Porunai (Thamirabarani) Civilisation and Tamil Nadu Excavation Sites – Porunai Museum, Korkai, Arikamedu, Poompuhar, Mayiladumparai & Yearly Excavations | TNPSC Notes

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Porunai is the ancient Tamil name of the **Thamirabarani** river of Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts, and the **Porunai (Thamirabarani) civilisation** is the name now given to the early settlements, burial sites and ports of its basin – **Adichanallur**, **Sivakalai**, **Korkai** and **Thulukarpatti**. Their finds are displayed in the **Porunai Museum** at Reddiarpatti, Tirunelveli, inaugurated on **20 December 2025**. Since 2021 the **Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology** has announced a fresh set of excavation sites every year, so sites such as **Mayiladumparai**, **Gangaikonda Cholapuram**, **Vembakottai**, **Thulukarpatti** and **Porpanaikottai**, together with the older port sites of **Korkai**, **Arikamedu** and **Poompuhar**, are now regular exam topics.

தமிழில் படிக்க

These notes are written for TNPSC Group 1, 2/2A and 4 aspirants and are meant to be complete on their own. Excavation sites, Sangam ports and museums belong to **History, Culture, Heritage and Socio-Political Movements of Tamil Nadu** (archaeological discoveries, Sangam age, Tamil heritage); Indo-Roman trade, the Cholas and early Indian archaeology belong to **History, Culture of India and Indian National Movement**; rivers and districts link to **Geography of India** (physical geography of Tamil Nadu); and the yearly excavation announcements, new dates and museum openings are asked under **Current Events**. Keezhadi, Adichanallur, Sivakalai and Kodumanal have their own separate notes, so here they appear only as one-line pointers. Read each section, then use the tables, the quick revision table and the key points at the end.

Tamil Nadu Excavation Sites at a Glance

Site	District / place	River / coast	Known for
Korkai	Thoothukudi (Srivaikuntam taluk)	Near the Thamirabarani; old coast of the Gulf of Mannar	Sangam-age Pandya port; pearl fishery
Arikamedu	Puducherry (Union Territory, not Tamil Nadu)	Ariyankuppam river, near the coast	Indo-Roman trading port (Poduke)
Poompuhar (Kaveripoompattinam, Puhar)	Mayiladuthurai	Mouth of the Kaveri	Sangam-age Chola port; underwater surveys
Mayiladumparai	Krishnagiri	Hill-side habitation and burial site	Iron dated to 2172 BCE (AMS)
Gangaikonda Cholapuram (Maligaimedu)	Ariyalur	Inland Chola capital	Palace remains of Rajendra Chola I; Chinese ware
Vembakottai	Virudhunagar (near Sattur)	Vaippar river	Glass beads, shell bangles, gold ornaments
Thulukarpatti	Tirunelveli (Radhapuram taluk)	Nambiyar river	Tamil-Brahmi potsherds, including "Puli"
Porpanaikottai	Pudukkottai	Inland fort site	Fort indicated; brick water channel; gold nose stud
Keezhadi (pointer)	Sivaganga	Vaigai river	Sangam-age urban settlement
Adichanallur (pointer)	Thoothukudi	Thamirabarani river	Iron Age urn-burial site
Sivakalai (pointer)	Thoothukudi	Thamirabarani basin	Rice dated 1155 BCE; iron dated 3345 BCE
Kodumanal (pointer)	Erode	Noyyal river	Gem and bead industrial centre

Background: Why Archaeology Matters for Tamil History

- **Literature needs proof:** Sangam poems describe ports such as **Korkai** and **Puhar**, pearl trade and foreign ships. Excavations test these descriptions with datable material.
- **Writing:** potsherds with **Tamil-Brahmi (Tamili)** letters from many sites show that writing was used by ordinary people and traders.

- **Science-based dating:** the State Department sends samples to laboratories in India and abroad for **AMS radiocarbon dating**; announcements such as Keezhadi (580 BCE), Sivakalai (1155 BCE) and Mayiladumparai (2172 BCE) come from these tests.
- **Who digs:** the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** is the central body; the **Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA)** conducts the State's own excavations. Excavations need permission from the Central Advisory Board of Archaeology (CABA) of the ASI.
- **Yearly programme:** since 2021 the State has announced a fresh list of sites and phases each year, followed by an excavation season that usually runs from early in the year to about September.

