

Ādiśeṣa and the Anchor Rope in Caṅkam Poetry

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In *Akanāṇūru* 1 a girl asks a friend if her lover might have forgotten his promise never to leave her. Lines 5-7 read as follows:

ciṛu kārōṭaṅ payiṇoṭu cērttiya
kal pōl piriyaalam eṇṇa col tām
maṛantaṅgar kollō tōḷi.

Eva Wilden (2018: 11) provides the following translation (the additions between square brackets, including the question mark, are mine):

[T]he words “we won’t separate like the stones [*kal*]
joined together [*cērttiya*] with glue [*payiṇoṭu*] by the little whetstone maker
[*ciṛu kārōṭaṅ*]”,
has he forgotten (them), friend[?]

If I understand the translation correctly, the whetstone maker would glue two or three stones together. Apart from the question if in the case of heavy (whet)stones the glue would hold, it is unclear for what purpose the stones are glued together. Hart’s translation (Hart 2015:4) differs only in details:

He said he would never leave, that his promise was as firm
as the stone smeared with paste by the low-born [*ciṛu*] whetstone maker.

Wilden, whose edition of the *Akanāṇūru* available so far stops at poem 120, does not consider the occurrence of the same simile in 356, 9-10:

ciṛu kārōṭaṅ payiṇoṭu cērttiya
kaṛpōl naviṇēṇ,

which Hart (2015: 358) translates as follows:

.... my tongue (*nāviṇēṇ*) seemed as strong
as a resin-bonded stone made by a whetstone maker.

From what follows – the girl did not betray her lover – it is clear that her tongue was “strong” in the sense that she held it in check. Her tongue was transfixed, just like the stone/lover mentioned in *Akanāṇūru* 1, who promised not to leave the girl.

The words *kārōṭaṅ* and *payiṇ* in the passages quoted above are rare and have no obvious derivations and meanings. For the meanings, Hart and Wilden simply followed the *Tamil Lexicon*, which, in its turn, drew its information mostly from the commentaries. In one such commentary, quoted by Wilden *ad Akanāṇūru* 1, *kal*, “stone”, is glossed with *cāṇai*, “whetstone”, *kārōṭaṅ* with *paṇaiyaṅ*, a person handling a *paṇai*, “drum”, a word which is, however, taken to mean “whetstone” here, and *payiṇ* with *arakku*, or “lac, shellac”, which would be used as a kind of glue.¹ For *payiṇ*, “glue”, besides the above *Akanāṇūru* passages,

¹ *kārōṭaṅ* – *paṇaiyaṅ*, *payiṇ* *arakku*, *kal* *cāṇai*, *arakkum kallum kūṭṭi ceyta kallai vēru piṛikka* [for *piṛikka*] *oṇṇāteṇṇu kaṛpōl piriyaalam eṇṇār*, in Wilden (2018, Vol. III, p. 9).

the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 2490) refers to *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 235. In addition, the dictionary mentions a meaning “rudder,” for which it refers to *Paripāṭal* 10, 53-55. These two passages will be dealt with below. The point I want to make here, is that the meaning of *payiṇ* was apparently lost sight of and needs to be established on the basis of the available contexts. On the very basis of the two passages quoted above, the meaning “glue” can already be ruled out, as it is based on a misinterpretation of the function of the sociative case ending *-oṭu* in *payiṇoṭu*. As we have seen, both Wilden and Hart take the sociative case as expressing the substance *with which* the stones are put together. However, a sentence from Modern Tamil like *kaiyōṭu kai cērttukkoṇṭu iruvarum naṭantārkaḷ*, “the two walked together, hand in hand”, quoted in the *Cre-A Dictionary of Contemporary Tamil*, p. 639, shows that in this context (note the transitive verb *cērttal*) the case denotes the object *to which* the stones are attached.

With this, the question of the meaning of *payiṇ* is completely open again, but, as indicated, in trying to establish the meaning we have only the two other instances of the word at our disposal, in *Paripāṭal* 10, 53-55 and *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 235, already mentioned above, as well as a descriptive name of Adīṣeṣa in Villiputtūr Ālvār’s *Makāpāratam*. I will begin with *Paripāṭal* 10, 53-55, which reads:

itaiyuṅ kayiṇum piṇaiyum iriyac
citaiyuṅ kalattaiṇ payiṇār rirukkum
ticiyaiṇi nīkāṇum pōṇm.

