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CĀRU, “FESTIVAL”, IN CAṅKAM POETRY

INTRODUCTION¹

Tamil *cāru* is related to *cēru* through the interchange of *ē* and *ā* after a palatal plosive.² Both words are attested in Caṅkam poetry, in two cases even side by side in one sentence. They share the meaning “sap, juice”. In addition, *cēru* means “mud, slush”³ and *cāru* “festival”.⁴ As to *cāru* “festival”, it is unclear if we are dealing with the same word as *cāru* “sap, juice” and, if so, how the two meanings are related. Nevertheless, commentators, editors and translators have shown an outspoken preference for the meaning “festival” and have ignored the other meaning except in a few cases where “sap, juice” was absolutely inevitable. In this article I will have a closer look at a number of instances of the word *cāru* in Caṅkam poetry and try to show that as far as these instances are concerned the meaning “festival” is unnecessary beside that of “fluid”. Besides, in several of the passages that will be investigated, *cāru* seems to mean more particularly “mud”, the very meaning supposed to be peculiar to *cēru*. On closer consideration it would seem that in Caṅkam poetry the meanings of *cēru* and *cāru* overlap much more than has hitherto been assumed. Even so, there seems to have been scope for using the two words side by side, each with its own specific meaning.

Before discussing instances of *cāru* “festival” I will present a few examples of *cēru* “juice, sap, mud” and of *cāru* “juice, sap”. I should also add that the conclusions reached here are provisional as they are restricted to Caṅkam poetry and are based on only a selection, though a fairly large one, of the instances of *cāru* available in that corpus. Some instances have been left out

1 I would like to thank Whitney Cox for his most stimulating comments.

2 Krishnamurti 2003: 99.

3 Other meanings beside “mud, slush” mentioned in the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 1640) are “kernel, as of a coconut”, which rests on a misunderstanding of *Puṛaṇāṅṅūru* 225, for which, see below, and “liquid of thick consistency”, with reference to *Paripāṭal* 6, 41, which I will also deal with below. The latter meaning is merely a contextually determined version of that of “mud, slush”. So is the meaning “pus”, mentioned in the lexicon as well. The meaning “wood-apple” does not seem to be relevant here. Finally, the *Tamil Lexicon* mentions a meaning “temple festival” with reference to a traditional lexicon. Most likely, however, we have to do with *cēru* for *cāru*!

4 Another meaning mentioned in the *Tamil Lexicon* is “worship”, with reference to *Paripāṭal* 8, 96. This meaning seems to have been made up *ad hoc*, as an alternative for “festival”, which did not fit in this context (see below). Besides, the dictionary mentions a meaning “marriage” with reference to *Tiruviḷaiyāṭarpurāṇam* 31, 5: *nāṇmarai vitiyir cāru ceytē*. To the latter instance I will return below.

of consideration because I simply failed to make sense of the poem as such or because the context was too meagre to come to any definite conclusion concerning the meaning of *cēru*.

cēru “mud” and “pulp, juice”

The meaning “mud” for *cēru* is well attested in Caṅkam poetry. Examples are *Aiṅkuṟunūru* 28, 2, *taṅ cēru kaḷavan varikkum ūraṅku*, “the man from the town where a crab leaves its ‘footprints’ in the cool mud” and *Patirruppattu* 65, 16, *cēru ceṅ māriyiyiṅ*, “like rainclouds turning earth into mud”. Another example is found in *paṭṭiṅappālai* 43–51:

... .. aṭṭir
 kañci
yāru pōlap parantoḷuki
yēru porac cērākit
tēr oṭat tukaḷ keḷumi
nīṟāṭiya kaḷiru pōla
vērupaṭṭa viṅai yōvattu
veṅkōyiṅ mācūṭṭun,

The gruel, flowing from the kitchen like a river, having turned into mud as buffaloes waded through it, splashed up as chariots raced through it and made the resplendent palace with walls decorated with paintings look like an elephant which had taken a bath in mud.

There are several descriptions of elephants “playing” in the mud: e.g. *Narriṅai* 51, 9, *iruñcērāṭiya ...kaḷiru*, “the elephant which played in the dark mud” and *Akanāṅūru* 121, 6, *cēru koṅṭāṭiya ... kaḷiru*, “id.”. In *Narriṅai* 278, 7 it is a mule, *kaḷicērāṭiya ... attiri*, “a mule playing in the mud of the backwaters”.

In *Ciṟupāṅārruppaṭai* 27–8, *nuṅkiṅ iṅcērikutarum*, *cēru* refers to the dripping juice of the palmyra fruit. An interesting example of this meaning of *cēru* is found in *Puṟaṅāṅūru* 225, 1–3:

talaiyōr nuṅkiṅ ṟiñcēru micaiya
iṭaiyōr paḷattiṅ painkaṅi māntak
kaṭaiyōr viṭuvāyṅ piciroṭu cuṭukilaṅku nukara.

As I understand the passage, the warriors in the vanguard of the army were given the sweetest and softest parts of the palmyra fruit⁵ and those forming the middle and the rear increasingly less sweet and soft parts:

The warriors at the front of the army enjoyed the sweet juice (or pulpy kernel) of the palmyra fruit, those behind the front the green part of the fruit and those forming the rear the stringy (*viṭuvāy*) fibers and the unpleasant (*cuṭu*) root.

In all these instances, whether it means “mud” or “juice, sap”, *cēru* refers to relatively thick or turbid fluids, never, for instance, to clear water.

cāru “juice, sap”

There are a few instances of *cāru* in which one simply cannot get around the meaning “juice, sap”. Thus, in *Perumpāṇāṟruppaṭai* 262, *karumpiṇ ṛīncāru virumpiṇir micaimiṇ*, it refers to sweet sugarcane juice. In the passage *Puraṇāṅṅūru* 24, 12–6 this sweet sugarcane juice is part of a list of three juices (*munṇīr*):

irumpanaiyiṇ kurumpainīrum
pūṅkarumpiṇ ṛīncārum
ōṅkumaṇar kuvavuttāḷait
tīnīrōṭuṭaṇ virāay
munṇīr uṇṭu ...

mixing the juice of the young fruit of the high palm trees with those of the flowering sugarcane and the nuts of the coconut trees growing in groups on the high sands, and drinking this mixture of three juices ...

