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Faithful Copying in Tamil Manuscripts: A Philological Remark

Giovanni Ciotti

1. Introduction

It is now quite a few years that Marco Franceschini and I have been collecting and analysing a large corpus of colophons, borrowing/lending formulas, and paratextual elements at large that can be found in palm-leaf manuscripts hailing from Tamil Nadu.¹ It should however come as no surprise that some expressions found therein are still problematic to interpret.²

One such expression – in Tamil – reads *X elutiṇa naṇmaikku*.³ It literally means something like ‘for the goodness of writing X’ or ‘for the goodness of X that is written’ – ‘X’ being here a placeholder for the title of a work or a word meaning ‘manuscript’ and the like. *Elutiṇa* is the past relative participle (*peyareccam* in Tamil) of the verbal root *elutu-* ‘to write’ or, rather, ‘to copy’ in the case of manuscripts. *Naṇmaikku* is the dative of the abstract noun *naṇmai* ‘goodness’, in turn from the adjectival/defective root (*kuṟippuvinai*) *nal-* ‘to be good’.

In the above-mentioned corpus, which as of today contains 953 colophons, etc. from palm-leaf manuscripts containing mostly religious, belletristic and grammatical texts,⁴ *elutiṇa naṇmaikku* occurs only four times, and its precise import is rather elusive. It must clearly refer to the quality of the copy, but in which exact terms? It is a natural step, then, to expand the research to as many other

1 See BURIOLA MENEGHIN, CIOTTI & FRANCESCHINI forthcoming, CIOTTI 2022, CIOTTI & FRANCESCHINI 2016, CIOTTI & FRANCESCHINI 2024, and FRANCESCHINI 2022. Some may prefer the term “paracontent” to that of “paratext”, see CIOTTI *et al.* 2018.

2 On a similar concern, see CIOTTI 2022.

3 As it will appear in the attestations discussed below, the words *elutiṇa* and *naṇmaikku* can also be spelled *elutiya* and *naṇmaikki*, respectively.

4 These are the main topics of the texts preserved in the manuscript collections in Tamil Nadu and Europe.

sources as possible, including other text genres and material supports, in search of more attestations that will help us better understand its meaning.

2. Attestations Included in the Current Corpus

Here are the four attestations mentioned above. An edition of the full paratext is first given, followed by an English translation where the expression *X eḷutiṇa naṇmaikku* is for the time being simply translated as ‘for the goodness of X that is copied’.

(1) *BnF Indien 337 – Upatēcakāṇṭam – date unclear*

[ff. 273r7–v3] ... *tirucciṛṛampalam* ௨ *civamayam* ௨ ⟨āka⟩c *ceyyuḷ* – 4333 ௨ *tun-*
muk[i] ⟨YJ1a⟩ *āvaṇi m° 8* ⟨D2⟩ *cukkiṛavāramu makālaṭcuminonpum uttirāṭanaṭcat-*
tiramun tiraiyoteci pīraṭoṭapuṇṇiyakālamuṇ kūṭiṇa cupatiṇattile cellamaṇipīḷaiya-
varkaḷukku upatēcakāṇṭam eḷuti nīraiveriyatu murṛum ௨ *ivaḷ eḷutiṇa naṇmaikku ti-*
ruveṇṇainallūr tillaiyappavāṭṭiyār kumārār [[...]] *kūṭappākkam vāṭṭiyār tampi am-*
palavāṇavāṭṭiyār kai eḷuttu ௨ *ivaḷiyil* [u] *ruttirākkam māṇmiya varaikkum ceyyuḷ* 712
†?† *nīkki ceyyuḷ* 3621m *ampalavāṇavāṭṭiyār* \+/ / *kai* \ *eḷuttu* ௨ *śrī kokilāmpāl kiru-*
pai ௨ *civamayam*⁵

