

Mahodayapuram-Koṭuṅṅallūr: a Capital City as a Sacred Centre

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Mahodayapuram or Makōtai, identified with the coastal town of modern Koṭuṅṅallūr in the Trichur (Tṛṣṣūr) district in Kerala, India, was the capital city of the Cēramān *Perumāḷs* who ruled over much of the present day State of Kerala for a little over three centuries from AD c. 800¹. Even after the last of the Cēramān *Perumāḷs* had long disappeared from the scene, the town was still nostalgically remembered in literature and popular tradition as a political centre from where Kerala was ruled². But the town is known today more as a sacred centre. In fact, Koṭuṅṅallūr is so much a sacred centre that the Dravidian place name, Koṭuṅṅallūr, is fancifully derived from Sanskrit *Kōṭiṅgapura*, “the town of ten million *liṅgas*”. To this day, it attracts pilgrims from all over Kerala to the temple of Kālī who, in her fierce form, is supposed to be the custodian of the “seeds” of smallpox. The temple is famous or notorious for the *Bharaṇi* festival in the solar month of *Mīnam* (March-April) every year, when people from all over Kerala throng there chanting “prayers” that are less than acceptable to a decent audience. The celebrated Śiva temple of Tiruvañcikkulam or Tiruvañcaikkaḷam, which forms part of the pilgrimage circuit of Śaiva devotees because of its association with the Tamil Bhakti saints such as Cēramān *Perumāḷ* Nāyanār and Sundaramūrtti Nāyanār, makes it sacred for the Śaivas. So do other Śiva temples in the town such as Śṛṅgapuram and Kīṭṭali. Mahodayapuram-Koṭuṅṅallūr is equally holy for the Vaiṣṇavas for the Tṛkkulaśēkharapuram temple, possibly built by Kulaśēkhara Āḷvār, one of the twelve Āḷvārs of the Tamil Bhakti tradition. The Muslims, too, hail the town as sacred, as it is claimed that Muslim scholars won the last Cēramān *Perumāḷ* in disputations and not only got him converted to Islam but also had the first

¹ The history of Kerala, written on “modern” lines, had not recognised that Mahodayapuram or Koṭuṅṅallūr was the capital of Kerala in historical times, despite the strong tradition to this effect. When epigraphists discovered and published a large number of inscriptions in the twentieth century, this recognition came about gradually. It was Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai who hit the nail on the forehead by both identifying the existence of a kingdom of Kerala in the three centuries after AD c. 800 and locating its capital at Mahodayapuram. He also “identified” it with Koṭuṅṅallūr and wrote a somewhat defensible history of that kingdom. Most of his writings are in Malayalam; but the more important ones are available in English translation. Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam, 1970. M.G.S. Narayanan continued the good work of Elamkulam, offered many important corrections and placed the kingdom of the Cēras of Mahodayapuram on secure foundations. For details, M.G.S.Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Calicut, 1996.

² This Cēra kingdom had ceased to exist in the first quarter of AD twelfth century. However, literary texts produced in the subsequent periods continued to remember it as *the* capital city of the kingdom of the Cēramāns, *the* rulers of Kerala. This is true of creative literature of the classical variety contained in Sanskrit and *Maṅṅipravāḷam* (a union of Malayalam and Sanskrit) as well as folk memories of history as contained in the *Keralolpatti*. The literature is too extensive to be cited; but for samples, see *Kōkilasandēśa*, *Kōkasandēśa*, *Śukasandēśa*, *Anantapuravarṇana*, etc.

mosque in India built there during the life-time of the Prophet himself³. The Christians, in their turn, believe that it was there that St. Thomas, the apostle, landed and began his missionary activities⁴. The Jews had a considerable settlement there; but, following the atrocities of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, they left the place swearing never again to spend another night in the vicinity of the town⁵. They have, however, left behind the place name *Jūtakkalam* (Jewish Settlement) as the relic of their having been in that town. There are also unsupported claims linking the place with Jainism and even Buddhism⁶. In any case, Koṭuññallūr has been a sacred centre for the followers of nearly every religious persuasion. It is our primary purpose in this paper to bring out the linkages between this sacredness on the one hand and the political and economic importance of the centre on the other and show how the one factor was as much the cause, as it was the effect, of the other in the complex development of the town and the locality of which it is part. Both the sacred character and the economic and political importance can be seen as a function of the geographical situation of the town and the locality of which it is part.

In fact, a study of the development of Koṭuññallūr as a sacred centre can clarify several issues related to the transformation of an ordinary place into a sacred centre. The complex processes leading to any centre becoming sanctified would show how a certain place, on account of a combination of circumstances, becomes more central than others in a region and how this centrality is sought to be retained by attaching a religious aura to it. This is not, to be sure, to say that behind the process of a place acquiring sacredness was a deliberate action with sinister motives calculated to achieve secular ends through invoking religion. Nor may there be any agency that consciously does this. A second purpose of this paper, thus, is to demonstrate the process of the sanctification of a place, transforming its character from the secular to the sacred. We examine the historical evidence regarding the centre as a sacred place first and then look at the importance of the place from the social and political points of view. This procedure may bring out causal connections between the two with clarity.

The earliest clear indication of Koṭuññallūr being a sacred centre is in the Tamil Śaiva tradition. Sundaramūrtti Nāyanār, one of the sixty-three celebrated Śaiva saints of the Tamil Bhakti Movement, has an exquisite hymn devoted to the deity of Tiruvañcaikkalam in Koṭuññallūr⁷. The Nāyanār does not fail to mention the location of the town, on the walls of which the ocean breaks its waves. *Periyapurāṇam*, a slightly later text cherishing the tradition continuing from an earlier period, says that Sundaramūrtti had stayed in the town on two

³ For an analysis of the tradition, see below.

⁴ There is considerable literature on the traditions of Christians in Kerala. A balanced discussion of the present problem is available in Narayanan, *op.cit.*, pp. 155-61; 186.

⁵ For a discussion of Jews in Mahodayapuram, see below.

⁶ One of the fancy explanations of the Bharani festival, where obscene songs are sung as "prayers", is that it was to drive away the nuns from the Buddhist *vihāra* which stood there!

