Chapter II

CENTRES OF TRADE AND COMMERCE

"Business is like riding a cycle. Either you keep moving, or you will fall down".

- John David Wright
CENTRES OF TRADE AND COMMERCE

Many cities and towns during the Sangam period served as busy centres of trade and commerce. The emporia sometimes happened to be capital cities like *Maturai* and *Kāñci*, far away from seashores, and sometimes port cities like *Pukār (Kāvirippumpattinam)*, *Tonṭi* and *Muciri*.

A city to be an emporium or a busy centre of business activities should have the necessary infrastructural facilities. Buildings, godowns, streets, roadways, vehicles, dwelling places, shops, protection for life and property, etc. are the basic necessities for a trade centre. A close study of *Maturai* and *Pukār* gives ample evidence that they fulfilled all the necessities required for a full-fledged emporium.

Some of these emporia were internationally recognized and they were in no way less important to any of the Western centres of trade like Alexandria. They had a long history of business transactions with many of the foreign kingdoms of those days, both on the East and the West.

Apart from the capital cities of the three Tamil countries viz. *Maturai*, *Pukār* and *Vañci*, some other places like *Korkai, Urantai, Tonṭi, Muciri* and *Kāñci* had also been centres of trade during the Sangam period. Since these cities happened to be the seats of great kings and also busy centres of trade, ambassadors and messengers from distant and different places visited them.
Maturai

Maturai is a popular place in Tamilnadu for ages. It was the capital city of Pantiya Kings. There were many places with the same name. A city connected with the legend Lord Krishna was also called Maturai (i.e. Vaṭa Maturai-Northern Maturai). The first Sangam was supposed to have existed some three thousands years back in Maturai called Teq Maturai (The Southern Maturai) which was swallowed by the furious ocean long ago.

K.K. Pillay speaks of some places for their namesake:

"It may be observed in this connection that there is a small island called Madurai very near to the Northern part of Java. Madura (Dutch Madorea) and island Dutch East Indies separated by the swallow strait of Madura from North East coast of Java. Near the coast of Borneo also there exists an island, Madurai by name" ¹

Since the ancient city had marutam trees in plenty, it was named as ‘Marutai’ which later corrupted as Maturai. Some opine that it was named after Sanskrit ‘Maduram’ which means sweetness. The third Sangam existed at Maturai, the present city.

Maturai was constructed in the shape of a lotus flower. Paripājal vividly describes the various parts of the city.

¹ K.K. Pillay, p.48, fn.
The city was round in shape like the blossomed lotus which adorns the navel of Lord Tirumāl. The streets were like the petals of lotus; the palace of the king is like the thick seed ‘pokuṭṭu’ (Pari. Tiraṭṭu 7).

The fort was constructed with strong walls surrounded by deep moats. The moats, deep and full of water, are described as ‘maṇṇura aḷanta maṇinīrki kīṭaṅku’ (Maturai. 35).

The river Vaikai, running very close to the northern side of the fort, used to splash on the walls with a thunderous sound: ‘vaiyaitan nīrmurri matil pōlum’ (Kali. 67).

The area on the outskirts of the fort with big trees and bushes was called miḷai or kāvarkātu. It was also so formidable that no enemy could easily pass through it. Cilappatikāram describes this palace as

‘ilaicīl miḷaiyotu vaḷaivutan kīṭanta
ilaṅkunīr parappin valampuṇṭar akālī’ (Cila. 14/6263).

The outer walls of the fort was called puramatiḷ and the inner walls akamatiḷ. They were tall, wide and strong, rendering the enemies difficult to break through. The walls had heavy weapons hidden inside them at various secret places.

In the middle of the city was situated the grand palace of the king. Neṭunālaṭṭai describes the palace in full detail. The big building, the entrance, the wooden gates, the various parts and rooms of the palace, the apartment of
the queen, her beautiful cot, the couch on it, and the beautiful screens and paintings have all been minutely depicted by Nakhīrar in that poem.

There were big and beautiful streets in all directions from the palace. They were like the petals of a flower i.e. round in shape:

The principal streets in the city were the royal street, the market street, the courtesans’ street; the other streets were flooded with goldsmiths, corn dealers, merchants who sold gems, pearls and other precious stones, etc.

The bazaar had the following streets: kāvalar vīti, kalaiyōr vīti, irattinak hātai vīti, aruvai vīti, kūla vīti, āvana vīti, etc. The vehicles that passed through the bazaar were called vaiyam, pāntīl, and tēr.

Cilappatikāram also mentions a number of armors used in war, which were being sold in the bazaar. They included

"coats of mail, attractive goads, gloves used in warfare, efficacious medicines, curved bludgeons, white furry fans, pig-faced shields, shields with a picture of the forest on them, machines fitted with spears."

Articles made of steel and ivory were there along with garlands and sandal pastes spreading sweet fragrance in the bazaar. Each shop in the bazaar had a flag which was more or less a sign post indicating the article sold within. In aruvai vīti, there were clothes made of smooth cotton, rat’s hair and

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silk. In the street where pulses were sold, a large variety of grains including pepper were available for sale. At various places were canti, a junction of three streets and catukkam, a junction of four streets i.e. nārcanti (Cila 14/213).

