


# Mastering Deathlessness

## Some Remarks on Karpam Preparations in the Medico-Alchemical Literature of the Tamil Siddhas

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Résumé de l'article

The article presents some remarks concerning practices aimed at achieving rejuvenation, longevity and immortality described in the literature of the Tamil Siddhas, with special reference to the medico-alchemical stream of the tradition. The study is based on the philological analysis of selected representative works of Tamil Siddha literature, starting from the Tirumantiram of Tirumūlar (6-12th century). The Tirumantiram is generally acknowledged to be a root text of the Tamil Siddha tradition and it contains passages that elaborately discuss the theory and practices of yoga, presenting them as a means of attaining longevity and immortality. It also contains references to medical practices. Further, relevant ideas about rejuvenating, life-prolonging and immortalizing methods found in selected texts of the medico-alchemical stream of the tradition are discussed. The literature of the medical and alchemical lore of the Tamil Siddhas, roughly dated to the period between the 16th and 19th centuries, abounds in practical recipes for the drugs (karpam) for prolonging life. Certain items credited with extraordinary powers connected with rejuvenation and immortalization, such as triple salt (muppu), mercurial jewel (racamaṇi), human urine, special varieties of medicinal plants, etc. are particularly referenced to in the paper. Finally, the concepts relating to “the art of non-dying” (cākākkalai) taught in the works of Vaḷḷalar, the poet-saint born in 19th century and closely linked with the Tamil Siddha tradition, are outlined in the article.

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# Mastering Deathlessness: Some Remarks on Karpam Preparations in the Medico-Alchemical Literature of the Tamil Siddhas

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THIS paper aims at presenting remarks about the practices oriented towards rejuvenation, longevity and even immortality described in Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature.<sup>1</sup> Those medico-alchemical practices relate mainly to the use of certain substances and preparations for internal and external application called *karpam*.<sup>2</sup> This essay describes and examines several selected substances and procedures, such as the use of black herbs (*karumūlikai*), the "triple salt" (*muppu*), the "tied salt" (*kaṭṭuppu*), mercury (*iracam*) and urine (*amuri*) related to *karpam* therapy, along with the effects ascribed to the *karpam* preparations in Tamil Siddha literature. As observed in the examined passages, *karpam* therapies seem to be closely connected with the discipline of yoga in medico-alchemical texts. The affinity between the purpose of medico-alchemical preparations on the one side, and of yogic practices on the other, such as the stabilisation and preservation of the physical body, as well as the synergy of the methods of both disciplines stated by the medico-alchemical Tamil Siddha literature suggest a close relation between Siddha medicine, alchemy and yoga.

The chronology of Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature remains uncertain, due to the lack of critical and comprehensive studies done so far. Often scholars date texts that are traditionally accepted as authoritative works of Tamil

1 The medico-alchemical stream of Tamil Siddha literature is one of the few categories of Siddha texts recognized by scholars. On the classification of the Tamil Siddhas and their literature see, e.g., Venkatraman 1990; Ganapathy 1993: 22–24; Zvelebil 1993: 17–19, 2003: 19–20. On the content of non-

medical Tamil Siddha literature see, e.g., Buck 1976; Venkatraman 1990; Zvelebil 1993; Meenakshi 1996.

2 The term *karpam* is the Tamilized version of the Sanskrit word *kalpa*, "proceeding", "rule", "treatment", "medicinal compound."

Siddha medico-alchemical literature to the period starting from the 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. However, the material contained in them most probably derives from earlier centuries.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, it is also probable that the texts include large interpolations of recent origin. It is estimated that the number of Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical texts encompasses hundreds of works preserved on palm-leaf manuscripts, only some of which have been printed so far. The texts are scattered and unorganized and it is assumed that the vast amount of manuscripts still remains in private hands.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. SOURCES

THIS ESSAY is based on the reading of selected Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical texts. The text most widely cited here is the *Pōkar Karpaviti* (PKV)<sup>5</sup> by Siddha Pōkar.<sup>6</sup> It is almost entirely dedicated to prescriptions for drugs called *karpam*. It consists of 342 stanzas divided into ninety-four small subsections, each of which deals with a particular topic, often with a particular prescription. The text in major part contains practical recipes for preparations with herbal, animal, mineral and metallic ingredients. Prescriptions usually provide lists of ingredients and a general description for the method of preparation, some of them also list the diseases against which the preparation can be used, as well as other effects

3 See, e.g., Scharfe 1999: 609–612; Weiss 2009: 48–50; Zysk 2013: 182–183.

4 See Venkatraman 1990: 15; Zvelebil 2003: 139. Recently, a project entitled “Conservation, Documentation and Preservation of the Knowledge of Siddha Medicine” headed by Brigitte Sébastia and supported by the British Library, was carried out at the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP) in order to preserve, catalogue and digitise extant Siddha manuscripts. One of the aims of the project was to put the digitised manuscripts online on the website of the British Library (see the project website, Sébastia 2015–2017).

5 I have used the edition of the text with the commentary edited by Citta maruttuva ilakkiya ārāycci āvaṇatturai, citta maruttuva maiya ārāycci nilaiyam in Chennai on the basis of the palm leaf manuscripts collected at the Maharaja Serfoji’s Saraswati Mahal Library in Thanjavur.

6 In scholarly publications other transcriptions of the Tamil name “Pōkar” are also used, such as “Pōgar”, “Bōgar” or “Bhōgar.” “Pōkar” is a Tamil name which derives from the Sanskrit noun *bhoga*, “enjoyment”, “eating”, “pleasure”, “wealth.” The Siddha called Pōkar, considered to be the author of the text, is a highly-esteemed figure among traditional Siddha practitioners. However, it is possible that among Tamil Siddhas there were several authors with the name “Pōkar” (see Venkatraman 1990: 65). The most famous one probably could be regarded the author of the monumental work *Captakāṇṭam* (“Seven Chapters”), in which marvellous, and sometimes phantasmagorical, journeys undertaken by the author with the use of mercurial pills are described. On the biography and works of Siddha Pōkar see, e.g., Ganapathy 2003; Little 2006; Natarajan 2009; Kędzia 2017.

of the drugs. In this essay, I also refer to the works of other Siddhas that elaborate on the subjects relevant for the present study that are not discussed adequately in the text of Pōkar. Those texts include two works ascribed to Siddha Akastiyar,<sup>7</sup> namely the *Kuru Nūl Muppu 50* (KNM), consisting of 49 stanzas, and the *Karpa Muppu Kuru Nūl 100* (KMKN), consisting of 103 stanzas. Both texts deal mostly with "triple salt" (*muppu*), and they provide recipes for some *karpam* preparations as well. Yet another Siddha whose works have been used for the present research is Yākōpu alias Irāmatēvar,<sup>8</sup> the prolific author of at least seventeen works,<sup>9</sup> which are highly esteemed and used as manuals by contemporary Siddha doctors, especially with regard to metallic preparations.<sup>10</sup> Cita-

