



References to Kahavaṇa in Early Historic Inscriptions of Sri Lanka

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මෙම අධ්‍යයනයේ ප්‍රාථමික මූලාශ්‍රය වන්නේ ක්‍රිස්තු පූර්ව තුන්වන සියවසයේ සිට ක්‍රිස්තු වර්ෂ පස්වන සියවස දක්වා කාල පරිච්ඡේදයට අයත් බ්‍රාහ්මී ලිපිවල සඳහන් වන කහවණු පිළිබඳ පරිත්‍යාගයන් ය. මෙරට ශිලාලිපිවල සාහිත්‍ය මූලාශ්‍රයන්හි සඳහන් නොවන විවිධ කාසි වර්ග සහ විවිධ ප්‍රමාණයේ මුදල් වර්ග පිළිබඳ ව තොරතුරු ඇතුළත් වී තිබේ. ඒවා ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ වෙළඳ හා වාණිජ ඉතිහාසය හැදෑරීමේදී ලා ඉතාමත් වැදගත් වේ. එම තොරතුරු පදනම් කොටගෙන විශ්ලේෂණාත්මක අධ්‍යයනයක් සිදුකිරීම මෙහි අරමුණ විය. මෙහි දී අභිලේඛනවල සඳහන් වන මුදල් පරිත්‍යාග ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ සාමාන්‍ය පොදු ජනතාවන් බෞද්ධ ආරාම හා හික්ෂු සමාජයන් මුදල් පිළිබඳ ආර්ථිකයට සම්බන්ධ වූ ආකාරය ගැන විශේෂ අවධානයක් යොමුකර ඇත. ඉඩම් පරිත්‍යාග මෙන් ම මුදල් පරිත්‍යාග ද වාර්තා කරන ශිලාලිපි ඉඩම්වල වටිනාකම අනුව කළ මුදල් පරිත්‍යාග ද සඳහන් කරයි. අර්ධද්විපික ඉන්දියාවේ සමකාලීනව ඇතිවූ ආර්ථික ප්‍රවණතාවයන්හි ම තවත් පැතිකඩක් ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ ශිලාලිපිවලින් හෙළිදරව් කෙරෙන බව කිවයුතු ය. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ ආරම්භක ඓතිහාසික යුගයේ මුදල් ආර්ථිකය පිළිබඳ ව පුළුල් අයුරින් අධ්‍යයනය කිරීමක් මේ දක්වා සිදුවී නැත. බොහෝ දෙනා පුරාවස්තු ලෙස හමුවන කාසි නොසලකාහැර තිබේ. එබඳු පුරාවස්තුවල ස්ථානගතවීමේ ස්වරූපය මෙරට පැරණි ආර්ථිකය පිළිබඳ ව ගතානුගතික අදහස් ප්‍රශ්න කිරීමට භාජනය කරයි. සමාජීය ආයතනවල වර්ධනය තත්කාලීන මුදල් පිළිබඳ ආර්ථිකයේ ස්වරූපය නොයෙකුත් වෙනස්කම්, සිදුකිරීමට බලපා තිබේ. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ මුදල් භාවිතය පිළිබඳ

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ඉතිහාසය බහු විෂයමය දෘෂ්ටිකෝණයක් ඔස්සේ තවදුරටත් ඉදිරියට ගමන් කළයුතු බව මෙම අධ්‍යයනයේ දී පැහැදිලි විය.

මුඛ්‍ය පද: කහවණු, අභිලේඛන, බෞද්ධ ආරාම, භික්ෂු සමාජය, මුදල් අර්ථිකය

Introduction

The economic history of ancient Sri Lanka, since the time of the Colonial historians, has been viewed mainly through literary source and such studies utilized inscriptional sources in a limited scale. Until recent times the use of numismatic evidence and associated archaeological data was not seriously considered in the research agenda. The pioneering works, of John Still (1907), Codrington (1924), Hettiarachchi (1950; 1952), Caldera (1959), Sirisoma and Amarasinghe (1986) are catalogues by nature and not probes into the economic history of this country based on numismatic evidence. In view of this, we have attempted to probe into the information available from the references to coined money, in Early and Middle Historic inscriptions of Sri Lanka in situating such references within a socio-economic context. This study also draws its material evidence from excavated and other archaeological material retrieved to date. The chronological context of the inscriptions in this study fall within a time framework of B.C. 3rd Century to 7th century A.D.