PUKAR

Pukār, also known as Pūmpukār or Kāverippūmpatīnagam, was on the northern banks of the river Čavēri, and was the hub of commercial activities of the Cola country for many centuries. Paṭṭinappālai, Porunarruppattai, Cilappatikāram and Maṇimēkalai along with a few stray lyrics of other Sangam works serve us as a source material for the ancient city of Pukār. Particularly, Paṭṭinappālai and Cilappatikāram vividly describe the plan of the town, the regions and streets allotted for various activities, the port, the merchandise, the people, etc. and they give a wholesome account of Pukār.

PUKAR - ITS AREA

On the extent and area of the ancient Pukār city, Cilappatikāram says:

In the Catukkam, there was a demon which in a loud voice audible to more than four kātams (1 kātam = 10 miles), shouted that it will catch those who gave false witness and spoke from one’s back, with its deadly rope.

According to Mayilai Seeni Venkatasami, the city was rectangular in shape, its length on the East and West and its breadth on the South to North.³

³ Mayilai Seeni Venkataswamy, Sangakālat Tamilaka Varalāṟṟil Cila Ceytkai, Annamalai University, Annamalai nagar, 1970, p.128. (Hereafter cited as Venkataswamy).
T.V. Sadasiva Pandarattar estimates an area of 30 sq. miles for the Pukār of those days.

**THE PLAN OF THE CITY**

The capital city of Pukār which was situated on the northern bank of the river Kāveri had two broad divisions viz. Maruvūrppākkam and Paṭṭinappākkam. The sandy place adjacent to the sea was called neytalāṅkāṇal. On the western part of the city was Paṭṭinappākkam and the eastern part close to Neytalāṅkāṇal was called Maruvūrppākkam. There was a park in between the two pākkams which looked like the vacant battle field of two armies. Around the park, there was a market called Nālaṅkāṭi. On the south of Maruvūrppākkam was the paṇṭacālai a godown for storing articles imported and exported.

**MARUVŪRPPĀKKAM**

As mentioned earlier, the division between the eastern side of the park of Nālaṅkāṭi and the seashore was called Maruvūrppākkam. There were open terraces, godowns and warehouses with windows like the eyes of the deer. Commenting on the trade and commerce in this part of Pukār, Ramachandra Dikshitar has observed:

T.V. Sadasiva Pandarattar, Kāverippūmpattīnam, Matavi manram, Malaipperumpallam, 1939, p.16
"In the streets of the city hawkers went about with paints, bathing powders and cool pastes, flowers, incense and fragrant scents. In certain places weavers were seen dealing in fine fabrics made of silk, fur and cotton. Whole streets were full of silks, corals, sandal and myrrh, besides a wealth of rare ornaments, perfect pearls, gems and gold, which were beyond reckoning."

There were also streets where grain-dealers lived who kept their grains in separate heaps. washermen, makers of muffins, wine-sellers, fishermen selling fish, dealers in white salt, those who sold betel leaves, those who dealt in scents, mutton vendors, oil mongers, meat-vendors, dealers in bronze, manufactures of copper, carpenters, strong armed blacksmiths, sculptors, potters, goldsmiths, jewelers, tailors, cobblers, skilled workers of all sorts who made fancy trinkets of pieces of cloth and cork, great musicians who knew the whole technique of musical science and could exhibit their faultless skill on flute and lute by sounding the seven notes; and finally the lower class of artists who excelled in several minor arts, had their respective localities. All these places in the city went by the name of Maruvūrppākkam.5

The above description clearly gives us an idea of the composition of Maruvūrppākkam. All the foreigners, vendors of articles like fish, meat and salt, workers, skilled and unskilled, artisans, musicians and instrumentalists who were in the lower rung of the society lived here.
Businessmen from foreign countries stayed in beautiful buildings which attracted the attention of the onlookers. Yavanás and sailors of different nationalities had come and stayed at Marvūrppākkam.

The coming of foreigners to this city is confirmed by Pāṭṭīnapalai as 'pulampeyar mākkal kalantini turaiyum muṭṭac cirappīn paṭṭinam' (Paṭṭīna. 217-218)

PĀTTINAPPĀKKAM

Both Cilappatikāram and Pāṭṭīnapalai give a vivid account of Pāṭṭinappākkam. The king’s palace, the magnificent temples, the beautiful parks and the houses of the rich people who lived in that part of Pukār are detailed in these works. Particularly, the Nālaṅkāti, the day-market was described elaborately. It was a "large area of an open ground, planted with trees at regular intervals" (Cila. 5/59-63) The important day-market was held here.

