

The Fifteen Meanings of *pāṇṭil*

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Introduction

For Tamil *pāṇṭil*, found only in classical literature, the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 2598) gives altogether fifteen meanings. For three of these, “bowl of a lamp” (*Piṅkalanikaṅṭū*), “Taurus of the zodiac” (*Cēntaṅ Tivākaram*) and “country, territory” (Winslow’s dictionary, 1862), it refers to other (traditional) dictionaries. The remaining twelve are based on interpretations of actual text passages: “circle” (*Aiṅkuṟunūru* 310), “small bowl or cup” (*Puṟanānūru* 97), “a pair of cymbals” (*Cilappatikāram* 26, 194), “horse-drawn chariot” (*Narriṅai* 141), “two-wheeled chariot” (*Cilappatikāram* 14, 168), “felly of the wheel of a chariot” (*Cilappatikāram* commentary to 14, 168), “circular bedstead or cot” (*Neṭunalvāṭai* 123), “glass, mirror” (*Puṟapporuḷvenpāmālai* 6, 12), “circular piece of hide used in making a shield” (*Patirrupattu* 74, 11), “saddle” (*Patirrupattu* 90, 35), “bull” (*Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 2054) and “stand of lamp, standard” (*Neṭunalvāṭai* 175). In addition, the dictionary has a separate lemma for the siris flower, called *pāṇṭil*. We clearly have to do with a range of contextual meanings, some of which appear to have in common the supposed circular form of the object in question. It is unclear, though, how the meanings “saddle”, “bull” and “lamp-stand” would fit in. It does not help that the word does not seem to have any cognates in the other Dravidian languages or any counterparts in Sanskrit for any of its meanings, except, possibly, for the siris flower, for which the *Tamil Lexicon* quotes Sanskrit *bhāṇḍīra*. However, before considering possible cognates it will be necessary to find out what a *pāṇṭil* actually is, which is as yet far from clear. To this end I propose to have a closer look at the instances of the word as they occur in classical Tamil literature. The Pondichéry *Index des mots de la littérature tamoule ancienne* mentions 22 instances, to which three may be added from texts not covered by this index. As I will show, of these 25 instances five do not properly belong here. Next I will have a closer look at the remaining 20 instances, in the first place those that might provide information about the material and shape of the *pāṇṭil*, and the various functions the objects in question seem to have had. After that, the other instances will be dealt with more briefly.

pāṇṭil “bull” and “siris flower”

As will be shown below, in the majority of instances *pāṇṭil* refers to a metal object. Therefore, five of the instances may be discarded, since four of them refer to a draught animal and the fifth to a flower. Thus, in *Kalittokai* 109, 4 we have to do with a “young (*iḷam*) *pāṇṭil* of a bull (*ērrin*) yoked to a chariot (*tēr*)”. *Cīrupāṇārruppaṭai* 259-260 describes a *pāṇṭil* which shows great enthusiasm, has strong legs and a white head. The animal, together with a *valavaṅ*, or charioteer,¹ is gifted away. *Cilappatikāram* 14, 168 reads *vaiyamum pāṇṭilum maṇittērkkotuṅciyum*, “a cart, a draught animal and a staff placed inside the cart to hold on to, decorated with bells”.² In the first instance, *Kalittokai* 109, 4, there is a variant *pāṇṭi*,³ while in his commentary on *Cilappatikāram* 14, 168 the editor similarly notes that for *pāṇṭil* there seems to have been a variant *pāṇṭi*. This form is also found elsewhere, referring to a draught animal.⁴ This raises the question if these instances of *pāṇṭil* are actually corruptions of *pāṇṭi*,

¹ For *valavaṅ*, “charioteer”, see, e.g., *Puṟanānūru* 27, 8, *Narriṅai* 11, 8 and *Glossary of Tamil Inscriptions*, p. 541 (*tēppākaṅ*).

² For *koṭuṅci*, see *Cilappatikāram* 26, 132 and 213, and 27, 37.

³ For the variant *pāṇṭi*, see Irāṅṅavari (2015: 578).

⁴ For other instances of *pāṇṭi*, see *Paripāṭal* 10, 16, where the word is part of a list of animals: a horse as fast as a bird, a female elephant, an unruly (*akavu arum*) *pāṇṭi*, obviously an animal of some kind, and a mule. The

though *pāṇṭi* is as rare as *pāṇṭil*. Three other instances of *pāṇṭil* mentioning a draught animal (instances which are not included among those of *pāṇṭil* in the *Index des mots de la littérature tamoule ancienne*) are *Peruṅkatai* 1, 36, 32 (“a *pāṇṭil* decked out with a golden garland and as fast as a bird, fastened to the *kaṭamaṇai*, or front part of the cart”), 3, 5, 65 (“a *vaiyam*, or chariot, with a *pāṇṭil* running as fast as the wind”) and *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 2054 (“a *pāṇṭil*, adorned with a necklace of beads, a garland and chaplet, fed with ghee and milk ... was hitched (*paṇṇi*?) to a cart”; see Ryan and Venugopal 2018). In these instances the editors give the glosses *erutu* or *nārai* *erutu*, “an ox (*erutu*) with a dewlap (*nārai*)” and “a white (*nārai*) ox”. Obviously, the meaning “Taurus of the zodiac”, represented by the symbol of a bull, belongs here as well.

As indicated, in the *Tamil Lexicon* *pāṇṭil*, “siris flower” has a separate lemma. It is attested in *Aintiṇai Eḷupatu* 27, 1: *kārppuṭai pāṇṭil kamaḷa*.