In *Paripāṭal* 6, 41–2 *cāru* occurs side by side with *cēru* in a list of fragrant substances produced by, or floating in, the Vaiyai river:⁶

5 The *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 1640) quotes *nuṅkiṇ ṛīncēru micaiya* as an example of *cēru* “kernel, as of a coconut”.

6 This passage is responsible for the meaning “water in which aromatic substances are infused” for *cāru* listed in the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 1397) and “liquid of thick consistency, as sandal paste” for *cēru* (p. 1640). Another poem in which the two words are found side by side is *Paṭiṟruppattu* 65, which will be discussed below.

*cāruñ cēru neyyu malarum
nārupu nikaḷum yāruvaralāru,*

Lotions, pâtes, huiles et fleurs,
Déroulant ses parfums, c'est la venue de la rivière!⁷

In either case we are, as in the case of *cēru*, dealing with a liquid with something in it, not with clear, pure water.

cāru “mud”

The possibility that *cāru*, like *cēru*, could mean “mud” as well has not been considered. A case in point is *Narrīṇai* 200, 3–4:

*yāru kiṭantaṇṇa vakaṇṇēṭun teruvir
cāreṇa nuvalu mutuvāy kuyava.*

Wilden has translated these lines as follows:⁸

O potter of old wisdom who talks about [the coming] festival in the streets wide [and] long as a river gone to rest.⁹

To understand the passage one should know that the comparison of a wide street to a river with still—and clear—water is standard; see *(y)āru kiṭantaṇṇa vakaṇṇēṭun teruvir* in *Neṭunalvātai* 30 and *Maturaikkāñci* 359. Another example is found in *Malaipaṭukaṭām* 480–2, which is particularly interesting since there, as in the poem under consideration, the clear water of the river is contrasted to *cāru*:¹⁰

*viyaliṭam peṛāa viḷupperu niyamat
tiyāreṇak kiṭanta teruvir cāreṇa
vikaḷunar verūuñ kavalai marukir,*

7 Gros 1968: 32–3. For his notes, see p. 204. Parimēlalakar glosses *cāru* with *maṇaṇir* and *cēru* with *cantaṇam kuṅkumam alattaka mutaliya kuḷampu* (*Kalittokai*, pp. 85–6).

8 Note that for the *Narrīṇai* we do not possess an old commentary (see Marr 1985: 340).

9 Wilden 2008. See also Kandasamy's translation: “Oh intelligent potter ... saying ‘Festival’ in the broad long street lying like a river” (Kandasamy 2008: 141).

10 The commentator Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar does not single out *cāru* for comment; see *Pattuppāṭṭu*: 652–3.

We are not in a James Bond film here, in which our secret agent manages to shake off his pursuers by mingling in a festive crowd, but in the world of Indian warfare, in which military campaigns run aground in the mud (*cāru*):¹¹

[The king's town] with crowded streets lined with large, richly laden shops, which resemble (wide) rivers flowing softly, [and] with narrow, ever-forking lanes which his enemies fear because of the mud.

Going back to *Narriṇai* 200, a bard (*pāṇaṇ* in line 8) has compared the wide street of the village to a river with still, clear water. All the potter sees, however, is mud. “Festival” does not yield the right contrast here. The point is that the bard tries to gloss over the fact that the rainy season has started and the wife's husband has failed to fulfil his promise to be back in time. Deaf to poetry, the potter unwittingly exposes the bard as a liar. Note in this connection how the poem continues. Obviously by way of a joke, someone urges the potter to take it upon himself to warn the women of the village to protect themselves against the bard's cruel lies (lines 10–11: *ivaṇ* [the bard of line 8] *pōypoti koṭuñcol oṃpumiṇ*). The potter (*kuyavaṇ*) in this poem may be compared to the village types in *Hāla's Sattasāi*, who have no ear for poetry, taking it too literally.¹² His characterization of the potter as *mutuvāy*, or “of old wisdom”, is obviously meant ironically here.

Marching warriors are not the only ones who fear mud. The poor man in *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 82 has his own particular reasons for that:

cāru talaikkōṭṇaṇaṇ peṇṇ ṭṛṛṛṛeṇaṇ
paṭṭa māri ṇāṇra ṇāyirruṇ
kaṭṭiṇiṇakkum iḷiciṇaṇ kaiyatu
pōḷṭūṇṭūciyiṇ viraintaṇru mātō
ūrkōla vanta porunaṇo
ṭār puṇai teriyaṇeṭuntakai pōrē.

¹¹ Admittedly, it is strange to see how the scene of military campaigns has been shifted here from the countryside to the town.

¹² See Khoroché and Tieken 2009: 161ff.

Ramanujan’s translation runs as follows:

With the festival hour close at hand,
his woman in labor,
a sun setting behind pouring rains,

the needle in the cobbler’s hand
is in a frenzy
stitching thongs for a cot:

swifter, far swifter,
were the tackles of our lord
wearing garlands of laburnum,

as he wrestled with the enemy
come all the way
to take the land.¹³

Beautiful though this translation is—Hart’s more recent translations differs only in details¹⁴—it misrepresents the situation. A festival “at hand” (Rāmanujan) or “impending” (Hart) is given as a reason here for the man to hurry with the bed. The editor of the Kaḷakam edition explains: because he has to be ready to be able to assist at the festival.¹⁵ But why has the bed to be ready before nightfall—the scene is explicitly set at sunset (*ñāṇṇa ṇāyīṟṟu*), that is, just before it is getting really dark? As I see it, it is because the man’s pregnant wife has to sleep on it. Otherwise she would have to sleep on the ground, which has become muddy (*cāru talaikkōṇṇa*) due to the rain (*paṭṭa māri*). With all this we should keep in mind that the man is poor (*iḷiciṇan*) and probably he and his wife do indeed usually sleep on the ground.

¹³ Ramanujan 1985: 123.

¹⁴ Hart and Heifetz 1999: 61

¹⁵ Unfortunately, the editor of the Kaḷakam edition of the *Puṇanāṇṟu* does not distinguish, for instance by using different letter types, between the explanations of the anonymous, old commentary and his own comments (see Marr 1985: 69–70).