‘The illustrious *Ṭirṛampalam*. The essence of Śiva. Total stanzas 4333. On the auspicious day when the Jovian year *Tunmuki*, the month of *Āvaṇi*, the 8th day, Friday, the *Makālaṭcumi* festival, the constellation of *Uttirāṭam*, the thirteenth [lunar day], the auspicious time of the evening (*pīraṭoṭa°*) come together, the *Upatēcakāṇṭam* was copied and completed for Mr *Cellamaṇipīḷai*. The handwriting of *Ampalavāṇavāṭṭiyār*, son of *Tillaiyappavāṭṭiyār* of *Tiruveṇṇainallūr* [and] younger brother of *Kūṭappākkam-vāṭṭiyār* for the goodness of these [stanzas] that are copied. Among these [stanzas] (*ivaḷiyil*), excluding (*nīkki*) the 712 stanzas up into (*varaikkum*) the *Uruttirākkam Māṇmiyam* (= the section of the *Upatēcakāṇṭam* called *Rudrākṣamahātmya*), 3621 stanzas are

5 Hereafter, only the relevant parts of colophons are quoted, the omitted parts being replaced by ellipses. A number of brackets of different shapes are used to indicate that the original reading has issues and has been restored: ⟨ ⟩ for symbols, [[]] for scribal elisions, \ / and / \ for scribal insertions, [] for damages of the support and their editorial evaluation. † † (*cruces desperationis*) are used when reading and/or interpretation have failed. A few observations are included in round brackets in the translations, when needed.

in the handwriting of Ampalavāṇavāṭṭiyār. The compassion of the illustrious Kokilāmpāl. The essence of Śiva.’⁶

(2) BnF Indien 383 – Kūḷappanāyakkaṇ Vīraliviṭutūtu – no date

[ff. guard-leaf2r2–5] ... śrī(rāma)ce(yam) ௨ yinta cuvaṭi yeḷutiṇa naṇmaikki cimāi nāṭṭāmai mācilāmaṇiyā (piḷḷai) kumāraṇ mayil (piḷḷai) taṇṇuṭa ciṇēkitam puṭa-vaikaṭaik kaṇakku mukammatu ucaṇ cāyapu uṭaiya contac cuvaṭi ௨ yeṭuttavaṇ kuṭukka vēṇum kuṭukkāvīṭṭāl tampirāṇukku narakavāḷiy āvārkaḷ yitu ariya vēṇṭiyatu ௨ vēṇum

Tentative translation – ‘Victory to Lord Rāma! The manuscript is property (contam) of Mukammatu Ucaṇ Cāyapu (i.e. Mohamed Hussain Sahib), saree shop’s accountant, thanks to the friendly [copying] (ciṇēkitam?) of the district chieftain (cimāi nāṭṭāmai, read cīmai nāṭṭāṇmai?) Mayil Piḷḷai (read Mayiluppillai?) son of Mācilāmaṇiyā Piḷḷai, for the goodness of this manuscript that has been copied. Those who take [this manuscript] should return it; if it is not returned, to the Lord they will be (āvārkaḷ) residents of hell (narakavāḷi). This should be known. It is necessary (vēṇum, read vēṇum).’⁷

6 In this article, all translations are mine, and date conversions are directly calculated or checked by Marco Franceschini, whom I thank for this. As far as BnF Indien 337 is concerned, this has been catalogued here: <https://tst-project.github.io/mss/Indien_0337.xml>. It seems that there is a mistake in the date and this cannot be precisely identified and, therefore, converted to the Gregorian calendar. The most plausible emendation would allow us to convert the date to 21 Aug. 1896, but the manuscript is supposed to have reached Paris in 1855. Hence, Emmanuel Francis-Gonze provisionally dates it to either 1716 or 1776, on the basis of other possible emendations and conversions, as well as in light of the overall appearance of the manuscript. For an investigation on the mentioned change of scribal hand in the manuscript, corroborated by the use of Hussein Adnan Mohammed’s ‘Handwriting Analysis Tool’ (HAT) <<https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/publications/software/hat.html>>, see CIOTTI & FRANCESCHINI 2024.

