Imperial Languages and Public Writings in Tamil South India: A Bird's Eye View in the very Longue Durée

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Beyond Boundaries

Religion, Region, Language and the State

Edited by
Michael Willis, Sam van Schaik
and Lewis Doney

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Peter C. Bisschop and Elizabeth A. Cecil

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Imperial Languages and Public Writings in Tamil South India: A Bird's-Eye View in the Very *Longue Durée*

In North India, the Gupta period (ca 320–550 CE) witnessed the spread of Sanskrit as the expressive language of political inscriptions and the final displacement of the Prakrit languages in this capacity in the framework of what Pollock has called the Sanskrit cosmopolis.[1] This shift toward Sanskrit – for aesthetic rather than religious reasons, according to Pollock, who has also argued that Sanskrit had linguistic stability and had been secularized – also took place very early in South India, notably in Āndhra. It is from Āndhra that the oldest known copper-plate grant survives: the Prakrit Patagandigudem plates, which begin with a Sanskrit formula.[2] Āndhra is also significant as the region in which the Pallavas rulers first find mention. The Pallavas quickly shift from the use of Prakrit charters in favor of Sanskrit charters around the middle of the fourth century CE. Later, when the dynasty is reestablished in the north of present-day Tamil Nadu (around 550 CE), we find bilingual charters composed in both Sanskrit and Tamil.

The relocation of the Pallava polity to the northern portion of the Tamiḻakam ("the Tamil space"), and the linguistic dynamics that this geographic shift entailed, provide a useful introduction to the subject of this paper. I will look – in the very *longue durée*, from ca. 550 CE to the early nineteenth century CE – at the languages used in political expressions intended for public viewing (that is, in copper-plate and stone inscriptions) in the Tamil South, a region that experienced the coexistence and cross-fertilization of two rich literary and intellectual traditions, one expressed in Tamil, the other in Sanskrit. I will first adopt a dynastic approach (§ 2), examining language use by successive dynasties of the Tamil South in their epigraphical production. I will then focus on a particular district of present-day Tamil Nadu (§ 3) and assess its epigraphical languages over a very long period. The inscriptional records presented here are thus mainly royal inscriptions, that is, inscriptions commissioned by royal figures (which is especially the case of the copper-plate grants), but nonroyal records will also be taken account, especially when they contain eulogies of kings and royal self-depictions,

1 Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

2 *EIAD* 55, ca. 250–300 CE.

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presumably borrowed from royal records. My aim is to assess which languages were used in inscriptions in the Tamil South, at which periods, and for which reasons.

1 Epigraphy in the Tamil South

The Tamil South is one of the richest regions for the study of Indian inscriptions. A reasonable estimate of their quantity is 30,000 inscriptions, mostly on stone (temple walls) and copper (grants).[3] These were written in different languages (Sanskrit, Tamil, Maṇippiravāḷam, Telugu, etc.) and different scripts (Grantha, Siddhamātṛka, Tamil, Vaṭṭeḻuttu, etc.), in various constellations: most inscriptions were composed exclusively in Tamil, but a significant number of bilingual inscriptions, mainly in Tamil and Sanskrit, are also found. Unlike other regions of India in which bilingual inscriptions are found, the Tamil South is unique in that different scripts were used for Sanskrit and Tamil: Grantha and, rarely, Siddhamātṛka script for Sanskrit, and Tamil and Vaṭṭeḻuttu script for Tamil-language inscriptions.

The choice of language and language register often depended on the content of the record and the type of material (stone, copper, etc) to be inscribed. Typically, charters produced between the seventh and fourteenth century CE were bilingual (Sanskrit and Tamil) and diglossic, while later ones were monolingual (Sanskrit or Tamil or another southern language). The cases of diglossia – "hyperglossia," as Pollock calls it, underlining the fact that Sanskrit was a superordinate language with respect to Tamil[4]– are those in which Sanskrit is used for the eulogy and Tamil for the administrative portion, or when (part of) a Tamil record written in prose or "administrative" style also contains a royal eulogy in literary and metrical Tamil (that is, *meykkīrtti*).

Often, words written in Grantha script can be found in inscriptions written mostly in Tamil language and script. For instance, it is customary to begin an inscription with the words *svasti śrī* written in Grantha. Some words are preferably written in Grantha at some periods, and later on become assimilated to Tamil orthophony and orthography. For instance, we find both *brahmadeya*

3 This count excludes graffiti and inscriptions on potsherds. For a table of the distribution of Tamil inscriptions, see Y. Subbarayalu, "Tamil Epigraphy Past and Present," in *Negotiations with the Past: Classical Tamil in Contemporary Tamil*, eds. M. Kannan & C. Mena (Pondicherry: IFP, 2006), 47.

4 Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, 50 and 118.

(Grantha) and *piramateyam* (Tamil script, i.e. *piramatēyam*), sometimes in the same inscription. I would not however describe such inscriptions in terms of epigraphic Maṇippiravāḷam (mixing of Sanskrit and Tamil language): the Sanskrit words are not numerous and are typically used to refer to normative concepts or categories of the cosmopolitan order (for instance, *brahmadeya* to designate a grant to Brahmins or *maṇḍapa* to designate an architectural element); in other words, Sanskrit and Tamil here are again in a diglossic relationship.[5] Other inscriptions (or parts of inscriptions), of which I will present some examples below, illustrate what I would call epigraphic Maṇippiravāḷam proper, since in these inscriptions, the Sanskrit and Tamil languages are used complementarily in the same function.

I will also show that the inscriptions commissioned by major and minor dynasties[6] in the Tamil area evince various strategies of public communication, which relied on the Sanskrit and/or Tamil literary traditions. Various genres of eulogy were produced: Sanskrit *praśasti*s proper, in the form of a genealogy; Tamil *meykkīrtti*s, focused on the achievements of a single ruler; *birudāvali*s or lists of *birud*as or *biruda* titulature, that is, strings of glorifying sobriquets of the king. I will illustrate my points with inscriptions drawn from the corpora of the Pallavas, Pāṇḍyas, Muttaraiyars, Irukkuvēḷs, Cōḻas, Kāṭavarāyars, Vijayanagara kings, Nāyakas, and Teṉkāci Pāṇḍyas. I have no ambition to be exhaustive here, as I have dealt extensively with the Pallava and Cōḻa inscriptions elsewhere.[7]

5 For the conceptualization of Sanskrit loanwords as a diglossic phenomenon, see Timothy Lubin, "Legal Diglossia: Modeling Discursive Practices in Premodern Indic Law," in *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-Cultural Fertilisation: Sanskrit and Tamil in Medieval India*, eds. Whitney Cox and Vincenzo Vergiani (Pondicherry: IFP & EFEO, 2013).

6 Major dynasties are "imperial" dynasties, such as the Pallavas and the Cōḻas, that were the dominant dynasties of their time in the Tamil South and played a transregional role. Minor dynasties are royal lineages, such as the Muttaraiyars, who were subordinate to the major dynasties of their time.

7 I will thus refrain from repeating what I have already published elsewhere, but will refer to earlier publications. Illustrations have been selected in order to call attention to graphic, and sometimes calligraphic, aspects of royal inscriptions, which, while extraordinary, are beyond the scope of the present paper. On calligraphy, see Richard Salomon, "Calligraphy in Pre-Islamic India," in *Indian Epigraphy: Its Bearing on the History of Art*, eds. Frederick M. Asher and G.S. Gai (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH, 1985); on the shell script (*śaṅkhalipi*), see, among many other publications, Richard Salomon, "A Recent Claim to Decipherment of the 'Shell Script,'" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, no. 2 (1987): 313–15.

2 Dynastic Approach

2.1 Pallava Charters (ca. 300 to 900 CE)

The Pallava inscriptions from ca. 300 to 350 CE (one pillar inscription and four copper-plate charters) are in Prakrit, with minimal portions in Sanskrit (see Table 1).[8] For the period of ca. 350 to 550 CE, we have from the Pallavas only copper-plate grants, written entirely in Sanskrit. As the Pallavas relocate to the north of present-day Tamil Nadu, around 550 CE, we start to find bilingual copper-plate grants in Sanskrit and Tamil. The first bilingual diglossic Sanskrit-Tamil copper plates in the Tamil South are the Paḷḷaṉ Kōyil copper plates.[9] Sanskrit is used for the *praśasti* of the first portion of the grant, while Tamil is used for the documentary or administrative portion that follows. We thus have here bilingual, diglossic Sanskrit and Tamil copper-plate grants.

