

# The riches coming from the mountain: “pepper”, as *kari* and *miḷaku*, in Ancient Tamil Literature

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## I. SLOWLY CHANGING GEOGRAPHICAL BASE OF AN ANCIENT LITERARY LANGUAGE

The modern European customers who buy in 2020 a jar of “Tellichery pepper” in a supermarket, are in a situation which has common points with the situation of some of their ancestors at the time of the Roman Empire, although they probably have more choice than those ancestors regarding the variety of spices available and pay less, in relative terms, and therefore do not consider pepper as a luxury item, unlike many of their ancestors. If they are French and try to find Tellicherry on a map, they will find out that Tellicherry’s official name is Thalassery, that it is in Kerala, lies on the shore of the Arabian sea and is very close to a place whose name rings a bell, namely “Mahé” (fig. 1), because it was one of the five “comptoirs” which France possessed in India for several centuries – this was one of the results of the competition between several European nations, partly motivated by their commercial interest in spices – until 1954 (*de facto*), or until 1962 (*de jure*), when they became part of the newly formed Republic of India. If those customers decide to buy their “Tellichery pepper” on the internet, they will be informed by online sellers that the pepper is not produced in Thalassery itself, but comes from a production area, the “Wynaad plateau”, which is roughly 100 km to the West of Thalassery, in a district called “Wayanad” (fig. 3), inside a mountain range called Western Ghats, at an altitude of 800 meters above the sea level.

What might however be more difficult for our European customers to discover on their own is the fact, which will be the initial anchor for this article, that some of the ancient poets who expressed themselves in one of the languages current in the Southern part of India (fig. 2), in a zone which includes three of the five “comptoirs français”, namely Pondichéry, Karikal and Mahé (fig. 1), while describing the prosperity of some of their sea-ports, have alluded to the fact that ships arrived with gold and left with pepper (see 2b

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in section 2), as already noted in 1941 by Pierre Meile [1911-1963] (Meile 1941, p. 90), in his well-known article, which we shall briefly revisit in the next section and which was meant at the time to corroborate the numismatic discoveries by archeologists of Roman coins in South India by complementing them with a philological exploration of ancient Tamil texts which had then recently become available in book form, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, thanks to the labour of Tamil philologists<sup>2</sup>, after a long period of transmission by the sole means of brittle palm-leaf mss. The poetical language in which those ancient poets had sung was called by them *cen-tamiḷ* ("Perfect Tamil") and is referred to nowadays in English as "Classical Tamil". What remains from the poetic activity of that period and of the following centuries is : (a) a significant number of poetical compositions, on the one hand ; (b) scholarly literature, intended for the training of poets, on the other hand. If we examine those two components, we can see that Classical Tamil, or *cen-tamiḷ*, seems to have been originally the common cultural vehicle of the inhabitants of a vast area covering what is now known as the two states of Tamil Nadu and of Kerala, as well as those components of the very small Union territory of Puducherry (Pondichéry; fig. 1). Even though that vast zone was partly united in intention by the use of that common poetical language, i. e. *cen-tamiḷ*, it was nevertheless politically divided between several centers of power, among which those associated with the "Three Kings" stand out, whose countries (*nāṭu*) were : (1) the *Cēra Nāṭu*, i. e. today's Kerala, plus some parts of Tamil Nadu; (2) the *Cōḷa Nāṭu*, which contains the fertile delta of the Kāvēri river<sup>3</sup>, and (3) the *Pāṇṭiya Nāṭu*, whose capital city is Madurai. Those three kings, who each had their capital cities, their seaports, and various emblems of power, sung by poets, were from time to time at war with each other, and some territories were disputed between them, as is visible in the most ancient part of Classical Tamil literature, which is also referred to as *Caṅkam* Literature (see section 6). This is especially true for that part of *Caṅkam* literature which is known as *puṟam* (litt. "external, public"), in which the most important topic is fighting. War between kings is however also present, in the form of allusions, in the other main branch of ancient Tamil literature, which deals with love and is called *akam* (litt. "internal, private"), as we shall soon see in 2a and 2b. The global area containing the three kingdoms was also most probably linguistically divided as attested by the expression:

(1a) *cen-tamiḷ cērnta paṇṇiru nilattu* ("in the twelve regions which belong to *Cen-tamiḷ*" [TC400c])<sup>4</sup>.

2. I shall remark here that the most well-known among those Tamil philologists, namely U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar (1855-1942), corresponded with Julien Vinson (1843-1926), who was the first holder of the Tamil chair which Pierre Meile held at the INALCO. Another holder of the position was Jules Bloch (1880-1953), who later held a position in the "Collège de France" and whose disciple Meile was. Bloch praises the pioneering Tamil work of Vinson in 1939, in a preface which he wrote for the first English translation, by V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, of the *Cilappatikāram*, an important work which we shall discuss in section 7.

3. See "*puṇal nāṭu*" in fig. 1. Today's most prominent cities in the *Cōḷa* country are Tanjore and Trichy, both located on the Kāvēri. A frequent English spelling for *Cōḷa* is "Chola".

4. The abbreviation TC refers to the *Collatikāram*, second book of the *Tolkāppiyam*, which deals with Classical Tamil morphology and syntax. For viewing (1a) in a wider context, see Chevillard 1996, p. 476,

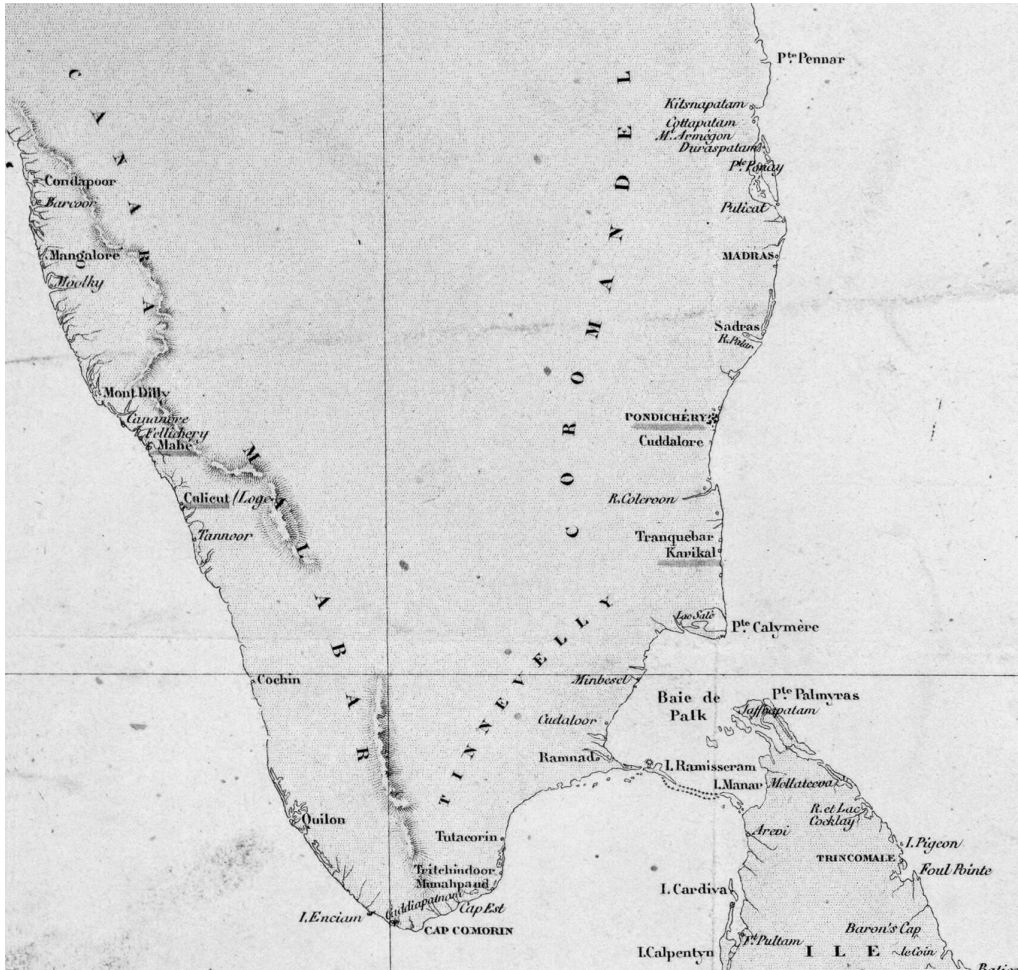


Fig. 1: Three of the «cinq comptoirs français», from *Carte des côtes de l'Inde*, gravée d'après la carte du Dépôt des cartes et plans de la marine par ordre de son Excellence M. le Cte P. de Chasseloup-Laubat, ministre secrétaire d'État au Département de la Marine et des Colonies, Paris, Pépin-Malherbe, 1862. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

These words, which are extracted from ancient Tamil scholarly literature, are illustrated here by Figure 2, which makes visible one possible interpretation of (1a) during the first millenium AD. More precisely, the book from which this verse fragment is taken is the *Collatikāram* (TC), which is the second book of the ancient Tamil treatise called

which contains a complete annotated French translation of the TC, along with a full translation of one of its medieval commentaries by Cēṇāvaraiyar. The final “c” in TC400c is necessary because the numbering of the verses of the TC is not the same depending on which commentary one uses. Inside the earlier commentary by Ḵampūraṇar, the same verse is TC394i.

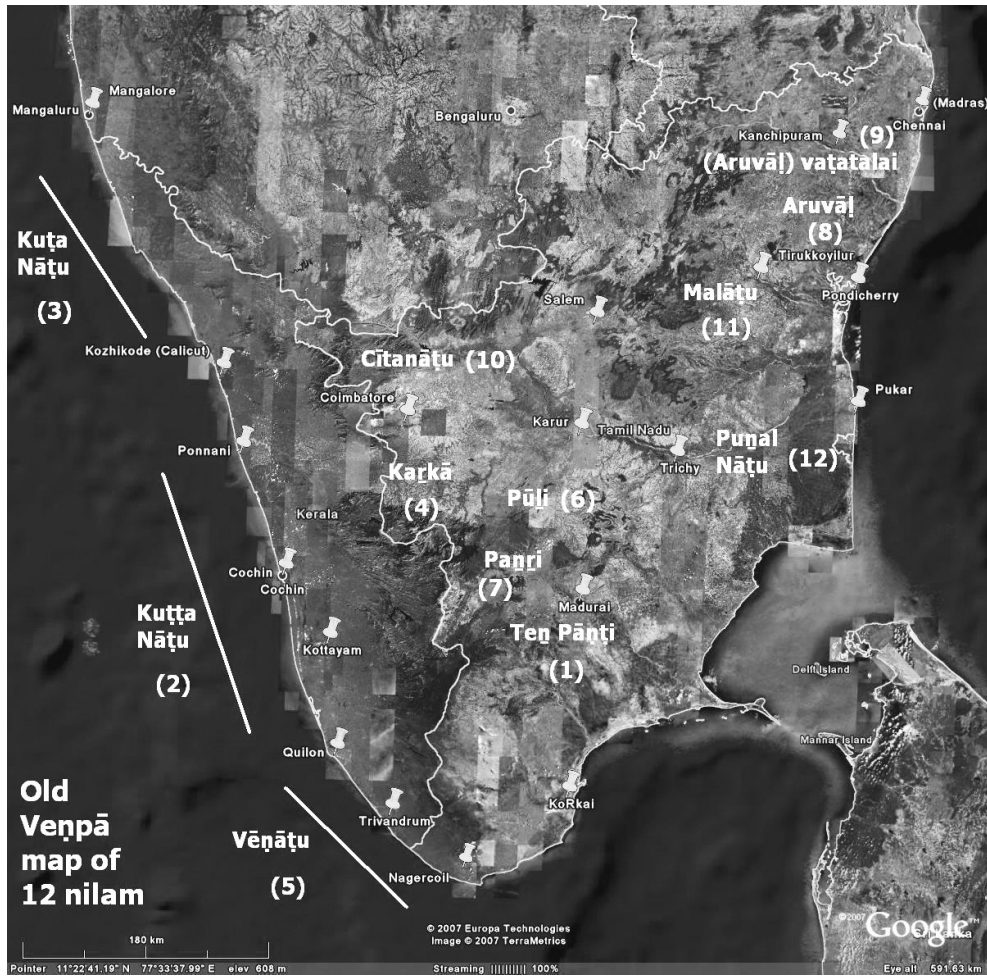


Fig. 2: One possible interpretation in the first millennium AD for the expression *cen-tamiḷ cērnta paṇṇiru nilam* “The Twelve regions which belong to Perfect Tamil” (see 1a).

