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Global Trajectories of a Local Lore: Some Remarks about Medico-Alchemical* Literature of the Two Tamil Siddha Cosmopolites

SUMMARY: Tamil Siddha medicine in the present-day discourses on identity and tradition is often presented as an exclusively Tamil system of science. The following paper aims at showing some examples of quite different images of the Tamil Siddha tradition depicted in a few of the classical Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical texts. The following consideration concentrates on the works of two respected authors of Tamil Siddha literature, namely Irāmatēvar alias Yākōpu and Pōkar, both of whom may be regarded as particular cosmopolites among the Tamil Siddhas. The texts ascribed to Yākōpu and Pōkar suggest the cosmopolitan nature of both of the authors, which may be also reflected in the character of their teachings presented in their literature as a transcultural system of knowledge dedicated to the benefit of all mankind.

KEYWORDS: Tamil Siddha literature, Tamil Siddha medicine, Irāmatēvar, Yākōpu, Pōkar.

In regard to Indian medicine the problem of the concepts of ‘regional’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ might be considered as a relation between local medical systems, represented by the body of literature often composed in vernacular languages, and the classical pan-Indian medical system of Āyurveda, the canonical texts of which have been composed mostly

* Traditional Tamil Siddha medicine is closely connected with alchemy. A wide range of metallic and mineral preparations used in traditional alchemy is regarded to be a speciality of the Tamil medical system. Entanglement between the two disciplines is reflected in Tamil Siddha literature, the texts of which often deal with both medical and alchemical subjects.

in Sanskrit. Nonetheless, there is yet another interesting aspect of this matter which may be observed with reference to Tamil Siddha medicine, i.e. its claims of affiliation with certain foreign traditions from outside India and consideration of those traditions as a valuable source of some integral elements of the Siddha medical system. In this case the concept of ‘cosmopolitanism’ could refer not so much to the pan-Indian and Sanskrit-language ‘cosmopolis’ addressed by Pollock (Pollock 2006), but it would rather designate going out further, even beyond India and the area of Indian cultural impact. This ‘cosmopolitanism’ would be connected not only with the assimilation of some elements borrowed from foreign medical traditions in the Tamil Siddha system of knowledge but also with describing it as a transcultural science dedicated to the well-being of all mankind.

Tamil Siddha medicine (Tam. *citta maruttuvam*, *citta vaiittiyam*)¹ is one of the traditional Indian medical systems recognized by the Indian Ministry of AYUSH.² In general, Siddha medicine, as traditional Tamil medicine, is closely tied with the specific Tamil community and regarded as an essential element of the Tamil tradition. This strong connection between Siddha medicine and the region of Tamil Nadu may be observed not only in political, medical and popular discourses but also in practice, since Tamil medicine is in fact absent outside Tamil Nadu (Rageth 2016: 1).³ In the context of the present-day imaging of the Tamil Siddha tradition, marked with a conception of Siddha medicine as a unique heritage of the Tamil nation, some examples of a different view presented in the classical Tamil Siddha literature appear

¹ According to the general convention in scholarly publications in English, in this paper I use the Sanskrit name *siddha* for the Tamil medical tradition, instead of its Tamil version *cittar*.

² AYUSH is an acronym for Āyurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy. However, since 2010 the traditional Tibetan medicine *sowa-rigpa* has been also legitimized by the Ministry. See Khalikova 2016: 2.

³ Among traditional Indian medical systems it is Āyurveda that is generally considered to be ‘national’ or ‘global’ medicine. On the dominancy of Āyurveda over the other Indian medical systems see Khalikova 2016.

unexpected and astonishing, and therefore remarkable. Siddha medicine is often presented in present-day discourses on identity and tradition as an exclusively Tamil system of science, which should be purified from external influences seen as a cause of damage to the original knowledge (Weiss 2008 and Weiss 2009). This paper aims at showing some cases of diverse images of the Tamil Siddha tradition depicted in the few texts of the classical Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature. Our consideration will be focused on the works of the two authors of the *Kāyasiddha*⁴ branch of the Tamil Siddha tradition, who, as will be shown, may be regarded as particular cosmopolites among the Tamil Siddhas. The cosmopolitan nature of the above-mentioned Siddhas, suggested in their texts, may be reflected also in the character of their teachings presented as a transcultural system of knowledge, dedicated to the entire mankind.⁵

According to the prevailing traditional view the total number of the Tamil Siddhas includes ‘Eighteen Siddhas’ (*paṭiṇeṇ cittarkaḷ*).⁶

⁴ This term derives from the word *kāyacitti*, i.e. the power (*citti*) of preserving the body (*kāyam*) from the effects of ageing by use of special medicaments, which is considered to be the main preoccupation of this stream of Tamil Siddha tradition (Venkatraman 1990: 7–9). For the classifications of the Tamil Siddha tradition see also Zvelebil 1993: 17–19, Zvelebil 2003: 19–20, Ganapathy 1993: 22–24.

⁵ It should be emphasised that the following study concerns only a few of the vast amount of Tamil Siddha texts and that the cosmopolitan character of the two authors of our present interest suggested by their texts is not a characteristic trait observed in all of the Tamil Siddha classical writings.

⁶ Modern scholars commonly agree that the number eighteen in reference to the totality of the Siddhas is unhistorical, see for example Venkatraman 1990: 6, Ganapathy 2004: 24–26. Number eighteen in regard to the southern Siddhas, as well as number eighty-four in regard to the northern Indian Siddha tradition, appears to be chosen on the grounds of its mystical connotations, widely present in Indian culture (see Zvelebil 1993: 28). Personages who are regarded to be Siddhas, variously listed in the texts, seem to be much more numerous than the traditionally accepted group of eighteen.

Those eighteen figures are regarded as a group of particularly respectable personages possessing great wisdom, supernatural powers (*citti*) and special skills in medicine, alchemy and allied sciences. Venkatraman in his book *A History of Tamil Siddha Cult* shows that a number of textual sources contain listings of those eighteen authorities, but no two of the lists are identical.⁷ Among variously listed eighteen Siddhas names of gods, demigods, celestial damsels, sages and religious personalities can all be found (Venkatraman 1990: 5–6).

Among the most traditionally revered Tamil Siddhas listed in the above-mentioned sources two personages are especially renowned for their accounts of distant travels in the quest for acquiring and spreading medical and alchemical knowledge. The first one is Irāmatēvar alias Yākōpu,⁸ who claims to have visited Mecca. The second one is Pōkar,⁹ who claims to have travelled around the world visiting many foreign places, including Mecca, Rome, Jerusalem and China. Although at the present stage of research it would be difficult to find external evidence of those travels, it may be supposed that the two Siddhas had a certain idea about the foreign traditions seen by them as a valuable source of knowledge, and as potential recipients of

On the relevance of the number eighteen within Indian spiritual traditions see Ganapathy 2004, Appendix 1.