THE HARBOUR AT PUKĀR

Being the capital of the Colas and an important centre of sea trade Pukār had a busy harbour. This has been recorded by foreign travellers also. The harbour was situated to the south of Maruvārppākkam where the river Kāveri joined the sea. A large number of ships, with high masts and flags, used to be anchored in the harbour. In Pāṭṭinappālai, the poet has compared the ship to an elephant tied to an iron pillar and agitating restlessly.
velil ilakkum kaijru polat
impukart turai munrugait
tunku navaity tuvanni rukhai
micaikkumpin acaikkoti (Paṭṭina.172-175)

In the harbour there were godowns to stock goods received from almost all directions (Paṭṭina.185-193). On the bags of articles, both imported and ready for export, there were seals of tiger, probably put by customs authorities. Near the harbour there was a big lighthouse which guided ships including those from other nations whose languages were different:

Thus, the activities of the harbour as described in Paṭṭinappālai lead us to consider this port of Pukār to be the most important in the whole of India during the first few centuries before and after the Christian Era.

TONTI .

It is clear from a careful study of the history of ancient Tamilnadu that the Cola, Pantiya and Cera kingdoms had two capitals each, both for the convenience of administration and for political and commercial purposes. One of them was invariably a sea-port, where according to the Foreign Notices on South India, trade flourished with Rome, Greece, Arabia and a few other countries. In the Cera country there were two sea-ports viz. Tonti and Muciri. Of these, Tonti was the seat of one or two of Cera kings. It has been referred to in many of the Sangam poems. Foreign travellers too have mentioned in their writings about the importance of this city.
Toṇti has very often been used by the poets of Sangam Age as a simile, to describe the beauty of young women. The port-city must have been both wealthy and beautiful. Unless it had been charming, the poets would not have likened the city to a damsel.

The eastern wind of Toṇti (kontaḷ) wafted the colourful waves of the sea to the sandy shores; the fishermen went into the sea in their old boats called ‘timil’ and brought horned fish, which were later left to dry on the high shores of the sea. The seaside ‘Pākkams’ of Toṇti had the pervasive smell of fish which only showed the wealth of the city.

The city of Toṇti was the headquarters of the Poraiyar line of Cera kings and this has been revealed in some of the Sangam poems. For example, a poem in Akaṇanur describes the action of a woman who carries cooked rice with fish and other dishes for her father, a fishing expert, which she acquired by selling salt. (Akam.60/1-7)

While Ptolemy mentions Toṇti as ‘Tyndis’, the Periplus put it as ‘Thundis’ it was a ‘large village close to the shore’. In the McCrindle of Ptolemy, we find Yule saying:

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6 Avvai S. Doraisami Pillai, Paṇṭainālaic Cāramannar Varalāru, Tiravalar Patippakam, Tuticorin, 1968, p.50.
7 V. Kanagasabai, The Tamils 1800 years Ago, Kazhagam, Madras, 1966, p.17. (Hereafter cited as Kanagasabai)
‘Tānur itself may be Tyndis; it was an ancient city, the seat of principality, and in the beginning of the 16th century had still much shipping and trade.‘

Though there are various arguments about the exact location of Toṇṭi, it is not examined in detail as it is beyond the scope of this study. But all accounts of Toṇṭi found in the Sangam poems and the notices of the foreign travellers emphasize the fact that Toṇṭi was a sea-port buzzing with commercial activities.

_Cilappatikāram_ mentions another Toṇṭi (Cila.14/107) which was a city on the eastern coast.

**MUCIRI**

Another important place in the Cera country which attracted Tamil scholars is Muciri, a port well-known for its connections with other countries through trade and commerce. Whether this port-city, Muciri was also the capital of the Ceras or not, we cannot say definitely about it. But there are some points which lead us to infer that Muciri might have been a minor capital city for some of the kings of the Cera dynasty, or that some viceroys of the Cera kings might have been stationed with Muciri as their headquarters. While dealing with the Indian voyage, Pliny has referred to this Cera city by name Muziris. He says:

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Quoted by Kanagasabai, p.18.
'If the wind called Hippalus be blowing, Muziris, the nearest mart of India, can be reached in forty days. It is not a desirable place to call, pirates being in the neighborhood who occupy a place called Nitrias, and besides it is not well supplied with wares for traffic. Ships, besides, anchor at a great distance from the shore, and the cargos have to be landed and shipped by employing boats. At the time I was writing this, Caelobothras was the sovereign of this country.'

The reference in the Sangam literature to Muciri as a busy trade centre and the siege on Muciri confirm our view that Muciri, besides being a busy sea-port, might have been a minor capital of the Ceras at least for some years.

Muciri was a wealthy city and the harbour was frequented by foreign ships. This resulted in the arrival and settling down of many foreigners in Muciri. As there were Yavana merchants and servants in other ancient cities such as Maturai and Pukār, Muciri too had a large number of them, perhaps larger in number than any other city.

A poet in Akaṇānūru mentions the presence of Yavana ships in Muciri:

'The beautiful Greek ships which came with a large amount of gold to Muciri left the harbour with pepper and other articles, making the sea water splash with white foam.' (Akam.149/8-11).

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K.A.N.Sastir, *Foreign Notices of South India*, University of Madras, Madras 1972, p.53.
Another verse in *Puranänūryu* (*Puram.*343/5-10) also tells of the bustle of ships in the harbour of *Muciri*:

Sacks of pepper were brought from the house to the market; gold received from ships, in exchange for articles sold, were brought to shore in barges, at *Muciri*, where the music of the surging sea never ceased, and where *Kṛṭṭuvan* (the Cera King) presented to visitors, the rare products of the seas and mountains.  