The Porunai (Thamirabarani) River and Its Civilisation

- **River:** the Thamirabarani (Porunai, Tan Porunai) rises in the **Pothigai hills** of the Western Ghats above Papanasam and flows through **Tirunelveli** and **Thoothukudi** districts into the **Gulf of Mannar**.
- **Sites in the basin: Adichanallur** (urn burials), **Sivakalai** (burials and habitation), **Korkai** (Pandya port) and **Thulukarpatti** (on the Nambiyar, a river of the same region).
- **"3,200 years":** in September 2021 the Chief Minister told the Assembly that rice from a burial urn at Sivakalai had been dated by Beta Analytic, Miami, to **1155 BCE** – about 3,200 years ago. On this basis the government said the Porunai (Thamirabarani) civilisation was about 3,200 years old.
- **Study plan:** the Central Advisory Board of Archaeology has also permitted field studies to locate sites along the Thamirabarani in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts.

Porunai Museum, Tirunelveli

The Porunai Museum (Porunai Archaeological Museum) was created to display the finds of the Thamirabarani basin in the region itself, in the same way that the Keezhadi museum (opened on 5 March 2023) displays the finds of the Vaigai basin.

Stage	Date	Details
Announcement	9 September 2021	Chief Minister M. K. Stalin, in the Assembly under Rule 110; Rs 15 crore announced for a "Porunai museum" in Tirunelveli
Foundation stone	18 May 2023 (International Museum Day)	Laid by video conference from the Secretariat; 13.02 acres allotted; Rs 33 crore for the first phase; 2,617 artefacts from Adichanallur, Korkai and Sivakalai to be shown
Inauguration	20 December 2025	Inaugurated by the Chief Minister at Reddiarpatti, Tirunelveli; about 13 acres
Opened to the public	23 December 2025	Open daily, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

- **Displays:** artefacts excavated at **Sivakalai, Adichanallur, Thulukarpatti and Korkai** – burial urns, pottery and metal objects.
- **Visitor facilities:** a **5D/7D virtual-reality theatre** with a simulated boat journey along the Thamirabarani past its archaeological sites.
- **Exam tip:** remember the three dates in order – **2021** (announced), **2023** (foundation, on Museum Day), **2025** (opened).

Korkai – The Pandya Pearl Port

- **Location:** a village in **Srivaikuntam taluk, Thoothukudi district**, about 3 km north of the Thamirabarani. The sea has receded, and the coast is now about 6 km away.
- **In literature:** Sangam poems describe Korkai as the port of the **Pandyas** and a centre of **pearl fishing** in the Gulf of Mannar; classical writers of the Greek and Roman world also knew it as a pearl port.
- **First excavation (1968–69):** by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology. It found a **brick structure** and **potsherds with Tamil-Brahmi letters** (dated about 300 BCE to 200 CE). Charcoal from the site was dated to about **785 BCE**.
- **Excavation resumed (2021):** after a gap of about 52 years, as one of the seven sites of the 2021 season. Brick construction and shell (chank) remains, pointing to a shell-working industry, were reported.
- **Offshore exploration (2022):** in September 2022 the State Department began a marine survey off the coast opposite the Thamirabarani mouth, flagged off at Thoothukudi, with the support of national institutions such as the **National Institute of Ocean Technology**.
- **Museum link:** Korkai finds are displayed in the Porunai Museum.

Arikamedu – Indo-Roman Trading Port (Puducherry)

Arikamedu is outside Tamil Nadu (in the Union Territory of Puducherry) but is studied with Tamil Nadu sites because it shows the Sangam-age trade of the Tamil coast with the Roman world.

- **Location:** on the bank of the **Ariyankuppam river**, near the Veerampattinam coast, close to Puducherry town.
- **Ancient name:** identified with **Poduke**, a port named in the **Periplus of the Erythraean Sea** (1st century CE) and in Ptolemy's Geography.
- **Early finds:** French scholar **G. Jouveau-Dubreuil** collected beads and an engraved gem (intaglio) believed to show Emperor Augustus.
- **Mortimer Wheeler (1945):** found **Arretine ware** (red-glazed Roman pottery made at Arezzo, Italy), **amphorae** (wine and oil jars) and **rouletted ware**, and called the site an **Indo-Roman trading station**.
- **J.-M. Casal (1947–50):** French excavations showed that the settlement was older than Wheeler thought.
- **Vimala Begley (early 1990s):** fresh excavations re-dated the beginning of the site to about the **3rd century BCE**, before Roman contact.
- **Industries: bead-making** (glass and semi-precious stone) and **textile-dyeing tanks**; ring wells.
- **Later life:** the site was occupied again in the Chola period (Chinese celadon and Chola coins have been found).