Table 1: Pallava copper plates (ca. 300–900 CE).

	ca. 300–350 CE (4 sets)	**ca. 350–550 CE (15 sets)**	**ca. 550–900 CE (15 sets)**
Prakrit	4 sets (Āndhra)		
Sanskrit		14 sets (Āndhra) 1 set (Tamil South)	2 sets (Āndhra)
Sanskrit & Tamil			13 sets (Tamil South)

2.2 Pallava Stone Inscriptions (ca. 550 to 900 CE)

The rock-cut caves and structural temples that the Pallavas had excavated and completed between the late sixth and late seventh century CE bear foundation

8 For a detailed presentation of the Pallava-period epigraphic corpus, see Emmanuel Francis, *Le discours royal dans l'Inde du Sud ancienne: Monuments et inscriptions pallava (IVème–IXème siècles)*, vol. 1, *Introduction et sources* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain, 2013), 61–75.

9 T. N. Subramaniam, "Paḷḷaṉkōvil Jaina Copper-plate Grant of Early Pallava Period," *Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India 1958–1959* (1959).

inscriptions in Sanskrit.[10] The Pallava kings were also fond of lists of *birudas*, that is, glorifying sobriquets extolling their fame. For example, the ruler Mahendravarman I (ca. 600–625) has *birudas* in several languages: Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Pillar found in the Ekambaranātheśvara temple, Kāñcīpuram, ca. 600 CE (today kept at the entrance of the Chennai Government Museum). Photo: E. Francis, 2017.

Narasiṃhavarman II Rājasiṃha (ca. 700–725 CE) has *birudas* in Sanskrit only, but in four different scripts (Figure 2): two varieties of Grantha and two varieties of Siddhamātṛka (one extremely ornamental) (Figure 3).

In the ninth century CE, we notice a modest uptick in the use of Tamil in royal Pallava records other than bilingual diglossic charters and the general rise of

10 See Francis, *Le discours royal*, 1:68–69; Emmanuel Francis, *Le discours royal dans l'Inde du Sud ancienne*: *Monuments et inscriptions pallava (IVème–IXème siècles)*, vol. 2, *Mythes dynastiques et éloges royaux* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain, 2017), 511ff., 537ff., 584ff.

Figure 2: Base of one of the miniature temples (no. 7) of the *prākāra* of the Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram, ca. 700–725 CE. Photo: E. Francis, 2008.

Tamil language as a politically expressive medium,[11] but there are earlier examples of smaller ruling lineages (such as the Muttaraiyars, below) that drew from the Tamil literary tradition in their epigraphic production before the Pallavas did.[12]

The royal Pallava corpus also contains other biscript or digraphic inscriptions, such as that found on the rock to the left and right of the entrance of a seventh-century CE cave at Cāḷuvaṉ Kuppam, near Māmallapuram (Figure 4).

It is possible that both of these inscriptions are part of a later intervention in the monument – perhaps a cave from the first half of seventh century CE may have been renovated at the beginning of the eighth century CE or slightly

11 See Francis, *Le discours royal*, 1:67 and 2:648.

12 On epigraphic praise in Tamil language during the Pallava period, see Emmanuel Francis, "Praising the King in Tamil during the Pallava Period," in *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-Cultural Fertilisation: Sanskrit and Tamil in Medieval India*, eds. Whitney Cox and Vincenzo Vergiani (Pondicherry: IFP & EFEO, 2013), 305–409.

Figure 3: Examples of inscriptions on the bases of the miniature temples of the *prākāra* of the Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram, ca. 700–725 CE. From top to bottom: Siddhamātṛka from miniature temple no. 3; two varieties of Grantha from miniature temple no. 7; and ornate Siddhamātṛka from miniature temple no. 17. Photos: E. Francis, 2008.

Figure 4: Cāḷuvaṉ Kuppam, Atiraṇacaṇḍeśvara cave, ca. 650–725 CE. From left to right: Sanskrit inscription in Grantha script, left of entrance; general view of the cave; Sanskrit inscription in Siddhamātṛka script, right of entrance. Photos: E. Francis, 2009, 2007, 2009.

earlier. On the left side of the entry to the cave, the visitor finds Sanskrit stanzas engraved in Grantha script, while on the right side, a nearly identical Sanskrit text is found, but written in a different, Siddhamātṛka-like script (Figure 5).[13]

Figure 5: The term *abhiṣeka-jalāpūrṇṇe* (first *pāda* of stanza 2), Cāḷuvaṉ Kuppam, Atiraṇacaṇḍeśvara cave, ca. 700 CE. Left: in Grantha script, on the rock at the left of the entrance of the cave. Right: in Siddhamātṛka script, on the rock at the right of the entrance of the cave. Photos: E. Francis, 2009, and processed facsimiles published in *EI* 10 (1909–10).

This Pallava eulogy from Cāḷuvaṉ Kuppam, as well as the above-mentioned four-row list of *birudas* at the Kailāsanātha temple, are part of a small corpus of royal inscriptions from South India, dated to the seventh and eighth centuries CE, that consists in paired texts, engraved on the same support or on different but complementary positions at the same temple or site. The paired inscriptions, in Sanskrit, feature more or less the same text, while the scripts are markedly different. One script is of a North Indian style – described in earlier scholarship as Nāgarī, though it might be preferable to label it Siddhamātṛka, as the Nāgarī script is not attested before the second half of the ninth century CE[14] – while the other is a refined and ornamental variety of the regional South Indian script. Besides the above examples from the capital and ceremonial cities of the Pallavas (Māmallapuram and Kāñcīpuram) in present-day Tamil Nadu, we also find other instances from the same period under the Western Cāḷukyas at Paṭṭadakal in present-day Karnataka.[15] The Pallavas and the Cāḷukyas both

13 The inscription on the left side of the entrance is longer than its counterpart on the right side of the entrance, as two further Sanskrit lines in Grantha script were added by another hand.

14 See Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 39–41.

15 For a recent assessment of the Paṭṭadakal biscript inscribed pillar, see Elizabeth A. Cecil and Peter C. Bisschop, "Columns in Context: Venerable Monuments and Landscapes of Memory in Early India," in *History of Religions* 58.4 (2019): 355–403. For late ninth-century CE examples of biscript inscriptions from Cambodia, see Julia Estève and Dominique Soutif, "Les

claimed the status of universal sovereign at that period; these biscript inscriptions participate visually in this rivalry, as the command of the cosmopolitan Sanskrit in two different scripts – one indexing the local and South Indian context, the other the North Indian homeland of translocal Sanskrit – supported their claim for authority and for the status of universal ruler of India.

2.3 Early Pāṇḍyas (ca. 750 to 900 CE)

The early Pāṇḍyas also issued copper-plate grants. These were bilingual Sanskrit and Tamil inscriptions like the Pallava copper-plate grants, but unlike their Pallava counterparts, their Tamil portions also contain a versified eulogy of the donor and his family.[16] These early Pāṇḍya plates, with their dichotomy between the Sanskrit eulogy and the Tamil administrative section, are thus diglossic like the Pallava grants. At the same time, however, the Tamil language, like Sanskrit, was also used for poetic praise. So while the same diglossia – that is, between the Sanskrit eulogy and the Tamil administrative section – operates here as in the Pallava grants, the novelty is that the first part of the Tamil portion has the same eulogistic function as the Sanskrit *praśasti* that precedes it. This eulogistic Tamil portion even adopts the conventions of the Sanskrit *praśasti* (for instance, the genealogical format). It thus appears as an example of the larger process of vernacularization that Pollock traces in his work – that is, the vernacular takes the Sanskrit literary tradition as its model.

We also find *biruda* eulogies in these Pāṇḍya charters, as in the Tamil section of the early Pāṇḍya Vēḷvikkuṭi plates (second half of the eighth century CE), where the king Neṭuñcaṭaiyaṉ is praised with a string of *birudas*, most of them Sanskrit loanwords in Grantha – marked with the Tamil third-person singular suffix *-aṉ*, Grantha-ized as *n* – as well as some *birudas* in Tamil.[17] This is an instance of epigraphic Maṇippiravāḷam proper, i.e. the mixing of Sanskrit and Tamil, where both languages have the same function.

