



Temple Guardians and ‘Folk Hinduism’ in Tamil South India: A Bronze Image of the ‘Black God’ Karuppannasamy in the Rijksmuseum

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Unlike typical Tamil manifestations of ‘orthodox’ Hindu gods, such as Natarāja and Somāskanda, representatives of Tamil folk Hinduism are studied surprisingly rarely. Several anthropological publications provide an overview of the cult itself and the roles the folk deities fulfil in the village community, but their iconography is not usually discussed in depth. Furthermore, metal images of village deities are rare – most are made of clay or stone – and very few of them date from before the beginning of the twentieth century.

In October 2013 the Rijksmuseum acquired a metal sculpture of a Tamil folk deity, presumably Karuppannasamy, for its collection of Indian art. The Amsterdam art dealer Jaap Polak donated the image, which may date back to the eighteenth century, to the Society of Friends of Asian Art (Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst, whose collection is on long-term loan to the Rijksmuseum) on the occasion of the Society’s ninety-fifth anniversary. The present study, carried out in part in temples and museums in south-east India, addresses the problems encountered in identifying this Rijksmuseum sculpture and those of other Tamil village deities, and attempts to shed light on the original function of this intriguing statue.

Fig. 1
Karuppannasamy,
Tamil Nadu,
c. 1750–1800.
Copper alloy, h. 14 cm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. AK-MAK-1736;
on loan from the
Vereniging van
Vrienden der
Aziatische Kunst.

The Problems of Identification

The sculpture depicts a self-assured young man (fig. 1). He has a pleasant face, with large almond-shaped eyes, a sharp nose and a moustache; his long hair is gathered in a bun on the side of his head. If one looks closely, one can make out a small vertical stripe and two thin diagonal lines on his forehead,¹ which should presumably be interpreted as the *vaiṣṇava nāman*, the mark applied to the forehead by followers of Viṣṇu. The youth stands in an elegant pose, with his right leg slightly bent at the knee and a twist to the hips, which animates this otherwise static figure. In his raised right hand he holds a large billhook or sickle (Tam. *aruvā*||*arivā*),² a characteristic tool of Tamil farmers; his left hand rests on a long staff. He wears several pieces of jewellery, including heavy earrings and a large round pendant, while an ornamental knife with the handle in the form of a parakeet is attached to the broad sash wrapped around his hips.

It is often difficult to correctly identify a folk deity when the original context of the image has been lost. Members of the Hindu divine pantheon are generally identified by the objects and animals associated with them. These, along with the poses and hand gestures deemed appropriate for a given deity, are laid out in the technical



Fig. 2
Karuppannasamy,
Ayyanārcuvāmi-
Karuppanācuvāmi-
Poṇ-Muniyānticuvāmi
Tirukkovi! (Madurai).
Photo:
Anna A. Ślaczka.

manuals on art and image-making (the *śilpa*- and *vāstuśāstras*) and are easily recognizable by every Hindu.³ One of the problems encountered in the study of Tamil folk religion is that the myths, cult practices and, indeed, iconography, are not fixed, but vary from village to village. The reason for this diversity might be the lack of written sources. Unlike the pan-Indian, 'orthodox' gods, the adventures of folk deities are not included in Sanskrit literary texts, and their iconography is not discussed in the *śilpaśāstras*. Stories of local gods, demons and deified heroes, which often provide an explanation for the presence of a particular attribute, are handed down exclusively through oral

tradition, sometimes in the form of ballads or folk theatre in vernacular languages (in this case in Tamil), which may be transformed at every staging.

There are several rural Tamil deities and heroes whose representations resemble the young man of the Rijksmuseum sculpture. Most popular among them is Karuppar or Karuppannasamy (Tam. *Karuppannacāmi*).⁴ He can be portrayed in a number of different ways, but in his predominant form he stands upright, holding the billhook on the right and the club on the left, while a short knife or dagger hangs from his belt. The hair gathered in a side-bun and the *vaiṣṇava* mark on the forehead, the latter clearly visible on painted statues, are also characteristic of Karuppannasamy (fig. 2).⁵ His body colour is dark blue.⁶

But Karuppar is not the only one endowed with these features. A large sculpture in the Vekkāliyammaṅ Temple in Uraiyur, now a suburb of Trichy (Tiruchirappalli), depicts a man holding a raised billhook on his right, while his left hand rests on a club.⁷ His hair is gathered in a bun on the side of his head and he wears the *vaiṣṇava nāman*. What is more, he is accompanied by a tiger, the animal sometimes associated with Karuppannasamy.⁸ Nevertheless, the label in Tamil script above the image and the temple's explanatory video identifies the man as 'Periyaṅṅaṅ', another deified hero in Tamil folklore.⁹ Karupparāyar, a god sometimes assimilated to Aiyāṅār, sometimes to Karuppannasamy, also holds a club and an *aruvāl*. Unlike Karuppar, he wears the *śaiva* markings on his forehead, but these might not be visible on some images.¹⁰ This demonstrates how difficult it is to ascribe a correct name to an isolated statue whose context can no longer be reconstructed.

The history of the Rijksmuseum sculpture as it is known to us goes back quite a long way, to 1954, when it was published in the catalogue of the

Algemene Ethnographica- en Kunsthandel Aalderink gallery in Amsterdam.¹¹ A provenance stretching back over half a century is certainly noteworthy. Despite this, the crucial information about when it was brought to the Netherlands and where it came from has proved impossible to obtain to date. Although the identification of the young man as Karuppannasamy can be assumed from the combination of the physical appearance and the attributes, the statue displays some unusual features. The long object supporting the man's left hand is not perfectly circular in diameter, but slightly flattened, and lacks the round or oval thickening frequently seen at the bottom of the club or staff held by Tamil deities. The only other figure endowed with a similar weapon is the small metal Karuppannasamy in the Chennai Government Museum where it is even thinner and almost stick-like.¹² The beautifully modelled ornamental knife with the handle in the form of a parakeet is also unique. Admittedly most images of Karuppar are worshipped and are difficult to study because of restrictions on photography and even on approaching the deities, and because the statues are adorned with flowers and draperies that conceal the body, mainly around the waist. Clay and terracotta figures, often used in temples of Karuppannasamy, also have to be replaced regularly, with older and damaged images often discarded. The clay statues seen in temples nowadays are therefore never very old. Still, neither Karuppannasamy, nor any South Indian bronze sculpture, of which numerous examples are on display in museums worldwide, seem to be armed with such a knife. Considering its size and the care with which it has been executed, making it one of the sculpture's most prominent features, it would be tempting to interpret the bird as more than just an ornament. And yet, there is no myth that links Karuppannasamy with a parakeet.

The bird does, however, figure in folktales surrounding another Tamil deified hero, Kāttavarāyaṇ, and is sometimes present in his iconography. A statue in the Kāmākṣī Temple in Kuttur shows Kāttavarāyaṇ with a raised billhook, instead of the more common sword or knife, on the right, and with a parakeet perched on his arm.¹³ The hairstyle, pose and overall martial appearance of the figure are also similar to the Rijksmuseum sculpture. Furthermore, the deity's left hand rests on top of the bridge of a *kiṇṇāram*, a musical instrument, whose shape resembles the object held by the Rijksmuseum statue to the extent that, at first sight, it could be mistaken for it. Only a closer look reveals the three round resonators attached to it at the back.

Considering the chiefly ornamental function of the parakeet and the lack of (traces of) the resonance gourds on the staff, the interpretation of the Rijksmuseum sculpture as Kāttavarāyaṇ, would appear to be a little far-fetched, despite the strong similarities. Periyannaṅ's usual attributes are a spear (right) and a club (left), so his sculpture in Uraiyur is unusual.¹⁴ The earlier proposed identification as Karuppannasamy consequently seems more plausible, although a small doubt will always remain.

