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THE YAVANAS' CLOTHES IN OLD TAMIL LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION*

One of the passages discussed by Meile in his article on the Yavanas in Old Tamil literature¹ is *Mullaippāṭṭu* 59–61:²

mattikai vaḷaiya maṛintuvīṅku ceṛivuṭai
meypai pukka veruvarun tōrrattu
valipunar yākkai vaṅkaṅ yavaṅar

The Yavanas in this passage are not merchants who came overseas from the west, as in, for instance, *Akanānūru* 149 or, to refer to another South Indian source, *Daśakumāracarita*,³ but guards of the royal camp. The word *yavaṅar* does not appear to be used as an ethnic term here, but as one for mercenary soldiers employed as guards in general.⁴ While the author of the text does not tell us where the Yavanas came from, according to Meile we are almost certainly dealing with Greeks. In this connection he refers to, among other things, the word *mattikai* “whip”,⁵ in which he sees a

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¹ Meile, P. (1940–1941) Les Yavanas dans l’Inde tamoule. *Journal Asiatique* 232, 85–123.

² Unless stated otherwise all quotations from Caṅkam poetry have been drawn from the editions published by the South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society of Tinnevely.

³ Agashe, G. J. (1919) *Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin*. Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series X and XLII. Bombay, pp. 106–107.

⁴ Meile refers to the Swiss Guards, who, of course, do not necessarily all have the Swiss nationality.

⁵ For this meaning Meile refers to several indigenous dictionaries. The meaning “whip” is also given in the *Tamil lexicon*. The source for this meaning are the medieval commentators Nacciṅārkkīṇiyār (on *Kalittokai* 96.12) and Parimēlaḷakar (on *Paripāṭal* 9.46 and 20.61). These passages will be discussed below. There is no traditional commentary available on the *Pattuppāṭṭu* collection, to which *Mullaippāṭṭu* belongs.



Tamilization of the Greek word for “whip”, namely *μάστιξ*, accusative *μάστιγος*. Another point he mentions concerns the obviously foreign clothing of the Yavanas, who wear a “gown” (*meyppai*, literally “a bag-like cloth covering the whole body”), saying he would leave it to other, more competent scholars to decide on the exact provenance of this kind of clothing. These ideas, including the etymology of the word *mattikai*, were later accepted by Zvelebil in an article⁶ in which he merely repeats everything done by Meile without, however, acknowledging the article in question.

In what follows I will have a closer look at some of the other instances of the word *mattikai* in Tamil literature, which seem to suggest a completely different meaning than “whip”. Through the new meaning of *mattikai* a much clearer picture will emerge of the type of clothing worn by the Yavanas in the *Mullaippāṭṭu* passage.

MATTIKAI IN KALITTOKAI 96

I will begin with what is probably also the most complicated instance of the word, namely in *Kalittokai* 96.12. The context of the passage is the following. The husband returns home, covered in sweat and with the sandal paste on his chest partly effaced. He explains to his wife that his ruffled appearance is the result of riding his horse. His wife replies that “she knows that horse which he has been riding” (*aṟintēn kutirai tān*, line 7). Next she describes a woman in terms of a horse. Part of this description (lines 7–18) together with V. Murugan’s English translation may be quoted here:

aṟintēn kutirai tān
pāl piriya aiṅkūntar paṇmayirk koy cuval
mēl virittiyāta cikalikai cevulaḷai
nīla maṅikkaṭikai vallikai yāppin kīl
ṅāliyal meṅkātiṟ pullikaic cāmarai
mattikaik kaṇṇuṟaiyākak kaviṅ peṟṟa
utti yorukāṅnūl uttariyat tiṅpiṭi
nēmaṇi nērmukkālp palpala kaṅṅikait
tārmaṇi pūṅṅa tamaṇiya mēkalai
nūpurap puṅṅil aṭiyotamaittiyāta
vārpolaṅkiṅkiṅi yārppa iyārri nī
kātalittūrnta niṅ kāmak kutiraiyai

The “horse” you speak of I know:
 It’s with unapportioned tresses in five modes dressed.