Poompuhar (Kaveripoompattinam) – The Chola Port

- **Location:** at the mouth of the **Kaveri**, in **Mayiladuthurai district**. Other names: Puhar, Kaveripoompattinam, Kaveripattinam.
- **In literature: Pattinappalai** by **Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar** (one of the Pathuppattu) praises Karikala Chola and describes Puhar's markets and harbour; **Silappathikaram** (Ilango Adigal) opens in Puhar, and **Manimekalai** (Seethalai Sathanar) is also set there.
- **Land excavations:** burnt-brick **wharf** structures were found at **Kilaiyur**, and a **Buddhist vihara** (monastery) with a Buddha image at **Pallavanesvaram**, dated about the 4th–5th century CE.

- **Underwater exploration (1981 onwards):** the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology and the **National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa**, began offshore surveys in 1981. Later surveys reported submerged stone structures off the coast.
- **Museum:** an **Underwater Archaeological Site Museum** functions at Poompuhar.
- **New survey (2025):** in September 2025 the State Department began a fresh underwater survey off Poompuhar with the **Indian Maritime University**, guided by archaeologist **K. Rajan**.

Mayiladumparai – Oldest Iron Date in India (so far)

- **Location:** a habitation-cum-burial site on a hillock in **Krishnagiri district**.
- **Earlier work:** first excavated in **2003** by **K. Rajan**, then of Tamil University, Thanjavur.
- **State excavation:** the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology resumed digging in **2021** (phase 1) and **2022** (phase 2).
- **Dating (announced 9 May 2022, Rule 110):** two **AMS radiocarbon** dates from **Beta Analytic, Florida** – **2172 BCE** and **1615 BCE**. The State said this places the beginning of the Iron Age in Tamil Nadu about **4,200 years** ago, the earliest among the AMS-dated Iron Age sites of India then known.
- **Other findings:** iron objects; black-and-red ware already in the late Neolithic layers; rock paintings in nearby rock shelters.

Gangaikonda Cholapuram – Maligaimedu Palace Site

- **Location: Ariyalur district**. **Rajendra Chola I**, son of Rajaraja I, founded the city as his capital to mark his victorious expedition to the Ganga, with the Gangaikonda Cholisvaram temple and the Cholagangam lake.
- **Maligaimedu** ("palace mound"): the mound where Rajendra's palace stood. Earlier excavations had already exposed parts of the palace.
- **Phase 1 (2021):** brick walls of a royal palace, many roof tiles and iron nails, a Chola copper coin, ivory objects, glass beads and bangles, and **Chinese ware** (porcelain, including celadon).
- **Phase 2 (2022):** a broken **gold-and-copper bracelet** of the Chola period, among other finds.
- **Phase 3 (from April 2023):** launched by the Chief Minister together with the other sites of the 2023 season.
- **Exam tip:** this is a **medieval (Chola, 11th century)** site – not a Sangam-age site.

Vembakottai – Vaippar River Site

- **Location: Virudhunagar district**, near Sattur, on the **Vaippar** river (excavation area at Vijayakarisalkulam, near Vembakottai).
- **Phases: 2022** (phase 1), **2023** (phase 2) and **2024** (phase 3, started in June 2024).
- **Finds:** several thousand objects – a large share of **glass beads**, with terracotta beads and figurines, **shell (conch) bangles**, gaming pieces and **gold ornaments**.
- **Meaning:** a craft and trade settlement of the early historic period on the Vaippar.

Thulukarpatti – Nambiyar River Site

- **Location:** near Radhapuram, **Tirunelveli district**, on the **Nambiyar** river.
- **Phases: phase 1 from March 2022**; **phase 2 from April 2023**.
- **Finds:** black-and-red, red and black ware, burial urns and many graffiti-marked potsherds; potsherds with **Tamil-Brahmi** letters, including one reading **"Puli"** (tiger).
- **Museum link:** Thulukarpatti finds are displayed in the Porunai Museum.