It must however be emphasized that the non occurrence of inscriptions in particular regions is not an indication to the flow of currency in that part of the island. This is clearly seen by comparing the tow maps where coin finds have been reported from areas that do not contain inscriptions referring to the use of coins. Similarly, the literary sources refer to areas where coins were in used. There is little archaeological or numismatic evidence to corroborate this. Similarly planned out research exploration leading to new discoveries of ancient coin finds and hitherto unknown inscription bearing sites is another limitation in giving a complete picture on the use of money in antiquity. Further to this the discovery of the major portion of coins from a stratified context took place only during the period following the last decade. Some of these coin finds

have not been properly analyzed or identified and therefore could not be used in this study.

Table 01

Period	No. of Inscriptions
B.C. 3 rd Century	02
B.C. 1 st Century	01
A.D. 1 st Century	03
A.D. 1 st – 2 nd Century	01
A.D. 2 nd Century	17
A.D. 3 rd Century	04
A.D. 4 th Century	18
A.D. 5 th Century	09
A.D. 5 th – 6 th Century	11
A.D. 6 th – 7 th Century	17

II

The 2nd Century B.C. inscriptions of Sri Lanka mention the term kahavaṇa and kaśapaṇa (Paranavitana, 1970, p. 60) and it is suggested that these coins refer to the coin denomination known as kahāpaṇa in the pali texts and as kārṣāpaṇa in the Sanskrit texts (Wickramasinghe, 1912, p. 210). Several variations of the above terms are found in the inscriptions of Sri Lanka as kahāvaṇa, kahāpaṇa, kahavaṇu, kahavaṇi, kahivaṇa, kavahaṇa, kavaṇa and kahana (Codrington, 1924, p.11-14; Paranavitana, 1943, p.140; 1966, pp. 571-604; Karunaratne, 1984, p. 93; Dias, 1991, p. 42). It is significant that the terms kāhāṇa and kāhaṇa are also found in the historic inscriptions of India (Sircar, 1966, p.149).

Several scholars who have attempted to interpret the term kahavaṇa are in agreement that the pali kahāpaṇa, Sanskrit kārṣāpaṇa and Prakrit

kāhāpaṇa or kāhāvana refer to the same coin denomination.² kārṣāpaṇa>karṣāpaṇa formed of karṣa+paṇa. karṣa may well derive from the root krṣ or 'to plough'. A unit of weight may have been associated with a particular quantity of grain in the remote past. Subsequently this may have been extended to a unit of weight associate with a regular standard medium of exchange i.e. metallic unit or coin during the Early Historic period. In fact Sircar points out that karṣa referred to a "name of a weight equal to 80 raties same as tola, sometimes regarded as 100 or 120 raties in weight" (1966, p. 149). Though paṇa may refer to trade (paṇi> traders in the Vedic texts), Sircar believes that paṇa refers to the silver kārṣāpaṇa in the historical sources (ibid, p. 149). The term kaṇam is found in the Tamil inscriptions referring to gold coins (ibid, p. 142).

The term huna-kavaṇa found in a 6th/7th Century A.D. inscription from the Barrow's Pavilion at Anuradhapura is said to mean huna-kahavaṇa (Paranavitana, 1943, p. 140). According to Codrington this was the same as soṇṇa-kahāpaṇa which is the largest denomination of the gold coins consisting of 08 aka (1924, pp. 46-49). It is significant that the term huna never occurs in any pre 6th Century A.D. inscription. On the strength of this, Codrington assigns a post 6th Century A.D. date for the gold coin consisting of 08 aka.

Inscriptions belonging to the post 6th Century A.D. refer to two other types of coins as mala-kahavaṇa and dama-kahavaṇa, (Muller, 1883, p. 76; Paranavitana, 2001, pp. 240-242) Codrington associates these coins with the drachma as the 'rope' or 'wreath' may have been represented in these coins (1924, pp. 14-15). Paranavitana also considers the mala-kahavaṇa to be associated with the Kingdom of the Malay Peninsula. It is however felt that these two terms require further investigation prior to drawing any firm conclusions about their nature and identity.

