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The Country and the City in the *Kāñcippurāṇam*[1]

ABSTRACT: Numerous pre-modern literary works in Tamil begin with a lengthy description of a country and a city. This convention is a stock element of texts belonging to the *kāppiyam* and *purāṇam* genres, which can be defined as long narrative poems and mythological narrations, respectively. Such descriptions are particularly numerous in *talapurāṇam*s, i.e., texts dealing with the mythology of sacred sites. This article discusses the description of the country and the city in the *Kāñcippurāṇam* (KP), a *talapurāṇam* of the city of Kanchipuram composed in the late 18th century by the author Civañāṉa Muṉivar. It will be shown that the description of Kanchipuram and its surroundings in the introductory chapters of the KP, rather than aiming at a realistic portrayal, is strongly based on Tamil literary conventions that can be traced back to ancient Tamil literature, but also to

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influential texts of the medieval period, such as the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* or the *Periyapurāṇam*. Moreover, the article examines how Civañāṉa Muṉivar correlates the literary landscape that he describes with the real-world geography of the region around Kanchipuram and Śaiva devotional topography, thus creating a complex multi-layered landscape.

KEYWORDS: *Kāñcippurāṇam*, *talapurāṇam*, Tamil literature, landscape, Tamil Śaivism

The country and the city in Tamil literature

Descriptions of countries and cities are found already in the *Caṅkam* works, the oldest extant literary works in Tamil, composed perhaps between the 1st and 6th centuries CE.[2] More specifically, such descriptions are found in the longer poems of the 'Ten Songs' (*Pattuppāṭṭu*), one of the subdivisions of the *Caṅkam* corpus.[3] Among the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, we find several works representing the genre of *āṟṟuppaṭai* (lit. 'guiding the way'), in which a bard directs another bard to the ruler in whose praise the poem is composed, describing said ruler's realm, which the fellow bard would pass on his way to his capital.[4] For example, the *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, a poem composed perhaps in the 4th century by the author Uruttiraṅkaṇṇaṉār in praise of Toṇṭaimāṉ Iḷantiraiyaṉ, a ruler of Kanchipuram, contains a lengthy section describing the land ruled by Iḷantiraiyaṉ, culminating with a description of his capital Kanchipuram. Similar descriptions are also found in three other *āṟṟuppaṭai* poems of the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, viz. the

[2] The dating of the *Caṅkam* works is uncertain and controversial. The dates suggested here are based on Wilden 2014. On the image of the city in *Caṅkam* literature, see Dubyanskiy 2010.

[3] The *Pattuppāṭṭu* are a set of ten longer poems that together with the 'Eight Anthologies' (*Eṭṭuttokai*) form the corpus of *Caṅkam* literature. Most of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* poems belong to the genre of *puṟam* or heroic poetry and deal with the praise of a particular ruler. For an English translation, see Chelliah 1962.

[4] On the *āṟṟuppaṭai* genre, see Dubyanskiy 2018.

Porunarāṟṟuppaṭai, the *Cirupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, and the *Malaipaṭukaṭām*.

Although the convention of describing the country and the city may have antecedents already in *Caṅkam* literature, the first Tamil work that actually *begins* with such a description is the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, a Tamil Jaina epic composed probably in the 9th or 10th century by the author Tiruttakkatēvar.[5] At the beginning of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, we find a description of its fictitious setting, the country of Ēmāṅkatam and its capital Irācamāpuram. The convention is also followed by the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, the influential Tamil version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* probably composed in the 12th century by the author Kampaṉ, which begins with a description of the Kosala country and the city of Ayodhyā.[6] As we will see, the description of the Kosala country in the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* is indebted to the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, while itself providing a model for later works such as the KP.

Another highly influential text that contains descriptions of a country and a city is the *Periyapurāṇam*, the canonized hagiography of the sixty-three Tamil Śaiva saints (*Nāyaṉmār*) composed also in the 12th century by the author Cēkkiḻār.[7] At the beginning of the *Periyapurāṇam*, immediately following a frame story that is set on the mythical Kailāsa mountain, we find a description of the Cōḻa country (the Kaveri delta region in central Tamil Nadu) and of the city of Tiruvārūr. The focus on Tiruvārūr and its surrounding region is because it provides the setting for the life story of the saint Cuntarar, which serves as the main narrative frame of the text. Moreover, Cēkkiḻār composed the *Periyapurāṇam* under Cōḻa royal patronage, providing another reason for his prominent description of the Cōḻa country. However, the *Periyapurāṇam* also contains a lengthy description of the Toṇṭai country (the region surrounding Kanchipuram) and of the city of Kanchipuram, contained in the story of the saint

[5] On the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, see Zvelebil 1995: 169–171. For an English translation, see Ryan 2005–2012.

[6] On the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* (or *Irāmāvatāram*), see Zvelebil 1995: 267–272.

[7] On the *Periyapurāṇam* (or *Tiruttoṇṭarpurāṇam*), see Zvelebil 1995: 545–548. For an English translation, see McGlashan 2006.

Tirukkuṟippuṭṭoṇṭar (a native of Kanchipuram).[8] As we will see, the description of the Toṇṭai country in the *Periyapurāṇam* also provided a model for the KP.

Most *kāppiyam*s and *purāṇam*s that were composed after the period of the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* and the *Periyapurāṇam* contain a section on the country and the city. Thus, the *Cīṟāppurāṇam*, a 17th-century Tamil biography of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, begins with a description of Arabia and Mecca, and the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, a Christian epic on Saint Joseph composed in the 18th century by the Italian missionary C. G. Beschi, with a description of the Holy Land and Jerusalem.[9] Even texts that are not directly connected to a particular place contain the customary chapters on the country and the city. This is true, for example, for the *Kantapurāṇam*, a work on the mythology of the god Murukaṉ (Skanda), composed probably in the 14th century by the author Kacciyappa Civācāriyar.[10] Although the narratives that are told in the *Kantapurāṇam* take place in the mythical realm of the gods and thus bear no direct relation to any earthly place, the text begins with a description of the Toṇṭai country and the city of Kanchipuram, Kacciyappa Civācāriyar's hometown and the place where he composed the *Kantapurāṇam*.

The largest body of texts that follow the convention of describing the country and the city is made up of the works of the *talapurāṇam* (or *sthalapurāṇa*) genre. *Talapurāṇam*s can be described as 'temple legends,' that is, they are works that relate the mythological narratives associated with particular sacred sites. Tamil *talapurāṇam*s were an extremely productive genre during the early modern period, with almost 400 such works composed mainly between the 16th and 19th

[8] *Periyapurāṇam* 1078–1205. The actual story of Tirukkuṟippuṭṭoṇṭar is told in a mere eighteen verses, whereas the first 110 verses deal with the description of the Toṇṭai country and of Kanchipuram. Cēkkiḻār's motivation to compose such a lengthy description may be due to the fact that, being born in Kuṉṟattūr (today a suburb of Chennai), he was himself a native of the Toṇṭai country.

[9] On the *Cīṟāppurāṇam*, see Narayanan 2000. On C. G. Beschi and his *Tēmpāvaṇi*, see Clooney 2022 and Trento 2022. For an English translation of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, see Dominic Raj 2019.

[10] On the *Kantapurāṇam*, see Zvelebil 1974: 185–190.

centuries.[11] Tamil *talapurāṇam*s were often composed on the basis of Sanskrit sources. While the Tamil and Sanskrit texts are closely related, the Tamil *talapurāṇam*s also considerably differ from their Sanskrit counterparts by pursuing a much more ambitious poetic agenda, more akin to *kāvya* than to purāṇic literature in Sanskrit, and by following distinctly Tamil poetic conventions. One of these conventions is beginning the work with a description of the country and the city. In the case of the *talapurāṇam*s, this is naturally the place with which the text deals and its surrounding region.

A more comprehensive survey of the chapters describing the country and the city in Tamil *talapurāṇam* literature has recently been undertaken by Ofer Peres (forthcoming). As Peres points out, chapters describing the country and the city are a distinctive feature of the *talapurāṇam* genre, albeit not an indispensable precondition, as there is also a significant number of *talapurāṇam*s that do not contain such chapters. Moreover, while these sections usually follow a relatively fixed pattern, there is also a significant degree of variance, reflecting the different priorities and choices of their authors. In this article, rather than attempting a general survey, I will focus on the description of the country and the city in one specific *talapurāṇam*, the KP, which I will situate in the larger field of Tamil literature and religiosity.