7 BnF Indien 383 has been catalogued here: <https://tst-project.github.io/mss/Indien_0383.xml>. There are a few words in this paratext that remain unclear to me: 1. I suggest to read cimāi nāṭṭāmai as cīmai nāṭṭāṇmai, the latter meaning ‘chieftainship’, but here understood to mean ‘chieftain’; 2. mayil (piḷḷai) could correspond to both names Mayiluppillai and Mayilappillai, the former being preferred because surely a male name (here needed since it is preceded by the word kumāraṇ); 3. By far the most far-fetched guess, I very tentatively translate ciṇēkitam (lit. ‘friendship’) as some sort of postposition (like mūlam ‘by means of’) and assume that it must somehow refer to the act of copying the text, otherwise the whole string yinta cuvaṭi yeḷutiṇa naṇmaikki would

(3) CNM D1063 – *Tirukkuraḷ with Saravana Perumal Aiyar's Commentary* – 13 Feb. 1835 & 1830 & 20 March 1835

[ff. 370r3–6] ... ௩ kaliyuka ⟨YJ1a⟩ 4935 – cālivākaṇa caka ⟨YJ1a⟩ 1756 – iṅkilicu ⟨YJ1a⟩ 1835 itil nikaḷkiṇṇa ceya ⟨YJ1a⟩ māci m° 3 ⟨D2⟩yil | kaliyuka ⟨YJ1a⟩ 4931 cālivākaṇa caka ⟨YJ1a⟩ 1752 iṅkilicu ⟨YJ1a⟩ 1830 itil nikaḷkiṇṇa vikirti ⟨YJ1a⟩ ceṇṇappaṭaṇattil acciṇṇa patippitta tirukkuraḷ – \1835 ⟨YJ1a⟩ mārci m°/ ceya ⟨YJ1a⟩ paṅkuṇi m° 9 [...] aṇuṣaṇaṣṣantiram paṇcami – cukkaṇavāram – riṣapalakkaṇattil – posttakattil eḷuti muṇṇittu ௩ eḷutiya naṇmaikki kēḷūr kaṇa⟨kku⟩ cōlaiya p° kumāraṇ veṅku p° kai yeḷuttu ௩

‘[Having begun?] in the Jovian year Ceya, month of Māci, 3rd day, which occurs in the year 4935 of the Kaliyuka, the year 1756 of the Cālivākaṇa era, the year 1835 of the English [era] (iṅkilicu), the *Tirukkuraḷ* that was printed in Chennai (ceṇṇappaṭaṇattil) in the Jovian year Vikirti, which occurs in the year 4931 of the Kaliyuka, the year 1752 of the Cālivākaṇa era, the year 1830 of the English [era], was fully copied in [this] manuscript in the Jovian year Ceya, month of Paṅkuṇi, 9th day, [which occurs in] the year 1835 [of the English era], month of Mārci, under the constellation of Aṇuṣa, on the fifth [lunar day], on Friday, in the Rṣabha lakṣaṇa. The handwriting of Veṅku Piḷḷai son of the accountant (kaṇakku) Cōlaiya Piḷḷai of Kēḷūr for the goodness of writing (?).’⁸

(4) IFP RE10832 – Kallāṭam – cyclical date, possibly 1835

[ff. 123r7–v1] vetava⟨nam⟩ kallāṭam yeḷuti naṇmaikkik korukkai nākalinṅkam nīṭūḷi vāḷka maṇmata āṭi m° 18 ⟨D2⟩ kallāṭa[m] eḷuti mukintatu

float unhinged with no logical connection to the rest of the sentence. Literally, *taṇṇuṭa ciṇṇēkitam* would mean ‘friendship with him’. On a safer side, for the translation in English of a similar occurrence of infinitive (here *aṇiya*) + *vēṇṇiyatu vēṇum*, see e.g. POPE 1859: 190.

- 8 This colophon contains three dates, namely 13 February 1835, April–December 1830, and 20 March 1835. The second and third dates clearly refer to when the text of the *Tirukkuraḷ* that is copied in the manuscript was originally printed and when the process of copying the manuscript was completed, respectively. However, what happened on 13 Feb. 1835 is unspecified. It is possible that this date refers to when the process of copying was begun and that the copyist simply forgot to add a gerund (*viṇaiyeccam* in Tamil), such as *āraṇpittu*, *tuṭaṅku*, or the like, meaning ‘having begun’. In this respect, it is possible to note that a vertical stroke is added after the end of the first date, probably to indicate that something is missing or irregular: 3 ⟨D1⟩yil | kaliyuka. For Tamil manuscripts copied from printed books, see FRANCIS 2017.