The inscriptions of Sri Lanka also refer to another coin named māśaka or masaka (Paranavitana, 1983, p. 72, pp.111-112). Which is known to the

² For these views see Muller, 1883,p.74; Bell, 1896, p. 144; Rhys David, 1877, pp. 3-13; Parker, 1909 , pp. 463-505; Wickramasinghe, 1912, pp. 208-211; Pieris, 1919, pp. 45-60; Codrington, 1924, pp. 11-16; Paranavitana, 1933, pp. 250-252; Sircar, 1966, p.149; Karunaratne, 1984, p. 93; Sirisoma and Amarasinghe, 1986, pp. 5-8.

Pali sources as māsaka and as māṣa to the Sanskrit sources. It is suggested that this may have been a silver or gold coin (Sircar, 1966, p. 200). Parānavitana has suggested that the māsaka of Sri Lanka was 1/20 of the kahavaṇa (1983, pp. 67-72).

III

In addition to direct references to coined money, some inscriptions also carry notices on payments made in money. For instance, a B.C. 2nd Century inscription from Dambulla records an endowment of fifty pieces or satāḍa dhana (Parānavitana, 1970, No.857). The type of coin is not specified. A 1st Century B.C /A.D. inscription from, Ganekanda records the amount spent on the construction of a village dam as nine hundred thousand (ibid, No. 1197). The Veheragala inscription of Sabha (A.D. 60-67), mentions five hundred each as the amounts spent on the procurement and the deepening of a reservoir named Upaladonika (Parānavitana, 1983, No.43). The 6th Century Nilagama inscription records 100 x 8 as amounts given to redeem eight slaves (Parānavitana, 1943, pp. 294-296). Though such inscriptions do not mention any specific coin type, we may firmly assume that such notices refer to coined money.

The Mampita vihara inscription, B.C. 2nd Century, is noted as the earliest inscriptional reference to kahavaṇa in Sri Lanka (Caldera, 1959, p. 5; also see Parānavitana, 1970, No.791). The Citadel excavation of Anuradhapura clearly established the occurrence of terracotta coin moulds, used in the production of punch-marked coins, from layer (4a) which is dated to B.C. 200 (Deraniyagala, 1972, p. 150). Parānavitana also draws our attention to certain terms found in the early Brahmi inscriptions, that may have a bearing on coin dealing. For instance, he is of the view that the term rupadaka found in the periyakadu vihara inscription derives from skt. rūpyādhyakṣa or 'superintendent of the mint' (Parānavitana, 1970, No.940 also see pp.120). However his derivation of the term rupavāpara in a 1st Century A.D. inscription at Kaduruwewa, from rūpyavyāpāra or 'dealer in coined money' (ibid, No.1205) is not acceptable due to a faulty reading. Our reading of the estampage clearly shows that this term could be read as dorakaṇikaha

vāpara and not as dorakaṇi rupavāpara (Senanayake, 1994). A B.C./A.D. 1st Century inscription from Handagala records the term paṇadaka (<paṇyādhyakṣa). Parnavitana (1970, No.1128, also see pp.114) interprets this as 'the superintendent of merchandise'. This may be questioned. Paṇa may well imply copper kārṣāpaṇa (see Sircar, 1966, p.149) and paṇadaka may have meant a 'superintendent of the mint for copper coins'.

A higher frequency of the term kahavaṇa/kahapaṇa in the inscriptions of the early Christian era is a clear indication to a wider use of coined money. For instance we may cite some details from an inscription at sinadiyagala which gives details about the capital and cash shares spent on a particular Buddhist monastery (See Parnavitana, 1987, No.46).

Table 2

Amount	Purpose
125,000 kahapaṇa	Construction of uposatha house
5,000 kahapaṇa	For the use of carpets. Purchased reservoir
200 māsa	Water rent to be paid by fifty families.

The earliest reference to kahāpaṇa in the Mahāvamsa is associated with an incident dating back to B.C. 2nd Century, where king Eḷāra is said to have donated 15,000 kahāpaṇa to construct a stūpa (MW, XXI: 26). Several references to kahāpaṇa are also found in association with the life story of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi. Codrington has prepared an exhaustive list of such literary references to kahāpaṇa from Sri Lanka sources (1924, pp. 11-13). It is unfortunate that scholars such as Codrington or Rhys-Davids did not pay sufficient attention to the Commentaries as sources for such information on the early coined money of this country.