*Tolkāppiyam*, considered by many to date back to the first half of the first millennium AD<sup>5</sup>. The *Tolkāppiyam* (henceforth T), even though it seems to know about the existence of “The Three [Kings]”<sup>6</sup>, does not however give details on what the “twelve regions” were

5. The first and the third books are the *Eḷuttatikāram* (TE), which deals with Phonetics/Phonology and the *Poruḷatikāram* (TP), which deals with Poetics, including metrics.

6. This is the traditional interpretation for a phrase in TP384i (*vaṇ pukaḷ mūvar*: “the three of generous fame”).



and divergent interpretations have been given for the Tamil expression seen in (1a)<sup>7</sup>. The differences have to do with the precise content of the list of twelve names on the one hand, but also with the status of the “twelve regions”, on the other hand. From the point of view of later medieval commentators, in the second millenium AD, who rely on another possible meaning of the word *cēṛnta*, the expression must not be understood as stated in (1a) but in the following manner:

(1b) *cen-tamiḷ cēṛnta paṇṇiru nilam* (“the twelve regions which are adjacent to [the country of] *Cen-tamiḷ*”; alternate interpretation of TC400c).

From the point of view of those later commentators, *Cen-tamiḷ* (“Perfect Tamil”, or “Straight Tamil”, or “Pure Tamil”), is used only in a specific area and various corrupt forms of the language, referred to as *Koṭun-Tamiḷ* (litt. “Crooked Tamil”), are spoken in twelve regions, whose list of names partially differs from previous lists, although there is some overlap. One notable practical consequence is that in the configuration which they envision, Kerala is no longer part of the domain of *Cen-tamiḷ*, although the Classical Tamil literature which glorifies the Cēra-s, kings of Keraḷa, remains part of the Tamil proud literary heritage.

Coming now to “pepper”, or rather to the Classical Tamil words which are used for referring to pepper, namely *kaṛi* and *miḷaku*, and which will be at the center of our attention in this article, I shall first revisit in section 2 one of the citations provided in Meile (1941, p. 90). This will be followed, in sections 3 to 6, by a progressive enlargement, covering first the presence of pepper inside one anthology, then in three *akam* anthologies and finally in all the eight ancient anthologies of the Caṅkam corpus, while at the same time providing details on the manner in which the Tamil literary tradition was cultivated and transmitted, thanks to the existence of a grammatical and poetological tradition, which starts with the T.

After that, in sections 7 to 10, I shall try to provide the reader with a more global view, discussing the historical layers of Tamil literature and the scholarly instruments available for navigating those layers. That will mean, among other things, an exploration of the presence of pepper inside later poetical compositions such as the *Cilappatikāram* (in section 7), which belongs to the second half of the first millenium AD, but remains mostly faithful to the ancient poetical linguistic usage. That will also imply a brief presentation, in section 8 and 9, of ancient Tamil lexicographical sources, such as the *Tivākaram* (8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> cent.) and the *Piṅkalam* (9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> cent.), in which we can see attestations of the high value of pepper, as part of a short list of precious commodities, but in which we also have to come to terms with the growing role played in the course of history by the Sanskrit language among Tamil speakers. I shall also visit a religious text, the *Tēvāram*

7. See Chevillard 2008 and Subbarayalu 2008, for a detailed discussion of the debate. As noted by Subbarayalu (2008, p. 319), the interpretation given by Cēṇāvaraiyar would for instance entail that the people in Madurai did not speak the standard language, which is paradoxical.

(in section 10), in which we can still see echoes of the importance of pepper. That visit will also be the occasion to introduce some additional meanings of the term *kari* which are not apparent in earlier poetry.

Finally, in sections 11 to 13, the focus will be on those other meanings of the word *kari*, which are the only ones left in Modern Tamil (see fig. 8 inside section 12). We shall try to understand the conditions under which the linguistic borrowing which resulted in the modern presence of “curry” in English and in other cosmopolitan languages took place, the early stage of the borrowing having taken place in Portuguese, where *kari* seems to have been borrowed as *caril* (plural *caris*). For that reason, we shall concentrate on the sections dealing with “food/cooking” inside the two Tamil thesauri already mentioned (Ti and Pi), and one document which is the result of the earliest contact in the Modern period between Europe and the Tamil-speaking South of India, namely the VTCSP, compiled by Antam de Proença in the 17<sup>th</sup> cent. and printed in 1679.

## II. GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF A CLASSICAL TAMIL LOVE POEM (AKAM 149) IN WHICH PEPPER IS MENTIONNED

I shall start this section by examining the extended context for one of the main citations on which Pierre Meile relies in his 1941 article. That citation is a 4-lines extract (see 2b, below), taken from a 19-lines love poem, which belongs to an anthology of 400 love poems known as *Akanānūru* (AN) (“the four hundred on *akam*”) or as *Neṭuntokainānūru* (“the **long**<sup>8</sup> collection of four hundred”). In the complete poem, the speaker, who is a man, describes a desertic area in lines 1 to 6, states in line 7 that he will not cross that arid zone in search of wealth, and explains in lines 8 to 19 the reason for his decision. Tamil being a language in which the equivalent of a relative proposition specifying a head noun precedes that head noun, the syntactically easiest way of rendering into English the hero’s explanations is to completely invert the order of the clauses, although this of course makes the translation partly unfaithful. The reason given by the hero for not going on a journey is as follows:

it would produce tears in the eyes a lady (line 19)  
 those eyes resemble some flowers (line 18)  
 those flowers are in a pond (line 17)  
 that pond is on the hill of a tall god (line 16)  
 that god has a peacock on his banner (line 15)  
 that hill is to the West of the city of Kūṭal [alias Madurai] (line 14)  
 the king of that city is the Ceḷiyaṇ [alias Pāṇḍya king] (line 13)

8. AN is a “long” collection, distinguished from the *Kuṇṭokai* – “short collection” (KT) –, which also contains 400 poems, because the average poem in the AN is almost three times longer than the average poem in the KT. See section 4.



Fig. 3: Geographical Background for poem Akam 149 (see 2a and 2b).

that king has captured a sacred image (*paṭimam*) after a difficult battle (line 12)  
 that battle included a siege of the harbour called Muciṛi (line 11)  
 in that harbour the good vessels of the Yavaṇar come with gold (*pon*) and leave with pepper (*kari*)  
 (lines 9-10)  
 the movement of the vessels produces foam in the river called Cuḷli-y-am-pēr-i-yāru (line 8)  
 that river belong to the Cēra kings [*cēralar*] (last foot of line 7).

If we add to that list of elementary poetical facts the information that the full name of the poet who composed this poem is, overlooking possible variant readings in some mss, Erukkāṭṭūr Tāyaṅkaṇṇāṇār, which means “Tāyaṅkaṇṇāṇār, who is from a place called Erukkāṭṭūr”, and that there is still today a village having that name, a possible geographical background for the poem Akam 149 can be seen in the map provided in fig. 3, where I have provided: the location of the Poet’s town (Erukkāṭṭūr), in the Cōḷa country; the location of the Pāṇṭiya king’s capital city (Madurai, alias Kūṭal), in the Pāṇṭiya country; the approximate location of the Cēra King’s harbour (Muciṛi, thought to be near modern Kodungallur), in the Cēra country, today’s Kerala; the possible location of the pepper producing area (Wayanad), also in Kerala, making the bold hypothesis that it might be the same as the area where the Tellichery pepper nowadays comes from<sup>9</sup>, to which

9. A question which will be raised but not answered in section 4 is the question when pepper started to be cultivated, as it is nowadays, rather than simply collected from naturally growing wild pepper creepers.

I add the irrelevant information that the distance between Tellichery (alias Thalassery) and Mahé is 9 km.

It is now time to provide a modern translation of Akam 149, dividing it into two sections, the second part, 2b, corresponding to the fragment translated in Meile (1941, p. 90). The translation is as follows:

- (2a) Even if, going the long way of thorn-apple trees,  
 where, when fed up with the prey contained in the tall red ant hill  
 raised with effort, [visible from] the distance by the little, lowly ants,  
 the dark relatives of the large-handed ant-eater<sup>10</sup> seize  
 the tubular white flowers of the Mahua tree on the low mountain,  
 the excellent wealth ever difficult to make were to be obtained easily,  
 I would not come, my heart,  
 so that the red-streaked proud rain eyes would take sweet dew  
 of her who is like a binding of contrasting blossoms  
 of blue lotus from the deep pool, elongated so that bees settle [there],  
 on the hill of the Tall one in unbroken festival  
 when the many-dotted peacock is raised as a victory banner,  
 to the west of [the city of] Kūṭal, with streets where flags sway,  
 of Cēḷiyaṇ, of deadly battle, with large good elephants  
 who snatched the image...
- (2b)<sup>11</sup> [...] after besieging, so that shouting rose,  
 fertile Mucīri, overcoming it in a great battle,  
 [the city] of the Cēra, where the Yavaṇar in [their] divine<sup>12</sup>, glorious good vessels  
 come with gold [and] return with pepper,  
 so that white foam is stirred up in the big Cullī river.  
 (English translation by Eva Wilden [unpublished]<sup>13</sup>)

10. For other translators, the word *eṇku*, which is here rendered by “ant-eater” refers to a type of bear (*karai*).

11. The Tamil text for the second part of the poem is as follows: [...] *cēralar // cuḷḷi-y-am pēr-i-yārru veḷ nurai kalaṅka // yavaṇar tanta viṇ māṇ nal kalam // poṇṇōṣu vantu kaṇiyoṣu peyarum // vaḷam keḷu mucīri y-ārpp-eḷa vaḷaii*. I shall discuss the variant reading *viṇai māṇ nal kalam* in the next footnote.

12. The presence of the word “divine” in the translation by Eva Wilden is justified by the reading “விண்” [vi ṇ] (“sky”) in several of the palm-leaf manuscripts which she has examined. Other manuscripts have the reading “வினை” [vi ṇai] (“action”). This difference of one syllabic symbol (“ண்” vs. “னை”) becomes the difference in translation between the two alternate specifiers for *naṇ-kalam* (“good-vessel (s)”), namely *viṇ-māṇ- (n)ṇ-kalam* (“the celestial, excellent vessels” [of the Yavaṇar]) and *viṇai-māṇ- (n)ṇ-kalam* (“the vessels of excellent making”), this second reading being the one followed by Meile, who renders *viṇai-māṇ* by “chef-d’œuvre”. I should add, for the sake of completion, that according to the rules of Tamil sandhi, the sequence *n-n* becomes *ṇ*, and therefore “*māṇ+naṇ*” becomes “*māṇṇ*”. The text given in the previous footnote is therefore a simplified sandhi-split text. This is also the explanation for the difference between “*naṇkalam*” (mss reading) and “*nal kalam*” (sandhi-split text), which some readers may have noticed.

13. This translation is taken from the second part, still unpublished, of *A Critical Edition and an Annotated Translation of the Akanāṇṇūru*, of which the first part has appeared in print as Wilden 2018.



It should be clear from its full translation that Akam 149 is not a historical document, even though it seems to contain allusions to historical events taken from a glorious past. We shall now, in the next section concentrate on other occurrences inside the older strata of Classical Tamil literature of the word which is currently central for us, namely the word *kaṛi*, which is found to occur in the sociative case form *kaṛiyoṭu* in the 10<sup>th</sup> metrical line (*ponnoṭu vantu kaṛiyoṭu peyarum*), for which the translation given was “come with gold [and] return with pepper”. And one of the questions which we must examine at some point in the future is the following: how do we know that *kaṛi* means “pepper”? This would indeed not be at all obvious to one who knows only Modern Tamil, and such a meaning is indeed not recorded inside dictionaries of Contemporary Tamil<sup>14</sup>.

### III. WHERE IS *KARĪ* TO BE FOUND IN THE *AKANĀNŪRU* ANTHOLOGY?

We shall now have a first glimpse into the *tiṇai* theory and the four-fold division of the inhabitable world, and especially at the poems for the mountain region, associated with the *Kuṛiñci* flower).

