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## Forerunners of Cōla *meykkīrttis*

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As a tribute to Dr. K.V. Ramesh, who has been a forerunner for establishing a dialogue between Indian epigraphists and foreign scholars, I would like to present him this paper about other forerunners from a remote period, those that went ahead of the well-known Cōla *meykkīrttis*.<sup>1</sup>

It is commonly supposed that the *meykkīrtti* genre was invented under Rājarājacōla I (r. ca 985-1014) with his famous panegyric beginning with the words *tirumakaḷ pōla* and appearing from his 8<sup>th</sup> regnal year onwards. *Meykkīrttis* are found mostly at the beginning of stone inscriptions, less often in copper plates. They consist in versified subordinate clauses dependent upon the name of a king, itself generally dependent on an internal date, and are composed in Tamil.<sup>2</sup>

The invention of the *meykkīrtti* under Rājarājacōla I was not a spontaneous phenomenon. Actually one can discern a long thread of royal panegyrics in Tamil – starting with the Puṛam poems of Caṅkam poetry – that lead to the *meykkīrtti* genre. We know for instance of smaller prose “epithets” (strictly speaking subordinate clauses ending with a relative participle) for many predecessors of Rājarājacōla I as well as for himself and his successors even after the full-fledged verse *meykkīrtti* had appeared.<sup>3</sup> I here intend to give a more detailed presentation of two particularly important late forerunners of Rājarājacōla I, namely Nandivarman III Pallava (r. ca 850) and Kṛṣṇa III Rāṣṭrakūṭa (r. ca 939-967).

### TEḷḷĀRR’ ERINTA NANTIPPŌTTARAIYAR

A later Pallava king named Nantippōttaraiyar (i.e. “the bull-king” or “sprout-king Nanti”) is known in inscriptions as the victor in Teḷḷāru.<sup>4</sup> His name is the subject of

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank the EFEO (French School of Asian Studies) through which a field trip to Caṅikkavāṭi was made possible in the summer of 2009. N. Ramaswamy alias Babu and Charlotte Schmid from the EFEO accompanied me on this field trip. Arlo Griffiths and Whitney Cox read a draft of this paper, making useful comments and polishing my English. My understanding of the Caṅikkavāṭi inscription has been especially improved thanks to many observations made by Whitney Cox. My sincere thanks to all of them.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed definition of *meykkīrtti*, see E. FRANCIS & C. SCHMID (2010, pp. viii-xii).

<sup>3</sup> About the antecedents of Cōla *meykkīrttis*, see FRANCIS & SCHMID (2010, pp. xii-xvi).

<sup>4</sup> M.K. NARAYANASAMI AYYAR & T.A. GOPINATHA RAO (1908, p. 173) place Teḷḷāru in the Wandiwash tāluk of the North Arcot district (i.e. nowadays Vantavāci tāluk, Tiruvaṅṅāmalai district).

either a relative participle or an absolute derived from the root *eri-*, itself governing the oblique *tellāru*, standing for a locative. The whole clause means “who cut” (*erinta*) or “having cut (*erintu*) into pieces” or “smashed” or “destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru.” The name Nantippōttaraiyar prefixed by this “epithet” is sometimes dependent upon the internal date of the records, but this is not always the case. I have found instances of this epithet in ten Pallava stone inscriptions, sometimes with small variants:<sup>5</sup>

Tillaisthānam, Ghṛtasthāneśvara temple (10<sup>th</sup> regnal year, seemingly of Nantippōttaraiyar): **svasti śrī** [||\*] *yāṅṭu pa[t\*]tavātu tiruṅettānattu m[ā\*]t[ē\*]varkku tellārr’ e[rī\*]nta na[nta]p[ō\*]ttaraiyar<sup>6</sup> tiruviḷakku[k\*][ku] [ku\*]tutta tiypp[ō\*]kkucempon<sup>7</sup> arupatiṅ kaḷaṅcu...” Prosperity! Fortune! In (his) tenth year, sixty *kaḷaṅcus* of refined gold that Nantippōttaraiyar who destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru gave for a sacred lamp to the Mahādeva of the Tiruṅettānam...”*

Centalai, Sundareśvara temple (12<sup>th</sup> regnal year, seemingly of Nantippōttaraiyar): **svasti śrī** [||\*] *yāṅṭu 12āvatu tellārru °eriṅcan<sup>9</sup> nantipp[ō\*]ttaraiyar niyamam[ā]kālattu piṭāriy[ā]rkku 400 paḷaṅkācu kuṭuttu...,<sup>10</sup> ”Prosperity! Fortune! In (his) 12<sup>th</sup> year, Nantippōttaraiyar who destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru having given 400 old coins to the Piṭāri of the Niyamamākālam...”*

Āṅāṅkūr, on a loose stone found in Āṅāṅkūr and preserved in the J.G. Matriculation School at Viḷuppuram (12<sup>th</sup> regnal year): **śrī** [||\*] *tellārr’ erinta nantipp[ō\*]ttaraiyarkku yāṅṭu panniraṅṭāvatu...,<sup>11</sup> “Fortune! In the twelfth year of Nantippōttaraiyar who destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru...”*

<sup>5</sup> These ten inscriptions amount to more than 20 % of the inscriptions dated to the reign of Nandivarman III, provided that he is, as I believe, this victor at Tellāru. For the edition of epigraphic sources, the following conventions are adopted: engraved letters that have been damaged but remain to some extent readable stand between square brackets; missing letters are indicated by an x between square brackets; restored letters, that is unengraved letters that are supplied or vowels with unmarked length, stand between square brackets and are marked by an asterisk; letters entirely worn and restored on the basis of parallels or meaning stand between curly brackets; letters engraved that ought to be erased stand between parentheses. The sign ° marks independent vowels in the original script. The elision of overshort *u* is indicated by ’. Grantha letters are printed in bold face.

<sup>6</sup> Read *nantip[ō\*]ttaraiyar*.

<sup>7</sup> Read *tīppōkku°*.

<sup>8</sup> SII V, No. 609\*; IP, No. 122. An asterisk marks the edition of reference in this and the following notes.

<sup>9</sup> Read °*erinta*.

<sup>10</sup> SII VI, No. 447\*; IP, No. 125.

<sup>11</sup> ARE 1992-93, appendix B, No. 391; Kō. MUTTUCĀMI 1994\*.

Kāñcīpuram, Ulakalantaperumāl temple (18<sup>th</sup> regnal year): *svasti śrī* [||\*] *tellārr' erinta nantipp[ō\*]ttaraiyarkku yāñtu patineṭṭāvātu*<sup>12</sup>,<sup>13</sup> “Prosperity! Fortune! In the eighteenth year of Nantippōttaraiyar who destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru...”

Tiruccennampūñṭi, Caṭaiyar temple (18<sup>th</sup> regnal year): *svasti śrī* [||\*] *tellārr' erinta nantipp[ō\*]ttaraiyarkku yāñtu 18āvātu*...<sup>14</sup> (fig. 1), “Prosperity! Fortune! In the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Nantippōttaraiyar who destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru...”

Tiruvorriyūr, Vālmīkinātha temple (18<sup>th</sup> regnal year): text unpublished.<sup>15</sup>

Cenṇivāykkāl, on a hero-stone near the ruined *gopura* of the Śiva temple (21<sup>st</sup> regnal year): *svasti śrī* [||\*] *tellārr' erintu rājya[mu]ñ koṇṭa nantipp[ō\*]ttaraiyar[k\*]ku yāñtu irupattoṅṅāvātu*...<sup>16</sup> “Prosperity! Fortune! In the twenty-first year of Nantippōttaraiyar who, having destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru, took the whole kingdom...”

