

Torpedo Jar Fragment

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Geography

Why in News?

The Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA) recently discovered a broken fragment of an ancient torpedo jar alongside submerged ring wells and over 250 ceramic artifacts.

Key Archaeological Finds

First Submerged Torpedo Jar Fragment in TN

- **Description** - A tubular, thick-walled ceramic vessel with a narrow neck and cylindrical body, engineered specifically to transport liquid commodities on long sea voyages without spillage.
- **Provenance**- Originates from West Asia (likely Parthian/Sasanian or early Islamic Persian Gulf trade routes).
- It serves as direct material evidence of trans-oceanic Indian Ocean maritime trade during the Early Historic period.
- **Parallel Sites**- Torpedo jar fragments have previously been excavated at terrestrial Sangam-era sites in Tamil Nadu, including Alagankulam, Korkai, and Porpanaikottai.

Submerged Ring Wells

- Archaeologists uncovered **4 intact terracotta ring wells** with diameters ranging between 60cm and 65 cm on the ocean floor.
- The presence of freshwater ring wells underwater strongly confirms that a **palaeochannel** once flowed through this location, supporting human settlements before marine transgression or tsunamis submerged the coastline.
- The exploration utilized advanced marine geophysical tools, including Side-Scan Sonar, Sub-Bottom Profilers, Multibeam Scanners, and Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) to map submerged structures amidst low underwater visibility.

Key Archaeological Finds

First Submerged Torpedo Jar Fragment in TN



Torpedo jar fragment
(Underwater image)



Ceramic vessel

Tubular, thick-walled vessel with a narrow neck to transport liquids.



From West Asia

Likely Parthian/Sasanian or early Islamic trade routes.



Evidence of trade

Shows trans-oceanic Indian Ocean maritime trade in the Early Historic period.



Found at other sites

Similar fragments at Alagankulam, Korkai and Porpanaikottai (TN).

Submerged Ring Wells



4 intact ring wells

Terracotta ring wells with diameters of 60–65 cm.



Evidence of a palaeochannel

Confirms a freshwater channel once flowed here, supporting human settlements before marine transgression or tsunamis.

OUR PAST BENEATH THE WAVES

Poompuhar (Kaveripoompattinam)

- **Sangam Era Capital & Port** - Poompuhar served as the primary port city and second capital of the **Early Cholas**.
- **Literary References** - Extensively documented in classical Sangam and post-Sangam literature:
 - **Pattinappaalai**- Describes busy docks, customs houses, and international merchants residing in the city.
 - **Silappadikaram & Manimekalai** -Chronicled urban planning, bustling markets (*Yavanar* quarters for Greco-Roman traders), and the legendary submergence of the city due to a catastrophic marine inundation (tsunami/sea-level rise).
- **Foreign Accounts**- Mentioned as *Kaberis* by Ptolemy and referenced in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.

Significance for Maritime History

- Provides concrete physical artifacts to corroborate Tamil epic accounts of Poompuhar's urban layout and its ultimate catastrophe/submergence under the Bay of Bengal.
- Highlights that ancient Tamil ports interacted not only with the Roman/Mediterranean sphere (*amphorae*) but also maintained sustained commercial ties with West Asian/Persian Gulf economies (*torpedo jars*).

Reference

[The Hindu | Torpedo jar fragment](#)



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