I shall examine in this section other occurrences of the word *kaṛi* inside the *Akanānūru*, that anthology of 400 poems from which the poem translated in (1a) and (1b) is taken. Before doing that, however, I must provide the reader with additional information, concerning the poetical conventions followed by ancient Tamil poets, alias *pulavar*, because these conventions are constitutive of that poetry and explain its nature. The first relevant piece of information has to do with the division of the habitable world into four regions, which one refers to conventionally, since the time of the *Tolkāppiyam*, by means of the names of four flowers: (b) *mullai*, (c) *kuṛiñci*, (e) *marutam* and (f) *neytal*. Those four flowers are respectively associated with: (b) pastoral forest landscape, where shepherds and cowherds can raise animals, (c) mountain landscape, which we shall soon visit, (e) riverine landscape, where cultivation with irrigation is possible, and (f) seashore landscape, where fishermen live. Outside those four inhabited landscapes, there is a fifth landscape<sup>15</sup>, or arid landscape (D), through which one can travel, but which is not fit for habitation, except by marginal people such as highway robbers. In the course of time, this landscape also received a conventional floral designation, which is *pālai*, or flower (D)<sup>16</sup>.

14. A good example is the Cre-A dictionary. See fig. 8.

15. However, in our discussion of the symbolic importance of numbers, inside section 8, we shall remark that there is another way for moving from four to five. It consists in adding to the four civilized lands another civilized space which is the city (*nakar*). See Table 5, in section 9.

16. The reason for the apparent irregularities in my lettering scheme is that the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter in the *Tolkāppiyam*, where those elements are described, starts in fact with the mention of a scheme of seven-types, alias seven *tiṇai*-s, “AbcDefG”, where A and G are abnormal *tiṇai*-s. It quickly concentrates however on the “central five *tiṇai*-s”, namely “bcDef”, but does not give a name to its central element D, referring to it simply as “the middle *tiṇai*”, probably because it is not associated with inhabitable land. More detail will be given in section 5, when we discuss the technical term *tiṇai*.

That context being provided, it is now time to reveal that the *Akanāṇṇūru* anthology of love poetry which we have started to explore in the previous section, when we read the poem Akam 149, has a very sophisticated arrangement, with respect to the five landscapes (b), (c), (D), (e) and (f), named after the five flowers, because one can predict with absolute certitude which landscape a poem will describe, if only one knows what its number is. More precisely, we can say that:

**Table 1: The arrangement of the AN (*Akanāṇṇūru*, alias *Neṭuntokai*)**

(b)	every poem with a number ending in 4 is located in the mullai pastoral landscape;	mullai
(c)	every poem whose number ends in 2 or in 8 has its action taking place in a kuṇṇi mountain landscape;	kuṇṇi
(D)	every poem which has an odd number is about the fifth landscape, alias pālai arid landscape;	pālai
(e)	every poem with a number ending in 6 is about marutam riverine cultivated landscape;	marutam
(f)	every poem with a number which is a multiple of 10 is a neytal – seashore landscape poem.	neytal

I could of course continue by explaining that each landscape is conventionally associated with a prototypical love situation, but a complete explanation would take us too far away<sup>17</sup>, and we must now return to the occurrences of the word *kari* inside the *Akanāṇṇūru* anthology. We have already met with one occurrence, inside Akam 149, which is a *pālai*, type (D), poem, and the readers can now see for themselves, by re-reading (2a) and (2b), that the topic of *pālai* is separation, or imagined separation, which in this case is finally avoided. Apart from that, we have inside the *Akanāṇṇūru* (henceforth AN) four more occurrences of the word *kari*, which are found inside the poems AN-2 (line 6), AN-112 (line 14), AN-182 (line 14) and AN-272 (line 10), which according to the scheme just described are all *kuṇṇi* – mountain landscape – poems. More precisely, the occurrences of *kari* inside those poems are, providing a minimal context of at least one metrical line:

(3) *tēral // ariyātu unṭa kaṭuvan ayalatu // kari vaḷar cāntam ēral cellātu*: “having drunk the highly fermented honey, the male monkey could not climb up the nearby **sandalwood tree, on which pepper creeper spreads**.” (Akam 2, lines 4-6) (unpublished translation by V.M. Subramanya Ayyar [henceforth VMS], MS in French Institute of Pondicherry Library)

(4) *kaṇa kalai ikukkum kari ivar cilampiṇ*: “in **the slopes of the mountain where the pepper creeper spreads** and the herd of stags make a sound in a low pitch.” (Akam 112, line 14) (VMS translation)

(5) *atir kural mutu kalai kari muri muṇaii*: “the old black-faced male langur with a roaring voice, having hated **the tender leaves of pepper**, after eating them” (Akam 182, line 14) (VMS translation)

17. The interested reader can of course read for instance the 2018 translation by Eva Wilden, which covers the 120 first poems in the *Akanāṇṇūru*. As a sample, I shall simply indicate here that all *marutam* poems deal with jealousy, possibly because rich people can afford to have both a wife and a concubine.

- (6) *turu kal naṇṇiya kari ivar paṭappai*: “a garden on which the pepper creeper spreads on the boulders adjacent to the house” (*Akam* 272, line 10) (VMS translation)

Without going into details, I can nevertheless reveal that the four poems, from which these fragments are extracted, and which are typical of the *kuṛiṇci* mountain landscape, are all about the same topic, which is the union of the lovers, which normally takes place around midnight. We shall return to their vocabulary soon.

#### IV. THE FORMULAIC NATURE OF ANCIENT TAMIL POETRY, AND THE IMMEDIATE CONSTITUENT CONTEXT OF THE WORD *KARI* “PEPPER” IN THREE ANTHOLOGIES

The sample which has been provided until now, extracted from five distinct poems from the AN, may have given the reader more precise notions regarding the type of conclusions which one can draw from the presence of a word such as *kari* inside those four *kuṛiṇci* poems. There is on the one hand the apparently precise nature of the descriptions, which is however counterbalanced by the fact that the same formulas can be found in several poems. There is also, on the other hand, although this is not immediately apparent, the fact that whatever is said about a natural scene, can have an additional suggested “embedded” meaning, via an implicit comparison which must be decoded<sup>18</sup>, or rather guessed, within the context of the love situation.

Table 2: Figures concerning three *akam* anthologies

<i>Kari</i>	Title	Poems count	Total line length	Min. length	Average length	Max. length	<i>Miḷaku</i>
2 occ.	KT	401	2504 lines	4 lines	6.24	8 lines	0 occ.
2 occ.	NT	400	4180 l.	9 l.	10.45	12 l.	1 occ.
5 occ.	AN	400	7151	13 l.	17.88	31 l.	0 occ.

However, our goal being here to find out what all can be said about *kari* “pepper”, I shall now move from the AN to two other anthologies belonging to the same period, which is frequently referred to as the *Caṅkam* period<sup>19</sup>, and considered by many to fall within the first half of the first millenium AD<sup>20</sup>. Those two anthologies are called *Kuruntokai* (KT) and *Narṇṇai* (NT). Just like the AN, they each contain ca. 400 poems, the difference being however that their poems are shorter than those of the AN and, unlike the AN, the KT and the NT are not organized on the basis of a fixed *tiṇai* scheme connecting verse number and landscape. More precisely, every poem in the KT has a length standing

18. The technical term used in the *Tolkāppiyam* for that literary technique is *uḷḷuṇai uvamam* (“embedded comparison”).

19. In non-scientific transcriptions, the word *Caṅkam* can also be found written as “Sangam”.

20. For a general discussion of that literature, see for instance F. Gros’s *Paripāṭal* translation.

between 4 and 8 metrical lines, and similar constraints exist for the NT and the AN, as presented in Table 2 nearby. Because of those differences, it is sometimes said that the most ancient layers of ancient Tamil composition are to be searched for inside the KT, which must have been compiled as an anthology on the basis of already existing poems, whereas it seems plausible to hypothesize that whoever compiled the AN is likely to have filled in the possible gaps when combining the five types (b, c, D, e and f) of poems in the global structure described in Table 1. That being said, returning to our main topic, I shall now provide more information concerning pepper, drawing on the fact that, as indicated in Table 2, two occurrences of *kari* are found in each of the KT and the NT, to which we can add one occurrence of *miḷaku* in the NT, this being the term used nowadays for referring to pepper<sup>21</sup>. Those examples are as follow:

- (7) *muṟṟupu // kari vaḷar aṭukkattu iraviḷ muḷaṅkiya // maṅkul mā maḷai viḷntēṇa*: “because great rains had fallen from the cloud, that thundered at night near the **mountainside grown with ripe pepper**.” (KT-90, lines 1-3) (translation Eva Wilden [2010, vol. 1, p. 290])
- (8) *kari vaḷar aṭukkattu āṅkaṅ muri aruntu // kuraṅku oruṅku irukkum perum kal nāṭaṅ*: “the man from a land of big stones, where monkeys are together [and] eat from the **shoots at the mountain side where pepper grows**.” (KT-288, l.1) (translation Eva Wilden [2010, vol. 2, p. 655])
- (9) *kari vaḷar aṭukkattu kaḷaviṇṇi+ puṇarnta // cem muka manti*: “the red-faced she-monkey, who had united [with the male monkey] in secret meeting on the **pepper-grown mountain side**.” (NT-151, lines 7/8) (translation Eva Wilden [2008, vol. 1, p. 361])
- (10) *citar kāl vāraṇam // mutir kari yāppin tuṇcum nāṭaṅ*: “Lord of the country, where the cock of scratching legs, sleeps **on the mesh of matured pepper vines**.” (NT-297, lines 7/8) (translation Nī. Kantacāmi 2008)
- (11) *miḷaku peytaṇaiya cuvaiya puṇ kāy // lularu talai ukāy-c citar citarntu uṇṭa*: “when it had eaten, scattering bits, from the Ukāy tree with withered head, the red unripe fruits that tasted as **if poured with pepper**” (NT-66, line 1) (translation Eva Wilden [2008, vol. 1, p. 191])

Leaving aside example (11), which contains *miḷaku* and is taken from a description of an arid landscape, it can be seen from a comparison of the remaining four fragments with the four fragments seen in the preceding section, that some words co-occur several times with *kari*. Among them, we have *vaḷar*, which is the verbal root or *vaḷartal* “to grow”. It is seen two times, in (8) and (9), in the formula *kari vaḷar aṭukkattu* (“mountain side where pepper grows”), for which the head-noun is *aṭukkattu*, oblique case of *aṭukkam* “mountain side”. It is also seen once in the expression *kari vaḷar cāntam*, in which the head-noun is *cāntam* (“sandal-wood tree”). The pepper vine is a creeper, which climbs on trees, and that behavior is in fact more precisely described by another verb, *ivar-tal* (“to spread (by climbing)”), of which the verbal root is seen both in (4) and (6), in *kari ivar cilampin* and in *kari ivar paṭappai*, where *cilampin* is the oblique case of *cilampu* “mountain-slope” and

21. However, the word *miḷaku* is not seen at all in KT and in AN.

where *patappai* is “garden”. This leaves us with a question which we cannot really answer: is the pepper cultivated in a planned manner, as is nowadays the case in Kerala, or is it wild pepper, growing spontaneously, which some gatherers collect? Whatever the answer concerning the cultivation, it is clear nevertheless that someone collects it, and that the *mutir kari yāppin* mentionned in (10) allows us to see both the timing, because *mutir* means “ripe”, and the method, because *yāppu* (“tying”), verbal noun derived from the verb *yā-ttal* (“to tie”), seems to indicate that a number of grapes have been taken from pepper creepers and tied together, possibly for drying. Finally, another word, *muri*, which refers probably to a constituent of the plant, is seen in (5), next to *kari*, and also in (8), in a disconnected position. It could be a “tender leaf”, or a “sprout”, or still something else.