Tiruppalātturai, Ādimūleśvara temple (22<sup>nd</sup> regnal year): *svasti śrī* [||\*] *tellārr' erinta nantipp[ō\*]ttaraiyar (y)yāñtu irupattiraṅṅāvātu*...<sup>17</sup> “Prosperity! Fortune! In the twenty-second year of Nantippōttaraiyar who destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru...”

Tiruvatikai, Vīraṭṭāneśvara temple (no regnal year): *svasti śrī* [||\*] *tiruviraṭṭānattu*<sup>18</sup> *mahādevarkku tellārr' erinta nantipp[ō\*]ttaraiyar tiruviḷakkiṅṅukku kuṭutta poṅ*...<sup>19</sup> “Prosperity! Fortune! The gold that Nantippōttaraiyar who destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru gave for a sacred lamp to the Mahādeva of the Tiruvīraṭṭānam...”

Tiruvaiyāru, Pañcanadiśvara temple (no regnal year): *svasti śrī* [||\*] *tiruvai ārru mahāt[ē\*]varkku tellārr' erinta nantipp[ō\*]ttaraiyar kuṭutta poṅṅ arupatiṅ kalañcu*...<sup>20</sup> “Prosperity! Fortune! The sixty *kaḷaṅcus* of gold that Nantippōttaraiyar who destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru gave to the Mahādeva of Tiruvaiyāru...”

Nantippōttaraiyar, victor at Tellāru, is also mentioned in an inscription at Lālkuṭi dated to the reign of an unnamed king who must be a Pāṇḍya as shown by the specific “compound” style of the date:

<sup>12</sup> Read *patineṭṭāvātu*.

<sup>13</sup> *MCC Magazine* 8, pp. 98 ff.; SII V, No. 567; IP, No. 135\*.

<sup>14</sup> SII VII, No. 503\*; IP, No. 137. This inscription records an arrangement for supplying *ghee* to the temple priest in order to burn lamps with 60 *kaḷaṅcus* of gold seemingly given by the king.

<sup>15</sup> ARE 1937-38, appendix B, No.162 and § 23, p. 87; IP, No. 329. This inscription records an arrangement for burning two lamps with 105 *kaḷaṅcus* of gold given by the king.

<sup>16</sup> SII XII, No. 56\*; IP, No. 141.

<sup>17</sup> SII XII, No. 57\*; IP, No. 142. This inscription records an arrangement for burning two lamps with 60 *kaḷaṅcus* of gold seemingly given by the king.

<sup>18</sup> Read *tiruviraṭṭānattu*.

<sup>19</sup> SII VIII, No. 309\*; IP, No. 123.

<sup>20</sup> ARE 1995-96, appendix B, No. 107; Ila. TIYĀKARĀCAṅ 1994; S. SWAMINATHAN 1995\*.

*svasti śrī* [||\*] *yāṅṭu 4vatin etirām āṅṭu itaiyārru nāṅṭut tiruttavatturai māhādevarkku*<sup>21</sup> *tellārr'* *erintu venra nantipp[ō\*]ttaraiyar kuṭutta paḷaṅkācu 60tu...*,<sup>22</sup> “Prosperity! Fortune! In the year opposite to 4 (i.e. in the fifth year current?), the 60 old coins that Nantippōttaraiyar who, having destroyed (his enemies) at Tellāru, vanquished gave to the Mahādeva of the Tiruttavatturai in the nāṅṭu of Itaiyāru...”

There has been a debate about the identity of this Nantippōttaraiyar who gained a victory Tellāru. Some scholars identified him as Nandivarman III who reigned for more than twenty years in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>23</sup> while others conjectured that he was Nandivarman IV, a supplementary Pallava who outlived the last of the great Pallavas (Aparājitavarman) during the period of nascent Cōḷa hegemony in the first half of 10<sup>th</sup> century. This hypothesis of a Nandivarman IV has been put forward by T.N. SUBRAMANIAM (1955, pp. xlvi-lx). He has been followed by K.R. SRINIVASAN (1964, p. 18) and, more recently, by S. SWAMINATHAN (1995; 1998, p. 47). K.R. SRINIVASAN ascribed very precise dates to Nandivarman IV (r. ca 904-926) and considered him as the father of Kampavarman (r. ca 948-980) whereas SUBRAMANIAM (1955, pp. lviii-lix) placed his accession around 925. Several arguments lead these scholars to suppose his existence.

SUBRAMANIAM (1955, pp. xlxviii-xlix) argued that some inscriptions attributed to this Nantippōttaraiyar victorious at Tellāru mention names referring to Cōḷas of the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> The hero-stone at Ceṅṅivāykkāl (SII XII, No. 56; IP, No. 141) mentioned above, which based on palaeography may be dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, mentions the *parāntakapurattu arintikai-īśvaragr̥ha*, “the temple of Īśvara (i.e. Śiva) (built by or for) Arintikai in Parāntakapuram.” SUBRAMANIAM believed that this temple and this place-name had been named after the Cōḷa kings Ariṅjaya (r. ca 956-967) and his father Parāntaka I (r. ca 907-955).<sup>25</sup> He concluded that this inscription cannot be earlier than these Cōḷas and, consequently, that Nantippōttaraiyar cannot be Nandivarman III but is a supplementary and later Nandivarman. Moreover an inscription at Tiruvaikāvūr (SII XII, No. 58; IP, No. 143) dated to the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of Nantipmarājan (read Nantivanmarājan, i.e. Sanskrit Nandivarmarāja) mentions Tiripuvaṅamātēviccaruppetimaṅkalam, which is an alternative name of Tiruvaikāvūr known only in inscriptions later than Nandivarman III.<sup>26</sup> SUBRAMANIAM (1955, p. xlxviii) believed this place had been named in reference to the queen of Parāntakacōḷa I and arrived at the same conclusion as with the Ceṅṅivāykkāl

<sup>21</sup> Read *māhādevarkku*.

<sup>22</sup> EI XX, No. 3A\*; IP, No. 269.

<sup>23</sup> For the consensual date of Nandivarman III, see C.R. SRINIVASAN (1979, p. 25). His twenty three-year rule started at the earliest in 826 and came to an end at the latest in 872.

<sup>24</sup> See also K.R. SRINIVASAN (1964, p. 12), SWAMINATHAN (1995, pp. 93-94).

<sup>25</sup> Following V. VENKATASUBBA AYYAR (1943, p. 24).

<sup>26</sup> See VENKATASUBBA AYYAR (1943, p. 24).

inscription concerning the identity of Nandivarmanrāja, i.e. that he is Nandivarman IV.

SUBRAMANIAM (1955, p. xliii) remarked also that the Karantai copper plates of the 8<sup>th</sup> regnal of Rājendracōḷa I (ca 1020) describe Parāntakacōḷa I as having captured the fame, territory, wealth and vehicles of the Siṃhala, Pāṇḍya, Keraḷa and Pallava kings.<sup>27</sup> He concluded that in contradistinction to what was already known, i.e. that Ādityacōḷa I killed the last Pallava king Aparājitavarman,<sup>28</sup> this Cōḷa king did not wipe out the Pallavas who were able to recover their kingdom for a short time at least. SUBRAMANIAM (1955, pp. xlii ff.) hypothesised then that Nandivarman IV, allied with the Bāṇas and maybe helped by the Rāṣṭrakūṭa Indra III, got back his kingdom (see phraseology of the Ceṇṇivāyakkāl inscription: *rājyamun koṇṭa*) through his victory at Teḷḷāru against the Cōḷas.<sup>29</sup> He would have been defeated later on by Parāntakacōḷa I and he should be the Pallava referred to in the Karantai copper plates.