The material of which the pāṇṭil is made

In the following instances the *pāṇṭil* is said to be made of metal, often gold. In *Aiṅkuṟunūru* 310 the woman’s hips (*alkul*) are covered – or decorated – by rows (*nirai*) of small shining metal objects (*kācu*) made of freshly polished (*pacum*) gold (*polam*) *pāṇṭils* (*polam pacum pāṇṭiṟ kācu nirai alkul*); and *Aiṅkuṟunūru* 316 reads *poṇ cey pāṇṭiṟ polaṅkala nanta tēr akal alkul avvari vāṭa*,⁵ “the gold ornaments consisting of *pāṇṭils* made of gold become dull and the beautiful folds in the broad-hipped (*tēr akal alkul*) woman’s stomach are disappearing”.⁶ However, whatever type of metal the *pāṇṭil* is made of,⁷ it shines or reflects light, as illustrated by the phrases *oḷirum pāṇṭil* in *Puṟapporuḷ Veṇpāmālai* 6, 12, *tikaḷ viṭu pāṇṭil* in *Paṭiṟruppattu* 74, 11 and *mīṇpūttanṇa viḷaṅkumaṇippāṇṭil* in *Paṭiṟruppattu* 90, 35. In the above two passages from *Aiṅkuṟunūru* strings of *pāṇṭils* are worn by women around their hips. This appears to be just one of the uses of *pāṇṭils*. In other passages they are found fixed on a warrior’s belt, his shield or his upper garment; they are also found to adorn a horse’s harness. Furthermore, they function both as a musical instrument and as the reservoir of an oil lamp. In what follows I will have a closer look at those passages which might tell us more about the form and shape of *pāṇṭil*, beginning with the *pāṇṭil* and the oil lamp.

meaning of *pāṇṭi* in *Paripāṭal* 20, 17 (*vaṅkappāṇṭiyiṟ tiṇṭēr ūravum*) is unclear. According to the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 3452), *vaṅkappāṇṭi*, which is found only here, is a kind of vehicle. It may be asked, though, if *vaṅka* does not derive from Sanskrit *vakra* (Middle Indic *vaṅka*), expressing the same idea here as *akavu arum*, “difficult to steer”, i.e. “unruly” in *Paripāṭal* 10, 16.

⁵ See also *Puṟaṇāṇūru* 353, 1-2: *ācil kammiyaṇ mācaṟap puṇainta/polaṅ cey pal kācaṇinta alkul*.

⁶ Compare the phrases *polam pacum pāṇṭiṟ kācu* and *poṇ cey pāṇṭiṟ polaṅkala(m)* with *Kuṟuntokai* 67, 4: *polāṅkala voru kācu*, “one (a single) shining metal object consisting of a gold ornament”. The *kācus* in *Tirumuruḷkāṟruppaṭai* 16 (*pal kācu niraitta cil kāḷ alkul*) were strung on threads (*kāḷ*). At this stage it is difficult to determine if this was also the case with the *pāṇṭils*, that is, if they had a hole in the middle through which to lead the thread, or if they were instead fixed on a belt.

⁷ *Peruṅkatai* 1, 33, 93-94 mentions an *aṭarppāṇṭil*, in which compound *aṭar* specifies *pāṇṭil*. It is not clear if we have to do with the noun *aṭar* here, “a thin plate of metal”, or with the verb *aṭar-*, “to hammer into the required shape”. In *Malaipatuḷkaṭām* 4 the same *aṭarppāṇṭil* serves as a musical instrument, most probably a pair of cymbals, which, however, is made of *urukku*, or cast metal. In the case of *aṭarpoṇ* in *Kalittokai* 22, 19; 51, 7; 140, 7, and *Aiṅkuṟunūru* 430, 2 it is difficult to decide whether we have to do with the verb or the noun *aṭar*. In *ceppaṭar* (*Akanānūru* 9, 4), “(an) *aṭar* made of copper”, *aṭar cey āy akaṟ cuṭar* (*Akanānūru* 19, 17) and *tikaḷ aṭar iṭu cutar* (*Paripāṭal* 21, 54) “flashes of light produced by a metal plate”, we are most likely dealing with the noun. Likewise, in *aṭarāmarai* (*Puṟaṇāṇūru* 29, 1), “a lotus of thin metal plate” and *poṇṇaṭar pūmpuṇai* (*Paripāṭal* 12, 12), “an artificial flower of thin gold plate”. In *vaṇṭaṭar aimpāl* (*Akanānūru* 181, 23) and *kall aṭarc ciṟu neṟi* (*Akanānūru* 72, 17) we have to do with the verb stem, which describes hair densely covered with honey bees and narrow paths densely covered with stones, respectively. In *aṭarpukar* (*Puṟaṇāṇūru* 6, 12) the verb seems to specify (“densely dark”?) the colour (*pukar*) of an elephant. For the meaning “densely”, see *Kriyāviṇ tarḱālattamiḷ akarāti*, p. 18.

The *pāṇṭil* of the oil lamp

In *Paṭiṟruppattu* 47, 5-6 we find the compound *pāṇṭilviḷakku*:

coricurai kavaru ney valipurāliṅ
pāṇṭil viḷakkup parūuccuṭar aḷala.

It describes high flames (*parūuccuṭar aḷala*) produced by a *pāṇṭilviḷakku*, which the modern commentator, who is also the editor of the text, glosses with *kālviḷakku*, “standing lamp”, as if *pāṇṭil* means “standard”. (I will return to the phrase *coricurai kavaru(m)* below.)

Subramanian in his translation speaks of “tall lamps ... furnished with a generous wick which burning gives off a brilliant light fed by liberal stocks of ghee poured to the brim and overflowing at the jutting nose of the lamp where the wick sucks up the fuel as it burns” (Subramanian 1980: 44). The one thing this instance makes clear is that we are dealing with an oil lamp, which is said to be filled with ghee (*ney valipurāliṅ*). From *Peruṅkatai* 1, 33, 93-94 it would appear, however, that the word *pāṇṭil* does not refer to the lamp’s standard (*kāl*), but to the part into which the oil is poured:

uḷḷiluturīya vollāṭarp pāṇṭir
riritalaik kolī yeritaru mālai

The night is set alight, having raised the wick in the shining metal *pāṇṭil*, which is filled to the brim with ghee.