The importance of *Muciri* as a centre of trade for the *Yavanās* is quite clear from these references.

Ships arrived in *Muciri* even from Egypt; Pliny says that the ships which left the harbour at Ocelis, with the help of the south-westerly wind, reached *Muciri* after forty days of travel. The *Periplus* too confirms this Egyptian contact with *Muciri*.

Since the number of foreigners who came to *Muciri* was large, a Roman colony was formed in the town exclusively for them. In order to protect their trade, the Romans had stationed two cohorts (consisting of army men between 840 and 1200) at *Muciri*. This is revealed by the Peutingerian Tables constructed probably about 226 A.D.

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10. Kanagasabai, p.16.
The Cera country stood foremost in commercial relationship with western countries during the Sangam age. This part of Tamilnadu had in abundance cash crops like pepper, cardamom, sandalwood, etc. which were sought after eagerly by foreigners especially Romans and Egyptians. Regarding the commodities exported and imported on the Western coast and especially in Muciri.

K.K. Pillay says:

"From the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, the work of an anonymous author of the 1st century A.D., it is learnt that Greek merchants from Egypt brought to the Malabar coast wine, brass, lead, copper, tin, orpiment, antimony and wheat. They also brought for sale to the Muziris (modern Cranganore) and to Bakare, identified with Vaikkarai near Kottayam. They purchased at these ports pepper, pearls, ivory, diamonds, sapphire, tortoise shell, silk, spikenard and malabathrum. In this connection it must be observed that the items of import and export seem to have been confused to a certain extent; but the lists indicate at any rate the articles which figured in the trade." 13

This kind of trade activity and the busy traffic in Muciri is well picturised in Sangam literature. Akam 149 quoted earlier describes how the foreign ships came with gold often and left Muciri with articles like pepper and the rare products of the sea and mountains of the Cera country.

13 K.K. Pillay, p.252.
As regards the Roman trade with *Muciri*, it has been pointed out that:

"The Roman imports were in the shape of coins, coral, wine, lead and tin. The Sangam works give ample evidence of the wine given by foreign traders and the reference in Puram 126, where the huge amount of gold that sailed into the Cera port is mentioned, is echoed by Tacitus bemoaning the drain of gold from Rome."  

Thus, of all the ports of ancient India, *Muciri* attracted foreigners more than any other. It had the most important and prominent harbour in the Western coast easily accessible to Romans and Greeks. Though the ships found it difficult to enter the harbour and had to be anchored at a distance, the transport of the goods was done with the help of small boats. Pliny considers Muziris as the most important port of India i.e. Primum Emporium Indiae.  

In sum, *Muciri*, along with *Toaṭi* was a great port city and had played an important role in the commercial relationships of the Cera country with Rome, Greece, Egypt and other countries. It proved to be an important centre of trade, busy with naval traffic, carrying merchandise to and from the Cera country.

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14 M.Arokiaswamy, *The Classical Age of the Tamils*, University of Madras, Madras, 1972, p.79.

15 K.K.Pillay, p.270
Korkai

Korkai, a seaport of by gone days and now a small village, was the second capital of the then Pantiyan Kingdom. Pliny and Ptolemy who have written about Pantiyas have mentioned this port as Kolkei, Kolchoi, etc.  

Korkai has been mentioned in many Tamil poems of the Sangam period. (Nar.23/6, Ai.185/1,188/2, Akam.27/9,130/1,201/4).

This city was very famous for its beautiful pearls which were taken from the deep sea and was a centre of commercial activity for a very long period.

Most of the historians are of the view that Korkai was the second or secondary capital of Pantiya country. But some scholars identify this city with Kapāṭapuram of the second Sangam and hence consider that Korkai was also a capital before Maturai.

Pliny, Ptolemy, Strabo, Tiberius and the author of Periplus have given some information on the trade contacts of Pantiya kings with Western countries, which should have been possible only through this harbour city of Korkai. Hence a study of Korkai necessitates a peep into the writings of these foreigners.

16 Kanagasabai, p.35.
PERIPLUS

On Korkai, the author of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (80 A.D) says: "From Comari (i.e. Cape Comorin) towards the south of this region extends to Colchi (i.e. Korkai) where the pearl fisheries are; (they are worked by condemned criminals) and it belongs to the Pantiyan kingdom." 17

PTOLEMY

In the list of palaces mentioned by Ptolemy (150 AD), Korkai finds a place. Further he has called the sea between Ceylon and the Pantiyan coast 'the Orgalic Gulf'; it may be remembered that the sea was called in Tamil ārkali (kaṭal). 18

TIBERIUS

The export from Korkai was on so large a scale that political leaders in Rome voiced their concern about the money spent on luxury. Rome bought articles from South India including pearls (of Korkai), worth 6 lakh gold coins. Commenting on the money spent on pearls in Rome, Tiberius (16-37 A.D.) said that Rome was becoming poor on account of this19

17 K.A.N.Sastri, Foreign Notices of South India, p.59.
18 Kanagasabai, p.23
Since Korkai happened to be an important trade centre of navigation and commerce, people from distant places assembled on the sands of the seashore. Valuable articles were loaded and unloaded in the dock.