⁷ M. Raghava Aiyangar, ed., *Cēravēntar Ceyyūṭkōvai*, Vol. II, (Trivandrum, 1951), pp. 78-82. Is *Mahodayapuram* (Mahā+udaya+pura) a Sanskrit translation of this Tamil word *Koṭuññallūr* (koṭum+kōl+ūr)?

occasions as a guest of his fellow-devotee, Cēramān *Perumāḷ* Nāyanār, the royal Śaiva saint⁸. In fact, both Sundaramūrtti and Cēramān *Perumāḷ* were so closely associated with the temple that both are stated to have ascended to Kailāsa, the abode of Śiva, from there. The works of Cēramān *Perumāḷ*, namely, the *Ādiyulā*, *Ponvaṇṇattantādi* and *Tiruvārūr Mummaṇikkōvai* are, however, curiously silent about Tiruvañcaikkaḷam. But the *Periyapurāṇam*, a twelfth century hagiographic work, does refer to the temple as the place where the Nāyanār was sitting in meditation when the Cēra ministers persuaded him to shoulder the responsibilities of the kingdom⁹. There are two bronze statues in the temple, believed to be of Cēramān *Perumāḷ* and Sundaramūrtti Nāyanār.

That Tiruvañcaikkaḷam was the royal temple of the Cēras is attested by evidence from epigraphy and literature¹⁰. It is located close to the royal residence, the site of which is identified with what is known today as *Cēramān Paṛambu* (“the Compound of the Cēramān”), immediately to the south of the temple. Local tradition describes this temple as *Cēramān Kōvil* (“the Temple of the Cēramān”)¹¹. *Kēraḷōtpatti*, the traditional historical narrative of Kerala, states that one of the *Perumāḷs*, Kulaśekhara, built the temple of Tiruvañcaikkaḷam¹². The idol is taken out in a ritual procession which forms part of the annual festival of the temple to the site of the old palace in *Cēramān Paṛambu*¹³. On the whole, the associations of the temple with the house of the Cēramāns are unquestionable.

Cēramān *Perumāḷ* Nāyanār is identified with Rājaśekhara (AD c.800-844), who was probably the first ruler of the Cēra kingdom of Mahodayapuram¹⁴. Rājaśekhara presided over a joint meeting of the representatives of the temple-centred Brāhmaṇa settlements of Vāḷappaḷli and Tiruvārūvāy in Tiruvalla,

⁸ *Periyapurāṇam*, *Kaḷarīṇṇarivār Nāyanār Purāṇam*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ The *Kokilasandēśa*, I, v. 88 describes the temple of Añjanakhaḷa (Tiruvañcaikkaḷam) as where the flags from roof-tops fan the horse of the Sun. An inscription of Rājasimha from Tiruvañcikkaḷam, AD c. 1036, although not detailed, is significant. *S.I.I.* V, NO. 789, p. 340; *T.A.S.* VI, II, No. 138, p. 1191. This temple was probably one of the constituents of the *Nālu Talī*. See below.

¹¹ In his translation of the *Śukasandēśa*, Koṭuñhallūr Kuññikkuṭṭan Tampurān, a renowned scholar-poet of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, who hailed from this town, uses the term Cēramān Kōvil for Tiruvañcikkaḷam. Koṭuñhallūr Kuññikkuṭṭan Tampurān, trans., *Raṇṭu Sandēśaṅṅal*, (Thrissur, 1900), v. 70, p. 32. The Sanskrit original uses the word Jayarāteśvaram. There is one Cēra ruler called Vijayarāga known to epigraphy, who ruled after Sthāṇu Ravi. Sthāṇu Ravi is certainly known to have gone up to AD 870, perhaps even beyond. This Vijayarāga has been identical with the Jayarāga of *Mūśakavamsākāvya*. Narayanan, *op.cit.*, pp. 26-7. Is the temple of Jayarāteśvaram in any way associated with the name of this Perumāḷ?

¹² Hermann Gundert, ed., *Kēraḷōlpatti (the Origin of Malabar)*, Mangalore, 1868. The references below are to the edition of eight works of Gundert brought together with a prefatory study by Scaria Zacharia, ed., *Kēraḷōlpattiyum Marrum*, Kottayam, 1992, p. 172.

¹³ This compound is known by that name even to this day. The site was excavated in 1944-46 and the Archaeological Survey in 1969-70 and recovered pottery, foundations of a big house and a temple and other odd little things from there. *Administration Reports of the Archaeological Department of Cochin for 1944-45 and 45-46 and Annu Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India, Southern Circle for 1970-71*. Full reports are awaited.

¹⁴ Narayanan, *op.cit.*, pp 24-5; 212.

which was one of the more prominent Brāhmaṇa colonies in Kerala. An inscription on copper plate recording the proceedings of this meeting, dated in his thirteenth year and datable to the first quarter of the ninth century, starts curiously with the invocation *namaśśivāya* ("obeisance to Śiva"), a solitary exception to the inscriptions from Kerala which begin usually with the invocation *svasti śrī* ("Hail! Prosperity!")¹⁵. It is pointed out that this may indicate the Śaivite bias of the founder of the kingdom. In any case, the big way in which the Bhakti Movement acted as props to the newly established monarchies in early medieval South India is well known¹⁶. It is hardly surprising that the founder of the Cēra kingdom too recognised its immense possibilities and promoted it personally.

The sacred associations of the city of Mahōdayapuram in the middle of the ninth century, immediately following the period of Rājaśekhara or Cēramān *Perumāḷ* Nāyanār, are brought out by an astronomical treatise composed in AD 869. This is a detailed commentary on the astronomical work called *Laghubhāskarīya* of the famous Bhāskarācārya by Śāṅkaranārāyaṇa¹⁷. Śāṅkaranārāyaṇa lived in the court of the Cēra king Sthāṇu Ravi Kulaśekhara (AD 844-883). He describes the city of Mahōdayapura significantly as a *sēnāmukha*¹⁸. He refers to the royal residence situated in a quarter of the city known as Gōtramallēśvara where there was a shrine of Gaṇapati called Bālakrīḍēśvara. However, the work does not mention any other temple in the town. Perhaps the references to temples there, such as they are, are only incidental to the work as its central concern is with problems of astronomy. Bālakrīḍēśvara, the shrine of Gaṇapati, is identified on the basis of a 14th century *Maṇipravāḷam* text, *Kōkasandēśam*¹⁹. It gives a detailed description of the town of Mahōdayapuram-Koṭuṇṇallūr, the details of which we shall turn to later in this paper. In the course of the description, there is a reference to the shrine of infant Gaṇapati in Bālakrīḍēśvara. This shrine is in the vicinity of the Tiruvaṅcaikkaḷam temple complex. Gōtramallēśvara, too, survives, arguably in its slightly altered form, Lokamallēśvaram, which is where the *Cēramān Parambu* is located immediately to the south of the Tiruvaṅcaikkaḷam temple. Excavations at the site, conducted by the Department of Archaeology of the erstwhile Cochin State and later by the Archaeological Survey of India, have brought out pottery and other interesting details.