Another instance of *cāru* to be discussed here is *Kalittokai* 102, 13–16:

colluka pāṇiyēm eṇṇār araikeṇṇār pārittār
māṇṇilai yārākac cāru
cārruḷ peṭai yaṇṇār kaṇ pūttu nōkkum vāyellām
miṭai perin ērāt takaittu.

Unfortunately, the only English translation available so far, by Murugan, is far too free to be of any use. For instance, the two instances of *eṇṇār*, “they say”, in line 13 are skipped, and so is *cārruḷ*, probably because Murugan did not know what to do with the combination of *uḷ* “inside” and *cāru*, which, following the commentator Naccinārkkinīyar, he translated as “festival”.¹⁶ To understand the poem we have to know that the scene is set at a so-called bull-baiting contest, at which young men vie with each other for the hand of the cowherd leader’s daughter by riding a bull. The poem under consideration is set on the following day, when a second contest is announced as the owners of the bulls were not satisfied with the outcome of the one on the day before (*nerunal* in line 30). The winner was only a “commoner” (*potuvaṇ*, l. 37), which, of course, he always was, as for the young men the contest was a way up from being a nobody to the son-in-law of the owner of a cattle herd. Furthermore, one should know that it has been raining heavily: the poem opens with a reference to rain showers and an enumeration of flowers typical of the rainy season, which the women present at the occasion are wearing.¹⁷ So we may safely assume that the area in which the contest takes place is muddy. In fact, this might explain why the girls are looking for an elevated spot (*miṭai*) from which to watch the performance. It is an elevated spot “amid all this mud” (*cārruḷ*). If instead of “mud” *cāru* would mean “festival” here, it does not refer to the occasion but to the crowd obstructing one’s view of the contest, which is an additional complication to the one offered by the meaning “festival”.

16 Naccinārkkinīyar has: *cāru ērukōḷ viḷā* (*Kalittokai*, *Mullaikkali*, p. 11). In Murugan (1999) the poem is numbered 101. His translation of the passage under consideration runs as follows: “Let the drum beat have a wider reach / Heralding the festive contest / For our richly jewelled girl’s hand./ Fitting and worthy it’d be / Were there raised platforms around / For the fowl-like lasses’ eyes / To feast on the contest.”

17 The bull-catching festival takes place in the rainy season. *Kalittokai* 101 and 103 open with a similar enumeration of flowers of that season, *Kalittokai* 106 with a description of rain-wet pastures. Therefore the bull-catching contest described in *Kalittokai* 102–6 is not the direct precursor of the modern *callikkaṭṭu* festival described by Zvelebil, which takes place in February–March (Zvelebil 1962).

Above I have rendered *cārruḷ* with “all *this* mud”, as *cārruḷ* echoes *cāru* in the preceding line, *pārittār māṇḷilai yārākac cāru*. The editor of the text glosses *cāru* with “festival”, translating *pārittār ... cāru* as *viḷavaip parakkac celutti*, “having set in motion the festival”.¹⁸ It is unclear, however, how *yārāka*, which he ignores, as was done by Murugan as well (see note 16), fits in. The context is the following. In the first “paragraph” (lines 1–8) we hear a young man asking after a girl who has caught his eye. In lines 9–12 he is told she is the prize of the bull-catching contest. After that we get three short sentences, namely *colluka pāṇiyēm eṇṇār*, *araikenṇār*, and *pārittār māṇḷilai yārāka cāru*, in which someone is telling what had happened the day before; that explains the past tense forms *eṇṇār* (twice) and *pārittār*. The subject of the first part, *colluka pāṇiyēm eṇṇār* is most likely the young men, who said “tell them that we are ready (for the contest)”. Next, they, or else the organizers of the contest,¹⁹ said: “beat the drums (to announce that we begin)”. The verb *pārittār* in the third sentence is otherwise rare in Caṅkam poetry. When it occurs, it is glossed with the verb *para-ttal*, “to spread”. It is used transitively, as in *akal nilāp pārikkum tiṅkaḷ*, “the moon which spreads moonlight”, in *Nālaṭiyār* 151,²⁰ as well as intransitively, as in *pakalcey maṇḷilam pārittāṅku* (*Perumpāṇṇāruppaṭai* 442), “like the sun appearing (*scil.* emitting its rays)”.²¹ Consequently, *pārittār māṇḷilai ārāka cāru* may be translated as follows: “the girls, the mud serving as a path (that is, walking through the mud), displayed their precious ornaments”, or, taking *māṇḷilai* metonymically, “the girls, decked out with precious ornaments, walked through the mud.”²² The *cārruḷ* sentence may be translated as follows: “if amid this mud (*cārruḷ*) all of them manage to find an elevated spot from which they can watch (the contest) with large eyes, resembling fowls, that would be wonderful.”

18 *Kalittokai*, *Mullaikkali*, p. 11.

19 Note that in line 11 (*araintaraṅintu*) the announcement by beating drums is done by the organizers.

20 *Tirukkuraḷ* 851 mentions a (contagious) disease (*nōy*) which infects (*pārikkum*) everybody with hate. In *payaṇḷai pāritturaikkum urai* (*Tirukkuraḷ* 193) the verb *pārittu* seems to express the idea that the speaker spoke to just anybody who cared to listen. In *Kalittokai* 71, 12, *puṇ pārittu puṇarttalṅ parattaimai* (Murugan 1999: 278 reads *puṇ pārittu puṇarnta niṅ parattaimai*), *pārittu* is glossed with *maṇaiyāmal*, “without hiding (as scar)” (*Kalittokai*, *Marutakkali*, p. 21), which assumes a positive “showing”.

21 Note that the commentator has added an object, “rays” (*kiraṇaṅkaḷ*): *nāyṛu taṅ kiraṇaṅkaḷaip parappit tōṇṇiṅārpōla* (*Pattuppāṭṭu*, p. 255).