K.R. SRINIVASAN (1964, p. 12) added that the Vākūr copper plates of Nandivarman III (EI XVIII, No. 2; IP, No. 155) do not mention in connection with him any victory at Teḷḷāru, which was manifestly a great feat since it is referred to in Tamil stone inscriptions. This absence confirmed, according to K.R. SRINIVASAN, that Nandivarman III is not the victor at Teḷḷāru.

SWAMINATHAN (1995, p. 94) further suggested that the Irukkuvēḷ chiefs of Koṭumpālūr helped Parāntaka I to defeat Nandivarman IV. His argument is based on the famous Koṭumpālūr inscription of Bhūti Vikramakesarin<sup>30</sup> in which this king declares that he made the Kāvēri river red with the blood of the Pallava army (verse 5: *kāverivāri śoṇaṃ samakṛta rudhiraiḥ pallavasya dhvajinyāḥ*). SWAMINATHAN noted moreover that the same Bhūti Vikramakesarin in the same verse also claims a victory over a Vīrapāṇḍya (*yo vīro vīrapāṇḍyaṃ vyajayata*), a king who has been identified as ruling in the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore an inscription from Kīlūr (EI XXXII, No. 10; SII VII, No. 125; IP, No. 129) dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Kōvijaiyanantivikkiramaparumaṇ, whom SWAMINATHAN identifies as Nandivarman IV, establishes that he was a contemporary of Bhūti Vikramakesarin (named Māravam Pūti in the concerned inscription). According to SWAMINATHAN, Nandivarman IV would have taken advantage of the political instability at the end of the reign of Ādityacōḷa I. But after his victory against the Cōḷas at Teḷḷāru he would have been vanquished by Parāntakacōḷa I. He might even have acknowledged the

<sup>27</sup> See K.G. KRISHNAN (1984, p. 70 and 195, verse 17): *nirjitya siṃhalapatiṃ yudhi pāṇḍyarājam prakhyātakī[r\*]tim atha keraḷam apy ajayyam [r\*] vīras sa pallavanṛpaṇ ca yasāṃsi [read yaśāṃsi] teṣāṃ rāṣṭrāṇi cādita vasūni ca vāhanāni ||*

<sup>28</sup> See the Tiruvālaṅkāṭu copper plates (SII III, No. 205, verse 49), the Kaṇṇiyākumari pillar inscription (EI XVIII, No. 4, verse 55), the Cārāla copper plates (EI XXV, No. 25, verse 55), and a stone inscription in the Ghṛtasthāneśvara temple at Tillaisthānam (SII III, No. 89, line 1).

<sup>29</sup> See also SWAMINATHAN (1995, pp. 93-94; 1998, p. 47).

<sup>30</sup> See IPS, No. 14; K.A. NILAKANTA SASTRI (1933); SII XXIII, No. 129, pp. 101-102.

Cōla authority, if he is the Pallavaracaṅ who offers gold for maintaining a lamp in the 3<sup>rd</sup> regnal year of a Parakesarivarman who must be Parāntakacōla I in an inscription from Tiruvēṭṭikkuṭi (SII V, No. 623).

Despite this apparently convincing argumentation, this theory of a Nandivarman IV is open to criticism for several reasons. I will not use arguments based on palaeography in accordance with the advice of our honouree K.V. RAMESH (1984, p. 62) to allow one hundred years leeway for any date fixed on palaeographic grounds. I can sum up my counter-arguments as well as those of T.V. MAHALINGAM (1969, pp. 197-201) in seven points.

First, it is no longer possible to consider – as K.R. SRINIVASAN proposed – this hypothetical Nandivarman IV as the father of Kampavarman, whose date, moreover, is earlier than previously believed. This is made clear through the genealogy available in the Vēlañcēri copper plates (R. NAGASWAMY 1979) discovered after the Nandivarman IV hypothesis had been advanced. This genealogy clarifies that Nandivarman III is the son of Dantivarman and father of Nṛpatuṅgavarman and Kampavarman, who were rivals.<sup>31</sup> Still, this does not preclude the possibility of a Nandivarman IV.

Second, as for the Ceṅṅivāykkāl and Tiruvaikāvūr inscriptions the following remarks have to be taken into account. If the Ceṅṅivāykkāl inscription dates to the 10<sup>th</sup> century as its palaeography indicates, it does not automatically follow that this inscription concerns a gift made in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. V. VENKATASUBBA AYYAR (1943, p. 23) proposed this date and suggested first that the place and temple of this record were named after the Cōla kings Ariñjaya and his father Parāntaka I. Noticing that Nantippōttaraiyar, whom he identified as Nandivarman III, was earlier than these Cōlas, he concluded that this inscription “therefore appears to be a later copy of the original record.” It is remarkable also in this connection that this is the only inscription which has the supplementary expression *rājyamun koṅṭa*. As for the Tiruvaikāvūr inscription, it is beyond doubt a copy as indicated in its eighth and last line (*itu kalveṭṭuppaṭi*, “this is in accordance with [an earlier] stone inscription”). As the place-name Tiripuvaṅamātēviccaruppetimaṅkalam is otherwise known only in inscriptions later than Nandivarman III, VENKATASUBBA AYYAR (1943, p. 24), who ascribed the Tiruvaikāvūr inscription to the 11<sup>th</sup> century on palaeographic grounds, judged that this was not an exact copy. It is thus possible that the Ceṅṅivāykkāl inscription is, like the Tiruvaikāvūr inscription, a copy. Its use of the otherwise unattested expression *rājyamun koṅṭa* tends to substantiate this view. It is thus conceivable that in both records the temple and place-names were revised at the time of the copy and did not figure as such in the original records. *Contra*, SUBRAMANIAM (1955, p. xlix) believed that copies are always true to the original and argued that “we have not come across a single instance wherein the text of the

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<sup>31</sup> K.R. SRINIVASAN (1983, pp. 87-88) rejected the Nandivarman IV hypothesis after the discovery of the Vēlañcēri copper plates.

original record was altered or tampered with when re-copying.” However I do not know of any instances where we possess both an original stone inscription and its later copy which would be required to substantiate this statement.

MAHALINGAM (1969, pp. 199-200), for his part, while considering the Ceṇṇivāykkāl inscription to be authentic and accepting SUBRAMANIAM’s statement concerning true copies in relation to the Tiruvaikāvūr inscription, rejected that the names in both inscriptions refer to persons dating to the period of Parāntakacōḷa I. He pointed out that the equation of Arintikai with Ariñjaya is not satisfactory, since the former is a female name; that Arintikai is the name of an Irukkuveḷ queen of the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century; that the name Parāntaka is borne by a Pāṇḍya one century earlier than Parāntakacōḷa I; that Tiripuvaṇamātēvi (i.e. Sanskrit Tribhuvanamāhadevī) is also known as the name of the daughter of a Kāṭupattikaḷ Tamarmēttiyār in two records of the time of Ādityacōḷa I (ARE 1927-28, appendix B, No. 161 and SII XIII, No. 351). Therefore MAHALINGAM believed that the temple and places in both these inscriptions were named in reference to people prior to Nandivarman III or contemporary with him.