7 Akastiyar is traditionally considered to be the founder of the Tamil Siddha medical system. He is claimed to be the author of more than two hundred texts in Tamil (see Zvelebil 1993: 32). According to the common view, he is credited with founding the first Sangam and with composing the first grammar of the Tamil Language (Sivaraja Pillai 1930: 36–38). However, it has been indicated by T. P. Meenakshisundaran that the language of the medical writings of Akastiyar cannot be older than the fifteenth century (T. P. Meenakshisundaran, quoted by Zvelebil 2003: 71). It is also highly dubious that a single person composed all of the works ascribed to Akastiyar. According to Zvelebil, in the medieval and modern Tamil tradition, several authors of the same name (with some variants, such as "Agastya", "Akattiyar", "Akattiyar") have been merged into one single personage credited with some supernatural characteristics (see Zvelebil 1992: 235–261.). The name "Akastiyar" is a Tamil version of Sanskrit "Agastya", the name of the revered Vedic sage, whose figure is well attested in the Sanskrit literature, starting from the *R̥gveda*. See "Agastya" in Macdonell and Keith 1912: 6–7.

8 Siddha Yākōpu probably lived between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (Natarajan 2004: 257). However, Venkatraman places his works in the later period, i.e., between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century (Venkatraman 1990: 63). The author introduces himself as a person

originally called "Irāmatēvar" in several passages in his texts, and provides a story about the origin of his family, which belongs to a lineage of warriors. According to autobiographical accounts contained in his texts, Irāmatēvar travelled to Mecca in search of alchemical knowledge. There he converted to Islam, underwent circumcision and received the Muslim name "Yākōpu." On the life of Yākōpu, see Natarajan 2004; Venkatraman 1990: 63–64; Kędzia 2017.

9 Yākōpu is credited with seventeen texts, claimed to be composed after his conversion to Islam. The list of his texts, provided by Ji. Irāmacāmik Kōṅ, the general publisher of Yākōpu's works, includes the following titles: *Vaṭṭiya Cintāmaṇi Eḷunūru*, *Kurunūl Aimpatti Aintu*, *Cuṅṅakkāṅṅam Arunūru*, *Cuṅṅam Munnūru*, *Centūra Cūstī[ram] Nūrru Aimpatu*, *Cūstīram Aimpatti Aintu*, *Vakārak Kalāṅku Munnūru*, *Paṅcamittīram Munnūru*, *Taṅṅakam Nūrru Pattu*, *Cūstīram Aimpatti Aintu*, *Ṭaiṭpākam Paṭiṅāru*, *Ceypākam Paṭiṅāru*, *Vaiṭya Vātacūstīram Nānūru*, *Vaiṭṭiyam Munnūru*. To this list the text entitled *Kallāṭam*, traditionally ascribed to Yākōpu, is also added (see VaiCin: 2). Moreover, before his travel to Mecca, Irāmatēvar may have also composed a few texts, for example *Civayōkam Irunūru* (see Natarajan 2004: 258).

10 Personal communication from Dr Kaviasu Balakrishnan, traditional Siddha practitioner. According to Dr Balakrishnan, Yākōpu's works are the prominent works on alchemy of the Tamil Siddha tradition.

tions from the *Cuṅṅakkāṅṭam 600* (CuṅKaṅ),<sup>11</sup> consisting of 605 stanzas, which provide many recipes related to *cuṅṅam*<sup>12</sup> preparations, as well as from the *Vaiṭṭiya Kallāṭam* (VK),<sup>13</sup> which is especially interesting with regard to its language as it contains manifold riddles, were the most relevant for the present paper. The *Ñānakarṇam 222* (ÑK) of Siddha Pulastiyar has also been referred to.<sup>14</sup> As indicated by the title, the text consists of 222 stanzas, and concerns subjects related to medicine, alchemy and yoga. I will also refer to an important older text that is usually not included among the medico-alchemical literature of the Tamil Siddhas, namely the *Tirumantiram* by Tirumūlar<sup>15</sup> (twelfth century)<sup>16</sup>. The *Tirumantiram* is often regarded as a foundational text of Tamil Siddha literature, including the medico-alchemical stream. The text consists of nine chapters called *tantiram* that comprise over 3000 verses, and it deals with a number of subjects, primarily yoga and Śaiva philosophy.

The content of the literature of the medico-alchemical stream of the Tamil Siddha tradition covers a wide spectrum of subjects, including medicine, alchemy, yoga, magic, etc. The number and choice of themes can vary significantly from one text to another. The texts often have the form of practical manuals, especially for certain medical and alchemical preparations. However, the prescriptions are frequently not provided with details necessary for the procedure and

11 I have used the printed edition provided with the modern commentary.

12 *cuṅṅam/cuṅṅam* is a variety of drug prepared from metals, white in colour and possessing qualities similar to calcium. It is regarded as very potent. It is obtained with the use of *ceyanīr* (a pungent liquid prepared by exposing the mixture of minerals to night dew), fuller's earth and acids. See *cuṅṅam* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994.

13 The *Vaiṭṭiya Kallāṭam* consists of three parts, dealing with medicine, alchemy and yoga, respectively. The first and the longest medical part, which has been used for the present study, contains 53 stanzas that provide recipes for medical preparations against various diseases, and is accompanied by an explanatory commentary.

14 In contrast to the above-mentioned Siddhas, no information about the life of Siddha Pulastiyar has been found in the available sources.

15 The twelfth-century text *Tiruttonṭar-purāṇam* recounts a story about the author

of the *Tirumantiram*. According to the tale, the author was a yogi who travelled to South India from the north. On his way, the yogi saw a herd of cows weeping over the body of a cowherd called Mūlan, who had died suddenly from a snake bite. The yogi secured his own body in a safe place and, having migrated into the corpse of the deceased cowherd, he led the cows to their home. Remaining in the cowherd's body, the yogi attained "real knowledge" (*meyñāṇam*). Then he sat down in meditation for three thousand years, composing the three thousand verses of the *Tirumantiram* at the rate of one verse per year. See Venkatraman 1990: 46–47.