‘For the goodness of copying (emend *yeluti* into *yelutiṇa*)⁹ the *Kallāṭam* at *Vetavaṇam* (?), may *Korukkai Nākaliṅkam* live a long time. In the [Jovian] year *Maṇmata*, month of *Āṭi*, 18th day, the *Kallāṭam* was fully copied.’

3. Attestations Not Included in the Current Corpus

Searching for other attestations of the same expression, I came across two more that are recorded in palm-leaf manuscript catalogues. They are not part of the corpus under investigation, since the latter includes only manuscripts that Marco Franceschini and I could inspect directly or through digital reproductions.

(5) *Kolkata, National Library, ms n° 3177 – Ilakkaṇaviḷakkam – no date*

*alaṅkāram elutiṇa naṇmaikku vayittiyaliṅkattiṇ kaiyeluttu*¹⁰

‘The handwriting of *Vayittiyaliṅkam* for the goodness of the *alaṅkāram* [content or chapter?] that is copied.’¹¹

(6) *Thanjavur, Saraswathi Mahal Library, ms n° 172 – Kuṇavākaṭam – problematic date*

(811) *īcura varuṣam māci mātam 1 kuṇavākaṭam ... elutiṇa naṇmaikku māṅkaṇi rāvuttar kumāraṇ ciṇṇayicumālaṇ*¹²

‘In the [Kollam] year 811, [Jovian] year *Īcuram*, month of *Māci*, 1st day, *Ciṇṇayicumālaṇ* son of *Māṅkaṇi Rāvuttar* for the goodness of the *Kuṇavākaṭam* that is copied.’¹³

9 In light of the occurrences discussed above, one would be tempted to emend *yeluti naṇmaikkik* into *yelutiṇa naṇmaikkik*, a plausible case of haplography. This would of course make also more sense syntactically with a relative participle (*peyareccam* in Tamil) rather than a gerund/absolut(ive) (*viṇaiyeyccam*) adjacent to a noun.

10 Text as per entry n° 97 of the catalogue, see CAṆMUKAM PIḸḸAI & KANTARAMŪRTTI 1979: 24.

11 At present, I cannot ascertain if the term *alaṅkāram* is used as a synonym of *aṇi* in the sense of the title of the subchapter of the *Ilakkaṇaviḷakkam* about ornamentation in poetry, or as a general term referring to the content of that chapter.

12 Text as per entry n° 276 of the catalogue, see VENKATARAJAN 1965: 123–4.

13 The date is problematic, since the Kollam year 811 cannot correspond to the Jovian year *Īcuram*. For more information about dates in manuscripts from Tamil Nadu, see FRANCESCHINI 2022 and FRANCESCHINI in this volume. The translation of this example is of course tentative, given that we do not know the extent of the missing text represented by the ellipsis.

4. Legal Documents

I could retrieve six attestations of the expression *elutiṇa naṇmaikku* in the *Putuvai Iṭṭṭṭṭai Valaṇkaic Cāṭiyar Varalāṟu* ('The History of the Left and Right Casts of Puducherry'), which deals with disputes between members of different casts in Puducherry around the 70's of the eighteenth century.¹⁴

All six attestations repeat the same legal formula (with minimal variations) that states that a document is signed, in fact in order to prove the 'goodness' (*naṇmai*), i.e. the authenticity, of what is written (*elutiṇa*) on it.

(7a) *inta vākkumūlam elutiṇa naṇmaikku cavarirāya nayakaṇiyappaṇ ūrkaṇakku yeṇṇu kaiyeḷuttu*¹⁵

'Signed (*kaiyeḷuttu*, lit. signature) as Cavarirāya Nayakaṇiyappaṇ town accountant, to [assure] the authenticity of this affidavit that has been written.'

(7b) *inta vākkumūlam elutiṇa naṇmaikku ūrkaṇakku cavarirāya nayaṇiyappaṇ eṇṇu kaiyeḷuttu*¹⁶

'Signed as town accountant Cavarirāya Nayaṇiyappaṇ, to [assure] the authenticity of this affidavit that has been written.'