Yaçodharâçrama, marqueurs d'empire et bornes sacrées – Conformité et spécificité des stèles digraphiques khmères de la région de Vat Phu," *BEFEO* 97–98 (2010–2011), 331–55.

16 For examples of early Pāṇḍya plates containing a Sanskrit *praśasti* followed by a Tamil metrical eulogy, see *IEP* 7, 11, 16, 61, 79, 90.

17 See Emmanuel Francis, "Multilingualism in Indian Inscriptions: With Special Reference to Inscriptions of the Tamil Area," in *Aspects of Multilingualism in South India*, eds. G. Ciotti & E. MacCann (Pondicherry: EFEO & IFP, forthcoming).

The early Pāṇḍya corpus comprises other (rare) instances of epigraphic Maṇippiravāḷam, such as on a slab found in the bed of the river Vaikai (Figure 6).[18] Two different scripts are used: Vaṭṭeḻuttu for Tamil, Grantha for Sanskrit, thus Sanskrit and Tamil are intermingled the same way as in the Maṇippiravāḷam of the medieval Vaiṣṇava commentaries and Kerala Maṇippiravāḷam.[19] Both languages are on a par, without any diglossic relationship, equally contributing to the shared purpose of praising.

Figure 6: Vaikai river bed inscription, eighth (?) century CE. Photo: Babu N. Ramaswamy, 2011.

18 *EI* 38, no. 4.

19 Kerala Maṇippiravāḷam, as defined in the *Līlātilakam* of the late fourteenth century CE, is a literary, poetic, and metrical language mixing Keraḷabhāṣā, i.e. early Malayalam, and Sanskrit.

2.4 The Muttaraiyars (Eighth Century CE)

Minor dynasties in the Tamil South show other types of inscriptions and eulogies. For instance, in Centalai, four pillars, each engraved on their square upper sections, yield a total of four *biruda* lists and twenty-four Tamil stanzas glorifying the Muttaraiyar kings (Figure 7).[20]

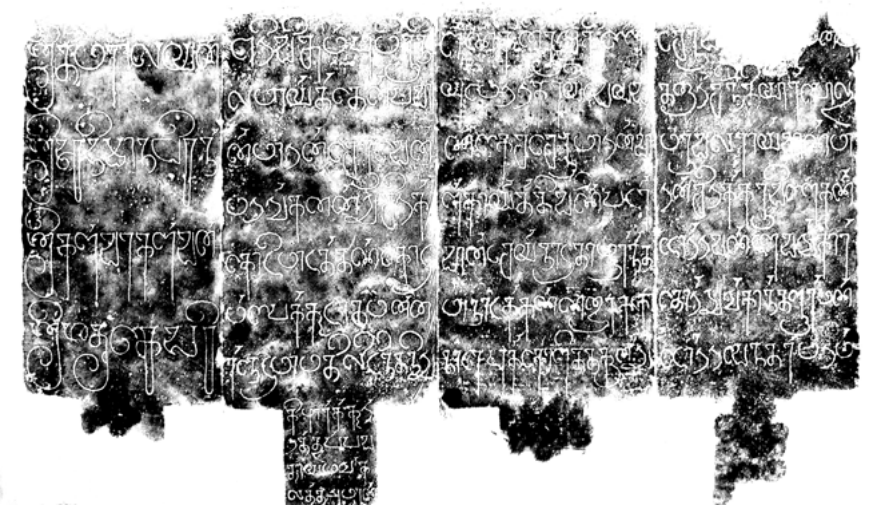

Figure 7: Pillar III, upper portion, Mīṉāṭcīcuntaresvarar temple, Centalai, eighth (?) century CE. From left to right: *biruda* list and three stanzas. Estampage: E. Francis, 2013.

While the Tamil poems in Centalai show that Tamil language, on its own, has the same capacity for praise as Sanskrit, the *biruda* lists are bilingual, with alternating *birudas* in Sanskrit and Tamil. Interestingly, one Tamil *biruda* (*śrīkaḷvarakaḷvaṉ*) is found written not only in Tamil script, but also in Grantha, a script normally reserved for Sanskrit.[21]

20 *EI* 13, no. 10, tentatively dated to the eighth century CE. See Francis, "Praising the King." Due to later construction, only 29 of the 32 inscriptions are accessible. Besides the *biruda* lists and the stanzas, there is a prose inscription introducing the lineage of the Muttaraiyar kings.
21 See Francis, "Multilingualism in Indian Inscriptions."

2.5 The Cōḻas (Tenth to Thirteenth Century CE)

Under the Cōḻas, we find bilingual (Sanskrit and Tamil), diglossic royal copper-plate charters similar to those of the late Pallavas. In the Cōḻa period, not only did kings issue plates, but also, for instance, temple authorities such as that of the Tirukkaḷar temple;[22] note, however, that the Tirukkaḷar plates were written entirely in Tamil and are not grants or charters proper, but list the property of the temple.[23]

As for Cōḻa-period stone inscriptions, those in Sanskrit are greatly outnumbered by their Tamil counterparts. Tamil stone inscriptions incorporate expressive Tamil in the form of *meykkīrtti*s. One example is the programmatic inscription of the whole epigraphic corpus of the great temple that Rājarāja I had built at Tanjore at the beginning of the eleventh century CE (Figure 8).[24] In this inscription, engraved on the base of the temple, Rājarāja I orders that a list of his gifts and those of his close relatives be engraved on the temple. The inscription starts with a Sanskrit verse stating that what follows is an order of Rājarāja I. Then comes the *meykkīrtti* of Rājarāja I – that is, his eulogy in metrical Tamil – and then the content of the royal order in Tamil (as the reported speech of the king), followed by the list of donated items.

The great innovation of the Cōḻa period under Rājarāja I is the *meykkīrtti*, the metrical Tamil eulogy of the ruling king that is found as a preamble to hundreds of Tamil inscriptions, royal and nonroyal, in Tamil Nadu and beyond. *Meykkīrtti*s are pieces of poetry that owe little to the Sanskrit literary tradition, unlike the Tamil eulogies of the early Pāṇḍya charters, which follow Sanskrit literary conventions. *Meykkīrtti*s definitely do not constitute examples of vernacularization in the Pollockian sense. They are not, for instance, in the form of a genealogy and do not include Sanskrit words in Grantha.[25]

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22 See *SII* 3, nos. 207–211, i.e. five sets of copper plates dated between 1030 and 1207 CE.

23 For a study and examples of Cōḻa copper-plate inscriptions, see Emmanuel Francis, "Cōḻa Copper Plates (10th–13th century): Languages and Issuers," in *Whispering of Inscriptions: South Indian Epigraphy and Art History: Papers from an International Symposium in Memory of Professor Noboru Karashima*, eds. A. Murugaiyan and E. Parlier-Renault (Oxford: Indica et Buddhica Publishers, forthcoming).

24 *SII* 2, no. 1.

25 On the genre of *meykkīrtti*, see Emmanuel Francis & Charlotte Schmid, "Preface," in *Pondicherry Inscriptions: Part II. Translation, Appendices, Glossary and Phrases by Dr. G. Vijayavenugopal* (Pondicherry: IFP & EFEO, 2010); Emmanuel Francis, "Pierres & inscriptions. Usages royaux et locaux dans le Sud tamoul (VIIe–XIIIe siècles)," in *Rājamaṇḍala: dans le cercle des rois. La société de cour comme paradigme en Inde*, eds. E. Francis and R. Rousseleau (Paris: EHESS Éditions, forthcoming).

