred to in the inscriptions set up by the *Nanadesis* in any part of South East Asia. His claim that they were a sub-division of the *Nagarattar* is unfounded and presumably arises from a serious misunderstanding. Whatever relationship that existed between the *Nagarattar* and the *Nanadesis* was in the reverse order. Contemporary inscriptions, particularly those from Karnataka, testify that the vast federation of long-distance traders called *Nanadesis* sometimes incorporated the *nagaram* within their membership.

In order to determine the true significance of the word *Nagarattar* found in the inscription concerned, one has to carefully consider its different connotations in both medieval and modern times. The name *Nagarattar* is applied to a mercantile community which has attained a position of great influence and high social status in contemporary Tamil society. The corresponding Kannada form *Nagarita* has been applied in the same manner as the name of a mercantile community in Karnataka. But the crucial point regarding our investigation on the *Nagarattar* relates to the semantic changes associated with this expression. Inscriptions recording the activities of mercantile communities in the medieval kingdoms of South India do not convey the impression that the word *Nagarattar* was applied as the name of a community and it would appear that the word acquired that connotation in relatively modern times. One is therefore prompted to find an alternative and a more appropriate explanation of the word on the basis of evidence from medieval epigraphy.

Commenting on the word *nagaram* Kenneth Hall observes:

'A *nagaram* is identified in Pallava and Col. inscriptions by the words *nagaram*, *nagara* and *nagarattom*. The difference among these words is indicated in the inscriptions. For example, in an inscription from Mamallapuram, the *nagarattar* of the *nagaram* established and defined the quarters of their *nagaram* as recorded by the "Karnam" (Clerk) of the *nagaram* on the orders of the *nagarattom*..... In inscriptional Tamil, *Nagarattar*

is the third person plural of the noun *nagaram*.... Since the collective term *nagarattom*, translated "We the members of the *nagaram*" is usually encountered when reference is made to a group decision or action, it would seem that the *nagaram*'s *nagarattar* were members of a corporate assembly of the *nagaram*. Thus, as with the designations *ur* and *nadu*, *nagaram* indicated both a place and the assembly that administered that place'.³²

Since the word *nagarattar* was applied in contemporary inscriptions to designate the residents of a *nagaram* and the members of a corporate assembly of the *nagaram*, the most plausible explanation of the word *nagarattar* found in the text of the inscription from Polonnaruwa is that it was applied to a *nagaram* which had an army of *Velaikkaras* in its service. Such an explanation gains support from the presence of the *Nanadesis* in and around Polonnaruwa during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. A short Tamil inscription found in a Siva devale between the North Gate of that city and the Rankot Vihara in Polonnaruwa and which could be assigned to the eleventh century on palaeographic considerations runs:

Svasti Sri Bhahicinakayil Bholappalli

Sri patinenpunit-tecit ticai vilankum

*ticaiyayiravar ainnurruvar pati palli.*³³

'Hail prosperity. The Bholappalli of Bhahicanakay is the palli (monastery) of the town of Ticai-ayiravar ainnurruvar,

'The Five Hundred of the Thousand Directions', the (nana) desis of the eighteen lands, who are famous in all directions'.

The reference to 'the monastery' of the town (*pati*) of the *Ticai-ayiravar ainnurruvar*, as found in this inscription, is of special relevance to the present investigation. The inscription

32. *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Cōlas*, p. 52.

33. *CTI*, pt. II, p. 12.

seems to record the construction of a Buddhist monastery (*paḷḷi*) in 'the town', *pati*, established by merchants of the *Ayyavole* fraternity. The word *pati* denotes a settlement or a town and many other items, but the context in which it occurs in this epigraph clearly indicates that it is applied to designate a settlement of the *Aiññuruvar*. The basic question that specifically concerns us is about the character of this settlement. It is useful here to recall the observations of A. Velupillai on the word *pati* as found in this inscription. He says: The word '*pati*' means city. The Vihare is said to belong to the thousand persons and five hundred persons of all directions..... The mercantile corporation obtained charters from reigning monarchs and managed its affairs in cities called *Virapaṭṭanas* in places where it established itself. Most probably a part of Polonnaruwa constituted a *Virapaṭṭanam*'.³⁴ Such an explanation gains support from an interpretation of the same word found in the following extract of the inscriptional preamble of the Chola King Rajendra II (1054-)::

*Natikalum natum patikalum anekam alittanan
valavanennum molippomukettu vekaven calukkiya
ahavamallan.....'*³⁵

'The Chalukya Ahavamalla raged with fury on hearing the reports that the Chola King (who advanced into Rattapadi) and destroyed many rivers, 'districts' and towns....'

What is significant in the foregoing description is the distinction maintained between *natu* and *pati*. If *pati* denoted a settlement which could be described as a village or the settlement of an agricultural community, the distinction maintained in the account between the two terms would be meaningless. As *pati* is represented as belonging to a category of settlements distinct from the *natu* (district), it is clear that it was used in contemporary Tamil epigraphy as a generic term of identification in respect of towns. The *pati* referred to the inscription of the *Aiññuruvar* from Polonnaruwa may therefore be recognized as a market town - a *nagaram*. Such a *nagaram* could have been one of the commercial sections of that city. The market areas of Polonnaruwa are described with some degree of poetic exaggeration in

34. *ibid.*, p. 11.

35. *Catāciva Pantārattār*, A History of the Later Cholas, pt. I, Annamalainagar,

the *Cūlavamsa*. In its account of the constructional work undertaken by Parākramabahu I (1153-86) the chronicles assert:

'Further in this beautiful town the all-wise (King) had different kinds of streets laid down, many hundreds in number, adorned with many thousands of dwellings of two, three or more storeys and provided with bazaars where all wares were to be had and in which day by day there was incessant traffic of elephants, horses and chariots'³⁶

That the *Nānādesis* were established in the environs of Polonnaruwa is also suggested by the evidence from two other inscriptions. As seen earlier, the fragmentary inscription from Anaulundava, near Polonnaruwa, which could be assigned to the twelfth century on palaeographic considerations, testifies to their presence in and around the city of Polonnaruwa. Another epigraphic record which provides an indication of their participation in the commercial life of that city is a fragmentary Tamil inscription of the *Āṇṇurmuvar*, which has been brought to light through excavations at Polonnaruwa conducted under the auspices of the Cultural Triangle.³⁷

The administrative functions of the nagaram

The mercantile towns described as *nagaram* in the Kingdoms of South India seem to have exercised comprehensive administrative rights over the lands and peoples included within their respective territorial limits. Inscriptions recording the details relating to the establishment of such units suggest that the tenurial right, '*nagarakkani*', which legitimized their autonomy was obtained from the King and his government on the condition that a fixed amount in kind and money from the assessed revenues of the *nagaram* was paid to the King's officials.³⁸ Except for this obligation, to which the *nagaram* members were

36. CV, 73: 148-150.

37. UNESCO - Sri Lanka Project of the Cultural Triangle, *Ālahana Parivena, Polonnaruwa, Third Archaeological Excavation Report, 1982*; ed. P.L. Prematilleke, p. 128.

