Chapter III

EXPORTS AND IMPORTS

"Merchants throughout the world have the same religion."

- Heinrich Heine
During the Sangam age the nature was bountiful; the lands were fertile yielding enormous production; the mountains were abound with a variety of rich articles like sandalwood, etc.; the seas were the source for plentiful pearls, fish and costly chunks; the people were hardworking and toiled night and day to manufacture excellent clothes like muslin and different types of handicrafts. Hence, the people from the West and the East naturally had a passion and fascination for the articles of Tamilnadu and visited the ports and cities frequently. The result was a flourishing trade between the Tamils and people from the West and the East. The activities in the busy centres of trade in Tamilnadu reveal the intensity of business carried on in the export and import fronts.

**TRADE IN PRE-SANGAM PERIOD**

Before the Sangam period, the South Indian kingdoms were slowly and progressively being Aryanized. Though there was a cultural change to a certain extent, the commercial contacts were never slowed down. K.K.Pillay observes:

"Maritime trade influenced the life and activities of Tamilagam, both in the early and medieval periods of her history. In the east, commerce paved the way for colonisation. Brave and adventurous, the Tamilians explored the region in the east and established commercial and colonial relationship with places like Java, Sumatra, Borneo and Siam. In all probability, there had begun commercial contact with the West from a much earlier period of time. The ports on the west coast..."
became active centres of trade with Persia, Asia Minor, Babylonian Greece and Rome" ¹

For this statement of pre-Sangam maritime trade activities there are some tangible references in literature and archaeology.

Some thousands of years before Sangam age, it seems that the ancient Tamils had exported gold, silk, pearls, spices, etc. to Babylon. This may be confirmed with the views of historians who have dwelt in detail the commerce and trade of Tamils. Says P.T.Srinivasa Iyengar:

"Dravidian speaking races of India traded with the ancient Chaldeans before the vedic language found its way into India. Indian teak was found in the ruins of Ur (now Mugheir) and must have reached from India in the 4th millennium B.C when it was the seaport of Babylon and capital of Sumerian kings (Prof. A.B. Sayee, Hibbert Lectures, p.137). The gold and spices mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions of the XIV century B.C. were probably exported from India, the only country so far as we know they were produced." ²

Hence it is clear that the Tamils' trade with Babylon was some four thousand years old and had been a point of interest with regard to the articles sent which were very rare to obtain from any other place during those days.

¹ K.K. Pillay, p.17.

A study of the inscriptions also brings out this fact:

"With regard to trade of these times it must be noted that the early Chaldean inscriptions speaks of ships of Ur, the capital city; and that from at least the 14th century B.C Gold, silks, pearls, etc. had been passing from India to Assyrian monarchy carried on both by caravans on land and by the coasting trade by sea." ³

It is interesting to note that the capital of Babylon had the name ‘Ur’, which in Tamil is very often used to mean a town or a city.

Again it is pertinent to note here the views of K.A. Nilakanta Sastri on the trade that flourished between Tamils and the Babylons during the pre-Sangam period:

"The Assyrian and Babylonian empires traded with India by sea from their ports on the Persian Gulf and continued to receive gold, spices and fragrant woods from India. It has been pointed out rightly that rice, peacocks, sandalwood, every unknown article which we find imported by sea into Babylon before the fifth century B.C, brought with it a Dravidian, not a Sanskrit, designation."

"A beam of Indian cedar found in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 B.C), the teak logs found in the temple of the Moon-god at Ur

³ Historical Inscriptions of South India, University of Madras, p.222, quoted by N.S.K.Pillai, Tamil India, p.224 fn
at levels belonging to about the same age or a little later, and the
Baveru Jataka which relates the adventures of certain Indian merchants
who took the first peacock by sea to Baylon, all confirm the existence of
active maritime intercourse between South India and its western
neighbours. In the seventh and sixth centuries B.C, Babylon was at the
height of the splendour, the greatest commercial mart of the world; men
of many nations frequented its bazaars, and we may well assume that
among them were merchants from South India." 

While discussing on the early venture of commercial activity of the
Tamils, K.K.Pillay, on the basis of the Bible, has this to say:

"Perhaps the only basis for an early trade assignable to the 10th
century B.C is the reference in the Holy testament to certain spices and
other articles in connection with the visit of Queen Sheba to King
Solomon of Israel sometime about 900 B.C. Though many commodities
like frank incense, cinnamon, cassia and myrrh figure among those
gifted to Solomon, it is certain that peacocks and very probably
sandalwood, both of which are mentioned in the list, went from
Tamilagam. It is positively certain that ‘Tuki’ the Hebrew for peacock
is derived from the Tamil word ‘Togai’." 

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5 K.K.Pillay, p.251.
Trade with Greece And Rome:

During the Sangam period, the maritime trade of the Tamils mainly was with the Greece and Rome in the West and China and other farthest countries in the East. The articles produced and manufactured in South India attracted the men and women of these countries, particularly the rich amongst them. Many historians of the past have written about the trade between Tamils and the Westerners in detail, though we cannot say much with authenticity, nobody can deny the existence of commercial contacts during that period with them.

Before tracing the trade of Tamils with Greek and Rome, it is essential here to mention that the Persians, Arabs and Egyptians preceded the Greeks and Romans in the commercial activities with South India. According to K.K.Pillay,

"The Arabs seem to have played a great part as the carriers of South Indian trade from early times. Under the Persian Emperor, Darius, in the 5th century B.C, the Indian commerce was further extended and the Arab merchants continued the trade."  

K.K.Pillay, p.252
Certain words from the Tamil language are found in the Hebrew Aramaic vocabulary. They were proof enough to confirm the commercial contact in the pre-Christian era.

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THE EGYPTIAN CONTACT

Before the Greco-Roman contact began with Tamils it is pertinent to note that the Egyptians were the forerunners in this field. The word for elephant in Hebrew is habim which found its way from the Egyptian eb, which in turn is a loan word from the Sanskrit iba known in Tamil as ipam. Similarly, the ape is kafī in Egyptian, kuf in Hebrew and cepus in Latin; the original word is kapi in Sanskrit which found its way into Tamil as kavi. According to W. Crooke.
"The trade terms such as the names used in the time of Solomon for ivory, apes and peacocks are Tamil; in other words they came from the Dravidian not a Sanskrit tongue."  

The loan words in the vocabulary is proof of the commercial contact of the Tamils with Egypt and other countries in the West. When the Greeks continued their trade after the downfall of the Egyptians, the Tamil words found their way into the Greek lexicons.

Pointing out that the trade and dialogue between South India and the Western world is a matter known from the excavations of Arikkamedu where tangible proof in the form of pottery and coins have been unearthed, Elike Lascarides Zannas, in one of her articles says:

"But, what is forgotten at least in this part of the world, is that Romans had not initiated this trade but inherited it. They simply continued a well-established-for centuries sea-route which had been well-organised by the powerful Ptolemies, the Greek ruling family of Egypt after Alexander the Great's death. Roman conquest of Egypt was complete by 31 B.C They inherited not only wealth, the elaborate administration, but also the famous trade with the East and the South that the ptolemies had organised."  

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8 Zannas, p.6/25.
Hence it is clear from this that the Greeks were mainly indebted to the Egyptians for the maritime trade they had with the Tamils. The Egyptians trade had two important niceties: One, they procured what all they wanted from Tamils; second, they resold some of the articles thus obtained, to other countries for more gains.

The articles exported from ports of Ancient Tamilnadu to Egypt in those days included ivory, tortoise shell, pearls, pigments and dyes (especially indigo), rice and various spices e.g. pepper, nard, costume, malapathron, some rare woods, various medicinal substances, cotton and silk.  

YAVANAS

Yavana is the name given to the Greek merchant. This word probably was derived from the ‘Ion’ people who formed a section of the Greek population. These people were originally from Attica, Western Asia Minor and the Ionian Islands. ‘yavanan’ is a corrupt form of the word ‘Ionian’ and ‘yavanar’ which occurs in many Sangam poems (Puram.56/18 etc.) is the plural form of that word.

Later the word ‘yavanar’ was used to denote the Romans also. In due course, all the people from the west including Arabs were called by the same word ‘yavanar’. They were also called as ‘miletcher’ probably from the Greek word ‘miletios’ which was the name of a city in Asia Minor.