Who is He?

Myths and Origin

Karuppannasamy, literally 'the black elder brother god', is a regional deity, primarily worshipped in central southern districts of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, especially in the area of Madurai and Trichy.¹⁵ But his shrines are also found in other areas with a high Tamil population, even outside India, for instance in Malaysia and Singapore. His name has a number of variations, including Karuppusamy, Karuppar, Karuppu, and several others.¹⁶ Some of them may indicate

differences in iconography. Cappāṇi Karuppar, for instance, is often depicted kneeling, while Cankili Karuppar is, predictably, tied with a chain (Tam. *cānkili*).¹⁷ Periya and Ciṅṅa Karuppu (Big and Small Karuppu) and Muttu Karuppu (Karuppu of Pearls), on the other hand, are often impossible to tell apart if not for the labels provided (fig. 3). In addition, the god might be represented in an aniconic form by a stone, termite hill or, more commonly, by an empty space on top of a flight of eighteen steps, recalling a local story.¹⁸ In fact, quoting Dumont, 'more than an individual god, Karuppu is clearly a category of gods, each one particularized'.¹⁹

This diversity is also seen in Karuppar's mythology: a universal myth does not seem to exist and the majority of stories are local ones, linking the god to a particular place

or temple.²⁰ Such is the tale of Paṭiṇēṭṭāmpaṭi Karuppar, 'the Karuppar of the eighteen steps'. Here Karuppar is the leader of the eighteen magicians who arrived from Kerala to steal valuables from the famous Viṣṇu temple in Alagar Koyil (near Madurai). The attempt failed, the magicians were discovered and killed, and their bodies buried under the steps leading into the temple. Karuppar managed to escape but only to be caught by Tirumala Nayaka (r. 1623-59), the king of Madurai, who spared his life, but in return made him the treasurer of Alakar, the form of Viṣṇu residing in the temple.²¹ Several important strands presented here reappear in other tales: robbery and protection from it, Kerala as the place of the origin of the deity, and the local rulers.²² Recently, some attempts were made to assimilate Karuppar into the orthodox tradition, for instance by

Fig. 3
Ciṅṅa Karuppuccāmi
and Muttu
Karuppuccāmi
(the two largest
figures), Aiyaṅār-
Karuppanasamy
Temple, Melakkal
(Madurai District).
Photo:
Anna A. Ślaczka.



making him part of the Hindu epos *Rāmāyaṇa* – evidence that his cult is a dynamic one and still evolving.²³

Despite a number of primarily anthropological studies in which Karuppar is discussed, there is still a lot to be learned about his origins and worship. Unlike Aiyāṇār, a very popular Tamil deity already known at the time of the Pallavas (seventh to ninth centuries AD), the beginning of Karuppar's cult remains a mystery.²⁴ An interesting hypothesis presented by E. Kent traces the origin of Karuppar to the community of the Kaḷḷars in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Tamil Nadu.²⁵ She stresses the similarity in costume and hairstyle of many Tamil deities, especially Maturai Vīraṇ, Kāttavarāyaṇ and Karuppannasamy, to those used in that period and she notes the presence of local rulers, particularly the Nayakas, in their mythology. The Nayakas ruled South India roughly between the mid-sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries from their centres in Gingee, Thanjavur and Madurai, but in some regions their rule was largely nominal. The relative decentralization of power in South India during that period resulted in local chieftains, known in historiography as poligars (Tam. *pālaiyakkārar*) or 'little kings', gaining considerable autonomy. In the area of Madurai, the poligars were usually drawn from the Kaḷḷars (Ambalakkarars), a martial caste that in the past fulfilled the role of 'village watchmen', responsible for protecting the inhabitants from thieves and cattle-raiders, overseeing harvesting and maintaining law and order. Kent proposes that the fierce forestdwelling hero deities were modelled on these poligars in the same way as 'the gods and goddesses who reside in the grand temples of Chidambaram and Madurai were modeled after premodern kings and queens'.²⁶ She stresses that it is not only these gods' costumes and myths that recall the Nayaka era, but also their function as protectors of villages

(and of deities standing 'higher' in the hierarchy; see below), brings to mind the tasks assigned by the Nayakas to the 'little kings'. Horses and weapons, in turn recurring motifs in their iconography, emphasize their warrior-like royal origins.²⁷ No images, iconographic features or other records of the Karuppannasamy cult predate the Nayaka period. The hypothesis presented by Kent therefore seems plausible. In support of her theory, it is interesting to add that *pālaiyakkārar* was the term used around 1700 in reference to the attendant deities in temples of Aiyāṇār (among which Karuppannasamy is the most prominent).²⁸ It is, of course, perfectly possible that Karuppar was worshipped in certain martial communities even before that and only gained popularity in the Nayaka era, but thus far there is no evidence for this.

The Kaḷḷars still retain strong links with Karuppar, who is considered their clan god (Skt. *kuladevatā*), and are often in charge of his temples.²⁹ Another community associated with Karuppar are the Vēḷārs (potters), who make the brightly painted terracotta figures of the god and his animal companions, horses and dogs, presented as votive offerings to the temples.³⁰ On the other hand, priests of rural deities can be of any caste³¹ and some of Karuppar's abodes are maintained by Vēḷḷārs³² and even by Dalits (the untouchables),³³ while the priests of the Paṭiṇēṭṭāmpaṭi Karuppar in Alagar Koyil are Brahmins (this being an exception).

Temples and Representations

Karuppannasamy belongs to the so-called 'fierce deities', whose abodes were traditionally situated on the village outskirts, sometimes right in the 'wilderness'. The opposition and tension between the *ūr*, 'the inhabited settled centre of a community' and the *kāṭu*, 'the wild, forbidding, but necessary forest that encompass it',³⁴ and their respective deities, is a complex

topic that has been discussed by several scholars of Tamil folk religion. The gods of the *kātu* are generally considered too dangerous and unpredictable to reside in the village, and they also seem to be disturbed by the sounds of village life.³⁵ Originally, the statues of fierce deities stood in the open air with no permanently built structures or visible boundaries around the sacred area. Nowadays many such shrines, together with the groves that once surrounded them, have been swallowed by the ever-expanding urban settlements, and assume the appearance of 'common' South Indian Hindu temples, together with a multitude of shrines, with a surrounding wall and a tower-like gateway (Skt. *gopura*).³⁶

Karuppannasamy's main function is protection – of other deities and, in a broader sense, of the entire village and its inhabitants. He is the treasurer of Viṣṇu in his famous sanctuary in Alagar Koyil (see above) and the guardian (Tam. *kāval tevyam*) and helper of Aiyaṅār³⁷ and of various local goddesses, such as Māriyamman.³⁸ Karuppar's idols are installed in separate shrines incorporated into Aiyaṅār's or goddesses' temple complexes. In the first case, they are located to the side of the main entrance and face a different direction from that of Aiyaṅār's principal shrine. Occasionally, Karuppar can function as the main deity and have his own temples.³⁹

Karuppannasamy is usually excluded from sanctuaries of pan-Indian Hindu deities, but exceptions, as in Alagar Koyil, do exist. In the Śiva temple at Kunnandarkoil a large sculpture of the god stands against one of the pillars of the hall,⁴⁰ and both the ancient temple of Murugan (Skanda) in Tirupparankunram and the Śrī Vayiravar (Bhairava, a ferocious form of Śiva) in Vairavanpatti have small shrines dedicated to him.⁴¹ In Kutralam near Tirunelveli, the 'Karuppar of the eighteen steps' guards the northern entrance to the

Śiva temple.⁴² It should be stressed that although Karuppannasamy is often the 'bodyguard' of the principal deity and therefore subordinate to him or her, in practice he is often considered more important and very effective in granting devotees' wishes.⁴³

As a rule, Karuppar's temples and shrines house several images that represent his various forms. Unlike Aiyaṅār, who has two wives, Karuppannasamy is a bachelor and is therefore depicted without consorts.⁴⁴ If there are images of females in his shrines, they are usually interpreted as his 'sisters'.⁴⁵ The principal image, installed in the main shrine, is made of stone and shows the god standing erect and armed with the billhook and the staff. Additional images, often made of terracotta and painted in bright colours, might be placed outside the shrine. The most imposing among them, the life-size statues of Karuppannasamy on horseback, greet the visitor at the entrance to the temple. Karuppannasamy is believed to patrol the fields at night with Aiyaṅār, so needs horses. Votive figures of horses are presented by the devotees and rows of them are frequently seen aligned along the temple wall.

