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Shattering the Crown of the God

Violence as a Formative and Legitimising Element in the Pāṇḍya Dynastic Narrative[*]

ABSTRACT: Among the extensive repertoire of Pāṇḍya dynastic themes, the motif of clash between a Pāṇḍya sovereign and Indra is ubiquitous. This *topos*, which supposedly originated around middle of the 5th century CE, can be traced to *Cilapattikāram* XI, 17–30, which celebrates a Pāṇḍya monarch wearing Indra's garland, capturing the clouds, and breaking the god's crown. The narrative was later employed in the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṛpurāṇam* (late 13th century) and its Sanskrit rendering, the *Hālāsyamāhātmya* (14th–15th centuries), where the actions of the Pāṇḍya kings were inserted in the narratives about the divine *līlā*s of Śiva in Madurai. Since the early phase of the dynasty, this mytheme was employed as a tool of political display in the South. After a survey of the motif in the first phase of the imperial documents, the paper will focus on the reemployment of the category of royal violence in the Teṅkāśi dynastic period (14th–18th centuries CE), using the lens of the official copper plates of the late Pāṇḍya chancery and the previous Sanskrit literary production.

KEYWORDS: Pāṇḍya dynasty, violence, Tamil literature, inscriptions, *mahākāvya*

Introductory remarks: violent rulers

Aggressivity, or violence in general, is a feature inextricably linked to royal power and the general institution of kingship. To administrate and protect their domains, rulers were expected to take recourse to violence and war for the sake of the welfare of their subjects and their possessions. In most cases, violence exercised by kings exemplified itself in war or political clashes. Perhaps the Tamil war poetry, vehiculated by its poems celebrating the deeds of the rulers of the ancient Tamil region, embodies the character of violence and warfare defining the kingship better and in a greater measure than any other Indian literary genre.

Since the first historical and literary attestations of the Pāṇḍya (Tamil Pāṇṭiya) dynasty (6th–14th centuries CE; 14th–18th centuries CE), one of the most striking features delineating public presentation of the Tamil royalty is its highly aggressive and somewhat gory character. Certain samples of the Caṅkam production, especially those connected to the category of *puṟam* ("exterior"), falling under the nomenclature of "heroic poems,"[1] specifically underline this trend, exemplifying the relationship of the hero/ruler with the external world based mainly on war and heroic values. The above-mentioned characters are best described in the literary text considered the quintessence of the Tamil heroic poetry. The *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, generally dated between the 2nd and 5th centuries CE (Zvelebil 1974: 41–43), and considered the last component of the *Eṭṭuttokai* ("Eight Anthologies"), anthologised in its final form around the 12th–13th century CE, exemplifies the traits of the ancient Dravidian military ethos, with its poems dedicated to the rulers of the Cēra, Cōḻa, and Pāṇḍya realms. The literary representation of kings belonging to the latter indigenous dynasty mirrors the dynamics of the violent kingship, as this excerpt from a *Puṟanāṉūṟu* poem perfectly exemplifies:[2]

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[1]   For the "Tamil heroic poetry" the reader may consult the standard reference on the subject, Kailasapathy 1968.

[2]   As it is widely known, the representation of the aggressive and violent characters of the Dravidian kingship are omnipresent in the *puṟam* poems celebrating the three indigenous dynasties of the Tamiḻakam, and not a specific trend of the

naḷi kaṭal iruṅ kuṭṭattu
vaḻi puṭaitta kalam pōlak
kaḻiṟu ceṉṟu kaḷaṉ akaṟṟavum
kaḷaṉ akaṟṟiya viyal āṅkaṉ
oḷiṟu ilaiya eḵku ēnti
araicu paṭa amar uḻakki
urai cela muracu veḷavi
muṭit talai aṭup pākap
puṉal kuruti ulaik koḷīit
toṭittōḷ tuṭuppiṉ tuḷanta valciyiṉ
aṭukaḷam vēṭṭa aṭupōrc celiya
āṉṟa kēḷvi aṭaṅkiya koḷkai
nāṉmaṟai mutalvar cuṟṟa māka
maṉṉar ēval ceyya maṉṉiya
vēḷvi muṟṟiya vāyvāḷ vēntē
nōṟṟōr maṉṟa niṉ pakaivar niṉṉoṭu
māṟṟār eṉṉum peyar peṟṟu
āṟṟār āyiṉum āṇṭuvāḻ vōṟē || 26 ||

As a ship pushed by the wind on the dark depths of a large sea, the elephant came and opened up the battlefront. In the breach, holding a leaf-shaped javelin of shining tip, you have ploughed that field, slaying the enemy kings; you have caught their drums spreading your glory; you have made a fireplace with their crowned heads; you have put on fire a cauldron with blood instead of water. You have stirred it with your arm adorned with bracelets and, with that food, you, Celiyaṉ of fierce war, have made a sacrifice on this field! King with the victorious sword who performed an ancient sacrifice while kings were attending you, together with Brahmins, Lords of the four Vedas, who obtained a restrained conduct and accomplished expertise! Your enemies have certainly acquired merits with ascetic practice to have become your enemies: despite being inferior to you, they will live in the afterlife!

Pāṇḍya royalty. Nevertheless, in the present paper, the attention is devoted exclusively to the primary material concerning the Madurai sovereigns. I quote the text of the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* according to Cāminātaiyar 1894; if not stated otherwise, all the translations in the present article are mine.

Violence and representations of bloodshed mirror at the literary lev-
el the ideological trends of the so-called "heroic style" of kingship,
a definition that was first advanced decades ago by Burton Stein
(1984: 3–11). According to the scholar's view, this primitive cate-
gory was shaped through a precise tribal pattern of leadership and
the heroic king's authority was generally recognized by the public
as that of a violent battle champion, descending from an illustrious
ancestry of warriors and selected for his victories during numer-
ous military campaigns. Moreover, the heroic style of kingship was
acknowledged within a limited geographical area confined to the royal
family, and not shared within a hierarchic system of power division
among sub-chieftains as in the later developments (Kaimal 1996: 34).
The most striking feature of this leadership style was anyway the pres-
ence of primitive and rudimental forms of *dāna*, "the ritual giving"—
an aspect constituting the ideological epicentre of Indian royal ide-
ology which, in Tamil war poetry, assumed predominantly the shape
of the sacrificial act (sometimes with Vedic connotations), as shown
in the above-mentioned stanza from the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* glorifying the
Pāṇḍya King, Talaiyālaṅkāṉattucceruveṉṟa Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ (210 CE).[3]

Even at the dawn of the ideological transition toward more elabo-
rated kingship assets, which found their pivotal epicentre in more
organised forms of purāṇic *dāna*,[4] the Pāṇḍya royal identity somehow

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[3] Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ, "Victorious at Talaiyālaṅkāṉam," won as a very young man a battle
against a Cēra and Cōḻa coalition at Talaiyālaṅkāṉam, a locality located in the
Tanjavur district, near Tiruvālūr; the victory culminated in the Pāṇḍya primacy
over the Tamil politics. This famous ruler, apart from being himself a poet, was
the recipient of the extended *Maturaikkāñci*, a literary work belonging to the
Pattuppāṭṭu; in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, 13 poems are dedicated to him (nos. 18, 19, 23,
24, 25, 26, 72 [authored], 76, 77, 78, 79, 371 and 372).

[4] These forms were mainly exemplified by the various aspects of building activities
such as establishment of Brahmanical settlements (*brahmadeya*s), irrigation sys-
tems, and, more important, temple building, generally considered the most costly
and prestigious form of *dāna*. As stated by Padma Kaimal, extending patronage
and donating to temples were in fact the crucial mechanisms for generating and
sustaining kings' sacred authority and contributed to create a lasting perspective
of it (Kaimal 1996: 55).

preserved its "ancestral" and heroic traits. During the first centuries of the current era, some violent narratives characterising the Madurai royal centre started to appear; in time, these specific legends were further conceptualised into a coherent and organised repository of royal accounts which, in the course of centuries, became fundamental tools employed by the dynasty in its public display. Some of these motifs were persistently used in the Pāṇḍya official presentation, becoming the foundational components of the dynastic self-perception of the Madurai kingdom through the centuries.

The king and the god: The *Cilappatikāram* and the imperial records

Among this extensive royal material, the narrative that occupies the foremost place in the Pāṇḍya dynastic identity is represented by the violent story of an anonymous sovereign fighting against Indra and shattering the latter's crown. According to the core of this mytheme, because of the arrogant behaviour of the Tamil monarch who dared to sit on Indra's throne, heavy rains hit the city of Madurai. Responding to the situation, the king captured clouds that were destroying his capital thus provoking the wrath of the god. After a fierce fight, the Pāṇḍya lord defeated Indra and broke his crown with a disk, a magical weapon granted to him by Śiva.