⁶ Kamil, Zvelebil (1956) The Yavanas in Old Tamil Literature. In Tauer F. et al. (eds), *Charisteria Orientalia Praecipue ad Persiam Pertinentia* (pp. 401–409), Praha.

And with a mane of well-shorn tuft of hair,
 With the reddish plume of hair knotted over in splits,
 The epaulet of sapphire for the halter,
 And tassels hang down from the soft ears,
 There's the splendid head-ornament [*utti*]
 For the whip [*mattikai*] evoking fright,
 The spun upper garment for the hardy rein,
 The three-stranded necklace of many a hue
 Made of pearls of kindred species,
 The golden waist-cord for the bell-string around,
 The tinkling anklets;
 The clamour of the inset bells there marked;
 It's the horse you went crazy about,
 And riding it . . .⁷

While the translation is far from exact, it is clear that we are dealing with a *śikhānakha* description, going from the horse's manes, which are compared to a woman's tresses, through the *mēkalai* (Skt *mekhalā*) around the middle to tinkling anklets. Assigning the meaning "whip" to *mattikai* has been based on Nacciṅārkkīyār's commentary. However, it is not clear then why a whip should occur in line 12, that is, somewhere between the head and chest (see *tār* "necklace hanging down on the chest" in line 15).⁸ While obviously the whole passage could do with a careful reconsideration, in what follows I would like to concentrate on lines 12 and 13:

mattikaik kaṇṇuraiyākak kaviṇ perra
utti yorukālnūl uttariyat tinpiṭi.

As we have seen, Murugan divides these two lines into two sentences, namely *mattikaik kaṇṇuraiyākak kaviṇ perra utti* "There's the splendid head-ornament/For the whip evoking fright" and *orukālnūl uttariyat tinpiṭi* "The spun upper garment for the hardy rein" respectively. However, as far as I see it, the first sentence is not complete and in these two lines we are actually dealing with a single sentence. The simplest way to make this clear is to have a closer look at the expression *kaṇṇuraiyāka*.

⁷ Murugan, V. (1999) *Kalittokai in English. Translation with Critical Introduction and Glossary* (pp. 398–403). Chennai, no. 95 [sic].

⁸ Note in this connection the following poem, *Kalittokai* 97, in which in line 13 a woman's head ornament (*toyakam*) is identified with an elephant hook (*tōṭṭi*). The hook is indeed applied to the head of the elephant.

THE EXPRESSION *KANṆURAI*

Murugan's translation of *kanṇurai* with "fright" is evidently based on Naccinārkkiniyār's commentary, which seems to equate *kanṇurai* with *kanṇūru* "evil eye".⁹ However, we are clearly dealing with an *ad hoc* solution here, which merely shows the commentator's embarrassment with the word in the present context. In any case, the meaning does not fit the three other instances of the word in Caṅkam poetry, namely in *Puranāṇūru* 15.18, 61.5 and 140.4. At the same time, however, the meanings assigned to *kanṇurai* in these latter passages do not appear to be very helpful either.

Beside the meaning "fright", which the *Tamil Lexicon* assigns specifically to the *Kalittokai* passage under investigation, the dictionary mentions another *kanṇurai*, meaning "curry, curry-stuff, relish", for *Puranāṇūru* 61.5 and 140.4. The first passage reads as follows (lines 4–6):

paḷaṇa vālaiṭ parūkkattuniyal
putunel veṅcōrṟuk kanṇuraiyāka
vilāppuṭai maruṅku vicippa mānti,

kanṇurai is taken to refer to the pieces of the *vālai* fish which serve as a relish or a (non-vegetable) curry (*kanṇurai*) with (or: on) the white rice.¹⁰ However, in *Puranāṇūru* 140.4 the situation appears to be the reverse. That is to say, there it is the rice (*arici*) which serves as the *kanṇurai*, or "relish", to a curry consisting of leaves (*aṭaku*) (lines 3–5):

vaḷaikṅai vīraliyar paṭappaik koyta
aṭakiṅ kanṇuraiyāka yāñ cila
*arici vēṅṭinē . . .*¹¹

⁹ *teyvavutti yeṅṅum pūṇiṇarukē tuvakki oru vaṭamāy nāluṅ cutṭi yākiya kutirai kanṇār kaṅṅu aṅcumpaṭiyāka viṭṭuvaitta aḷaku peṟra cammaṭṭi.* For the instance under investigation the *Tamil Lexicon* notes the meaning "fear at the mere sight of a thing, fright".

