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Canons, Conventions and Creativity:  
Defining Literary Tradition in Premodern Tamil South India

by

Jennifer Steele Clare

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

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Defining Literary Tradition in Premodern Tamil South India

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This dissertation looks at debates over the Tamil literary tradition in treatises and commentaries on poetics composed in South India between the eighth and the seventeenth centuries. Central to these discussions of what constitutes the literary was the relationship of new literary developments to the language and conventions of an ancient poetic system established in the earliest stratum of Tamil literature, known as “Sangam literature” or “literature of the assembly.” The chapters that follow look at these competing attitudes towards the classical tradition, beginning with the debates over defining the Tamil tradition found in Pērācīriyar’s thirteenth-century commentary on the section of poetics discussed by the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam*, and the *Virutti* commentary on the metrical treatise *Yāpparuṅkalam*, dated between the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The different interpretations of the Tamil past adopted by these commentaries reveal the capacity of the Sangam tradition to serve both as the foundation of an authoritative canon worthy of preservation as well as fertile material for experiments with new theories of literature and language, including those derived from Sanskrit. If the first two chapters explore the central role played by the Sangam conventions in Tamil literary theory, albeit mobilized for different interpretive projects, the next two chapters focus on the competing poetic system of the *pāṭṭiyals*, which theorize the capacity of Tamil language and literature to praise a royal patron, and explore the implications of this new understanding of the function of literary language. Finally, the dissertation ends with a seventeenth-century text, the *Ilakkana Viḷakkam*, which attempts an integrated theory of Tamil literature, in which the most influential “new” developments in Tamil aesthetics, including the praise poetics of the *pāṭṭiyals*, are rendered compatible with the Sangam tradition. By providing a comparative look at approaches to interpreting the Tamil literary tradition, this dissertation hopes to bring attention to the important role played by comparative literary theory in our approach both to the study of South Asian literature and to the study of world literature more generally.

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## Note on Transliteration and Translation

In the transliteration of Tamil words and Sanskrit words I have followed the convention of the *Tamil Lexicon* (University of Madras, 6 vols., 1924-36) with several exceptions.

For the sake of readability, I have left more commonly used words untransliterated, such as Shiva for Śiva, Vishnu for Viṣṇu, Chola for Cōḷa, and the languages of Tamil, Sanskrit and Prakrit. In the case of Sanskrit words that have been transformed into the Tamil orthographic system, I have chosen to use the more familiar Sanskrit transliteration (as found in the Monier-Williams *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*) such as *prabandham* instead of *pirapantam* and *śleṣa* instead of *cilēṭai*.

All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

*for my family, old and new*



## Introduction

### Reading a (Premodern South Asian) Literary Tradition

While recent scholarship on world literature has focused on the political, linguistic and/or aesthetic relationships between Euro-American literary traditions and literature of the non-West, this dissertation addresses the methodological question of how to understand texts produced outside of contact with the West, texts that often demand alternative modes of reading and aesthetic appreciation.<sup>1</sup> In the case of South Asia, where theoretical texts on language and literature have reflected and shaped both reading and compositional strategies for almost two thousand years, comparative poetics provides one particularly productive way to understand the ways in which interpretive processes are themselves embedded in complex cultural and historical contexts. My dissertation contributes to this discussion by looking at how the Tamil literary tradition was defined in texts on language and poetics produced in South India between the eighth and the seventeenth centuries. In particular, I focus on the shifting role of the classical past in the construction of this tradition in order to reveal the complex matrix of interpretive traditions competing for authority in the Tamil literary world.

Literary criticism of the last fifty years has centered around a basic mistrust of a text's statements and assumptions about itself. This position has led to the diverse schools of thought we now call "theory," united in their task of "provok(ing) a text into unpremeditated articulation, into the utterance of what it somehow contains or knows but neither intends nor is able to say."<sup>2</sup> This relationship of "strategic disrespect" is justified by its objective position vis a vis the text, its ability to offer "a standpoint of appraisal grounded somewhere outside the range of possibilities afforded by the text's internal or authorized commentary."<sup>3</sup> Although few scholars of literature would advocate returning to a mode of criticism based on decoding a text's singular "original" meaning, determining the standpoint from which to productively understand the multiplicity of any text's meaning has overwhelmingly favored a vantage point embedded in the

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<sup>1</sup> While the desire for a theory of world literature has defined Western literary scholarship since Goethe's well-known attempt at a definition, in the last ten years the discipline of Comparative Literature has more seriously addressed the "problem" of adopting a more inclusive methodology without abandoning the rigorous linguistic competency that is still the foundation of the discipline. Scholars ranging from Damrosch to Bhabha to Apter have proposed ways to theorize "world literature" as literature that circulates, literature of the interstice, and literature in translation, among others. See David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Although this scholarship has opened up possibilities for understanding relationships between literary cultures previously neglected by literature departments, these understandings of "world literature" overwhelmingly rely on physical or theoretical contact with the West's language and literary traditions. Within these frameworks, literature produced in contexts not in dialogue with Euro-American interpretive traditions, regardless of that literature's significance in other regions of the world, is excluded from being a legitimate object of analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

aesthetic and cultural worlds of the contemporary critic of the Euro-American academy. In its inability/refusal to acknowledge the possibility of a radically “other” cultural context, this interpretive framework is particularly problematic in the study of literature that inhabits a different cultural world with different assumptions about the nature of culture and literature themselves.<sup>4</sup>

This dissertation joins a growing field of scholarship engaged in historicizing the interpretive process itself, pointing out the range of ways in which literature has been read and appreciated outside the hegemony of Euro-American scholarship of the last fifty years. This development has been most notable in scholarship on medieval and Renaissance Europe, itself contending with the alterity of its object of study. To understand a literary culture in which post-Enlightenment distinctions between oral and literary, public and private, imitation and innovation are more porous and difficult to apply, scholarly attention has focused on historicizing the practice of “reading” along with the related histories of literacy and the book. These studies have centered around both the role of material culture in such histories as well as the role of physical embodiment in a literary culture that privileges memorization and performance of a text.<sup>5</sup> These studies draw not only on literary and visual representations of reading as well as the shifting technologies of book dissemination and collection,<sup>6</sup> but also on explicit reflections on the art and

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<sup>4</sup> As the philosopher and intellectual historian Kwame Appiah, in his call for what he calls “thick translation” suggests, the study of literature (per Appiah, particularly the study of literature in translation) carries with it an ethical pedagogical imperative to combat the “the easy atmosphere of relativism” in which “an easy tolerance amounts not to a celebration of human variousness but to a refusal to attend to how various other people really are or were. In response, Appiah calls for “a thick description of the context of literary production, a translation that draws on and creates that sort of understanding, meets the need to challenge ourselves and our students to go further, to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others.” {Appiah 1993} In his reference to Geertz’s 1973 essay, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” Appiah intentionally associates himself with the discipline of anthropology, which has spent the last thirty years asking itself how to responsibly engage with the (unknowable) other. In Geertz’s famous essay, which represented a split with the previous structural model practiced by anthropologists, Geertz points out the importance of contextual understanding in the interpretation of signs. (In particular, he pointed to instances in which culturally embedded indirect signs might in fact undermine the literal meaning). One of his many contributions to the field of anthropology was this emphasis on cultural specificity as well as a new emphasis on mediation, coming from his suggestion that the interlocutor (native informant) and the ethnographer as both reader and writer of culture can be theorized themselves as objects of study.

<sup>5</sup> Pollock provides a list of such possible approaches to textual culture in his manifesto for a disciplinary theory of a new/future philology, which he defines as the work of recovering “otherness” through the confrontation of textuality in the original language, including “the history of manuscript culture and what (he) once called script mercantilism; its relationship to print culture and print capitalism; the logic of text transmission; the nature and function of commentaries and the history of reading practices that commentaries reveal; the origins and development of local conceptions of language, meaning, genre, and discourse; the contests between local and supralocal forms of textuality and the kinds of sociotextual communities and circulatory spheres thereby created” {Pollock 2009@949}

<sup>6</sup> See Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books : Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994). In his more recent *Inscription and Erasure* (2007), Chartier focuses on the ways in which literary texts appropriate the technology, or “graphic culture” of their particular epoch.

practice of interpretation, such as the medieval art of *grammatica*, which provided the authoritative guide to how and what to read,<sup>7</sup> and literary commentaries that “authorized” particular aesthetic and/or ideological projects.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of premodern South Asia,<sup>9</sup> treatises on language and literature are particularly important in establishing a critical vantage point for literary analysis in part because in many cases, such texts are the only artifacts that help us understand how such literature was defined, read and appreciated.<sup>10</sup> However, such a focus is not only important because of the lack of other historical context, but also because of the central position held by such texts in South Asian literary culture. These texts, written on topics ranging from syntax to meter to literary theory, composed both in royal courts and in religious monasteries by authors identified with the diverse sectarian communities of Saivism and Vaisnavism as well as the heterodox traditions of Buddhism and Jainism, reveal a literary culture in which innovation is not associated with the spontaneous creative outpouring of an individual poet, but rather comes from a poet’s ability to maneuver within a system that privileges convention. Throughout the history of South Asian scholarship, texts on poetics have addressed this fine balance, whether through debates over

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture : 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350-1100* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> William Kennedy. *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> In the wake of Said’s 1978 publication of *Orientalism*, which drew attention to the role played by European scholars in the representation of an Eastern “other” as weak, indolent and therefore requiring governance by a morally, culturally and physiologically superior colonial administration, the study of historical reading practices has played a different role in studies of colonial and postcolonial India, grappling with how to responsibly engage with knowledge about the past, seen as irrevocably transformed by colonial intervention. Scholars such as Michael Dodson 2007, Bryan Hatcher 2005 and Vasudha Dalmia 2003 have argued for a more prominent role of the pandit in the construction of knowledge about India, suggesting that their participation in the Orientalist project opened up possibilities for them to advance their own personal and political projects. Similarly, V. Narayana Rao 2004, in his essay on the development of standard Telugu in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, points out that there were in fact multiple indigenous experts competing for the authority to supply knowledge about language and literature to the colonial administration. Rao argues that it was the choice of pandits as the authoritative voice of Telugu language and literature over the prose style of the community of record keepers (karanams) with their more flexible interpretation of the language that led to the emphasis on classical (and Sanskritized) Telugu in the teaching of modern Telugu prose. If these scholars focus on the institutions and persons responsible for the production of knowledge about India, Trautmann’s work, in the series of books and articles that make up his self-titled “Languages and Nations” project, draws attention more specifically to the role of indigenous language theory itself in the development of the field of ethnolinguistics that came out of the Orientalist schools of Calcutta and Madras. In both “The Hullabaloo about Telugu”(1999) and further developed in his book *Languages and Nations: the Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (2006), he focuses on the role of the distinction made by indigenous scholars between Sanskritic and “local” roots of Telugu vocabulary on the “discovery” of the Dravidian family of languages.

<sup>10</sup> The dating of most texts in this region of the world is dubious, and there is often no clear relationship between a text and its hors-texte, let alone the existence of material culture to provide details about reading practices. In many cases, the context of literary production must be excavated from the horizon of expectation provided by the texts themselves, including the layers of intertextuality which situates them in a larger network of cultural production.

acceptable meter and poetic content or through more explicit discussions on what is included and excluded in literary categories. On the one hand, as texts that make explicit the rules of the game with which a poet is expected to be familiar, these treatises on language and literature and the commentaries that accompany them dictate the framework within which literary innovation is possible. As such, they contribute to our contemporary understanding of the aesthetic priorities and poetic logic of literature generated within this (often foreign) framework; in other words, they help us access meanings in the text that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Yigal Bronner's recent work on the genre of Sanskrit *śleṣa* (poetry of simultaneous narration, in which the different parsing of words in a line generates multiple meanings from the same set of syllables) exemplifies how the knowledge of premodern interpretive practices can inform a contemporary reading of a genre whose comprehension, let alone appreciation, requires reading strategies foreign to most contemporary readers in India and the West.<sup>11</sup> Bronner shows how the poems themselves, through a series of cues, indicate to the learned reader the presence of such multiplicity in a particular section of a poem. The "training" of the *śleṣa* reader extended to an explosion of thesauri, wordbooks and handbooks which both provided poets with lists of homonyms for the creation of new *śleṣa* poems, but, equally important, supplied the reader with the tools to recognize and appreciate this poetic technique. In such a context, failure of interpretation gains increased importance and itself become an object of theorization. *Śleṣa* poetry serves as a good example of the importance of recognizing "other" modes of reading in the study of world literature because of the relative impossibility of comprehending these poems outside this "foreign" theoretical framework.<sup>12</sup>

However, the relationship between literary theory and literary production in any culture is never one of a simple guide to traversing a complex landscape. As Monius points out in her work on the twelfth-century Buddhist text on language and poetics, the *Vīracōḷiyam*, and its commentary, such discussions of aesthetic value are never neutral, but rather reflect the concerns of the interpretive communities out of which they are born, whether local, cosmopolitan, national or global. Reflections on which innovations are acceptable and within which conventions, and the justification of such judgements reflect larger concerns with the legitimacy of a particular worldview and the rejection of interpretations seen as irrelevant or threatening to that ideological perspective. In her work, Monius shows how the theorization of language in the *Vīracōḷiyam* as well as the choice of examples used by the text's commentary not only inform us about a religious community about which we know few other details, but, Monius argues, this discourse on language and poetics performs "cultural work," carving out a space for Tamil Buddhists in the

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<sup>11</sup> Yigal Bronner. *Extreme Poetry : The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Outside the South Asian tradition, Pauline Yu's work on Chinese poetics offers another model for the role of interpretive traditions in the reading of world literature. In her study of the evolution of the use of metaphor in Chinese literature, Yu focuses on the role of the exegetical commentarial tradition in her readings of poems that reveal a use of metaphorical language that differs from that in the Western traditions. In her *Ways with Words* (2000), co-edited with Stephen Owen, Yu highlights the range of interpretations traditions available for the understanding of seven influential texts from the Chinese humanistic traditions of literature and intellectual history.

competitive intellectual milieu of Chola-period South India.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Norman Cutler, in his work on the tradition of commentary on the Tamil didactic text *Tirukkural*, compares the interpretive work done by the Shaivite Brahmanical commentator Parimēlaḷakar with the commentary of Pulavar Kuḷantai, inflected with new concerns associated with the construction of a non-Sanskritic Dravidian identity for Tamil culture.<sup>14</sup>

Such a reconstruction of the horizon of expectations revealed by premodern interpretive practices has been the basis of much of the recent work of Sheldon Pollock on Indian cultural history. In his book *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, Sheldon Pollock moves from a literary history of South Asia to what he calls “a history of literary cultures” in order to draw attention to the role of the history of definitions as a central part of the history of the literary. This methodological approach of “trying to understand what the texts of South Asian literature mean to the people who wrote, heard, saw or read them, and how these meanings may have changed over time. (...)”<sup>15</sup> places in the foreground people and texts invested with the task of generating, defining and defending literary categories, “includ(ing) everything from the sophisticated and powerfully articulated theorizations found in Persian, Sanskrit, and Tamil, among other traditions, to the entirely practical but no less historically meaningful judgments of anthologizers, commentators, and performers.”<sup>16</sup> Although the essays in Pollock’s book cover a wide range of South Asian literary traditions, ranging from genres associated with different performance contexts in premodern Kerala<sup>17</sup> to the development of Sinhala as a literary language,<sup>18</sup> all reflect his emphasis on the “recuper(ation of) historical reading practices” in the understanding of cultural history.<sup>19</sup>

Pollock’s voluminous work on Sanskrit literary culture follows a similar methodological line of thought, as he identifies the role of Sanskrit language and literary theory in the

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<sup>13</sup> Anne Monius. *Imagining a Place for Buddhism : Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-Speaking South India* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Cutler 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History : Reconstructions From South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 14.

<sup>16</sup> According to Pollock, such a “history of definitions would not only take account of both the semantic and pragmatic aspects, but ask directly how such definitions were formed and, once formed, were challenged; whether they were adequate or inadequate to the existing textual field, and by what measure of adequacy; whether, and if so, how, they excluded certain forms even while - and precisely by - including others.” (Ibid., 9-10)

<sup>17</sup> Richard Freeman, “Genre and Society: The Literary Culture of Premodern Kerala,” in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 437-500.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Hallissey, “Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture,” in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 689-745.

<sup>19</sup> Pollock continues this line of inquiry into the study of the early modern period in his recently published *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet* (2011).

development of literature across South and Southeast Asia. As Pollock points out, a crucial component in the emergence of vernacular literary traditions across these regions was the simultaneous rise of grammars and texts on poetics modeled on the Sanskrit tradition, a development that legitimized the “new” vernacular language as a language capable of expressive articulation (as opposed to workly, documentary).<sup>20</sup>

In its role in both shaping and reflecting literary culture, discourse on language and literature in South Asia provides an important contribution to the understanding of both a particular literary text as well as the broader literary world in which that text was produced. This understanding comes from both the intended meanings identified by these treatises, in their rules and reflections on acceptable literary production, as well as from the unintended and unpredictable meanings that our historical and cultural distance allows us to see more clearly.

My dissertation contributes to this understanding of how to read premodern South Asian literature by looking at the role of innovation and convention in debates over the Tamil literary tradition in treatises and commentaries on poetics composed in South India between the eighth

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<sup>20</sup> Sheldon Pollock, in his prolific writing on Sanskrit literature, is perhaps the most vocal advocate for the historicization of literary culture. Although he does not cite this theorist, his research interests revolve around what Foucault calls “epistemes”; distinct historical periods where a particular way of thinking (in Pollock’s case, an aesthetic way of thinking) is made possible by a historically specific relationship between culture and power. Using literary and inscriptional data, Pollock argues for two formative shifts in the development of not only Indian, but South Asian literature: the secularization and cosmopolitanization of Sanskrit around 0 C.E. and the supplanting of that Sanskritic cosmopolitan culture by vernacular literature a thousand years later. Pollock provides convincing evidence that during the reign of the Sakas, Sanskrit language was released from its earlier restriction to ritual language, enabling the development of *kāvya*, or literature, as a genre. The timelessness of Sanskrit, borne out of a tradition that saw it as an eternal language existing outside the temporal/spatial limits of the human world, is extended into this new politically motivated literary usage of the language, because it provided a useful medium for kings desiring to associate themselves with the translocal, cosmic level of the Sanskrit language. This use of Sanskrit as a language that conveys eternal fame plays out not only in *praśastis*, which emerge for the first time in Sanskrit during this period, and remain almost exclusively in Sanskrit until the “vernacular revolution”, but also in a “grammatical explosion”, encouraged by the new linkages between political and grammatical correctness. By exploring the relationship between “historical” analysis and “cultural/literary” analysis, Pollock has opened up possibilities for histories of literary production that take into consideration the relationship between cultural production and political power, a relationship that is usually limited to assumptions about the Golden Age of a particular dynasty. Pollock has published widely on the cosmopolitanization and subsequent vernacularization of South and Southeast Asian literature. For the most complete account, see Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men : Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

and the seventeenth centuries.<sup>21</sup> In particular, my dissertation focuses on the relationship of these conventions to an ancient poetic system established in the earliest stratum of Tamil literature, known as “*Caṅkam* literature” or “literature of the assembly.” This system, articulated in several poetic compilations as well as in an ancient poetic treatise, provided a powerful framework within which innovation could be appropriately introduced and accommodated. While all scholars writing between the eighth and the seventeenth centuries reveal some familiarity with this “classical” tradition, they reflect a range of strategies for integrating the older literary conventions with the newer developments in meter, style and literary genres that had appeared since that time.