16 The date of the *Tirumantiram* remains uncertain. However, as demonstrated by Goodall on the grounds of the conceptual content of the text, most probably it cannot be earlier than the twelfth century. See Goodall 1998: xxxvii–xxxix, n. 85; Goodall 2000: 213, n. 27.

are sometimes hardly understandable without a commentary, because of the peculiar esoteric language, which contains colloquial Tamil forms, cryptic symbolic expressions and ambiguous technical terms of the traditional lore. The use of the symbolic and equivocal "twilight language" (Tamil: *cūṇiya-campāṣaṇai*, "discourse on the void") is considered to be a common feature of the Siddha texts, also beyond the Tamil tradition. Such language, among other possible purposes, may serve to protect the great truths of the Siddha doctrine from profanation by uninitiated persons. Through the use of colloquial expressions, it may allow persons outside the literary elite to access Siddha teachings. Symbolic expressions may also be used to convey mystical experiences, expression of which remains beyond the abilities of ordinary language.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, in Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature, even simple recipes against common diseases may be intentionally presented in a highly perplexing way. In some texts, information necessary for the preparation, such as names of crucial ingredients, instruments or doses, have been hidden in rebuses and riddles, the solving of which is frequently impossible without a commentary. The riddles are often based on word-play with the use of synonymous words. For example, the solution of the riddle "join the mother to the beginning of lead"<sup>18</sup> is "clove" (*ilavaṅkam*), because when the synonymous words of the word "mother" (*avvai*), i.e., *ila*,<sup>19</sup> is added to the beginning of the word "lead" (*vaṅkam*), the word *ilavaṅkam* ("clove") will be obtained. Another example is based on the simily between Tamil letters and numbers: "add the mother (*tāy*) to the eighty (*eṇpatu*)".<sup>20</sup> In the Tamil system of writing, the numerals "8" and "o" of number "80" have a very similar shape to the letters "a" and "ya." If we add yet another synonymous word for "mother", i.e., *kāntai* ("wife", "woman") to the cluster "a+ya", we obtain the word *ayakkāntai*, which is almost identical with *ayakkāntam*, i.e., the Tamil Siddha term for lodestone.<sup>21</sup> The use of such an enigmatic language is also found in esoteric yogic texts which contain passages concerning spiritual practices aimed at obtaining liberation. One remarkable example of such esoteric passages is the whole seventeenth chapter of the ninth section (*tantiram*) of the *Tirumantiram* entitled *cūṇiya-campāṣaṇai* ("Discourse on the void") or *maṛaiporuṭ kūrṛu* ("Speech

17 See Ganapathy 2004: 3–6.

18 VK: 32:3 [...] *vaṅkamuta lavvaic cērttu* [...].

19 The word used in ancient times in addressing a woman in a familiar manner. See *ila* in the University of Madras's *Tamil Lexicon* (1924–1936).

20 VK: 49: [...] *eṇpatu tāyai cērttu* [...].

21 This method of encoding, based on the similarity between the visual form of the

Tamil numerals and the letters is more common in the Tamil Siddha tradition, also beyond the medico-alchemical stream. One remarkable example is number "82" which has an important meaning for the Tamil Siddhars. Numbers "8" and "2" look very similar to Tamil letters "a" and "u", so the number "82" is used to denote the sacred syllable "aum."



on secret sense"). The chapter consists of seventy stanzas composed in symbolic and highly ambiguous language and it concerns yogic practices which aim at liberation.<sup>22</sup>

The view that rejuvenation and long life can be achieved through certain practices is well-attested in Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature. Moreover, in some texts it is also suggested that some preparations and therapies may even bestow immortality.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, the concept of immortality is not elaborated in the consulted medico-alchemical texts. From the context, it may be inferred that immortality, as conceived by the medico-alchemical Siddha writers, is related to the preservation of a prosperous, youthful and handsome physical body, which is often suggested to be the result of the application of the described preparations. In the consulted texts, it is not explicitly stated what the aim of the attainment of such a body is. The pursuit of an immortal body found in medico-alchemical texts may indicate a link between yoga and medicine within the Tamil Siddha tradition. Bodily immortality and the preservation of youthfulness are repeatedly stated to be a result of yogic practices in the *Tirumantiram*. The author claims that both the body and the soul are equally important and interdependent entities, and the body is considered to be indispensable for achieving "true knowledge" (*meyñānam*) leading to liberation.<sup>24</sup> This view, although not explicitly stated in medico-alchemical texts, may underlie the practices described in them as well.

## 2. RECIPES FOR REJUVENATION, LONGEVITY AND IMMORTALITY

**I**N MEDICO-ALCHEMICAL LITERATURE, it is *karpam* therapy that is widely recommended to achieve rejuvenation, longevity and the power to remain deathless:

I have told [you] about the *karpam* preparations which have the power to [keep a person] alive without dying.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> TM: 2826–2895.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g., VK: 53; PKV: 328.

<sup>24</sup> TM: 704–705 "If the owner of a body perishes, then the owner of the soul will perish [too]. He will not achieve real knowledge with certainty. Having learnt the means for cultivating the body, I have cultivated the body and [therefore] indeed I have cultivated [my] soul. Previously I considered the body to be inferior [to the soul]. [Then] in the body I saw the wealth. Knowing that God set [his] temple in this body, I am pro-

tecting the body".

*uṭampār aliyil uyirār alivar*  
*tiṭampaṭa meynānan cēravu māṭṭār*  
*uṭampai vaḷarkkum upāyam arintē*  
*uṭampai vaḷarttēn uyirvaḷarttēnē*  
*uṭampinai munṇam ilukkeṇ riruntēn*  
*uṭampinuk kullē yuruporuḷ kaṇṭēn*  
*uṭampulē utaman kūyilkoṇ ṭānenru*  
*uṭampinai yānirun tōmpukin rēnē.*

<sup>25</sup> PKV: 328:1 *mālātē irukkavallō karpāñ conṇēn*

Recipes for *karpam* drugs are found in numerous medico-alchemical texts. However, as indicated by A. Shanmuga Velan, none of the texts presents the complete line of the treatment.<sup>26</sup> Some passages suggest that certain herbs alone may serve as a powerful *karpam*.<sup>27</sup> Siddha texts frequently mention extraordinary rejuvenating powers of *karpam* plants. It is often repeated that *karpam* herbs possess not only rejuvenating and healing properties, but that they are also powerful catalysts in alchemical operations, effecting "binding" (*kaṭṭu*) operations on many metals.<sup>28</sup> Pōkar enumerates forty-five *karpam* herbs that are credited with alchemical powers, including effecting *kaṭṭu* on sixty-four substances.<sup>29</sup> It is also said that those herbs provide support for yogic practices, bestow rejuvenation and immortality upon the human body, and allow one to walk in the sky.<sup>30</sup>

The majority of *karpam* preparations are recommended to be taken internally. However, there are also preparations prescribed to be applied externally, for example as an anal ointment, eye ointment, or in the bath.<sup>31</sup> The range of *karpam* recipes encompass both very simple preparations<sup>32</sup> as well as extremely complicated prescriptions, fulfilment of which requires repeated operations with the use of special apparatuses and numerous ingredients from plant, animal, mineral and metal kingdoms.

26 See Velan 1992: 55–56.

27 For example, passage PKV: 204–6 ascribes certain herbs to particular Siddhas. It states that the Siddhas have lived for aeons only due to the application of those herbs.