ERYTHRAEAN

Erythraean is the name of the sea on whose bank Alexandria existed. It was the most important port city of the Egyptians. Traders from various countries visited Alexandria. An unknown author who wrote ‘The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea’ had stated about the maritime trade of the Greeks and Romans.

Greek merchants who were interested in gold and spices of the South Indian coast brought wine, glass, brass, lead, copper, tin, etc., via. Egypt to the Cera country. They unloaded them at Muziris (now Cranganore) and Bakare (near Koṭṭayam). These articles were not available in Southern India in those days and hence the import of these were welcomed by the people.

In turn, the Greeks purchased pearls, ivory, diamonds, sapphires, silk, tortoise-shell, pepper and malabathram. It is no wonder that the export of these articles fetched to the treasury of the Cera country a considerable revenue.

During the first century B.C, the Greeks who visited India for commercial purposes, did not straight away come to India, but through Eudaemon which was in between the two countries, as an important centre of trade.¹⁰

¹⁰  N.S.K. Pillai, Tamil India, p.231.
Some other informations on trade gathered from the *Periplus* (part 53 to 60 of the *Periplus of Erythraean Sea*) are:

1) *Naura Tyndis* (*Toṇṭi*) were the first towns of commercial importance in Tamilnadu; next come *Muziris* and *Nelkynda* ports. These two were the top commercial centres of that period.

2) *Tyndis* belonged to the Cera country. It was a village near the sea; *Muziris* too belonged to the same country. A large number of ships brought by Greeks from Arabia with merchandise were there. It was on the bank of a river and was at a distance of 500 stadia (a stadia is equivalent to 8-2/3 miles)\(^{11}\) from *Tonti*.

3) *Nelkynda* was also at a distance of 500 stadia from *Muziris* but it was in Pantiyan country. This town was also on a river bank and was 120 stadia away from the sea.

4) Ships coming to *Nelkynda* were anchored at *Bakare*, a village at the mouth of a river for loading and unloading, since the river was full of shoals and mud banks and the channels were not deep.

5) From *Komar* (*kumari*) the country of Pantiyan extends to *Kolkhoi* (*Korkai*) which was a port city. Here for the pearl fishery (*muttuk kulittal*), the slaves and condemned criminals were engaged.

\(^{11}\) However, V.S.V. Raghavan in his book *Megasthenes*, says that one stadia is just equal to one furlong i.e. 220 years, p.25.
Periplus also mentions a place called Argaru which is identified with Uraiýur, the capital of Cola kings during the Sangam period. According to its author, all pearls gathered on the coast were sent to Uraiýur and from that place muslin called Argaritic were exported.\textsuperscript{12}

**STRABO, PLINY AND PTOLEMY**

The four main contemporary sources which speak elaborately on the maritime trade of South India during Sangam period are 1) Strabo 2) *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* 3) Pliny, 4) Ptolemy.

Strabo wrote his *Geography* in 19 A.D.; Pliny the Elder brought out *The Natural History* in 77 A.D; the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* was written in the first century (80-89 A.D); and Ptolemy, the Alexandrian geographer, prepared the *Map of the World* in about 150 A.D.

The information gathered from the *Periplus* has been already discussed in the previous section. The views of the other three authors are detailed here to bring out the commercial activities of Tamilnadu with Greece and Rome.

Strabo lived during the time of Augustus Caesar. Augustus was the Roman Emperor who developed the trade with India after he conquered Egypt in 30 B.C Strabo confirms that 120 ships proceeding to India were seen near

\textsuperscript{12} Cf.K.A.N.Sastri, *History of South India* p.140
the Mediterranean Islands Myos Hormuz in 25 B.C. According to him, a Pantian embassy visited the court of Augustus in 20 B.C.\textsuperscript{13}

Pliny's observation on the maritime trade of India with Greece and Rome is very much interesting. Pliny estimated that the Roman empire paid more than a hundred million sesterces to India and other countries for the purchase of luxury items alone.

"Pliny says our ladies glory in hanging pearls suspended from their fingers, two or three of them dangling from their ears, delighted even with the rattling of the pearls as they knock against each other; and now at the present time the poor classes are even affecting them. They put them on their feet and that not only on the laces of their sandals but all over the shoes."\textsuperscript{14}

It is also said that the Queen of the Emperor Caius wore pearls and other gems worth 40,000,000 sesterces which was collected from the people as taxes. Pliny also says that India gobbled 55,000,000 sesterces (i.e.486,979 gold coins) for the pearls supplied and the Indian gems like pearls were purchased by the Romans at hundred times of the original price.

Julius Caesar presented to Servilia, the mother of Brutus, with a pearl which was worth 447,457 Pounds The ear rings made of pearls worn by Queen Cleopatra was worth 151,450 Pounds.


\textsuperscript{14} S.Krishnaswamy Aiyengar, \textit{Beginnings of South Indian History}, quoted by N.S.K. Pillai, \textit{Tamil India}, p.236
Pliny’s remark that “This was the price we paid for our luxuries and our women” can be taken as a protest against the import trade of the Romans which resulted in the drain of bullion.\textsuperscript{15}

Cleopatra dissolved a pearl worth 80,000 pounds in the wine and drank it; when she attempted to put another pearl in the wine her companion prevented her from that act. Nonius, a minister in the court of Antonius, was dismissed from his post just for the sake of a sapphire worth 8000 pounds; he ran away with the gem leaving all his properties.

Ptolemy mentions in his work some of the cities and harbours of Tamilnadu. In the West coast Ptolemy speaks of Muziris and other ports already mentioned by Periplus; He has added to that list Bramagara and Kalaikarias between Tyndis and Muziris, and Vaikkaria, Podoperoura, Semne and Kareoura. Vaikkarai is near Koṭṭayam and Karoura is Vañci also called Karur of Cera country; the rest of the towns mentioned by Ptolemy are not identified so far.

These accounts of the foreigners regarding the maritime trade and the goods exported and imported are confirmed by the literary evidences.

**Greeks in Tamilnadu**

Some of the Greeks who came here for trade in Tamilnadu resided at convenient places. They some times continued their known vocation for their
own living. Maṇimekalai mentions carpenters from Greeks who stayed in Pūmpukār (Maṇi. 19/108).

There were some Greek godowns at Arikkamedu, south of Pondicherry. Archaeologists confirm that some Greek workers were engaged in making glass beads.\(^\text{16}\)

Some of the Greeks who were strong, sturdy and well-built undertook some other jobs such as watchman, warriors and bodyguards. Cilappatikāram confirms that some Greek watchman guarded the entrance of the fort gates. They were considered to be experts in that particular job.

\[Kaṭimatil vāyil kāvalir ciranta\]

\[aṭalval yavanarkku\] (Cila. 14/66-67)

They had swords to intimidate the wrong-doers.

Since they were considered to be trustworthy, some of them were taken into the army itself. Pantiya kings enrolled them in the army and Mullaippāṭṭu describes their typical dress modes. They wore short skirt-like waists, and had shirts on them. They rode horses and had a sharp stick in their hands (Mullai. 59-61). They created fear among the locals by their stern appearance, strength and roughness. The poet uses the terms ‘veruvuran tōrram’ (stern appearance), ‘valipuṇar yākhai’ (strongly built body) and ‘vanaṅyavanar’ (merciless Greeks).

\(^\text{16}\) Venkataswamy, Palaṅkālat Tamilar Vāṅikam, p.61
The Greeks had their business at many places in Tamilnadu. They were widespread in the country and had satisfactory transactions with the local people. The gold and silver coins used by the Greek merchants were unearthed at many places in and around Tamilnadu. Some of the places where the coins were found:

- **Punjar** near *Tiruvananthapuram*
- **eyyal** near *Tirichür*
- **Karur**
- **Peṇṇär**
- **Pollachi**
- **Vellalur** - all in Kongu country
- **Maturai**
- **Karivalam vanta Nallur**
- **Kaliyamputtur** in Pantiyan country
- **Karukkak Kuricci** in Pudukkotai
- **Mahabalipuram**
- **Thanjavur**

Greeks, Romans, Arabs and other foreign merchants stayed at a particular colony near the harbour making it convenient for their business and other transactions. It was in the *Maruvūrppākkam* in *Pukār* city where they resided. The poet in *Paṭṭinappālai* speaks of the colony as a place where people from various country spacing different languages had their residences:

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moḻipala perukiya paḻitir teyattup
pulampeyar makkal kalamal turaiyum

(Paṭṭina.215-216)

The twin epics, Cilappatikāram (5/11-12; 6/130-131 5/9-10) and Maṇminēkalai (1/16) too mention about their living places in the same manner. Cilappatikāram mentions the Greek colony as ‘yavanar irukkai’ (5/10). Since they were of foreign origin who belonged to the merchant community, they had their lights burning throughout the night (Cila .6/143).