Porpanaikottai – Fort Settlement in Pudukkottai

- **Location: Pudukkottai district**. A LiDAR survey made before digging indicated a fort with habitation inside it.
- **Phase 1 (from 20 May 2023):** a **brick water channel**, a **gold nose stud**, a carnelian bead, glass beads and bangles, hopscotch pieces, a coin and graffiti-marked potsherds.
- **Phase 2 (from 18 June 2024):** part of the eight-site season launched by the Chief Minister.
- **Meaning:** officials describe it as a Sangam-age site where a fort once stood.

Pointers: Sites with Separate Notes

- **Keezhadi (Keeladi)** (Sivaganga, Vaigai): Sangam-age urban settlement; first three seasons by the ASI (2014–15 to 2016–17), later phases by the State Department; AMS date of 580 BCE; Keezhadi museum opened on 5 March 2023.
- **Adichanallur** (Thoothukudi, Thamirabarani): Iron Age urn-burial site; excavated by Alexander Rea (ASI) from 1899 into the early 1900s, and again by the ASI in 2004–05 and from October 2021.
- **Sivakalai** (Thoothukudi): rice dated 1155 BCE (2021); iron dated 3345 BCE in the January 2025 report "Antiquity of Iron".
- **Kodumanal** (Erode, Noyyal): "Kodumanam" of Pathitrupathu; gem, bead and iron industries.

Excavation Seasons Announced Each Year (State Department)

Season	Sites (phase)	Notes
2021 (from February)	Keezhadi (7th) with Agaram, Manalur and Konthagai; Adichanallur; Sivakalai; Korkai; Kodumanal; Gangaikonda Cholapuram; Mayiladumparai	Season launched on 13 February 2021 (Keezhadi 7th phase)
2022 (from February)	Keezhadi (8th); Sivakalai (3rd); Gangaikonda Cholapuram (2nd); Mayiladumparai (2nd); Vembakottai (1st); Thulukarpatti (1st); Perumbalai, Dharmapuri (1st)	Korkai offshore survey began in September 2022
2023 (from 6 April)	Keezhadi (9th); Gangaikonda Cholapuram (3rd); Vembakottai (2nd); Thulukarpatti (2nd); Kilnamandi, Tiruvannamalai (1st); Porpanaikottai (1st, from 20 May) and others	Excavation season launched by the Chief Minister
2024 (from 18 June)	Keezhadi (10th); Vembakottai (3rd); Kilnamandi (2nd); Porpanaikottai (2nd); Thirumalapuram, Tenkasi; Sennanur, Krishnagiri; Kongal Nagaram, Tiruppur; Marungur, Cuddalore (all 1st)	Inaugurated by the Chief Minister by video conference
2025–26	Poompuhar underwater survey (from September 2025); Keezhadi and seven new sites – Vellalur (Coimbatore), Pattanamarudur (Thoothukudi), Karivalamvanthanallur (Tenkasi), Manikollai (Cuddalore), Nagapattinam, Thelunganur (Salem) and Adichanur	ASI permission given in March 2026

Key People Involved

Person / body	Role
Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA)	Conducts the State's yearly excavations; runs site museums
Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)	Central body; early digs at Adichanallur and Keezhadi; gives permission through the Central Advisory Board of Archaeology
M. K. Stalin (Chief Minister)	Announced the Porunai Museum (2021) and the Sivakalai and Mayiladumparai dates; inaugurated the museum (2025)
Thangam Thennarasu (State minister)	Flagged off the Korkai offshore exploration (2022)
K. Rajan (archaeologist)	Excavated Mayiladumparai (2003); guides the 2025 Poompuhar underwater survey
R. Sivanantham (State Department)	Joint Director of the State Department; member of the 2025 Poompuhar survey team
Mortimer Wheeler	Excavated Arikamedu, 1945
J.-M. Casal; Vimala Begley	Later excavators of Arikamedu (1947–50; early 1990s)
Alexander Rea	ASI officer who excavated Adichanallur from 1899
National Institute of Oceanography, Goa	Partner in Poompuhar underwater surveys from 1981

Outcomes and Significance

- **Older dates:** scientific dating has pushed back the known antiquity of iron, rice cultivation and settled life in Tamil Nadu (Mayiladumparai 2172 BCE; Sivakalai 1155 BCE; Korkai about 785 BCE).
- **Sea trade:** Korkai, Arikamedu and Poompuhar confirm the overseas trade described in Sangam poems; Arretine ware, amphorae and rouletted ware are key evidence.
- **Literacy:** Tamil-Brahmi sherds from Korkai and Thulukarpatti show writing in daily use.
- **Crafts:** bead-making (Arikamedu, Kodumanal), shell-working (Korkai) and textile dyeing (Arikamedu); glass beads in large numbers at Vembakottai.
- **Medieval links:** Chinese ware at Gangaikonda Cholapuram shows Chola-period trade with China.
- **Heritage and tourism:** site museums (Keezhadi 2023, Porunai 2025, Poompuhar underwater site museum) bring finds back to the regions where they were found.
- **Caution:** some dates and interpretations announced by the State are debated by scholars outside Tamil Nadu; in answers, write "according to the State Department of Archaeology".