Sankaranarayana was patronised by Sthāṇu Ravi Kulaśekhara²⁰. This ruler, who in all probability was the immediate successor to Cēramān *Perumāḷ*

¹⁵ T.A.S., II, No. 2, pp. 8-14.

¹⁶ M.G.S.Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, "The Bhakti Movement in South India", in S.C.Malik, ed., *Indian Movements: Aspects of Dissent and Protest*, Simla, 1978, pp. 33-66 esp. pp. 43-5.

¹⁷ P.K.Narayana Pillai, ed., *Laghubhāskarīya of Bhāskara*, Trivandrum, 1949. The commentary of this work, called *Vivarāṇa* by a certain Śāṅkaranārāyaṇa, is published along with it. Śāṅkaranārāyaṇa says clearly that he was patronised by Ravivarma, who had the title Kulaśekhara, and alludes to him as a Sthāṇu in the opening verse.

¹⁸ *Laghubhāskarīya*, *op. cit.*, Chapter III, p. 42.

¹⁹ Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Kōkasandēśam*, reprint, Kottiyam, 1972, p. 76, v.75.

²⁰ Narayanan, *op.cit.*, pp. 25-26.

Nāyanār or Rājasēkhara, was himself an interesting figure if we go by a couple of identifications. In the first place, it is suggested that he was identical with Kulaśēkhara Ālvār, the royal Vaiṣṇava saint who is stated to have belonged to the dynasty of the Cēras of the West Coast²¹. There is no reason why the author of the *Perumāḷ Tirumōḷi*, evidence of the recitation of which at Śrīraṅgam is available at least from AD 1088²², should not be identified with this *Perumāḷ* who ruled in the ninth century as we will have to wait till the end of the eleventh century for another Cēra *Perumāḷ* with a name or title of Kulaśēkhara. Apart from *Perumāḷ Tirumōḷi* in Tamil, he is also described to have composed *Mukundamālā*, a hymn in Sanskrit. In the colophon to certain editions of this work, it is stated that a pilgrimage to Śrīraṅgam is celebrated every day in the town of king Kulaśēkhara²³. There is also the tradition that this Cēra ruler dedicated his daughter to that temple as a dancing girl, and the shrine of Cērakulanācciyār within the temple complex is believed to commemorate her. It may be noteworthy in this connection that an inscription from Pagan in Myanmar, referring to a merchant from Mahodayapuram, quotes a whole verse from the *Mukundamālā*²⁴.

It is interesting that the successor to the royal Śaiva saint of the dynasty of the Cēra *Perumāḷs* of Mahodayapuram was a Vaiṣṇava saint. Obviously, this points to the realisation of the vast potentials of the Bhakti Movement in both the streams as an ideology of the newly emerging order over which the Cēra *Perumāḷs* were called upon to preside²⁵. It is in this connection that another identity of Kulaśēkhara acquires significance: he is also thought to be the royal playwright called Kulaśēkharavarman, the author of the Sanskrit plays *Subhadrādhanañjaya* and *Tapatīsamvaraṇam* and the *campūkāvya*, *Āścaryamañjarī*²⁶. The author calls himself *Mahodayapuraparamēśvara*, “supreme lord of Mahodayapura”²⁷ and *Keraḷādhinatha*, “the overlord of Kerala”²⁸ terms that are very meaningful in ways more than one. His Vaiṣṇavite leanings are unmistakable in the plays; the somewhat unwarranted introduction of the Vāmana story in the *Tapatīsamvaraṇa* is not without significance either.

This royal playwright is also believed to have been responsible for the inauguration of the Sanskrit theatre in Kerala through patronising the *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* form of presenting Sanskrit plays. Commentaries on the play known as *Vyaṅgya Vyākhyā* are stated to be prepared under instructions of the author

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 213-4.

²² *South Indian Inscriptions*, III, pp. 148-52.

²³ “*ghuṣyate yasya nagare raṅgayātrā dīne dīne |
tamaham śirasā vande rājānam kulaśekharam | |*”

²⁴ *Epigraphia Indica*, VII, No. 27, p.97.

²⁵ Kesavan Veluthat, “The Socio-Political Implications of Kulaśēkhara Ālvār’s Bhakti”, in the *Proceedings of the India History Congress*, Bhubaneswar, 1977.

²⁶ Narayanan, *op.cit.*, pp. 213-4.

²⁷ *Tapatīsamvaraṇa*, Prologue.

²⁸ *Subhadrādhanañjaya*, Prologue.

himself and for easy enactment of the plays on the stage²⁹. So also, there is the story of a legendary court jester, Tōlan, stated to be a contemporary of the royal playwright, who is believed to have contributed much towards choreographing the plays³⁰. Even to this day, Cākyārs who stage Sanskrit dramas in the form of *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* use Kulaśēkharavarman's plays in a big way in spite of their being not exactly the best of dramatic compositions available in Sanskrit. This has significance going beyond being one more jewel on the monarch's crown; as theatre was one of the important means of communication, useful in propagating the ideology of *bhakti* through the popularisation of the *Mahābhārata* and other stories, its patronage by a ruler meant patronage of the movement in a considerable manner. This argument gets added emphasis when it is recognised that Kulaśēkhara was not only a *patron* of the Bhakti Movement but he was its great *leader*. Incidentally, it may also be mentioned that the Cākyārs of Kerala believe that when their art has no longer any takers, they are to abandon their profession by leaving their costumes on the branch of a banyan tree in front of the Tiruvañcaikkaḷam temple.