In view of Sri Lanka's transoceanic trade based on luxury products and other strategic resources, coined money brought in through such trade mechanisms during the Early Historic period may prove to be a strong corroborative source for dating the local coins found within an

archaeological context and also as a source for the study of the money vortex of that time.

IV

It is generally believed that the ancient civilization of Sri Lanka was primarily based in the 'Dry Zone' (see Mendis, 1963, pp. 132-133; Silva, 1977, pp. 32-33; Nicholas, 1959, pp. 10-11). Contrary to this, inscriptions bearing notices on early coined money and payments also find spots of Punch-marked coins and local coins falling within the period under discussion spread well outside the confines of the dry zone and extend to the montane region as well. A parallel situation is seen in association with the distribution pattern of Roman coins (A.D. 1st to 5th Century) where such finds spread into the wet zone and the montane zone of this island (Prickett, 1990).

This situation is quite clearly related to the movement of strategic resources from the wet montane zone to the lowland regions, a process that has an antiquity dating back to the Proto Historic period. Recent studies have suggested that such resource requirements conditioned community movement towards the central hills of Sri Lanka (Seneviratne, 1983; 1990, pp. 125-127; Seneviratne and Senanayake, 1987). Exchange route networks and economic interactions were already in existence when the such of coined money entered such regions. It is significant that the earliest reference to kahapaṇa from a B.C. 2nd Century inscription is located at Mampita vihara in the lower montane region in the wet zone. In addition to several punch-marked coin finds in the wet zone, the largest hoard of punch-marked coins were also found in the heart of the wet zone at Minuvangoda (Sirisoma, 1987). Recent studies on the middle and the upper valleys of the Mahaoya very clearly indicates the development of production distribution centre and the Mampita vihara inscription is located within such a context (see Rambukwella, 1994). Similarly, the Ganekanda vihara inscription (B.C. /A.D. 1st Century) recording the investment of a large quantity of cash on an irrigation system, is situated near an entry point to the hills. It is suggested that such entry points i.e. kaḍa, transferring strategic

resources from one eco system to another, housed affluent socio-economic groups who could afford such cash investment (see Seneviratne, 1990). It is in the above context that one may note the occurrence of punch-marked coins, other local copper coins and Roman coins in the wetland plains and in the montane zone.

It is therefore not surprising that we come across a variety of ways in which coined money is referred to in the textual and inscriptional sources, ranging from donations, investments to taxes. The B.C. 2nd Century inscription at Mampita vihara is in a damaged state and is not clear the purpose for which the kahavaṇa were spent. An early Brahmi inscription from Dambulla mentions an endowment of 'half a hundred' or śataḍa dhana (Paranavitana, 1970, No.857). The endowment was made by a śamaṇi. A B.C./A.D. 1st Century inscription at Ganekanda vihara mentions the amount paid for labour in the construction of a dam (ibid, No. 1199). In fact the Mahāvamsa records cash payments for labour in the narrations associated with Duṭṭhagāmiṇi and Mahācūḷimahātissa. The 1st Century A.D. inscription at Vihāragala records that 500 was spent to purchase a reservoir in addition to another 500 spent for the silt to be removed, the latter being a clear reference to the amount paid for labore (see Paranavitana, 1983, No.43). The amount of hundred thousand and quarter of kahāpaṇa spent on the upōsathagara by king Vasabha (A.D. 67-111) obviously implies the payments to material and labour utilized in the building of that structure (see ibid. No.46). It is precisely during the same period that we come across inscriptions referring to taxes collected in cash. For example, the Situlpavuwa inscription of Gajabahu (A.D. 114-136) records the donation of two kahavaṇa collected daily from the court house for medicinal expenses of the monks at the Cittalapabbata monastery (ibid, No. 64). The Sinadiyagala inscription of Vasabha, clearly records 200 māśaka as the water tax charged from the peasants (ibid. No.46). Literary sources such as the Sihaḷavattuppakaraṇa (85,108,131,132,136) carry several references as to how various individuals utilized kahāpaṇa. According to these notices some purchased land, some sold personal items, some purchased food items and some other obtained cash payments in lieu of labour.