Writing Mains Answers on Porunai and Tamil Nadu Excavations (Group 1 / Group 2)

Descriptive papers ask about recent archaeological discoveries and their meaning for Tamil history. Use the frameworks below and support every point with a site, a date and a find.

Significance of the Porunai (Thamirabarani) civilisation (about 200–250 words)

- **Introduction:** Porunai = Thamirabarani; basin sites Adichanallur, Sivakalai, Korkai, Thulukarpatti.
- **Antiquity:** Sivakalai rice 1155 BCE (2021); Korkai charcoal about 785 BCE.
- **Burial culture:** urn burials and iron objects at Adichanallur and Sivakalai.
- **Port and trade:** Korkai – Pandya pearl port; offshore exploration from 2022.
- **Writing:** Tamil-Brahmi sherds at Korkai and Thulukarpatti ("Puli").
- **Heritage:** Porunai Museum – announced 2021, foundation 2023, opened 20 December 2025 (about 13 acres).
- **Conclusion:** archaeology now supports Sangam literary accounts with datable evidence; continued scientific study and peer review are needed.

Archaeological evidence of the maritime trade of ancient Tamil Nadu (about 150–200 words)

- **Arikamedu:** Poduke of the Periplus; Arretine ware, amphorae, rouletted ware (Wheeler 1945); bead-making and dyeing.
- **Korkai:** Pandya pearl port; shell industry; offshore survey 2022.
- **Poompuhar:** Chola port of Pattinappalai and Silappathikaram; Kilaiyur wharf; underwater surveys from 1981 and again from 2025.
- **Inland links:** carnelian bead at Porpanaikottai; beads and shell bangles at Vembakottai.
- **Medieval phase:** Chinese ware at Gangaikonda Cholapuram.
- **Conclusion:** Tamil ports linked the Mediterranean world and East Asia across many centuries.

Role of the State Department of Archaeology after 2021 (about 100–150 words)

- A yearly programme of sites and phases (seven sites in 2021; eight in 2024).
- Scientific dating through AMS and other laboratory methods; the "Antiquity of Iron" report (2025).
- Marine archaeology at Korkai (2022) and Poompuhar (2025).
- Site museums – Keezhadi (2023) and Porunai (2025).

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Practice: Match the Following

Item	Match
Korkai	Pandya pearl port, Thoothukudi district
Poompuhar	Chola port at the Kaveri mouth, Mayiladuthurai district
Arikamedu	Poduke; Indo-Roman port on the Ariyankuppam river
Mayiladumparai	Iron dated to 2172 BCE, Krishnagiri district
Maligaimedu	Palace mound at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Ariyalur district
Vembakottai	Vaippar river, Virudhunagar district
Thulukarpatti	Nambiyar river; "Puli" Tamil-Brahmi sherd
Porpanaikottai	Fort settlement, Pudukkottai district
Reddiarpatti	Porunai Museum, Tirunelveli
Mortimer Wheeler	Arikamedu excavation, 1945

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **Mayiladumparai vs Mayiladuthurai:** Mayiladumparai is the iron-dating site in Krishnagiri district; Mayiladuthurai is the district in which Poompuhar lies.
- **Arikamedu is not in Tamil Nadu:** it is in Puducherry (Union Territory).
- **Ports and dynasties:** Korkai – Pandyas; Puhar – Cholas.
- **Rivers:** Porunai = Thamirabarani; Vembakottai is on the Vaippar (not the Vaigai); Thulukarpatti is on the Nambiyar; Keezhadi is on the Vaigai.
- **Three different dates:** Mayiladumparai iron 2172 BCE; Sivakalai rice 1155 BCE; Korkai charcoal about 785 BCE.
- **Porunai Museum dates:** announced 2021, foundation 18 May 2023, inaugurated 20 December 2025 – not the same as the Keezhadi museum (5 March 2023).
- **Gangaikonda Cholapuram** is a medieval Chola site (Rajendra I), not a Sangam-age site.
- **Wheeler** dug Arikamedu (1945); **Alexander Rea** dug Adichanallur – do not interchange.

