

A New House for the God in Tenkasi: Divine Dreams and Kings in 15th–16th-century Pāṇṭiya Inscriptions and Sanskrit Courtly Production

DAVID PIERDOMINICI LEÃO

Abstract: This paper is devoted to a parallel study of the 15th-century Tamil inscriptions from the Kāṣivīśvanātha temple in Tenkasi (Tamil Nadu), describing the circumstances and building phases of this shrine, together with a modified retelling of the same episode by a 16th-century *mahākāvya*, the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*. The comparative study of these passages aims to highlight significant changes in the traditional institution of Indian royal patronage. It will also enable considerations on the revolutionary transition in the description of the Pāṇṭiya kingship in the 16th century, marked by the rise of a new ideological idiom expressed by the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*.

Keywords: Pāṇṭiya dynasty, Tenkasi, kingship, patronage, legitimisation

David PIERDOMINICI LEÃO, Jagiellonian University, Cracow;  0000-0002-6725-3219

1. Historical coordinates

After the collapse of the imperial line of Madurai, the Pāṇṭiya dynasty ceased to play a fundamental role in the political scenario of Tamil Nadu. In the 14th century, the Muslim invasion of the South led by Malik Kāfūr, a general of the Sultan of Delhi ‘Alā’ ud-dīn K̲haljī (1267–1316), deeply destabilised the politics of the southern reaches of the Indian sub-continent, already aggravated by the precarious balance of the Hōysaḷa kingdom in Karnataka, after the diarchy of Narasiṃha III (1263–1292) and his brother Rāmanātha. In concomitance with this scenario, the Tamil stronghold represented by the powerful Pāṇṭiya dynasty suddenly experienced a fatal breakdown: Māṇavarman Kulacēkara I (1268–1308) was murdered by his son, the co-regent Jaṭāvarman Cuntara III (accessed 1304), who started a civil war against his brother, Jaṭāvarman Vīra II (accessed 1297; NILAKANTA SASTRI 1958: 208–209; DERRETT 1957: 151). This disastrous internecine conflict escalated with the Islamic conquest of Madurai

(Tamil Maturai), and the foundation in 1335 of an independent Sultanate by Jalāl ad-dīn Aḥsan Kḥān, an officer with Muḥammad bin Tuḡluq (1325–1351; DERRETT 1957: 171). The collapse of the Hōysaḷa kingdom, the death of Ballāḷa IV in 1346 and the rise of the Vijayanagara empire (1336–1565) sanctioned the end of Pāṇṭiya influence in the South. Having irremediably lost the capital, Madurai, the Pāṇṭiyas drew back in the Western regions of the Tamil land, establishing a small political centre at the borders with Kerala.

Around the last decades of the 14th century, a family of rulers claiming direct descent from the Madurai Pāṇṭiya reign organised a centre of power around the Tirunelveli area, in a subordinated position to the Vijayanagara. The dynastic connection between this obscure family – perhaps a collateral branch – and the principle line of Madurai still remains uncertain (BRANFOOT 2012: 371); nevertheless, the new dynasty of Tenkasi (Tamil Tenkāci) undoubtedly represented a surprising – yet decaying – ruling continuum after the havoc of the 14th century.¹

Arikēcari Parākkīrama (1422–1463 CE) ruled the kingdom of Tenkasi during the Vijayanagara domination of the whole Southern parts of the Indian sub-continent. Compared to his predecessors, Arikēcari's reign marked indeed the apogee of the later Pāṇṭiya dynasty.² The epigraphical documentation ascribable to this monarch records his full royal titling as Jaṭilavarman Tribhuvanacakravarti Aḷaṅṇ Poṇṇiṇ Pērumāl Arikēcari Parākkīrama.³ A Sanskrit *biruda* registered in the inscriptions – especially in the genealogical *praśastis* of the 16th–17th century – was Mānābharaṇa or, as a variant, Mānabhūṣa.⁴

¹ NILAKANTA SASTRI 1972: 217–218: ‘The history of the later Pāṇḍyas of Tinnevely is the story of a more or less steady decline, punctuated by a few feeble attempts at revival, ending the final disappearance of the dynasty towards the close of the sixteenth or early in the seventeenth century.’

² For the chronological division of Pāṇṭiya history I refer to the canonical periodisation in ‘early’, ‘medieval’, ‘imperial’ and ‘later’ phases theorised by Nilakanta Sastri and Sethuraman (NILAKANTA SASTRI 1972; SETHURAMAN 1978, 1980).

³ For a complete list of Arikēcari's record in the Tirunelveli district the reader may consult RANGACHARYA 1919: 1482–1489.

⁴ The Pudukkottai plates of Civaladeva and Varatūṅkarāma (Ś.1505; GOPINATHA RAO 1910: 61–88) refer to Arikēcari Parākkīrama with the same *biruda*. The Pāṇṭiya king named with this sobriquet is referred to in the Kṛṣṇapura copper plates (EI IX, no. 52) dated to the reign of the Vijayanagara emperor Sadāśivarāya (1543–1567). Sadāśiva acceded the throne in 1543, after the demise of his uncle Acyutadevarāya (1529–1542) and the murder of his son Cinna Venkaṭādri I (1542). He was held hostage by his powerful minister, the *de facto* ruler Aḷīya Rāmārāya (1542–1565), Kṛṣṇadevarāya's son-in-law, till the havoc of the empire in 1565. According to the inscription, one of Sadāśiva's predecessors mentioned in the genealogical account, Narasa Nāyaka (1491–1503), is said to have defeated a Pāṇṭiya king named Mānabhūṣa

Arikēcari acted at first as a co-regent of King Māravarman Tribhuvana-cakravarti Kōnērinmaikoṇḍān Śrīkaliyugarāma Tirunelvēli Pērumāl Vīra (1421–1448?), whose access to the throne in 1421 is calculated based on two inscriptions: the first (ARE 1905, no. 86), issued in the 12th regnal year of the ruler, 1433; the Tiruvaikuntam record (ARE 1895, no. 178), dated to the 19th year of reign, 1439.