On the commercial importance of Korkai, the Manual of Tinnevely has this to say:

"Persians, Arabians, Phoenicians, Hebrews, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Greeks and Romans as well as Chinese, Burmese, and other Eastern nations all had intercourse with the Tamilans and traded in various commodities as fine gold, pearls, different gems, ivory, peacocks, monkeys, sandal, ebony and other rich woods, ointments, spices, indigo, cotton and silk clothes, etc." 20

The Pantiyas' contact with Rome and Greece was only through Korkai. They had sent ambassadors to Rome during the periods of Augustus (63 B.C -74 A.D.) and Nero (54 A.D.-68 A.D.). Because of the great friendship between the two counties, the trade too had reached a new peak during the first century B.C and A.D. In Korkai, more articles were exported than imported. According to Strabo, one hundred and twenty ships carrying a large amount of gold and money left Hormas to buy costly articles in India. 21

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20 A Manual of Tinnevely, Stuart, pp.43-44.
21 A.Raghavan, Konakar Korkai, Kalainur Patippakam, 1971, p.62 (Hereafter cited as Raghavan)
P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar writing on the commercial success of Pantiyan kingdom says: "In the time of Emperor Augustus, there was a great development of India’s trade with Rome."

The pearls of Pantiya Kingdom attracted foreigners. It is said that the great Egyptian queen, Cleopatra, wore pearl ornaments such as ear rings and necklaces. Even her dress had pearls tagged on to the edges. In one of her feasts, she dropped pearls in the wine served to the guests. It is further stated that her ear-rings alone were worth 1,16,458 sovereigns

VAṉCI

The study of Vaṉci is more fascinating than the study of any other city of India. This ancient capital city of the Cera country had been the subject of discussion among erudite Tamil scholars in the past four or five decades. The name, the history, the location and everything else connected with the city have been topics of controversy and commentary.

As a capital city Vaṉci naturally caught the attention of ancient poets who have referred to it in numerous verses. For this very reason, interpretations became complicated and difficult in later years. The city was named Vaṉci, because it had plenty of Vaṉci trees and Vaṉci creepers. Maṉimekalai clearly refers to the name as "porkoṭip peyar pattūum"
ponnakar" (Mani.26/92). Vañci was a rich city and people had all they needed. Hence, it was called by the poet Ilanko Atikal ‘vaḷa vañci’. (Cila.17/31).

The city had a towering Buddhist temple constructed by an ancestor of Kōvalan to which Mācāttuvān (Kōvalan’s father) went for worship ‘Later he became a Buddhist monk and resided in the Intiravikāram monastery of the town.’

The city had an impregnable fortress surrounded by a deep moat. It had swimming pools where the young men and the beautiful women of the city used to bathe. The city also had a well-planned drainage system.

Coming to the activities of commerce and trade, Vañci had a large number of thickly populated streets. There were separate streets for those who sold fish, white salt, toddy, sweet-meats and such as appam and piṭṭu, mutton, betel leaves and fragrant articles (Mani.28-29).

Next to them were the streets of potters, coppersmiths and goldsmiths, carpenters, sculptors, painters, makers of leather goods, tailors, flower sellers, astrologers, musicians and others; then followed the streets of chank cutters and makers of pearl necklaces (Mani.28-44).

Vañci also had streets where pulses were sold and streets for those who entertained and praised the king. There were also streets for textile workers who spun nice clothes with fine multi coloured threads.

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The next streets were those of gold merchants who lived in tall houses, of merchants who sold a variety of gems, and of Brahmins who never failed to perform religious rituals. Then there were the big palace street and the council of ministers street; and then streets of commanders of war and other officials. Those who trained elephants and horses had their own streets (*Maṇi*.28-60).

This long list of streets mentioned in *Maṇimēkalai* bears testimony to the wealth of the people, the easy availability of articles, the best arrangement of streets and the high standard of commerce and trade in *Vaṅci*, the capital city of Ceras.

**URAIYÜR**

*Uraiyyur* was centre of trade situated on the southern bank of *Kavēri*; now it is a part modern town Tiruccirappalli this was second only to *Pukār* in Cola kingdom.

Ptolemy mentions *Uraiyyur* by the name Orthoura, ‘the royal city of Sorlago.’*25 Periplus* also refers to this city. According to the *Periplus* the capital city *Uraiyyur* was the chief mart for the pearls and the well known Argynitic muslins.*26 This adjective is derived from ‘*Urakapuram*’ another name for *Uraiyyur*. It was also was also called *Urantai*.