Returning to the phrase *coricurai kavaru(m)* in *Paṭiṟruppattu* 47, 5-6 quoted above, it would appear that the ghee passes through a number of outlets (note the verb *kavar-*, “to separate into various channels, bifurcate”), in which wicks have been placed. As to *coricurai*, unlike in the case of the *kālviḷakku* we do not seem to be dealing with “jutting noses” (*pāce* Subramanian) or balconies open from above, but with tubes or nozzles. The object described represents a cow’s udder with (four) teats (*curai*) through which the milk flows (*cori*) and in which, in the case of the lamp, the wicks are stuck.⁸ It may be doubted, though, if the comparison has to be taken that literally, or if the tubes or noses are a standard part of the *pāṇṭil*. In any case, they will not have been part of the *pāṇṭil* worn around a woman’s hips, as they would hurt her, and have no counterparts in the *pakanṇrai* flower with which the *pāṇṭil* is compared, a comparison that will be discussed next. Possibly we have to do with notches or incisions in the rim instead, but even these need not be there, as the wicks themselves can suck up the oil (see Figure 1). The comparison with a cow’s teats would merely serve to underline the liberal flow of the ghee. We may well have to do with a so-called *kālviḷakku*

⁸ For *curai*, “cow’s udder, teat”, see *Narriṅai* 57, 5 *vīṅkucurai ṅemuṅka ... tīmpāl*, “sweet milk (is produced) ... when the swollen teats are squeezed”. See also *Kuruntokai* 132, 4 and 187, 2. The phrase *pāṇṭil viḷakkup parūuccuṭar aḷala* of *Paṭiṟruppattu* 47, 5-6 is also found in *Neṭunalvāṭai* 173-175, which reads:

vaṭantait taṅvaḷi yeritoru nuṭaṅkit
terkērpīraiṅciya talaiya narpal
pāṇṭil viḷakkir parūuccuṭar aḷala,

While high flames are coming from many good oil lamps, fluttering and bending towards the south with every blow from the cool northern wind.

In this translation *pāṇṭil viḷakku* is rendered simply by “oil lamp”, as such a lamp assumes the presence of a reservoir.

here, as in the figure below, but the point is that *pāṇṭil* does not mean “standard” or “pole”. Instead, it is a metal bowl, which in the above two instances serves as an oil reservoir for a lamp.



Figure 1: a *kālviḷakku*

The pāṇṭil and the pakaṇrai flower

Before moving on to the comparison of the *pāṇṭil* with the *pakaṇrai* flower I want to draw attention to the expression *pāṇṭirparuti* in *Paṭirrupattu* 74, 10-15. The passage and its context will be dealt with in more detail below. The point I want to make here is that the compound *pāṇṭirparuti* suggests a round object, and roundness is one of the characteristics the *pāṇṭil* shares with the *pakaṇrai* flower's calyx.

In two passages the *pakaṇrai* flower is compared with the *pāṇṭil*. The first one is *Narriṇai* 86, 1-4:

... *maṛavar*
vēl eṇa virinta katuppiṛ rōla
pāṇṭil oppiṛ pakaṇṇrai malaruṅ
kaṭum paṇi arcira naṭuṅka,

While we shiver in the fierce cold in which the *pakaṇṇrai* flowers bloom, resembling *pāṇṭils* on the shields made of animal skins, the hairs of which stand on end like robbers' spears thrown at them.

The animal skin (*tōl*) is a *pars pro toto* for a shield, and the hairs of the skin standing on end look like an equal number of spears that had pierced it. The second passage, *Akanāṇūru* 217, 6-8, reads:

pācilaip potuḷiya putaltorūm pakaṇṇrai
nīluṅ paccāi nīramaṛaittu aṭaicciya
tōleri pāṇṭiliṅ vāliya malara,

While among the dense green foliage of every *pakaṇṇrai* bush its flowers bloom whiter (or: brighter) than the shining (*eri*) *pāṇṭils* fixed (*aṭaicciya*) on shields, which hide (*maṛaittu*) the green colour the animal skin has acquired after having absorbed the indigo.

George L. Hart, who, incidentally, translates *pāṇṭil* with “piece of glass” here, writes that untreated leather, when coloured with indigo, acquires a greenish colour (Hart 2015: 224). (For more on *pāṇṭils* on shields, see below.) The above passage provides an exact description of how the *pakaṇṇrai* plant looks: a dense green foliage with here and there a white flower sticking out from between the leaves, echoing the contrast between the white, or rather shining, *pāṇṭils* on the dark brown skin of the shield. Furthermore, as an example of the trumpet flower species, seen from above the *pakaṇṇrai* presents a (white) round disc with a broad rim, tapering off in the middle towards the filaments and pistil at the bottom (see Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2: the *pakaṇṇrai* flower



Figure 3: *pakāṅṅrai* flowers against a background of dark green leaves

A trumpet with its wide bell up and a long tube ending in a narrow mouthpiece does not immediately bring to mind an oil reservoir. At the same time, the depth of the flower may be variable, becoming more shallow when it is fully open with only its round orb being visible between the green leaves. In that case it is a small step from the *pāṅṅṅil/pakāṅṅrai* to the cymbal, which consists of a concave disc or a shallow bowl with a broad rim. The meaning “cymbal” has been retrieved from *Paripāṅṅal* 15, 42:

pakar kuḷal pāṅṅṅil iyampa,

which François Gros translates as:

Sur le ton de la flûte, au battement des cymbales, les chansons.

For this interpretation he refers to the commentator Parimēḷaḷakar, according to whom *pakar* refers to the words of a song, *kuḷal*, or “flute”, to the melody and *pāṅṅṅil*, or “cymbals”, to the *tāla*, or “rhythmic beat” (Gros 1968: 266). The meaning “trumpet”, suggested by *pakāṅṅrai*, is preempted by that of “flute”.