¹⁰ Unfortunately, in Hart's translation the word *kanṇurai* has been lost. What follows is my composition on the basis of Hart's translation, in which the text has been completely drawn asunder:

When the laborers have finished their fish, fat pieces of the scabbard fish from the pools, they take glowing white rice from the freshly cut paddy and eat until their ribs bulge out. (Hart, G. L. & Heifetz, H. (1999) *The Four Hundred Songs of War and Wisdom. An Anthology of Poems from Classical Tamil. The Puranāṇūru.* New York.)

¹¹ As far as *kanṇurai* is concerned Hart's translation of the passage is again a disappointment:

What I asked of him was only a little bit of rice
 so that my dancing women adorned with their bangles
 might cook it with the leaves they plucked in the rear yard.
 (Hart, G. L. & Heifetz, H. *The Four Hundred Songs of War and Wisdom.*)

From these two passages it will be clear that *kaṇṇurāi* cannot refer to “curry”, or the concrete “curry-stuff”. On the other hand, the more general meaning “relish” does not really help us in the third instance of the word *kaṇṇurāi*, namely *Puranānūru* 15.18, a passage, which, it should be noted, was somehow overlooked in the *Tamil Lexicon*. In *Puranānūru* 15.18 the word *kaṇṇurāi* is found in a description of a Vedic sacrifice (*āvuti*, Skt *āhuti*) (lines 16–19):

... *puraiyil*
narpaṇuvanālvētat
taruñcīrttip peruṅkaṇṇurāi
neymmalī āvuti poṅka ...

Strictly speaking, the expression *peruṅkaṇṇurāi* could be construed directly to the ghee (*ney*), describing it as a “great relish” (to the sacrificial fire). However, as I see it, *peruṅkaṇṇurāi* is to be taken on a par with the preceding expressions, *puraiyil* ... *aruñcīrtti*, which describe the sacrificial undertaking as a whole: the sacrifice is “in accordance with the four Vedas of many faultless *sūtras* (*narpaṇuvanālvētattu*), gives rare fame (*aruñcīrtti*) and is (a) *peruṅkaṇṇurāi*”. It is not likely that *kaṇṇurāi* has anything to do with the sense of taste. At this point I would like to turn to the separate elements which constitute the word *kaṇṇurāi*, the nouns *kaṇ* “eye” and *urāi* “place”. As such, the expression could mean “a place for the eye, a place on which the eye is fixed”, that is, “a feast for the eye, spectacle, decoration”.¹² This meaning does indeed make excellent sense in the present context, the sacrifice (*āvuti*) “offering a great spectacle”.¹³

The passage from *Puranānūru* 61 may consequently be translated as follows:

While large chunks of scabbard fish from the fields [lay] as a feast for the eye (a decoration) on the white rice of fresh paddy, they ate so much that their sides bulged,

and *Puranānūru* 140.3-5 as:

¹² There is also a verb *uraital* “to reside” but a verb *kaṇṇuraital* is not attested. Though *kaṇṇurāi* is not a verbal noun, Sanskrit offers an interesting parallel in the verbal noun *prekṣaṇa* “the act of looking at, spectacle”.

¹³ It is not clear which words in Hart’s translation are to represent *peruṅkaṇṇurāi*: after performing many sacrifices prescribed by the Four Vedas and the books of ritual, fine sacrifices of an excellence that will not die away and charged with a fame that is difficult to achieve, oblations that rose high in ghee and all the other elements of the sacrifice. (Hart, G. L. & Heifetz, H. *The Four Hundred Songs of War and Wisdom*.)

We desire (only) a little rice as a feast for the eye (a decoration) to go with the leaves cut in the fields by our wives who wear bracelets.