The tradition of Tamil poetics dates back to the earliest stratum of Tamil literature. The earliest text on Tamil poetics, according to most scholarship,<sup>22</sup> is the *Tolkāppiyam*, composed sometime between the first century B.C.E. and the fifth century C.E. This text includes 1600 verses divided into three sections: morphology (*eḷuttu*, lit. “letter”), phonology (*col*, lit. “word”) and poetics (*poruḷ*, lit. “content, subject matter”).<sup>23</sup> This incorporation of grammar and poetics in one text is distinctively Tamil, in contrast to the Sanskrit tradition, which distinguishes between grammar and poetics. The section on poetics is astounding in its scope and confounding in its organizational logic, addressing topics as varied as meter, thematic material, grammatical

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<sup>21</sup> Although Tamil has a long and varied history of reflection on language and literature, there exists few studies on or adequate translations of Tamil texts on poetics, a field ignored by both Tamil literary scholars and Sanskritists. Approaches to the field are primarily compendious, describing in detail the categories laid out by the treatises and judging their relationship to the extant poems of the period. These discussions rarely address extra-literary details to help historicize their texts of study, nor do they differentiate between the various strands of the tradition, presenting instead a monolithic body of material. For an introduction to Tamil poetics in English, see Zvelebil 1973, 1986, 1989 (whose teacher was the student of the great scholar U.V. Swaminatha Iyer) who has provided the Western authoritative voice on Tamil poetics for most of the latter half of the twentieth century. Zvelebil’s presentation of Tamil poetics, while a good introduction to the terms and ideas involved, does not address shifts in understanding in the several hundred years between the two treatises nor does his approach attempt to situate these treatises in a larger context of Tamil (or larger South Asian) intellectual traditions. Indra Manuel’s *Literary Theory in Tamil* (2001) presents a thorough, systematic discussion of the development of Tamil literary theory. Although her treatment of the historical development of poetic categories is more thorough than other accounts in English, she too does little to contextualize this development. She briefly mentions but does not satisfactorily discuss the influence of other traditions on Tamil theory, further contributing to the faulty impression that Tamil poetics developed in a vacuum. Hart 1975 is still the most thorough comparative study of Tamil and Sanskrit poetics. In his foundational book on Tamil literature, Hart identifies the poetic technique of suggestion as a phenomenon originating in early Deccani conceptions of language and religion shows how this technique was later adopted into Sanskrit literature and literary theory. Selby 2000 offers a different comparative view of the use of suggestion in Tamil, Prakrit and Sanskrit poetry. In the introduction to their translation of the seventh-century *Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ*, Buck and Paramasivan 1997 provide an overview of the poetics of akam, or poems of love and domestic life. Lehmann 2009 gives a more specific overview of the commentarial tradition.

<sup>22</sup> Zvelebil dates the *Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ* before the *Tolkāppiyam*.

<sup>23</sup> The *Tolkāppiyam*’s Chapter on Poetics is probably the latest section of the text, given the amount of Sanskritic influence, an influence that does not permeate the poems attributed to a slightly earlier period. Takahashi 1995 is the most thorough discussion of the dating of the *Tolkāppiyam* and subsequent theoretical texts.

commentary, and figurative language. The first five chapters of this section,<sup>24</sup> which lay out the appropriate conventions for the *akam* (poems of love and domestic life) and *puṛam* (poems of war, ethics and kingship) poetic genres of Caṅkam literature, are explicitly related to the earliest extant corpus of Tamil literature.<sup>25</sup> However, the remaining four chapters, both the Chapter on artistic manifestation of emotion (*Meyppāṭṭiyal*) and the Chapter on Simile (*Uvamaiyiyal*), as well as the Chapter on Poetics (*Ceyyuliyal*) and the Chapter on Traditional Usage (*Marapiyal*), which includes classification of such diverse subjects as female and male animals, the four varṇas, and types of commentary, theoretically pertain to all literary production.

Although many of the verses in the *Tolkāppiyam* reflect the customary deferral to an anonymous authority, as seen in the ubiquitous verse ending “as is said by scholars” (*eṇmaṇār pulavar*), nowhere does the *Tolkāppiyam* explicitly refer to previous or contemporary scholarship, either as an authoritative source or as an example of an errant interpretation of the tradition.<sup>26</sup> As such, although scholars have tried to identify sections of the *Tolkāppiyam* with Sanskrit linguistic and literary theory, including the pre-Pāṇinian school of Sanskrit grammar<sup>27</sup> and the early Sanskrit treatise on drama, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, we have little concrete information about the network of scholarship, Tamil, Sanskrit or otherwise, in which the *Tolkāppiyam* might have participated.

In contrast to this sparse fragment of what may or may not have been a rich (multilingual) scholarly milieu in early Tamil literary culture, the period between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries witnessed an explosion of scholarship on Tamil language and literature in treatises and commentaries on syntax, poetic ornament (*alankāra*), meter, and poetic content, among other topics. These approaches to defining the Tamil tradition were in no way homogenous, but reflected new choices available to the Tamil scholar, including the choice of language and literary theory outside the poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the early poems. It is within this competitive intellectual milieu, which saw an unprecedented exhibition of new possibilities of interpreting Tamil literature, that the story of the Tamil classical past first appears. In this well-known story, the Tamil literary tradition originates in three great literary schools, or Caṅkams, populated by a collection of divine and semi-divine scholars. After a seven-year famine forced

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<sup>24</sup> *Akattiṇaiyiyal*, *Purattiṇaiyiyal*, *Kaḷaviyal*, and *Karpiyal*

<sup>25</sup> *Akattiṇaiyiyal* introduces the reader to the *tinai* semantic network, in which the natural universe (including gods) is organized according to five Tamil landscapes, named for a flower that grows in that area. The elements within each *tinai* are organized according to whether or not they are related to time (*mutal*), physical phenomena such as plants, animals, gods (*karu*), or emotions (*uri*). *Purattiṇaiyiyal* arranges the *puṛam* poems by categories that correspond theoretically to the *akam* categories, although the use of *tinai* in the *puṛam* poems is far less systematic. The chapters on *Kalavu* and *Karpu*, or stolen love and married love, are organized around the monologic utterances of the stock characters involved in the *akam* poems; these dramatic situations will be systematized into the *turai*s of the later grammars. *Poruḷiyal* further classifies these dialogues, and also includes discussion of *iraicci* (35-37) and *uḷḷurai* (48-50), terms that have not been sufficiently explored, but have both been equated with the concept of Sanskrit *dhvani*.

<sup>26</sup> This will be the subject of the first chapter.

<sup>27</sup> See A.C. Burnell, *On the Aindra School of Sanskrit Grammarians : Their Places in the Sanskrit and Subordinate Literatures* (Mangalore, 1875).



literary scholars into other kingdoms, the knowledge of the old tradition was lost, only to be recovered through divine intervention.<sup>28</sup> Beginning with Nakkīrar's eighth-century commentary on the poetic treatise *Iraiyāṇār Akapporuḷ*, a commentary which implicates the Caṅkam poems and the poetic treatise *Tolkāppiyam* in the story of the divine origin of Tamil literature, the Caṅkam tradition emerges as an identifiable and authoritative canon in Tamil scholarship.

In their use of the Caṅkam poems and the *Tolkāppiyam* to establish the origins of Tamil as a literary language, Tamil scholars participated in a larger pan-Indian phenomenon of the creation and legitimation of literary languages ranging from Bengali to Kannada during this period, a phenomenon Sheldon Pollock identifies with new expressions of royal power situated in the vernacular idiom, in contrast to Sanskrit, which had dominated literary production in South (and Southeast Asia) for nearly 1000 years. However, unlike other vernacular traditions, which transformed themselves into literary languages through the creation of new literature and grammars, often modeled on Sanskritic literary genres, Tamil scholars constructed a classical canon with texts that had already influenced Tamil literary culture for several hundred years.

The invocation of these ancient texts is an important distinguishing feature of the Tamil literary tradition in the eighth through fourteenth centuries, in part because of the widespread familiarity with this canon, which extends beyond a particular sectarian group or courtly community. However, while Tamil (and Indian) literary culture can not be fully understood without taking into consideration the antiquity of the Caṅkam tradition, the hegemony of this canon has been overstated in Tamil scholarship over the last hundred and fifty years. In fact, the status of the classical tradition was always a subject of debate in Tamil scholarship; while literary scholars writing between the eighth and fourteenth centuries all display familiarity with the tradition, they do not all accept its canonical and/or divine status. Rather, in their interpretation of subjects ranging from language use to literary form and content, these scholars reveal a tension between the authoritative tradition of the Caṅkam conventions, and the newer developments in meter and literary genres that had appeared since that time.

The first part of my dissertation looks at these competing attitudes towards the classical Caṅkam tradition in scholarship produced between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries, and tries to situate these debates in larger sectarian projects of defining Tamil literary culture during this period. The first chapter looks at representatives of two approaches to this tension over defining the Tamil tradition, Pēraciriyar's thirteenth-century commentary on the section of poetics discussed by the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam*, and the *Virutti* commentary on the metrical treatise *Yāpparuṅkalam*, dated between the eleventh and twelfth centuries. While both Pēraciriyar and the *Virutti* commentary reveal familiarity with this "classical" tradition, they reveal a tension between the authority of the Caṅkam tradition and the newer developments in meter and literary genres that had appeared since that time. For Pēraciriyar, the *Tolkāppiyam* and

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<sup>28</sup> The story of the classical past has loomed large in Tamil national consciousness over the last one hundred and fifty years. According to these literary histories, the tradition was once again lost several centuries later and was only rediscovered and painstakingly revitalized by scholars such as U.V. Swaminatha Iyer in the late nineteenth century. While the role of this "Tamil renaissance" in the development of the Dravidian movement and modern Tamil nationalism has been well documented by scholars such as Irschick 1964, Venkatachalapathy 2005, Ramaswamy 1997 and others, few contemporary scholars have interrogated the complex history of this established story.

the Caṅkam poems, as representatives of the “classical” origins of Tamil, provide the sole authoritative source of Tamil language and literature in the face of the threat of multiple interpretations of the Tamil tradition, including those that prioritize contemporary literary developments. In contrast, the *Virutti* commentator is silent on the subject of the Tamil past but accepts the Caṅkam conventions as one of many competing ways of introducing new developments into Tamil literature. These different interpretations reveal both the central position of this tradition in poetic texts of this period as well as the ways in which this tradition is mobilized to address a range of aesthetic and cultural concerns. In particular, I argue that the attitude towards tradition adopted by Pērācīriyar arose from a perceived threat to his version of the Caṅkam past, a threat that can be understood in a larger context of competing sectarian literary cultures during this period.

Our understanding of Caṅkam literature, in particular the *akam* poems (poems of love and domestic life) has been shaped by Pērācīriyar’s canon, in which the genre ceases to be productive outside a particular corpus of literature identified with the origins of Tamil literature. Even the later *kōvai* grammars protect the integrity of the original *akam* corpus, limiting innovation to a new genre with its own strict set of rules and conventions. The second chapter looks outside the Caṅkam corpus to a set of *akam* “experiments” in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentary, literary examples that apply new aesthetic priorities to the old *akam* conventions, resulting in poetry that recalls but does not imitate the Caṅkam *akam* poems. In particular, this chapter looks at what these examples reveal about a shift in the use of literary language away from the emphasis on suggested meaning in the Caṅkam *akam* poems to a system which draws attention to its own artificiality through the use of extensive alliteration and linguistic wordplay that can be “solved” by a learned reader.

If the first two chapters explore the central role played by the Caṅkam conventions in Tamil literary theory, albeit mobilized for different interpretive projects, the third chapter focuses on a set of treatises in which the debates over the authority of the Caṅkam past are replaced by a poetic system that theorizes the capacity of Tamil language and literature to praise a royal patron. This system, articulated by a genre of grammars called “*pāṭṭiyals*” (lit. “the nature of song, poetry), integrates praise literature from throughout the Tamil literary universe, including the Caṅkam puṇam tradition, the devotional literature of the Shaivite and Vaishnavite compilations and the later courtly narrative genres of the *kāvya*, *ulā* and *paraṇi*, among many others, with an extended discussion of the mantraic power of the first word of any poem to bless (or curse) the poem’s patron. The third chapter explores the articulation of this new poetics of praise in the *pāṭṭiyal* treatises of the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* and the *Venpa Pāṭṭiyal*, and the implications of this new understanding of the function of literary language.

The poetics of the *pāṭṭiyals*, including the discussing of mantraic language and the classification of praise genres, is a radically different theorizing of Tamil literature than that presented by the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators. However, in a display of the reach of this shift in literary culture towards an emphasis on praise, even the conservative commentators of the *Tolkāppiyam* deviate from their standard canon of Caṅkam literature to accommodate praise poetry. In their inclusion of poetic examples ranging from invocatory verses to the *paraṇi* to verses in the *kali* meter praising a range of divine and royal figures in the larger praise category

of *vālttu*, both the commentators Pērācīriyar and Naccīnārkkīniyar attempt to integrate this important new aesthetic development with the rules of the ancient grammar.

Of the prolific scholarship on Tamil poetics composed between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries, none<sup>29</sup> attempt the integrated approach of the *Tolkāppiyam*, which combined discussions of grammar with the various branches of literary theory, including meter, poetic ornament and content. Rather, treatises were dedicated to specific fields of Tamil literature, and while a treatise on meter might incorporate details from other fields, for example, these details are relegated to sections on Miscellany and there is no reflection on their relationship with the larger project of the text. In the seventeenth century, however, the tradition of integrated grammar and literary theory returns to Tamil scholarship, and remains a productive theoretical framework for the next three hundred years. The final chapter looks at the first of such integrated grammars, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*, which consolidates the most influential developments in Tamil aesthetics, including content from both the commentaries of Pērācīriyar and the *Virutti*, as well as the *alaṅkāra* theory of the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* and the praise poetics of the *pāṭṭiyals*. In its attempt to integrate new literary developments with the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam*, this text, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*, represents a different approach to the Tamil tradition. This chapter explores the differences between the strategy of intertextuality and integration adopted by the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* and the strategies of canonization and compilation seen in the commentaries of Pērācīriyar and the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* respectively and argues that the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* reflects larger shifts in the status of the Tamil tradition between the period of the earlier commentaries and the seventeenth century in which the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* was composed.

The texts and commentaries that are the subject of this dissertation represent a range of approaches to defining the Tamil tradition, from the canonizing project of Pērācīriyar to the compilation of different scholarly perspectives in the *Virutti* commentary, to the consolidation of authoritative traditions into one integrated theory in the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*. Whether as representatives of an authentic Tamil tradition or as fertile material for new literary experiments, the shifting role of the classical corpus in these projects reveals the multiplicity of interpretive frameworks available for a greater understanding of Tamil literature and literary culture more generally.

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<sup>29</sup> The exception being the twelfth-century *Viracōḷiyam*. See fn. 385 of this dissertation for more details on this exceptional text.

## Chapter 1

### Looking Back at the Interior Landscape: Debates over the Classical Past in the Tamil Commentarial Tradition

The story of the anxiety over innovation and convention that animates Tamil poetics begins in the eighth century<sup>30</sup> with debates over the status of the earliest stratum of Tamil literature, the “Caṅkam” poetic collections of the *Eṭṭuttokai* and the *Pattupāṭṭu* and the ancient grammar, the *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>31</sup> Over the next several hundred years, which witnessed a period of prolific scholarship dedicated to defining the Tamil literary tradition, the Caṅkam tradition plays a central role in establishing the theoretical framework and technical vocabulary for interpreting Tamil literature. However, while literary scholars writing between the eighth and fourteenth centuries all display familiarity with this tradition, they do not all accept its canonical and/or divine status. Rather, in discussions of subjects that range from meter to poetic ornament (*alaṅkāra*) to content, these texts reveal a tension over how the Tamil literary tradition should negotiate the conventions of the early poetic system with the newer developments in meter, style and genre that had appeared since the *Tolkāppiyam*’s time.

This chapter closely examines representatives of two interpretations of the role of the Caṅkam past in the Tamil literary tradition: Pērācīriyar’s thirteenth-century commentary on the section of poetics discussed by the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam*, and the *Virutti* commentary on the metrical treatise *Yāpparuṅkalam*, dated between the eleventh and twelfth centuries. While both commentaries acknowledge the importance of Caṅkam poetics in their interpretation of Tamil literature, they differ in their interpretation of this tradition. For Pērācīriyar, the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam poems, as representatives of the “classical” origins of Tamil, are the sole authoritative source of Tamil language and literature to the exclusion of contemporary literary developments. In contrast, the *Virutti* commentator is silent on the subject of the Tamil past but accepts the Caṅkam conventions as one of many competing ways of introducing new developments into Tamil literature. These different interpretations reveal both the central

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<sup>30</sup> While the earliest text on poetics, the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam*, dates several centuries earlier, the first text to discuss the Tamil literary tradition is Nakkīrar’s eighth-century commentary on the *Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ*. Because of Nakkīrar’s central position in Tamil poetics, I have suggested a starting date of the eighth century for this period. Most of the texts addressed in this chapter date between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries.

<sup>31</sup> While contemporary scholarship has primarily focused on the mobilization of this “classical” tradition in service of the nineteenth-century construction of a Tamil cultural and political identity, there is virtually no scholarship on the prehistory of the making of this tradition. There is an extensive bibliography on the discovery of the Caṅkam classics and the relationship between the Tamil tradition and nineteenth-century Dravidian politics. See Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India; the Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), K. Nampī Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905-1944* (Madurai: Kutal, 1980), A. R. Venkatachalapathy, “Enna Prayocanam: Constructing the Canon in Colonial Tamilnadu” in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, no. 42(4) (Delhi : Vikas Pub. House, 2005) and Norman Cutler, “Three Moments in Tamil Literary Culture,” in Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

position of this tradition in poetic texts of this period as well as the ways in which this tradition is mobilized to address a range of new aesthetic and cultural concerns.