Analysing all these points, K.A.Nilakanta Sastri sums up as follows:

"There were Yavanas, doubtless Greco-Roman merchants, sailors and others, with perhaps as admixture of Arabs, they are described as strong in body, fierce in appearance, wearing coats, armed and holding whip in hand, while guarding the palace and its bedrooms along with other mlechchas who wore coats and expressed themselves by means of signs made with eyes and hands as they could not speak the language of the people; they watched the broad streets of Madurai at night."

It is also said that the Greeks who resided in Muciri had constructed a temple for Augustus which was mentioned in the Peutriverian tables (222 A.D). The Greeks called Tamils as ‘Damarike’ in their works. Studying the appropriate weather fit for sea travel, the Greeks used to start their journey

18 K.A.N.Sastri, The Cultural History of Tamils, p.77
in the month of Āṭi (July-Aug) and left India in Mārkali (Dec-Jan). It may be noted that the Westerners avoided the hot summer seasons and stayed through the rainy winter seasons (kār, kūtir, mūṇpāṇi and pīṇpāṇi seasons).

For some unknown reasons, the yavaṇas had to face the wrath of the Cera king Imayavarampan Neṭuṅcēralātan and were subdued in a battle and put into prison (Patirru, patikam 2);

\[
\begin{align*}
nayani\text{īl vanc̄}{\text{o}}\text{l yavaṇarp pīṇt̄tu} \\
neytalai p̄eytu k̄aipîr k̄ofi \\
aruvilai nankalam vayiramoṭu koŋtu \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Patirru, patikam 2/8-10)

Herein it is said that the king defeated the kindless and harsh-worded yavaṇas, poured ghee on their heads, tied their arms behind, and took away their costly gems including diamonds. This shows the rough and tough nature of the Greeks who never feared picking up quarrels with the locals.

The above facts about the Greco-Romans are proof enough for the close contact between them and Tamils, apart from the political and cultural intermingling which is a fit subject for another study. The export and import merchandises with which they transacted business is dealt with in a later section.

19 N.S.K. Pillai, Tamil India, p.225
TRADE WITH THE EAST

Maritime trade of the Tamils on the East also requires our attention. Being brave and bold navigators, the Tamils pierced the turbulent sea to have commercial contact with China, Java, Sumatra, Burma, Siam and Borneo.

The Tamils had a long coast on the East as there is one in the West. But the ports on both sides were battered very often by the storms and cyclones which frequented the Tamilnadu shores. It is a well-known fact that a vast area beyond the present Pāmpukār, Māmallapuram, Korkai and many other places have been swallowed by the ferocious sea. These had affected the maritime trade activities of the Tamils.

CHINA

On the East the earliest trade relationship of Tamils should have commenced with China. According to Schoff the trade with China started flourishing as early as the 7th century B.C. The most important articles imported from China were silk and sugar. The names of these articles themselves are proof of this fact. Silk is called ‘pattu’ in Tamil and so in Chinese too; even after many centuries sugar is still called as ‘cīpi’ in Tamil which is derived from the word ‘Cīgam’ i.e. China. Pepper, cardamom, incense and coral were exported from Tamilnadu in exchange of silk and sugar.
As per the views of P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar, if Chinese cinnamon found its way to the coasts of Arabia and East Africa in Indian shipping it follows that there must have been commercial intercourse between China and India.\(^{21}\)

A Chinese coin of the second century B.C has been discovered at Chandravalli in Mysore and that confirms the contact of South India with China. It is also said that there was a Chinese colony somewhere on the Kerala coast, which has not been identified so far.\(^{22}\)

The Chinese trade with Tamils was maintained for much longer period than that of the Greco-Roman commerce. Even in the ninth century A.D Quilon had busy commercial relationship with China.\(^{23}\) On this topic, K.K. Pillay concludes:

"Among the discoveries at Arikkamedu are celadon-ware shreds which are stated to have been common in China and South East Asia. Therefore, it is probable that Roman ships proceeding to China and South East Asia touched ports in Tamilnadu. Thus trade with the countries to the east of India was as early, it not earlier than, that with Western Asia."\(^{24}\)

\(^{21}\) P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar, *History of Tamils*, p.111

\(^{22}\) K.K. Pillay, p.260.

\(^{23}\) K.K. Pillay, p.261.

\(^{24}\) K.K. Pillay, p.263.
The history of the contact between India and China from early times were dealt with in detail by many scholars such as P.C. Bagchi (India and China, Calcutta, 1945), the Frenchmen P. Pelliot and E. Chavannes and others.

The South Indian contact with China was mainly through the sea-route though there were other land routes via Assam and Burma. The sea route from India to China was upto Tonkin till the end of the seventh century, after that Canton became the principal port of China. The Tamils who sailed by ships had to halt at Yavadvipa (Java) and Srivijaya (East coast of Sumatra). Another port of disembarkation on the way was Simhapura (i.e. Singapore).

It is a wonder that the early Chinese did not have their own naval fleet whereas the Tamils and other maritime traders had their own. On this point V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar says:

"While Indian vessels and ships from other countries, were busily engaged in trade and commerce with China exporting their own goods and importing Chinese goods to their countries, it is said that China owned no ships of her own and entirely depended on foreign vessels for transport. China began to have ships of her own centuries after her contact with India."  

According to Pan Kou who wrote Ts’ien han shu probably in the second century B.C., there was commercial intercourse between Southern India and China, and the Chinese traders visited Houangtche (Kānci) and it took a year...
by boat from the coast of Indo-China to reach this city. Chinese bought pearls, glass, rare stones and other products not available in their country and in exchange they supplied gold and silk.\textsuperscript{26}

Like the Greeks during the time of Imayavarampan Netunjéralatan who were troublesome and so were subdued, in later days, the Arabs and sometimes Tibetans too had some supremacy and interfered with the local rights.

The commercial contact later extended to political and cultural fields connecting China and South India, which helped to a large extent for a later day Pallava king to take steps and overpower Arabs and Tibetans. King Narasimha of the Pallava dynasty wanted to punish the trouble making Arabs and Tibetans. He promptly consulted his good friend, the Chinese Emperor of that day who blessed him in his endeavour. The Emperor named the Pallavan army as ‘the army that cherished virtue’. This incident is recorded in Ts’o fu Yuan Kuei a cyclopaedia of 1013 A.D.\textsuperscript{27}

Another important information regarding the trade of Tamils with the Far East which included costly gems and stones is given by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri as follows:

"Entries in the Chinese annals of the third, fourth and fifth centuries A.D show clearly that the Hindu Kingdoms of Indo-China and

\textsuperscript{26} Dikshitar, \textit{Southern India and China}, p.7.

\textsuperscript{27} Dikshitar, \textit{Southern India and China}, p.21.
the archipelago were in active touch with South India on one side and China on the other; they are said to have sent to the Chinese court on many occasions presents of *vaidurya* (the semi-precious cat’s eye), sandal wood and pearls which are specifically South Indian products."²⁸

When the facts are such, the statement of Mayilai Seeni Venkataswamy that ‘the Chinese did not come to Tamilnadu (for that matter India) for trade’ quite unacceptable.²⁹

**AR EAST COUNTRIES**

Ancient Tamils had frequent contacts, both commercial and cultural, with the Far East countries, Sumatra, Java, Burma (Myanmar), Siam, Indochina, Ceylon, Malaya, etc., The Tamils colonised many of these countries one two thousand years ago and established their presence in many fields.

"Kern recognised long ago that the earliest Indian colonists of Sumatra were of Dravidian origin. Before the spread of Malaya in different parts of the archipelago, the Dravidian element was supreme. The Austric people of Cambodia (Kampuchea) mixed with the Dravidians and founded a powerful kingdom long ago."³⁰

If Dravidians i.e Tamils left their native place and colonised other countries, it would have been only for amassing wealth and nothing else as the proverb runs ‘tirai kaṭalōtīyum tiraviyam tēṭu’ (Earn money even leaving for abroad beyond the seas).

