

Article

Jewels Set in Stone: Hindu Temple Recipes in Medieval Cōla Epigraphy

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Abstract: Scholarship abounds on contemporary Hindu food offerings, yet there is scant literature treating the history of food in Hinduism beyond topics of food restrictions, purity, and food as medicine. A virtually unexplored archive is Hindu temple epigraphy from the time that was perhaps the theological height of embodied temple ritual practices, *i.e.*, the Cōla period (ninth–thirteenth centuries CE). The vast archive of South Indian temple inscriptions allows a surprising glimpse into lived Hinduism as it was enacted daily, monthly, and annually through food offerings cooked in temple kitchens and served to gods residing in those temples. Through analyzing thousands of Tamil inscriptions from the tenth through the fourteenth centuries CE, I have gleaned information concerning two distinct material cultural facets. (1) The practice of writing these rare but remarkable recipes which themselves are culinary textual artifacts has allowed us to access (2) Hindu food offerings of the past, also complex, *sensory* historical artifacts. In exploring these medieval religious recipes for the first time, I aim to show: the importance that food preparation held for temple devotees, the theological reality of feeding the actual bodies of the gods held in these temples, and the originality of the Cōla inscriptional corpus in bringing about a novel culinary writing practice that would be adopted more extensively in the Vijayanagara period (fourteenth–seventeenth centuries CE). This study, a radical new attempt at using historical sources inscribed in stone, sheds new light on medieval Hindu devotees’ priorities of serving and feeding god. The examination of this under-explored archive can help us move our academic analysis of Hindu food offerings beyond the hitherto utilized lenses of economics, sociology, and anthropology. Further, it contributes to our understanding of medieval temple worship, early culinary studies, and the history of food in India.

Keywords: food offerings; Hinduism; Hindu ritual; Tamil epigraphy; feeding god; culinary history; recipe studies; Cōla temples; South Indian food; material religion

How can one investigate the material culture of a religion’s past when an object of that study—namely, food—is no longer accessible to us? Due to this predicament, scholarship abounds on Hindu food offerings in contemporary India and the South Asian diaspora, yet scant academic literature treats the history of Hindu food offerings. As a result, the study of food in early Hinduism rarely extends beyond topics of food restrictions, proscriptions, purification, and food as medicine. Few studies move the academic analysis of Hindu food beyond lenses of economics, sociology, and anthropology. Yet there exists an underutilized textual corpus for the history of Hindu food offerings in the virtually unexplored archive of temple epigraphy: specifically, the medieval Tamil Cōla inscriptions. My focus for this study is the epigraphic accounts that detail what I consider to be recipes and an early form of culinary writing in Tamil.

The Cōla period (ninth–thirteenth centuries CE) was particularly significant for South Indian history as it was a period of relatively stable imperial expansion under a single dynasty whose leadership contributed to more centralized political organization and infrastructures such as irrigation systems that advanced agriculture and the overall prosperity of the state. The Cōla dynasty also contributed intensely to the patronage of arts and culture, including the building of a number of major

temple sites and religious art. The prominence of inscriptions in temples and the strong patronage of religious sites during this time indicate that this period was a historical apex for embodied temple ritual practices. This was in part due, no doubt, to the Cōla period immediately following upon the rise of the *bhakti* (devotional) movement in South India (sixth-ninth centuries CE), with its fervor of visionary saint-poets, the Nāyaṇārs and Ālvārs, the first *bhaktas* (worshippers) in India to express the intense dedication of their lives and minds to locally situated gods using their poetry. Their popular emotive verses directly contributed to the onset of practices like temple pilgrimage and visits to divinities at specific sites described in their poems (Dehejia 1988; Peterson 1989). Concurrent with the Cōla period was the crystallization of theological ideology in the writing of scholar-saints such as Rāmānuja, whose theology advocated the worship of icons as *embodied* worship. All of these reasons made the Cōla period a high point for temple culture and religious practices and an ideal milieu for examining temple food and religious culinary culture. In this way, the vast archive of South Indian inscriptions allows an intimate look at lived Hinduism as it was enacted daily, monthly, and annually through ritual food offerings cooked in temple kitchens, served to gods residing in those temples, and fed to priests, donors, festival attendees, and others.¹

Many questions spurred my research on temple cooking. Why do recipes only first come to be composed in the Tamil language in medieval Cōla temple writing? What was remarkable about this historical context that led to the beginning of recipe writing in Tamil? How did these dishes taste? How might medieval South Indian food taste? Is there any continuity between temple food prior to the Cōla period or following it? How vast is the divide between the medieval Cōla taste for divinity and how it tastes today, bearing in mind the fame of modern Tamil temple *prasād*?²

In order to begin to delve into these inquiries, my method has been to search through the published volumes of inscriptions compiled starting in the late nineteenth century, including the most recent publications that include findings of stone carvings from the past decade and that also revise earlier readings of rubbings and epigraphy still in situ.³ The intention of inscribing in stone at a temple—which was often the most public and visible setting in a village, city, or town—was to create a public record of some act, agreement, or gift, like a notarized document today (Karashima 1996). Such inscriptions might announce, for example, that a regional leader relieved a tax burden from a certain community under great strain or granted a tax remission whose resulting funds would sponsor a lamp to be burnt at intervals for a god. Donative inscriptions typically intended to publicize a gift of land or personal wealth to a temple or its assembly or to the village assembly. Inscriptions usually stipulated the resulting interest accruing from such an asset that had been invested in the temple

¹ While priests' families never receive mention in the inscriptions, in the modern period, it is most common practice for the *naivedya* (food offering presented first to the deity) to go to priests and their families, and then to donors, and, depending on the temple, perhaps any remaining to visiting devotees. The Cōla inscriptions never indicate that donors receive any portion of the offerings in return as *prasād*, although this came to be practiced later in the Vijayanagara period (Breckenridge 1986, pp. 37–38).

² *Prasād* here of course indicates food offerings *after* they have been given to god, which are then consumed by worshippers. For orthography, I have opted to use what is most frequently recognized. Often this is the Sanskrit spelling, but at times, a name might be equally commonly known in Tamil morphology. On occasion, a Hindi word might be the most recognizable, so I have used such spellings, as in *prasād*. If a food word is in common usage in English, I have opted not to write the Tamil spelling, which often obstructs understanding, as in the case of *dosa/tōcai*.

³ Given the vast number of sources, at this stage I have done a partial survey of the inscription volumes. This excludes volumes of the *South Indian Inscriptions* (here on in, SII) (Archaeological Survey of India 1986) dedicated to other languages, as well volumes 5–8, left out due to time limitations. However, I have included the Tamil *Inscriptions of the Pudukkottai State* (Srinivasa Ayyar 2002) in this study, and key selections from the *Epigraphia Indica* volumes (here on in, EI, which generally focus on north Indian epigraphy) (Archaeological Survey of India 1939). Volumes fully examined: 2 Volumes of *Inscriptions of the Pudukkottai State*, EI Vol. 21, and SII Vols. 1, 3, 12, 13, 19, 32, and 34 in full. Volumes studied in part/partially examined: Vols. 1, 2, 9, and 11 of EI, Vols. 2 Part 1 & 2 and Vol. 2 Parts 3–5, Vols. 4, 8, 24, 28, and 30. Volumes not examined: SII Vols. 5–7 (mixed lang. vols.), 9 (Kannada), 10 (Telugu), 11 (Bombay Karnatak), 14, 15 (Kannada), 16 (Telugu), 17, 18 (Kannada), 20–23, 25–26, 27 (Kannada), 29 (unobtainable), 31 (other lang. content), and 33 (other lang. content). Overall, I have fully examined 10 out of 36 volumes (28% of total, not including EI volumes) and partially examined another 11 volumes (perhaps an additional 15% of total content). These are rough estimations, as the pagination varies in each volume, from only 200 pages in some volumes to over 700 pages in many others.

treasury or among the *capai* (Skt. *sabhā*, assembly) of leaders. Inscriptions also indicated what the annual interest was to be used for, whether to repair part of the temple, to feed religious mendicants or professionals (teachers, *yogins*, scholars of the Vedas), or, most importantly for this study, to feed gods in temple.

Excluding inscriptional content that concerned matters such as sales of property, local political agreements, government mandates, and so on (Karashima 2009, p. 27), most donative inscriptions provide for offerings such as keeping eternal lamps lit for gods or generic offerings funding the bathing and anointing of gods, including the decoration of the gods with scented pastes and flowers (Mchugh 2012). A significant number of donative inscriptions refer to gifts of food offerings in a general sense as *naivedya*, *nivēdi*, or *amutu/amitu* (food offering or “ambrosial offering”).⁴ These mentions of general food offerings number far greater than the inscriptions that specify gifts of distinct dishes, such as *tayiramutu* (yogurt offering),⁵ *parupparamutu* (dal offering), and similar dishes served to the deity daily, at various times per day.

Even fewer inscriptions—statistically rare, considering the tens of thousands of temple inscriptions in Tamil⁶—actually detail recipes by ingredient and by amount in weight or volume. I have isolated eighteen recipes from the Cōla period material that I consider to be actual recipes for *naivedya* dishes. Accounting for additional inscriptions that time did not permit locating, there could easily be another twenty to a hundred recipes (or more) in the whole inscriptional corpus. There is certainly a larger number of recipes in the Tirupati inscriptions, which largely concern Vijayanagara period material (discussed below), by which time the epigraphic practice of recipe writing for gods’ food was widely practiced, as I argue below. From the inscriptions under examination, I have selected case studies of offerings and festival foods that elucidate my points and begin to track a narrative of temple culinary history in line with Tamil literary history and with later Tamil devotional practice.

Along with my detailed analysis of these inscription-recipes, I forward the following claims as my main arguments for epigraphical culinary writing. I argue first and foremost that these inscriptions do in fact contain recipes and that food preparation was a serious matter of importance for devotee donors of the medieval period (not only for kitchen staff, cooks, and priests). I also contend that these devotees fed the actual bodies of gods through their donative food offerings. Further—what is most significant for the historicization of culinary culture in India—I assert that Cōla inscriptions contained innovative forms of culinary writing that led to the development of a culinary writing practice in stone that would be adopted more extensively in the Vijayanagara period.

In advancing scholarship on medieval Hindu food offerings and religio-culinary practices, we may better understand later developments in the widespread production and sales of *prasād* in Hindu temples as well as Hindu domestic food offerings in relation to early temple offerings. This research contributes greater knowledge on an ignored aspect of *rasa* (taste or savor, but with an extended meaning of the delight of the divine experience) in early *bhakti* (devotional worship). The study also contributes knowledge concerning the developments that led to modern Hindu temple worship and practice as we know them today. Finally, this work advances our understanding of early culinary studies and food history in (South) India.

⁴ *Naivedya* often appears spelled the Sanskrit way in Grantha in the Tamil inscriptions. For a mention of *nivēdi*, see line 25, inscription #17, Vol. 21 of (Archaeological Survey of India 1939, p. 109). Inscription is in the Subramaniya temple (first slab; first face) in Tirucentūr, Tinnevely district: “...for the *naivedya*, the vegetables to be cut and fried...” *Amutu* (variant spellings *amitu/amirtu*) is virtually ubiquitous in the inscriptions.

⁵ While *tayir* is traditionally called curd in India, I have opted for the term yogurt due to its familiarity among readers. They are different products, with curd technically being curdled milk with the whey liquid separated from it, unlike what most people in India refer to as curd today.

⁶ Karashima gives a rough statistic of about 30,000 extant Tamil inscriptions. (Karashima 1996, p. 2).

1. The Recipe for Writing Recipes

Before detailing the intricacies of medieval temple recipes, I must first justify my claim that these carvings on temple walls are, in fact, recipes, since they appear in the midst of sometimes complex donative deeds that are public declarations and also, essentially, financial transactions. Let us keep in mind that pre-modern recipes are quite distinct from our late modern understanding of recipes, due to both structural and linguistic differences of form (Pennell and DiMeo 2013, p. 7). Even in Europe, medieval recipes typically lacked the specific directions for making and applying the recipes that we assume today to be the actual content of a recipe (Alonso-Almeida 2013, p. 68). What we understand as “recipe” derives from the European *receptaria* tradition of medieval monasteries that recorded alchemical and artisanal trade secrets for use in the monastery itself (Pennell and DiMeo 2013, p. 9). In the Latin sense of “receipt” from *recipere*, what was received involved a giver and a recipient, meaning one person gave (wrote) the prescription or receipt for how to prepare something, and the receiver would follow the instructions given. Thus, in effect, the Cōḷa inscriptional recipes are *doubly* recipes, for they first involve the giving and receiving of the recipe as cooking method for a certain dish—the actual recipe or receipt—and secondly, because each inscription records a gift of land, gold coins, or similar that will have interest accrue from it as a gift from donor to (usually) temple recipient. This second sense is how the inscription actually functions, as “receipt” of the donation. So if anything, these Cōḷa recipes are even more “recipe” than what you find in Martha Stewart’s cookbooks!

When analyzing the recipe for its register, form, and so on, recall that genre is “a cultural construct” that “varies according to the speaking community” (Alonso-Almeida 2013, p. 70), so what appears familiar to us as a recipe will not necessarily appear so to others, and what definitely appeared to be a recipe in the eleventh century might not seem so to us today. In its most basic sense, a recipe’s functional definition would be some text that “communicates information about the preparation of foodstuffs” (Pennell and DiMeo 2013, p. 6). In its substantive definition, no element is necessary in a pre-modern recipe except for ingredients listed, per Francisco Alonso-Almeida, perhaps the only historical linguistic recipe theorist (Alonso-Almeida 2013, p. 71). What we understand today as the “stages” (parts) of a recipe—name of dish, serving suggestions, preparation method, number of servings, virtues or applications—are in fact optional (Alonso-Almeida 2013, p. 70), although some stages will appear at times in pre-modern recipe writing, like names of dishes in the twelfth-century *Mānasollāsa* or the virtues or demerits of a dish in the *Pākadarpaṇa* (undated). Whereas some recipe-writing is actually prescriptive in nature (informing on desired action or behavior, or how one should cook, ideally), the Cōḷa temple recipes are *descriptive* and detail actual practice—how food items were actually prepared on a daily basis—not an ideal representation of how they ought to be prepared.

The significance of these recipes, then, lies in the fact that the highly detailed nature of the inscriptional register meant that the important details of *what mattered* to the donor and temple recipient became inscribed in stone. The temple inscriptional register was able to be fully culinary in scope and effectively a *culinary* register of writing because of the importance of details. It mattered to the donors that one and a half *ceviṭu* measure of cumin seeds and one *uri* measure of ghee actually made it in the daily offerings given to god in their name. Feeding god properly mattered, hence the proportions contained in dishes mattered. Thus we are able to find the first true recipes ever to be written in the Tamil language on temple walls during the Cōḷa period.

2. The Inscription as Culinary Textual Artifact

The effort of carving writing into stone in a language that is among the longest in the world in terms of extension (for overall characters per semantic idea and word length) means that one realistically ought only to write what is truly necessary in an inscription. Of course, we see very long, publicly impressive inscriptions, of which the Tirumukkūṭal inscriptions featured later in this article are a case in point. Nonetheless, the difficulty of writing in stone means that the content present in an inscription already indicates what the priority was for the donor and for the recipient. From this,

the importance that food preparation held for temple devotees becomes evident, as donating devotees expressed their desires to have very specific foods prepared for their gods in temples.

We have such a fine archive of medieval recipes due to the precision of the inscriptional record, which placed high priority on the specificity of details to be put on public record. Inscriptions are replete with details such as how many measures it is from a certain tree near the river that a donated property ends, exactly how much paddy from each harvest of each crop will go to pay for fuel for the eternal lamp lit for a god, exactly how much interest a certain number of gold coins placed in the temple treasury's trust will accrue, and how many Brahmins can be fed lunch daily at a temple with X, Y, and Z lunch items from that interest.

These inscriptions are artifacts in and of themselves—textual artifacts of a culinary nature, with a physical, material presence and (semi-)permanence in stone. In part, I suspect, because of the extensive development of temple culture and temple worship in Tamilakam (Tamil-speaking-land) in the medieval period, we are fortunate to have more inscriptions in the Tamil language than are available in any other language (or even in combinations of language families) across India.⁷ Tamil speakers simply took to heart a writing practice in stone to an extent not seen elsewhere. This serious inscriptional practice means that we have an extensive archive—rather, an extensive body of *artifacts* in stone. Further, these stone artifacts are *culinary* artifacts. Not only do pots, grinding stones, early stoves, and remnants of food in potshards constitute culinary artifacts but these temple walls (and sometimes side stones, head stones, and stepping stones) are culinary artifacts attesting to taste in the past. These inscriptional artifacts are our best attempt at assimilating the flavors, taste preferences, and culinary developments of the medieval period for non-cosmopolitan and relatively non-elite populations. They present a different sort of record, one that supplements the royal, elite, and literary descriptions of food and culinary culture found elsewhere in India at the time.⁸

Cōla imperial culture placed real centrality on temple life, evident in masterworks of temple construction and feverish virtuosic artistry in the creation of bronze *mūrtis* (effigies or images) to be housed in temples and brought out for processions (Dehejia 1990), the graceful bronze gods that are perhaps the Cōla empire's most lasting claim to fame (Davis 1997, esp. Ch. 1, "Living Images," pp. 15–50). Recall that the Cōla period coincides with the centuries of greatest fervor in terms of embodied religious devotional practice. The Cōla period followed fast upon the heyday of the Tamil saint-poets (ca. sixth-ninth centuries CE) who were the forerunners of the *bhakti* movement. They sang the glories of their gods that they worshipped with love and of their preferred temple sites of devotional worship.