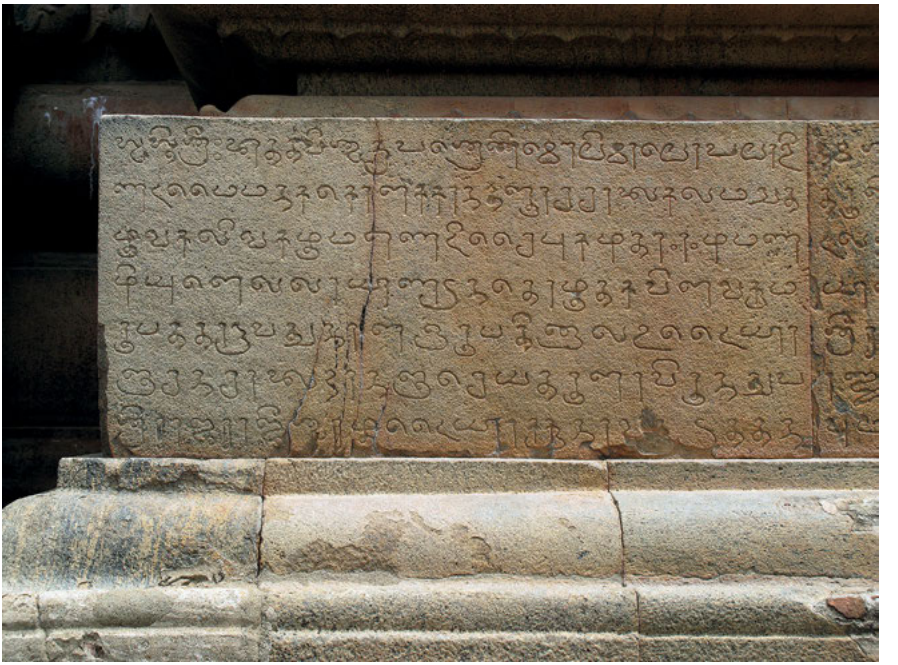

Figure 8: Tanjore, inscription of Rājarāja I Cōḷa, early eleventh century CE. Photo: E. Francis, 2008.

2.6 The Kāṭavarāyars (Late Twelfth to Thirteenth Century CE)

The end of the Cōḷa period saw the emergence of several would-be kings, such as the Kāṭavarāyars Kōpperuñciṅkaṉ I and Kōpperuñciṅkaṉ II, who claimed to be heirs of the Pallavas. A late-twelfth-century CE epigraphic poem praises several of the Kāṭavarāyars over eleven Tamil stanzas interspersed with prose.[26] On Kōpperuñciṅkaṉ I, we find Tamil and Sanskrit eulogies on stone inscriptions, some bilingual. For instance, at Vailūr,[27] a five-verse Tamil eulogy of Kōpperuñciṅkaṉ comes after a short prose passage that is also found, however

26 This poem is found twice, at Vṛddhācalam (*SII* 12, no. 263) and at Tiruveṇṇainallūr (*SII* 12, no. 264). See Leslie Orr, "Chiefly Queens: Local Royal Women as Temple Patrons in the Late Chola Period," in *The Archaeology of Bhakti: Royal Bhakti, Local Bhakti*, eds. E. Francis & C. Schmid (Pondichéry: IFP & EFEO, 2016), 404.

27 *EI* 23, no. 27 = *SII* 12, no. 128.

fragmentary, at Tiruvaṇṇāmalai.[28] Kōpperuñciṅkaṉ I is described as victorious over the Cōḻa king at Teḷḷāṟu and is addressed as Avaṉināṟāyaṇaṉ, Kāṭavaṉ, Nṟpatuṅgaṉ, king of Mallai. Such a description makes him the heir of the Pallavas and provides a parallel with the depiction of the Pallava Nandivarman III (ca. 850 to 860 CE) in the *Nantikkalampakam*, a ninth-century CE Pallava court poem praising Nandivarman III.[29] On Kōpperuñciṅkaṉ II, there is a lengthy twelve-verse Sanskrit eulogy written in Grantha script side by side with identical versions in Telugu and in Nāgarī scripts.[30] We thus have here a rare case of a trigraphic eulogy, with the same text engraved three times and in three different scripts.

2.7 The Bāṇas (ca. 850 to 1400 CE)

Other would-be kings, appearing in the historical records earlier than the Kāṭavarāyars and remaining in later times, are the Bāṇas.[31] Early Bāṇas (ninth century CE) are known from Tamil records dated to the regnal years of Pallava kings, some of which contain eulogistic or titulature-related phrases in Sanskrit in Grantha script.[32] From the same period, there recently surfaced an exceptional dedicatory inscription in Sanskrit at Taccūr: the inscribed slab, possibly part of a staircase and found along with other sculptures, records the foundation of

28 TAM 189, line 1.

29 On the *Nantikkalampakam*, see Francis, *Le discours royal*, 2:701ff. Further inscriptions praising Kōpperuñciṅkaṉ I are: a lengthy Tamil eulogy of Kōpperuñciṅkaṉ I (TAM 208 = *SII* 8, no. 69); a long string of Sanskrit *birudas* at the beginning of an inscription (*SII* 12, no. 120); a Tamil eulogy in six verses (*SII* 12, no. 125); and a record of his benefactions, which starts in Tamil and ends in Sanskrit (*SII* 12, no. 126). Leslie Orr has pointed out to me that other Tamil verses praising a Pallavarkōṉ are found at Karantai (*ARE* 1939–42, Appendix B [1939–40], nos. 140 and 142). This Pallavarkōṉ seems to be Kōpperuñciṅkaṉ I, since he is described as victorious at Teḷḷāṟu in one of the records. Kōpperuñciṅkaṉ I is also probably the Kāṭava king praised in three Tamil verses at Tirukkaṭaiyūr (*SII* 12, no. 265) and described as the vanquisher of the Cōḻa king.

30 *SII* 12, no. 247 and *ARE* 1905–06, Appendix B (1905), nos. 197 and 202.

31 My information about these later Bāṇa inscriptions derives mostly from Leslie Orr, "The Bhakti of the Bāṇas," in *Clio and Her Descendants: Essays for Kesavan Veluthat*, ed. M. V. Devadevan (New Delhi: Primus Publications, 2018). See also Orr, "Chiefly Queens" and Leslie Orr, "Women and the Gift in Medieval South India," in *Women, Religion, and the Gift: An Abundance of Riches*, ed. M. Joy (Springer International Publishing Switzerland, 2016).

32 See *SII* 3, nos. 42ff. (Tiruvallam) and *EI* 11, no. 22 (Guḍimallam). Sanskrit formulaic phrases are found, e.g., in *SII* 3, no. 42 (the Bāṇa king is involved in the transaction, but does not seem to be the direct commissioner of the inscription) and in *EI* 11, no. 22D. See *SII* 22, no. 86 for a variant formulaic phrase in an inscription dated to year 26 of Rājarāja I Cōḻa (1011/2 CE).

the Dayāvakeśvaragṛha by Satī, the daughter of the Bāṇa king Viṣṇu and the spouse of king Purodhaḥpati, whose lineage is not mentioned.

In addition, we have two sets of copper plates issued by Vikramāditya II (ca. first half of the tenth century CE).[33] The Guḍimallam plates[34] are almost entirely in Sanskrit: they provide, in Sanskrit, the genealogy of the Bāṇas, followed by a statement of the recorded transaction, which is the confirmation of a land grant to Brahmins (lines 1–53). The Tamil portion (lines 53–54) consists in one short sentence stating the revenue assessment (Tamil *puravu*) of the village granted. The Utayēntiram plates[35] are entirely in Sanskrit but are incomplete: we also find here a genealogy of the Bāṇas and the donation is likewise a land grant to Brahmins. The Utayēntiram plates might have ended with a Tamil portion. The set contains four plates, but one is an "odd plate," also incomplete and in Sanskrit, with verses identical to those found in the Guḍimallam plates, followed by Sanskrit prose. As put forward by Leslie Orr,[36] the Sanskrit is used for documentary purposes here, but unlike the Tamil of the administrative portions of bilingual plates, I would argue, as the focus here is on the eligibility of the recipient(s) of the grant rather than other details, such as the obligations and services owed to the recipient(s) by local people.[37]

On the later Bāṇas, whose connection with the earlier Bāṇas might be fictive, we also find some interesting stone inscriptions. For instance, discrete Tamil and Sanskrit metrical eulogies of the chief or magnate named Vāṇakōvaraiyar Poṉparappiṉāṉ Rājarājatēvaṉ, aka Makātēcaṉ (late twelfth and early thirteenth century CE), are found in the Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, Pudukkottai, and Madurai regions, as listed in Table 2.

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33 Another set has long been considered as Bāṇa, but is in fact more properly Cōḻa. See Emmanuel Francis, "Cōḻa Copper Plates (10th–13th century): Languages and Issuers" (forthcoming). Bāṇa copper-plate grants are known beyond the Tamil South, in Karnataka: the Beḷkere grant, in Sanskrit and Kannaḍa, dated to the third year of Vṛddharāja (*ARE* 1962–63, Appendix A, no. 42 = *DLCPI* 1, no. 11) and the Sanskrit Muḍyanūr plates, dated to the twenty-third year of Malladeva Nandivarman and, anachronistically, to the Śaka year 261 (= 339–340 CE). See B. Lewis Rice, "Mudyanur Plates of Saka 261 of the Bana King Malladeva-Nandivarman," *Indian Antiquary* 15 (June 1886): 172–177.