The original frame of this motif is traceable to its oldest textual occurrence, fixed approximately during the 5th century CE. The origin of this myth, as in the case of the other narratives concerning the exploits of the Pāṇḍyas, is obscure and cannot be traced to any previous source. Its first attestation, presumably already coherent in contents and development, and juxtaposed with other narratives, appears at the opening of the second section of Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ's *Cilappatikāram*, the earliest Tamil epic and the greatest among the so called *aimperuṅkāppiyaṅkaḷ* ("five major epics"). The *Cilappatikāram* narrates the story and peregrinations of a young couple, Kōvalaṉ and his wife Kaṇṇaki, the unjust execution of the former, accused of having stolen an anklet

(*cilampu*) of the Pāṇḍya queen, the furious madness of the latter who cuts off one of her breasts, the destruction of Madurai in a fire, and Kaṇṇaki's subsequent divine apotheosis as the goddess Pattiṉi, patron deity of marital fidelity. The subject matter is nevertheless related to a more ancient legend, which pre-existed in the indigenous Tamil tradition, and which is alluded to in some classical texts;[5] the poem is then considered a massive and progressive reworking of the original narratological nuclei of this story, which occupies foremost position in the Tamil literary and regional imagery. In the same way, even the actual form in which the *Cilappatikāram* has reached us does not represent its original version. In fact, as it has been long established by scholarship, the prologue to the *epos*, the epilogue, the closing sections of the three *kāṇṭam*s, and an introductory prose portion opening canto XXIX are widely considered to be later textual additions. As it is a posterior interpolation, the third book—*Vañcikkāṇṭam*, "The Book of Vañci"—was probably inserted to complete the ideological balance represented by the two previous sections of the poem (*Pukār* and *Maturaikkāṇṭam*s), which take place in the Cōḻa and Pāṇḍya lands.[6] Generally, given the stratified nature of the epic, the scholars tend to date the definitive asset of the poem towards the middle of the 5th century CE.[7]

At the beginning of the *Maturaikkāṇṭam* ("The Book of Maturai"), in the eleventh chapter, Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṉ, on their way to the Pāṇḍya capital, meet with an old bard, Māṅkāṭu, intent on singing the praises of the local sovereign. Hence, the singer's eulogy of the Madurai King, Āriyapaṭaikaṭanta Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ:[8]

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[5] Zvelebil 1973: 173; as stated by the scholar, the original motif is hinted at in *Naṟṟiṇai* 216 and in an even more ancient composition, *Puṟanāṉūṟu* 278.

[6] Pukār—or Kāvirippaṭṭiṉam (Zvelebil 1974: 132)—is considered the capital and fundamental seaport of the Cōḻa kingdom.

[7] For the dating of the *Cilappatikāram*, and, more specifically, the debated "Gajabāhu Synchronism," the reader may refer to Zvelebil 1973: 174–175 and Nilakanta Sastri 1958: 112. Concerning the articulated problematic of the transmission of the poem, its characters and synopsis—which are beyond the scope of the present paper—please consult Zvelebil 1974: 131–135; Zvelebil 1973: 172–184.

[8] I refer to the text of the *Cilappatikāram* according to Cāminātaiyar 1892.

vāḻka eṅkō maṉṉavar peruntakai
ūḻito rūḻito ṟulakaṅ kākka
aṭiyir ṟaṉṉaḷa varacark kuṇartti
vaṭivēl eṟinta vāṉpakai porātu
pakṟuḷi yāṟṟuṭaṉ paṉmalai yaṭukkattuk
kumarik kōṭuṅ koṭuṅkaṭal koḷḷa
vaṭaticaik kaṅkaiyum imayamuṅ koṇṭu
teṉṟicai yāṇṭa teṉṉavaṉ vāḻi
tiṅkaṭ celvaṉ tirukkulam viḷaṅkac
ceṅkaṇā yirattōṉ tiṟalviḷaṅ kāram
poṅkoḷi mārpir pūṇṭōṉ vāḻi
muṭivaḷai yuṭaittōṉ mutalvaṉ ceṉṉiyeṉru
iṭiyuṭaip perumaḻai yeytā tēkap
piḻaiyā viḷaiyuṭ peruvaḷañ curappa
maḻaipiṇit tāṇṭa maṉṉavaṉ vāḻkeṉat
tītutīr ciṟappiṉ teṉṉaṉai vāḻtti
māmutu maṟaiyōṉ vantirun tōṇai
yātu nummūr īṅkeṉ varaveṉak || XI, 17–30 ||

Long live our celebrated King and Ruler who protects the World through the eras! Long live the Teṉṉavaṉ[9] who rules the South and who conquered the Ganges in the north and the Himālaya! Since the beginning he made the enemy kings know his prowess, when the raging sea, against which he hurled his sharp javelin, not accepting such great enemy, took hold of the Pakṟuḷi river and also of the Kumari peak with its mountains. Long live the One who wears on his bright chest the shiny necklace of Indra of one thousand red eyes, so that the great lineage of the prosperous god of the Moon may shine! Once, when the broad thundering clouds passed by without stopping, complaining "He broke the armlet on the crown of Indra, the Supreme God!," he bound and subdued them, so that they could give great prosperity to the crops, without fault. May he long live!," thus a great Brahmin of ancient lineage, who arrived and stayed there, was saying, celebrating the Teṉṉaṉ of faultless excellency.

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9 Teṉṉavaṉ, "Lord of the South" (literally "man of the South"), is a typical epithet referring to the Pāṇḍya rulers from an early age.

According to this passage from the *Cilappatikāram*, the Southern ruler is portrayed as a majestic sovereign, who annexed the Ganges area and the Himālaya mountain range to his domain and to defend his land from natural disaster, hurled his javelin into the raging sea, which had retaliated against the Paḵṟuḷi river and Kanyā.[10] The second part of the bard's eulogy refers to the act of seizing Indra's garland and the breaking of the god's crown. As the *epos* suggests, this episode is connected to a wider narration involving clouds destroying the Pāṇḍya capital and the subsequent fight between Indra and the Madurai sovereign.

The origins of these specific narratives are not known and, at the present state of research, it is not possible to trace any precedents in any Caṅkam sources; they appear in the *Cilappatikāram*—perhaps as proper creations of the *epos*—around the middle of the 5th century CE, in an approximately coherent aspect, or as if their narrative skeleton had been set out previously, perhaps in an unknown or unattested repository of royal legends concerning the Madurai kings. Another possibility that can be advanced here takes into account the "composite" nature of the epic poem and its different *strata* of adaptation and reworking. We may further venture to argue that this specific section of Māṅkāṭu's eulogy in the Tamil epic poem—a text which in its current aspect bears strong mark of a Cēra reworking of a previous narratological tradition—testifies to a considerable Pāṇḍya component, represented by this group of dynastic narratives that might be considered a textual record or a vestige of a much older Pāṇḍya royal tradition circulating in the South but which is not possible to trace to its origin at the present state of research. Provisionally, the celebration of Āriyapaṭaikaṭanta Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ, structured in the *Cilappatikāram* through a reference to these episodes, might contain traces of Pāṇḍya narratological nuclei, which were the result of an assimilation from unattested sources or of a progressive adaptation of previous literary

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[10]   This episode of the flood and the aggressive advancement of the sea against the Pāṇḍya land is connected also to the story of the foundation of the third Caṅkam Academy (*kaṭaiccaṅkam*), which took place after the Madurai lord saved his domain. The episode is hinted at in Nampi's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* (XXI, 8–9), as observed in Wilden 2014: 223.

antecedents in the South that were obscured in time, or, perhaps, by the very same Cēra reworking of the poem.