The classical poems that are at the center of these debates are well known to Tamil scholars.<sup>32</sup> Although their dating is still a matter of scholarly contention, these poems, which come to be known as the “Caṅkam poems,” or “poems of the scholarly assembly,” are generally understood to have been composed between 100-300 C.E., based on considerations of meter, language and cultural references. These poems are the reference point for the earliest extant Tamil poetical treatise, the *Tolkāppiyam*<sup>33</sup> (indicating that they were recognized by an early scholarly tradition) and the influence of their literary conventions extends to a wide range of literature from different sectarian communities, including the narrative epics of the Jain *Cilappatikāram* and the Buddhist *Maṇimēkalai* (500-600 C.E.),<sup>34</sup> the devotional poetry of the Shaivite and the Vaishnavite bhakti saints (600-900 C.E.)<sup>35</sup> and the Jain courtly epic *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* (≈900 C.E.).

Despite this familiarity with the conventions of the early poems, the Tamil literary and scholarly tradition prior to the eighth century contains no explicit mention of the poems nor references to a literary canon. As for references to the Caṅkam, or literary assembly in which the poems are said to have been composed, scholars such as Zvelebil and Sivaraja Pillai have suggested that the term “Caṅkam” referring to a group of scholars may have originated in the Prakrit Jain tradition, which claims a Dravidian Caṅkam was established in South India in the fifth century C.E.<sup>36</sup> As Zvelebil points out, the term Caṅkam appears in the earliest literature

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32 In part because of their important role in the construction of a Tamil identity, the Caṅkam poems have received considerable scholarly attention relative to other Tamil literature.

33 The dating of the *Tolkāppiyam* is even more problematic. Looking at inconsistencies within the text, Takahashi provides a convincing argument for the grammar’s being composed in layers, with the earliest stratum dating from the time of the earliest poems and later segments being added over several centuries. See Takanobu Takahashi, *Poetry and Poetics: Literary Conventions of Tamil Love Poetry* (Leiden; New York : E.J. Brill, 1995).

34 For scholarship on Caṅkam literary conventions in the *Cilappatikāram*, see Parthasarathy’s introduction in *Ḥaṅkōvaṭikaḷ*. *The Cilappatikāram of Ḥaṅko Aṭikaḷ : an Epic of South India*. Transl. Parthasarathy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For *Maṇimēkalai*, see Paula Richman, *Women, Branch stories, and Religious Rhetoric in a Tamil Buddhist Text* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1988) and Anne Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-Speaking South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

35 The Afterword to A.K. Ramanujan’s *Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Vishnu* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1983) provides a detailed discussion of the use of the Caṅkam akam conventions in the poems of the Vaishnavite poet-saint Nammālvār. In his discussion of the Shaivite tradition of devotional poetry, Cutler acknowledges the presence of these akam conventions, but argues for a poetics of bhakti that is more closely modeled on the puṛam genre. See Norman Cutler, *Songs of Experience: the Poetics of Tamil Devotion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

36 In his discussion of the early history of the Agastya story, Sivaraja Pillai suggests that the Caṅkam poems were “propped up” with the story of the Caṅkams as part of a larger Brahmanical response to the thriving Jain grammatical tradition. K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, *Agastya in the Tamil Land* (New Delhi: Asian Education Services, 1985): 40-44.

with a different meaning; "the nearest meaning (of the word "Caṅkam") to the one (adopted) later is that of the (sixth-century Buddhist epic) *Maṇimēkalai*, where Caṅkam signifies the Buddhist Sangha, the association of monks, one of the 'three gems' of Buddhism."<sup>37</sup> The seventh-century Shaivite devotional poems of Appar and Campantar contain several scattered references to a literary assembly associated with the god Shiva, although whether these references are better understood as historical evidence of a Shaivite assembly or as a sectarian response to the Jain and Buddhist tradition is limited to speculation. Neither of these mentions of the Caṅkam refer to an associated literary tradition, nor do they provide details about the nature of such an intellectual community.

The first mention of these poems and their ancient grammar as an authoritative tradition appears in discourse on literary convention found in the commentaries on poetic texts produced between the eighth and thirteenth centuries. Beginning with Nakkīrar's eighth-century commentary on the poetic treatise *Iraiyaṅār Akapporuḷ*, a commentary that implicates the Caṅkam poems and the poetic treatise *Tolkāppiyam* in the story of the divine origin of Tamil literature, the Caṅkam tradition emerges as an identifiable and authoritative canon in Tamil scholarship.

All commentaries produced during this period reveal the influence of the early tradition.<sup>38</sup> In their discussion of subjects that range from the basic metrical elements of poetry (such as *māttirai*, *eḷuttu*, *acai*, *cīr*) to the system of symbolic signifiers (*tiṇai*) central to Caṅkam poetics, the commentaries use terminology and conventional frameworks first found in the *Tolkāppiyam*. However, while the influence of this tradition can not be overstated, most of the commentaries produced during this period acknowledge a balance between the old tradition and new literary developments. In their choice of literary examples, for example, the commentaries integrate

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37 Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan on Tamil Literature of South India* (Leiden: Brill, 1973): 128.

38 The influence of the poetic conventions found in the *Tolkāppiyam* and the early poems can also be seen throughout Tamil treatises on language and literature of this period. To begin with, the structures of most of the grammars produced during this period are indebted in some way to the ancient grammar. Grammars such as the twelfth-century *Vīracōḷiyam* retain the chapter divisions of phonology, morphology and poetics given by the early grammar, while other texts cover in greater detail one or more subjects treated in these chapters. The thirteenth-century grammar *Nannuḷ*, for example, covers the fields of phonology and morphology, while the general category of poetics discussed by the *Tolkāppiyam* is expanded into separate texts on meter, alankāra and poetic content, covered by texts such as the *Yāpparuṅkalam*, the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, and the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* respectively. However, while the *Tolkāppiyam* remains a reference point for most of the grammars produced during this period, all show various degrees of deviation from the ancient grammar. The *Vīracōḷiyam*, for example, retains the basic chapter headings of the early grammar, but introduces new grammatical rules based on Panini. The grammars on the akam tradition (poetry of the interior, love) rearrange the basic system of poetic scenes laid out in the *Tolkāppiyam* into a narrative chronology, reflecting changes in this genre since the earlier time.

poems from the early compilations with “new” literary examples, either drawn from contemporary literature or created by the commentators themselves.<sup>39</sup>

When situated in the larger context of these various approaches to the Tamil tradition, Pērācīriyar’s thirteenth-century commentary on the *Tolkāppiyam* stands out as the most conservative. Both in his choice of literary and grammatical examples and in his rejection of contemporary literary developments, Pērācīriyar attempts to establish the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam poems as the sole authoritative source for all Tamil language and literature to the exclusion of contemporary developments.

Pērācīriyar includes throughout his commentary thousands of literary examples used to illustrate the rules expressed in the *Tolkāppiyam*’s concise grammatical verses. While it is not Tamil commentarial tradition to identify the provenance of these verses,<sup>40</sup> they are an integral part of the traditional method of teaching, which relies on a scholar’s vast recollection of these exemplary fragments.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to other commentaries of this period, Pērācīriyar draws his literary examples almost exclusively from the early compilations of the *Eṭṭuttokai* and *Pattuppāṭṭu*, as well as the early didactic poems of the *Patīṇēṅkīlkaṇakku*<sup>42</sup> and the Jain narrative poem *Cilappatikāram*. Excluded are the bhakti poems of the Shaivite and Vaishnavite corpus, the early Buddhist narrative poem *Manimekhalai*, the short love poems of the *Patīṇēṅkīlkaṇakku*, the longer Jain and Buddhist epic poems, including the well-known *Civakacintamani*, as well as courtly literary genres such as the *kōvai*, the *kalampakam* and the *ulā*. When situated within a larger intellectual milieu of scholarship on Tamil poetics, Pērācīriyar’s delimitation of the Tamil literary field represents a minority position, one that privileges the preservation of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam tradition, while excluding contemporary developments.

Pērācīriyar justifies this strategy by appealing to the antiquity of this tradition, which he identifies with the story of the origins of Tamil language and literature first articulated by Nakkīrar in his eighth-century commentary on the *Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ*. In this story, both the *Tolkāppiyam* and the early poems represent the vestiges of an ancient literary culture associated with three great Caṅkams, or literary assemblies, presided over by a

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39 The treatises on the “love” or “*akam*” genre of Tamil literature, for example, integrate examples from the Caṅkam collections with verses from the newer *kōvai* genre. Other texts, such as the tenth-century *Purapporuḷveṅpāmālai* and the *Taṅṅiyalaṅkāram*, do not cite from the Caṅkam compilations, but introduce poems in new meter that imitate the classical poems in style and content.

40 Editors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have provided citations, when possible.

41 This method of teaching is almost extinct in Tamil scholarship. The late Gopal Iyar was known for his ability to quote literary fragments in his teaching of Tamil literature and Tamil literary theory, most notably the commentaries of Nacciṅārkkīriyar.

42 It is unclear why Pērācīriyar does not include the love (*akam*) compilations of the *Patīṇēṅkīlkaṇakku*. In a later section, Pērācīriyar identifies a poem from the *Tinai Malai Nurraimpatu* as an example of a violation of tradition. See Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 90, p. 476. I discuss the place of these poems in Pērācīriyar’s commentary and in the *akam* tradition more generally in Chapter 2.

multitude of divine and semi-divine figures.<sup>43</sup> According to Nakkīrar, the third, or Final Caṅkam (*kaṭai caṅkam*), which took place in the city of Madurai, witnessed the composition of the poems of four hundred and forty-nine poets, including the compilations of the *Akaṇānūru*, the *Kuruntokai*, the *Narriṇai*, the *Aiṅkurunūru*, the *Puraṇānūru*, the *Paṭirrupattu*, the one hundred and fifty poems in kali meter (*Nurraimpatu Kali*), the seventy *Paripāṭal* poems, the *Kūttu*, the *Cirricai* and the *Pēricai*. Pērācīriyar extends this list, which is the first mention of the Caṅkam poetic corpus in Tamil literary history, to include the collection of the *Pattupāṭtu*, the *Paṭiṇeṅkīlkaṇakku* and the *Cilappatikāram*.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, while Nakkīrar mentions the individual compilations of the Akananuru, the Narrinai, and others, Pērācīriyar is first to classify these individual texts into the well-known compilations of the Pāṭtu (Pattupāṭtu) and Tokai (Eṭṭuttokai). Although the coherence of the Caṅkam corpus is now taken for granted by Tamil literary scholars, Pērācīriyar’s list implicates a body of poems composed over several hundred years in a range of styles on themes that range from scenes of romantic love to praise of Vishnu to didactic aphorisms in a body of literature that embodies the Tamil literary tradition.

Throughout his commentary, Pērācīriyar appeals to the superiority of this old tradition. In his commentary on the last two chapters of the *Tolkāppiyam* that cover poetic conventions,<sup>45</sup> Pērācīriyar distinguishes between the Caṅkam era and his own (debased) time, identifying texts produced during the Caṅkam period as “poetry of excellent people” (*cāṅrōr ceyyuḷ*)<sup>46</sup> in contrast to the work of “scholars of today” (*ikkālattār*), “later scholars” (*pirkālattār*) who are “ignorant of poetry” (*ceyyuḷ ariyātār*).<sup>47</sup> This section is also the closest the commentator comes to an outright condemnation of contemporary literary developments when he critiques people who “write poems other than [the Caṅkam compilations] *pāṭtu* and *tokai* (...) and claim that these [new]

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43 The first Caṅkam (*talai Caṅkam*) was presided over by the god Shiva, his son Murugan and a score of other divine and semi-divine figures. The second, or Middle Caṅkam (*iṭai Caṅkam*), witnessed the composition of the *Tolkāppiyam* as well as several literary worlds that are no longer extant. See Buck & Paramasivan for an English translation of this story as it appears in Nakkīrar’s commentary.

44 Pērācīriyar acknowledges the same number of *kali* and *paripāṭal* poems identified by Nakkīrar, and specifically identifies them as having been “compiled by people of the Caṅkam” (*nurraimpatu kaliyumu eḷupatu paripāṭalum eṇac caṅkattār tokuttavarṇuḷ*) (Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 149, p. 340), in a retort to those who claim that these poems do not belong. He is also first to recognize the eight compilations on *akam*, or poetry of the interior, as the collection of the *Eṭṭuttokai*. He does not mention the *Kūttu*, the *Cirricai* and the *Pēricai*, texts about which we have no additional information. Despite Nakkīrar’s association of these poems with the early corpus, he does not include excerpts as examples throughout his commentary, presumably because they do not pertain to the *akam* conventions with which he is concerned.

45 The *Tolkāppiyam* is made up of three books, each of which contain nine chapters. The last book, the *Poruḷatikāram*, contains rules pertaining to Tamil poetics, including the Caṅkam conventions of *akam* (poems of love and domestic life) and *puṇam* (poems of kingship, war and ethics). The last two chapters of the *Poruḷatikāram*, the Chapter on Poetry (*Ceyyūḷiyal*) and the Chapter on Tradition (*Marapiyal*) are the most general; these rules theoretically apply to all Tamil literature, and not just those defined by the stricter Caṅkam conventions laid out in the earlier chapters.

46 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 90, p. 476.

47 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram*, p. 447.



poems are great and devoid of faults.”<sup>48</sup> These references to later scholarship are not just rhetorical devices; while he does not mention any of these later scholars by names, he paraphrases and occasionally quotes their perspectives before following up with his ubiquitous “that is not so” (*arru anru*). He also identifies specific threats to the old tradition, such as the introduction of new genres not found in the early grammar, stating that “if a scholar creates genres according to his own interest, or according to the rules of people with other languages, this is not the tradition for creating Tamil literature.”<sup>49</sup> This concern over genres reappears in his attack on a particular set of later literature that emphasizes sophisticated word play (*cittirakavi*, also *mirāikkavi*) not found in the Caṅkam poems.<sup>50</sup>

He appeals to this logic to condemn competing poetic systems throughout his commentary, most notably in his rejection of new ways to theorize meter and literary genre. In his commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* verse 461 defining the meter *kalippā*, Pērācīriyar argues that the reworking of the fourfold metrical system laid out in the *Tolkāppiyam* into the new subdivisions of *pā* and *pāviṇam*<sup>51</sup> should be rejected on the grounds that this new classification leaves too much open for interpretation. Not only can one stanza be in fact classified within two metrical categories at the same time according to this new system, but subdividing the basic meters opens up the possibility of further subdivisions, potentially leading to limitless metrical categories and thus renders them useless as a grammatical system. Arguing that this type of classification leaves too much open for interpretation, the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators show that one stanza can be in fact classified within two metrical categories at the

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48 The full quote mentions that those learned scholars who compose these new texts will only be considered learned by a (limited) group of people (*pāṭṭum tokaiyum allātana cilanāṭṭik koṇṭu marru avaiyum cānrōr ceyyūḷāyiṇ, vaḷuvil vaḷakkamenpār uḷarāyiṇ ikkālattuḷḷum orucārārkallatu avar cānrōr eṇappaṭār*). Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 94, p. 482.

49 “*ācīriyar vēṇṭumārṇaṇum piṇapātai mākkal vēṇṭuṇ kaṭṭalaiyāṇum tamīlcceyyuḷ ceytal marapanṇeṇṇavāru*” (Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 80, p. 237-8). The alternate reading is *āriyar*, or Northerner, usually referring to a scholar trained in Sanskrit. Although this is a plausible reading, given the following mention of “people with other languages”, the lack of such specific refutations of the Sanskrit tradition leads me to favor the reading of *ācīriyar*, or “scholar/teacher”.

50 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 90, p. 476.

51 See Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 149, p. 340. While the earlier system, developed for the shorter poems of the Caṅkam, designated one meter to a poem, beginning with the devotional poems of the *Tēvāram* and the *Divyaprabandham*, and extending to the long poems of the epics and *prabandhams*, meter had been rethought in terms of shorter poetic units, called *iṇams*. A poem could now combine components from the earlier four meters without a problem of categorization. In this new classification, the four meters presented by *Tolkāppiyam* (*ācīriyam*, *veṇpā*, *kalippā* and *vañci*) are replaced by a twelve-fold system, in which each metrical category is further subdivided into subgroups, or *iṇams*. This new presentation of meter, which continues into the present day, considers as its primary unit the stanza, rather than the entire poem. As a result, most long poems are now considered to be composed in multiple meters (*iṇams*). This system, perhaps originating out of the longer poems of the Jain and Buddhist *kāyvas*, or the stanzaic form of the Shaivite and Vaishnavite bhakti poems, ultimately all but replaces the simpler *Tolkāppiyam* metric system. For the most detailed account of this metrical change, see Kandaswamy.

same time, denying the possibility of one fixed rule for that particular poem.<sup>52</sup> He is also concerned with the introduction of new genres not found in the early grammar, stating that “if a scholar creates genres according to his own interest, or according to the rules of people with other languages, this is not the tradition for creating Tamil literature.”<sup>53</sup> This concern with genres reappears in his attack on a particular set of later literature that emphasizes sophisticated word play (*cittirakavi*, also *miṛaikkavi*) not found in the Caṅkam poems and therefore in violation of Tamil tradition.<sup>54</sup> “Even if (one) creates a grammar (for such new genres), (...) and others make poetry based on these rules, one can’t say that these are (legitimate) grammatical rules because there is no limit to them.”<sup>55</sup> These new classificatory systems are not found in the early grammar, and are therefore rejected as being not in accordance with tradition.

Adherence to tradition, mentioned throughout Pēraciriyar’s commentary, defines a literary scholar’s work. This perspective is defended on the logical grounds that grammar, if not limited to one authoritative tradition, degenerates into relative rules that are not useful in understanding language. If some grammatical texts define a ruby as red-colored, Pēraciriyar questions, and others as black-colored, how can we know or say anything about a ruby?<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, if one creates a grammatical text that reflects the changes inherent in every era, Pēraciriyar points out that such a grammar would quickly become irrelevant as the language continued to develop. Pēraciriyar locates the solution to this threat to the stability of Tamil grammar in the authoritative tradition of the unassailable primary treatise. He includes a lengthy discussion on the nature of this tradition in his commentary on the last chapter of the *Tolkāppiyam*, the chapter on convention (*Marapiyal*). In this section, which reveals an anxiety over both the creation and the identification of a primary treatise, Pēraciriyar emphasizes that a

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52 Pēraciriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 149, p. 340. The full text reads as follows: “In addition to the three subdivisions of *viruttam*, *turai* and *tāḷicai*, one could also add more, as they do for the musical category of *tīraṇ*, bringing the six types of meter to thirty. If one subdivides this way, it would lead to infinite divisions (*viruttamun turaiyūn tāḷicaiyumanṇri oppun tīraṇumenṇrārpōḷvaṇa cilakūṭṭi aruvakaic ceyyūḷōṭturaḷa muppatām; iṇi, avarrai vikarpittunōkka eṇṇiranta pakutiyaḷvām [...]*)”

53 “*āciriyar vēṇṭumārraṇum piṇapātai mākkal vēṇṭuṇ kaṭṭalaiyāṇum tamīlceyyuḷ ceṅtal marapaṇṇreṇṇavāru*” (Pēraciriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 90, p. 237-8). The alternate reading is *āriyar*, or Northerner, usually referring to a scholar trained in Sanskrit. Although this is a plausible reading, given the following mention of “people with other languages”, the lack of such specific refutations of the Sanskrit tradition leads me to favor the reading of *āciriyar*, or “scholar/teacher”.