The *Kāñcippurāṇam* and its chapters on the country and the city

Generally considered one of the major Tamil *talapurāṇam*s, the KP was composed in the late 18th century by the author Civañāṉa Muṉivar (d. 1785) on the basis of an anonymous and undated Sanskrit text, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM).[12] It describes Kanchipuram's sa-

[11] The number is based on the count by Vē. Irā. Mātavaṉ (1995). On the Tamil *talapurāṇam* genre, see also Shulman 1980a, Ramesh 2020, and Nachimuthu 2022.

[12] More precisely, the KP contains two books (*kāṇṭam*), the first composed by Civañāṉa Muṉivar and the second by his pupil, Kacciyappa Muṉivar. However, the less well known second book is in fact a separate composition that is based on a different Sanskrit source. In this article, I am only concerned with Civañāṉa Muṉivar's

cred space from a Śaiva perspective, dealing with the mythical origin stories of numerous Śiva temples in and around Kanchipuram and culminating with the great Ekāmranātha (Ekāmbaranātha) temple, the city's main Śaiva sanctuary. I have discussed the relation between the KP and the KM elsewhere in more detail (Buchholz 2023). Here it may suffice to say that the KP closely follows its Sanskrit source on a narrative level, but differs considerably in terms of its literary agenda, being composed in a far more complex poetic style and often adding ornate descriptive passages. Moreover, Civañāṉa Muṉivar has added four chapters at the beginning of the KP, which have no equivalent in the Sanskrit text, namely a prefatory section (*pāyiram*), the two customary chapters on the country and the city, and an introduction (*patikam*) that summarizes the contents of the work.

The two chapters on the country and the city, labelled *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*, "chapter on the holy country," and *tirunakarappaṭalam*, "chapter on the holy city," contain a lengthy description (comprising 145 and 126 stanzas, respectively) of the Toṇṭai country (the region around Kanchipuram) and of the city of Kanchipuram itself.[13] The chapter on the country begins with a description of the Palar (Tam. Pālāṟu, here called Pāli), the main river of the Toṇṭai country. It then follows the Palar river on its course through the Toṇṭai country, from its source to the ocean, describing the landscapes that the river passes. The description of these landscapes adheres to the model of the five *tiṇai*s or poetic landscapes, a distinctly Tamil literary convention, which I will discuss in more detail below. The chapter on the city, on the other hand, is structured according to a different pattern as the description moves from the outside of the city to its centre, with the Ekāmranātha temple

first book of the KP. For more information on the two books of the KP and their Sanskrit sources, see Buchholz 2022: 24–29.

[13] The Toṇṭai country (*toṇṭaināṭu* or *toṇṭaimaṇṭalam*) is one of the traditional divisions of the Tamil country, encompassing the north-eastern part of the present-day state of Tamil Nadu and some neighbouring areas of Andhra Pradesh. It coincides with the core area of the historical Pallava dynasty, which ruled from Kanchipuram between the 3rd and 9th centuries CE. On the historical geography of the Tamil country, see B. Stein 1977.

forming its very core.[14] The text takes us from the groves that surround the city to the horse and elephant stables and military encampments at its outskirts and then to the city's fortifications before proceeding to the inner part of the city. The text then describes the brothels, the bazaars, the streets, and the tall mansions of the city (with the section on the mansions mostly dealing with the beauty of the women dwelling therein). Finally, the text moves to the Ekāmranātha temple (Fig. 1). The description of the temple also begins at the outside, with the temple walls and the *gopuram* (gateway tower) and then describes various structures of the temple complex before culminating with a description of the main deity, Śiva's local manifestation as Ekāmranātha, 'the lord of the single mango tree.'[15] As such, the KP presents Ekāmranātha as the very heart of the city, thus marking Kanchipuram as Śiva's realm.[16]

While the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* and the *tirunakarappaṭalam*, as we have seen, are Civañāṉa Muṉivar's additions, the KP also contains another description of Kanchipuram, which, unlike the chapters at the beginning, is based on the Sanskrit KM. This description is found in the seventh chapter of the KP, titled *talavicēṭappaṭalam*, "chapter on the excellence of the place," as a part of the frame story in which Śiva explains the greatness of Kanchipuram to Pārvatī.[17] Here, the Tamil text closely adheres to the Sanskrit source, which at times also exhibits poetic ambitions, for example when the city's gardens are said to be full of lotuses that keep their eyes open as if they were soldiers

[14] As Peres (forthcoming) points out, the 'zoom-in' motion that progresses from the periphery to the centre is typical for the descriptions of the country and the city in Tamil *talapurāṇam*s and can be interpreted as a literary expression of pilgrimage.

[15] On the Ekāmranātha temple, see Schier 2018, ch. 1.

[16] It is worth noting that the KP, like its Sanskrit source, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, presents us with an exclusively Śaiva view on the sacred geography of Kanchipuram. This Śaiva geography coexists with Vaiṣṇava and Śākta perspectives, with the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple and the Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ temple, respectively, at the centre (Hüsken 2017). All these traditions have produced their own texts (Buchholz 2022). On Kanchipuram's urban layout in a historical perspective, see Stein 2021.

[17] KP 7.17–29, corresponding to KM 3.64–104.

on patrol,[18] or when coconut palms are compared to arms that the city stretches out to welcome its visitors.[19] The Sanskrit text also contains a lengthy enumeration of some forty different tree species that grow in Kanchipuram.[20] Yet, there is a marked contrast between this passage and the descriptions of the country and the city in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* and the *tirunakarappaṭalam*, as the description of Kanchipuram in the *talavicēṭappaṭalam*, being rooted in the KM, is informed by Sanskrit, rather than Tamil, poetic conventions; moreover this passage is much shorter and far less sophisticated than the chapters found at the beginning of the text.

Quite in contrast to the sections of the KP that are based on the Sanskrit source text, the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* and the *tirunakarappaṭalam* are composed in an extremely ornate style with numerous striking images and elaborate similes.[21] Several stanzas also employ the stylistic device of *śleṣa* (Tam. *cilēṭai*) or paronomasia, using homonyms to convey two different meanings at the same time.[22] Due to the length and extreme denseness of the two chapters, it is impossible to unravel them completely in the scope of this article. However, to

[18] KM 3.74c–75b: *udyānaśatasāhasrair unnidrakamalekṣaṇaiḥ / udyuktair iva rakṣārtham antassainyair ivābabhau*. Cf. KP 7.22: *kāvaṉ māṟā nilaiy uṭaiy uṭcēṉaiy eṉak kuvaḷai viḻi nantaṉa nīḷ vaṉamun*. The image is based on an inversion of the usual comparison of eyes to lotuses (or water lilies, as in the Tamil version).

[19] KM 3.77c–78b: *nāḷikeradrumair eṣā rājate nayanapriyā / lokān āpatataś śīghraṃ hastair āhvayatīva sā*. Cf. KP 7.23: *eytuvōraic cem patumak karam eṭuttu viraiya nakar viḻippatu pōṟ ṟeṅku nīḷum*.

[20] KM 3.83c–86: *punnāgapāṭalāśokatamālāmalakāsanaiḥ / hintālatāḷavaku ḷa-kramukāgastyakiṃśukaiḥ / āragvadhamadhūkākṣalikucāmlakacampakaiḥ / tvak sārabījapūrāmrajambūplakṣaśilāvaṭaih / namerusaraḷāṅkolakarṇikāraśamīdrumaiḥ / tintriṇīciribilvārkanimbāśokasuradrumaiḥ / pavamādibhir anyaiś ca bhūruhair bhāti saṃvṛtā.* This enumeration is omitted in the KP.

[21] I have argued elsewhere that the passages that Civañāṉa Muṉivar added when composing the KP allowed him to explore his poetic imagination in a way that was not possible for the rest of the text, where the outline of the narrative was already predetermined by the KM (Buchholz 2023: 400–405).