This period's emphasis on temples led to an incredibly extensive inscriptional practice, in which, at times, even donors' personalities and the priorities of certain communities show through. Such a prolific epigraphic practice allowed space for some originality in writing, which we see in the Cōla inscriptional corpus. During the Cōla period, the extensiveness of the inscriptional practices and the flowering of new temples and temple worship allowed the space for this originality in writing. This resulted in a novel writing practice that was culinary in scope, recording recipes, a culinary genre of its own within the inscriptional genre.⁹ Perhaps other temple visitors saw these donative inscriptions that included recipes—or perhaps they observed donors specifying their recipes to be inscribed by scribes—which led to the repetition of this culinary writing practice such that, by the time of the Vijayanagara period (fourteenth-seventeenth centuries CE), this practice of recipe writing

⁷ Karashima estimates 30,000 Tamil inscriptions out of 80,000 inscriptions total for all of India (3/8, or almost half of all inscriptions in India!). There are 17,000 extant inscriptions in Kannada, 10,000 in Telugu, and 23,000 total for all of the other languages of India, including Sanskrit, Prakrits, and all north Indian languages (Karashima 1996, p. 2).

⁸ While some donations are made by royalty, chieftains, and powerful members of society, temple dancers and other temple works, laborers, and agricultural caste members fund many donative food offerings for god.

⁹ We do not encounter anything like this culinary writing in the earlier epigraphic record, for example, during the immediately preceding Pallava period. I located zero recipes for the Pallava period, although I did search through Pallava inscriptions in my study.

was adopted much more. Compared to the *eighteen* recipes I have found from the Cōla period after examining approximately 30–40% of the inscriptional corpus (perhaps 50–60% of the total Tamil corpus), I readily encountered and translated over *thirty* recipes from the (succeeding) Vijayanagara Tirupati inscriptions while having examined less than 16% of that inscriptional corpus.¹⁰ Further, I gave preference to examining the earlier portion of the Tirupati record in order to trace more continuity with the directly preceding Cōla record, and the earlier portion of the Tirupati material contains fewer recipes than the later portion of the corpus does. This might suggest a grand total of two hundred or more epigraphic recipes for the Vijayanagara period, although the number could easily be much higher. This is significantly higher than my estimate of potentially forty to one hundred total recipes for the Cōla period.

3. *Naivedya* as Artifact

Not only are inscribed recipes artifacts for our study but also the dishes prepared as offerings to gods—*naivedya*—although they are cultural artifacts that are harder for us to apprehend today. Following food historians Rachel Laudan and Massimo Montanari (Montanari 2006, pp. viii–ix),¹¹ I treat all food as human artifact, as substances that undergo culturally and historically determined modification, processing, and preparation by humans. Tamil temple *naivedya* and festival foods are complex sensory artifacts of the past, communicating much about practice and beliefs, as evinced in my following case studies. The challenge of understanding food dishes as historical artifact—for example, a dish served at noon in a temple in the village of Tiruccenturai in 930 CE—is why recipes are so crucial for this study of what would otherwise be intangible cultural heritage of the sort that UNESCO has only recently been classifying: traditional, artisanal, and local techniques and know-how for making crafts and art forms (in other words, for the production of artifacts) (UNESCO 2018). Without the inscriptional recipe archive, we would only be able to glimpse at medieval Tamil food through literary mentions of dish names with no other information.

When considering *naivedya* as artifact, it is important to reflect on how this temple practice might have come about, although the topic is much more complex than this simplified overview might suggest. Offering *naivedya* is one of the sixteen *upacāras* (acts) of a *pūjā* (worship),¹² one that seems to have developed by the beginning of the common era at Hindu shrines. Earlier Vedic ritual included food offerings in the form of *huta*—an offering or oblation, like ghee, placed in the fire—not designated as *naivedya*. Vedic rituals such as the *darśapūrṇamāsa* also included cooked offerings, like the baked *puroḍāśa* which was divided and shared among the priests following its ritual function and the *anvāhārya*, an abundance of grain (often rice) that was cooked on the *dakṣiṇa* fire, sprinkled with ghee, and then offered to the priests in the southerly direction and divided into four parts (Kane 1942, pp. 1068–69). The practice of *naivedya* seems to have been in place from at least the time of the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s composition, where we learn of the recommendation that *naivedya* should be what everyone’s food was.¹³ Later *dharmaśāstra* (legal) commentators such as Medhātithi quote the *Rāmāyaṇa* verse, so it was obviously in the literati’s consciousness for a long time.¹⁴ P. V. Kane did link the

¹⁰ Of the Tirupati inscriptional volumes, from here on called TT, which are primarily but not entirely Vijayanagara in epoch, I have examined 330 pages’ worth out of a total of 2,107 pages of inscriptions in order to locate recipes (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998).

¹¹ For food as a human construction, see (Laudan 2016, p. 3 & p. 6).

¹² The sixteen *upacāras* are *āvāhana*, *āsana*, *pādya*, *arghya*, *ācamanīya*, *snāna*, *vastra*, *yajñopavīta*, *anulepana* (or *gandha*), *puṣpa*, *dhūpa*, *dipta*, *naivedya* (or *upahāra*), *namaskāra*, *pradakṣiṇa*, and *viśarjana* (or *udvāsana*). That is, (summarily) invoking/inviting the god, offering a seat to the deity, offering water to the god’s lotus feet, offering water to the hands for ritual washing, sipping water for purification, bathing the deity, dressing the god, tying the sacred thread on him, anointing with fragrant paste(s), offering flowers, then incense, offering the deity light from a lamp, offering food, saluting with prayer, circumambulating clockwise around the deity (keeping the right [reverential] side toward the deity), and terminating the rite. The list sometimes differs. (Kane 1942, p. 729).

¹³ *yadannah puruṣo bhavati tadannāstasya devatāḥ* || 95.31 || (Vālmiki 2008, p. 490).

¹⁴ Medhātithi (v. 7) cites this *Rāmāyaṇa* passage when commenting *The Law Code of Manu*, per (Kane 1942, p. 733).

practice of offering *naivedya* in temple to the earlier Vedic ritual invitations to the gods to consume the *apūpa* (*appam*, grain cake-like offering), yogurt, etc. (Kane 1962, p. 35), although I think a connection to the sacrificial offerings shared amongst god, priests, and patron might also be suggestive. Equally important might be the (originally Vedic) "welcoming the guest" ritual, perhaps embedded in the purpose of giving food to gods in temple. While an exhaustive, contextualized exploration of the precursors of *naivedya* and *prasād* is not possible here and would require a separate study, I would be at fault not to acknowledge the topic at all in discussing *naivedya*.¹⁵

Modern-day priests offer more pragmatic explanations for the development of the *naivedya* and *prasād* tradition. Babu Shastri, one of the head priests of Kanchipuram Kāmāṭciyamman Temple, told me that he suspected that the *naivedya* tradition developed because devotees would come from far away, or at least travel a great length of time to come to a temple and see a deity. After waiting in line so long, a devotee is famished, thirsty, and hot, so the temples would give a bit of food, just a little bit to make one feel satiated. In his words, one can be more satisfied with the experience of that little bit because it is something (when you had nothing, is implied), and then later the devotee can get more refreshment and rest.¹⁶ This was, of course, his unprepared response when I had asked him to reflect on how the system of *naivedya* came about. This is in line with Carol Breckenridge's mode of thinking that the *prasād* system developed as a way of distributing foods to many in order to confer prestige to the donor and that later, sales of *prasād* items that were less perishable and would travel well began at large temple sites for pilgrims who had traveled a long way (Breckenridge 1986). This explanation—visitors' refreshment after long travel—makes better sense to me for interpreting how the *annadāna* system (the giving of meals) became more prominent. There is often *annadāna* service in place in temples where the *naivedya* is kept exclusively for priests and priests' families' use and is not shared with devotees (for free or for sale). I would also link this function of refreshment for travelers to the pre-modern development of the *chattri* (*chattram* [Skt.] or choultry [Eng.]) system of room and board, often at temples,¹⁷ although we already see a few inscriptions that designate funds for food (not *naivedya*) to refresh and satiate pilgrims and travelers in the Cōla period in inscriptions.¹⁸ No doubt the development of the full extension of *naivedya* and *prasād* service at temples is complex, multi-cause, and cannot be explained solely by the need to refresh pilgrims and traveling devotees.

4. Food Offerings Case Studies

I must preface my analysis of the historical recipes for specific important dishes by clarifying that the quintessential offering in Tamil temples *past and present* was and continues to be plain boiled rice made from aged raw rice. In temples today this is usually called *śuddhānnam*, pure (in the sense of unmixed, plain) white rice, but which temple cooks informally call *vellai cātam* (white rice).¹⁹ This was and continues to be treated as the main offering given to god in temples, hence the other name it frequently goes by: *mahānaivedya*, the main (great or important) offering. Even today in most temples across Tamil Nadu, *śuddhānnam* is typically offered three times a day to the gods (once in the morning, once at midday or early afternoon, and once in the evening). It also constitutes most of the food material of the *bali* offerings that are left daily at the peripheries of temple structures. Interestingly, in the modern era, the great offering is never returned to devotees as *prasād*, neither free nor sold at stands.

¹⁵ For a nuanced exploration of the topic of *prasād*, see (Pinkney 2013) and the work of Gerard Colas, e.g., (Colas 1996).

¹⁶ Per my interview with Babu Shastri held in Kanchipuram, 17 May 2015.

¹⁷ For a history of the later development of the *chattri* system during the Maratha Thanjavur kingdom, see (Linderman 2013).

¹⁸ Ex. of *apūrvī* in line 17, inscription #35, (Archaeological Survey of India 1986), Vol. 3, Parts 1 & 2, p. 79. Inscription of Rajaraja II. Leslie Orr describes new visiting pilgrims as *apūrvīs* on (Orr 2004, p. 452).

¹⁹ The Tamil word *cātam* derives from Sanskrit *prasādam*, the already (divinely) sampled portion of the offering that is distributed among devotees in temples across India. First, the "*sādam*" is given to god as *naivedya* and then it is returned as *pra-sādam* (Breckenridge 1986, p. 37).

The medieval inscriptions record donations intended to fund the *naivedya* of boiled rice in countless instances, surely numbering in the hundreds, if not more. The ubiquity of *śuddhānna* as the *naivedya* par excellence stems from the fact that white (not whole grain) rice is the most important and most highly-valued food in South India,²⁰ even if and when no other food is given.²¹ For the Cōla-period inscriptions, the standard amount of white rice offered per day is typically four *nālīs* in measure, over six kilograms of rice before cooking, except when six *nālīs* are offered per day, with two *nālīs* offered at each of the three *sandhis* (the three “meeting points” of the day, roughly, at sunrise, midday, and sunset).²² So commonplace was it to offer four *nālīs* of white rice per day in temple that some inscriptions record donors funding provisions of four *nālīs* for oblations to be offered to gods without even specifying that it is four *nālīs* of rice that is to be offered! A tenth-century inscription written during Rājārāja Cōla’s reign records a donor granting the supervision of land he had purchased to the village assembly, the proceeds and profits of which are meant to be assigned to providing four *nālīs* (of rice, implied) daily for the midday oblations for Tiruvā[y]molitēvar, presumably the sainted Vaiṣṇava poet Nammālvār enshrined as deity in the village temple.²³

To cite another—somewhat later—example²⁴ of the boiled rice offering being the main and only offering given at temples, the produce from land assigned to a Perumāḷ (=Viṣṇu) temple was designated in order to make the holy offerings of four *nālīs* of rice given to the god first thing in the morning (“*cirukālaisandhikku* [literally, at the early morning *sandhi*]. . . *nānāli arici* [illegible text] *amutu ceytaruḷukaikku*”) for as long as the sun and moon [exist].²⁵ To make clear the importance of such a gift, the entire nineteen-line inscription details the land perimeters and method of proceeding for providing the rice offering. It exceptionally details that the better half of the remains of the offerings was to be given to Śrīvaiṣṇava travelers who had not yet received such an offering (meaning first-time visitors to the temple),²⁶ and is a very rare instance of a Cōla period inscription specifying that the leftovers of the *naivedya* were designated for devotees passing through, not simply for god. While this is an isolated incidence in the Cōla inscriptional record, it became more common practice in the later post-Cōla record.

With these and other examples, it is easy to see the significance and consideration of rice alone as enough sustenance for a temple deity. In what follows, I outline other remarkable *naivedyas* and

²⁰ For a lengthy discussion of the high prestige and value placed on processed white rice, and especially so in the medieval period, see (Smith 2006).

²¹ Even today, when no other offering can be given due to lack of funds, etc., white rice is offered in temples across Tamil Nadu. In fact, if white rice is offered, nothing else really need be offered; anything else is simply additional or “extras.” Per my interview with Babu Shastri, head priest of Kāmāṭciyamman temple, 17 May 2015.

²² In a few instances, other amounts of rice are indicated for the holy offering of plain rice. For example, inscription #9 from (Archaeological Survey of India 1986), Vol. 34 indicates that [one] *nāli* of raw rice is to be given once a day: *tiruvamitariciorāṭṭai nālāl vanta* (line 5). . . *nāli arici uccam pōtaikku aṇṇa palikkāvatāṭakavum nel vantaṇa* (line 7). The number one is implied when *nāli* is specified with no descriptor. Tenth-century inscription dated to ca. 991 CE (the sixth year of Irājarājacōla’s reign) (Archaeological Survey of India 1986), Vol. 34, p. 15.

²³ Line 2 of inscription #2, (Archaeological Survey of India 1986), Vol. 3, p. 4 (section on Ukkal inscriptions). This inscription dates to the thirteenth year of Irājarājacōla’s reign, so ca. 997–998 CE. We learn that Nārāyaṇa Irācaciṇ[k]aṇ donated 550 *kūlis* of land to the village assembly for this purpose. . . *tiruvā[y]molitevarukku ucciyam pōltu nānālīt* (line 2) *tiruvamutu amirtu seyvatarku* (line 3). “For preparing the holy ambrosia offering [unusually redundant here, literally “holy offering offering”] of four *nālīs* [of rice is implicit] at high-noon time for the deity / divine Tiruvā[y]moḷi.”) Vaiṣṇava inscription in Śivacūḷā[maṇimaṇ]ka[l]am village, also known as Śrī Vikramābharaṇaccatu[r]vetimaṅkalam.

²⁴ To cite an even earlier example, inscription #8 from (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998) Vol. 1, p. 14 (in Tamil), section on the early Pallava and Cōla inscriptions. Inscription appears on the north wall of the first *prākāra* of the Tirumala temple (the main Venkaṭeśvara temple in Tirupati). Queen Sāmavai Kāṭavan-Perundevi, who was the queen of Śattiviṭṭaṅkan (Śaktiviṭṭaṅkan), arranged for daily propitiation (*nimandam*) with four *nālīs* of rice (*tiruvamutu*) to be cooked as the daily offering. This dates to the fourteenth year of Koppātra-Mahēndra Panmar I (a descendant of the Pallavas), hence, a minor ruler with limited local power at the time of Parāntaka II’s rule, ca. 957–970.

²⁵ Lines 9–10, inscription #35, (Archaeological Survey of India 1986) Vol. 3, pp. 79–82. Inscription pertains to the eighth year of Irājarājacōla’s II’s reign, hence ca. 1140 CE. This is one of the Maṇimaṅgalam inscriptions in a Rajagola Perumal temple, and, unusually for these inscriptions, starts with a long panegyric (*meykkīrtti/praśāsti*).

²⁶ See earlier footnoted discussion of *apūrvī* and (Orr 2004, p. 452).

temple foods that have become prominent in the Tamil diet, still appear offered to deities today in Tamil Nadu in domestic and temple worship, and/or have appeared in pre-modern Tamil literature.

5. *Pōṇakam*: The First “*Pōṇkal*,” Later, the Main Midday Offering

The plain rice offering of *śuddhānnam* was and is the norm, but that does not mean it is the only thing fed to god(s). Another particularly important offering widespread across South Indian temple practice is something that was called *pōṇakam* in the Cōla period, but which is more familiarly known today as pongal (*pōṇkal*, in the savory version either as khara pongal or as *venṇpōṇkal*). Pongal is popular today as the festival day food for an eponymous harvest festival held early in the calendar year, marking the commencement of the sun’s travel northward in the heavens. During the festival, Tamilians take their cooking pots to the town center or main square (or near a temple of their choice or simply in front of their own home), and boil a pot of milk rice until it overflows. It is the “boiling over,” (*pōṇkal* = lit., a “boiling” in a nominal form) significant of prosperous abundance, that is supposed to be the source for the name of the dish and holiday itself. But any regular temple-goer will have observed that pongal, usually *venṇpōṇkal*,²⁷ is actually a typical temple *prasād*, perhaps the most prevalent temple dish served to the public (and to gods in private, behind the screen, after bathing/*abhiṣekam* and clothes changing). This pongal is a ghee, pepper, and cumin seed laden dish of rice and dal, often served today with ghee-fried cashew nuts, curry leaves, and suffused with aroma from asafetida water.