54 Pēraciriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 90, p. 476.

55 ‘*orrai irattai putti vittāra*’ *eṇṇrārpōḷvaṇa palavuṇ kaṭṭikkonṭu avarrāṇē ceyyūḷ ceyyūṇ kaṭṭiyalākāmaiṇi avarriṇku varaiyaṇaivakaiyāṇ ilakkaṇaṅkūra lākāveṇpatu*. Pēraciriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 90, p. 476. The first four words appear to be a quote from a specific text or tradition that Pēraciriyar is rejecting, although I have not been able to identify it.

56 The full sentence deals more specifically with a grammarian who chooses to write a text that contradicts the primary treatise. This type of text is identified in grammars such as the *Nannūḷ* as an *etirṇūḷ*. “*māṇikka maṇiyiṇaic cevvaṇṇam mutalāyiṇa cila ilakkaṇaṅkūriya nūḷ kiṭṭappak karuvaṇṇa mutalāyiṇavum, atarkilakkaṇameṇṇru oruvaṇ etirṇūḷ eṇṇpatōr nūḷ piṇkāḷattuc ceyyūṇmāyiṇ atu atāṇ ilakkaṇameṇṇap paṭātākālāṇeṇṇpatu*” Pēraciriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 93, p. 478.

scholar cannot create a text on poetics based on his own knowledge<sup>57</sup> and that although there are Tamil texts that claim to be primary treatises today (*mutunūl ulava enru ikkālattu ceytukāṭṭiṇum*),<sup>58</sup> these texts must not be original because they did not exist in earlier times. Furthermore, if a scholar disagrees with a previous treatise and writes a treatise challenging these ideas in a later time, he is creating a text that goes against Tamil treatises and Tamil tradition.<sup>59</sup> In fact, Pērācīriyar points out that even if a scholar in a later period creates a treatise that adheres to grammatical rules (in that it contains the necessary elements of grammatical verse [*cuttiram*], gloss [*kāntikai*] and commentary [*urai*]) the text will violate tradition if the content contradicts an earlier treatise.<sup>60</sup>

Not surprisingly, Pērācīriyar locates this primary treatise in the same story of the three Caṅkams from which he draws his literary examples. This time he reaches back to the first Caṅkam, presided over by Shiva, Murugan and a host of other divine and semi-divine figures. According to both Pērācīriyar and Nakkīrar, this Caṅkam witnessed the production of the first Tamil grammar, the *Akattiyam*, composed by the semi-divine grammarian-sage Agastya. Throughout his commentary, Pērācīriyar appeals to the authority of this primary text with his ubiquitous style of question and response. “If you ask whether or not one (should) accept this,” Pērācīriyar asks, “Accept (it) because it is thus said by the scholar Agastya who created the first treatise.”<sup>61</sup> The appeal to the primary treatise provides the ultimate justification for the rejection of new developments such as the new classification of meter. “If later scholars want to mix up the meters,” Pērācīriyar says, “Clear up a student’s confusion (on this subject) by telling him that the primary treatise *Agattiyam* has not discussed (this new metrical classification).”<sup>62</sup>

After establishing the *Akattiyam* as the primary treatise, Pērācīriyar claims the *Tolkāppiyam* as the legitimate heir to the *Akattiyam*’s grammatical tradition as the authoritative secondary treatise (*vaḷi nūl*) and the main grammatical text for the Second and Third Caṅkams. Here Pērācīriyar draws on several sources, including Nakkīrar and the preambles of three

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57 “*oṇṇan vaḷiyē anriyum tām tām arintavārrāṇum nūl ceyya peṇārō eṇiṇ, atu marapu anru*” (Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 93, p. 478).

58 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram*, p. 661.

59 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 94, pp. 479-481. Much of the discussion of the primary treatise in this section is incoherent, perhaps because it is corrupt.

60 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 105, p. 499.

61 The full quote identifies Agastya as the author of this treatise “*atu errārperutum eṇiṇ mutanūl ceyta ācīriyaṇ akattiyaṇār collumārār perutum enrvāru*” (Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 51, p. 198) .

62 . Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 51, p. 199) This line also include a reference to a musical classification established by Agastya, that of *paṇ* and *tiraṇ*. Agastya is supposed to have authored a treatise on music as well.

grammatical treatises that establish *Tolkāppiyaṅār* as the leader of all Agastya’s disciples.<sup>63</sup> Pērācīriyar emphasizes that “all scholars concerned about violating tradition say that *Tolkāppiyaṅār* was the leader of the scholars who follow Agastya.”<sup>64</sup> For Pērācīriyar, Agastya’s other students, despite their affiliation with their legendary teacher, disappear into the oblivion of second-rate grammarians in order to elevate the *Tolkāppiyam* to its monolithic status.<sup>65</sup>

In his insistence on the proper identification of a Tamil tradition articulated in a genealogy of authoritative treatises, Pērācīriyar provides a methodological response to his anxiety over the multiplicity of interpretive frameworks that had appeared in Tamil since the *Tolkāppiyam*’s time. However, this firm stance on the maintenance of an authoritative grammatical tradition seems to contradict his very understanding of the way that language changes over time. In an earlier section of his commentary, in which he discusses tradition not as a grammatical phenomenon but as a component associated with poetry, Pērācīriyar interprets the term “tradition” as a concept that adapts to particular circumstances. Pērācīriyar explains, for instance, that the antiquated words for “there, here, and in between” (*atōḷi itōḷi utōḷi*) and for “cloud” (*kuyiṅ*), even though they appear in the *Tolkāppiyam*, were not used in the Caṅkam collections *Pattuppāṭṭu* and *Eṭṭuttokai* because they had fallen out of use by the time of the creation of these poems.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, later poetry should not use words found in *Pattuppāṭṭu* and *Eṭṭuttokai* if these words are no longer understood by people.<sup>67</sup>

Pērācīriyar goes on to point out that even if words remain in usage, a poet has to be sensitive to the ways in which the meaning of the word shifts over time. He gives several examples, including how the words for “mountain” (*malai* and *pirāṅkal*) were synonyms at the time of the *Tolkāppiyam*, but the word “*malai*” has since lost the sense of “height”.<sup>68</sup> Other

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63 In his defense of *Tolkāppiyam*, Pērācīriyar reserves a special place for Nakkīrar, whose claim that the *Tolkāppiyam* was the authoritative grammar for the second and third Caṅkams is legitimized by Nakkīrar’s status as one who has “foregone meat and undertaken austerities” (*avar pulavut turanta nōṅpuṭaiyār*) and therefore “does not tell lies” (*poykūrār*). (Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 94, p. 481).

64 *innāṇaṅ kūṛākkāl ituvum marapuvalūvenru aṅci akattiyar valittōṅriya ācīriyarellāruḷḷun tolkāppiyaṅārē talaivareṅpatu ellā ācīriyaru kūrupaveṅpatu* (Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 94, p. 481).

65 Jean-Luc Chevillard provides a detailed history of the story of Agastya’s disciples, including a thorough investigation of the way in which different versions of the story were transmitted into the nineteenth century. He proposes that the standard understanding of Agastya’s twelve disciples may be a nineteenth-century intervention by the Shaivite Arumuka Navalar, as part of a synthesis of what were previously different strands of the Agastya story. Chevillard, Jean-Luc, “The Pantheon of Tamil grammarians : a short history of the myth of Agastya’s twelve disciples” in Colas Gérard & Gerschheimer Gerdi, (Eds), *Écrire et transmettre en Inde classique*. Études thématiques N°23. (École Française d’Extrême-Orient. Paris, 2009) 243-268.

66 Although most contemporary Tamil scholars date the *Tolkāppiyam* as posterior to the Caṅkam poems, Pērācīriyar assumes that the grammar preceded the poetry.

67 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 80, p. 235.

68 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 80, p. 237.

words have retained their meaning but have changed form, such as the towns of Kuṭavāy and Uṛaiyūr, which were called Kuṭantai and Uṛantai respectively in the Caṅkam poems.<sup>69</sup> Finally, Pērācīriyar recognizes that the meaning of a word is also specific to a place and should not be confused with the meaning in other areas, just like the different decorations and costumes of people are specific to the eighteen linguistic areas.<sup>70</sup> Unlike grammar, which requires strict adherence to the tradition of an authoritative older treatise, the tradition of literary language must reflect shifts in contemporary usage.

Furthermore, even though Pērācīriyar acknowledges divine influence in the beginnings of the Tamil grammatical tradition, he does not assume the divinity of the language itself. In fact, he stresses that Tamil is a language spoken by “those of the world” (*ulakattār*),<sup>71</sup> even if those worldly speakers are understood to be superior, learned people (*cāṅṅōr; uyarntōr*). For Pērācīriyar, scholarship on language covers not only poetic usage, but also colloquial usage, as he addresses in his commentary on the first verse of the chapter on poetics. In his overview of the subjects covered by this chapter, Pērācīriyar explains that while this chapter collects and discusses grammar for poetry, the other eight chapters in this section discuss colloquial language.<sup>72</sup> In fact, Pērācīriyar explains that the boundary between poetic and colloquial usage is not hard and fast. As he mentions in his commentary on the verse on “usage” (*marapu*) in the Ceyyūḷiyal, or chapter on poetics, poetry can and does come from applying metrical rules to colloquial usage. To illustrate this point, he takes a sentence from colloquial usage and shows how it can operate as poetry with the addition of meter. Likewise, he points out that poetry can become colloquial usage, as in the example he draws from the *Nālaṭiyār*, a collection of moral aphorisms that may have been used to pepper everyday language, similar to a proverb.<sup>73</sup> This mingling of poetic and colloquial language distinguishes this tradition from that of other South Asian grammatical traditions, in which “(...) a sharp distinction between literature and non-literature was both discursively and practically constructed by those who made, heard, and read texts in premodern South Asia.”<sup>74</sup>

In his acceptance of the mutability of language in both literary and colloquial usage, Pērācīriyar abandons his strict position that Tamil language should be based exclusively on the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam texts. This contradictory stance on tradition, in which it has one meaning for literature and another for grammar, raises questions about the relationship between

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69 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 80, p. 237. He cites *Akam* 60 and *Puṛam* 69 as examples of the old forms.

70 “*paṭiṇēnpāṭait tēcikamākkaḷ aṇiyiṇaiyuṅk kōlattīṇaiyum viravikkūrātu avvanāṭṭār pūnumārraṇum puṇaiyumārraṇum ērpaccollutal marapu*” (Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 80, p. 235).

71 See, for example, Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 80, p. 234.

72 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 1, p. 113.

73 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 80, p. 234.

74 Pollock 2006: 5.

grammar and literary production in Pēraciriyar's commentary.<sup>75</sup> How can a literary tradition stay faithful to an authoritative grammar on the one hand and on the other hand be reflective of linguistic changes? If literature does not need to adhere to grammar, what then is the function of a grammatical text, particularly a text on poetics?

One clue to these questions lies in identifying the cultural project to which Pēraciriyar is committed. Like much in South Asian literary history, scant extra-literary evidence exists to help historically situate these different interpretations of the role of the Caṅkam past. Little scholarship exists on these commentaries, and the few existing biographical details are often contradictory. Unlike the majority of commentaries of the same period, such as the *Vīracōḷiyam* and the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*, neither Pēraciriyar nor the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* are associated with a patron, royal or otherwise, and the manuscript tradition, which dates back only several hundred years, is relatively undocumented. However, the cultural project at stake in these commentaries becomes more clear when we locate Pēraciriyar's interpretive strategies within a larger network of sectarian approaches to the classical past and the origins of the Tamil literary and grammatical tradition.

In his use of the Caṅkam poems and the *Tolkāppiyam* to establish the origins of Tamil as a literary language, Pēraciriyar participated in a larger pan-Indian phenomenon of the creation and legitimation of literary languages ranging from Bengali to Kannada during this period, a phenomenon Sheldon Pollock identifies with new literary expressions of royal power situated in the vernacular idiom, in contrast to Sanskrit, which had dominated literary production in South (and Southeast Asia) for nearly one thousand years.<sup>76</sup> As vernacular traditions transformed themselves into literary languages through the creation of new literature and grammars, Sanskrit literature and literary theory provided the model for much of this process. In contrast, Pēraciriyar emphasizes the non-Sanskritic elements of the Tamil past. He acknowledges the existence of other languages, but says that they have no place in his discussion of Tamil tradition.<sup>77</sup> The story of the Caṅkams itself is rooted in a very local version of the Tamil past as

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75 Pēraciriyar attempts to justify this contradiction by attributing proper language usage to a select group of superior people (*uyarntōr*) whom he identifies as "Brahmins and others with like knowledge." A tentative attempt at reconciling these two sections might result in the speculative conclusion that tradition allows for certain types of changes, reflected in the language of the superior people, while other types of changes, reflected in the language of inferior people, deviate from tradition. Whether or not this formulation accommodates innovation is unclear. See Pēraciriyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 92, p. 477.

76 See Pollock 2006. Pollock provides a earlier, less detailed overview of his concept of vernacularization in "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular" in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Feb., 1998): 6-37.

77 "(...) texts in other languages don't need to follow this tradition;" "(...) because they aren't Tamil texts, they aren't researched here." Pēraciriyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 93, p. 479; Pēraciriyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 97, p. 484.

the Caṅkams take place in Madurai, under Pandya patronage.<sup>78</sup> Although Pērācīriyar does not refer to Madurai, he refers to a flood that was said to have destroyed Madurai during the Second Caṅkam, using this detail of local history/legend to determine the chronology of two scholars. The second scholar's mention of the sea as the boundary of Tamil country is evidence for Pērācīriyar that he composed his text after the flood eliminated the Kumari River and rearranged the boundaries of South India.<sup>79</sup> Pērācīriyar's silence on the Sanskrit tradition is also evident in his version of the Agastya story. While the majority of Agastya stories in Tamil address Agastya's virtuosity in both languages,<sup>80</sup> Pērācīriyar strips Agastya of his Sanskritic association.

When situated within a larger network of approaches to the Tamil past, Pērācīriyar's version reflects a view shared by other Tamil Shaivite scholars. To begin with, Pērācīriyar's choice to identify with Nakkīrar's version of the Caṅkam past situates his interpretation of the origins of Tamil language and literature within the Shaivite tradition. In Nakkīrar's story, Shiva is not only the leader of the first Caṅkam, in which Agastya's primeval grammar is composed, but he is also later responsible for the revival of Tamil poetics after the knowledge is lost due to the exodus of Tamil scholars from the Tamil land. While Pērācīriyar does not attribute Shaivite origins to Tamil as explicitly as Nakkīrar does, he does refer to Nakkīrar as an authoritative figure<sup>81</sup> and acknowledges Shiva's authorship of the grammatical treatise on which Nakkīrar comments.<sup>82</sup>

More importantly, Pērācīriyar's identification of Agastya as the founder of Tamil grammar draws on a widespread network of stories linking Agastya, Shiva and grammatical

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<sup>78</sup> In an attempt to radically rethink the dating of the Tamil literary tradition, including the composition of the Caṅkam poems, Tiekēn 2001 uses inscriptional and literary evidence to attempt to link the entire Caṅkam tradition with the ninth and tenth century Pandyan kings. Rejecting the scholarship of Zvelebil, Hart, Kailasapathy, Marr, Gros, and countless others, Tiekēn argues that the Tamil Caṅkam poems are literary compositions of the ninth-century Pandyan court, as part of a project to identify the medieval Pandyan kings with the Caṅkam period dynasty of the same name. He does not accept previous attempts at historicization through the accounts of battles and kings recorded in the poems; rather, he concludes that this material is fictional, and not useful as historical evidence. Using a radically new interpretation of the poems, as well as extraliterary information about the nature of the Pandyan court, Tiekēn presents the Tamil poems as derivative of Sanskritic literary tradition, following similar poetic conventions as the Prakrit Sattasai as well as texts such as the Kamasutra.

The story as it appears in Nakkīrar's commentary is closely linked with the representation of the Pandya kings both as devotees of Shiva and as patrons of grammar. Interestingly, all reference to the Pandyas is removed in Pērācīriyar's account.

<sup>79</sup> Pērācīriyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 94, p. 482

<sup>80</sup> See William Davis, *Agastya: The Southern Sage From the North* (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 2000), Kamil Zvelebil, *Companion Studies to the History of Tamil Literature* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1992): 235-262; K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, *Agastya in the Tamil Land* (1930. Reprint, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1985) for the most thorough treatments of Agastya's role in South India. For the relationship of Agastya to the Tamil grammatical tradition, including a detailed study of the legends surrounding his disciples, see Chevillard 2009.

<sup>81</sup> Pērācīriyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 94, pp. 480-481.

<sup>82</sup> He identifies the text as “*perumāṇaṭikaḷ kaḷaviyal.*” Pērācīriyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marapiyal* 94, p. 480.

production.<sup>83</sup> As Davis points out in his discussion of the Southern Agastya tradition, “Agastya is used to interpret the Tamil country as a domain of Shiva. He provides evidence of the presence of Shiva in the region, and of the god’s benevolence and goodwill towards it. (...) First, Agastya functions as an intermediary between Shiva and the Tamil country, responsible for the bestowal of things to the Tamils, including the Tamil language, rivers, government, and the sight of Shiva himself and his wife Parvati (...)”<sup>84 85</sup>

Approximately one hundred years after Pērācīriyar, the Shaivite commentator Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar reflects this “special capability of Agastya to move easily between the divine realm and human” in his commentary on the preamble to the *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>86</sup> In contrast to Pērācīriyar, whose references to Agastya are primarily limited to the local story of the Tamil Caṅkams, Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar introduces details of the Agastya story from the larger, translocal

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83 As Davis 2000 points out, most of the stories about Agastya in the Tamil country are talapuranams. He also points out that the biggest contributors to the Agastya myth are Shaivite sectarian brahmins.

84 Davis, 2000: 228. Also, in some of the talapuranam journey narratives Shiva’s presence in the Tamil country is also made concrete through the identification of Agastya with Shiva himself, as well as that of his wife Lopamudra with Parvati, the Kaveri (or other specific river) with the Ganges, and Potiyil Mountain with Mount Kailasa” (Davis, 2000: 228). Davis emphasizes Agastya’s special function of being able to “move(s) easily between divine realm and human” (Davis, 2000: 230).

85 Chevillard more explicitly implicates Shiva in the relationship between Shiva and the Caṅkam tradition, stating that Agastya serves "as a symbolic intermediary between Siva and texts (such as the *Eṭṭutokai* and *hte Pattuppāṭṭu*) that were already extant before the Shaivite bhakti wave" (Chevillard 2009: 21) In the same article, Chevillard points out the association between Agastya and Tamil in the *Tēvāram* that we have the association of Agastya with Tamil (Chevillard 2009:19).