According to the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 2490), *payiṇ* does not mean “glue” here, but “rudder”, a meaning presumably suggested by the description of the ship’s captain as a good steersman, who “knows all about the directions of the wind” (*ticiyaiṇi*): while the sails (*itai*) and ropes (*kayiṇu*), and the ropes holding the planks together (*piṇai*), have come loose (*iriyac*) and the ship threatens to fall apart, the captain (*nīkāṇ*), who is a capable steersman (*ticiyaiṇi*), with the help of the rudder (instrumental *payiṇāl*) manages to stay on course.² As indicated, the meaning “rudder”, which clearly does not fit in the above *Akanāṇūru* passage – one does not attach a stone to the rudder – was obviously brought to mind by the immediate context, namely by the description of the captain as a capable steersman. At the same time, however, it stretches to the limit the meaning of the verb *tirukkum* (with the *sandhi* resolved: in *payiṇāl tirukkum*), the regular meaning of which is “to mend, repair, refit”. In fact, all the captain needs to refit the ship is a good piece of rope. If *payiṇ* does indeed refer to a rope, as I will argue it does, it must be another rope than those belonging to the rigging or those holding the planks of the ship together, which have to be replaced.

Before going into the question of what rope we are dealing with, I first want to have a look at *payiṇ* in *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 235, to test the new meaning “rope” there. The stanza reads:

palkiḷiyum payiṇun tukiṇūloṭu
nallarakkum melukun nalaṅ cāṇṇaṇa
vallaṇavumm amaittāṅkeḷu nāḷiṭaic
celvatōr māmayil ceytaṇaṇ anrē

² Careful philologist as he is, François Gros, while rejecting the meaning “glue” as well as the other meaning “rudder”, and rather than hiding his embarrassment with the term *payiṇ* by providing an ad-hoc translation, as done by Hart and Wilden, graciously admits that he does not know what to do with it in the present context (Gros 1968: 236). In the translation he therefore preferred to leave *payiṇ* out:

Pareils au pilote qui connaît les directions,
 Et qui redresse son vaisseau en perdition
 Quand assemblages, cordes et voiles ont été arrachés.

According to the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 2490) as well as the modern editor-cum-commentator of *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* (who writes *parrutar̥kuriyaṇa*, “things used for joining things”), this passage would provide yet another context for the meaning “glue”.³ However, as argued above, this meaning can be ruled out. The reason to consider this passage is to find out if the meaning “rope” belongs to the possibilities or had better not be considered any further. The stanza gives a list of things with which within seven days (*eḷu nāḷitai*) a large peacock puppet (*mayil*) is to be made, on which the queen, pregnant of Cīvakaṇ, the protagonist of the text, might fly away to escape her husband’s assassins. In the list *payiṇ* is found between “a great number of pieces of cloth” (*pal kiḷi*) and “a thin thread” (*tukil nūl*), after which are mentioned “lac” (*arakku*), “wax” (*meḷuku*) and other things to make a beautiful bird (*nalañ cāṇṇaṇa vallaṇavum*). As I see it, the – minimal – requirement for the meaning of the word, namely that the context provides no reasons to reject the meaning “rope”, seems to be met. With this the question remains what kind of rope we are dealing with.

As we have seen in the *Paripāṭal* passage, *payiṇ* refers to a piece of rope that unlike the ship’s rigging is still whole. We may also assume that it is a regular item on board of a ship. Furthermore, in the *Akanāṇṇūru* passages a stone is attached to it. The first thing that comes to mind then is that we have to do with the ship’s anchor, which in ancient times consisted of a stone which was lowered to the seabed with a rope.⁴ This stone should be bound fast, to prevent the ship from losing its anchor and going adrift, and as such it provides an apt image for a person who cannot slip away (*Akanāṇṇūru* 1) or a tongue which cannot escape control (356). All this also casts a new light on the expression *kārōṭaṇ*, the last part of which, *ōṭaṇ*, could well be an alternative formation of *ōṭam*, “boat”.⁵ The phrase *ciṛu kārōṭaṇ* could be translated as “a small dark boat”, which, apart from anything else, solves the problem of how to fit in the adjective *ciṛu* “small, little”, for which, as we have seen, Hart took recourse to an *ad hoc* translation “low-born” (“a low-born whetstone maker”).⁶ At the

³ The modern commentary glosses *payiṇ* with *parrutar̥kuriyaṇa*, “means with which to join things”.

