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**The Transforming Science:
Some Remarks on the Medico-Alchemical Teachings in Selected Works
of Siddha Yākōpu, with Special Reference to the *Kuru Nūl Aimpattaintu****

SUMMARY: The paper explores the concept of variously conceived transformations associated with figurative transcendence of manifold limitations, referred to in medico-alchemical Tamil Siddha literature. The research has been based on the study of selected texts of Yākōpu alias Irāmatēvar, one of prominent Tamil Siddha authors dated to 17th–18th centuries. Special reference has been made to the *Kuru Nūl Aimpattaintu* (“Fifty-five [Verses] of the Book on the Excellence”), considered by its author as a book containing some essential teachings of his science. The transformations referred to in the text concern both the domains of the human body, and the non-biological matter, being the object of alchemical operations of the Siddha adept. Such transforming science taught by Yākōpu is based on the action of certain substances credited with extraordinary potency.

KEYWORDS: Tamil Siddha literature, Tamil Siddha medicine, alchemy, Irāmatēvar, Yākōpu, transformation

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The aim of this paper is to investigate the theme of variously imaged transformations, associated with the concept of metaphorical surpassing of diverse natural limitations, and related to the actions of certain material substances of extraordinary character, found in the medico-alchemical teachings of Siddha Yākōpu alias Irāmatēvar, i.e. one of the prominent authors of Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature.¹ According to modern scholars, the Siddha lived probably around the 17th–18th centuries.² His medico-alchemical books, usually in the form of practical manuals composed in verses, contain recipes for various preparations, which are still highly revered among contemporary Tamil Siddha practitioners.³ According to the autobiographical accounts scattered in his texts, Yākōpu was born to the lineage of warriors called “Maṛavar”⁴ and initially lived in South-East India.⁵ The author introduces himself as a person originally called “Irāmatēvar” in several passages found in his various texts (i.a. CuṅKāṅ 79, CuṅKāṅ 466, VaitCin 6). It is further reported in his works that at a certain point of his life Irāmatēvar travelled to Mecca in search of alchemical knowledge. The Siddha relates:

¹ Yākōpu is credited with at least seventeen works, the list of which is provided by the general editor of his texts, Ji. Irāmacāmik Kōṅ (see Kuppucāmi Nāyutu and Irāmacāmik Kōṅ 1960: 2). Moreover, apart from the texts composed under the name “Yākōpu”, the same figure may be credited with several works authored under his original name, i.e. Irāmatēvar, for example *Civayōkam Irunūru*.

² See Venkatraman 1990: 63. Kanchana Natarajan dates Yākōpu to a slightly earlier period, i.e. between 15th–17th centuries (Natarajan 2004: 257).

³ Personal communication from Dr Kaviarasu Balakrishnan, traditional Siddha practitioner, Pondicherry 2016.

⁴ In VaitCin 18, Yākōpu provides an account on the mythical origin of his lineage, which is claimed to have descended from god Indra. See also Natarajan 2004, Kędzia 2017.

⁵ According to Kanchana Natarajan, Yākōpu lived in the coastal area of Nagapattinam (see Natarajan 2004: 263). However, the scholar does not provide textual evidence which would confirm this view. Several references present in Yākōpu’s works to the Kanduri festival (*kantiri*, *kantūri*), i.e. the festival annually held in Nagore in the commemoration of Muslim saint Hajarat Ceyyatu Şāhul Hamītu Kātir Vali Nākōri (Moini 1935:716, quoted by Saheb 1998: 61), may indeed suggest that Yākōpu was originally associated with the Nagore city in the Nagapattinam area.

Indeed, I sailed the northern sea [and] the southern sea! Having taken a [mercurial] pill (*kuḷikai*)⁶ in order to remove difficulties, I sailed the ocean located in the West. Studying many artful alchemies (*vātaṅkaḷ*), I came [to Mecca], remembering in [my] thoughts the border (*ōram*) of the sea located in the East [i.e. coast of Eastern India].⁷

It is claimed that Irāmatēvar stayed in Mecca for a long time (PañMit 5), during which he became well acquainted with local culture, customs and the language (e.g. CuṅKāṅ 437). While living in Mecca, the Siddha approached local alchemical masters, whom he called “the prophets” (*napimarkaḷ*). He gradually gained their sympathy and step by step learned from them the esoteric art of local alchemy, which initially was kept secret from the foreigner (i.a. PañMit 5, VāVai 5). It is further suggested that the studies of alchemy were inseparable from Islamic religious practices (e.g. CuṅKāṅ 378). In this connection, Irāmatēvar eventually converted to Islam, underwent circumcision and accepted a new name, i.e. “Yākōpu”, given to him by local authority figures. Under this later name the Siddha is contemporarily particularly renowned for his medico-alchemical works. A summary report of his

⁶ The mercurial pill (*kuḷikai*), as it is presented in Yākōpu’s works, is one of the extraordinary items associated with the Siddha lore, which bestows upon the person who keeps it in the mouth the ability to fly in the sky (e.g. CuṅKāṅ: 144; Cuṅ: 153–155). In other Tamil Siddha texts, the *kuḷikai* is sometimes related to more surrealistic travels, such as a journey to the mythical Mount Meru (see especially Pōkar’s *Eḷāyiram*, e.g. PōEḷ: 1475–1476. For the summary of some of the fantastic journeys of Pōkar, as well as popular stories about this Siddha author, see Little 2006: 71–110). Such connotations may suggest that the pill could be associated with certain narcotic substances, the use of which, as it may be indicated by yet other passages (e.g. CuṅKāṅ 358, 532), may not have been uncommon among the adepts of Siddha alchemy.

⁷ *tāmētāṅ vaṭakaṭalen̄ kaṭalumōṭit*
taṭaiyaravē mēṅkiluḷḷa camuttirattil
vāmētāṅ kuḷikaiyiṭṭu oṭināṅum
vakaiyāṅa vātaṅkaḷ mikavumpārttēṅ
kāmē tāṅ kiḷakkiluḷḷa kaṭaliṅōram
karuttilē niṅaittumē vantutāṅum [...], CuṅKāṅ: 287.

All translations are the author’s.

experiences in Mecca is provided by the Siddha in the following passage:⁸

When I was staying in Mecca, in order to become [the one, who I am now], I considered “Rāmatēvar” as my name [...]. Having climbed sixteen steps⁹ in order to experience fame, the royal prophets (*napimārkaḷ*) transmitted the knowledge [to me]. Having performed the penance, I was circumcised. For the heaven [to be obtained] the prophets called me “Yākōpu”.¹⁰ I was living [there] for a long time, for the truth to be [realized].¹¹

The journey to Mecca presented in autobiographical portions of Yākōpu’s texts may provide a point of departure for the discussion on the theme of transformations associated with crossing the borders

⁸ For the references to more autobiographical passages from Yākōpu’s works regarding his journey to Mecca, see Natarajan 2004, Keđzia 2016.

⁹ Although the text does not elucidate how the mentioned “sixteen steps” (*patiṅāru paṭi*) should be interpreted here, it may be assumed, taking into consideration the context, that the number sixteen, associated with perfection and fullness, could suggest the completion of the alchemical knowledge of the prophets. In yet another place Yākōpu mentions that he was also attempting to climb “eighteen steps” (*patiṅeṭṭu paṭi*). However, during the climbing he got confused and was helped by the master called “Iṛacūl” (VāVait 5). The number eighteen has similar connotations with the concept of fullness and perfection as the number sixteen (on the meaning of the number eighteen within Indian spiritual traditions, see Ganapathy 2004: Appendix A). The passage could, therefore, indicate Yākōpu’s quest for a complete alchemical training, which was finally achievable with the help of a local teacher.