38. *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Cōlas*, p. 38, 122.

collectively responsible, they do not seem to have been subjected to any control or interference from any external agency save under abnormal circumstances.

The membership of the *nagaram* and its standing committees seems to have been confined exclusively to members of trading communities, while others were under the jurisdiction (*kilkkalanai*) of the *nagaram*.³⁹ As administrative institutions the *nagarams* managed the affairs of their market places and exercised administrative rights over the surrounding lands. They regulated and controlled commercial activities and, for the conveniences of traders, provided such services as police protection, street clearance and garbage collection.⁴⁰

They collected two types of taxes, market cesses as well as land taxes, and in some cases their revenue collections were from a large variety of items. The revenue collections of the *nagaram* of Sungantavirtta Colanallur, for instance, were the cesses on flowers sold in the market (*kataippu*), lime trees, dry crops, red water-lilies, areca-nuts, betel leaves, saffron, ginger, sugarcane, the share of the *karanam* (clerk) who measured the paddy, the tax on looms (*tari irai*), the tax on oil mills (*cekkerai*), the tax on trade (*cettirai*), the tax on goldsmiths (*tattar pattam*), tolls (*vari-ayam*), the tax on shops (*ankaṭip-pattam*), the tax on weights (*itai-vari*), the fine on rotten eggs (*alikal carakku*), the salt-tax (*uppayam*), and cesses on elephant-stalls and horse-stables.⁴¹ In certain instances, as in the case of Mummucolapuram, the *nagaram* charged fees for using its market (*nilakkuli*) and for police protection (*patikaval*).⁴²

The administration of the *nagaram* was organized along the lines of that of the rural assemblies called *sabha* and *ur* and the Committee formula was widely adopted, the *nagara variyam* being the most important among several such standing Committees.⁴³

39. *ibid.*, p. 104.

40. *ibid.*, p. 58.

41. *ibid.*, p. 123.

42. *ibid.*, p. 55.

43. *ibid.*, p. 56.

Another important Standing Committee was the annual Supervision Committee. Such Committees were also appointed for the management of temples, other institutions of public utility and lands. The *nagarams* had under their service persons who performed certain designated functions and were remunerated for their work. The most important among them were those who had the designation *Nagarakaraṇattān*, *Nagarakkaṇakku* and *Nagarak-kaṇkaṇi*.⁴⁴ The first of these was applied to the employee who recorded the transactions and activities of the *nagarām* under construction. The *Nagarakkaṇakku* was one who maintained the accounts of the *nagarām* while the *Nagarakkaṇkaṇi* was the designation of the person(s) appointed to supervise the undertakings which were under the purview of some of the Standing Committees of the *nagarām*.

The foregoing description of the *nagarām* administration provides a firm basis for interpreting intelligibly some of the information found in inscriptions recording the activities of the *nagarām* in the island. Yet, it may be pointed out that one cannot expect the administration of the *nagarāms* established by the *Nānadesis* in the island to be a mere replica of that of their Indian counterparts, particularly on account of the consideration that even in India the institutions of the *nagarām* were subject to periodic and regional variations.

Some information pertaining to the administration of the *Nānāteciya Virapattinam* of Vahalkada is recorded in the inscription set up by the *Nānadesis* at that locality. It records the names and designations of nineteen persons who are therein collectively described as the *pattinam*. Only a correct interpretation of the expression *pattinamakaiyum*, 'being the *pattinam*', would enable one to comprehend the text of the inscription. The true significance of this expression has eluded the ingenuity and imagination of those who have earlier commented on the details of this inscription. The fact that it occurs in the text just after the names and titles of many individuals in itself suggests that it is used as a qualifying expression describing collectively all those individuals. The only plausible explanation that could be offered about it is applied in relation to the nineteen individuals, implying that all of them constituted the *virapattinam* of the *Nānadesis*.

44. *ibid.*, p. 113.

In this specific instance *paṭṭinam* does not denote a physically defined area occupied by the *paṭṭinam* or the general assembly of its resident merchants. As it is applied as a term of description in relation to a select group of persons, it is clear the expression *paṭṭinam*, in this specific instance refers to an institution, 'the governing council', administering the *Virapaṭṭinam*. A scrutiny of the designations of its members provides further fresh insights about the administration of the *Virapaṭṭinam* of Vahalkada. The names and designations of those who constituted the *paṭṭinam*, as found in the inscription, are:

1. Ceṭṭi pāli takkiṇa patinen pūmināṭṭuc Ceṭṭi Teciya maṅṭai alakiyamaṅṭavalanarana munrutaram-alaiḱ kalaiḱāta kaṭṭa naṭṭuc ceṭṭiyar, otherwise called Tecikku innatan vatakkuc ceṭṭiyar.
2. Perrān vītivīṭankan, otherwise called Aṭaikkala naṭṭuc ceṭṭi.
3. Vēlān Ampalakkūttan, otherwise called Virakan.
4. Tevan utaiyār, otherwise called Virakan Cēnāpatī-
ceṭṭiyar.
5. Ceṭṭi tēvan, otherwise called mūnru taram
tinkalankāta kanta aṅḱurruvar vīṭan.
6. Corutai appan.
7. Ariṅci kulaiccān, otherwise called Māṅṭai tōṅakkāra
kaṅattar paṭṭavarttanam.
8. Kaṅṭan aṭaimān nūrāyiran, otherwise called Cēnāpati
aṅṭan.
9. Cēnkaṅmālar, otherwise called Teci piṅṅan.
10. Vītirācan, otherwise called Vikkān Ilapiyānai.
11. Talaittalālukaṅra tēci paṭṭavarttanam.
12. Kaṅṭan Jayankaṅṭān, otherwise called maṭikaiyāṅṭan.
13. Cēntan etirālan mallan, otherwise called
Teci matavaraṅam.