⁴ See Athiyaman and P. Jayakumar (2004). For pictures of anchor stones, see below. References to anchor stones in classical Tamil texts are apparently rare. Rajamanickam and Arulraj (1994: 77–78) mention only one passage, namely *Maturaikkāñci* 376–379, which they translate as follows:

Because of heavy wind the anchoring stone of the ship detached from the rope and the ship was found in the midst of heavy whirlwind and circling water.

Compare Chelliah’s translation (1962:253):

... make the anchor roll about,
Impell the vessel into whirlpools strong
And make it spin.

On closer consideration, however, the text does not mention a stone serving as anchor but stones the ship has collided with. The relevant lines, 378–379, read:

kaṭuṅkāṇṇeṭuppak kal poruturaii
neṭuñcuḷip paṭṭa nāvāy pōla.

Like a ship, damaged (intransitive *uraii*) after having collided (*porutu*) with rocks after a heavy storm had got up, which is drawn into a vortex.

⁵ For the alternation between *-m* and *-n*, see *nilam/nilaṇ*, “ground”, and *pulam/pulaṇ*, “arable land”, quoted in Andronov (2003: 100).

⁶ In a footnote Hart (2015: 4) writes: “‘Low-born’ translates *ciṛu*, “small.” For *ciṛiyaṇ*, the Lexicon gives ‘a small, mean person’ but here the word apparently refers to the status of the whetstone maker.”

same time, though, it is not clear what *kār*, “dark, black”, tells us about the boat in question. The passage may be translated as follows:

Like the stone (firmly) attached to the rope of the anchor of a small black boat, I will not part from you/my tongue lies still.

However, *payiṇ* does not mean just “rope”. It refers to a coil of rope, or to how a rope that is not used is generally kept on board a ship. In this light, note a descriptive name of Ādiśeṣa, namely *payiṇaṇ*, which according to the *Tamil Lexicon*, p. 2490, is found in Villiputtūr Ālvār’s *Makāpāratam*, *campavaccarukkam*, stanza 119.⁷ The relevant passage, 119 c, reads:

payiṇaṇ mēlvaru kalleṇac ceṛinta meyp pavaṇaṇ maintaṇum ottāṇ,

He (Bhīma) resembled (*ottāṇ*) the hero Vāyu (*pavaṇaṇ maintaṇum*) who greatly exited (*kalleṇa*) with a solid body (*ceṛinta mey*) attacked the Ādiśeṣa.

This battle between Vāyu and the snake Ādiśeṣa is described on p. 793 of Vettam Mani’s *Purāṇic Encyclopaedia* (1975: 793). where, however, the snake is not called Ādiśeṣa but that other name, namely Vāsuki, which it also had when it was used as the rope for the churning the Milk Ocean. The battle is about who is the stronger of the two. Vāsuki lay curled around Mount Meru so tightly that even air (Vāyu) could go in or out. From the ensuing fight no winner emerged, but it did frighten the whole world, after which Viṣṇu was called in to bring the two to reason. At Viṣṇu’s request the snake released a small part of the mountain from its suffocating grip. This part of Meru, called Trikūṭa, was taken up by Vāyu and next dropped south of the continent Bharata. Later the town Laṅkā was built on it. Though Vettam Mani does not mention the source of this story, there is no reason to doubt that *payiṇaṇ*, “he with a *payiṇ*”, refers to a snake here, more in particular, to a snake which has coiled itself around Mount Meru. In that way the snake looks indeed like a coil of rope, or rope coiled up. By way of illustration, I have below added two images of Viṣṇu sitting on the full-length body of the snake Ananta, which is rolled up like a coil of rope.

Having established a more satisfactory meaning of the word *payiṇ*, one that fits the contexts better and thus calls for a different interpretation of the passages in which it occurs, its derivation remains unclear. The word belongs to a small category of nouns ending in *-iṇ*, which besides words like *vayiṇ*, “place” and *kaviṇ*, “beauty”, which are well attested in Caṅkam poetry, includes more obscure words, like *eyiṇ*, the name of a tribe, or the plant name *ukiṇ*, “Indian hogplum”. At the same time, the category consists of quite a number of plantnames ending in *-piciṇ*, which refers to the resin or gum produced by these plants, e.g. *kampilippiciṇ*, “Dikmali gum-plant”. It is not unlikely that in trying to establish the meaning of *payiṇ* the early commentators ended up looking among the other words of this small category and took it to be a synonym of *piciṇ*. “resin, gum”.