## V. PEPPER AS A KARU-P-PORUḶ (“SEMINAL ELEMENT”) OF THE TIṆAI CALLED KURINĠCI

In a sense, I have until now written as if the availability to us of ancient Tamil literature and the possibility for us to understand it was a self-evident fact, or the simple

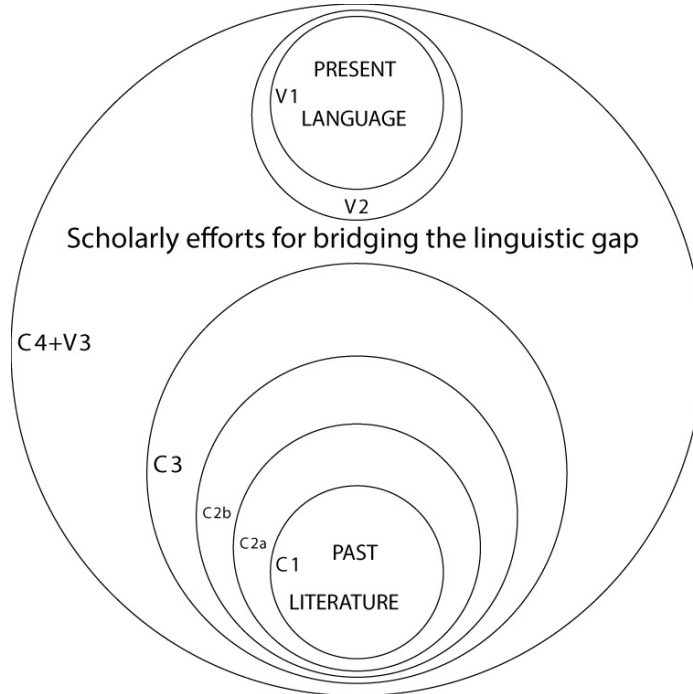


Fig. 4: Bridging the gap between two poles, Poetry (*Ceyyul*) and usage (*Valakku*) has been the goal of Tamil scholars since the Tolkāppiyam.



consequence of the intelligence of modern human beings. The truth is however that the preservation of that literature is the result of a long concerted effort, over many centuries, by a multi-generational group of dedicated Tamil scholars making use of some auxiliary technical texts, which were memorized and transmitted. Just like the 20<sup>th</sup> scholars whose work will be presented in a later section, those scholars of the past were also trying to develop strategies for bridging the growing gap between poetical (ancient) Tamil and their own (living) language (see fig. 4). Some of the scholarly texts created by them can be called “grammars”, in an expanded sense of the term, and some can be called “dictionaries”, or more precisely “thesauri”. Regarding the word *kari* which is at the center of our attention, the Tamil grammars would seem not to have much to teach us directly, until we realize that one feature of Tamil poetry which is presented inside their poetological sections is relevant for items such as pepper, or such as its companion, the sandal-wood tree, already met in citation (3). Revisiting the features which I have referred to until now as the five flower names, b, c, D, e, f, symbolizing five landscapes, I can now add that they are enumerated inside the T as the possible values of a category called *tiṇai*. Inside the T, that ancient treatise which I have mentioned several times, the *tiṇai* is one of the descriptive parameters which can be predicated about an individual poem. Among the 27 chapters (alias *iyal-s*) of the T, the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter, called *Aka-t-tiṇai-y-iyal* (“Chapter on private/internal *tiṇai-s*”), is devoted to an exposition of the 7 *aka-t-tiṇai-s*<sup>22</sup> which can be predicated about a love poem, whereas, symmetrically, the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter, called *Pura-t-tiṇai-y-iyal* (“Chapter on public/external *tiṇai-s*”), gives a presentation of 7 *pura-t-tiṇai-s*, all having flower names, which can be predicated for classification purpose about a war poem<sup>23</sup>. Leaving those *pura-t-tiṇai-s* however, and concentrating on the five among the seven *aka-t-tiṇai* with which we are already familiar thanks to the Table 1, we can say that what the ancient Tamil poetological tradition teaches about them is that they can be recognized – if decoding an ancient poem – or used – if creating a new poem which follows the tradition – by means of three sets of parameters:

a place and/or a time, called *mutar-poru!* (“primary substances”). These would be the mountain landscape at midnight in the case of the *kuriñci-t tiṇai*;  
 some “seminal substances”, called *karu-p poru!* in Tamil. These could be animals or plants, such as those which appear in the fragments cited in citations 3 to 10, but could also be melody types<sup>24</sup> etc.;  
 explicit indications regarding the love situation: (b) patient waiting, (c) secret union, (D) travel causing separation, (e) jealousy, (f) anxious waiting. This feature is called *uri-p poru!* (“appropriate meanings”)<sup>25</sup>.

22. Two more names, (A)*perun-tiṇai* and (G)*kai-k-kiḷai*, which are not flower names, are added to the five names enumerated in Table 1, completing the scheme “AbcDefG” evoked inside.

23. For the sake of brevity, I am of course simplifying. These poems are not all about war, strictly speaking.

24. The verse dealing with this inside the *Tolkāppiyam* is TP20i.

25. The word *poru!* must sometimes be translated by “thing, substance” and sometimes by “meaning, thing referred to, value”.

Therefore, any person who is initiated into the conventions of ancient Tamil poetry knows that if pepper, sandal wood or monkeys are mentionned in a poem, that poem is probably a poem about the secret union of lovers, even though the *Tolkāppiyam* never mentions pepper<sup>26</sup>.

## VI. HOW VAST IS THE ANCIENT CORE (C1) OF TAMIL LITERATURE?

The ten citations examined so far, from (2) to (11), inside sections 2, 3 and 4, represent the totality of the occurrences of *kaṛi*, and of *miḷaku*, inside a set of 1201 poems, where we have combined together the content of three anthologies, namely the AN, KT and NT anthologies. Those citations do not however exhaust the information on pepper which can be found in the whole of *Caṅkam* literature, because that literature consists of “Eight Anthologies” (*Eṭṭut Tokai*, henceforth ET) and “Ten Long Songs” (*Pattup Pāṭṭu*, henceforth PP)<sup>27</sup>. The total set of occurrences of *kaṛi* and *miḷaku* in that ensemble, which consists of almost 33,000 metrical lines and which seems to have been composed by a group of ca. 450 poets whose names are known, and by a few others<sup>28</sup>, is provided inside tab. 3 below. Inside that table, I have tried to distinguish between (α) the examples where, on the one hand, *kaṛi* and *miḷaku* are used as *karup poruḷ*, for the *tiṇai* called *kuṛiṇci*, as explained in section 5, and the examples where, on the other hand, this is not the case; (β) either because several landscapes coexist inside one poem<sup>29</sup>; (γ) for other reasons. To that collection of figures, I have also added those concerning the *Tolkāppiyam*, because it belongs roughly to the same poetical universe and the same period<sup>30</sup>.

26. This is not completely true. See the verse TC384c in the second book of the T, which contains the word *karippu* (“pungency”), as part of a series of explanations concerning the meanings of the word *kaṭi*. And the medieval commentators illustrate it by an example containing the word *miḷaku*. This is in fact part of a chapter which is the ancestor of the later thesauri which we shall examine in sections 8 and 9. See Chevillard 2019a.

27. The shortest among those “Ten long songs” is the *Mullaip pāṭṭu*, which has 103 metrical lines. The longest is the *Maturaik Kānci*, which has 782 metrical lines. The average length is 355 lines.

28. More precisely, a 1940 book, called *Caṅka Ilakkīyam* (“Caṅkam Literature”) compiled by S. Vaiyāpuri Pillai (1891-1956), organizes all the poems contained in the *Eṭṭut Tokai* and the *Pattup Pāṭṭu* alphabetically, under the names of their authors, and contains on 1320 pages the texts of 2279 poems by 473 authors. Those poems are followed, on 48 pages, by 102 more poems for which the poet’s name is not known at present. This brings the total number of poems in that book to 2381.

29. This is technically referred to as *tiṇai mayakkam* (“mixture of *tiṇai*-s”).

30. The T as we have it could be contemporaneous with the anthologization process, and/or with the composition of one of the anthologies, the *Kalittokai*, composed in a meter called *kalippā* concerning which the T gives a lot of information.

**Table 3: Distribution of the 26 occurrences of *kari* & *mīḷaku* inside corpus C1 (Eṭṭut Tokai, Pattup Pāṭṭu & Tolkāppiyam)**

	Anthologies	<i>kari</i>	<i>mīḷaku</i>	Poems	Metrical Lines	<i>kari</i> and <i>mīḷaku</i> used as <i>karup poruḷ</i> for the <i>tiṇai</i> called <i>kuṟiñci</i>		(γ) Other cases
						(α) [Core]	(β) [Extended]	
Eṭṭut Tokai	KT, NT & AN	9 occ.	1 occ.	1201	13,835	8 <sup>31</sup>	1 <sup>32</sup>	1 <sup>33</sup>
	<i>Aiṅkuruṇūru</i>	2 occ.		500	2,163	2 <sup>34</sup>		
	<i>Kalittokai</i>	1 occ.		150	4,314	1 <sup>35</sup>		
	<i>Paripāṭal</i>	1 occ.		22	1,833		1 <sup>36</sup>	
	<i>Puṟam</i>	3 occ.		398	5,448		1 <sup>37</sup>	2 <sup>38</sup>
	<i>Paṭiṟupṭattu</i>		1 occ.	81	1,711			1 <sup>39</sup>
<i>Pattup Pāṭṭu</i>		6 occ.	2 occ.	10	3,552	4 <sup>40</sup>	1 <sup>41</sup>	3 <sup>42</sup>
TOTAL (poetry)		22 occ.	4 occ.	2362	32,856			
<i>Tolkāppiyam</i>		0 occ.	0 occ.		4,013			
Grand Total (Corpus C1)						15	4	7

Briefly commenting on the data contained in this chart, I shall first say that the two anthologies which appear just after our initial group of 1201 poems, namely *Aiṅkuruṇūru* and *Kalittokai* are both organized on the basis of the *tiṇai* concept, and each contain five sections, one for each *tiṇai*. In conformity with this division, the occurrences of *kari* which they contain are all found in their *kuṟiñci* sections and two of them contain the formula *kari vaḷar cilampu* (“mountain slopes where pepper grows”), which will be familiar to those who compare them with examples (4), (7), (8) and (9). This is why they are placed in the (α) column.

31. See examples 3 to 10, inside sections 3 and 4.

32. This is NT 66-1, translated in (11) [section 4] (taken from a description of an arid landscape).

33. This is Akam 149, translated in 2a and 2b. Pepper is mentioned as a merchandise, exported via a harbour.

34. *Aiṅkuruṇūru* (UVS, p. 108 & 109): 246-1//246-2 (*karīya // kaṇ-mukai vāya-p-pulī*); 243-1 (*kari vaḷar cilampu*)

35. *Kalittokai*: 52-17 (*kari vaḷar cilampir*).

36. *Paripāṭal*: 16-2 (*mai paṭu cilampiṇ kariyoṭu um cāntoṭu um*)

37. *Puṟam*: 168-2

38. *Puṟam*: 14-14, 343-3

39. *Paṭiṟupṭattu*: 41-21 (UVS, 1967, p. 98).

40. *Pattupṭāṭṭu* : malai. 521 + malai. 521 (*karum koṭi mīḷakiṇ kāy tuṇar pacum kari*) (PLANTS IN A MOUNTAIN POEM) muruku. 309 (*kari koṭi karum tuṇar cāya porī puṟam*) (PLANTS IN A MOUNTAIN GOD POEM) kuṟi. 187 (*paḷu mīḷaku ukka pārai neṭum cuṇai*) (PLANTS IN A MOUNTAIN POEM).

41. *Pattupṭāṭṭu* : ciṟu. 43 (*paim kari nivanta palaviṇ nīḷal*) (PLANTS IN NATURAL SETTING)

42. *Pattupṭāṭṭu* : perum. 307 (*uruppuṟu pacum kāy pōḷoṭu kari kalantu*) = COOKING; matu. 289 (*iñci mañcaḷ paim kari pīra um*) = LOCAL COMMERCE; paṭ. 186 (*kāliṇ vanta karum kari mūṭai um*) = LONG-DISTANCE TRADE;

Moving now to the following anthology, namely *Paripāṭal*, the occurrence of *kaṛi* which it contains has been placed by me inside column (β) because the main function of the poem concerned is the festive description of the flood of the river Vaikai, which the inhabitants of the city called Maturai celebrate by bathing. However, the flooding river carries things which are coming down from the mountain, including pepper creepers and sandal wood, two precious mountain symbols<sup>43</sup>. We shall see more of these, when we examine the *Tēvāram*, inside section 10.

If we now turn to the anthology called *Puṛaṇāṇūru* (PN), which also originally contained 400 poems, although two have been lost and some are preserved only fragmentarily, the reader can see in tab. 3 that among the three occurrences of *kaṛi* that it contains, one is in column (β) and two are in column (γ). The former, found in *Puṛam* 168-2, contains the same formula *kaṛi vaḷ ar aṭukkattu* (“on the mountain side where pepper grows”), already seen in (8) and (9). Among the two others, *Puṛam* 343-3, which is discussed at length in Meile (1941, p. 93)<sup>44</sup>, contains a syntagm which we have not yet seen, namely *kaṛi-mūṭai* (“pepper bundles”), which describes one of the items found in that same sea-port called Muciṛi, which was described at length in Akam 149, already translated here in (2a) and (2b). As for the last occurrence of *kaṛi* in *Puṛam* 14-14, namely *ūṇ-ruvai // kaṛi-cōru*, in what might be the culinary description of a rich food item, we shall return to it in section 12, where it will be citation (25).