V

One of the most interesting aspects associated with coined money in ancient Sri Lanka was the implications it had on the Buddhist establishment of that time. It is clear Sri Lanka the use of coined money was definitely not restricted to the lay society alone. Ideally though monks were expected to refrain from handling precious metals and coined money (Vinayapitakam, 111: pp. 236-239), the realities of economic interaction in an urban society created the necessity of utilizing coined money in the procurement of essential items. This became a hard reality especially to those monks who had to fend for themselves, especially during famines and other calamities, or even living away from the more affluent monasteries that were well endowed by patronage (see Adikaram, 1946, pp. 59-72; Rahula, 1956, pp. 78-91; Paranavitana and Nicholas, 1961, pp. 111). This contradiction between the ideal and the practical reality surfaced in less than a hundred years after the demise of the Buddha, when the issue of utilizing precious metals and money was debated at the 2nd Council. The development of monastic landlordism during the Middle Historic Period is viewed as an in-built system safeguarding a dependent community in society (see Gunawardana, 1979, p. 79).

It is interesting to note that as early as B.C. 1st Century, the Buddhist clergy possessed money enabling them to make private donations. The Dambulla inscription datable to B.C. 1st Century recording such a donation made by a śamaṇi is a case in point. A donation of 40 kahapaṇa by a monk is found in a first Century A.D. inscription (Nicholas Collection, III: 30). As time went on the concentration of wealth in the hands of the monks seems to have increased. A 3rd Century A.D. inscription from Murutange records a donation of 300 dama-kahavaṇa by a Buddhist monk for the construction of a flight of steps (Paranavitana, 1933, p. 22). By the 4th- 5th Century A.D. there are clear references, e.g. Hinguregala inscription, to them such as sagasata kahavaṇa or the 'kahavaṇa of the saṅgha' and the manner in which that money was utilized to purchase land (Paranavitana, 1966, pp. 115-117).