It is this dish that appears early in the inscriptional record and throughout it as *pōṇakam* (lit., “the boiled food [offering]”), also known as *tirupōṇakam* (the holy offering) or *venṇpōṇakam* (white cooked offering/white pongal). I suggest that by the Cōla period, the term *pōṇakam* was used to refer to the cooked offering, which would be every offering given to god for private consumption, with only raw offerings like fruit, fresh coconut water, and yogurt being offered to god before the devotees’ gaze. The usage of this term varies, so generally it meant the cooked offering, and in Cōla times, it meant the dish with rice, dal, cumin, pepper, and ghee that is so beloved of Tamil temple-goers. It also appeared in other juxtapositions, for example, *pālṇpōṇakam* (a cooked milk offering), *paruppupṇpōṇakam* (cooked dal offering),²⁸ or the tenth-century occurrence of *payarupṇpōṇakam* (lit., whole bean cooked offering, meaning an offering of cooked [in this case] dal). In this rare instance, the unsplit bean to be used to make the dal is *toor*, with a resulting one *uri* measure of toor dal along with two *nālīs* and one *uri* of rice used daily in this cooked dish offered once a day in the early morning.²⁹ This inscription is remarkable because the customary dal used in *pōṇakam* is typically green gram (moong) dal.

A later Vijayanagara period recipe for *veḷḷai tirupōṇakam* records a more standard recipe for (moong dal) *pōṇakam* as might be familiar to temple devotees today (*venṇpōṇkal*). Note that the amounts indicated for this sixteenth-century recipe are vastly greater than was commonplace in the earlier Cōla period. This is partly because this offering was donated and supplied by the Queen of Acyūtārāya, hence a very wealthy personage at the height of her king’s and the whole empire’s power, and secondly, because these were offerings for what had become the largest pilgrimage site in South India at this time, the Tirumalai temple at Tirupati, in present-day Andhra Pradesh. Her extensive profuse offerings were given daily immediately following her husband’s (the king’s) offerings and

²⁷ While I have found epigraphic mention of thirteenth-century *venṇpōṇakam*, which ought to be synonymous with *venṇpōṇkal*, there are sadly no recipes or complete ingredient lists included in this inscription (which also mentions offerings of *appam*, dal *pōṇakam*, milk *pōṇakam*, offerings of fresh young coconut water, and more) to corroborate this synonymy. Inscription #201, from the seventeenth year of an unclear ruler’s reign, in the Naṭarāja temple of Chidambaram, (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1986), Vol. 12 (The Pallavas), p. 122. For another inscription (#188, same volume, p. 112) from the fifteenth year of this same ruler’s reign, inscription #188, the epigraphists give a date of 1257 CE, and the prior inscription, #187, pp. 111–12, from the fourteenth year of the same ruler’s reign, gives clear astronomical indications with confirmed dating of 1256 CE, suggesting that inscription #201 dates ca. 1259 CE.

²⁸ Both of these appear in inscription #201, (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1986) Vol. 12, p. 122, line 5 and surrounding. Unfortunately, this inscription does not record complete recipes and only lists dish names for offerings to be given.

²⁹ In particular, lines 6–8, inscription #210, (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1986) Vol. 19, p. 107. From the eighth year of Śrī Kōpparakēcaripana(r)’s reign, ca. 914–915. One *uri* equals a half *nālī*. I presume that *tūp[ṇ]aruppu* in line 8 refers to toor dal; epigraphic orthography is often irregular.

also after Kṛṣṇarāya's offerings were presented, in a long line of copious offerings for the god, priests, and devotees.

Recipe for twenty large platters of the Queen's *veṇṇṇaṇkal* / *vellaṇṇai tirupōṇakam*:³⁰

"1 *vaṭṭi* of rice of the Tirumalai Temple measure (*malaikuniyaṇṇiṇṇāṇkāḷāl*, i.e., using the *kāl* / measure of the [temple of the] one standing lower than the hill, i.e., the Tirumalai measure)...

2 *nāḷi* and 1 *uri* of ghee...

2 *nāḷi* and 1 *uri* of green gram...

2 *nāḷi* and 1 *uri* of black pepper..."

The Queen's recipe for *vellaṇṇai pōṇakam*, while lavish in volume, actually seems to be lacking some of the ingredients we usually understand to make up *veṇṇṇaṇkal* (cumin seeds, asafetida), although is still recognizable as *pōṇkal* due to the abundant presence of ghee and peppercorns, equal in volume to the green gram! But there is a Cōḷa-period dish called *appakkāykarīyamutu* that I argue has been mistakenly attributed to be a fruit dish by Eugene Hultzs. As you see, the recipe below for *appakkāykarīyamutu* to be offered in the Big Temple at Thanjavur contains everything we expect to find in *veṇṇṇaṇkal* (except for the addition of sugar, which appears in most medieval temple recipes, as I discuss in a later section). Despite correctly transcribing the inscription and translating the entirety of its contents, Hultzs did not realize that what was detailed as *appakkāykarīyamutu* is in reality pongal. To his credit, all quantities of ingredients in this inscription are grouped by ingredient, not by dish, meaning that one has to separate which ingredients belong together in the same dish when they are actually recorded by ingredient over numerous lines of text.³¹ Here is the eleventh-century recipe as I have parsed it out and reassembled it:

Appakkāykarī amitu (*Appakkāykarīyamitu*) (=Kārttikai Festival *Pōṇakam*)

"1 *urakku* and 1 *ārakku* of aged rice (*palavarici*)...

1 *urakku* and 1 *ārakku* of (green gram?) dal (*pōṇakapparuppu*)...

3/4 *ceviṭu* of black pepper...

1 1/2 *ceviṭu* of mustard seed...

3/18 of a *ceviṭu* of cumin seed...

1 1/2 *kācu* sugar (*carkkarai*) (= less than a half *palam*; under 2 oz. or so)...

3/4 *ceviṭu* ghee...

salt (the inscription only mentions the total amount of salt to be used for all *karis* [vegetable or accompanying dishes] and for the yogurt for this set of offerings and does not detail the exact amount

³⁰ *Vaṭṭi* is a round basket, pot, or bowl, presumably a very large one. While the *vaṭṭi* appears in *Tolkāppiyam*, Eḷut. 170 as a measure like a *nāḷi* or *paṭi* (which are supposedly identical in volume, something like 1.5 kg each) per the (University of Madras 1936, p. 3470), this is not possible in the Vijayanagara period, for the recipe could never have more ghee than rice, or more pepper than rice! I presume the literal "basket" is something like a sack of rice today might be in size. Perhaps this is similar to modern plate measure used in some temples today, which holds approximately one kg. of cooked rice.

³¹ To get a sense of how the inscription reads (and it goes on for pages), for the black pepper requirements for this set of offerings, the inscription reads: "one and a half *ceviṭu* of pepper [is required] for the vegetable curry, three quarters of a *ceviṭu* of pepper for the *appakkāy*..., three quarters of a *ceviṭu* of pepper for the tamarind curry, three quarters of a *ceviṭu* of pepper for the soured curry with tamarind, and three *ceviṭu* of pepper for the pepper powder." Similarly, the inscription records the quantities of mustard seed, tamarind, cumin, and so on. In other words, someone interpreting this inscription needs to single out ingredients from total requirements listed for a number of different dishes, and independently compile which ingredients and how much of each is required for each dish. This organizational structure makes sense from the point of view of the temple *paṇṭāra* (storehouse-treasury) which would hand out a certain amount of black pepper, cumin, and so on at the value of a certain amount of paddy (*nel*) to be used each day in the temple kitchen for preparing the specific offerings. So it is quite understandable that Hultzs did not reassemble the recipes interwoven inside the inscription. Inscription #26, (Archaeological Survey of India 1986) Vol. 2, Parts 1 & 2, pp. 126–30. Inscription in the Thanjavur big temple, from the twenty-ninth year of Irājarājacōḷa's reign, ca. 1013, near the final year of his reign.

to be used for each variety of offering)”

This will sound like temple pongal to many, but Hultzch was thrown off by the *appakkāy* in the dish’s name. He supposed it to be the fruit (sic., vegetable) of some plant called *appam* (!), which apparently also goes by the name *puṭṭuttiruppi* (!), and he resorted to a dictionary that defines *puṭṭuppalam* as an edible fruit (Archaeological Survey of India 1986) Vol. 2 Parts 1 & 2, p. 129, footnote 5. Since this recipe in fact calls for no fruit at all (one would imagine that the fruit would make the list of ingredients for the dish), I propose that the dish has a special name related to the holiday on which this temple offering was meant to be offered: the festival on the Kārttikai day of the month of Kārttikai. As it turns out, the first day of the Kārttikai festival just happens to be called “Appakartikai” by many Tamilians and I believe that the name for this version of pongal might simply be some garbled variant of Appakartikai, as *appakkāykarī* actually contains all of the same phonemes if one drops one “t” from “Kartikkai,” flipping “Kār(t)i-kkai” to make “Kāykarī.” Even if my attribution is not correct, the recipe definitely describes pongal. The *Tamil Lexicon* has duly followed Hultzch’s reading in defining *appakkāykarīyamitu* as a “kind of curry preparation,” while technically I think this is a misnomer, since this recipe for *amitu* (offering) falls under the category of *pōṇakam*, not among the *karis*.

Finally, the ubiquity of *pōṇakams*—dishes of pongal—as temple offerings throughout the Cōla period eventually led to the term *pōṇakam* being used in a later period (Vijayanagara) to describe the full (often midday) offering, typically a large spread of items similar to the thali plate of today. By the Vijayanagara period (fourteenth-seventeenth centuries, 1336-1646 CE), the term *pōṇakam* largely does not mean “pongāl” any more in the sense of the dish with cumin, pepper, ghee, dal, and rice, but instead has come to designate what is formally called the full *alanṅkāra naivedya* (including white rice, yogurt, dal, vegetable curries, sometimes a tamarind curry, [today often served with rasam], and so on). *Tirupponakam* appears with this semantic value numerous times in the Vijayanagara period inscriptions from Tirupati, and definitely by the fourteenth century, as seen for example in the *tirupponakam* to be offered twice daily at Tirupati according to one fourteenth-century inscription, including offerings of rice, yogurt, vegetables, and so on.³² Another inscription dating to roughly seventy years later describes that the *tirupponakam* to be offered at the *sandhi* (presumably the midday sandhi, since only one is to be given daily) must include one *marakkāl* of rice, one *ālāṅku* of ghee, one *ālāṅku* of bean (= *pa[ya]rṛamutu*, presumably green gram, which seems to have been the norm), yogurt, vegetables, salt, pepper³³—all the makings of a basic *alanṅkāra naivedya*. Once again, the term *pōṇakam* has returned to its earliest meaning of “holy cooked offering,” for in fact the whole midday/luncheon offering consists of cooked foods (except for the yogurt, by some classification systems).

6. Kaṇṇāmutu

Another offering from the Cōla period that continues to go by virtually the same name in the present day is *kaṇṇāmutu* (alternate spelling *kaṇṇamamutu*, pronounced “kaṇṇ’m’du”) or, as it was more commonly called at the time, *kaṇṇāmaṭai*, “sugar cooked rice” or “sweet rice.”³⁴ The oldest recipe for *kaṇṇāmutu* that I have located—dated ca. 1126 CE—appears inscribed on the west wall of the so-called “malai” stone platform at the Aruḷāḷa Perumāl temple in Kanchipuram.

³² Year 1366 CE, inscription #197, (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998) Vol. 1, p. 188.

³³ Line 7, (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998) Vol. 1, p. 211, dated 1446 CE.

³⁴ (University of Madras 1936), p. 692, derives *kaṇṇāmutu* from *kaṇṇal*, a word for (less refined) sugar or candy (related to *kaṇṭu* from Sanskrit *khaṇḍa* = the partially dried, less refined sugar). The *Lexicon* (p. 3025) also derives *kaṇṇāmaṭai* as *kaṇṇā+maṭai*, with *maṭai* as an offering for a deity, like boiled rice (*maṭai* is apparently *cōru* in the *Piṅkala Nīkantu*, per (University of Madras 1936), so, a sweet rice offering which is slightly tan in color due to the sweetener (unrefined sugar or jaggery being used in the present day).

Recipe for *tirukkaṇṇāmaṭai*:³⁵

"2 *nālis* of rice...

1 *uḷakku* of ghee...

20 *palams* of sugar (less refined)...

10 bananas"

While *kaṇṇāmutu* as it is known today as an offering for Lord Viṣṇu (or Kṛṣṇa) does not usually contain banana or any fruit, this was apparently commonplace in the pre-modern era, as some inscriptions from the Vijayanagara period confirm that *kaṇṇāmutus* would at times have fruit added.³⁶ One Vijayanagara inscription at Tirupati³⁷ includes two different variants on the classic *tirukkaṇṇāmaṭai* with fruit: one recipe is to be offered to Gōvinda daily in the month of Mārkaḷi and another is to be offered to Gōvinda once a (lunar) month on the Mūla asterism. Each recipe for *tirukkaṇṇāmaṭai* calls for four fruits to be added (*paḷa amutu nālum*),³⁸ but, fittingly, the sweet rice offering to be served daily to Viṣṇu in Mārkaḷi month, traditionally conceived to be the coldest (winter) month of the year (usually falling mid-December to mid-January) includes a warming addition of ginger (*iñci amutum*) in unspecified quantity, resulting in a sweet and fruity ginger rice "pudding."³⁹ While these fruity *kaṇṇāmutus* surprise us today, the classic ingredients always include rice, ghee, and sugar (the less refined, *muscovado* type is indicated by Tamil *cakkarai*). This fruitless version became the normative *kaṇṇāmutu*, as in the Queen's recipe for *tirukkaṇṇāmaṭai* to be offered to Lord Veṅkaṭeśvara at Tirupati,⁴⁰ in two other classic recipes for Veṅkaṭeśvara and Gōvinda dating to the fifteenth century, and in preparations up to the present day.⁴¹ While most offerings discussed here can be given interchangeably to manifestations of Śiva, Viṣṇu, goddesses, and others, *kaṇṇāmaṭai* is exclusively a Vaiṣṇava offering and is only given to forms of Viṣṇu, to my knowledge.

7. Srirangam Appam

A discussion of temple offerings cannot ignore the most significant Tamil temple pilgrimage site of the present day and the largest Vaiṣṇava temple complex in India: Srirangam, or, as it is otherwise

³⁵ Inscription #80, line 7, ([Archaeological Survey of India 1986](#)) Vol. 3 Parts 1 & 2, p. 188. For an approximate conversion, this is 3 kgs. of raw rice, 0.3 or 0.4 kg. of ghee, 5 c. sugar, and 10 bananas.

³⁶ I discuss all Vijayanagara recipes for *kaṇṇāmutu* in the body of my text, except for one additional *tiru kaṇṇāmaṭai* recipe that I do not discuss above: inscription #190, ([Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998](#)) Vol. 1, pp. 179–80. This inscription also contains recipes for *kaṇṇāmutu* and *appam*. On the west wall of the first *prākāra* of the Tirumalai temple; dates 1393 CE, the reign of Harihararāya II, of the first Vijayanagara line. Recipe: 4 *nālis* rice, ghee (listed generally for the offerings), and *cakkarai* (4 *nālis* shared between the *appam* and the *kaṇṇāmaṭai* in this inscription).

³⁷ This inscription is actually engraved in the Gōvindarājasvāmi temple located at Tirupati (not in the main temple), and dates to 1445 CE. Inscription #212, ([Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998](#)) Vol. 1, p. 216.

³⁸ To me this suggests the fruits are four in number, but V. Vijayaraghavacharya and Sadhu Subrahmanya Sastry have interpreted this to mean four kinds of fruit. I am familiar with Hindu offerings that require five different kinds of fruit, but to my knowledge do not know of a ritual specification for four fruits. Since other inscriptions indicate quantities such as "*vālaippaḷam pattum*" (line 7, inscription #80, ([Archaeological Survey of India 1986](#)) Vol. 3 Parts 1 & 2, p. 188, the recipe for *tirukkaṇṇāmaṭai* in the body of my text) with the meaning of "ten bananas," I see no reason not to read this as four pieces of fruit.

³⁹ Also unspecified is whether this is dried ginger powder or fresh ginger. Typically the inscriptions only record the more costly dried spices, as when an early inscription mentions the five *kāyam* ("pungent" spices), inscription #17, ([Archaeological Survey of India 1939](#)) Vol. 21, p. 102, lines 4143. Usually, dried ginger is indicated in modern Tamil with the term *cukku*, which I do not recall ever seeing in a temple inscription.

⁴⁰ For one offering of *tirukkaṇṇāmaṭai*: 1 *marakkāl* of rice, 1 *nāli* and 1 *uri* of ghee, and 60 *palams* of *cakkarai* (unrefined processed sugar, *muscovado* type). Inscription #29, ([Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998](#)) Vol. 4, pp. 59–60. In the Tirumalai temple, on the western *kumudapaṭṭai* of the west wall in the first *prākāra*. This offering is specified for Veṅkaṭeśvara. Inscription's dating: 1534 CE.

