The advent of the early historical period in South India is generally dated to the 3rd century BCE. As mentioned earlier, recent archaeological data from the site of Kodumanal suggests the possibility of earlier beginnings, at least the 4th century BCE. The early kingdoms of Tamilakam—the land between the Tirupati hills (Vengadam) and the southernmost tip of the peninsula—emerged in rice-growing areas of rich agricultural potential. The principality of the Cholas in the lower Kaveri valley corresponded roughly to modern Tanjore and Trichinopoly districts of Tamil Nadu, and had its capital at Uraiyur. The kingdom of the Pandyas in the valleys of the Tamraparni and Vaigai roughly correspond to modern Tirunelveli, Madurai, Ramnad districts, and south Travancore and had its capital at Madurai. The Cheras on the Kerala coast had their capital at Karuvur, also known as Vanji. All these areas participated in the flourishing trade networks of the time. The premier Chola port was Puhar (also known as Kaveripumpattinam), the major Pandya port was Korkai, while Tondi and Muchiri were the important ports in the Chera kingdom.

PUNCH-MARKED COINS FROM ANDHRA AND PANDYA COUNTRY

The major sources of information on the political history of the time are laudatory poems, which often exaggerate the achievements and virtues of rulers. Tamil–Brahmi inscriptions corroborate the historicity and rough dates of some of the rulers mentioned in texts. The Chera, Chola, and Pandya kings were the *vendar* (crowned kings). These great kings had their special insignia of royalty such as the staff, drum, and umbrella. They also had specific emblems of power—the tiger, bow, and fish were the emblems of the Cholas, Cheras, and Pandyas respectively. Apart from the *vendar*, there

were a number of chieftains known as *velir*. Internecine conflict was a feature of the politics of the time. The kings and chieftains also often fought against each other by forming alliances. The lesser rulers no doubt had to pay tribute to their more powerful counterparts.

Udiyanjeral is the earliest known Chera king.[3] His son was Nedunjeral Adan, described as having defeated seven crowned kings and winning the exalted rank of *adhiraja*. Poetic exaggeration credits him with extending his conquests upto the Himalaya mountains and carving the Chera bow emblem on them. He defeated an enemy on the Malabar coast and captured several Yavana traders, later releasing them for ransom. He fought a war against a Chola king, an encounter in which both the principal adversaries lost their lives. Kuttuvan, the younger brother of Nedunjeral Adan, is supposed to have conquered Kongu and extended the power of the Cheras up to the eastern and western oceans. One of Adan's sons is described as an *adhiraja* who wore a garland of seven crowns. He achieved military successes against Anji, a chieftain of Tagadur, and led an expedition against a ruler named Nannan, who held sway in the area to the north of Malabar.

UNINSCRIBED COPPER COINS OF CHERAS, CHOLAS

PANDYAS

Senguttuvan was another of Adan's sons. He won a war against the Mokur chieftain. The *Silappadikaram*, a post-Sangam work, tells us that he attacked Viyalur in the land of Nannan and took the Kodukur fortress in Kongu country. He seems to have successfully backed one of the claimants in a Chola succession conflict, leading to the death of nine other contenders. He is also credited with fighting against an *arya* chieftain in order to obtain stone for an image of Kannaki (the heroine of the *Silappadikaram*) and bathing in the Ganga before bringing the stone back to his country. Kudakko Ilanjeral Irumporai is one of the last Chera kings mentioned in the Sangam poems. He is said to have fought victorious wars against the Cholas and Pandyas. Another Chera monarch, Mandaranjeral Irumporai, ruled in the early 3rd century CE. On one occasion, he was captured by the Pandyas, but managed to regain his freedom and return home.