⁷ Venkatraman 1990, Appendix 2, 3, 4.

⁸ It is the name ‘Rāmatēvar’ (i.e. variant of the more common form ‘Irāmatēvar’) only which figures on the eighteen Siddhas lists provided by Venkatraman, whereas there is no mention of the name ‘Yākōpu’ (see Venkatraman 1990, Appendix 2: 199). Both the names are used repeatedly by the author in his texts, hence in the present paper I will refer to the author interchangeably as ‘Irāmatēvar’ and ‘Yākōpu’.

⁹ ‘Pōkar’ is a Tamil name, derived from the Tamilized version of Sanskrit noun *bhoga*, i.e. ‘enjoyment’, ‘eating’, ‘pleasure’, ‘wealth’. In the present paper I use the Tamil version of the name, instead of its Sanskritized counterparts, i.e. Bhogar/Bhōgar/Pōgar, which often figure in English publications on the subject.

their science as well.¹⁰ Imagined or not, distant travels were described in the passages scattered in the literature ascribed to these two authors. The following section of the present paper will examine selected passages from the texts of Yākōpu and Pōkar which may imply the cosmopolitan character of both of these extraordinary Siddha personages and which could suggest the cosmopolitan character of the teachings contained in their texts as well.

Irāmatēvar alias Yākōpu: The quest for knowledge to ‘the land of Mecca’

As far as some figures enumerated on the above-mentioned lists of the Eighteen Siddhas seem to be mythical characters whose names were adopted by some Tamil Siddha writers in order to raise the esteem of their works, Irāmatēvar is considered to be a historical person. Most probably he lived between 15th and 17th centuries.¹¹ As argued by Natarajan, in opposition to the opinion that Yākōpu was a foreigner among Tamil Siddhas, most certainly he was a native Tamil alchemist and medicine man. The author introduces himself as a person originally called ‘Irāmatēvar’ in several passages in his texts.¹² Moreover, he provides an account about the origin of his lineage called ‘Maravar’ and ‘Tēvar’, which is claimed to be a family of warriors, connected with some Hindu mythical personages:

¹⁰ Some passages, especially from the works of Yākōpu, may suggest that the author personally visited the lands described, as some cultural details and foreign words are provided in the description. On the other hand, there are also phantasmagorical descriptions included in the texts, especially in the works of Pōkar, which would rather imply that the travels are imagined. So far there is no external evidence found which could confirm the alleged journeys of the two Siddhas.

¹¹ Natarajan 2004: 257. According to Venkatraman Yākōpu lived in a later period, between 17th–18th centuries (Venkatraman 1990: 63).

¹² See for example VaiCi: 6: *ātimuta leṅpēru irāmatēvar* [...] (‘At the beginning my name [was] Irāmatēvar [...]).’)

As Indra, [the Lord] of Celestials, made love to Akalikai,¹³ in this [way] was born our family. [There are] great warriors [belonging] to it. Because for the sake of happiness [the seduction of Akalikai by Indra] was concealed, also the noble Gautama was called the skilful ‘Maravar’ and ‘Tēvar’. In this [family] also great venerable persons [who performed] sacrifices [for] the world were [born]. Firmly also ‘Rāma’ is called ‘Tēvar’ [i.e. Irāmatēvar]! Akastyar¹⁴ gave [us] also the name ‘Makapati’¹⁵ and all the sages were giving blessings and rejoicing.¹⁶

It is reported that in search of medical and alchemical knowledge Irāmatēvar travelled to Mecca, famous for its alchemical masters, where he converted to Islam, was circumcised and received the Muslim name ‘Yākōpu’:

When [I] was in Mecca to become [who] I [am now], I knew my name as ‘Rāmatēvar’. I went to the land of Mecca in order to obtain help [of the prophets]. [...] The noble prophets revealed [to me] the

¹³ ‘Akalikai’ is Tamilized form of the Sanskrit name ‘Ahalyā’. This stanza is closely connected with the Hindu myth about seduction of Ahalyā, the wife of the sage Gautama, by god Indra. According to the version of the myth from *Rāmāyaṇa*, Indra disguised himself as the sage Gautama and seduced his wife, Ahalyā. When Gautama saw the god disguised as himself and realized what had happened, with the power gained by his great austerities he damned his wife and cursed the god, so that both of Indra’s testicles fell off. See Doniger O’Flaherty 1994: 94–96.

¹⁴ ‘Akastiyar’ is one of the Tamilized versions of the Sanskrit name of vedic sage ‘Agastya’.

¹⁵ ‘Makapati’ is Tamilized version of Sanskrit compound *makha-pati* and it means literally ‘the Lord of Sacrifice’, i.e. Indra.

¹⁶ VaiCi: 18: *akalikaiyai tēvēntiraṇ cinēkañceyya*
atirpiranta teṅkaḷkula maṇṇāḷtaṇṇil
cukamāka maraintatiṇāl kautamarum
cūṭcamuḷḷa maravareṇrum tēvareṇrum
jekameccap pērumiṭṭā ratiliruntu
tīramuṭa nērāma tēvareṇru
makapatiyā makastiyarum pērumiṭṭu
vāḷttiṇār muṇivarellā makiṇtiṭṭārē

Knowledge. I was reformed, I got circumcised, for heaven [to be obtained] the prophets¹⁷ called me ‘Yākōpu’. I was living [there] truthfully for a long time.¹⁸

Yākōpu is regarded to be a prolific author, as he is credited with at least seventeen works on medicine, alchemy and magic.¹⁹ Reports from his travel to Mecca are scattered in all of his texts composed after his conversion to Islam (Natarajan 2004: 6). As observed in the texts, the journey to the distant land and the first encounter with a foreign culture may have been a difficult experience for the author. According to the account given in the *Cuṇṇakāṇṭam 600*, the journey to the distant ‘land of Mecca’ (*makkātēcam*) required the use of both ordinary transport (sailing) as well as extraordinary means, i.e. application of the mercurial pill (*kuḷikai*), which according to the Siddha tradition bestows upon the user the ability to fly in the sky:

¹⁷ In another book Yākōpu claims that it was his teacher, Irācūl, who gave him the name ‘Yākōpu’. See VāVai: 241.