Third, the absence of mention of the victory at Tellāru in Sanskrit copper plates is not really a surprise.<sup>32</sup> Sanskrit *praśastis* indeed refer less often to actual military victories than do Tamil inscriptions. Rather we tend to find there lists of vanquished dynasties in conformity to the ideal of the world conquest (*digvijaya*). In the case of the later Pallavas I have found mention of actual victories – by which I mean place-names of battlefields – only in five out of the eleven available sets of copper plates.<sup>33</sup>

Fourth, the idea that Nantippōttaraiyar who vanquished at Tellāru got his kingdom back through this victory is based on the Ceṇṇivāykkāl hero-stone inscription. But this inscription might not mean that Nantippōttaraiyar got his kingdom *back* but instead that he got the *whole* kingdom (*rājyam-um*). It could be a reference to the recovery of a portion of his dominion at the expense of a vassal who declared independence from the great Pallavas or at the expense of a dynastic rival who encroached on the Pallava kingdom.<sup>34</sup>

Fifth, there is no reason to believe that the verse 17 of the Karantai copper plates has to be taken at face value: it lists four great kings as vanquished in a boasting enumeration, common in royal panegyrics. Moreover none of these kings are named: instead, dynasties are aimed at in a general way. Furthermore these plates describe Ādityacōḷa I in one and a half verse (verses 15 and 16ab) only, while five and a half verses (verses 16ab-21) recount the feats of his son Parāntakacōḷa I. Finally in the

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<sup>32</sup> See also T.V. MAHALINGAM (1969, pp. 200-201).

<sup>33</sup> The Utayēntiram copper plates of Nandivarman II (SII II, No. 74; IP, No. 76) exceptionally provide many battlefield names (more than ten) while the other copper plates (SII II, No. 73; SII II, No. 98; EI XVIII, No. 2; R. NAGASWAMY 1979) have one or two names (Vātāpi being mentioned in several different copper plates).

<sup>34</sup> On the identification of the vanquished king at Tellāru, see MAHALINGAM (1969, p. 204).



short description of Ādityacōḷa I there is no mention that he killed Aparājitavarman or conquered the Pallava country, in contradistinction to other inscripational records. It is thus possible that the poet of the Karantai copper plates attributed unhistorical feats to Parāntakacōḷa I whether deliberately – in order to minimise the achievements of Ādityacōḷa I and boost those of Parāntakacōḷa I – or by ignorance.

Sixth, if the Kīlūr inscription proves that a Pallava king named Nandivarman was contemporary with Bhūti Vikramakesarin, he could well be Nandivarman III. As noted by SWAMINATHAN (1995, p. 94), Bhūti Vikramakesarin appears in inscriptions of Ādityacōḷa I (r. ca 871-907). The Vīrapaṇḍya over whom he claims victory in the Koṭumpālūr inscription may not be the personal name of a Pāṇḍya king of the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century but a generic name (“the heroic Pāṇḍya”) for any Pāṇḍya of the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. It is thus possible that the Pallava king’s army with whose blood Bhūti reddened the Kāvēri was not that of an hypothetical Nandivarman IV, but that of Aparājitavarman, the last great Pallava against whom Bhūti would have sided with Ādityacōḷa I. Apparently, after having been a vassal of Nandivarman III as the Kīlūr inscription seems to indicate, Bhūti sided with the Cōḷas. As for the Pallavaracaṇ of the inscription of Parāntakacōḷa I, there is no certainty that he is a great Pallava. Pallavaraiyar and variants titles were indeed common titles for officers or vassals under the Cōḷas.<sup>35</sup>

Seventh, the Lālkuṭi inscription provides the information that Nantippōttaraiyar, the victor at Tellāru, is contemporary with an unnamed Pāṇḍya king. This Pāṇḍya has been identified as Varaguṇa I by the editor of this inscription (K.V. SUBRAHMANYA AIYER 1933, p. 51), who fixed the date of his accession in 812. MAHALINGAM (1969, p. 202) thought this Pāṇḍya is Varaguṇa II whose initial regnal year is, according to him, 862. He based his argument on the fact that the Lālkuṭi inscription in question is directly followed by another one – “looking as though it is a continuation of it” and “apparently by the same scribe” – dated to the fourth plus nine year (i.e. in the ninth year of rule as Rāja, after four years of rule as Yuvarāja?) of a Varaguṇa whom he identified as the second one. If this identification is correct, it matches the accepted regnal period of Nandivarman III (around 850).<sup>36</sup>

For these seven reasons, I do not subscribe to the hypothesis of a Nandivarman IV living in the first half the 10<sup>th</sup> century. I consider that the Nantippōttaraiyar who smashed his enemies at Tellāru is Nandivarman III who reigned about the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

If so, Nandivarman III is one of the first kings – in fact maybe the first one – to assume in local Tamil inscriptions a recurrent and specific Tamil “epithet” (namely a

<sup>35</sup> See N. KARASHIMA (1984, pp. 62-63) and, for instance, an inscription at Tanjore (SII II, No. 32, lines 5-6) that mentions a Pirāntaka[p\*]pallavaraiyaṇ, “the Pallava king (at the service) of Pirāntaka (i.e. Parāntaka).”

<sup>36</sup> An inscription at Tiruvatikai (SII XII, No. 71; IP, No. 167) records a reverse situation, that is a donation of [P]āṇṭi Varaguṇa Mahārājaṇ – identified as Varaguṇa II – in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Nṛpatuṅgavarman, the son of Nandivarman III.

subordinate clause ending with a relative participle governed by his name) hailing his military conquest.<sup>37</sup> The use of such epithets is known also for early Cōla kings and even for later Cōla kings when verse *meykkīrttis* were in use. For instance,<sup>38</sup> Vijayālayacōla (r. ca 850-871), a contemporary of Nandivarman III, is *tañcai koṇṭa*, “who took Tañcai (i.e. Tanjore)”<sup>39</sup> and his grandson Parāntakacōla I is *maturai koṇṭa*, “who took Maturai”.<sup>40</sup> Such epithets used by Nantippōttaraiyar and early Cōla kings can be considered as proto-*meykkīrttis*. Although short and in prose, they foreshadows the invention of the verse *meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōla I, that begins with the words *tirumakaḷ pōla*. This *meykkīrtti* is in fact an enlargement of a proto-*meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōla I, namely the shorter epithet (*kāntaḷūr*) *cālai kalam arutta* (or *arutt’ aruliya*), which is attested earlier and is incorporated as the third metrical line in the *meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōla I. It is important to remember that, like such proto-*meykkīrttis*, proper *meykkīrttis* too are subordinate clauses ending with a relative participle governed by the name of the praised king.

If one thus considers that *meykkīrtti* is in fact a verse development of such short prose proto-*meykkīrttis* and agrees that the Nantippōttaraiyar who smashed his enemies at Teḷḷāru is Nandivarman III of the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, this king could in fact be the one for whom the proto-*meykkīrtti* was invented, a practice soon to be adopted by the early Cōlas and later to develop into *meykkīrttis*. The content of some of the inscriptions where Nantippōttaraiyar is described as victorious at Teḷḷāru, i.e. records of his own donations,<sup>41</sup> suggests that he may have been personally involved in the introduction of the proto-*meykkīrtti* even though one may doubt that these inscriptions are strictly royal (in contradistinction to Sanskrit copper plates).