Neither the Tamil hymns of Kulaśēkhara Āḷvār nor the Sanskrit plays of Kulaśēkharavarman refer to a temple in the capital city, Mahōdayapuram, much less one built by him. But there does exist a temple in the town of Koṭuññallūr with the name Ṭṛkkulaśēkharapuram. An inscription in the temple dated in the 195th year of the construction of the temple has been assigned palaeographically to the eleventh or twelfth century³¹. Reckoning backwards, then, the date of its construction would fall well within the regnal period of Sthāṇu Ravi Kulaśēkhara, identified with both Kulaśēkhara Āḷvār and Kulaśēkharavarman, and the name of the temple may point to his hand in its construction and consecration. That the Tamil and the Sanskrit works of the monarch do not mention the temple may be because the temple was built after their composition. In any case, it forms part of the pilgrimage circuit of Vaiṣṇava devotees in South India.

Apart from the Tiruvañcaikkaḷam temple associated with Cēramān *Perumāḷ* Nāyanār and the Ṭṛkkulaśēkharapuram temple founded by Kulaśēkhara Āḷvār, the city of Mahōdayapuram in the age of the *Perumāḷ*s boasted of two other temples both in close proximity to the former - the Kīlṭṭaḷi and the Ciñṇapuram or Sṛṅgapuram Taḷi. Both are dedicated to Śiva. These four temples were together known as the *Nālu Taḷi* or "The Four Temples" and they had a major role to play in the government of the Cēra kingdom³². In fact, a discussion of the role of the *Nālu Taḷi* in the polity of Kerala in this period can be useful in bringing out a major aspect of the sacred geography of Mahōdayapuram as well as the sacral character of Cēra kingship.

²⁹ *Vyaṅgyavyākhyā*, quoted by N.P.Unni, *Sanskrit Dramas of Kulaśēkhara: A Study*, Trivandrum, 1977, p.24.

³⁰ K. Kunjunni Raja, *The Contribution of Kerala to Sanskrit Literature*, Madras, 1958, 1980, pp. 11, 18, 57. Raja accepts the identification, first proposed by Koṭuññallūr Kuñṅikkūṭṭan Tampurān, of Tōlan with the author of *Vyaṅgyavyākhyā*.

³¹ *S.I.I.*, vol. V, No. 790, p. 340; *T.A.S.*, VI, II, pp. 193-4.

³² Narayanan, *op.cit.*, pp. 85-6.

The role of *Nālu Taḷi* in the government of the *Perumāḷs* of Mahodayapuram is a matter of recent recognition by historians. When research into the history of Kerala was initiated on “modern” lines in the twentieth century, statements about the *Nālu Taḷi* in the narrative called *Kēraḷōtpatti* were dismissed, together with other details there, as “legendary nonsense”. The story goes that after Paraśurāma created the land of Kerala and gifted it to Brāhmaṇas who were settled in 64 *grāmas* or “villages”, he invested the donees with the right to carry on the governance of the land as *brahmakṣatra*, “Brāhmaṇas in the role of kṣatriyas”. The sixty-four *grāmas* elected four from among themselves, namely, Peruñcellūr, Panniyūr, Paṛavūr and Ceññannūr as *kaḷakams* to represent them. Each of them sent an agent known as *rakṣāpuruṣa*. They together carried out the work of governance. But they promptly got corrupted in course of time and it was realised by the community that the work of governance was not their cup of tea, it being the function of kṣatriyas. Thereupon they decided to have a ruler of the kṣatriya caste elected for a period of twelve years, to be succeeded by another similarly elected kṣatriya ruler. These rulers were known as *Perumāḷs* and were established at Mahodayapuram. The Brāhmaṇa representatives of the four *grāmas* continued to be the advisors of the *Perumāḷs*. However, as the *grāmas* from which they hailed were too far away from the capital city, four new *grāmas* were elected, superseding the earlier four, to represent the Brāhmaṇa community. The newly elected ones were Mūḷikkalam, Airāṇikkaḷam, Paṛavūr and Iruññāṭikkūṭal, all within close proximity to the capital. Each of these was also accorded a seat in the capital city in a temple, namely, Mēlṭtaḷi, Kīḷṭtaḷi, Neṭiya Taḷi and Ciññapuram Taḷi respectively. The narrative also mentions the names of Nambudiri houses, younger members of which were officiating as the *Taḷi Adhikārikaḷ* or *Taḷiyāṭiris*³³. At least two of these houses which used to enjoy considerable aristocratic privileges, namely Kariññampallī and Eḷamprakkōṭ, survive to this day.

The narration in *Kēraḷōtpatti* is necessarily confused and devoid of a chronological order. Different layers of memory collapse and are mixed up. There is no trace of evidence in other sources to help us say anything about the four *kaḷakams* in the pre-*Perumāḷ* era. But the statements about the *Perumāḷ* era in relation to the *Nālu Taḷi* are interestingly supported by other sources from the period and immediately thereafter³⁴. There are inscriptions which suggest that the *Perumāḷ* had a council called *Nālu Taḷi*. At least a couple of them speak of the *Perumāḷ* having taken important decisions in consultation with it. In one case, the meeting is described as being held in Neṭiya Taḷi. The affiliation of Neṭiya Taḷi to Paṛavūr is brought out by literature³⁵ and that of Kīḷṭtaḷi to Airāṇikkaḷam by an inscription from Kīḷṭtaḷi³⁶. The affiliation of the other two temples to their

³³ Scaria Zacharia, ed., *Kēraḷōlpathiyum Marrum, op. cit.*, pp. 161-2; 166.

³⁴ Narayanan, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-6.

³⁵ Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Kōkasandēsam, op. cit.*, pp. 82-3, v. 84.

³⁶ *Administration Reports of the Archaeological Department of Cochin*, 1100 ME (AD 1924-25), App. E., No. 36, p. 21; *Ibid.*, 1103 ME (AD 1927-28), p. 4.

respective *grāmas*, namely Ciṅṅapuram Taḷi to Iruṅṅāṭikkūṭal and Mēlṭṭaḷi to Mūlikkaḷam may be assumed safely. A record of the immediate post-Cēra period, granting trade privileges to the Syrian Christians in Mahōdayapuram, speaks of “*Nālu Taḷi* and the *grāmas* attached to them” as situated within the limits of the town³⁷. Literary texts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, too, refer to *Nālu Taḷi* and the *grāmas* which they represented. A verse in the *Śukasandēśa*, a Sanskrit text of the 15th century, is worth quoting for various reasons³⁸:

This [capital city] shines forth on account of the great Brāhmaṇas who live in rows of *maṭhas* in the *sthalis* here. These leaders of the sixty-four *grāmas* are equal to Bhṛḡu in their command of the weapons and the sciences and are paragons of acceptable manners, upon whose bidding the king is verily the lord of the earth.