The Tenkasi ruler built the majestic complex of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple (Tamil Kācivicuvanātar); three important Tamil inscriptions of Arikēcari Parākkirāma in this *śaiva* complex furnish interesting and fundamental details about the sovereign and his kingdom.⁵ This paper is devoted to a comparative analysis of this epigraphical material concerning the circumstances of the foundation of the Viśvanātha temple and a re-elaboration of the same episode as narrated in the Tenkasi Pāṇṭiya literary production in Sanskrit.

2. The God and the King

The first record of the Kāśīviśvanātha complex (no. II), dated to the 30th regnal year of the Arikēcari (1452), is engraved on the western and southern bases of the *mahāmaṇḍapa* of the temple; it registers two cases of land granting by the King, together with incidental mentions of the various architectural structures erected by the monarch together within the main shrine. More interesting is the introductory section of the record, which gives a lengthy depiction of the Pāṇṭiya monarch, celebrated in highly extolled terms, referring to his royal majesty, prestige and his role as a perfect *śaiva* devotee; as quoted in this passage:⁶

(stanza 11). GOPINATHA RAO 1910: 52 claimed that this sovereign was identifiable with Arikēcari Parākkirāma; quoting his words, ‘we know that Narasa Nāyaka lived about the first usurpation of the Vijayanagara kingdom by Sālūva Narasiṃha about A.D. 1470 and distinguished himself in the latter’s service. The period agrees very well with that of Parākrama Pāṇḍya.’ In reality, Sālūva Narasiṃha usurped the throne in 1485 and not in 1470, after having murdered the last of the Saṅgama rulers, Praudhadevarāya. Even supposing that Narasa defeated Arikēcari as a *senādhipati* of the Vijayanagara emperor, Arikēcari ruled until 1463, almost two decades before the beginning of the reign of Sālūva Narasiṃha and three before Narasa acceded the throne. This easy calculation shows that Gopinatha Rao’s identification of the Mānabhūṣa of the Kṛṣṇapura plates with Arikēcari Parākkirāma presents some chronological problems; it would be cautious stating that the king mentioned in the Vijayanagara plates can be identified with one of his predecessors.

⁵ These three records were published and partially translated in issue no. VI of the *Travancore Archaeological Series* as nos. II, III and IV (GOPINATHA RAO 1910: 89–102).

⁶ I quote here Gopinatha Rao’s translation for the relative part of the inscription (GOPINATHA RAO 1910: 93).

Be it well! The year...opposite the twenty-eight of the reign of Parākrama Pāṇḍyadeva *alias* Ari...deva, – who was born in the *chandra-kula* so that the damsel seated on the (lotus) flower (Lakshmi) might glow on his chest; the lady of learning (Sarasvati) might shine resplendent on his tongue and the goddess of victory might embrace his mountain-like shoulders; while the dual carps were bright like the (two) eyes of the world; who grew as though he were the seedling of the virtue of (all) his ancestors; who had understood the Southern (Tamil) and the Northern (Sanskrit) sciences; who was crowned with a jewelled crown for the purpose of protecting humanity; who wore the lotus feet of Śaṅkara; who was wielding the just sceptre and making his white umbrella shelter (of the world); who gave his people without failure the water of the rain, the food of his favour and the water of libations (poured on the occasion of making gifts); who rooted out the weeds of sin and raised the crops of virtue; who saw the hacks of kings [...] and established the lamps of his fame in all directions...

The second inscription (no. III) consists of sixteen verses in Tamil engraved on the walls of a ruined *gopura* in front of the Viśvanāthasvāmin temple. This document is of the foremost importance because it gives a detailed and dated record of the construction process of the shrine and exact chronological references to establish Arikēcari Parākkīrama's death. The first four verses of the inscription register the building of specific architectural elements, with its relative temporal reference, while stanza 13 records the death of the monarch:⁷

*anpiṇuṭaṇ cakāttamāyirattu muṇṇuṛṛarupatteṭṭatan mēl vaiykācit tiṅkal
maṇṭiyatiyīraintir pūruvapakkamanuvu tecamiyil vellī vārantanṇil
miṇṭikaluttiranāl miṇattil vākai vēlarikēcari parākkīrama makīpaṇ teṇ
ticaiyir kācinakar kkōyilkāṇac ceṇru ninru karlcaṇai⁸ tāṇ ceyvittāṇē || 1 ||*

In the Śaka year 1368, on Friday, the tenth *tithi* of the bright half of the month Vaikāsi, the fifteenth day on that month on the Uttara *nakṣatra* and Mīna *rāśi*, the glorious King Arikēcari Parākkīrama began to perform the *karṣaṇa* [ceremony] for the establishment of the temple in the Benares of the South (6th May 1446).

⁷ I refer to the edition of the record by Gopinatha Rao; if not otherwise stated all the translations from Tamil and Sanskrit are mine.

⁸ As stated in GOPINATHA RAO 1910: 96, note no. 8, this term in accusative case should be read as *karṣaṇai*. The word seems to be a Tamilised version of *karṣaṇa*; another variant is *karlcaṇa* (ORR 2013: 336).