86 While Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar shares many of the literary examples of Pērācīriyar, he also draws on more of the Brahmanical details from Nakkīrar’s story. To begin with, Nakkīrar is the first literary scholar in Tamil to attribute the benefit (*payan*) of spiritual liberation (*vītu*) to the reading and understanding of a scholarly text. Although spiritual liberation had been established as the most important of the four Hindu aims of life in Sanskrit texts by the time of the *Tolkāppiyam*, the ancient grammar only mentions “the three aims beginning with righteous action,” referring to the aims of righteous action (*aṛam*, Skt. *dharma*), prosperity (*poruḷ*, Skt. *artha*) and pleasure (*inṇam*, Skt. *kāma*).<sup>47</sup> Despite the original text’s silence on the topic of liberation, the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators reflect Nakkīrar’s concern with this new important principle. In his commentary on the preamble (*pāyiram*) to the *Tolkāppiyam*, Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar defines both colloquial language (*vaḷakku*) and poetry (*ceyyuḷ*) as "that which conveys righteous action, wealth, pleasure *and* liberation in the words used in a certain time period."<sup>48</sup> He predicts questions about the absence of the term “liberation” in the *Tolkāppiyam*, responding that while "neither Agastya and *Tolkāppiyānār* discussed the nature of liberation in a grammar, they discussed the *causes* of liberation, [referring to the other three aims of life] (Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Eḷuttatikāram*, Preamble, p. 65. Emphasis mine. He follows this sentence with a odd reference to the author of the *Tirukkural*, saying that Vaḷḷuvaṅ, also of this perspective, also gave the causes of gaining liberation in the form of three chapters. Later, Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar explains that the *Tolkāppiyam* verse that specifically introduces the three aims of life does not include liberation because the verse pertains to literature about worldly customs, whereas liberation requires letting go of [these] worldly things (*ulakiyaṛ poruṇmūṇṇaraiyūm ivaiyeṇak kūri avarrai viṭumāruṅ kūravē vītuṅ kūriṇṇām*). Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram*, verse 418, p. 132. Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar adds that poetry that covers liberation can be found in the section on kockakam meter, which is associated with divine praise. The treatment of devotional and praise poetry in the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries is the subject of a subsequent chapter.



world of the Sanskrit purāṇas and the greater Hindu pantheon. In Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar’s version of the Agastya story, the sage is dispatched to South India by the gods to offset the weight of a divine gathering in the North. On his way to the South, the holy man encounters various sages and semi-divine beings, including Tiruṇatūmākkīṇiyār alias Tolkāppīyaṇār, son of the Vedic seer Yamatakkīṇi, as well as the demon Rāvaṇa from the pan-Indic Rāmāyaṇa story. Agastya eventually settles in his home at Mount Potiyal, the sacred mountain with which he is often associated. After an incident in which Tolkāppīyaṇār breaks his promise to Agastya in order to protect his teacher’s wife Lopāmudra, Agastya curses him and tells the literary assembly not to accept Tolkāppīyaṇār’s grammar.<sup>87</sup> Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar’s story is as striking for its introduction of non-Tamil elements<sup>88</sup> as it is for its silence on details about the three Caṅkams given by Pērācīriyar and Nakkīrar. Although the Caṅkams do not feature in this section of his commentary, he refers to them throughout his later commentary.

Nakkīrar and the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators were not the only Tamil scholars of this period to associate the Tamil past with the *Tolkāppiyam* and the mythological Agastya. When situated within a larger network of attitudes towards the Tamil literary tradition, the privileging of Caṅkam literature as well as the role of Agastya and Tolkāppīyaṇār in the origins of Tamil seems to be an interpretation shared by commentators associated with the Shaivite tradition. The preamble of the tenth-century Shaivite poetic treatise *Purapporuḷvenpāmālai* also attributes the origins of Tamil to the sage Agastya. The details given in this verse overlap with those given by Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar, including the mention of Agastya’s staying on the Southern Mountain at the request of the gods, and the description of his role as Tamil teacher to his twelve disciples, including Tolkāppīyaṇār.<sup>89</sup> The Shaivite Aṭiyārkkunallār’s thirteenth-century commentary on the epic *Cilappatikāram* contains even more details of the Agastya story, including references to Nakkīrar’s commentary. While Aṭiyārkkunallār’s range of literary examples is considerably greater than that of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators, he also emphasizes the importance of the Caṅkam past and Agastya’s role in that tradition. He begins his commentary by identifying the *Tolkāppiyam* as the primary treatise for literary Tamil at the time of composition of the *Cilappatikāram*, and by rejecting later grammars as unsuitable. His references to Agastya are both local and translocal; on the one hand, he situates both Agastya and Tolkāppīyaṇār not only in the second Caṅkam but specifically in the court of the Pāndyan king in the ancient Tamil town of Kapāṭapuram. On the other hand, throughout his commentary, he introduces Agastya stories found in the purāṇas, including the story of Agastya’s being sent to the South, a detail shared by Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar and the *Purapporuḷvenpāmālai* commentator.

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87 Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Eḷuttatikāram*, Preamble, p. 66.

88 As Sivaraja Pillai points out, Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar’s Tolkāppīyaṇār story involves several unmistakable parallels with the story of Parasurama, also a son of Yamatakkīṇi and also known for settling the South, supporting literary studies, and inhabiting a mountain. Sivaraja Pillai 1930 (1985): 30..

89 Unlike the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries, however, this version of the story introduces a new grammar of the same status as the *Tolkāppiyam* (the *Panniru Patalam*) as well as a new generation of students: the Chera king Ayaṇār, who learned the grammar from Agastya’s disciples and created the *Purapporuḷvenpāmālai*.

While Pērācīriyar’s interpretation of the Tamil past is significantly more conservative than that of Aṭiyārkkunallār or the *Purapporuḷvenpāmālai* commentator, they share a common tradition invested in the recovery and preservation of lost knowledge. Without the *Tolkāppiyam*, the knowledge of Agastya’s grammar would be lost, and with it the origins of Tamil language and literature. Pērācīriyar acknowledges this shared perspective by including these scholars in his commentary. In a rare reference to a contemporary scholar, Pērācīriyar cites the *Purapporuḷvenpāmālai* as an authoritative perspective on Agastya and the *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>90</sup>

However, not all scholars writing during this period adopted the authority of Agastya, the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam past. The eleventh-century Jain *Virutti* commentary on the metrical treatise *Yāpparuṅkalam*, for example, reveals a very different approach to the classical tradition. To begin with, the *Yāpparuṅkalam* itself, an eleventh century treatise by the Jain scholar Amutacākara, integrates new developments in meter and poetics with the conventions laid out in the *Tolkāppiyam*. The first chapter of the *Yāpparuṅkalam*, the Chapter on Poetic Components (*Urappiyal*),<sup>91</sup> begins with verses on the basic components of literary language found throughout Tamil poetics, including the *Tolkāppiyam*. The second chapter, the Chapter on Poetics (*Ceyyuliyaal*), discusses the four major meters presented by the *Tolkāppiyam* before introducing the same metrical subdivisions of pā and iṅam condemned by Pērācīriyar. Finally, the third chapter, the Chapter on Miscellany (*Oḷipiyal*), includes only three verses, two of which list poetic topics with which a learned poet should be familiar. The topics addressed here are not limited to those covered by the *Tolkāppiyam* or ostensibly to any other particular tradition. Some are familiar from the Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram, the better known 12th century text on poetic figure based on the Sanskrit *Kāvyaḍarśa*, including six of the mīraikkavi genres, rejected by Pērācīriyar.

The anonymous commentary, most likely composed by a student of Amutacakarar, presents a very different approach to the classical tradition privileged by Pērācīriyar. In contrast to the privileging of the *Tolkāppiyam* found in the Pērācīriyar’s commentary, the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* commentator integrates many different positions into his commentary without applying judgments of hierarchy. The commentary on one verse may include several different perspectives, complete with exemplary verses borrowed from other grammars to support each approach. This strategy of compilation, which presents discourse on a particular topic without one resolution, differs from the monolithic stance taken by the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators, in which any position that differs from the *Tolkāppiyam* is rejected. The *Virutti* commentator acknowledges the *Tolkāppiyam* tradition<sup>92</sup> and a grammar called the “Caṅkam metrical text” (*Caṅkayāppu*)<sup>93</sup> but recognizes them as only two of many potential interpretative traditions. Unlike the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators, whose story depends in part on the lost knowledge of Agastya’s grammar, the *Virutti* commentator refers to a text by Agastya that appears to be circulating during his time; he tells the reader to learn more about this text from those well-

90 Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Marappiyal* 94, p. 481.

91 According to the *Tolkāppiyam (Ceyyuliyaal* 1), literature is made up of a series of such poetic components.

92 See *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam* 40, p. 166 for a good example of this catholic perspective.

93 *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam* 16, p. 79.

versed in the tradition since he doesn't have the space to discuss it in his commentary.<sup>94</sup> As for Nakkīrar, the *Virutti* commentator cites an anonymous *cuttiram* mentioning “Nakkīrar’s authoritative treatise” (*kīrar aṭi nūl*, p. 437) but does not attribute any special status to this mention. Additionally, the *Virutti* commentator stands out for his citation of his sources, an unusual practice among premodern Tamil scholars. By identifying his range of sources, the *Virutti* commentator draws attention to his compilative project with no attempt to present the heteroglossia of Tamil scholarship as a cohesive voice.

In contrast to Pērācīriyar, who insists on the distinctly local origins of Tamil language and literature, for the *Virutti* commentator Sanskrit is a productive source of literary genres and theories. In his commentary on the last verse of the *Yāpparuṅkalam*, which consists of a list of genres and poetic topics that, according to the commentator, display the author’s breadth of knowledge, the commentator discusses the same literary genres condemned by Pērācīriyar, identifying them as Tamil versions of genres “created in the vast ocean of Sanskrit.”<sup>95</sup> He also occasionally introduces verses from Tamil scholars who follow Sanskrit (*vaṭanūl uṭaiyār*)<sup>96</sup> without recognizing them as foreign or threatening.

As for references to the Caṅkam poetic framework discussed by the *Tolkāppiyam*, here also the *Virutti* commentator presents a range of interpretations existing during his time. In his discussion of landscape (*tiṇai*), a key concept in the poetics of the early poems,<sup>97</sup> the *Virutti* commentator does not cite the *Tolkāppiyam*, but rather includes sources from alternative texts, including the *Paṇṇiru Paṭalam*, said to have been composed by another of Agastya’s students, and a text called *Tiṇai Nūl*.<sup>98</sup> As for a reference to tradition (*marapu*), the *Virutti* commentator’s only mention of the term refers to technical ways of describing the poem’s patron, a subject of much literary debate in later grammars.<sup>99</sup>

The *Virutti* commentator is equally inclusive in his choice of literary examples. Although he occasionally includes Caṅkam poems as examples throughout the commentary, the majority of his examples are either contemporary examples, including the Jain epics *Valaiyāpati*, *Cūlamaṇi*, and *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, or unidentified poems that may have been written by the commentator or may have served as generic grammatical examples. These unidentified examples include a range of new literary genres, such as devotional Jain poems and poems inspired by folk traditions, as well as poems that imitate the Caṅkam poems in imagery and

<sup>94</sup> *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 16, p. 282.

<sup>95</sup> “āriyam eṇṇum pārirumpauvattuk kāṭṭiya akkaraccutakamum, mātiraic cutakamum, pintu matiyum, pirēlikaiyum mutalākavuṭaiyaṇavum, ipperriyē tamilākac collum miṇaik kavikaḷum aṇintu kolka eṇravāru” (*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 96, pp. 525-553).

<sup>96</sup> *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 93, p. 370.

<sup>97</sup> See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of this central concept in Tamil poetics.

<sup>98</sup> *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 96, p. 569.

<sup>99</sup> *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 96, p. 554-555.

literary convention.<sup>100</sup> These Caṅkam “imitations” clearly indicate the poet’s knowledge of the Caṅkam conventions, although unlike Pēraciriyar, who implicates the poems in a canonizing project in support of an authoritative tradition, for the *Virutti* commentator, Caṅkam poetics provide a vehicle through which the commentator introduces new developments in meter, *alankāra* and content.<sup>101</sup>

It is fairly clear through the intertextuality of the commentaries that Pēraciriyar saw the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* or the tradition represented by the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* as a threat that, though never mentioned by name, needed to be rejected on the grounds of violating Tamil tradition.<sup>102</sup> Whether in the field of metrics, literary genres or the reinterpretation of Caṅkam conventions, the *Virutti* commentary represents the heteroglossia which threatens the cohesiveness of the Tamil tradition. This perceived threat to the monolithic authority of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam tradition may explain the conservative position of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators. In fact, the insecurity over the status of the *Tolkāppiyam* during this period extended beyond challenges to its authoritative position to the instability of the text itself. In his commentary on the first verse of the *Ceyyūḷiyal*, Pēraciriyar expresses concern over a perceived lack of textual coherence of the *Tolkāppiyam*. He mentions that there are scholars who consider this section to be a separate chapter called the *Yappatikāram*, or chapter on meter. He refutes this suggestion, saying that this division would disrupt the symmetry of nine chapters in each section.<sup>103</sup> Although the order of chapters and subsections within the *Tolkāppiyam* is now taken for granted, it appears that there was some insecurity during the time of the commentators as to how to understand the text as a whole. This insecurity was not unique to the *Tolkāppiyam*; Pēraciriyar discusses the erroneous conflation of the Caṅkam poems *Paripāṭal* and *Kalittokai* during his period. He states that “because these come as different compilations in [the Caṅkam compilation] *Eṭṭuttokai*, those who say that *Paripāṭal* comes within *Kalittokai* are ignorant of literature.”<sup>104</sup> As Cutler has discussed in his work on the *Tirukkuraḷ* commentaries, one function of the commentary is to stabilize the text according to one interpretation.<sup>105</sup> If the commentaries

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100 In contrast to a scholar such as Jagannātha Paṇḍitarāja, who saw himself as an innovator within the Sanskrit alankāra tradition, the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* commentator doesn’t identify in such a way. See Tubb & Bronner 2008 (36): 619-632 for a discussion of Jagannātha and “newness” in Sanskrit poetics.

<sup>101</sup> This is the subject of the following chapter.

<sup>102</sup> See Pēraciriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 18, p. 151 for a direct refutation of the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* commentator, which includes an unusual citation of the *Virutti* commentary. Also see Pēraciriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 139, p. 323. In a later section of commentary, Pēraciriyar’s refutation of new meters in Tamil reflects the metrical system laid out in the *Yāpparuṅkalam*.

<sup>103</sup> Pēraciriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 1, p. 112.

<sup>104</sup> *paripāṭaluṅ kalippāviṇuḷ aṅkumenpārum uḷar. kaliyum paripāṭalumeṇa eṭṭuttokaiyuḷ iranṭu tokai tammiṅ vēṛātaliṅ avvāru kūruvār ceyyūḷ ariyātāreṇpatu.* Pēraciriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 130, p. 313.

<sup>105</sup> Norman Cutler. “Interpreting Tirukkuraḷ: the Role of Commentary in the Creation of a Text,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 112, no. 4 (Oct. – Dec. 1992): 549-566.

felt such a need to stabilize the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam poems, this insecurity would help explain their stance of preservation in a highly competitive intellectual milieu.

On the one hand, this threat can be more specifically situated in the competition between sectarian intellectual communities. Just as the attempt to situate Tamil grammar within an authoritative tradition associated with Agastya fits within a larger network of Shaivite attitudes towards the Tamil past, the *Virutti* commentator's approach to the Caṅkam tradition is shared by other scholars of the heterodox traditions of Jainism and Buddhism. The Buddhist commentary on the *Vīracōliyam* quotes extensively from the *Virutti* commentary and also incorporates a range of scholarly perspectives without privileging the *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>106</sup> Both Mayilainathar's fourteenth-century Jain commentary on the grammatical text *Nannūl*, and the twelfth-century Jain commentary on the grammatical text *Nēminātam* mention Agastya and *Tolkāppiyāṅār* as grammarians devoid of any divine association. Like the *Virutti* commentator, these commentators include citations from a grammar they identify as the *Akattiyam*<sup>107</sup> along with a range of other grammatical perspectives and literary examples. While all of these Jain and Buddhist commentators draw from Caṅkam literature in their examples, none mention Nakkīrar's story of the classical past, including the earliest commentator on the *Tolkāppiyam*, *Ḥampūraṅār*, who is identified as a Jain. In fact, Pēracīriyar himself hints at the sectarian nature of these intellectual debates. In a rare example of identifying his opposition, Pēracīriyar refers to those who challenge the authority of the *Tolkāppiyam* as "renunciants" (*āllātār*) who violate Tamil tradition<sup>108</sup> and "those who oppose Vedic practice" (*vēta vaḷakkoṭu mārukoḷvār*), terms that could refer to either Jain or Buddhist practitioners.<sup>109</sup>

In their sectarian affiliations the commentaries take part in a larger movement in the creation of communities. profuse scholarship associated with the creation of many religious and literary communities. During a time when sectarian boundaries were being reworked, religious doctrine was often "defined and defended in the realm of the literary", across a wide range of religious communities writing in both Tamil and Sanskrit. However, the sectarian role in debates over the classical tradition should not be mistaken for the types of sectarian polemic seen throughout Tamil literary history.<sup>110</sup> The boundaries between these scholarly groups, most likely established at a court or another non-sectarian site of royal patronage, was porous. The Jain commentator on the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* acknowledges the primacy of

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106 The preamble to the *Vīracōliyam* identifies Agastya as a student of the Buddhist saint Avalōkitēśvara, with no mention of the *Tolkāppiyam* or the story of the Caṅkams.

107 While the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* commentator includes seven verses from the *Akattiyam*, the *Nannūl* commentator includes sixteen. *Ḥampūraṅār* includes five. See Zvelebil, *Companion Studies to the History of Tamil Literature* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1992), 246. "The richest collection of quotations from the work of Agastya the grammarian is found in Mayilainatar's (13th century) commentary to the *Nannul*, which contains 18 fragments" (Chevillard 2009: 22).

108 Pēracīriyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram*, verse 645, p. 476.

109 Pēracīriyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram*, verse 649, p. 481.

110 The Shaivite devotional poems are well-known for their attacks on Jains and Buddhists. The Shaivite minister Cēkkiḷār's critique of the Jain *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* stands out as a notable example from this period.