After that, regarding the following anthology, *Patirruppattu*, the occurrence of *miḷaku* which it contains, on line 21 of poem 41, is part of a striking image, where what happens to the “black heads” (*irun-talai*) of the “enemies” (*tevvar*) of a Cēra king is compared with what happens to grains of “pepper” (*miḷaku*), when the “pounding pestle” (*eri-y-ulakkai*) “crushes” (*iṭittu*) them. This example has been put in column (γ), although the basis of the comparison is certainly realistic.

Finally, the eight occurrences of *kaṛi* and *miḷaku* in the PP are very interesting for several reasons: those in the (α) column provide more botanical details for understanding the structure of the plant. Others chime in with information available elsewhere. They might be of interest in the future to a botanist.

## VII. THE HISTORICAL LAYERS OF TAMIL LITERATURE

After this rather extensive covering of the innermost core (alias C1, in fig. 5, below) of ancient Tamil literature, namely the “Eight Anthologies” and “Ten Long Songs”, justified by its very high symbolic value and historical importance, not to mention its intrinsic beauty, but given the fact that it would be impossible for me in such a short article to make a completely exhaustive report on everything which can be found on pepper in

43. See the translation by François Gros (Gros 1968, p. 104).

44. Note the opposition *malait tāram* and *kaṭarārāram* in *Puṛam* 343.

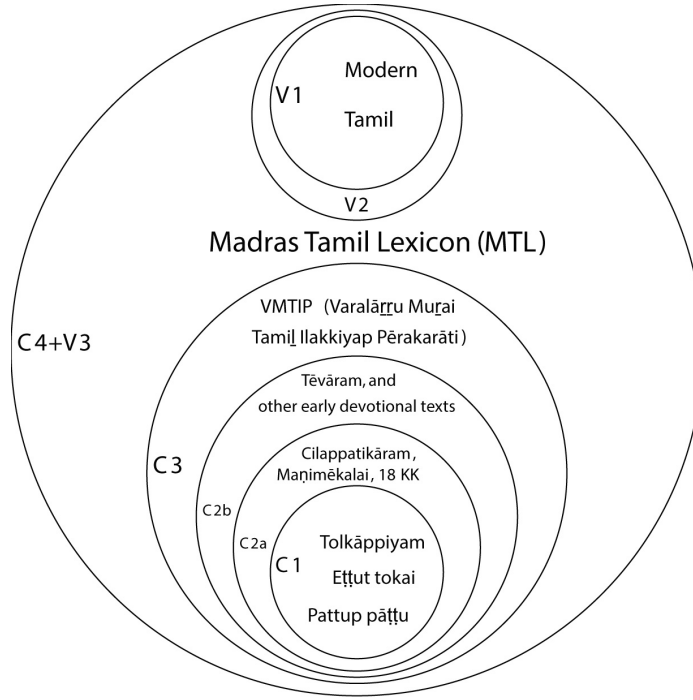


Fig. 5: Tamil poetical (*Ceyyul*) vocabulary, chronologically seen as a succession of larger and larger rings, from C1, and its ca. 473 poets, to C4.

the whole of Tamil literature, I shall try to be more concise in the remaining part of this small section, giving a bird's eye view of its constituents and of its chronology, combined with a brief overview of the instruments which are currently available for navigating this ocean of data. Among those instruments, the most impressive is the *Madras Tamil Lexicon* (MTL), which was prepared by a group of scholars during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when the process of editing the most ancient constituents of the inner core of ancient Tamil literature (see C1 and C2a, in fig. 5) was very much a work in progress. The MTL is however not necessary ideal for a precise information on those ancient texts because its ambition was to encompass at the same time the living standard language for intellectual communication and the archaic language which has been preserved in a literature whose difficulty of access grows mechanically with the time interval, because of inevitable language change.

Because of that, scholars felt the need to prepare dedicated linguistic instruments and the most useful currently among them is a glossary, the 2001 VMTIP, whose full title appears inside ring C3 (see fig. 5) and in the bibliography. That Glossary, which is valid for all the concentric rings going from C1 to C3, is based on the "dépouillement" of more than 130 works, representing in intention every work composed until 1800 A.D.



Because of the very large historical period covered by the VMTIP, which prevents it from being an exhaustive coverage, some earlier works such as the exhaustive *Index des mots de la littérature tamoule ancienne*<sup>45</sup>, published in 1967, 1968 and 1970 by the Institut Français d’Indologie (Pondicherry), which covers integrally the works contained in the concentric rings C2a and C1<sup>46</sup>, retain their high specific utility, as is seen from Table 4, where the difference between two works considered to belong roughly to the same period<sup>47</sup>, is clearly illustrated. The same can be said of other specific instruments, such as the exhaustive indices covering some of the devotional texts contained in ring C2b, which we shall examine later, in section 10<sup>48</sup>.

**Table 4: a comparison of two work belongs to chronological ring C2a**

	<i>kaṛi</i>	<i>miḷaku</i>	Cantos	Lines	(α)	(β)	(γ)
<i>Cilappatikāram</i>	4 occ.	0 occ.	30	5246	24_11- 2, 28_114 <sup>49</sup>	25_41,	14_210 <sup>50</sup>
<i>Maṇimēkalai</i>	0	0	30	4856			

Briefly commenting on Table 4, I shall simply remark that the two long compositions, *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*, on which that table reports, are frequently called “The twin Epics”, because the latter presents itself as a continuation of the former. These “twins” are however quite different. Whereas the *Maṇimēkalai* is an apology of buddhism which uses Classical Tamil as a linguistic vehicle for preaching some buddhist doctrine and programmatically doing away with many traditional facets of Tamil culture<sup>51</sup>, the *Cilappatikāram* is deeply rooted in the practice of many arts and in earlier Tamil literature, as illustrated for instance here by the following example:

45. This Index does not provide meanings for the terms indexed.

46. Ring R2a contains 20 works, which are possibly not much later than the 6<sup>th</sup> century, namely the *Cilappatikāram*, the *Maṇimēkalai* and the so-called 18 “Minor works” *Kīḷkaṇakku* (18KK).

47. Beginning of the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millenium AD.

48. Ring C2b represents Tamil devotional literature, which has its start in the second half of the first millenium AD, and in which a prominent element is a collection of hymns to Śiva called *Tēvāram*.

49. Cilap. 28\_114: *kaṛi vaḷar cilampil tuṇṇuṇṇu yāṇaiyir* “[You destroyed Viyalūr, famed // for its clusters of dark lilies and] elephants // who sleep in the mountains thick with pepper”. (translation: Parthasarathy, p. 253).

50. Cilap. 14\_210: *kālam anriyūṇ karuṇ kaṛi mūṭaiyoṭu // kūlam kuvitta kūla vītiyūṇ* “in the grain merchants’ street, [traders // wandered about everywhere with balances, // measures and bushels.] There were bags of grain // and black pepper in all seasons”. (translation: Parthasarathy, p. 149).

51. In a nutshell, the *Maṇimēkalai* is the story of a girl, Maṇimēkalai, who should have become a dancing girl like her mother, Mātavi, but decides to refuse the love of a prince and to become a buddhist nun. The connection between the two epics is that Mātavi is one of the three main protagonists of the *Cilappatikāram*, where her artistic talent is described at length.

(12) *kari vaḷar taṇ cilampaṇ ceyta nōy tirkka*: “[She has called the shaman to perform the dance], to rid me of this illness caused by the man, from the cool mountain on which pepper corns grow.” (Cilap. 24, 11-2) (translation: Parthasarathy, p. 214)

This example is extracted from the 11<sup>th</sup> song inside Canto 24, *Kuṇṇrak Kuravai* (“The dance of the hill-dwellers”). That 24<sup>th</sup> canto is almost a mini-anthology of (newly composed) *kuṇṇi* poems, and is the opening canto of the third and last section of the *Cilappatikāram*, the *Vaṇṇik Kāṇṭam*, which takes place in the Cēra kingdom, whereas the first and the second canto take place respectively in the Cōḷa and the Pāṇṭiya kingdoms. After that, in the following canto, the situation moves to the capital city, where we see the mountain dwellers bringing gifts to the Cēra King, the long list of mountain products including pepper and many other items.

(13) *yānai veṇ kōṭum akiliṇ kuppaiyum // māṇ mayirk kavariyum matuvin kuṭaṇkaḷum // cantanāk kuṇaiyum cinturak kaṭṭiyum // aṇṇaṇat tiraḷum aṇi aritāramum // ēla valliyyum iruṇ kari valliyyum [...]*: “The hill dwellers came before him. They carried // Gifts on their heads]: white tusks // Of elephants, piles of eaglewood, whisks // Of deer hair, pots of honey, sticks // Of sandalwood, lumps of sindura, kohl // And orpiment, stalks of cardamom and pepper, // [...]” (Cilap. 25, lines 37-41) (translation: Parthasarathy, p. 220)

I do not elaborate further on this list because we shall see other examples of showcasing catalogues of precious substances in the coming sections, some of them in pedagogical texts (see section 9), which explain how to compose poetry, and some of them in the compositions of practicing poets (see section 10).

## VIII. THE TAMIL LEXICOGRAPHIC TRADITION AND THE OTHER NAMES OF PEPPER

I shall now evoke briefly the Tamil lexicographical tradition. This is the second pillar which has made possible the transmission over many centuries of the decodability/learnability of ancient Tamil literature by scholars who were trying to bridge the gap<sup>52</sup>, the tension between the primordial imagined center (see C1 in fig. 5 and fig. 4) of the language, *Cen-tamiḷ* (“Perfect Tamil”), which they loved and cultivated, and the real center (see V1 in fig. 5 and fig. 4) of the language which they used in their everyday life. Unlike what we have seen in the grammatical tradition, with one exception<sup>53</sup>, this is a field where explicit information on “pepper” is available: specific words are enumerated

52. Of course, those scholars were not simply trying to preserve the understanding of the past. They were also training the newly born would-be poets, who would carry on the torch.

53. See footnote 26.

and some of the answers to questions which were raised earlier can be found there. Briefly described, the texts belonging to the ancient Tamil lexicography are collections of verses which were meant to be memorized by the people who wanted to become professional poets (alias *pulavar*-s). The most ancient extant one among those lexicographic texts is the *Tivākaram* (henceforth Ti) and might date back to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century. It contains twelve chapters, totalling 2518 verses. Inside the fourth chapter, which is called *marap-pe-yar-t tokuti* (“collection of names of trees”), the 132<sup>nd</sup> verse, out of 217, which is the 758<sup>th</sup> verse of the Ti, reads as follows:

(14) *marīci kari-y-ivai miḷak-eṇa vaippar*. “They keep [the designations] *marīci* [and] *kari* intending *miḷaku*”<sup>54</sup> (Ti-758) (my translation)

Until now, the reader of this article has had to take my word, concerning the fact that the word *kari* means “pepper” in ancient Tamil, although I have already hinted to the fact that modern Tamil dictionaries do not list this meaning for *kari* (see fig. 8) and that the word in current use is *miḷaku*, which we have seen used in citation (11). The verse quoted in (14) is therefore an important witness which shows in which manner the semantic continuity was maintained within the Tamil learned tradition, because it shows how two unfamiliar words, not belonging to ordinary language, namely *kari* and *marīci*, were taught to the students who memorized the *Tivākaram*. The status of those two words is however very different: if on the one hand, *kari* is omnipresent in the ancient, poetical, *Caṅkam* corpus (C1) where *miḷaku* makes some rare appearances; the word *marīci* is unattested even when exploring the totality of C1 upto C3as represented in fig. 5, and it is only on basis of its occurrence in Ti-758 that the MTL attribute to it the meaning of “pepper”, postulating that it is a variant form of *maricam*, which is the Tamil-adapted form of SKT *maricam* (“pepper”). To this we can add that the successor of the *Tivākaram*, which is called *Piṅkalam* and which has twice its length, contains a longer list, in which *marīci* is also present, along with *kari*, but which has five additional designations. The *Piṅkalam* verse reads thus:

(15) *kari-y-u marīci-y-uṅ kāyam-uṅ kaliṇai-y-uṅ // kōlakam-un tiraṅkal-u miriyal-u miḷak-ē*. (Piṅkalam, verse 2936) : “[The words] *kari*, *marīci*, *kāyam*, *kaliṇai*, *kōlakam*, *tiraṅkal* et *miriyal* [signify the same as] *miḷaku* (pepper)”. Nominal sentence in which the subject is the coordination of 7 terms (which all are marked by the coordinative clitic particle -um) and the predicate is a single term (7 items under *miḷaku*)

It is of course very difficult to decide how effective the injunction given to Tamil students by the composer of the *Piṅkalam* was. I have already stated that as far as *marīci* is concerned,

54. Because of sandhi, the overshort “u” which is at the end of *miḷaku* is elided in front of the initial vowel of the particle *eṇa*.

the injunction left no trace in what has been preserved of ancient Tamil literature. Regarding the five others, an exploration of the VMTIP and of the MTL reveals that:

- VI. *kāyam* is found in the *Civakacintāmaṇi*, a medieval composition;
- VII. *kalinai* is not attested (except in thesauri);
- VIII. *kōlakam* is not attested (except in thesauri);
- IX. *tiraṅkal* is not attested (except in thesauri);
- X. *miriyal* is not attested (except in thesauri);

Such a result might indicate that the inclusion of all these words in a memorized text was not necessarily meant to encourage their use, but may have simply tended to harmonize the Tamil encyclopedic knowledge-base with the knowledge-bases for other Indian languages at that time. It may also mean that the thesauri sometimes played the role which would be played in modern times by a bilingual (Tamil-Sanskrit) dictionary. Only a precise comparison with the thesauri available for other languages, such as Sanskrit, Kannada, various Prakrits etc. might bring more light. But I shall not pursue this track and shall leave the question open, in the hope that others, knowledgeable in those languages, might bring more light some day.