The next occurrence of this dynastic *topos*, a symptomatic evidence of the relevance of this royal narrative and its on-going crystallisation into precise patterns, can be traced in a specimen from the epigraphical corpus dated to the "First Empire" (6–10th centuries CE), a few centuries after the *Cilappatikāram*.[11] The "smaller" Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates of King Varaguṇa I (approximately 768–811 CE), with dating lost but surely issued between the 8th–9th century CE, are represented by three plates excavated at the Perumāḷ temple at Ciṉṉamaṉūr, in Madurai district.[12] This document, composed partly in Sanskrit and partly in Tamil stanzas and prose, presents for the first 14 lines a genealogical exposition of the Pāṇḍya dynasty which frames the recording of the immediate scope of the grant. As even a preliminary reading shows, the formulas in which the relevant parts of the plates are composed are clearly congruent with the idiom of the *Cilappatikāram* eulogy. In lines 3–14, covering the second side of the first copper plate and the first side of the second, we read as follows:[13]

amṛtakiraṇaṉ-aṉvayattil ākaṇḍalaṉat aḻiva kala samaramukhatt asuragaṇantalaiy aḻiyac cilai kuṉittu vaṭa-varaiyatu valāra-cūḷikai maṇik-keṇṭaip-poṟi cūṭṭiyun teṉ-varai micaik-kumbhodbhavanatu tīn-tamiḻiṟ cevi kaḻuviyum harihayanatu hāram pūṇṭu marddhāsanam-āvaṉōṭ-ēṟiyuṅ

[11] For the chronological division of Pāṇḍya history I refer to the traditional periodisation into "early," "imperial" (first/second phases) and "later" periods advanced, since the beginning of research on the kingdom, by Nilakanta Sastri and Sethuraman (Nilakanta Sastri 1972; Sethuraman 1978, 1980). These chronological divisions were of course the products of the early 20th century historiography, and they do not reflect an actual division of the Pāṇḍya kingdom's history into such temporal arches. Despite this, all the scholarly works on the subject maintain such periodisation, which I have kept for the sake of clarity and uniformity.
[12] Term "smaller" Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates highlights distinction of the said plates from another copper record recovered in the same locality in the Madurai district, the "larger" Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates issued during the 16th regnal year of the last monarch of the first imperial phase, Māṟavarman Rājasiṃha II (900–920 CE).
[13] I refer to the Tamil text of the smaller Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates according to *Pāṇṭiyar ceppēṭukal pattu* (pp. 75–77); the translation is from Krishnan 2002: 26–27.

curi-vaḷaiy-avaṉ- ṟiru-muṭi-micait-tūṇi pala paṭat tōḷ-ēcciyum ōtam-
īḷa vēl-eṟintum ōr-āyiraṅ kratuc-ceytum bhūtagaṇam paṇiy-āṇaṭum
bhuvanatalam potu nīkkiyum yāṉaiy-āyiram-aiyam-iṭṭum aparimitam-
atiśayaṅkaḷ ceytu ūṉam-il pukaḻ-pāṇḍyavaṃśatt-ulōkanāthar palar
kaḻintapiṉ [|; ll. 3–14]

> After a number of kings of the Pāṇḍya family of spotless fame (born) in
> the race of the Moon—who bent their bow to cut off heads of crowds
> of *Asura*s on the battle front to prevent the destruction of Ākhaṇḍala
> (i.e., Indra); who mounted the emblem of the beautiful carp on the ada-
> mantine crest of the Northern mountain (i.e., the Himalayas); who bathed
> their ears with the sweet Tamil of Kumbhodbhava (i.e., Agastya residing)
> on the Southern Mountain (i.e., the Podiyil hills); who wore the neck-
> lace of Harihaya (i.e., Indra) and sat with him on one-half of his throne;
> who raised their arms breaking into pieces the ring around his sacred
> crown…(ll. 3–14)

This genealogical passage from the Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates, the first instance
of this narrative in the whole Pāṇḍya epigraphical corpus,[14] seems to
be clearly based on the imagery of the *Cilappatikāram* eulogy, where
the episode of the fight between the Madurai king and Indra occurred,
with the identity of the king being attributed to the ruler Neṭuñceḷiyan.
The insertion of this motif into an official imperial document testi-
fies to the relevance and importance of this narrative for the Pāṇḍya
public identity and its presentation. In underlying this dynastic rep-
ertoire, the genealogical *praśasti* introducing the Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates
(and other imperial records as well) projected a clear and undoubted
claim of descent of the imperial Pāṇḍyas from anonymous ancestors
who faced down and defeated Indra, destroying his crown, the sym-
bol of his sovereignty.

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[14]   The mytheme of the ruler fighting will be omnipresent also in the later epi-
       graphical production; for instance, ll. 87–88 from the Tamil eulogy framing the
       Taḷavāypuram plates, issued during the reign of King Parāntaka Vīranārāyaṇa
       (880–900 CE): *harihayaṉat āram pūṇṭum avaṉ muṭiyoṭu vaḷai uṭaittum*, "[the
       Pāṇḍyas] wore the garland of Harihaya and broke his crown and ring."

Given the approximate chronological vicinity of these pieces of evidence, it might be tempting to try to establish direct connection between the occurrence of this legend as it appears in the Tamil epic and the smaller Ciṉṉamaṉūr charter, which, presumably, inherited this account from the *Cilappatikāram* eulogy. As we have stated, this mythical account is centered on the fight between a Pāṇḍya sovereign and the god Indra, which culminates with the destruction of the divine crown. Additionally, the story, which appeared in the Tamil epic, is one of the most often recurring in the royal repository of the Madurai ideology and its origin seems uncertain, given that in the *Cilappatikāram* it appears already formed, or at least coherent in its pattern. Perhaps the aspect in which it appears in the epic and later in the early epigraphical corpus may have been the result of a reworking of an earlier non-extant Pāṇḍya narratological repository, or supposedly and conjecturally, it may have been based upon non-indigenous sources and adapted subsequently. In this sense, the narrative of the clash between the king and Indra may bear interesting similarities to the well-known episode of the fight between Kṛṣṇa and the god narrated in the *Viṣṇuparvan* of the *Harivaṃśa* (II, 74). Additionally, the general motif of the clash with Indra is present elsewhere in the *itihāsa*, which shows several samples of a ruler or a hero fighting with the lord of the gods. One interesting instance is represented by a not very recurrent myth of Agastya, namely the story of the twelve-years-long sacrifice (*Mahābhārata* XIV, 92). The sage was engaged in the performance of this particular ritual, and Indra, scared of the *ṛṣi*'s ascetic power, stopped the rains over the region to hinder the sacrifice. Agastya then threatened the god, declaring that he is going to become a new Indra (*upendra*); the god reconsidered his stand and once again sent beneficial rains to the land.[15] The frame of a struggle with the god in this Agastya legend may seem relevant, considering the recurrence of other myths of the sage in the epigraphical corpus and their importance in the Madurai

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[15] More specifically, the story of Agastya's sacrifice and the "fight" with Indra shows similarities with another Pāṇḍya legend, encountered already in the eulogy of the *Cilappatikāram*, of the Madurai ruler who had captured clouds which had refused to rain on the land.

repository.[16] In fact, the *ṛṣi* is traditionally considered the *rājaguru* of the Pāṇḍya rulers and the tutelary figure of Tamil grammar. Nevertheless, even admitting the plausible influence of the twelve-years-long sacrifice narrative over the Pāṇḍya story of the king against Indra, this legend does not involve a real fight with the god, nor does it justify the other two accessory segments, namely the obtaining of the garland and staking claim to half of the heavenly throne. On the other hand, other mythical narratives that figure in the *Mahābhārata* present several common points with this royal Pāṇḍya legend and its articulation. Firstly, the story narrated in the Sanskrit epic about the fight of Skanda-Kārttikeya and his victory over Indra (III, 216): after the struggle with the lord of the gods, Śiva's son obtains from his opponent the golden garland made by Viśvakarmā and two of Indra's weapons, a *vajra* and a club. Furthermore, in an earlier passage from the same *Mahābhārata* (III, 214), Skanda pierces the Mount Krauñca with arrows.[17] Some of

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[16]   The Vēḷvikuṭi copper plates clearly hinted to Agastya and his deed in its Sanskrit genealogical portion. Stanza 3 makes allusion to some episodes connected to the sage's career, the stopping of the Vindhya mountains' growth and the drinking of the ocean waters, all narratives which are echoing the influence of *itihāsa*s (or epic in general). The story of Agastya and the Vindhya range is narrated in the third *parvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (III, 104); the mountains, being jealous of mount Meru which was due to be revolved around by the sun, asked the sun to do the same with them. At the sun's refusal, they grew to such a degree as to obstruct its path. Then the *devatā*s asked Agastya to intercede on their behalf and the sage requested the Vindhyas to bend over in order to facilitate his passage to the South, making them promise that they would keep such position until his return. Agreeing to the sage's proposal, the mountains bent, reducing their height; Agastya never returned from the southern lands and the Vindhya, not managing to outmatch Meru, were not able to resume their larger aspect. The second narrative, namely the *ṛṣi* drinking the ocean, is retold in the same *parvan* of the *itihāsa* (III, 103): after the clash between Indra and Vṛtra, the evil *asura*s hid in the ocean, threatening the gods and the Brahmins. Agastya, requested by the *deva*s to help them, drank all the waters, revealing the demons which took abode at the ocean's bottom and were finally defeated.