Even though he is a guardian, Karuppannasamy is a dangerous deity, unpredictable and short-tempered. Even the involuntary breaking of the taboos surrounding the shrine may result in a severe punishment for the careless devotee or a passer-by. Karuppu's diet mirrors his character, as he may receive blood sacrifices, mainly chickens and goats.⁴⁶

The Search for Metal Images

Images of folk deities are commonly made of stone or clay. In the case of pan-Indian gods, stone sculptures are permanently installed in the main sanctum (Skt. *garbhagrha*), while bronze or copper idols serve almost exclusively as processional images during temple festivals or are used in

personal worship at the home altar. Village temples do not always have the means to commission a bronze statue.⁴⁷ Moreover, during a folk festival the deity might be represented in other ways: by pots filled with water or milk or by 'god-dancers' (Tam. *cāmiyāṭi*), people ritually possessed by a deity.⁴⁸

If employed at all, processional images of village deities tend to be of clay or wood.⁴⁹ As far as personal worship is concerned, Karuppannasamy is considered too dangerous to be worshipped at home.⁵⁰ Only his priests and those having special links with him may keep his image near the house, usually in the yard, and never in the prayer (Skt. *pūjā*) room with other gods.⁵¹

Metal images of Karuppannasamy are thus extremely rare and, to my knowledge, have not been mentioned in previous studies of Tamil folk deities.⁵² A search in museums and temples of Tamil Nadu turned up only a few images like these. The Chennai Government Museum has seven metal statuettes of Karuppannasamy from around 1800, one of which carries the billhook and the staff.⁵³ Their execution, however, is rather crude and differs greatly from that of the Amsterdam image. The same can be said of the seventeenth-century British Museum 'male warrior', presumably Karuppannasamy, holding similar weapons (fig. 4),⁵⁴ and of the three 'village deities' in the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena.⁵⁵

Between 1956 and the present day, the Institut Français de Pondichéry (French Institute of Pondicherry, IFP) has conducted an intensive survey of Tamil temples and images still used for worship resulting in an impressive archive of more than 160,000 photographs. The archive contains a number of entries labelled 'Karuppannasamy' or a variant of it, fifteen of which relate to metal statues, yet hardly any of them resemble the image in the Rijksmuseum.⁵⁶ Most carry a sword and a



shield, attributes more commonly associated with other folk heroes, especially Maturai Viṛaṇ.⁵⁷ Others hold unidentified objects or no objects at all. One deity, with a sword and a club, is accompanied by a female figure described as Karuppiyamman, whose presence close to the bachelor god is unusual.⁵⁸ It is remarkable that only two photographs show deities armed with the *aruvāl* and the staff.⁵⁹

Fig. 4
Male Warrior, Tamil Nadu, 17th century. Bronze, h. 16.5 cm. London, British Museum, reg. no. 1998,0616.23.



Fig. 5
Karuppannasamy,
Aiyṅār-Temple,
Kovil Esanai
(Trichy District).
Photo: Courtesy of
the Institut Français
de Pondichéry,
IFP 02244.09.

The archive does not contain any information about the way the identification of the sculptures with Karuppannasamy was established, but it is possible that local priests told the photographers. In an attempt to verify it, and to understand the ritual use of metal sculptures of folk deities, I visited three of the temples which, according to IFP records, housed bronze and copper statues of Karuppannasamy between 1961 and 1963. The temples are located in remote villages of Periya Tirukkonam, Telur and Kovil Esanai in the Trichy District. In two cases the priests and devotees did not recognize the statues. The temples in question are dedicated to Śiva and the village inhabitants expressed surprise that an image of a folk deity would be kept there.⁶⁰ In the Aiyṅār temple in Kovil Esanai, however, there was an immediate response to the photograph taken in 1961: the statue was still in the temple's

possession, and I was allowed to see it after the necessary permissions were granted. It is a large sculpture, about forty centimetres tall including the pedestal and the halo, which presumably is detachable (fig. 5). It depicts a fierce warrior holding a billhook in his raised right hand and with his left hand leaning on a staff – the 'classical' Karuppannasamy attributes. According to the priest, the image is always kept in storage and is only brought outside for important festivals, when it is carried in procession.⁶¹ Ascribing a date to this interesting statue is difficult, but it could have been made somewhere in the late eighteenth or perhaps early nineteenth century.⁶²

Of the thirteen other temples and shrines of Karuppannasamy visited in February 2014 and 2015 only one, in Rangiem (in the region of Chettinad, Pudukottai District), housed a metal statue of the god. It was a modern bronze of rather large dimensions (about eighty centimetres tall) that functioned as a festival image.⁶³ None of the remaining temples housed a metal sculpture, and according to the priests no such images had ever been in use.⁶⁴ It is difficult to tell how exceptional the situation in Rangiem really is: located in the heart of Chettinad and patronized by the wealthy Chettiyars, traditionally a caste of merchants and bankers, the temple would probably be in a position to afford such a sculpture; furthermore, it could, for the same reason, undergo 'gentrification' and adopt some aspects of orthodox Hinduism, including the use of bronze and copper images in festivals as occurred in other South Indian temples.⁶⁵ Compared to terracotta or wooden idols (stone sculptures are not carried in procession for practical reasons), metal images last longer, so pragmatic aspects may also play a role here.

Contemporary bronze sculptures are produced in the region around Kumbakonam, famous for its casters

who employ traditional methods and supply processional images for orthodox Hindu temples in India and abroad. The casters reported that images of Karuppar are occasionally commissioned as well, almost exclusively by his priests, and are intended for personal worship.⁶⁶ These would be installed in gardens or, in the case of very small statues, always carried by the owner.⁶⁷ It is difficult to tell, however, if these practices are old or were introduced recently.

Date of the Rijksmuseum Sculpture

It is never easy to assign a date to a sculpture when it does not seem to fit into any established category and no similar examples can be found. It is a common problem in the study of ethnographic artefacts, where every workshop might have developed its own style. Moreover, folk tradition is often regarded as less sophisticated, and images of rural deities are only rarely encountered in museums.