#### IX. NUMBER-CODED INFORMATION INSIDE TAMIL THESAURI: *KARĪ* “PEPPER” INSIDE A TOP-FIVE LIST OF IMPORTANT MOUNTAIN TREASURES

As we have seen briefly in the preceding section, Tamil thesauri provide information to their students on quasi-synonyms. Approximately speaking, this information occupies 70 % of their volume. In addition to that, they also provide, in other sections, information concerning difficult polysemic items, and this takes roughly 20 % of their volume<sup>55</sup>. Finally, they also contain a third type of information, less familiar to the users of Western dictionaries, which we can briefly characterize as number-based mnemotechnics. In that third component, which occupies approximately 10 % of their volume, lists of elements are associated with numbers. More precisely, a general notion, of which the elements of the list are instances, is associated with the total count of elements in the list, and can even sometimes stand for it<sup>56</sup>. This being rather abstract, I shall now give an example, extracted from the third chapter in the *Piṅkalam*. In that chapter, which contains 135 verses, we have, in 89<sup>th</sup> position, inside a series of 23 verses dedicated to collections of five items, the following verse:

55. See Chevillard 2019b for more details.

56. As an example, because there is a canonical list of three fires, the word “fire” can sometimes be used a substitute for “three”. This is seen in chronograms.

(16) *akil-kaṛi kōṭṭa moṭu-tak kōḷaṇ // kuṇkuma m-aintu malai-paṭu tiraviyam*: «*akil* (“eagle-wood”<sup>57</sup>); *kaṛi* (“pepper”); *kōṭṭam* (“Putchock”<sup>58</sup>); *takkōlam* (“cubeb pepper”<sup>59</sup>); *kuṇkumam* (“safron”): these are the substances appearing in the mountain (*malai*) » (*Piṅkalam* 401)

However, a precise interpretation of this verse is difficult, as can be seen from the footnotes attached to some of the items. A possible explanation for the interpretation problems is that this verse represents partly a pan-indian form of knowledge, useful for standardized descriptions of “luxury”. We have already met, in citation (13), with an illustration of what “luxury” means, in the mountain context. We shall meet in the coming section, in citation (18), with another illustration (in the *Tēvāram*) of that same phenomenon<sup>60</sup>. In order to plunge my reader in an even greater perplexity (concerning the problem of realism), I shall now conclude this section by providing in tabular form the content of the group of five verses, of which *Piṅkalam* 401 is the concluding one. The five by five chart is as follows:

**Table 5: Five by Five substances in *Piṅkalam* 397-401 (with anomalous city)**

Substances	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Forest</b> ( <i>kāṇ-paṭu tiraviyam</i> )	arakku “Lac, sealing-wax”	iṇāl “honey-comb”	tēṇ “honey”	mayiṇ-pili “peacock feathers”	nāvi “musk”
<b>Sea</b> ( <i>kaṭal-paṭu tiraviyam</i> )	pavaḷam “coral”	muttu “pearl”	caṅku “conch” (bracelet)	okkōlai “ambre gris”	uppu “salt”
<b>Country (Fields)</b> ( <i>nāṭu-paṭu tiraviyam</i> )	cen-nel “paddy(rice)”	cevvilāṇiṇ “coconut water”	ciṇu-payaru “green gram”	karumpu “sugar cane”	vālai “banana”
<b>Cities</b> ( <i>nakar-paṭu tiraviyam</i> )	kaṇṇāṭi “mirror”	pittaṇ “madman” (Śiva ?)	karuṇkurāṇku “black monkey”	yāṇai “elephant”	vēntaṇ “king”
<b>Mountains</b> ( <i>malai-paṭu tiraviyam</i> )	akil “eagle-wood” (fragrant smoke)	കുറ്റി [KAB] “pepper”	kōṭṭam “putchock” (fragrant root)	takkōlam “cubeb pepper”	kuṇkumam “safron”

57. *Akil* is found 18 times in the R1 core of Tamil Literature (*Eṭṭut Tokai* and *Pattup Pāṭṭu*). It is a resinous substance, coming from a tree and burnt for producing a fragrant smoke.

58. Fragrant costus-root.

59. This is not the only available interpretation for *takkōlam*. The MTL enumerates five possible meanings: 1. cubeb (normally called *vāl-miḷaku*); 2. Betel-leaf and areca-nut (normally referred to jointly as *tāmpūlam*); 3. Ruddy black plum (*ciṇu-nāval*); 4. Jaman-plum (*nāval*); 5. Long pepper (normally called *tippili*). However, in the chronology of Tamil literature, *takkōlam* is attested for the first time in a work which belongs to ring R2, namely the *Nāḷaṭiyar* (verse 43), where the meaning is thought to be the MTL second meaning (“Betel-leaf and areca-nut”), which is not a produce of the mountain. This may be the reason why some Tamil scholars think that *Piṅkalam* 401 refers to “Cubeb pepper”, although it is not clear when Cubeb pepper started to be cultivated in India – this is currently the case in Kerala, in the Idukki area – and whether it may have grown natively in India in ancient times.

60. Another such occurrence, in the Caṅkam literature, was alluded to when I evoked, inside section 6, the description of the flood of the river Vaikai in *Paripāṭal* 16-2.



As already announced<sup>61</sup>, this is another way of going from four to five. The list for the city is however partly enigmatic for me. I reproduce it here as it is, hoping to receive suggestions for an elucidation.

## X. PEPPER IN THE TĒVĀRAM: CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION

We now leave scholarly literature and return to ordinary literature, although of a different kind. The corpus which we shall briefly examine is a collection of devotional hymns, referred to nowadays as *Tēvāram* and composed in honour of the God Śiva by three authors. Chronologically, it belongs to the C2b ring inside fig. 5 and its 8,272 four-line stanzas contain 7 occurrences of *karī*, along with 5 occurrences of *miḷaku*. The precise coordinates are provided inside Table 6, below.

**Table 6: *karī* & *miḷaku* inside the *Tēvāram***

Tēvāram	<i>karī</i>	<i>miḷaku</i>	Stanzas	Lines	(a)	(β)	(γ)
Campantar			4,169	16,676	1-39_6, 3-26_10	1-102_6, 3-89_2, 3-91_4	
Appar			3,066	12,264			6-3_8
Cuntarar			1,037	4,148		7-3_2, 7-74_4	7-46_10
TOTAL	7	5	8,272	33,088			

From this chart, I shall extract several citations. Some, such as (17), below, illustrate a kind of stylistic continuity, by making use of a formula such as *karīvaḷar kunram*, which echoes the *karīvaḷar aṭukkattu* of (7), (8) and (9), although the general purpose is of course different.

(17) *karīvaḷar kunram eṭuttavaṇ kātal kaṇkavar aiṇkaṇaiyōṇ uḷalam, porīvaḷar āṛ alal uṇṇa*: “the big fire with growing sparks to consume the body of the Cupid who has five arrows and has a form captivating the eyes and who is the dear son of that one who lifted **the hill on which pepper-creeper was growing**.”<sup>62</sup> (*Tēvāram*, 1-39, stanza 6) (VMS translation, from *Digital Tēvāram*)

Others illustrate the precious substance catalogue feature, incorporated in the description of the flood of a “fertile” river, which is nearby a Śiva temple, as is the case in (18) below, which is extracted from a hymn on Cīrkālī, in the Cōḷa country:

61. See footnote 15.

62. This passage from Campantar’s *Tēvāram* contains references to two purāṇic stories: (A) the burning of the God of Love (alias Kāmaṇ) by the frontal eye of Śiva; (B) the lifting of mount Govardhana by Viṣṇu. The two episodes are then connected by the statement of the fact that Kāmaṇ is the son of Viṣṇu.

(18) *ēlam āṛ-ilavamōṭu\* iṇa-malar-t-tokuti-y-āy eṇkum nunti, // kōla mā miḷakoṭu koḷuṇ-kaṇi konṛai-y-um koṇṭu, kōṭṭāṛu*: “[Kāviri] river of high bank, pushing forth everywhere the collections of various kinds of flower, red-flowered silk cotton trees and cardamoms, taking **colourful pepper creepers**, plumpy fruits and Indian laburnum trees.” (*Tēvāram*, 3-89, stanza 2, lines 1-2) (VMS translation, from *Digital Tēvāram*)

The innovation here, if we compare with *Paripāṭal* 16-2, where it was the Madurai river Vaikai which was evoked, is that the word used for pepper is not *kaṛi*, but *miḷaku*, combined with two specifiers, namely *kōla* (*m*) (“beautiful”) and *mā* (“big”). Among those two, the first one seems to be decorative, but the second one could have been used for pointing to a particular subspecies called “big pepper”, although I can certainly not verify that fact. The same phenomenon occurs in two more *Tēvāram* examples, reproduced below in (19) and in (20). However, in both those examples, a new specifier, namely *kaṛiyum*, precedes *mā* as second specifier and *miḷakoṭu* as head-noun in the sociative case. An interesting phenomenon, which will occupy us in the next section, is the fact that the resulting identical noun phrase, namely *kaṛiyu* (*m*) *mā miḷakoṭu*, receives two divergent translations from the learned translator, V.M. Subramanya Ayyar (VMS), whose English rendering of the *Tēvāram* was posthumously published in the *Digital Tēvāram* CD (see Bibliography). Those two divergent translations, between which he, as well as other scholars, must have hesitated are as follows:

(19) *kaṛiyum mā-miḷakoṭu kataliyiṇ palaṇkaḷum kalantu nunti* : “pushing forward, mingling plaintain fruits along with black pepper which is eaten by biting.” (*Tēv.* 3-91, stanza 4) (VMS translation, from *Digital Tēvāram*)

(20) *kaṛiyum mā-miḷakoṭukataliyum unti* : “pushing the plaintain trees and big pepper creepers which have a pungent taste” (*Tēv.* 7-74, stanza 4) (VMS translation, from *Digital Tēvāram*)

In order to understand how such a discrepancy is possible, the reader must of course be provided with additional information. I shall first of all remark that those two verse fragments are organized alliteratively, which is why I have signalled the syllable “ka” five times by the means of boldface, in order to show that fragment (19) contains three segments with initial alliteration whereas fragment (20) contains two such segments. In both fragments, the initial segment is the same, namely *kaṛiyum mā-miḷakoṭu*, which is a noun-phase, and can be analysed more in detail as the combination of:

- III1. the relative participle *kaṛiyum*, which is a left-specifier to the head of the noun-phrase;
- III2. the adjective *mā* (“big”);
- III3. the noun *miḷaku* (“pepper, pepper creeper”) which is the head of the noun-phrase and stands here in the sociative case form *miḷakoṭu* (“along with the pepper”).

In both fragments, the noun-phrase is in initial rhyme with another noun-phrase starting by the word *katali*, which refers to a variety of banana (alias “plantain”), and the two *realia* (pepper and plantain) are described as being carried away by the flooding

river. The visible difference between the translation of the two fragments by VMS lies in the fact that:

- *kariyum* is translated by VMS in (19) as “which is eaten by biting”;
- *kariyum* is translated by VMS in (20) as “which have a pungent taste”.