¹⁰ In yet another book (VāVait 241), Yākōpu states that it was his teacher Iṛacūl who gave him the new name.

¹¹ *nāṅāka makkāvil iruntapōtu*
nāṅiṅēṅ yeṅpēru rāmatēvar
pōṅēnāṅ makkāviṅ tēcantanṅil
pukalarīya patiṅāru paṭiyilērik
kōṅāna napimārkaḷ putticonṅṅār
kuṅappaṭṭuc cuṅṅattuc ceytukōṅṅēṅ
vāṅāka napimārkaḷ yākōpenrār
vaṭivāka vekukālam yāṅṅiṅṅēṅ, PaṅMit 5.

in the works of the Siddha. In this case, going beyond the boundaries would be taken in the literal, spatial sense. The references to the marine travel in the first of the above-mentioned passages, along with the enumeration of the several seas passed by Yākōpu, highlight the fact that the natural borders (*ōram*) of his homeland were not only ultimately crossed, but also left far behind. Travel was associated with an evident transformation of the author in relation to his faith, alchemical progress, as well as his physical body, and presumably the whole personality, symbolically completed by accepting the new name.

Autobiographical stories of similar character are scattered in several different works ascribed to Yākōpu. However, they constitute only a relatively small part of the full content of those texts, which is usually significantly dominated by practical recipes for manifold preparations and instructions dedicated to adepts of Siddha sciences. In these portions the theme of variously conceived transformations is nonetheless remarkably relevant. Moreover, it is frequently associated with figurative transcendence of certain natural limitations. The theme of these transformations, which pervades the teachings of the Siddha's works, will be explored in the next part of the present paper.

The study presented in this article is in major part based on Yākōpu's text *Kurunūl Aimpattaintu* ("Fifty-five [Verses] of the Book on the Excellence",¹² KuNū). As claimed by the author, the book is a shorter and condensed version of another much more voluminous tome, i.e. *Vaittiya Cintāmaṇi Eḷunūru* ("Seven Hundred [Verses] on the Thought-Gem of Medicine", VaitCint):

Moreover, I have transmitted with delight this fifty [verses], the condensation of the *Seven Hundred [Verses on the Thought-Gem of Medicine]*. I have named the book which has been transmitted [with a title] *The Book on the Excellence*.¹³

¹² The "excellence" (*kuru*) is the name of a preparation credited with extraordinary transforming properties (see below).

¹³ [...] *iṅṅameḷu nūrukkuc curukkantaṅṅai*
iṅimaiyuṭa ṅintavaim patuvuñcoṅṅēṅ

The shorter KuNū appears to be regarded by its author as an “essence” of the more voluminous VaitCint (KuNū 2). Therefore, for the present study it seems justified to consider the text as a representative work of Yākōpu’s medical works. References to other texts will also be made, especially to the already mentioned VaitCint and *Cuṇṇakkāṇṭam Ārunūru* (CuṇKāṇ), dedicated respectively to Siddha medicine men and alchemists. These two texts are the most voluminous works ascribed to Yākōpu, and they are often regarded as the most comprehensive tomes, in which the extensive teachings of the Siddha have been presented.¹⁴ Further references include also works of several other important authors associated with Tamil Siddha tradition.

The text of KuNū consists of fifty-five stanzas. As its “mother-text”, i.e. VaitCint, it is divided into smaller subchapters, each of which usually deals with a single recipe for a medical preparation. To complete the majority of all the fifteen preparations described in the text, the fundamental substance called “the excellence” (*kuru*) is required.¹⁵ Frequently the structure of those recipes follows a common pattern. First, the ingredients for the preparations are enlisted, although the weights and proportions of the materials essential for the recipe

coṇṇatoru nūlukku kurunūlākac
cūṭṭiṇēṇ [...], KuNū 53.

¹⁴ As indicated by their titles, VaitCint and CuṇKāṇ consist of seven hundred and six hundred verses respectively. The books are seen by the contemporary Tamil Siddha practitioners as the most comprehensive pieces authored by Yākōpu. However, certain recipes included in the texts are not complete, and as such they require reference to other texts of the author. According to the contemporary Siddha practitioner, Dr Kaviarasu Balakrishnan, who employs recipes from Yākōpu’s books in his medical practice, in order to produce the drugs correctly, the practitioner should study the collection of Yākōpu’s books, as his works are interconnected within the network of cross-references. Only after studying the whole number of the texts, will a Siddha practitioner be able to gather necessary information for the proper practice (personal communication from Dr Kaviarasu Balakrishnan, Pondicherry 2019).

¹⁵ The recipe for the excellence is provided by the author in the initial parts of his book (KuNū 2–5).

are usually not provided by the author.¹⁶ Next follows the description of the methods of preparation, containing information about the order of the operations and instruments which should be applied by the practitioner. The final verses of the recipes generally present enumeration of the effects ascribed to the drugs, along with the basic prescriptions regarding the intake of the drug.¹⁷

Going beyond the bodily limitations: transformations of the human body in *Kurunūl Aimpattaintu*

As indicated in the final stanzas of the recipes, the preparations handed down by Yākōpu are frequently aimed at curing specific diseases. The spectrum of enumerated illnesses is wide and comprehensive, including both external and internal afflictions, and ranging from less severe conditions, such as weariness (*iḷaippu*) or sore throat (*tonṭaivali*), to more serious diseases, e.g. leprosy (*kuṣṭarōkam*) or jaundice (*kāmālai*). A general ability to remove all the diseases is also mentioned.

In addition to the healing proprieties, the drugs in KuNū are also believed to remove certain causes of the diseases, i.e. the “actions” (*viṇai*, KuNū 51), understood as the results of previously committed deeds brought about by the force of karma. In Tamil Siddha tradition, as implied by the texts, karma is regarded to be one of the main causes of health problems.¹⁸

¹⁶ This may indicate that the book is probably not destined for an inexperienced practitioner, but that it is rather intended for a person acquainted with medico-alchemical jargon and procedures learnt directly from a qualified teacher.

¹⁷ Such prescriptions in Tamil Siddha medical literature are usually called *pattiyam*. Frequently, the *pattiyam* portions in the text refer to the elimination of common salt (*uppu*) and acid (*puḷi*) substances from the diet, as well as to the avoidance of sex.