28 *Kaṭṭu* ("bond") is an important alchemical operation, frequently mentioned in the texts. The operation aims at consolidating the substances and rendering them heat-resistant (see *kaṭṭu* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994). Substances subjected to *kaṭṭu* often mentioned in Pōkar's text are mercury, metals, salt and sulphur. *Kaṭṭu* seems to be the art of rendering the substances stable, dense, resistant and solid. Materials recommended to be used for effecting the "bond" on the substances are usually herbals which are also used as *karpam* medicines. A counterpart of *kaṭṭu* can also be found in Sanskrit alchemical literature. Among operations aimed at perfecting mercury (*saṃskāra*) the operation of "binding" (*bandhana*) mercury is also listed. The goal of the operation is the fixation of the mercury with the use of one

of the 25 or 26 alchemical "bonds" (*bandha*). Each of the bonds may also be used in medicine (see White 1996: 266–67).

29 PKV: 190–94.

30 In Indian alchemical traditions, the ability to walk in the sky is regarded as a skill acquired by the alchemist due to the specially prepared mercurial pill kept in the mouth. See White 1996: 211–12. Stories about the Siddhas travelling around the world due to the powers of mercurial pills are also found in Tamil Siddha literature, see e.g. works of Siddha Yākōpu, such as *VāVai*: 4, *Cuṇ*: 153–156, *CuṇKaṇ*: 287.

31 PKV: 8; 9–10; 5.

32 For example, *miḷaku karpam* (black pepper *karpam*) consists of just one ingredient (black pepper). Initially 5 peppercorns per day should be taken with urine. Every following day the dose should be increased by 5 peppercorns until it reaches the amount of 100 peppercorns per day. Subsequently, the dose should be reduced by 5 peppercorns each day (see PKV: 37).

The most common operation in metallic *karṣam* preparations described in the texts seems to be roasting the drug in the *puṭam*, i.e., a capsule constructed with the two identical earthen plates. The usual sequence of actions in the *puṭam* operation starts with the repeated grinding of the metals in the mortar with the juice of certain *karṣam* herbs, the choice of which depends on the metal used. Ingredients should subsequently be put inside the capsule, after which a special lute, usually made with herbal leaves, is applied. Then, the capsule should be placed into a fire of a determined number of burning cow dung patties and roasted. Usually, the whole sequence of the above-mentioned operations should be repeated several times. The products of metal processing are named after the form they obtain at the end of the *puṭam* operation, the most common drugs being: *centūram*,<sup>33</sup> *parṣam*<sup>34</sup> and *cunṇam/cuṇṇam*.<sup>35</sup> All three preparations are considered to be highly assimilable metallic compounds.

Among materials used by the Siddhas in *karṣam* therapy, some items belonging to herbal, animal, mineral and metal domains are credited with particularly powerful rejuvenating and life prolonging properties:

#### BLACK HERBS

Among herbal recipes, Pōkar mentions certain *karṣam* preparations which require the use of black varieties (*karumūlikai*) of some common medical plants, for example *karantai* (fragrant basil) or *nelli* (*amla*).<sup>36</sup> Those plants are credited with medical properties even in their common form, but according to the Siddha, their black variants possess particular rejuvenating powers. Pōkar provides instruction for cultivating such herbs.<sup>37</sup> The preparation of a special soil appears to be crucial for their cultivation. According to the text, one should fill half of a box with a dark alluvium soil and tamp it down. The remaining volume of the box should be packed with marking nuts (*cēṅkoṭṭai*). Then, the soil should be watered for six months, if whole nuts were used, or for three months, if the nuts were previously halved. When the nuts decompose, the soil should be left to dry. Next, on the soil prepared in the described way, one sows the seeds of the medical herbs. When the crop ripens, the new seeds should be collected and the whole operation should be repeated three times. Pōkar claims that the fourth crop will be black in colour. The text states that cultivated black herbs rejuvenate the body, and remove wrinkles and grey hair. To test the efficacy of the black

<sup>33</sup> *centūram* – red calcined oxides. For the varieties of *centūram* type of drugs see *centūram* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994.

<sup>34</sup> *parṣam* – calcined oxides, white in colour. For the varieties of *parṣam* see *parṣam* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994.

<sup>35</sup> See *supra* note 12. *Cuṇṇam* may look similar to *parṣam*, but it is regarded as more potent. See *cunṇam* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994.

<sup>36</sup> *karantai*: PKV: 62–63, *nelli*: PKV: 128.

<sup>37</sup> PKV: 198–203.

herbs, one should take a feather of a crane and smear it three times with the black herb juice. The feather, having dried in the sun, should become as black as the feather of a crow.<sup>38</sup>

Apart from the black herbs, plants collected in mountain regions are believed to be of better quality than herbs growing elsewhere.<sup>39</sup> This belief prevails among contemporary traditional Siddha doctors.<sup>40</sup>

### "TRIPLE SALT" (MUPPU)

*Muppu* is one of the most mysterious items mentioned in the literature of the Tamil Siddhas. The term *muppu* may be translated literally as "triple salt" (*muppu*)<sup>41</sup>. In a great number of medical texts, it is suggested that *muppu* should be understood as a compound of the three material substances. According to the text *Karpa muppu kuru nūl* ascribed to Siddha Akastiyar, the essential ingredient of *muppu* is obtained from soil found in desert-like places devoid of plants and grass:

Indeed, in the place where grass does not grow, [there] will be [the substance, white like] garlic [...].<sup>42</sup>

On soil with white foam-like salty efflorescence, one should look for stones resembling skulls or eggshells:

What [kind of] soil [is it]? It is a brackish soil with consolidated foam, it [is] a beautiful white salty substance. [...] What [is its] form? Learn [it], it [would appear] to you in such a way [as if it was] an eggshell [or] a skull.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> PKV: 203.

<sup>39</sup> Passage PKV:184–9 relates that one mountain herb even transformed a cow who consumed it into the mythical wish-fulfilling cow (*kāmatēṇu*).

<sup>40</sup> In order to find the best quality herbs, yet another special plant called "grass of light" (*jōti pul*, *arukampul*, i.e., *hariyali* grass) is used. The blade of the grass, when wet with water and held in two fingers, starts to spin. In order to test a plant the spinning blade should be held above it. When the grass spins clockwise it should be interpreted that the herb being tested possesses beneficial properties. See my video demonstration, Kędzia 2016.

<sup>41</sup> According to yet another interpretation, the original term should be spelled with a

long *-ū* as a final vowel (it should be kept in mind that spelling mistakes and inconsistencies are not uncommon in Tamil Siddha literature). In that case, the term *mup-pū* could mean "triple blossoms", understood as a mixture of three bodily secretions. In Tamil a word "blossom" (*pū*) means also "menstruation", and, by extension, *mup-pū* may be interpreted as the three bodily fluids: menstrual blood, semen and urine. See Zvelebil 2003: 98.