¹⁸ PaMi: 5: *nāṇāka makkāvil iruntapōtu*
nāṭiṇēṇ yenpēru rāmatēvar
pōṇēnāṇ makkāviṇ tēcantāṇṇil
pukalarīya patiṇāru paṭiyilērik
kōṇāṇa napimārkaḷ putticonṇār
kuṇappaṭṭuc cuṇṇattuc ceytukoṇṭēṇ
vāṇāka napimārkaḷ yākōpenrār
vaṭivāka vekukālam vāṇtiṭṭēṇē

¹⁹ Yākōpu is credited with seventeen texts, which he is claimed to have composed after his conversion to Islam. The general publisher of the Yākōpu’s works, Ji. Irāmacāmi Kōṇ, lists the seventeen works as follows: *Vaiṭṭiya Cintāmaṇi 700*, *Kurunūl 55*, *Cuṇṇakkāṇṭam 600*, *Cuṇṇam 300*, *Centūra Cūsti[ram] 150*, *Cūstiram 55*, *Vakārak Kaḷaṅku 300*, *Pañcamittiram 300*, *Taṇṭakam 110*, *Cūstiram 55*, *Iṭaipākam 16*, *Ceypākam 16*, *Vaiṭya Vātacūstiram 400*, *Vaiṭṭiyam 300*. To this list *Kallāṭam* is also added as a work traditionally ascribed to Yākōpu. See Kuppucāmi Nāyūṭu 1960: 2. However, before his travel to Mecca, Irāmatēvar probably also composed a few texts, for example *Civayōkam 200*. See Natarajan 2004: 258.

Having sailed the northern sea and the southern sea, having sailed through the ocean located in the West in order to obviate the obstacles, having applied the pill (*kuḷikai*), I have seen many artful alchemies! I have come [to Mecca], considering among [my] aims [reaching again] the edge of the sea in the East [i.e. India]! [...] ²⁰

The statement that at the time of travelling to Mecca Irāmatēvar already possessed the magical mercurial pill suggests that he images himself as a skilful alchemist even before the departure from his homeland. However, as may be observed from the reports of his journey, in the quest for knowledge he seems to be unceasingly willing to improve. Nonetheless, it is suggested that having reached the destination, i.e. Mecca, learning alchemy from the Muslim masters appeared to be an arduous task. It is reported that the Muslim prophets (*napimarkaḷ*), presumably local authorities in the domain of alchemy (*racavātam*), at the beginning showed indifference or enmity towards Irāmatēvar:

In Mecca there are many prophets living in great joy. Look, they will not tell [anything] to anybody. At first they will speak with hatred, do not stand before them desiring anything! ²¹

However, it is claimed that the explorer did not give up on his quest for knowledge. On the contrary, it is suggested that he patiently and humbly followed the demands of the prophets, learnt about the culture, observed and performed local customs and finally fulfilled the required tasks and gained the favour of the authorities. The act of granting

²⁰ CuKa: 287: *tāmētāṇ vaṭakāṭalten kaṭalumōṭit*
tataiyaravē mēṛkiluḷḷa camuttirattil
vāmētāṇ kuḷikaiyiṭṭu oṭināṇum
vakaiyāṇa vātaṅkaḷ mikavumpārttēṇ
kāmē tāṇ kiḷakkiluḷḷa kaṭaliṇōram
karuttilē niṇaittumē vantutāṇum [...]

²¹ PaMi: 4: *iruppārkaḷ makkattil napikaḷ rempay*
iṇpamuṟru oruvarukkuṅ collārpāru
veṟuppākaḷ pēciṭuvā ravarkaḷ munṇē
virumpiyē nī niṛka vēṇṭāmpiṇṇē [...]

his possessions to the citizens of Mecca may have also been helpful in acquiring the friendship of the locals:

Having thus truthfully bestowed [my] possessions [upon] the prophets [who kept guard at] the border of the land of Mecca I spent [money] on the preparation of the Kantiri²² Festival. Having bestowed [money] for the livelihood [upon them] I went [in] by walk. At the time of going happily through the gateway of the street of Allah in Mecca blessed with supernatural powers the prophets will be loving [you], oh dear, listen in good manner to them as [they] will speak.²³

I went to the land of Mecca, in order to obtain help [of the prophets]. I climbed the sixteen steps²⁴ and the noble prophets revealed [to me] the Knowledge.²⁵

²² Kantiri—a Muslim festival held in honour of a deceased holy person.

²³ CuKa: 374: *vaittumē ippaṭikku makkātēcam*
vaṭivākap pōkumaṭṭum napicottaittāṇ
vaittumē celavaḷittuk kantiripaṇṇi
vakaiyāka vaittumē naṭantupōyi
cittuvara makkāviṇ allāvīti
ciṛappāka vācalilē pōkumpōtu
nattumē napimārka ḷiruppārappā
nalamāka avarkaḷukkuc collakkēḷē

²⁴ The text does not explicitly say what kind of steps are meant by the author here. Number sixteen in Indian tradition is associated with fullness and perfection. Conquering sixteen steps in the quest for the knowledge may indicate the complete character of learned science. On the meaning of the number sixteen in Veda, Yoga and Tantra, see White 1996: 36–45. Interestingly, in another work Yākōpu relates climbing not sixteen but eighteen steps (see for example VāVai: 5). Similarly to the number sixteen, the number eighteen is yet another figure connected with fullness in Indian tradition. Sixteen and eighteen are especially meaningful in Sanskrit alchemical tradition of *rasaśāstra*, as the first figure is a number of perfecting operations (*saṃskāra*) which prepare mercury and other substances for the ultimate transmutation of metals into gold and creation of an immortal body, the last two of the total eighteen alchemical operations. See White 1996: 265–269.

²⁵ PaMi: 5.2–3a: *pōṇēnāṇ makkāviṇ tēcantāṇṇil*
pukalariya paṭiṇāru paṭiyilērik
kōṇāṇa napimārkaḷ putticonṇār

Listen, for a very long time I was hated by the prophets in a terrible way.
 [But finally] they accepted me as a protégé and lowered [their] hearts.
 They told me orderly about one salt. [...] ²⁶

It could be presumed that Yākōpu probably describes his own experience when he advises the reader how to behave towards the prophets unwilling to let the foreigner in and to reveal the secrets of alchemy:

Having gone inside [Mecca] and stopped, having seen many prophets on the excellent streets you too should bow towards them and worship [them]. In this place you should praise and prostrate yourself with love. Every day you should go [there] and fall to [their] feet, [their] helpful hearts will melt and you [will] walk [in] and stay. Ask for [their] orders and do with energy [according to their] will! ²⁷