14. Cīttan cāttan, otherwise called Valanceyar
Cēnapati Valāñceyantān.
15. Kōṇan māṭavan, otherwise called Valāṅkaiyantān.
16. Paṭṭāḷakan tēvan, otherwise called Mumunatakkaliru.
17. Ūn innātan Tēci Caṅkan.
18. Akkaçālai Vikkiramātittan, otherwise called
Ilañcīnkam.
19. Kaṇapati Cōlan, otherwise called Viṭṭam Muriparan.

It is interesting to find that all these persons are referred to with two or more names. It would appear that one of them was a personal name, while the others were epithets conferred on the respective individuals in recognition of their attainments and achievements. It may be assumed that such epithets, some of which signify positions of rank and honour, were conferred on them by the community of merchants in recognition of one's valour, spirit of adventure and special contributions to the cause of the corporate community's advancement.

The epithets applied to the members of the *paṭṭinam* suggests that they were of three principal categories: merchants, warriors and persons responsible for certain specific administrative functions of the town. Among the nineteen names of the list, seven (1, 2, 5, 9, 11, 13, 17) could easily be recognized as those of merchants, while four others had epithets suggesting that they were leaders of armed retainers. A third category consisted of persons (Nos. 10, 12, 18) who could be identified as those responsible for some specific aspects of *nagaram* administration on the basis of their epithets or titles. There were yet five others among the members of the *paṭṭinam*, who cannot be included into any of these categories on the basis of the descriptions given about them in the inscription. As the *paṭṭinam* was established and dominated by a mercantile community it may be assumed that these four individuals were also merchants.

The details pertaining to three individuals, namely, Ilañcīnkam, Kaṇṭam Jayankōtan and Vikkan Iḷapiyanai are of the utmost importance as they illustrate certain aspects of the administration of the *nagaram* at Vahalkada. They are described respectively

as *Akkacālai Vikkīramātittan*, *Matī-Kaiyāntān* and *Vītirācan*. The expression *Akkacālai Vikkīramātittan* suggests that *Vikkīramātittan*, who was otherwise called *Ilancinkam*, was associated with some work at the *kkacālai*. Commenting on this expression, K. Indrapala observes: 'It may mean either that this person owned a mint or that he worked in a mint. In either case it would be difficult to dispute the fact that minting of coins formed one of the activities of some of the members of the South Indian mercantile communities under discussion'. However, it is difficult to endorse this view as no specimens of coins issued by the mercantile communities have hitherto been recognized or identified anywhere in the island or in those parts of India which came within the sphere of their activities. Therefore, a more plausible explanation of the *akkacālai* is that it was a foundry where metal workers were engaged in craft production. Such an explanation gains support from the consideration that artisans and other commodity producers were often found in association with mercantile communities at many localities in India. They were among the residents of mercantile towns and were considered as being subject to the authority of the *nagaram*. A Chidambaram inscription, for instance, describes *taccar* (carpenters), *kollar* (blacksmiths), *tattar* (goldsmiths) and *koliyar* (leather workers) as residents who were subject (*kilkalanaikal*) to the authority of the *nagaram*.⁴⁵ *Vikkīramātittan* of the *akkacālai* referred to earlier may be considered as a *nagaram* functionary who supervised or organized work pertaining to metal craft production within the limits of the *Virapattinam*.

The expression *maṭīkaiyāntān*, 'the superintendent of the customs post', used in the inscription from *Vahalkada* as an epithet of a person called *Kaṅṭan Jayankaṅṭan* is significant as one that provides some indication of the character of the *Virapattinam*. The word *matikai* and its corresponding Sinhala form *maḍighaya*, encountered in Sri Lankan epigraphy from the twelfth century

45. In the Lankatilaka Tamil Inscription of the reign of *Bhuvanekabahu IV* (1344-1359) the expressions *ulmatikai* and *pura-maṭikai* are recorded in connection with revenues from commercial transactions. The Sinhalese Rock Inscription of the same date from that site contains the corresponding Sinhalese forms *atulu-maḍighaya* and *pita-maḍighaya*, which are translated by S. Paranavitana as inner customs house and outer customs house respectively. *University of Ceylon Review*, vol. XVIII, Nos. 1 & 2, January, 1960, p. 12.

onwards, designated a customs post where tolls were levied on merchandise on transit.⁴⁶ The fact that a person described as *Matikai-antan* was included in the governing council of the *Virapattinam* presupposes that there was a customs post set up within the *Virapattinam* with arrangements for its proper management. It also implies that the *Virapattinam* exercised administrative jurisdiction over the area encompassed by it and collected tolls at the customs post. It may also be recalled here that in the reign of Queen Lilavati the *Nanadesis* had established a customs-post at Anuradhapura, as noticed earlier.

Another designation, *Vitirācan*, applied to a certain *Vikkan Ilapiyanai*, also suggests the assignment of certain specific functions of *nagaram* administration to certain individuals. The expression *Vitirācan* translates 'King of the streets' in a rigidly literal sense. But, when it is considered that grand eloquent terms were often used in contemporary literary and epigraphical texts to describe individuals of even lesser ranks, an appropriate explanation of the expression concerned is that it designated the rank of an individual who supervised and organized work pertaining to the streets of the town. On the basis of ascertained facts relating to *nagaram* activities such work could only have been connected with arrangements for security (*paṭikaval*) or street clearance and garbage collection. It may be assumed that *Vikkan Ilapiyanai* was one who was vested with responsibility by the *Virapattinam* for organizing and conducting such work.

That the *Virapattinam* at Vahalkada had once exercised the right of collecting taxes from its market-places is suggested by the expressions, *periya kataiyam koḷḷarakavum*, 'they shall not levy taxes on shops in the bazaar', found in a fragmentary inscription recording some details relating to the *Virapattinam* of Vahalkada. This arrangement regarding the remission of such taxes made by the governing council of the town was a measure of relief in consideration of the fact that the *pattinam* had suffered in consequence of paying a heavy ransom to an individual, as seen earlier.

46. An inscription dated in the reign of Rajendra Chola refers to merchant groups called *Caṅkarapatīyar* and *Vaṇīyar* in connection with an endowment made to a Saivite Shrine at Mantai. As *Caṅkarapatīyar*, *Caliyar*, *Vaṇīyar* and *Viyapankal* traditionally described as *nagaram* merchants, it may be assumed that the merchant groups referred to in this particular inscription were in some way associated with a *nagaram*.

A close scrutiny of the inscription at Vehalkada reveals that the *nagaram* of the *Nanadesis* at that locality, unlike most of its counterparts in India, adopted the practice of assigning specific functions of *nagaram* administration to single individuals and not to committees. But there is some reason to imagine that the committee formula was adopted by the *Nanadesis* of *Ayyampolil pattinam* at Padaviya. There is a general reference to members of the committee who were skilled in accomplishing their tasks (*ciriya tolil variyan*) in the preamble of one of the inscriptions they had set up in the premises of Siva Devale No.1 at Padaviya.

