

2. Tamil Brahmi Inscription in Egypt- Art & Culture

Tamil Brahmi inscriptions found in Egypt's Valley of the Kings shed light on ancient trade links. Researchers have identified nearly 30 Tamil Brahmi, Prakrit, and Sanskrit inscriptions in Egypt's Valley of the Kings, dating to the 1st–3rd century CE. This discovery provides rare epigraphic evidence of ancient Indian visitors extending their presence from Red Sea ports to the Nile Valley, reinforcing the depth of Indo-Roman maritime trade and cultural exchange.

Historic Discovery in Egypt

Researchers have identified nearly 30 Tamil Brahmi, Prakrit, and Sanskrit inscriptions inside the ancient tombs of Egypt's Valley of the Kings. This significant finding highlights the deep historical and maritime connections between ancient India and the Roman Empire.

About the Findings

Location- The inscriptions were discovered in six tombs within the Theban Necropolis, located in the Nile Valley region of Egypt.

Key Discovery- Around 30 newly documented inscriptions have been identified inside these tomb complexes.

Script and Language

1. Scripts- Predominantly Tamil Brahmi, along with Prakrit and Sanskrit.
2. Significance- This linguistic diversity points to the varied origins of Indian visitors to Egypt during antiquity.

Chronology- The inscriptions date back to the 1st to 3rd Century CE, coinciding with the peak phase of Indo-Roman maritime trade.

Nature of Inscriptions- Most are personal names and short graffiti. They are carved on tomb walls, corridors, and entrances.

Cultural Practice- Indian visitors likely followed the local Greek tradition of leaving their names inside tombs as commemorative marks or signs of visitation.

About Tamil Brahmi Script

Definition- An early adaptation of the Brahmi script used specifically to write Old Tamil.

Timeline- It was in use roughly between the 3rd century BCE and 3rd century CE.

Key Archaeological Sites in India

1. Earliest Site- Mangulam (Tamil Nadu).
2. Other Major Sites- Pugalur, Jambai, Kodumanal, and Arikamedu.

Names Identified in the Inscriptions

Name / Phrase	Details & Significance
Cikai Koṛṛaṇ	• Repeated eight times across five tombs, suggesting a prominent individual. • Etymology- Cikai links to Sanskrit śikhā (tuft/crown); Koṛṛaṇ derives from Tamil koṛṛam (victory), associated with goddess Koṛṛavai. • Correlations- The name Koṛṛaṇ appears on a sherd at Berenike (Red Sea port) and in Sangam literature (e.g., Chera king Piṭṭāṅkoṛṛaṇ in Purananooru). • Similar names exist in Pugalur inscriptions (Chera capital).
Kopāṇ	• Recorded as “Kopāṇ varata kantan” (Kopāṇ came and saw), indicating a visitor's graffiti. • Correlation- The name Kopāṇ has been found in inscriptions at Ammankovilpatti (Tamil Nadu), showing continuity.
Other Names	• Names such as Cātaṇ and Kiraṇ were also documented.

Trade and Mobility Linkages

Indo-Roman Trade Network- The inscriptions reinforce existing evidence of a robust maritime trade network between ancient Tamilagam and the Roman Empire via the Red Sea and Nile routes.

Merchant Mobility- The visitors were likely traders, sailors, or intermediaries traveling along established commercial circuits who took detours to visit these ancient monuments.

Sangam Correlations- The similarity of names found in Egypt with those in Sangam literature and Chera inscriptions strengthens the literary-archaeological link.

Key Ports Involved-

1. Tamil Ports- Muziris (Muchiri), Korkai, Arikamedu, Kaveripattinam (Puhar).
2. Egyptian Red Sea Ports- Berenike, Myos Hormos.

Historical Significance

Cultural Interaction- The findings highlight cross-civilisational contact that went beyond mere trade, indicating pilgrimage-like visits and cultural curiosity among ancient Indians.

Geographical Expansion- Research focus has now expanded from the coastal Red Sea ports to the inland Nile Valley, broadening the spatial understanding of Indian mobility in Egypt.

Tamil Maritime Legacy- The discoveries reaffirm the global reach of ancient Tamil traders from the Malabar and Coromandel coasts.

Epigraphic Importance- These inscriptions provide rare primary evidence of Indians physically present in Pharaonic tomb spaces during the early centuries of the Common Era.

About the Valley of the Kings

Location- A long, narrow valley located west of the Nile River in Upper Egypt (near modern-day Luxor).

Time Period- Served as the burial site for pharaohs of the 18th, 19th, and 20th dynasties (1539–1075 BCE).

UNESCO Recognition- Designated as a World Heritage site in 1979 as part of the ancient Thebes complex.

Tomb Architecture- Carved deep into mountain rock. Features descending corridors, often interrupted by deep shafts to deter robbers. Layouts include pillared halls, vestibules, storage chambers, and a burial chamber with a stone sarcophagus.

Notable Tombs- Contains tombs of kings, queens, high-ranking officials, and sons of Ramses II.

1. Longest Tomb (Tomb 20)- Belongs to Queen Hatshepsut, extending nearly 700 feet into the rock.
2. Largest Tomb (Tomb 5)- Built for the sons of Ramses II, featuring dozens of chambers across two levels.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/tamil-brahmi-inscriptions-found-in-egypts-valley-of-the-kings-shed-light-on-ancient-trade-links/article70619929.ece>