Agastya and *Tolkāppiyam*, and the *Tolkāppiyam* commentator Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar is well known for his erudite and sensitive commentary on the Jain courtly epic *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*. Aṭiyārkkunallār, though himself a Shaivite, commented on the Jain epic *Cilappatikāram* and his patron is said to be a Jain minister. Nowhere in the commentaries are doctrinal points explicitly discussed, and even Pērācīriyar concedes that the heretical position taken by non-Vedic people is specific to contemporary times; heterodox communities of the Caṅkam period would not have challenged Tamil grammar in such a way.<sup>111</sup> The *Virutti* commentator, while identified as Jain in the introductory *pāyiram* and by the many Jain poems throughout his commentary, draws on multiple traditions in his literary examples, including those from Shaivite and Vaishnavite sources. Throughout his commentary, he singles out for praise the Shaivite grammarian Mayēccurar, whom he praises with numerous Shaivite epithets. Additionally, his imitative examples do not appear reflect a Jain aesthetic vision as does the Buddhist commentary on the *Vīracōḷiyam*.<sup>112</sup>

The differences in understanding of the Tamil tradition may be more accurately situated in sectarian style, rather than in ideological polemic. While many of the Brahmanical commentators participate in a network of scholars who emphasize the authoritative power of a singular, classical tradition substantiated by mythical and divine origins, the Jain commentators accept multiple authoritative claims on Tamil language and literature, including those from other language traditions. In their more catholic approach to the Tamil tradition, these Jain commentators appear to participate in a pan-Indian Jain approach to poetics, an approach shared by the twelfth-century Sanskrit Jain poetician Hēmacandra, a contemporary of the *Virutti* commentator. As Gary Tubb explains in his work on this Jain scholar, “the amalgamative approach characteristic of Hēmacandra is in fact a distinctive feature of a whole body of work by Jain scholars”<sup>113</sup> who emphasized “the importance (...) of taking different points of view into consideration.”<sup>114</sup> Tubb points out that “underlying their approach was a shared attitude, an intellectual stance that Gerow, in discussing Hēmacandra, described as ‘a comprehensive skepticism rare among Indian śāstris,’”<sup>115</sup> an attitude clearly shared by the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator.

There exists almost no scholarship on the history of Jain poetics in South India, let alone the relationship between Jain poetic traditions in Sanskrit, Tamil and other languages, making a conclusive statement about pan-Indian sectarian styles impossible. However, thinking in such terms acknowledges the existence of interpretive communities that neither reflect the categories of “Jain”, “Shaivite” or “Buddhist” as they are commonly understood, nor do they reflect a

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111 “*vēta vaḷakkoṭu mārukoḷvār ikkālattuc collīṇum iranta kālattup pira pācāṅṅikaḷum mūṇruvakaic caṅkattu nāṅku varuṅattoṭu paṭṭa cāṅrōrum atu kuṅār*” (Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Marapiyal* 94, p. 481).

112 See Monius 2001.

113 Gary Tubb. “Hemacandra and Sanskrit Poetics” in John Cort, ed., *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Culture in Indian History*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY University Press, 1998: 54.

114 Ibid., 61.

115 Ibid., 54.

courtly literary culture free of sectarian concerns. In the case of South India during the eighth through the fourteenth century, when intellectual culture was shaped by the anxiety over defining Tamil language and literature, the vastly different interpretations of the role of the Tamil past in this project reveal the complexity of affiliations between these various scholarly networks.

Although the Caṅkam conventions continue to influence Tamil poetics, the next generation of Tamil scholarship centers around different aesthetic and cultural concerns. The next part of my dissertation looks at this transitional moment in the history of Tamil literary culture, during which time debates over the authority of the Caṅkam past are replaced by a new poetic system, in which all literature, old and new, is theorized in terms of a royal or divine patron. While the Caṅkam poems are included in this system, they are not granted a privileged place, and there is no mention of their early history. This new system, articulated in the *pāṭṭiyal* treatises, dominates Tamil scholarly and literary production until the late nineteenth century, when the strategy of preservation and recovery found in the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries will again be privileged.

## Chapter 2

### Outside the Caṅkam Canon: Innovation in *Akam* Poetics in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* Commentary

While Pērācīriyar's identification of an authoritative past serves to justify the antiquity and excellence of the Tamil literary tradition, his canonizing project does not leave room for literary innovation within the conventions laid out in the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam poems.<sup>116</sup> Rather, in inferring through both his choice of literary examples and his refutation of contemporary scholars that contemporary literature is not worthy of theorization,<sup>117</sup> Pērācīriyar transforms the authoritative past into a relic, effective as a means to promote his interpretation of Tamil amidst a competitive intellectual milieu, but ultimately disconnected from actual literary production.

Among the scholars who share Pērācīriyar's investment in the Tamil classical past, only Pērācīriyar takes such a conservative stance regarding new literary developments. However, even Nakkīrar's commentary, which reinterprets the classical *akam* poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam poems as a poetic system that privileges the new narrative genre of the *kōvai*,

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<sup>116</sup> This despite his theoretical position on the flexibility of literary language, discussed by the previous chapter.

<sup>117</sup> Pērācīriyar allows for several notable exceptions. Chapter 4 deals with the implications of such deviations from his standard position.



does not attempt to revive the old poetic system through creative imitation;<sup>118</sup> rather, a new genre must be devised for innovation.<sup>119</sup>

However, not all scholars of this period limit the development of akam poetics in the service of a canonizing project. For scholars such as the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator, who do not accept the story of the Caṅkam past or the authoritative status of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam “canon” as articulated by Pērācīriyar and Nakkīrar, akam poetics provide fertile material for new and varied literary production in the service of new aesthetic priorities. Unfettered by the need to adhere to a monolithic interpretation of the Tamil past, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentary offers a range of alternative interpretations of akam poetics, interpretations that have been lost in Tamil literary history.<sup>120</sup> This chapter looks at literary innovation in the “alternative” akam examples of the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti*, in which akam poetics is not limited to the divisions of the Caṅkam compilations of the *Eṭṭuttokai* (and to a lesser extent, the *Pattuppāṭṭu*) and the new *kōvai*, but encompasses a range of literary experiments based on poetic techniques not emphasized in the early poems, such as new meters, alliteration and poetic ornament (*alaṅkāra*). In this model, the akam poems of the Caṅkam corpus do not reflect an ancient system that must be preserved or carefully managed at the risk of corruption, but rather

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<sup>118</sup> This reference to imitation as a productive form of nostalgia draws on Thomas Greene’s discussion of the Renaissance practice of *imitatio*, which Greene distinguishes from the intertextuality of earlier literary traditions. Greene argues that it is the historical consciousness of rupture experienced by the humanists (first articulated by Petrarch) and the subsequent yearning to participate in a lost community of scholars that drives imitation in the humanist endeavor, which Greene identifies as a “revivalist initiative.” See Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1982.

<sup>119</sup> Throughout his commentary, Nakkīrar juxtaposes verses from the seventh-century *Pāṇṭikkōvai* with selections from the Caṅkam compilations referenced by Pērācīriyar, situating the important new genre of the *kōvai* within the Tamil literary canon associated with the Caṅkam past. For Nakkīrar, such an introduction of newness does not pose a threat to the Caṅkam canon or the *Tolkāppiyam*, in part because the theoretical system laid out in the “new” grammar of the *Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ* draws its authority not from its status as the earliest treatise on Tamil literature, but from its association with both the god Shiva, who is said to have composed the work after knowledge of the *Tolkāppiyam* had been lost, and the Pandyan king, whose prayers were responsible for the divine composition. However, while divine authorship and royal patronage may justify the introduction of the *kōvai* to the Tamil literary corpus, Nakkīrar’s framework should not be seen as an invitation to alternative interpretations of the tradition, but as a strict guide to acceptable innovation. In fact, even though the *Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ* is understood to be chronologically distant from the composition of the *Tolkāppiyam*, nowhere does Nakkīrar acknowledge a substantive difference between the two texts. Rather, by identifying the *Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ* as a replacement for the “lost” poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam* and by including illustrative verses from the *Tolkāppiyam* throughout his commentary, Nakkīrar presents the new akam poetics as a seamless interpretation of the old tradition.

The same limitation applies to the other major treatise on akam poetics from this period, the thirteenth-century *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*, which also limits its analysis to verses from the Caṅkam canon and the *kōvai*, explicitly identifying the text as being composed by one “having researched the ancient poems and the *Tolkāppiyam*.” (*Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam pāyiram*) These new theories of akam, both of which are firmly situated within the tradition discussed by Pērācīriyar, limit innovation in akam poetics to one schematic: that of the *kōvai*.

<sup>120</sup> The degree to which these examples have disappeared in Tamil literary history reflects the hegemony of the *kōvai* tradition.

allow for the compatibility of the ancient tradition with new understandings of what constitutes literature and literary language.

In its exposition of the ninety-six verses of the *Yāpparuṅkalam*, the *Virutti* commentary provides hundreds of literary examples that differ dramatically from the literary examples seen in both the commentaries of Pērācīriyar and Nakkīrar. The scope of these examples is vast, ranging from the epics *Cuḷāmaṇi* and *Civakacintāmaṇi* to the devotional texts of the Jain *Tiruppāmālai* and the Shaivite *Tiruveḷukkūṟṟikai* to versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Utaṇa* story.<sup>121</sup> The Caṅkam compilations identified by Pērācīriyar and Nakkīrar also appear throughout the commentary, although they do not occupy a privileged position.<sup>122</sup> While the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* provides an impressive display of the world of Tamil literature familiar to any contemporary Tamil scholar, the majority of the examples in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* are poems which are not identified with an extant compilation or literary corpus, but reflect a Tamil literary universe about which we have little additional information, including whether or not these poems were limited to grammatical examples or were circulated in a wider literary milieu.<sup>123</sup> The examples range in content, form and meter, including poems praising both the Jain arhat and the Brahmanical gods Vishnu and Shiva, poems that incorporate folk motifs and colloquial language, and “riddle” poems based on masterful word play. Amidst this large body of examples, many bear the influence of the *akam* conventions found in the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam *akam* poems both in their content and structure.

Determining the influence of poetic conventions in a tradition defined by anonymous intertextuality is a difficult (and often impossible) enterprise. Poets rarely mention their source material, and the conventions used by a poet often extend across different languages and genres, including genres outside the elite world of literate belles-lettres. Without the anchoring sense of property that a tradition invested in poetic authorship provides, metaphors, imagery and even syntax serve as “floating signifiers” available for borrowing without the need to acknowledge a predecessor.<sup>124</sup> However, by including both verses from the *Tolkāppiyam* as well as individual poems from the *Eṭṭuttokai* in his commentary, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator points to his familiarity with not only the poetics of the early *akam* tradition as it was articulated by the early treatise, but also with how this poetic system was expressed in individual poems associated with the early tradition.

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<sup>121</sup> In his introduction, Ilaṅkumāraṇ gives a comprehensive list of the literary and grammatical texts included in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentary. See *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti*, 1973: 28.

<sup>122</sup> See the previous chapter for discussion of the role of the Caṅkam past in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti*.

<sup>123</sup> Like most Tamil commentaries, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* does not identify the sources for these examples. According to Mu. Arunachalam, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* is the first Tamil scholar to create his own examples. However, the use of these examples in other commentaries complicates this conclusion. The question of whether or not these were standard grammatical examples or literature circulated in a wider literary milieu is for now a matter of speculation.

<sup>124</sup> An important exception is the formal genre of the *avaiyatakkaṁ*, in which the author displays his humility and his indebtedness to past masters. See S. Cauntara Pantiyan, *Tamilil Avaiyatakkaṁ Patalkal* (Chennai: Star Piracuram, 1988) for an overview of the genre.

These conventions represent one of the most complex poetic systems in South Asian literature. In its focus on the stages of romantic love between a well-matched hero and heroine, *akam* poetics cover a subject matter common to many South Asian (and world) literary traditions. However, *akam* poetics as reflected in the early *Caṅkam* poems and the *Tolkāppiyam* are marked by a highly conventional system that distinguishes the tradition from other literature on similar subject matter. This system, which has received substantially more attention from contemporary scholars than any other field of Tamil poetics,<sup>125</sup> centers around short monologues set in the voice of a stock set of characters, including the hero, heroine, heroine's girlfriend, the foster mother and the courtesan, among others. These characters are always anonymous, reflecting their status as archetypes with set limitations on how and what they can express.<sup>126</sup> The emotions articulated by these characters as they navigate their inner lives are described using a striking system of conventions that correspond the various stages of romantic love with specific landscapes of the Tamil country. In this system, called the *tiṇai* system, "a whole language of signs is created by relating the landscapes as signifiers to (...) appropriate human feelings." The use of images conventionally associated with the landscape of the forest (jasmine, *mullai*), for example, would situate the poem in the emotional landscape of the heroine's anxious waiting for her lover after he has left her.<sup>127</sup>

In this highly conventional system, poetic innovation comes from the skillful manipulation of this "vocabulary of symbols"<sup>128</sup> associated with these "interior landscapes."<sup>129</sup> As Ramanujan points out, "in this world of correspondences between (landscape) and human experiences, a word like *kurinci* has several concentric circles of meaning: a flower, the mountain landscape, lovers' union, a type of poem about all these, and musical modes for these poems. But its concrete meaning, "a mountain flower" is never quite forgotten."<sup>130</sup> This semantic flexibility results in complex layers of meaning that are simultaneously independent expressions of poetic virtuosity and dependent on participation in the larger corpus, in which

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<sup>125</sup> There is a large bibliography of literature on the *akam* conventions in Tamil, English and other languages. For English sources see Zvelebil 1974, Ramanujan 1967, Hart 1975, Selby 2000, Mu. Varadarajan 1957, Marr 1985, Takahashi 1995. The Tamil bibliography is immense, as most of the major scholars of the last fifty years have published on *akam* poetics. See T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai 2007, C. Balasubramaniam 1989, C. M. Comacuntaram 2007, Mu. Varadarajan 1964, 1965.

<sup>126</sup> As Ramanujan explains in his discussion of *akam* poetics, "the girl friend of the heroine may speak out on the following occasions: when the heroine, left behind by her lover, speaks of her loneliness; when she helps him elope; when she begs the hero to take good care of the heroine; when she tries to dissuade hte parents from their search for the runaway couple, or consoles the grieving mother" Ramanujan 1985 quoting *Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram* 42 in his Afterword, p. 248).

<sup>127</sup> In the Afterword of his collection of translations, Ramanujan provides a useful chart introducing the reader to the symbolic vocabulary associated with each landscape. See Ramanujan 1967: 107.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>129</sup> Ramanujan's well-known translation of the term "*akattiṇai*" and the title of his collection of translations.

<sup>130</sup> Ramanujan, 1985: 241.

“every (poem) resonates in counterpoint with all the other uses of the whole tradition (...).”<sup>131</sup> While the *Tolkāppiyam* discusses *akam* poetics as a mode that is not specific to a particular genre,<sup>132</sup> thinking about the *akam* tradition as articulated in the *Tolkāppiyam* and the *akam* poems of the *Eṭṭutokai* as a generic category is helpful in understanding the “rules of the game” associated with a conventional interpretation of the tradition.

On the one hand, the interconnected nature of such a poetic system limits interpretive possibilities.<sup>133</sup> Significant deviation from the tradition, such as a poem in which the heroine takes a lover after marriage, or a metaphor that compares the heroine to an image associated with the hero, such as a kingfisher preying on fish, would signal to the learned reader that he was outside the horizon of expectations of the *Caṅkam akam* genre and therefore outside the network of conventions on which a meaningful interpretation of the poems depends.

On the other hand, the poetic effect of the poems centers on the the poetic technique of suggestion (*uḷḷurai*), in which “the interplay of symbols (in the early Tamil poems) causes the poems to create a resonant effect in the reader’s mind, with each symbol reinforcing the others to create an almost inexhaustible variety.”<sup>134</sup> The suggested meaning comes from the juxtaposing of these symbols in relationships of comparison that “is often not implied by the word such as like or by an evident metaphor. Rather, the two objects are simply mentioned in different parts of the poem with no apparent connection, and it is left to the reader to relate them.”<sup>135</sup> Such an evocative polysemic juxtaposition of images is evident in the following poem from the *Caṅkam akam* compilation *Kuṟuntokai*, a poem set in the landscape of the forest during the time of the monsoon (*mullai*), also associated with the heroine’s waiting for the hero (*irattal*).<sup>136</sup> In this forest (*mullai*) poem, the heroine’s friend (*tōḷi*) wants to confirm whether or not the sound she

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>132</sup> The discussion of genre in the *Tolkāppiyam* is limited to a brief section in the Chapter on Poetics (*Ceyyuliyal*) on the seven types of literature. While our understanding of the terms included is largely dependent on later commentarial intervention, neither the categories of “*akam*” or “*puṟam*” are included in this list. Genre becomes a central theoretical category in later poetics, ranging from the new *kōvai akam* grammars to treatises informed by Dandin’s *Kāvyādarśa* to the praise genres of the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, discussed at length in chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>133</sup> The relationship between this conventional system and the resulting limitations of interpretation is the basis of Selby’s distinction between the use of suggestion in Tamil and the use of suggestion in Prakrit and Sanskrit. See Selby 2000. As I discuss throughout this chapter, I think Selby overstates the limitations of early *akam* poetry, in which, as I see it, polysemy as the primary poetic logic in contrast to later literature. Here I follow Hart’s argument about the development of suggestion in South Indian literature and in Indian literature more generally. Hart 1975.

<sup>134</sup> Hart 1975: 169.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>136</sup> As is the case in many of these poems, the heroine and her friend share an emotional life, making the distinction between the characters difficult. While the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentary does not specify the speaker of this poem, the commentary on the *Kuṟuntokai* poem below places this type of poem in the voice of her friend, who wants to reassure the heroine that the hero is coming. In the case of the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* poem, the interpretation is not affected by the choice of speaker; however, in the *Kuṟuntokai* poem, the choice of speaker opens up different possibilities of suggested meaning.

hears comes from the cows returning home as the sun sets, or from the lover's chariot as he returns home to the chariot.

*Kuruntokai* 275.

Let's climb to the top of the high rock  
covered in sprawling jasmine,  
and make sure, oh friend!  
Is that the sound of bells hanging on the necks  
of sweet cows chewing grass  
as they return home in the changing light  
with their mates?  
Or is it the sound of bells on a chariot  
making its way through the wet mud  
as (our lover) returns home with a steadfast heart,  
his work completed,  
surrounded by his guards who wield strong bows?<sup>137</sup>

Much of the beauty of this *Kuruntokai* poem rests in the use of suggestion. By beginning with the word “jasmine” (*mullai*), the poem immediately signals to the reader that this is a poem that describes anxious separation. Throughout the poem the poet returns to images that remind the heroine (and the reader) of the heroine's loneliness. The time is evening when the cows come home from their grazing, a time known for the intense pain it elicits in separated lovers. As Hart explains, “(in Tamil poetry) the agony of night is foreshadowed by evening and is not directly described; the most poignant time of suffering is its beginning, filled as it is with foreboding.”<sup>138</sup> If evening is the most painful time of day for separated lovers, the monsoon time is the most painful season, as this is the time when men return home from their various duties. The reference to the chariot's coming through the wet mud (*īrmaṇal kāṭṭāru*) situates the poem in the rainy season. However, while interpretation of this poem is clearly situated within the expectations of the *akam* conventions, there is no one “solution” to this poem. Whether in the implicit comparison between the cows returning home with their mates and the heroine's loneliness, or in the question posed by the friend, which ultimately remains unanswered, the poem offers up a range of interpretive possibilities within the emotional world of sad longing.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *mullai yūrnta kalluya rērik*  
*kaṇṭaṇam varukañ ceṇmō tōḷi*  
*ellūrc cērtarum ēruṭai yiṇattup*  
*pullār nallāṇ pūṇmaṇi kollō*  
*ceyviṇai mutitta cemma luḷlamoṭu*  
*valvil ilaiyar pakkam pōrṛa*  
*īrmaṇar kāṭṭāru varūum*  
*tērmaṇi kollāṇ ṭiyampiya vuḷavē.*

<sup>138</sup> Hart 1975: 233.