Two almost identical 2nd century CE inscriptions at Pugalur mention three generations of Chera princes of the Irumporai line. They record the construction of a rock shelter for a Jaina monk on the occasion of the investiture ceremony of the heir apparent Ilankatunko, son of Perunkatunkon, and grandson of king Adan Cher Irumporai. The last mentioned ruler can be identified with king Ilanjeral Irumporai mentioned above. The names of another branch of Chera kings have been found in two short inscriptions at Edakal in Kerala, dated on palaeographic grounds to the 3rd century CE.

The Chola king Karikala is associated with many heroic exploits. A poem in the *Pattuppattu* describes how he was deposed and imprisoned early in his reign, but succeeded in escaping and re-establishing himself as king. Karikala is credited with having defeated a confederacy including the Pandyas, Cheras, and their allies at the battle of Venni. We are told that 11 rulers lost their drums in the field (the royal drum was an important symbol of royal power) and that the Chera king, who suffered a wound in the back, committed ritual suicide by starvation. Karikala is credited with another major victory at Vahaipparandalai. This time, we are told that several chieftains lost their

umbrellas (the umbrella was one of the insignias of royal power). These and other victories suggest that Karikala succeeded in impressing his might over many contemporary kings and chieftains. Another important Chola ruler mentioned in the poems is Tondaiman Ilandiraiyan. He ruled from Kanchi, either as an independent ruler or as a subordinate of Karikala. He was a poet; of his four songs that have survived, one emphasizes that the personal character of a king was important for him to rule well. In later times, the Chola kingdom was racked by a protracted and bitter war between two contenders for the throne—Nalangilli and Nedungilli.

The early Pandya kings included Nediyon, Palshalai Mudukudumi, and Nedunjeliyan. The death of Kovalan, hero of the *Silappadikaram*, is supposed to have taken place during the reign of the last-mentioned ruler who is said to have died of remorse because of his role in the tragic turn of events. This Nedunjeliyan was followed by another king of the same name. He is credited with many major military victories. It is said that he defeated a confederacy of Cholas, Cheras, and five chieftains at a battle at Talaiyalanganam while he was still very young. (It is in this battle that the Chera king was taken prisoner.) He is also described as having conquered territory from other chieftains. Two early 2nd century BCE Tamil–Brahmi inscriptions from Mangulam record gifts made to Jaina monks by a subordinate and a relative of Nedunjeliyan. Mahadevan suggests that this Nedunjeliyan should probably be placed earlier than the two kings of this name mentioned in Sangam poems. A *c*.1st century BCE inscription from Alagarmalai mentions a person called Kalu(Katu)mara Natan, who, from his name, seems to have been a Pandya prince or subordinate.

PRIMARY SOURCES

The royal drum

Its black sides glisten,
long straps fastened to them faultlessly.
It shines with a garland
woven of long, full peacock feathers,
blue-sapphire dark,
with bright spots,
and is splendid with golden shoots
of *ulinai*.
Such is the royal drum, hungry for blood.
Before they brought it back from its bath without knowing I climbed on to its bed and lay on the covering of soft flowers that was like a froth of oil poured down.
Yet you were not angry,
you did not use your sharp sword.
Surely that was enough for all of the Tamil lands to learn of it.
But you did not stop there.
You came up to me,
you raised your strong arm, as big around as a concert drum;
you fanned me

and made me cool.
mighty lord, you must have done
these things
because you know that except for those whose fame is spread across the broad earth
no one has a place for long in the high world of paradise.

This is one of many Sangam poems that bring out the close relationship between kings and poets.

The royal drum (*murachu*) was beaten in the morning to awaken the king, during battle, and on other special occasions. It was made from a special tree and special skin, and was associated with sacred power. The desecration of the drum was considered a very serious offence. In this poem, Mochikirnarin praises Cheraman Takaturerinta Peruncheralirumporai. The poet tells us that he climbed on to the drum by mistake and fell asleep on it. When the king arrived, he did not kill him in fury, but instead fanned him tenderly till he awoke.