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Quick Revision Table

Year / date	Event
1899 – early 1900s	Alexander Rea (ASI) excavates Adichanallur
1945	Mortimer Wheeler excavates Arikamedu – Indo-Roman trading station
1947–50	J.-M. Casal excavates Arikamedu
1968–69	State Department excavates Korkai; charcoal later dated about 785 BCE
1981	Poompuhar underwater exploration begins (State Department with NIO, Goa)
Early 1990s	Vimala Begley's excavations at Arikamedu
2003	K. Rajan excavates Mayiladumparai
2014–15 to 2016–17	ASI excavates Keezhadi (first three seasons)
2021 (Feb onward)	Seven-site season: Keezhadi, Adichanallur, Sivakalai, Korkai, Kodumanal, Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Mayiladumparai
2021 (9 Sep)	Porunai Museum announced (Rs 15 crore); Sivakalai rice dated 1155 BCE
2022	Vembakottai, Thulukarpatti, Perumbalai begin; second phases at Mayiladumparai and Gangaikonda Cholapuram
2022 (9 May)	Mayiladumparai iron dated 2172 BCE announced
2022 (Sep)	Korkai offshore exploration begins
2023 (5 Mar)	Keezhadi museum opened
2023 (Apr–May)	New season; Porpanaikottai phase 1 begins (20 May)
2023 (18 May)	Porunai Museum foundation stone (International Museum Day)
2024 (18 June)	Eight-site season including Keezhadi phase 10 and Vembakottai phase 3
2025 (Jan)	"Antiquity of Iron" report – Sivakalai iron dated 3345 BCE
2025 (Sep)	Fresh underwater survey off Poompuhar
2025 (20 Dec)	Porunai Museum inaugurated at Reddiarpatti; public from 23 Dec

TNPSC Key Points (PYQ-style facts)

- Porunai is the ancient name of the Thamirabarani; it flows through Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi into the Gulf of Mannar.
- Porunai Museum: Reddiarpatti, Tirunelveli; announced 9 September 2021; foundation 18 May 2023; inaugurated 20 December 2025; about 13 acres.
- Porunai Museum displays finds from Sivakalai, Adichanallur, Thulukarpatti and Korkai.
- Korkai: Srivaikuntam taluk, Thoothukudi; Pandya pearl port; excavated 1968–69 and from 2021; charcoal about 785 BCE; offshore survey 2022.

- Arikamedu: Puducherry; Ariyankuppam river; Poduke; Wheeler 1945; Arretine ware, amphorae, rouletted ware.
- Poompuhar: Mayiladuthurai district; Kaveri mouth; Pattinappalai; Kilaiyur wharf; Pallavanesvaram vihara; underwater surveys from 1981 (with NIO, Goa) and 2025.
- Mayiladumparai: Krishnagiri; iron dated 2172 BCE (AMS, announced 9 May 2022).
- Gangaikonda Cholapuram: Ariyalur; Maligaimedu palace mound; Chinese ware; gold-copper bracelet (2022).
- Vembakottai: Virudhunagar; Vaippar river; phases 2022, 2023, 2024; glass beads, shell bangles, gold.
- Thulukarpatti: Tirunelveli; Nambiyar river; phases 2022 and 2023; "Puli" Tamil-Brahmi sherd.
- Porpanaikottai: Pudukkottai; fort site; phase 1 from 20 May 2023; gold nose stud; brick water channel.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is meant by the Porunai (Thamirabarani) civilisation?

Porunai is the old Tamil name of the Thamirabarani river, which rises in the Pothigai hills of the Western Ghats and flows through Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts into the Gulf of Mannar. The term refers to the ancient settlements and burial sites of this river basin – Adichanallur, Sivakalai, Korkai and Thulukarpatti – excavated over more than a century and now displayed in the Porunai Museum at Tirunelveli.

When was the Porunai Museum announced and opened, and what does it display?

Chief Minister M. K. Stalin announced it in the Assembly under Rule 110 on 9 September 2021 (initial outlay Rs 15 crore). The foundation stone was laid on International Museum Day, 18 May 2023. He inaugurated it on 20 December 2025 at Reddiarpatti, Tirunelveli; it opened to the public on 23 December 2025. Built on about 13 acres, it displays artefacts from Sivakalai, Adichanallur, Thulukarpatti and Korkai.