¹⁸ Removing “actions” (*viṇai*) is often mentioned in Yākōpu’s medical texts as an effect of various drugs, see e.g. *VaitCint* 48, 117, 125, 143, 144, 203, etc. It is stated that certain drugs remove two kinds of actions (*iruvīṇai*). It may seem dubious that such statements refer to the concept of a pair of good and bad deeds (*nalviṇai*, *tīviṇai*), suggested as a fundamental karma division by *Tamil Lexicon* (see *viṇai* in the University

Moreover, certain drugs are credited with general health-promoting properties, such as increasing of the bodily layers (*tātu virtti*) and nourishment of the body (*puṣṭi*). Such effects are for example ascribed to the calcined ash of lead (*vaṅka paṛpam*, KuNū 13–14):

If you take [the ash of lead] in butter [which in colour is] like gold, surely the nourishment [of the body] will occur. Troublesome pains (*cūlai*)¹⁹ [and] wounds (*puṇ*) will fly away. [Several types of] gonorrhoea (*piramiyaṅkaḷ*), syphilis (*piṛaṅki*) and so on will [all] disappear. Yākōpu proclaimed [this recipe] to [achieve a state of] being like a moon! Complete [the recipe] in the superior manner and watch [the effects]!²⁰

“Layers” (*tātu*) are related with the ayurvedic concept of seven bodily strata or tissues (SKT. *dhātu*), i.e. the essence (*rasa*), blood (*rakta*), flesh (*māṃsa*), fat (*meda*), bone (*asthi*), marrow (*majjan*), and semen (*śukra*), which according to the classical ayurvedic doctrine are created in a chain of transformation from food digested in the stomach by inner fire (*agni*, see Wujastyk 2003: 398–399). These layers may increase

of Madras’s *Tamil Lexicon* (1924–1936)). The two types of actions may be rather interpreted in the light of the classical ayurvedic concept of two kinds of deeds, i.e. actions committed in the past (*karma paurvadaihiham*) as well as human endeavours or actions to be undertaken at present (*puruṣakāra*). In such cases the removal of the actions could refer to evil deeds only. On the doctrine of karma in classical Āyurveda, see *Carakasamhitā, Vimanasthāna* 3.29–3.35. See also Weiss 1980.

¹⁹ These pains are usually associated with morbid activity of the “humoral” wind, and they are linked with diseases such as arthritis, contraction of muscles and nerves, spasmodic pains, irregular menses, gout, colic, etc. See *cūlai* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994, vol. 4, part 1.

²⁰ [...] *taṅkampōl veṅṅeyilē tāṅēkoṅṭāl*
cariyākat tātuvirtti puṣṭiyākum
paṅkamauḷḷa cūlairuṅṅum paṛantēpōkum
paṛaṅkimutaṛ piramiyaṅkaḷ tīrtupōkum
tīṅkaḷpō liruppataṛku yākōpōṅṅār
cīṛappākac ceytuṅi muṭittuppārē, KuNū 14.

or decrease, affecting human health. Therefore, the curing therapy aims at reducing the excessive layers and boosting the layers which are weakened (see Benner 2005: 6–7). In medical verses of Yākōpu, stimulation and cultivation of the layers is repeatedly listed among the desirable effects of the prescribed drugs (e.g. VaitCint 643). On the other hand, nowhere in the consulted texts does the author mention the reduction of overgrown layers. Neither does the author refer to specific tissues by their name. It may therefore seem that the word *tātu* possesses in Yākōpu’s works more general meaning, as it may probably refer to all the healthy elements of the body. The comparison to the Moon in the quoted stanza may also indicate the general nourishment and increase of bodily constituents, as the satellite, due to its periodic “growth” and “rounding”, may be associated with the concept of regaining natural fullness. Moreover, the light that the Moon reflects as well may be related with the radiance and lustre of a healthy person. Such a glow, comparable to the Sun or Moon, is seen in Tamil Siddha literature as an indicator of good health, youth and wellbeing (i.a. VaitCint 544, CuṅKāṇ 168).

Apart from their curative and health-promoting properties, some drugs are also credited with certain extraordinary actions performed on the human body. The passage KuNū 19–21 is dedicated to the preparation of a *karṣam* drug. *Karṣam* is the name of a class of preparations which according to Siddha medico-alchemical literature are aimed at rejuvenation, longevity or even bestowing immortality upon the body of their user. As suggested by Pōkar, an alleged author of the book wholly dedicated to the *karṣam* drugs, the central feature of *karṣam* preparations is their ability to provide deathlessness upon the human: “I have told [you] about the *karṣam* preparations which have the power to [keep a person] alive without dying.”²¹

²¹ PKV: 328:1 *mālātē irukkavallō karṣaṇ connēṇ*. On *karṣam* preparations in selected Tamil Siddha texts, see Kędzia 2017.

In this respect, a recipe for a preparation called “*kaṛṣam* of herbs (*mūli kaṛṣam*)” is concordant with the general convention observed in Tamil Siddha literature. As Yākōpu claims:

People were taking one hundred and eight²² *kaṛṣam* [preparations]. [The following one] will be the *kaṛṣam* of herbs, [prepared] with love. Together with a little bit of bark of *āvarai*²³ cleanse the bark of Śiva’s *vēmpu*²⁴ [and] Indian kino tree (*veṅkai*).²⁵ Without thinking about insignificant [things], put all the three [ingredients] together in an earthen pot. With a real excellence, add the essence obtained from the first born five-month-old foetus of a woman (*aiṅkōlakkaru*). Yākōpu said [this] for help. Put properly [a coat] of cloth [soaked with] clay over the mouth of the pot. Kindly distil and collect the pit-oil (*kuḷittaiyam*).²⁶ If you take in a dosage of the weight of a coin (*paṇam*) having praised the God, the diseases along with the difficulties will go away. Long vessels (*narampu*) will grow stronger. Skin on a firm body will shed. This *kaṛṣam* is necessary for the yogis. Yākōpu proclaimed [it] further. If you eat this *kaṛṣam* for

²² The number hundred and eight in some Indian religious traditions is believed to have mystical connotations.

²³ *āvarai* is most probably a misspelled form of *āvārai* (*Cassia auriculata* L., see *āvārai* in Pandanus Database of Indian Plants (Charles University 1998–2009).

²⁴ According to the commentary, the phrase *civaṅ vēmpu* stands for the plant *civaṅārvēpmu*, i.e. *Indigofera aspalathoides* Vahl ex DC. See *civaṅārvēpmu* in *Medicinal Plants in Siddha System of Medicine* (Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions 2006).

²⁵ *Pterocarpus marsupium* Roxb. See *veṅkai* in Pandanus Database of Indian Plants (Charles University 1998–2009).

²⁶ In order to extract pit-oil from herbs and other medicinal substances, one must dig out a pit in the ground. At the bottom of the pit a receiver pot should be placed. Over the receiver pot one should then place a main vessel containing the medicinal substances, with a small hole made in the bottom. This pot should be next covered with cow dung cakes. The cakes should be piled up and kindled. During the heating the oil would ooze out from the medicinal substances and drip down to the receiver pot through the hole in the bottom of the main container. See *kuḷittaiyam* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994, vol II, part II.

the period of *maṅṭalam*,²⁷ the body will become strong as a diamond (*vayiram*). This is the *kaṛṣṇam* which in the beginning was eaten by the celestials. [Afterwards their] bodies became indestructible. Those [adepts] who had [once] created it, did not abandon [it] even for one day. They applied [it] to mercury (*cūtam*), [and] it became bound. Yākōp said: “I have taken [it] too.” He has spoken [about the *kaṛṣṇam*] intending [it] for the people of the world.²⁸

The *kaṛṣṇam* firstly is stated to fight diseases. The text, however, does not mention the illnesses by name, so it may be assumed that it suggests universal curative properties of the drug. Next, it is stated that

²⁷ According to the *Tamil Lexicon*, *maṅṭalam* is a period of 40, 41 or 45 days (see *maṅṭalam* in the University of Madras’s *Tamil Lexicon* (1924–1936)), according to the dictionary of Sambasivam Pillai it lasts 40 days (see *maṅṭalam* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931-1996, vol. V), whereas the period of 45 days is suggested by Anandan 2005: 432–433.

