

# Chandravalli inhabitants had trade ties with ancient Rome

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**By: Mihika Basu**

*Assessment of historic settlement also points towards mineral exploitation as income source*



An assessment of the sources that supported human habitation at one of the early historic settlements in Karnataka — Chandravalli — has led to an interesting finding on the existence of commercial contacts with ancient Roman world.

Besides commercial activity, mineral exploitation was a source of income, says Hema Thakur, researcher from the National Institutes of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bengaluru.

“It is important to understand the sources which supported human settlement at Chandravalli. Along with mineral exploitation, commercial activity seems to have provided sustenance to the region. At Chandravalli, Roman coins, which include two denarii of Augustus (23 BC-14 AD) and three of Tiberius (14 AD-37 AD) have been found along with Rouletted Ware, Mediterranean amphora and a jar comparable to amphora in red ware. Similarly, at Brahmagiri, Rouletted ware has come to light.

This evidence taken collectively points towards contacts, possibly commercial, with the Roman world. Trade with the Roman world was at its peak in the early centuries of the Christian era. Furthermore, coins of Maharathis, Anandas and Satavahanas might have facilitated internal exchange to an extent. That these settlements were thriving in the early centuries of Christian era is manifested by the structures found, especially at Chandravalli,” said Thakur. The analysis and the findings have been published in the Journal of Ancient History and Archeology.

## **EARLIEST EXCAVATIONS**

One of the earliest excavations, which identified early historic phase in Karnataka, was conducted by MH Krishna at Chandravalli in Chitradurga district. He recorded a large number of lead and potin coins of the Satavahanas, coins of the Anandas and Maharathis along with a Roman silver piece of Augustus Caesar. He also came across ruins of foundations and flooring of large bricks. In the latest excavation, undertaken by V Mishra, a huge structure consisting of many rooms and a number of floors was found.

## **Mineral wealth**

According to Thakur, there was considerable development in the early historic period at Chandravalli as manifested by the tangible remains, which include structures, pottery, fine quality terracottas, ornaments particularly beads, inscription, coins as well as Roman artifacts.

“The area of South Maidan, where Chandravalli is located, is well endowed with minerals and economically viable rocks. It is a possibility that exploitation of these minerals provided sustenance to the settlement and the permanent brick structures may have belonged to the members of the trading community,” she said in her findings.

According to her assessment, permanent structures made of bricks such as houses, walls, floors and drain that been recorded were perhaps the ‘abode’ of the rich and the affluent.

"Perhaps the permanent structures found here were occupied by the members of the trading community. Fine pottery such as the Rouletted Ware and the imported Mediterranean amphora might have been for the exclusive use of the rich. A large number of Maharathi, Ananda, Satavahana and Roman coins have been found along with Mediterranean amphora and a jar comparable to amphora in red ware, thereby indicating that Chandravalli was perhaps involved in trading activity and the trading class might have been a significant and affluent section of the society," she said.

However, says the researcher, the possibility cannot be denied that Chandravalli was also an important administrative centre, particularly in the post-Mauryan period, as coins belonging to successive dynasties of the post-Mauryan era, have come to light.

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