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25 Kanagasabai, p.22
King Karikālan came back to this city which was once destroyed by his enemies. On the renovation of Uraiyyur, V. Kanagasabai says,

"His sagacious mind was not slow that the position of his captial Uraiyyur, far from the sea coast, was disadvantageous to commerce. He therefore, fortified Kāvēripaṭṭinam the grand emporium of trade at the mouth of Kāvēri and made it his capital" 27

Excavations were undertaken at Uraiyyur and many valuable materials were unearthed testifying the commercial contacts of ancient Tamilnadu with Rome. A considerable quantity of rouletted ware was unearthed at this site in the lower-most levels. This finding confirms the contact between Uraiyyur and Rome before 2nd century A.D.

KAṆCI

Kānci was capital of Tontainātu; it is a city of temples and in Sanskrit it is praised as 'nagareshu kānci'. Maṇimēkalai and Perumpāṇṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟheritance give some information. The city was also called as Kacci and Kāncipuram.

Kānci was a beautiful city with tall buildings made up of brick in the form of lotus flower (Perumpāṇ.402-405). The city was also compared to the jack fruit tree which has ripe fruits without having previously any flower (Perumpāṇ.407). Kaccippēṭṭu Nānṇākaiyār was a Sangam poet belonging to this city. Since this was a cosmopolitan city for a long time with people of various religious faiths assembling very often there, the city could have been

27 Kanagasabai, p.68
developed as a centre of trade slowly and by the time when Hieun Tsiang visited, it was not only a land of religion but also a commercial centre. Not much is known about this commercial city.

According to Perumpān, there were many foreigners in the city of Kānci, who roamed about in the streets selling costly articles brought by road from mountains and by ships from abroad (Perumpān, 67-76); Naccinārkkiniyar, the commentator says, that these merchants sold gems, pearls and sandalwood.28

The poem also says that there were people who took bags of pepper on the backs of donkeys for commercial purposes, and the merchants had to pay necessary customs tax on this highway (Ulkuṭaip peruvali – the highway where the customs tax were collected, Perumpān, 81).

TARANGAMBADI

During the Sangam Age, there were many smaller port cities along the Coromandal coast. Apart from Pāmpukār, Toṇṭi and Korkai, there existed Poraiyār, Tarangambadi (Tranquebar), Karaikkal, Nākappattinam, etc., on this coast.

"According to Dr. Nagasamy, The whole coastal area from Nangur to Nagappattinam, has been an active international commercial and cultural centre from about 3rd century B.C. onwards."29

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29 R.Nagaswamy, Tarangambadi, B.S.Combine, Madras, 1987, p.3 (Hereafter cited as Nagaswamy)
Tarangampadi (Tranquebar) is situated 15kms, south of the ancient port Pümpükär. Its history along with the near by city Poraiyār can be traced from the early Christian era.

"The Puranānūru, Narrinai and Akanānūru refer to Poraiyār. The famous poet Kallātanār praises the chieftain of Poraiyār in Puram 391. Poraiyār is referred to as a port town i.e. Munturai. It is likely that the sea which was originally skirting Poraiyār has received subsequently to the second century A.D. by about a mile. Poraiyār continued to play an important role in the history of Trnaquebar till 19th century."

The port which was frequented by Greeks and Arabs during the early centuries later had the rare distinction of receiving English, Dutch, French and the Danes from the seventeenth century onwards.

**PONDICHERY**

Periplus mentions about Podouke which is now identified with Pondicherry, also known as Putuccēry. According to that work, Podouke was sixty miles North of Camara i.e. Pukār. Periplus might have given the name of Podouke instead of Arikkamedu, according to scholars.\(^{31}\)

Excavations at this site has given ample proof for the trade connection between Tamilnadu and Greco-Romans. There might have been a godown at

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\(^{30}\) Nagaswamy, p.2

this place. Many artifacts confirming the visits of foreign merchants in the first century A.D were unearthed at Arikkamedu. Vases, vessels, amphorae, coins belonging to Romans speak volumes on the close link between Tamilnadu and the West.

"At Arikkamedu glass beads of different shapes have been found in the strata datable to the 1st century A.D. Specimens of imported Roman glass have also been found in the same site." 32

A number of sawn conch-shells have also been found in the Arikkamedu excavations confirming the export of the chanks to Greece and Rome from Tamilnadu.

Regarding Pondicherry and Arikkamedu, K.K.Pillay says:

"The excavations have revealed that Arikkamedu was not only an ancient town and port, evidently identifiable with the Poduke of Ptolemy, but also a centre of trade with the Greco-Roman world... On the basis of internal and external evidence, Dr. Mortimer Wheeler concludes that the pottery and the arretine ware and amphorae, imported from Italy, can be dated to 20-50 A.D." 33

According to him, "the glorious epoch of Arikkamedu's industrial and commercial activity ranged during the first two centuries of the Christian era" 34
Excavations confirm ‘the presence of a Roman factory at Arikkamedu (Aruhan mound, Jaina mound) in the neighbourhood of Pondicherry in the first century.’

**EYIRPATÌNAM**

This port-city which lies near Pondicherry was mentioned in the foreign notices as ‘Sopotma’ (*Sō* i.e. *Chō* means fortress; *eyil* is a synonym for *sō*, and hence the name *Sopotma*). The city now goes with the name Marakkānam, just a few miles from Pondicherry.