[22] For a comprehensive study of *śleṣa* in Sanskrit and other Indian literatures, see Bronner 2010. For examples of *śleṣa* in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*, see KP 2.19 and 2.45–48.

give the reader an impression of the style of the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* and the *tirunakarappaṭalam*, I will quote the stanza KP 3.7, which describes the groves in the outskirts of Kanchipuram:

நறவமூற் றெடுப்பச் சிறகர்வண் டிமிரு நளிபொழி
லிடும்பைகூர்ந் தழகு
குறைபடப் பொதிந்த குயின்களை வல்லே குதித்தெழுந்
துதைத்துதைத் தகற்றி
நிறைபுனற் றடத்துப் பிறழ்தருங் கிழமை நெட்டிள
வாளைமீன் றனக்குத்
துறைதொறுங் கைம்மா றெனக்கனி செழுந்தேன்
சொரிவன நெடுமரப் பொதும்பர்.

naṟavam ūṟṟeṭuppac ciṟakar vaṇṭ'imiru
naḷi poḻil iṭumpai kūrnt' aḻaku
kuṟaipaṭap potinta kuyiṉkaḷai vallē
kutitt' eḻunt' utaitt' utaitt' akaṟṟi
niṟai puṉaṟ ṟaṭattup piṟaḻtaruṅ kiḻamai
neṭṭ' iḷa vāḷai mīṉ ṟaṉakkut
tuṟaitoṟuṅ kaimmāṟ' eṉak kaṉi ceḻun tēṉ
corivaṉa neṭu marap potumpar.

The groves with their tall trees
shed fruits and luxuriant honey on all the banks
as a recompense for the large young *vāḷai* fish
that flop into the tanks filled with water
after they have leaped high and chased away the clouds
that were so heavy that the dense groves,
where bees with wings buzz while nectar flows forth,
became distressed and lost their beauty.

One may note the rather heavy diction and dense imagery of this stanza. The image of the *vāḷai* fish (a species of catfish) jumping up from the tanks to the clouds is characteristic of the hyperbolic style that Civañāṉa Muṉivar employs. Elsewhere we learn, for example, of elephants that empty entire tanks when drinking from them, only

to fill them again with their musth (KP 3.11),[23] or of horses that are rendered invisible because the radiance of the jewels that adorn their bridles blinds anyone who looks at them (KP 3.20). At the same time, the idea that the groves recompense the fish for driving away the clouds by shedding fruits and honey into the tanks is a striking example of the poetic figure of *utprekṣā* or 'poetic fancy,' a stylistic device that Civañāṉa Muṉivar also frequently employs, for example when he states that the mansions in Kanchipuram reach up to the sky because their upper stories want to let Indra's celestial elephant pass through them, just like ordinary elephants pass through the doorways in the lower stories (KP 3.72). While these stylistic devices are reminiscent of Sanskrit *kāvya,* Civañāṉa Muṉivar also makes use of distinctly Tamil poetic conventions. Thus, the stanza quoted above recalls the famous image, found in the *Caṅkam* poems *Kuṟuntokai* 8 and 164,[24] of a *vāḷai* fish snatching a mango that has fallen into the tank. While this does not necessarily mean that the KP was directly influenced by the *Kuṟuntokai*, as opposed to later works from the intervening period that also employ the same image,[25] it does show that the KP subscribes to a Tamil literary tradition that has its roots in the poems of the early first millennium. We will return to this topic later.

In his description of the country and the city, Civañāṉa Muṉivar also employs a large number of elaborate similes. Befitting the theme of the KP, these similes often refer to the local mythology of Kanchipuram, for example when the moat that surrounds the city's ramparts is compared to Pārvatī, who embraced the *liṅga* that she had built of sand when Śiva sent a

[23] Elephant bulls discharge a secretion from their temples during musth, a rutlike condition that they experience periodically. References to elephants' musth are frequent in Sanskrit and Tamil poetry.

[24] For a discussion of these poems, see Wilden 2006: 362–366.

[25] U. Vē. Cāmināṭaiyar, in his commentary on *Kuṟuntokai* 8 (p. 24), points out to parallels in the *Cūḷāmaṇi*, a Tamil Jaina epic composed by the author Tōḷāmoḻittēvar perhaps in the 10th century, and the *Villipāratam*, Villiputtūrār's 15th-century Tamil version of the *Mahābhārata*.

flood to test her devotion (the central myth of the Ekāmranātha temple),[26] or when a buffalo that has laid down in an irrigation channel is compared to Viṣṇu, who stopped the flood of the torrential Vegavatī river by lying in its way (the myth of origin of Kanchipuram's Yathoktakārī Perumāḷ temple).[27] In other cases, the similes are based on well-known purāṇic myths, for example, when the sight of mahouts who are trying to tame a frenzied elephant that has jumped into the moat is compared to the gods and the *asura*s churning the milk ocean with Mount Mandara as their churning rod.[28] Yet other similes allude to narratives that were common knowledge among South Indian Śaivites at Civañāṉa Muṉivar's times, such as the life stories of the Tamil Śaiva saints (*Nāyaṉmār*) that are told in the *Periyapurāṇam*,[29] or Śiva's legendary 'games' in Madurai, which are the subject of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*.[30] Finally, Civañāṉa Muṉivar, being himself an influential preceptor of the religio-philosophical school of Śaiva Siddhānta, also included various references to Śaiva Siddhānta concepts in his simi-

[26] Cf. KP 3.29. On the Ekāmranātha temple's myth, see Schier 2018, ch. 3. In the KP, it is told in chapter 63 (*taḻuvakkuḻaintapaṭalam*) and 64 (*tirumaṇappaṭalam*).

[27] Cf. KP 2.67. On the Yathoktakārī Perumāḷ temple and its myth, see Nagaswamy 2011: 39–54. This myth is primarily a Vaiṣṇava one and is told in greater detail in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, but is also briefly referred to in the KP (11.29–31).

[28] Cf. KP 3.31. The myth of the churning of the milk ocean is one of the best-known Hindu myths. The comparison of an elephant to a mountain is a standard one in Tamil and Sanskrit poetry. The theme of the moat resembling various mythical oceans is elaborated over several stanzas in the *tirunakarappaṭalam*.

[29] Cf. KP 2.101 (Kuṇṭaiyūrk Kiḻavar providing paddy for the saint Cuntarar, cf. *Periyapurāṇam* 3163–3184), KP 2.139 (the saint Ceruttuṇai Nāyaṉār cutting off the nose of a queen who had smelled flowers that were meant for Śiva; cf. *Periyapurāṇam* 4120–4126), and KP 3.10 (the saint Tirunāvukkaracar being thrown into the sea by the Jainas; cf. *Periyapurāṇam* 1387–1399).

[30] Cf. KP 2.3 (Śiva sending four clouds to Madurai; cf. *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* ch. 19), KP 3.75 (king Ugravarman imprisoning the clouds; cf. *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* ch. 14), and KP 3.97 (Mount Meru yielding a treasure to king Ugravarman; cf. *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* ch. 15). The *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, Parañcōti Muṉivar's 17th-century Tamil *talapurāṇam* of Madurai, as well as its Sanskrit parallel text, the *Hālāsyamāhātmya*, found in wide circulation in early-modern South India (see Fisher 2017, ch. 4).

les.[31] All of these similes shed light on the religious and intellectual milieu in which Civañāṉa Muṉivar participated, thus helping us understand the circumstances of the KP's production.[32]

Leaving behind these general remarks on the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* and the *tirunakarappaṭalam*, I will now focus on three aspects of Civañāṉa Muṉivar's description of the Toṇṭai country, namely the section on the Palar river and its antecedents in Tamil literature, his use of the convention of the five landscapes (*tiṇai*), and the relation of the landscape that Civañāṉa Muṉivar describes in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* to the real-world geography of the Toṇṭai country and the Śaiva devotional landscape.

The river

As we have seen, Civañāṉa Muṉivar's chapter on the Toṇṭai country begins with a description of the Palar river. The section on the Palar, for its part, begins with a description of the rainclouds (KP 2.2–12). These rainclouds, we learn, approach the Nandi hills, the place of origin of the Palar,[33] where they shed their water in the form of torrential rains, thus forming the Palar river (KP 2.13–17). In what follows, the course of the river through the Toṇṭai country is likened to the military campaign of a king: like a king, the river conquers the country through which it flows, invading villages and towns and tearing down city walls (KP 2.18–31). At the same time, the Palar is portrayed as a just ruler who protects his subjects, "yielding six times as much riches as it has seized before."[34] This is followed by a few stanzas that describe the Palar's abundance of water and the fertility

[31] Cf. e.g., KP 2.12 (the karmic imprint [*vātaṉai*, Skt. *vāsanā*] that remains even after one has overcome the impurities of the soul [*malam*, Skt. *mala*]), KP 2.65 (Śiva's nine manifestations), KP 3.116 (the five types of bondage of the soul [*pācam*, Skt. *pāśa*]).