⁴¹ This is offered on seven annual festival days for Veṅkaṭeśvara and Gōvinda. Recipe: 1 *marakkāl* of rice, 5 *uḷakku*s and 1 *ālakku* of ghee, 50 *palams* of sugar. Inscription #213, ([Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998](#)) Vol. 1, p. 217, year 1445 CE. Another *tirukkaṇṇāmaṭai* is offered at night for Gōvinda, described in inscription #223, ([Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998](#)) Vol. 1, p. 240, year 1457 CE, with recipe as follows: 1 *marakkāl* of rice, 5 *uḷakku* and 1 *ālakku* of ghee, and 60 *palams* of sugar (V. Vijayaraghavacharya and Sadhu Subrahmanya Sastry indicate jaggery; I discuss this misnomer earlier).

known, Śrī Araṇkanāṭarsvāmi temple. Although time did not permit my examination of all epigraphs located at Srirangam, I found a recipe for festival *appam*. *Appam* is still served daily to Viṣṇu at this temple in the early evening service at 6:45 pm, along with offerings of *vaṭai*, *tēṅkulal* (the extra large fried *mulukku* for which Srirangam is best known today), *appam*, and “Srirangam,” a rice dish cooked in milk. Srirangam temple also prepares special *celvar appam* (jaggery rice *appam* fried in ghee) for festival days. This *celvar appam* resembles the two-inch ball-shaped *paṇṇiyāram*, in case one had in mind the large dome-shaped, pan-sized *appam* better known in the far southern tip of the peninsula.

Appam’s historical significance overshadows its daily service at Srirangam and the apparent continuity of the dish being prepared during the Cōla period and also in the modern period. *Appam* appears in the Vedas, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Law Book of Manu*, India’s earliest work on grammar predating the common era (Pāṇini’s *sūtras*, as well as its later commentaries), and numerous other works under its Sanskrit name *apūpa*.⁴² Its repeated appearance in the Vedas and *Mahābhārata* means that it was well known throughout the literary and textual history of India. Its proscription in Manu—one is not to make and eat *apūpa* just any day of the week for no reason at all—means that *apūpa* has appeared over the centuries in every legalistic text or commentary following Manu that is worth its salt. It may be that already by the twelfth century CE (but probably much earlier) *apūpa* seems to have been reserved in particular as a religious food. In the royal *Mānasollāsa*’s lengthy outlining of recipes for cakes, pancakes, breads, and everything in between, *apūpa* does not appear as a food to be served to the king, his family, and retinue, but does appear in the list of offerings to be prepared for deities (*devatās*).⁴³ So it is no wonder that we find *appam* among the eleventh-century offerings and religious festival foods provided at the Srirangam temple (and in other inscriptions of the period). There might have been a shift in usage at some point in time to an exclusively religious appellation for *appam/apūpa*, for earlier works refer to *apūpa*-makers that seem to be more of the nature of street-food/market-food makers.⁴⁴ Finally, the pendulum may have shifted equally in the other direction up to the modern day, when *appam* is again quotidian fare and can be procured on many a street corner in Tamil Nadu and is not reserved exclusively for religious purposes.

The Srirangam record is an inscription that dates to Kulottuṅka Cōla I’s reign, in his eighteenth regnal year (ca. 1087 CE). Per Kālīṅkarāyaṇar’s donation, for both the chariot festival in Appikai month and on the Paṅkuni festival day, holy water is to be given as *prasād* and a hundred holy *appam amutus* are to be provided annually (on both days). Again, the recipe for *appam* will strike our modern-day sensibility with a shocking contrast of pungent black pepper and cumin with sweet unrefined sugar and banana. The pairing of pepper and sugar appears again and again in medieval temple *naivedya*; although it is a poor comparison, one might liken it to German Christmas cookies (think peppery sweets and ginger sweets) or perhaps to sugary masala chai.

Recipe for Srirangam *appam*:⁴⁵

⁴² For etymological equivalence of *appam* and *apūpa*, see (University of Madras 1936, p. 85). Sanskrit *apūpa* is also called *pūpam*, though less frequently. Pāṇini 5.1.4 is an optional grammar affix rule mentioning *apūpa*: *vibhāṣā havirapūpādibhyah*. For *apūpa* in the Vedas, see RV3.52.1-7, RV8.91.2, RV10.45.9, AV18.4.16-2, and ŚB 2.2.3.12-13. For *apūpa* in the *Law Code of Manu*, see MDh5.7 (*vṛthākṛsarasaṁyāvam pāyasāpūpameva ca | anupākṛtamāṁsāni devānnāni havīmṣi ca ||* 5.7 & 9.264 || In the MBh., 12.37.26 (reiterates MDh5.7), 13.53.17, and elsewhere. Om Prakash writes that *apūpa* is probably “the earliest sweet preparation known” in India, (Prakash 1961, p. 19).

⁴³ (Someśvara III 1961), *vāstūpaśamana* section, 3rd *viṁśati*, Part 2, p. 9, v. 92. The *Mānasollāsa* is so thorough in its inclusion of sweets, breads, and cake recipes that it would be strange for *appam* to be on the king’s menu for dining, yet not be included among his recipes, when it is mentioned elsewhere in the text, especially because other dishes to be given to the *devatās* do appear detailed in the recipe section.

⁴⁴ From commentaries on Pāṇini, per (Monier-Williams 1899, p. 143).

⁴⁵ Inscription #70, lines 13-14, (Archaeological Survey of India 1986) Vol. 3, pp. 148–150. Engraved on the east wall of the third *prākāra* of the Srirangam Ranganātha temple. Epigraph from the eighteenth regnal year of Kulottuṅka I.

"1 *patakkum* of aged rice...
 3 *nālis* of dal...
 3 *nālis* of ghee...
 100 *palams* of muscovado sugar (*caṛkarai*)...
 3 *ulākkus* of pepper...
 1 *ulākku* of cumin...
 3 *ulākkus* of salt...
 50 bananas...
 5 ripe coconuts (thus coconut meat)"⁴⁶

This inscription is especially informative in that it stipulates funds (derived from interest from the coin endowment) to be given as pay to workers making the *appam*, specifying amounts "for those who look after the pounding of the paste/flour (*māvu*) for the *appam amutu*, for those who bring water, for those who fetch firewood, and for those who cook the *appam amutu* (*cūtuṇṇārkum*)..." The verb *cūtu* indicates heating or cooking and is indeed still used to describe the frying of things like dosa and *paṇṇiyāram* today, but sadly does not communicate if the *appam* are fried as they are today, steeped in hot ghee or oil using the shallow frying technique in *paṇṇiyāram* pans, or if they might have been closer to the dosa type, resembling griddle frying, with less oil or ghee.

Another eleventh-century Vaiṣṇava Cōla recipe for *appam* appears in the earlier mentioned lengthy Tirumukkūṭal inscription. Here, the inscription commands that the *appa amutu* be offered to Kṛṣṇa at this shrine on his *Jayanti aṣṭamī* (birthday), with the cakes prepared in the proportion of one *kuṟuṇi* and two *nāli* of rice, one *nāli* of dal, one *uri* of ghee, twenty *palams* of unrefined sugar, one *ālākku* of black pepper, two and a half *ceviṭu* of cumin seed, one *ulakku* of salt, and six ripe coconuts.⁴⁷ In this variant recipe, coconut is again present (as it is today as an optional add-in), but the bananas of the Srirangam *appam* (popularly held today to add softness to the *appam*) are absent. Otherwise, the recipes' similarity is evident.

An earlier recipe for *appam*—the earliest I have encountered in the medieval epigraphs—records its date as the twenty-third year of Parakēcarivarman's rule (Parāntakaṇ I), ca. 930 CE.⁴⁸ This recipe is much simpler, and only requires three *nālis* of paddy's equivalent value in aged rice and value from land produce totaling the cost of one *ālākku* of ghee. Ground grain for the batter and ghee for frying is, after all, all one really needs to make basic dosa, *paṇṇiyāram*, or *appam*. But this inscription is certainly an early one, perhaps signaling an earlier simplicity in offering practices that rapidly became more elaborate and sumptuous in the early Cōla period. This offering was also intended for a Śaiva temple, for the god at Īśānamaṅkālam, which might also account for the offering's simplicity, since complex and rich offerings are more the mark of Vaiṣṇava sites. What the recipe lacks in complexity, the inscription offers us in affectionate detail, as we learn that chieftain Bhūti Parāntakaṇ made this donative offering to the god of Īśānamaṅkālam (probably a form of Śiva) on the occasion of the first feeding of his son, a big deal for a proud father!

Two Vijayanagara-period Tirupati recipes for *appam* attest to the persistence of black pepper and unrefined sugar as mainstays in the ideal model for late pre-modern *appam* (two ingredients that incidentally also recur in recipes for *atirasam* and sweet dosa⁴⁹). The Vijayanagara-period recipes also

⁴⁶ We can be sure that the coconut is ripe coconut meat from the Tamil term used, *tenkāy*, and because the inscription provides funds to cover an additional ten young coconuts to be used at these festivals for fresh coconut water *amutu*.

⁴⁷ Inscription #38, line 24, (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1939) Vol. 21, pp. 236–47.

⁴⁸ Inscription #2 of the appendix to (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1986) Vol. 32, p. 388. Inscription located on the *jagati* (south), central shrine of the Chandraśekhara temple in Tiruccenturai, Trichy taluk, in Trichy district.

⁴⁹ *Atirasam*, another of the oldest sweets of India, literally (and amusingly) means "too tasty!" With the addition of both pepper and sugar, no wonder it got its name for so much flavor. Vijayanagara period recipes from Tirupati with both pepper and sugar can be found in inscription #6, (*Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry* 1998) Vol. 4, pp. 16–19, inscription #19, (*Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry* 1998) Vol. 4, p. 41, inscription #29 (without pepper; sweet *atirasam* as known today), (*Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry* 1998) Vol. 4, pp. 59–60, and elsewhere.

return to the greater simplicity of *appams* that we saw in the earliest inscriptional recipe from the tenth century. The recipe from 1393 CE calls for seven *nāli* of rice and one *ulakku* of pepper, with the required amount of sugar listed to be shared between this *appam* offering and another offering for *kaṇṇam/kaṇṇāmutu*.⁵⁰ The Queen's sweet *appam* (1534 CE) adds ghee into the mix,⁵¹ presumably for frying, which seems to be lacking in the fourteenth-century recipe for *appam*, but is probably included in the mass volume of ghee required for all offerings listed in that inscription.⁵²

Overall, all of the inscriptional recipes for *appam* confirm that this sweet dish is a treat offered to gods especially at festival times, given on the occasion of birthdays, annual festivals, and special events like a baby's first solid food.⁵³ The only instances I have found of *appam* being offered everyday are the late pre-modern sixteenth-century offering by the queen of Acyūtarāya at the Tirupati temple—obviously a grand and extravagant offering for a magnificent temple site—and in the modern-day daily service of *appam* (not the festival *celvar appam*) given to Lord Ranganathar at Srirangam, another grand and magnificent deity at an out-of-the-ordinary temple site. The reservation of *appam* for special occasions and festivals reminds us of Manu's early warning (reiterated in the *Mahābhārata* and elsewhere) that one is not to eat *appam* for no reason at all. Over a millennium after Manu's dictum, Cōla inscriptions continue to communicate this ideal practice: *appam* is not for the everyday, but for those special moments in life.

8. *Puḷiṅkari* vs. *Puḷittakkari*: How Sour can South India Go?

Something curious occurs with some other Cōla-period temple offerings typically included in what is understood today as the main service of *alaṅkāra naivedya* (the full meal including white rice, dal, yogurt, vegetable dishes, and so on). South Indian cuisine famously features sour (green mango, tamarind, or lemon rice) and soured foods (yogurt so sour it makes one's teeth hurt, fermented soured batters for idli, dosa, and even *atirasam/adirasam*). Natural souring of foods was an inevitable process in the heat and humidity of South India when food sat out for even a short amount of time, but also (or, as a result), something that people sought out as a desirable flavor, perhaps because of its prevalence. Sour must be the definitive savor of the southern states, the taste preference that is obscured today by the modern era use of tomato (sour yet sweet) and by the wide availability of snacks with industrially produced sugar. In the past, refined sugar would have been more of a delicacy due to the laborious, energy-consuming complexity of sugar-refining and processing.

Sour and soured foods appear not only in temple inscriptions but also in a number of the earliest Tamil descriptions of food and food preparation in the classical *caṅkam* (sangam) corpus, which I highlight here in order to assert the long duration of the importance of sour tastes in South India. Sour foods are among the most prevalent in the descriptive portions of the sangam corpus (here, largely from the *Pattuppāṭṭu*). The *Malaipaṭukaṭāṁ*, a lyric landscape poem dating to ca. third-fourth century CE, contains various accounts of tasty meals served to the bard and musicians as they progress through different zones of the land. As one bard describes to another, when they visit village huts they will receive bamboo rice porridge (cooked grain) and a tasty tamarind mix with broad beans

⁵⁰ Inscription #190, (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998) Vol. 1; pp. 179–80, on the west wall of 1st *prākāra* of the Tirumalai temple. Dates to the reign of Harihararāya II, of the first Vijayanagara line. Both recipes together call for four *nālis* of unrefined sugar, divided between the *appam* and the *kaṇṇam*. It is impossible to determine whether that would mean two *nālis* of sugar per offering, or more sugar for the *kaṇṇam* and less for the *appam*.

⁵¹ For one offering (*paṭi*) of *appam*: 2 *marakkāl* of rice, 3 *nāli* and 1 *uri* of ghee, 1 *ālakkku* of pepper, and 100 *palams* of sugar (*cakkarai*). Inscription #29, (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998) Vol. 4, p. 59–60. In the Tirumalai temple, on the western *kumudapaṭṭai* of the west wall in the first *prākāra*. The queen of King Acyutarāya made this donation.

⁵² Inscription #190, (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998) Vol. 1, pp. 179–80, lists 5 *nāli*, 3 *ulakku*, and 1 *ālakkku* of ghee as required overall for four different offerings.

⁵³ The 1393 CE Vijayanagara Tirupati inscription also specifies that the *appam* (along with other offerings) is to be served on the Viṭāyārri days of each of the festivals, meaning it is a special offering and not commonplace. (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998) Vol. 1, p. 180.

(hypothetically like a broad bean tamarind *kuḷampu* [=mix/sauce]).⁵⁴ The semantic value of the term *pulī* as tamarind and not simply something sour (or sourness itself) is as uncertain in Tamil as *amla* is in Sanskrit (meaning something soured, like yogurt, or something sour, among which tamarind is possible). We can only assume that, then as now, the semantic range of the term encompasses the adjective “sour,” “sourness,” and “tamarind,” and derive meaning contextually in each instance. In this passage we do not have another indication of yogurt or buttermilk, so I see no reason not to accept that the mixture for the sauce among these villagers is tamarind-based.

Another tamarind sauce appears on the menu in the *Cirupāṇārruppatai*, another song cycle contained in the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, where, reportedly, the women who have cooked will feed the bard and his companions sweet tamarind cooked grains and [meat] from wild cattle that is hot and ready.⁵⁵ The dish sounds rather like tamarind rice (which can certainly be described as sweet), and the insertion of the adjective sweet (*iṇ*)⁵⁶ before the word for tamarind, *pulī*, almost confirms that the meaning indicated is tamarind, and not simply “sour,” but again we have indication of the prevalence of tamarind in the South Indian/Tamil diet. Further, in *Akam* 311 we have a reference to tamarind in what seem to be sweet tamarind steamed cakes.⁵⁷

Sourness in *caṅkam* dishes did not necessitate only tamarind as the source. We have plenty of references where other sour ingredients like yogurt convey the sourness (*pulī*) mentioned directly in poems, as in *Akam* 394. In this song, small-headed-sheep’s milk yogurt has thickened, ripened, and yellowed a bit, and is added to kodo millet cooked grain porridge along with winged termite young (*īcal*). However unappealing this dish might sound to western readers today, the dish is generally described in the poem as “delicious sour light cooked grains” (*iṇ pulī veñcōru*, v.5), and termite young still make up some Tamil communities’ cuisine.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ v. 435–436 of *Malaipaṭukaṭām* (the section on “*Pul Vēynta Kuṭicaikaḷ puliṅkūḷum, piṇavum perutal*,” “Receiving tamarind sauce and other things at the thatched huts”): *vēy koḷ arici mitavai corinta / cuval viḷai nellin avarai ampuḷiṅkūḷ*. Tamil text from (Herbert, no date).

⁵⁵ I have left an unspecified “grain” in my translation of *cōru* (which can refer to any boiled or cooked grain, perhaps here one of the millets that grow in a short time in drought conditions) because the landscape here is *pālai* (wasteland), and I doubt they had abundant white rice in a wasteland. *Cirupāṇārruppatai*, 175–177: *eyirriyar aṭṭa iṇ puli veñcōru / tēmā mēni sil valai āyamotu / āmān cūṭṭin amaivarap perukuvir*. From the section on “*Uruveyirku ulai iya uruppu avir kurampai*,” Tamil text from (Herbert, no date).

⁵⁶ It is possible that the adjective *iṇ* simply indicates “delicious, delightful, pleasant.” I think “sweet” contributes to the idea of tamarind because the fruit is not only sour but also has some sweetness. Regardless of how to interpret *iṇ*, *pulī* (in this reference and others) supports my argument of the prevalence of sour/tamarind dishes in early South Indian cuisine.