In any case, the victory of Nantippōttaraiyar at Teḷḷāru is not hailed only in Tamil stone inscriptions. It is also referred to many times in the *Nantikkalampakam*,<sup>42</sup> the earliest surviving example of the *kalampakam* genre, a poem composed in honour of Nanti, i.e. Nandivarman III. The epigraphical epithet even occurs once *verbatim* in the *Nantikkalampakam*.<sup>43</sup> Besides this, a peculiar stanza of this poem eulogising Nandivarman III as a warrior stands out as a forerunner of the *meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōla I. In the stanza 65 of the *Nantikkalampakam*, presumably genuine and not

<sup>37</sup> If one would still believe that Nantippōttaraiyar who smashed his enemies at Teḷḷāru is Nandivarman IV, this king would still be among the first kings to bear such epithets. But in that case he would have adopted a practice introduced by the Cōlas.

<sup>38</sup> For a longer list of such epithets of Cōla kings, see FRANCIS & SCHMID (2010, p. xv, n. 55).

<sup>39</sup> See NILAKANTA SASTRI (1955, p. 111) and, for instance, ARE 1936, No. 51.

<sup>40</sup> See NILAKANTA SASTRI (1955, p. 121) and, for instance, SII III, No. 12 and SII XIX, No. 181.

<sup>41</sup> This is the case explicitly at Tillaisthānam, Centalai, Tiruvorriyūr, Tiruvatikai, and Tiruvaiyāru, and seemingly at Tiruccēṇṇampūṇṭi and Tiruppālātturai.

<sup>42</sup> See *Nantikkalampakam* 32, 33, 37, 42, 53, 56, 57, 68, 75, 79, 82, 84, 85, 90, and 91.

<sup>43</sup> See *attellārr’ erinta māṇōtayan* in *Nantikkalampakam* 85.

interpolated because it fits in the *antāti* scheme,<sup>44</sup> the poet plays with roots that he uses two times with different subjects:

*tiruvīṅ cemmaiyum nilamakaḷ urimaiyum*  
*potuv inṛi āṅṅa polam pūṅ pallava*  
*tōḷ tuṅai āka māvellāṛru*  
*mēvalark kaṅanta aṅṅāl nanti niṅ*  
*tiru varu neṅuṅ kaṅ civakkum ākiṅ* 5  
*cerunar cērum pati civakkummē*  
*nīraṅ kiḷar puruvam tuṅikkiṅ niṅ kaḷal*  
*iraiṅcā maṅṅarkk' iṅam tuṅikkummē*  
*maiyl vāḷ uṅai kaḷikkum ākiṅ*  
*aṅṅāṅkār peṅṅir* 10  
*pūṅ mulai muttap pūṅ kaḷikkummē*  
*kaṅuvāy pōḷ vaḷai atira niṅṅoṅu*  
*maruvā maṅṅar maṅṅam tuṅikkummē*  
*mā mata yāṅai paṅṅiṅ*  
*utiram maṅṅu niṅ etir malaintōṅkkē* 15

“O Pallava with golden ornaments, who ruled (or: cherished), without sharing (them), the excellence (or: beauty) of Tiru (i.e. Śrī) and the possession of Nilamakaḷ (i.e. Bhū), o Nanti, great man who overcame the enemies in Māvellāṛru (i.e. the big Vellāṛru) with the help of his arms,

if your large eyes where beauty (*tiru*) dwells become red (*civakkum*), the place where the (enemy) soldiers gather also becomes red (*civakkum*).

If your bright-coloured eyebrows quiver (*tuṅikkiṅ*), the left side of the kings who do not bow to your feet (literally: anklets) also quivers (*tuṅikkum*).<sup>45</sup>

If you remove (*kaḷikkum*) your bright (or: flawless) sword from its sheath, the wives of reluctant (kings) also remove (*kaḷikkum*) the pearl-ornaments of their ornamented breasts.<sup>46</sup>

When conchs similar to your *kaṅuvāy* (“harsh voice”, i.e. Nanti’s bellowing war-drum) resound, the determination of the kings who are not on your side falters.

<sup>44</sup> The *Nantikkalampakam* as edited yields more stanzas than expected for a poem in honour of a king. Hence the probability that some of the stanzas are interpolated. See NARAYANASAMI AYYAR & GOPINATHA RAO (1908, p. 170 et n. 2).

<sup>45</sup> A left-side shaking is a bad omen.

<sup>46</sup> As widows do not wear any more ornaments, one has to understand that Nanti kills all his enemies leaving their wives widowed.

If you prepare your big intoxicated elephant(s) (for battle), the blood of the kings opposing you congeals (i.e. their blood runs cold).”

From the metrical, thematic and structural points of view, this stanza recalls the Cōḷa *meykkīrttis*: it is in *ācīriyappā*, opens with the mention of goddesses as spouses of the king, and mentions a concrete battlefield (Māveḷḷāru) where the praised king gained victory. These features are similarly found in the Cōḷa *meykkīrttis*, which are also set in *ācīriyappā* and consist almost exclusively—after the mention of the goddesses—in the enumeration of victories, if not actually historical at least set in an historical context.<sup>47</sup>

If we thus consider the stanza 65 of the *Nantikkalampakam* side by side with the *tēḷḷārr’ erinta* proto-*meykkīrtti* of the stone inscriptions, the epigraphic and belletristic creations produced under Nandivarman III stand out as important forerunners of the *meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōḷa I. In this context one has to recall that Cōḷa *meykkīrttis* are mainly encountered in local Tamil stone-inscriptions, in which the Cōḷa king sometimes plays no other role than furnish a regnal date. Cōḷa *meykkīrttis* can thus be considered as a development of the Tamil panegyric of Nandivarman III: they are a versified development of epithets like *tēḷḷārr’ erinta* and a thematic avatar of a poem like *Nantikkalampakam* 65.

#### KṚṢṆA III RĀṢṬRAKŪṬA

Approximately one century later than Nandivarman III, we encounter another important milestone towards the *meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōḷa I, viz. in a Tamil inscription dated to the 25<sup>th</sup> year (963-964) of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Kṛṣṇa III.<sup>48</sup> This inscription is engraved on a pillar planted in a field at Caṇikkavāṭi (Pōḷūr tāluk, undivided North Arcot district, today Tiruvaṇṇāmalai district) where I was able to see it in August 2009 on the occasion of an EFEO field trip with N. Ramaswamy and Charlotte Schmid (fig. 2). At the time of our visit, the field had fortunately been harvested, so that we could actually find the pillar. This pillar is 140 cm high (for the portion we had access to, that is from top up to the lowest engraved lines), 33 cm wide and 20 cm thick. Its inscription is entirely composed in *ācīriyappā*.<sup>49</sup> It runs from lines 1-29 on the front face (fig. 3-4) and from lines 30-57 on the back face (fig. 5). The front face has undergone some deterioration since the Archaeological Survey of India made the impression used by K.G. KRISHNAN (1986): lines 11-12 are now completely missing, while the left portions of lines 13-18 has been trimmed. The

<sup>47</sup> See FRANCIS & SCHMID (2010, pp. xvii-xviii).

<sup>48</sup> See ARE 1939-40 to 1942-43, appendix B, No. 132, and pp. 235-236; K.G. KRISHNAN (1986), with facsimile; A. KRISHNAN (1998, p. 27); SWAMINATHAN (2000, inscription No. 72, pp. 59-62); Leslie C. ORR (2009, pp. 105-106).