Unfortunately, the two other instances do not provide information unequivocally pointing to the meaning “cymbal”. The one in *Malaipaṅṅikaṅṅām* 4 is found in an enumeration of musical instruments; it is hemmed in between a drum (*muḷavu*) and a horn (*kōṅṅu*). The relevant part of line 4 reads:

nuṅṅurukkuṅṅra viḷaṅṅkaṅṅar pāṅṅṅil.

As can be seen, in this case the *pāṅṅṅil* is made of thin (*aṅṅar*) and delicate (*nuṅṅ*) cast iron (*urukku*).⁹ The third instance is found in *Cilappatikāram* 26, 194:

iṅṅikuraṅṅ muracam iḷumen pāṅṅṅil

which Dikshitar (1939: 300) translates as:

⁹ The editor of the text glosses *pāṅṅṅil* with *takaṅṅu*, “metal plate”. Chelliah translates the word as “cymbal” (Chelliah 1962: 293).

roaring drums ... and sweet cymbals.

In spite of its seemingly simple structure – the drums are *iṭikural* and the cymbals *iḷumeṇ* – the text raises a problem. “Sweet” in “sweet *pāṇṭil*” translates *iḷumeṇ*, which, however, elsewhere imitates the sound of the *muracam* drum; see *muracam iḷumeṇa muḷaṅka* in *Puraṇāṅṅuru* 3, 3 and 93, 1. It is indeed difficult to hear in muffled *iḷum* the shrill sound produced by metal cymbals, and most likely this onomatopoeia is to be construed with preceding *muracam*. As a result the *pāṇṭil* is unaccompanied by any sound-imitating word, which leaves us in the dark about the type of musical instrument that might have been intended.

Patirrupattu 74

As already mentioned, in *Patirrupattu* 74 the *pāṇṭil* is described as round (*paruti*). While in the instances dealt with above *pāṇṭil* is found on animal skins which cover warriors’s shields, in this poem it is fixed on a *kṣatriya*’s upper garment made of the skin of a spotted deer. The poem is addressed to a king, praising him for how he organized a Vedic sacrifice which was to assure him of the birth of a son. He is now congratulated with the birth of this son, and with having worthy heir. The *pāṇṭil* passage consists of lines 10-15:

pulli yirulait tōḷṅutirtut
tītukaḷainteṅciya tikaḷviṭu pāṇṭir
paruti pōkiya puṭaikilai kaṭṭi
eḷkuṭai yirumpiṅ uḷḷamaittu vallōṅ
cūtu nilaiyurṛuc cuṭarviṭu tōṛram
vicumpāṭu marapir paruntūraḷappa.

During the sacrifice the king was wearing an upper garment which in accordance with the rules laid down in the *Dharma-* and *Gṛhyasūtras* was for him as a *kṣatriya* made of the skin of a spotted deer – the *pulli yiralai* in line 10.¹⁰ For brahmins the garment is instead made of the skin of a black doe and for *vaiśyas* of the skin of a goat.¹¹ In all cases it is made by a craftsman (*vallōṅ*).¹² The first thing the craftsman did, after having caught, killed and skinned the deer, was to remove pieces of flesh left on the inside of the skin (*ūṅ utirttu*). In the commentary supplied by Turaicāmi Piḷḷai, the editor of the text, the phrase *tītu kaḷainteṅciya* in the next line seems to have been broken up into *tītu kaḷaintu* and *eṅciya*, and *eṅciya* is constructed directly with *tikaḷ viṭu*, which, in turn, would describe *pāṇṭir paruti pōkiya puṭai*. However, the phrase *tītu kaḷainteṅciya* means “(those blemishes) that remained (*eṅciya*) after the more obvious ones had been removed (*tītu kaḷaintu*)”. The phrase may be compared with *yāṅai yoṭittuṅṅeṅciya yā vari nilar ruṅcum* (*Kuruntokai* 232, 4-5), “which sleeps in the dappled shade of the *yām* tree, or what was left of it after its branches and leaves were broken and eaten by the elephant”, and *māṅ uṅṅeṅciya kalīḷi nīrē* (*Aiṅkurunūru* 203, 4), “the water muddy after the deer had been drinking there (and disturbed it)”. As such the phrase cannot be a description of following *pāṇṭil*, which does not denote a blemish, so we have to look for a head noun further on in the text. As far as I can see, the first one that comes into consideration

¹⁰ In his messy translation, for which, see footnote 13 below, A.V. Subramanian puts the uppergarment on the shoulder of the king’s wife (Subramanian 1980: 70-71).

¹¹ See, e.g. *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* 1, 3, 3-5. *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra* 1, 19, 10.

¹² For this meaning of *vallōṅ*, see for instance *Puraṇāṅṅuru* 33, 16, *Narriṅai* 77, 8, and *Akaṅṅūru* 98, 19 and 134, 5.