## XI. EXAMINING THE VALUES OF A VERB WHOSE ROOT IS KARI- AND TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE TASTE OF PEPPER IS

**கறி<sup>1</sup>-த்தல்** kari-, 11 v. tr. [T. karacū.]  
To chew; to eat by biting or nibbling, as biscuits, grass; கடித்துத் தின்னுதல். அரிமா கொடிப் புழ் கறிக்குமோ (நாலடி, 141).  
**கறி<sup>2</sup>-த்தல்** kari-, 11 v. intr. cf. கார்-. See கரி<sup>1</sup>-, 1.  
**கறி<sup>3</sup>** kari, n. <கறி<sup>1</sup>-. [K. M. kari.] 1. Chewing, eating by biting; கடித்துத் தின்னுகை. மான்கறித்தற் கூழைமெளவல் (சீவக. 485). 2. Vegetables, raw or boiled; மரக்கறி. 3. Meat, raw or boiled; இறைச்சி. கறிசோ றுண்டு (புறநா. 14, 14). 4. Pepper. See மிளகு. கறிவளர் பூஞ்சாரல் (திணை மாலை. 7).  
**கறி<sup>4</sup>** kari, n. <U. ghari. cf. ghaṭikā. Measure of time = 24 minutes; ஒரு நாழிகை.

Fig. 6: The four distinct *kari* entries on p. 825 of the MTL.

**கறிப்பான் (11வி)** கடித்தற்கு: “கொடிப் புல்லென்று கறிப்பான் நாவிற் குலவி வளைக்க” (சீவ:4:82).  
**கறிப்பு (பெ)** உவர்ப்பு: “கறிப்பு அறியா மிகும் கல்வி கற்றேனே” (மூல:290).  
**கறியும் (11வி)** உறைக்கும்: “கறியும் மா மிளகொடு” (சம்:3:91:4).  
**கறிஇ (11வி)** கடித்து: “கொடி விடு குருதித் தூங்கு குடர் கறிஇ” (அக:337:14).

Fig. 7: Four entries on p. 652 of the VMTIP.

Therefore we should expect a relative participle of the form *karikkum* instead of the form *kariyum* seen in (19). This fact is duly noted by some traditional commentators of the *Tēvāram*, who explain it away as a poetical licence. Returning now to the question of understanding the discrepancy between (19) and (20), I shall now remark that the more specialised VMTIP glossary, which was discussed by us in section 7 (see fig. 5), differs from VMS concerning the interpretation which is to be given for example (19). We know that, because it so happens, that the form *kariyum* is explained on page 652 of the VMTIP precisely on the basis of its occurrence in *Tēvāram* 3-91 (stanza 4).

The reader probably wonders at this stage whether the form *kariyum* seen in (19) and in (20) is related to the word *kari* (“pepper”) which we have been tracing in ancient Tamil literature for the greater part of this article. A preliminary short non-answer is that the focus of our investigations until now has been what a cursory look at page 825 inside the *Madras Tamil Lexicon* (MTL, see fig. 6) would characterize as “meaning 4 inside entry *kari*<sup>3</sup>”, or more precisely கறி<sup>3</sup>. That entry *kari*<sup>3</sup> is a noun, with more than one meaning enumerated, but the MTL also contains two verbs having *kari*- as a root, namely *kari*<sup>1</sup> and *kari*<sup>2</sup>. We can see on fig. 6 that the translation given by VMS for citation 19 is in conformity with the meaning given for the verb *kari*<sup>1</sup>. There is however a slight difficulty because the MTL entry tells us that the verb belongs to the 11<sup>th</sup> class and there-

I should add at this stage that VMTIP is a glossary, and not a dictionary. This means that it provides its readers with information on word-forms, without committing itself to telling them under which lemma those word-forms fall. If we examine for instance the fragment from the VMTIP provided inside fig. 7, we see that it contains four entries, in Tamil script, the head-words of which can be transliterated as *karippān*, *karippu*, *karīyum* and *karīi*. A complete transliteration of the second entry is provided here below in 21, and reads:

(21) *karīyum* (11 vi) *uraikkum*: “*karīyum mā miḷakoṭu*” (cam:3:91:4)

That entry gives us a meaning/gloss, *uraikkum*, expressed in Modern Formal Tamil, and a citation, given as a textual authority for that meaning, which turns out to be our citation (19). Cutting short what would be a long explanation – because the verb *urai-ttal*, used in the gloss in its relative participle form *uraikkum*, possesses 13 distinct meanings in the MTL (p. 486) – I can reveal that the meaning provided by the VMTIP for *karīyum* in (19) seems to be identical with the meaning seen in (20), namely “to be pungent”, which we could probably further clarify by equating it with “to have a biting taste”, although that may not be the precise etymology of “pungent” from the point of view of a Latin specialist. Given the fact that VMS himself was part of the team of scholars who compiled the VMTIP in the 1950s, we can see his hesitation, in (19) and (20), between two possible translations for *karīyum mā-miḷakoṭu* as typical of what happens when scholars want to live simultaneously with two distinct stages in the history of a language. It should also be seen as a symptom of the fact that the study of Classical Tamil is still very much a work in progress, especially if we realize that the VMTIP was published as recently as 2003.

As part of that “work in progress”, one can for instance ask whether it is possible for a scholar who makes only use of the MTL to obtain the translation “which have a pungent taste”, provided by VMS for the word *karīyum* in 20. This is now the time to remember that fig. 6 contains a second verb *kari-ttal*, namely *kari*<sup>2</sup>. There is however a slight difficulty consisting in the fact that the entry *kari*<sup>2</sup> does not contain any English translation, but only pointers towards at least two other entries, namely “கார்-” and “கரி<sup>4</sup>-, 1.”. Following those pointers can be a trying experience, as seen in (22) and (23), below:

(22) கார்<sup>3</sup>-த்தல் *kār-*, 11 v. intr. cf. *kṣāra*. 1. To be pungent, acrid, hot to the taste; உறைத்தல். (பிங்.) 2. To be very saltish or brackish; உப்புக்கறித்தல். (W.) (MTL, p. 879)

(23) கரி<sup>4</sup>-த்தல் *kari* -, 11 v. cf. கார்-. intr. 1. To be saltish to the taste; உப்புச்சுவைமிகுதல். இந்தக்கறிஉப்புக்கரிக் கிறது. 2. To smart, as the eyes from oil or soap or chilly; உறுத்துதல். எண்ணெயாற்கண்கரிக் கிறது. 3. To feel an irritating sensation in the throat due to acidity of the stomach; அசீரணமுதலியவற்றால்கண்டத்தில் உறுத்துதல். உண்டசோறுநெஞ்சிற்கரிக் கிறது. – tr. 1. To nag, worry; to blacken; குற்றங்கண்டுகுறைகூறுதல். என்பெண்ணைக்கரிக் கிறாள். 2. To shun, despise; வெறுத்தல். கரித்துநின்றான்கருதாதவர்சிந்தை (திருமந். 2431). (MTL, p. 746)

What we see here, which we would also see if we tried to explore the Tamil semantic graph, starting at *urai-ttal*, is the fact that it was probably not so easy, at some stage, to distinguish, using words, between the taste of salt and the taste of pepper, since several words seem to be compatible with both. I must however leave the still incomplete exploration of this branch at this stage, because other explorations are still awaiting us, concerning the noun *kari*<sup>3</sup>, of which we have thoroughly explored only the fourth meaning, namely “pepper”. Before trying to do justice to its other meanings, I shall simply remark, as an additional sign of inconclusiveness for this section, that many modern dialects of Tamil have lost the distinction between the two R-s, namely “r̥” (ற) and “r” (ர), which are seen in the transliterations of *kari-ttal* and *kari-ttal*. How far back in time the merger goes is very difficult to say. We won’t be able to come back to this topic, which would take us too far.

## XII. COOKING AND THE OTHER MEANINGS OF KARI<sup>3</sup>: FLESH/MEAT AND VARIOUS TYPES OF FOOD

கறி பெ. 1: மாமிசம்; இறைச்சி; (raw or cooked) meat. ஆட்டுக் கறி கிலோ என்ன விலை?/ தோசைக்குக் கறிக் குழம்பு 2: (ஏதேனும் ஒரு காய்கறியை அல்லது இறைச்சியைத் துண்டுதுண்டாக நறுக்கி வேகவைத்துச் செய்யப்படும்) கொழு கொழப்புள்ள அல்லது கெட்டியான உணவுப் பண்டம்; a liquid or solid side dish (prepared with pieces of one vegetable or meat); curry. முட்டைக்கோஸ் கறி/ மீன் கறி 3: (வ.வ.) குழம்பு; any sauce used for mixing with cooked rice. புளி இல்லாத கறி வைத்திருக்கிறேன். 4: (அ.வ.) (இரத்தச் சிவப்புடன் காணப்படும்) சதை; (bloody, raw) flesh. மாட்டை அடித்த அடியில் கறி பிடிந்து தொங்குகிறது.

Fig. 8: *kari* in the Cre-A dictionary.

We must now tackle even more difficult questions, also falling under the general topic of language change. When we started to explore the uses of the word *kari* in the ancient corpus which I have sometimes referred to as C1 (see fig. 5), I indicated that the meaning of “pepper” which we found for all the 26 occurrences of *kari*, with one possible exception, was not at all the meaning known to speakers of Modern Tamil. The MTL being the conflated result of the exploration of many stages of the language (see fig. 5), the entry for *kari* which is found inside the

MTL can be expected to reflect both Modern Tamil and Ancient Tamil. I reproduce it here below, in (24), although it has already been provided to the readers as part of fig. 6. That entry can be usefully compared with the content of fig. 8, which is the equivalent entry inside the Cre-A dictionary, a dictionary which deals exclusively with Modern Formal Tamil.

(24) கறி<sup>3</sup> *kari*, n. <கறி<sup>1</sup>-. [K. M. *kari*.] 1. Chewing, eating by biting; கடித்துத்தின்னுகை. மான்கறிகற்றுகூழைமௌவல் (சீவக. 485). 2. Vegetables, raw or boiled; மரக்கறி. 3. Meat, raw



or boiled; இறைச்சி. கறிசோறுண்டு (புறநா. 14, 14). 4. Pepper. See மிளகு. கறிவளர்பூஞ்சாரல் (திணைமாலை. 7). (MTL, p. 825)

I shall first remark that three of the four meanings given for *kaṛi*<sup>3</sup> inside 24 are based on the authority of citations taken from ancient Tamil literature. Surprisingly, the citation given for the meaning “pepper” is from a work which does not belong to the ancient core C1, but only to what is referred to by me as C2a inside fig. 5. On the other hand, the third meaning “Meat, raw or boiled; இறைச்சி [*iraicci*]” is given on the basis of a truncated citation from a poem belonging to C1, namely *Puṛam* 14-14. A more complete citation would be:

(25) *ūṇ-ruvai // kaṛi-cōru unṭu varuntu toḷil allatu // piritu toḷil ariyā* : “[the hands] which do not know any work except the distressing work of eating [a combination of] meat [*ūṇ*], *tuvai*, *kaṛi* and rice” [skeleton translation] (*Puṛam* 14, lines 13-15).