The commercial and cultural activities of the nagaram

That the *Nanadesis* and their associates played a most important role in the commercial life of the island during this period is suggested by both the distribution of their *nagarams* and other establishments over a wide area in the island and the consideration that all contemporary epigraphic notices on mercantile communities and activities pertain to them exclusively. In the principality of *Rajarata* corresponding to the northern portions of the island the *Nanadesis* or their associates had established their *nagarams* at Padaviya, Vahalkada and Viharehinna. Besides, they had their outposts, which were established also in the three principal cities of that principality: Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Mantai. The localities of Detiyamulla, Budumuttava and Galtenpitiya, where they have left behind their inscriptions, were included in the principality of *Dakkhinadesa*. The first of these sites was in the neighbourhood of Panduvasnuvara, which was the principal centre of dynastic power in that principality, besides being a focal point of considerable constructional and cultural activity. The modern village of Budumuttava covers an area that was included in the medieval town of Magala (otherwise called Vikkiramā Calamekapuram in a Tamil inscription).

The composite character of the mercantile elements in the *nagarams* is suggested by the descriptions found in inscriptions recording their activities. It may be assumed that such groups as the *Vinavalañciyar*, *Cettis*, *Cettiputras*, *Kavores*, *Kamundasvamis*, *Vañiyar* and *Cañkarapati* referred to in local inscriptions were associated with the *Nanadesis*, otherwise called *Ticci-ayirat-tañnaruvār* in their trading operations. The close association of so many groups of traders at *nagaram* towns presupposes close interaction between the *Nanadesis*, who were long distance traders, and other trading groups, whose activities were restricted to

local and regional commercial operations. The tone and contents of the inscriptions at Vahalkada, Padaviya and Viharehinna suggest that the *nagaram* towns in the island were established on the initiative of the *Nanādesis*. Such towns, like their Indian counterparts, were essentially market towns dominated by mercantile groups and were the points of inter-section between two realms of commercial activity, regional or internal trade, and maritime commerce. Such an impression is supported by the description of the commercial activities of the *Nanādesis* as found in their inscriptions.

The preambles of some of the inscriptions of the *Nanādesis* found in South India and Sri Lanka describe the areas of their commercial operations as

- (1) the eighteen *paṭṭinam* (market towns)
- (2) the thirty-two *vaḷarapuram* (prosperous coastal towns)
- (3) and the sixty-four *kaṭikait-tāvaḷam*.⁴⁷

The distinction maintained among these three categories of market centres is of significance as providing an indication of a recognition of three different levels of market-oriented commodity exchanges in the regions where the *Nanādesis* were engaged in commercial activity. Besides, the account presupposes a close link among all these three categories in the form of a closely knit commercial network through the agency of the *Nanādesis*. The *paṭṭinam* were the inland emporia, usually described as the *nagaram*, while the *vaḷarapuram* were port towns which provided the setting for international commerce.

The *nagaram* linked the villages of the surrounding hinterland into a community of exchange and provided the setting for the market-oriented exchange of goods and services. Such centres where merchants, artisans and craftsmen occupied permanent sectors of the community, had streets of permanent shops, where exchanges were continuously transacted.⁴⁸ Grain and other surplus products from the village were taken by traders to the *nagarams* market where they were sold either in bulk or retail. Merchants based in the

47. *Trade and Statecraft under the Cōlas*, p. 142.

48. *ibid.*, p. 105.

nagaram could also collect commodities from nearby villages through their agents, who would distribute by sale luxury items and other products of distant origin in the settlements surrounding the *nagarams*. Besides, the *nagarams* were visited by itinerants and their caravans laden with commodities of distant origin and the wholesaling of their goods was negotiated in the open markets. As a marketing institution the *nagaram* provided facilities for traders and charged from them levies in the form of taxes and tolls for the services they provided. As noticed earlier, the *Virapattinam* of Vahalkada had arrangements for the proper maintenance of its streets. It also exercised the power of levying taxes on shops and bazaars (*periyakataiyam*).⁴⁹

An institution which served as an instrument for regulating and controlling commercial activity in the *nagaram* was the *matikai*. The *Virapattinam* of Vahalkada had as one of its members a person called Kaṅṭan Jayankaṅṭan, who had the designation *Matikai-antaṅan*, 'the superintendent of the customs-post'. Such a designation implies that the *Virapattinam* of that locality had within its premises and under its control a customs-post, where tolls were levied on merchandise on transit. As a self-governing and marketing institution the *Virapattinam* seems to have exercised a supervisory control over all commercial transactions in its markets. The Nānādesis at Anuradhapura are said to have supplied spices and other requisites for an alms-hall, set up there on the initiative of Queen Lilavati, from the proceeds of a *madighaya*, in accordance with an arrangement made by the Queen.⁵⁰ The control of *madighaya* by the Nānādesis presupposes that they administered a marketing institution in a commercial sector of Anuradhapura.

The *tavalams*, another category of market centres, often referred to in inscriptions recording the activities of the Nānādesis or their associates, were, as suggested by the expression *katikai* (period) prefixed to them, periodic markets held on designated days of the week. They are specifically referred to in inscriptions as sites where the traders called *Cetti* and *Cetti-*

49. *CTI*, pt. II, p. 7.

50. Paranavitana has pointed out that D.M. de Z. Wickremasinghe, who edited this inscription, has incorrectly read the expression *madighaya* as *masisaya*. See *UCR*, vol. XVIII, Nos. 1&2, p. 12.

puttirar conducted commercial transactions in accordance with the norms (*dharma*) of the *samayam*, the corporate organization of long-distance traders. It is generally assumed, with some justification, that bands of traders halted with their caravans at such centres for conducting commercial transactions with local traders and commodity producers.⁵¹ It would appear that the *nagaram* and *tavaḷam* were closely connected to each other in a commercial network encompassing internal and foreign trade.