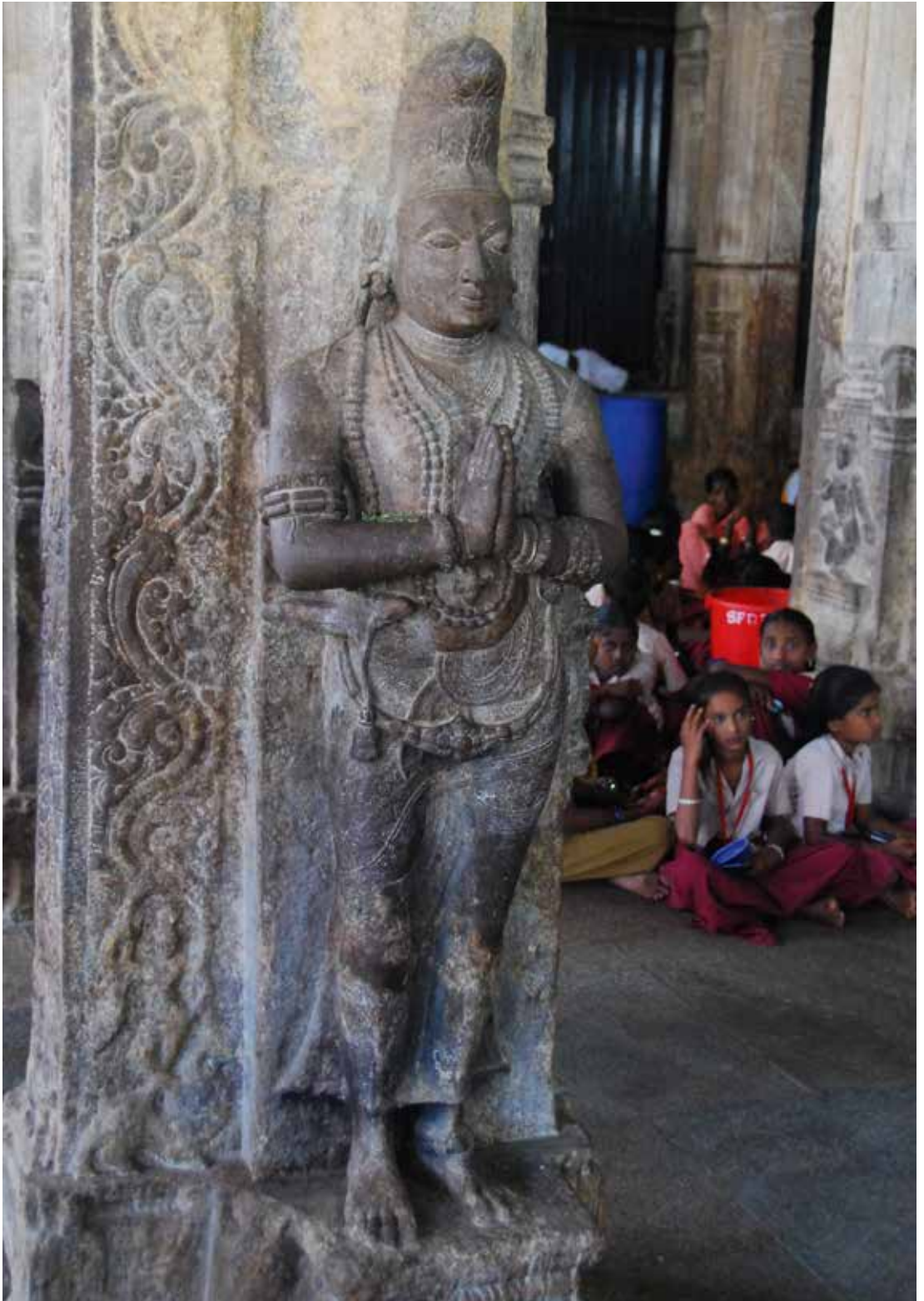
The Rijksmuseum statue, although depicting a local hero-deity, can hardly be classified as 'folk art', however. The sculpture is unique in being of higher artistic quality than other such examples. The execution of details is superb and there are no elements typically associated with rural tradition, such as attenuated limbs and little 'knobs' used for decoration and for marking the knees, as seen, for example, on the aforementioned image in the British Museum. The workmanship of the fabric of the loincloth and the sash, and of the parakeet knife, is of particularly high quality, lacking the thick, deeply incised lines disfiguring some of the bronzes photographed by the IFF.⁶⁸

In terms of style, the young man's unmistakably martial appearance, the self-assured pose, his large eyes, deep profile and bristling moustache, as well as the hair gathered in a bun on the side of the head, are reminiscent

of Nayaka-period sculpture (mid-sixteenth to mid-eighteenth centuries). The same features, indeed, can be observed on the figures carved in high relief on columns in temples of this era, the most famous examples of which are located in central-southern Tamil Nadu. Commonly referred to as 'donor portraits', the reliefs depict a range of subjects: deities, characters from folk literature, guardian figures, kings and donors.⁶⁹ It has thus far not been possible to find a sculpture identical to the one in the Rijksmuseum. But it should be noted that several 'donor figures', for example in the great Raṅganāthasvāmi Temple in Srirangam, display the same round medallion, earrings and hairstyle (fig. 6). More importantly, two figures, one in the Raṅganāthasvāmi, another in the nearby Jambukeśvara Temple, carry a knife with the handle in the form of a parakeet (figs. 7-12).⁷⁰ The two sculptures are located in the temples' halls, which presumably date to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries AD.⁷¹ One of the

Fig. 6
Donor Portrait, Ranganāthasvāmi Temple, Srirangam (Trichy). Note the hair style with a side-bun, a ribbon (or perhaps the end of cloth used to keep the hair together) on the forehead and the earrings. Photo: Anna A. Ślaczka.







< Fig. 7
Donor Portrait,
Raṅganāthasvāmi
Temple, Srirangam
(Trichy).
Photo:
Anna A. Ślaczka.

Fig. 8
Parakeet knife,
detail of fig. 7.

Fig. 9
Detail of fig. 7.

Fig. 10
Detail of fig. 7.
Note the parakeet
on the headdress.

men, with large, almond-shaped eyes, raised eye-brows, a large nose and small but full lips curved in a half-smile, resembles the young man of the Rijksmuseum statue (fig. 9).

As we have seen, it is possible that the remarkable resemblance between some Tamil village deities and Nayaka-period warriors and noblemen has its roots in these deities' origins, for this was the era and the environment in which they were conceived or, in any case, gained importance. It has often been observed that craftsmen imitate earlier styles, especially those considered important or 'classical'. Contemporary Tamil images of orthodox Hindu deities, for example, are modelled on sculptures from the Chola period (ninth to fourteenth century), considered the apogee of





< Fig. 11
Donor Portrait,
Jambukeśvara Temple,
Srirangam (Trichy).
Photo:
Anna A. Ślaczka.

South Indian art.⁷² In the case of the Rijksmuseum statue, however, the Nayaka traits seem to be more than just an imitation and the similarities to the sculptures in the Srirangam temples are certainly meaningful. In terms of workmanship, the image more closely resembles some representations, in bronze, of the Tamil saints⁷³ than the Karuppannasamy images seen in

museums and photographed by the IFP.⁷⁴ I would like therefore to suggest that the statue was produced somewhere around the end of the Nayaka period or shortly afterwards, perhaps in the second part of the eighteenth century.⁷⁵ In light of the paucity of comparable statues and of scholarship on Nayaka-bronzes in general, however, this dating should be treated as tentative.⁷⁶

Function of the Rijksmuseum Sculpture

Nothing can be said with certainty about the likely purpose of the sculpture, but it can certainly be argued that the image was meant for personal worship in the way small Karuppar's statues are used nowadays.⁷⁷ At only fourteen centimetres tall, it was probably not intended as a festival image to be carried in procession.⁷⁸ It might, though, have been gifted to a temple as a votive offering. As I noted earlier, in the past copper and brass images of village deities were preserved in temples of Śiva. In fact, perhaps for the reasons set out above (that is to say village temples not having the means to commission and preserve such images), they seem more frequent in temples of pan-Indian gods, where they would not have played a part in a festival, than in those of village deities.⁷⁹ Little has been written about the use of such small-scale metal statues in temples in general, but their presence there, as early as the time of the Cholas, is recorded in inscriptions.⁸⁰ It should be noted that the majority of antique Karuppannasamy statues are of modest size, ranging from twelve to twenty-three centimetres in height.⁸¹ Why they were produced and how they were used is still a matter of conjecture. Despite previous studies of Tamil village deities, much work remains to be done, especially with regard to iconography and the use of metal sculptures in rituals, which stresses the uniqueness of the image in the Rijksmuseum collection.⁸²

Fig. 12
Parakeet knife,
detail of fig. 11.