*aṭaivutikaḷ cakāttamāyirattu munṇūrrarupattoṇpatin mērcel mituṇa
ñāyarriṭaimanuvu tiyatipati[n]e [lacuna] viṛ caṇivāramataṇil
mīṇattil maṇa [lacuna] ṭaiyavarait teṅkāciv cīvālapattiṇuḷlamaittut
teḷlamutamūṭṭiṇāṇē || 2 ||*

In the Śaka year 1369, on the seventeenth-eighteenth [day] of that month in which the Sun stood in the middle of the Mithuna constellation, Mīna rāśi [...] Saturday, [King Arikēcari] offered pure *amṛta* nectar, having consecrated the image of Śiva in Teṅkāci (**10th June 1447**).

*paṇru kaliyuka nālāyirat taiññuṛ raimpatteṭṭiṇ mēlevarum paṇintu
pōrra[c] ceṇṇel vayar teṅkāci nakaril naṛkarattikaittiṅkaḷ ttiyati yaintiṛ
cempoṇ vāramanṇiya mārkalināḷil maturai vēntaṇ vaṭiveḷutoṇāta
parākkīrama makīpaṇ coṇṇavaraipōṛ tirukkōpuramuṅkāṇat
tūṭṭiyaipāyupāṇamutal tūṭakkiṇāṇē || 3 ||*

In the Kaliyuga year 4558, on the fifth day of the month Kārttikai, on Thursday, on the Mārḡaśīrṣa *nakṣatra*, the King of Maturai Parākkīrama, having bowed to worship in the city of Teṅkāci of superior paddy fields, began [to build] the basis of the foundations to see the auspicious *gopura* similar to Mount Meru.

*erāruṇ cakāttamāyirattu munṇurreḷupat toṇpatinmēṛ karattikai
māttatiṛ cirānuntiyatiyaintiṛ kuruvārattiṛ ciṅka mukurttattil
mīṛukaciṛiḷcattataṇṇila raṇaruḷāl vaḷuta parākkīrama makīpaṇ kurāpāṇa
mutal kōṭṭiṇāṇē || 4 ||*

In the Śaka year 1379, on the fifth day of month Kārttikai, on Thursday, in the Siṃha *muhūrta*, Mārḡaśīrṣa *nakṣatra*, King Parākkīrama, the *vaḷuti*, erected the beginning of the majestic foundation with the favour of Śiva (**3rd November 1457**).

The record states that six years after the beginning of the construction of the front *gopura*, King Arikēcari Parākkīrama died on the Citra *nakṣatra*, which occurred on the *puṇṇima* of month Mārḡaśīrṣa of Ś.1385, and which, according to the calculations, corresponds exactly to the 24th December 1463. The last three stanzas of the inscription (14–16) contain a kind of elegiac lamentation of the poet who composed the record, who wondered if Arikēcari Parākkīrama, at the moment of his earthy demise, had reached the abode of the sixty-three *śaiva* saints, or the feet of the God represented by the golden hall of the Chidambaram temple, the *Vedas*, the *Śivaloka* or the feet of Viśvanātha, the patron deity of the Tenkasi ruling line (stanza 13; GOPINATHA RAO 1910: 98). As stated by the inscription, Arikēcari died in 1463 when the stone basement

of the *gopura* was finished; the structure was completed by his younger brother Aḷakaṇ Pērumāl Kulacēkara (1430–1477), whose Tamil inscription is engraved next to no. III.⁹

The epigraphical documentation gives further interesting detail. Luckily, apart from the phases of construction, we possess little data about the directors of the works of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple. An inscription issued in the reign of Arikēcari's nephew, Jaṭilavarman Parākkirama Kulacēkara (1480–1508), (ARE 1918, no. 503), dated to Ś.1412–1490 CE – refers to two Brahmins, Taṇḍaiyunkālumaḷagiyāṇ Kumārasvāmin and Mudaliyāṇ Parākkirama Pāṇṭiya, who were versed in rituals (*tantra*) and architecture (*māna*) and under whose direction the building of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple was carried out.

The last inscription (no. IV) in Tamil language – with a mixture of Sanskrit words in Grantha alphabet¹⁰ – is engraved on a pillar in front of the ruined *gopura*. It is dated to Ś.1384, in the 40th regnal year of Arikēcari, which corresponds to 1462, one year before the death of the King as registered by the previous document. This epigraph is highly important because it gives valuable data about the circumstances under which the Pāṇṭiya sovereign erected the Viśvanāthasvāmin shrine. Lines 15–24 on the east face of the pillar retell how God Śiva appeared in a dream (*svapna*) to Arikēcari, asking him to build a new temple, given the dilapidated status of his Viśvanātha complex in Benares:¹¹

*viśvanātha uttarakāśīyileḷuntaruḷi irunta civālayam jīrṇamākaiyālē
teṇṇarināṭṭu ccitranadī uttaratīrattilē namakku dakṣiṇakāśiyāka
ālaiyañceytu taravēṇūm eṇṇu eṇkaḷuṭaiya karttar pērumāl
arikēsaridevar eṇṇu tirunāmamuṭaiya poṇṇiṇ pērumāl parākrama
pāṇḍyadevar iruntaruḷiya iṭattiṇ uṭaṇē [sva]pnattilē tiruvuḷḷamparri
aruḷukaiyālē... (ll.15–24)*

In accordance to God's will **from a dream**, saying: 'Having constructed for us the temple of Dakṣiṇakāśī on the northern bank of the Citranadī river in the southern lands due to the decayed *śaiva* shrine which graciously rose in the Northern Kāśī – Benares –, the Viśvanāthasvāmin, you should offer [us]', the creator, our glorious King called with a sacred name, Arikēcari-devar Poṇṇiṇ Pērumāl Parākkirama Pāṇṭiya, [began to build]...