There were instances where the *tavaḷam* was integrated with marketing cycles of the *nagaram*. One of the inscriptions of the *Nanādesis* from Padaviya suggests that a *tavaḷam* called *Vikkirama-katikait-tavaḷam* was attached to the *nagaram* of *Ayyampolil paṭṭi-nam*.⁵² The fact that the collections from this *tavaḷam* were deposited with the *nagaram* presupposes that the *tavaḷam* was under the control of the *nagaram*. Such periodic markets were probably organized by the *Nanādesis* and other mercantile groups associated with them at several localities in the Island. The evidence from the Tamil inscription of the *Aññurruvar* from Ataragalla is of some relevance in this connection. That epigraph, dated in the regnal year of a Chola King named Rajendra, refers to an institution called *Aññurruvan-ambalam*.⁵³ This *ambalam*, (generally defined as a resting place) named after the *Aññurruvar* was presumably set

51. *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, New Series, vol. I, July-December, 1971, No. 2, p. 108.
52. *CTI*, pt. ii, p. 20. In the published version of the text *Vikkirama-katikaittavaḷam* has been incorrectly read as *Vikkirama-katikaitaruḷam*.
53. Much of this inscription is badly damaged and most of the letters are not clear, except those in the first and last two lines of the text. The author had an opportunity of examining the inscribed slab at its present location. The letters representing the expression *Aññurruvan ambalam*, which occur in two places in the text, are however very clear. The inscribed slab was originally found amidst the architectural remains of a structure which may be identified as the monument referred to in the inscription. The principal remains were found to be rectangular granite pillars. These remains were removed from their position in recent times by the employees of the Irrigation Department in the course of constructing an irrigation channel. The author was assisted by Piyatissa Senanayake in his attempt to scrutinize the inscription and examine the archaeological remains (contd.)

up by them and designed for their own purposes. It would appear that it was used as a place of rest, where they halted caravans laden with packs of commodities in the course of their journeys across the country. The fact that it was located in the vicinity of the Ataragalla tank and about a quarter of a mile from a medieval Buddhist monastery, the remains of which are still to be found, is of significance as providing some indication of its historical setting. The site of this *ambalam* appears to have been a central place, a marketing region where the *Aññurruvar* had participated in commercial enterprises.

The *nagarams*, which served as agencies for the penetration of the *Nanadesis* and their associates into the interior parts of the island, appear to have maintained close connections with long-distance traders and merchantmen operating at the sea-ports. The fact that all the *nagarams* in the island were set up by the *Nanadesis* themselves in itself presupposes such close connections. Of particular relevance in this connection is the description of a certain Ariñci Kulaiçcan as *Mantai, tonakkara paṭṭavarttanam* which expression translates: "The chief of the guild of the boatmen of Mantai". Such a description of a member of the *Virapattinam* is significant as providing an indication of the character of the *Virapattinam* of Vahalkada. It illustrates that this particular market town had wide-ranging connections and served as a point of intersection between two different levels of commercial activity - long-distance trade and regional or internal trade. Ariñci Kulaiçcan was evidently a cargo-shipper who organized the transport of merchandise that passed through the port of Mantai.⁵⁴ It would appear that the *Virapattinam*, at Vahalkada had a stake in commercial and transport operations at the sea-port of Mantai and had its interests secured there through 'the chief of the guild of boatmen', who was afforded sufficient recognition of being incorporated into the *Virapattinam*, and his agents. Such an arrangement also presupposes that the prosperity of the *nagaram* and its communities depended considerably on the stimulus provided by maritime commerce. Another important factor of consequence to the fortunes of the *nagaram* was the relative stability of dynastic power in the whole region in which the mercantile communities involved with the *nagarams* had their commercial outposts and establishments.

found scattered at the site. See *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. IV, no. 1415, for a text of the inscription. The version, however, is defective.

54. Ariñci is referred to as the name of a locality in an inscription of a Chola-Pandya prince.

The meagre evidence that could be gathered from relevant sources suggests that harmonious relations were fostered between mercantile associations and kings. The rulers, who clearly recognized the advantage to be secured through the promotion of commerce, displayed a marked tendency towards extending facilities and privileges for traders whose enterprises had the potential of providing considerable revenue to the government in the form of customs duties on luxury items and taxes on commodity exchanges in markets. The mercantile communities had a proneness to support those who exercised authority with a view to securing facilities and privileges in relation to their establishment and operations. The role of mercantile communities in the political and military enterprises of monarchs and their agents is far from being clear, but there is unmistakable evidence of their mutual interaction and collaboration with regard to the establishment and maintenance of religious and cultural institutions.

The *Nānādesis* and their associates, who secured a foothold in Sri Lanka after the Chola conquest, had interacted closely with Chola military subordinates and other agents in the island. The *Cūlavamsa* even assigns to merchants a role in the Chola conquest of the island. Commenting on the political conditions that prevailed there on the eve of the Chola conquest, this chronicle asserts:

'As he wandered from the path of statecraft and was of very weak character, the peasants did not deliver him his share of the produce. As the prince in his tenth year had entirely lost his fortune, he was unable to satisfy his troops by giving them their pay. All the Keralas who got no pay planted themselves one with another at the royal palace, determined on force, bow in hand, armed with swords and (other) weapons..... But the King duped them. Taking with him all his movables, he escaped..... to Rohana..... But in the remaining parts of the country Keralas, Sinhalas and Kannātas carried on the government as they pleased. But a horse-dealer, who had come hither from the opposite coast, told the Cola King on his return about the conditions in Lanka. On hearing this, the powerful (prince) with purpose of taking possession of Lanka, sent off a strong body of troops.' 55

55. This account relates to the reign of Mahinda V (982-1017), who lost his throne at Anuradhapura in consequence of a revolt led against him by his troops.

The foregoing account suggests a close and even intimate relationship between the Chola King and the particular horse-trader who had visited the island. It may also be assumed that traders who visited distant lands were used by Chola Kings to obtain first-hand information about the conditions prevailing in neighbouring kingdoms and that decisions regarding military activities against such kingdoms were sometimes taken on the basis of information obtained through merchants. But it is very doubtful that this account in itself could be cited as conclusive evidence in support of the claim that Chola military expeditions were motivated by considerations of commercial expansion. The Chola conquest, however, seems to have provided the setting for the penetration of the South Indian mercantile communities into the interior parts of the island on a scale that was unprecedented. As seen earlier, the *Nanadesis* had secured a foothold at Padaviya and Polonnaruwa during the period of Chola occupation. In the town of Padaviya, where their settlement gradually evolved into a *nagaram*, the *Nanadesis* were closely interacting with Chola warriors and their other agents in matters relating to the construction and maintenance of the Saivite temple of Iravikula-manikkaisvaram, named after one of the epithets of the Chola King, Rajaraja I.⁵⁶ Some of the foundation stones of that monument are said to have been laid by merchants. In an inscription of Rajaraja, found among the architectural remains of that monument, a person named Konnavil Venkatan, who belonged to the Nanadesi fraternity of merchants, is mentioned as one among those who donated bronze lamps, bells and other such objects to the temple. Among those who were associated with him in the donation were warriors and Chola officials.⁵⁷

The *Nanadesis* seem to have gained control over the management of this temple and its endowments in course of time. Their *nagaram* - the *Ayyampolil pattinam* - had concerned itself with the administration of the temple and its endowments in the period that followed the fall of Chola power in the island. In one of their inscriptions the *nagaram* is said to have been dedicated to the service of the temple of Siva. The same epigraph mentions also of a temple of Kali, which was presumably constructed and maintained by the *nagaram* of the *Nanadesis*. In one of their inscriptions from Padaviya the *Nanadesis* claim to have made images of

56. K. Indrapala, 'An Inscription of the time of Rājarāja Cōla I from Padaviya', *Epigraphia Tamilica*, Jaffna Archaeological Society, June 1971, p. 32-36.