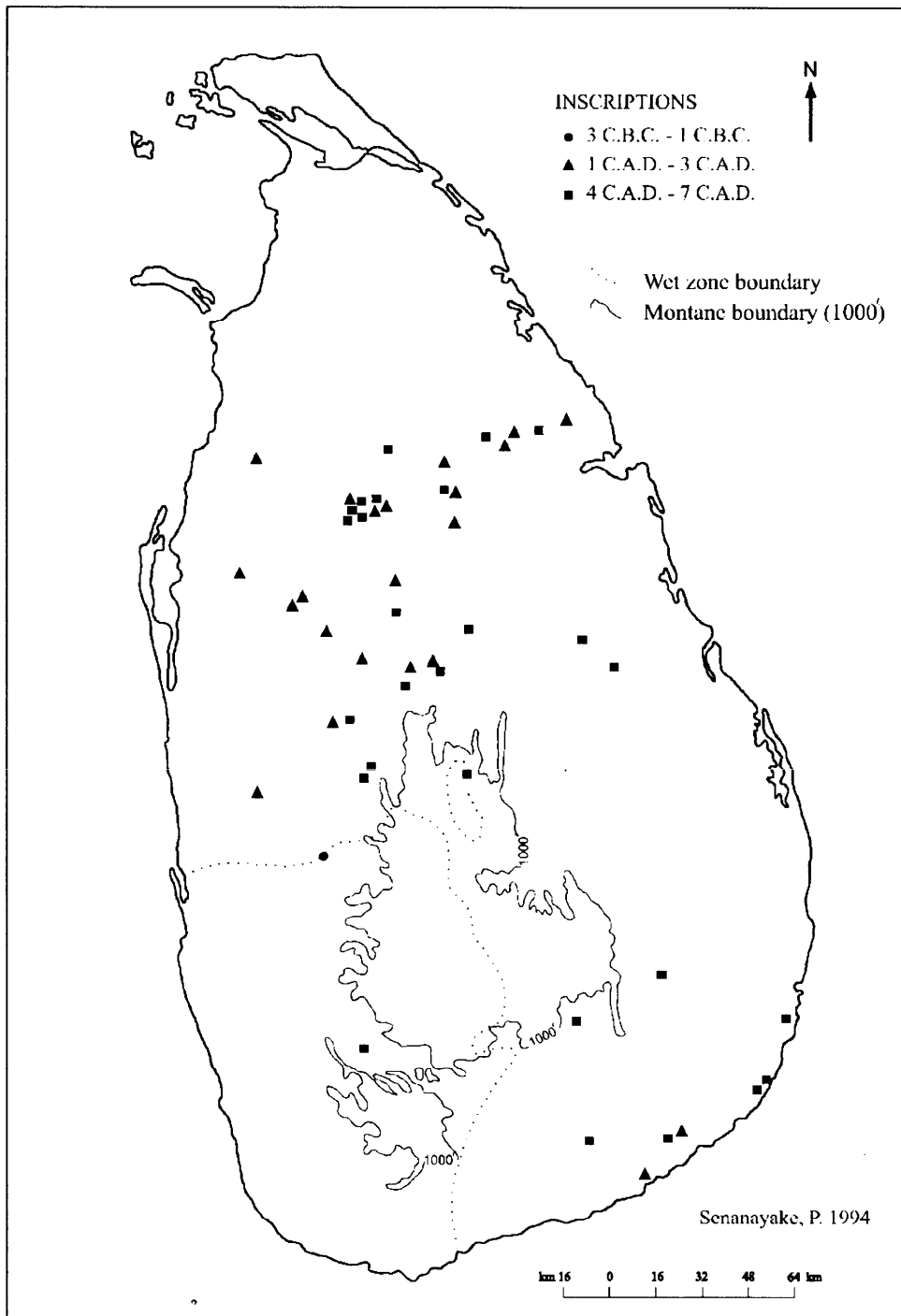
It is quite likely that the initial accumulation of such coined money took place through cash donations made towards the monastic establishments. For instance, a 2nd Century A.D. inscription from Ganekanda records a donation of 200 māśaka by a layman to a cētiya (Paranavitana, 1983, No.77). Such donations along with the donation of 40 kahāpaṇa made to the stūpa by a śamaṇi clearly implies that cash was deposited in favour of the monastery enabling the procurement of necessary items required for religious observances associated with the stūpa. A direct cash donation (of kahapaṇa) to the saṅgha is found in an inscription datable to A.D. 2nd Century at Situlpauva. The donation was made to the monks in general and not to any individual monk. From a slightly later context, the Jetavana tablet inscription mentions a donation of 100 kahavaṇa donated to the monks by two merchants (Dias, 1990, pp. 207-209). It is precisely cash accumulated through such donations that may have resulted in the development of standing funds such as sagasata kahavaṇa with the monastic establishments.

During the Middle Historic Period the utilization of coined money by the monks took place though other agencies as well. The earliest hint at this is seen in a 4th Century A.D. inscription from Tonigala (Paranavitana, 1933, pp. 177-179). Here the deposit was made in the form of grain and the interest was also derived in the form of grain and was given to the monks. By the 5th Century A.D. we hear of 100 kahāpaṇa being deposited with a particular establishment called mahatabaka niyamatana and the cash interest given to the monastery to conduct a particular ritual ceremony called the ariyavasavaṭa (Paranavitana, 1933, p.250). It is now suggested that the establishment known as Mahatabaka may have been a major copper working guild (Seneviratne, 1994), which was obviously involved in commercial operations as well. The above inscription located at the Labuātabendigala and several others inscriptions belonging to the same period found at Situlpauva, Kongala, Kotaveheragala record kahavaṇa deposits and the donation of cash interest to the monasteries (Dias, 1991, p. 92, 94; Codrington, 1924, p.192).