NOTES

- 1 The diagonal lines are very thin and follow the outline of the eyebrows. Nevertheless, I propose that they are part of the *nāman*.
- 2 *Arivāl* is the official term, while *aruvāl* is more colloquial. Tamil words are designated Tam. and the transliteration follows the use of the *Tamil Lexicon*, Madras 1924-38. Sanskrit words are designated Skt. and follow the IAST (International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration) system.
- 3 These might vary slightly in images produced in different regions: in the South of India, for example, Śiva is frequently depicted holding a small deer, which never occurs in his North Indian representations. Nevertheless, even these variants are faultlessly recognized by the devotees.
- 4 When featuring names of deities (sometimes occurring as part of a temple name) for the first time, or when they are only sporadically used in the article, these are written according to the Tamil and Sanskrit transliteration rules in order to avoid confusion with other, seemingly similar words (for example: n, n̄ and ṅ are different letters in Tamil). When a name is used very frequently, such as Karuppannasamy, I will refrain from using the diacritical marks.
- 5 I based my search to find the best match for the Rijksmuseum sculpture on previous studies (lacking art historical research, mainly anthropological studies), on the 'invocation-songs' of Karuppannasamy, giving a fairly good description of his features (the songs are performed in temples in order to summon the god), such as 'Karuppucāmi Enka Karuppucāmi', *Tamil Folk Songs*, vol. 10, by Vijayalakshmi Navaneethakrishnan, Raakky Audio, Paravai (Madurai) 2005, and on my own observations of temples and sculptures of Tamil Nadu conducted in 2014 and 2015.
- 6 This is also the colour of Viṣṇu. According to some, Karuppannasamy is an *avatāra* (manifestation) or an 'aspect' of Viṣṇu. See E. Masilamani-Meyer, *Guardians of Tamilnadu: Folk Deities, Folk Religion, Hindu Themes*, Halle 2004, p. 99. In spite of this association, images of Karuppannasamy are not usually found in temples dedicated to Viṣṇu.
- 7 Uraiyur is also written as Woriyur.
- 8 Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 226 and H. Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India*, Calcutta 1921, p. 98. Sometimes the animal resembles a lion, these two being often equated in India (for instance in the iconography of the goddess Durgā). For Karuppannasamy with a lion see, for example, K. Gough, *Rural Society in South-East India*, Cambridge 1981, p. 163.
- 9 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNi8T6Z6HQw>, accessed on 31 July 2015; the image is mentioned after the eighth minute of the video. Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 25, refers to Periyaṅṅacāmi as a form of Karuppu, but this identification might only be valid for the temple she describes (Oṅtikkaruppu Temple, Irattaimalai near Trichy; Periyaṅṅacāmi, in general, has his own myths).
- 10 Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 226. The *śaiva* mark consists of three horizontal lines. A deity sometimes equated with him is Irāyar (Rāyar), worshipped chiefly in western Tamil Nadu, who is sometimes equipped with a sword instead of the billhook (Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 26-27). It should be added that these two attributes might look similar on some representations (and they are sometimes indeed substituted for each other) and are therefore difficult to distinguish on small, badly worn statues or photographs.
- 11 *Catalogus Aangeboden bij de Jubileum-Tentoonstelling van Oosterse Plastieken, Georganiseerd ter Gelegenheid van het 25-jarig Bestaan van de Algemene Ethnografica- en Kunsthandel Aalderink, Spiegelgracht 15, Amsterdam, 9 december 1954*, cat. no. 115 and fig. 12a.
- 12 F.H. Gravelly and T.N. Ramachandran, 'Catalogue of the South Indian Hindu Metal Images in the Madras Government Museum', *Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, New Series – General Section 1* (September 1932), pp. 17, 139 and pl. 23, fig. 14. Also published in P.R. Srinivasan, *Bronzes of South India, Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, New Series – General Section 8* (1994) [orig. pub. 1963], fig. 362, pl. 203.
- 13 Kuttur is located in the Thanjavur District. The figure is published in E. Masilamani-Meyer, 'The Changing Face of Kāttavarāyan', in A. Hildebeitel (ed.), *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, Albany 1989, pp. 69-104, fig. 2. For the myth of Kāttavarāyan, see Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), esp. pp. 78, 82; E. Masilamani-Meyer, *Kāttavarāyan Katakā: The Story of Kāttavarāyan: an Annotated Translation*,

- Wiesbaden 2004; and D.D. Shulman, 'Outcaste, Guardian and Trickster: Notes of the Myth of Kāttavarāyan', in Hildebeitel, op. cit. (this note), pp. 35-68, esp. pp. 44, 51. Both authors refer to the bird as a parrot. However, true parrots are not native to India and the bird in the story should probably be understood as a parakeet. K.V. Zvelebil, 'Some Tamil Folklore Texts: Muttupattān Katai, Kāttavarāyan Kataippātal, Paḷaiyaṇur Nīlī', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1989), pp. 290-303, also retells the myth of Kāttavarāyan, but the bird is not mentioned here.
- 14 Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 229.
- 15 Ibid., fig. 254, table 1. There are also temples dedicated to him in the region of Coimbatore and Salem.
- 16 Again, several writing variants can be found, also in Tamil script: Karuppannacāmy, Karuppucāmi, Karuppacāmi and others.
- 17 Tam. *cappāni*: lame. A metal statue in the Chennai Government Museum shows him standing, but leaning on a staff. Another statue depicts Caṅkili Karuppar holding one end of a chain which rests on the right shoulder; the left hand holds a vessel. See Gravely and Ramachandran, op. cit. (note 12), pl. 23, figs. 12, 15.
- 18 For Karuppannasamy in the form of a stone and termite hill, see Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 50. I address the myth of the eighteen steps later in this article.
- 19 L. Dumont, *A South Indian Subcaste: Social Organization and Religion of the Pramalai Kallar*, Oxford 1986, p. 441.
- 20 Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 22-23.
- 21 As related by E.F. Kent, *Sacred Groves and Local Gods: Religion and Environmentalism in South India*, Oxford 2013, p. 46. H. Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India*, Calcutta 1921, pp. 113-15 and Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 23-24, give a slightly different version of the story. Whitehead (p. 114) also mentions a 'huge image of Karuppan ... with enormous eyes as big as umbrellas' at the top of the flight of steps in Alagar Koyil, but it seems implausible (he is the only author to mention it, and the image was not there in February 2015 when I visited the temple). It should be added that according to some accounts, Alagar was originally a local deity or a deified warrior 'of a thief caste' (i.e. the Kaḷḷars), who was adopted into Hinduism; W.T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, Madras 1925, p. 84. Interestingly, eighteen steps also lead to the principal shrine of Aiyappaṇ (sometimes considered related to or even the same as Aiyāṇār) in Sabarimalai in Kerala, which shows how entangled the relationships between various local deities really are.
- 22 In the majority of the tales found in secondary literature, Karuppannasamy images reached a specific location (where, subsequently, his temple has been built), floating on the river from Kerala, a region considered the heart of black magic, see Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 23. One devotee, however, was convinced that the god came from Andhra Pradesh (Ben Meulenbeld, personal communication), see also note 23.
- 23 As, for instance, in the stories encountered in Tavattiru Cuvāmi Onkāranantā, *Karuppacāmi Oru Naṭamāṭum Teyvam* (Karuppasami: A Walking God), Chennai [2011], one of which makes Karuppar an adopted son of king-god Rāma and his wife Sitā, created from a leaf of a sacred *darbha*-grass or, in an alternative version, brought to life by the famous sage Vālmiki. Further on, the story speaks of a fire ordeal, where Rāma asks all his children to go through the fire, which turns the adopted child black (Tam. *karuppu*). Rāma makes him a guardian and endows him with special powers (pp. 7-8). On pp. 32-33 another story is told in which Karuppar, a watchman in the country of Rāma, gets involved in a fight with the monkey-god Hanumān and ends up bound with a powerful chain (which, subsequently, he breaks: an allusion to the Caṅkili Karuppar?). The book also refers to eight different views on the origin of Karuppannasamy (p. 5), one of them stating that the cult was brought from Kerala or from Bengal (but the author himself expresses doubts about the last). I would like to thank J.-L. Chevillard and S. Vijay Kumar for translating the text for me. Yet another 'Puranic' story of Karuppar was narrated to me by a devotee from Karaikudi (from a Chettiyar caste). Incorporating local tales into the all-India epic stories happens already at the village level, for instance during folk performances. See C. Maloney, 'Religious Beliefs and Social Hierarchy in Tamil Nadu, India', *American Ethnologist* vol. 2: *Intra-Cultural Variation* (1975), pp. 169-91, esp. p. 181.
- 24 As demonstrated by Aiyāṇār's sculptures from that period. See M.E. Adiceam, *Contribution à l'étude d'Aiyāṇār-Śāstā*, Pondicherry 1967 and S.L. Huntington, 'Iconographic Reflections on the Arjuna Ratha', in J.G. Williams (ed.), *Kalādarśana: American Studies in the Art of India*, Leiden 1981, pp. 57-68, esp. p. 62.
- 25 Kent, op. cit. (note 21), pp. 18-57.
- 26 Ibid., p. 45.