²⁸ *kaṛṣṇamatu nūṛṛeṭṭu makāṅkaḷ koṅṭār*
kāṭaluṭaṅ mūlikaiyiṅ kaṛṣṇamākum
coṛṣṇamitu āvaraiyiṅ paṭṭai yōṭu
cutticeyṭu civaṅvēmṇu vēṅkaṛṣṇaṭṭai
aṛṣṇamēṅru niṅṅaiyāmal mūṅrumoṅṛāy
aṅṇāka vēṇṇōṭṭup pāṅṅattaiṭṭuc
cāṅṅuruvā yaiṅkōlak karuvuṅkūṭṭic
cāṅṅvāka yākōṇu cāṅṅiṅṅarē (19)
pāṅṅamataic cīlaimaṅ cariyāyṅceyṭu
paṭcamoṭu kuḷittayila miṅṅakkikoṅṭu
āṅṅṅavaṅṅaiṅ pōṅṅriceyṭu paṅṅaviṅṅaiṅ
arumaiyūṭa nuṅṅkoṅṅāḷ viyāṅṅipōṅṅum
nīṅṅatoru narampukaḷum valuttupṅōṅṅum
niṅṅaiyāṅṅa tēkattir caṅṅṅaiṅṅāṅṅum
vēṅṅiyatu ikkaṅṅam yōṅṅikkuttāṅ
meṅṅmēlum yākōṇu viḷaṅṅiṅṅār (20)
maṅṅṅalamē ikkaṅṅam koṅṅṅāyāṅṅāl
vayirampōṅ rēkamatu valuttupṅōṅṅum
aṅṅṅarellāṅ koṅṅṅakaṅṅa mituṅṅāṅṅmuṅṅpu
aḷiyāṅṅa tēkattō ṅiṅṅukkalāccu
kaṅṅṅavarka ḷoruṅṅāḷuṅ kaiṅṅiṅṅārkaḷ
karuvāṅṅa cūṅṅattir kiṅṅṅārkaṅṅum
koṅṅṅavaṅṅum nāṅṅēṅṅru yākōṅṅcoṅṅṅār
kūṅṅiṅṅa rulakōṅṅkkuk kuṅṅṅippāyṅṅṅāṅ (21), KuNū 19–21.

the preparation enhances the “vessels” (*narampu*), which are regarded to be a category of the constituents of the body. However, the identification of this body element in the above-mentioned stanza is not clear, as the term *narampu* may mean “nerve”, “tendon”, “sinew”, as well as “blood vessel” or any duct in the body.²⁹

The next effects of *karpam* listed in the quoted stanzas reach beyond the spectrum of the treatments of ordinary medicine. It is said that the drug causes shedding of old skin and that it renders the body firm. Sloughing off old skin is a characteristic symptom of successful rejuvenation attested in classical Indian medical literature. References to the idea of decomposition of the old body before the completion of the rejuvenation therapy can be found already in one of the earliest Sanskrit ayurvedic treatises, i.e. *Suśrutasaṃhitā* (4.29).³⁰ The firmness of the (presumably) new body, mentioned in the passage, is a common effect ascribed to the number of recipes in Tamil Siddha medical literature (i.a. VaitCint 116, 392, 425, 619) and is stated to be an important

²⁹ In some verses of Yākōpu’s texts *narampu* seems to be used interchangeably with another term for bodily tubular vessels, i.e. *nāṭi*. The discrimination between the meaning of the two terms is not clear in Yākōpu’s texts. A synonymous meaning was suggested by Sambasivam Pillai (see *taca narampu* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994, vol. 4).

As is attested already in the ayurvedic compendia of Caraka and Suśruta, various kinds of tubular vessels (i.e. *srotas*, *dhamanī*, *sirā*) were recognized in early classical Ayurveda. Such vessels play an important role in ayurvedic physiology, as they hold the body together, transporting within the organism not only various sorts of bodily liquids, but also items such as breath, sensory data, speech, laughter, crying, etc. As evidenced in the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, the distinction between the variety of conduits was controversial already in the ancient period (see Wujastyk 2003: 399–401). The concepts of *narampu* and *nāṭi* and the blurred differentiation between the two may, therefore, reflect the age-old uncertainty related to the various attempts of classification of tubular bodily parts characteristic of Indian medicine.

³⁰ The text of the compendium consists of several historical layers, with the oldest core probably dated back to several centuries BC. The text was largely re-edited before AD 500, gaining the shape in which it exists today (see Wujastyk 1998: 104–105). The English translation of the passage concerning the rejuvenating Soma rite was provided by Wujastyk 1998: 171–177.

aim of the Siddha adept.³¹ Similarly to the general aims of yogic practices of Tamil Siddhas described in the fundamental text of the tradition, i.e. *Tirumantiram* of Tirumūlar,³² the firmness (*nilai*), being the goal of the Siddha adept, according to Yākōpu, is essential to achieve longevity for an unimaginable period of time: “If you achieve firmness (*nilai*), there will be life for aeons. Those who do not possess firmness (*nilaiyillār*) will live no longer.”³³

The association of the *karpam* drug with yoga is further explicitly expressed in the quoted passage, which states that the preparation is necessary for yogic practitioners (*vēṇṭiyatu ikkarpam yōkikku tāṇ*, KuNū 20).³⁴ Additionally, in connection with the stabilisation of the body, in Yākōpu’s works the body of a successful practitioner is compared to a “rock-pillar” (*kārrūṇ*, i.a. VaitCint 433, 478) or to a “mountain” (*malai*, VaitCint 161), which may highlight the necessity to achieve bodily immobility and stability. Such complete “stone-like” firmness may be associated with the concept of total resistance to the changes

³¹ VaitCint 608. The passage contains general prescriptions addressed to a Siddha practitioner. Firmness (*uṛuti*) of the body is mentioned there as the aim for which the person should strive, and it is listed among other guidelines, such as attentive studies, worship of the great ones or avoidance of prostitutes and boasting.

³² *Tirumantiram* (TM) of Siddha Tirumūlar is dated to the 12th century (on the dating of the text on the ground of its conceptual content, see Goodall 1998: xxxvii–xxxix, n. 85; Goodall 2000: 213, n. 27. Indian scholars often suggest a much earlier date of the text, cf. Arumugam 2006: 27–32). The text consists of c. three thousand verses and in a vast part concerns the practices of yoga, which aim at achieving immortality of the body (on the concept of liberation in the living body in the *Tirumantiram*, see Thanyanithy 2010). In TM it is stated that those who practice the described forms of yoga will be freed from death (TM 574:4: [...] *namaṇillai tāṇē*), will conquer time (TM 583:4: *kālattai velluṇ karuttitu tāṇē*), become young (TM 590:4: *pāḷaṇum āvāṇ*), and live for aeons without decay (TM 591:4: *uṭaiyāmal ūḷi irukkalu māṁē*, cf. Thanyanithy 2010: 71–72).

³³ *nilaipeṛṛāl nīṭuḷi vāḷalākum*

nilaiyillār orupōtum vāḷamāṭṭār, CuṇKaṇ 551.

