

REVISITING OF THE PUNCH- MARKED COIN FINDING PLACES IN SRI LANKA

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Punch-marked Coins are the earliest coin type found in Sri Lankan coinage³⁰³. The coins had been circulated from 3rd century B.C. to 4th century A.C.³⁰⁴ Punch-marked Coins found in Sri Lanka belong to imperial series and have a Northern Indian origin³⁰⁵. The coins have been unearthed from many regions of Sri Lanka. Most researches have been conducted on the basis of North Central, North-West and North of the Island as these regions unearthed plenty of artefacts, but less in Wet Zone in early and the historical period in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, any information on Wet Zone has not mentioned in the historical resources such as Mahavamsa, Deepavamsaya. In addition to this, the historical sources mainly were focused on to discuss and explain all aspects of major centers such as Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa in the Dry Zone and have not focused on the other regions. In addition to this, any epigraphic evidence related to trade and coins of the Punch-marked Coins circulated period in the Wet Zone of Sri Lanka cannot be identified. However, plenty of Punch-marked Coins and Roman Coins have been unearthed from the Wet Zone³⁰⁶

Henry Parker had been conducted a research on Punch Marked Coins in his book of 'Ancient Ceylon' in 1909. Under the chapter XII- The Earliest Coins. He has presented the information under the sub-topic of 'The PurāṇaDaranas, Or Sālākas'. Here, he has mentioned that Punch Marked

³⁰³ H.W Codrington, Ceylon Coins and Currency (Ceylon: A.C.Richards, Acting government printers, 1924), 16.

³⁰⁴ R. Cunningham, and C. Batt, (Dating the Sequence. In: Cunningham, R., ed. Anuradhapura: British – Sri Lankan Excavations at Anuradhapura Salgaha Watta 2, 1, The Site (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1999), 128.

³⁰⁵ K.W.C. Tharangani, A Comparative Study of Punch-marked Coins Found in Sri Lanka and South India (M. Phil., University of Peradeniya, 2015), 201.

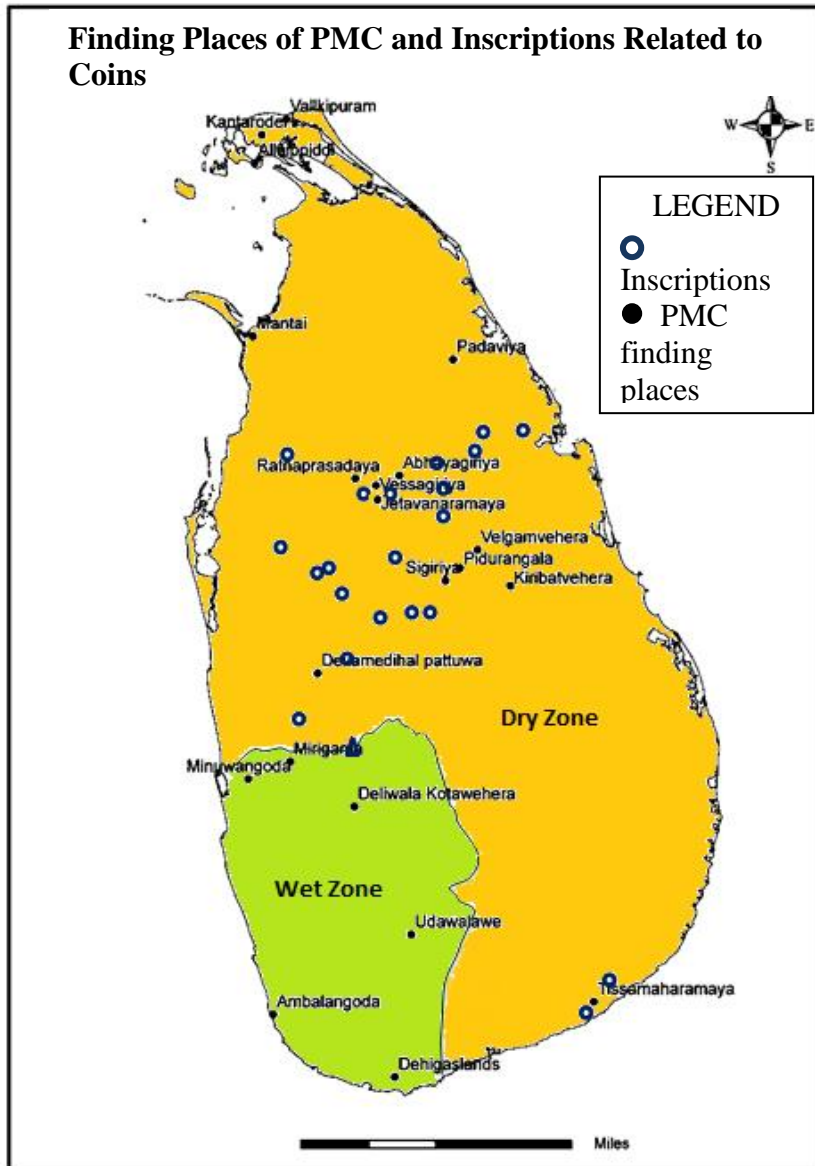
³⁰⁶ D.P.M. Weerakkodi, Taprobane (Brepols Turnhout, 1997), 2-29.