⁹ This epigraphic document was edited and translated in GOPINATHA RAO 1910: 103.

¹⁰ For the admixture of Sanskrit and Tamil expressions in the Southern epigraphical domain the interested reader may refer to ORR 2013.

¹¹ I quote the text of the record according to the edition in GOPINATHA RAO 1910: 96–97.

Starting from line 25, the record states that the King began the building of the structure in Ś.1368, 1446, as registered by inscription no. III, with the *karṣaṇa* ceremony. Lines 32–56 enumerate all the religious structures erected by Arikēcari in his complex. Lastly, line 57 states that the overall building process took seventeen years, starting from the 24th to the 40th regnal year of the sovereign, approximately from 1446 to 1462.¹²

The same circumstance of the building of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple is retold in a 15th–16th-century Sanskrit *mahākāvya* (lit. ‘great poem’), the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*. This work is an incomplete ‘historical’ poem in 12 *sargas* narrating the origin and establishment of the Pāṇṭiya kingdom. The poem, in its actual form, retells the history of the dynasty from the mythological accounts of the Tamil ‘Madurai cycle’ – drawn from the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam* of Perumparrāpuliūr Nampi (late 13th century) and a Sanskrit rendering of this material, the *Hālāsyamāhātmya* (14th–15th century) – to the times of King Jaṭilavarman Tribhuvanacakravartī Kōṇērinmaikoṇḍāṇ Parākkīrama Kulacēkara (c. 1480–1508 CE).¹³

About the author of the *mahākāvya*, Maṇḍalakavi, nothing is known, except for what he stated in each colophon of the poem; for instance, the ending of *sarga* I:¹⁴

|| iti kuṇḍinakulamaṇḍanasya maṇḍalakaviśvarasya kṛtau
pāṇḍyakulodaye prathamah sargaḥ ||

Here [ends] the first canto in ‘The resurgence of the Pāṇṭiya race’, composed by the Lord of poets Maṇḍala, the jewel of the Kuṇḍina clan.

In canto IX, Maṇḍalakavi extensively dealt with the reign of Arikēcari, celebrating his royal majesty and retelling the same building activities of the monarch, but introducing a slightly different scenario compared to the frame offered by the official narrative of the inscriptions. The first four stanzas of the poem introduce the King, with standard depictions of his power and munificence; for instance:

¹² An inscription on the *maṇḍapa* in front of the central shrine of the Kāśīviśvanātha complex issued in the 44th regnal year of Aḷaṅ Pērumāl Kulacēkara (1474 CE; SII V, no. 762) confirms the data of record no. IV.

¹³ The reign of Jaṭilavarman Kulacēkara is testified to by a dozen of unpublished records (ARE 1918, nos. 502–505, 508–510, 516, 524, 527, 534, 618); this epigraphical documentation gives the King’s access to the throne in 1480. Record no. 618 attests to the great patronage the monarch dedicated to the temple building, just like his maternal uncle Arikēcari Parākkīrama. This inscription, dated to 1508, involves donations and maintenance of the Aḷagiya Cokkanār and Varamtūram Pērumāl temples in Kadayannallur (Tirunelveli district).

¹⁴ Here and later on, I quote the text of *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* according to the critical edition (SARMA 1981).

*tasyānu pāṇḍyanṛpater dharaṇīśakoṭi-
koṭīrakoṭigrhamedhipadāravindah |
hastānubhāvahasitāmaralokaśākhī
bhartā bhuvo 'jani parākramapāṇḍyadevaḥ || 1 ||*

After this Pāṇḍya sovereign [Vīra; last sovereign of *sarga* VIII], Parākrama became the Lord of the Earth; his lotus-feet were [as] a host for numberless crowns of numberless kings and his hand mocked at the Divine Tree for munificence.

*yad gandhasindhurakarabhramitāribhūbhṛd-
unmuktaraktapayasā pariśicya hr̥ṣyan |
pratyarthisainyam asipāṭitam āhavorvīm
pātrārtham abhyavajahāra paretarājaḥ || 4 ||*

Death, sprinkling in ecstasy the enemy soldiers slain by swords with the water of blood, shed by enemy kings whirled around by the trunks of [Parākrama's] elephants, took her food [using] the battlefield [as] a vessel.

The poet represented Arikēcari Parākkīrama as a munificent and benevolent monarch, with the depiction of submissive kings bowing at his feet and honoured by his compassion, with imagery that somehow recalls passages from the Tamil *praśasti* in his Tenkasi record (no. II). The warrior-like temperament of the Pāṇṭiya sovereign is described in stanza 4, where we find the sinister image of the *paretarāja*, 'Death', enjoying the slaughtering perpetrated by the army of Arikesari on the battlefield, which is conceived as her food-plate.

Closing this descriptive introduction, Maṇḍalakavi described the circumstances of the construction of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple, but with slightly different particulars from the inscriptions, which, as we shall see, are of the foremost importance. The poet, in stanza 5, represented the Pāṇṭiya King sitting on his throne, at night, having accomplished his religious duties; all of sudden, he received an unexpected visit:

*sāyaṃ kadācid akhilaṃ niyamaṃ samāpya
bhadṛāsane prakāṭitasthitir eṣa pāṇḍyaḥ |
kāśyā dadarśa kam api dvijamājihānaṃ
sākaṃ saroruhadṛśā tanusambhavābhyaṃ || 5 ||*

On an evening, this Pāṇḍya was sitting on the throne, having performed his religious observances; he saw then a certain Brahmin coming from Kāśī, together with his lotus-eyed wife and two children.