For the sentence *mattikaik kaṇṇuraiyākak kaviṇ perra utti* of *Kalittokai* 96 we would get something like:

The head-ornament (*utti*), beautiful (*kaviṇ perra*) as a decoration (*kaṇṇuraiyāka*) on the [horse's] *mattikai*.

As a result we are left with an unfinished sentence and have to read on:

[The head-ornament] is [like] the *tiṇṇiṇi* (knot or clasp) of the woman's *uttariyam* (upper garment or ornament covering the breasts), which was made of a single string of pearls (*kāl*)¹⁴

If *utti* is indeed a head-ornament, the meaning “whip” for *mattikai* becomes very unlikely. Instead, we have to do with something attached to the head of a horse, a kind of headgear, on which this ornament is fixed. As we will see below, something similar is found in *Paripāṭal* 20, in which the *mattikai* is “like a garland” placed on (the head of) a buffalo. Another point concerns the nature of the *uttariyam*. Apparently, we are dealing with something, a bodice or an ornament, covering a woman's breasts. In *Paripāṭal* 9, which will be discussed below, the *mattikai* is identified with a strap or a small piece of cloth which functions as a brassiere. It does not seem unlikely then that in *Kalittokai* 96 we are dealing with a brassiere as well.

MATTIKAI IN PARIPĀṬAL 20.60-61

Paripāṭal 20. 60-61 reads:¹⁵

... *toḷuvattut tantu vaṭṭiṭṭittu*
mattikai mālaiyā mōti ...

¹⁴ In the translation I have taken *kāl* in the meaning “pearl”. See in this connection *Cilappatikāram* (ed. Vē. Cāminātaiyar) 4.41, *parūkkālāram* “a string of big pearls” (compare *parukkāl* in *Purapporuḷ Venṇāmālai* 9.14, quoted in the *Tamil Lexicon* s.v. *kāl*³.) *kāl*, of the verb *kāl-ttal* “to become hard, solid”, in the meaning “pearl” is a kind of loan-translation of Sanskrit *muktā* from MI *muttā* (< *mūrtā* “solid, solidified” from *mūrchatī*). The compound is analysed as *oru-kālñūl*. Admittedly, the expression *orukālñūl* remains problematic as otherwise *kāl* does not seem to refer to a pearl but to a string of pearls or a garland of flowers. For instance, in *Cilappatikāram* 6.87–88 we come across a fine cloth (*tukil*) with thirty-two (*muppattiru*) strings (*kāl*) of big pearls around Mātavi's waist. Similarly, in *Kalittokai* 54.7 we come across the same combination *orukāl* as in *Kalittokai* 96, which, however, in this case refers to a (one, single) garland of flowers worn by a woman on her head and smelled at by her lover.

¹⁵ Gros, F. (1968) *Le Paripāṭal. Texte tamoul*. PIFI 35. Pondichéry.

As indicated, this passage does not deal with a horse but with a buffalo. This animal is put in a cowpen (*toḷuvattu*), and harnessed (*vaṭittu*) and trained (or beaten into obedience; *iṭittu*). Next, presumably with some force,¹⁶ a *mattikai* is put on the buffalo as if it is a garland (*mālaiyā*),¹⁷ after which it is led to the meeting place. In the case of a buffalo a garland is put either on the head (or the horns) or on the neck. Again, the proper place of the *mattikai* appears to be the head. In addition, the identification with a garland suggests that the *mattikai* is a rope-like thing or a small band of cloth. In fact, something similar is found in *Paripāṭal* 9.

PARIPĀṬAL 9.46

Paripāṭal 9. 45-47 reads:

*tār tār piṇakkuvār kaṇṇiyōccit taṭumārūvār
mārpaṇi koṅkaivār mattikaiyāp putaippār
kōtai varippantu koṅṅerivār.*

The passage describes women who have put aside their innocence and turned themselves into prancing horses with their riders in order to attack their competitors. They sling their garlands over their backs (*tār tār piṇakkuvār*) and stagger, breaking the wreaths on their heads (*kaṇṇiyōccit taṭumārūvār*). Furthermore, they snap (*putaippār*) the band put over (around) their breasts (*koṅkaivār*) as if it were a *mattikai* (*mattikaiyā*). Finally, they are said to throw their necklaces and the balls with which they used to play at their adversaries.