34 *EI* 17, no. 1, from present-day Andhra Pradesh, very close to present-day Tamil Nadu.

35 *EI* 3, no. 13, from the northern part of present-day Tamil Nadu.

36 See Leslie Orr, "Tamil and Sanskrit in the Medieval Epigraphical Context," in *Passages: Relationships Between Tamil and Sanskrit*, eds. M. Kannan & J. Clare (Pondicherry: IFP, 2009), 102, note 12, and Leslie Orr, "Words for Worship: Tamil and Sanskrit in Medieval Temple Inscriptions," in *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-Cultural Fertilisation: Sanskrit and Tamil in Medieval India*, eds. Whitney Cox & Vincenzo Vergiani (Pondicherry: IFP & EFEO, 2013), 329.

37 See Francis, "Multilingualism in Indian Inscriptions."

Table 2: Eulogies (verse) of Vāṇakōvaraiyar Poṉparappiṉāṉ Rājarājatēvaṉ, aka Makātēcaṉ (late twelfth century CE).

	Sanskrit verse	**Tamil verse**
Arakaṇṭanallūr	*ARE* 1934–35, Appendix B, no. 117	*ARE* 1934–35, Appendix B, no. 191
Tiruppālappantal		*SII* 17, no. 177
Tiruvaṇṇāmalai	TAM 214 = *SII* 8, no. 135 TAM 215 (same as TAM 214)	TAM 212 = *SII* 8, no. 97 TAM 213 = *SII* 8, no. 134 TAM 216 = *SII* 8, no. 145
Ceṅkamā		*SII* 7, no. 123
Nārattampūṇṭi	*ARE* 1924–25, Appendix B (1925), nos. 369–371[38]	*ARE* 1924–25, Appendix B (1925), nos. 367–368, 372–374
Tiruvāṉaikkāval	*ARE* 1908–09, Appendix B (1909), no. 482	*ARE* 1939–42, Appendix B (1941–42), nos. 255–258[39]
Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam	*ARE* 1939–42, Appendix B (1941–42), no. 247[40]	
Poṉṉamarāvati		*IPS* 677
Kuṭumiyāmalai		*SII* 22, nos. 381–383, 385

We thus find more Tamil than Sanskrit verses, but interestingly, eulogies in both languages are found at five sites. Leslie Orr notes that the Bāṇa chiefs directly patronized only the temples at Arakaṇṭanallūr, Tiruppālappantal, and Tiruvaṇṇāmalai. She further emphasizes that "the eulogies do not refer to the ruler as the patron of brāhmaṇas or temples, but instead focuses on his military prowess; only in one of the Sanskrit verses at Tiruvaṇṇāmalai[41] is there a brief mention of his having gilded the roof of the temple" and that "Makatecaṉ's title Poṇparappiṉāṉ ('he who spread gold') presumably alludes

38 Sakalavidyācakravartin is mentioned as the poet in *ARE* 1924–25, Appendix B (1925), nos. 369 and 371.

39 With these might be also considered *ARE* 1939–42, Appendix B (1941–42), nos. 225 and 259.

40 The poet here is again Sakalavidyācakravartin. *ARE* 1902–03, Appendix A (1902), no. 544, which alludes to the gilding of a temple by a Bāṇa chief, might also be considered here, but it is not clear whether it is verse or not.

41 TAM, no. 214.

to this act of generosity."[42] These eulogies are thus closer in content to *meykkīrtti*s than to *praśasti*s, as the latter refers to royal patronage more regularly than the former.

2.8 Vijayanagara Copper Plates (1336 to 1646 CE = Śaka 1258 to 1568)

Moving forward in time, let us have a look at the Tamil South after it was integrated into the Vijayanagara empire, with a focus on copper plates. In the two volumes of the *Dynastic List of Copper Plate Inscriptions Noticed in Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy* (*DLCPI*), 268 items are classified as Vijayanagara.[43] I have selected those which unequivocally concern transactions in the Tamil South[44] and obtained a total of ninety-eight plates (see Table 3 for their distribution language-wise), most dated or at least datable, but some of which, however, might not be royal inscriptions.

Table 3: Vijayanagara copper plates concerning the Tamil South (fourteenth century to 1646 CE).

	Sanskrit (38+0[45])	Tamil (17+23)	Telugu (4+8)	Kannaḍa (1+0)	Multilingual (6+1)
Śaka 1236–1300	2[46]		1[47]		1[48]

42 Orr, "The Bhakti of the Bāṇas," 375.

43 I have not been able to take full account of volumes 5 and 6 of the *IVR*, in which Vijayanagara copper plates not listed in the *DLCPI*s are likely to have been included.

44 I have thus provisionally excluded plates kept in the Madras/Chennai Government Museum or in Madras/Chennai city, some of which, after examination, could prove to concern transactions in the Tamil South.

45 The first figure is the total before Śaka 1566, the second the total after Śaka 1574.

46 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1079 (Śaka 1258; Harihara I), 1096 (Śaka 1255; Kṛṣṇadevarāya, thus most probably a forgery). None of these are found in *IVR*, vol. 6.

47 *DLCPI* 1, no. 1130 (Śaka 1236; Vīranarasiṃharāya).

48 *DLCPI* 1, no. 1094 (Sanskrit and Tamil; undated, but the donor is Harihara, son of Saṅgama, i.e. Harihara I).

Table 3 (continued)

	Sanskrit (38+0[45])	Tamil (17+23)	Telugu (4+8)	Kannaḍa (1+0)	Multilingual (6+1)
Śaka 1300–1400	5[49]	3[50]	1[51]	1[52]	3[53]
Śaka 1400–1500	19[54]	9[55]	2[56]		2[57]
Śaka 1500–1574	12[58]	5[59]			
Śaka 1600–1669		12[60]	8[61]		1[62]
Śaka 1715–1726		11[63]			

Note that one has to be cautious with the early plates, some of which might be forgeries (see footnote 46). Note too that, under the label Vijayanagara, the *DLCPI*s also classify plates that were issued after the fall of the Vijayanagara empire, which is conventionally dated to Śaka 1568 (1646 CE), when Śrīraṅga

49 *DLCPI* 1, no. 1064, 1071, 1075, 1126, 1201.
50 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1122, 1145; *DLCPI* 2, no. 293.
51 *DLCPI* 1, no. 1093.
52 *DLCPI* 1, no. 1061.
53 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1068 (Sanskrit and Kannaḍa), 1092 (Kannaḍa and Telugu); *DLCPI* 2, no. 287 (Sanskrit and Telugu).
54 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1035, 1040, 1046 (Sanskrit?), 1100–1101, 1106, 1111–1112, 1118–1119, 1134, 1147, 1152, 1165, 1167, 1169–1171; *DLCPI* 2, no. 305 (undated, but the donor is Kṛṣṇadevarāya).
55 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1045, 1105, 1146; *DLCPI* 2, nos. 294–297, 298 (undated, but the donor is Mallikārjuna, like in the other plates in this series), 299.
56 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1037, 1135.
57 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1113 (Sanskrit and Kannaḍa), 1159 (Telugu and Sanskrit).
58 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1121, 1172–1173, 1175, 1202, 1207, 1210, 1212–1213, 1217, 1230–1231.
59 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1178, 1209, 1225; *DLCPI* 2, nos. 310–311.
60 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1184–1185 (Śaka 1658 and 1663 respectively; Śrīraṅga III, although then dead), 1234–1237 (Śaka 1631; Veṅkaṭa IV); *DLCPI* 2, nos. 317 (Śaka 1602; Rāmarāja), 319 (Śaka 1648; Veṅkaṭapatirāya), 320 (Śaka 1650; Rāmarāya), 322–323 (Śaka 1659, Śrīraṅgadevamahārāya), 325 (Śaka 1690; Śrīraṅgadeva).
61 *DLCPI* 1, Nos. 1233 (Śaka 1630; Veṅkaṭa IV), 1238 (Śaka 1632; Veṅkaṭa IV), 1240 (Śaka 163[9]; Veṅkaṭa IV), 1241–1243 (Śaka 1644, 1654, 1655 respectively; Veṅkaṭa, ruling from Ghanagiri); *DLCPI* 2, nos. 321 (Śaka 1656; Śrīraṅgarāya), 324 (Śaka 1666; Veṅkaṭapatidevamahārāya).
62 *DLCPI* 1, no. 1239 (Sanskrit and Telugu; Śaka 1639; Veṅkaṭa IV).
63 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 1186–1195 (dated from Śaka 1715 to 1726; Śrīraṅga), 1196 (undated, but the donor is Śrīraṅga, like in the other plates of this series).