[17]   *Mahābhārata* III, 214.31ab: *bibheda sa śaraiḥ śailaṃ krauñcaṃ himavataḥ sutam*. Another passage from the *itihāsa* (IX, 45.70–81) explicitly states that Skanda cleft the mountain not with arrows, but with a javelin given him by Agni (*śaktyā bibheda bhagavān kārttikeyo 'gnidattayā* (73cd). This narrative of the destruction of a mountain shows close similarities to an episode of the Pāṇḍya repository

these elements in the story of Kārttikeya bear significant similarities with the overall structure of the legend of the Madurai king and Indra. Another epic narrative which involves a fight with the lord of the gods and, additionally, the obtaining of Indra's throne, is represented by the famous episode of Arjuna's journey to *Indraloka*, the fight with the god (I, 229), the hero sitting himself on the divine throne (*Mahābhārata* III, 43.20) and Indra's gift of three mythical weapons.[18] All these epic narratives bear striking similarities with the general feature of the Pāṇḍya motif of the fight between the ruler and Indra. In my contention, these similarities are overly recurrent and of too great a relevance to be discharged as mere textual coincidences and we may here argue that the Madurai narrative could have been influenced by these stories taken from the *itihāsa* sources. If this conjecture were acceptable, we could assume that these epic narratives involving Agastya, Skanda and Arjuna may have had a significant influence in the development of this episode. This, then, may have resulted in the assimilation of specific characters of these *itihāsa* legends and their re-adaptation in the Pāṇḍya royal context, which attributed these exploits not to gods or epic heroes, but to the legendary Madurai rulers. The feature/motif of the Pāṇḍya narrative of the ruler fighting against Indra may be then the result of the influence of the epic narratives concerning Agastya, Arjuna and Skanda. The assimilation may be motivated by the apparent importance of these legendary figures for the Pāṇḍya ideology, especially considering the role played by Agastya and the recurrent mention of Arjuna in quite a few instances as far as the copper plates go.[19]

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which will be fixed many centuries later, around the late 13th century CE, in the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* by Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi, namely the *līlā* of the Pāṇḍya King Ugra who humbled Mount Meru with a club (story no. 61), similarly to Skanda on Mount Krauñca with arrows/javelin.

18   The granting of legendary weapons is already present in the story of Skanda and Indra; the same motif will figure also in the Pāṇḍya context, in the story from the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* about Ugra receiving weapons, a disk and a javelin, from his father, Śiva (story no. 12).

19   Similarly to Agastya's case, the Pāṇḍava hero is explicitly mentioned in the Vēḷvikuṭi charter's Sanskrit genealogical *praśasti* (stanza 12) and, among other royal legends, in the Tamil portion of the Taḷavāypuram grant of Parāntaka

However, it may be that the dynastic legend of the sovereign who destroyed Indra's crown became, by the first centuries of the current era, a fundamental trait of the Pāṇḍya royal identity. This aggressive myth, which seems omnipresent in the epigraphical corpus of both imperial phases of the Madurai kingdom, together with other legends,

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Vīranārāyaṇa (ll. 86–102), and, lastly, in stanzas 6–7 of the Sanskrit eulogy of the "larger" Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates. A reference to the *Mahābhārata* context seems coherent if we take into account the more than attested presence of the Southern rulers in its narrative. The *itihāsa* refers to the Pāṇḍyas and their land more than once: at III, 85 and following, there is an *excursus* on the holy *tīrtha*s in the Pāṇḍya region, which include some localities connected to Agastya and the Kanyakumari area. A southern delegation attended Yudhiṣṭhira's royal consecration (II, 36/43), while, as is known, Pāṇḍya contingents joined the Pāṇḍava cause and fought at Kurukṣetra (V, 22). The *Mahābhārata* seems to consider them valiant soldiers, being inserted in Bhīṣma's military rating as *mahāratha*s, "great warriors on chariots" (V, 172). Additionally, a further reference to Arjuna in the imperial copper plates testifies not only to this intentional adaptation of epic material, but to the ideological "distortion" of deeds related to the Pāṇḍava hero and their application to Pāṇḍya rulers. The Tamil eulogy of the "larger" Ciṉṉamaṉūr (l, 85) relates the peculiar legend of the Pāṇḍya king who removed Arjuna's curse. According to the *Mahābhārata* narrative, the Pāṇḍava hero was cursed by the Vasus, the attendants of Indra, due to the treacherous death of their brother Bhīṣma in the Kurukṣetra war. Ulūpī, the Nāga Princess who married Arjuna during his twelve-years-long exile, sought her father Kauravya's help to remove danger from her husband. The Nāga king begged the river Gaṅgā, Bhīṣma's mother, to alleviate the curse, and the goddess predicted that Arjuna would be killed in a battle by his own son Babruvāhana, conceived with Princess Citrāṅgadā, and later would be brought back to life by Ulūpī with the aid of a magical gem. According to the epic (XIV, 79–80), the Nāginī provoked the meeting of Arjuna and his son Babruvahāna in Manipur, which resulted in the fight between father and son and, as the Gaṅgā foresaw, the consequent death of the hero. Ulūpī recovered then from the netherworld the magical gem and, placing it on the chest of the lifeless Pāṇḍava, restored him to life, removing in this way the curse of the Vasus. In the Ciṉṉamaṉūr dynastic celebration, it is stated that a Pāṇḍya ruler saved Arjuna from this curse; it is evident that the 10th century Madurai chancery operated a massive adaptation of this epic story, assigning fundamental role to one of the mythical rulers. This modification of the *itihāsa* narrative had beyond doubt the ideological function of placing the Pāṇḍya presence in the legendary pan-Indian past, emphasising once more the already attested presence of the rulers in the *Mahābhārata*.

constituted the foremost narrative through which the Pāṇḍyas not only perceived their past but presented their royal self-perception to be conveyed by their official chancery documents.

Moreover, this conception, perhaps inherited from the ancient traits of the Dravidian *puṟam* ethos or the reworking and adaptation of pan-Indian epic material, was not only an ideological product of the Madurai court. In the course of time, the theme of the Pāṇḍya ruler fighting against the god became an idiom through which the southern literature in Sanskrit, else rival political centres, referred to and perceived the Madurai monarchy and its ideological trends. For instance, in the literary frame of Veṅkaṭanātha's *Haṃsasandeśa*, at the closing of the first *āśvāsa*, we read how the hero Rāma, entrusting his love message for the imprisoned Sītā to his *dūta*, commands him to fly over the Pāṇḍya land; the Tamil region is described as follows:[20]

> *īṣād astrāṇy* [em.; *astrād* ed.] *adhigatavatāṃ kṣatriyāṇāṃ prabhāvāt*
> *kārāvāsasmaraṇacakitais siktasasyān payodaiḥ |*
> *paśyan yāyāḥ param alakayā spardhamānair ajastraṃ*
> *puṇnyāvāsaiḥ purajanapadair maṇḍitān pāṇḍyadeśān || 50 ||*

> Travel on, looking at the Pāṇḍya land, which is adorned with cities, rural parts, and abodes of sanctity that constantly challenge the city of Alaka to excel it; [the land] that has its growing crops watered by rain clouds which tremble in fear at the memory of their imprisonment by the great power of the *kṣatriya*s who had obtained magical weapons from Śiva.

In this stanza, Veṅkaṭanātha provides thus a vague allusion to the background of the dynastic motif of fight between the Pāṇḍya king and Indra. This passage from the messenger poem hints, in fact, at the imprisonment of clouds, the narratological background that frames the clash, and some warrior kings (*kṣatriya*) who obtained weapons from Śiva; perhaps a subtle reference to the divine *cakra* (the weapon

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[20] I refer to the original text of the *Haṃsasandeśa* according to Narayana Iyengar 1955.

used by the Madurai king to defeat Indra). Despite this hint found in the *dūtakāvya*, we may assume that the author referred specifically to the Pāṇḍya narrative about the fight between the Tamil monarch and the king of the gods. However, although in the *Haṃsasandeśa* the allusion is rather subtle, in other sources the references are far more explicit and easier to comprehend.