<sup>42</sup> KMKN:11: 4: *pullatā muḷaiyāta viṭattilētān /pūṇṭirukkum [...]*

<sup>43</sup> KMKN:12: 1–2, 4: [...] *pūmiyeṇṇa / poṅkininra uvaruppu yiramaveḷḷai/karuveṇṇa itu uruveṇṇa terintukoḷḷu unakkuttāṇum/ oṭeṇru maṇṭaiyeṇru muraikkalāccē [...]*

It is often claimed by scholars that this essential ingredient of triple salt should be interpreted as a salty substance obtained from the water collected from fuller's earth (*pūnīr*, "a water of earth").<sup>44</sup> It is stated in the Siddha texts that *pūnīr* should be collected only during three months of the Tamil year, i.e., *Māci*, *Paṅkuṇi* and *Cittarai* (mid-February to mid-May).<sup>45</sup> Another two ingredients of *muppu* are often enlisted as *aṅṭakkal* ("egg-stone"), considered to be white stones found in the sites of fuller's earth and *kalluppu* ("rock-salt").<sup>46</sup> The last ingredient remains the most obscure, since it may signify a salt mined from rocks, sea salt, or an artificially prepared salt. According to some Siddha texts, *kalluppu* is insoluble in water and it melts in fire. Some texts also list *veṭiyuppu* ("explosive salt", potassium nitrate) among the ingredients of triple salt.<sup>47</sup> Siddha Yākōpu provides the following recipe for the preparation of triple salt (*cavukkāram*, another term for triple salt in Siddha literature):

Look, dear, in merciful *Paṅkuṇi*, the month [appropriate] to collect *punīru*,<sup>48</sup> collect [it] and listen. [...] Dear, measure four units (*paṭi*) of [*punīru*], add one unit (*paṭi*) of the well-formed limestone (*karcuṇṇam*). Indeed, dear, add one unit (*paṭi*) of rock-salt (*kalluppu*). Listen still with esteem, [there] is one method [of preparation]. [...] Dear, I have spoken about the processed urine (*amuri*) in the 700 [verses], study [that]!

Take eight units of [processed] urine (*amuri*), about which has been [previously] spoken, and add [it to the mixture]. In the well-known way, leave it for three days. Kindly collect the liquid on the fourth day, put it in the oven [and] heat it in the firm fire. Having noticed the change [in consistency] into a thick liquid, like molasses, orderly add [to the mixture] half a unit of sesame oil . [...]

Pour [the liquid into the vessel] and cook [it] in order to coagulate. After it becomes beautifully ripened, praise God at the proper time [and] according to [my] wholesome words, expose the ground to the width of nine inches and spread the ashes on it. Listen! In an affectionate manner, place [on the ashes] two [layers] of cloth, apportion the [cooked] thick liquid with the ladle and pour [it on the first layer of the cloth] in order to sink in. Listen!

Then with tenderness leave the liquid [prepared in the described manner] with *punīru*, which has been taken and poured with the

44 See, e.g., Jappār 2014.

45 Jappār 2014: 5.

46 Jappār 2014: 12–13 and 20–22.

47 See Velan 1992: 66 .

48 In Yākōpu's work the variants *punīru* and *punīru* are used interchangeably for *pūnīr*.



final portion of *Karpaviti* enumerates the benefits bestowed by the "salt" (*muppu*). The salt is especially credited with beneficial properties in the fields of yoga and alchemy:

Study with delight – all the successes [are bestowed] by the salt. Study! The above-mentioned bodily powers [are bestowed] by the salt, all the flying pills [are bestowed] by the salt, all the alchemical [operations] which were explained in order [are enabled] by the salt, the [yogic] exercises in breathing [are supported] by the salt, all the *puṭam* operations [are enabled] by the salt, accelerated ripening of gold [is enabled] by the salt, rare eight-limbed [yoga] [is supported] by the salt. Everything [is bestowed] by the excellent salt!<sup>54</sup>

Yet another passage suggests that one cannot become a "fulfilled one", i.e., a Siddha (*cittan*) without *valalai*, which is another synonymous term for *muppu*:

Would [one] become fulfilled without the fundamental *valalai*?<sup>55</sup>

#### "TIED SALT" (KAṬṬUPPU)

Another salt important for the *karpam* practices is *kaṭṭuppu* ("tied salt"), described in the texts as a processed edible salt used in place of common kitchen salt during *karpam* therapy.<sup>56</sup> According to Pōkar, in order to prepare *kaṭṭuppu* rock salt should first be ground with juices of medical herbs such as *kuppaimēṇi* (*Acalypha indica* L.)<sup>57</sup> and *kalluruvi* (*Ammannia vesicatoria*), and with lemon juice. The mixture should be left to dry. Then mineral ingredients, such as borax, cinnabar and red arsenic should be added and pounded with the two herbal juices and mixed into the salt. Then, the mixture should be roasted as part of the *puṭam* operation. Subsequently, the whole procedure should be repeated. The obtained substance should be pulverized and eaten with food in place of common salt. It is said that "tied salt" makes the body "like an iron pillar" (*uṭampu irumput tūṇām*), and that it is not evacuated with the urine. It is also stated that if one eats an ordinary non-tied salt, all his "flourishing powers" (*vāyttirunta cittiyellām*) will "become dust" (*maṇṇāy pōmē*).<sup>58</sup> The "powers" (*citti*, a Tamilized version of the Sanskrit term *siddhi*) refer to the powers acquired during yogic practices.

54 PKV: 328: 4–329: [...] *valappamellām up-pālē makilntu pārē pāreṇṇa kāyacitti uppi nālē/ paṇantōṭuṇ kuḷikaiyellā muppi nālē vāreṇṇa vātamellā muppi nālē/ vāciyullē āṭuvatum uppi nālē pūreṇṇa puṭaceyamum uppi nālē/ ponṇōṭip paluttatuvum uppi nālē āreṇṇa aṣṭāṅkam uppi nālē/ atitamā muppālē ellā māccē.*

55 PKV: 335: 3: [...] *atiyāṇa valalaiviṭṭāl citta nāmō.*

56 According to Siddha Yākōpu, in order to achieve efficacy in alchemy it is absolutely essential to learn how to prepare the triple salt and the tied salt. See CuṇKaṇ: 5.