As claimed by the author, the prophets revealed to him some alchemical preparations. The process of learning was gradual and required a lot of patience and continual effort in order to constantly please the prophets. ²⁸ The description of the experiences in ‘the land of Mecca’ presents its author as a keen observer of the foreign culture. He describes Mecca as a rich country abundant with gold and precious stones (Cu: 151–152). He also extols the local prophets, who are said to reside in Mecca in huge numbers. Yākōpu portrays them as modest, skilful,

²⁶ CuKa: 376: *kēlumē vekukōṭi kālamnānum*
keṭiyāka napimāraik kārṭtiruntēṇ
ālumē avarkaḷtāṇ maṇamiraṅki
aṭaivāka oruuppuc coṇṇārtāmum

²⁷ CuKa: 377: *ceṇrumē uḷḷētāṇ niṇrunṭiyum*
ciraṇṇāṇa vīṭiyilē napimārrempak
kaṇṭumē avarkaḷukku vaṇaṅkipṭōṛrik
kaṇivākat toḷuṭiraiṅcip paḷḷitaṇṇil
aṇrumē pōyumē aṭivaṇaṅki
aṭaivāṇa maṇaturukic ceṇrūyēki
niṇrumē uttaravu kēṭṭukkoṇṭu
niṇaippaittā nuruṭiyāyc ceyiṭiāyē

²⁸ See for example PaMi: 105–112.

wealthy, good-minded but reserved.²⁹ It is suggested that the Siddha observed, learnt and performed the local religious customs, such as Muslim prayer (*kalimā*), he also repeatedly mentions worshipping Muhammad, following the path of Muhammad and praying with the phrase *lāyiyillāyillallāku*, which most certainly is a Tamilized version of the initial part of the Muslim confession of faith. As described in the texts, the expedition to Mecca seems to have been exceedingly fruitful for Yākōpu. First of all, it is suggested that he managed to acquire the recipes for alchemical preparations from the Muslim alchemical lore, which seems to be regarded by him as highly valuable knowledge. It is said that he received the teachings from Muslim prophets, among whom with special emphasis he mentions the master called ‘Irācūl’ (Arab. *rasūl*, ‘messenger’, ‘prophet’):

[...] In the land of Mecca there were many great persons of rare fame. They told [me] about many different alchemies. Having seen and examined the basics for the [preparation of] the artful pill (*kuḷikai*), I moved towards eighteen separated steps. I climbed the twelve [steps] and I got confused. At that time Irācūl saw [me] and gave [me] a hand competently, [so that] the bliss would occur.³⁰

He [Irācūl] blessed [me] and told me [how] to [make] iron become gold.³¹ I heard [about] all the fertile alchemies. I shared and told the permanent

²⁹ For example Cu: 151–152.

³⁰ VāVai: 5: *pukuntittē makkāviṇ tēcantanṇir*
pukalariya periyōrkaḷ mettavuṇṭu
vakuntittā vātānkaḷ mikavuṇṇōṇṇār
vakaiyāṇa kuḷikaimutar kaṇṭutēri
ukuntittā patinēṭṭu paṭiyilyāṇum
urumē yīrāru paṭikaḷērip
pakuntittēṇ yīrcūluṅ kaṇṭārappō
pakkuvamāyk kaikoṭuttār pataviyāmē

³¹ According to the common belief the successful Siddhas are capable of producing pure gold from other metals. Gold created in the alchemical operations is expected to provide livelihood for the Siddhas, who should devote their time fully to medical and alchemical works and spiritual practices.

essence [of the knowledge]. I followed and united with the prophets on the Earth and I revealed [the knowledge]. [...] I saw and studied all the deep matters. [...] ³²

It is also claimed that apart from the alchemical preparations the prophets revealed to Yākōpu the location of the mythical Well of Mercury (*racakiṇaru*),³³ which allowed him to collect mercury for the preparation of two more magical pills (*kuḷikai*) (Cu: 153–155). Subsequently the pills enabled him to travel by flight even further than Mecca. He asserts to have visited ‘all the worlds’ and learnt alchemies of many sages and Siddhas. However, he does not provide the reader with more detailed descriptions of the alleged travels (Cu: 156). Beside mastering the art of flying in the sky (*kēcaram*) Yākōpu claims to have achieved the highest goal, i.e. the final bliss, due to his travels and education:

Having walked the path of Muhammad, having examined and learnt unspoilt alchemy in an excellent way, with sharpness of the intellect I have entered [the domain] of those who walk in the sky (*kēcaram*).³⁴ I have risen on the ancient path and indeed I have entered the final bliss.³⁵

³² VāVai: 242: *vāḷttiṇār corṇamaya mākaveṇru*
vaḷamāṇa vātamellām kēṭṭukkoṇṭu
pāṭṭiyē pativāṇa cattucconṇēṇ
pāruḷakil napimāraip pattittēri
 [...] *kaṇamāṇa poruḷellāṇ kaṇṭutēri* [...]

³³ About the myth of the well of mercury in Sanskrit alchemical literature and its parallels outside India see White 1997.

³⁴ The Tamil word *kēcaram* derives from the Sanskrit term *khecara*, ‘moving (*cara*) in the air (*kha*)’. In Indian alchemy it is regarded to be a skill acquired by the alchemist who in his mouth keeps mercury bound due to alchemical operations, called *khecari* (‘the one that moves in the air’). See White 1996: 211–212.

³⁵ VāVai: 4: [...] *kaṇṇarntu mukammatuviṇ mārkattēkik*
kuṇaivillā racavātaṇ kuṇamatākak
kūрмаiyāyp paṭikēca rattirpukkip
puraiyāṇa vaḷitaṇilē yēriyāṇum
pukkiṇēṇ patavitaṇiṇ pukuntitṭēṇē

In his books Yākōpu mentions not only his Muslim teachers from Mecca, but also *gurus* from Indian tradition, i.e. the Siddhas,³⁶ which may indicate the multicultural roots of the science contained in his texts. Therefore, it could be expected that the teachings of Yākōpu contain elements of both traditions, that is of Muslim and Siddha lore. Apart from alchemical recipes claimed to be of Islamic origins, in his teachings Yākōpu preserves also elements deeply rooted in Indian tradition, for example, he recommends the performing yoga in order to achieve success in alchemy (Cu: 160) or he suggests the worship of Hindu deities (Natarajan 2004: 160). He claims to have acquired his knowledge not only from his travels to Mecca, but also from classical Indian scientific texts, such as *śāstra* (*cāstiram*) and *sūtra* (*cūttiram*):

After hearing oral explanations, as all the prophets were showing creation of many alchemical [preparations] which they had [well] examined, I, [who am] a slave who became refined, learnt [the alchemy]. I was walking in the forest and considering [the learnt science]. I have taken the index of the treatises (*cāstiram*) and recited the treatises (*cāstiram*) and the aphorisms (*cūttiram*) in order to remove the obstacles. In the old world I have revealed [the science], oh dear, I, [who am] Yākōpu of acute intellect, have committed myself to speaking.³⁷

The syncretic character of his science may be reflected also in the language of his books, which contains foreign vocabulary from Sanskrit, Arabic, Urdu, Persian and Chinese (Natarajan 2004: 262).