is *kaṭṭi*, which apart from being the verbal participle of *kaṭṭu-*, “to construct”, as it is taken to be by the editor, is also a noun meaning “clod, lump, boil, abscess”, found on someone’s skin. In this context, we seem to be dealing with a big lump or abscess, exceeding (in size) (*pōkiya*) the circumference (*paruti*, compare Sanskrit *paridhi*) of the *pāñṭil*. As to the words *puṭai kiḷai*, the commentator’s paraphrase of the passage is of interest: *pāñṭir paruti pōkiya puṭai kiḷai kaṭṭi: vaṭṭamāka arutta tōliṅ viḷimpilē; iṅamāka cērak kaṭṭi*, “along the hem of the skin which was cut into round pieces (the gems from Koṭumaṇam and pearls from Pantar, mentioned in lines 5-6) were properly (*iṅamāka?*) set”. However, as a synonym *iṅam* covers *kiḷai* only partly, and from *kiḷai* it is impossible to arrive at a meaning “properly”, or whatever else the adverb *iṅamāka* is supposed to mean in *iṅamāka cēra*. It is anyhow difficult to imagine what the phrase *puṭai kiḷai* would mean as a descriptor of a boil or abscess. In this connection the absence of a critical edition of the *Patirruppattu* is to be regretted. The edition available to me, the one by Turaicāmi Piḷḷai from 1950, does not list any variant readings for the passage under consideration. This edition, which was based on two unspecified manuscripts, was preceded in 1904 by one by Cāminātaiyar, which drew on six manuscripts (Wilden 2014: 109). If meaningful variant readings had been mentioned in Cāminātaiyar’s edition, they must have been available to Turaicāmi Piḷḷai and he might have mentioned them, though one cannot be entirely sure of that he would have done so. For all that I want to suggest that the text must originally have read *purai kiḷai kaṭṭi*, with *purai kiḷai-*, which according to the *Tamil Lexicon* (pp. 2778-9) is a synonym of *puraiyōṭu-*, “to become fistulous, as an ulcer”. (Compare *purai*, “deep ulcer, fistula”, and *kiḷai-*, “to ramify, branch out, abound”.) The boil or abscess on the cured animal skin proved too large to be covered by a round *pāñṭil*, so the craftsman repaired the skin hide with sharp iron pins (*eḥkuṭai irumpiṅ*) on or from the inside (*uḷḷamaittu*). Having consequently become a proper garment (*vallōṅ cūṭunilaiyurru*) which emits light (*cuṭar viṭu tōṛram*) because of the sharp iron pins stuck into the animal skin, the eagle hovering above (*vicumpāṭu marapir paruntu*) took it for a kill (*ūrāḷappa*).¹³

¹³ Compare *Patirruppattu* 51, 32: *nīram peyar kaṅṅip paruntūrāḷappa*, “the eagle took the warrior’s chaplet which had changed colour (smeared with blood) for a kill”. The light reflected from the animal skin is produced by the *pāñṭils* with which the craftsman had covered the smaller blemishes. The iron pins stuck into the garment make it look like a deer with the metal arrows and spears that killed it sticking out. In Subramanian’s translation (1980: 70-71) the light was in addition caused by the gems brought from Koṭumaṇam and the pearls from Pantar, mentioned in lines 5 and 6 of the poem. If, as I suggest, *kaṭṭi* is not a verb but a noun, there is actually no verb denoting the action of fixing the gems and pearls on the animal skin. Could we not be dealing with wealth collected from various places to finance the ritual sacrifice organized by the king? I may quote here Subramanian’s chaotic translation, in which, it will be noted, text passages far apart from each other are combined: “Those in your land with the expertise [*teriyunar*, l. 8] roaming over hills and mountains [*varaiyaka naṅṅik kuṛumpoṛai*, 7] sought [*nāṭi(t)*, 7] the deer of the special kind [(*puḷḷi*) *yirulai(t)*, 10] with glossy spots all over its body [*ciraṛuṭaiṭ paṅmpoṛi*, *puḷḷi*, 8 and 10] and spreading antlers looking like a branching twig [*kavaimaraṅ kaṭukkuṅ kavalaṭaiya maruppiṛ*, 9] and polished it and made it shine [*tītukalainteṅciya tikaḷviṭu (? pāñṭir)*, 11]; they then had the glossy skin cut to a round shape [*paruti pōkiya*, 12] and the edge sewed up [*puṭai kiḷai kaṭṭi*, 12] by a skilful craftsman [*vallōṅ*, 13] operating with a steel needle [*eḥkuṭai yirumpiṅ*, 13] who set bright gems along the hem [*puṭai ... uḷḷamaittu*, 12 and 13] procured from the town Koṭumaṇam and pearls from Pantar praised by all [*koṭumaṇam paṭṭa viṅaimāṅ aruṅkalam pantarp payanta palarpukaḷ muttam*, 5 and 6]. The skin was set with a central gem of such wondrous ruddy hue [*cūṭu nilaiyurru cuṭarviṭu tōṛram*, 14] the eagle flying in the air marked it down as a piece of flesh [*vicumpāṭu marapir paruntūrāḷappa*, 15]! The jewelled skin fit to be worn your queen dons: the handsome lady who wears this on her lovely shoulders, whose hair is soft and delicate like black sand [*cāyaraḷ kaṭukkuṅ tāḷirūṅkūntal*, 3] and her frontal curls falling over a lustrous forehead [*oṭuṅkīr oṭi yoṅṅutal*, 17], the lady that is like Goddess Thiru in all respects except the way She came into being [*vērupaṭu tiru*, 4] and the queen was born, became pregnant [*karuvil*, 17] for the perpetuation of yours, the royal Chēra line [*niṅ vaḷi*, 4]; at the end of ten months [*eṅṅiyan murrī*, 18], when it was due, she bore you a son [*perrāṅai*, 21] for the good of those that inhabit this world, a boy blessed with native good sense and a capacity to receive instruction as a prince that would fit him for his future role, instruction that

The combination of *paruti* and *pāñṭil* in lines 11-12 describes a flat disc, as, for instance, in *paruti nālattu* (*Puṛaṇāñṭūru* 174, 3), “of the world which is represented as a flat disc”.¹⁴ In *paruti cūlṅta vippayaṅ keḷu mānilam* (*Puṛaṇāñṭūru* 358, 1) it refers to the sun: “this vast earth around which the sun circles”; see also *pakal cey pal katirp parutiyañ celvaṅ* (*Akaṇāñṭūru* 229, 1), “the many-rayed sungod who makes the day”, and *oru kāl ūrtip parutiyañ celvaṅ* (*Akaṇāñṭūru* 360, 2), “the sungod driving his one-wheeled chariot”. If we combine this information with that of an oil lamp’s reservoir and a cymbal, a picture emerges of a round, domed piece of metal. The comparison of a *pāñṭil* of shining metal between the hairs of an animal skin with a white trumpet flower peeping through dense, dark-green foliage at first sight suggests a disc with the concave side facing outside. I think, though, and as already briefly indicated, that what the metal *pāñṭil* and the flower in the respective circumstances have in common is both their round form and their brilliance against a dark background. If in this case the round *pāñṭil* was concave as well, it was most likely fixed on the skin with the convex side up or facing outwards. In this connection it should be noted that in *Paṭiṛruppattu* 74 it is used to cover lumps or abscesses on the outside of the cured animal skin. Moreover, only then would it deflect arrows shot at the shield and thus reduce their impact.

