

# A Tamil Document Relating to Changes in the Value of Currency of the Dutch Period in Ceylon

by

S. THANANJAYARAJASINGHAM  
*Department of Tamil, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya*

**D**URING the period of Dutch rule in Ceylon (1658-1796), the Governor-in-Council issued proclamations which had to be obeyed and observed by the general public. Dutch proclamations of this type were called 'Plakkaats'. They were issued in Dutch, Sinhalese and Tamil, and the Sinhalese and Tamil plakkaats were but translations of the originals in Dutch.

A Tamil plakkaat relating to the rating of the Dutch copper coin duit<sup>1</sup> is preserved in the Department of National Archives, Nugegoda, Ceylon (CNA. 1/2440/32). This plakkaat was issued on the 5th day of the month of Maaci in the year 1773 by Jacob Christiaan Pielat who was sent as Special Commissioner to investigate the affairs of the Dutch East India Company in Ceylon. It is in thick white hand-made paper, and measures 8" by 14" in size. The plakkaat contains 24 handwritten lines in black ink, is well preserved, and has a margin of one inch at the top, as well as on either side, and 2½ inches at the bottom.

The following is the English transliteration of the unamended Tamil text of the plakkaat and my English translation of it :

## Tamil Text

1. iinhthiyavil aalocanaikku eksiththarao Tuthanaariyum inhtha ilangkaith thiivuk kove
2. tinamenhthuvil kompanjjiyavit kaariyangkalbukku iinhthiya thecaththai aalhukita vaththaaviyavil aathikka
3. maana cinjnormaaraale komecaayirumaakiya yaakkoppuk kiriisththiyam piilaaththaakiya aathikkamaana
4. varum avaruTaiya aalocanaith thalaivamaarungkuuTa ithaik kaaNkita allathu vaacikkitathaik keTkita caka
5. lamaana perkalhukkum aarokkiyamaaka atiyappaNNukitathaavathu
6. 1731: aaNTu aavaNimi 8 thikathi kaTTalhaip paththiraththaikkoNTu pitaciththamaakki oru velhikkaacu

<sup>1</sup> *Memoir of Jacob Christian Pielat, 1734*, trans. by Sophia Pieters, Government Printer, Colombo, 1905.

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7. kku anjcaakavum allathu oru thuTTukku ira NTAakavum inthak kovetinamenhthuvit cakala thalangalhilum valha
8. njkappaNNina ulaanhthaavaale koNTuvanhta campukkaacu itaiyaal 1045 m irupathu velhikkaacit
9. thampakkaacum anthak kaNakkinpaTikkuththaane matupaTiyum maatiyeTuththukkolhihumpaTikku muuntu maathath
10. thukkulhhaakak kompanjniiyavit pokkishaththile oppukkoTukkit athukku iinthiyavai aazhukita veththaaniya
11. vil aathikkamaana cinjnormaaruTaiya cangkai ponhtha kaTTalhai- kalhaik kaTanaampaTiya nhiizhikkappaNNa veNTi
12. inthap pitakiTTa varusham atpaci 30 m thikathiyile pitaciththa- maakina paththiraththile ezhuthic cakalamaana per
13. kalhukkuk kaTTalhaipaNNinapaTikku anthak kutikkappaTTa avathi thai mi 30 m thikathiyile mukinthuponapaTi
14. yinaale melaale kutikkappaTTa aathikkamaana cinjnormaaruTaiya cangkai ponhtha kaTTalhaiyai athika
15. maaka niilhikkappaNNumpaTikku anthak kaacukalhai vaththaa- viyavile valhangkukita pitakaaramaakaththaane oru velhikkaacu
16. kku eTTaaka matupaTiyum valhangkukitathukku 31 m thikathiyile engkalh aalocanaiyile mukinhthapaTiyinaale me
17. laale collappaTTa campukkaacukalh oru velhikkaacukku eTTaaka nantaaka nantaaka valhangkukita nhaa Naiyampola avarava
18. re kaTanitukkitathileyum mattungkaariyangkalhileyum anthap pitakaaramaamaakaththaane matupaTi koTukkitathukkum kom
19. panjniiyavit pokkishaththile oppuvikkithukkum inthha aracaaTii- kkukkuk kiilhaakale kuTiyirukkita uththama kompanjnii
20. yavit paNiviTaikaatarung kaikkiiT kuTiyaanavarkalhumaakiya velhhaikkaatar katuththa manushar cakalamaana perkalhukkum
21. ithaikkoNTu kaTTalhaipaNNukitom itu engkalh kuTiyaanavarkal- huTaiya nhanmaip pakuthikkum purocanath
22. thukkum nallathenkitathu engkalhukkuth thottappaTTirukkuthu
23. inthak kaTTalhaipaththirang koTupaTTathu 1733 aaNTu maaci mi 5 thikathi kozhumpit koTTaiyile