Why is Korkai important for TNPSC?

Korkai, in Srivaikuntam taluk of Thoothukudi district, was the main Pandya port of the Sangam age and was famous for pearl fishing. The State Department of Archaeology excavated it in 1968–69 and found brick structures and potsherds with Tamil-Brahmi letters; charcoal from the site was dated to about 785 BCE. Digging resumed in 2021, and an offshore exploration began in 2022.

What did the excavations at Arikamedu reveal?

Arikamedu, on the Ariyankuppam river near Puducherry, is identified with Poduke of the Periplus. Mortimer Wheeler's 1945 excavation found Roman Arretine ware and amphorae and called it an Indo-Roman trading station. Later work by J.-M. Casal (1947–50) and Vimala Begley (early 1990s) showed that the settlement began earlier, around the 3rd century BCE, and was also a centre of bead-making and textile dyeing.

Why is Mayiladumparai in the news?

Mayiladumparai in Krishnagiri district was excavated by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology in 2021 and 2022. On 9 May 2022 the Chief Minister announced in the Assembly that AMS radiocarbon dates from a laboratory in Florida placed iron there between 2172 BCE and 1615 BCE, pushing back the beginning of the Iron Age in Tamil Nadu to about 4,200 years ago.

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Practice questions

1. 'Porunai' is the ancient Tamil name of which river?

A. Thamirabarani
B. Vaigai
C. Kaveri
D. Vaippar

2. Where does the Thamirabarani river meet the sea?

A. Palk Strait
B. Gulf of Mannar
C. Arabian Sea
D. Pulicat Lake

3. Besides Sivakalai, Adichanallur and Korkai, finds from which site are displayed at the Porunai Museum?

A. Keezhadi
B. Thulukarpatti
C. Kodumanal
D. Mayiladumparai

4. When was the Porunai Museum inaugurated?

A. 9 September 2021
B. 18 May 2023
C. 5 March 2023
D. 20 December 2025

5. The Porunai Museum foundation stone was laid on 18 May 2023, which is observed as:

A. International Museum Day
B. World Heritage Day
C. World Tourism Day
D. Tamil Nadu Day

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6. The Porunai Museum mainly displays finds from sites of which river basin?

A. Vaigai
B. Thamirabarani
C. Kaveri
D. Palar

7. In which district is the Sangam-age port Korkai located?

A. Tirunelveli
B. Ramanathapuram
C. Thoothukudi
D. Kanniyakumari

8. Korkai was the port of which dynasty and was famous for what?

A. Cholas – horse imports
B. Pallavas – shipbuilding
C. Cheras – pepper exports
D. Pandyas – pearl fishing

9. To about which date was charcoal from Korkai dated?

A. c. 2172 BCE
B. c. 1155 BCE
C. c. 785 BCE
D. c. 300 CE

10. In which year did the State Department of Archaeology begin offshore exploration off Korkai?

A. 1968
B. 1981
C. 2022
D. 2025

11. Arikamedu lies on the bank of which river?

A. Gingee river
B. Pennaiyar
C. Ariyankuppam river
D. Gadilam

12. Arikamedu is identified with which port named in the Periplus?

A. Muziris
B. Sopatma
C. Kamara
D. Poduke

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13. Who excavated Arikamedu in 1945 and called it an Indo-Roman trading station?

A. Mortimer Wheeler
B. Alexander Rea
C. J.-M. Casal
D. K. Rajan

14. Which finds are the key evidence of Arikamedu's Roman trade?

A. Black-and-red ware only
B. Arretine ware and amphorae
C. Chinese celadon only
D. Burial urns

15. In which district is Poompuhar (Kaveripoompattinam) now located?

A. Nagapattinam
B. Thanjavur
C. Mayiladuthurai
D. Cuddalore

16. Who composed Pattinappalai, which describes Puhar?

A. Ilango Adigal
B. Seethalai Sathanar
C. Nakkeerar
D. Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar

17. In 1981, which institution joined the State Department in the Poompuhar underwater exploration?

A. National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa
B. ISRO
C. Geological Survey of India
D. Anna University

18. Mayiladumparai, with iron dated to 2172 BCE, is in which district?

A. Mayiladuthurai
B. Krishnagiri
C. Dharmapuri
D. Salem

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19. Which is correct about the Mayiladumparai iron dating?