This ironical self-deprecating statement is uttered by the poet Kapilar, who after praising the strong hands of the king says that that his own hands are soft because they do not have any hard work to perform, except eating. I have left two words untranslated here, in this “preliminary translation”, because the term *tuvai*, which occurs five times inside *Puṛam*, is not precisely understood nowadays, and because the term *kaṛi* is the center of our discussion. However, the general meaning is clear, and the direct object of the verbal participle *unṭu* (“eating”) is clearly a rich food item, consisting of four ingredients. As we have seen, in (24), through the MTL extract, some commentators think that *kaṛi* in *Puṛam* 14-14 means “meat”. However, this is not a universally accepted opinion<sup>63</sup>, as shown by the 1962 *Index of Puṛanāṇūru*, published in 1962 by V. I. Subramoniam. In that index, the three occurrences of *kaṛi* in the *Puṛam* which we have already examined in section 6, are said to have the following values, expressed first in English, and then in Modern Tamil:

- “dish” (*kaṛi*), in *Puṛam* 14-14;
- “pepper creeper” (*miḷakuk koṭi*), in *Puṛam* 168-2;
- “pepper” (*miḷaku*), in *Puṛam* 343-3;

Noting the interesting equivalence postulated between English “dish” and Modern Tamil *kaṛi*, which are both mobilized by V. I. Subramoniam for elucidating the meaning of Classical Tamil *kaṛi* (Subramoniam 1962), I shall now pursue further this topic of discussion on the basis of another text, namely the *Tēvāram*, that collection of hymns to Śiva, which was discussed inside section 10. I shall again, as I did in the case of (19) and (20), and as we have just done concerning *Puṛam* 14-14, take as a basis of observation

63. The stronger argument for saying that *kaṛi* does not mean “meat” in *Puṛam* 14-14, is the fact that it would be redundant with *ūṇ*, which itself means “meat, flesh”.

a case of hesitation, by comparing the translation of two parallel passages by VMS. Those two passages, pertaining to the topic of cooking, are given below in 26 and 27:

(26) *kari-viravu ney-cōru mu-p-pōtum vēṇṭum*: “I must get thrice in a day food, **curry** and rice, and ghee to be mixed with these two.” (*Tēvāram*, 7-46, stanza 10) (VMS translation, from *Digital Tēvāram*)

(27) *kari-viravu ney-cōru kaiyil uṇṭu* : “eating from the hands the rice which was mixed with **vegetables** and ghee.” (*Tēvāram*, 6-3, stanza 8) (VMS translation, from *Digital Tēvāram*)

The noun-phrase *kari-viravu ney-cōru* is found identically in both stanzas, but the translation is slightly different, because VMS renders *kari* in English by “curry” in (28) and by “vegetables” in (29). The reason for the difference is probably the fact that (29) is taken from a hymn by Appar, who evokes the time when he was a jain, before reconverting to shaivism. Everybody knows of course that jains are very strict vegetarians. The example (26) is extracted from a hymn by Cuntarar, who was never jain. It is therefore possible for VMS to be ambiguous and to use a term like “curry”, which is neutral with respect to vegetarianism and concerning which I shall say more in the following final section.

It should be apparent that we have now moved from an examination of monolingual Tamil sources, to an exploration of mixed-language sources, in which use is made of one “anglo-indian” term, namely the international culinary term “curry”, which is found in (26), and which seems to be what V. I. Subramoniam has in mind, when he posits as equivalent “dish” and *kari*. The history of the term “curry” is rather well documented in the well-known *Hobson-Jobson*, “A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words [...]”, compiled by Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They seem to think that the term “curry” was adopted into English on the basis of Portuguese *caril*, or more precisely from its plural *caris*, as can be inferred from some of their remarks inside the entry CURRY, from which the following excerpts are taken.

(28) [...] there is hardly room for doubt that *capsicum* or red pepper (see CHILLY) was introduced into India by the Portuguese (see *Hanbury and Flückiger*, 407); and this spice constitutes the most important ingredient in modern curries. The Sanskrit books of cookery, which cannot be of any considerable antiquity, contain many recipes for curry without this ingredient. A recipe for curry (*caril*) is given, according to Bluteau, in the Portuguese *Arte de Cozinha*, p. 101. This must be of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

It should be added that *kari* was, among the people of South India, the name of only one form of “kitchen” for rice, viz. of that in the consistency resembling broth, as several of the earlier quotations indicate. European have applied it to all the savoury concoctions of analogous spicy character eaten with rice [...]

1598. – “Most of their fish is eaten with rice, which they seeth in broth, which they put upon the rice, and is somewhat soure, as if it were sodden in gooseberries, or unripe grapes, but it tasteth well, and is called Carriel [v.l. Carriil], which is their daily meat.” – Lindschoten, 88; [Hak. Soc. ii. 1]. This is a good description of the ordinary tamarind curry of S. India.

1606. – “Their ordinary food is boiled rice with many varieties of certain soups which they pour upon it, and which in those parts are commonly called **caril**.” – *Gouvea*, 61*b*.

[...]

1681. – “Most sorts of these delicious Fruits they gather before they be ripe, and boil them to make **Carrees**, to use the Portuguese word, that is somewhat to eat with and relish their Rice.” – *Knox*, p. 12. This perhaps indicates that the English curry is formed from the Port. *caris*, plural of *caril*. [...] (Yule & Burnell, Hobson-Jobson, 1994, entry CURRY, pp. 281-283)

### XIII. IN GUISE OF A CONCLUSION: COOKING; FROM *KARI* TO “CURRY”, VIA *CARIL* AND *CARIS*; OR HOW AN UNTRANSLATABLE TAMIL ITEM CONQUERED THE WORD

I am now left with the difficult task of concluding a long chronological journey, through the lives of a language, of a literature and of a scholarly community, all three being located in the country, or countries, whose maps have been provided in sections 1 and 2. This linguistic journey has been mostly based on monolingual Tamil sources, although my narration was performed in English, which of course entailed coping with the difficulty inherent in the task of translating. However, from the 10<sup>th</sup> section onwards, we have also sometimes been discussing local sources partly composed a variety of English, in which the international word “curry” is present, and that somehow changes the nature of the exploration, because, on the one hand, if we consider only the phonetic form, and forget temporarily the meaning, the word “curry” is not a “translation” of *kari*, but a change of spelling, which is essentially not different from what is seen when the name of the Tamil city of Kaṭalūr is written with the English spelling “Cuddalore”, or when a Sanskrit paṇḍitaḥ is called a “pundit”. On the other hand, when the word *kari*, spelt “curry”, is borrowed by the speakers of other languages, because it is considered as “untranslatable”,

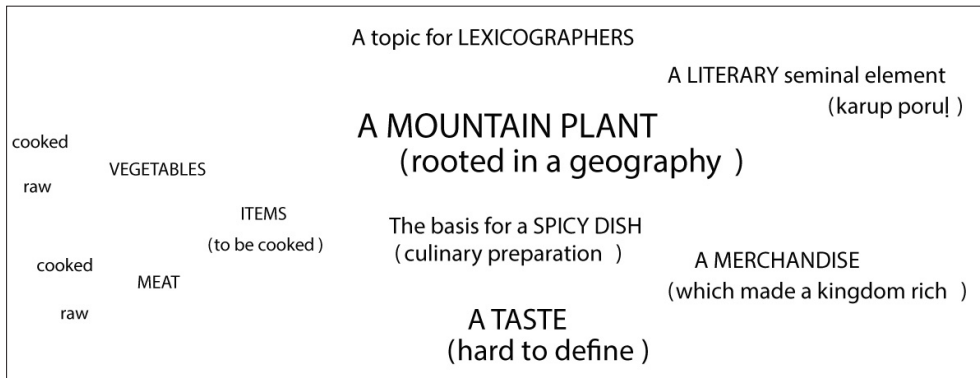


Fig. 9: The semantic graph for *kari*.

it retains a part of its original set of meanings, but is bound to see new meanings appear, which could not have been predicted by the original users, in the source language, who could not have imagined the future popularity of the “Curry Wurst” in Germany.

I shall, in this final section, briefly explore further the topic of cooking, trying to find out how far back in time the “curry” meaning of the word *kari* is attested, in order to render more precise the semantic graph (see fig. 9) which I have tried to build while writing this article. We shall now visit the first bilingual “dictionary” involving Tamil, which was prepared by Portuguese missionaries, as a consequence of their encounters with the Tamil-speaking world, which started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Their efforts resulted, among other things, in the printing in 1679 of the *Vocabulario Tamulico, Com a Significação Portuguesa* (VTCSP), compiled in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Antam de Proença (1625-1666) and printed posthumously in Ambalacatta (now in Kerala) by his colleagues. That *Vocabulario* contains an entry which reads:

(29) கறரி [kari]. Iguaria<sup>64</sup>, caril. (VTCSP, entry 269\_L\_e)<sup>65</sup>.

To this, we must add that, from the point of view of the 1679 VTCSP, the Tamil word for “pepper” is *milaku*, as attested by the following entry:

(30) மிலாகு [milaku]. Pimenta. (VTCSP, entry 132\_L\_i)

Concentrating however on *kari*, I shall now briefly present the results of a search for the word-forms *caril* and *caris*, inside an incomplete electronic text of the VTCSP<sup>66</sup>. On a total of 12,700 entries currently available, 23 entries, including citation 29, contain *caril* or its plural *caris*. Among the remaining 22:

- 5 are the names of vegetables which are used in the preparations of specific curries<sup>67</sup>;
- 4 are more general designations, referring to categories of curry<sup>68</sup>;
- 4 refer to techniques or ingredients pertaining to seasoning<sup>69</sup>;

64. The item *iguaria* which appears in the Proença’s Portuguese gloss translates as “delicacy, titbit” in a Modern Portuguese-English dictionary, whereas *caril* is explained as “curry”, with the example *caril de galinha* explained as “Chicken curry”. We are far from the time evoked by Yule and Burnell in the Hobson-Jobson.

65. A facsimile edition of the VTCSP was printed in 1966 by Thani Nayagam. I am currently in the process of preparing an electronic edition of the VTCSP (this falls under the general label “Digital Humanities”). The coordinates given here refer a coordinate system defined by me and explained in Chevillard 2017. See there for more technical details.

66. The current coverage is 78 %.

67. See entries 4\_L\_d, 140\_L\_o, 161\_R\_p, 209\_R\_l, 237\_L\_l. For example, entry 237\_L\_l reads: “பீழைகங்கு ய. *Huma fruita pera caril rodonda, como bugalhos*.”

68. See entries 82\_L\_g (*ilaik kari*), 185\_R\_b (*paccati*), 240\_R\_M. (*poriccal*) and 248\_R\_M. (*puriñca kari*). As an example, entry 82\_L\_g covers all vegetable curries, in the following manner: “இலைககறி. Verzas, hortaliça, // em quanto cõpreheende todas // as eruas, que se comem.”

69. See 219\_R\_e, 351\_L\_l, 351\_L\_o and 351\_R\_a.

- 3 are the names of tools used for grinding spices and other food items<sup>70</sup>;
- 5 are the citation form of verbs pertaining to some stage in cooking, and handling food, and one of them (41\_L\_f) mentions the possible use of “meat, fish, herbs or vegetables” (*carne, peixe, eruas, legumes*)<sup>71</sup>.

This shows that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the situation was not very different from what is attested by the Cre-A dictionary for the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and also resembles the situation at an earlier stage, as evidenced by the citations (25), (26) and (27), discussed in section 11. It would be possible to continue this examination by visiting again the Tamil thesauri which were presented in sections 8 and 9, and more precisely from their thematic sections which deal with cooking. We could certainly find there arguments for establishing that even at the time when those thesauri were composed, the meaning which is nowadays expressed in English by the word “curry” already existed. However, such an exploration would take us too far and it is now time to conclude, although many questions remain. The simplest way of concluding seems to be to try to put together in a sort of semantic graph (see fig. 9) all the factual kernels which have been visited in the various sections of this article. As a final remark, I shall mention a track which could have been followed, if more time or more competence had been available, namely the occurrences of *kaṛi* and *miḷaku* in Tamil inscriptions<sup>72</sup>. I am sure that the task will be usefully performed in the future.

### Abbreviations

AN: Akanāṇūru

KT: Kuṟuntokai

NT: Naṟṟiṇai (sandhi form of Nal Tiṇai)

Pi: Piṅkalam (second most ancient thesaurus)

T: Tolkāppiyam (a treatise on grammar & poetics)

TC: Collatikāram (2<sup>nd</sup> book of T)

TE: Eḷuttatikāram (1<sup>st</sup> book of T)

Ti: Tivākaram (most ancient thesaurus)

TP: Poruḷatikāram (3<sup>rd</sup> book of T)

VMS: V. M. Subramanya Ayyar

VMTIP: Varalāṟu Muṟait Tamiḷ Ilakkiyap Pērakarāṭi

VTCS : Vocabulário Tamulico Com a Significação Portuguesa

70. See 16\_L\_M. (*ammi*), 309\_L\_p (*kuḷavi*) and 310\_L\_p (*kuḷavi*).

71. The entries are 40\_R\_g (*aviccup pōtukiratu*), 41\_L\_f (*avikkiratu*), 322\_R\_k (*kūṭṭukiratu*), 323\_L\_b (*kūṭṭuvikkiratu*) and 395\_R\_a (*uraṇṭukiratu*).

72. A starting point would be the 10 entries starting with *kaṛi* on p. 164-165 and the 6 entries starting with *miḷaku* on p. 499 of the *Tamiḷ Kalveṭṭuc Collakarāṭi* compiled by Y. Subbarayalu and published in 2002 by the Santi Sadhana trust (Chennai). Poets knew of course that the pepper trade had made the Cēra kingdom rich. Otherwise they would not have mentioned it in what is our citation (2b).

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