koṅkaivār is a literal translation of Sanskrit *kucabandha* and refers to some kind of brassiere. Following Gros the women used the straps of their brassieres as whips:

Elles frappent avec, en guise de fouet, les lanières de seins qui parent leur poitrine.¹⁸

¹⁶ The verb *mōtu-* means either “to hit. strike, dash against with force” or “to put on plaster as earth to a mud wall”. In the present context we apparently have to do with the latter type of meaning. It may be noted that the alternative, that is, “to strike it (the buffalo) with a whip as if with a garland” or “to strike the whip against the buffalo as if it is a garland” hardly makes sense here, if at all.

¹⁷ Note Gros, *Le Paripāṭal*, p. 128, who ignores the “suffix” *ā* in *malaiyā*: “Le frappant du fouet de nos guirlandes”.

¹⁸ Gros, F. (1951) *Le Paripāṭal. Texte tamoul*, p. 56. The brassiere, or *kucabandha*, can indeed have many other functions. For instance, in the *Daśakumāracarita* Queen Vasumatī is attempting to commit suicide by hanging herself from a tree with a noose made from her *uttariya*. See Ghurye, *Indian Costume (bhāratīya veṣabhūṣā)* (p. 255). Bombay and the *Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin* (ed. Agashe, G. J.), p. 5, lines 5–6.

However, for *mattikai* starting from a meaning “headgear” or “bridle” the same straps could also be identified with the reins here.¹⁹ Thus, the women are snapping the straps of their brassieres as if they were reins, in order to make the horse go faster. In the case of *Paripāṭal* 20 the women put something comparable to a horse’s bridle on the buffalo’s head in order to be able to lead it. And, finally, in *Kalittokai* 96 we would have a bridle decorated with an ornament. If I am correct, the derivation of *mattikai* from Greek μάστιξ, μάστιγος will have to be abandoned. In fact, as far as the derivation is concerned, the meaning bridle or headgear only makes things much easier. *mattikai* would have a regular Indian derivation, namely from Sanskrit *mastikā* (Middle Indic *matthikā*), which in turn might be an abbreviation of *mastikā rajju*, “a rope for the head”.

As may be gathered from the representations of the horses yoked in front of chariots seen in, for instance, Sāñchī,²⁰ the ancient Indian horse bridle looked practically the same as the modern western one. It consists of two horizontal straps, one just above the horse’s mouth to which the reins are attached and one just above the eyes, which two straps are connected by one or more vertical ones. In *Patipāṭal* 9 the *mattikai* is compared to a *kucabandha*, or brassiere. In this connection the question arises what a brassiere in ancient India looked like for it to be compared to a bridle.

The type of brassiere most commonly met with in Indian art consists of a strap or band (of cloth) tied around the woman’s chest and covering the nipples.²¹ In its simplest form it consists indeed of this single, horizontal strap, which seems to be tied at the back. However, there is a more complex variant, in which the horizontal band is held in place by straps across the shoulders.²² While the first type does not really look like a bridle, this

¹⁹ Vaidyanathan, S. (1971) *Indo-Aryan Loanwords in Old Tamil*. Madras, 1971: 38 and 119, quite ingeniously connects *mattikai* in *Paripāṭal* 9. 46 with *mattu/mattam* “churning rod”, which in its turn would be connected with the Sanskrit verb *math-*.

²⁰ See Marshall, J. & Foucher, A. (1940) *The Monuments of Sāñchī*. Calcutta, e.g., plate L^a and LI^b.

²¹ See von Hinüber, O. (1975) Kulturgeschichtliches aus dem *Bhikṣuṃī-Vinaya*: Die *saṃkākṣikā*. *ZDMG* 125, 133–139, the picture opposite p. 136, which depicts a heavenly couple from Ajañṭā. It is the same picture as found in Mode H. *Die Frau in der indischen Kunst*. Wien-München, 1970, plate 13. Other examples are Ghurye GS. *Indian Costume*, plate 255; the women in the (proper) left part of the depiction of the descent of the Ganges in Mahābalipuram in Sivaramamurti C. *The Art of India*. New York, 1974, plate 138; for an example from Sigiriya (Sri Lanka), see *op. cit.*, plate 116.