⁵⁷ This passage is less certain, but I am inclined to consider *aṭai* as describing the Tamil food we know of the same name (small cakes, sometimes steamed). The mention of the hollow cane tubes (*kuḷāy*)—probably bamboo because the *tinai* (landscape) is *marutam*—supports my idea, since steamed cakes like *puṭṭu* have long been steamed in bamboo. I do not follow the commentators’ interpretation that the sweet tamarind “ending ears” (?) means that the couple was so hungry that their ears were blocked and the food ended this ear blockage. I see no reason not to accept *aṭai* as the *aṭai* we know later from Tamil cuisine, and the collocation of ear (*cevi*) is not too problematic, for I have references to deep fried “ear cakes” in the *Mānasollāsa*. These are cakes presumably cooked in shapes that resemble ears, “*kaṭakarṇān*,” meaning either hollow ears, pan ears or crispy ears, v. 1396 and preceding; of the *annabhoga* section, *vimśati* 3, *adhyāya* 13, p. 119 of Vol. 2 of (Someśvara III 1961). Further, *cevi* refers to taste in the *Nāḷaṭiyar* (a fifth-sixth century didactic text, dating that is not too remote from the *akam* poem), so it is not impossible to conceive that *cevi aṭai* might refer to a tasty *aṭai*/adai cake (University of Madras 1936, p. 1615). In any case, the collocation of “ear *aṭai* cake” inserted directly between “sweet tamarind” and “strong teak leaves” suggests that it describes what is being apportioned (*pakukkum*) on the teak leaves rather than the food’s effect (of blocking some unmentioned hunger apparent somehow in the ears), which I might expect to find located before the sweet tamarind in the verse. The commentators seem to have been grasping at straws with “ear blocking.” George Hart follows the commentary’s interpretation (Hart 2015), *Akam* 311, p. 316, footnote 12. *Akam* 311, verses 9–12: ... *kōvalar / māla viṭaiṭ pūṭṭiya kuḷā ayt tīm puli / cevi aṭai tīrat tēkkilāip pakukkum / pulli naṇṇāṭṭu umpar*... Tamil text from (Herbert). My tran. of the passage: “... the pastoral people (*kōvalar*, line 9), dividing/apportioning (*pakukkum* 11) the delicious sour/tamarind (10) “ear” cakes (*aṭai*) on strong (*tīra*) teak leaves (11) tied together (*pūṭṭiya*) in hollow cane tubes (*kuḷāy* 10) [carried] on the young male bulls...”

⁵⁸ *Akam* 394, lines 2–5. *cirutalait turuvin paḷuppuru vilai tayir / itaip puṇa varakiṇ avaippu māṇ ariciyōṭu / kār vāyṭtu oḷinta iṇvāyṭ purrattu / iyal peyṭu aṭṭa iṇ puli veñcōru*. Tamil text from (Herbert, no date). My tran.: “... small-headed-(*ciru talai*) sheep[’s milk] (*tūru*) yogurt that has thickened/ripened (*vilai* / *paḷuppu*) and become (*uru*) a little yellow (line 2), with excellent (*māṇ*) pounded (for husking the shell, *avaippu*) grain (*arici*) of kodo millet (*varuku*) from that dry (*puṇa*) plot of land (=field, *itai*), (3)...” Some communities in Tamil Nadu such as the Irula tribals still eat termite young, either trapped from the anthill mounds and grilled, or caught (in an urban context) and pan-fried with masala (Lenin 2018; Rajendran 2018).

This excursus into earlier saṅgam-era culinary practices of the Tamiḷ area—and its privileging of sourness—helps us better understand the presence of sour dishes in the Cōḷa record. In the Cōḷa temple offerings, we also find both yogurt and tamarind (sometimes together!) conveying a dish's sourness. In an inscription from Rājaraḷa's reign (the most powerful of the Cōḷa emperors, ruling at the empire's height),⁵⁹ festival day offerings included fried vegetable offerings, pepper powder, (steam/boiled) vegetable offerings, a tamarind dish (*puḷiyittuṅkaṛi amutu*),⁶⁰ and another sour dish (*puḷiṅkaṛi amutu*), in which the sourness is from both tamarind and yogurt.⁶¹ In this context, the *puḷiyittuṅkaṛi* suggests a dish much like the saucy sour *puḷi kuḷampu* as Tamilians know it today, and the *puḷiṅkaṛi* is a bit more complex, perhaps something like a *mōr kuḷampu* (buttermilk saucy dish) or a prepared tamarind curd (yogurt) rice with both tamarind and banana (perhaps unripe) appearing where we find carrots and pomegranate fruit seeds today.

In the Tirumukkūṭal inscription of Vīraṛaḷendra,⁶² one observes that *puḷittakāṛi* contains tamarind and that *puḷiṅkaṛi*, appearing in two separate instances in the inscription, always has some fermented dairy, whether yogurt or buttermilk. One *puḷiṅkaṛi* is offered on the Kārttikai day of Kārttikai month (along with the *appakkāykaṛi* discussed earlier). This sour dish required one *kuṟuṇi* of yogurt.⁶³ Later in the inscription, *puḷiṅkaṛi* is also included among dishes given to feed Śrīvaiṣṇavas on one annual festival occasion. For the *puḷiṅkaṛi* to feed one hundred Śrīvaiṣṇavas at the *tīrtham* at Tiruveṅkaṭamalai (presumably Tirupati, which is not too far from Tirumukkūṭal), the donation covers one *tūṇi* and one *padakku* of paddy in value to cover the cost of the buttermilk for the Śrīvaiṣṇavas' *puḷiṅkaṛi*. Although I do not intend to interpret the past using modern-day criteria, this *puḷiṅkaṛi* made with either buttermilk or yogurt sounds a great deal like *mōr kuḷampu*, in which either buttermilk or yogurt with some water are interchangeably used. Conversely, the Tirumukkūṭal's *puḷittakāṛi* given to feed the same Śrīvaiṣṇavas requires tamarind and seems to be more akin with the great temple (Bṛhadiśvara *kōyil*) at Thanjavur's *puḷiyittuṅkaṛi* described one paragraph earlier.⁶⁴ These descriptors are exactly the opposite of how we might expect the dishes today. I would more likely call a dish "soured" (*puḷiya/puḷiyittu*) because of the addition of yogurt or buttermilk, whereas I would expect *puḷiṅkaṛi* (compound noun) to be "tamarind curry;" instead we observe exactly the opposite in these records! Regardless, the appearance of both dishes in tandem in more than one inscription using the same ingredients confirms the usage of the day.

Finally, confirming the ubiquitousness of tamarind and sour components as a main feature in the Cōḷa period Tamiḷ South, countless inscriptions note menus for temple feedings (similar to a modern *annadāna*, where donors regularly provide meals to temple visitors or regulars) that invariably include tamarind among the needed ingredients. One "shopping list" for the temple *paṇṭāram* (which is at the same time the temple storehouse, granary, and treasury, all in one) for feeding twenty Brahmins daily

⁵⁹ Inscription #26, (*Archaeological Survey of India 1986*, pp.127–8) Vol. 2 Parts 1 & 2. From the twenty-ninth year of Rājaraḷa's reign (ca. 1013, near the final year of his reign). Inscription is in the inner *gopuram* of the Thanjavur big temple, on the right side of the entrance. The offering was served for each of the thirteen festival days (the twelve monthly festivals of Tīrūsataiyam on the Sanskrit Śatabhishaj *nakṣatra*) and on the Kārttikai day of the Kārttikai festival.

⁶⁰ *Puḷiyittuṅkaṛi amitu* recipe: 3/4 of a *ceviṭu* of pepper, 3/20 and 3/18 of a *ceviṭu* of cumin, 1 1/2 *palams* of tamarind, with paddy and salt generally required. This recipe calls for twice as much tamarind as the following recipe (*puḷiṅkaṛi*), which combines the tartness of tamarind with the sourness of yogurt. 1 *palam* (volume) = 4 *kācu* (weight), hence 1.5 *palams* = 6 *kācu*, contrasting with the following recipe's 3 *kācu* weight measure of tamarind.

⁶¹ *Puḷiṅkaṛi* recipe: 3/4 *ceviṭu* of pepper, 1 1/2 *ceviṭu* of mustard seed, 3/18 *ceviṭu* of cumin, 1 *kācu* of sugar, 3 *kācu* of tamarind, 1 *nāli* and 1 *uri* of yogurt, 3 *ceviṭu* of horse gram (*kollu*), and 3 plantains or bananas (*vaḷaipalam*). This inscription refers to needing paddy and salt generally for the recipes. Since the salt is clearly intended to be added directly into the fried vegetable offering and other offerings, it is hard not to imagine that the paddy is not also meant to be applied directly in the recipes. This suggests that the dish might be like some fancy prepared tamarind "curd" (yogurt) rice (such dishes exist even today), or, it might simply be another *kuḷampu*/sauce to be served alongside the vegetables and the *śuddhānam* (white rice) (*Archaeological Survey of India 1986*, Vol. 2 Parts 1 & 2, pp. 127–28).

⁶² The Tirumukkūṭal inscription of Vīraṛaḷendra, (*Archaeological Survey of India 1939*) Vol. 21, especially pp. 236–38 and 247–48.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁶⁴ Lines 29–30 of the above inscription.

in the Naṭarāja temple of Cidambaram includes the daily tally of rice (uncooked), vegetables (*kaṛi*), pepper (*mīḷaku*), tamarind (*puḷi*), five fruits, salt, turmeric, ghee, yogurt, betel leaves, and areca nuts.⁶⁵ Notably, the daily humble fare—not offered to god—includes only fruit for sweetness and not sugar, but is marked by the prominence of sourness in both tamarind and yogurt.

Throughout this section, the emphasis on sour and fermented foods reminds us of the prevalence of the sour taste in Tamiḷ and Cōḷa period food. This is often overshadowed in discussions of holy offerings due to the heightened presence of sweet desserts and special festival, value-added, sugary offerings to impress upon the public the munificence and prestige of the temple donor and his/her gift. Less remarkable offerings that did not make my final list of case studies routinely appear in inscriptions, like *tayiramutu* (yogurt offering) and *puḷiṅkaṛiyamutu* (sour curry or tamarind offering). The simplicity of these dishes meant that, more often than not, recipes for these offerings were not included in the inscription-writing practice of donative epigraphy. This might suggest that sour dishes were quotidian and commonplace in the diet of pre-modern Tamilians, and that the sweetness in sugary offerings really was something special and out of the ordinary, something that needs reminding of with the easy accessibility of sugary sweets today.

9. *Akkāra Aṭicil*

Another offering with significant literary mention is *akkāra aṭicil*, with *akkāra* being a Tamilization of the Sanskrit word for less refined clumped sugar (Tam. *cakkarai* or *caṅkarai*, vernacular *akkāra*; Skt. *śarkarā*), and *aṭicil* meaning “something cooked,” from verb *aṭu* (to cook, roast, fry, boil, melt). This medieval offering is closest to what is known today across South India as *cakkarai poṅkal*, and is the sweet version of the *poṇakam* discussed above. This sweet offering is prominent in the temple inscriptional record, but it is equally prevalent in literary sources that precede the Cōḷa period references. Curiously enough, at this time I have not encountered a dish by this name (or similar) in the later Vijayanagara epigraphical record at Tirupati,⁶⁶ despite most of the inscriptions, liturgy, and temple practices at Tirupati being culturally Tamiḷ in nature. As to why the offering lost prominence by the Vijayanagara period, Carol Breckenridge’s argument of the increased popularity of individual-sized, hand-held, and especially fried snacks as temple offerings in the Vijayanagara period might account for this change in trend. *Akkāra aṭicil* is semi-liquid and does not travel well in the case of pilgrims returning home with portions of *prasād* to share with family and others.⁶⁷

Certainly the most famous (and earliest) mention of this dish appears in a song composed by female saint Āṇṭāl from her collection *Nācciyār Tirumoli* (*Sacred Words from the Goddess* [i.e., from Āṇṭāl; name for collection given later], ninth century CE), written in adoration of and love for Lord Viṣṇu. Āṇṭāl sings:

“For the lord
of the sweet fragrant groves of Māḷiruṅcōlai
I offered a hundred pots of butter
and yet another hundred brimming with **sweet rice** [= *akkāra aṭicil*]
Will the beautiful lord who rides on Garuḍa

⁶⁵ Inscription #223, lines 29–30, (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1986, pp. 28–31), Vol. 4. In Chidambaram at the Naṭarāja temple, outside the first *prakāra* on the north side. The dating of this inscription is unclear. For further information, this inscription corresponds to AR numbering 115 of 1888.

⁶⁶ At this time, my study of the Tirupati inscriptions is incomplete, so my data for this period is perhaps inconclusive in terms of making a firm statement.

⁶⁷ Breckenridge’s criteria for latter-day Vijayanagara *prasād* include the lack of perishability, easily counted individual units for determining the scale of how impressive the offering was, its redistributive capacity, and more (*Breckenridge* 1986, p. 41).

not come to claim my offering?”⁶⁸

The following verse in the decad continues Āṇṭāl's desire to give delightful offerings to her god:

“If only he will claim my offerings
I would offer yet another hundred thousand pots.
If only the lord who abides
in the groves of Tirumāliṛuñcōlai
fragrant with the breeze from the South
would take me into his heart:
I, who have always been his slave.”⁶⁹

Legend has it—according to Āṇṭāl's commentators, which is popular knowledge among Śrīvaiṣṇavas—that Rāmānuja, in devotion to Āṇṭāl, fulfilled her vow and offered hundreds of dishes of *akkāra aṭicil* at the Tirumāliṛuñcōlai temple of Cuntararāja Perumāḷ before he reached Āṇṭāl's home temple (where she had united with Lord Viṣṇu, in Śrīvilliputtūr) (Venkatesan 2010, p. 212). The significance of Āṇṭāl's worship of Lord Viṣṇu with offerings of *akkāra aṭicil* is held to be so important that even to this day Vaiṣṇavas still recreate the offering while reciting the Tirumoli verses. North American diaspora Vaiṣṇavas re-enact Āṇṭāl's feeding of her god by ceremonially offering a hundred pots of *akkāra aṭicil* to Viṣṇu as far removed from Śrīvilliputtūr as is North Carolina.⁷⁰

This food offering also appears in a similarly dated epic poem that is one of the five great epics (*makākāppiyaiṅkal*) of Tamiḷ literature, the *Cīvakaṇṭāmaṇi* (v. 928). This reference to the religious offering is scathing; the epic, a Jaina text, promotes Jaina values and does not endorse the Hindu practices or worship of its day (probably ninth century CE).⁷¹ The surrounding verses (vv. 927 & 929) criticize decadent and sinful practices more generally (gambling, lust, drinking, wealth, and dancing) and suggest breaking free from this lascivious, illusory cycle (*saṁsāra*) of birth, death, rebirth, and re-death (v. 917). This food verse hints at a critique of particularly Hindu behavior and singles out the excess of offerings like *akkāra aṭicil*. The milky sweet lentil rice (*ām pāl akkāraṭalai*) is here called by the traditional temple name used in inscriptions—*akkāraṭalai*—amongst descriptors such as “sweet milk offering,” “boiled [dishes] the color of decadent gold,” and “many varieties (*pālavarai*) of offerings” (*amirtam*, i.e., specifically religious food offerings) “gushing with fragrant ghee” (v. 928).⁷²

By now it should be clear: this is a very special food offering indeed. The literary references nicely highlight the fact that what might look today to be a relatively simple dish—rice, dal, ghee, milk, sugar—is in fact something special. Value-added ingredients due to complex refining (ghee and sugar) and laborious, time-consuming processing from raw materials (rice and dal) result in an indulgence, as fine an offering as one can give to god. The two recipes that I have encountered for *akkāraṭalai* in the inscriptions slightly postdate the above literary references. One tenth-century recipe appears in an incomplete inscription recorded in a Śaivite temple,⁷³ which sadly does not indicate whether the

⁶⁸ Nācciyār Tirumoli 9.6 (Venkatesan 2010, p. 172). *nāru narum poḷil māliṛuñcōlai nampikku nān / nūru taṭāvil veṇṇey vāynerntu parāvi vaitṭēn / nūru taṭā niraṇṭa akkāraṭicil conṇēn / ēru tiruvuṭaiyān inru vantivai kolluṇkolō?* (Āṇṭāl 1966, p. 56).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 9.7. *inru vantittaiyāyū amutu ceytiṭap peril nān / oṇru nūṛāyiramāk koṭuttup piṇṇumālum ceyvaṇ / tenṛal maṇaṇ kamaḷum tirumāliṛuñcōlai taṇṇuḷ / niṇṛa pirāṇ aṭiyēṇ maṇattē vantu nēr paṭilē.* (Āṇṭāl 1966, p. 57).

⁷⁰ For the Vaiṣṇava practice of offering *akkāra aṭicil* while reciting Āṇṭāl's verses, see (Āṇṭāl 2018). For the American diaspora re-enactment of Āṇṭāl's offering, (Ahobila Math 2018).

⁷¹ Per George Hart's dating in his foreword to (Hart 2005, p. ix).

⁷² *tīm pāl aṭicil amirtam sem poṇ vaṇṇap puḷukkal / ām pāl akkāraṭalai aṇṇal nīr ūru amirtam / tām pālavarai nāṭit tantu ūṭṭu ayaṛvār coriya / oṇpā nāru ney vellam olukum vaṇṇam kāṇmin* (Tirukkatēvar 2018).