³⁶ For example Kumpamuṇi and Tēvariṣi Cittar, see VāVai: 6.

³⁷ VāVai: 240: *naviṇriṭṭa molikēṭṭu napimārellām*
nāṭiyē vātamikac ceytukāṭṭak
kaviṇriṭṭa aṭiyēṇuṇ karrukkoṇṭu
kāṇakatti lēkiyē kaṇakkaippārttut
taviṇriṭṭa cāttirattiṇaṭṭavanai koṇṭu
taṭaiyaṇacās tiramuṇcūs tiramumpāṭi
tuviṇriṭṭa tollulakil conṇēṇappā
tūṭiyāṇa yākōpu tōyntiṭṭēṇē

Yākōpu presents his teachings as a science destined for the well-being of all the world:³⁸

I have shortened [all the learnt knowledge] and said [it] with love for [all] the present and future worlds, indeed [I], Yākōpu, [have] proudly [said] the truth.³⁹

Students who will follow the alchemical instructions contained in Yākōpu's books are promised to achieve the ultimate goal of salvation, becoming emancipated ones (*muttar*)⁴⁰ and to lead happy lives of Muslim prophets (*napi*) 'in all the three worlds' (*mūvulakil*):⁴¹

[...] if they examine all my books and prepare *centūrams*,⁴² starting with *kaḷaṅku*,⁴³ they will all live happily as the prophets in all the three worlds having reached the desired state as the emancipated ones.⁴⁴

It is also stated that they will obtain permanent and pure satisfaction and master the alchemy. Moreover, it is asserted that they will

³⁸ Presenting the teachings contained in the text as knowledge destined for the benefit of the entire world may be considered as conventional in Siddha literature. Such claims are present also in other Tamil Siddha sources, see e.g. Pari: 1.6.

³⁹ VāVai: 242: [...] *tāḷṭṭiyē yikaparattuk koppāyc conṇēṇ*
tāṭṭikamā yākōpu taṇmaitāṇē

⁴⁰ *muttar* is a Tamilized form of the Sanskrit term *mukta*, i.e. 'liberated', 'emancipated'.

⁴¹ 'in all the three worlds' (*mūvulakil*) i.e. in heaven, on earth and in the intermediate space.

⁴² *centūram*—calcined red oxide. For the division of *centūrams* see Sambasivam Pillai 1991–1998, vol. 4, part 1: 466–469.

⁴³ *kaḷaṅku*—alchemical preparation in the form of a pill, with several metals and mercury as a chief ingredient, see Sambasivam Pillai 1991–1998, vol. 2, part 1: 530–531.

⁴⁴ PaMi: 303: *cuttaraca vāti-tā ṇ-eṇ-ṇūl-ellām*
cōṭittuk kaḷaṅkumutal centūraṅkaḷ
muttarāyp pākamāyc ceytukoṇṭāl
mūvulakil napimārāy muḷutum vālvār [...]

be transformed to the fulfilled ones—the Siddhas (*cittar*)—who possess the riches (*pākkīyamāvār*):

At the time when [they will] be eternally [and] purely satisfied the alchemy certainly will come. [Thus] said Yākōpu . They will change into Siddhas who possess the riches [...].⁴⁵

Successful adepts of Yākōpu's teachings are, therefore, expected to become highly respected members of Islamic society as well as revered personages among the Indian Siddha tradition.

Pōkar: Collecting and spreading the knowledge around the world

The following section will concern the figure of Pōkar, the author of the text *Pōkar 7000*. This voluminous text consists of seven major portions, each containing about 1000 verses, and, therefore, it is also alternatively called *Captakāṇṭam*, i.e. *The Seven Portions*. The name of the author occurs in the Siddha listings examined by Venkatraman extraordinarily frequently, as it figures in all of the consulted lists (Venkatraman 1990: 198–200). Venkatraman discerns three different Tamil Siddhas called 'Bhōgar'.⁴⁶ The first one (Bhōgar I) supposedly lived around the 10th to the 11th century, and he is mentioned in *Tirumantiram*⁴⁷ as the pontiff of one of

⁴⁵ PaMi: 303: *nittiyamāy nirmalamāy niṛaintapōtu
nirṇayamāy vātamvarum yākōpucoṇṇār
cittarāyt tirivārkaḷ pākkīyamāvār [...]*

⁴⁶ Venkatraman, as well as other scholars on the Tamil Siddha tradition, follows English transcription throughout his book, using for the Tamil name 'Pōkar' the form 'Bhōgar'.

⁴⁷ *Tirumantiram* of Tirumūlar is traditionally considered as a source text for the Tamil Siddha tradition. The book is also accepted as one of the twelve parts of *Tirumuṛai*, i.e. a collection of sacred Tamil Śaiva scriptures. The chronology of the text is uncertain. It is dated to the period around the 5th to the 6th century CE by Ganapathy (Ganapathy 2006), Zvelebil accepts the 7th century CE as a period of its composition (Zvelebil 1993: 72), whereas according to Venkatraman the text is not older than the 10th to the 12th century CE (Venkatraman 1990: 45).

the Siddha religious centres. So far no preserved texts of this Siddha have been found. Bhōgar II possibly lived in the early 17th century in the region of Caturakiri.⁴⁸ He is believed to have been the teacher of many students, among which Koṅkaṇar and Karuvūrar are the most prominent Siddhas. There exist many texts ascribed to this author. Finally, Bhōgar III lived around the 17th to the 18th century (Venkatraman 1990: 65). He is closely linked with the Paḷaṇi region in the Madurai district and in popular view he is considered to be the creator of the famous Taṅṭapāṇi⁴⁹ idol believed to be made of ‘nine poisons’ (*navapāṣāṇam*),⁵⁰ located in the Paḷaṇi shrine.⁵¹ *Captakāṇṭam* is considered by some scholars to have been composed in Citamparam in the 17th century (Natarajan 2009: 154). However, as indicated by Venkatraman (Venkatraman 1990: 163), at least some parts of the text cannot be older than the 19th century, as it refers to the Muslim poet Kuṇaṅkuṭi Mastāṇ (1788–1835).⁵² It remains uncertain which

⁴⁸ Caturakiri is located near Srivilliputhur in the Madurai district in Tamil Nadu. The place is closely associated with Siddha tradition. The name of the hill might be translated as ‘the square (*caturam*) mountain (*kiri*)’, as it is situated in the middle of the square formed by the sixteen other mountain peaks, four on each side of it (See Murukēcaṇ 2013: 13). Another possible translation is ‘the mountain (*kiri*) of wisdom (*caturam*)’, indicating Siddha sages’ relation with the site. It is reported to be a natural habitat of rare medical herbs endowed with supernatural powers and an abode and place of practices of renowned Siddhas. See Venkatraman 1990, Appendix 8: 215–217.