57. *ibid.*

deities and gifted them to a temple, and this claim is partially confirmed by the recent discovery of a bronze image of a Hindu deity with the label 'Nanadesi' inscribed on its pedestal.

The *Vāṇiyar* and *Caṅkarapāṭiyar*, two communities generally identified with the *nagaram* in Tamil literature and epigraphy, were settled at the city of Matottam, otherwise called Rajarajapuram under the Cholas. They were found to be interacting closely with an agent of Rajendra Chola, called Cirukulattur Uṭaiyan, in connection with an endowment made to the Sāivite temple of Tiruviramiśvaram, a Chola foundation at Rajarajapuram. His donation consisting of four *kaku*, given for the purpose of burning perpetual lamps at the shrine, were distributed among corporate mercantile communities, who assumed responsibility for administering the endowment. The *Caṅkarapāṭi* merchants received a deposit of one *kacu*, while each of the communities called *Vāḷaikkay vāṇiyar* and *Verrilai vāṇiyar* received one *kacu*.⁵⁸ Such interaction between Chola warriors and mercantile communities at Māntai and Padaviya suggests a very close connection and a certain degree of inter-dependence between the local Chola administration and merchants in matters of common concern.

The texts of two twelfth century inscriptions illustrate that a similar kind of relationship had existed between the Sinhalese monarchy and the *Nanadesis* and other itinerant mercantile communities. The Nainativu Tamil inscription of Parakramabahu I is of special relevance as it records that King's proclamation regarding facilities provided for merchants. The relevant portion of the text runs:

'..... the *paradesis* should come and stay at (the port of) Ūratturai. They should be protected. The *paradesis* from many (foreign) ports should come and assemble at our port(s). As we have a special concern for elephants and horses and if the boats which bring elephants and horses for us get wrecked, a fourth share (of the cargo) should be taken for the government and the other three parts should be left for the owner. If boats (laden) with merchandise get wrecked an exact half should be taken for the

government and the other exact half should be left to the owner'.⁵⁹

The King's instruction that the *paradesis* from foreign ports should be encouraged to call and assemble at his port and that they should be protected is of particular significance as providing an illustration of a conscious effort on his part to promote commerce. The arrangements stipulated in the edict addressed to port authorities were designed to attract itinerant merchants to the King's ports and win their confidence by providing facilities required for orderly commercial transactions.⁶⁰ Another important consideration arising from a scrutiny of the inscription is the King's special concern for the trade in elephants and horses. As these animals are specifically said to have been brought for the King, it may be assumed that he had close and even direct dealings with itinerants who were specialist in the trade of elephants and horses. In the text of the inscription a distinction is maintained between the merchandise brought for the King, and general merchandise. The fact that merchants who brought elephants and horses for the King were allowed to retain three quarters of their cargo in cases of ship-wreck, while others who brought other merchandise were allowed to retain only a half of the cargo in such a situation, reveals that special concessions were allowed to traders who had dealings with the royal court. The development of Ūratturai (Kayts) as a centre of elephant trade and a port visited by itinerants provide an indication of the measure of its increasing importance in the twelfth century.

59. The translation given slightly modifies the version given by K. Indrapala. The word *snekam*, used in the inscription to characterize the King's attitude towards elephants and horses, has the connotation 'friendship'. It implies that the King had a special preference for those animals. Because of this I have substituted the words 'special concern' for 'liking' found in his translation. Besides, the word *paṅṭaram* has been rendered here as 'government' in preference to the word 'treasury' used by Indrapala. In the South Indian inscriptions word *paṅṭaram* is usually found when references are made to the King or the government. For a text and translation of the inscription see Indrapala, K. 'The Nainativu Tamil Inscription of Parakramabāhu I', *UCR*, vol. XXI, No. 1, April 1963, p. 63-70.

60. Indrapala's assertion that the edict of Parākramabāhu I (contd.)

The expression *paradesi*, applied to mercantile communities in this inscription, could be explained in two different ways. It is often used as a term of description in relation to aliens and people of foreign origin. It was also applied in epigraphy, during the period under consideration, to designate a community of traders affiliated to the *Nanādesis*.⁶¹ Some inscriptions recording the activities of the *Nanādesis* refer to the *paradesis* as one of the many mercantile communities affiliated to them, while others refer to three categories of merchants called *svadesi*, *paradesi* and *nanādesi*. The *paradesis* referred in Kannada inscriptions were probably a South Indian mercantile community which specialized in foreign trade and were affiliated to the *Nanādesis*. The Nainativu inscription of Parākramabahu, presumably applies the expression *paradesi* to designate the members who belonged to such a community. Such an impression seems to be supported by the consideration that the *Nanādesis* claimed in some of their inscriptional preambles to have traded in elephants and horses and the fact that some of their South Indian *nagarams* had in their markets elephant-stalls and horse-stables.⁶²

The Anuradhapura slab-inscription of Queen Līlavati (1197-1200, 1209-1210, 1211-1212), one of the consorts and successors of Parākramabahu, also provides evidence about the close relationship that existed between the merchants and the royal court. It records:

'..... For the purpose of giving alms to the full satisfaction of the poor that throng into Anuradhapura from various quarters, she caused

at Nainativu "was addressed to the foreign traders who frequented the port of Urazturai" is wrong and is doubtless based on a misunderstanding of the tone of the contents of the inscription. It was obviously addressed to the port authorities, who were expected to regulate commercial activities, to levy duties and to administer the port.

61. *Paradesis* are mentioned along with a large number of other communities as being associated with the *Nanādesis* in a few Kannada inscriptions. See *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. VII, p. 158-159; *Annual Report on Epigraphy (Madras) 1918*, p. 174.