[32] For a discussion on the milieu of the KP, see Buchholz 2023: 406–409.

[33] The Nandi hills are located in the state of Karnataka around sixty km north of Bangalore.

[34] KP 2.31: *muṉṉ uṟak kavarntu koṇṭa vaḷattiṉu mūviraṭṭi piṉṉ uṟav aḷittu*.

that it brings to the Toṇṭai country (KP 2.32–35) before the focus of the description shifts to the country itself.

The image of the river as king builds on the notion of a king being both a warlike conqueror and a provider for his people, thus highlighting the Palar's potentially destructive force as well as its life-giving nature. In former times, the annual monsoon floods of the Palar must have regularly caused devastation, but agriculture in the Palar valley was also relying on the river's water for irrigation. From a contemporary point of view, the descriptions of the Palar's abundance of water may seem surprising, given that the Palar now is completely dry for most of the year (see Fig. 2). However, there is evidence that the river carried significantly more water at least till the 19th century before its drying up lead to the decline of once prosperous localities in Kanchipuram's hinterland (Stein 2022: 77–79). Does the KP describe a more pristine state of the Palar at the time of the text's composition? Possibly yes; at the same time, however, it is important to keep in mind that Civañāṉa Muṉivar's description of the Toṇṭai country is strongly based on literary conventions. As such, one should be cautious of uncritically reading what appears to be the conventional description of an ideal river as a reflection of real-world circumstances.

Indeed, the very fact that Civañāṉa Muṉivar begins the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* with a description of the Palar river amounts to a literary convention. Most Tamil *purāṇam*s and *kāppiyam*s of the period contain a section on a river at the beginning of their description of the county. This convention apparently goes back to the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, which begins with a description of the Sarayū (the river flowing through Ayodhyā).[35] The description of the river in the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* seems to have provided the model for many later texts, including the KP. The section on the Sarayū in the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*

[35] Unlike in the KP, where the description of the river is contained in the chapter on the country, in the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, the description of the Sarayū forms a separate chapter, titled *āṟṟuppaṭalam* ('chapter on the river'), preceding the chapters describing the Kosala country (*nāṭṭuppaṭalam*) and the city of Ayodhyā (*nakarappaṭalam*).

and that on the Palar river in the KP have a very similar structure as both of them begin with a description of the clouds, whose outpour on the mountains (the Himalayas in the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, the Nandi hills in the KP) causes the river (the Sarayū and the Palar, respectively) to come into being. Moreover, even individual stanzas in the KP clearly show the influence of the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*. Compare, for example, the stanzas that open the description of the clouds in the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* and the KP, respectively:

Kamparāmāyaṇam I.1.2

நீற ணிந்த கடவு ணிறத்தவா
னாற ணிந்துசென் றார்கலி மேய்ந்தகிற்
சேற ணிந்த முலைத்திரு மங்கைதன்
வீற ணிந்தவன் மேனியின் மீண்டதே.

nīṟ' aṇinta kaṭavu ṇiṟatta vāṉ
āṟ' aṇintu ceṉṟ' ārkali mēynt' akiṟ
cēṟ' aṇinta mulait tiru maṅkai taṉ
vīṟ' aṇintavaṉ mēṉiyiṉ mīṇṭatē.

The clouds, which have the colour of the god who wears ashes [= Śiva],
beautifully go on their path, drink from the sea and return
like the body of him [= Viṣṇu] who majestically wears [on his chest]
Lakṣmī, whose breasts are adorned with sandalwood paste.

KP 2.2

கடல்க டைந்திடச் செல்லுறூஉம் வெள்ளைமால் கடுப்பப்
படலை வெண்முகில் பரவைநீ ருழக்கிவாய் மடுத்து
விடமெ ழுந்தென மீண்டவம் மாயனை விழைய
வுடல்க றுத்துவிண் ணெறிப்படர்ந் தொய்யென மீண்டு.

kaṭal kaṭaintiṭac celluṟūum veḷḷai māl kaṭuppap
paṭalai veṇ mukil paravai nīr uḻakki vāymaṭuttu
viṭam eḻunteṇa mīṇṭav am māyaṇai viḻaiyav
uṭal kaṟuttu viṇ ṇeṟip paṭarnt' oyyeṇa mīṇṭu.

> Resembling white Viṣṇu who went to churn the ocean,
> the billowing white clouds stir up and drink the water of the sea,
> and, their bodies become dark like the same Viṣṇu
> who returned after the poison had arisen,
> they set out on their path in the sky and quickly return.

The parallels between the two stanzas are unmistakable: both describe how the clouds 'drink' from the sea (i.e., absorb the evaporating water),[36] set out on their path, and then return (note how both stanzas end with slightly different forms of the same verb: *mīṇṭatē*/*mīṇṭu*). Moreover, both stanzas contain variations of the same simile: in the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, the white clouds are compared to Śiva's ash-gray complexion and the rainclouds to Viṣṇu's dark blue colour. The simile in the KP is slightly more complex as it refers to the myth of how Viṣṇu became dark through the effect of the poison that was created when the gods churned the milk ocean; here the colour of the clouds before and after they have become saturated with water is compared to Viṣṇu's complexion before and after the churning of the milk ocean, respectively.[37] Evidently we are dealing not just with a shared convention, but with a clear intertextual reference. It thus becomes clear that Civañāṉa Muṉivar must have consciously followed the model of the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*.[38]

The KP is not the only Tamil literary work that was influenced by the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*. Thus, the description of Arabia in Umaṟup Pulavar's *Cīṟāppurāṇam* begins with a very similar description of the rainclouds, which, as Vasudha Narayanan has shown, is also indebted to the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* (Narayanan 2000: 83–85). The same appears to be true for the description of the rainclouds at the beginning of

[36] The image of the clouds drinking from the sea is quite common in Tamil literature already from the *Caṅkam* works onwards.

[37] A version of this myth of the churning of the milk ocean is told in chapter 12 (*maṇikaṇṭīcappaṭalam*) of the KP. According to this version, the poison burned the gods, causing Viṣṇu to become dark.

[38] I have speculated elsewhere that Civañāṉa Muṉivar's motivation might have been to outdo the (Vaiṣṇava) *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, a work that he seems to have opposed on religious grounds (see Buchholz 2023: 401).

C. G. Beschi's *Tēmpāvaṇi*, which, as we know from other examples, has an intertextual relationship with the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*.[39] To name only two examples from the *talapurāṇam* genre, Parañcōti Muṉivar's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* and Ti. Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai's *Amparppurāṇam* both also begin with very similar descriptions of the rainclouds.[40] All these texts describe how the white clouds become dark after they have drunk from the sea, closely mirroring the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* stanza that was quoted above.[41] A full investigation of Kampaṉ's influence on later Tamil poets is beyond the scope of this article, but it should be clear from these examples that the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* played a crucial role in establishing a convention that later works followed.[42]

At the same time, the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* itself builds on earlier sources, most importantly the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*. It has long been accepted that Kampaṉ was greatly influenced by the Tiruttakkatēvar's Jaina epic, and this also seems to be true for his description of the river. The chapter on the Ēmāṅkatam country in the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* also begins with a description of the rainclouds that pour their water on the mountains, forming the Carai river.[43] It thus appears that the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, with its description of the river, the country, and the city, provided a model for the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, which for its part was emulated by many later works. This seems to confirm George L. Hart's verdict about the relation between the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, and later Tamil literature:

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[39] See the discussion of the *avaiyaṭakkam* (apologetic preface) of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* by Sascha Ebeling (Ebeling 2020: 161–163).

[40] On the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, see above (fn. 30). Ti. Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai (1815–1876) was one of the last great traditional Tamil poets and the author of no less than twenty-two *talapurāṇam*s. The *Amparppurāṇam* (composed in 1869) is considered his *magnum opus*. See Ebeling 2010: 33–87.

[41] Cf. *Cīṟāppurāṇam*, *nāṭṭuppaṭalam* 1; *Tēmpāvaṇi*, *nāṭṭuppaṭalam* 1; *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, *tirunāṭṭucciṟappu* 2; *Amparppurāṇam* 47.