A South Indian, Kaundinya by name, married a native princess Nagini Soma in Funan, and became the king of the country in the 1st century A.D. This was the beginning of the Cambodian dynasty which ruled for well over 1000 years.\(^{31}\)

Similarly, a prince named Vijayan went from Kalinga, a South Indian Province, to Ceylon and became the first King of the Island. Since he belonged to the ‘singa’ (Lion) dynasty, the country was called ‘Singalam’.\(^{32}\)

The fact that the Snake Worship is prevalent from early days in Ceylon, Malaya, Indo-China, Java and Sumatra, just as in Tamilnadu, proves beyond doubt that these countries were colonised by Tamils.\(^{33}\) Again, the glass beads and bangles unearthed in North Borneo, Java and Malayan Peninsula indicate the commercial intermingling of the Tamils with these countries\(^{34}\).

The commercial contact of the Tamils with Ceylon is age-old one. It is said that a group of merchants (\textit{vaṅkaceṭṭu}) from Tamilnadu went to


\(^{32}\) N.S.K.Pillai, \textit{Tamil India}, p.125.

\(^{33}\) N.S.K.Pillai, \textit{Tamil India}, p.125.

\(^{34}\) K.K.Pillay, p.260.
Anuradhapura in Ceylon. There was a big bungalow which housed Tamil merchants and the places where the captain of the ship and other leading merchants were seated had their names inscribed on the respective stones.**[^35]**

Though the Sangam literature does not have any mention of the commerce between the Tamils and Ceylonese, the Ceylon chronicles *Mahavamsa* and *Dipavamsa* bear testimony to this. Two Tamil merchants Cēnan and Kuṭṭakan in second century B.C. went to Ceylon and defeated the king, Curatissan of Sinhala community and ruled for well over twenty-two years. The two were called ‘assanaiker’ which means ‘horse merchants’ (*assa-asva*-horse; *nāiker*-merchant).**[^36]**

Though the capital city of the then Ceylon was *Anuradhapura*, the port city for them was *Maṇipallavam* also known as *Jambukōla Paṭṭinam*. A brief description of this port-city is given in *Manimēkalai*, the Buddhist Tamil Epic. *Maṇipallavam* was an island city some thirty *yosana* distance of the south of Pūmpukār (*Maṇi*. 6/211-213). The Tamil merchants’ ships used to arrive first to this place to stock drinking water and then leave to other cities (*Maṇi*. 14/79-84).

On the western coast of Ceylon was a port named *Mātiṭṭai* (or *Mahātiṭṭai*). During the first century B.C. there was a battle between a local King Ēlēlan of Tamil origin and *Tuttakamanu*, a king of Sinhala origin. The

army from Cola country sent to help Ėlēlan reached Mātiṭṭai (Mahāvamsa, 21/80) port. Ėlēlan was a contemporary of Saint Tiruvalluvar and a big merchant with a fleet of ships and also known for his benevolence.

Tamils imported food articles from Ceylon which must have been of higher quality. Paṭṭinappālai while listing the articles which were unloaded at Pukār mentions ‘Iḷattu uṇāvu’ (Paṭṭina. 181) i.e. food articles from Iḷam, the Tamil name for Ceylon.

The Eastern Islands, consisting of Java (Cāvakam), Sumatra (Kuṭāram), Burma (Kālakam), Indonesia, Philippines, etc. had been very often visited by Tamil merchants. The common name of all these islands is Cāvakam in Tamil.37 Most of the world famous incense and items like pepper were available there, apart from certain gems like coral.

The pepper from Java was imported in Tamilnadu to meet the shortage of this article because most of the pepper of Cera country, which is of superior quality, was sent to the Western countries in exchange of gold and wine.

Another item of these islands to be mentioned is sandalwood. Further camphor, clove and many other rare articles like, cāṭikkāy, paccaikkarppūram, pāḷitam, and tīmpu were also available in these islands. The Tamil merchants brought them from these islands for day to day use.

Venkataswamy, Paḷaṅkāḷa Tamiḷar Vāṇikam, p.42.
The islands where the Naga tribes inhabited were also on the Eastern seas. *Mañimekalai* narrates the story of Tamil merchant *Catuvan* who, because of a ship-wreck incident, reached this Naga island of man-eating aborigines (*Mañi*. 16/13-16).

Java is called in Tamil as *Cāvakam*; in Chinese *Ye Tiao*; in Sanskrit and other North Indian languages *Yava tīva*. The capital of Java was called *Nākapuram*. Java was considered as the center place for commerce where Chinese, Tamils, North Indians and some of the Westerners assembled to buy and sell articles. Later merchants of Java as far as Madagascar came, established business centres there for trade with Africans and Arabs.\(^{33}\)

*Champa* (Annam) owes its name to *Pūmpukār* which was also known as *champa* and its oldest inscription in South Indian script, might have had commercial contact with ancient Tamils.\(^{39}\)

Burma is called *Kālakam* in ancient Tamil. It is also known as 'swarna bhumi' and it found its way in Ptolemy's work as 'Golden Chryse', apparently a translation of the Sanskrit term. Periplus records that very large ships called 'Colandia' (*Kalam in Tamil*) sailed to Burma from the coromandal coast in Tamilnadu.\(^{40}\) *Paṭṭinappālai* mentions this country and tells that articles from

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\(^{33}\) Venkataswamy, *Paḷaṅkālat Tamiḻar Vāṇikam*, p.70.

\(^{39}\) K.K.Pillay, p.261.

\(^{40}\) K.K.Pillay, p.261.
ere reached the port of Pukār. (*Kālakattu ākkam* - the products from Burma; *uṭṭina*. 191).

Malaya is another place in the East where Tamils had frequent trade contacts. P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar suggests that the term *verrilai* (betel-leaves) as derived from Malay.¹¹ Takua-Pa is mentioned by Ptolemy as “Takola”, a arbour and also a trade centre. Ancient Tamils used to chew betel leaves ong with arecanut, lime, *takkōlām*, *paccai karpūram*, *tīmpū* (*kuṇkumappū*), *itikkāy* and clove after their meals. Most of these items in those days came om the East is to be mentioned here.

Sandal, clove, cardamom and camphor were mostly procured from lalaya and other Far East countries and were resold to Greek and Rome, long with their own pepper, pearl and other items. This was possible because amilnadu was suitably situated in the middle between the China and the Far East Islands on one side and the Greek and Rome of the Mediterranean sea on the other side.

**NORTH INDIA**

From the economic point of view, the Tamils never considered the North Indian kingdoms as viable promoters of trade and commerce. The Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the Indus and their tributaries were providing the North Indians sufficient water for agriculture. There were a large number of small kingdoms which very often quarrelled with each other and there were foreign

invasions through the Himalayan Passes, and the long stretch of land from south to north which was found very difficult to proceed - all these made the Tamils shy and indifferent to the trade with North India. However, there were some vague notices regarding the North-South commercial contact. Kapāṭapuram, a port-city and capital of the Pantiyan Kingdom before the third century B.C., has been mentioned in the Ramayana and Mahabharata as ‘Pandya Kāvaṭa’. "Its wealth and grandeur are described in these epics. Kautilya in his Artha Sastra, refers to pearls imported into North India from this place."

As such, we can surmise that the Tamils some two thousands years ago had business contacts with their North Indian counterparts to a certain extent.

There was some trade relationship between Magadha and Tamilnadu in the fourth century B.C. Kautilya mentions certain articles which were acquired by the kings in Pataliputra (Patna). Ratna (a precious stone) from Tāmparaparani and Pantiya Kavāṭa (Kapāṭapuram), and Vaidūriyam (another precious gem) from Srirajya (Kerala). It is also believed that blankets and excellent cotton materials were sent from Maturai. All these must have been carried in the bullock carts through rough and unprotected highways to North India.

Neither the seas nor the rivers were made use of for upcountry trade; the highways were seldom free from thefts and robbery. The travel was

42 K.K. Pillay, p.50.
tiresome too. Hence the Tamils were averse to have commercial contact with North India.

**Artha Sastra** has mentioned three kinds of pearls viz. *Pantiya Kavāta*, *Tāmpraparpiyam* and *Sourniyam*. The first one was from *Kapātapuram*, the second was from the sea near the confluence of River *Tāmparpaparaṇi*, and the last one was from the sea where *Periyāru* (also known as *Sourniyāru*) merged with the sea. Like the people from West and the East, the people in the North too admired the pearls of the Tamilnadu coast and were proud to have them in their possession.