*Cirupānāruppatai*, sung by *Nattattaṉar*, describes this city as one surrounded by forts and deep moats (*Ciru*.153); the ships unloaded here ‘virai maram’ a timber of incense, most probably brought from Java. Horses and the articles from North India were brought by ships to *Eyirpatinnam*. (*Perumpaṉ*.320-323). There was a lighthouse here (*Perumpaṉ*.350).

**MARUṆKŪRPATÌNAM**

Another centre of trade in Pantiyar kingdom *MaruṆkūrppatinnam*. *MaruṆkai* in short was on the Eastern shores. There were lagoons and beautiful gardens in *MaruṆkai*. According to Nakkīrar, this city was prosperous and the streets were always full of commercial activities. (*Akam* 227/19-21).

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Ships used to frequent this city of Maruṅkai and one of the narrinai poems mentions the anchored ship on which crows rested with the fish stolen from the market place (Nar.258/8-10). A part of this port-city was called Ünür which had big buildings surrounded by fortresses and moats (Akam.227/18). This place was fertile with plenty of paddy fields (Akam.220).

In one of his essays, Mayilai Seeni Venkatasami has made a brief description of this city of Maruṅkai along with the interior Ünür. He has also sketched the probable plan of Maruṅkai and Ünür, (the figure is given in Appendix), which according to him was almost similar to that or Pukār having two separate distinct divisions, one adjoining the shore, Maruvārppākkam and the other being interior place, Paṭṭinappākkam.35

**NELLŪR**

There is a mention of this city, Nellūr, in Mauteraikkānci (Maturai.87) which also happens to be a port-city of the Pantiyan kingdom. Commentators point out that this city was also called as Cāliyur, Cāli being a kind of paddy (Maturai. 87, Naccinārkkiniyar).

Caliyur has the distinction of being mentioned by the Greek geographer Ptolmey as *Salour*. The description of the harbour of this city in Mauteraiikkānci is as follows:

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35 Venkatswamy, Palankālat Tamīlār Vānikam, p.25
A large number of ships from abroad which splashed through the roaring seas with the aid of favourable winds were anchored in the harbour. Goods were unloaded from the ships to the accompaniment of music. The scene of the ships on the seas was like the siege of mountains by floods. (*Maturai*, 75-88).

At another place in the same idyll, the poet describes the merchandises brought in the ships. They include pearls, conch, grains, jaggery, salt, dry fish, etc. along with horses from foreign countries (*Maturai*, 315-324).

Mayilai Seeni Venkatasami considers *Nellūr* or *Cāliyūr* as none other than the *Maruṅkūr* mentioned earlier.\(^{37}\) There is no evidence to show that both *Nellūr* and *Maruṅkūrppaṭṭinam* were one and the same.

**OTHER CENTRES OF TRADE**

Foreign notices give us a list of important cities which might have been centres of trade in those days.

The unknown author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* mentions *Naoor, Thundis, Mooziris, Nelkunds, Bakarae, Kolkhoin, Komor, Camara, Poduke* and *Sopotma*.

The ‘Map of the World’ prepared by Ptolemy the Alexandrian Geographer, gives us the names of *Bramagara* and *Kalaikarias* between

\(^{37}\) *Venkatswamy, Pāḷaṅkāḷa Tamiḻar in Vāṇigam*, p.95
Tundis, Muziris, Vaikkarai, Podoperoura, Semne and Koreoura, Cottanara, Melkunda, Elangkon, Kottiara, Bommala and Komaria, Sosikourai, Salour, Khaberia, etc.

Scholars have succeeded in identifying some of these trade centres, Naora or Naura is Cannanore in the Cera country. Tyndis or Thundis is none other than Tońi of the West coast mentioned in Sangam works; this is identified with Ponṇāṇi; Muziris is the famous Muciri port, later known as Cranganore.

Melkunda or Nelcynda which was part of the Pantiyan kingdom was situated on a river at a distance of 120 stadia from the sea; but at the mouth of the river there was a village called Bakarae. K.K. Pillay doubtfully refers this to Vaikkarai near Koṭṭayam or Vaṅkalai near Kollam on the West. But K.A.N. Sastri prefers Bakarae to Porakad of the same coast. According to the author of Periplus, "here (Bakarae) the vessels which come down from Nelkunda lie in an open road to receive their cargoes, for the river is full of shoals of mud banks and the channel between them is not deep."

Komor is Kanyākumāri which was frequented for the purpose of ablution by those who lead a life of devotion and taken a vow of celibacy. Ptolemy prefers to call this Komoria. This place became a place of worship and ceased

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38 K.K. Pillay, p.266
39 K.A.N. Sastri, A History of South India, p.139.
40 K.K. Pillay, p.266
to be a port in later period. Since Korkai was very near Komar, ships were directed to that busy centre of trade.

Elaŋkōn was a mart in the Aioi country. This is identified with Viliñam, an important town under the Ay chieftains, feudatories of Pantiyan Kingdom. This is the place where great battles were fought and won by Varakuṇa Pantiya (765-815) and Kulōttuṟika Cola (1070-1122) during the medieval period.

