

TAMIL CIVILIZATION: HISTORY

NEWS: *Unearthing an ancient Tamil civilisation*

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Recent radiometric dating confirms the Iron Age in Tamil Nadu began in the first quarter of the 4th millennium BCE, underscoring the region's role as a center of early metallurgy and advanced urban civilization.

Historical Context of Tamil Civilization

- **Age and Development:** Tamil Civilization is one of the oldest known civilizations with urban life, trade, and metallurgy dating back over 5,300 years.
- **Geographical Spread:** The civilization flourished along major rivers like Thamirabarani, Vaigai, and Noyyal, fostering a continuous cultural and economic network.

Significant Archaeological Sites in Tamil Nadu and Their Discoveries

Sivagalai:

- **Archaeological Details:** This site revealed early Iron Age activities with evidence of iron tools and agriculture practices, dating back to the first quarter of the 4th millennium BCE.
- **Cultural Insights:** The discovery of paddy grains in urns from 1155 BCE illustrates advanced agricultural techniques and community organization.

Adichanallur:

- **Historical Continuity:** As one of the oldest excavation sites, it has revealed complex burial practices with artifacts like gold diadems and microlithic tools from the mid-3rd millennium BCE.
- **Cultural Richness:** The site's continuous use underscores a long-standing and evolving cultural tradition.

Keeladi:

- **Evidence of Urbanization:** Unearthed artifacts suggest a highly developed urban settlement with advanced craftsmanship and a flourishing weaving industry from the 6th century BCE.
- **Linguistic Contributions:** Potsherds with Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions provide crucial links to early Tamil literature and language.

Korkai:

- **Trade Hub:** Excavations confirm Korkai's role as an ancient port city with trade connections across the Indian Ocean, highlighted by discoveries of shell bangles and artifacts linked to maritime commerce.

- **Historical Importance:** Its strategic location and findings illustrate the dynamic trade and cultural exchanges during the Iron Age.

Mayiladumparai:

- **Iron Age Evidence:** This site confirms Iron Age presence from 4200 years ago, with findings including memorial stones and inscribed potsherds.
- **Cultural Layers:** Artifacts span from Neolithic to Medieval periods, providing a broad spectrum of historical development.

Gangaikondacholapuram:

- **Chola Dynasty Capital:** Known for its architectural relics from the time of Rajendra Chola I, including ruins of palaces and temples that speak to the grandeur of Chola architecture.
- **Archaeological Significance:** The site offers insights into the urban planning and artistic achievements of the Cholas, evident from the sophisticated structures and artifacts.

Porpanaikottai:

- **Sangam Age Fort:** Findings include terracotta artifacts, iron tools, and remains of fortifications that depict the military and civil organization of the Sangam period.
- **Cultural Artifacts:** Diverse discoveries such as glass beads, hopscotches, and terracotta wheel fragments suggest a rich cultural life and varied economic activities.

Pallavaram:

- **Paleolithic Settlement:** Known for prehistoric stone tools discovered by geologist Robert Bruce Foote, illustrating early human life and activities in the region.
- **Archaeological Continuity:** Later findings include a terracotta sarcophagus, indicating continued importance and habitation into historical periods.

Kodumanal:

- **Ancient Industrial Centre:** Excavations have uncovered evidence of a thriving industrial center with artifacts like beads, coins, and potsherds that link it to extensive trade networks.
- **Cultural and Commercial Importance:** The site's location on an ancient trade route underscores its significance in regional commerce and cultural exchanges during the Sangam period.

Vembakottai:

- **Recent Discoveries:** Excavations have unearthed terracotta, carnelian intaglios, and other artifacts that highlight the region's craft skills and trade connections.
- **Cultural Diversity:** Findings reflect a blend of local traditions and external influences, evident in the materials and artistic expressions.

Vaigai River Settlement (Keeladi)

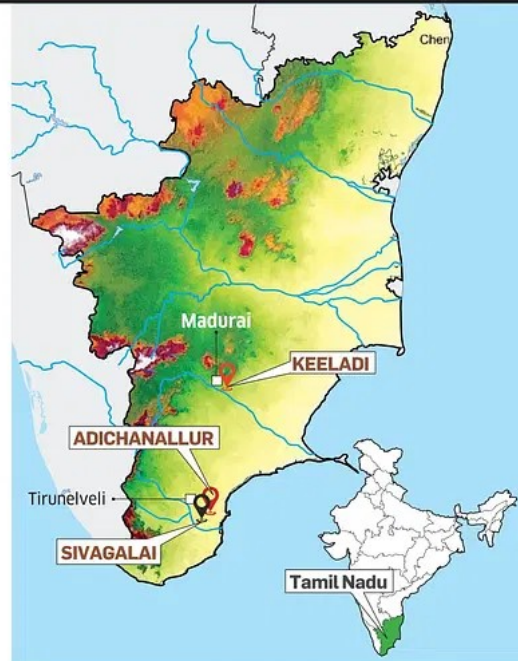
KEELADI, a sleepy village located 12 km southeast of Madurai on the highway connecting the temple town with the holy island of Rameswaram, is now the cynosure of all eyes.

The archaeological excavation, which began in 2014, has unearthed an ancient urban industrialised civilization that is at least 2,600 years old on the banks of River Vaigai (referred to as Vaiyai in Sangam Literature). The age of the period has been established through carbon dating of artefacts found during excavation.



Some of the findings at Keeladi

are elaborate brick structures, open covered brick, bone points, dice made of ivory and terracotta, figurines, gold ornaments like pendant, ring, and plate and various types of beads. Huge number of potsherds with Tamil-Brahmi letters and graffiti were also unearthed. The graffiti sherds recovered are more than 2,000 years old.



Porunai River Settlement (Sivagalai/Adichanallur)

Though the ASI has been conducting excavations at Adichanallur over the years, the TNSDA began its work in 2020 in **Adichanallur, Sivagalai, and near-by areas**. During the first and second phases, archaeologists found habitation and burial sites.

Sivagalai, a burial excavation site near Tirunelveli on the banks of river Porunai, could be older than Keeladi – the carbon dating says husk and paddy found in a burial urn is 3,200 years old.

Findings from these excavations, one of the biggest so far in Tamil Nadu, has caused a lot of excitement.



FINDINGS

KEELADI

Carbon dating of six artefacts found in Keeladi date back to 580 BCE, pushing the Sangam Era further back by three hundred years

SIVAGALAI

Paddy and husk found inside an offering pot were sent to Beta Analytic Testing Laboratory in Florida, USA. The analysis established the period of the materials to be 3,200 years old.

How is the age of the sites established?

Through carbon dating of artefacts

Residue analysis of sediments scraped from offering vessels

DNA analysis of artefacts and further studies

INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN CARBON DATING AND OTHER STUDIES ON ARTEFACTS



Beta Analytic
Lab, Florida,
US



Deccan
College,
Pune



University
of Pisa,
Italy



Birbal Sahni Institute
of Palaeosciences,
Lucknow



Madurai Kamaraj
University,
Madurai*

*The Madurai Kamaraj University in Madurai is setting up an ancient DNA lab to analyse the artefacts found in Keeladi. The lab is in the initial stages of being set up and will help in establishing the original dates of archaeological findings.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/unearthing-an-ancient-tamil-civilisation/article69225649.ece>