

Preface



Prof. Vijayavenugopal and Ramaswamy Babu inspecting and documenting inscription No. 26 in the Yathoktakārī temple © Ute Hüsken

Being an ancient temple mentioned in some of the earliest Tamil poems, *Tiruvekkā* (Yathoktakārī, *Coṅṇa Vaṅṅam Ceyta Perumāḷ*¹ *Kōyil*) holds significant importance within Kanchipuram. Notable for its association with Tirumaḷicai Āḷvār, this place is regarded as a *divya-deśa* ('divine land') and is today an important Śrīvaiṣṇava pilgrimage centre. The inscriptions in this temple, although mostly concerned with land grants and donations, also contain important information for reconstructing the premodern history of Vaiṣṇava Kanchipuram. For example, ARE 21/1921 (inscription No. 1 in this volume) records the name of the main deity as Ananta Nārāyaṇa Parama Svāmi, offering us a glimpse into the evolution of the deity's names, alongside the various epithets used by the Āḷvārs and the Sthalapurāṇa-influenced "Yathoktakārī" or "Coṅṇa Vaṅṅam Ceyta Perumāḷ" of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas. Early inscriptions at this site, such as ARE 23/1921 (inscription No. 2 in this volume) and ARE 22/1921 (inscription No. 6 in this volume), refer to the deity as 'Tiruvekkā Aṅai Kiṭantaruḷiṇa Parama Svāmi' and 'Ananta Nārāyaṇa Svāmi', focusing on the deity's reclining posture, but without specifying that he reclines on his left side or alluding to his link with the Āḷvārs or with the later stories linked to them, such as Tirumaḷicai Āḷvār and his disciple Kaṅikkaṅṅaṅ (see Muralidaran 2026 and Narayanan 2026). Similarly, ARE 21/1921 (ca. 10th century; inscription No. 1 in this volume) names several Brahmin donors to the temple – Māṅikka

1 Perumāḷ ("great person, god") is a Tamil name for Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa widely used in the context of temples and in everyday usage. A translation of the Sanskrit "Yathoktakārī", *coṅṇa vaṅṅam ceyta perumāḷ* ("The God Who Does as He Is Told") is the name given to the deity in the Tiruvekkā temple based on the narratives in the Sthalapurāṇa texts. For more information on this topic, see Buchholz 2026.

Caṇmaṇ (= Śarman), Kanaka Caṇmaṇ, Paṭṭa (= Bhaṭṭa, ‘priest’) Cimmaṇ, and Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭaṇ – who were possibly Vaiṣṇavas, but perhaps not Śrīvaiṣṇavas. The 10th inscription in this volume (dated to the 12th century) indicates that the temple was administered by followers of the “Ālvār”, which is here likely a reference to the main deity rather than the saint-poets. This raises further questions: Who were these followers? The 11th inscription (12th century?) mentions that “Āryan Kōvinda (Kōviṅca) Paṭṭaṇ” donated a few pillars. Could this be Rāmānuja’s cousin Empār, born as Govinda Bhaṭṭa in the nearby Madhuramangalam? Or does the name indicate that Śrīvaiṣṇavas were beginning to make their presence felt at this temple? Questions abound. The 14th-century ARE 27/1921 (inscription No. 12 in this volume) records a Śrī Parakāla Nampī, clearly a Śrīvaiṣṇava name, perhaps heralding the appearance of unmistakably Śrīvaiṣṇava names in later inscriptions. This and further inscriptions in the Yathoktakārī temple thus map the growing influence of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas. Their thorough study would be a valuable contribution to the history of Vaiṣṇavism in Tamil Nadu, especially in what is known as the Pallava region.

One might have supposed that the large corpus of pre-modern epigraphs of such an important site would all have been long ago edited and translated, but as it turns out, many of them have not even been documented and transcribed. For all its importance and antiquity, of the 26 inscriptions of its corpus, 14 were noticed in a report of the Archeological Survey of India of 1921, but none had been published. Fortunately, thanks to a collaboration with the ERC DHARMA (n°809994) project (in which the EFEO is a partner institution, and which collaborated with the project “Hindu Temple Legends in South India” [HTL], funded through the Academies Programme of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities), and thanks to the tenacity of N. Ramaswamy Babu and G. Vijayavenugopal, permissions for photography were obtained from Nallappa Srinath, trustee of the Coṇṇa Vaṇṇam Ceyta Perumāl temple in Kanchipuram. N. Ramaswamy Babu, head of the photography department at EFEO, has meticulously taken photographs of the inscriptions so that the corpus was published locally in 2024 in Tamil as

Vicayavēṇukōpāl, Kō. *Kāñcīpuram Coṇṇa Vaṇṇam Ceyta Perumāl Kōyil Kalveṭṭukkal*, published by Śrī Kōmaḷavalli Nāyikā Sameta Śrī Yatōktakārī Perumāl Tirukkōyil Trustees in collaboration with EFEO Pondicherry, under the DHARMA Project, Kanchipuram.

The present book is the English translation of this locally available Tamil publication, enriched by numerous photographs of the inscriptions and their locations. The Tamil text has been translated into English by Vigneshwaran Muralidaran. Occasional explanatory footnotes have been added and editorial decisions regarding the transcription of Tamil and Sanskrit terms, names, and titles have been taken by the series editors, Suganya

Anandakichenin and Ute Hüsken. Most importantly, this publication was made possible only through the kind cooperation of the trustee of the Yathoktakārī temple, Nallappa Srinath, who generously gave the permission for the documentation of the inscriptions and assisted in the documentation whenever necessary. To repeat what G. Vijayavenugopal aptly stated in the preface to *Kāñcipuram Conṇa Vaṇṇam Ceyta Perumāḷ Kōyil Kalvetṭukkal*:

If more temple trustees, like Mr. Nallappa Srinath, come forward to assist, numerous inscriptions will come to light. Such fundamental data will greatly help reconstruct the history of Tamil Nadu.

Not only that – the publication of these inscriptions can also greatly help to create an awareness among the local population about the important cultural heritage that the temples represent.

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