*bhasma praśastam avanīramaṇasya phāle
yacchan natucchakarūṇāvaruṇālayasya |
ābhāṣya kiñcid ayam ātmanūbhavābhyām
haste phalaṃ vipulam asya vibhor adāsīt || 6 ||*

Bestowing sacred ashes on the forehead of the King, who was an ocean of infinite compassion, and saying something to this two sons, [the Brahmin] gave the King a large fruit.

The mysterious Brahmin from Benares, after having honoured Arikēcari with the sacred ashes and offering a precious fruit, informed the King of the purpose of his visit. In the next stanzas, the identity of the religious man is disclosed as well, to the great surprise of the Pāṇṭiya Lord:

*duṣṭair aluṇṭhi sakalaṃ dravinam tuluṣkaiḥ¹⁵
harmyaṃ ca ramyaṃ avadāritam asmadīyam |
kāntaṃ niśāntam upakalpaya dabhrasindhos
tīre mameti kathayan sa tirobabhūva || 7 ||*

After having said: '[Our] whole wealth was plundered by the evil Muslims and our lovely mansion burst to the ground. Build for us a beautiful house on the bank of Dabhra river!' he disappeared.

*kāśīm apāśya karuṇānidhir īśa eva
skandena sindhura mukhena dharendraputryā |
mām abhyupeta iti bāḍavasārvabhaumam
antarhitāḥ kṣitibhṛd ākalayāñ cakāra || 8 ||*

On the disappearance, the King reckoned the Brahmin: 'Indeed [He was] the Lord of the ocean of compassion, Śiva, who, having left Kāśī, has come to me together with Skanda, Gaṇeśa and Pārvatī – the Daughter of the Mountain.'

As the King realised, the Brahmin was the God Śiva himself, who had reached Arikēcari Parākkīrama with his divine family to ask the monarch to build a new house for them, after the Muslim plundering of Benares, which had destroyed his mansion there, the famous Viśvanātha temple. The Pāṇṭiya King then, after the disappearance of his divine visitor, commenced the erection of a new great sanctuary – described in very vague connotations in stanza 10 – in a completely new city:

¹⁵ The term seems to be a graphical variant for the more usual *turuṣka*, 'Turk' (MONIER-WILLIAMS 2005: 451).

*āsāḍya dabhrasaritas taṭam abhralaṅgha-
jaṅghālasālagahanam gahanam vilūya |
viśveśvarasya bhavanair vividhair vicitrām
cakre purīm sapadi dakṣiṇakāśiketi || 9 ||*

Reaching the banks of the Dabhra river and having cut the dense forests of *sāla* trees that reached up unto the sky, [the King] quickly built a city adorned by divers mansions of Śiva called Dakṣiṇakāśī – Benares of the South.

*prāsādagopuramahāmaṇimaṇḍapāni
bimbaṃ ca śāmbhavam anekavidham vidhāya |
nityotsavān api nirgalavikramo 'sau
kālam nināya kam api kṣapitārivargah || 10 ||*

Having established several Śiva idols, large jewelled halls, towers and palaces, and even regular festivities, [that monarch] of unbarred power and defeated enemies spent some time there.

Compared to the epigraphical material we examined in the first part of the essay, Maṇḍalakavi has modified the episode in several aspects. First of all, the most immediate difference between this passage of the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* and the inscriptions is that the poet attributed the construction of the capital city Tenkasi to the Pāṇṭiya King, while, as we have seen, one of the records (no. IV) mentioned only the erection of the temple.¹⁶ Moreover, the same Tenkasi

¹⁶ N. Sethuraman in his summary of the inscription no. IV, claimed that Arikēcari Parākkirāma, before erecting the Kāśīviśvanāthasvāmin temple, built the capital city of Tenkasi as well (SETHURAMAN s.d.: 5). The record (lines 28–31) reads [...] *dakṣiṇakāśiyākat tiruppaṭaivīṭum uṇṭu ākki uṭaiyār viśvanāthanaṭaiyum nācciyār ulakamumūtuṇaiya nācciyāraiṭum (...)*, ‘The Lord built in Dakṣiṇakāśi the temple [of Tenkasi] and installed [the idols of] God Viśvanātha and the Goddess Ulakamumūtuṇaiya Nācciyār’. In reality, the inscription does not make any kind of explicit reference to the building of the Pāṇṭiya capital, only to the main shrine and its subsidiary structures. This ambiguity may also be explained taking into consideration that in South Indian religious traditions the shrine and the god that resides in it are often identified with the place. Specifically, the Kāśīviśvanātha temple may be thought of as the city of Tenkasi itself. The Sanskrit Dalavāyagrahāram copper-plates of Varatunkarāma (GOPINATHA RAO 1910: 126–133), dated to Ś.1510 (approximately 1589 CE), attributed the building of the capital city of Tenkasi to Arikēcari Parākkirāma as well:

*svapne svālayakṛtyai viracitarūpeṇa viśvanāthena |
dattānugrahaśālī dakṣiṇakāśīti yaḥ purīm akarot || 11 ||*

The one, who obtained favour by Viśvanātha who had appeared in a dream to command the building of his abode, built the city called Dakṣiṇakāśī.