SOURCE *Purananuru* 50; Hart, 1979: 148–49

The Sangam poets also eulogize various chieftains such as Ay, Andiran, and Pari for their bravery and generosity. Pari seems to have held sway in the Pandya country near the hill known as Kodungunram or Piranmalai. Kapilar, who wrote many poems in praise of Pari, seems to have been a loyal camp-follower. He moved to the court of the Chera king Shelvakkadungo Vali Adan only after Pari's death. Other rulers of the time included Adi-gaiman (also known as Neduman Anji), ruler of Tagadur, who is praised in the poems of the poetess Auvaiyar. Although assisted by the Pandya and Chola kings, he was defeated by Chera Perunjeral Irumporai, whose suzerainty he had to subsequently acknowledge. He died fighting on behalf of the Cheras in an expedition against Pali, the capital of Nannan. This famous chieftain is mentioned in a 1st century CE inscription at Jambai. Tamil–Brahmi inscriptions from Pugalur and Kaniman mention other chieftains as well.

In the Tamil–Brahmi inscriptions found at several places in South India, kings are addressed as *ko* and the chieftains as *ko* or *kon*. Princes have the suffixes 'ko' or 'kon' in their name. The reference in the Pugalur inscription to an investiture ceremony for the heir apparent is significant. The mention of a subordinate ruler or functionary of the Pandya king in a Mangulam inscription is also noteworthy. A *kalatika* (superintendent of pearls, i.e., an officer who supervised pearl fisheries) is mentioned in a 2nd century BCE Mangulam inscription; this person was also a member of a merchant guild. A 1st century BCE inscription from Alagarmalai refers to the *kanatikan* (chief of scribes). Such inscriptions give glimpses into the administrative organization of the Pandyas.

TRANSLITERATION IN ROMAN SCRIPT:
kani-i nata-siri-y kuvan…
vel-arai-y nikamatu
kaviti-iy kalitika antai
asutan pina-u kotupiton

TRANSLATION:
To Nanta-siri Kuvan, the *Kani*. Antai Assutan, the superintendent of pearls and *kaviti* of the merchant guild of Vellarai, caused to give the cave (?).

SOURCE Mahadevan, 2003: 318–19

A TAMIL–BRAHMI INSCRIPTION AT MANGULAM

The most important basis of legitimation of political power in early historical South India was the eulogy of the poets. The relationship between poet and patron in ancient Tamilakam was a reciprocal one (Kailasapathy [1968], 2002, 55–93; Shulman, 2001: 74–75). The poet was dependent on his patron for material support and well-being. But the king too was dependent on the poet. It was only the poet's praise of his generosity and heroism that could lead to his attaining lasting fame. Conversely, the poet's anger could prove costly for his patron and lead to his ruin. In some poems, poor bards beseech their patrons for favours and gifts. Others indicate that kings would give generously, even if it meant going out on a looting expedition. The relationship between ruler and poet was often very close and intense, based on strong bonds of loyalty, even friendship.

MAP 8.2 TAMIL–BRAHMI AND EARLY VATTELUTTU INSCRIPTIONS (AFTER MAHADEVAN, 2003)

However, Sangam poems also reflect the emergence of new bases of royal prestige and legitimacy —the performance of Brahmanical sacrifices, establishing links with the northern epic tradition, the worship and patronage of certain deities, and the patronage of Jaina ascetics. Several poems refer to the king's performance of Vedic sacrifices. The Pandya ruler Mudukudumi had the title *Palshalai* which means 'one who has many halls', presumably sacrificial halls. Certain chiefs claimed to have emerged from the sacrificial fire pit of a northern sage, and connected themselves both with the sage Agastya and the god Vishnu. The chieftain Adigaiman is described as having been born in a family which honoured the gods by performing worship and sacrifices. Later tradition credits the Chera

king Senguttuvan as having played an important role in establishing the cult of the goddess Pattini (Kannaki, deified as the epitome of the chaste wife). The Chola king Senganan is described in legend as devoted to Shiva and as having fed the two warring armies on the eve of the Mahabharata war. Tamil–Brahmi inscriptions record the excavation of caves for Jaina monks and nuns by kings, chieftains, and many others.