⁷³ The dating is unclear but certainly corresponds to the tenth century. The inscriptional notes indicate that it corresponds to the third year of Uttama Cōḷa's reign, so 972 CE, but this volume is for Parakesarivarman's (Parantakan's) reign, so perhaps 910 CE. Inscription #60, (Archaeological Survey of India 1986, p. 29). Vol. 19. On the west wall of the Anantīsvara temple, at Uṭaiyārkūṭi, near Kāṭṭumannārkōyil, Cidambaram taluk, South Arcot district. This describes a land endowment endowed by Mūttan Kāman alias Nārāyaṇa Viḷuppērayaṇ, made after purchasing the land from another: “...for the daily offering

devotee's donation was intended for the Śaivite temple where it was engraved or for another temple; it was relatively common practice of the day to record a donation in one temple that was intended for another. The other recipe appears in an eleventh-century inscription at the Tirumukkūṭal temple, definitely Vaiṣṇava. Offerings of *akkāraṭalai* and more are for the Mahāviṣṇu at Tirumukkūṭal, a site not far from Ceṅkalpaṭṭu, relatively close to both Kanchipuram and Chennai.⁷⁴

Since these recipes appear close both chronologically speaking and in terms of ingredients, I have listed them in chart form for easy comparison (Table 1). Despite an unfamiliarity with classical measurements,⁷⁵ it is easy to tell at a glance that the later, eleventh-century Vaiṣṇava offering is significantly sweeter and richer in both sugar and ghee, even after compensating for a greater volume of dal and milk used in the later recipe. Only one century later, we see over a *doubling* of sugar by actual weight (a topic to which I will return a little later) and a quadrupling of ghee (by actual volume) used in the recipe, making for an offering even better suited for god. Looking at the later amounts of sugar and ghee in this rich dish, it is easier to comprehend the Jain resistance to such a decadent religious culinary practice, as we saw in the *Cīvakaśintāmaṇi*'s clash with Hindu ways of expressing devotion to god.

Table 1. *Akkāra aṭicil* recipes.

	10th c. (ca. 972 CE)	11th c. (ca. 1067 CE)
aged rice	4 nālīs	4 nālīs
moong dal	2 nālīs	4 nālīs
milk	4 nālīs	6 nālīs
bananas	10	8
less refined/brown sugar (cakkurai)	14 palams	32 palams
ghee	1 uḷakku	1 nālī (= 4 uḷakku)
total volume (approx.)	12.25 nālīs	18 nālīs
sugar ratio (to total volume)	0.14 (1/7, meaning sugar makes up 1/7 of total volume)	0.22 (2/9)
ghee ratio (to total volume)	0.02 (2%) of total dish (ghee makeup to total volume 1/50)	0.055 of total dish (5.5% of total dish); 1/18

of sweet *akkāraṭiyal*. . . with this land eternally is to be prepared. . . . Recipe: "4 nālīs of rice, 2 nālīs of dal, 4 nālīs of milk, 10 bananas, 14 palams *caṅkarai* (sugar), and 1 uḷakku ghee."

⁷⁴ Inscription #38, the Tirumukkūṭal inscription of Vīrārājendra (reigned 1063–1068 CE), line 34, ([Archaeological Survey of India 1939](#), pp. 235–49). Vol. 21. This inscription is from the fifth regnal year of Vīrārājendra, thus ca. 1067 CE, and mentions the temple kitchen (*maṭaipaḷḷi*), as other inscriptions do, being at Tirumukkūṭal with no mention of a *maṭh* (monastery) to which it could have been attached, nor do we have any record of there being a *maṭh* near this locale. This might be useful in correcting Breckenridge's notion that there were no permanent temple kitchens on site at temples until the Vijayanagara period based on the sole fact that we have no remaining Cōla period archaeological remnants from such sites intact within temple complexes ([Breckenridge 1986](#), p. 29 and footnote 12, p. 46). Yet the fact that such structures had been given such names by the tenth century suggested that, for temple-goers of the day, they understood whatever structure was there and was called *maṭaipaḷḷi* to be permanent and always present for the daily cooking of offerings. All pots in temples were traditionally made of clay and destroyed after use and all fuel used for the kitchens was firewood; most temples would not require a large building-like structures, so it is perhaps not so surprising that we do not have Cōla period archaeological remains of kitchens still attached to the archaeological remains of temples, which were certainly built up and built over over time. It might also be useful to revise our idea of "permanence" in the medieval temple context where the materials were deliberately impermanent for purification's sake. This inscription also remarkably records details of a hospital (!), school, and hostel also attached to the temple—very rare for the period. Recipe: 4 nālī rice, 4 nālī *paruppu* (dal) or 1 *kuṟuṇi* of *payaru* (whole bean), 6 nālīs milk, 1 nālī of ghee, 8 bananas, and 32 palams of sugar per day, prepared every day.

⁷⁵ Sugar is measured by weight, whereas other ingredients are measured by volume. For our purposes, this does not make too much difference, except that it is challenging to convert the *palam* to the other set of measurements. I take one *palam* to equal 112 grams, and consider the Tamil *palam* to be equivalent to the Sanskrit *palam*. This follows Hultzsich's and others' values, with the Sanskrit *palam* equaling four Sanskrit *karṣa* and the Tamil *palam*, according to inscriptions ([Archaeological Survey of India 1986](#)), Vol. 2, inscription #127, equaling four *kācu*. Hultzsich uses these values ([Archaeological Survey of India 1986](#), p. 75), Vol. 2 Part 1, in footnote 2, and D. C. Sircar also considers 4 *karṣa* to equal one *palam* ([Sircar 1966](#), p. 227). I estimate that one *palam* is approximately 112 grams, so slightly over one cup volume as we know it. Four uḷakkus make one nālī.

So, what about the bananas? As we saw earlier with Srirangam *appam* and *kaṇṇāmutu*, it was not uncommon to use fruits such as banana in a sweet offering for god, although I am hard-pressed to find a modern-day recipe of *cakkarai poṅkal* that does. While in conversation with one temple head priest's wife, my suggestion of a theoretical addition of raisins—quite sweet to my mind—to *cakkarai poṅkal* brought a grimacing look of disgust to her face: “raisins would make *cakkarai poṅkal* bitter!”⁷⁶ Needless to say, modern taste has become so accustomed to extreme sweet that fruit is only found in fruit offerings, like the temple offering of five fruits in coconut, sugar water, etc., i.e., *pañcāmṛtam* of the Paṇi variety. On the other hand, a modern devotee cook might find lacking the absence of cashew nuts, today a perennial addition to *cakkarai poṅkal*. The cashew, of course, only arrived to the Indian subcontinent with the Portuguese who brought it from Brazil, so it does not make an appearance in Indian cooking until the sixteenth century CE, still quite early in comparison with the potato or tomato, two other modern perennials of Indian cooking.

10. Feeding God

The whole point of discussing recipes (ingredient combination and ratio) as the epigraphical record of *naivedya* for gods is that food preparation mattered to individuals, temples, and priests, and not just to temple cooks—who already, presumably, knew the usual ratios—for the correct feeding of gods. The inscriptions highlight the quantities and weights of ingredients because of the *value* of such ingredients. The price of a sack of paddy mattered, as did the value of processed refined sugars compared to less refined jaggery, the value of processed, threshed, hulled, and aged rice, cooked ghee, dry spices, and any number of other ingredients. It is fortunate for us that the cost of ingredients mattered when keeping accounts for inscriptional purposes; this is how we have access to these medieval recipes in the first place.

Priests like Babu Shastri and scholars like Breckenridge have supposed that regular *naivedya* practices in temples came about to sustain increasingly voluminous crowds of pilgrims who needed refreshment during and following temple visits. However, I theorize that the feeding of gods as a regular feature of temple life was more direct in intention: one feeds god to nourish god, with as lavish an offering as one can offer on display in the public arena⁷⁷ that is the Tamil temple (versus giving vast offerings at home, which feeds and impresses the god, but impresses the community and visitors at large less so) (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976; Talbot 1991, 2001). I suggest that the Cōla medieval practice of offering *naivedya* for god is first and foremost for *feeding, sustaining, and nourishing god*, which goes against the sociologico-functional explanation that *naivedya* was institutionalized to feed large numbers of pilgrims.

In order to understand the actual function of *naivedya*, one must pay close attention to the inscriptions themselves and to ideological concerns expressed in religious texts up through the Cōla period. Both the Cōla inscriptions and religious doctrinal texts suggest the theological reality of feeding the actual *bodies* of the gods held in these temples. The typical formula for these inscriptions is that a certain amount of gold (or coin or land) is meant to pay for raw materials (usually paddy) for ingredients for a certain festival day or ritual for the god held at a certain temple, and that this amount of gold was invested in the temple treasury or with the temple *capai* (*sabhā*). Often these inscriptions refer to the god directly by his or her name, usually the local name at that temple site. But again and again, we see inscriptions that indicate that the offering is “for the *tirumeṇi* (holy body) at X [temple].” In one example from the Bṛhadīśvara temple at Thanjavur (historically called Taṇjai), we read that each *kaṣu* (coin) put in the treasury brings the interest to pay out for the four *nālīs* of aged rice for the twice daily “holy offering for the holy body which has graciously appeared” (referring

⁷⁶ Per my interview with Mrs. Rajeshvari, wife of head priest Mr. Sampat Bhattar of Kamāṭciyamman temple in Kanchipuram, held on 16 May 2015.

⁷⁷ For the idea of temple inscriptions as being the public theater, see (Karashima 1996, pp. 6–10).

to appearing for processional viewing), with two *nālīs* of rice being used each time, and then further detailing the quantity of each ingredient used in addition to the rice.⁷⁸ In the Cōla inscriptions and in later devotional contexts,⁷⁹ *tirumeṇi* (the holy body)⁸⁰ is the standard term used for the image (where in Sanskrit we find the terms *vigraha* or *mūrti*) housed in the temple, whether it refers to the (often sculpted) figure of a deity carried around during festival processions or to any of the fixed main icons that permanently reside in temple *saṃṇitis* (shrines).

Leslie Orr first recognized this usage when pointing out that Cōla inscriptions frequently do not use any word at all to refer to the image housed in a temple. The direct mention of the name of the god himself/herself carries with it the implication that the god's actual "pervasive presence at a particular sacred site... is of primary significance" (Orr 2004, p. 458). Orr indicates that *tirumeṇi* means "sacred form,"⁸¹ which it certainly does, as does Sanskrit *vigraha* in the sense of form (shape) of the body of something. The first definition that the *Tamil Lexicon* gives for *mēṇi* is "body" in the literal sense of *uṭampu*, which is how it was defined by the (roughly contemporaneous with Cōla inscriptions) Tamil lexicographer Piṅkala.

I think it is important not to downplay the physicality of divine embodiment, which using a translation like "form" does, when the inscriptions donating foods to feed temple gods actually indicate giving the offerings to the holy body residing at a given temple. This is especially true given the theological understanding at the time that the god actually resides in the temple as a theophany or embodiment and not some form, figure, or sculptural representation of a god who is elsewhere. The Sanskrit equivalent appearing in other contexts is *divyadeha* (divine body) (Davis 1997, p. 37), which, while indicating "divine" in some spiritual sense, equally indicates that one confronts the *body* of god in temple.

Orr has discussed both "Śaiva Siddhānta and Śrīvaiṣṇava theologies of 'descent' into image form, which were being formulated by teachers of these traditions in the same period as the inscriptions were being engraved on temple walls" (Orr 2004, p. 459). These theologies indicate that the divine presence resides in the figure held in temple. Take, for example, Rāmānuja's teachings (eleventh-twelfth century CE; contemporaneous with the Cōla period) that advocated for the support of rituals performed on idols (*vigrahas*) as the bodies of gods. As Rāmānuja argued, Viṣṇu was bodily incarnated in the temple deity's *arcā* (image to be worshipped), so for Rāmānuja and, doubtless, for countless devotees of the same era, "image worship" was "a practice of true knowledge, not illusion" (Davis 1997, p. 48, footnote 28).⁸² Richard Davis also highlights the "(G)od's actual embodiment" (Davis 1997, p. 50) in temples with the "icon" as the "body for the god being worshiped" (Davis 1997, p. 46, emphasis added). I cannot emphasize this idea enough when examining the actual practices of Hindu devotees of the period, for it is fundamental for understanding the beliefs of medieval devotees and their behavior. The *abhiṣekam* (bathing of the deity that precedes the *naivedya* feeding) is another example of taking care of the body of the god, as is the application of unguents such as perfumed sandalwood paste that

⁷⁸ Inscription #6 of Rājārājadeva, (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1986, pp. 71–72), Vol. 2 Parts 1 & 2, line 7. "...*eluntaruḷuvitta tirumeṇikkut tiru amurtukkuppotu paḷa arici irunālī āka iraṇṭu potaikkū paḷa arici nānālīkkū nellukkuruṇi irunāliyum ney amutu potu...*" If one reads only the translation provided below this inscription, one misses the whole point, since it reads "for (the requirements of) the image,... (One) *kuṇṇi* and two *nāri* of paddy (are required) for (conversion into) four *nāri* of old rice (to be used) for the sacred food (*tiruvamudu*) at both times (of the day),...—two *nāri* of old rice (being used) each time; four *nāri* of paddy for (one) *āṇakku* of ghee (*ney-amudu*),..." For an understanding of my translation of *eluntaruḷuvitta*, see (Orr 2004, p. 459).

⁷⁹ The term *tirumeṇi* appears in the Tamil Vaiṣṇava *Kōyil Oluku* (Anonymous 2007), an anecdotal history of the Srirangam temple.

⁸⁰ It is also remarkable that this is a Tamil term, when many of the ritual terms used in these Cōla inscriptions are Tamilized Sanskrit, and recognizably Sanskrit, as we see in this "mixed Tamil-Sanskrit" epigraphical "language" that Orr calls "inscriptional Maṇipravāla" (Orr 2010, p. 327).

⁸¹ (Orr 2004, p. 458, footnote 28). Orr also indicates in this footnote that the term *tirumeṇi* also frequently appears in Jain donative inscriptions to indicate that the physical "image"/*mūrti* was set up by a given donor. She also discusses this term in (Orr 2010, p. 338).

⁸² For details on Rāmānuja's theology, see (Carman 1974) and (Carman and Narayanan 1989, pp. 34–42).

is another *upacāra* included in the full *pūjā* worship (which was otherwise typically performed on royal bodies, for kings and princes). The ritual inclusion of intimate moments such as screening the god before bathing and changing his/her clothes, combing the hair in specific festival rituals, and showing the god his/her own image in a small mirror all accentuate the *bodily* and *embodied* aspects of icon worship. Combing a god's hair is not just *sevā* (service) but is taking care of the body of a god.

Again, Orr points us in the right direction in her analysis of various donations of valuable wedding *tālis* (necklaces) to goddesses who, as married goddesses, ought to wear *tālis* and not appear without a wife's appropriate adornment, like not being fully clothed (Orr 2007, pp. 116–17). In these and similar Cōla donative instances, the devotees act in the manner of family, as family members would acquire the *tāli* for a daughter to be married. Orr's argument is that donations often establish kinship-like relations between donor and god, and that inscriptions themselves describe a family relationship between donor and god, in various cases referring to the goddess as the donor's daughter (Orr 2007, pp. 117–18).⁸³ Following Orr's proposal, it makes perfect sense to feed one's god (daily and regularly) as a way of taking care of the god's body, just as one takes care of a daughter or son's body with regular feeding.

Seen in this light, I think it is correct to attribute the motivations for Cōla-period *naivedya* practices to medieval Hindu devotees' priorities of serving and feeding god, in particular, taking care of, maintaining, and sustaining a god's *body*. I would *not* attribute *naivedya* practices to any secondary resulting effect of having a fair amount of food at temple, which doubtless could be used to feed priests, their families who also caretake at the temple, other temple workers, or visitors. Cōla period inscriptions make the *most* mention of feeding the gods, *occasional* mention of feeding Śivayogins, religious devouts, Brahmins attached to temples, or Śrīvaiṣṇavas (locals), and much *rarer* mention of feeding pilgrims and first-time visitors called *apūrvīs* in the inscriptions, people who have “never before been seen” at the temple.⁸⁴ It is also clear from the inscriptional record that donations for feeding religious devouts, Brahmins, and Śrīvaiṣṇavas are *not* donations for *naivedya*; there is never mention of giving these meals to the god.

Feeding god—and this means the body of god—was a priority during the Cōla period. While the counted examples of detailed recipes for *naivedya* dish preparation are rare, we have a vast number of other Cōla-period donative inscriptions whose sole communication is coins or land donated for *naivedya* or *tiruvamutu*. Feeding the gods mattered even when the nitty gritty of ingredient quantities, measurements, and type of spice did not. Nonetheless, through the rare recipes we find, we see remarkable interest in precision on the part of the donor in specifying exact quantities and ingredients, in the same way that a grandmother insists on adding just so much spice to a dish or not failing to add some special secret ingredient. The donation—just like a specially prepared cooked dish—is meaningful to a donor because of the details. Fittingly, the old proverb clues us in: God, in fact, is in the details.