An understanding of the *Nālu Taḷi* is crucial in trying to look at the sacred character of the city of Koṭṭūṅṅallūr; it is equally crucial for the sacral nature of the Cēra kingship as well. The *Nālu Taḷi* and the *maṭhas* attached to the temples are known to have been the seats of the representatives of the four *grāmas* of Mūlikkaḷam, Airāṅṅikkaḷam, Iruṅṅāṭikkūṭal and Paṛavūr. These *grāmas* are situated in the southern parts of the Trichur and the northern parts of Ernakulam districts, where there is a concentration of Brāhmaṇa settlements. It may be remembered that the Brāhmaṇa settlements in Kerala had come up in the immediate pre-Cēra period, forming clusters around the lower reaches of the Pērār, Periyār and Pampā rivers, in the tract which is most hospitable to rice cultivation³⁹. Even there, it is the Periyār valley which can boast of the greatest density. It is but natural that four Brāhmaṇa settlements from this cluster should be representing the establishment in Kerala, particularly when the seat of government was in that locality. Thus, when the Brāhmaṇas of the *Nālu Taḷi* are described in the verse quoted above as “paragons of acceptable manners leading the sixty-four *grāmas*” - “*grāmān ṣaṣṭim catura iha ye grāhyaceṣṭā nayanti*” —, our author was stating something which was well known. The *Nālu Taḷi* was the symbol of the Brāhmaṇical world of Kerala in the Cēra capital.

What is more important is the political role which the *Nālu Taḷi* played. Epigraphic evidence tells us that this body functioned as the king’s council. It seems that it influenced the decisions of the monarch considerably in administrative and fiscal matters. An inscription from the Rāmēśvaraswāmin

³⁷ *Epigraphia Indica*, IV, pp. 290-7. Incidentally, this is an extremely important document giving many details of the town of Makōtaiyar paṭṭinam-Koṭṭūṅṅallūr with its *ali*, *gōpura* and other details of the urban centre.

³⁸ “*vācā yeṣām bhavati nṛpatirṅyako rājyalakṣmyāḥ
grāmān ṣaṣṭim catura iha ye grāhyaceṣṭā nayanti |
śāstre śāstre’pi ca bhṛḡunibhaiśśāśvadudbhāsate yā
viprendraistairoipulamaṭhavaryāvaliṣu sthaliṣu ||*” *Śukasandēśa*, I, v. 69. in Koṭṭūṅṅallūr Kuṅṅūkkuṭṭan Tampurān, trans., *Raṅṅu Sandēśaṅṅal*, op. cit., p. 32.

³⁹ For the identification of the Brāhmaṇical *grāmas* in Kerala and their geographical location, Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies*, Calicut University, 1978, pp. 21-38.

temple at Kollam speaks of the amends that king Rāmavarma Kulaśekhara had made for the wrong he had done the “*āryas*” - an expression used to indicate the Brāhmaṇas⁴⁰. This shows the extent of power that the Brāhmaṇas had whereby they could force such an act of atonement on the ruler himself. That the documents makes a specific reference to the presence of the *Nālu Taḷi* on the occasion is significant. In fact, accounts in the *Kēraḷōtpatti* say that the *Nālu Taḷi* had extracted an oath of habitual allegiance from the ruler and that it was the *Nālu Taḷi* that was responsible for establishing the king on the throne. *Nālu Taḷi*, and the Brāhmaṇa power it represented, have been demonstrated as the real power behind the Cēra throne. It is this fact that is underlined by the verse quoted above: “upon whose bidding the king is verily the lord of the earth” - “*vācā yeṣām bhavati nṛpatir nāyako rājyalakṣmyāḥ*”.

It was not for nothing that Kerala was described as *brahmakṣatra* - a land where Brāhmaṇas played the role of ksatriyas. Paraśurāma himself, who created the land, had combined these two in him! The story goes that Paraśurāma created the land of Kerala and donated it to Brāhmaṇas as *brahmakṣatra* with the right to rule and protect the land which they so got⁴¹. Several Brāhmaṇa families of Kerala were even given training in the use of arms for this purpose, a tradition which is again attested by epigraphy and literature⁴². Thus, when our author says that the Brāhmaṇas of Kerala were “equal to Bhrgu in their command of the weapons and the sciences” - “*śāstre sāstre’pi ca bhṛgunibhaiḥ*” -, we have to see this historical allusion.

This heavy Brāhmaṇical influence and a certain sacredness claimed on account of it was a characteristic feature of the Mahodayapura monarchy. The *double entendre* employed in the opening verse of the commentary on *Laghubhāskariya* brings this out clearly. It praises the ruler, Sthāṇu Ravi, who was the patron of the astronomer although all the terms used to describe the object of the praise are also equally applicable to Śiva⁴³. In fact, one of the characteristic features of the image of royalty in the whole of south India in this period is this divinisation through various means⁴⁴. This is seen in the case of the Cēra kings of Mahodayapuram as well. The rulers of this dynasty are described as *deva* (god) as witness the titles *Rājaśekhara deva*, *Kulaśekhara deva*, *Rāma deva*, *Manukulādicca deva*, etc., in the epigraphic records⁴⁵. Kulaśekhara varman, the royal playwright, liked to call himself Mahodayapura-*Parameśvara*. This divine claim or attribute is a pointer to the sacral character of kingship and, naturally, the seat of that king becomes a sacred centre. Even this, at least in the case of Mahodayapuram, was probably because of the role of the Brāhmaṇas in the polity. It may be remembered that the largest number of

⁴⁰ T.A.S., V, No. 13, pp. 40-46.

⁴¹ Scaria Zacharia, *Kēraḷōlpathiyum Marum*, op. cit., p. 156.

⁴² For the arms-bearing Brāhmaṇas of Kerala, Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements*, op.cit., pp. 101-115.

⁴³ P.K.Narayana Pillai, ed., *Laghubhāskariya of Bhāskara*, op. cit., v. 1.

⁴⁴ For a discussion, Kesavan Veluthat, “Royalty and Divinity: Legitimation of Monarchical Power in South India”, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Hyderabad, 1978.