**Kaliṅkam** was in the north-eastern border of Tamilnadu then. Tamils were fond of the cloth of this *Kaliṅka* kingdom and so they brought them to Tamilnadu from that place. Some of the merchants stayed permanently there for this purpose. Their stay extended from third century B.C. to the middle of second century B.C. It is said that King Karavelan of *Kaliṅka* was very much worried about this trend and feared that one day these merchants may overthrow him. This information finds place in the Hathikumbha Inscriptions of Karavelan. Another important item brought from *Kaliṅka* was ‘sandal stone’[^43].

Clothes from South India too found their way to North Indian Cities particularly Benares and Pataliputra. **Artha Sastra** names one kind of cloth as

‘Madhuriya’. This is nothing but the cloth woven from Maturai which was very much sought after in those areas.”

COINS

Though barter system was the prevalent one, we do find monetary system also. Gold and copper coins were vogue in those distant days. Coins were called in Tamil as ‘Kācu’. There are many references to those coins in Sangam literature.

Poet Maturai Kollan Vanṇakkaṉar in one of his poems describes these coins as some in the shape of gooseberry (nelli) but somewhat flat. (Akam.363/8). The coins were in yellow colour and had a hole in the top. Hence, they were compared of the fruits of ukā tree with yellowish colour, and the holes as the eyes of cuckoo birds (Akam 293/6-9). The gold coins were sometimes made into a chain (kācu mālai) and worn by the ladies in their waists (Puram 353; Akam. 75; Aiṇ.pālai.10).

The Cera Kings who were sung in the Patirruppattu were generous enough to present their court poets with lakhs of gold coins called ‘kānam’. (Patirru. Patikam, 4,8) The great Karikālan has presented Uruttirankaṇṇaṉar, the poet of Paṭṭinappaḷai, with ten lakhs of gold coins.
Some coins made of lead with letters in Brahmi script were found in Chengam (N.A. District of Tamilnadu) which shows that coins were vogue in those days in other such metals also.

Regarding the coins of Sangam days K.K. Pillay remarks.

"There is no doubt that indigenous coins of the Tamils were in use in the Sangam age. The gold ‘kācu’ as well as unminted solid gold were bestowed as gifts to poets, Brahmins and Pānars. ‘Kāgam’ is another name of the gold coin in usage; but like kacu it also denoted gold in general. The ‘kāṇams’ appear to have been regular in shape; they do not show the figures of kings or other details. On the other hand, they contain representations of the tiger and elephants. Some punch-marked coins of gold also have been found; they are akin to the ‘Purana’ or ‘Dharana’ silver coins of North India."\(^{15}\)

Apart from gold, coins were made in silver and copper also, some of which belonging to Pantiyan and Cola kings were found in Maturai and Pukār. Earthen moulds used to prepare such coins were also found at Pukār and Kānci.

Since the Roman exports were not enough to pay for their imports from Tamilnadu, they had to rush large amount of minted coins of gold to pay for their goods. A large number of Roman coins have been unearthed at different places in Tamilnadu, belonging to the period from that of Augustus to that of

\(^{46}\) K.K.Pillay, p.245.
Zeno. According to Pliny, a large number of Roman coins were sent to India (i.e. Tamilnadu) mostly for luxurious items. 612 gold coins and 1187 silver coins of Roman kings were unearthed here. Pliny also says that 100 crores of Sesterces gold coins from Rome were gobbled by India, China and Arabia.

As regards the presence of Roman coins in Tamilnadu, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri puts crisply in the following words:

"The large quantities of gold and silver coins struck by all the Roman emperors down to Nero (A.D.54-68) found in the interior of the Tamil land testify to the extent of the trade, the presence of Roman settlers in the Tamil country, and the periods of the rise, zenith and decay of this active commerce."

It is, of course, a field for further study on the coins found in Southern India, which requires a keen knowledge of numismatics. However, at present we can conclude that the findings of a large volume of Roman coins, along with the remarks of foreign travellers, do stand a witness for brisk commercial activities of Tamils with Greeks and Romans.

INTERNAL TRADE

As for as internal or local trade was concerned the barter system had the prime place. The lands were divided into four regions: Kuriñci or hilly

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region; *Mullai* or forest region; *Marutam* or river-flowing fertile region; *Neytal* or coastal region. *Pālai* a region made up of uncultivable *Kurinci* or other regions, by freak of nature.

In *Kurinci*, the people had *tinaï* crop and a kind of *aivana* paddy; They also cultivated some roots and jack fruits. They were able to get honey. They hunted elephants and forest pigs. The produce in the land was very much short of their needs. Hence they sold honey, ivory, sandalwood etc. and in turn they received milk, rice, salt and other articles. *Porunarārrupatāi* speaks of hunters who got fish and toddy in exchange of their honey and roots (*Porunar. 214-215*).

The people in the *Mullai* region were mostly cowherds. They sold milk, curd, buttermilk, butter and ghee and in exchange received grains to cook and feed the elders as well as the children (*Perumpāṇ. 155-163; Kuru. 221/3*). It is also said that some of the cow-herdes who sold ghee refused gold in exchange but preferred cows and buffaloes (*Perumpāṇ. 164-166*).

*Marutam* region had fishes of river and tanks aplenty. The housewives sold them for pulses (dhall) (*Ain. Marutam. 417*) and grains (*Ain. 49 & 48*). It is to be noted that most of the local trade were carried on by the womenfolk, the other sex actively engaged in much harder physical core.

In the *Neytal* region, the fishermen and their womenfolk produced salt from the sea waters and sold it to the people of other regions and in exchange procured paddy (*Akam 140/5-6; Kuru. 269/4-6*). Also it is interesting to see that
the volume of paddy they received was equal to that of the volume of salt they
gave. This shows the value of salt in those days as well as the cheapness of
paddy. (Akam. 391/8-9; Nar.254/6). The fishermen called umanār usually
carried their salt in bullock drawn carts; but sometimes they used small boats
to carry it (Paṭṭina.26-60).

Like the people of Marutam, Neytal folks too sold the fish they caught
in the seas (curā, irāl, etc.) easily for paddy and other grains and prepared
tasty curd rice. (Nar. 239/3; Akam.60/4; 340/15). These people, mostly women,
preferred festival times to sell the fish. At times, when it was not possible for
them to sell or fish, the ladies chose to sell fresh and colourful flowers such as
patiri, alari, kurukkattii, pittikai and other varieties. (Nar.116/8-11; 97/6-9).

From these it may be understood that paddy, milk, fish, salt and toddy
were the principal commodities sold in the local market. The system followed
in the regions was barter. Paddy and salt seemed to be the measure of value.
It is interesting to note that ‘kuli’ (wage) is derived from the word ‘kūlam’
(grain) and ‘campaḷam’ payment derived from ‘aḷam’ (salt).

Pedlars and hawkers went around the villages vending the articles for
sale. When they had valuables they went in groups. The streets were always
not smooth. Some were sandy, some rocky and some arid. Villages and towns
were connected by highways called ‘peruvali’.

In big cities and port-cities many other articles came to the market
place. In Pukār, textiles, perfumes, sandal paste, various flowers, dyes, etc.
were sold; Eatable like rice, cakes, cooked fish and mutton, vegetables and other things came for sale. Certain streets were noted for ornaments, jewels, gems, gold and silver. On the roof of the shops flags indicating the articles sold were flying.

Day time markets were named ‘nālāṅkāṭi’ and the evening or night bazaars were called ‘allaṅkāṭi’ according Cilappatikāram (23/150). A big street in the bazaar was called ‘āvaṇam’ (Paṭṭina, 158).

In Maturai, there were separate streets in the market for selling particular kind of items. For instance, there were streets selling diamonds, pearls and gold ornaments. Ilaṅkōvaṭikaḷ in Cilappatikāram mentions a few famed streets of Maturai. They were: (1) Aṅkāṭi vīti where blacksmiths and others sold weapons etc. (2) Gems street where vairam, māṇikkam, puruṭarākam, vaiṭūriyam, nilam, kōmētakam, muttu (pearl), pavalam (coral) were sold; (3) Gold street where four kinds of (cāṭarūpam, kīḷiccirai, āṭakam and cāmpūnatam) gold were sold; (4) Aruvai vīti were clothes made of cotton, rat’s hair, silk were sold; (5) Kūla vīti where pepper, arecanut and sixteen types of grains were marketed. (Cil. 14/168/211).