(7c) *inta vākkumūlam elutiṇa naṇmaikku cavaṇiyappaṇ ūrkaṇakkeṇṇu kaiyeḷuttu irukkiṇatu*¹⁷

'Signed as Cavaṇiyappaṇ town accountant, to [assure] the authenticity of this affidavit that has been written.'

(7d) *itu elutiṇa naṇmaikku ūrkaṇakku cavarirāya nayaṇiyappaṇ neṭṭeḷuttu*¹⁸

'The signature (*neṭṭeḷuttu*) of the town accountant Cavarirāya Nayaṇiyappaṇ, to [assure] the authenticity of what (*itu*) has been written.'

(7e) *itu elutiṇa naṇmaikku putuvai nakarm ūrkaṇakku cavarirāya nayaṇiyappaṇ neṭṭeḷuttu*¹⁹

'The signature of the town accountant of Putuvainakaram (i.e. Puducherry) Cavarirāya Nayaṇiyappaṇ, to [assure] the authenticity of what (*itu*) has been written.'

14 Text as per the edition, see CAUNTARAPĀṆṬIYAṆ 1995: 144–168. This is based on paper manuscript GOML 3196, of which I could only access a transcript dated 1962–63 that is available online.

15 CAUNTARAPĀṆṬIYAṆ 1995: 145.

16 CAUNTARAPĀṆṬIYAṆ 1995: 145.

17 CAUNTARAPĀṆṬIYAṆ 1995: 148.

18 CAUNTARAPĀṆṬIYAṆ 1995: 152.

19 CAUNTARAPĀṆṬIYAṆ 1995: 159.

These attestations and their legal context clarify the import of the expression *elutiṇa naṇmaikku*, but invite us to reflect further on the distinction between authenticity and faithfulness.

5. Revised Interpretation

If it is clear that when it comes to affidavits (*vākkumūlam*) and the like, the core issue is to ensure their authenticity, due to the legal implications of their content. We should however consider for a moment whether this interpretation makes sense in the case of manuscripts containing religious, belletristic and grammatical texts. If we want to move beyond a rather vague rendition of *naṇmai* as ‘goodness’ and the unfitting one of ‘authenticity’, I would suggest that the term ‘faithfulness’ is probably the most appropriate. This would of course imply that the copyist was as careful as possible in copying the content of the model/antigraph into the copy/apograph.

Additionally, we should, of course, add the remark already made in the introduction that *elutiṇa* cannot be translated as a relative participle of ‘to write’, but rather of ‘to copy’, considering that the verb *elutu-* clearly covers both meanings. Therefore, I propose for *X elutiṇa naṇmaikku* the overall translation ‘in [assurance] that X has been faithfully copied’.

Finally, one should notice that *kaiyeluttu* cannot easily be understood to mean ‘signature’. Copyist’s signatures are extremely rare in manuscripts, at least in the manuscripts of the corpus under investigation.²⁰ The term can then be rather translated as ‘handwriting’.

Consequently, I would rectify the translations of (1)–(6) into (1 bis)–(6 bis), as follows:

(1 bis) *BnF Indien 337*

ivai elutiṇa naṇmaikku [...] ampalavāṇavāttiyār kai eluttu

‘The handwriting of Ampalavāṇavāttiyār [...] in [assurance] that these [stanzas] have been faithfully copied.’

20 The only clear case is that of IFP RE10890 [55v5] *ippaṭikku – i – vēluppiḷlai* ‘Thus/In faith, I. Vēluppiḷlai’. Two more plausible cases of signatures can be found in IFP RE10829α and IFP RE10845 (see CIOTTI 2022: 164–165). Another clear occurrence outside the above-mentioned corpus is found in BnF Indien 348 [13v3] (Emmanuel Francis-Gonze, personal communication). In both cases, the name of the scribe comes at the end, contrary to the examples discussed in this article.

(2 bis) BnF Indien 383

yinta cuvaṭi yeḷutiṇa naṇmaikki ... mayil <piḷḷai> taṇṇuṭa ciṇēkitam ...