³⁴ *Karpam* preparations in Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature are often presented as a support in yogic practices, such as breath control or opening of the central channel (*cuḷumuṇai*). See i.a. ÑK: 11–76; PKV: 12, 73, 68, 97, 166.

intrinsically associated with the passage of time, and as such with defying the most afflicting limitations of the human condition, such as aging and decay. The quest for transformation of the human body into the state comparable to the lifeless matter (stone, mountain) may moreover suggest that the border between the living and the lifeless matter may not be obvious and fixed in the Siddha author's view. The transformed body of an adept, which is no more subjected to any changes, may be considered as a body that transcends the biological processes inevitably associated with the passage of time, characterized by constant transitions, becoming old and degenerated. The body may appear to be lifeless, comparable to non-biological matter, but as such also deathless, as it has surpassed the ordinary mode of human existence.

The concept of the body which is fixed and resistant to the changes brought about by the passage of time may be further alluded to in the quoted verse (KuNū 21) in its comparison to the diamond (*vayiram*). The idea of the adamantine body is known in wider Siddha literature, also from beyond Tamil Nadu. Such a body, achievable due to yogic and alchemical practices, is associated with persistence and immortality.³⁵ In Yākōpu's text, however, the concept of a diamond body is not elaborated upon.

Moreover, it is suggested that the *karpam* preparation has a power to transform the human body into a divinized body, which is resistant to destruction. The drug is presented as an immortalizing ambrosia-like substance, able to transmute the person into a divine being, characterized by an indestructible body. In the light of aforementioned descriptions of the healthy, enhanced physical body, it may be assumed that the transformed body of the user of the *karpam* drug is expected to remain nonetheless material. It is noticeable that the idea of the non-material body, which, supposedly, would be the aim

³⁵ On the adamantine body among other concepts related to various kind of bodies in Sanskrit literature of the Nāth Siddha tradition, see Ondracka 2015. Cf. White 1996: 72, 102, 202, 271, 303.

of the Siddha practices, as suggested by Ganapathy (Ganapathy 1997: 241–244, Ganapathy 1993: 124–125), is nowhere explicitly mentioned in the consulted works of Yākōpu.

Yet another passage from KuNū (KuNū 49) implies the extraordinary power of transformation of the human ascribed to the recipes contained in the book: “If [you] reach [the prescribed] path [and] become the one who completes [the described recipes] as the master, the inhabitants of the world will call [you] “Kupēraṅ””.³⁶ The comparability to Kupēraṅ (SKT. Kubera, king of Yakṣas), the mythological figure who gained immortality as a boon from Brahma for his severe penance, once again suggests that the user of the medical recipes from Yākōpu’s books is able to transcend limitations of basic human condition and to eventually become equal to celestials.

Going beyond the ordinary human condition is also suggested in the passage on another drug, i.e. the ash of orpiment (*tālaka paṛpam*, KuNū 11–12). Here the medicine is not only credited with efficacy for curing certain diseases, but it is also suggested to provide an adept with supernatural powers (*citti*):³⁷

Take one *palam* [unit] of orpiment (*aritāram*) and purify [it]. Indeed, keep it [aside] with love. Heat the great *nāyuvuvi*.³⁸ Without mistake add the ambrosial milk³⁹ [and] grind [the mixture]. Prepare a proper crucible [with the *nāyuvuri* paste].⁴⁰ Smear the orpiment with

³⁶ *kūṭiyē valituraiyāyc ceyvāṅākīr*
kupēraṅṅac colluvarka ḷulakīluḷḷōr, KuNū 49.

³⁷ Supernatural powers (*citti*) are also elaborated upon in the *Tirumantiram*, where they are regarded to be the result of yogic practices. The text enumerates eight powers, i.e. *aṇimā*, *ilakimā*, *makimā*, *pirāṭti*, *karimā*, *pirākāmiyam*, *īcattuvam* and *vacittuvam* (TM 668–692), see Thayanithy 2010: 154.

³⁸ *Achyranthes aspera* L. See *nāyuvuri* in Pandanus Database of Indian Plants (Charles University 1998–2009).

³⁹ I.e. women’s milk (*tāyppāl*), according to the commentary.

⁴⁰ The crucibles used in Siddha medicine and alchemy differ from the apparatuses applied f. ex. in a metal factory or jeweller’s workshop, which are usually made of clay. Alchemists’ crucibles, as explained by Sambasivam Pillai, “are specially made

the previously mentioned liquid of the excellence (*kuruvām nīr*).⁴¹ Put [it] in a small crucible. Seal [the crucible with] the cloth [soaked with clay]. Apply calcination in the fowl (*kukkuṭattil*)⁴² in order to generate [supernatural] powers (*citti*).⁴³

References to the supernatural powers called in Sanskrit *siddhi* (“accomplishment”, “success”, “fulfillment”) are common also in the literature of other Indian traditions associated with yoga.⁴⁴ In the studied texts of Yākōpu, it is usually claimed that the adept achieves general extramundane powers (*citti*) due to the action of the preparations

of alkaline substances or other strong chemicals so as to withstand not only the higher temperature in the melting process, but also to satisfy the other conditions peculiar to alchemical transmutations, such as consolidation, sublimation, retention, annihilation, etc.” See *kukai* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994, vol. II, part II. Here the plant ashes and women’s milk are presumably used in mixture with another unspecified material in order to build the crucible proper for this particular recipe.

⁴¹ The phrase “liquid of the excellence” (*kuruvām nīr*) may probably refer to the mixture of the excellence (*kuru*) and saliva (*vāyūnīr*) mentioned in the verse KuNūl 9 of the previous recipe.

⁴² *Kukkuṭam* (“fowl”) is one of the several kinds of calcination operations (*puṭam*), which are distinguished on the basis of the amount of cow dung cakes burning during the process. The fowl type of operation is the calcination for which the height of the heap of the cow dung cakes destined for burning reaches the height of the fowl. See *kukkuṭa puṭam* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994, vol. II, part II.

⁴³ *arītāram palamvāṅkic cutticeytu*
aṅpuṭaṅē ataittānum vaittukkoṅṭu
peritāṅa nāyuruvi taṅṅaiccuttup
picakāma lamutappāl viṭṭaraittu
cariyāṅa kukaiceytu aritārattil
cārriyatōr muṅkuruvām nīrārpūci
cīritāṅa kukaikkūḷ vaittuc cīlaiceytu
cittiperak kukkuṭattil puṭattaippōṅē, KuNū 11.

⁴⁴ See the chapter “Yogic Powers” in Mallinson and Singleton 2017. On the supernatural powers in various traditions connected with yoga, see Jacobsen 2015. The papers contained in this publication confirm the broad reach of the concept of powers regarded to be the result of yogic practices in traditions related to different religious systems also beyond India.

described in the recipes (e.g. VaitCint 58, 131, 171, 335). In some places the powers are specified as “body powers” (*kāyacitti*, see e.g. VaitCint 108, 137, 260, 483). It may be assumed that the body powers are associated with the preservation of a healthy and youthful body, as they are mentioned among possible effects of the drug. Similar concept of body powers is also present in *Tirumantiram*, in section entitled “The means [for achieving] the body powers” (*carīra citti upāyam*, TM 724–739). There the powers refer to the effects of yogic practices connected with breath control and meditation, and they are related to rejuvenation and preservation of the body. Tirumūlar explicitly states that the care for the physical body is essential for spiritual development. The author claims that both the body and the soul are equally important and interdependent entities.⁴⁵ The body is considered to be indispensable in achieving the liberating “true knowledge” (*meyñāṇam*) and as such it should be properly secured. According to Tirumūlar, the physical body is indispensable in the quest for liberation, which explains the reasons why the body should be fostered and secured from the old age and deterioration. Such a view is evidently echoed in the works of Yākōpu.