22 Incidentally, it is not entirely certain that the girls are the subject of *pārittār*. The fact is that the young men wear garlands of flowers as well (see *Kalittokai* 103). If the young men are the subject, we get an interesting contrast: they swagger through the mud, while the girls seek refuge from it on elevated spots.

cāru combined with the verb *koḷ*

In several instances *cāru* is combined with the verbs *koḷ* or *ayar*. The meaning of *koḷ* as an independent verb is more or less clear; it means “to hold, contain, keep, acquire”.²³ The meaning of *ayar* is less clear and requires an investigation of its own. I will begin with some instances involving *koḷ*. The first one is from our point of view also the most interesting in that *cāru* occurs in it side by side with the more common word for “festival”, namely *viḷavu*. The context seems to rule out that *cāru* means “festival” as well. I refer to *Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu* 189–194 here:

... .. *palavi*
nekiḷntuku naṟumpaḷam viḷainta tēra
nīr cettayinṟa tōkai viyalūrc
cāru koḷ āṅkaṅ viḷavukkaḷa nanti
yarikkūṭṭiṇṇi iyaṅ karaṅka vāṭumakaḷ
kayirūr pāṇiyir raḷaruṅ cāral.

The passage describes a peacock which has drunk (*ayinṟa*) the fermented juice (*viḷainta tēral*) of the fragrant jackfruit (*palavin*), which had fallen on the ground (*nekiḷntuku*), thinking (*cettu*) it was water (*nīr*), and has got drunk. It staggers (*taḷarum*) like the slow (irregular) beat (*pāṇi*) with which the pebbles (*arikkūṭṭū*) in the tightrope dancer’s anklets rattle (*karaṅka*) with each step she sets on the rope.²⁴ Either the peacock or the dancer is enjoying him/herself (*nanti*) on the festival site (*viḷavukkaḷam*), a place (*āṅkaṅ*) which is “having” (*koḷ*) *cāru*.²⁵ It is unlikely that *cāru* means “festival” here, as the commentator Naccinārkkiniyār on the text would have it.²⁶ Instead, it seems to describe the state the festival grounds are in. In that case “mud(dy)” is definitely a possible meaning here. In this particular instance the mud may have been caused by the juice dripping from the jack fruits. More in general, during feasts, and probably during festivals as well, toddy is spilled

23 Steever 2005:195–6.

24 The construction *āṭumakaḷ kayirūr pāṇi*, “the rhythm (of the feet) with which the tightrope dancer moves slowly along the rope”, may be compared with *kaṇṟu puku mālai* (*Akanāṇṟu* 9, 20), “the evening when the calves come home”. For the semantic role of the noun phrase to be relativized (*ūr* = *ūrnta*) and its case marking (*pāṇiyiṇ* instrumental) in Modern Tamil, see Lehmann 1993: 288ff.

25 *āṅkaṅ*, “place”, seems to anticipate *viḷavukkaḷam*. Compare *āṅkaṅ* in *niḷalil āṅkaṅ aruñcurakkavalai* (*Narṇṇai* 105, 5–6) and *koṭuṅkaḷi yiḷumeṇa volikkum āṅkaḷ peru nīr vēli* (*Kuṛuntokai* 345, 5–7). For *āṅkaṅ*, “place”, see *iṇṟu periteṇṇum āṅkaṇatavaiyē* (*Kuṛuntokai* 146, 5) and *kaṛi vaḷar aṭṭukkattāṅkaṅ muṛi yaruntu* (*Kuṛuntokai* 288, 1).

26 *viḷākkōḷḷutarṅkuriya avviṭaṅkaḷaiyuṭaiya akarṅciyuṭaiya ūrkaḷil viḷākkōḷḷutalaiyuṭaiya kaḷattē mikku* (*Pattuppāṭṭu*, p. 503).

turning the earth into mud. The following passage, *Puṟanāṅṁūru* 68, 15–18, may give us some idea of what went on such occasions, in case at a drinking party:

*kaṭuṅkaṭ parukunar naṭuṅkukai yukutta
naṟuṅcēṟāṭiya vaṟuntalai yāṅṅai
neṭunakar varaippiṟ naṭumuḷā vōrkkum
uṟantai*

Hart translates this passage as follows:

and some men drinking strong toddy let the cups fall from their unsteady hands while elephants, although no one rides on their heads, dance in the mud rendered fragrant by that splashing toddy as they listen, with rapt attention, to the sound of a muḷā drum that is beaten somewhere within the towering mansion in the city of Uṟantai.²⁷

Another instance is *cāru koḷa eḷuntu* in *Paripāṭal* 8, 96. I quote the passage from lines 93 to 102:

*kuḷirpoykai yaḷaru nīraiya
maruta naḷi maṅṅaṅ ṅemarnta
naṅimalarp peruvaḷic
cīraṭiyavar cāru koḷa veḷuntu
... ..
aruvaraic cērāt toṭunar.*

Gros's translation runs as follows:

L'eau boueuse remplit les frais étangs;
Le sable épais de la plaine s'étale
Sur le grand chemin abondamment fleuri
Où tes humbles servantes se sont mises en route pour Te célébrer.
... ..
(Diverses qualités de santal ... et les autres objets nécessaires, tenant tout cela,)
Elles rejoignent la montagne d'accès difficile, tes adoratrices.²⁸

²⁷ Hart and Heifetz 1999: 52–3.

²⁸ Gros 1968: 50. Gros reads *toṭunar* for *toṭunar*; see his notes on p. 224.

In Gros's translation *cāru* "festival" is hidden away in "Te célébrer". "Festival" is indeed difficult to fit in as the "humble servants" (*cīraṭiyavar*) do not go to a festival but to a temple (*kaṭinakar* in line 126) on Tiruparaṅkuṅṅam to worship Cevvēl, or Murukaṅ, there.²⁹ As I see it, there is no good reason not to translate the passage as: "the women with small feet set off on wide roads so that they (or their small feet) get covered with mud", as they pass muddy (*aḷaru*) ponds (*poṅkai*) and (wet) sandy (*maṅal*) fields.

In *Paripātal* 19, 6 one of Murukaṅ's lovers, Tēvayāṅṅai—the other is Vaḷḷi,—is described as *cārukoḷ tuṛakkattavaḷ*, or "Celle qui [est] dans le paradis rempli de fêtes."³⁰ I do not know of other references to festivals organized by the gods among each other in heaven. However, they do drink *amṛta*, or the drink of immortality. *cāru koḷ tuṛakkattavaḷ* may accordingly be translated as "the goddess in heaven enjoying 'the liquid' (i.e. the *amṛta*)."