In the case of the uppergarment or jacket described in *Paṭiṛruppattu* 74, the *pāñṭil* served a practical purpose: it was used to cover blemishes of the animal skin it was made of. The question may be put if this is not a secondary use and if the *pāñṭils* did not in the first place serve a decorative purpose, while one or two of them might have been used to cover blemishes as well. In any case, in the *Aiṅkuṛunāru* instances quoted above, in which a woman’s hips are covered with rows (*nirai*) of *pāñṭils*, they seem indeed to have a purely decorative function.

More on pāñṭils on shields

Above, two passages have been discussed in which a warrior’s shield is decorated with *pāñṭils*.¹⁵ However, these metal plates will no doubt also have had a practical function, namely that of reinforcing the shield. It is possible to read the following passage, *Puṛapporuḷvenpāmālai* 6, 12, in such a way that we seem to be doing with veritable badges of honour earned in battle by a great and successful warrior. The stanza reads as follows:

niṅra pukaloliya nillā uyirōmpi
iṅru nām vaikal iḷivākum venṛoḷirum
pāñṭil niraitōl paṅiyār pakaiyaraṇam
vēṅṭiṅ eḷitenrāṅ vēntu,

The king said: “to hold back to save our lives, which are impermanent anyhow, in the process giving up fame, which is permanent, brings shame. If we want to take in the

the boy imbibed with such zeal he has mastered the art of governance: his qualities like a balanced mind and other traits have developed a perfect state. You have, O King, sat at the feet of masters, learning scriptural texts [*kēlvi kēṭtu*, 1] and to the delight of noble men you have performed sacrifices [*vēlvi vēṭṭaṅai yuyarntōr uvappa*, 2] observing the vows prescribed [*?paṭivam oṭiyātu*, 1]. O mighty King that love warfare! You have paid the three-fold debt [*ivaṅarkkaruṅkaṭaṅirutta ceruppukaṅ muṅpa*, ll. 21 and 22]!

¹⁴ The presentation of the world, or rather the earth, as a flat disc (“runde Scheibe”) is discussed in Kirfel (1920: 9).

¹⁵ See the descriptions of shields in *Mahābhārata* 6, 56, 17: *suvarṇatārāgaṅabhūṣitāni śarāvarāṇi*, “shield decorated with a great number of golden stars”, and 6, 83, 30: *āṣabhāṇi ca carmāṇi śatacandrāṇi ... aśobhanta raṇe*, “on the battlefield shield made of a bull’s skin shine with hundreds of moons” (mentioned by Singh 1965: 116-118).

fortification of the enemy, when he refuses to submit himself, a shield with rows of shining *pāṇṭils* which we have won in many previous battles is all we need.”

“Which we have won in many previous battles” translates *venru*, which by its position at the very beginning of the second sentence should be compared to *venru* in *Puranānūru* 288, 2-4: *aṇṇaṇallēriṇaṇṭuṭaṇ maṭuttu/venṇataṇ paccai cīvātu pōrtta/tiṇpiṇi muracam iṭaippulattiraṅka*, “As in the middle of the battlefield the drum is beating, tightly bound with its leather straps, covered with the untreated skins of the two fierce bulls he (the hero/ drummer) had wrestled with and conquered” (adapted from Hart and Heifetz 1999: 170). The *pāṇṭils* in the above stanza from *Purapporuḷvenpāmālai* are presented as tokens of the heroism the warrior had shown in battle. This does not rule out, of course, that they may have had other functions as well, that of reinforcements or repairs.

In *Puranānūru* 97 and *Narriṇai* 141 the *pāṇṭils* are mentioned as part of the outfit of a warrior. *Puranānūru* 97, 15-16 reads:

polantumpaik kaḷarpāṇṭir
kaṇaiporuta tulaittōlaṇṇē,

He wears the golden *tumpai* flower, the anklet, *pāṇṭils* and a shield hit by arrows and full of holes.¹⁶

Unfortunately, it cannot be determined if the *pāṇṭils* are indeed part of the enumeration (*tumpai*, *kaḷal*, *pāṇṭil* and *tōl*), as in the translation given above, or if the word somehow has to be construed with following *tōl*, or shield. The passage *Narriṇai* 141, 7-9 reads:

... .. *paruntupaṭap*
pāṇṭiloṭu poruta palpiṇart taṭakkai
yēntukōṭṭiyāṇai yicaivenkiḷli.

Before offering a translation I want to draw attention to a significant variant reading for the phrase *paruntu paṭa*, “so that kites come down (to tear apart the dead corpses)”, namely *cēkumāṇ*, which describes following *pāṇṭil* as “an excellent piece of work (*māṇ*) known for its hardness and solidity (*cēku*)”:¹⁷

Fierce and famous King Kiḷli, whose army includes elephants which raise their tusk high into the air and have broad trunks with many bruises (*piṇar*) from crashing into excellent, solid *pāṇṭils*.¹⁸

¹⁶ For curiosity’s sake I quote the translation by Hart and Heifetz (1999: 97): “He himself ... wears a garland of golden *tumpai* blossoms and carries a shield pierced by arrowheads that leave marks like leg rings and like tiny bowls [*pāṇṭil*].”