In Pukār, apart from avenues and colonies, there were day and night markets with separate streets, as in Maturai, to sell particular kind of articles. They include: 1) nakara vīti (Town Road) where hawkers sold flowers, incense, colour powders and fragrant pastes; 2) textile street where clothes and dresses made of silk, cotton and rat’s hair were sold; 3) Gem street where apart from
silk, articles such as corals, pearls, sandal etc. were sold; 4) Grain Street where eight kinds of grains (nel, pul, varaku, tinai, irukku, torai, cama and kalainel) are sold; 5) Eatables street: where people sold rice cakes such as pitru and appam, toddy mongers, fish merchants, salt vendors, hawkers who sell betal, arecanut etc., meat sellers and oil-mongers did their business. These streets were in Maruvurppakkam.

Further, there were wholesale merchants who did import and export business having their godowns near the harbour. They mingled with foreigners who had a separate colony 'yavanar irukkai'. The goods in the harbour were heaped like mountains where the goats and other tame animals used to play on them.

Hawkers, pedlars, shop-keepers, oil-mongers, big merchants who dealt with gold, gems and other precious articles, overseas traders and a variety of businessmen had contributed to the success of the commercial activities of ancient Tamilnadu which on one hand brought pride and on the other revenue to the Tamil kingdoms.

**EXPORT ITEMS**

Some of the items exported from Tamil kingdoms during the Sangam age can be identified when we gauge through the literature of that period and the notices of foreign authors. When the supply was more than the demand and when the excess products were eagerly consumed by foreigners, then the surplus was exported for much more revenue. None of the items which were
in short supply were exported since in those days the people, particularly merchants, were never greedy.

**PEPPER**

Of all the items pepper, the king of spice, had been the much sought after article in western countries. This commodity grew in abundance in Taminadu, particularly in the Cera country, and it was of the highest quality. Ships from Ocelis, a port city in Red Sea, after forty days of sailing reached Muciri. All ships from the emporia of Alexandria connected Rome and India. The main reason for the shipping was to import pepper from India because three-fourth of the articles was pepper.

Since chillies were not in use in those days, pepper had heavy demands. It was used not only as a spice, but also to protect the mutton from decay. Another important quality of pepper was its medicinal value; Greeks quickly learnt its curing effects and used it for medicinal purposes. Hippocrates called the pepper as ‘Indian Medicine’. During the period of Augustus pepper had rich value. Packets of pepper powder were sold in those days. It is said that a Gothic by name Alaric seiged the fort in Rome, he demanded among other things 3000 pounds of pepper to withdraw his troops.48

Pepper was exported to China and other Far East countries, the business of pepper was most lucrative and so the merchants from Arab, Venice and Genoa took it over in later days. West Europeans too were lured to this

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profit channel and so they sent Columbus, it is said, to find a way to India, but he ended in discovering America. Later, Portuguese (Vasco da Gama) and the Dutch reached the Kerala borders in 15th and 16th centuries for pepper trade. During Elizabethan period, Britishers came to India and other far east countries for such kind of business and ended in colonising many places.\(^{18}\)

Java too produced pepper in large quantities, but it was of inferior quality. The best quality pepper grew only in Cera and Tulu areas in ancient Tamilnadu. The world preferred this kind of pepper to preserve food for longer duration and hence the demand increased day by day.

We have many references regarding this pepper in Sangam literature. The pepper grew in creepers which went around the jack-fruit trees (Cirupāṇ.43). Some varieties on the hills creped on the sandal trees (Akm 2/6). On the slopes of many a hills pepper grew in abundance (‘Karivalar atukkam’-Kuru. 288/1). Poets of Sangam age Avūr Mūlaṅkēḷār (Akm 112/4), Karuṅur Katappillai Cattanār (Puram 168/2), Maturai Aruvai Vaṅikar Ilavēṭṭanār (Akm 272/10) and Nakkirar (Tirumuru. 309) have mentioned this plant as ‘kāṟi’ in their songs. There is a mention in Perumpāṇāṟṟuppāṭai wherein the poet states the food prepared included along with rice, pepper and karivēppilai (307/308).

Since pepper was grown in abundance on the areas close to Western ghats, the people in other areas such as Pantiya, Cera, Konku, Cola and Tontai

\(^{46}\) N.S.K. Pillai, Tamil India, p.242.
countries had to bring them by road either on carts or on herds of donkeys on whose back the pepper bags were hung like two jack-fruit (Pathina. 186; Perumpaar. 78).

It is said that the Arabs went to the ports in the Western coast just to buy pepper in large quantities so that they could sell them at higher prices in Rome and other Mediterranean countries. Later, people from Greece and Rome found a way to the Cera country and bought pepper in large quantities in big vessels in exchange of enormous amount of gold. Tayankaanwar of Sangam age says:

"The beautiful ships of Greeks reached the plentiful Muciri on the banks of Culliyam Periyaru of Ceras with gold and returned with pepper." (Akam. 149/9-11). The same trade has also been mentioned by another poet in Puram too. (343). In the North, people called pepper by the name ‘marici’, a corrupt form of its growing place ‘Muciri’. In Tami pepper was called ‘milaku’, ‘curry’, and ‘miriyal’.

Since the Greeks and Romans were fond of this spice and had spent a large amount for buying and also were very crazy in using them, the article pepper was called ‘yavanapriya’.

**PEARLS**

Pure glittering white pearls were found in large quantities in the seas surrounded by Tamil kingdoms. Korkai in Pantiyan country was famous for
pearl-fishery. Shells containing pearls were seen under the sea where rivers meet the sea. Kings, queens and rich merchants wore chains and garlands made of pearls. These pearls had attracted the ladies in Greece and Rome. Hence, pearl export had an important place in the trade of Sangam age. Pearl is called ‘muttu’ in Tamil.

Sangam literature very often mentions the pearls found in Korkai and other places. ‘Korkaiyam perunturai muttu’ (Akam 27/9). ‘Muttuppaṭu parappiṇ korkai munturai’ (Nar. 23/6) and such other phrases describe the pearls found in Korkai (Akam 296; 201; 130; Maturai 134-138; and Cīrupāṇ. 55-62).

Korkai is situated where the River Tamparaparani joins the Bay of Bengal. Hence the pearl found there was named in Artha Sastra was as ‘Tamaraparāṇyam’. Muciri is situated where the river Cūrṇi meets the Arabian sea and so the pearl picked up there was called ‘courneyam’ which later became ‘kourneyam’ in Artha Sastra. ‘Kavātam’ was another kind of pearl found in Kapāṭapuram the capital of the Pantiya country which was swallowed by the sea during the great second deluge, mentioned by Kautilya in his Artha Sastra.

The pearls which were sold in Pantar, a place near Muciri, have found a place in Sangam verse as ‘Pantar payanta palarpukaḷ muttam’ (Patirru. 8/4). Pantar in Arabic means market place and hence this must be a place wherein a large number of Arab merchants stayed for their business.50

50 Venkataswamy, Pāḷāṅkalat Tamilar Vāṇikam, p.150.
Pearls were found in plenty in Tamilnadu and so they had been sung by different poets in various situations. *Akanānūru* says that fishermen in *Korkai* when they were fishing had also got some pearls which they sold for purified toddy. (*Akam*. 296/8-10).

When the fisherfolk worshipped Mother Goddess of the Sea, they threw pearls and chanks as their offerings into the sea (*Akam* 201/4-7). In one of the poems in *Akanānūru*, a poet says that the horses while running fast on the seashore were obstructed by a large number of pearls strewn over the sandy beach at *Korkai* (*Akam*. 130/9-11).

The anklets of the queens and the ladies of rich mercantile community had pearls of Pantiya country with them. One such was worn by Köpperuntévi, the Queen of Pantiyan Netunceliyan of *Maturai* (*Cila*. 20/59). Regarding the usage of pearls by Greeks and Romans Rev. Xavier S. Thaninayagam has this to say:

"The derivation of the Latin word for pearl (margarites) is not certain but the pearls of the Gulf of Mannar and of *Korkai* (*Kolkhoi*) were put to most extraordinary uses around the Mediterranean, you will remember the pearls which Cleopatra dissolved in vinegar in order to drink, as well as the dinner of a certain Clodius who gave each guest a pearl to swallow, and Nero throwing precious stones and pearls to the people and hanging his first beard adorned with pearls for veneration at the Capital. Lollia Paulina, wife of the Emperor Caius had 30 million of sesterces worth of pearl ornaments; and Roman ladies had pearls on
their fingers, toes, ears, sandals and shoes so that the rattling of pearls could be heard as they walked.  