- 27 Ibid., p. 34, also mentions elephants on this point. Images of Karuppannasamy on an elephant do exist, but are relatively rare (Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 226 and personal communication). The animal is more often associated with Aiyāṅār whose cult, however, reaches farther back than the Nayaka era.
- 28 See B. Ziegenbalg, *Genealogy of the South-Indian Gods*, Madras 1869, p. 134: 'Moreover, close by the temple, on both sides of it, stand many and various figures of clay, among which are Aiyāṅār's generals, called Pālaiyakkārēr. These figures are presents to the god from people who called on him in their sickness and recovered.' Ziegenbalg was a missionary in South India; the book is a translation from German notes that date back to around 1717. It should be stressed that Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 21, 99, considers Karuppar Aiyāṅār's general par excellence.
- 29 The Kaḷḷars play an important role in the famous festival of Alagar Koyil and their connection to Karuppar is stressed by several authors. See, among others, Kent, op. cit. (note 21), pp. 18-57; Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 23-24; S. Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*, Cambridge 1989, p. 4.
- 30 U. Niklas, personal communication. See also S. Inglis, 'Possession and Pottery: Serving the Divine in a South Indian Community', in J. Punzo Waghorne and N. Cutler (eds.), *Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India*, Chambersburg 1985, pp. 89-102 and M. Jarzombek, 'Horse Shrines in Tamil India: Reflections on Modernity', *Future Anterior* 6 (2009), pp. 18-36.
- 31 Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 21.
- 32 Dumont, op. cit. (note 19), p. 441, referring to the temple at Melakkal near Madurai.
- 33 Such as the temple in the village of A. Kokkulam, Madurai District (visited by the author in February 2014; see also K.S. Muthu, *Dalit Deities*, Madurai 2005, p. 83) and in Maranadu, Sivaganadu District (Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 15).
- 34 As phrased by Kent, op. cit. (note 21), p. 41.
- 35 Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 61-67, 83-84; Kent, op. cit. (note 21), pp. 43, 90, 183. It would be interesting to know whether Karuppar's image as a fierce and dangerous deity extends back to the time of the poligars. It seems that several deities nowadays categorized as 'folk' and 'dangerous' were not seen as such by the worshippers of the past, and could even perhaps be classified, using today's vocabulary, as 'orthodox'. This shows that the division between 'folk' and 'orthodox' or 'pan-Indian' might be very fine, or even fluid. For a very interesting discussion of this process, called by her 'de-Sanskritization' of deities (as a reverse of the 'gentrification' that takes place nowadays), see L. Orr, 'Identity and Divinity: Boundary-Crossing Goddesses in Medieval South India', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73 (2005), pp. 9-43.
- 36 Such as the Ayyāṅārcuvāmi-Karuppan-acuvāmi-Poṅ Muṇiyānticuvāmi Tirukkoviḷ in Ponmeni, Madurai. According to the local informants (February 2014), thirty years ago this temple was surrounded by paddy fields. Now it stands in a suburb of Madurai and contains images of pan-Indian deities in 'classical' style and positioned in the same way as in genuine Chola-period (ninth- to thirteenth-century) temples.
- 37 Temples of Aiyāṅār are frequently located near the village water-tank as he is held responsible for the rainfall and crop fertility, but nowadays they can also be located inside the village. Aiyāṅār's worship is more widespread than that of Karuppannasamy and includes northern Tamil Nadu, where Karuppannasamy's guardian or 'minister's' role is taken over by other deities. See, for instance, Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 21, 99.
- 38 Ammaṅ (from Tam. *ammā*, 'mother' or 'goddess') is a generic term for all local goddesses, whose number is rather numerous. Temples of Māriyamman are often in the centre of the village, but other goddesses may reside outside the village or on its boundary.
- 39 Shrines dedicated exclusively to Karuppannasamy do exist, although they can be rather small, such as the Tēraṭi Karuppannacuvāmi in Uraiyur (Trichy) and the Karuppannacāmi Alayam in Tiruverumbur I visited in 2014 (the names are a transcription of those given above the entrance to the shrines).
- 40 I wish to thank Corinna Wessels-Mevissen for this information and for sharing with me the photograph of the sculpture. The god has his hands together in the adoration gesture (Skt. *añjali*) and his sculpture seems to be separated from the pillar behind it – both being rather unusual (could it originally be a sculpture of a donor subsequently adopted as Karuppannasamy? For sculptures of donors, see below). The rock-cut temple in Kunnandarkoil dates from around the eighth century AD, but the (structural) hall is a much later addition. It would be interesting to research how ancient this and other such images and shrines of Karuppannasamy in