<sup>139</sup> In his discussion of the technique of suggestion, Hart offers analyses of the polysemy of a range of poems from both the *akam* and *puṛam* compilations. See Hart 1975: 161-171.

On the one hand, the *akam* examples of the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* reveal familiarity with both the conventional structure and the symbolic vocabulary of the early *akam* poems. To an uninitiated reader, many of these poems could be mistaken for examples of the early corpus. For example, the following poem from the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentary echoes the *Kuṟuntokai* poem discussed above.

Let's climb the mound of white sand and go see, oh friend!  
 The ship and its mast appear in the great sea  
 like a post and a war elephant  
 on the fertile seashore of that man who has forgotten us.<sup>140</sup>

Both the structure and content of this poem situate it within the interpretive world of the early *akam* conventions. Set in the heroine's voice, the poem presents a dramatic address to a girlfriend who is the heroine's confidante and is, like the heroine, an anonymous character who expresses herself according to poetic convention. The poem centers around one simile - the form and nature of the hero's ship likened to a war elephant and the post to which it is tied - before concluding with a description of the hero in terms of the landscape to which he belongs. The syntax of the poem emphasizes the importance of place in the poem; the Tamil ends with the oblique locative "in the land" (*nāṭṭē*),<sup>141</sup> framing the emotions represented in the poem in terms of the landscape system central to the *akam* conventions.<sup>142</sup> The references to white sand, the ship and the sea as well as the identification of the hero as a man from a land by the sea situate the poem in the landscape of the seashore (*nēyṭal*), associated with the sorrow the heroine experiences due to separation from the hero (*iraṅkal*).<sup>143</sup>

However, the simile used in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* example, while not outside the realm of a meaningful interpretation, does not elicit the same poetic effect as do the implicit comparisons featured in the *Kuṟuntokai* poem. In contrast to the *Kuṟuntokai* poem, where the suggestive juxtaposition of images opens up rich potential for interpretation informed by the knowledge of the *akam* conventions, the role of suggestion in this poem is not as clear. If the ship is likened to the elephant, does the post suggest anything other than the straightforward comparison of form with the ship's mast? Even if the post suggests entrapment of the hero, the

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<sup>140</sup> *kuṅṅra venmaṅal ēṟi niṅṅru niṅṅru*  
*iṅṅam kāṅṅkam vammō tōḷi!*  
*kaḷiṟum kantum pōla naḷikaṭal*  
*kūmpum kalaṅṅum tōṅṅrum*  
*tōṅṅral maṟantōṟ tuṟai keḷu nāṭṭē*  
*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam* 95, p. 382.

<sup>141</sup> Note on translation: Literally, "in the land filled with seashores."

<sup>142</sup> Hart points out that "this is the most often used formula for suggestion in the poems" (Hart 1975: 186).

<sup>143</sup> Many of the emotions associated with the mullai landscape correspond to those associated with the neyṭal landscape. Hart points out that as the landscape of neyṭal is the least specific of the five landscape, "it was probably the last to take shape." (Hart, 1975: 243).

most obvious concordance of meaning, how would such an interpretation relate to the larger context of the poem?

These poetic examples, in which *akam* conventions are used without the use of suggestion central to the early poems, are scattered throughout the *Virutti* commentary. In the following conventional messenger poem addressed to a heron, the description of the hero hints at the suggestive possibilities of earlier poems of this type.

Oh heron who hunts in the flowery pond for the tiru crab!  
Is it so wrong for you to say one nice thing about  
the lovesickness spreading across my chaste belly  
to the man of a land  
where waterfalls roar, releasing watery spray, pearls and black crabs?<sup>144</sup>

This poem, which is structured as an address by the heroine to the heron, a trope familiar to the *akam* tradition, contains familiar references, such as the description of the hero in terms of his land and the description of the lovesickness that afflicts the heroine. Identifying an emotional landscape for this poem is not as clear cut because of the mixing of images associated with the landscape of first union (waterfalls) with the landscape of infidelity after marriage (heron, pond). However, this muddling of landscapes is often used to various poetic effect even in the more conventional poems and does not itself signal a violation of tradition. In the case of this poem, however, it is not clear whether or not the description of the hero is meant to elicit suggested meaning. If the reference to the heron's hunting for crabs refers to the hero's infidelity, a common correspondence in the *akam* poems, the suggested meaning ends there.

Although this poem resonates with a seashore poem (*nēyṭal*) from the early *Narriṇai* compilation, the use of suggestion in the the *Narriṇai* poem is far more evocative. When we compare the poems, the difference in poetic effect is clear.

*Narriṇai* 54.

*Incomplete translation for the purposes of comparison:*

“White heron with strong legs!

Listen to me!

Even though you like going about with your family,

hunting in the swirling waters,

stay a while here with your kin,

nibbling on the dark flesh (of little fish) (...).

The early evening is full of sorrow.

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*tirunantu pūmpoykai tērttuṇṇum nārāy!*  
*oru naṇṇuraittal tavaṇṇō? - karunantu*  
*muttuppan tīṇum muḷaṅkaruvi nāṭarkeṇ*  
*pattiṇimai alkuṇ pacappu*

*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkala Ceyyuḷiyal* 24 p. 227

(...)

Talk to our lord of the seashore surrounded by screwpine trees  
where young *ñālal* trees, their tender leaves  
plucked for garlands,  
caressed by the clear shining waves,  
so he knows of our suffering.<sup>145</sup>

Both poems describe a similar situation, yet the imagery in the *Narriṇai* poem conjures up a world of interpretive possibilities absent in the simpler address of the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* example. The heroine's request for the heron to stay echoes her desire for her hero to stay with her. The image of the heron's nibbling at the fish suggest the hero's enjoyment of the heroine, as does the image of the tender leaves being plucked.

In the next *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* example, the poet draws on the familiar convention of the heroine's concern for her modesty after she has made love with the hero for the first time. Here she expresses her fear that no one but the surrounding forest will hold the hero to his promise of marriage.

Approaching the bank where my girlfriend, my other friends and I play  
that man with his chariot and charioteer came and took my virtue.  
If he leaves after saying words (sweet) like milk and honey,  
Won't the *kāṇ* flower, the grass and the screwpine tree all be my (only) witness?<sup>146</sup>

The well-known *Kuṟuntokai* 25 echoes a similar theme.

*Kuṟuntokai* 25:

No one was there except that thief,  
and if he lies what can I do?

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<sup>145</sup> *vaḷainīr mēyntu kiḷaimutaṟ celī*  
*vāpparai virumpiṇai āyiṇun tūccirai*  
*irumpulā aruntuniṇ kiḷaiyoṭu ciṟitiruntu*  
*karuṅkāḷ veṅkuruku eṇava kēṇmati*  
*perumpulam piṇṇē ciṟupuṇ mālai*  
*atunī aṟiyiṇ aṇpumār uṭaiyai*  
*notumal neṇcaṅ koḷḷātu eṅkuṟai*  
*irṟāṅku uṇara uraimati taḷaiyōr*  
*koykuḷai arumpiya kumari ṇālal*  
*teṇṭirai maṇippuṟan taivaruṅ*  
*kaṇṭal vēlinum tuṟaikīḷa kōrkē!*

<sup>146</sup> *yāṇum tōḷiyum āyamum āṭum tuṟaināṇṇit*  
*tāṇum tērum pākaṇum vantaṇ nalaṇuṇṭāṇ*  
*tēṇum pālum pōlvaṇa collip pirivāṇēl*  
*kāṇum puḷḷum kaitaiyum ellām kariyaṇṇē?*

*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 95, p. 384. Also, *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse, p. 350.



There was a heron  
looking for eels in the running water,  
its green legs like millet stalks,  
when he took me. (transl. Hart)

Both poems describe the heroine's isolation and helplessness faced with only the flora and fauna around her as witnesses to her love-making with the hero. However, while the heroine's situation is made explicit in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* poem, the *Kuruntokai* poem suggests the isolation of the heroine through the description of the indifferent heron, engaged in its own activity of consumption as the hero has consumed her. Although the *akam* conventions situate this scene in a particular interpretive context (this poem would not be set in the voice of the courtesan, for example), the relationship between the description of the heron and the relationship between the hero and the heroine is not made explicit, but is left for the reader to imagine.<sup>147</sup>

The following set of *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* poems describe a theme also familiar to the early *akam* poems: that of the heroine's fear for the hero as he traverses dangerous paths to return home to her. Each of these poems is clearly situated in the horizon of expectations of the early *akam* genre, but like the previous examples, lack the complex suggestive imagery of the early poems.

Oh man of the cāral tract!  
If you don't come back, I will be frightened.  
The path that you take is filled with  
beautiful spirits and  
forest streams that rush with swirling eddies.<sup>148</sup>

Oh man of the mountain tract!  
How will you come (safely) on that path where thieves  
and tigers roam?  
How will you swim in the rapid river that pours down from the great mountain  
where the thick dark of the night  
mingles with a cold wind  
and clouds full and heavy over the shining mountain

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<sup>147</sup> The *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* example contains other deviations of usage, including the involvement of the friend in the approach of the hero.

<sup>148</sup> *cūral pampiya cirukāṇ yārē;*  
*cūrara makaḷir āraṇaṅ kiṇarē;*  
*vāralai eṇiṇē yāṇaṅ cuvalē;*  
*cāral nāṭa! nīvara lārē*  
*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 95, p. 389.

after having taken water from the dark spreading ocean.<sup>149</sup>

If you come thinking of us on the stony way on the banks of the forest river,  
as the tiger runs away, afraid.

Let the grey elephant fear the spear in your hand.

We are afraid of the mountain nymphs grabbing you.

So don't go.<sup>150</sup>

If you come on the mountain path, thinking of me,  
the fierce bull who even attacks elephants runs away in fear of you.

Let the elephants (also) fear the spear in your hand!

We are afraid of the sky maidens grabbing you.

So don't go.<sup>151</sup>

Compare with the way in which this “situation” is expressed in the early akam poems of the *Aiṅkuruṅṅuru*.

Were you to go  
on that forking, stony path  
where elephants poach water  
from the cattle troughs  
dug by the sticks  
of unskilled cowherds,  
this soft-natured girl  
with long, cloud-black tresses  
will suffer alone.

Great Man with sturdy horses,  
may you not be able to go. (transl. Selby)

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*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 95, p. 398.

<sup>150</sup> *karaiporu kānyārraṅ kallatar emmuḷḷi varutirāyiṅ*  
*araiyiruḷ yāmat taṭupuli yēraṅci akaṅrupōka*  
*naraiyuru mēru nuṅkai vēlaṅcum nummai*  
*varaiyara maṅkaiyar vavvutal aṅcutum vāralaiyō?*

*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 76, p. 280.

<sup>151</sup> *vāṅakac cōlai varayatar emmuḷḷi varutirāyiṅ*  
*yāṅaikaṅ ṭārkkum ariyēru nummaṅci akaṅrapōka*  
*yāṅaiyō nuṅkaivēl aṅcuka nummai*  
*vāṅara makaḷir vavvutal aṅcutum vāralaiyō!*

*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 76, p. 280.

The *Aiṅkurunūru* poem, among the shortest of the *Eṭṭuttokai* akam poems, reflects a different idiom than the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* poems on the same theme. In contrast to the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* poems, which explicitly state the danger faced by the hero, this short poem suggests the harsh nature of the path through the vivid description of a land so dry that the elephants must steal water where they can. The poem also contrasts this inhospitable landscape with the description of the heroine as gentle and soft, tempting the hero with the pleasures of domestic life if he stays.<sup>152</sup>

This short selection of akam poems is representative of the transformation the tradition undergoes in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentary. As poems that explicitly draw on the structure and conventions of the Caṅkam akam poems, these poems clearly intend to be associated with more conventional forms of the genre. However, without the use of suggestion and vivid descriptions that defines the akam poems of the *Eṭṭuttokai*, they push the boundaries of that generic category.

As many scholars from Frye to Jameson have argued, genre is not an objective category with impermeable boundaries that include or exclude individual expressions of the genre. Whether situated in social class or textual community, genre is a contract for purposes of interpretation that continually changes depending on new social and aesthetic contexts. Seen in these terms, while scholars invested in a more conservative interpretation might critique such innovations as an inferior use of the conventions at best and a violation of tradition at worst, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti akam* poems discussed so far generate interpretations that are meaningful within the horizon of expectations associated with the akam “genre,” a category that contains a range of poems even by the most conservative standard.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> The Virutti commentator’s borrowing of akam conventions also extends to the borrowing from the imaginative world of the Caṅkam poems. The following two examples refer to the Caṅkam chieftains Kāri and Pāri, who figure in both the Caṅkam akam and puṇam poems.

Oh girl who trembles with shyness,  
 your arms like the bamboo that grows in Kāri’s victorious Muḷḷūr,  
 Louder than the taṅṇumai drum that resounds on Pāri’s mountain  
 and louder than the paṇai drum of the Aryan kings  
 is the gossip in the heart of this famed city.  
 āriya maṅṅar paṇaiyiṅ eḷuntiyampum  
 pāri paṇaiṇmer raṅṅumai - kāri  
 viṇṇamullūr vēṅkai vetirṇāṇun tōḷāy  
 niṇṇamullūr uḷḷa talar  
*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 95, p. 393.

The feet of the women of Pāri’s land Parampu, suffused with dark-colored *neytal* flowers and kotti flowers make fragrant the hair of women from other countries, bowing (down before them).  
 “*narunīla neytaalum koṭṭiyum tīṇṭip*  
*piṇṇāṭṭup peṇṭir muṇṇārum pāri*  
*paṇaiṇṇāṭṭup peṇṭir aṭi*”  
*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 56, p. 238.

<sup>153</sup> As in the long poems of the *Kuṇṇicippāṭṭu* and the *Mullaippāṭṭu*.

However, the next set of *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* examples stretch the boundaries of the akam genre beyond the limits of the “contract,” making meaningful interpretation difficult. For example, the following poem places the characters of a conventional *akam* poem in a new context that frustrates meaningful interpretation.

The girl of the *pālai* lands which belong to the man with a golden chariot  
beats the drum in the royal victory gate,  
carrying a garland of fragrant kuḷai flowers  
as the bees swarm around.<sup>154</sup>

Why is a girl of the *pālai* lands, a desert not considered a real “landscape” by the tradition, beating a drum for this man? What is their relationship? In interpreting this verse as an “akam” poem, the reader is left stranded.

The following two poems retain the structure of dramatic address but also introduce new content that does not “make sense” in the interpretive world of the early *akam* poems.

Oh man of the mountains, where the gardens are surrounded by jewels,  
grace the women/fools with your sweet words  
even if they are old.<sup>155</sup>

Oh woman with hair adorned with different types of flowers!  
Embrace the man of the land of shining waters,  
his chest decorated with finely-made garlands!<sup>156</sup>

At first glance these poems do not appear so foreign; the structure of the poems is familiar and the hero is conventionally described. However, the introduction of two key words in these poems interfere with what would otherwise be a standard interpretive process. In the first poem, the description of the women as “old” violates all conventions, which dictate that the heroine be young, beautiful and well matched to the hero. In the second poem, the speaker violates convention by telling the heroine to “embrace” the hero. In the world of the early *akam* poems, such a command would not make sense. In what context would such a command be appropriate?

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<sup>154</sup> *naṅkorra vāyinaṅkuḷait tārkōṅṅu*  
*currumvaṅ tārppap puṭaittālē - porērāṅ*  
*pālai nal vāyiṅ makaḷ*  
Virutti commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse , p. 237.

<sup>155</sup> *maṅcucūḷ cōlai malaināṭa! mūttālum*  
*aṅcol maṭavārkkku aruḷu*  
Virutti commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 59, p. 230.

<sup>156</sup> *iṅa malark kōtāy! Ilaṅku nīrc cērppaṅ*  
*puṅai malart tārakalam pullu*  
Virutti commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 59, p. 230.

Finally, the following poem retains the stock characters of the akam poems, but drops the structure and imagery.

She suffered more than him.  
He suffered more than her.  
And there is one who gave her away (her father).  
And there is one who took hold of her ornamented hand (her husband).  
He is a king of a beautiful mountain.  
He is also a chieftain of the lovely seashore where *punnai* trees grow.<sup>157</sup>

In this poem the stages of akam love are reduced to a simple series devoid of imagery or reference to the *tinai* system: the couple suffers and then they get married. The poet gestures towards the landscape tradition by describing the hero in terms of his land, but it is a confused description that identifies him both as a king of a beautiful mountain and the leader of the seashore. These descriptions appear in repetitive parataxis, as opposed to the compounded subordinate clauses that characterize the early akam poems, reflecting a different idiom. Without the interpretive guides provided by participation in the conventional akam genre, understanding the intent of this poem is difficult. Is the poem a commentary on the akam conventions? Although attempts at interpreting this poem are speculative, this could be taken as a poem that elicits humor.

The disorientation that results from reading these poems should not be confused with the poetic effect of suggestion, in which multiplicity of meaning prevents a “correct” reading. While the beauty of the early akam poems is derived in part from this openness, their participation in the conventional world of akam poetics guides the interpretive process. However, these poems should also not be seen as bad “akam imitations.” His deviation from the standard akam conventions is a deliberate move on the part of the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator. Clearly familiar not only with the poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam*, but also with the individual poems of the Caṅkam akam corpus, the commentator is deliberately eschewing the conventions in favor of some other project. How do we understand the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti*’s choice to include these *akam* poems, which operate outside the interpretive guides to the tradition as established by the Caṅkam poems and the *Tolkāppiyam*?

An answer to this question lies in the position of these poems in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentary. These poems are not illustrations of *akam* content, but rather of metrical categories, most of which postdate the Caṅkam poems. In fact, nowhere does the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* provide any analysis of akam content; even in his commentary on the last verse of the

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<sup>157</sup> *ivaṇṇinum ivaṇṇinum ivaḷ varuntiṇaḷē;*  
*ivaḷṇinum varuntiṇaṇ ivaṇṇē;*  
*ivaḷaik koṭuttōṇ oruvaṇum uḷaṇē;*  
*toṭikkai piṭittōṇ oruvaṇum uḷaṇē;*  
*naṇmalai nāṭaṇum uḷaṇē;*  
*punnaiyaṅ kāṇal cērppaṇum uḷaṇē.*  
*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 72, p. 271.