J. C. PIELAT.

**English Translation**

Be it known for the welfare of all persons who either read or hear the reading of this proclamation from His Excellency, Jacob Christiaan Pielat, Extraordinary Councillor of India and Supreme Head and Commissary for the affairs of the Company in the Island of Ceylon and his Chief of Councillors, on behalf of the Honourable Government of Batavia :-

By the issuing of the proclamation on the eighth day of the month of AavaNi in the year 1731, a Silver-Caasu was made current at five to the double stuiver. With a view to making the supreme orders of their High Mightinesses who rule India from **Batavia continue** in force, we ordered all persons concerned by this proclamation issued on the thirtieth day of the month of Aippaci of this very same year to deliver within three months to the treasury of the Company the Copper-Caasu brought from Holland, 1045 Reaals, 20 Silver-Caasu and Thampakkaasu for exchange again at the same rate. The said time, being over by the thirtieth day of the month of Thai, with a view to making the most supreme enactments of the said High Mightinesses continue to be still more in force, we in accordance with the resolution of the Council on the Thirty-first day, hereby order the servants of the Honourable Company, white men, dark men and all others who are subjects of the Honourable Company which is under this Government, to deliver to the treasury of the Honourable Company all such coins so that they may be rated once again at sight to one for a Silver-Caasu as current in Batavia, since people settle their dues with eight of the above said Copper-Caasu to one Silver-Caasu, as though it is the genuine coin in circulation, and in making payments again at the same rating in other transactions. We considered this best in the interests of our subjects and property. This proclamation was issued on the fifth day of the month of Maaci in the year 1733 from the fort of Colombo.

J. C. PIELAT.

**Glossary**

**eksththraaoTuthanaari.** This phrase is derived from Dutch 'extra ordinariis' and means 'extraordinary'. It refers to the membership of the Governor in the Council of India in Batavia. An ordinary member of that Council, when he was present in Batavia, had the right to vote in Council; the extraordinary member was allowed to attend meetings only but had no vote.

**ulaanhthaa.** This is a tamilisation of 'Holland' and it refers to the Dutch. The term is even now in common parlance in the Jaffna District.

**kovetinamenhthu.** This term is from Dutch 'gouvernement' and it means 'government'.

**kompanjnjiya.** The Portuguese word for company is 'companhia' and this is derived from it. The term refers to the Dutch East India Company as ruling the island of Ceylon.

**komecaayir.** This is from Dutch 'commissaris' and it means 'Commissioner'.

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**cinjajor.** This is an honorific prefix derived from Portuguese 'Senhor' and it means 'Sir, Lord'.

**thuTTu.** This is a tamilised form of the Dutch word, 'duit'. Duit was an old Dutch copper coin of which eight went to make a stuiver. It is in common parlance in the Jaffna dialect of Tamil, and also among the Sinhalese.

**yaakkooppuk kiriisththiyaam piilath.** This is a tamilisation of the Dutch name Jacob Christiaan Pielat. Jacob Christian Pielat was sent as Special Commissioner to Ceylon in 1732 to investigate and bring back to order the chaotic state of affairs which resulted from the tyrannical administration of the Dutch Governor, Petrus Vuyst (1726-1729). His position in Ceylon was higher than that of Governor.

**veththaaviya.** This is a tamilisation of 'Batavia' which was the Dutch headquarters in the East <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>. The author of this paper is very much indebted to Mr. A. Devaraja, Director of the Department of National Archives, Nugegoda, Ceylon for making available to him photostat copies of the document and permitting him to publish the document.