Given that the inscription is over one century later than Arikēcari, it be possible to suggest that after the erection of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple in the 15th century the city evolved around this holy shrine. So, in the later Pāṇṭiya tradition Arikēcari must have been perceived as the founder of both the capital and its iconic religious centre.

document gave fundamental details about the occasion of the construction of the temple: in the inscription's narrative, Śiva appeared to the monarch in a dream to ask to build a new temple in the South.¹⁷ In the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, on the contrary, the God and his family reached Arikēcari themselves, in an undefined place, for the same purpose.¹⁸

Given the absence of the dream mechanism in the *mahākāvya*, the modification operated by Maṇḍalakavi seems, indeed, to have the function of lessening the divine intervention as stated in the epigraphical record and to stress the royal effort in the prestigious task of giving a new home to the distressed Śiva, even under his direct request (*upakalpaya*, stanza 7). In the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, King Arikēcari Parākkirama is not a passive instrument guided by the divine will of the Tenkasi record, but an active re-establisher of lost welfare for the God. In this passage of *sarga* IX, Śiva, Pārvaṭī, Skanda, and Gaṇeśa, having suffered during the invasion of the *tuluṣkas* in North India, re-acquired their divine status and their right to be worshipped – exemplified by the image of a new temple – thanks to the Pāṇṭiya sovereign. The king is now not only the one who supports the divinity with the usual mutual dynamic

¹⁷ A similar parallel for the motif of the divine appearance in a dream can be traced in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* as well, namely, in the mythical episode of the foundation of Madurai (II, 40–60), which, of course, finds precedent in both the *Tiruvilaiyāṭṭarpurāṇam* (3) and *Hālāsyamāhātmya* (*adhyāya* 7). At night, in the Nīpavana forest, a Vaiśya merchant has a vision of a 'phantom city' appearing before him and reaches the Pāṇṭiya royal palace to inform the monarch. In the same night, King Pāṇḍa, the eponymous hero of the dynasty, receives the visit in a dream of Śiva (stanzas 49–51), who commands to erect an 'enduring city' (*śāśvataṃ puram*, verse 50) with temples for him, God Viṣṇu and the Devī. The King reaches the Nīpavana site and builds a magnificent city called Madhurā, or Madurai (stanzas 57–60).

¹⁸ In stanza 5 of the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, Maṇḍalakavi portrayed King Arikēcari sitting on his throne before receiving the visit of Śiva and his family, but without a precise spatial coordinate. At the closing of the narrative sequence concerning Varakuṇavarman II (862–880), in VIII, 17, the Pāṇṭiya King was ruling from the city of Madurai. From stanzas 18–58 of the same canto, the poet stopped mentioning the historical capital. Obviously, this data is mirrored, in the historical reality, by the Pāṇṭiya political situation at the advent of the Cōḷa interregnum. Even when the narration reached King Jaṭāvarman Kulacēkara II (1237–1266), son of Māraṇvarman Cuntara I (1216–1241), the establisher of the 'Second Empire', the poet did not specify the existence of any centre of power of the Tenkasi dynasty. Before the foundation of the new capital in *sarga* IX, as described by the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, it seems that the Pāṇṭiya sovereigns exercised their power from a 'no-place', undefined and deprived of specific spatial and historical coordinates. It is only with the edification of the second capital that Maṇḍalakavi referred once again to a dynastic and political place. It may be suggested that in the general plan of the *mahākāvya*, the foundation of Tenkasi assumed the function of what we could define as 'implementation of spatial absence'. After the historical loss of Madurai, Arikēcari 'implemented' the absence of a gravitational point building a new legitimising political and religious abode, both for the Tenkasi Pāṇṭiya power and for the God who once occupied the throne of the first capital as Cuntara Pāṇṭiya and who now received a new worship centre exemplified by the Kāśivīśvanātha complex.

of the religious patronage but also the one who grants it its heavenly status. The *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* seems then to express somehow a direct dependence of the divinity on his human patron.

As the reader may recall, the standard relation between the institution of kingship and the temple donation can be summarised as a mutual and interdependent one. Bestowing gifts or concessions on a given shrine was the tool to gain political legitimisation and temporal authority sanctioned by the divinity and, by extension, the Brahmanical class. Such a dynamic has been perfectly described by James Heitzman with the notion of ‘gifts of power’ in relation to the Cōḷa polity. Quoting his words,

The driving force behind donations was the concept of legitimization of authority, whereby gifts to the gods or their representatives on earth resulted in a transfer of divine sanctity and merits to the givers. The primary purpose of eleemosynary grants was, then, to tap into the power of the divine, to enhance sanctity and then to demonstrate it to society. (HEITZMAN 1997: 1).

This institutional paradigm of Indian kingship presupposed then the presence of a ‘servant’ – the monarch acting in favour of the God – ‘the served one’. Even given the mutuality of the process, the divine ‘served’ occupied always the foremost focal point in the religious and ideological aspect of the ‘gifts of power’.

In relation to the issue of the royal patronage, Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam have analysed the particular changes in the matter of the courtly sponsorship, in the framework of their study on the conflation between kings and gods, and, by extension, the royal court and temple in 17th-century Nāyaka Thanjavur. The scholars claimed that a symptomatic turning point had to be located in the vernacular literary production of the period. Taking into account literary sources in Telugu dated to the times of the last ruler of the dynasty, as the *Hēmābjanāyikāsvayaṃvaramu* by Mannārudeva (c. 1670), the scholars proposed a shifting in the ideological balance of the patronage institution, recreated through a rhetorical superimposition of the emblematic places of the ritual giving, the temple and the court. Analysing a fundamental scene of patronage in this *yakṣagāṇa*, during which the God himself speaks to the Nāyaka king, defined as ‘you are my son, minister and general; my friend, devotee and trusted companion... you seek my welfare in all things’ (NARAYANA RAO et al. 1998: 181), they concluded that ‘in a sense the traditional patronage has been inverted, the servant has risen to mastery... the king is son, servant, commander to the god, but also superior in power; he is

the source of gifts to the temple' (NARAYANA RAO et al. 1998: 180–181). After having taken into consideration further evidence, such as the *maṅgalaśloka* from the *Rājagopālavilāsamu* of Ceṅgalva Kālakavi, which states a rhetorical equation between the God Rājagopālaśauri and the King Vijayarāghavaśauri through 'the endless wealth' given by the latter, Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam concluded that