[42] By contrast, the *Periyapurāṇam*, which is roughly contemporaneous with the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, does not describe a river as part of its description of the country.

[43] Cf. *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 1.32–39.

> The *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* spawned a whole new type of literature in Tamil. In the twelfth century, Kampaṉ imitated it to produce what is arguably the greatest literary work produced in India, his version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which he called *Irāmāvatāram*. In that great work, we can see Takkatēvar's influence everywhere, from the template of the beginning verses to the form of the verses to the meters. […] After Kampaṉ, Tamil literature was never the same. Every writer imitated Kampaṉ, much as the great poet had imitated Takkatēvar, and a huge literature of *sthalapurāṇas*, epics, devotional poems, and literary works was produced. (Hart 2005: x–xi)

The genealogy of this convention, however, does not necessarily end with the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*. James D. Ryan, referring to T. V. Gopalaiyar, has pointed out that the structure of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* follows the *Paṭṭiṉappālai*, one of the ten longer poems of the *Caṅkam* corpus, "which describes in order the river, country, capital town and king" (Ryan 2005: 293). Although I find the connection between the *Paṭṭiṉappālai* and the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* less obvious than in the case of the texts discussed above, it is clear that many of the conventions that Tamil authors of the early modern period such as Civañāṉa Muṉivar followed can be traced back quite far in time.

The *tiṇai* concept

Another ancient convention of which the KP, like many other *purāṇams* and *kāppiyams*, makes use is that of the *tiṇai* concept. The term *tiṇai*, famously translated as 'interior landscape' by A. K. Ramanujan (1967), refers to a Tamil poetical concept, according to which a poem is set in one of five landscapes (the mountains, the wasteland, the woodlands, the agricultural lands, and the coast), each of which is associated with a particular poetic theme.[44] The *tiṇai*

[44] For an overview, see Table 1. In spite of the attention that the *tiṇai* concept has received, a comprehensive study of *tiṇai* in Tamil literature is still a desideratum.

concept was originally developed in the genre of classical Tamil love poetry (*akam*) and is first attested in the *Caṅkam* works. At the same time, it was theorized by a rich and equally ancient Tamil tradition of poetics. While the earliest *Caṅkam* poems do not always fully conform to the *tiṇai* system as it is described by the poetological treatises,[45] later texts started following their prescriptions more and more closely and thus present us with an increasingly regularized picture of the *tiṇai*s. The *tiṇai* concept continued to play an important role in Tamil literature right into the 19th century before the traditional literary genres came to an end.[46]

Table 1. The five *tiṇai*s and their respective sections in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*

Tiṇai	**Landscape**	**Theme**	**Stanzas**
Kuṟiñci	mountains	lovemaking	2.39–51
Pālai	wasteland	separation	2.52–55
Mullai	woodlands	waiting	2.56–63
Marutam	agricultural lands	quarreling	2.64–118
Neytal	coast	lamentation	2.119–127

Tiṇai is a fairly complex concept. Each of the five landscapes is associated with particular conventional landscape elements such as plants or animals (in fact, the *tiṇai*s are named after flowers that are typical for the respective landscape). The inhabitants of the different landscapes and their typical occupations are also frequently described. These landscape elements provide the poets with a reservoir of signi-

For an introduction to the *tiṇai* system as it is found in *Caṅkam* literature, see Ramanujan 1967: 105–108 and Zvelebil 1973: 85–110.

[45] For example, Eva Wilden estimates that more than a fourth of the poems of the *Kuṟuntokai* (one of the early *Caṅkam* anthologies), does not contain any *tiṇai* elements, leading her to the conclusion that "a regional setting of a poem is certainly an important factor, but not as all-pervading as the *tiṇai* concept would make us belief [sic]" (Wilden 2006: 197).

[46] For an example of the use of *tiṇai* in 19th-century Tamil literature, see Ebeling 2010: 93–94.

fiers that they can use to evoke the *tiṇai* in question. What is crucial for the *tiṇai* system, however, is the connection between landscape and poetic theme: *tiṇai* poems do not just describe landscapes, but they deal with particular poetic themes that are set in a particular landscape. These poetic themes are often reduced to the keywords: 'lovemaking,' 'separation,' 'waiting,' 'quarrelling,' and 'lamentation.'[47] In reality, however, these keywords stand for a complex set of conventionalized situations that unfold in the love story of an idealized couple. Thus, *kuṟiñci* deals with the situations that revolve around the lover's secret meetings in the mountains; *pālai* deals with the journey through the desert that the man undertakes to find wealth; *mullai* deals with the woman in the forest landscape who waits for her lover's return at the beginning of the rainy season; *marutam* deals with the couple's marital quarrels in the agricultural landscape; and *neytal* deals with the woman's lamentation on the seashore as she is anxious that the man might forsake her.[48]

Returning to the KP, we may note that the description of the Toṇṭai country in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* is almost in its entirety structured according to the *tiṇai* system. After the section describing the Palar river, the text devotes a section to each of the five *tiṇai*s (see Table 1). In the Toṇṭai country, we learn, there are tall mountains, parched wastelands, dense forests, fertile paddy fields, and vast seashores. In the sections on each of the *tiṇai*s various typical plants and animals are mentioned. At the same time, Civañāṉa Muṉivar also refers to the conventional poetic themes associated with each of the *tiṇai*s. Consider the following verse (KP 2.41), which is part of the *kuṟiñci* section:

[47] These oft-cited keywords go back to the *Tolkāppiyam*, the oldest extant grammatical/poetological treatise in Tamil, which defines the themes (*uripporuḷ*) associated with the five *tiṇai*s as *puṇartal*, *pirital*, *iruttal*, *ūṭal*, and *iraṅkal*, respectively (see *Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram* 16).

[48] This is still an oversimplification that does not take into account the great number of specific conventionalized situations associated with each of the themes. For an overview, see Takahashi 1995, ch. 6.

வேட்டை மேற்புகு வார்க்குநல் வினையுந்த மடவார்
கூட்டம் வாய்க்குமச் சாரலிற் றினைக்குரற் கெய்துஞ்
சேட்டி ளங்கிளிக் குலங்களத் தெரிவைமா ரோம்பும்
பாட்டி சைத்திற மொளியிருந் தனுதினம் பயிலும்.

vēṭṭaimēṟ pukuvārkku nal viṉaiy unta maṭavār
kūṭṭam vāykkum ac cāraliṟ ṟiṉaik kuraṟk' eytuñ
cēṭṭ' iḷaṅ kiḷik kulaṅkaḷ at terivaimār ōmpum
pāṭṭ' icait tiṟam oḷiyirunt' aṉutiṉam payilum.

On those mountain slopes, where, as a result of their good karma,
young women grant union to the men who have gone hunting,
flocks of youthful parrots that go after the ears of millet call out every day,
drowning out the sound of the songs of the women who try to chase them away.

The stanza is unmistakably set in the *kuṟiñci* landscape, as the mention of the mountain slopes makes clear; moreover, hunting and millet cultivation are typical occupations of the hills people. In addition, the stanza also refers to the theme of secret lovemaking, as is befitting for the *kuṟiñci tiṇai*. The trope of the women who are sent to the millet fields in the mountains to chase off the parrots but then use the secluded spot for clandestine meetings with their lovers is a familiar one, attested already in the *Caṅkam* poems.[49] In the same way, the other *tiṇai* sections, too, allude to well-known conventional themes: in the *pālai* section, men hesitate to leave their women behind as they prepare for their journey; the *mullai* section describes how the women rejoice at their men's return; in the *marutam* section, sulking women are reconciled with their husbands; and in the *neytal* section, the women shed tears after their lovers have left.[50]

The sections on the five *tiṇai*s are followed by a section termed *tiṇaimayakkam*, 'mixture of *tiṇai*s' (KP 2.128–142), a concept that is

[49] Cf. e.g., *Kuṟuntokai* 141, 198, 217, 291, and 360.
[50] Cf. KP 2.54, 2.62, 2.116, and 2.125.

also sanctioned by Tamil poetics.[51] In this section, elements from several *tiṇai*s occur in various, different combinations. To give an example, I will quote a stanza in which *kuṟiñci* and *marutam* elements are combined (KP 2.131):

தாம்பயிலும் வரைக்கிளைத்த செயலைமலர்
கவர்மாரன் றன்மேற் சீறி
யாம்பலினங் கழனியிற்போ யவன்சேமச்
சிலைக்கரும்பை யழித்துண் டார்க்கும்
பூம்படுகர்ப் பகட்டினங்கள் வெகுண்டெழுந்து
மலைச்சாரற் புனிற்று வாழை
தேம்பயில்செந் தினையனைத்து மழித்துழக்கி
மேய்ந்துவக்குஞ் செவ்வித் தோர்பால்.

tām payilum varaik kiḷaitta ceyalai malar
kavar māraṉ ṟaṉmēṟ cīṟiy
āmpal iṉaṅ kaḻaṉiyiṟ pōy avaṉ cēmac
cilaik karumpaiy aḻitt'uṇṭ'ārkkum
pūm paṭukarp pakaṭṭ'iṉaṅkaḷ vekuṇṭ'eḻuntu
malaic cāraṟ puṉiṟṟu vāḻai
tēm payil cen tiṉaiy aṉaittum aḻitt'uḻakki
mēynt'uvakkuñ cevvitt'ōr pāl.