Champakalakshmi (1996: 92–93) has argued that the urbanization of the Sangam age did not take place in a context of a state polity, and that this was an age of tribal chiefdoms or at the most 'potential monarchies'. She asserts that the *vendar* exercised limited control over agricultural tracts and depended on tribute and plunder for their sustenance. However, the evidence of writing, a sophisticated literature, urban centres, specialized crafts, and long-distance trade suggest otherwise. The references in poems to these kings making gifts of gold, gems, muslin, and even horses and elephants suggest a differential access to and control over resources. Kings were involved in long-distance maritime trade as consumers of luxury goods and by developing ports of trade and levying tolls and customs. There is also clear evidence of dynastic coin issues. The existence of at least a rudimentary state structure cannot be denied in the case of the Chola, Chera, and Pandya monarchies, even if these rulers did not have full control over the agrarian plains, a regular or extensive system of taxation, or a centralized coercive machinery.

Villages and Cities

More is known about cities of *c.* 200 BCE–300 CE than about villages and agriculture. The Jatakas speak of *gama*s ranging from 30–1,000 *kula*s (extended families). There are references to *gama*s associated with particular occupational groups such as reed workers (*nalakara*s) and salt makers (*lonakara*s). There is also mention of villages of potters, carpenters, smiths, forest folk, hunters, fowlers, and fishermen. Some of these villages seem to have been located close to cities.

Early Tamil–Brahmi inscriptions offer brief glimpses into aspects of village life in Tamilakam. A 2nd century BCE inscription at Varichiyur records the gift of 100 *kalam*s of rice. A 1st century BCE inscription at Alagarmalai refers to a *koluvanikan* (trader in ploughshares). The *kolu* is the hard iron tip fixed to a wooden ploughshare. A 2nd century BCE inscription found at Mudalaikulam seems to refer to the construction of a tank by the assembly (*ur*) of Vempil village (Mahadevan, 2003: 140, 125). If Mahadevan's interpretation is correct, this is the earliest inscriptional reference to a village assembly in the Indian subcontinent.

Recent Discoveries

Plant remains from Sanghol

Compared to earlier periods, there is very little archaeological data about the agricultural economy of settlements in different parts of the subcontinent during the early historical period. There are, however, a few exceptions.

A. K. Pokharia and K. S. Saraswat collected over 300 plant samples from 28 trenches of 'Kushana' habitational levels (*c.* 100–300 CE) at the site of Sanghol (Ludhiana district, Punjab).

They identified carbonized remains of 17 crop plants, four spices and condiments, 11 wild and cultivated fruits, and one dye-plant:

Cereals

Rice (*Oryza sativa*), two kinds of barley (*Hordeum vulgare* emend. Bowden; *Hordeum vulgare* Bowden var. *nudum*) wheat (*Triticum*, jowar millet (*Sorghum bicolor* Moench.)

Pulses

Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum*), field pea (*Pisum arvense*), lentil (*Lens culinaris* Medik), grass pea (*Lathyrus sativus*), green gram (*Vigna radiata* Wilczek), black gram (*Vigna mungo* Hepper), cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata* Walp.), horse gram (*Dolichos biflorus*).

Oil seeds

Field Brassica (*Brassica juncea* Czern and Coss.), sesame (*Sesamum indicum*, *til*).

Fibre-crops

Cotton (*Gossypium arboreum* G. *herbaceum*).

Spices and condiments

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*), coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), cumin (*Cuminum cyminum*), black pepper (*Piper nigrum*).