<sup>49</sup> The metre is precisely *nēricai ācīriyappā* according to K.G. KRISHNAN (1986, p. 49).

back face has been slightly damaged at the beginning of line 32 where the first character is now missing. The inscription reads (fig. 4-5):<sup>50</sup>

- (1) *svasti śrī* ||-
- i      *tiru[maka](2)ḷ muyaṅkac cīrmakaḷ [vi](3)laṅkap*  
ii      *porukaṭa[l u](4)ṭutta pūtalamu[luva](5)[tu]ñ*  
iii      *ceṅkō[l] [xxx]*  
(6-10) [xxxxxxxxxxxxx]  
(11) [xx]tta[xxxxxx]  
(12) [xxx]ṭu[xxxx]{vi?}  
(13) laṅkiya [xxxxx]  
(14) pāṭikka<sup>51</sup>[xxxxx]  
(15) tīyoṭu[xxxxx]  
(16) la mānilaṅ ka[xxx]
- x      (17) *gajamallaṅ āṅa* [xxxx]  
xi      (18) *cīr °akāḷavaruṣa{ṅ?}[xxx]*  
xii      (19) *prativallabhamah[ārā](20)jaṅ*  
xiii      [*°ē\**]rp poli *rājā(21)dhirājapameśvaraṅ*  
xiv      [*ta*](22)rātaḷam pukaḷuñ calaka(23)nalātaṅ  
xv      *kāṅṭaku kacci(24)yun taṅcaiyuṅ koṅ(25)ṭ' aṅk<sup>52</sup>*  
xvi      *āṅṭa yāṅṭ' [°\*]ri(26)rupattaṅciṅuḷ*  
xvii      *pal(27)lavar k[°\*]māṅ palla(28)vāparaṅaṅ*  
xviii      *kall uya(29)r tiṅṭ[°\*]ṭ kāṅci**bhu**(30)[ja]ṅkaṅ*  
xix      *nuḷampa[ṅ a](31)ṅṅikaṅ vaḷaṅ taru ma(32)ṭalai*  
xx      (*i?*)yāru c[*°ē\**]r araṅ a(33)[ṭi] matakaṅ mantākani<sup>53</sup>  
*ki(34)[x]ru<sup>54</sup> mayintaṅ kāṭala(35)[r?].reḷi<sup>55</sup> tara*

<sup>50</sup> The text given here is my own reading from *in situ* examination of the pillar as it is today and from the facsimile published by K.G. KRISHNAN (1986). Letters no more readable from the stone but only legible on this facsimile are not italicised. The lines on the stone are indicated by Arabic numerals between (). The text is disposed metrically when possible and metrical lines (*aṭis*) are indicated by Roman numerals in the left margin. Otherwise it is arranged according to the lines as on the pillar.

<sup>51</sup> *Contra* K.G. KRISHNAN (1986): *paṭikka*.

<sup>52</sup> *Contra* K.G. KRISHNAN (1986): *āṅku*.

<sup>53</sup> Read *mantākini* according to K.G. KRISHNAN (1986). But it seems possible to read *mantarikaḷiki* or *mantarikaṅiki*. Actually the exact reading of the whole *aṭi* and the proper division of its words are not clear at all.

<sup>54</sup> Read *kiṅaru?* Or read with the last word of the preceding *aṭi* as *mantākinikk' i[x]ru*.

<sup>55</sup> *Contra* K.G. KRISHNAN (1986): [xx]roli.

	veṅṅe(36)[xx]kalaiyum iruñca
	[xxxxxx]ṅa
	[xxxxxxxx]me <sup>56</sup>
xxiv	[xxxxxxxx]vañ
xxv	[xxxxxx]rru
xxvi	[xxxxxxxxxx]larāṅ
xxvii	[xxxxxx][m]paramai <sup>57</sup>
xxviii	[xxxxxx]la
xxix	vaḷaṅ (44) taru[m][xxx][ke] vaḷḷa(45)l tulaṅkāt
xxx	talama(46)li caḷukkipāṭiy ākiya
	(47) kalaimalikalakkili(48)k kaṭikaimaṅkalattu(49)l
	maṅumayaviccū(50)vakaṅmā nī maṅai(51)y
	eṅa mikav ulaki(52)l elil peṅa viyaṅ a(53)ṅrav <sup>58</sup>
	ampalam amai(54)ttāṅaṅ eṅpar
	(55) cempōṅ kamala(56)ttut tiruvaḷar ta(57)ṅrav[ē*]y   -  -

“Prosperity! Fortune! [line 1]

So that Tirumakaḷ embraces (him, i.e. Kṛṣṇa III), so that Cīrmakaḷ shines [aṭi 1; lines 1-3],

so that the entire earth encircled by the dashing sea (is under the protection or authority) of his upright sceptre [aṭis 2-3; lines 3-5]

...shining (viḷaṅkiya?) [lines 12-13]

...while bringing about (pāṭikka) [line 14]

...the great earth (māṅilam) [line 16]

...alias Gajamallaṅ (i.e. he who is a wrestler to the elephants that are the other kings) [line 17]

...the glorious Akāḷavaruṣaṅ (Sanskrit Akāḷavarṣa, i.e. he who is an unseasonable rain) [line 18],

the great king beloved of the earth (**pr̥itivivallabhamah[ārā]jaṅ**) [aṭi 10; lines 19-20],

the supreme lord emperor of the kings (**rājādhirājaparamēśvaraṅ**), who abounds (or: shines) (poli-tal) with beauty (ēṅ) [aṭi 11; lines 20-21],<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Contra K.G. KRISHNAN (1986): *mum*.

<sup>57</sup> Contra K.G. KRISHNAN (1986): *mparamē*.

<sup>58</sup> Contra K.G. KRISHNAN (1986): *urav*.

<sup>59</sup> As pointed out to me by Arlo Griffiths, the *birudas* in lines 18-21 are attested for Kṛṣṇa I Rāṣṭrakūṭa. See for instance EI IV, No. 18, lines 20-21: *akāḷavarṣaśrīprithivivallabhamahārājādhirāja-paramēśvarabhṭṭārakasy[a]*.

Calakanalātaṅ<sup>60</sup> whom the earth praises (or: who is praised [throughout] the earth) [aṭi 12; lines 21-23],

took (*koṅṭu*<sup>61</sup>) Kacci, which is excellent (*taku-tal*) in beauty (*kāṅ*) (or: which is pleasing to the eye), and Tañcai [aṭi 13; lines 23-25].

In the 25<sup>th</sup> year when he ruled there (*aṅku*) [aṭi 14; lines 25-26],

the king of the Pallavas (*pallavar kōmaṅ*), the ornament of the Pallavas (*pallavāparaṅaṅ*, i.e. Sanskrit *pallavābharaṅa*) [aṭi 15; lines 26-28],

the lover (*bhujaṅka*, i.e. Sanskrit *bhujaṅga*) of Kāñcī with strong shoulders that are as high as a mountain [aṭi 16; lines 28-30],

Nuḷampaṅ Aṅṅikaṅ, the son (*matalai*) who gives prosperity<sup>62</sup> [aṭi 17; lines 30-32]

as the foot (or: feet) of Araṅ (i.e. Śiva) who joins (*cēr-tal*) with rivers (*āru*)<sup>63</sup> – that powerful one (*mayintaṅ*), (her) lover (*kātalaṅ*) – gives beauty (*teḷi*, literally “clearness”) to the (many-)sluiced (*mataku*) Mantākini (i.e. the Ganges)... [aṭi 18-19; lines 32-34]<sup>64</sup>