With the end of the first imperial phase of Madurai, culminating in the battle of Vellore around 925 CE, in which the Cōla King Parāntaka I (907–955) vanquished Māṟavarman Rājasiṃha II (900–920) and conquered the Pāṇḍya capital,[21] the Tanjavur kingdom extended its sway over the territorial area of the old empire. After a progressive weakening of the internal structure of the Cōla administrative machine, old scions of the Pāṇḍya imperial family gradually reacquired a hold over the region and, by the beginning of the 13th century CE, began a series of military campaigns against the Tanjavur overlords. According to Nilakanta Sastri, Māṟavarman Sundara I (1216–1239), the monarch who laid the basis for the advent of the "Second Empire," started to remove the yoke of the Cōla domination in the Pāṇḍya land, defeating Kulottuṅga III (1178–1218) and sacking the imperial cities of Tanjavur and Uṟaiyūr.[22] In order to further consecrate this decisive victory, Sundara performed the *vīrābhiṣeka* in the Cōla royal hall and the *tulābhāra* ceremony in Chidambaram, as testified to by his Tirupparaṅkuṟṟam record (ARE 1890, no. 49), issued in his

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[21]   The conflict between Parāntaka and Rājasiṃha escalated in three consecutive stages, which saw at first the Pāṇḍya sovereign being defeated by his opponent. After the first battle, Rājasiṃha sought help of the Ceylonese ruler Kassapa V (913–923 CE); however, the Sinhalese and Pāṇḍya conjoint forces were crushed by the Cōla army. Finally, Parāntaka annihilated his enemies in the battle of Vellore in 925, which provoked the flight of Rājasiṃha aided by Dappula IV (923–934) and the fall of Madurai (Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 122–123). These historical events are corroborated also by the *Mahāvaṃśa*, the Sinhalese chronicle (chapters 52–52; the interested reader may refer to Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 121,123 for the translation of the relevant passages).

[22]   Nilakanta Sastri 1958: 193; Nilakanta Sastri 1972: 127; please refer also to Thinakaran 1987: 41–42.

seventh regnal year, and by his Tirunelvēli inscription.[23] After the battle, the Pāṇḍya King assumed the *biruda* of *cōṇāṭu koṇṭaruliya*, "the one who took the Cōḻa country," and restored the throne to the defeated Cōḻa ruler.

In this political scenario, which saw the rise of the Madurai kingdom after centuries of Cōḻa interregnum, the Pāṇḍyas confirmed themselves as a significant power in the South, together with the weakened Tanjavur centre—especially under the rule of Rājarāja III (1216–1246)—and the rising influence of the Hōysaḷa kingdom in Karnataka. The 13th century CE saw the development of balance and political relations of these three kingdoms; interactions between them may also be observed in the courtly literary production in Sanskrit.

The *Gadyakarṇāmṛta* of Sakala Vidyācakravartin, poet laureate at the Hōysaḷa court, is a work that indeed testifies to the historical interrelations between the three major political powers in the South in medieval times, the Cōḻa, the Pāṇḍya and the Hōysaḷa, and narrates in poetical form the story of war between Vīra Narasiṃha II (1220–1234) and Māṟavarman Sundara I. At the end of the conflict narrated in the *gadyakāvya*, the Pāṇḍya sovereign is defeated and Narasiṃha compels Sundara to pay tribute. What is more interesting is the way the author of the *Gadyakarṇāmṛta* describes the scene and characterises the Madurai lord; below the relative passage from the prose:[24]

karadīcakāra cakrāratalatāḍanamukharaśatamakhamakuṭakarmograb-
hujacaṇḍimānaṃ pāṇḍyādhipam |

[Vīra Narasiṃha] rendered tributary the Pāṇḍya king, [who resembled] the fierce Lord Ugra against the crown of the one hundred-headed One— Indra—striking it with the surface of his speedy discus.

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[23] EI XXII, no.10.

[24] I quote the text of the *Gadyakarṇāmṛta* according to the critical edition by S. S. Janaki (Janaki 1981); the excerpt from the *gadyakāvya* is taken from p. 81 of the critical text.

It is noteworthy how Sakala Vidyācakravartin, a poet at the rival Hōysaḷa court, choose to refer to Māṟavarman Sundara I by employing a periphrasis built upon one of the Pāṇḍya dynastic motifs, which, evidently, circulated among the political elites of the South in the 13th century. Nevertheless, contrary to the textual evidence previously analysed and afferent to the Pāṇḍya ideological domain, in the *Gadyakarṇāmṛta* the royal narrative is not attributed to an anonymous sovereign as in the early Pāṇḍya epigraphical *praśasti*s of the first imperial phase, but to the purāṇic ruler Ugra, the son of Śiva-Sundareśvara as king of Madurai according to the religious repository of the Madurai Tamil *talapurāṇam*. This "alternative" version, which in all probability implied a process of variation of the "original" dynastic motif presumably started in medieval times, culminating with the composition of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* by Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi in the late 13th century,[25] will find attestation and application

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[25]   Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi composed his work in Chidambaram, the seat of the medieval *śaiva* tradition in the South. The dating to the second half of the 13th century can be perhaps conjectured thanks to evidence found in an inscription (ARE 1908, no.183), dated approximately to 1298, during the 30th regnal year of King Māṟavarman Kulaśekhara Pāṇḍya I (Jeyechandrun 1985: 25). This inscription records the redistribution of lands close to Chidambaram, granted to a certain Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi, who, fairly reasonably, can be taken for our author. The *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* is a collection of 64 episodes narrating the divine exploits of the god Śiva in Madurai (Sanskrit *līlā*, Tamil *viḷaiyāṭal*). The *Hālāsyamāhātmya*, traditionally considered as part of the *Skandapurāṇa*, is the first Sanskrit version of this Madurai cycle in seventy *adhyāya*s. As stated by Eva Wilden, the text is based on the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* and, a revealed by the analysis of the thematic development, is thus later than Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi. Moreover, Wilden has successfully proposed to date the *māhātmya* to the late 14th–early 15th centuries (Wilden 2014: 248), while Elaine Fisher (Fisher 2017: 159–165) dated the work to the 17th century. The fame of Nampi's work is obscured by the "other" *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, by Parañcōti Muṉivar, composed during the 17th century in the Nāyaka Madurai and the coeval "adapted" Sanskrit version, the *Śivalīlārṇavamahākāvya* by Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita. The episode of the fight between Ugra and Indra is narrated in the 44th chapter of Nampi's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, titled *intiraṉ muṭimēlvaḷaiyeṟinta tiruviḷaiyāṭal*, "The sacred sport of the breaking of Indra's crown with the discus," and in *adhyāya* XVIII of the *Hālāsyamāhātmya*.

in the later Pāṇḍya ideology, especially in the Sanskrit courtly production of the Teṅkāśi phase (14th–18th centuries CE).[26]

Striking Indra's crown in Teṅkāśi

The ensuing collapse of the Madurai empire and the end of the second imperial phase constituted one of the foremost turning points in the history of medieval South India. After the great regnal periods of Jaṭāvarman Sundara I (1251–1269 CE) and Māṟavarman Kulaśekhara I (1268–1308), the internal structure of the restored Pāṇḍya kingdom abruptly collapsed as a result of a sudden havoc, which coincided with specific historical changes fated to influence the politics of the South.

In the early 14th century, the Muslim invasion of the South, led by Malik Kāfūr, general of the Delhi Sultan, 'Alā' ud-dīn K̲h̲aljī (1267–1316), destabilised the political balance of the southern regions, already aggravated by the progressive weakening of the Hōysaḷa kingdom in Karnataka. According to some outdated historical views, in this critical moment, the Pāṇḍya King Māṟavarman Kulaśekhara I was murdered by his son, Jaṭāvarman Sundara III (acceded 1304), who then started a war against his brother, Jaṭāvarman Vīra II (acceded 1297)

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[26] The motif of the king fighting Indra, obtaining his garland and capturing the clouds, is obviously attested before the later Teṅkāśi phase, especially during the "second" Pāṇḍya imperial phase. Several *meykkīrti*s contain celebratory accounts of the Madurai rulers which refer to the canonical royal narratives, including this very same motif of the fight against Indra and the supersession of god's power. To illustrate, quoted below are two excerpts from royal eulogies, one dedicated to Jaṭāvarman Parāntaka (1130–?) and the other to Jaṭāvarman Kulaśekhara (1190–1218):

> *teṉmaturā purittōṉṟit tēvēntiraṉō ṭiṉitirunta* (Cuppiramaṇiyam 1983: 223)
> who, having appeared in the city of southern Mathurā, sat down (with) sweetness with Indra

> *cuntara mārpiṉil intiraṉ pūṭṭiya*
> *āramum alaṅkalum aḻakuṭaṉ tikaḻa* (Cuppiramaṇiyam 1983: 231)
> while the garland that Indra fastened on his beautiful chest and the wreath (crown?) were graciously shining

(Nilakanta Sastri 1958: 208–209; Derrett 1957: 151). In reality, this
reference to a supposed assassination of Kulaśekhara and the hos-
tility between the two princes was inherited and confirmed as a his-
torical evidence by historians due to a distorted account presented
by the Persian author Waṣṣāf al-Ḥaḍrat (1265–1328) in his *Tajziyat
al-amṣār wa-tazjiyat al-a'ṣār*. N. Sethuraman firstly noticed the in-
congruence between the foreign account and the South Indian coeval
evidence, which present a completely different scenario concerning
the Pāṇḍya royal family.[27] This period of instability escalated with the
progressive Islamic occupation of Madurai and, in 1335, the founda-
tion of an independent Sultanate by Jalāl ad-dīn Aḥsan Ḵẖān, an of-
ficer of Muḥammad bin Tuġluq (1325–1351), the ruler of Delhi. The
collapse of the Hōysaḷa kingdom after the death of Ballāḷa IV in 1346
and the consolidating tendency of the Vijayanagara empire (1336–
1565 CE) heralded the end of the Pāṇḍya influence in the South and
the consequent displacement of what was left of the old kingdom in the
southern-western areas of Tamil Nadu.