⁴⁵ *uṭampār aḷiyil uyirār aḷivar*
tiṭampaṭa meyñāṇaṅ cēravu māṭṭār
uṭampai vaḷarkkum upāyam aṟintē
uṭampai vaḷarttēṅ uyirvaḷarttēṅē
uṭampiṅṅai muṅṅam iḷukkeṅ riruntēṅ
uṭampiṅṅuk kuḷḷē yuruporuḷ kaṅṅēṅ
uṭampuḷē uttamaṅ kūyilkoṅ tāṅṅeru
uṭampiṅṅai yāṅṅirun tōmpukiṅ rēṅē, TM 724–725.

“If the owner of a body perishes, then the owner of the soul will perish [too]. He will not achieve the real knowledge with certainty. Having learnt the means for cultivating the body, I have cultivated the body and [therefore] indeed I have cultivated [my] soul. Previously, I considered the body to be inferior [to the soul]. [Then] in the body I saw the wealth. Knowing that God set [his] temple in this body, I am protecting the body.”

The powers ascribed to certain preparations in Yākōpu’s works are also called “yoga powers” (*yōka citti*). As indicated by the context, they are as well related to rejuvenation of the body (see e.g. VaitCint 483). Taking into consideration wider Tamil Siddha literature on *karṣam* drugs, it may be also assumed that “yoga powers” refer to the supportive action in regard to certain yogic practices, such as breath control, opening of the central channel, and so on (see Kędzia 2017).

Transmutation of the non-biological matter in the alchemical teachings of Yākōpu

In Yākōpu’s works yet another kind of superpowers gained due to the action of drugs is discerned, i.e. “the powers of alchemy” (*vātamatu citti*, VaitCint 482). As was already shown in the quoted passage, the same drug, i.e. herbal *karṣam*, apart from its actions on the human body, is also expected to effect certain alchemical operations on the non-biological matter, such as binding (*kaṭṭu*) of mercury. It is assumed that the substances subjected to alchemical binding become maximally consolidated, condensed and resistant to physical changes. Therefore, the binding (*kaṭṭu*) operation may in certain respect correspond to the previously mentioned practices aimed at immobilization and conservation of the body, referred to in Siddha texts. Next to the stabilisation of the body, also consolidation of the semen is mentioned in Yākōpu’s works as an effect of the intake of the described preparations.⁴⁶ The operation of consolidation of the nonhuman

⁴⁶ E.g. CuṅKāṇ 154–155.
 [...] *perukavē centūran taṇṇaiyuṅṅāl*
pilakkumē tēkantā ṇirukiyērum
karukavē vintūrukum naraiyumillai
kāraṇamāy malaipōlē tēkamākum [...]
vaṭivāṇa kalluppaic cuṇṇampaṇṇak
kāṇṇētu carakkellām noṭiyirkaṭṭum
kaimuṇaiyāy nākattaik kavvikkoḷlum
tāṇṇētu cakalam ellāṇ cittiyākum [...]

substances, especially in regard to mercury, is seen as an essential part of the alchemical work,⁴⁷ not only in the Tamil Siddha alchemy, but also in other Indian alchemical traditions.⁴⁸ Fixed mercury is not only credited with immortalizing properties, but it is also believed to be effective in the further transmutation of metals into gold. The production of gold is pictured in Tamil Siddha texts as an accomplishment of the operations of a Siddha practitioner. In the works of Yākōpu, gold is presented as a source of livelihood for an adept (see e.g. CuṅKaṅ 366–374). The belief in the possibility of transmutation of metals into gold is related to the concept of ripening of metals. According to this view, metals other than gold are regarded as “unripen” and therefore imperfect. Gold, on the other hand, is considered to be the perfect metal and the effect of ripening of the ores of “lower” metals in the ground.⁴⁹ The work of an alchemist, who accomplishes the ripening through the performance of the operations described in the recipes, may be,

“If you eat this calcined powder [of salt] (*uppuc centūram*) [it] will strengthen the body. [The body] will harden. [...] Semen will thicken, there will be no grey hair. The body will become [firm] as a mountain. [...] As you calcine fair rock salt, all the substances (*carakku*) will be bound in a moment. According to the method, eat the [abovementioned] lead [preparation]. All the powers (*citti*) will be generated.”

⁴⁷ The texts several times provide the summary of important operations to be mastered by an alchemist, among which one of the important steps seems to be binding of mercury. E.g. CuṅKāṅ 564:

[...] *vaṭivāṇa cavukkāra muṇṇēvaittuk*
kārētu vaṅkattaic cuṇṇampaṇṇik
kaṭumaiyā yaṭiṇpiṇṇē turucainīru
pārētu ataṇpiṇṇē cūtaṅkaṭtu
pativāka racavātam ceytuṇṭiyum [...]

“In the beginning you too create beautiful *cavukkāram* (see below), calcine the lead, so that it will become pungent. After that reduce blue vitriol to ashes. After that bind the mercury and humbly perform the mercurial alchemy (*racavātam*).”

⁴⁸ On the operations performed on mercury related to in Sanskrit alchemical sources, see White 1996: 265–269. On the processing of mercury in Sanskrit medical texts, see Wujastyk 2013.

⁴⁹ On the beliefs that the ores ripen in the ground similarly to human or animal embryos in alchemical thought from beyond India, already present in the archaic societies, see Eliade 2007: 6–7.

therefore, regarded to be a catalyst of natural processes, which in their ordinary course would last unimaginably long.

It is suggested that the production of gold relates to the fulfilment of alchemical “work” (*vēlai*), which is several times referred to in Yākōpu’s works.⁵⁰ The work is mentioned also in KuNū 45. The passage states that, due to the action of the drug called the “ash of blue vitriol” (*turucup paṛpam*), prepared with the use of the excellence (*kuru*) and described as a unique and pre-eminent preparation (KuNū 44), the alchemist will be enabled to complete alchemical “work” (*vēlai*):

When, as a luxury, [you] consume this excellence (*kuru*) [in the form of] the ash of blue vitriol (*turucup paṛpam*)⁵¹ in the vehicle (*aṇuppāṇam*),⁵² diseases which are caused by the three humoral substances, [i.e. wind, bile and phlegm] (*caṇṇi*), basic enlargement of spleen (*keṇṭaikaṭṭi*), eight kinds of glandular enlargement in the abdomen related to indigestion, colic and emaciation (*kuṇmam*), pains caused by humoral wind (*vāyccūlai*), [all of these] which are the object [of the action of the drug] will enter the sea!⁵³ A blessed adept of alchemy will accomplish the work (*vēlai*).

⁵⁰ E.g. CuṅKāṇ 560.

[...] *itaivīruc celavuveytu*
itamāka itīṇaṭutta periyavēlai
narukkākat terintukoḷḷa vēnumippō [...]

“Now, having sold it [i.e. the gold], having earned your living, you should comfortably learn the great work which was enabled by the gold.”

⁵¹ The “ash of blue vitriol” (*turucu paṛpam*) is a calcined preparation described in the preceding verses (KuNū 42–44). The processing of the blue vitriol according to the recipe involves the use of herbal substances and the excellence (*kuru*). The passage presented above may suggest that the excellence contained in the preparation (*turucu paṛpaṇ kuru*) is seen as an essential ingredient, which is responsible for the enumerated effects of the drug.