Next to pepper, it was pearl business which brought huge sum of gold and silver to Tamilnadu.

**GEMS**

Apart from the pearls all the other gems too were available in Tamilnadu for which the foreign merchants made a beeline in the harbours of *Pukār* and other places.

As already seen there were separate streets wherein gold, pearls, sapphires and other gems were sold. Some of these had been produced from the Far East countries like Java; some were of local origin. Goldsmiths and other artisans made jewels and ornaments with these gems which had a very big business in those days.

A part of *Koṅgu nādu* of the Tamils extended up to Mysore in the North. The River *Kāviri* had made this region fertile. The northern parts of *Koṅgu* country was called *Punnātu* and *Kāttūr* was its capital, which was on the banks of River *Kapppani*, a subsidiary of *Kāviri*. It was later called *Kiṭṭūr*, *Kiṭṭipuram* and still later *Tirṭṭipuram*. One of the nine gems *Kōmētakam* was available in this place. This gem was in various colours viz. Blue, green, brown

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of which the blue one was quite attractive. Being the colour of the sea waters, this gem was called "aqua marine" by the Romans. This gem was available only in Punnuṭu and in no other place. The aqua marine gem got from the mines of Punnuṭu had very much attracted the Romans and the gem merchants imported this beautiful stones in Rome. Pliny has mentioned about Punnuṭu and also its mines.  

According to Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, the Greeks and Romans along with other foreigners purchased pepper, pearls, ivory, diamonds, sapphires, tortoise-shell, silk, spikenard and malabathrum.

All the nine kinds of gems which were available for sale in the city of Maturai have been well described in Cilappatikāram. (Cila. 14).

The first of them was Vayiram (diamond). The defects of Vayiram are twelve and the fineness are five; these and other deficiencies and fineness of all kinds of nine gems were described in detail by the commentator Aṭiyarkkunallē.  

"Diamonds which were free from such defects as crows’ feet, spots, holes and lines, which had no natural deficiencies observable by experts of trained acuteness, and which reflected the colours of the four castes (the colours of four castes, white,
red, green and black are distinguished in the diamonds). Emeralds of green brilliance free from black spots and defects of line and curve (marakatam-emerald); the manikkam variety known as patumam, nilam, bindu and spatikam, all of which were free from recognised defects; the pusparaga set with gold resembling a cat’s eye; the beautiful sardonyx (gomedaga) with the faultless brilliance of the sun; the blue gem (nilam) with crystallised darkness; the double-coloured vaiduriya; the good gems of five different kinds born from a common source (crystal quartz) and glimmering like the setting sun, as well as heaps of white pearls (candraguru), pink-lustred pearls (angaraka) and pearls of the finest quality (animuttu) all of which sparkled without any blemish caused by wind or sand, stone or water. There were also well-formed corals completely free from flaws in their inner cavities, without stones in their interspaces and untwisted  

This much is enough to show the ingenuity of the gem-merchants who selected the best of the gems accurately without any defects for exporting and selling in the local market.

The gold sold by the merchants were in four different kinds: cātarūpam, kijiccirai, atakam and cāmpūnatam. These were sold in four separate streets which have different type of flags indicating the type of gold available there.

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55 Dikshitar, (Tr.) The Cilappatikāram, pp. 236-237.
Ivory is one of the precious articles of the Tamil kingdoms exported during the Sangam age. The Cera and Kongu countries had plenty of this material for there were a series of hills in them which were the dwelling places for elephants. Even in other parts of Tamilnadu wherever there were mountains it seemed that the elephant population was of enormous size.

A poet while praising Ṛṣy Antiran, a chieftain, for his munificence of obliging the have-nots with hoards of elephants, says that the tuskers in his hills might have delivered at least ten calves at a single time (Puram.130/2). The synonyms for elephant, yānai, kaliru, vēlam, kari, piti, tumpi and ipam shows that elephant was well known and well used by the people. Taming an angry elephant was considered a brave act. Kövalan, the hero of the epic Cilappatikāram was once praised for his act of taming an elephant and saving an elderly person from its clutches ('Kaṭakkaliru atakkiya karunai maravan' Cila. 15/53).

A saying in Tamilnadu goes as follows: 'The Pantiyan country has pearls in plenty; the cola country has rice in plenty; the Cera country has elephants in plenty'. Almost all the kings had a retinue of elephant mounted warriors in their four-fold armies. One of the Cera kings was called 'palyaṅaiccel kēlu kuṭṭuvan' which actually means the Cera king with many an elephant hoards in his army. (Yānaiccel-elephant hoards). A part of the Cera country is called 'umpar kāṭu' (umpal - elephant; kāṭu-forest) i.e. a forest of elephants.
The hunters in the Kurĩṇci forests were experts in catching live elephants. Since they had ivory enormously, they exchanged them for rice (Kuru.100/3-5) and sometimes for toddy (Akam 61/9-10). Ivory was one of the items presented to the king Cēraṇ Ceṅkuṭṭuvan by the hunters when he visited their hilltop, along with honey, sandalwood, pepper, Jack-fruits etc. (Cila 25/37). Many valuable articles were made with ivory. There were skilled artisans who cut, screwed and polished ivory in those days (Cila 14/176). The Greeks and Romans purchased articles of ivory from Tamils by paying gold.

CLOTHES

Cotton was grown in plenty in many parts of Tamilnadu; when the ripe cotton burst nice spongy cotton came out; this cotton was purified with a bowl-like instrument and the seeds from them were removed; from this white cotton sponge, women, mostly widows and destitutes, made threads (Puram. 393/13; Nar. 253/1-2; Akam.133/6).

From this cotton rough and nice varieties of clothes were woven. They were so nice, that the poets compared the cotton cloth to the smoke of milk (pāl āvi), the coat of the snake (pāṃpu uri), the softness of flower petals (Pakanraip Putumalar) (Puram 397/15; 393/17, Porunar 82-83).

The shirts made of cotton threads were called either kaṅcukam or meyppai (Cila 16/107; 26/166; 28/80). Some officials and spies were seen attired in this kind of shirts. Mostly people wore two pieces of untailored clothes one
on the upper body and the other from the waist down to the ankle (‘uṇṇatunāli uṭuṇṇava ivranē’ - Puram 189/5).

The clothes from Tamilnadu were sent to many parts of the world. The nice varieties (muslin) were exported to Greece and Rome. It seems that they were sent to far Eastern countries because the cotton was not cultivated there. Artha Sastra indicates that the clothes from Tamilnadu went to Pataliputra of the Mauryas in the 3rd century B.C.; it uses the word ‘Maturam’ for clothes which means the cloth produced in the city of Maturai, the capital of Pantiyan country.

There was a separate street in Maturai called ‘Aruvai Viti’ where only textiles were sold. Cilappatikāram says there were several kinds of bundles piled up, and woven of cotton thread, rat’s hair and silk thread (Cila. 14/205, ‘Nülinum mayiriñum nulainur paṭṭinum’).

Tamils who went to Kalinka country on business returned with the clothes which were of a different type and quality, sold them in many parts of Tamilnadu. This cloth was called ‘Kalingam’. Later Kalingam became a household name of cloth.

Silk too was known to the Tamils. The ladies who changed their silk attire and used a common cotton variety during bedtime (Paṭṭina - 105) were mentioned in Sangam literature; the silk sarees had wide borders with many designs (Porunar 155); they were sometimes in dark red colour (Cila. 4/86).
The silk must have been produced in China and the Tamils who went to Java for trade purposes should have purchased silk from the Chinese and brought to Tamilnadu. Since the silk was not available in the west, Tamils took this opportunity to be middlemen in selling the silk to Greek, Rome, Egypt and Persia.

**OTHER ITEMS**

Apart from pepper, pearls, diamonds, ivory, cotton and silk, many other articles were exported to the West. They included cocoanuts, gingelly oil and timber of various kinds. Tigers, elephants, hounds parrots, peacocks, serpents and pythons were also exported to the West.