Because they are angry with Kāma, who has taken [as his arrows]
the ashoka flowers that grow on the mountains where they roam about,
the elephant herds go to the paddy fields and trumpet
after they have eaten up the sugarcane that is his strong bow.
[Seeing this,] the buffalo herds from the flowering tanks
angrily rise, trample down and happily feed on all of

[51] While the concept *tiṇaimayakkam* would be worth of a more detailed study, it seems plausible that the concept was originally introduced by the poeticians to account for poems that did not strictly follow the rules of the *tiṇai* system. Later poets like Civañāṉa Muṉivar, however, consciously exploited *tiṇaimayakkam* as a means of poetic expression.

the fresh bananas and the sweet red millet from the mountain slopes. Such is the beauty of one part [of the Toṇṭai country].[52]

Apart from the *tiṇai*s that belong to the genre of *akam* or love poetry (*akattiṇai*), the Tamil poetological tradition describes an analogous set of *tiṇai*s for the genre of *puṟam* or heroic poetry (*puṟattiṇai*). These *tiṇai*s are associated with different stages of a military campaign and identified through different flowers, which the warriors are said to wear as chaplets during the respective situations. Moreover, each of the *puṟattiṇai*s is said to correspond to one of the *akam* counterparts.[53] The concept of *tiṇai* in the *puṟam* genre is generally considered a rather artificial category that is difficult to relate to the actual poems. Civañāṉa Muṉivar, however, is fully aware of the poeticians' prescriptions about *puṟattiṇai* and productively employs the concept in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*: in the description of the Palar river as a king on a military campaign, he describes the different *puṟattiṇai*s and correlates them with the *akattiṇai*s that correspond to the landscapes through which the river flows.[54] To name only one example, in KP 2.22, elements of the mountain landscape (honeycombs, elephants' tusks, and *kāṇṭaḷ* flowers) that have been swept away by the floods are compared to weapons (discus, bow, and arrows) with which the river attacks its enemies while wearing a garland of *veṭci* flowers. Here, the *kuṟiñci tiṇai* of the *akam* genre (associated with the mountains) is correlated with the *veṭci tiṇai* of the *puṟam* genre (associated with the theme of cattle raid). The use of the *puṟattiṇai*s is, however, restricted to a few stanzas and thus plays a clearly subordinate role in comparison to the *akattiṇai*s.

To sum up, in his description of the Toṇṭai country, Civañāṉa Muṉivar presents us with a highly conventionalized picture of the five

[52] The love god Kāma is said to shoot flower arrows with a bow made of sugarcane. Ashoka flowers, elephants, bananas and millet are typical elements of the *kuṟiñci* landscape. Sugarcane and buffaloes are typical elements of the *marutam* landscape.

[53] For an overview of the *tiṇai*s in the *puṟam* genre, see Kailasapathy 1968: 188–191.

[54] Cf. KP 2.22–30.

*tiṇai*s, which is informed by a thorough knowledge of the Tamil poetological treatises and resonates with a literary tradition that stretches back to the beginning of the first millennium. While it may seem remarkable to find the same conventions that are already attested in the Caṅkam works in a text from the 18th century, it should be noted that the KP's use of the *tiṇai* concept is by no means unparalleled among Tamil *purāṇam*s and *kāppiyam*s. Thus, the description of the Kosala country in the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* is structured according to the *tiṇai* system, as is the description of the Toṇṭai country contained in the story of the saint Tirukkuṟipputtoṇṭar in the *Periyapurāṇam*.[55] This is also true for the introductory chapters of many *talapurāṇam*s, such as the description of the Pāṇṭiya country in the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* or that of the Cōḻa country in the *Amparppurāṇam*. Indeed, even the descriptions of Arabia in the *Cīṟāppurāṇam* and of the Holy Land in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* follow the convention of the five *tiṇai*s, full of its conventional South Indian landscape elements.

One should, however, be careful not to overemphasize the continuities between the ancient Tamil literature and the *purāṇam*s and *kāppiyam*s of the early modern period. Firstly, the fact that the later texts follow the same conventions as the *Caṅkam* works does not necessarily mean that they were directly influenced by them; rather we are dealing with a continuous, but constantly evolving literary tradition that presents itself as a chain with many links.[56] Secondly, the discontinuities between a text like the KP and the works of *Caṅkam* literature may be as striking as the continuities. Thus, the heavy, hyperbolical style of the KP markedly differs from the naturalistic aesthetics of the early poetry. Moreover, even the way in which the *tiṇai* concept is employed is, despite all shared conventions, clearly different. In the early literature, *tiṇai* was closely tied to poems about love, and conventional landscape elements could be

[55] The description of the Cōḻa country at the beginning of the *Periyapurāṇam*, on the other hand, does not make use of the *tiṇai*s.

[56] See the example of the image of the mango-eating *vāḻai* fish that was discussed above.

used to reinforce the emotional message of a poem. However, *tiṇai* as a central category for love poetry ceased to be productive shortly after the *Caṅkam* era.[57] After that, the conventionalized situations, rather than the landscape setting, became the central concern of Tamil love poetry, resulting in new genres such as the *kōvai*, which remained popular well into the 18th century.[58] What survived, however, was the use of *tiṇai* in country descriptions. This is use of the *tiṇai*s is found already in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* works of the *Caṅkam* corpus and continues in the *purāṇam*s and *kāppiyam*s of the early modern period. Here, the portrayal of the *tiṇai*s follows the same conventions as the earlier texts but serves an entirely different purpose as the focus is on the description of the country and not on love or emotion. As we have seen, Civañāṉa Muṉivar does refer to the love situations associated with each of the *tiṇai*s, but these situations are entirely decontextualized and serve as mere staffage to the landscape description. In other words, by the time of the KP, *tiṇai* has become a learned exercise with which the author can demonstrate his knowledge of Tamil poetics.

Multi-layered landscapes in the *Kāñcippurāṇam*

At this point it should have become clear that the KP does not present us with a realistic description of the Toṇṭai country, but with a highly idealized literary landscape that is described in accordance with the Tamil poetical conventions. At the same time, however, Civañāṉa Muṉivar also seeks to connect this imagined landscape with the actual topography of the Toṇṭai country. At the end of each of the *tiṇai*

[57] The last texts that make use of *tiṇai* as a central concept for love poetry are the *akam* works of the *Patiṉeṇīḻkkaṇakku* corpus, which were composed in the period immediately following that of the *Caṅkam* works, perhaps in the seventh and eighth centuries. For a brief overview of these texts, see Buchholz 2017: xi–xvii.

[58] In the *kōvai* genre, the conventionalized situations in the love story of the idealized couple are arranged in a more or less linear narrative sequence, resulting in a sort of serialized verse drama. A comprehensive study of the *kōvai* genre is lacking. For a brief overview, see Zvelebil 1974: 202–204. For the discussion of a 19th-century *kōvai*, see Ebeling 2010: 90–101.

sections except for *pālai*, we find one or more stanzas that mention real places that are found in this landscape.[59] Consider the following stanza, which is found at the end of the *marutam* section (KP 2.118):

> தசும்புறழ் கொங்கையொ டெம்பெரு மான்மகிழ் தண்பாசூர்
> விசும்பை யுரிஞ்சு மதிற்றிரு வல்லம் விரைச்செந்தே
> னசும்பு தடம்பொழி லேனைய வைப்பு மனந்தஞ்சூழ்
> பசும்பணை மாமரு தத்தெழில் யார்பகர் கிற்பாரே.