57 See *kuppaimēṇi* in Pandanus Database of Indian Plants (Charles University 1998–2009).

58 PKV: 207–10.

## MERCURY AND THE "NINE POISONS" (NAVA-PĀṢĀṆAM)

It is often claimed that mercury plays a central role in the Siddha system of medicine.<sup>59</sup> Pōkar states that there is no death for the one who has mastered the operation of "binding" (*kaṭṭu*, i.e., consolidating) of mercury, which is considered to be the semen of the god Śiva:

Indeed, the truth [is, that] there will never be death for the one who has bound the semen of Śiva [i.e., mercury].<sup>60</sup>

Mercury and its compounds are widely used in recipes for *karpam* preparations in the consulted texts. Three mercurial compounds, namely *vīram* (corrosive sublimate), *pūram* (subchloride of mercury) and *ilīnkam* (vermillion), are included in one of the traditional categories of the fundamental materials used by Siddhas in medicinal preparations, called "the nine poisons" (*navapāṣāṇam*).<sup>61</sup> Mercury, as well as the poisons, should be subjected to operations which remove their toxicity. However, the consulted texts do not contain systematic descriptions of such operations.

An especially powerful form of mercury described in Tamil Siddha literature is called *rasamaṇi*, "the mercurial jewel." There is a saying among the Siddhas that *karpam* therapy consists of the three elements, namely *mantiram*, *maṇi* and *maruntu*, i.e., "mantras, the [mercurial] jewel and medicines".<sup>62</sup> Generally *rasamaṇi* is consolidated mercury rendered fire-resistant and formed into a bead. Various methods of *maṇi* preparation are described in Siddha literature. Usually it is stated that the liquid consistency of mercury should be first turned into a butter-like state during the repeated operation of *curukku*, i.e., adding herbal juices to liquid metals.<sup>63</sup> According to one recipe, mercury should be placed in an iron ladle and the juice of a certain *karpam* herb (*veṅkarantai*, white Indian globe thistle<sup>64</sup>) should be applied for twelve hours:

Having taken and squeezed white *karantai*, take more than the unit of one *palam* of its juice. Clean an iron ladle and put the purified

59 See Velan 1992: 69–73.

60 PKV: 60: 4: [...] *civaviṅṭaiṅ kaṭṭi nōrkku/orukālum cāvillai uṅmai tāṅē*.

61 The whole list of the nine poisons encompasses *vīram* (corrosive sublimate), *pūram* (subchloride of mercury), *ilīnkam* (vermillion), *māṅōcilai* (realgar), *tālakam* (yellow orpiment), *kauri* (golden coloured arsenic), *vellai* (white arsenic), *elipāṣāṇam* (arsenic oxide), *kārmukil* (dark prepared

arsenic). See *navapāṣāṇam* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994.

62 Personal communication with anonymous informant.

63 See e.g., PKV: 28–32; 50–55; 57–61.

64 Other passages recommend different herbs for the *curukku* operation, such as aloe, gall-nut (PKV: 28–32), or *civakkarantai* (PKV: 57–61).



mercury in it. For twelve hours apply the *curukku* operation. [The mixture] will beneficially become like butter, collect [it].<sup>65</sup>

Afterwards the butter-like mixture of metal and herbal juice should be formed into lumps and roasted in burning camphor. Next the lumps should be again roasted in a *puṭam* capsule sealed with the leaves of the *ārai* plant (*Marsilea minuta coromandelica*). Another *puṭam* should then be applied, and this time, mercurial balls should be inserted into the shells of *Datura*. Then, the lumps should be roasted in a *puṭam* capsule sealed with the ground leaves of the abovementioned *veṅkarantai* plant yet another three times. The text states that the consolidated mercury, when melted, would appear like gold and when crushed, would look like a diamond.

Form [the mixture] into lumps, roast [the lumps] in the fire of the flawless camphor, roast [the mixture] in the [capsule sealed with] the leaves of *ārai* plant, roast [the mixture] in the *Datura* shells. Prepare [the capsule sealed with] *karantai* plant, apply the *puṭam* three times. Look, when melted it will appear like gold! Look, when crushed into pieces, it will shine like a diamond!<sup>66</sup>

After consolidation, the mercurial bead may be worn as an amulet. Some passages of the *Karpaviti* state that the jewels can also be worn as a necklace and that, if an adept wears a necklace made of 108 mercurial pills and repeats the mantras in mind, then lord Śiva with his consort shall come to him and bestow upon him supernatural powers, including the power of preserving the body (*kāyacitti*):

Having put on 108 [mercurial] jewels as a necklace, repeating the proper mantras consisting of five and six letters, if [you] look with your internal [eye], indeed lord Śiva with the Goddess will come and will bestow [upon you] great power in yoga and the power [to preserve] the body. If you desire wealth, he will give [you] the power [associated with] alchemy. If your mind is firm, all the powers will become [yours].<sup>67</sup>

65 PKV: 57: 2-4: [...] *veṅkarantai koṅṭu vantu/ atikamāṃ paṭiccāru pilintuvaṭṭu [...] ayakkarāṅṭi cutti paṅṇi/ cuttiitta cūttattai atilē viṭṭu [...] nālcāmam curukkup pōṭu/ nalamāka veṅneyāṃ valintu vānkē.*

66 PKV: 58: *vāṅkiyē kilipōlak kaṭṭik koṅṭu/ mācārṛa cūṭaṅatu tīyil vāṭṭu āṅkiyē ārai-y-ilaik kuḷḷē vāṭṭu/ atikamā mattaṅkāyḱ kuḷḷē vāṭṭu mūṅkiyē muṅ karantaik kavacaṅkaṭṭu/*

*mūṅru puṭam pōṭṭeṭṭuttu urukkippāru tāṅkiyē taṅkampōl uruki yāṭun/takarṭuttuṭaittāl vāyirampōl taḷukkām pāre.*

67 PKV: 259: 2-4: [...] *nūṅru yeṭṭumaṅi tāvaṭamāyḱ kōttu/iyalpāna ainteluttu āreluttu mōta maṅampārttu tēviyoṭu civaṅtāṅ vantu/ makattāṅa yōkacitti kāyacitti iṅvār taṅampārttu vātamoṭu cittai iṅvār/ cāṅkamāy maṅamurāittāl citti yāmē.*

It is believed that the jewel possesses healing properties, protects its owner from aging and witchcraft, and supports meditative practices. The bead can also be processed further in order to obtain edible forms, such as *centūram*.<sup>68</sup> Preparing digestible forms of the jewel requires roasting it with addition of other metals (e.g., gold and lead) and certain "poisons" (e.g., cinnabar, arsenics), pounding it with the juice of other *karṣṇam* herbs and subjecting it to fire.<sup>69</sup> Some passages also mention mercury consolidated in the form of a "pill" (*kuḷikai*). The distinction between a pill (*kuḷikai*) and a jewel (*maṇi*) requires further research. However, some passages suggest that both the terms might be used interchangeably.<sup>70</sup> In some Siddha texts, a pill is often mentioned in connection with the power of walking in the sky, which it is said to bestow upon the one who keeps it in their mouth.<sup>71</sup> Pōkar's text suggests that the pill could be furthermore subjected to the empowering operation called *cāraṇai*,<sup>72</sup> however the description of the operation is not provided by the texts.<sup>73</sup> It is stated that the empowered *kuḷikai* enables its user to perform some extraordinary actions, such as going to the moon and back with great speed. It is also suggested that the pill turned into an edible drug (*centūram*) and taken with honey for forty days would rejuvenate the body by shedding its external cover.

