

XXX. *An Account of an Inscription found near Trincomalee, in the Island of Ceylon.* By Sir ALEXANDER JOHNSTON, Knt. V.P.R.A.S.

To the Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society.

SIR: I have the honour to send you, for the Royal Asiatic Society, the fac-simile which was made in 1806 by my direction, of the inscription on a flat stone near the road leading from the town and fort of Trincomalee to the large tank or artificial lake of Kandellé, in the province of Trincomalee, on the north-eastern side of the island of Ceylon. The public object which I had in view in forming the collection of inscriptions of which the accompanying is one of the most remarkable, the great celebrity of the Hindu temple at Trincomalee in ancient times, and the equal celebrity of the magnificent harbour at the same place in modern times, render the illustration of every document relative to that place an object not only of literary curiosity, but of national importance.

The late Sir Thomas Maitland, when governor of the island of Ceylon, in consequence of my representing to him that the surest way of restoring that island to its ancient state of cultivation and population would be, to establish by act of parliament some permanent system for its government, founded upon a thorough knowledge of the history and feelings of the people, and really applicable to the local capabilities and present situation of the country, resolved, in council, to send me officially to England, for the purpose of laying before his Majesty's Ministers, in my official capacity of Chief Justice and President of His Majesty's Council on Ceylon, such a system of government for that island as in my opinion was calculated to attain the objects which I have mentioned; and, that I might be enabled to afford his Majesty's Ministers such recent information as they might require upon the occasion, previously sent me, in 1806, on a circuit completely round the island, with the fullest powers to collect the most authentic and detailed information relative to the ancient and modern history of the country; the origin of all the different classes of inhabitants, their laws, their castes, their religion, their language, their agriculture, their manufactures, and their commerce.

As the general history and local traditions of Ceylon, confirmed as to this fact by the remains of four of the most stupendous tanks or artificial lakes that were ever constructed in India, prove beyond a doubt that the immense tracts of cultivable land in the northern and eastern provinces of the island, which are now completely waste and depopulated, were at a former period of history most highly cultivated and very densely peopled, and as one great object of the system of government, which I proposed to Sir Thomas Maitland, was to restore those tracts of land to their former state of cultivation, I caused, while I was on the above circuit, surveys to be made of some of these tanks, and of the extent of the lands which could be irrigated by them; estimates to be formed of the expense of putting them into repair, and copies to be taken of all the inscriptions, ancient or modern, which could be found in their neighbourhood; and I urged the natives of the country, by every motive which could stimulate their activity, to collect for me on the spot such local information, as might explain to his Majesty's Government the causes both of the former prosperity and of the present desolation of those extensive provinces.

In the course of this inquiry all the best-informed men of the island, approving highly of its object, zealously co-operated with me in eliciting local information from every part of their respective districts; and the native chiefs of the province of Trincomalee laid before me, together with many other valuable inscriptions, the one of which the fac-simile accompanies this letter, and which they described as the most ancient and the most curious in their province.

I was informed by those chiefs, that the late French Admiral Suffrein, when he was at Trincomalee with the French fleet in 1781, thinking that a translation of this inscription would throw much light upon the ancient history and upon the ancient state of cultivation of the province of Trincomalee, sent a copy of it to the late Mons. Anquetil du Perron, then in France, with an offer of a considerable reward to any person who could decypher it, but which, so far as I can learn, has never been accomplished.

The race of people who at present inhabit the province of Trincomalee and the adjacent province, are completely ignorant of the character in which it is written: they however believe, from the traditions which are preserved amongst them, that it is the character which was in use throughout the whole

of the northern and eastern parts of the island in the age of the two Kings of Solamandelum, MANUMETHY CANDESOLAM and his son KALOCATA MAHARASA, who are stated, upon what authority I cannot ascertain, in all the ancient histories of Trincomalee (of which I have in my possession both the Tamul originals and the English translations) to have reigned over the southern peninsula of India and the greater part of the island of Ceylon about the five-hundred and twelfth year of the *Cali-yug*, or about 4,400 years ago, and during their reign to have constructed not only the celebrated pagodas or temples of Trincomalee, the whole of which were in the beginning of the sixteenth century destroyed by the Portuguese, and the materials of which were subsequently used by them for building what forms a portion of the present fortifications of Trincomalee, but also the four equally celebrated tanks or artificial lakes called Kattucarré, Padvilcolam, Minerie, and Kandellé, the remains of which may, from their great magnitude and strength, and from the skill which is displayed in their construction, be considered as some of the most venerable and splendid monuments ever discovered, of the high state of perfection to which the science of irrigation had been brought in the northern and eastern parts of Ceylon, in the remotest periods of history ; and of the extraordinary efforts which were made by the Hindu monarchs of India to secure their subjects from the miseries of famine, by securing to the cultivators of land a regular and an abundant supply of water.

There are many traditions in the country respecting the contents of this inscription, but the three following are those to which the natives of the province most generally allude. The first is, that it contains an account of the taxes which the priests of the temples of Trincomalee had a right to levy on the inhabitants of their own and the adjacent provinces ; of the expenses which had been incurred by the sovereigns of the country in building those temples ; of the lands and the treasure which were the property of the temples ; of the different countries in which the lands were situated, and of the different places of security in which the treasures were deposited.

The second is, that it contains an account of the construction of the great tank of Kandellé ; the sums that were expended upon it ; the number of people who were employed in completing the work ; the quantity of water which the tank contained ; the manner in which, and the seasons at which, the

waters were distributed amongst the proprietors of the adjacent fields ; the number and extent of the fields to which its waters could be conducted ; and the quantity of rice which could be raised in them.

The third is, that it contains the heads of the original laws, both civil and criminal, according to which the two kings of Solamandelum, MANUMATHY CANDÉSOLAM and his son KALOCATA MAHARASA, ordained in the five-hundred and twelfth year of the *Cali-yug*, or about 4,400 years ago, that the Hindu people of the northern and eastern parts of the island of Ceylon should be governed, and upon the faith of which the original Hindu settlers had, on the invitation of those sovereigns, come over from the peninsula of India, and established themselves in the different provinces of Ceylon.

However contradictory these traditions may be as to the meaning which they attach to the inscription, I think it may safely be concluded, both from them and from all the different histories which I have in my possession, that the race of people who inhabited the whole of the northern and eastern provinces of the island of Ceylon, at the period of their greatest agricultural prosperity spoke the same language, used the same written character, and had the same origin, religion, castes, laws, and manners, as that race of people who at the same period inhabited the southern peninsula of India ; and that it is therefore probable that some information as to the character and language in which the inscription is written may be derived from the ancient histories and traditions of that part of India, many of which I procured from the Brahmans of Ramisserum, Trichendore, Madura, Seringham, Combeconum, Chillebrum, Congeveram, and Tripetty, while I was travelling in the peninsula in 1807 and 1817.

I have the honour to be, SIR,

Your most obedient servant,

ALEXANDER JOHNSTON.

*Great Cumberland Place,*

*18th July 1827.*