

Roman coin finds: A comparative study of South Indian and Sri Lankan sites

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The Roman coin finds in Sri Lanka have been reported from at least 85 different sites on the island. In contrast, India represents a lesser number of sites. According to our findings, such sites are located in the North, South and the western coastal area of Sri Lanka. The Indian finds are recorded from the beryl yielding regions in the Coimbatore District and the eastern coastal area.

According to literary and archaeological sources, there is reason to believe that in the first two centuries of the Christian Era, the Roman traders had not established direct contact with Sri Lanka. During the first century B.C. a large quantity of Roman coins are imported into South and western India. In contrast only a few Roman coins have been found in Sri Lanka belonging to the Imperial series. The large number of fourth and fifth century copper coins were mostly local copies. Chetty (1848) mentioned Roman buildings and finds of iron chains with three copper and one gold coin. However, Still (1907) suggests that as many as 99% of the Roman coins, that were found in Sri Lanka may be imitations. This is confirmed by recent studies.