If [you] perform *cāraṇai* operation on hardened mercury, [you will] go to the moon and back with high speed! If you prepare *centūram* [you will reach] mountain peaks in thousands! Prepare *centūram* as [described] before, in order [to gain] the power! With attention eat [*centūram*] for forty days in honey, having shed the external skin [the body] will become reddish.<sup>74</sup>

#### URINE (AMURI)

According to the *Tamil Lexicon*, the term *amuri* can designate "urine", as well as the "nectar believed to be generated in the body by yōgic practice".<sup>75</sup> The term

68 PKV: 60–61

69 See PKV: 53–54.

70 See, e.g., PKV: 249–262.

71 See, e.g., *CuṇKaṇ*: 287; *Cuṇ*: 153–155; PKV: 278–285.

72 *cāraṇai* is the Tamilized form of the Sanskrit word *cāraṇa*. In Sanskrit alchemical literature (*rasaśāstra*), this term has a technical meaning. It is one of the sequenced operations for perfecting mercury before its internal application (see White 1996: 268). The processing of mercury in perfecting op-

erations is also described in Sanskrit medical literature starting from the ninth century and becoming more prominent after the thirteenth century (see Wujastyk 2013).

73 PKV: 262.

74 PKV: 180: 1–3: *kaṭṭiyāñ cūtattil cāraṇaiyō ceytāl/ kaṭuōka matiyaḷaou kaṇṭu miḷum oṭṭināl centūram āyirattir kōṭum/ urutiyāy munpōlē centūram paṇṇu tiṭṭiyāy maṇṭalantāñ tēṇi luṇṇu/ ciṇṭākac caṭṭaikakkic ciṇṭappu mākuṁ.*

75 See *amuri* in *Tamil Lexicon* (1924–1936).

might be used in both senses in Siddha literature, which contributes to the ambiguities in the interpretations.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, there are numerous passages in which the term may be most certainly interpreted as urine. Urine is an important vehicle for numerous herbal *karpam* recommended in the texts. Besides, in some *karpam* recipes, urine is listed as the main ingredient. For example, the following passage from the text *Ñānakarpam* 222 ascribed to Siddha Pulastiyar, provides a recipe for a preparation in which the urine of young boys fed with sweets is the main ingredient:

Properly take sixteen measures of the urine of young boys fed with sweets. In a harmonious manner, put the water of the body [i.e., urine] [in the vessel], similarly take eighteen measures of slaked lime and dissolve it without hesitation in the urine. Keep it in separation for three days [exposed] to the sun. [Then put it] in a secret place unknown to the people, away from dew, sun, wind and the shadow of women, for four days. Collect the bright liquid [accumulated] in the

<sup>76</sup> A prominent example of the ambiguities concerning the interpretation of the term *amuri* is found in the *Tirumantiram*. The chapter *kāyacitti upāyam* ("Means of [attaining] bodily powers") describes the practice called *amuri tarāṇai* ("preservation of *amuri*", TM:825–30). This cryptic passage deals with the drinkable fluid (*kuṭinīr*) contained in the body and called *amuri* ("urine", "nectar"). It is said that one should keep control over the flow of *amuri*. Drinking the fluid is presented as a therapy which prevents and cures diseases, stabilises breath and mind, and changes the body into gold (TM:826: *teḷitarum intac civanīr parukil/olītaru mōrāṇṭil ūṇamōṇ ṛillai/vaḷiyuṛum eṭṭiṇ maṇamum oṭuṇkum/kaḷitaruṇ kāyaṇ kaṇakama tāṁē*; "If one drinks this water of Śiva which bestows clarity, in one year [he] will receive the light, there will be no defect [in him], the breath will stabilise in eight [years], the mind too will be restrained, the body, granting delights, will indeed become gold"). It is also stated that the liquid removes grey hair and wrinkles and vanquishes death (TM:828:4: *naṛaitīrai māru namaṇuman killaiyē*; "Grey hair and wrinkles will change and there will be

no death"). One passage recommends drinking *amuri* mixed with black pepper, as well as externally using the mixture on the crown of the head. It is suggested that the preparation is the best of all medicines and that it eliminates grey hair (TM:827 *nūru miḷaku nukaruṇ civattinīr/ mārum itarṅku maruntillai māntarkal/tērīl itaṇait teḷiyucci kappiṭiṇ/mārum itarṅku maṛumayi rāṁē*; "The water of Śiva consumed [with] one hundred black pepper grains – there is no medicine for human equal to [it]! If you accept it and apply it on the grey crown of the head, it [the head] will be transformed, the [grey] hair will change"). The last portion of the section contains a recipe for a preparation in which the fluid and some common Indian medical herbs, i.e., black pepper, amla, turmeric and neem, are used. It is stated that the mixture rejuvenates the body and changes grey hair into black (TM:829:2–4: *kaḷavu kāyaṇ kalantain nīrilē/miḷaku nelliyum maṇcaḷum vēmpīṭil/iḷakum mēṇi iruluṇ kapālamē*; "If one places black pepper, amla, turmeric, and neem in this water contained in the body, the body will grow tender and the [hair on] the head will darken").

pit of the vessel. Now leave it alone in the vessel. Accordingly to the prescription, place it on the fire place. Keep it on a moderate fire.<sup>77</sup>

When taken during yogic practices, this preparation is expected to turn the human body into a diamantine body.<sup>78</sup>

### 3. ANALOGIES

FROM THE PRESENTATION ABOVE, the question arises what the relation between the mentioned items and rejuvenation, longevity and immortality is. In the case of the black herbs, the black colour of the plants may be easily associated with the black pigment in hair of the person who has not aged yet, and therefore, by extension, with youthfulness and vitality. Moreover, the recurring theme in the discourse on the abovementioned substances is their immobilization, especially with regard to mercury, which in the form of a bound, resistant and consolidated jewel is expected to bestow immortality. Such immobilization associates medical and alchemical preparations with yogic practices, aimed at the stabilisation of mind, breath and semen. Yet another mentioned instance refers to the binding of the salt into *kaṭṭuppu*, which is stated to have the power to stabilize the body, so that it resembles an iron pillar. The stabilization and retention of the movement and changeability is associated with resistance to the passing of time and ageing. *Karpam* substances, such as herbs and triple salt are also believed to effect the operation of "binding" (*kaṭṭu*) on the physical substances manipulated by the Siddha doctor-chemist, which justifies their use in the stabilisation and preservation of the body. Moreover, the special status of triple salt among the substances may be also connected with the symbology of the number three. In the Siddha tradition, various triplets of concepts are recognized, among which the three phonemes of the syllable *aum* are especially important. The triadic character of the salt may suggest correspondences between the mantra seen as the transformative agent during spiritual practices and the salt used to transform physical substances and the human body.<sup>79</sup> Drinking urine is also stated to stabilise the body and it may be further related to yogic practices in which the bodily secretions are applied on the body of the practitioner. As pointed out by Mallinson, numerous haṭhayogic texts contain references to practices