III of the Aravīḍu dynasty was defeated at Virinchipuram by a coalition of the sultan rulers of Bijapur and Golkonda. These late Vijayanagara plates belong to the residual Aravīḍu dynasty: Śrīraṅga III died in 1672 CE,[64] but plates were dated to his reign even after this (see footnote 61), as well as to the reign of Veṅkaṭa III and IV, according to the ASI genealogical nomenclature. These late Vijayanagara plates could have been taken into account in § 2.11, but I prefer to consider them in the present paragraph, as their labeling and authenticity await further assessment (most of these plates are still unpublished as far as I know).

With the Vijayanagara dominance over the whole of South India in the fifteenth century CE, we observe, as far as royal copper-plate grants are concerned, the issuing of fully Sanskrit copper plates, such as the one edited by Jean, Vasundhara, and Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat (1986).[65] This recourse to Sanskrit is understandable, as Vijayanagara was an empire covering most of South India, where various Dravidian languages were spoken: Sanskrit was thus seemingly promoted in official documents as a transregional idiom.[66]

We thus see that, in the Tamil South, under Vijayanagara, between the mid-fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth century CE, we revert to monolingual Sanskrit plates with thirty-eight sets,[67] compared to seventeen in Tamil, four in Telugu, one in Kannaḍa, and five multilingual plates (four of which contain Sanskrit).

As for the plates, later than Śaka 1574, we see that none is monolingual Sanskrit and that the languages chiefly used are Tamil and Telugu. Sanskrit is however used in the only multilingual set from this period.[68] This tendency to use the vernaculars in this period will be confirmed, as we will see, with the plates of the later rulers of Tamil Nadu.

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64 P. R. Srinivasan, *Tiruvannamalai: A Śaiva Sacred Complex of South India*, vol. 1.1 (Pondicherry: IFP, 1990), 111.

65 Jean, Vasundhara, and Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, *A Copper Plate Inscription of Śrīraṅgarāya I* (Pondicherry: All India Press, 1986). The plates are dated 1585 CE. The text is entirely in Sanskrit verse (*praśasti* and documentary portion).

66 Note also that Vijayanagara rulers fostered Sanskrit studies and literature. See Cezary Galewicz, *A Commentator in Service of the Empire: Sāyaṇa and the Royal Project of Commenting on the Whole of the Veda* (Vienna: Sammlung de Nobili, Institut für Südasien-, Tibet- und Buddhismuskunde der Universität Wien, 2010). The Vijayanagara princess Gaṅgādevī (fourteenth century) authored the *Madhurāvijaya*.

67 Note that among the thirty-eight monolingual Sanskrit copper-plates, only one is in Grantha (*DLCPI* 1, no. 1075; Śaka 1367), whereas the others (dated from Śaka 1255 to 1566) are in Nāgarī/Nandināgarī.

68 *DLCPI* 1, no. 1239.

2.9 Vijayanagara *Biruda* Titulature

The Vijayanagara kings are very often eulogized with strings of *birudas*, which are thus not, *pace* Cuppiramaṇiyam (1983), *meykkīrtti* proper.[69] As an illustration, here is the beginning of an inscription from Tiruvaṇṇāmalai:[70]

> *svasti śrimanumahāmaṇḍaliśvaran harirāyavibhāṭan bhāṣai*kku tappuvarāyara kaṇṭaṉ muvarāyar kaṇṭaṉ *pūrvvadakṣiṇapaścimasamudrādipa*ti *śrī*°ariyappa°uṭaiyār kumārar *śrīvīraviruppaṇṇa*°uṭaiyar *prithivirājyam* paṇṇiyarulāniṉṟa *śakābdam* 1310ṉ [. . .][71]
>
> Prosperity! In the Śaka year 1310, when "the glorious lord of large territory," "the destroyer of enemy kings," "the warrior to (i.e. the chastiser/destroyer of) kings unfaithful to their words," "the warrior to (i.e. the vanquisher of) the three kings,"[72] "the lord of eastern, southern and western oceans," (that is,) the glorious and heroic Lord Viruppaṇṇa (i.e. Virūpākṣa I), son of the glorious Lord Ariyappa (i.e. Harihara II), was graciously taking on the rule over the earth [. . .][73]

The string of *birudas* (each individually enclosed between quotation marks in the translation), of variable length and dependent on the date, is very often found at the beginning of stone inscriptions throughout the Vijayanagara empire.[74] According to Y. Subbarayalu and S. Rajavelu, such a "stereotyped *praśasti* passage [. . .] is a Tamil variant of the Kannada original."[75]

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69 See Pū. Cuppiramaṇiyam, *Meykkīrttikaḷ* (Ceṉṉai: International Institute of Tamil Studies, 1983), 279–296, and Whitney Cox, *Politics, Kingship and Poetry in Medieval South India: Moonset on Sunrise Mountain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 54, note 54.

70 *SII* 8, no. 156 = TAM 341 = *IVR* 5.1, no. 156; dated to Śaka 1310 = 1388 CE. Original text in transliteration, Grantha script in italics, Tamil script in roman; initial vowels preceded by "°."

71 I follow here the edition of *SII* 8, no. 156, which alone discriminates between Tamil and Grantha scripts.

72 This epithet seems to be used specifically in the Tamil South and refers to the Cōḻa, the Cēra, and the Pāṇḍya kings.

73 My translation, following P.R. Srinivasan, *Tiruvannamalai: A Śaiva Sacred Complex of South India*, vol. 1 (Pondicherry: IFP, 1990), 429. Compare earlier translations of some of these *birudas* by J. Burgess and S.M. Naṭēśa Śāstrī, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions with Notes on Village Antiquities: Collected Chiefly in the South of Madras Presidency* (Madras: Government Press, 1886), 157 ("lord of the great world, who destroyed the army of Ariyarāyar, who cuts into a thousand and three thousand pieces those failing in [*the correctness of*] their language") or Vasundhara Filliozat, *L'épigraphie de Vijayanagara du début à 1377* (Paris: EFEO, 1973), 5 ("[. . .] mahāmaṇḍalēśvara vainqueur des rois ennemis, punisseur des rois infidèles").

74 For examples from outside the Tamil South, see *IVR*s and Vasundhara Filliozat, *L'épigraphie de Vijayanagara*.

75 Y. Subbarayalu & S. Rajavelu, *Inscriptions of the Vijayanagara Rulers*, vol. 5, *Part I: Tamil Inscriptions*. (Bengaluru: Indian Council of Historical Research, Southern Regional Centre, 2014), xv.

2.10 Teṉkāci Pāṇḍyas (Sixteenth Century CE)

In the sixteenth century CE, Teṉkāci was the site of a Tamil renaissance, according to David Shulman. Sanskrit was not discarded, however, as the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* by Maṇḍalakavi, a Sanskrit historical text, was probably composed at the Teṉkāci court.[76] Several Teṉkāci Pāṇḍya kings are known, and interestingly, the copper plates issued by them in the sixteenth century CE, listed in the *DLCPI*s, are all in Sanskrit and Grantha.[77] Later plates, from the seventeenth century CE, are however in Tamil.[78]

2.11 Copper Plates of Later Rulers of Tamil Nadu (Seventeenth to Early Nineteenth Century CE)

If we take a look at the production of copper plates after the Vijayanagara period, from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century CE (see Table 4, where the figures are based on the two volumes of the *DLCPI*), we find that Tamil was the main medium.

From the seventeenth century CE onwards, the use of Sanskrit as a medium for copper-plate inscriptions dwindles dramatically, in contrast with the late Vijayanagara plates (§ 2.8), most of which were in Sanskrit. The late seventeenth century CE thus marks a historical shift, that is, a second regionalization (the first being that of the *meykkīrtti*), in which, besides Tamil, the languages of migrant groups are also attested (Kannaḍa, Telugu, Marāṭhī).