⁵² *aṇuppāṇam*, as presented in Siddha texts, is usually a fluid or semi-fluid substance used as a vehicle for the drugs, which enforces their action. Usually the drugs are associated with vehicles such as honey, milk, ghee, treacle, etc.

⁵³ “Entering the sea” (*kaṭal pukatal*) is frequently mentioned as a metaphor for the disappearance of diseases in Yākōpu’s works.

All the Siddhas departed without saying [about their practices]. Yākōpu has [thus] spoken abundantly as a teacher, so that the alchemists too would obtain salvation.⁵⁴

The alchemical “work” has been mentioned in several other passages of the consulted books of Yākōpu. The texts, however, do not explain how exactly the term should be interpreted. As indicated by these contexts, the “work” may refer to the test of alchemical skills (PañMit 4) which were required by the Arabic masters of alchemy in order to allow the Siddha to learn their teachings. Another passage (CuṅKaṅ 487) places the “great work” (*periya vēlai*) among advanced alchemical skills, such as the creation of the pill which bestows upon its user the ability to fly in the sky (*kuḷikai*), or turning metals into powders (*cuṅṅam*), which should be mastered by the alchemist. Yet in another stanza (CuṅKaṅ 587), it may be suggested that the “true work” (*nica vēlai*) in fact may be related to the transmutation of silver (*matī*), presumably into gold, and associated with the achievement of bodily permanence (*nilavaram*).⁵⁵ The final verses of the above-quoted

⁵⁴ *turucuparpaṅ kuruvataṅai yaṅuppāṅattil*
cokucākaḥ cāppiṭavē caṅṅikkāyccal
karuvāṅa keṅṅaiḥṅai aṅṅa kuṅṅam
karuttāṅa vāyccūlai kaṅṅalēpukkuṅ
tiruvāṅa vāṅimakaṅ ceyvāṅvēlai
ceppāmal viṅṅārkaḥ cittaṅellām
kuruvākum yākōpu turaṅiyatākak
kūṅṅiṅār vāṅikaḥṅum piḥṅaikkattāṅē, KuNū 45.

⁵⁵ *vāṅimār nica vēlai ceyyumpērkaḥ*
vaṅivāṅa cāṅṅirattiṅ vakaiyaikkaṅṅu
 [...]
 nilavarattai kaṅṅarivār nēṅṅyittāṅum
piṅṅiyē matitaṅṅilē vēlaicevār
piraṅṅāka irukkātu piḥṅavārē, CuṅKāṅ 587.

“The people who perform the true work (*vēlai*) of the alchemists, having studied the methods from the scientific treatises [...], will directly experience the permanence [of the body]. They will perform the work in silver (*matī*), they will not be deceitful, they will not fail.”

passage, which consociate the work with salvation, may, moreover, suggest its connections with spiritual practices. All in all, the “work”, as suggested by the studied material, is related to a certain proof of the skills of the alchemist. The preparation described by the text, which enables the accomplishment of such a task, may, therefore, be regarded as an agent that enforces the transformation of the Siddha adept into a fully acknowledged alchemist.

Transforming agents: the triple salt and the excellence

The operations described in KuNū in most part require the use of a special ingredient, i.e. the excellence (*kuru*), as repeatedly mentioned in the quoted passages. The excellence is credited with an extraordinary power of transforming other substances into calcined ashes or “powders” (*cuṅṅam*):⁵⁶

The preparation [described in the preceding verses] has become the excellence of the triple salt (*muppu*), [white] as pearls! Indeed, it has become [the substance] which is appropriate [to be called] the beneficial excellence! Without being confused, when [you] add a little bit [of it] to any of the volatile substances, surely [they] will become powders (*cuṅṅam*)!⁵⁷

The power to effect reduction of other substances to the no more reducible ashes or powders (such as *cuṅṅam* or *centūram*) seems to be regarded as a particularly desirable quality of the preparations

⁵⁶ In the Tamil Siddha system of medicine *cuṅṅam/cuṅṅam* is regarded to be a class of drugs prepared from minerals. Basically, three kinds of processed mineral drugs are discerned, namely *centūram* (red powder obtained in the process of calcination), *paṟṟam* (calcined preparation, white in colour) and *cuṅṅam* (in appearance similar to *paṟṟam*, but more potent than it). See *cuṅṅam* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994, vol. 4, p. I.

⁵⁷ [...] *nakaipōlē muppūviṅ kuruvumāccu*
naṅṅaiyuḷḷa kuruvaṅṅu mituvēyāccu
tikaiyāmar pukaiccaraku etuvāṅṅalum
tīramākak koṅcamīṭac cuṅṅamāmē, KuNū 5.

produced by the alchemist. The substances which are able “to kill” other substances (which in the Siddha jargon is synonymous with transformation into ashes) are regarded to be especially valuable and powerful. The ability to catalyse such a process may also be seen as an indicator of their transforming power in relation to the human body.⁵⁸

As indicated above, the excellence is obtained from the “triple salt” (*muppu*, KuNū 5), often considered to be the speciality of Tamil Siddha medicine and alchemy. According to the passage KuNū 2–5, the triple salt is produced in a sequence of operations. It consists of three main ingredients (“salts”), among which the first one is called *pūnīru*,⁵⁹ and is generally identified with the mineral substance collected from fuller’s earth. In Tamil Siddha literature it is frequently described as a salty efflorescence on the brackish soil, which appears only during three months of the year (i.e. *cittirai*, *vaikāci*, *paṅkuṇi*) before the dawn.⁶⁰ The site where this ingredient can be found was described by another Siddha, i.e. Akattiyar, as a desolated place without plants and grass, on the surface of which appears the salty efflorescence.

⁵⁸ Frequently the substances are credited with transforming powers regarding both the non-biological matter and the human body, e.g. CuṅKāṅ 201:

[...] *naricutāṅ cūtamatu kaṭṭippōkum*
nalamāṅa turucaturvum nīrumākum
puricutāṅ navalōka mellāmnīrum
pōkkōṭē ceytākkāl putumaimetta
varicaiyāyt tēkamatu karṛūṅākum
vaṭivāṅa cittiyeḷḷān taṅkamāmē

“[Due to previously described preparation] mercury (*cūtam*) will become bound, virtuous blue vitriol (*turucu*) will be reduced to ashes as well. [...] All the nine metals will be reduced to ashes. If you proceed with the recipe, as the youthfulness will abound, the body orderly will become [like] a rock pillar. All the bodily powers [and] gold will be generated.”

⁵⁹ In Yākōpu’s texts occur also several other variants of the term *pūnīru*, such as *pūnīru* (e.g. CuṅKāṅ 10), *pūṅṅīr* (e.g. CuṅKāṅ 14) or *pūnīr* (e.g. VaitCint 77). As all the terms seem to be used interchangeably, in the present paper, in order to maintain clarity, I will adhere to the form *pūnīru*.

⁶⁰ Cf. Jappār 2014: 5, according to which the proper season for collecting *pūnīru* lasts during *māci*, *paṅkuṇi* and *cittirai*.