⁴⁹ ‘Taṅṭapāṇi’ is one of the names of god Murukaṇ.

⁵⁰ Nine poisons (*navapāṣāṇam*), i.e. corrosive sublimate (*vīram*), subchloride of mercury (*pūram*), vermilion (*ilīnkam*), realgar (*maṅḍōcilai*), yellow orpiment (*tāḷakam*), golden coloured arsenic (*kauri*), white arsenic (*veḷḷāi*), rat’s bane (*elippāṣāṇam*), dark coloured prepared arsenic (*kārmukil*). See Sampasivam Pillai 1991–1998, vol. 2, part 2: 1571. *Nāvapāṣāṇam* are widely used in the Tamil Siddha medical system and are generally available in medical shops across Tamil Nadu.

⁵¹ About the relations between Siddha Bhōgar and the Paḷaṇi shrine see Little 2006: 31–61.

⁵² Kuṇaṅkuṭi Mastāṇ was a Sufi mystic poet and yogi. He wrote over 1000 verses of mystic poetry in Tamil. See Venkatraman 1990: 173–174.

Bhōgar/Pōkar was the author of the *Captakāṇṭam*.⁵³ Nevertheless, the text itself presents its author as a master of alchemy, a scientist and a constructor, who travelled around the world visiting famous places and meeting renowned personages. The text contains references to the various, often marvelous, means of transport used by Pōkar during his travels in the air, on the earth and in the water. In the book, one finds frequent references to the magical flights enabled by the use of a mercurial pill (*kuḷikai*), as well as mentions of travel by steam-engine vehicle (*pukairattam*) (Pō: 2203–2231),⁵⁴ ship (*kappal*) (Pō: 1926), steam ship (*nīrāvi kappal*) (Pō: 4115), air balloon (*mēlpōkum kūṇṭu*) (Pō: 2390–2393), and parachute (*kūṇṭu*) (Pō: 1281–1284), **all the machines claimed to have been constructed by Pōkar himself**. The author provides the reader with the description of how to construct a few of his inventions, for example the parachute:

With pleasure I will tell [you] about the copula [constructed] in order to watch the earth from the skies. Listen about the suitable length and width of the umbrella— a circle of six feet [would be] suitable. Make the rope out of beautiful silks. In order to complete [the copula] fasten also thirty-two stalks of rattan and a strong wheel. While fastening, drive the iron screws in the wheel, according to the method. [...] While covering the long beams with the cloth, arrange [it] with a long cord. Let [the copula] expand with the beauty of form, hold the umbrella up. Skillfully let the wind make it bloom while jumping. Having learnt [the method] with earnest desire the copula will swing [in the air]. Quickly you will be able to see the people below. Hold the umbrella up in [your] hands immediately at the time of jumping from the mountain. The umbrella will wholly hold a man up, the man [should] take [all] the confidence. At the time of descending to the Earth all the lands in the eye will appear small. You will know [it when you see it] with [your] eyes. Thus said Pōkar. [...]

⁵³ According to Little, shifts in voice throughout the text indicate that there were at least three authors of *Captakāṇṭam*. See Little 2006: 68.

⁵⁴ *Pukairattam* means literally ‘smoke-car’. In another place Pōkar calls this vehicle also ‘divine car’ (*tēvaratam*), see Pō: 2212.

⁵⁵ Pō: 1281–1283: *pārkkavē vākāṣampāvantaṇṇil parivuṭaṇē kutippataṅku kūṇṭucolvēṇ*
kārkkavē vaṭṭamāṅkuṭaitāṇṇoru pāṅkaṇa kuṭainikaḷa makalaṅkēḷir
ērkkavē āraṭiyāvavṭavītu yelilāṇa paṭṭuvaṭaṇ taṇṇārceytu

Among the places allegedly visited by Pōkar the reader of *Captakāṅṭam* finds mythical places such as Mount Meru (*maiyaḱiri, mēru*),⁵⁶ as well as really existent cities and countries from all over the world, such as Rome (*rōmaḱuri*),⁵⁷ Mecca (*makkāvām puri*) (Pō: 2228–2233), Jerusalem (*erucalēm nakaram*) (Pō: 2221) and China (*cīṅam*).⁵⁸ Pōkar describes his meetings with many prominent persons encountered during those travels, such as sages (*riṣikaḷ*) and Siddhas (*cittar*) inhabiting Mount Meru,⁵⁹ disciples of Jesus (*ēcuvira)ṅ cīṣar*) in Rome (Pō: 2216), and Muslim prophets (*napi*) in Mecca (Pō: 2233). He also claims to have taken some sages and Siddhas in his steam-engine car with him for a ride to Rome (Pō: 2215) and to China (Pō: 2225):

[...] I, who am [just] a slave, [have constructed] with the calculations the steam [engine] cars in order to astonish everyone. Having praised Siddhas, sages and saints with cordiality I have bravely taken them to China. I have shown them one by one all the beauties and wonders.⁶⁰

tīrkkavē pirampatuvum muppattiraṅṭu tīramāṅa cakkaramumōṅrēmāṭṭē
(1281)

māṭṭavē cakkaratilirumpukkampi mārkkamāyt tāṅmuṭukki vāṅimāṭṭi
nīṭṭamuṭaṅ kampikkut tuṅitāṅpōrttu neṭitāṅa cūttiramāṅ kayarṭāṅkōrttu
vāṭṭamuṭaṅ tāṅvirittu kuṭaiyaiyēnti vākākat tāṅkutikkil vāyupūntu
tēṭṭamuṭaṅ kāṅratuvuṅkūṅṭēṭūkkum tīviramāy maṅitaṅuntāṅ kīṅōkkalāmē
(1292)

nōkkalām kūṭaitaṅaiyē kaiyilēnti noṭikkulḷē malaiyaiviṭṭu kutikkumpōtu
tūkkumē kuṭaitāṅumaṅitaṅaiṭṭāṅ tuppuravāy maṅitaṅaṅkē tuṅivukoṅṭu
tēkkuṭaṅē pūmitaṅiliraṅkumpōtu tēcamellāṅkaṅṅukku ḷaṅuvupōlum
nōkkuṭaṅē teriyumēṅru pōkartāṅum nēṅākap pāṅivaṭṭēṅ nēрмаipārē
(1293)

⁵⁶ For example, Pō: 2213–14. The journey across the peaks of Mount Meru in full form is described in section 5 of *Captakāṅṭam*, starting from verse 4813. For the condensed English version of the surreal trip to Mount Meru, as well as other accounts from *Captakāṅṭam* and popular stories about Bhōgar see Little 2006: 71–110.