¹⁷ For *pāṇṭiloṭu poruta* the same source has *vēntaroṭu poruta*, in which case *cēkumāṇ* does not make sense. The variants are provided in Eva Wilden’s edition of the *Narriṇai* (Wilden 2008). Yet another variant for this passage is *porunta* for *poruta*. I do not see, however, how this infinitive fits into the passage.

¹⁸ Wilden’s translation of the last part runs as follows: “with broad trunks with many rough spots that dashed against chariots (?)”. In a note to this translation of *pāṇṭil*, she refers to a suggestion by Gopal Iyer that *pāṇṭil*, “circle”, via “wheel”, would be a *pars pro toto* for “chariot”. Though I do not agree with this, so far I can follow the argument. Wilden resorts to sheer nonsense, though, when she continues to write that the chariots were drawn by the elephants (“chariots to which the elephant (*sic*) are attached”).

In this interpretation *cēkumāṇ pāṇṭiloṭu poruta* explains the presence of bruises on the elephants' trunks, while with *paruntu paṭa* instead of *cēkumāṇ* an additional, or at any rate different, effect of the clash is introduced. As I see it, we have to do with *pāṇṭils* on the shields of strong opponents with long service records here. However, these *pāṇṭils* do not seem to represent traces of repairs, as suggested above, but rather, or also, seem to have turned the shield into a weapon in itself in close combat.

Neṭunalvāṭai

Five of the six instances of the word *pāṇṭil* in classical Tamil poetry that have not yet dealt with so far do not yield any more information about its form. I will return to them below. The sixth, however, namely in *Neṭunalvāṭai* 123-125, does seem to provide such information. Furthermore, in this particular passage the *pāṇṭil* appears to have a purely decorative function. *Neṭunalvāṭai* 123-125 is part of a description of a luxurious bed, beginning with the lower part (*nōṇmutal porutti aṭiyamaittu*), its pot-like feet that resemble a woman's swollen breasts (*vīṅkumulai*), and working its way upwards from there to such items as a neatly woven net-like curtain (*cālēkam*)¹⁹ set with pearls (*muttuṭai*), and pinned to (*kutturuttu*) and hanging down (*nārrī*) from (a frame), thus forming a canopy:

*pēraḷaveytiya perumpeyarp pāṇṭil
maṭaimāṇuṇṇilai poliyat toṭaimāṇṭu
muttuṭai cālēka nārrīk kutturuttu*

Before offering a translation of this passage I have to admit that I am uncertain about how to interpret the construction, or whether *pāṇṭil* is to be taken with *maṭai*: “clasps made of, or having the form of, *pāṇṭils*”, or is a third decoration of the curtain, beside pearls and clasps. For all that, in the translation below I have opted for the first solution. Apart from that, the meaning of *pēraḷaveytiya perumpeyarp pāṇṭil* is not self-evident, nor is it clear what *perumpeyar* or its synonym *perumpēr*, “of great fame, widely known”, is to mean as a descriptor of a *pāṇṭil*. Actually, the same question arises when *perumpeyar* or *perumpēr* are combined with, for instance, *yākkai*, “body”, in *Cilappatikāram* 28, 172: *perumpēriyākkai peṇṇa nalluyir*, “the good soul that has acquired a *perumpēr* body, or *accam*, “fear”, in *Cilappatikāram* 25, 101: *piḷaiyuyir eytir perumpēr accam*, “when a living being comes across a misdemeanor *perumpēr* fear arises”. Another instance that might be mentioned here is *Paṭiṇruppattu* 21, 7, in which *perumpeyar* is combined with *āvuti*, “(the smoke produced by) offerings poured into the sacrificial fire”: *virumpumey paranta perumpeyar āvuti*, “the *perumpeyar* (smoke produced by) offerings poured into the sacrificial fire, that brings to life the desire (of the performers to reach heaven) and truth”. We have to do with a Vedic sacrifice here, which is juxtaposed in a passage that follows with a less strictly regulated form of sacrifice. The Vedic sacrifice is *perumpeyar* because it is *virumpumey paranta*. Rather than “famous” one might consider a meaning “prestigious” or “marking the performer as a great man”. Another instance that may be referred to here is *Maturaikkāñci* 699, which, moreover, presents the same type of construction as the above *Neṭunalvāṭai* line. The instance reads *mikkupukaḷ eytiya perumpeyar maturai*, which may be translated as “it has won much fame, (therefore) Maturai is known as a town of great fame (or a widely known town)”. The above *Neṭunalvāṭai* passage may be translated as follows:

¹⁹ The word *cālēkam* is rare. The Pondichery index mentions two instances from *Muttoḷāyiram* (48, 4 and 51, 4). In Citamparanāta Mutaliyār's edition of this text it is found in 9, 4, meaning “lattice window”, and in 53, 4, meaning “fishnet”. It is tempting to connect *cālēkam* with Sanskrit *jālaka*, but how exactly this would be the case is unclear.

Having hung down and fastened with pins a net-like curtain set with pearls and its individual threads connected with finely decorated shining clasps, consisting of (round) metal plates well-known for their big size.

The point of the description seems to be that the threads are not connected by simple hooks but by veritable pieces of art (*iḷai*), namely hooks covered by *pāṇṭils*, or a round metal plate. As such, this passage provides some information of the size of the *pāṇṭil*: the object is large enough to hide the hook. In this instance the *pāṇṭil* does not seem to serve any practical purpose but, as said, is purely decorative.

The five remaining instances of pāṇṭil

In the following two instances the *pāṇṭils* are part of a horse's riggings or harness. Metal plates were a regular part of these, as ornaments or to protect the horse. Both Pant (1997) and Deloche (1990) provide numerous drawings and pictures of a horse's harness, but it is unfortunately difficult to point out any specific item with any certainty that may be said to be the *pāṇṭil* in question. Both instances are found in the *Patirrupattu*, the first one in 64, 9-10:

... .. *koy cuvaṛ puravi*
alaṅkum pāṇṭil iḷaiyaṇintīm eṇa

Say: you should give horses with well-kempt manes decked with (*iḷai*) glittering *pāṇṭils* (or: decked with swinging *pāṇṭils*).