⁷ After a question for a pdf of the text posted on the Indology List, I received replies from Appasamy Murugaiyan (https://archive.org/details/vrajeshkumar_gmail_01) and from Ravindran Ramacchandran (<http://www.tamilvu.org/library/13800/html/13800ind.htm>). I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to both colleagues.

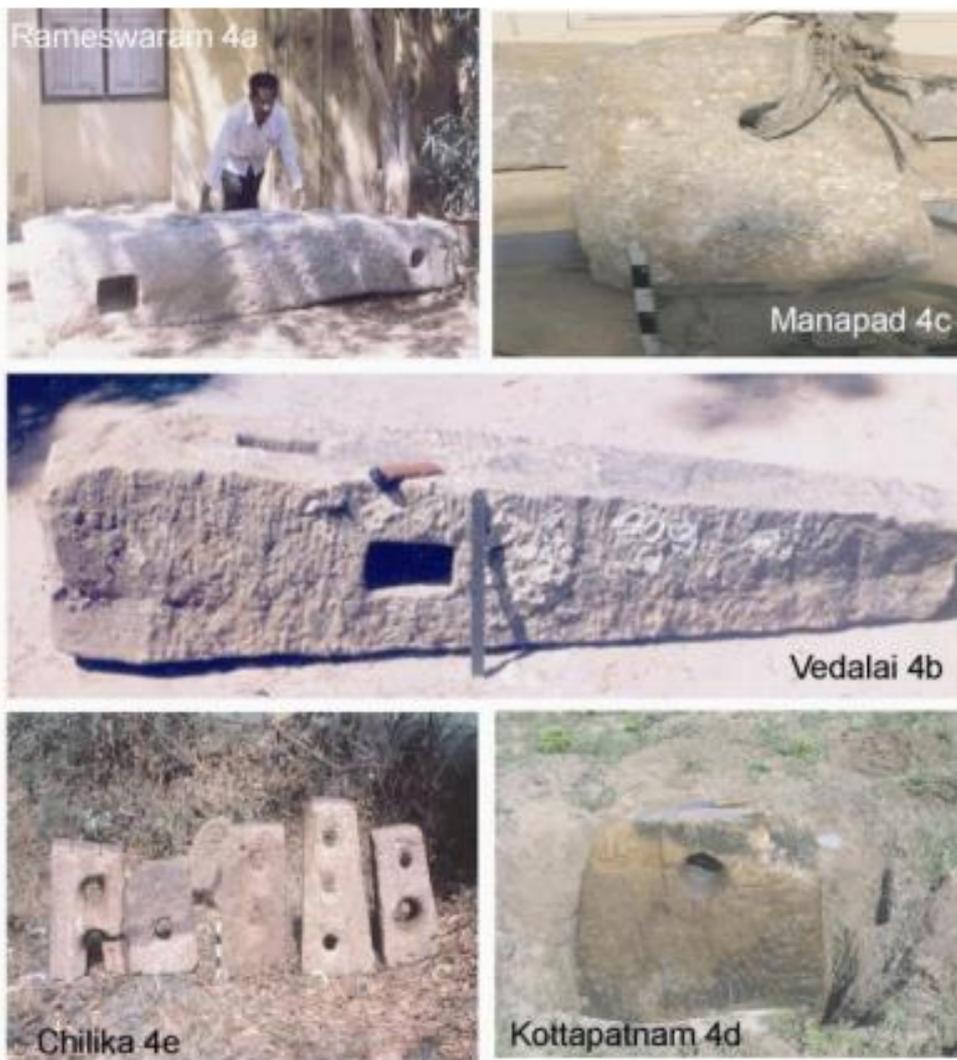


Fig. 4 Types of stone anchors found along the east coast of India. (Sila Tripathi and N. Athiyaman)

From Tripathi, Sila. 2014. "Stone anchors of India: Findings, Classification and Significance". In: Proceedings of the 2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Underwater Cultural Heritage Edited by Hans Van Tilburg, Sila Tripathi, Veronica Walker, Brian Fahy, Jun Kimura Honolulu, Hawaii, May 12-16, 2014, Vol. 2: 973-986.



Viṣṇu sitting on Ādiśeṣa. Lakshmi Narayana Temple, Hosaholalu



Viṣṇu sitting on Ādiśeṣa. Sri Chennakeshava Temple. Somanathapura (Wikimedia commons)

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