⁴⁵ For references, Naryanan, op.cit., chapter on “Chronology of the Cēras”.

inscriptions of this period in Kerala are from the Brāhmaṇa settlements centred on temples and that the majority of them are concerned with land and its use for rice cultivation. What is peculiar there, in contrast to the rest of south India, is the general absence of a powerful class of non-Brāhmaṇa landowners. Therefore, it was easier and more appropriate to use the Brāhmaṇical idioms in politics and its legitimacy in Kerala; Mahōdayapuram, the capital, naturally represented and projected this sacredness through the large number of temples and other symbols of Brāhmaṇical religion.

At the same time, Mahōdayapuram-Koṭuññallūr was equally sacred for those who practised the non-Brāhmaṇa cults as well. This is brought out by the importance of the Kālī temple there, although even Kālī has been co-opted to the pantheon of the Brāhmaṇas. Interestingly, there is no reference to this temple in the sources of the Cēra kingdom of Mahōdayapuram, although the possibility of the temple having been there cannot be ruled out. By the time the temple finds mention in the post-Cēra records, it was already a Brāhmaṇical temple, with centrality given to Śiva in a technical sense but Kālī herself remaining more important for the worshipping devotees⁴⁶.

Three *sandēśakāvya*s from the post-Cēra period, all modelled on the *Meghasandēśa* with the separated and pining hero sending a message to the heroine through an unlikely messenger, are interesting in this context. In all the three, like in other similar *sandēśakāvya*s, the hero gives detailed descriptions of the route to be taken by the messenger. Of these 14th-15th century texts, the *Kōkasandēśam* is a *Maṇipravālam* (a mixture of Malayalam and Sanskrit) work of anonymous authorship while the *Kokilasandēśa* of Uddaṇḍa and *Śukasandēśa* of Lakṣmīdāsa are in Sanskrit. The destination of the messenger is different in each case; but each has to go *via* Mahōdayapuram-Koṭuññallūr.

Kōkasandēśam has about 25 verses to describe the complex⁴⁷. Kālī of the Kuṛumpakkāvu shrine takes more than three verses⁴⁸. She is the dark, tall and fierce goddess, who drinks the blood of the demons, and is surrounded by goblins dancing in the blood of the demons so fallen. But she is also the benevolent mother of the entire world. For the author of *Śukasandēśa*, the fierce goddess in the sacred grove is the deity of destruction for whom the entire cosmos is not enough for one gulp at the time of the ultimate flood⁴⁹. Uddaṇḍa in his *Kokilasandēśa* describes her as enshrined in a grove and as very fierce. Even Death is scared of her and thus she is helpful to Life. Her attendants are described as trying to sacrifice the buffalo which Yama, the god of death, rides on⁵⁰!

The way in which this shrine in the grove is described in these three important *kāvya*s is significant. This place of worship, just outside the city of

⁴⁶ For a recent study of the temple of Kālī at Koṭuññallūr and the worship there, Sarah Caldwell, *Oh Terrifying Mother: Violence, Sexuality and Worship of the Goddess Kali*, New Delhi, 1999.

⁴⁷ Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai, ed., *Kōkasandēśam, op.c it.*, pp. 63-79, vv. 55-79.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vv. 55-7.

⁴⁹ *Śukasandēśa*, v. 71 in Koṭuññallūr Kuññikkuttan Tampurān, trans., *Raṅṅtu Sandēśaṅṅal, op. cit.*, p. 33

⁵⁰ *Kokilasandēśa*, v. 86 in Koṭuññallūr Kuññikkuttan Tampurān, trans., *Raṅṅtu Sandēśaṅṅal, op. cit.*, p. 43.

Mahodayapuram, is where animal sacrifices were offered. The deity there presides over the final dissolution of the universe. She is herself bloodthirsty and is surrounded by goblins who play in blood. In fact, this is a faithful picture of the goddess in the Kālī temple of Koṭuññallūr, who is a non-Brāhmaṇical deity in a fierce form, pleased by animal sacrifice. At the same time, attempts to link her with Purāṇic mythology and cosmology are made in these texts, which are of great significance.

The Kālī temple at Koṭuññallūr became a centre of pilgrimage for non-Brāhmaṇa devotees in the period after the decline of the Cēra kingdom. Pilgrims from all over Kerala, after fasting and observing several other month-long austerities in March-April, go there in groups for the *Bharaṇi* festival, shouting obscene songs as part of their worship. They offer turmeric and pepper to Kālī. Till recently, cocks and goats were also sacrificed at the festival. How and why this festival began and took shape is hard to say; but it is interesting that people from different parts of Kerala, which were recognised as separate political units under the Cēras of Mahodayapuram, participate in this festival. It is significant that members of the Nāyar and Īlava castes who had military pretensions formed the largest number of pilgrims. There are a large number of Kālī shrines in different parts of Kerala where it is claimed that the deity is a close kin, mostly an elder or a younger sister, of the goddess of this temple. A number of Teyyams, the folk deities worshipped by the non-Brāhmaṇas in North Malabar, cherish this tradition⁵¹. The special rights that the Taccōḷi house from North Malabar, famed for their military achievements in the post-Cēra period, had in this festival are particularly noteworthy⁵². It is tempting to ask if this annual pilgrimage was a vestige of the movement of soldiers from the chiefly territories to the capital of the overlord. One is reminded of the important statement made by Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa, the commentator of *Laḡhubhāskariya*, that the city of Mahodayapura had a separate *senāmukha* ("Cantonment")⁵³. The role that a Nāyar body of Koṭuññallūr known as the *Onnu Kuṛe Āyiram* ("The Thousand Less One") had in this festival would support this surmise, although nothing can be said definitely about this.

The *Onnu Kuṛe Āyiram Yogam* continues to have considerable rights and privileges in the Kālī temple. M.G.S. Narayanan has proposed that this body may represent a continuation, in altered form, of the *Āyiram* ("The Thousand") identified as the bodyguards or Companions of Honour of the Cēra *Perumāḷs* of Mahodayapuram⁵⁴. That a body with military and police functions got transformed largely as a body managing the affairs of a temple with rights and privileges there during a major festival where non-Brāhmaṇas had a greater participation is significant for our understanding of the sacred character of a

⁵¹ M. R. Raghava Varier, "The Sacred Geography of Teyyams" An unpublished paper.