As a side note, I must acknowledge one common strain of religious thought that contends that the gods in temples do not actually eat the *naivedya* offered to them but instead smell the fragrant aromas from the food.⁸⁵ This is evident even today if one catches the usually deliberately private act of a priest offering *naivedya* to a *mūrti*, as I have witnessed on occasion (at the Nittiyakaliyāṇa Perumāḷ temple

⁸³ Orr describes how female donative practices sought to link the goddess to the donor's female kin and connect the donor to the goddess (Orr 2007, p. 117). Orr refers to ARE 720 of 1916, an inscription of a woman serving the Pāṇṭiyan kings who “set up an image of the goddess, in the name of her daughter and named after her daughter, to which she presented jewels and other gifts to support worship.” She also mentions two tenth-century inscriptions that refer to goddess Umā as their daughter (Archaeological Survey of India 1986), Vol. 19, #404, and a male donor of the same period who claimed “the goddess Uma as his daughter, provided “her with land to support daily worship and offerings, and” gave “her in marriage to the lord of the temple (ARE 151 of 1836-37)” (Orr 2007, pp. 117–18).

⁸⁴ (Archaeological Survey of India 1986, p. 79) Vol. 3, Parts 1 & 2, inscription #35, line 17, and (Orr 2004, p. 452). The mentions of *apūrvīs* indicate that other mentions of feeding devouts, Śivayogins, and Śrīvaiṣṇavas were a local matter of regulars at a given temple.

⁸⁵ Per my interview with Mr. Babu Shastri (2015) and my anonymous informants. Also see (Malamoud 1996, p. 38).

and at the Kāñci Ēkāmparanātar temple). The priest, holding the *taḷikai* (plate) of *naivedya* in one hand, lifts the cover (usually a cloth or leaves, today often a section of silk saree) and uses the first two fingers and thumb to waft the aroma from the cooked offering in the deity's direction. This implies that gods might not savor their food but simply smell the aroma and live off the ambrosia of the wafting *vācaṇai* (scent). This interpretation explains why traditional Hindus do not smell or taste food while cooking it (one should not even smell it before offering to the god; it would be otherwise “enjoyed” and spoiled before the god can enjoy it). This is also meant to explain why *naivedya* is covered (traditionally with cloth or leaves) while being carried from the temple *maṭaipalli* after preparation to the *sanniti* for offering (which of course ignores the fact of wanting to protect the food from dust and insects).

I do not intend to discredit this idea; I will simply state that it makes no appearance anywhere in the inscriptions, nor does scent or aroma at all. The aromatic components of *pūjā* worship are present in the *upacāras* of *anulepana*, the application of usually scented and fragrant unguents, which is not coincidentally also known as *gandha* (perfuming) and in the *dhūpa* (the incensing or “fumigating” of the god), and not necessarily a feature of the *upacāra* of *naivedya*, according to traditional dharmasāstric understanding of *pūjā*. This is not to say that aroma is not an important facet of many parts of *pūjā*, including the feeding with *naivedya*. Even the *upacāra* of *puṣpa* (offering flowers) is meant to be with flowers that are fragrant and not with flowers that have no aroma, which would be an offense to god (Kane 1942, p. 733, citing the *Viṣṇudharmasūtra*). So, while the fragrance of food is an aspect not to be ignored in *naivedya* nor in other *upacāras*, this facet of divine consumption does not appear in the inscriptional discourse. I thus contend that Cōla inscriptions account for the *actual feeding* of divine bodies, and that this idea is consistent with the epigraphy of the period, regardless of other theological understandings of *naivedya* as appreciated by god(s) through aroma.

11. Made Sweeter for God

The recipes examined above may appear deceptively simple to our eyes today but we must not mistake *carṅkarai poṇakam* or spiced and sugared Srirangam *appam* as humble cuisine.⁸⁶ Bear in mind that, historically, processing foods from raw materials consisted of numerous laborious, painstaking, lengthy procedures. Processing paddy into aged raw rice required numerous steps, pack animals for threshing, stone machines for hulling, and months from harvest time to being ready for consumption.⁸⁷ Dals also required similar processes (although shorter) to prepare the bean, dry, and split it using heavy stone machines. But the ingredient that required perhaps the most complex technologies for processing was the sugar used in these *naivedya* dishes, even though this sugar would have been much more like the least refined dark *muscovado* sugar that we can find today.⁸⁸ In some temple offerings, the more refined white crystal rock sugar was required and indicated by the terms *pañcatārai* or *kañṭacarṅkar[ai]*,⁸⁹ the *cakkarai* that is “sugar” in these Cōla recipes is much more like the *muscovado* type and not the jaggery that epigraphists have typically considered it to be.⁹⁰ There is some confusion among epigraphers that *carṅkarai* refers to jaggery due to incorrectly assuming that

⁸⁶ I use Laudan's distinction of high and humble cuisines to designate elite culinary practices in relation to the cuisines of the masses. It is important to still designate both and all culinary cultures as “cuisine” in revision of earlier definitions of what qualifies as cuisine and what does not (Laudan 2013, pp. 2, 7, and elsewhere).

⁸⁷ For a thorough study, see (Greenland 1997). Monica L. Smith comments on the high investment of labor, threshing, and storage at (Smith 2006, p. 484).

⁸⁸ What is sold as *muscovado* (light in color) is still more refined and treated than early India's *śarkarā* would have been: closer to the darkest, lumpiest *muscovado* you can find rarely today at quite a price in some specialty shops importing this darkest of sugars prepared using artisanal traditional methods.

⁸⁹ For *kañṭacarṅkarai* in Cōla-era inscriptions, see (Archaeological Survey of India 1986, p. 188), Vol. 3 Parts 1 & 2, inscription #80 (ca. 1126), line 7, and (Archaeological Survey of India 1986, p. 299), Vol. 7, inscription #485, lines 6–7. Please note that both of these inscriptions require rock sugar candy to be given as a separate offering to god, not to be used in a culinary preparation. For Vijayanagara-period uses of rock sugar candy in recipes (*pañcatārai*), see (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998, p. 26), Vol. 4, inscription #12, and elsewhere.

⁹⁰ Per V. Vijayaraghavacharya and Sadhu Subrahmanya Sastry's translations in the (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998). However, the (University of Madras 1936) correctly defines *carṅkarai* as sugar, not jaggery.

the technology did not exist for refining sugar into white crystals. However, it is important to point out that the sugar-refining technologies in use in early India lost ground to the “modern” imported western industrial methods of refining and cannot be found practiced in India from the mid-nineteenth century.⁹¹ Further, mentions of rock candy in Cōla inscriptions and of white sugar in contemporaneous texts from other part of South India doubly confirm that these sugar refining technologies did exist.

The historical methods of sugar-making reach far back into the classical period and there are abundant early references to white processed sugar as (Sanskrit) *sitā*,⁹² a word which means white. Even if not as white as bleached sugar is today, it certainly indicated a type of sugar known for its light color. Since these inscriptions do indicate when the sugar is rock sugar (white and more refined), and since we do have other references to jaggery blocks in early inscriptions as *karuppu katti*,⁹³ in Cōla epigraphy, *carṅkarai* refers to soft brown sugar.⁹⁴

This *carṅkarai*, then, is a highly refined product from the sugarcane plant that requires great skill, technology, and labor to produce, and is hence a value-added food.⁹⁵ It comes as no surprise that we find such a prestigious food item in most temple recipes, even in aromatic *naivedya* with pepper and cumin. Sugar adds crispness to foods (like in *appam* or *dosa*), gives a golden, browned color to cooked dishes (the border of cookies and cakes), balances the savory, spicy, and acidic components in a dish (as in pasta sauce), and most importantly, is a natural preservative, retarding food spoilage, something that is significant in hot tropical South India. Despite these other various motivations that might have spurred its addition in temple dishes, the fact remains that sugar is valuable and worth offering to god simply because it is sweet and good, like the divine experience.⁹⁶ Offerings to god should be sweet, even when savory!

We find similar usages of sugar, sweets, and products made from refined sugar in European and Latin American Catholic preparations, where religious monasteries actually dominated the sugar-refining technologies and processes, typically being the sweet and confectionery makers in medieval and early modern towns and cities. In medieval Europe as in medieval Tamil temples, there was a definite association between giving sweets to god, and the control of sweet production and usage at religious and monastery sites. Food historian Rachel Laudan may be correct in crediting the early Indian Buddhist monasteries with a great deal of the maintenance of sugar-refining technologies, machines, and skills (Laudan 2013, pp. 113–14), for it is through the Buddhists in India of the first millennium CE that the Chinese learned the techniques of sugar refinery, later adding their own variations to the process.⁹⁷ Similarly, in the monasteries and convents of medieval Europe that were

⁹¹ (Naik 1922) describes the traditional Indian sugar refining, already by that time only in demand among orthodox Hindus due to the high cost of production and not being able to compete with sugar production in Indian factories using imported modern methods. The industry was only still surviving in 1922 due to religious sentiment for traditional methods. I credit James Mchugh for bringing this and other information regarding sugar to my attention.

⁹² In the *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, which has a *terminus ante quem* of fifth century CE for the latest layers of the text, per (Wujastyk 1998, pp. 104–5). The twelfth-century (Someśvara III 1961, p. 134) refers to white sugar as *sitā*, v. 1578 and elsewhere, and also details one process of how to whiten and refine sugar from the *śarkarā* and the four stages of candy making, p. 121, vv. 1412–16. For two thorough studies of sugar-making in early India, see (von Hinüber 1971) and (Gopal 1964).

⁹³ The inscription is a public testimony recording that Villiyāṇḍān-Ālakapperumāl and his brothers had committed a sin against the Brāhmaṇas in stealing and utilizing the temple food offerings, especially “the jaggery (*karuppu katti mīṭṭavai*) for the purpose of food-offerings to the deity Tiruttaliyāṇḍānāyaṇār” (Archaeological Survey of India 1986, p. 157, Vol. 25, inscription #125). Dated 1290 CE (the reign of reign of Māṇavarman Kuḷaśekhara I) and located on the south wall of the first *prākāra* of the Tiruttaliśvara temple in Tiruppattūr, Tirupattur taluk, Ramanathapuram District.

⁹⁴ But not the kind they sell in the supermarket today, which is refined white sugar with molasses added back in. For a detailed description of sugar classifications and terminology, and processes, see (Mchugh, In progress).

⁹⁵ Like ghee, sugar also has a “long shelf life (important in India) and a high value-to-weight ratio,” both easily “traded over long distances” (Laudan 2013, p. 114).

⁹⁶ For Tamil *bhakti* saint-poets such as Śaivite Māṇikkavācakar likening the divine experience to sugar, see, among numerous examples, *Tiruccatakam* #90 in (Cutler 1987, p. 165). For the historical comparison of the sugar-refining process to alchemy, see (Laudan 2013, p. 110 and elsewhere). For sugar representing the ideal of goodness in Catholicism, Buddhism, and Islam, see (Laudan 2013, p. 177).

⁹⁷ (Mazumdar 1998, pp. 20–33) and (Kieschnick 2003, pp. 254–62). “In 647, the emperor Taizong sent an envoy to India charged with learning the secrets of sugar making. He returned with six monks and two artisans, who established sugar manufacturing south of Hangchow, where the climate was favorable to sugarcane... Like the Indians, the Chinese used

sites of sugar refining industries, sugar-derived products were first medicinal in purpose and then produced as confections for consumption before and after fasting, for festival days (Laudan 2013, p. 177). In the Iberian empire, we see a similar phenomenon: the religious missionary-driven spread of sugar-refining technologies⁹⁸ and the colonial production of sugar cane on New World plantations led to nunneries leading in the confectionary production of sweets at Catholic convents in the New World as well as at Iberian colonies elsewhere, such as among Portuguese Jesuit nuns at Goa (Laudan 2013, p. 195). Without a doubt, medieval and early modern religious culinary cultures around the world were heavily laden with sugar and dishes involving refined sugar products.

Seen from this perspective, the religious priority of using value-rich sugar in most Tamil temple offerings is obvious. But is a rise in sugar usage over time detectable in the data? It is possible to observe an increase in the prevalence of sweet preparations overall in the Cōla period inscriptional record (compared to unsweetened dishes, Tables 2 and 3) which is also confirmed by an even greater increase in sweet dish prevalence in the Vijayanagara period inscriptions, with a greater *variety* of sweet dishes offered as donative foods (Tables 4 and 5).⁹⁹ The inscriptional data not only suggest a greater presence and frequency of sugar's appearance in temple offerings as time passes, but also reflect increased sugar *usage* over time, determined by quantity or weight of sugar used. For the Cōla period, although my data is not completely exhaustive, it is apparent that sugar gradually appears more frequently used in temple recipes, with 25% of tenth-century recipes containing sugar, 50% of eleventh-century recipes requiring sugar, and 100% of thirteenth-century recipes calling for sugar. By gross volume of sugar used in these same Cōla recipes, the amount increases from an average of six *palams* required per recipe in the tenth century, to twenty-seven *palams* required per donative offering in the eleventh century, to an impressive two hundred and three *palams* needed per offering in the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁰

milk to whiten sugar, though they used their own edge-runner presses rather than the Indian ox-driven pestles and mortars. The Chinese produced several grades and kinds of sugar, most of them soft and brown" (Laudan 2013, p. 120).

⁹⁸ Augustinian missionary "Martin de Rada, on a mission to one of China's major sugar manufacturing areas, Fujian, reported on it to both Spain and Mexico. Other missionaries studied sugar-making methods in India and China." All happening primarily in the sixteenth century, with the mill technologies transferred much earlier from India to China, per (Laudan 2013, p. 193), who also cites (Daniels and Daniels 1988, pp. 527–30).

⁹⁹ In my survey, out of twenty-three completely described Tirupati Vijayanagara recipes, seventeen (74%) contain some form of sugar. Newer varieties for the inscriptional record include: *atirasam*, sweet *tōcai* (dosa), *cukiyaṇ* (modern sukhiyan), and *ciṭtai* (modern *ciṭtai*). Compare this to nine out of a total eighteen (or 50%) complete recipes from the Cōla period inscriptions calling for sugar.

¹⁰⁰ The conversion from *nālī* to *palam* is challenging, since *palam* is a weight measure and *nālī* volume, but I calculate that if: 1 *kācu* = 28 grs. (per (University of Madras 1936)), and 4 *kācu* = 1 *palam* (per (Sircar 1966)), then 1 *palam* = 112 gr., so there are 9 *palams* to the kg. There are 5 *ālākkū* to the kg., and 8 *ālākkū*s to the *paṭi* (per (University of Madras 1936, p. 253 & p. 2435)), and 1.6 kgs. to the *paṭi*. So, 1 kg. is 0.625 of a *nālī*, hence 2 *nālīs* = 1.25 kg, which is approx. 11.25 *palams*.

Table 2. Cōḷa period data.

10th c. inscriptions w/no sugar	10th c. inscriptions w/sugar	11th c. inscriptions w/no sugar	11th c. inscriptions w/sugar	12th c. w/no sugar	12th c. w/sugar	13th c. inscriptions w/no sugar	13th c. inscriptions w/sugar
3	1 (6 palams)	6	6 (32 palams; 20 palams; 11/2 kācu [= 3/8 palam]; 1 kācu [=1/4 palam]; 100 palams; 10 palams)	no recipes available from data source	no recipes available from data source	0	2 (6 palams & 400 palams)
% w/out sugar (per century)	% with sugar (per century)	% w/out sugar (per cent.)	% with sugar (per cent.)	% w/out sugar (per cent.)	% with sugar (per cent.)	% w/out sugar (per cent.)	% with sugar (per cent.)
75%	25%	50%	50%	—	—	0% w/out sugar	100% w/sugar
	average amt. of sugar per recipe in this century		average amt. of sugar per recipe in this cent.		average amt. of sugar per recipe in this cent.		average amt. of sugar per recipe in this cent.
	6 palams/recipe (average)		27.1 palams/recipe (average)		—		203 palams/recipe (average)

Table 3. Cōḷa data by inscription in chronological order.

Year in CE (ca., Calculated According to Regnal Year of King)	Amount of Sugar Required in Recipe (Unless Otherwise Indicated, Sugar Means Muscovado Type)
914–915	—
930	—
930	—
972	14 palams
1013	—
1013	1 1/2 kācu (= 3/8 palam)
1013	—
1013	1 kācu (= 1/4 palam)
1013	—
1013	—
1067–8	32 palams
1067–8	20 palams
1067–8	—
1067–8	—
1067–8	10 palams
1087	100 palams
1237	6 palams of karuppukkaṭṭi (jaggery block)
1253	400 palams

Table 4. Vijayanagara period data.

14th c. w/ no sugar	14th c. w/ sugar	15th c. w/ no sugar in inscription	15th c. w/ sugar in inscription	16th c. w/ no sugar in inscription	17th c. w/ sugar in inscription
0 recipes	2 recipes (2 nāli + 2 nāli)	0 recipes	6 recipes	5 recipes	10 recipes
% w/out sugar (per century)	% with sugar (per century)	% w/out sugar (per cent.)	% with sugar (per cent.)	% w/out sugar (per cent.)	% with sugar (per cent.)
0%	100%	0%	100%	33%	66%
	average amt. of sugar per recipe in this century		average amt. of sugar per recipe in this cent.		average amt. of sugar per recipe in this cent.
	11.25 palams/recipe		45 palams/recipe		75 palams/recipe

Table 5. Vijayanagara period data by inscription in chronological order.