"The Periplus testifies to the South Indian export of coconut oil. While Pliny includes bananas, rice, millets and various medicinal plant products including nutmegs and tamarind".\(^{55}\)

Hence it is not without reason that Dr. Robert Caldwell, the author of the book, ‘A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages’. described the early Tamils as the ‘Greeks of the East’.\(^{57}\)


\(^{57}\) K.K.Pillay, p.261.
GOODS IMPORTED

As numerous items from the Indian shores were exported, so a large number of articles had been imported during Sangam period. The merchants who had pepper in large quantities exported it, by receiving gold or other valuable articles in exchange. No cash payment was ever expected from the foreigners as transaction in money was very much less. The whole of internal trade within the five regions was always on barter system; no money was involved in it.

Since almost all essential articles were grown in Tamilnadu itself, the people never had any problem of shortage of anything. Rice varieties, pulses, pepper, vegetables, salt, etc. were easily available then in Tamilnadu.

Some of the articles imported were horses, gems, incense wood, lamps, wine, silk, and certain machines as noted from ancient literature. Paṭṭinappālai. First let us see what the work Paṭṭinappālai says about the articles imported in Pukār, the Cola port.

\[
\begin{align*}
nirininru & \text{ nilattēravum} \\
nilattininru & \text{ nirpparappavum} \\
\text{āḷantariyōp} & \text{ palapaṇṭam} \\
varampariyāmai & \text{ vantiṇṭi} \quad (\text{Paṭṭina}, 129-132)
\end{align*}
\]

In Pukār, there were big godowns in which huge amount of various articles were collected; later, they were loaded on the ships waiting for taking
them to far away countries like Rome and Greece. The loading and unloading activities were compared to the clouds taking the water from the sea and pouring it on the mountains and the mount in turn sending the water by way of floods to the sea again. There was no restriction to the goods exported, but all the goods imported had the seal of the tiger, the insignia of the Cola emperor. The poet simply says that a variety of articles were imported as well as exported by the phrases ‘pala paṇṭam’ (Paṭṭina. 131) which means many articles and ‘mali paṇṭam’ (Paṭṭina. 135) a large quantity of articles.

There is another passage which details the articles which were imported (Paṭṭina. 185-195). The first of them was the horses. It is said that they were unloaded from the ships. They would have come from the Arabian countries which had big, tall and brave horse in large numbers. Hence ‘nīrin vanta nimirparip puravi’ (the horses which came by ship) confirms the import of horses.

The next article mentioned was ‘kālin vanta karunkari mūtai’ i.e. the black pepper bags which came also on ships with the help of winds. Though pepper was grown in the interior parts of Tamilnadu, businessmen were interested in buying a different variety of pepper from some other countries for onward transmission to the West.

Articles imported from North India included gold and mānikkam; they might have been brought in exchange of articles supplied by Tamil merchants. So they were mentioned as ‘vaṭamalaip piranta maniyum ponnum’ i.e. gold and mānikkam (a red coloured gem) found in Northern mountains.
‘Āram’ and ‘Akil’ were incense timber which the Tamils very much liked for their sweet smell; they came from the westerly mountains. Most probably these might have come through Western Ghats.

Pearls from the southern seas and corals from the eastern seas had also filled the Pukār harbour, the former from the Pantiya country and the latter from Far East countries. Though the Cola country had its own pearls and corals, they might have imported these for their variety or the superiority of the articles.

A large number of articles were imported from the Gangetic region such as elephants, mānikkam and perarls, according to the commentator Atiyārkkunallār; Pukār harbour also had the yields of Kāviri region too; these should have come from the river-side towns and villages.

It is surprising to note that a variety of eatables were imported in Pukār from the Ceylon; they might have been sealed and packed foodstuffs like pickles are fresh vegetables grown in Ceylon. There were also articles from ‘kālakam’ which is identified by scholars to Burma (now Myanmar). Though the names of the articles were not mentioned in Paṭṭinappālai, they might have been incense timber like Akil.

The items detailed in the lines of Paṭṭinappālai and the description of the harbour of pukār thereon clearly shows that a large number of articles were imported in good quantities to cater to the needs of the merchants and the general public. Greece and Rome in exchange of pepper and other articles
brought (1) gold coins, (2) metallic lamps, (3) silver coins and (4) wine of superior quality among other things.

Hoardsof gold coins have been unearthed at very many sites in Tamilnadu, particularly around Coimbatore district and Āticianallūr. They were not used as bullion but only as valuable metals. In the same way silver coins had been collected.

Metallic lamps in the shape of beautiful ladies and swans made of exquisite workmanship have been imported in large numbers (Neṭunāl.103; Mullai 85; Cila 5/154; Mani. 1/145; Perumpāṇ. 315-317). The frequent references in Sangam literature on the various types of lamps are proof enough to the import of them which have adorned the palatial building in those days.

Wine in beautiful containers had been imported from Rome. They were found in the Pantiyan palace where the king used to entertain the poets and others with the foreign wine (Pūram.56: Maturai.779-781). The shreds of many a beautiful wine pots were found at the sites where archaeological excavations were undertaken at Arikkamedu.⁵⁸

Many other articles also had been identified by the scholars. A gem called pushparāgam (topaz), muslin or linen clothes with embroidery, aṅcanakkal (antimony), coral, copper, lead, tin orpiment and realgae were some of the articles imported.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Venkataswamy, Paḻaṅkālet Tamiḻar Vāṉikam, p.124.
⁵⁹ Tamilnāṭṭu Varalāṟu, Sangekāḷam, Vāḻiyai, Tamil Nadu Text Book Society, Madras, (1983) P.166. (Hereafter cited as Tamilnāṭṭu Varalāṟu)
A kind of herbal medicine called spikenard, rare gems like diamonds, sapphires and conches were also imported; the first one came from North India, while the rest found their way from Malay islands.  

Some of the articles such as incense timber from Far East and silk clothes from China were also often imported only to export them to Greece and Rome where they were much sought after; Tamils acted only as middlemen as far as these goods were concerned.  

It is said that one of the ancestors of King Atiyamān of Takatūr brought sugarcane for the first time from the heavens by performing yagas and rituals to please the Gods [Puram 99]. There is no other references to confirm this act. However we come across a reference to a sugarcane-crushing machinery where jaggery was extracted from sugarcane at a place called Tenūr (Ain.55/1-2). The verse says that the sounds produced by the machines were like those of he – elephants. The smoke emanated from the jaggery manufacturing factories creating a like – alike of fire in the day time. (Ain.57).  

Silk in those days were imported from China and other Far East countries. We have many references of Tamil ladies wearing silk sarees in Sangam literature [Porunar.155; Paṭṭina.105; Cila. 4/86]. Cilappatikāram mentions akil, āram (incense timbers), tukil (silk), vācam and karuppūram

60 Tamilnāṭṭu Varāḷu, P.166.  
61 Tamilnāṭṭu Varāḷu, P.171.  
(used with betel leaves for taste and fragrance) were imported from Far East and unloaded at Tonyi on the Coromandal coast. Of these silk was purchased by Arabs and Greeks for selling in the Western countries.⁶³

To conclude this discussion, we may safely say that the maritime trade between the Tamils on one side and the Arabs, Greeks, Romans on the other side was brisk and profitable for the Tamil mercantile community. As Dikshitar puts it:

"Commerce by land and commerce by sea were their profession. These merchants had such a prosperous and flourishing trade that they massed mountains of wealth Pukar became one of the wealthiest towns of South India. This only shows that the ancient Tamils were forward in Commerce."⁶⁴

The history of South India of the Sangam Age written by many scholars and the numerous foreign notices of that period are replete with a large amount of details regarding the commercial activities of Tamilnadu. No historian will complete his work on Tamils without eulogising the external trade on both Coromandal and Western Coasts.

The archaeological finds at Arikkamedu near Pondicherry which confirms the existence of a Greek colony and a Roman factory at Nellur near Kollam where a potful of Roman coins were unearthed; at Pukar where many

⁶³ Venkataswamy, Pañhākalat Tamilār Vāṇikam, P135; Cīla 14/106-110.
⁶⁴ Dikshitar, Studies in Tamil Literature, p.262.
artefacts found confirm the external trade; at Ugaivur where considerable quantity of rouletted ware and a dyeing vat were unearthed confirm the Indo-Roman trade relationship; at Korkai where NBP viz. Northern Black Polished ware, pieces of 2nd century A.D. were found confirming the Tamils' contact with Northern India; at Karaikkatu and Kanchipuram wherein large conical bottomed wine jars called 'amphorae' were found which confirm the ceramic manufacturing in Tamil land - all confirm the Export - Import trade connections of Tamil merchants with their counterparts in the rest of the world.