⁵² V.T.Induchudan, *The Secret Chamber*, Trichur, 1969, pp. 117,118. Fantastic theories contained in it notwithstanding, this book documents many important details regarding Koṭuññallūr.

⁵³ P.K.Narayana Pillai, ed., *Laḡhubhāskariya of Bhāskara*, *op. cit.*, Chapter 3, p. 42.

⁵⁴ Narayanan, *op.cit.*, pp. 122-4.

political centre. If the process of the former can be known in greater detail, the latter could be brought out with greater clarity.

As stated earlier, Koṭuññallūr is sacred also for the Jews, Christians and Muslims. There are no Jews there any more, but that there used to be a considerable Jewish settlement is attested by the place-name *Jūtakkalam*. The Jewish Copper Plates of Bhāskara Ravi Varman (AD 1000) were not only issued from this town but also gave Joseph Rabban, the Jewish merchant chief, considerable aristocratic privileges⁵⁵. Jewish tradition believes that the first permanent settlement of the Jews in this town, known to them as Shingly, dates from AD 370, following the destruction of the second temple at Jerusalem by Titus Vespasian. There is rich folklore among the Jews of Cochin, which preserve the memories of the Synagogue at Kōtai or Makōtai, another name by which the town of Koṭuññallūr was known. It was in AD 1567 that the Portuguese razed this settlement and the Synagogue to the ground⁵⁶. So also, a strong Christian settlement exists there. In fact, Christians believe that it was there that St. Thomas, the apostle, began his missionary activities. They boasted of a Christian royal house known as the Villārvaṭṭam *swarūpam*, which is believed to have had its seat in the vicinity of Koṭuññallūr⁵⁷. So also, there is a mosque that is presented as dating from the beginning of the Kollam era (AD ninth century), that being the date on which the legendary Cēramān *Perumāḷ* was believed to have been converted to Islam and gone to Mecca⁵⁸. Even if this early date is an exaggeration, it is possible that there was a strong Islamic presence in the port town which had trade contacts with West Asia in a big way. Whether or not the last *Perumāḷ* was converted to Islam and had one of first mosques established there, a medieval Sanskrit text, the *Viṭanidrābhāṇam*, makes a reference to the “*paḷḷi* of the shaven heads” (*muṇḍadhāriṇaḥ paḷḷi*) to the south of the Tiruvañcaikkalam temple⁵⁹. There are also unsupported claims linking the town with Buddhists and Jains.

We have seen that Mahōdayapuram-Koṭuññallūr was a sacred centre as much as it was a capital city. The factors responsible for the one were themselves working towards the other. It may be necessary to go a little

⁵⁵ *Epigraphia Indica*, II, pp. 68 ff.

⁵⁶ I owe these details to the articles contained in the 400th anniversary souvenir of the Jewish Synagogue of Cochin.

⁵⁷ There are many claims, most of them of a glorifying variety, related to the history of Christianity in Kerala. Among the factors responsible for the arrival of Christianity in Kerala, the West Asian connections of Koṭuññallūr was not the least.

⁵⁸ What is known as the “Cēramān Mosque” in Koṭuññallūr exhibits a modern plaque showing the date of its construction as AD 828. This is not acceptable. However, historians are in a mood to accept the story that the last *Perumāḷ* got converted to Islam and left for Mecca. Narayanan, *op.cit.*, pp. 64-70.

⁵⁹ “*aho cūrnisarītkallolahastāliṅgitamekhalāyāḥ keralakularājadhanyaḥ śrīrāmavarmaparipālītāyāḥ mahodayapuryaḥ ... śāthakopasya muṇḍadhāriṇaḥ paḷḷimuttareṇa*”. Cited in Narayanan, *op. cit.*, Chapter V, n. 47. Narayanan, however, takes the *paḷḷi* for a Jain institution, with nothing to support the identification. Given the fact that there is a Muslim mosque to the south of the temple, that mosques in Malayalam are called *paḷḷi*, and that Muslims in Kerala till recently used to shave their heads, I propose this identification.

backward in time in order to realise this. It is well known that Mahodayapuram-Koṭuññallūr was a continuation of the ancient port town, known to Tamil sources as Muciri and to Greco-Roman records as Muziris⁶⁰. Muziris was “the first emporium of India” for the Romans, where the ships of the Yavanas arrived in large numbers and took back pepper and other products in exchange of gold. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* tells us that Muziris abounded in ships sent there with cargoes from Arabia and Greek ships from Egypt. Pliny, however, has reservations about the desirability of the port because of pirates from Nitrias and also because ships had to anchor at some distance with the result that boats had to be employed for taking the cargoes to the coast. It was the land of Coelobotros. The pepper came there from Cottonara. The Greco-Roman accounts speak of the variety of goods exported from and imported through Muziris. Evidence from a papyrus in the Vienna Museum, published recently, speaks of trade in bulk goods between Muziris and Alexandria⁶¹. This record is a trade agreement between a *vaṇīkar* (trader) from Muziris and a trader from Alexandria. The fabulous amount of trade which this single document testifies to underlines the substantial scale of the Indian trade with the Greco-Roman world in the second century that passed through Muziris. It did continue, as suggested by statements about considerable Roman settlements in Muziris. In fact, the *Peutingian Tables* even speak of a temple of Augustus in the town⁶². However, this temple has not come down to us in archaeology or in memory. In any case, the fact of Muziris having been a port of considerable importance for Roman trade cannot be disputed. So also, records dating from later times as well attest its continuity as a centre of trade, particularly with the western world. Into this latter category would fall documents like the Jewish Copper Plates of Bhāskara Ravi (AD 1000) and even the so-called Syrian Christian Copper Plates of Vīra Rāghava Cakravarttika⁶³ (AD 1225).

This extensive trade with West Asia from the early centuries of the Christian era brought Muziris into contact with Judaism and Christianity early on. It is only natural that this *entrepot* of West Asian trade, “the first emporium of India”, was also the place where the earliest settlements of Semitic communities sprang up. One need not accept the tradition of St. Thomas as a precondition to imagine that Syrian Christians arrived on the Indian coast in ships that came to Muziris. The presence of Jews in Muzirikkōṭu, the way in which Muciri or Muziris came to be known in later Malayalam, gets an explanation in the same way. Again, whether or not Muslim scholars had won one of the *Perumāḷs* in disputations and converted him to Islam, it is not hard to

⁶⁰ For Muziris as a centre of Roman Trade in the early centuries AD and a most recent attempt at its identification within Koṭuññallūr, Rajan Gurukkal and Dick Whittaker, “In Search of Muziris,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, vol. 14 (2001), pp. 333-350.