Around the last decades of the 14th century, a family of rulers claim-
ing direct descent from the Madurai Pāṇḍya empire organised in the
Tirunelvēli area a centre of power that remained in a formally subordi-
nated position to Vijayanagara. The dynastic connection between this ob-
scure family and the principal line of Madurai remains uncertain (Bran-
foot 2012: 371); however, the new dynasty of Teṅkāśi (Tamil Teṉkāci)

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27   Sethuraman 1983: 6: "The Persian poet Wassaf (1312) states that Vira Pandya was
     younger and Sundara was elder. He further states that Vira Pandya was the ille-
     gitimate son and Sundara was the legitimate son. Wassaf was wrong. The Nallur
     record discussed above states that Vira Pandya was elder and Sundara was young-
     er. Both were the legitimate sons of Kulasekhara. Wassaf states that Kulasekhara
     crowned Vira Pandya rejecting the claim of Sundara. This is also wrong. The
     dates of the two princes prove that they were crowned during the life time of their
     father Kulasekhara. […] Wassaf states that at the close of Hijira year 709 i.e. in
     the year 1310 A. D. Sundara Pandya killed his father Kulasekhara. This is totally
     wrong. Inscriptions prove that Kulasekhara lived till 1312. A record which comes
     from Thirumal Ukandan Kottai belongs to the second son Jatavarman Sundara
     Pandya, year 9, corresponding to 1312. It states that Sundara arranged services
     to God for the welfare of his father."

represented a surprising, though greatly inferior ruling continuum after the havoc of the 14th century CE.

The new Pāṇḍya court in Teṅkāśi began to consolidate its claim as the rightful heir to the Madurai empire with a precise ideological strategy, namely the recovering and reuse of the official imperial documents and their repertoire of dynastic motifs, *in primis* the narrative of the fight between the king and Indra. This political path was obviously the most efficient one to present for public display the new dynasty visualised as a historical continuation of the old imperial state in Madurai which had collapsed decades earlier.

A fundamental detail we must firmly take into consideration is that from the 14th up to the second half of the 16th century, the Pāṇḍya official records totally lack genealogical *praśasti*s (Branfoot 2012: 329). That is to say that for the initial part of the Teṅkāśi period, the official narrative of the new ruling court did not project its political self-perception through the usual dynamic of dynastic genealogies. Only in the first decades of the 16th century, do we find testimony of deep revival of genealogical celebrations, the foremost of which is the one opening the most important evidence to reconstruct the royal history of the later period, the Putukkōṭṭai plates.

The primary medium through which the Teṅkāśi royal line expressed its public identity and legitimisation as inheritors of the lost Madurai line was initially conceptualised in the cosmopolitan discourse of the Sanskrit classical *kāvya* production, the *Pāṇḍyakulodayamahākāvya*. The *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* ("The Resurgence of the Pāṇḍya Race") is an incomplete "historical" poem by Maṇḍalakavi in twelve *sarga*s narrating the mythical origins and establishment of the Madurai kingdom and its evolution into the later phase. The initial sections of the poem (cantos I–V) retell the history of the dynasty according to the mythological accounts of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, and the *Hālāsyamāhātmya*.[28]

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[28] The contents of the first part of the *mahākāvya* are of course not coincidental. The recovery of the purāṇic material of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* had the function of presenting the dynastic identity of the new ruling centre as in line with and firmly anchored to the Madurai past. Maṇḍalakavi, introducing several modifications in the royal genealogies of the Pāṇḍya rulers in Nampi's work, shaped the identity

The "proper" historical matter presented by the *mahākāvya*, starting approximately from *sarga* VI, reaches up to the times of King Jaṭilavarman Kōṉērinmaikoṇṭāṉ Parākrama Kulaśekhara (c. 1480–1508 CE), who, in all probability, was the patron of the poem's author.[29]

In the fifth canto, Maṇḍalakavi extensively reworked the traditional narrative of the Pāṇḍya king and Indra—he expanded it and bestowed upon it a proper literary structure, at first only developed in the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*. At the closing of *sarga* IV (stanzas 38–45), we learn, due to a drought in the South, Śiva's son Ugra decided to visit *Indraloka*, together with the Cōḻa and Cēra kings, to ask the god for rains to restore the prosperity to their land. While the other monarchs showed respect in front of Indra, the bold Ugra sat on the heavenly throne and provoked the wrath of the god, who decided then to destroy the Pāṇḍya country. The clouds attacked Madurai with heavy rains (stanzas 10–23); however, they were eventually captured and thrown into jail by Ugra (29–31). At this turn of events, Indra declared outright war on the audacious Ugra, son of Śiva, and prepared to march with his heavenly army against Madurai (verses 35–45). In a series of virtuosic stanzas (49–66), the poet describes the fierce duel between the god and Ugra; only by using the discus (*valaya*) given to him by his father Śiva, did the Pāṇḍya king manage to defeat Indra.[30]

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of the Teṅkāśi kings as successors of those mythical ancestors who acted in the "Sacred Games of Śiva." Such literary and political strategy was also adopted by the Nāyakas of Madurai (1559–1736 CE), who employed the ideological past of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* to justify their role as rulers of the old imperial capital of the Pāṇḍyas. On this broader perspective the interest reader may refer to the detailed study in Branfoot 2012.

[29]   The reign of Jaṭilavarman Kulaśekhara is testified to by a dozen of unpublished records (ARE 1918, nos. 502–505, 508–510, 516, 524, 527, 534, 618); this epigraphical documentation gives king's access to the throne as 1480. Record no. 618 testifies to the great patronage the monarch extended to temple building, just like his maternal uncle, Jaṭilavarman Arikesari Parākrama (1422–1463 CE), the founder of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple. This inscription, dated to 1508, involves donations and maintenance of the Aḻakiya Cokkanār and Varaṃturam Perumāḷ temples in Kaṭayanallūr (Tirunelvēli district).

[30]   The original nucleus of the story of Indra's defeat is attested a few centuries before the original model of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*. The episode is hinted at in

It is worth analysing this specific segment, namely the acme of the battle, which took place between Ugra Pāṇḍya (as in the source model and in the *Gadyakarṇāmṛta*) and Indra; the relative stanzas (66–67) describe the culmination of the clash between the King and the god as follows:[31]

> *śastrair ajayyam ahitaṃ śamayāmuneti*
> *pūrvaṃ puratrayabhidā valayaṃ vitīrṇam |*
> *maulau pravātamathanasya [mumoca] tena*
> *nirbhinnam asya makuṭaṃ nipapāta bhūmau || 66 ||*

[Saying:] "Destroy the enemy invincible by [other] weapons!" [Ugra Pāṇḍya] threw at the head of the Slayer of Pravāta (Indra) the disk bestowed (on him) earlier by the Destroyer of the Three Cities (Śiva) and made his crown to fall to the ground in pieces.

> *śakalitamakuṭaṃ samantataḥ*
> *śithilaśiroruhaśīrṇaśekharam |*
> *amarapatim ayaṃ vibhāvayann*
> *abhajata kām api vikriyāṃ hriyā || 67 ||*

At seeing the Lord of the Immortals (Indra) with injured head, scattered hair, and the crown reduced totally to pieces, [Ugra Pāṇḍya] felt a certain agitation out of shame.

The *mahākāvya*'s description is perfectly in line with the primary narrative fulcrum but Maṇḍalakavi, contrary to the original nucleus, has introduced some ideological modifications relevant for other parts of the work. It is enough here to analyse Ugra's reaction to Indra's defeat. Once the fight is over, the Pāṇḍya ruler realizes that he had

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stanza 154 of the anonymous *Pāṇṭikkōvai* ("String of Stanzas [for the] Pāṇṭiya"), an intertext handed down in Nakkīraṉār's commentary on the *Kaḷaviyal eṉṟa Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ*, a treatise on Tamil poetics dated approximately to the 8th century CE. The reader may refer to Buck and Paramasivan 1997: 161–162 for further details.