77 NK: 73: *iṇiyapattiyamān*  
*cirivarkal/muriyireṭṭu* *paṭiyatukaṇakkāy*  
*icaivatāy pāṇtaminnīroviṭṭatani/* *linaiy-*  
*ilāk kalcunṇanīru paṇiyettuppaṭikoṇṭa*  
*muriyiltākkic/caṅkaiyillāmālum* *karaittu*  
*taṇiyavattataṇai* *mūṇrunāḷravaiyil/*  
*taraṇināṇiṭarkaḷu* *mariyā paṇiravikārrum*

*vaṇitaiyarnilalum/paṭāmālum* *raka-*  
*ciyamākapa pākamāyycaturṇā!* *pāṇtamān-*  
*cillu/pativatāy teḷintanīrovaṅki iṇiyorupāṇtamē*  
*taṇiṇirrelivai/viparamāy viṭṭuṭaṇaṭuppil [...]*  
*/mitamatāyt tīyerintiṭumē.*

78 See Venkatraman 1990: 110.

79 See Zvelebil 2003: 27–31; 98–99.

associated with massaging the body with various bodily secretions, including urine. In certain passages, human urine is also credited with the power of transmutation of copper into gold as well.<sup>80</sup> Drinking urine is also part of the yogic technique called *amarolī*.<sup>81</sup> In addition, the ambiguous Tamil term *amuri* suggests connotations between urine and the concept of immortalizing nectar believed to be the effect of yogic practices.

Passages on *karpam* drugs repeatedly advise to practice yoga during therapy with *karpam*.<sup>82</sup> The text *Pōkar Karpaviti* also states that during *karpam* therapy, some side effects may occur, such as a burning sensation in the body. The experience of excessive heat in the body is often regarded as a characteristic symptom of the awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī* energy during practices of yoga, which also may suggest a further connection between yoga and *karpam* therapy. Pōkar's text prescribes herbal *karpam* to fight such heat.<sup>83</sup> Connections between medicine, alchemy and yoga are apparent in regard to the effects ascribed to the *karpam* preparations contained in medico-alchemical literature. The most often mentioned effects of *karpam* therapy in Siddha texts are rejuvenation and strengthening of the body. The purifying properties of the preparations are also frequently mentioned, especially with regard to phlegm,<sup>84</sup> which is considered to be a serious obstacle in yogic practices, as it is believed to obstruct the oozing of the yogic nectar to the throat of the practitioner.<sup>85</sup> In Siddha literature, it is repeatedly stated that *karpam* preparations support yogic practices, for example by facilitating control of the breath, and by supporting and opening the central channel (*cuḷumunai*).<sup>86</sup> Yet another frequently mentioned effect of eating *karpam* is the visible transformation of the body, which becomes healthy, beautiful and youthful.<sup>87</sup> It is claimed that due to *karpam* therapy the body becomes as beautiful as the one of the love-god,<sup>88</sup> or like gold,<sup>89</sup> and that it is consolidated like a diamond.<sup>90</sup> As already mentioned, the consolidation of the body is associated also with yogic practices connected with the stabilisation of breath, mind and semen. Finally, it is claimed that *karpam* substances provide immortality.<sup>91</sup>

80 See Mallinson 2007: 220, n. 328.

81 Mallinson 2007: 221, n. 333.

82 See, e.g., PKV: 68, PKV: 97, PKV: 166.

83 PKV: 111–112.

84 See, e.g., PKV: 7.

85 See Velan 1992: 82.

86 See, e.g., ŅK: 11–76; PKV: 12; PKV: 73.

See Venkatraman 1990: 109–110.

87 In *Karpaviti*, it is even claimed that certain preparations may rejuvenate a ripened

banana, which after administering the drug through the cut in the skin would become green within a few hours. See PKV: 158.

88 See, e.g., PKV: 78: 4: [...] *matanpō lākum*.

89 PKV: 128: 3: [...] *taṅkampōl mēṅiyellān taḷukkuk kāṅum*.

90 PKV: 90: 1: [...] *vayiram pōlirukum tēkam*.

91 PKV: 90: 4: [...] *orukālum cāvillai uṅmai tānē*.

## 4. CONCLUSION

TO CONCLUDE, the application of *karpam* drugs seems to be closely associated with yogic practices in Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature. On the one hand, it is repeatedly stated that *karpam* preparations support yogic practices, such as meditation and breath control, they remove phlegm seen as an obstacle in the process of yogic perfection, open internal channels and so on. On the other hand, it is also claimed that yoga supports the efficacy of the *karpam* therapy. Additionally, the two disciplines are also related with alchemy, references to which are widely present in the consulted texts. Looking from the broader perspective, some parallels with *karpam* therapy can also be found within alchemical and medical Sanskrit texts, which refer to certain preparations (*rasāyana*) connected with attaining the special powers, such as extending life span far beyond the ordinary length or rendering the body imperishable.<sup>92</sup>

The conviction that the body and soul are equivalent and interdependent and that the body is necessary to achieve the final aim of liberation, directly expressed in the *Tirumantiram*, legitimizes *karpam* practices aiming at the preservation of the physical body, which are described in the later texts. This conviction, which underlies the practices described by Tirumūlar, although not explicitly stated, resonates strongly in Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature. The conception that the human being is an inseparable connection of the material body and soul, authorizes the synthesis of the disciplines of medicine, yoga and alchemy which refer to both material and spiritual domains. The three disciplines might be regarded as the three integral parts of a wider Siddha system of knowledge, oriented towards achieving immortality and liberation.

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- ÑK *Pulastiyar Viḷakkiya Nāṅṅakarṅpam-222* (1936). Ceṅṅnai: Cakkaravartti piras.

92 On the special powers associated with *rasāyana* preparations in medical and al-

chemical Sanskrit texts see Wujastyk forthcoming.

- PKV “Pōkar Karpaviti” (2004). In: *Cittar Kāyakarpam*. Ed. by citta maruttuva maiya āraycci nilaiyam Citta maruttuva ilakkiya ārāycci āvaṇatturai and citta maruttuva maiya ārāycci nilaiyam Citta maruttuva ilakkiya ārāycci āvaṇatturai. Ceṇṇai: Citta maruttuva ilakkiya ārāycci āvaṇatturai, citta maruttuva maiya āraycci nilaiyam.
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