- pan-Indian temples are, and why they were constructed.
- 41 Located in Madurai and Sivaganga Districts respectively. The same as Kunnandarkoil, the cave-temple at Tirupparankunram (also written Tirupparankundram) dates from the eighth century, but the series of halls that precede it were built largely in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See C. Branfoot, 'Mangammal of Madurai and South Indian Portraiture', *East and West* 51 (2001), pp. 369-77, esp. p. 375 and C. Branfoot, 'The Madurai Nayakas and the Skanda Temple at Tirupparankundram', *Ars Orientalis* 33 (2003), pp. 146-79. The Vairavanpatti, one of the Chettiyar's ancestral temples, was completed in the mid-nineteenth century, although it might seem earlier because of its conservative, seventeenth- to eighteenth-century style.
- 42 The last one as reported by Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 100.
- 43 Kent, op. cit. (note 21), p. 24 (referring to Alagar Koyil).
- 44 Bachelor deities are, in popular tradition, considered fiercer than 'married' ones, which is consistent with Karuppar's character. However, Orr argues against this in her study of South Indian goddesses; in her opinion strict division into either 'married and benevolent' or 'bachelor and dangerous' is a recent phenomenon and should be reconsidered. See Orr, op. cit. (note 35), p. 36.
- 45 Family ties, especially between siblings, play an important role in folk mythology and there are several groups of family-bound divinities (for example the 'seven sisters'; see Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 130-33). And yet Karuppar's hypothetical sister does not figure in any of his myths.
- 46 In some temples Karuppar became a vegetarian, which somehow elevates his status among other deities; see Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 99. For the opposition between vegetarian and non-vegetarian Tamil deities, see, for example, C.J. Fuller, 'The Hindu Pantheon and the Legitimation of Hierarchy', *Man: New Series* 23 (1988), pp. 19-39 and Dumont, op. cit. (note 19).
- 47 The only exceptions are images of Aiyaṅār and some forms of the local Goddess, which may be executed in metal. This might reflect the fact that both Aiyaṅār and the Goddess, although commonly categorized as 'folk deities', nowadays (partly due to the continuing 'gentrification' of both deities thanks to the Tamil cultural revivalism) fall somewhere in between the folk deities and the orthodox ones. See, for example, D.P. Mines, *Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual, and the Politics of Dignity in a South Indian Village*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2005, p. 126 and J. Punzo Waghorne, 'The Gentrification of the Goddess', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 5 (2001), pp. 227-67. Further to this, silver images of the local deities Pandara Appici, Bhagavati and Mahamuni, are reportedly used during the yearly festival in Bhavani near Erode (E. Masilamani-Meyer, personal communication).
- 48 For religious possession in Tamil folk religion, see, among others, Mines, op. cit. (note 47), and K. Kapadia, 'Dancing the Goddess: Possession and Class in Tamil South India', *Modern Asian Studies* 30 (1996), pp. 423-45.
- 49 Biardeau mentions wooden processional images of Karuppannasamy and Kāttavarāyaṅ in two temples dedicated to Māriyamman, see M. Biardeau, 'Brahmans and Meat-Eating Gods', in Hiltbeitel, op. cit. (note 13), 19-33, esp. pp. 21-22.
- 50 Apart from that, as Maloney commented, few agricultural labourers would engage in long and complicated daily worship at home as practised, for instance, by the Brahmins, mainly due to the nature of their work, which involves starting work at dawn with insufficient time to perform the necessary ablutions. See Maloney, op. cit. (note 23), pp. 169-91, esp. pp. 186-87.
- 51 I was told this unequivocally by several devotees of the deity in the area of Trichy and Madurai I interviewed, including the priests of the Karuppannasamy temple in Alagar Koyil.
- 52 E. Masilamani-Meyer and D.P. Mines, who both conducted an intensive research on Tamil village religion, did not encounter any such images in the temples (Masilamani-Meyer and Mines, personal communication).
- 53 Gravely and Ramachandran, op. cit. (note 12), pp. 17, 139-40. Three are illustrated, see: pl. 23, figs. 12 (Sangili Karuppan, h. 17 cm), 14 (Karuppannaswamy, the form holding a billhook and a staff or stick, 23 cm) and 15 (Chappani Karuppan, 12 cm, holding a staff on the right and a water vessel with spout on the left). The remaining ones are: Kulḷa Karuppan (13.15 cm, his right hand in the so-called *kaṭaka* pose often used to hold attributes was, according to the authors of the *Catalogue*, intended for the billhook; the left hand rests on his hip) and three images of Karuppannasami (14.15, 20 and 20 cm respectively), one holding a sword (right) and a blade of a billhook (right), and two holding a billhook (right), while the left hand rests on the hip. The authors do not give

- the inv. nos. The images are said to come from the village of Naikuppam, Tiruppattur Taluk, Ramnad (Ramanathapuram) District (according to the administrative division in 1932).
- 54 London, British Museum, inv. no. BM 1998,0616.23, h. 16.5 cm.
See http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=222851&partId=1&searchText=male+warrior+nayaka&page=1, accessed on 31 July 2015.
- 55 Coming from the region of Pudukottai and dated fifteenth to eighteenth century. See P. Pal, *Asian Art at the Norton Simon Museum, Vol. 1, Art from the Indian Sub-Continent*, New Haven 2003, p. 284, no. 209 D-F (inv. nos. N.1981.6.18.S, N.1981.6.19.S and N.1981.6.20.S). Note that the present inv. nos. are M.2010.1.227.S, M.2010.1.228.S and M.2010.1.229.S. I was also able to trace in private collections in the West three images of village deities that could perhaps depict Karuppannasamy. The images date from about the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century.
- 56 One of the photographs is labelled as Karuppayya (IFP 00069.12).
- 57 See Gravely and Ramachandran, op. cit. (note 12), pl. 23, fig. 13 and Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 227.
- 58 The photo caption reads 'Karuppannasamy avec Karuppiyamman' (IFP 02816.08).
- 59 One of them (IFP 02792.01) is wearing sandals which, again, is unusual for Karuppar who should be represented barefoot. He can perhaps be interpreted as Cōnaicāmi, sometimes equated with Karuppu, see Masilamani-Meyer, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 226 and 92. Stone images photographed by the IFP and labelled 'Karuppannasamy' show similar variations in iconography, including at least two stelae showing a male figure attempting to cut off his own head with a sword, in the style of the usual 'hero stones'. I would like to thank Charlotte Schmid for pointing me towards these photographs.
- 60 These are the Sri Adimadayarjunar (Periya Tirukkonam, IFP 02194.12 and IFP 02195.1) and Sri Chamundisvara (Telur, IFP 02197.3). The fourth temple I visited in this period, Sri Gnanapurisvara (Melappanaiyur, IFP 02792.1) in the Pudukottai District remained closed and the priest was not available for interview. Despite the strong views presented by the villagers, the statues could in the past be preserved in these temples. Apparently, temple administration has undergone a major change since the time when the photographs were taken, with village temples enjoying more autonomy now. Moreover, as I have said, many abodes of folk deities have been transformed from open shrines into 'proper' temples with ample, safe storage for valuable objects, such as bronze and copper statues. It should be added that, unfortunately, many bronze and copper images have disappeared from temples in recent years. Marguerite Adiceam mentions a bronze image of Karuppar (Ākāśakaruppu) belonging to a temple in Peraiyur, Trichy District, which was already missing when her book was being published in 1967. The god was apparently represented standing, with a hair-bun to the side, right hand on the hip and left holding the billhook (Adiceam, op. cit. (note 24), p. 53, note 26). There is no photograph of the bronze in Adiceam's book, nor could I find it in the IFP archive. In addition, stone images of village deities are occasionally kept in temples of 'pan-Indian' deities as testified by a group of Aiyānār, Pecci, a figure resembling a 'classical' Karuppar, a figure attempting to cut his head off with a knife (not a usual hero-stone) and others, placed along the outer wall of the Śiva (Matrurai Varadeśvarar) temple in Tiruvasi near Trichy. The placement of the deities along the southern wall invites parallels with the placement of the images of the seven 'Mother goddesses' in Tamil Śiva temples. For a discussion on the 'Mother goddesses' and their 'de-Sanskritization', see Orr, op. cit. (note 35), esp. p. 30. The southern direction, traditionally associated with death, seems to have become the place to install deities now considered 'peripheral' and dangerous at the same time.
- 61 The priest mentioned here the *kumbhābhiṣeka* 'that happens once in twelve years'.
- 62 This date should be treated as very tentative. The image was kept in a locked room near the priest's house. After a telephone call to the Endowment Office in charge, the image was brought outside, but I was not allowed to measure, hold or photograph it. In any case, it seems to be made of brass, has a strong yellowish colour, and gives an impression of being less old than one would guess looking at the black-and-white IFP photograph.
- 63 It was placed in the hall, to the right of the main shrine, as part of the preparation for a festival, which was about to happen in a few days, in February 2015. Unfortunately, I was not able to stay to witness the festival.
- 64 Or the priests were not willing to share such information: following several recent theft scandals, priests and devotees alike have