⁶¹ Cited in Romila Thapar, “Black Gold: South Asia and the Roman Maritime Trade”, *South Asia* (Journal of the South Asian Studies Association), Armidale, NSW, Australia, New Series, vol xv, No. 2, Dec. 1992. Thapar’s study is useful in this context.

⁶² Gurukkal and Whittaker, *op.cit.*

⁶³ *Epigraphia Indica*, IV, pp. 290-7.

believe that Islam disembarked on the West Coast in Kerala at the port of Koṭuññallūr. The centre also became sacred for the followers of these Semitic religions.

Mahōdayapuram-Koṭuññallūr was acquiring importance at another level as well. Early Tamil literature known as the “Saṅgam Literature” and Greco-Roman accounts are clear in linking this port town with the early Cēras, who had their seat in Karūr (in the modern Tiruchirappalli district of Tamilnadu). One does not know what happened to the Cēras in the period between the close of the early historical period (“the Sangam Period”) and AD ninth century when evidence of the later Cēras is available from Mahōdayapuram. It has been suggested that a collateral line of the Cēras might have been residing in Muciri even in the early historical period and that, following the “decline and fall” of the Roman empire and the drying up of Roman trade, this line as well as the port town suffered an eclipse. It may have been this line which got revived in the period after the eighth century under totally different conditions.

It is these conditions that are important in this context. One of the major developments that took place in the intervening period was the phenomenal expansion of agriculture, particularly in the major river valleys. It is seen from the records that this agrarian expansion was also linked with the rise of Brāhmaṇa settlements. In fact, the Brāhmaṇa settlements formed clusters in the more fertile regions of the river valleys⁶⁴. The thickest of such clusters was on the lower Periyar basin, in the southern parts of the Trichur and the northern parts of the Ernakulam districts of modern Kerala, in the centre of which was the town of Koṭuññallūr. The causal connection between the expansion of agriculture, the rise of the Brāhmaṇa settlements as corporations of a class of intermediaries placed above the cultivating peasantry and the development of the *agamaic* temples which were also the nuclei of the Brāhmaṇa settlements on the one side and the rise of the Cēra monarchy of Mahōdayapuram on the other has been brought out in a convincing manner⁶⁵. Thus, even in an entirely different socio-economic and political formation, Mahōdayapuram-Koṭuññallūr remained a centre with considerable sacred character. The sacredness in the changed context eminently suited the elements that had acquired importance in the new formation. That it was a seat of a sacral monarchy is brought out by the fact that temples sacred to the Bhakti tradition of both the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava persuasions exist there. These temples enjoyed considerable patronage from the royalty; the royal patrons were themselves Bhakti saints of the respective canons. The mutual support that the Bhakti Movement and the new monarchies in South India had is a point that has been brought out by historical studies⁶⁶. So also, the institution of *Nālu Tāḷi* brings out the Brāhmaṇical character of this sacredness. Incidentally, it is significant that two of these “four temples” are royal temples, associated with Bhakti saints.

⁶⁴ Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala, op.cit.*, pp. 21-38

⁶⁵ Narayanan, *op.cit.*, *passim*.

⁶⁶ M.G.S.Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, “The Bhakti Movement in South India”, *op.cit.*

In the period following the break-up of the Cēra kingdom, Koṭuññallūr retained its sacred character. While the Brāhmaṇical temples continued to be important, the Kāḷi temple, with its non-Brāhmaṇa forms of worship and animal sacrifice, came into prominence and got Brāhmaṇised to a great extent. The martial character of the body of Nāyars who managed the temple and its *Bharaṇi* festival as well as the pilgrims who went there is interesting. The post-Cēra period of the history of Kerala, it is suggested, was a period of continual bickering among the principalities that formed a heterogeneous assortment in the political geography of Kerala. The Semitic religions, too, continued to hold the town as important and sacred, for there was a revival of trade by the second millennium. Mahodayapuram's standing as a centre of trade in the post-Cēra period is brought out by epigraphic evidence from Southeast Asia and also from Mahodayapuram itself. It continued its brisk trade with West Asia, until a cataclysmic flood filled the port with silt in AD 1341 and rendered it literally high and dry⁶⁷.

Thus, Mahodayapuram-Koṭuññallūr offers a good case study in sacred geography. Endowed with geographical peculiarities such as location on the estuary of a river and potentials as a port, it attracted traders from different parts of the world who brought with them religions of different descriptions. It is well known that pepper dominated the merchandise of that trade. That pepper should also be an offering dear to the deity of the Kāḷi shrine is of its own significance. Even after that early trade dried up, the religions which came with it thrived. At a later point in time, again on account of the location of the centre in the midst of rich rice-producing plains, it becomes the centre of a sacral monarchy and the sacred institutions attached to it. In fact, the sacral character of the monarchy of the *Perumāḷs* of Mahodayapuram and the sacredness of the institutions attached to it were themselves factors which contributed to the sacredness of the town. The fall of that monarchy did not, however, lead to the loss of its sacredness. On the contrary, the urban centre became a centre of pilgrimage. Even in the period following the fall of that monarchy, the memory of the town as a capital city lingered. Even this memory was sacred in character. The sacredness of royalty and the relics of royal institutions made the town sacred in the period that followed. The way in which the Kāḷi temple rose to prominence in the post-*Perumāḷ* era, commanding allegiance from all over Kerala, is suggestive of this. The military character of the pilgrims to this shrine in the *Bharaṇi* festival is of particular interest in this connection. The Semitic religions, in their turn, continued with renewed vigour in the context of the revived trade that the port facilitated. The flood of AD 1341 and the consequent deposit of silt rendered the port literally high and dry; but the town continued as, and remains, a sacred centre.

⁶⁷ Till recently, there was an era reckoned from this point onwards, which was known as the Puduvaippu Era. This commemorated the throwing up of the land mass known as Puduvaippu ("the New Deposit") to the south of Koṭuññallūr. The closing down of the port of Koṭuññallūr and the opening up of Cochin, together with the creation of the Puduvaippu, marked a new era in the history of Cochin. So, the Puduvaippu Era commemorates both a fact and a metaphor.