[T]he god's new name, indeed his entire status in this temple... has emerged out of Vijayarāghava's gifts. There is still some sense of mutuality... but there is an equally powerful claim to equality; both god and king are, not by accident, Śauri... here service marks the dependence of the served on the supposed servant. (NARAYANA RAO et al. 1998: 182–183).

To my contention, the ideological revolution which supposedly took place in the Nāyaka era, if perhaps not fully developed, was already present *in nuce* in 16th-century *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*. The scenario of royal patronage offered by Maṇḍalakavi in *sarga* IX is, in reality, different and more powerful than that presented in the successive vernacular sources. Arikēcari Parākkirama is not represented in the act of bestowing 'gifts of power' in the temple but building the temple itself. The descriptive framework presented by the *mahākāvya* introduced moreover a considerable difference compared to the official narrative of the Kāśīviśvanātha record no. IV, completely centred on the mechanics of the divine dream. Taking into consideration the important changes, the poet portrayed the Pāṇṭiya sovereign hosting the distressed divine family of Śiva, who, after the Muslim incursion in the North, lost the abode in the holy city of Benares. Maṇḍalakavi described the God as a wandering Brahmin, seeking Arikēcari's benevolence and patronage.¹⁹ It can be reasonably stated that such a modality for the poet's depiction is far from coincidental. Maṇḍalakavi subtly drew out the polar tension of the patronage dynamics exemplifying it through the dialogue between the sovereign, a member of the *kṣatriya* caste, and Śiva, disguised as a Brahmin, in search of support. The meeting of the King and the divine Brahmin in *sarga* IX of the *mahākāvya* incorporates symbolically the interdependent relationship between the temporal and sacral power, which assure royal legitimisation through its Brahmanical sanction.

¹⁹ The final scene of the meeting between the Pāṇṭiya sovereign and the Brahmin/God is open to several interpretations. For instance the narrative sequence of the bestowing of sacred ashes and the fruit to the King may suppose the treating of the monarch as a deity; or, the act may be simply read as an exemplification of the mutual exchange, a blessing for the temple construction. It is my contention that both possibilities are conceivable.

A probable shift in patronage can be observed also in the ideological results of the building of the Tenkasi complex. Following the data given by Maṇḍalakavi about the construction of the city itself (stanza 9), Arikēcari not only bestowed a new abode to the distressed divinity, but granted a new political and legitimising centre to the new Pāṇṭiya line as well. Apparently, the support given to the legitimising god and the construction of a new historical capital could have led to an ideological shift in the patronage balance in favour of royal power, conceived as both religious and political focal points of the dynamic.

As a last point, we may also note how the monarch in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* re-created Śiva's lost abode in the North in the Tamil land, building it and bestowing it to the divinity who only then regained his natural right to worship. In a sense, Arikēcari, erecting a new Viśvanātha temple, reconfigured the identity of the God as well, who was transformed from the old Viśvanātha of Benares into the 'imported' Viśvanātha of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple,²⁰ who guaranteed a powerful claim of political and religious legitimisation for the Tenkasi Pāṇṭiya dynasty.

In the *mahākāvya*, the traditional concept of patronage seems then to be completely reconfigured. The 'servant' – the sovereign – has gained 'mastery' over the 'served', the God, who now is dependent on the former not only for the religious patronage but also to have a worship centre which can exemplify its mutual relation with the royal power.

3. Conclusions

As we briefly noted at the beginning of the historical survey, by the 14th century, the Pāṇṭiya dynasty lost control over its historical capital Madurai, in the context of one of the most delicate periods in the history of South India. An obscure line of rulers, claiming direct descent from the imperial Pāṇṭiyas, founded a small kingdom in the Tirunelveli area, with their capital at Tenkasi. Arikēcari Parākkīrama, the most important sovereign of this later dynasty, erected the majestic complex of the Kāśīviśvanātha, whose building process is attested to by several pieces of inscriptional evidence. Among this epigraphic material, documents nos. III–IV have occupied a relevant part of our analysis. While the former is undoubtedly valuable for its careful dating of each step in the building process, the latter attested to the Tenkasi official

²⁰ The motif of the God Śiva coming to the Southern lands from the North is a recurrent topos in the Tamil religious tradition. It is enough to think about the myths of Naṭarāja coming to Chidambaram or Śiva in the form of Sundarēśvara (Tamil Cuntarēcuvarar) finding his abode in Madurai.

ideological narrative for the building of the temple. God Śiva, the patron deity of the Pāṇṭiya line, appeared in a dream to Arikēcari Parākkīrama, asking him to build a new shrine in the South due to the dilapidated conditions of its Viśvanātha complex in Benares. The same episode was retold a few decades later in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* by Maṇḍalakavi. In the *mahākāvya*'s framework, the narrative of the Kāśīviśvanātha inscriptions has been modified for precise finalities: as we have evidenced, the author lessened the mechanism of the dream revelation to emphasise the royal effort in the construction of the temple. Arikēcari Parākkīrama, portrayed in the inscriptions as the passive performer of Śiva's will, became the active restorer of the divine welfare in Maṇḍalakavi's poem and the bestower of a new ruling centre to the Tenkasi kingdom as well. This modification had significant consequences in the representation of the patronage dynamics within the new Pāṇṭiya ideology. As we have seen, the sovereign in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* restored the God's position with the construction of a new temple. The polarity between the 'servant' and the 'served' has been tightened and restructured with an emphasis on the role of the kingship institution, upon which the divine authority is now completely dependent. The poet subtly exemplified the ideological balance of the patronage dynamic with the meeting between the King, a *kṣatriya*, and Śiva, disguised as a Brahmin.