²² See the two statues of Mahiṣamardinī from Karnāṭaka in Sharma IK. *The Temples of the Gaṅgas of Karnāṭaka*. Architectural Survey of Temples no. 6. Archaeological Survey of India. Delhi, 1992, plates 24 and 58. See also plate 639 in Sivaramamurti C. *The Art of India*. Quite a number of instances of this type of brassiere may be found in Rajeshwari DR. *Sakti Iconography*. Delhi, 1989, figures 11, 12, 25, 33, 51, 57, 58, 59, 60 and 61.

second type with the straps comes somewhat closer to it. Turned over 90 degrees, it resembles exactly one side of the bridle. It may be asked, however, if such exactness was indeed aimed at. Maybe a woman's breasts covered all over by straps already sufficed to bring to mind the bridled face of a horse.

However, as already indicated this type of brassiere appears to be regularly tied behind the back. It is unlikely, though, that *Kalittokai* 96, in which the horse's head-ornament is compared to the knot or clasp of the bodice, refers to some ornament at the back of the head. More likely it is to be found in front. In some representations the knot is indeed found in front, as in the statue of Pārvaṭī kept in the museum in Indore²³ or that of the Gaṅgā terracotta stèle from Ahicchatrā.²⁴ In a relatively recent wooden statue of Maḥiṣamardinī from Kerala we find exactly at that place a kind of medallion, which is probably an ornamented clasp.²⁵ This might be the *utti* of *Kalittokai* 96.

However, it is possible that *Kalittokai* 96, rather than referring to a brassiere, describes some a kind of complex breast-ornament. In this connection I would like to refer to the many examples of a kind of necklace, the two strands of which come together between the woman's breasts. Below the breasts they split again, fall down and gradually disappear behind the woman's back. Below the breasts from the node in the middle a third string hangs down over the woman's stomach.²⁶ Incidentally, this type of ornament is also found with men.²⁷ In a variant, if that is what it is, it consists of a string of pearls tied tightly around each breast.²⁸ Especially the more common, first, type, when seen from the front, indeed closely resembles a horse's bridle. It should be noted, however, that in the representations of this contraption no knot or clasp (*tinṇipiti*) is visible, at least not in front.²⁹ On the other hand, this breast-ornament, which seems to consist of, among other things, a string of pearls, might provide a clue

²³ A. Keilhauer, P. (1983) *Die Bildsprache des Hinduismus. Die indische Götterwelt und ihre Symbolik*. Köln, 193, plate 137.

²⁴ Sivaramamurti, C., *The Art of India*, plate 33. The band is found in combination with a piece of cloth tied around the breasts.

²⁵ Sivaramamurti, C., *The Art of India*, plate 650.

²⁶ Sivaramamurti, C., *The Art of India*, plates 198–200 and Mode, H. *Die Frau in der indischen Kunst*, plate 6.

²⁷ See, for instance, the bronze statue of Krishna in Sivaramamurti C. *The Art of India*, plate 63.

²⁸ Mode, H., *Die Frau in der indischen Kunst*, plate 8.

²⁹ In a photograph from behind a bronze image of the goddess Tripurasundarī a kind of clasp is seen at the back (Palast der Götter. *1500 Jahre Kunst aus Indien*. Berlin, 1992: 231, figure 162).

for understanding the description in *Kalittokai* 96 of the *uttariyam* as made of a single string of pearls (*orukālnūl*).

CONCLUSION: THE YAVAṆAS' MATTIKAI

To return to the question put at the outset of this paper, namely the nature of the Yavaṇas' *mattikai* in *Mullaippāṭṭu* 59–62. If *mattikai* does indeed denote a bridle, or at least, a band put on or around the head, we are in for a surprise if we turn again to the description of the Yavaṇas in *Mullaippāṭṭu*:

mattikai vaḷaiiya marintuvīṅku cerivuṭai
meypai pukka veruvarun tōṛrattu
valipunar yākkai vaṅkaṅ yavaṇar.