The last instance of the phrase *cāru koḷ* to be dealt with in detail is found in *Puraṅāṅūru* 22, 14–19:

alaṅkucenner katir vēynta
āykarumpiṅ koṭikkūrai
cāru koṅṅa kaḷam pola
vēṅuvēru polipu tōṅṅak
kuṛṅāṅā vulakkaiyāṛ
kaliccummai viyalāṅkaṭ.

Hart's translation reads:

... there are rows of roofs that are plaited
of soft sugarcane, covered with sprouts of the finest
swaying paddy, variously resplendent as if
we were at the site of a festival, a vast
place full of noise, where to the endless drumming of pestles,

...³¹

29 Among the meanings of *cāru* the *Tamil Lexicon* mentions "worship" with reference to this particular instance, as if worship and festival are the same thing, which they are not.

30 Gros 1968: 118.

31 Hart and Heifetz 1999: 18.

As I see it, what is described here is not a festival but a wet (*cāru koṇṭa*) field in which paddy and sugarcane grow in abundance. The firls looks like a roof thatched with paddy and the sugarcane sticking out from it resemble flagpoles.³²

cāru in combination with the verb *ayar*³³

There are two types of constructions in which *cāru* co-occurs with *ayar*, namely *cārayar mūtūr* in *Ćirupāṇārrippaṭai* 201, which is similar to *cāru koḷ āṅkaṅ* in *Kuriṅcippāṭṭu* 192 discussed above, and *cārayarntaṅṅa* in *Kuriṅcippāṭṭu* 201 or *cārayarntu* in *Maturaikkāṅci* 366. The commentator Naccinārkkīṅiyar translated *cārayar mūtūr* with *vilā naṭakkiṅra paḷaiya ūr*,³⁴ *cārayarntaṅṅa* as *vilāk koṇṭāṭiṅār pōla* or *pōṅra* (see below), thus, as if *cāru* means festival (*vilā*). That, however, remains to be seen, as the meaning also depends on that of the verb *ayar*. This verb is generally translated as “to perform” and its contextual variants.³⁵ Objects found with it are dances (*kuravai yayarum* in *Puṛaṅāṅūru* 129, 3), the reception of a guest (*elviruntayaru maṅaivi* in *Narriṅai* 121, 11), marriage (*nāṭarkayarvar naṅmaṅamē* in *Aiṅkurunūru* 230, 5), and festival (*ūrē ... vilavayarummē* in *Narriṅai* 348, 3–4). Other objects are flower plucking (*poytal ayara* in *Maturaikkāṅci* 589) and guarding one’s daughter (*aruṅkaṭi yayara* in *Aiṅkurunūru* 292, 4). However, besides instances in which a specific dance is mentioned, as in *kuravai yayarum* quoted above, there are also several instances in which *ayar* seems to mean “to dance” or “to make dancing movements” all by itself. Examples are *makaḷir kuḷaṅir ayara* in *Maturaikkāṅci* 603, *pēymakaḷ ayara* in *Puṛaṅāṅūru* 371, 27, and *tuṛai ... yām ... ayarkaṅ cērum* in *Kuṛuntokai* 80, 3.³⁶ Similarly, we find *ayar* with *celavu*, a noun expressing the action of going (*celavayarntaṅṅaiyē* in *Aiṅkurunūru* 423, 2). It would seem, that *ayar* in the first place denotes a fast or quick movement and, from there,

32 As I will try to show below, another passage in which *cāru* and flagpoles are found in each other’s proximity, *cārayarntaṅṅa eṭutta vuruvaṅṅaḷoṭi*, in *Maturaikkāṅci* 366, is a deceptive parallel.

33 The *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 1396) dedicates a separate lemma to *cārayartal*, “to celebrate a festival”. It refers to *Civakacintāmaṅi* 1221: *cārayarntiṅaiṅar pēṅi*. Unfortunately, I have been unable to check this particular instance. As I will indicate below, it is not impossible that in post-*Caṅkam* text *cāru* was used in the meaning of “festival.”

34 *Pattuppāṭṭu*, p. 169.

35 Wilden (2008), who more or less consistently translates *ayar* with “to be engaged in”, in connection with its use in *celavayarntiṅaiṅal* in *Narriṅai* 149, 9, suggests that the verb might mean “to express a plan”. She might, however, have taken the trouble to check if these meanings make sense in the other instances of the verb. We do have excellent word indexes of the *Caṅkam* corpus nowadays!

36 For the construction *ayarkaṅ cērum*, compare *maṅ koṅarkaṅ cēru(m)*, “we go to fetch sand”, in *Kuṛuntokai*, 113, 5. For the meaning “to dance”, see also *vilaiyāṭāyamoṭayavōḷ* in *Kuṛuntokai* 396, 2. In *pāvai ... ayarum ... makaḷir* (*Puṛaṅāṅūru* 283, 10–1) *ayar* seems to mean “to play [with a doll]”.

for instance, dancing. Besides, the word seems to express the idea of exerting oneself; an example is the noun *ayarvu* in *Puraṇānūru* 182, 5–6: *paḷiyenin / ulakuṭan perinuṅ koḷḷalar ayarvilar*, “even if they conquer the whole world, if it brings them shame, they will not bother to keep it”. In some instances exertion seems to lead to exhaustion, which meaning may be assigned to *ayarcci* in *Aiṅkurunūru* 396, 3: *curattiṭai yayarcciyai yāruka*, “may we recover from the exhaustion (or: fatigue) we suffer from as we go through the wasteland”.³⁷

If the above considerations do not rule out a translation of *cārayarntaṅṅa* with “as if a festival was celebrated”, it also opens other possibilities. Take *Kuriṅcippāṭṭu* 201–2:

cārayarntaṅṅa miṭāaccoṅṅi
varunarkku varaiyā vaḷanakar.