The study of these descriptive passages from the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* has shown also how the Tenkasi political narrative of the 15th–16th century projected powerful claims of legitimisation with the building of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple. This secondary dynasty recreated within its Tamil realm the holiest of shrines, the Viśvanāthasvāmin temple of Benares, reshaping the identity of the God, who, from its Northern aspect, was readapted as the patron deity of the new city of Tenkasi. The import of the deity from the North not only sustained the claim of legitimisation of this obscure ruling line, but realigned it within the *śaiva* and, of course, the political tradition of the Madurai Pāṇṭiyas.

As a last point, the episode of the building of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple and Arikēcari's role represented the second step of an ascending climax running throughout the structure of the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, impacting the representation of Pāṇṭiya kingship. In *sarga* V, in the mythical episode drawn from the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam* of the war between Indra and King Ugra, the latter, considered the ancestor of the new Tenkasi ruling line,²¹ defeated the

²¹ In *sarga* VI of the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, Maṇḍalakavi interrupted the drawing from the mythological section of the Pāṇṭiya past, in order to introduce the proper historical matter. Modifying the genealogical tables of the Tamil cycle, Maṇḍalakavi connected the two parts stating the end of the rule of Ugra and the access to the throne of his son Varakuṇa Pāṇṭiya (VI, 40), while in the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam* and *Hālāsyamāhātmya* Ugra's successor was his

Lord of the Gods, hitting his crown. Modifying the source passage from the Madurai cycle, Maṇḍalakavi portrayed Ugra crowning Indra and restoring his authority²² – which suggests an unprecedented depiction of the legitimisation of the divine supremacy by the royal power. The next step, represented by *sarga* IX, impacted further the representation of the Tenkasi kingship; in the narrative sequence of IX, 5–9, we have read how Arikēcari Parākkīrama saved the distressed Śiva and his family, building the Kāśīviśvanātha temple and restoring both the lost welfare of the God and his right to the cult. The dynamic of the ‘served’ and ‘servant’, inverted by Maṇḍalakavi and transformed into a univocal mechanism in which the God was completely dependent on his royal patron, was sublimated into the portraiture of the poet’s patron – Jaṭilavarman Parākkīrama Kulacēkara (1480–1508) – as a God and his first genuine divinisation,²³ completing then this progressive climax in the structure of the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*. This ideological turning point in the *mahākāvya* impacting the representation of the Tenkasi kingship, together with the official narrative of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple, are symptomatic evidence of powerful claims of legitimisation and succession by a circumscribed dynasty – such as the Tenkasi

son Vīra Pāṇṭiya. This King, according to SARMA 1981: L, is to be identified with Varakuṇa II (862–880), the foremost monarch of the ‘medieval’ period. Altering consistently the genealogy from the mythological matter of the Madurai cycle and making this King the supposed son of Ugra, the poet ingeniously unified the two *axis* of the *mahākāvya*, the divine past and the first imperial phase of the Pāṇṭiya dynasty. The connection of the mythical matter to the historical ‘reality’ – represented by King Varakuṇa II – implies also other consequences. Unifying the two polarities, Maṇḍalakavi not only shaped the dynastic identity of the Tenkasi rulers as the legitimate successors of the Madurai Kings, but directly created a clear claim of descent from the gods Śiva, Mīnākṣī and their son Ugra (as the father of Varakuṇavarman).

²² *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* V, 68:

*apacaraṇam idaṃ kṣamasva me
valamathaneti vadan mahīpatiḥ |
mukutaṃ adhiśīro marutvato
nyadhita mumoca nīradacchadam || 68 ||*

The King, saying: ‘O Destroyer of Vala! Please forgive this imprudent action of mine!’, replaced the crown on Indra’s head and released the imprisoned clouds.

The section of the *Tiruvilaiyārpuṇṇam* and the *Hālāsyamāhātmya* devoted to the fight of Ugra and Indra (XVIII, 49–81) presents a different scenario comparing to the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*: after the breaking of Indra’s crown in stanza 65, Indra ran away in fear, Ugra worshipped the *somasundaraliṅga* (66) and returned to Madurai with his army (68).

²³ In *sarga* X, 67–74, Maṇḍalakavi portrayed the physical appearance of his patron Parākkīrama Kulacēkara violating the canonical *kāvya* dynamic for the representation of the human beings, *nakhaśīkhavarṇana* (‘description from the toe-nails to the head’), employing instead the style of representation for the description of the gods, starting from the head and finishing to the feet. The interested reader may refer to PIERDOMINICI LEÃO 2020 for the matter of the divinisation of kingship in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*.

one at the dawn of the 16th century – struggling for survival and the political recognition in a Southern scenario ruled by the last great Hindu empire India ever had, Vijayanagara.

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Abbreviations

- ARE *Annual Report of Indian Epigraphy* 1895, 1905, 1918. Madras: Archaeological Survey of India.
- EI Hultzsch, Eugen and Sten Konow, eds 1981. *Epigraphia Indica IX*. Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India.
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