...in Kaṭikaimaṅkalam, which is devoid of tumult (or: affliction) (*kalakku+ili*) and plenty (*mali-tal*) of arts (*kalai*) [aṭi 26; lines 47-49],

alias Caḷukkipāṭi, which abounds (*mali-tal*) in sacred places (*talam*) which are not shining (*tulaṅkā*) thanks to (any) liberal donor (*vallal*)...giving riches (*vaḷan*) [aṭi 24-25; lines 43-46],<sup>65</sup>

in order that it abide (*ara*) (in) the sky (*viyaṅ*) and get very much (*mika*) beauty/height (*elil*) in the world like (*eṅa*) a lofty house (*maṅai*) (made by) Maṅu (i.e. Manu), Maya (architect of the Daityas) and Viccuvakaṅmā (i.e. Viśvakarman, the architect of the Devas) [aṭi 27-28; lines 49-53]

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<sup>60</sup> The meaning of Calakanalātaṅ – otherwise unattested, as far as I know – is not clear. Could it be a Tamil *biruda* meaning “he whose soul (*ātaṅ*) is water (*calam*) and fire (*kanal* standing for *kaṅal*)”? Alternatively, as suggested to me by Whitney Cox, it could be a Kannaḍa epithet: “he who is a good (or: noble) bull.” See F. KITTEL & M.M. BHAT (1968-1977, s.v. *salaga*).

<sup>61</sup> The absolutive *koṅṭu* is translated here as a finite verb for the sake of clarity, even though it is dependent on *āṅṭa*.

<sup>62</sup> One could also translate, as pointed out to me by Whitney Cox, as “the pillar (*matalai*) who gives prosperity” and consider that this refer to Śiva who is mentioned in the next *aṭi* and is often called Sthāṅu (“the Pillar”).

<sup>63</sup> Viz. Śiva loves rivers. See for instance EI I, No. 9A, verse 1, where Śiva is *nadīpriya*.

<sup>64</sup> It is difficult to make sense of these *aṭis* 18-19. In the translation proposed I take *mantākaniki[x]ru* as *mantākinikk’ i[x]ru*. Alternatively, if *kiṅaru* is to be restored, these lines could refer to some irrigation work named in connection with the myth of the Ganges falling onto the earth through the intercession of Śiva.

<sup>65</sup> I understand here that Nuḷampaṅ Aṅṅikaṅ claims to patronise a place that has not enjoyed many endowments. Alternatively, as suggested to me by Whitney Cox, one can disconnect, on the one hand, “the generous man (*vallal*)...who gives prosperity (*vaḷan*)”, as referring to Nuḷampaṅ Aṅṅikaṅ, and, on the other hand, “Caḷukkipāṭi, which abounds (*mali-tal*) in sacred places (or: lands) (*talam*) which are undisturbed (*tulaṅkā*).” In that sense Caḷukkipāṭi is presented as a quiet place, fit for endowments since it is not subject to any kind of threat. The same place is presented in the next *aṭi*, under its alternative name Kaṭikaimaṅkalam, along the same lines.

(he, i.e. Nuḷampan̄ Aṇṇikan̄) created (*amaittan̄an̄*) a hall (*ampalam*). So they say [*aṭi* 29; lines 53-54].

(This is) a gift (*taravu*) that makes Tiru prosper on her red-golden lotus [*aṭi* 30; lines 55-57].”

Lines 6-15 are unfortunately damaged and full of lacunae. Otherwise we would have at the beginning of this inscription a complete *meykkīrtti* of an estimated extent of thirteen *aṭis*. What is striking here in this preserved portion is, on the one hand, its setting in *ācīriyappā* which is the metre of *Cōḷa meykkīrttis* and, on the other hand, the opening mention of the goddesses, which is a feature common to most *meykkīrttis*. Moreover it is noticeable also that Tirumakaḷ (i.e. Śrī) is named first, as in the most common *meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōḷa I, which starts with the words *tirumakaḷ pōla*. This unique eulogy of Kṛṣṇa III at Caṇikkavāṭi appears in this regard as the immediate forerunner of the *meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōḷa I.<sup>66</sup> It is actually in both content and form a *meykkīrtti*<sup>67</sup> and it could truly have been a direct model for the *meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōḷa I. In this connection it is remarkable that Kṛṣṇa III also has a proto-*meykkīrtti* that is prefixed to his name in inscriptions (*kacciyun tañcaiyuṅ koṇṭa*, “who took Kacci [i.e. Kāñcīpuram] and Tañcai [i.e. Tanjore]”) and that this longer Caṇikkavāṭi eulogy is in fact a much expanded verse development of this proto-*meykkīrtti* (see *kacciyun tañcaiyuṅ koṇṭu* in its lines 23-25), in the same manner as the usual *meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōḷa I is the elaboration of a proto-*meykkīrtti*, as we have seen above.

## CONCLUSIONS

By way of conclusion I will consider the nature of these sources providing forerunners to *Cōḷa meykkīrttis*. By nature, I mean whether these are literary compositions directly patronised by the eulogised king or creations produced at a local, non-royal level.

While the *Nantikkalampakam* can be considered as a court poem composed in the royal household of Nandivarman III, one may question the royal character of the epigraphic sources. Were they directly commissioned by the eulogised king or the product of a local initiative? We have seen that some of the inscriptions of Nandivarman III hailing him as victor at Tellāru record his own donations of gold. Moreover the number of inscriptions containing this epithet is proportionally high compared to the total amount of the inscriptions of Nandivarman III (more than 20 %). Both observations lead me to infer that Nandivarman III was personally involved

<sup>66</sup> This has already been pointed out by K.G. KRISHNAN (1986, p. 47) in regard to the mention of the goddesses.

<sup>67</sup> For K.G. KRISHNAN (1986, p. 47) the inscription cannot be called a *meykkīrtti* or *praśasti* since it is entirely in verse. But I consider that there is a *meykkīrtti* from the beginning of the inscription up to the mention of the date in *aṭi* 14, whether the rest of the inscription is in verse or not.



in the invention or introduction of a proto-*meykkīrtti* to these records. As for the Caṅikkavāṭi inscription, which is an isolated instance of a Tamil eulogy of Kṛṣṇa III, it seems plausible that it was composed at the initiative of Nuḷampan̄ Aṅṅikaṅ, the vassal of Kṛṣṇa III whose foundation is recorded in the inscription.

But whoever commissioned these inscriptions, the epigraphic and belletristic production under Nandivarman III Pallava (middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century) and under Kṛṣṇa III Rāṣṭrakūṭa (middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century) stand out as forerunners of the *meykkīrtti* composed for Rājarājacōḷa I. Nandivarman III as well as Kṛṣṇa III were endowed with proto-*meykkīrttis*, that is “epithets” that clearly foreshadow fully fledged *meykkīrttis*. The stanza 65 of the *Nantikkalampakam* in honour of Nandivarman III and the Caṅikkavāṭi inscriptional poem in honour of Kṛṣṇa III Rāṣṭrakūṭa can be seen as models for the *meykkīrtti* of Rājarājacōḷa I. These remarkable literary pieces help to bridge the gap between Caṅkam Puram poetry and Cōḷa *meykkīrttis*.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

EI: *Epigraphia Indica*.

IP: *Inscriptions of the Pallavas*, see T.V. MAHALINGAM (1988).

IPS: *Inscriptions of the Pudukkottai State*.

SII: *South Indian Inscriptions*.