⁵⁷ For example Pō: 2215–16.

⁵⁸ For example Pō: 2220, 2225–26.

⁵⁹ For example Pō: 2213–14, 1310, 2266.

⁶⁰ Pō: 2225: [...] *kaṅitamūṭa naṅiyēṅum pukairataṅkaḷ kācīṅiyil yārēṅum aticayikka*

Pōkar states that he has visited seventy countries (Pō: 2219), and that he has seen, among others, the tombs of the kings of Rome (Pō: 2215), the tomb of Emmanuel (*immāṅvēl*) and Israel (*isuravēl*) (Pō: 2216), tombs of twelve Apostles (*paṅireṅṅu cīṣavar*) (Pō: 2217), tomb of Jesus (Pō: 2219) and tomb of prophet Muhammad (*kōri*) (Pō: 2230). It is claimed that during his travels he was learning from the people encountered⁶¹ and he was teaching his science to the locals on his way as well. Pōkar's teachings to the people in China are mentioned repeatedly in the text:

The praised sage [Kalamamuṅi]⁶² told me: 'The knowledge that [you have] learnt having matured in the old world, without desire [and] with kindness, it [this knowledge] is [destined] for the students in China to be emancipated.' With all the affection and with efforts, without [any] fault, the learnt science about which the sage has spoken I have poured forth with affection among all the people. Learn the truth!⁶³

Accordingly to the will of sage Kalamamuṅi, Pōkar is repeatedly reported to have taught his knowledge to the people in China. Lessons 'poured forth' by Pōkar concern many various subjects, from construction of a parachute and steam engine to construction of the mansion (*mālikai*) in which the dead people can be seen in their bodily form (Pō: 1272–1280). It is suggested that revelation of such

tunivutaṅē cittarmuṅi riṣikaḷ tammaic cukamuṅaṅē tāṅētti cīṅantaṅṅil aṅiyāṅiyāykkonṅuceṅruaṅiyellā mavaravarkkuvaticayattaikkāṅṅiṅēṅē

⁶¹ For example, Pōkar receives teaching of doctrine (*ṅāṅa upatēcam*) from the group of a thousand Christian heroes met on the way from Rome (Pō: 2217), he is also taught by Siddha Akastiyar the 'knowledge of the ultimate reality (*piramaṅṅera vittai*) (Pō: 1749).

⁶² Sage Kalamamuṅi is mentioned in the previous stanza (Pō: 1479). It is said that he has been visited and worshipped by Pōkar in his *samādhi* (*camāti*) in China.

⁶³ Pō: 1480: *toḷutiṅṅa yentaṅṅukku muṅitāṅconṅṅār tollulakil nūrkarravittaitaṅṅai paḷuttitiṅṅa millāmal cīṅantaṅṅil paṅcamuṅaṅ māṅākkalpiḷaikkavenṅru muḷutiṅṅan taṅṅuṅaṅē muṅitāṅnacolla myarāciyutaṅ karravittai paḷutillāmal vaḷutiṅṅamuṅaṅ rāṅṅumaraiṅṅaiyellā māṅiṅattil koṅṅiviṅṅeṅ vaṅṅmaipārē*

a powerful and so far secret ‘science’ caused the disapproval of the other Siddhas, who ‘have swollen up with anger like boiling milk’ (Pō: 1279–1280). Apart from the relations from the visits in China, the descriptions of the travels to other destinations are usually devoid of details. Pōkar does not share with his readership a lot of insightful observations⁶⁴ and the stories are written in phantasmagoric manner, for example, one of the relations from his travels reads as follows:

[...] I went to the land of China. I saw the vision of Jesus who is a God. I turned back in order to see with details the group of [his] disciples and warriors. Having constructed the steam-engine car with bell metal I came to Jerusalem with [all my] virtue. I have put in [the fuel], I have applied the pill (*kuḷikai*), I have come [to Mecca] to see the Great Prophet.⁶⁵

Links between Pōkar and China are especially remarkable.⁶⁶ References to his visits to China are repeatedly mentioned throughout the *Captakāṇṭam*. Ganapathy indicates that in another Tamil Siddha text, *Agastiyar – 12000*,

[...] it is said that Bōgar⁶⁷ is a Chinese, that he is a disciple of Kālāṅgi (who lived in China) and that he is the guru of Pulippāṇi (the Indian name of Bōgar’s Chinese disciple Yu). (Ganapathy 2003: 66)

There is also a view that the Siddha Pōkar was in fact Lao-Tzu, the founder of Taoism in China (Ganapathy 2003: 67). According

⁶⁴ An example of the very few details included in the report from travels to places other than China is mention of roti bread (*rotṭi*), which Pōkar was given by prophets in Mecca. See Pō: 2230.

⁶⁵ Pō: 2226: *kāṭṭivantēṇ cīṇapatitanīrcenrēṇ kaṭavuḷāmēcuvīṇṭaṇ kāṭcikaṇṭēṇ vāṭṭamuṭaṇ pīmārkaḷ cīṣavarkkam vakaiyuṭaṇē kāṇavenru tirumpicēṇrēṇ kāṭṭamuṭaṇ pukairattatai māṭṭikkoṇṭu nalamuṭaṇē erucalēm kāṇavantēṇē māṭṭimaiyāy kuḷikaiyatu pūṇṭukoṇṭu mānapiyaiikkāṇavenru vantīṭṭēṇē*

⁶⁶ The maritime trade route between the south-east Indian coast and China had been established already by the beginning of the Common Era. Later, the early contacts resulted in the wider Sino-Indian exchange of ideas and goods, and also in the domain of alchemy and medicine. See White 1996: 61–66.