62. *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Cōlas*, p. 123.

an alms house with the title of Pala-balavi medhavi to be established, protected and maintained. And for supplying spices and the like / required / for it, she caused the *madighaya* called *pala balavi medhavi* to be built in the neighbourhood of the alms house by the Nanadesi merchants.'⁶³

The above passage implies that the *Nanadesis* were involved through the instrumentality of the court in the maintenance of an alms-house established at the behest of the Queen. They were responsible for supplying spices and other requisites for their charitable institution from the proceeds of the *madighaya*, which they established, and for this purpose the monarch made a perpetual endowment of four *yalas* of fields, thirty serfs and hundred and fifty oxen and buffaloes. The text of the inscription has much wider implications than have been recognized by the editor of the inscription. The administration of the 'customs house' and the endowment are two points that require clarification and rather detailed consideration. The fact that the *madighaya* was constructed by the *Nanadesis* and that spices and other requisites for the charitable institution were to be supplied from the proceeds of the *madighaya* by the *Nanadesis* suggests that the *madighaya* was an institution that was left under their management. The management of a customs-house by a mercantile community presupposes that it had some jurisdictional control over an area in which the *madighaya* was located. It would appear that the *Nanadesis* were in control of a marketing institution, a *nagaram*, in a commercial sector of Anuradhapura. Līlavati's endowment, therefore, had the effect of recognizing and legitimizing the status which the *Nanadesis* had attained in that sector. The consideration that the endowment made by the monarch was intended to be a perpetual one also seems to reinforce the conclusion that the settlements of the *Nanadesis* at Anuradhapura was considered to be of a permanent nature. It is not clearly stated in the inscription who the recipients of the endowment were. But the tone and contents of the inscription, and particularly the consideration that the endowment was made for the purpose of providing supplies to the alms-hall instituted by her, and the fact that the *Nanadesis* provided these supplies, suggest that they were the recipients of the grant and that they assumed responsibility for the administration of Līlavati's endowment.

The *Nānādesis*, who are generally described in their inscriptions as adherents of a Hindu religious sect and promoters of the values and ideals associated with Hinduism, appear to have interacted closely with Buddhism and its institutions in some of the localities in the island where they had their settlements. A brief inscription from Polonnaruwa, which could be assigned to the period of Chola occupation on palaeographical considerations, refers to a Buddhist foundation in a settlement of the *Aññurruvar* (*Aññurruvar pati paḷḷi*). The *Valañciyar* and the *nagaram* had participated in some capacity in the arrangements made for the protection and maintenance of the Temple of the Tooth Relic at Polonnaruwa. They presumably negotiated the terms of the arrangement with the army of the *Velaikkarar*, whose services were sought by Thera Mugalan and some of the ministers of state during a period of crisis in the city. A Buddhist institution with which the *Nānādesis* were very closely associated was the *Aññurruvan paḷḷi* of the town of Magala, which is referred to in their slab-inscription from Budumuttava. The expression, which means 'the monastery of the *Aññurruvar*', is applied in the inscription as the name of an institution. The fact that a monastery was named after the mercantile community called *Aññurruvar* suggests that it was either founded by the *Aññurruvar* or that they had undertaken the responsibility of protecting and maintaining it as the *Velaikkarar* had done in the case of the Temple of the Tooth Relic at Polonnaruwa. Such an undertaking on their part presupposes that they were established at Magala. The architectural remains of this institution are covered by a mound almost by the side of an irrigational channel of the Magalla tank. It may also be mentioned here that the *Aññurruvan paḷḷi* was situated in very close proximity to the Hindu Shrine called *Vikkirama calameka isvaram*.

The *nagaram* and its military establishments

The inscriptions of the *Nānādesis* found in the island are of unusual interest on account of the information they provide on the military establishments of the *nagaram* to an extent not encountered in the epigraphs they had set up elsewhere. Two of the many communities referred to in inscriptions as their associates could clearly be recognized as military communities. They are *aiṅkakarar* and *Koṅkavaḷar*.⁶⁴ The *Koṅkavaḷar* are referred to only once, whereas the *Aiṅkakarar* are mentioned in the inscriptional preambles of the records pertaining to the three *nagarams* of

64. *CTI*, pt. II, p. 112.

Padaviya, Vahalkada and Viharehinna.⁶⁵ Other groups, the *Vīrokoti*, referred to in at least four inscriptions, may also be recognized as one associated with military functions.

The word *Kōnkavālar*, which is applied in the inscription from Vahalkada as the name of a community, literally means 'the swordsmen of Kongu'.⁶⁶ It is probably that this particular group of warriors derived their name from the fact that they were originally recruited from the predatory tribes inhabiting the land called *Kōṅku-tēcam*. That the *Aṅkakkārar* held a much more important position in the activities of *nagarāms* in the island is suggested by the contents of the inscriptions from all the three localities of Padaviya, Vahalkada and Viharehinna. They are referred to as the associates of the mercantile communities in all the inscriptions from these sites. Besides, they are found to be associated with some prominent merchants, and the *Nakaravar* in some deliberations pertaining to the town at Padaviya. The word *Aṅkakkāran*, which is found in the Kannada and Tamil inscriptions of the *Nānādesis* and other mercantile communities, is generally defined as one applied to soldiers and particularly those employed as body-guards of Kings, princes and others of social consequence. The word *aṅga* in most Indian languages denotes body or limb, and the expression *aṅkakkāran*, which is derived from it, would normally have the connotation of a body-guard, guardian or companion in arms. Such an explanation is supported by the evidence from one of the inscriptions from Tiruvannamalai recording the views undertaken by a number of individuals that they would sacrifice their lives in defence of their chieftain, who was styled *Malayaman Sarrukūtatan* and *Vanniyarnayan*. The epigraph concerned refers to a person called *Aṅcatan* as an *Aṅkakkāran*, implying thereby that *Aṅkakkārar* were in actual fact armed retainers of chieftains and others. A more interesting consideration and one which provides fresh insights about the military group of *Aṅkakkārar* is the description of *Aṅcatan Aṅkakkāran* as a *Velaikkāran*.⁶⁷ Such

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65. I cannot find any reference to *erivīrar* or *munaivīrar* in any of the inscriptions in the island.
66. The Vahalkada inscription of the *Nānādesis* makes a reference to the *Kōnkavālar*.
67. The text of the inscription recording the vow runs: *Svasti Sri. Iraiyyuran periya utaiyan Irajaraḥa Cetiyarayan Velaikkāran Aṅcatanana Aiyān Aṅkakkāranen...* which translates: 'I, Aiyān Aṅkakkāran otherwise called Aṅcatan, a *Velaikkāra* of Rajaraja Cetiyarayan, the Periya Utaiyan of Iraiyyur...! *Annual Report on Epigraphy*, Madras, 1934/35, p. 61.

a description implies that the *Vēlaiikkārar* or some of them were *Aṅkakkārar*. Therefore the *Aṅkakkārar* mentioned in the inscriptions of the *Nānādesis* in the island could be recognized and identified as *Vēlaiikkārar*.