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## FIGURES

Fig. 1: Tiruccenṇampūṇṭi, Caṭaiyar temple. Inscription dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> regnal year of *Tellārr’ erinta Nantippōttaraiyar* (SII VII, No. 503; IP, No. 137), lines 1-8. Photo by Charlotte Schmid.

Fig. 2: Caṇikkavāṭi, pillar in a field with inscription dated to the 25<sup>th</sup> regnal of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Kṛṣṇa III (EI XL, No. 9). Photo by the author.

Fig. 3: Caṇikkavāṭi pillar inscription, front face. Photo by the author.

Fig. 4: Caṇikkavāṭi pillar inscription, front face, i.e. lines 1-29. Photo and computer processing by the author.

Fig. 5: Caṇikkavāṭi pillar inscription, front face, i.e. lines 30-57. Photo and computer processing by the author.

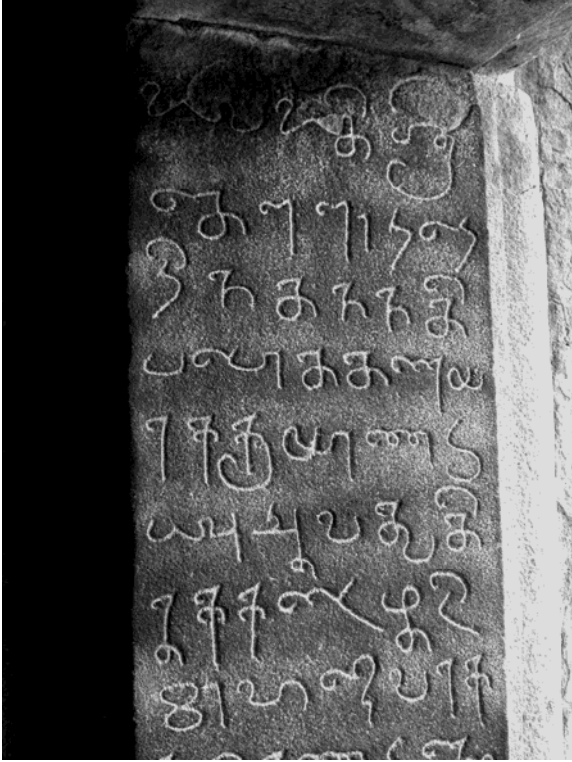


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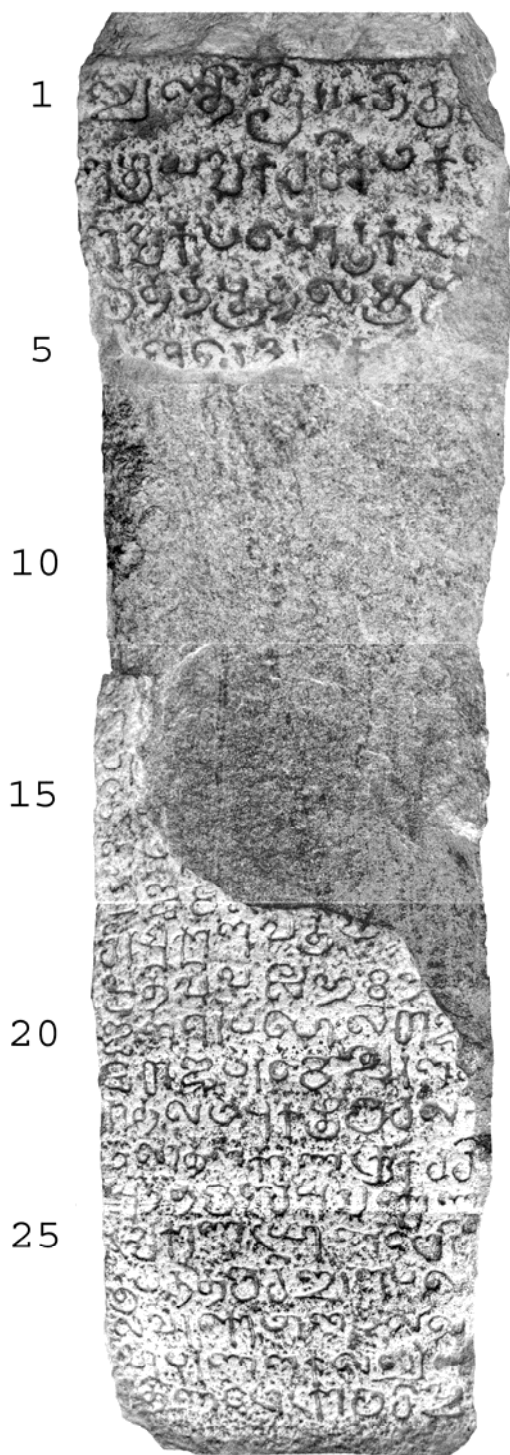


Fig. 4: Caṅikkavāṭi pillar inscription, front face, i.e. lines 1-29.  
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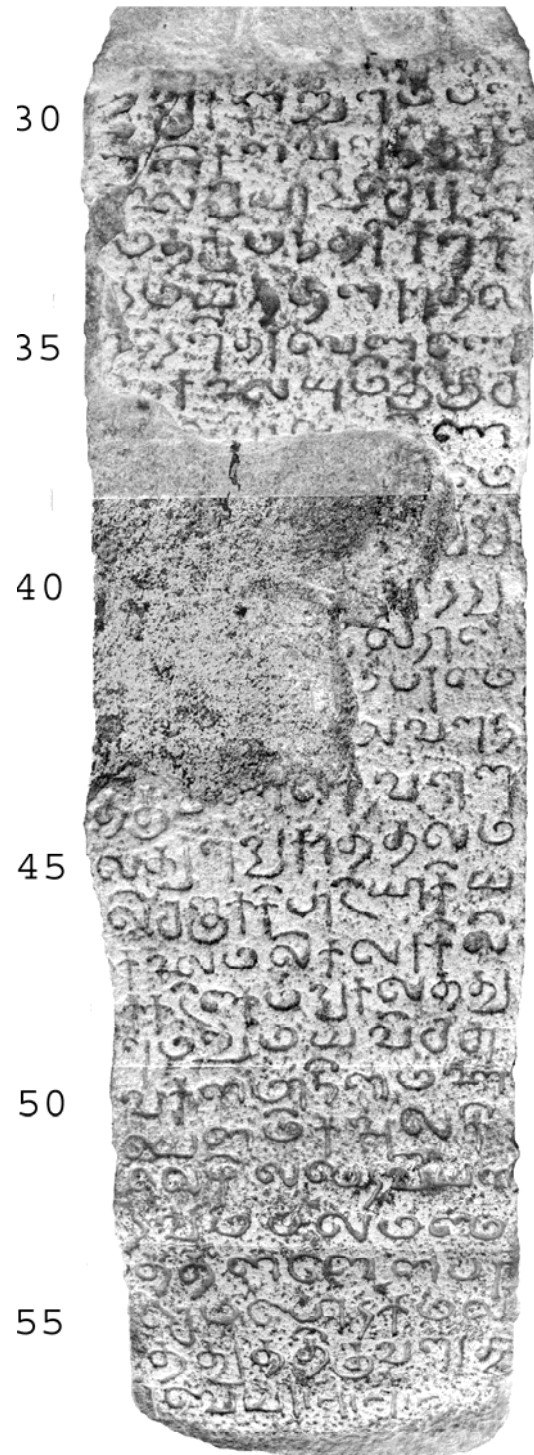


Fig. 5: Caṅikkavāṭi pillar inscription, front face, i.e. lines 30-57.  
Photo and computer processing by the author.