⁶⁷ ‘Bōgar’ is yet another version of transcription of the Tamil name Pōkar, used by Ganapathy in his book.

to some scholars, Pōkar was a Chinese Buddhist or Taoist philosopher who came to India to study medicine.⁶⁸ Yet other academics hold the view that Pōkar was originally a South Indian alchemist who went to China to study and teach his science (Natarajan 2009: 152). As pointed out by Ganapathy, Pōkar himself in his *Captakāṇṭam* claims to be the disciple of Kālāṅki, who was the disciple of Tirumūlar, the author of the *Tiruman-tiram* and the revered ancestor of the Tamil Siddhas, which suggests his South Indian origin (Ganapathy 2003: 67). Pōkar highlights his opinion about the special status of China among the countries of the world by juxtaposing its greatness among other countries with the greatness of devotion to the Supreme Being among other kinds of devotion:

If [you could] call [anything] ‘a country’—it’s the country of China. No one in the world has seen [such a country]! If [you could] call [anything] ‘a devotion’—it’s the devotion to the Supreme Being (*piramam*). In the earthly world people will eternally worship [It]. [...]⁶⁹

Again, as in the case of Yākōpu, Pōkar’s teachings are frequently declared to have been dedicated to the well-being of all humans. The knowledge contained in *Captakāṇṭam* is said to be an abridged version of a much vaster book, containing seven hundred thousand verses, shortened for the sake of the humanity of the whole world:⁷⁰

Having studied all the wonders I have composed with love the book of seven hundred thousand [verses]. I have abridged [it and] proclaimed [it] as *Pōkar 7000* for the sake of the mankind of the world. [...]⁷¹

⁶⁸ See Ganapathy 2003: 80, Natarajan 2009: 152.

⁶⁹ Pō: 1524: *tēcamenrāl tēcamatucīṇamāmō jekattil kaṇṭavarkaḷyārumillai pācamenrāl pīramamattin pācamākum pāṇulakil catānittam toḷuvārmāntar*

⁷⁰ The description of the shortening of a previously composed longer text is mentioned also in other Tamil Siddha texts. The texts often claim to contain a huge amount of knowledge, and at the same time they highlight their availability for the wide spectrum of audience by the statements that they are abridged, condensed and facilitated versions of some older authoritative literature, which originally was much more voluminous. See, for example, CauCa: 12.

⁷¹ Pō: 6: *aṛaintiṭṭēṇ ēḷulaṭcam kirantantaṇṇai aṇṇāka aticayaṅkaḷellām pārttu kuṛaintiṭṭēṇ pōkarēḷāyiramākakūriṇēṇ lōkattu māntarkkāka [...]*

Pōkar says that people have been deceived by other Siddhas with their unclear texts.⁷² He claims that for the salvation of all the people he has travelled around the world looking for hidden knowledge. It is stated that in his book he revealed secret teachings previously hidden and guarded by other Siddhas:⁷³

[...] With clarity of mind for the salvation of mankind, having applied the pill (*kuḷikai*), I have been flying from country to country with effort [through] proud mountains, caves and forests. I have seen all the dwelling places of independent Siddhas, as well as the robust tombs and so on. I have obtained all the books composed by the royal branches [of the Siddhas], the entire essence [of knowledge] which was kept hidden in the caves. As a master [of science] I have got into a quarrel with the Siddha. I have ridiculed [him] and obtained all the treatises. Having examined respectfully all the subtleties which were kept hidden I have converted [them] into the book for the sake of the mankind.⁷⁴

Moreover, Pōkar does not limit his lessons only to humans but he is concerned with animals as well. There are numerous animal stories contained in *Captakāṇṭam*. Pōkar repeatedly speaks with animals and helps them in various ways.⁷⁵

⁷² See, for example, Pō: 1431–1432.

⁷³ The claims about the secrecy of the teachings contained in the text are present also in works of other Tamil Siddhas. Similarly, quarrels with other Siddhas and the wrath of the traditional authorities unwilling to reveal obscured knowledge are also frequently mentioned in Siddha literature. See, for example, Pa: I.2, PiVaiCū: 3–4.

⁷⁴ Pō: 1475–1476: [...] *teḷivāka māṇṭarkal piḷaikkaვენru tēcatēcaṅkaḷmutal kuḷikaiḷpūṇṭu neḷivāna malaikukaikaḷ vaṅāntiraṅkaḷ nērpputaṅē kuḷikaiyiṭtu parantēntāṅē tāṅāna cittarmuṇi iruppiṭaṅkaḷ tākkāṅa camātimuta lellāmpārttu kōṅāna kavavararkaḷ ceytanūlai kukaitaṅilē maṟaittuvaitta karuvaivellām pāṅāka cittariṭam vatupēci paḷippōṭtu cāttiraṅka laṅaittumperrēṅ māṅāka maṟaittuvaitta nuṭpamellām matippuṭaṅē yārāyntu nulceyēṅē*

⁷⁵ See, for example, the story about the pride of lions which was living at the site of Pōkar's *samādhi* (Pō: 1351–1354). Having entered the state of *samādhi*, Pōkar appeared as a stone image. The pride of lions did not recognize

Conclusions

In opposition to the popular discourse emphasizing the local character of Tamil Siddha medicine, in some texts of the classical Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature the Siddha system of knowledge may be imaged not as local but as transcultural science transmitted for the benefit of universal scope. Such a way of portraying it is connected with the presentation of Siddha medicine as not only physical but also as spiritual. The teachings of the Siddhas are claimed to bestow spiritual benefits such as salvation and final bliss upon the people who follow the teachings and therefore they may appeal to the fundamental longings of every person. The knowledge contained in the texts is repeatedly and conventionally declared to be destined for the wellness and salvation of all mankind, regardless of nationality, sex or creed. Exemplary passages from the texts of the two Tamil Siddha cosmopolites, i.e. Siddha Irāmatēvar, alias Yākōpu, and Siddha Pōkar, present multicultural connections and indicate possible foreign influences in the local lore, seen by the authors as valuable contributions to their science. Although at the present stage of research there is no external evidence found which could confirm the statements of the authors about their travels, it may, nonetheless, be assumed that the authors were at least aware of the existence of foreign systems of knowledge and that they saw some value in deriving from them and spreading their own teachings among them. Whether imagined or not, affiliation with foreign traditions and intercultural exchange of knowledge are frequently mentioned and presented in the consulted works of the two Siddhas as precious and desirable. Keeping in mind the undeniable originality of Tamil medicine, recognized as a distinct medicine among the few indigenous Indian medical systems, attested in its vast

the Siddha and they stayed at the site. After receiving wisdom through the tear of Pōkar which dropped into a lion's mouth, animals started to worship him and lead a pious life feeding on vegetarian food only. When Pōkar came out of *samādhi*, he blessed the lions so that they were born as kings in their next birth. See Ganapathy 2003: 74.

literature composed in Tamil, as well as considering the substantial native component of Siddha lore, it is, nonetheless, noteworthy to see possible mutual influences between the local Tamil and foreign cultures, which may have been seen by the Siddha authors as enriching for both of sides.

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