> *tacump' uṟaḻ koṅkaiyoṭ' emperumāṉ makiḻ taṇ pācūr*
> *vicumpaiy uriñcu matiṟ ṟiruvallam viraic cen tēṉ*
> *acumpu taṭam poḻil ēṉaiya vaippum aṉantañ cūḻ*
> *pacum paṇai mā marutatt' eḻil yār pakarkiṟpārē.*

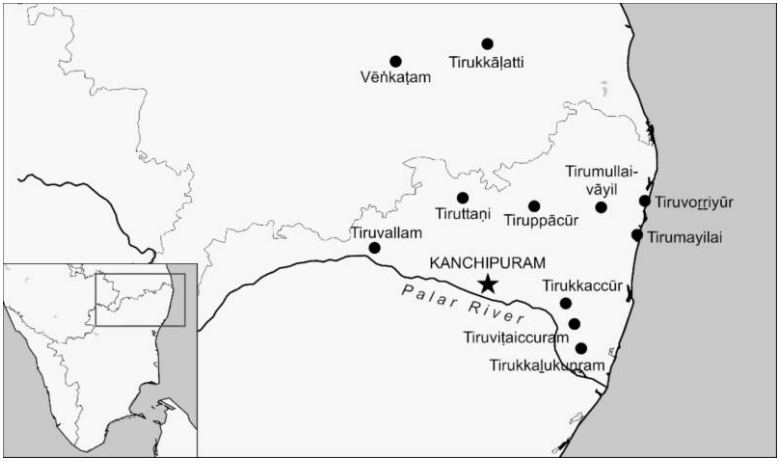
> Who can describe the beauty of the great *marutam* tract
> with its green paddy fields that perpetually surround cool Pācūr,
> where our Lord rejoices with [Pārvatī], who has pot-like breasts,
> Tiruvallam, whose ramparts scratch the sky,
> and other sites with large groves that ooze with fine fragrant nectar?

In this way, two places that exist in the real-world Toṇṭai country—(Tirup)pācūr (today Tiruppaccūr, located 45 km north-east of Kanchipuram) and Tiruvallam (today Tiruvalam, located 60 km west of Kanchipuram)—are anchored in the literary landscape previously outlined. In similar fashion, a total of eleven places, spread over four landscapes, are mentioned in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* (see Table 2 and Map 1).

[59] The reason why no places are mentioned for *pālai* is because *pālai*, according to the Tamil poeticians, is in fact not a landscape of its own, but any of the four other landscapes that has fallen barren during the hot season. Civañāṉa Muṉivar is clearly aware of this poetological discussion, for in the verse that leads up to the *tiṇai* sections (KP 2.38), he proclaims his intention to describe "the faultless five *tiṇai*s that excel in the four landscapes" (*nāṉilattiṇuṭ ciṟanta puraiy il aintiṇai*).

Table 2. Places mentioned in the *tirunāṯṯuppaṭalam*

Tiṇai	**Place**	**Stanza**
Kuṟiñci (mountains)	Vēṅkaṭam (Tirupati)	2.49
	Tiruttaṇi	2.49
	Tirukkāḷatti (Kāḷahasti)	2.50
	Tirukkaccūr	2.51
	Tiruviṭaiccuram	2.51
	Tirukkaḻukuṉṟam	2.51
Mullai (woodlands)	Tirumullaivāyil	2.63
Marutam (agricultural lands)	Tiruppācūr	2.118
	Tiruvallam	2.118
Neytal (coast)	Tirumayilai (Mylapore)	2.127
	Tiruvoṟṟiyūr	2.127



Map 1. Places mentioned in the *tirunāṯṯuppaṭalam*. Map by Jonas Buchholz

What is the rationale behind the choice of these places? To begin with, the first one, Vēṅkaṭam (Tirupati), is a major Vaiṣṇava pilgrim-

age destination in the present-day state of Andhra Pradesh, around 100 km north of Kanchipuram. The mention of a Vaiṣṇava site, all the more one that is today found outside the Tamil-speaking area, in a Tamil Śaiva text might seem surprising. Historically, however, Tirupati played an important role in the cultural geography of the Tamils because it was traditionally considered the northern limit of the Tamil country. This idea is famously formulated in the introductory stanza (*ciṟappuppāyiram*) of the *Tolkāppiyam*, the oldest extant grammatical work in Tamil—a stanza with which Civañāṉa Muṉivar was demonstrably familiar since he composed a commentary on it.[60] In the KP, he also refers to the idea of Tirupati as the northern limit of the Tamil country by describing Vēṅkaṭam as "the boundary for excellent Tamil" (*mētakun tamiḻkk' ellai*).

The second place mentioned is Tiruttaṇi, an important sacred site of the god Murukaṉ (the Tamil form of the war god Skanda), located at the northern border of the present-day state of Tamil Nadu, 45 km north of Kanchipuram. As the northernmost in a group of six famous Murukaṉ temples that are spread across Tamil Nadu, Tiruttaṇi, much like Tirupati, symbolically stands for the northern limit of the Tamil country.[61] At the same time, as a holy place devoted to Śiva's son Skanda/Murukaṉ, Tiruttaṇi was also relevant for the Śaiva tradition to which Civañāṉa Muṉivar belonged.

Leaving Tirupati and Tiruttaṇi aside, all other places mentioned in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* are Śaiva holy sites. All of them belong to the *pāṭal peṟṟa stalams* or 'places that have received a song,' a group of 274 (or 276) places that are mentioned in the hymns of the *Tēvāram*, the

[60] The introductory stanza of the *Tolkāppiyam* states that the "good Tamil-speaking world" lies "between Vēṅkaṭam in the north and Kumari in the south" (*vaṭa vēṅkaṭam teṉ kumari āyiṭai tamiḻ kūṟum nall ulakattu*) (see *Tolkāppiyam Eḻuttatikāram, ciṟappuppāyiram*). Here 'Kumari' refers to Kanyakumari or Cape Comorin, at the southern tip of the Indian Subcontinent. The importance of the *ciṟappuppāyiram* of the *Tolkāppiyam* for defining the Tamil-speaking region has already been noted by Selby and Peterson 2008: 4. On Civañāṉa Muṉivar's commentary, which covers the two introductory stanzas (*ciṟappuppāyiram* and *potuppāyiram*) of the *Tolkāppiyam*, see Cuppiramaṇiya Piḷḷai 1955: 69–70.

[61] On the six Murukaṉ temples (*Aṟupaṭaivīṭu*), see Clothey 1978: 116–131.

most important part of the Tamil Śaiva canon, and which are therefore considered particularly sacred in Tamil Śaivism.[62] Clearly, for a devout Śaivite like Civañāṉa Muṉivar, these places must have had a special status.[63] By listing the *pāṭal peṟṟa stalams* of the region, Civañāṉa Muṉivar maps the sacred landscape of his religious tradition and depicts the Toṇṭai country as a realm of Śaivism.

The choice of the places that are mentioned in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* of the KP is also indebted to another canonical Śaiva text, the *Periyapurāṇam*. As we have seen before, the *Periyapurāṇam* contains a lengthy description of the Toṇṭai country, contained in the story of the saint Tirukkuṟippuṭṭoṇṭar, and this description also mentions sacred sites that are situated in this region (see Table 3). As can be seen from a comparison of Tables 2 and 3, the places that are mentioned in the KP are, with few exceptions, the same that also feature in the *Periyapurāṇam*, and they occur in almost exactly the same sequence. It thus becomes clear that Cēkkiḻār's description of the Toṇṭai country in the *Periyapurāṇam* must have provided a model for Civañāṉa Muṉivar when he composed the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* of the KP.

Table 3. Places mentioned in the description of the Toṇṭai country in the *Periyapurāṇam*

Tiṇai	**Place**	**Stanza**
Kuṟiñci (mountains)	Tirukkāḷatti (Kāḷahasti)	1090
	Tiruviṭaiccuram	1090
	Tirukkaḷukuṉṟam	1091
Mullai (woodlands)	Tirumullaivāyil	1095
	Kalikai (Tiruvūṟal)	1096
Marutam (agricultural lands)	Tiruvallam	1107
	Tirumāṟpēṟu	1108

[62] The number of *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*s varies according to different counts. For a comprehensive overview of the sites, see Chevillard and Sarma 2007.