‘... thanks to the friendly [copying] (*ciṇēkitam?*) of Mayil Piḷḷai (read Mayilup-piḷḷai?), in [assurance] that this manuscript has been faithfully copied.’

(3 bis) CNM D1063

eḷutiya naṇmaikki kēḷūr kaṇa<kku> cōlaiya p° kumāraṇ veṇku p° kai

‘The handwriting of Veṇku Piḷḷai son of the accountant (*kaṇakku*) Cōlaiya Piḷḷai of Kēḷūr in [assurance] that [this *Tirukkuraḷ*] has been faithfully copied.’

(4 bis) IFP RE10832

... kallāṭam yeḷuti naṇmaikkik koṟukkai nākalīṅkam nīṭūḷi vāḷka

‘May Koṟukkai Nākalīṅkam live a long time, in [assurance] that the *Kallāṭam* has been faithfully copied (emend *yeḷuti* into *yeḷutiṇa*).’

(5 bis) Kolkata, National Library, ms n° 3177

alaṅkāram eḷutiṇa naṇmaikku vayittiyalīṅkattiṇ kaiyeḷuttu

‘The handwriting of Vayittiyalīṅkam in [assurance] that the *alaṅkāram* has been faithfully copied.’

(6 bis) Thanjavur, Saraswathi Mahal Library, ms n° 172

kuṇavākaṭam ... eḷutiṇa naṇmaikku māṅkaṇi rāvuttar kumāraṇ ciṇṇayicumālaṇ

‘Ciṇṇayicumālaṇ son of Māṅkaṇi Rāvuttar in [assurance] that the *Kuṇavākaṭam* has been faithfully copied.’

6. Attestations in Inscriptions

The same expression can also be found in a few inscriptions, both on copper and stone, of which two examples will be discussed below. Whether here *naṇmai* (‘goodness’) implies faithfulness of copying or authenticity of the content is sometimes difficult to ascertain – the two aspects being perhaps impossible to neatly tell apart.

(8) Copper-plate inscription for the Akkacālai Maṭam (Paḷaṇi) – ca. 1670

[lines 309–311] ... *intat taṇma cācaṇappaṭṭayam eḷutiya naṇmaikku avaṇiyāpuram camayak kaṇakku piḷḷai arikara puttiraṇ eḷutiṇa paṭṭayattiṇ paṭi rāyappācāmi makaṇ vacantarāyaṇ kaiyi eḷuttu* ௨²¹

Here, the polysemy of the verb *eḷutu-* (‘to write’, ‘to copy’ or even ‘to compose’)²² and the flexibility of Tamil syntax open the way to a plethora of interpretations, of which a few likely ones are discussed hereafter.

Translation 1 – ‘The handwriting of Vacantarāyaṇ son of Rāyappācāmi according to (*paṭi*) the grant that was written (*eḷutiṇa paṭṭayattiṇ*) by the son of Arikara[n] the accountant of the religious order (*camayam?*) in Avaṇiyāpuram, to [assure] that this legal (*taṇma*) grant order has been engraved (or copied) faithfully.’

In this first interpretation, Vacantarāyaṇ would be the person who engraved the text copied by Arikaraṇ’s son on the plate, presumably from a master document. If referred to Vacantarāyaṇ, the expression *eḷutiya naṇmaikku* would indicate that he engraved faithfully. Instead, if referred to Arikaraṇ’s son, it would indicate that the latter wrote, faithfully copying from a master document.

Translation 2 – ‘The handwriting of Vacantarāyaṇ son of Rāyappācāmi according to (*paṭi*) the document that was composed (*eḷutiṇa paṭṭayattiṇ*) by the son of Arikara[n] the accountant of the religious order (*camayam?*) in Avaṇiyāpuram, to [assure] that this legal (*taṇma*) grant order has been faithfully copied (or authentically composed).’

Here, Vacantarāyaṇ would be the person who copied (but not necessarily engraved) the text composed by Arikaraṇ’s son on a master copy, presumably a palm-leaf folio. Therefore, if referred to Vacantarāyaṇ, *eḷutiya naṇmaikku* would indicate that he copied faithfully what Arikaraṇ’s son composed, whereas, if referred to Arikaraṇ’s son, it would indicate the authenticity of his composition.