3 Regional Approach: Chingleput District

Following the above dynastic approach, which was also qualitative as it was based on a selection of inscriptions, I will adopt now a more decidedly quantitative approach, focusing on a portion of present-day Tamil Nadu. T.V. Mahalingam in his

76 David Shulman, *More than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 155ff., and 155, note 1.

77 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 739 (Śaka 1503), 747 (Śaka 1515), 748 (Śaka 1505); *DLCPI* 2, no. 187 (third year of Parākrama-pāṇḍya, son of Abhirāma-parākrama). Further Sanskrit plates of the Teṉkāci Pāṇḍyas are found in T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, vol. 1 (repr., Trivandrum: Government of Kerala, 1988), 87ff.

78 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 741 (Śaka 1692), 751 (Śaka 1675, incorrectly for 1676); *DLCPI* 2, no. 182 (Śaka 1675, incorrectly for 1676).

Table 4: Copper plates of later rulers of Tamil Nadu (seventeenth to early nineteenth century CE).

	Sanskrit (1)	**Sanskrit & Telugu (2)**	**Sanskrit & Tamil (6)**	**Tamil (137)**	**Telugu (14)**	**Tamil & Telugu (1)**	**Marāṭhī (2)**	**Kannaḍa (8)**
Nāyakas Maturai 17th century		1[79]		16[80]	14[81]	1[82]		
Nāyakas Tanjore 17th century	1[83]	1[84]		3[85]				
Cētupatis Rāmanāthapuram 17th–18th century				67[86]				
Marāṭhas Tanjore 17th–18th century			6[87]	12[88]			2[89]	1[90]

nine volumes of *Topographical List of Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu and Kerala States* lists a total of 16,673 inscriptions. Mahalingam however stops his list at 1300 CE and does not integrate the *Annual Reports on Epigraphy* (*ARE*) later than 1978. Given this sheer number of inscriptions, I have been able to compute information concerning only the undivided Chingleput District (Figure 9). I have selected this district because it was the seat of the Pallava dynasty, the epigraphic corpus of

79 *DLCPI* 1, no. 690.
80 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 682–689, 692, 697–699; *DLCPI* 2, nos. 153–156.
81 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 673–681, 693–696: *DLCPI* 2, no. 153.
82 *DLCPI* 1, no. 691.
83 *DLCPI* 1, no. 703.
84 *DLCPI* 1, no. 704.
85 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 700–702.
86 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 894–924; *DLCPI* 2, nos. 235–270.
87 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 625, 634–638.
88 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 626–628, 630–632; *DLCPI* 2, nos. 142–147.
89 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 629, 639.
90 *DLCPI* 1, no. 633.

Table 4 (continued)

	Sanskrit (1)	Sanskrit & Telugu (2)	Sanskrit & Tamil (6)	Tamil (137)	Telugu (14)	Tamil & Telugu (1)	Marāṭhī (2)	Kannaḍa (8)
Toṇṭaimāṉ Putukkōṭṭai 18th–early 19th century				11[91]				
Woḍeyars, Mysore 18th–early 19th century				7[92]				7[93]

which I have been studying for many years. The inscriptions of the Chingleput District are found in Mahalingam's volume 3, which contains 2,279 inscriptions, and which I have supplemented with post-1300 CE inscriptions and further *ARE*s.[94] I have thus obtained a total of 3,593 inscriptions.

3.1 Language Distribution in Chingleput District

If we look globally at the languages used in the inscriptions of the undivided Chingleput District, we obtain the following figures.

The lion's share, unsurprisingly, comprises Tamil inscriptions, with a total of 3,197 inscriptions – that is, inscriptions whose language is described in the *ARE*s as Tamil (3,192 items) or as "Tamil and Grantha inscriptions" (five items),

91 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 984–990; *DLCPI* 2, nos. 273–276.

92 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 650–651, 653, 655, 658–659; *DLCPI* 2, no. 223.

93 *DLCPI* 1, nos. 656–657, 660–663; *DLCPI* 2, no. 222.

94 I have not been able to update this list completely, as several *ARE*s later than 1978 are not accessible to me. I have not taken into account either copper-plate inscriptions or the inscriptions from Chennai (listed in Mahalingam's volume 5), as the latter require further assessment, since Chennai is not their findspot but their place of deposit (e.g. in the Chennai Government Museum, the collections of which include inscribed artifacts from the Madras Presidency, which was larger than Tamil South India). This list is thus only provisional for the time being, but nonetheless reveals some trends.

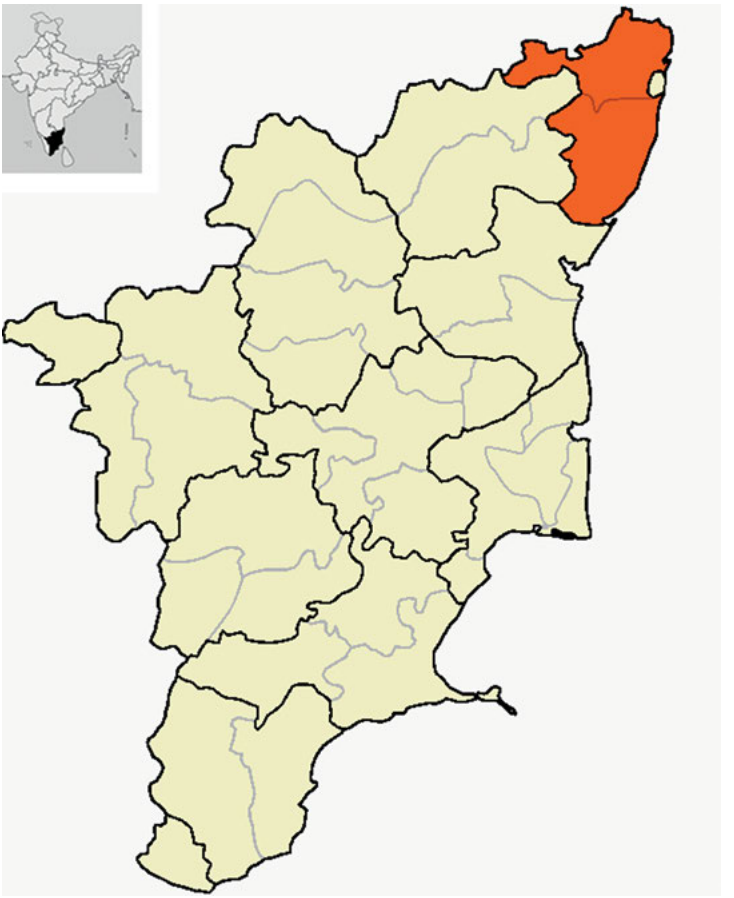

Figure 9: Undivided Chingleput District (as in 1956). Map: Adapted from Wikimedia Commons (© SwiftRakesh).

Table 5: Language distribution of inscriptions from the undivided Chingleput District.

Tamil	Sanskrit	Bilinguals (Sanskrit & Tamil)	Telugu	Kannaḍa	Multilinguals	Other	To be confirmed
3,197	131	50	73	15	15	32	80

which is, as far as I understand, a category for Tamil inscriptions in Tamil script but also containing Sanskrit words in Grantha script. Sanskrit comes second with 131 inscriptions, which I will treat in detail below (§ 3.2).

There are fifty bilingual inscriptions (Sanskrit and Tamil), but here too further assessment is required, since some of these might in fact be Tamil inscriptions in Tamil script containing only a few interspersed Sanskrit words in Grantha script.

The Telugu and Kannaḍa inscriptions (73 and 15 items, respectively) date, in large part, to the late Vijayanagara and Nāyaka periods (especially to the sixteenth century CE). There is one early Kannaḍa inscription (eighth century CE) at the Kailāsanātha temple.[95]

As for the fifteen multilingual inscriptions, these comprise: one item in Armenian, Hebrew (?), and Persian;[96] one item in English and Dutch;[97] one item in Portuguese and Latin;[98] one item in Kannaḍa and Tamil (dated to Śaka 1379); one item in Sanskrit and Telugu;[99] one item in Tamil and English (dated to Śaka 1699); and nine items in Tamil and Telugu (none earlier than the late Vijayanagara period).