It is also stated that such a site is marked with white stones resembling egg shells.⁶¹ For the preparation of the excellence, *pūnīru* must undergo ten times the operation of “initiation” (*tīṭcai*, the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word *dīkṣā*, also “initiation”, having religious connotations in Sanskrit). The initiation of salt is described as a process of purification, based on the repeated heating of the solution of salt and collecting of the residue. The residue once collected should be next dissolved again, and in similar manner the whole process should be repeated the given number of times.⁶² In other works of Yākōpu the term *pūnīru* sometimes seems to be used also as a synonym for a compounded preparation which contains *pūnīru* in its first meaning (i.e. as the substance collected from fuller’s earth), called frequently *cavukkāram*, which, on the other hand, may be at least partly synonymous with the triple salt (*muppu*). The interchangeable use of the terms may indicate the essential role of the *pūnīru* element (in its first, most basic sense) in the compounded preparation of the triple salt. *Pūnīru* is credited with an extraordinary status among the medico-alchemical substances. In Yākōpu’s works it is called the true “matter”, “wealth”, “goal” or “sense” (*poruḷ*) of the alchemy, as well as of the prophet Muhammad, and the alchemical masters (CuṅKāṅ 222). *Cavukkāram* elsewhere (CuṅKāṅ 89, 130, 1258, 175), in relation to its transforming powers regarding the “killing” of the substances, is equated with the god of death; the text moreover suggests that the substance should be praised equally with Allah (CuṅKāṅ 380), which presents it with a divine status.

Apart from the salty substance collected from fuller’s earth, the second ingredient of the triple salt according to KuNū is common table salt (*kariyuppu*), also subjected ten times to the “initiation” process. The last item of the triad of salts is the “explosive salt”

⁶¹ KNMN 11–12. For the English translation of the relevant passages, see Kędzia 2017. According to Er. A. Sugumaran, the head of the *Tamil Siddhars Heritage and Traditional Knowledge Research Foundation* and *Tamil Siddhars Manuscript Research Foundation*, in Tamil Nadu *pūnīru* can be found i.a. near Ulundurpet and Sivaganga (personal communication from Er. A. Sugumaran, Auroville, January 2019).

⁶² On the *tīṭcai* procedure, see KuNū 46–47.

(*veṭiyuppu*, i.e. saltpetre), “initiated” in a similar manner five times. After purification, all the three ingredients should be mixed in lemon juice and boiled. The oily substance which would appear in the process should then be removed, and the clear residue called the “salt” (*uppu*, here synonymous with *muppu*) should remain. The salt itself is credited with extraordinary properties and is compared to goddess Śakti (CuṇKāṇ 474).

In order to create the excellence, the salt should further be roasted. The white marble (*veḷḷaikkal*) should be calcined in order to create lime (*cuṇṇāmpu*). The obtained lime should then be mixed with ammonium chloride (*cāram*), ground, put in a porcelain vessel and “kept in dew” (*paṇiyil vaittal*), which in Siddha literature usually means the exposition of the preparation to the coolness overnight. The “water of victory” (*ceyanīr*,⁶³ i.e. acidic liquid) will be produced. This liquid should then be collected and mixed with two mercurial compounds, i.e. corrosive sublimate (*vīram*) and calomel (*pūram*). Subsequently, the previously prepared triple salt, until now kept aside, should be put into a mortar and ground with the aforementioned acidic water. Then the mixture should be formed into small round flat tablets (*villai*) and left to dry in the Sun. The tablets should next be roasted in ten cow dung cakes. The excellence (*kuru*) produced in such a manner is regarded to be the crucial agent of transformation in the processing of drugs described in KuNū. As evident in the recipe above, the production of the excellence is based on the triple salt (*muppu*), which in turn is closely associated with the salty substance found on the sites of fuller’s earth (*pūnīru*).

Concluding remarks

In Yākōpu’s medico-alchemical texts, the variously conceived transformations are presented as the aim of the use of the described drugs.

⁶³ *ceyanīr* is a general term for a class of acidic substances used in Siddha medicine and alchemy and highly valued for their caustic properties.

Such transformations frequently relate to the human body, which in this connection is expected to surpass the natural limitations of disease, aging and death. The transformed body is pictured as healthy, youthful, beautiful and powerful. At the same time, it is described as extraordinarily stable and resistant to the changes caused by the passage of time. These properties are also implied by the metaphors of a stone-like body or adamantine body, presented in the Siddha's texts. Such imaging of the body may further reflect the underlying Siddha view in which the distinctions between the lifeless matter and living body, human and non-human, does not appear to be obvious.

Certain preparations at the same time are believed to effect the significant transformation also in the non-human matter, such as "binding", "killing" into powders or ashes, or transmutation into gold. Medicine preoccupied with the healthy human body and alchemy engaged in the operations on manifold substances seem to be thus closely entangled in Yākōpu's works, and both may be regarded as integral parts of the wider system of sister sciences, aimed at variously perceived transformations associated with surpassing of the limitations of the natural order.

Medical and alchemical procedures are also tightly connected with yogic and spiritual practices, which supports the view that the human being in Tamil Siddha tradition is treated holistically, as an entity in which spheres of materiality and spirituality are intrinsically interconnected and interrelated. Such an assumption, clearly expressed in the fundamental text of the tradition (TM), underlies the practices described in Yākōpu's medico-alchemical books.

In the consulted texts of Yākōpu, special substances (*muppu*, *kuru*) associated with salty efflorescence found in local sites of fuller's earth (*pūnīru*) have been presented as fundamental items necessary for the fulfilment of the operations and as the main agents of the transformations. They are credited with extraordinary transforming abilities, and thus may be conceived as creative agencies, rather than inert, passive materials. In this respect, a Siddha perspective regarding the role of such items may offer an interesting point of view

for the reflection related to material ecocriticism, in connection to the questioning of “some of the most basic assumptions that have underpinned the modern world, including its normative sense of the human and its beliefs about human agency, but also regarding its material practices, such as the ways we labor on, exploit, and interact with nature” (Coole and Frost 2010: 4, quoted by Iovino and Oppermann 2014: 2), the first of which, as Iovino and Oppermann put it, “is the chasm between the human and the nonhuman world in terms of agency” (*ibid.*). The Siddha vision of the world as a dynamic plexus of human and nonhuman agents, expressed in and formed by Tamil Siddha literature, may be stimulating for the contemporary considerations on the fluidity of the dualistic categories such as human—nonhuman; lifeless—alive; body—spirit.

The occurrence of salty efflorescence fundamental for the successful operations of a Siddha practitioner is strongly dependent on regional spatiotemporal conditions (i.e. the proper season, special sites etc.), which binds Siddha medicine and alchemy tightly with the local environment. The possibility to perform operations which require the use of *pūnīru* strictly depends on the availability of the substance related to the natural cycle. Similarly, the local flora mentioned in the recipes, yet never that much praised, is also essential in the completion of the practitioner’s work. Thus, the production of transforming drugs depends on natural ingredients of various origin provided by the local surrounding, which indicates the interrelatedness with nature in regard to Siddha medicine and alchemy.

On the other hand, a Siddha practitioner is presented in the texts as a powerful master, who, with the use of medico-alchemical science, intervenes in natural processes, defying natural limitations. In Yākōpu’s works, nature and culture are mutually influencing each other and appear as the forces intertwined in the network of interdependences. Such an approach is concordant with the perspective of cultural ecology, which, as noted by Zapf, “considers the sphere of human culture not as separate from but as interdependent with and transfused by ecological processes and natural energy cycles” (Zapf 2010: 137).

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