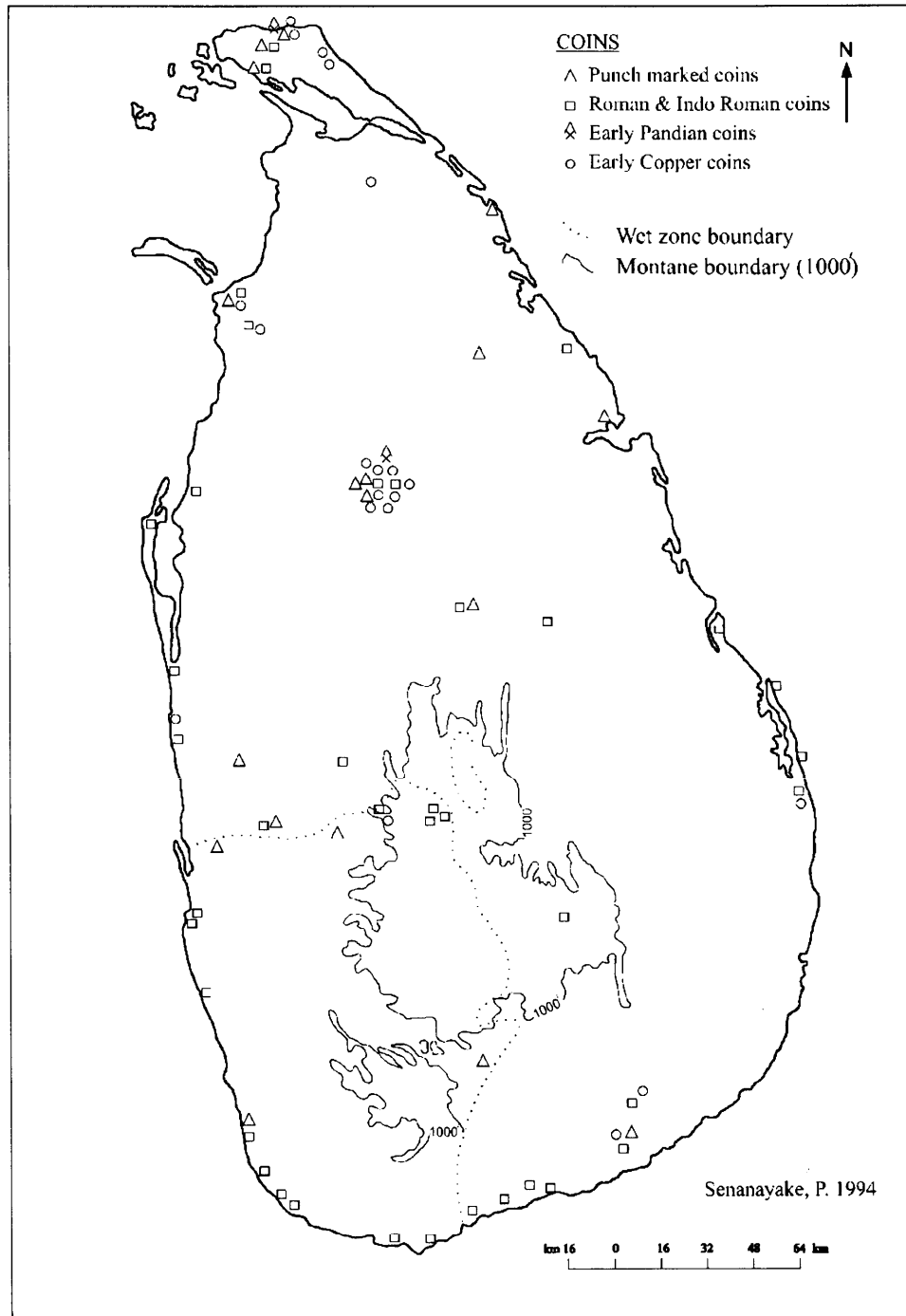
It is also interesting to note that out of 39 inscriptions carrying notices on coined money from 5th to 7th Century A.D. 22 of them record that the

interest money was utilized for the ariyavasa vaṭa koṭu and vaharala vaṭa koṭu. It is possible that the former may refer to the Āriyavaṃsa ceremony and the latter to the releasing of slaves. The exact meanings of these terms are debated. Yet, what is clear is that these functions did bring in a regular flow of cash to the monasteries, which ultimately linked the monastic economic operations to the existing cash nexus.

In conclusion we may note the following aspects. The epigraphically sources corroborated by numismatic, archaeological and textual sources establish that the use of coined money gained usage around B.C. 3rd /2nd Century. It was not restricted to a particular geographical zone but spread out in relation to exchange routes, resource locations and production-distribution centres. While the kahāpaṇa had a primary position, smaller and other varieties and denominations of coins were in use during the period under discussion. The use of coined money spread not only in various physical zones, but it also cut across various social and economic groups including the incorporation of the monastic establishments into the cash nexus of that time.



INSRIPTIONS REFERRING TO COINED MONEY



LOCATION MAP: EARLY HISTORIC COINS

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