As for the category "Other" (thirty-two items), these are mostly late inscriptions in Armenian (two items), Dutch (two items), English (nineteen items), Latin (one item), Pahlavi/Persian (five items), Arabic and Persian mixed (one item), Portuguese (one item), and Urdu (one item).

95 *EI* 3, no. 48.

96 See *ARE* 1966–67, Appendix B, no. 192 and Appendix D, no. 139. This inscription, dated to 1726 CE, was found on a tablet built into the Marmalong Bridge (today replaced by the Maraimalai Adigal Bridge) in Saidapet, south of Chennai. It records the reconstruction of the bridge by the Armenian merchant Petrus Uscan.

97 See *ARE* 1911–12, Appendix B (1911), no. 329. This item in fact consists in graffiti inscriptions, that is, English and Dutch proper names engraved by visitors in the seventeenth and eighteenth century CE.

98 See *ARE* 1961–62, Appendix B, no. 219. This is an epitaph on a tombstone, dated to 1744 CE, from Saint Thomas Mount, near Chennai. Other, monolingual (Tamil, English, Pahlavi) epitaphs were also reported in the same *ARE* and are integrated into Table 5. On these epitaphs and many more, not taken into account in Table 5, see Julian James Cotton, *List of Inscriptions on Tombs or Monuments in Madras: Possessing Historical or Archaeological Interest*, vol. 2, ed. B. S. Baliga (Madras, Government Press, 1946), 57ff. The bilingual Tamil/Portuguese item is no. 1365, p. 69.

99 See *ARE* 1905–06, Appendix B (1905), no. 450. The original must still be checked, as it is not clear from the report whether the inscription is fully in Sanskrit in Telugu script or bilingual, with both Sanskrit and Telugu in Telugu script.

3.2 Sanskrit Inscriptions in Chingleput District

Sanskrit, as we have already seen, comes second in the Chingleput District, with 131 inscriptions written in this language only,[100] that is, approximately 3.5% of the total, of which the chronological distribution is represented in Table 6.

Table 6: Chronological distribution of Sanskrit inscriptions from the Chingleput District.

Pallavas (550–900 CE)	Cōḻas (900–1300 CE)	Telugu-Cōḍas (13th century CE)	14th century CE	Vijayanagara (15th–16th century CE)	17th–18th century CE	Undated
58	18	7	2	12	4	30

We find that the majority (fifty-eight items) dates to the Pallava period and are in fact mostly from two sites, Kāñcīpuram and Māmallapuram, where most of the Pallava royal foundations are found. These are in Grantha, except for a few in Siddhamātṛka (see above).

There are seventeen Sanskrit inscriptions from the Cōḻa period, among which I also count one late Cēra inscription. Seven Sanskrit inscriptions belong to the Telugu-Cōḍa corpus. Only two Sanskrit records are found from the fourteenth century CE (one Hoyṣala item and one late Pāṇḍya item). Under Vijayanagara rule, in the fifteenth and sixteenth century CE, twelve Sanskrit inscriptions are noted (eight in Grantha script, three in Telugu script, and one in Kannaḍa script). Four Sanskrit inscriptions date to the seventeenth and eighteenth century CE: one Quṭb Shāhi record; two inscriptions dated to Śaka 1536; and one inscription dated Śaka 163[2].

Among the thirty undated Sanskrit inscriptions, several from Ayyangarkulam and Kāñcīpuram concern Tātācarya/Tātayadeśika (late fifteenth century to the first half of the sixteenth century CE), either as commissioner, composer, or the person referred to. They can thus be dated to the fifteenth century CE at the earliest.

From the figures obtained from the Chingleput District alone, we can say that the estimate of 30,000 inscriptions in Tamil Nadu is realistic. But it is difficult to extrapolate further on the basis of the data for one district only, as we can expect differences across regions.

100 Sanskrit is also used in the fifty bilingual (Sanskrit and Tamil) inscriptions of Table 5. Note that we also have to take into account the multilingual inscriptions from Table 5, which contain Sanskrit.

4 Conclusions: Moments and Trends

This bird's-eye view of the imperial languages in the Tamil South leads to the identification of what I will call moments and trends in the epigraphic production. By "moments," I mean experiments attempted once but never replicated, or innovations with no or almost no future; for instance, biscript or digraphic eulogies were mostly produced under the Pallavas. Moreover, the production of Tamil eulogies on the model of the Sanskrit literary tradition was limited to the early Pāṇḍya charters, to which alone Pollock's concept of vernacularization applies. As for epigraphic Maṇippiravāḷam, we find examples under the early Pāṇḍyas, as in the course of time the Sanskrit words became fully assimilated to Tamil script and ceased to be marked as Sanskrit words.

On the other hand, there are also long-lasting trends, opposed to which, at some point in time, we occasionally find countertrends. For instance, over a period of six centuries, under the Pallavas and Cōḷas and with the exception of the early Pāṇḍyas, royal copper-plate grants were diglossic. Under the Vijayanagara empire, one countertrend was to write copper plates entirely in Sanskrit, until finally, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century CE, Sanskrit was only rarely used in copper plates, mostly in favor of Tamil and other vernaculars. Another enduring trend is the *meykkīrtti*, which became a massive phenomenon under the Cōḷas and the later Pāṇḍyas, that is, over almost four centuries. As for *Birudāvali* eulogies, we find them consistently from the Pallavas to the Vijayanagara kings, for whom it was even the main type of eulogy.

Furthermore, we can also distinguish two periods of regionalization in the Tamil South. A first regionalization occurred under the Cōḷas, notably with the spread of the *meykkīrtti*s, metrical eulogies in Tamil: the status of Tamil as an expressive political language was firmly established, side by side with Sanskrit in the same capacity (a linguistic situation I propose to call "amphiglossia" as opposed to diglossia[101]). After the fall of Vijayanagara, an imperial formation that somehow marked the resurgence of Sanskrit as an imperial language, a second wave of regionalization took place, when, from the late seventeenth century CE onwards, inscriptions in Sanskrit became increasingly rare, while Tamil and other Dravidian languages displaced Sanskrit as the expressive political languages.

However, another language then entered the game, that of the British rule: English. To illustrate this development, one final example will suffice, encountered in recent fieldwork (Figure 10).

101 See Francis, "Multilingualism in Indian Inscriptions."

Figure 10: Stele at Vālīkaṇṭapuram, nineteenth (?) century CE. Photo: E. Francis, 2017.

This inscription is found on a stele currently kept to the right of the main *gopura* of the temple of Tiruvaḷḷikaṇṭaṉ at Vālīkaṇṭapuram (Perampalūr taluk and district, Tamil Nadu). It contains no internal date, but dates plausibly to the nineteenth or early twentieth century CE. It reads (Tamil text transliterated, English text transcribed):

viḷamparam
carkkār cottu
maṉat' aṟintu keṭuti ceykiṟavarkaḷ taṇṭak kaikuṭapaṭuvārkaḷ[102]

102 A straightforward translation of this Tamil text would be: "Notice. Property of the Government. Knowing (this) in their mind, those who do damage will receive punishment."

NOTICE
GOVERNMENT PROPERTY. ANY WILLFUL DAMAGE THERE TO WILL BE VISITED WITH A PENALTY.

The inscription, issued by a temple authority, comprises a Tamil text followed by an English text, both with the same content. We have here a true bilingual, not diglossic, inscription that is representative of a new development of the colonial period, when true bilingual inscriptions became more common than in the preceding periods. The story of colonial-period epigraphy is nevertheless beyond the scope of the present essay.

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Abbreviations

ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
ARE	*Annual Reports on Epigraphy*
BEFEO	*Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*
DLCPI	*Dynastic List of Copper Plate Inscriptions Noticed in Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy*See Gai (volume 1, 1986), Padmanabha Sastry (volume 2, 2008)
EFEO	École française d'Extrême-Orient
EI	*Epigraphia Indica*
EIAD	*Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa*. See Griffiths et al. (2017).
IEP	*Inscriptions of the Early Pāṇḍyas*. See Krishnan (2002).
IFP	Institut français de Pondichéry
IPS	*Inscriptions of the Pudukkotai State*
IVR	*Inscriptions of the Vijayanagara Rulers*. See Subbarayalu & Rajavelu (2014), Ritti (2017).
SII	*South Indian Inscriptions*
TAM	Tiruvannamalai inscriptions. See Srinivasan (1990).

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