[63] Elsewhere, I have briefly discussed how Civañāṉa Muṉivar deals with the *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*s of Kanchipuram in the KP (Buchholz 2023: 409).

	Tiruppācūr	1109
Neytal (coast)	Tiruvorriyūr	1116
	Tirumayilāpuri (Mylapore)	1117
	Tiruvāṉmiyūr	1117

Indeed, Civañāṉa Muṉivar indirectly acknowledges its source in KP 2.128, where he asks with feigned humility: "How will someone like me, a slave of birth, describe the beauty of the five *tiṇai*s in the four landscapes of the good and sacred Toṇṭai country if the great poet from the town of Kuṉṟai (= Cēkkiḻār) has already been able to show it?"[64] That Civañāṉa Muṉivar held the author of the *Periyapurāṇam* in high esteem can also be seen in the prefatory section (*pāyiram*) of the KP, which contains an invocation of Cēkkiḻār (KP 1.17). By following the model of the *Periyapurāṇam*, Civañāṉa Muṉivar pays further obeisance to Cēkkiḻār and simultaneously frames his own work as a part of a Tamil Śaiva literary tradition.

Now, let us return to the question how Civañāṉa Muṉivar (like Cēkkiḻār before him) links the places that he mentions to the *tiṇai*s that provide the framework for his description of the Toṇṭai country. Correlating the ideal landscapes of the *tiṇai* system with the real-world geography of the Toṇṭai country is not a trivial task. It is easy in the case of *marutam*, the agricultural landscape, since the region is indeed dominated by the arable plains of the Palar river basin. As one would expect, the *marutam* section is by far the longest of the *tiṇai* sections, comprising fifty-five stanzas. Most of the *marutam* section is devoted to a description of the paddy fields, which minutely details the various stages in the process of rice cultivation. While this section, like the rest of the chapter, is filled with numerous fanciful images and elaborate similes (and much of it is devoted to a description of the beauty of the women who work in the paddy fields), it also shows a

[64] KP 2.128: *tirut toṇṭai naṉ ṉāṭṭu nā ṉilatt' ain tiṇai vaḻamun terittuk kāṭṭa … kuṉṟai nakark kulak kaviyē vallāṉ allāṟ karut toṇṭar em pōlvār evvāṟu terint' uraippār.*

genuine awareness of the technicalities of paddy cultivation, rendering it more realistic than the sections on the other *tiṇai*s.[65]

Correlating *neytal*, the seashore, with the real-life landscape of the Toṇṭai country is also rather straightforward since the region borders the coast of the Bay of Bengal. Unsurprisingly, the two places that are mentioned in the *neytal* section, Tirumayilai (Mayilāppūr or Mylapore) and Tiruvo̲r̲iyūr, both today parts of Chennai, are both located on the seaside. On the other hand, locating *ku̲ṟiñci*, the mountains, in the Toṇṭai country is a more difficult task. Of the places that are mentioned in the *ku̲ṟiñci* section, Tirupati is indeed located in the mountainous landscape of the Eastern Ghats, but it is very much in the periphery of the Toṇṭai country (as we have seen, it marks the northern border of the Tamil region). Other than that, the Toṇṭai country does not possess any major mountain ranges. What is found, however, are numerous smaller rocky outcrops that protrude from the otherwise flat landscape. Aside from Tirupati, the other places mentioned in the *ku̲ṟiñci* section—Tiruttaṇi, Kāḷahasti, Tirukkaccūr, Tiruviṭaiccuram, and Tirukkaḷukuṉṟam—are all located on or near such outcrops (see Figure 3).[66] However, given the relatively modest size of these hillocks, the grand descriptions of the mountain landscape in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* seem somewhat overstated.

Similarly, it is rather difficult to correlate *mullai* with the present-day landscape of Tamil Nadu. According to the descriptions in the literary texts, *mullai* appears to be a semi-dry forested landscape that is used as a pasture ground for cattle. However, such lowland forests have almost completely disappeared from Tamil Nadu. It is

[65] One is tempted to wonder if the detailed description of the process paddy cultivation reflects the agriculturalist ethos of the Vēḷāḷar, the landowning community, to which Civañāṉa Muṉivar belonged. However, to answer that question one would have to compare the description of the paddy fields in the KP with similar passages in other texts.

[66] On Tiruttaṇi, see above. Kāḷahasti, like Tirupati, is situated in the present-day state of Andhra Pradesh, 130 km north of Kanchipuram, but is also an important place for the Tamil Śaiva tradition. Tirukkaccūr, Tiruviṭaiccuram (today Tiruvaṭicūlam), and Tirukkaḷukuṉṟam are all located 40 to 50 km east of Kanchipuram.

difficult to say if the situation was still different at Civañāṉa Muṉivar's time, but we may note that the only place that he describes as lying in the *mullai* landscape is Tirumullaivāyil, today a suburb of Chennai hosting the ancient Mācilāmaṇīśvara temple. The temple's myth of origin has it that a king discovered a hidden *liṅga* that was overgrown by a jasmine creeper (jasmine, Tam. *mullai*, being the prototypical plant of the *mullai* landscape) when he was passing through a forest (Shulman 1980b). In the case of Tirumullaivāyil, thus, the name and the mythology of the place provide an obvious link with the *mullai* landscape.

What we can witness in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* is a tension between the highly conventionalized *tiṇai* model and the actual realities found in the landscape of the Toṇṭai country. Clearly, the landscape descriptions in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* are not meant to be realistic, and the Tamil poetic conventions require the author to include such idealized descriptions in his work, no matter what the actual landscape of the country that he is describing looks like—after all, even Arabia and the Holy Land are described in accordance with the *tiṇai* system of Tamil literature. At the same time, however, Civañāṉa Muṉivar (like Cēkkiḻār before him) tries to correlate the *tiṇais* with the actual landscape of the Toṇṭai country. Add to this that most of the places that are mentioned in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* are Śaiva holy sites connected to the hymns of the *Tēvāram*, and we can see how Civañāṉa Muṉivar creates a multi-layered landscape, in which real-world geography, the literary landscape of Tamil poetics, and Śaiva devotional topography are intertwined with each other.

Conclusion

As this article has shown, understanding Civañāṉa Muṉivar's work requires a close reading of the text in its cultural and religious context. We have seen that the description of Kanchipuram and its surroundings in the KP is strongly rooted in the Tamil literary tradition, with influential works of the medieval period such as the *Kampa-*

rāmāyaṇam and the *Periyapurāṇam* providing a model that Civañāṉa Muṉivar (like many later poets) emulated. This can be seen from the description of the Palar river at the beginning of the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam*, which, as I have shown, is clearly indebted to the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, and from the fact that the enumeration of sacred places in the Toṇṭai country is based on that in the *Periyapurāṇam*. At the same time, Civañāṉa Muṉivar also makes use of ancient literary conventions that can be traced back to the *Caṅkam* literature of the early first millennium, most notably the *tiṇai* concept, which provides the backbone for his description of the Toṇṭai country. In spite of this remarkable continuity, however, there are also marked differences: by the time of the KP, the naturalistic imagery of the early poems has given way to entirely conventionalized and starkly hyperbolic descriptions of the five *tiṇai*s. Yet, Civañāṉa Muṉivar seeks to locate the ideal landscapes of Tamil poetry in the real world by mentioning actual places. Since most of these places are Śaiva sacred sites that were extolled in the hymns of the *Tēvāram*, their mention also serves the purpose of aligning the KP with Śaiva religious and pilgrimage traditions. As such, the description of the country and the city in KP (like the work as a whole) can be seen as an example of how Tamil literature and Śaiva religiosity enter a union in the *talapurāṇam* genre.

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Fig. 1. Gopuram of the Ekāmranātha temple, Kanchipuram (2023).
Photo by Jonas Buchholz

Fig. 2. The dry bed of the Palar river at Ōrikkai, near Kanchipuram (February 2023). Photo by Jonas Buchholz

Fig. 3. The hill in Tirukkaḷukuṉṟam (2020). Photo by Emma Natalya Stein