The other instance is found in 90, 35-36:

mīṇ pūttanṇa viḷaṅkumaṇip pāṇṭil
āymayirk kavariṇ pāymā mēl koṇṭu

Riding a prancing horse with a plume of hair on its head as soft as that of the yak-tail (and) decked with precious stones (bells, *maṇi*) and *pāṇṭils* that shine like stars in the evening sky.

For the interpretation of *āymayik kavari* I follow the gloss supplied by the editor of the text (p. 434): *aḷakiya kavari mayirālākiya talaiyāṭṭattaiyum uṭaiya ... kutirai*, “a horse that has a plume on its head (*talaiyāṭṭam*) of the hair of the yak-tail”.²⁰

In *Akanāṇṇūru* 376, 8-9 the *pāṇṭils* are found on the warrior Atti's belt, side by side with jewels (or bells, *maṇi*). When Atti is dancing, the objects produce a tinkling sound (*telirppa*). Most probably, the *pāṇṭils* have only a decorative function here.

This leaves us with two instances in which the *pāṇṭil*, as in *Patirrupattu* 47, 5-6, *Peruṅkatai* 1, 33, 93-94 and *Neṭunalvāṭai* 173-175 discussed above, is a part of a lamp. The instances in question are *Aiṅkurunūru* 405 and *Patirrupattu* 52, 13-16. Before dealing with these two passages it should be mentioned that if their interpretation raises any questions, these do not directly concern the *pāṇṭil* itself. In *Aiṅkurunūru* 405 a mother holding her baby son is said to illuminate (*viḷakkāyiṇa!*) her husband's house like a red flame (*ceṅcuṭar*) rising

²⁰ For these plumes, see Pant (1997: 51).

from a lamp's shining bowl (filled with oil) (*oṅcuṭarp pāṅṭil*).²¹ As said, if there is a question about this poem it concerns the redness of the flame,²² which might be interpreted as signifying the wife's anger at her husband. In a majority of the poems in the decade 401-410 the wife, while embracing or feeding her baby son, has her back turned to the husband, behaviour which in the erotic Prākṛit poems of Hāla's *Sattasaī* is one of the ways in which a wife shows that she has enough of her husband's infidelities.²³

Patirrupattu 52, 13 describes a lamp illuminating the performance of a *tuṅaṅkai* dance performance. The line reads:

cuṭarum pāṅṭir rirunāru viḷakkattu,

A *tirunāru* lamp with a glittering reservoir.

It is difficult to determine what *tirunāru* is supposed to mean in this context. I have been able to trace only one other instance of *tirunāru*, in *Maṅimēkalai* 18, 43-44, in a description of a section of a *maṅṭapam*:

*arava vaṅtoṭu tēṅṅam ārkum
tarumaṅaṅ ṅemiriya tirunārorucirai,*

in one section of which, which was covered with fresh (white) sand and was *tirunāru*, honey bees were humming loudly.

Given the fact that the place attracts a great number of honey bees it is tempting to take *tirunāru* to mean something like "spreading a rich, fragrant smell" here. The question if this meaning applies to *Patirrupattu* 52, 13 as well is, however, beyond the scope of the present paper as it requires a another, detailed study of lamps in classical Tamil poetry.

Concluding remarks

The many specific meanings of the word *pāṅṭil* provided by the *Tamil Lexicon* appear to have been abstracted from the uses or functions of the object so named in the various individual contexts. In all cases, however, the *pāṅṭil* is a round, relatively thin and domed (concave or convex, depending on one's point of view) piece of metal. It is made of any type of metal, including gold, and in all cases it has a bright sheen. It is worn as an ornament, fixed on shields and sacrificers's jackets, and used as cymbals. The word is also used to refer to the oil reservoir of a lamp, in particular the relatively shallow type of reservoir as seen in the *kālvilakku*, or standard lamp. With the use of the word *pāṅṭil* to refer to a dish-like reservoir of an oil lamp it appears to overlap with Sanskrit *bhāṅḍa*. Furthermore, like *pāṅṭil* Sanskrit *bhāṅḍa* is also used as a word for a horse's harness, as, in for instance, *Māhābhārata* 7, 2, 16: *aśvān ...taptair bhāṅḍair kāñcanair upetān*, and 122, 45: *hayodagrair ... hemabhāṅḍavibhūṣitaiḥ*. It is, however, difficult to determine if *bhāṅḍa* refers to the harness in its entirety or to individual items of the harness, as seems to be the case with *pāṅṭil* in *Patirrupattu* 90, 35-36 quoted above. Apart from such considerations, it remains unclear

²¹ The editor of the text glosses *pāṅṭil* correctly with *poṅṅāl iyaṅra voru takaḷi*, that is, "a reservoir made of gold". Selby's translation runs as follows: "The mother became the light of the house, like a red glow in the bowl of a bright-flamed lamp" (Selby 2011: 159).

²² The "adjective" *cem* in *ceṅcuṭar* means really "red" here; see *ceṅcuṭar koṅṭa kuruti maṅṛattu*, "the court covered with blood that gave off a red glow", in *Patirrupattu* 35, 8 and *pavaḷac ceṅcuṭar tikaḷ oḷi mēṅṅiyaṅ*, "his body had the bright brilliance of (red) coral" in *Cilappatikāram* 22, 51.

²³ See Khoroché and Tiekén (2009: poems 369, 371 and 377).

where the ending *-il* in *pāṅṭil* would come from. For all we know, the derivation of the word *pāṅṭil* remains a mystery. I hope to have shown, though, that the number of meanings of *pāṅṭil* given in the *Tamil Lexicon* may be reduced considerably.

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