Fruits

Date (*Phoenix* sp.), *anwala* (*Emblica officinalis*), *jharberi* (*Zizyphus nummularia*), custard apple (*Annona squamosa*, sitaphal), walnut (*Juglans regia*), almond (*Prunus amygdalus* Batsch), grape/raisin (*Vitis vinifera*), *jamun* (*Syzygium cumini*), *phalsa* (*Grewia*), *reetha* (*Sapindus* cf. *emarginatus* Vahl./*trifoliatus*/*laurifolius* Vahl.), *harra* (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.)

Dye plant

Henna (*Lawsonia inermis*, *mehndi*)

Various weeds and wild plant species (28 types) were also identified. The results of this study give interesting details about the agricultural economy and food habits of the people who lived at Sanghol in the early centuries CE. Several of the plants are known from earlier cultural contex in the area, showing a broad continuity in agricultural practices from protohistoric times. However, there are also some new additions. People were using spices in their food. It can only be speculated what henna was used for. The discovery of seeds of custard apple in such an early context is especially intriguing, as it is generally believed this fruit was introduced into India from South America by the Portuguese in the 16th century.

SOURCE Saraswat and Pokharia, 1997–98

The period *c.* 200 BCE–300 CE was marked by urban prosperity all over the subcontinent. Unfortunately, the archaeological details of most early historical sites are rather meagre and tend to be confined to a few details about fortifications. Some sites have been excavated vertically, giving a tiny glimpse of what they hold; a much greater number have not been excavated at all. The archaeological literature often identifies the periods or levels of occupation at sites according to dynastic labels, e.g., Indo-Greek, Shunga, Kushana, or Satavahana. This should at most be understood as a convenient shorthand for broad chronological phases, but can be misleading. For instance, the term 'Shunga' is often used for levels at a site where Shunga rule never prevailed.

Certain questions link the subject of this chapter with the discussion in Chapter 7. What was the impact and legacy of Maurya rule on the so-called 'peripheral areas', and to what extent was interaction with the Maurya state an impetus to 'secondary state formation' in these areas? Secondary state formation is the emergence of states which have the model of already existing states before them, and which emerge as a result of interaction with already existent ('pristine') states. While the Maurya impact cannot be discounted, neither should it be given undue emphasis. The long-term development of urban centres required and involved an expansion in agricultural production, developments in specialized crafts, and wider and more intensive and extensive trade networks.

CITIES OF THE NORTH-WEST

The site of Pushkalavati, one of the important cities of this period, is identified with the mounds at Charsada, spread out over some 4 sq miles.[4] Pushkalavati is known as Peucelaotis or Proclais in Graeco-Roman accounts. Arrian mentions it as a place where Philip had to station a Macedonian garrison due to its revolt against Alexander. The city seems to have been important in the Indo-Greek period, but declined somewhat in the Kushana period due to the increasing eminence of Purushapura (modern Peshawar). Nevertheless, it continued to be a major centre of trade. The occupation at Bala Hisar mound at Charsada goes back to the 6th century BCE. By the 4th century BCE, the settlement had grown and was protected by mud fortifications and a ditch.

Aerial photography at the Shaikhan mound at Charsada revealed a city with a rectangular plan, parallel streets, and blocks of houses, dominated by a large circular structure, probably a Buddhist *stupa*. Excavations indicated occupation from the mid-2nd century BCE to the mid-3rd century CE. Drains, refuse pits, and cesspools of a wide street were identified. While the earlier houses were made of stone diaper masonry (a style of masonry in which spaces between large stone blocks are separated by flat, thin pieces of stone), those of the Kushana phase were made of mud-brick. A room with a fireplace in the middle was identified. A house consisting of a courtyard with rooms built on three sides was also unearthed. The name 'Haradakha' was engraved on the pedestal of a relic casket found in this house; perhaps this was the name of its current or past owner. The courtyard had a bathing area connected to the street by a stone drain. The house was renovated many times, and a shrine with a Buddha figure was added in the last phase of renovation.

The political upheavals and cultural influences of the time were more than evident at Taxila (Marshall, 1951). Here, a new city was laid out in the early 2nd century BCE at the site of Sirkap, to