First, however, I have to deal with a grammatical detail. Zvelebil has taken *mattikai* as the object of a transitive *vaḷaiiya*: “Abundant (rich, dense) cloth, copious, folded, *concealing a whip*”.³⁰ However, the infinitive must have another subject than the following absolutes, that is, thus, the *mattikai* itself. In this respect, but only in this respect, Meile's translation is better than Zvelebil's: “avec leur jupe ample . . . *que serre un fouet*”. However, it is not a whip which is surrounding the Yavaṇas' dress but a band tied around the head:

The Yavaṇas have entered (*pukka*) a bag-like dress covering their whole bodies (*meypai*), in which they disappear completely (*cerivuṭai*), folding (*marintu*), billowing (*īṅku*), while a headband is put around it.

What we have here is clearly a description of an Arab or Middle-eastern dress, with the shawl, or *kaffiyer*, held in place by the headrope, or *igal*. Admittedly, the shawl is a distinct piece of cloth, different from the cloak (*'aba*). However, seen from some distance and if they are both of the same colour, which is often the case, it looks as if they are of one piece.

In Tamil literature, and likewise in Sanskrit literature, the term *yavaṇar* was used to refer to foreigners coming in particular from the west. As such it included people from the north-west, who came over land, such as Śakas, Greek Bactrians and Kuṣāṇas, and Roman, Greek, Syrian and Arab traders, who came from across the sea. Probably Arabs were among the earliest traders visiting the towns along the coast of South India. Therefore the identification of the Yavaṇa in *Mullaippāṭṭu* as an Arab does not necessarily point to a later date than that of the trade between Rome and South India in the beginning of our era. However, there is already sufficient other evidence which suggests that Caṅkam poetry should not be dated

³⁰ Zvelebil, K., *The Yavanas in Old Tamil Literature*, p. 405.

that early. Instead, it seems to have had its origin among the Pāṇṭiyas of the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century.³¹ Even so, I think that in *Mullaippāṭṭu* we are probably still dealing with one of the earliest unambiguous descriptions in Indian literature of a man from the Arab world.

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³¹ See Tiekens, H. (2001) *Kāvya in South India. Old Tamil Caṅkam Poetry*. Gonda Indological Studies X. Groningen. It is not clear what conclusions should be drawn for dating Caṅkam poetry from the “retention” of the intervocalic *-k-* as *-k-* or *-g-* in Middle Indic *matthik(/g)ā* which underlies Tamil *mattikai*. At first sight the retention of *-k-* as *-k-* or *-g-* against its elision (*matthi(y)ā*) might suggest an early date. It should be noted, however, that instances of the voicing and elision of a single intervocalic plosive are attested already quite early in inscriptions; see, for instance, Mehendale, M. A. (1948) *Historical Grammar of Inscriptional Prakrits*. Poona, 1948: 61 (e.g., *palogana* in Kaṇḥēri, first or second century A.D., *sāmiya* Nāsik IV, first century A.D.). In the spoken languages the process of voicing and elision had apparently already been going on around the beginning of our era. This seems to mark the Prakrit dialects of the playwright Aśvaghōṣa, in which these processes are virtually absent, as artificial constructs. The same seems to apply to the “classical” Prakrits. In any case, the complete elision of single intervocalic plosives (except for the retroflex plosives) in Māhārāṣṭrī Prakrit is almost certainly the result of a generalization process (see Massica, C. P. (1993) *The Indo-Aryan Languages*. Cambridge, p. 66). The situation in Śaurasenī Prakrit definitely requires a careful investigation of the manuscript transmission, during which this dialect seems to have been changed considerably under the influence of Māhārāṣṭrī Prakrit. In this connection it should be noted that Māhārāṣṭrī is the only literary Prakrit which had acquired a life of its own outside drama and which as a result has exerted a great influence on the literary tradition as a whole. Finally, it might not be ruled out that *mattikai* had actually been borrowed directly from Sanskrit, in which case the rules of Prakrit were called in as it were to solve the problem of the representation of the combination *-st-*, which does not exist in Tamil.