- become very reluctant to give information about the whereabouts of metal statues, especially to strangers. In an interview in February 2015, the priest of the Melakkal temple near Madurai told me, the only one to do so, that metal images (in general) had been moved to a 'safe location'. In any case, no metal sculptures were 'on view' in any of the temples.
- 65 See, for instance, J. Punzo Waghorne, op. cit. (note 47), pp. 231-34 and 238, where she relates a story of a local goddess, earlier depicted by a simple stone but now equipped with a solid silver mask and a pair of silver feet. Further, on p. 261, note 12, she remarks: 'This line between 'village' deities and urban gets very thin with groups like the Nāṭṭukōṭṭai Ceṭṭiyars, whose palatial homes are often in very small towns in Chettinad.'
- 66 As reported in February 2014 by the owner of the Easwari Sculptures in Tiruvalanjuli (near Swamimalai), who himself supplied some such images. Photographs of brass images of village deities, some carrying a curved knife or sickle and some on horseback, were also shown to me by D. Srikanda Sthapathy, a co-owner of one of the biggest bronze casting workshops in the area, Sri Jayam Industries ('S. Devasenaspathy Sthapathy Sons') in Swamimalai. The images were produced at the workshop, but unfortunately, Srikanda Sthapathy, who mainly provides sculptures for orthodox Hindu temples, was not able to give me the deities' names or tell me who commissioned the statues.
- 67 One such image about 5 cm high was shown to me by the priest of the Paṭiṇēṭṭāmpaṭi Karuppar Temple in Alagar Koyil, who claimed that he always carried it with him (February 2015).
- 68 Such as, for instance, the 'Karuppannasamy avec Karuppiyamman' (IFP 02816.08).
- 69 On the Nayaka-period columns and donor portraits, see articles by C. Branfoot, such as 'Imperial Frontiers: Building Sacred Space in Sixteenth-Century South India', *The Art Bulletin* 90 (2008), pp. 171-94, esp. p. 185; 'Mangammal of Madurai and South Indian Portraiture', *East and West* 51 (2001), pp. 369-77 and 'Dynastic Genealogies, Portraiture, and the Place of the Past in Early Modern South India', *Artibus Asiae* 72 (2012), pp. 323-76.
- 70 The bird on the knife in the Rāṅganāthasvāmi has been almost completely erased, but closer examination reveals two superimposed layers of feathers and a tiny leg. Parakeets seem to be a favourite ornamental motif of the sculptor(s) of these two images: two similar birds facing each other are represented on sides of the cap worn by both figures (see fig. 10). Images of parakeets are indeed ubiquitous in Nayaka sculpture. Yet, there is a remote possibility that the presence of the bird stresses the subject's special devotion to the goddess Mīnākṣī of Madurai (or, alternatively, to Aṅṭāl), whose symbol is a parakeet. To attempt to prove this, however, it would be necessary to examine all the 'donor portraits' with 'parakeet paraphernalia', including the images identified as portraits of the Madurai Nayaka rulers who are known to have been devoted to Mīnākṣī.
- 71 The halls were added to the existing temples in the Nayaka period. However, 'Dating later south Indian temple architecture is problematic for there is a notable dearth of any form of inscription from the 15th century and later, whether actual or recorded, and particularly inscriptions on structures that can help to give secure dates for monuments.' Branfoot, op. cit. (note 41), pp. 369-77, esp. p. 372.
- 72 In the case of the village deities, the artists' decision to depict the Nayaka features might not only be caused by the fact that it is the last South Indian style considered 'classical', but also that the deities presumably evolved from local heroes of this period. Unlike the pan-Indian deities, the images may originally have depicted real historical personages. Kent, op. cit. (note 21), p. 45, suggests that the pan-Indian deities could also have been modelled on historical personages, the 'grand' kings and queens; this is plausible, but only in a much broader sense, with links to the presumed models buried in the distant past.
- 73 Such as, for example, the bronze image of Tirumangai Alvar recently auctioned in Munich, where the body built, pose, facial features and hair style are very similar to those of the Rijksmuseum image. The bronze was dated fifteenth century, which in my opinion seems a little too early, but a date within the Nayaka period seems plausible. See A. Renard, *Art Islamique – Art Indien: Wunderkammer Exotica Munich Highlights*, Munich 2014, no. 14.
- 74 It would be interesting to know how the image was made. Images of village deities, such as those at the Chennai Museum, are made through the *cire perdue* method and, unlike images of pan-Indian deities commissioned by temples, tend to be hollow-cast with 'an unstable, vacuolated core' (Srinivasan, op. cit. (note 12), p. 405). See also D.K.

- Chakrabarti and N. Lahiri, *Copper and its Alloys in Ancient India*, New Delhi 1996, pp. 181-82, where the authors mention communities of casters in the area of Muttunayakampatti who produce images of village deities following the hollow cast process.
- 75 The round stone support, on which the deity stands, is obviously a modern addition. In the 1954 photograph (see note 11), we can see a cubical support, perhaps made of wood. The figure was, most probably, cast together with the (still existing) round flat base under the deity's feet and then incorporated into a high metal base as often seen in South Indian bronzes.
- 76 Nayaka-period bronzes, including those of pan-Indian deities, are much less studied than those belonging to the earlier styles and are only rarely collected by (Western) museums with the majority of them being still under worship in South Indian temples.
- 77 Most probably by a priest or someone for whom it was a family deity. However, we do not know if the restrictions on keeping the god's figure at home were also valid in the previous centuries.
- 78 Small scale bronze or silver processional images do exist, but are not very common. The use of the Rijksmuseum image in processions cannot be entirely ruled out, therefore, but it is less likely.
- 79 The majority of Karuppannasamy metal images photographed by the IFF were, if their identification is correct, kept in temples dedicated to Śiva and only very few in temples of Aiyāṅār and other village deities.
- 80 For instance at the great Bṛhadīśvara (Śiva) Temple in Thanjavur (c. 1010 AD) and the Gomuktīśvara Temple at Tiruvaduturai (945 AD). The inscriptions list metal images owned by the temples and provides their height and, at times, weight. The images are mostly of copper alloy, although a few are of gold or silver and one of brass. Among them, there is one Kṣetrapāla of 23 cm, one of 5.9 cm, and a number of very small Gaṇeśas ranging between 2.8 and 14.4 cm (V. Dehejia, 'Assemblages of Sacred Bronzes', in V. Dehejia (ed.), *The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India*, New York 2002, pp. 80-87).
- 81 See notes 53-54. The largest of the Norton Simon Museum images is 22.2 cm. Images in private collections (see note 55) are also small. One of the statues photographed by the IFF is 68 cm in height, but this seems exceptional; the statue may have been meant to be used in processions as it belonged to a temple of Māriyamman (IFF 08353.3).
- 82 In the future, it would be desirable to attempt to trace all the metal images of Karuppannasamy recorded by the IFF in various temples of Tamil Nadu and to conduct a search in small regional museums, especially their restricted collections, and in antique shops and galleries in India (some of which occasionally sell early twentieth-century images of village deities). One should also interview bronze casters in areas other than Swamimalai (where they chiefly focus on producing 'classical' images of pan-Indian deities), such as in and around Muttunayakampatti (see Chakrabarti and Lahiri, *op. cit.* (note 74)), in order to find out for what purpose the images are commissioned and if there has been a recent increase in the number of orders. Finally, it would be desirable to visit other temples of Karuppannasamy in order to determine if the differences in iconography of the deity depend on the region or rather on the community in charge of the temples. It should be added that the Karuppar's temple priests and devotees asked to identify the deity on the IFF photographs gave very different answers ranging from 'Karuppannasamy' to 'Karuppayyar' and 'Maturai Viran'. One has the impression that an image produced and consecrated as Karuppannasamy is indeed Karuppannasamy, no matter the iconography, and to establish a 'correct' name of the deity is of more interest to scholars than to the devotees themselves. Having said that, it is still possible that some regional or clan-based variants do exist and could be systematized.

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