31   I quote the text of *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* according to the critical edition (Sarma 1981).

defeated the lord of the gods and had almost subverted the divine or-
der of the world.[32] In the following stanza, Maṇḍalakavi depicts Ugra
acting in the most significant of ways, trying to make amends for his
impudence:

> *apacaraṇam idaṃ kṣamasva me*
> *valamathaneti vadan mahīpatiḥ |*
> *mukuṭam adhiśiro marutvato*
> *nyadhita mumoca nīradacchadam || 68 ||*

> The King, saying: "O Destroyer of Vala! Please forgive this imprudent
> action of mine!," replaced the crown on Indra's head and released the
> imprisoned clouds.

Ugra thus atones for the *apacaraṇa* and his sin by placing the crown
back on the head of the god. This detail is far from coincidental: the
Pāṇḍya sovereign, after having defeated Indra, restored the emblem of
Indra's authority and, moreover, released the divine power embodied
by the clouds. Through this, Ugra not only acknowledged the power of
god but was also the one to legitimize it by crowning the heavenly rul-
er while simultaneously reassuming his own role of lord of Madurai,
and reestablishing the natural order of the world.

The difference in the presentation of the royal narrative between
the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* and its model appears even more significant if
we compare the description at the end of the episode, specifically
with reference to the moment when Indra's crown is shattered. Quot-
ed below is the parallel passage from the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*

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[32]   According to Monier-Williams 2005: 955, the term *vikriyā* is registered with the
        meaning of "agitation, affection, altered condition." In my opinion, it would be
        very suggestive to see the employment of *śleṣa* here: the same term may also
        signify "rebellion" and, according to Apte 1965: 850, "violation (of the proper
        duties)." Following this second layer of meaning, Ugra, defeating Indra, has com-
        mitted a real rebellion against the god, and a violation of his duty (as a king?); this
        interpretation would be most fascinating.

by Parañcōti Muṉivar, a work based strictly on Perumparrapuliyūr
Nampi's original narrative:[33]

> *kāyiṉ maṭaṅkal aṉṉāṉ*
> *kaivaḷai cuḻarri vallē*
> *vīciṉaṉ kulicam taṉṉai*
> *vīḻttu atu viṭuttāṉ ceṉṉit*
> *tēciṉṉal makuṭam taḷḷic*
> *citaittatu citaitta lōṭum*
> *kuciṉaṉ añcip pōṉāṉ*
> *tuṉrā iṟatu arinta vīraṉ* || 1105 ||

> Such a man, as the Pāṇḍya [Ugra] was, threw with celerity the whirling
> discus like a thunderbolt; as [Indra] threw this thunderbolt, [the King]
> injured him, crushing the bright crown on the head of Indra who was
> throwing. Having been defeated, Indra, full of fear, ran off on his elephant.

In the source model of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭṭarpurāṇam*, the god, defeated
by the Pāṇḍya lord, ran away, in fear, on his mount Airāvata, whereas
in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* the narrative is far more complex: Ugra, rec-
ognising his *apacaraṇa*, asks Indra for forgiveness, placing the crown
back on Indra's head, in a scene that has all the flavour of a symbolical
coronation with a mortal sovereign acknowledging and sanctioning
the divine authority.

Regional kings defeating Indra: The copper plates

As already mentioned earlier, in the last decades of the 16th century,
the Teṅkāśi chancery started to produce official records containing
genealogical *praśasti*s. These documents, issued comparatively late in
the history of the kingdom, had the ideological function of displaying

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[33]   I refer to the Tamil text of Parañcōti's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭṭarpurāṇam* according to the
       Kaḷakam edition published by the South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing
       Society in Tirunelvēli (1931).

to the South Indian political players the public iteration of the new
Teṅkāśi kingdom. In other words, the copper plates brought out by
the Pāṇḍya chancery assumed the function of grounding royal identity
of the new centre into the imperial Pāṇḍya tradition. As we shall see,
the Teṅkāśi court aimed indeed at recovering the old Madurai docu-
ments, reemploying their structure, and adapting the vast repository of
mythical and royal motifs, including the traditional narrative of fight
between the king and Indra.

Among this inscriptional material, the copper plates discovered
in the early 20th century at Putukkōṭṭai occupy important position,
being the foremost source to reconstruct the later Teṅkāśi dynastic
history. The Putukkōṭṭai charter, issued in Ś. 1505–1583 CE, during
the reign of the Kings Śrīvallabha and his cousin Varatuṅgarāma,[34] is
represented by a set of seven copper plates, engraved on both sides;
the language is Sanskrit, while the script is Grantha Tamil. The prin-
cipal object of the record is to register the donation of the village of
Putukkōṭṭai (today in the south-east Tamil Nadu) to a group of Brah-
mins at the request of an obscure character, Tirumalairāja, defined in
the document as the son and grandson of Timmā and Rāma Nāyaka
respectively, and a great devotee of Viṣṇu Raṅganātha. In all proba-
bility, as observed by Gopinatha Rao, Tirumalairāja was a secondary
rank officer and served under the Nāyakas of Madurai, to whom the
Teṅkāśi kingdom was subordinated (Gopinatha Rao 1910: 63).

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[34] According to the dynastic genealogy as presented in the Putukkōṭṭai plates, the
two Teṅkāśi Kings belonged to two branches of the royal family. Śrīvallabha
was the son of king Jaṭilavarman Tribhuvanacakravarti Tirunelvēliperumāḷ
(1552–1563 CE) and elder brother of Ativīrarāma (1563–1605). There is no
evidence about Śrīvallabha, nor are there any dated records which would al-
low us to place his reign on solid evidentiary bases (Gopinatha Rao 1910: 58),
apart from the Putukkōṭṭai charter. The plates simply state that at the death of
Ativīrarāma, the ministers (*mantrivara*) anointed Śrīvallabha as king (stanza 19).
Varatuṅgarāma was crowned in Teṅkāśi in 1589, as recorded by his crowning in-
scription in the Kāśiviśvanātha temple (Gopinatha Rao 1910: 115–116, inscrip-
tion no. X); he was the son of Parākrama, Tirunelvēliperumāḷ's brother. He ruled
presumably up to 1595, as testified to by his Karivaḷavandallūr record (ARE 1908,
no. 275), issued in Ś.1517 (1595 CE), the last date ascribable to the ruler.

The Putukkōṭṭai record begins with an extensive genealogical account of the Pāṇḍya family which covers the first 41 stanzas (130 lines; up to the first side of plate 3) of the document, and which is articulated in three parts, the purāṇic, mythical, and historical. This internal structure of the document is clearly based on the early Pāṇḍya imperial documents, which present the very same articulation and dynastic motifs, starting approximately from the first decades of the 10th century CE.[35] The first section briefly traces the origin of the dynasty from Viṣṇu, and his descendants Brahma, Atri and Candra, the moon (stanza 6). The legendary section opens with the exploits of unnamed legendary rulers (stanzas 7–12), while the proper historical section covers vv. 13–41. In the mythical section, recording the exploits of the ancestral Pāṇḍya rulers, we read as follows:[36]

yatsambhavo jalanidhi surakāryahetos tu-
lyaṃ mamantha puruṣeṇa purātanena |
kaścit samastanṛpamaulivibhinnaśiṣṭa-
maulim babhañja yad valāt valaśasanasya || 10 ||

[There was a Pāṇḍya King who] churned the ocean, a task to be done for the gods, together with the ancient Primordial Man; a certain one shattered by force the crown of the slayer of Vala, which was left all in pieces.

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[35] The early Pāṇḍya *praśasti*s, especially those dated to the first imperial phase, presented the same structure, namely a genealogical introduction articulated in the purāṇic, mythological, and historical parts. For instance, the family eulogy of the Taḷavāypuram plates of Parāntaka Vīranārāyaṇa, dated to 910 CE, the very first instance of this canonical structure, begins with *maṅgalaśloka*s to Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva (vv. 1–4), proceeding then with the purāṇic section (v. 5), then the legendary one (vv. 6–12), and, lastly, with the historical part mentioning Parāntaka himself and his brother Varaguṇa II (vv. 13–17). For these copperplates the interested reader may refer to Krishnan 2002: 72–83. This very same articulation in three parts will be kept in all the Teṅkāśi dynastic eulogies.

[36] I quote the original text of the Putukkōṭṭai record after the edition by Gopinatha Rao published in *Travancore Archaeological Series* 1.6. (Gopinatha Rao 1910: 64–82, inscription no. I).