Coins were imported from India. A brief description of the shapes, symbols, weight, and metal of the coins have included.

H.W. Codrington has conducted a research on numismatics. The work has been published as a book named *Ceylon Coins and Currency* (1924). It includes coins from the beginning of the coinage system to the British period. He has mentioned that the Punch-marked Coins have arrived from India.

Anuradhapura was active as the political capital of ancient Sri Lanka and it seems that the coins were unearthed from far away from the Anuradhapura and its hinterland. GIS application and numismatics epigraphic evidence are used to understand the economic history of the wet zone of ancient Sri Lanka.

It reveals that not only dry zone but also the wet zone had played a vital role in the economic history of Sri Lanka. The following map shows the occurrence of the PMC and the inscriptions regarding coin system.



Map 1 Finding Places of PMC and Inscriptions Related to Coins

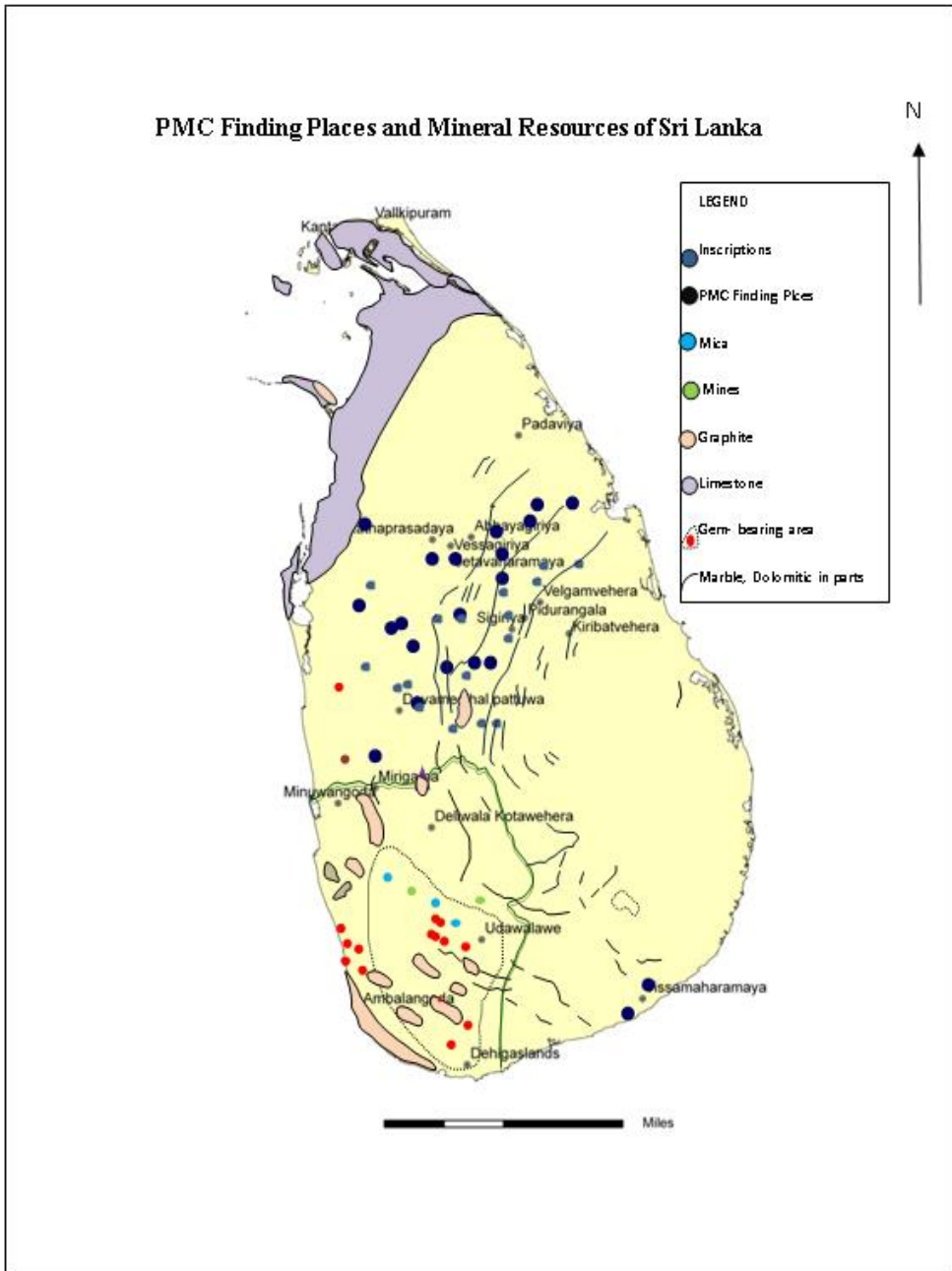
Sources: ASCAR 1892/191-11/1921-22/1951/1953/1955/1956/1965-66/1966-67; Senanayaka 2002:08

The map shows that there are 05 hoards located in the wet zone. The interesting thing is the biggest hoard containing 1028 coins have been unearthed from Minuwangoda in the wet zone³⁰⁷. In addition to this another coin hoard containing 275 coins found from Meerigama also located in the wet zone (Artifact Register: Colombo Museum). The coin hoard from Ambalangoda, located in coastal site. Two other hoards found in the countryside. The rest of PMC hoards located in the dry zone. The Majority of PMC located at Anuradhapura and the hinterlands. Then the three hoards yielded from north of the island named Kantarodai, Vallipuram, and Allaipitti. Mantai also unearthed a coin hoard. In further south-east region also yielded PMC which consider as another kingdom prevailed parallel to Anuradhapura kingdom.

The reason for the loss of epigraphic or historical evidence regarding trade or coins is quite questionable. The wet zone has not yielded any pieces of evidence related to trade except coins. It seems that the region was thinly populated. Inscriptions in the island have mentioned on the meritorious gifts for Buddhist monasteries, kings' orders and to advice to the public³⁰⁸. In further, it is visible that inscriptions always located in the regions which bear high population density as well as Buddhist monasteries. It seems that inscriptions are located in populated regions. The loss of the inscription shed light on the population in the Wet Zone allowing the argument that the area had been thinly populated. The following map gives a clue for the occurrence of the PMC in the Wet Zone

³⁰⁷ එම්.එච් සිරිසෝම, පී.අමරසිංහ , . ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ පුරාණ කාසි -1 හස් එබ් කහාපණ. (කොළඹ: පුරාවිද්‍යා දෙපාර්තමේන්තුව,1986),11.