The *Virakkoti*, referred to in at least four inscriptions recording the activities of mercantile communities, may be recognized as a military community closely associated with the functions of the *nagaram*. The expression *Virakkoti* meaning 'the flag of heroism' occurs in the inscriptional preamble of the Chola King, Virarājendra, in connection with a description of the celebration of military victory. The King is therein credited with having prominently displayed 'the banner of heroism' and 'the banner of dedication'. The expression undoubtedly had a military connotation, as could be seen from the context in which it is used in the Chola inscription, and when it is applied as the name of a community, that community may justifiably be recognized as a military community. In the inscription from Vahalkada they are said to have been involved in matters relating to the resurrection of the *Virapattinam*. The boundary posts of the town also seem to have been laid by them.⁶⁸ There is some indication in inscriptions that the *Virakkoti* assumed responsibility for engraving on stone texts recording the transactions of the mercantile communities and the *nagaram*. It would appear that they were assigned certain important functions of *nagaram* and its administration.

It may be assumed that the military communities associated with the mercantile communities occupied permanent sectors of their *nagaram* and were employed to provide a measure of security vital for inspiring public confidence in the *nagaram's* ability to protect merchants, their caravans and public institutions from the depredations of brigands. Besides, bands of armed retainers

68. The relevant portion of the text reads: *Kallum palakaiyum nattiṅṅom patinenṅṅumi Virakkotiṅṅom*; "We, the *Virakkoti* of the *patinenṅṅumi* ('the eighteen lands') have set up stones and planks". Presumably these were set up as boundary markers of the *Virapattinam*. The expression '*patinenṅṅumi*', which is often found in the inscriptions of the mercantile communities, may have been used in this particular instance as a term of reference in relation to the *Aṅṅurruwar* who are sometimes described as *patinenṅṅumitteci ticai-ayiravar aṅṅurruwar*, "The *Aṅṅurruwar* of the thousand directions, the (Nana)desis of the eighteen lands." It is clear from the tone of the expression that the *Virakkoti* were performing an important task for the *Virapattinam*.

accompanied merchants and their caravans laden with packs of commodities on their journeys across the country. The increasing influence of military communities in the affairs of the *nagaram* seems to be reflected by their involvement in the decision-making processes and institutions of the *nagaram*. Warriors, who seem to have constituted an important element in the population of the *nagaram*, appeared to have secured for themselves certain honours and privileges normally not conceded to other non-mercantile sectors of the population. Unlike the artisans, craftsmen and other commodity-producers affiliated to mercantile communities, who were assigned a subordinate status in the *nagarams*, the warriors seem to have enjoyed a status that was on par with that of the merchants and played a key role in the organization of activities. Their roles and status entitle them to be described as the allies of the mercantile communities, placed on an equal footing in matters of social status and ceremonial functions. Such an impression is supported by the consideration that they were the only non-mercantile group in the *nagaram* to be incorporated into its organization and assigned responsibilities relating to the undertakings of the *nagaram* in addition to their primary function of protection. It may be recalled that the *Virapattinam* of Vahalkada had four warrior chiefs in its membership. The *nagarams* in the island seem to have displayed a tendency towards increasing militarization owing to certain social pressures operating in the peculiar Sri Lanka context. Such an impression gains support from an examination of the symbols and other representations of figures carved on some of the inscribed slabs of the *Nanadesis*. The representations of weapons such as swords of two different kinds, knives, bow, arrow, trident and *kolan* are depicted at the bottom of the inscribed slab of the *Nanadesis* at Budumuttava.⁶⁹ The depiction of the figures of weapons along with some of the symbols associated with mercantile communities on the inscribed slabs of the *Nanadesis* at Budumuttava, Detiyamulla and Viharehinna has to be conceded some significance. The representations of figures found on inscribed slabs are symbolic and generally indicate the social function traditionally assigned to the people concerned with the transactions recorded in the text of the inscriptions, the principal exceptions being the instances where they are representative

69. The representations of a knife, spear and dagger are found engraved on the slab at Detiyamulla. The figures of a sword and some other weapons are also traceable below the inscribed portion of the slab at Viharehinna.

of the *Vēlaikkāras* as the name of their army. Another expression which has military connotations is *Vīramākalam*, referred to in the slab-inscription of the *Nānadesis* from Budumuttāva. As lexicographers define the term *Vīramākalar* as warriors belonging to an army unit named after *Vīramākālī* the expression *Vīramākalam*, found in the Budumuttāva epigraph, may be recognized as the name of an army unit. Such a conclusion is re-informed by the consideration that there was at the *nagaram* of *Ayyampolil pattinam* of Padaviya a unit called *Kālikanap-perumpatai*, which was named after the goddess *Kālī*, who is represented as the goddess of war in Hindu mythology.

It now remains to consider the relationship between the mercantile communities and the *Vēlaikkārar* at Polonnaruwa. The *Vēlaikkārar* assumed custodianship over the Tooth Relic Temple in that city on the request of Mahāthera Mugalan and the ministers of state. This was done in accordance with a resolution adopted at the assembly of the *Mahatantram*, 'the great army' of the *Vēlaikkārar*.⁷³ Among those who were invited for this assembly were the mercantile community called *Valanciyyar* and the *Nakarattar*. The presence of the *Valanciyyar* and the *Nagarattar* is easily explained if the *Mahatantram* of the *Vēlaikkārar* is considered as an army in the service of the *nagaram*. The plausibility of this explanation is supported by the fact that armies called *perumpatai* were in the services of the *nagarans* of Padaviya and Viharehinna and the consideration that warrior chief, who was a member of the *Vīrapattinam* of *Vahalkāda*, is described as 'the Senapati of the *Valanciyyar*' (*Valanciyyar Cēnāpati Valankaiyantān*). It may also be recalled here that the military community of *ankakkārar*, referred in the inscriptions from Padaviya, Viharehinna and Vahalkāda, could with justification be identified as *Vēlaikkārar*.*

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73. For a detailed discussion of the contents of the slab inscription of the *Vēlaikkāras* from Polonnaruwa, reference may be made to S. Pathmanathan 'The *Vēlaikkārar* in Medieval South India and Sri Lanka', *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, vol. II, No. 2, p. 120-137.

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