As expected, the commentator Nacciṅārkkiniyar translates *cārayarntaṅṅa* with *viḷāk koṅṭāṭiṅārpōṅṅa*, which he links to *vaḷanakar*.³⁸ In this translation, however, *cārayarntaṅṅa* does not function as a comparison to immediately following *miṭāaccoṅṅi*, “rice cooked in a pot”, but is linked to the house(hold), “which gives away (*varaiyā*) as if it is celebrating a festival”. I do not want to make yet another detour here by investigating how phrases like *cārayarntaṅṅa* are usually construed in the sentence. Instead, I would like to point out that taking *cārayarntaṅṅa* together with *miṭāaccoṅṅi* makes sense as well if we take *cāru* to refer to a liquid: “rice (cooking) in a pot bubbling like mud”. “Mud” stands here metonymically for a fast-flowing river, which is by nature muddy. Above we have seen that the verb *ayar* means, among other things, “to dance”; here, it seems to describe the movement of a muddy river. These two things come together in *Puraṇānūru* 22, 22–3, in which the *kuravai* dance is compared to “the waves in the sea”:

... .. *verikkuravai*
ōta nīriṅ peyarpu poṅka,

The frenzied *kuravai* moves this and that way and jumps up and down like the waves in the sea.

37 Note the intransitive verb *āru-* with an object, *ayarcciyai*, in the accusative.

38 *miṭāccōṅṅai varuvārkellām varaiyāmal iṭukiṅṅa viḷāk koṅṭāṭiṅārpōṅṅa celvattaiyuṭaiyai akam polivu perumpaṭi, Pattuppāṭṭu*, p. 504.

Another instance of *cārayarntaṇṇa* is found in *Patirruppattu* 81, 20–1:

cārayarntaṇṇa kāraṇi yāṇart
tūmpakam paḷuṇiya tīmpīli mānti.

The editor translates *cārayarntaṇṇa* with *vilāk koṇṭāṭinār pōla*, which is construed with the verb *mānti*, “people drink (*mānti*) sweet juice (*tīmpīli*) as on a festival”.³⁹ A translation accounting for *cāru* “mud” and *ayar* “to flow fast, etc.” would read: “They drink sweet juice ripened in fresh bamboo stems rising up towards the dark rainclouds which billow like a stream of mud”. *cārayarntu* on its own is met with in *Maturaikkāñci* 366:

cārayarnteṭutta vuvuvap palkoṭi,⁴⁰

A multitude of flags raised, billowing like a stream of mud.

In four instances, *cārayar*, like *cāru koḷ*, describes a town (*cārayarūr*) or else a field (*kaḷam*). One such instance is found in *Cirupāṇārruppaṭai* 200–2:⁴¹

aṇṇal yāṇai yaruvitukaḷ avippa
nīraṭaṅku teruviṇ avaṇ cārayar mūtūr
cēyttum aṇṇu ciṇitu naṇiyatuvē.

Here, elephants muddied the town, or rather, its streets:

His town (with its streets) flowing with mud, the dust in the streets settled as elephant bulls shower themselves with jets of water drops, is not far; it is nearby.

Another instance of *cārayar*, this time describing a festival site on the beach, is found in *Cilappatikāram* 6, 157–165:

āṭukaḷamakalīrum pāṭumakalīrum
... ..
vēruvēru kōlattu vēruvēru kampalai

39 *Patirruppattu*, p. 389.

40 The commentator Naccinārkkīṇiyar translates: *kōyilkaḷukku viḷakkaḷai naṭattik kaṭṭiṇa alaṇṇaiyūṭaiya pala kōṭikaḷum (Pattuppāṭtu, p. 377).*

41 Naccinārkkīṇiyar translates: *avaṇuṭaiya viḷā naṭakkiṇra paḷaiya ūr (Pattuppāṭtu, p. 169).*

By way of conclusion I would like to deal briefly with an instance of *cāru* in the *Cilappatikāram*. It is interesting because, as in *Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu* 192, *cāru* is found here as a part of the celebration of a *viḷavu*, or “festival”. The passage concerned runs from 5, 174 to 188. I quote only the parts 174–178 and 187–188:

māmutu mutalvaṅ vāymaiṅṅ valāa
nāṅmarai marapiṇ ṛīmuṇai yorupāl
nālvakaiṭ tēvaru mūvaru kaṇaṅkaḷum
pālvakai terinta pakutiṭ tōṇṇattu
vēṇvēru kaṭavuḷar cāru ciṇantorupāl

muḷavukkaṅ ṭuyilātu muṭukkarum vītiyum
viḷavukkaḷi ciṇanta viyaluḷāṅkaṅ.

The passage describes the various activities taking place at a festival site (*viḷavu*), from Vedic sacrifices and *Purāṇa* recitation to music making. The passage is summed up in the last two lines:

Where drums do not stop and in every street and alley the sounds of the festival are heard.

In the preceding lines some of the activities taking place are mentioned, beginning, as said, with the performance of Vedic sacrifices:

On one side Vedic sacrifices (in which offerings were poured into the fire, [*tīmuṇai*]), as ordained by Brahmā, are faultlessly performed.⁴⁵

After this we read how *cāru* is available in abundance for the gods.⁴⁶ Rather than a festival we may have to do with a *pūjā*-like activity here. Could, therefore, *cāru* not refer to liquids like coconut water or ghee poured over the idols of the gods?:

On another side great quantities of liquid were poured over the four classes of deities, the eighteen *gaṇas* and the many other gods.

45 This translation is based on Dikshitar 1939: 118.

46 Dikshitar translates: “[O]n another [side] the festivals pertaining to the four classes of Dēvas and the eighteen Gaṇas and different other gods, were separately and correctly conducted” (Dikshitar 1939: 118)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The above presentation, ending with a question, is inconclusive for a reason. While I hope to have shown that in many of the above instances “mud” and “liquid” make good sense as translations of *cāru*, it cannot in each and every case be shown that the meaning “festival” does not make sense. At the same time, why do we need a meaning “festival” to begin with, which, apart from everything else, is not covered by its cognate *cēru*? My provisional conclusion is that in Caṅkam poetry, in which against better judgement I include the *Cilappatikāram*,⁴⁷ there is no such word as *cāru* meaning “festival”. For all that I do not want to rule out the possibility that there may be instances in Tamil literature in which *cāru* is used in the meaning “festival”. As we have seen, traditional interpretation of the Caṅkam poems has resulted in the isolation of a word *cāru*, “festival”, which might as such have been given a second life in literature.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, I have no access to post-Caṅkam texts to check this. In this connection I may refer to the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, to which *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 1396) refers in connection with an instance of *cāru* “worship” in the phrase *cārayarntiraivar pēṇi*, the *Tiruvīlaiyātarpurāṇam*, to which the same dictionary (p. 1397) refers in connection with an instance of *cāru* “marriage in the phrase *nūṇmarai vitiyir cāru ceytē*, or, for that matter, the traditional dictionary *Cūṭāmaṇi Nikaṇṭu*, which according to the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 1640) includes a word *cēru* meaning “temple festival”.