In an interesting article on the connections of Greece and South India, from Ptolemy Philadelphus (283-246 B.C) to Cosmas Indicopleustos (C.543 A.D), Eliki Lascarides-Zannas has elucidated certain points. She says:

“It is interesting to point out that the Ptolemies desired to attract goods from the South (Africa and Arabia) and East (mainly India), not only for their own needs, but also for the purpose of re-exporting them to the North-East and North-West partly as merchandise in simple transit, partly in the form of manufactured articles, produced in the workshops of Alexandria and Egypt in general” 41

She also suggests that the discovery of the monsoon and the information given by a stranded Indian merchant might have prompted Eudoxus of Cyricus to carry out his first expedition towards the middle of second century B.C. 42

Zannas, p.6/27
When Romans in the first century B.C. conquered Western Asia, destroyed Jerusalem, and ruled Egypt, they continued and intensified the flourishing trade. She claims that the Chinese silk on destination to the Roman market was passing through *Muziris* or *Barygaza* on the Malabar coast, to avoid *Parthia*.  

Cosmos’ Christian Topography, in McCrindle’s translation gives the following information:

"Even in Taprobane (Tambraparani), an island in Further India where the Indian sea is, there is a Church of Christians, with clergy and a body of believers, but I know not whether there by any Christians in the parts beyond it. In the country called Male (Malabar), where pepper grows there is also a church, and at another place called Calliana (Calicut), there is moreover a bishop, who is appointed from Persia."  

Cosmos, though lived four centuries later, of our period of study, has enumerated the most notable places of trade in India. They include: *Sindhu, Orrbatha, Sibor, Male, Parti, Mangarouth, Salopatana, Nalopatana and Pondopatana.*

When Cosmos speaks of ‘island of Taprobane’ he might have thought of Sri Lanka; however *Taprobane* is identified with River *Tamparaparani*.

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43 Zannas, p.6/28  
44 Zannas, p.6/31
Cosmos details the trade activities in the island and frequent visits of ships from various parts of India, Persia and Ethiopia.

_Sindhu_ according to him, was on the frontiers of India, for the River _Indus_, that is, the Phison, discharges into the Persian Gulf. _Orrbatha_ is identified with _Surat_ in Gujarat; _Sibor_ is _Chane_ of Chenwal, a seaport 23 miles, south of Bombay.

_Male_ is the mart at _Malabar_; _Mangarouth_ has been identified with _Mangalore_; _Calliana_ is obviously the port city of _Calicut_; _Parti, Salopatana, Nalopatana_ and _Pondopatana_ were towns on the seashore (_Patana-pattinam_ which means a town on the sea coast), _Eliki_ states that they were situated between _Mangalore_ and _Calicut_ on the coast of _Cottanarike_, the pepper country. However, _Salopatana_ may be identified with _Caliyur_; _Nalopatana_ with _Nellur_; and _Pandopatana_ with _Pondicherry_, all the three have been mentioned elsewhere in this chapter.

A list of cities, towns, villages and islands mentioned by Ptolemy is given below. Some of the places have been identified by the scholars as mentioned earlier; some others have not been so far identified; 

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45 Zannas, p.6/33
46 This list is prepared from the Tamil book, _Tamilis 1800 years Ago_, by V.Kanagasabai, p.33-46.
1) **Western coast**

Adarima
Adarima Koxeour
Aioi
Aioi Morunda
Aloe
Arembur Bidaris
Bakarei
Bramagara
Elamgkon
Kalaikkarias
Karoura, the royal seat of Kerobothras
Komaria, a cap and down
Koreoura
Kottanara
Kottiara, the metro polise
Kouba
Kourellour
Masntonour
Melkynda
Mouziris, an emporium
Naroulla
Palaura
Pantipolis
Pasage
Podoperoura
Pournata
Pseudostomos
Samne
Tyndis
Vieeris
2) **Eastern coast**

Aboar
Akour
Argiron
Arovarnori
Bata
Batoi
Bere
Coty
Eikour
Karei
Karmare
Kalindoia
Kaliour
Kolkhi
Koroula
Korindiour
Kottis
Magour
Mantittour
Manarpha
Mendela
Modoura
Nikama
Orgalic Gulf
Orthoura
Paralia of the Soratai
Peringkarei
Poduka, and emporium mouth of river Tyna
Salur
Selour
Sosikouri
Tangala
Talara
Tainour
Tellagora
Thalkheir
Tittona

3) Island cities

Iatoyr
Ikarta
Island of kory
Island manigaris
Kandipatna
Karige
Kerange
Maisolia, watered by the river Mailsolas (the Krishna)
Malange, the royal city parasanagos
Phourion
Pikendaka
Polcour

To conclude, there were enough number of trade centres which served as catalysts promoting trade and commerce. It may be safely said that polarisation of centres of trade and commerce, and that of a large number of port cities facilitated free flow of internal and external trade. All of them contributed for the orderly development of economy during the period taken for study.