1. It used the AMS method

2. It was announced in the Assembly on 9 May 2022

3. The dates obtained were 2172 BCE and 1615 BCE

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

20. What is the mound at Gangaikonda Cholapuram where Rajendra Chola's palace stood called?

A. Kottaimedu

B. Porpanaimedu

C. Arikamedu

D. Maligaimedu

21. What do the Chinese ceramics found at Maligaimedu indicate?

A. Chola-period trade between Tamil Nadu and China

B. Roman trade

C. Indus Valley links

D. Portuguese rule

22. On which river is the Vembakottai excavation site?

A. Vaigai

B. Vaippar

C. Nambiyar

D. Noyyal

23. Which site on the Nambiyar yielded a Tamil-Brahmi potsherd reading 'Puli'?

A. Vembakottai

B. Porpanaikottai

C. Thulukarpatti

D. Kodumanal

24. Porpanaikottai, a fort site excavated from 2023, is in which district?

A. Sivaganga

B. Tiruchirappalli

C. Ariyalur

D. Pudukkottai

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25. Match:
A. Korkai – 1. Chola port
B. Poompuhar – 2. Indo-Roman port
C. Arikamedu – 3. Pandya pearl port
D. Maligaimedu – 4. Rajendra's palace

A. A-3, B-1, C-2, D-4
B. A-1, B-3, C-2, D-4
C. A-3, B-2, C-1, D-4
D. A-2, B-1, C-3, D-4

Answers with explanations

1. **A) Thamirabarani** – Porunai (Tan Porunai) is the old name of the Thamirabarani.

2. **B) Gulf of Mannar** – Rising in the Pothigai hills, the Thamirabarani flows into the Gulf of Mannar.

3. **B) Thulukarpatti** – The Porunai Museum displays finds from four sites – Sivakalai, Adichanallur, Thulukarpatti and Korkai; Keezhadi has its own museum.

4. **D) 20 December 2025** – It was inaugurated on 20 December 2025; announced 2021, foundation 2023.

5. **A) International Museum Day** – 18 May is International Museum Day, when the foundation stone was laid.

6. **B) Thamirabarani** – Sivakalai, Adichanallur, Thulukarpatti and Korkai belong to the Thamirabarani region.

7. **C) Thoothukudi** – Korkai is in Srivaikuntam taluk, Thoothukudi district.

8. **D) Pandyas – pearl fishing** – Korkai was the Sangam-age Pandya port famous for pearls.

9. **C) c. 785 BCE** – Korkai charcoal is about 785 BCE; 2172 is Mayiladumparai and 1155 is Sivakalai.

10. **C) 2022** – It was flagged off at Thoothukudi in September 2022.

11. **C) Ariyankuppam river** – Arikamedu is on the Ariyankuppam river near Puducherry.

12. **D) Poduke** – Arikamedu is identified with Poduke of the Periplus.

13. **A) Mortimer Wheeler** – Wheeler dug in 1945; Rea worked at Adichanallur, Casal in 1947–50.

14. **B) Arretine ware and amphorae** – Italian Arretine ware and amphorae prove the Roman trade.

15. **C) Mayiladuthurai** – Poompuhar is now in Mayiladuthurai district.

16. **D) Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar** – Pattinappalai, praising Karikala, is by Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar.

17. **A) National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa** – The State Department and NIO, Goa, began the surveys in 1981.

18. **B) Krishnagiri** – Mayiladumparai is in Krishnagiri district – not Mayiladuthurai.

19. **D) 1, 2 and 3** – All three are correct – two AMS dates from a Florida lab, announced under Rule 110.

20. **D) Maligaimedu** – Maligaimedu means 'palace mound'; palace walls were found there.

21. **A) Chola-period trade between Tamil Nadu and China** – They point to trade between Tamil Nadu and China in the Chola period.

22. **B) Vaippar** – Vembakottai is on the Vaippar in Virudhunagar district.

23. **C) Thulukarpatti** – The 'Puli' sherd came from Thulukarpatti, Tirunelveli district.

24. **D) Pudukkottai** – Porpanaikottai is in Pudukkottai district; phase 1 began on 20 May 2023.

25. **A) A-3, B-1, C-2, D-4** – Korkai–Pandya, Poompuhar–Chola, Arikamedu–Indo-Roman, Maligaimedu–palace.

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