Translation 3 – ‘The handwriting of Vacantarāyaṇ son of Rāyappācāmi is the copy (*paṭi*) of the document that was written/composed/engraved (*eḷutiṇa paṭṭayattiṇ*) by the son of Arikara[n] the accountant of the religious order (*camayam?*) in Avaṇiyāpuram, to [assure] that this legal (*taṇma*) grant order has been faithfully copied (or authentically composed).’

21 Text as per the edition, see IRĀCU 2010: 106. Note that *ibid*: 96 the name Rāyappācāmi is given as Rāyappa Ācāri.

22 For an overview of composing, writing and engraving inscriptions and their terminology in Indo-Aryan languages, see SALOMON 1998: 65–66.

Finally, this time due also to the ambiguity of the term *paṭi* (‘according to’ ~ ‘copy’), we cannot exclude that Vacantarāyaṇ reissued a (lost?) grant by Arikaraṇ’s son. Here, I would maintain that the latter’s role as either author, copyist or engraver would ultimately remain undecidable. As for *eḷutiya naṇmaikku*, if referred to Vacantarāyaṇ it would indicate that he reproduced faithfully the original grant order and, if referred to Arikaraṇ’s son, it could indicate that the latter’s original grant order was an authentic document.

(9) *Inscription n° 1967/79 – Donation record on stone (Tiruvallikkēṇi, Cennai) – ca. 16th century*

[line 6] ... *yivarkaḷ colla eḷutiṇa naṇmaikku ūrkaṇakku cokkaṇā[ta]ṇ eḷuttu* ௭²³

‘The [hand]writing of the village accountant Cokkaṇātaṇ, in [assurance] of the faithfulness of what has been written as they spoke.’

Here, if it is correct to understand that Cokkaṇātaṇ wrote down what was said by the donors, who are mentioned in an earlier part of the inscription and are here referred to by the pronoun *yivarkaḷ*, the most suitable interpretation of *naṇmai* seems to be that of ‘faithfulness’ – ‘authenticity’ rather being a feature of the donors’ statement.

7. Conclusion

The statements in *Putuvai Iṭaṅkai Valaṅkaic Cātiyar Varalāru* (7a–e) and both inscriptions (8) and (9) invite us to a further consideration. In all these cases, a *kaṇakku* or *kaṇakkupillai*, i.e. an accountant, is mentioned as some sort of a notary, if not even a scribe.

It so happens that accountants are also mentioned in CNM D1063 and BnF Indien 383. In the former the copyist is in fact the son of an accountant, but given that professions were mostly inherited, it is plausible to assume that he had the same job of his father. In the latter – granted that my interpretation is correct –, the accountant would just be the owner of the manuscript, but incidentally the possible scribe may have had a prestigious public office (i.e. district chieftain), hence would presumably have been well-versed in legalese jargon.

Therefore, one is left wondering if, perhaps, the expression *X eḷutiṇa naṇmaikku* was in fact typical of the language of accountants (or the like) that had a function in legal procedures and, thus, when we encounter it in manuscripts the content of which is not specifically legal, we should consider that their copyists

23 Text as per the edition, see NĀKACĀMI 2009: 106.

did nevertheless belong to that particular sphere of professional life. Otherwise, why would a statement about the faithfulness of the copy suddenly appear in just a handful of attestations in the corpus under investigation, out of the many hundreds of paratexts composed by copyists from other walks of life (teachers, priests, etc.)? As always, further research is needed.

If asking this question may seem stretching the bearing of the few examples at hand (*excusatio non petita*), one should not forget the dearth of personal information that manuscript copyists from Tamil Nadu has left us with, and how not even details, but broad strokes about their lives escape us almost completely. Yet, the challenge of making historical sense of the countless manuscripts they have produced and that are still available to us nowadays remains irresistible (*guilty as charged*).

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Abbreviations

BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris)
CNM	National Museum of Denmark (Copenhagen)
GOML	Government Oriental Manuscripts Library (Chennai)
IFP	Institut français de Pondichéry (Puducherry)

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