³⁰⁸S.Paranavitana, Inscription of Ceylon (Ceylon: Department of Archaeology,1970)



Map 2: PMC Finding Places and Mineral Resources of Sri Lanka

Sources: ASCAR 1892/191-11/1921-22/ 1951/ 1953/ 1955/ 1956/ 1965-66/ 1966-67; Cooray 1967: Plate 37; 1984:228 Senanayaka 2002:08

According to the above map, it seems that the PMC located in the Wet Zone is rich with plenty of minerals such as graphite, gem(precious stones), kaolin, mica, thorionite³⁰⁹. PMC are appeared nearby the graphite ores as well as in the circle of gems. The other PMC hoard bearing sites in the Dry Zone such as Anuradhapura and hinterlands, Mantai, Jaffna, and Tissamaharama were capitals, hinterland, and harbours. The overlook at the minerals of those regions shows that the sites bear crystallize limestone. In addition to this Mantai bear graphite as well. The crystallize limestone has less specific gravity that means it can be broken down easily. The mineral cannot use for any purposes neither building material nor other purposes because of the low specific gravity nature of the mineral. Instead of this, the graphite is quite different from the crystallize limestone.

The graphite has been used to make crucibles. In addition to this, the gems were precious stones. Hence the present writer surmises that the PMC have occurred in the wet zone of Sri Lanka to obtain graphite and precious stones in the wet zone. As a result of this, a lot of PMC have unearthed from the wet zone. The amounts of the coins in the coin hoards are higher than the other hoards in the island.

The excavations have unearthed only a few coins most of the time. Anuradhapura Salgahawatta excavation has unearthed 16 PMC and three of them are silver plated³¹⁰. Anuradhapura citadel excavation unearthed 02 coins and the excavation at Tissamaharama unearthed one coin, Godavaya also have unearthed one coin³¹¹. In addition to this excavation at Mantai also yielded coins. Apart from these other surface findings such as Jaffna yielded 20 coins, 28 from Akurugodella, 32 from Niyadell.³¹² It seems that the

³⁰⁹ P.G.Cooray, *The Geology of Ceylon* (National Musuem of Ceylon Publication,1967), Plate 37;1984,228)

³¹⁰ O.Bopearachchi, *Coins*, ed. R.Conningham (Oxford: Archaeopress 2006), 7-8.

³¹¹ S.U.Deraniyagala, *The Prehistory of Sri Lanka: An Ecological Perspective* (Colombo: Department of Archaeology, 1992), 139,142

R.Walburg, *Coins and Token from Ancient Ceylon: Ancient Ruhuna Sri Lankan –German project in Southern province*, Vol.2. (2008.), 261,265.

³¹² O. Bopearachchi, R.M.Wickremasinghe, *Ruhuna: An Ancient Civilization Re- Visited Numismatic and Archaeological Evidences on Inland and Maritime Trade* (R.M. Wickremesinhe. 1999),32.

above-mentioned coin hoards bear fewer coins than the other coins found in the wet zone.

Hence it can be hypothesized by concerning all the corroborative evidence that the occurrence of the huge amount in one hoard in the Wet Zone may be the result of the attraction for the mineral resources in the Wet Zone. The Indian traders might have attracted to the graphite ore and gem mines in the wet zone sometimes authority of the economic sector might not handle by the capital center of the kingdom Anuradhapura. In some cases, it can be argued that the area was thinly populated. However, sometime the rulers may handle the mineral resources and economic activities in the Wet Zone but they may not mention them in their chronicles or inscriptions because the region was thinly populated. The reason for the thin population may be the climatic condition in the Wet Zone. The thick vegetation, as well as rainfall, may effect for the population for the people in the PMC circulated period when the main occupation was paddy cultivation or shifting cultivation.

Finally, the economic history of Sri Lanka shows that the Punch-marked coins located in the wet zone have come for the attraction of the mineral resources and the other located as the result of trade purpose in day -to- day life

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