The excerpt refers to the shattering of Indra's crown at the end of the fight with the Pāṇḍya ruler: if in Maṇḍalakavi's poem, for example, the narrative was focused on Ugra (in accordance with the definitive crystallisation of the Pāṇḍya dynastic narratives in Nampi's *Tiruviḷai-yāṭaṟpurāṇam*), here we have an unnamed sovereign. It appears that in recovering the dynastic repertoire of the Madurai phase, the Teṅkāśi chancery turned to the old trends of the early Pāṇḍya royal repository and the original core of this mythological episode, as it appeared in the records of the first imperial phase. Even if this archaising choice was of the foremost importance for the new ruling line in order to publicly display its claim as the heirs of the Madurai kings, the Teṅkāśi court introduced several innovations in the canonical regal repository, as we can observe in successive passages from the same Putukkōṭṭai plates. More specifically, we can trace such modifications in the traditional Pāṇḍya narrative in the section devoted to the *praśasti* of the Teṅkāśi ruler Śrīvallabha (stanzas 20–27; second plate, *verso*), one of the donors of the grant. In this celebratory section one can find the mythical legend of the fight between the sovereign and Indra:

> *valayena kṛtaś cheda*[em; *kṛtach śeda-* ed.]*valārimakuṭo 'pi ca |*
> *sāhityasārvabhaumaś ca devabrāhmaṇatarpaṇaḥ || 24 ||*

The one who broke even the crown of the enemy of Vala (Indra) into pieces with the discus, the Emperor of Literature, and the one who satisfies the Brahmins and the Gods

> *so 'yam pāṇḍyakṣitīndras surapatimakuṭītāḍanaprauḍha-*
> *dhāmoddaṇḍaś caṇḍāyudhaśrīmakaramayayaśolāñchanodārameruḥ |*
> *vikhyāto vīrabhadras samiti jayaramācāruveṇikṛpaṇo vīra*[ḥ]
> *śrīvallabhākhyo vidhutilako ramyam urvīm praśāsti || 27 ||*

The hero Śrīvallabha, the auspicious mark of the lunar race, rules the lovely Earth; [the King who is] a sword for the charming braid of wives [of enemy rulers] in victory and bears a resemblance to Vīrabhadra; the Pāṇḍya sovereign [who is] the great Mount Meru the glorious mark of which is represented by the fierce golden fish and who is the punisher possessed of violent power [capable of] hitting the crown of the Lord of the gods.

While in the first example of this omnipresent Pāṇḍya narrative, the motif of the breaking of Indra's crown was attributed to a mythical and unspecified sovereign—and to Ugra in the *Pāṇḍyakulodayamahākāvya*—in this segment, the regal repository is applied to Śrīvallabha, a historical sovereign.[37] It is quite clear that the Teṅkāśi chancery, in its reuse of the Madurai imperial *praśasti*s and their ideological background, distanced itself from a fundamental trend: recycling the same motifs, the new Pāṇḍya sovereigns projected their auto-perception through the same dynastic myths, but attributed them directly to specific historical rulers in an attempt to sustain their claim as the real heirs of the Madurai kingdom. Similarly, stanza 27 refers to the exact same motif of the shattering of the divine crown, an act still performed by the very same sovereign, similarly to the attribution of such legendary exploit to King Āriyapaṭaikaṭanta Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ in the

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[37]   In other official Teṅkāśi grants, the royal narrative of the fight between the king and Indra and the splitting of the crown is ascribed to Ugra Pāṇḍya, as in the case of Maṇḍalakavi's *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*. For instance, the Sanskrit Taḷavāyagrahāram plates, dated to Ś.1504 (1583 CE) and issued in the name of Varatuṅgarāma, is represented by four plates engraved on both sides. The immediate scope of the record was the granting of the village of Muruganēri (Madurai district) to Candraśekhara, son of a certain Chokkappa Paṇḍita, who served as a court doctor (vv. 23–24). In the mythical section of the genealogical *praśasti* (stanzas 6–10), we read as follows:

> *ugras tadīyo bhuvanaikavīraḥ*
> *pratāpaśauryādibhir ugra eva |*
> *vyatāri sindhurbhuvi tevanena*
> *vyabhedi caindraṃ makuṭaṃ ca yeja || 9 ||* (Gopinatha Rao 1910: 119; complete edition in 117–125, inscription no. XI)

> Related to him (Jaṭāvarman Sundara I) [there was] Ugra, the Sole Hero of the World, indeed ferocious (*ugra*) for prowess, glory and other [qualities]; a might pleasure-garden was bestowed on Earth and the Ocean, and [the King] defeated Indra and shattered his crown.

It is clear that, in the Teṅkāśi dynastic narrative, the mythical episode was attributed also to Ugra, as in Nampi's *talapurāṇam* and in the *Pāṇḍyakulodayamahākāvya*, signifying the fluid nature of this royal motif.

Cilappatikāram eulogy or to Sundara I in the *Gadyakarṇāmṛta*. In the last instance, in the new Teṅkāśi royal ideology, King Śrīvallabha's prowess, capable of vanquishing the Lord of the gods, is a perfectly specular corollary to that of his legendary ancestors, who destroyed Indra's crown and ruled over the great Madurai empire.

Conclusions

As the analysis of the above evidence might show, the violent motive of the ruler defeating Indra and destroying his crown assumed a primary importance in the Pāṇḍya identity presentation and self-perception. This specific dynastic account, which as we have seen, started to circulate around the 5th century CE, appeared firstly in the *Cilappatikāram* but its genesis is not easily traceable. The available data allows only conjecturally to formulate a conclusion on its possible origin, as an independent creation within the narrative skeleton of the *epos*, or as a vestige of adaptation, else reworking of previous Pāṇḍya dynastic traditions assimilated by the textual stabilisation of the epic poem and later not preserved. Some attempts at explaining the possible connections of the legend of the king and Indra have been offered in this paper; presented arguments are based on textual similarities with other accounts in the pan-Indian epic tradition, especially those connected to the exploits of the sage Agastya, Skanda and Arjuna. If such data were coherent and plausible, the assimilation and modifications of these narratives from the pan-Indian epic tradition would testify to a precise attempt of the Pāṇḍya politics at projecting its royal identity into a wider ideological discourse since the first centuries of the Madurai kingdom. In modifying epic sequences and applying them to the Madurai royal repository, the literary and, more importantly, official chancery documents underlined this complex attempt of the Pāṇḍya court in forging the identity of rulers, at first regionally localised, and then projected into the wider and more participative cosmopolitan discourse of the early medieval political and ideological scenario.

Following the first occurrence of this motif, the narrative of the Madurai king and Indra found a primary place in the genealogical sections of the Pāṇḍya imperial records around the 8th century CE, becoming overtime omnipresent in the official chancery documents and acting as strategical tool through which the dynasty publicly displayed its history and ideology. The relevance occupied by this royal myth was not only limited to the perception of the local, indigenous courtly life but became a wider identity marker through which the political arena of South India of the medieval times perceived the Pāṇḍya imperial heritage. A further symptomatic evidence of the ideological impact of this myth was testified to by its recurrence in the first of the Madurai *talapurāṇam* inserted into the more generic frame of the *Śivalīlā*s, and its readaptation in the 15th–16th centuries in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* where the narrative was extensively modified in order to portray the new Teṅkāśi royal ideology based upon the canonical royal repository and project it into the wider Sanskrit cosmopolis.

After the period of Sanskrit production at the Teṅkāśi court and the long ideological "silence" of the later official records, deprived of any genealogical representation up to the 16th century CE, the later phase of the kingdom was amply characterised by the flourishing of family *praśasti*s. This foremost tool to publicly display the royal identity was based on the recovery of old imperial Madurai records, and, among their mythical repository, the myth of the Pāṇḍya king destroying Indra's crown. The official chancery carried forward this ideological enterprise adopting the contents of the previous Pāṇḍya genealogies, their internal structure, and their eulogistic apparatus. Such a political intervention granted in the Teṅkāśi optic an assurance of political continuity from the Madurai imperial phases. The royal repertoire characterising the trends of ancient Pāṇḍya self-perception, with its dynastic legends and motifs, was used to lay the foundational basis of the identity of the later sovereigns. This reuse of the political corpus forged an interrupted chain linking the old imperial public display to the ideological presentation the later rulers laid before the mid-16th century political scenario of South India.

Moreover, the enterprise carried on by the Teṅkāśi chancery was not simply characterised by a passive reemployment of the imperial records; this corpus was not only actively recovered, but also adapted and modified to serve the political purposes of its new patrons. The foremost instance of this trend is represented by the severe modifications effected on the mythological section, where, for instance, the aggressive legend of the king and Indra was not attributed to unnamed ancestors as in the imperial past, but to the specific members of the new ruling line.

Violence then, more in its ideological aspect, became not only a foundational element in shaping the Pāṇḍya identity, but also an ideological tool to grant legitimisation and continuity in face of the political irrelevance of the Teṅkāśi kingdom at the closing of the 16th century.

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