It is not difficult to see how *cāru*, when it was misunderstood, came to be interpreted as a word for festival. Some of the scenes described are set at a festival (*Kalittokai* 102, at a bull-catching festival, *Kuriṅcippāṭṭu* 189–194 at a *viḷavu*, *Cilappatikāram* at the Indra festival). From these instances the meaning may have spread to the other ones. However, the question is rather why *cāru* was misunderstood. I think that for an explanation we have to turn to Modern Tamil. As we have seen, in most of the passages discussed above, *cāru* means “mud”. A good example is *Cirupāṇārruppaṭai* 200–2, in which the roads are covered with *cāru* after the dust had been sprayed by elephants. Both *cēru* and *cāru* have survived into Modern Tamil but the meanings seem to have been redistributed so that “mud” has come to be associated with *cēru* and more watery liquids with *cāru*. Thus, for *cēru* the *Cre-A Dictionary of Contemporary Tamil* (p. 641) gives the meaning “mud, slush” and for *cāru* (p. 569) “juice, extract” and “accumulated

47 The Caṅkam corpus consists of poems selected according to a few specific criteria (see Tieken 2001: e.g. 194–5). The *Cilappatikāram* does not fit these criteria.

48 The artificial nature of Tamil literature, in particular later, nineteenth-century literature, has been well documented by Ebeling (2010).

saliva in the mouth (when one chews betel leaves, tobacco, etc.).” At the same time there is already evidence of this specialization in Caṅkam poetry itself. For this we may have a closer look at *Patirruppattu* 65, 16–7, in which, as in *Paripāṭal* 6, 41, *cāru* and *cēru* occur side by side but in which case the meanings are redistributed with *cēru* meaning “mud” and *cāru*, as in *Paripāṭal* 19, 6, “liquid”. As “the liquid” *cāru* would refer to the milk of the mythological Milk Ocean. I should, however, immediately add that we cannot be certain that *cāru* already at the time of the composition of the *Patirruppattu* did mean “watery liquid” (against “mud”) or was merely used in that meaning for alliteration’s sake: *cēru cey māriyiṅ aḷikkum niṅ / cāru paṭu tiruviṇṇai makilāṇē*. On the other hand, it is *cāru* which is used here for the more watery liquid, not *cēru*. The passage in question is *Patirruppattu* 65, 12–17:

... .. niṅ
 nāṇmakilīrukkai yiṅitu kaṅṭikumē
 tīntoṭai narampiṅ pālai vallōṅ
 paiyuḷ uruppīṅ paṅṅup peyarttāṅkuc
 cēru cey māriyiṅ aḷikkum niṅ
 cāru paṭu tiruviṇṇai makilāṇē.

Before presenting my interpretation I would like to paraphrase the one given by the editor of the text (to the passage *tīntoṭai ... peyarttāṅku* I will come back below): “We are (were?) glad to see (what happens in) your audience hall (*niṅ / nāṇmakilīrukkai yiṅitu kaṅṭikumē*), in your audience hall (*makilāṅ*), which has the festive appearance of festival grounds (*cāru paṭu tiruviṅ*), in which toddy is distributed (*aḷikkum ... [n]ṇṇai*), which resembles rain which turns the earth into mud.⁴⁹ All words are there, but none is in its proper place; the editor does not consider grammar.⁵⁰ A case in point is the way he links *ṇṇai* (*tiruviṅ ṇṇai*) in line 17 as the object to *aḷikkum* in line 16, which apart from everything else breaks up *cāru paṭu tiruviṅ ... makilāṅ*, which he otherwise takes as constituting one phrase. In addition, the editor overlooked *niṅ* in *niṅ cāru paṭu tiruviṇṇai*, apparently because he did not know how to fit it in. Finally, the comparison of toddy to (rain)

49 *Patirruppattu*, p. 309.

50 Compare the translation of the corresponding part by Subramanian: “[y]ou distribute pots of liquor[,] which, fermented, tastes bitter-sweet (like showers of rain which turn the earth into sticky mire) to those in the court[,] which takes on a gay festive look. I am happy that I could see all this joy and merriment of your daytime camp, O Vāzhiāda!” (Subramanian 1980: 61).

clouds is curious. Usually, (rain)clouds are mentioned to evoke a liberal patron, not the thing he gives.⁵¹

Evidently, the editor did not really know what to make of the passage. In these circumstances it is best to begin with those parts that are more or less clear. For instance, *cēru cey māriyiṅ aḷikkum niṅ*, “of you who give, resembling rain which turns the earth into mud”.⁵² Interestingly, *cāru paṭu tiruviṅ* is among the clear passages as well. Thus, *tiru* is Sanskrit *śrī*, and except in titles such as *Tirukkuṟaḷ* refers either to wealth or to *Śrī*, the goddess of wealth. The latter arose from the so-called Milk Ocean when it was churned. *cāru paṭu tiru* may accordingly be translated as “*Śrī* fallen in ‘the liquid’, *Śrī* from the Milk Ocean”. *niṅ/nāṅmakīḷirukkai yiṅitu kaṅṭikumē* belongs here too, though for the rare formation *kaṅṭikum* there are at least two possible interpretations. Both Rajam and Lehmann take it as a past tense formation for the first person plural.⁵³ Though it is indeed used for the first person plural (see *kaṅṭikum yāmē* in *Aiṅkuruṅūru* 198, 4), the past tense does not seem to fit here, as the bard, while standing in front of him, seems to comment on the king’s present situation. Apart from that, according to Lehmann the form is also used as a second person singular imperative, “please look”. Though I do not intend to go any further into the meaning of forms like *kaṅṭikum* here (the only other available form is *kēṭṭikum*), it may be noted that *kaṅṭikum* does combine the first person plural ending *-um* with that of the second person singular *-ti*. In the present context, however, I am almost certain that we have to do with the first person plural. If *-ti* is indeed the ending of the second person singular, we may treat *kaṅṭikum* as a present tense formation and translate lines 12–3 as: “We look with great pleasure at (the things happening in) the hall in which you enjoy yourself during the day (the public hall where you hold your audiences)”. After this, however, things become problematical. For instance, the question of how *naṅaimakiḷāṅ* and *cāru paṭu tiruviṅ* are to be meaningfully combined and how *niṅ* in line 16, if not to immediately following *cāru*, is to be connected with the text in the next line is not immediately clear. To begin with *makīḷ* in line 17, I do not see how it takes up *nāṅmakīḷirukkai* in line 13, as assumed by the editor (see above). The compound *naṅaimakiḷ* would mean “being elated from toddy”. It is hard to believe, however, that the goddess *Śrī* (*tiruviṅ* (*n*)*naṅaimakiḷ*) drinks toddy and gets drunk. As to the king (*niṅ... naṅaimakiḷ*), as shown by *Puṟaṅāṅūru* 123, being liberal