Year in CE (ca. Calculated According to Regnal Year of King or Approx.)	Amount of Sugar Required in Recipe (Unless Otherwise Indicated, Sugar Means Muscovado Type)
1393	2 nāli (= approx. 11.25 palams)
1393	2 nāli
1434	10 palams
1445	50 palams
1445	50 palams
1445	50 palams
1445	50 palams
1457	60 palams
1530	— (no sugar)
1530	1 vīcai = 40 palams
1531	25 vīcai of pañcatārai (hard rock candy sugar) for 100 tōcai (dosa) offerings, means 10 palams/dish of offering
1532	1900 palams/19 dishes, so 100 palams/dish of offering
1533	110 palams of pañcatārai (hard rock candy sugar)
1534	— (no sugar)
1534	30 palams
1534	100 palams
1534	— (no sugar)
1534	100 palams
1534	100 palams
1534	100 palams
1534	100 palams
1534	60 palams
1534	— (no sugar)
1535	— (no sugar)

For fear of my data being potentially misleading in its conclusions, I should point out that the sample of available data for the Cōla thirteenth century is rather reduced, limiting the extent of my findings. Furthermore, over time, we do see an increase in overall *volume* of donative offerings at a more impressive scale, meaning that some increase in the amount of sugar would be expected over time, to balance the generally larger offerings being given in temples. Also, what we know from the literary mention of dishes like *akkāra aṭicil* suggests that sweet offerings always made up a significant and noteworthy aspect of donative gifting of food to gods in temple, even in times preceding the Cōla period. With this, I do not want to imply that an increase in use of sugar in food offerings was a particular feature of the Cōla period. At this time, my data must remain suggestive instead of entirely

conclusive, but there is at least a definite trend in increased prevalence of sugar in donative food offerings as time progressed and an increase in the volume of sugar used in such offerings over time, which are perhaps significant enough findings for religious gifting in and of themselves.

12. What is Missing?

Any temple *prasād* connoisseur will have quickly realized a few key items of *prasād* that are notably absent from my evidence. Two of the most famous are Kanchipuram idli and the famed Tirupati laddu. Kanchipuram or *kōyil* idli, steamed inside leaves in a large basket, weighing in at over three kilograms, and well over a foot long before slicing,¹⁰¹ has attained such popularity that it is now *de rigueur* even outside of religious contexts at receptions across India. Tirupati laddu is also notorious for its impressive size, although the pilgrim's laddu (still large after recent downsizing) is much smaller than the massive thirty-two kilogram laddus prepared for Viṣṇu on special occasions. While temple elders will assure you that these forms of *prasād* have been prepared at temples since time immemorial,¹⁰² both of these must be late modern variants on earlier *naivedya* formulas. The Vijayanagara Tirupati inscriptions do not mention laddu, although it could be related to the *manoharam* that appears in a few inscriptions.¹⁰³ The earliest epigraphic references to idli also appear during the Vijayanagara period,¹⁰⁴ although we have no way to gauge how big these idlis were at the time, whether steamed very large in the modern Kanchipuram style, or small and hand-sized, as are the dosas served to Viṣṇu at the Srirangam temple and elsewhere. We do have references pre-dating the Vijayanagara period to *paṇṇiyāram* type preparations such as *piṭṭu* (which is typically steamed, as is idli),¹⁰⁵ although it seems unlikely that what used to be the *paṇṇiyārāppam* called *piṭṭu* would later appear under the name idli, when there are mentions of idli in Cōla-era sources outside the temple context.¹⁰⁶

Another important ingredient for *naivedya* that seems notoriously absent is curry leaves. While we do find occasional references to dry spices such as coriander seed, turmeric, and small mustard seed in the inscriptions,¹⁰⁷ we do not find mention of fresh aromatic leaves. I suspect that these are

¹⁰¹ (Lakshmi and Ramakrishnan 2018). Note: the recipes given in this article in no way resemble the actual preparation of Kanchipuram idli cooked at the Varadaraja Perumal temple, per my interview with Mrs. Rajeshwari, wife of Mr. Sampat Bhattar, head priest at Varadaraja Perumal, 16 May 2015.

¹⁰² Per my interview with Mrs. Rajeshwari, 16 May 2015.

¹⁰³ Breckenridge describes *manoharam* as “a sweet, round ball of green and Bengal gram roasted (sic, fried) in ghee and rolled in a sugar syrup,” (p. 39) but earlier wrote that *manoharam* was “a pretzel-like sweet” (p. 35) that she footnotes with “Some speculate that this is the antecedent to the now famous sweet called laddu which is distributed at the temple today” (Breckenridge 1986, p. 48, footnote 24). Not only do her definitions disagree with each other, but the inscriptions give no actual indication that the sweet would have been ball- or pretzel-shaped; see Inscription #134 of (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998, pp. 243–47, Vol. 4, line 6 and surrounding). There is no way to determine the shape based on historical evidence. Further, this does not quite agree with the epigraphers’ (slightly confused) equation of modern *manohara-paṭi* (sic, appears in inscriptions as *manokara*) with *tirukkaṇāmaṭai*, which they describe as a kind of cake/cake offering (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998, p. v, Vol. 4), which also disagrees with the general consensus for the modern period that *manohara* is a ball-shaped sweet with puffed rice very different from *kaṇṇamaṭai*.

¹⁰⁴ Inscription #38 (1535 CE), line 3 of (Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry 1998, p. 76, Vol. 4): “For twelve *ittali-p-paṭis* (one *paṭi* offering for each of the festival days): 1 *vaṭṭi* and 4 *marakkāl* of rice measured with the Tirumalai measure, 12 *marakkāl* of black gram, and 12 *nālī* and 1 *uri* of ghee.” This seems like a lot of ghee, although the actual Kanchipuram recipe for Kanchi idli (which is not as it is presently cooked) calls for ghee as well (per my interview with Mrs. Rajeshwari, 16 May 2015).

¹⁰⁵ Inscription #43, lines 3–4 and surrounding, (Archaeological Survey of India 1986, pp. 35–36, Vol. 30). Lady Amāṭṭan Sivaṇaimūlutaḍaiyāl gifted *piṭṭu* for Lord Murukan in 1237 CE (around the twenty-ninth year of Viṣṇuvarāha’s rule) in Tirumurugaṇpūṇṭi: “For the holy *paṇṇiyārāppam* for the *piṭṭu* *amutu* offering, given each Sunday, 4 *nālīs* of rice, 1 coconut, 1 *uri* of dal, and 6 *palams* of jaggery cubes (*karuppu-k-kattī*).” The inscription also seems to list a small quantity (*kāṇa*) of salt (a half *piṭi* [handful]): “*piṭṭamutukku tiruppaṇṇiyārāppattukku arici nānāliyum teṇkāy onṛum* (sic) *paruppuruyiṇ karuppuṇṇakattiyāraip palamum kāna upporuppiṭṭu araipiti...*”

¹⁰⁶ *Mānasollāsa* (1131 CE) idli recipe at v. 1397cd-1401 (Someśvara III 1961, pp. 127–28, Part 2).

¹⁰⁷ Inscription #17, Vol. 21 of (Archaeological Survey of India 1939, pp. 109–10). Located in the Subramanya temple on the first slab, first face, in Tiruchchendūr village, Tinnevely district, this carving lists the five spices as pepper, turmeric, cumin, small mustard, and coriander. K. V. Subrahmanya Aiyar discusses the dry spices as *kāyam* (a Tamilized word from Skt. *kaśāra*, Prakritized as *khāra* and also Tamilized as *kāram*) on p. 102 and cites similar Tamil words with semivocalic shifts of *ra* and *ya*, i.e., we see both *peruṇkāram* and *peruṇkāyam* for asafetida, and *veṇkāram* and *veṇkāyam* for onion. Lines 41–43: *kāyam miḷa[kamitu] maṇjaḷ amitu cīraka amitu ciṇu kaṭukamitu kottamba[ri amitu] ēṇri-kkāyam aintu*. While *kottampari/kottamalli* is

simply left out of the inscriptions because their acquisition did not involve an exchange of values in the temple treasury and storehouse, through which raw materials such as paddy and ingredients and dry grains like ghee or urad dal would be accessed. Epigraphic references abound to *nantavaṇams* on site at temple complexes. These gardens were intended to grow flowers to offer to and garland gods; they also included orchard trees, according to the inscriptional evidence.¹⁰⁸ I suspect fresh greens would have been obtained directly—when available—from these temple gardens, so there was no need to endow funds to secure a regular supply of green produce such as curry leaves. If this is the case, it could be hard to isolate what might be missing from these recipes. Taking a small amount of leaves from the temple garden would not require an attentive transfer of funds for food from the treasury and would hence not be recorded in the inscription. Only spices that were not available in the immediate locale, however, would appear in the inscriptional record, as happens with salt, even if coming from a relatively nearby salt field. Spices' storage at the temple *paṇṭāram* (*bhāṇḍāram*) would necessitate accounting for how much to dole out in exchange for a certain value taken from the donation's interest.

A similar phenomenon might be at work with some vegetable items that could potentially have been procured on site from the temple *nantavaṇam* as well. We do find explicit mention of vegetables in some inscriptions,¹⁰⁹ but in many inscriptional recipes, vegetables seem absent where one would expect them.¹¹⁰ In these cases, inscriptions list a total amount of paddy required for a number of offerings, and it is unclear if this is meant to be exchanged for fresh vegetables at market, if a gross total value was listed in paddy for *all* goods required in cooking the offerings (as is sometimes evident from the text), or if the vegetables might not also have been obtained from the temple garden. One recipe for a vegetable offering (*kāykkari amutu*) in an inscription dated ca. 1013 calls for one and a half *ceviṭu* of pepper and three *ceviṭu* of mustard seed, explicitly lists no amount of vegetable, but does list a bulk amount of paddy and salt required in common among a number of *amutu* dishes.¹¹¹ In other instances, whether vegetables are actually involved remains uncertain: when a dish is called *kariyamutu*, it might or might not actually have a vegetable, although one suspects that it would. But in this case of the *kāykkari amutu*, the name explicitly indicates vegetables. This same ca. 1013 inscription details a *porikkari amutu* (fried curry or fried vegetable offering) and only lists the amount of ghee required, three *ceviṭu*, without indicating the vegetable quantity. Salt and paddy requirements are shared among all offerings, so again, one cannot be sure if the paddy amount refers to a value that could be used to procure fresh vegetables or if the vegetables simply came from the temple garden.

Less of a mystery—although perhaps surprising to some considering the implicit hierarchy of god over earthly kings—is the absence of very spiced, flavored, and contrived dishes that we find in royal culinary manuals of the same period.¹¹² The multi-step elaboration in royal recipes is not present in

usually reserved in modern usage for the coriander/cilantro leaf, since this inscription refers to spices purchased for temple use, logic suggests that it must refer to the dried seed.

¹⁰⁸ Inscriptions discuss the gardens' expansion, caretakers, tree planting, and more, for example in Vol. 3, Inscription #302, (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1986).

¹⁰⁹ As in Vol. 21, inscription #17, (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1939), discussed just above. Also in Vol. 1, inscription #207 (in the Tirumalai temple, 1434 CE), (*Vijayaraghavacharya and Sastry* 1998, p. 209), around line 37. The vegetables are included in the *paruppuviyal tiruppōṇakam*, a boiled dal offering, to me resembling modern aviyal, to Breckenridge resembling sundal, (*Breckenridge* 1986, p. 40), in spite of the addition of vegetables in the inscription.

¹¹⁰ We see the vegetables specified in a recipe for *kari amutu* (vegetable offering). Inscription #2 (discussed earlier), appendix to Vol. 32, line 5, (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1986, p. 388). Corresponds to the twenty-third year of Parakesarivarman's (Parāntakan I)'s rule, i.e., 930 CE. Located on the *jagati* (south), in the central shrine of the Chandrasēkhara temple, Tiruccenturai, Trichy taluk, in Trichy district, describing offerings to be made to the god at Īśānamānkālam, on the occasion of the first feeding of Bhūti Parāntakan's son: "for this, three times a day, 6 *nālis* of paddy [are required], and for the vegetables given three times a day, 6 *nālis* of paddy, and for the spices, salt, and tamarind, 3 *nālis* of paddy [value is required]." . . . *kariyamutu potu munrukku nel aru nāliyum kāyattukkum uppukkum pulikkum nel munṇāliyum* . . .

¹¹¹ Vol. 2 Parts 1 & 2, inscription #26, (*Archaeological Survey of India* 1986, p. 127). This is the inscription with the *appakkāy* recipe discussed earlier.

¹¹² Cf. recipes in (*Someśvara III* 1961) and (*Mahārājanala* 1983). Examples of contrived elaborations include adding flowers to perfume a dish and removing them before service, fumigating dishes, chopping vegetables and other ingredients all to the same size as the rice for the *trompe l'oeil* effect that the whole dish consists of rice alone, and disguising meat dishes in the shape of vegetables to trick the diners.

temple recipes, confirming that religious cuisine stands in contrast to royal cuisine as a distinct culinary mode. Royal food is, indeed, regal in a way that temple food is not.¹¹³ Food for god is still costly in the processed, refined quality of its ingredients even before it becomes transvalued following consumption by the god, whereafter it becomes *prasād*.¹¹⁴ Food for god secondarily is distinguished in value by the quantities offered, the vastness of the donative offering, and the number of dishes, in some cases. Nonetheless, temple food remains closer to the spectrum's end of humble cuisine rather than high cuisine (Laudan 2013, p. 2 & p. 7), and was often served to large numbers of temple workers, foremost among which were the priests, of course. Because they represent humble cuisine, examining these precious temple recipes offers us insight into the common person's diet, or at least more information concerning the diets and gustatory experiences of a broader population base than we may otherwise glimpse.

13. Conclusion: Carving Out a Place for Culinary Textual Studies Using Medieval Cōla Epigraphy

My case studies have illustrated key facets of medieval Hindu ritual offerings and have traced a historical development of *naivedya* as one component (*upacāra*) of *pūjā* from its basic form of white rice (*śuddhānnam*) through increasingly elaborate offerings, meals, and delicacies for god. *Ponakam*, the term for any basic cooked offering, was the original palimpsest for the dish (and eponymous festival) *ponikal*. *Ponakam* also appeared in variants offerings of cooked milk, cooked dals, and more, and its prominence in *naivedya* led to its later usage in the sense of the full meal served to god, the *alaṅkāra naivedya*. From the inscriptions, I have also been able to equate *kaṇṇāmutu*, a sweet offering still given to Viṣṇu today, with the Cōla offering of *kaṇṇamaṭai*. Further, a recipe for *appam* from one of the most important sites of temple worship past and present—Srirangam—illustrates to us that medieval taste was different from ours today, but also confirms the traditional Hindu principle that *appam* / *apūpam* was intended as a special delicacy for rare festival occasions and not an everyday food. Examining some sour recipes allows us to explore another aspect of South Indian taste: the preference for acidic, tangy, and fermented flavors (like tamarind or very sour yogurt) that persisted from the early *caṅkam* period up to the present day. Valuable recipes for *akkāra aṭicil* prove that foods mentioned in “non-historical” sources (narrative, epic, and rhetorical writing, as well as in devout religious poetry) existed in actual historical practice. This finding suggests that many other genres of writing do contain historical content on material culture worth the historian's examination today.

Through my survey of the temple epigraphic record, I have shown that premodern Tamil recipes did not follow the same formula as recipes familiar to us today, but that they are recipes nonetheless. The inscriptions are in themselves artifacts both textual and physical, and merit our study in that they allow access to other historical artifacts otherwise impossible to experience: the intangible cultural heritage of cooked dishes and culinary practices of the past. The inscribed recipes' level of detail confirms that the intricacies of food preparation *really mattered* to devotees because they cared about feeding gods well just as they would care about feeding their family well. Understood from the medieval perspective, *naivedya* offerings fed the actual bodies of these temple gods. Food for god should not be approached using a Western or rationalist framework but rather using the theological framework of the day.

Historicizing these practices within their contextual moment using the preceding and contemporaneous textual sources allows us to explore and theorize steps in the development of the *naivedya* and *prasād* system that today is *so integral* to temple practice. When we observe historically and textually situated notions and practices within the culture itself, we can frame the development of this religious practice from within and from preceding religious practices rather than making claims

¹¹³ Similarly, Indian temple perfume recipes are notably simpler in formula than their royal (and other) counterparts, per my communication with James Mchugh, July 2018.

¹¹⁴ For the idea of transvalued food, see (Breckenridge 1986, p. 37).

about its development that read backward from later practice. This historical archive also allows us to explore the role of sugar in Hindu religious practice, doubly illuminating when seen in light of scholarship on the history, anthropology, and sociology of sugar elsewhere in the world (Mintz 1985). It is also worth taking pause to discuss this important foodstuff in Hindu offerings given sugar's prominence in other world religions' histories.

Finally, the diachronic examination of textual descriptions of *naivedya* suggests that the Cōla period was instrumental in the institutionalization of more complex offering practices in temples. The Cōla-era effluence of inscription writing was also pivotal in the creation of novel forms of culinary writing as recipes written in stone and initiated a more widespread practice of recipe writing adopted in Vijayanagara-period epigraphy. This indicates that, as with the strong Cōla patronage of infrastructure, temple art, and religious culture, Cōla-period patronage allowed culinary culture to flourish during this time period when religious culinary practices and culinary writing thrived.

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