51 Hart 1975: 249–50.

52 For another instance of a participle tagged to the oblique of a personal pronoun, see *polinta niṅ* in *Patirrupattu* II, 19.

53 Rajam 1992: 596 and Lehmann 1994: 98–9.

while drunk brings him nothing but contempt.⁵⁴ There is also a verb *naṇai-*, “to be wet, to bud (of flowers), but a *viṇaitokai*⁵⁵ *naṇaimakiḷ* does result in similar problems. A third possibility, which I would like to suggest, is to read *aṇaimakiḷ*, “such (great) joy”.⁵⁶ For... *iṇitu kaṇṭikumē/ ... cēru ceṅ māriyiyiṇ aḷikkum niṇ/ cāru paṭu tiruviṇaṇai makiḷāṇē* this yields the following translation:

We look with great pleasure at (the things happening in) the hall in which you enjoy yourself during the day ... because of the enthousiasm, which is like that (*aṇai*) of the Goddess Śrī from the Milk Ocean, (your enthousiasm) with which you shower presents (making us bards happy) like a raincloud making mud.

Admittedly, the distance of *niṇ* from *makiḷ* is awkward. It should be noted, however, that in this interpretation, with *aṇai* meaning “such as” *cāru paṭu tiruvaṇaṇai makiḷ* forms a fixed phrase, which does not allow *niṇ* to intervene.

So far, lines 14–5 have been left out of consideration. In these lines the king alleviating the distress of poor bards is compared to a musician, who, well-skilled in melodies belonging to the *pālai* category, quickly switches from the secondary melody type called *paiyul*, or “poverty”, to another, presumably pleasanter type.⁵⁷

hpriṭṭj pēk

I would like to end by explaining how I got interested in the relationship between *cāru* and *cēru* in the first place. A few years ago, having collected money at the State Bank of India (*pārata sṭēṭ pāṅku*) on Anna Salai in Madras, I went to have a fruit juice in a small shop in a side street. On the refrigerator a piece of paper

54 *Puṇaṇāṇūru* 123: “If someone takes his seat every morning in his court/ and drinks himself blissfully drunk, it’s a simple thing/ then to give away chariots! But Malaiyaṇ, whose good name glows/ and is never diminished, even without getting delightfully drunk,/ gives away more lofty, ornamented chariots/ than the drops of rain that fall on fertile Muḷḷūr Mountain!” (Hart and Heifets 1999: 122).

55 This is how Naccinarkkiṇiyar describes the compound in his commentary to *Cirupāṇāṅruppaṭai* 66–7, which, however, does not read *naṇaimakiḷ* but *makiḷnanai: tamiḷ nilai perṇa tāṅkaru marapiṇ makiḷ naṇai marukiṇ maturaṅiyum varitē*, “Maturai too, where Tamil has taken roots and on whose streets because of that people brim over from joy, a joy which is difficult to contain, that Maturai, too, is poor”.

56 For other instances of this use of *aṇai*, see *aṇaiperuṅ kāmam*, “a desire so great” in *Kuṇṭtokai* 99, 6, *aṇai matukaiyar kol*, “are they that strong?” in *id.*, 290, 2, *piriya (v)anainalam uṭaiyaḷō*, “is your lover so beautiful that you’d leave ... this girl?”, *aṇaināl*, “on that day/such a day”, in *Puṇaṇāṇūru* 301, 7, *aṇai yarum paṇṇināṇ*, “such rare qualities” in *Kalittokai* 44, 9, and *aṇaivarai*, “that far” in *id.* 128, 26.

57 For *paṇṇuppeyarttu*, see *Cilappatikāram* 7, 47, 4.

was stuck which read *ḥprijj pēk*. It took me some time to decipher the text. In the first place I was amazed by the occurrence of the *āyṭam* (*h*), a sophisticated letter I had not expected to find in what was after all a rather shabby establishment. If *ḥprijj* meant “fridge”, what to make of *pēk*? I was told that it referred to a pack of bottles. This example shows that for writing /æ/ in Tamil there are two options, either *ā* as in *pāṅku*, “bank” and *ē* as in *pēk*, “pack”. My initial idea about *cāru* and *cēru* in Caṅkam poetry was that we are dealing with just two ways of writing one and the same word. This idea was quickly found to be untenable, as in *Paripāṭal* 6, 41, 2 both words are used side by side, apparently referring to different kinds of fragrant fluids. This suggested that we have to do with two separately inherited words. On the other hand, *cāru* and *cēru* are not the only pair showing this particular variation. Another instance is the instrumental/conditional suffix *-āl*, which has a variant *-ēl*, in, for instance, *turappāyēl* (the second person singular *turappāy* followed by *-ēl*) in *Kalittokai* 3, 10, *uṇṇēl* in *Kalittokai* 38, 13, and *viṭuvāṇēl* (the third person singular masculine *viṭuvāṇ* followed by *-ēl*) in *Kalittokai* 147, 50.⁵⁸ It cannot be a coincidence that all the instances of the variant *-ēl* which have been identified so far are from the *Kalittokai*.⁵⁹

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⁵⁸ Lehmann 1994: 118–20.

⁵⁹ For other instances, see Lehmann and Malten 1992, s.v. *-ēl*. The suffix has not been acknowledged in Rajam 1992.

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