*Yāpparuṅkalam* which includes *akam* content<sup>158</sup> among the topics with which a poet should be familiar, the commentator is silent, giving neither interpretation nor literary examples.<sup>159</sup> Rather, throughout his commentary, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator uses his *akam* literary examples to introduce a new aesthetic concern with the artificiality of literary language, from the emphasis on the decorative effects of alliteration and internal rhyme to poems whose interpretation requires readerly attention to their syntactic construction. Viewed through this interpretive lens, the content of the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti akam* examples, let alone their relationship to more conventional forms of the genre, is of less concern than the poems' ability to illustrate this different conceptualization of the literary.

The *akam* examples used in the commentary on the second chapter of the *Yāpparuṅkalam*, the Chapter on Metrics (*Ceyyūḷiyal*) focus primarily on the effect of phonetic ornamentation on literary composition.<sup>160</sup> Throughout his commentary on the Chapter on Metrics, his *akam* examples reflect this aesthetic shift. The example of the girl of the *pālai* landscape, discussed earlier as an example that frustrates conventional interpretation, is used as an example of a poem in *nēricai cintiyal venpā* meter, distinguished from other *venpā* poems for its use of second syllable rhyming (*etukai*, Skrt. *dvitīyākṣaraprāsa*). Below is the Tamil version of that poem with the rhyming highlighted.

*naṛkorra vāyiṅṅarūṅkuvaḷait tārkoṅṅu*  
*cuṛumvaṅ ṭārppap puṭaittālē - porrērāṅ*  
*pālai nal vāyiṅṅ maka!*<sup>161</sup>

Not only is this an effective example of a poem with second syllable rhyming, but the repetition of consonants throughout the poem, along with the long vowel *ā*, though not required for the meter, highlights the special use of language in this poem. Poetic content and its relationship to

<sup>158</sup> The list includes the components (*uruppu*) of landscape (*tiṅṅai*), speaker (*kūrṅṅu*), time (*kālam*) found throughout *akam* poetics, including the *Tolkāppiyam*, but omits other components associated with this list.

<sup>159</sup> The extent of his analysis of *akam* content is the inclusion in this section of several grammatical verses that reinterpret the two categories of *akam* and *puṛam* that govern the Caṅkam poetics as articulated by the *Tolkāppiyam* with a fourfold system attributed to an alternate grammar, the *Paṅṅiruppāḷalam*. Throughout his commentary on this section, he emphasizes the diversity of the *akam* tradition by providing lists of exemplary grammatical verses from texts other than the *Tolkāppiyam*. However, despite his obvious familiarity with multiple articulations of *akam* poetics, he provides no literary examples in this section, either from the early corpus or from his “new” examples.

<sup>160</sup> Although alliteration and internal rhyme also appear in the early poems, the use of such sonic effect is sporadic and does not follow specific metrical rules. “From a survey of ten poems of the Akananuru, the frequency of beginning rhyme in Tamil appears to be about 20 percent (...) Hart 1975: 210.

<sup>161</sup> The English translation reads:

The girl of the *pālai* lands which belong to the man with a golden chariot  
beats the drum in the royal victory gate,  
carrying a garland of fragrant *kuvaḷai* flowers  
as the bees swarm around.

the signifiers of the *akam* system is secondary to the ornamental use of alliteration, the use of which pervades the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti akam* experiments in this section.

In the following poem from the same section, the poet invokes the heroine and the hero in a situation that makes their relationship unclear.

When the warrior comes with his bull,  
he (appears) with crowds of fierce soldiers,  
and he will destroy (others) with his powers of killing!  
Oh girl! Listen to me!

Although the poem echoes the *akam* conventions, the relationship between the characters is confusing. The speaker could be telling the girl to stay inside to avoid falling in love with the warrior on procession, in the style of the later *kalampakam*. Or the speaker could be reassuring the heroine that her lover will in fact come back alive because of his martial prowess. Here the multiplicity of meanings is not a productive evocation of interpretive possibilities, but rather results in a void of meaning. However, as an example of not only a *nēricai cintiyal veṅpā* poem, but a poem illustrating the poetic effect of multiple alliteration, it is extremely effective.

*kālaiyōtu āṭik katakkāri tōṅrukāl*  
*vālaḷuva makkaḷōtu ākumām; kōḷoṭum*  
*ponrumām naṅkāy! nam kēl!*<sup>162</sup>

Not only does the poem contain second syllable rhyming, but less formally defined alliteration is scattered throughout the short poem. From the three instances of “*kā*” in the first line to the repetition of syllables in “*naṅkāy! nam kēl!*” in the last line, this poem reflects an emphasis in sonic effect different from what we see in the *Eṭṭuttokai* poems in which alliteration, especially the formal use of rhyming, is far less striking.

Even those verses not explicitly defined by their use of alliteration privilege this use of language. This extends even to poems composed in the *āciriyaṅpā* meter familiar to the *Caṅkam akam* corpus, such as the poems discussed earlier that describe the dangerous path of the hero.

*karaiporu kāṅyāṅṅaṅ kallatar emmuḷḷi varutirāyīṅ*  
*araiyiruḷ yāmat taṭupuli yēraṅci akaṅrupōka*  
*naraiyuru mēru nuṅkai vēlaṅcum nummai*  
*varaiyara maṅkaiyar vavvutal aṅcutum vāralaiyō?*<sup>163</sup>

Alliteration is used throughout this poem, including second syllable rhyming.

*vāṅakac cōlai varaiyatar emmuḷḷi varutirāyīṅ*

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<sup>162</sup> *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse ,p. 237.

<sup>163</sup> *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 76, p. 280.

*yāṇaikaṅ tārkkum ariyēru nummanci akanrupōka*  
*yāṇaiyō nunkaivēl ancuka nummai*  
*vāṇara makaḷir vavvutal ancutum vāralaiyō!*

This emphasis on a literary language that draws attention to its own artificiality reflects a shift in aesthetic sensibility in Tamil literature. In particular, the use of second syllable rhyme (*etukai*, Skrt. *dvitīyākṣaraprāsa*) is associated with the development of Shaivite devotional literature, first appearing in the compilations of the *Tēvāram* (600-900 CE) and the *Tiruvācakam* (900 CE).<sup>164</sup> The technique is also a standard feature of the long narrative poem in Tamil, beginning with the early Buddhist poem *Maṇimēkalai*<sup>165</sup> and becoming more prominent in the epics (*kāppiyam*, Skrt. *kāvya*) *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* (900 CE) and the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* (12th century?).<sup>166</sup> The shift from a poetics of suggestion to a poetics that privileges complex rhyme and meter may reflect the introduction of the Sanskrit emphasis on poetic ornaments (*alaṅkāra*) associated with sound, a central component of early Sanskrit poetics until Anandavardhana issues in a new paradigm.<sup>167</sup>

However, this recognition of what may have been a new Sanskritic emphasis on rhetorical devices associated with sound should not be seen as a borrowing of Sanskrit prosody. As Bronner points out in his discussion of the Tamil and Telugu versions of the Sanskrit poetic technique of bitextual poetry (*śleṣa*), the Southern traditions adapt Sanskrit poetics to the contingencies of their own vocabulary and syntax.<sup>168</sup> Similarly, although the increased use of alliteration in these poems may reflect a new interest in *anuprāsa* associated with Sanskrit literature and literary theory, *etukai* itself is “a distinctive feature of the poetry and musical composition in South Indian languages.”<sup>169</sup>

This shift may be better understood in terms of a larger distinction between Sanskrit and Tamil understandings of literary language. While Sanskrit poetics has always centered on what distinguishes literary language from other forms of language, Tamil poetics, beginning with the *Tolkāppiyam*, whose theory of language includes both the language of literature, the language of the court and the language of merchants, does not make such a distinction. While a

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<sup>164</sup> Hart (210) quoting Sambamoorthy, 1954: 280.

<sup>165</sup> The technique is also used in the *Cilappatikaram*, although less consistently.

<sup>166</sup> Many of the stanzas of these poems are composed in the ācīriya viruttam meter, defined as four lines that contain *etukai*.

<sup>167</sup> The seventh-century Kāvyaḍarśa dedicates seventy-seven verses to the poetic figure of “internal rhyme” (*yamaka*) in addition to a short discussion of alliteration (*anuprāsa*). For the “paradigm shift” in Sanskrit poetics, see Lawrence McCrea, *The Teleology of Poetics in Medieval Kashmir* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Dept. of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, 2008). Ironically, this shift centered around the new role of suggestion (*dhvani*) in Sanskrit literary theory at the same time that suggestion was being de-emphasized in the Tamil tradition.

<sup>168</sup> Bronner 2010: 132-140.

<sup>169</sup> Hart (210) quoting Sambamoorthy, 1954: 280. The discussion of *etukai* appears in a larger argument Hart makes about the non-Sanskritic source of both Tamil and Maharastrian meter and rhyme. Hart, 1975: 197-210.



comprehensive comparison of the treatments of literary language in Sanskrit and Tamil is a subject for future research, the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti*'s choice to include examples that highlight such a special use of language, even at the expense of coherent meaning, suggests the influence of this radically different conception of the literary.

If the examples in the Chapter on Meter (*Ceyyuliyal*) highlight an emphasis on the artificiality of literary *language* through the use of new modes of alliteration and versification, the examples in the last chapter, the Chapter on Miscellany (*Olipiyal*), reflect a similar approach to theorizing poetic *content*. In contrast to the akam poetics of suggestion, in which the construction and interpretation of content comes from the use of symbolic vocabulary associated with various emotional states, the poetics on display in the Chapter on Miscellany situate the interpretation of meaning in the proper unravelling of complex poetic structures that draw attention to their unnatural construction.

The simplest of these poems are included as illustrations of *poruḷkoḷ*, a series of poetic techniques which make explicit the role of the structure of the poem in the construction of meaning.<sup>170</sup> For example, a *niral niṛai* poem in this category draws attention to the semantic connections between words in a poem, particularly when these connections challenge conventional syntax. To illustrate the *etir niral niṛai* poem, or a poem in which the semantic connections are reversed from conventional order, the commentary introduces the first example discussed in this chapter, an address by the heroine's friend to the heroine about signs of the hero's return.

To refresh, the poem reads as follows.

Let's climb the mound of white sand and go see, oh friend!

The ship and its mast appear in the great sea

like a post and a war elephant

in the fertile seashore land of that man who has forgotten us.<sup>171</sup>

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the relationship of comparison in this poem is obviously between the ship and the elephant, and the mast and the post, yet the syntax of the poem reverses the order of these images, forcing the reader to make the connection himself to generate a meaningful interpretation.

The next poem, discussed earlier as an example of an *akam* poem lacking in suggestion, illustrates a *kuṛai eṇ niral niṛai* poem, in which the poet draws attention to the lack of parallelism in the poem's syntax.

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<sup>170</sup> In her short discussion of *niral niṛai*, Rajam identifies the technique as an example of a "mode of employing the various types of *totai* (which can refer to the repetition of sounds or content)." This definition explicitly associates the art of alliteration with the art of syntax. Rajam 1992: 205.

171 *kuṅṅra veṇmaṅal ēri niṅṅru niṅṅru*  
*iṅṅam kāṅṅkam vammō tōḷi!*  
*kaḷiṅṅum kaṅṅum pōla naḷikaṅṅal*  
*kūṅṅpum kaḷaṅṅum tōṅṅrum*  
*tōṅṅral maṅṅantōṅṅ tuṅṅrai keḷu nāṅṅṅē*

Virutti commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 95, p. 382.

Approaching the bank where my girlfriend, my other friends and I play  
that man with his chariot and charioteer came and took my virtue.  
If he leaves after saying words (sweet) like milk and honey,  
Won't the kāṇ flower, the grass and the screwpine all be my witness?

While the first, second and fourth line each contain three nominatives (my girlfriend, my other friends and I; (the hero), his chariot and his friend; the kāṇ flower, the grass and the screwpine), the third line only contains two (milk and honey).<sup>172</sup> The effect is more dramatic in Tamil.

1. *yānum* 2. *tōliyum* 3. *āyamum* āṭum turaināṇṇit  
1. *tānum* 2. *tērum* 3. *pākanum* vantaṇ nalaṇṇāṇ  
1. *tēnum* 2. *pālum* (third nominative missing) pōlvāṇa collip pīrivāṇēl  
1. *kānum* 2. *pullum* 3. *kaitaiyum* ellām kariyaṇṇē?<sup>173</sup>

Not only does the poem contain the alliteration discussed earlier, but it draws attention to its own structure as a series of parallel nominatives interrupted by the third line.

The next example illustrates the *porulkōḷ* mode called “*aṭimaṛi moḷi māṛru*,” or “poem in which the lines are interchangeable” without sacrificing meaning or rhythm (*ōcai*). I have included a literal rendition of this poem to better illustrate this technique.

It is a little forest path with streams that rush with swirling eddies  
There are forest deities (who come as) beautiful spirits  
If you don't come back, I will be frightened.  
Oh man of the cāral tract! (This is) the path that you take. <sup>174</sup>

In contrast to much of akam poetry, in which the compounding of images requires a deft use of syntax to obtain multiple layers of suggestion without sacrificing meaning, the classification of this poem is based on the status of each line in this poem as an independent semantic unit that can appear in any order.

Compared to a technique such as bitextual poetry (*śleṣa*), in which a poem can be read in one of two ways depending on the way a particular oronym is construed, these *porulkōḷ* poems

<sup>172</sup> “Honey and milk” are nominatives in the Tamil version.

<sup>173</sup> This poem is also used in the Ceyyuliyal as an example of a kali nilai turai poem, a type of poem that has five ciris in a line, and in which the lines are not interchangeable (*aṭi maṛi ākātu*). See *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 88, p.

<sup>174</sup> Earlier in the chapter I translated the poem as:  
Oh man of the cāral tract!  
If you don't come back, I will be frightened.  
The path that you take is filled with  
    beautiful spirits and  
    forest streams that rush with swirling eddies.  
*Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 95, p. 389.

constitute a relatively simple method of emphasizing the role of structure in the interpretation of a verse.<sup>175</sup> However, in his commentary on the last verse of the Chapter on Miscellany (*Olīpiyal*), the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator includes more “extreme”<sup>176</sup> versions of this same aesthetic principle. In this verse, which outlines subjects with which a learned poet should be familiar, the *Yāpparuṅkalam* provides names of twenty-one poetic genres identified as “poems with hidden meanings (*miṛaikkavi pāṭṭu*).”<sup>177</sup> If the *poruḷko!* poems indicate a shift away from suggestion towards a poetic technique that emphasizes its own constructed nature, the poems in this section represent a radical departure from the poetics of the Caṅkam poems and the *Tolkāppiyam* towards this new aesthetic. Like the landscape (*tiṇai*) system central to early *akam* poetics, these poems expect a initiated reader, but unlike the early *akam* poems, whose meaning is not entirely dependent on familiarity with the conventions, the majority of these poems are incomprehensible without the assistance of a commentary or learned teacher. The poems include “picture poems,” in which the syllables of the poem are arranged in the form of a wheel (*cakkaram*), the zig-zagging line of a cow’s urine (*kōmūttiri*), or a swirling pond (*cuḷikuḷam*). They also include poems in which each line contains a number in ascending and descending order (*eḷu kūṛṛirukkai*). Other genres share the bitextuality of the Sanskrit *slesa*, such as a genre that takes its name from a mythological one-legged bird (*ekapātam*), in which the use of homonyms and oronyms in a verse made up of four lines of the same syllables produces a distinct meaning for each line, and the genre of the “hidden story” (*kātai karappu*), in which a second poem can be construed from the syllables of the original. Similarly, the genre of *orrupeyarttal*, although defined as a poem in which the meaning can be changed by replacing the last word of the poem,<sup>178</sup> is illustrated by poems that appear to be examples of *slesa*.<sup>179</sup> Several of the genres include constraints on syllables, such as the poem of hard consonants (*vallinam pāṭṭu*), made up only of the letters *k*, *c*, *ṭ*, *t*, *p*, and *r*.<sup>180</sup> What these genres share in common, as indicated by the name of the meta-genre to which they belong, is the existence of meaning obscured by complex structures, to be disentangled by a learned reader. The pleasure derived from this “decoding” forms the aesthetic basis of these genres, for which no mention is made of content. Amidst a large array of poetic examples in the commentary on these “poems with hidden meanings,” the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator includes two poems that explicitly draw on *akam* conventions, although the description of the genre contains no such injunction.

<sup>175</sup> Several of the *poruḷkō!* genres correspond to the *vyuktrānta* riddle genre (*prahelika*) discussed by Dandin, in which the meaning of the poem is obscured by the manipulation of syntax in unexpected ways. An examination of the relationship between the new aesthetic of the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* and specific Sanskrit aesthetic treatises warrants considerable attention in a future study.

<sup>176</sup> Here I borrow from Bronner’s use of the term in his book of the same title.

<sup>177</sup> *Yāpparuṅkalam*, verse 96, p. 525.

<sup>178</sup> *oru molīyaip pāṭṭin irutikkaṅ vaittup piṛitoru poruḷ payakkappāṭuvatu. Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam* 96, p. 541.

<sup>179</sup> *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam* 96, p. 542.

<sup>180</sup> Equivalent poems for *mellinam* and *itaiyinam*. See *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam* 96, p. 540.

The first poem is the sole illustration given by the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* of the genre of “a poem on one subject” (*oru poruḷ pāṭṭu*). The poem, as the name suggests, contains twenty-two lines, of which are an extended description of the natural features of the hero’s land, in particular the banana tree. Here the *akam* convention of compounded description of one subject has been reinterpreted in light of this new aesthetic of hidden meaning.<sup>181</sup>

The second *akam* example given by the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* illustrates the genre of “the mixing of lines” (*pāta mayakku*). The commentator defines the genre as “the adding of (a poet’s) own line to three lines composed by three poets in (the meter) *āciryappā* to construct the meaning (of the poem)” (*mūvar mūṅru āciryā aṭi conṅāḷ, tāṅ ṍraṭi pāṭik kiriyai koḷuttuvatu*).<sup>182</sup> The example begins with three verses taken from the Caṅkam *akam* compilation of the *Akananuru* and the long poem *Mullaippāṭṭu*, included in the compilation of the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, also associated with the Caṅkam tradition.<sup>183</sup>

“Breaking open the wet termite mound” (*īyar purhrat tīrpuṛat tīrutta*) (*Akananuru* 8:1)

“The Brahmin who washes (his clothes) on a stone and dresses his body” (*kaṛṛōyt tuṭutta paṭivap pārppāṅ*) (*Mullaippāṭṭu* 37)

“The gold-colored bamboo blooming in the auspicious time of the early morning” (*naṅṅāṭ pūṭta poṅṅiṅar vēṅkai*) (*Akanāṅṅuru* 85:20)

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<sup>181</sup> *maṅaṅkaṅin taṅṅa maṅmicait tōṅrip*  
*paṅaṅkaṅi niṛatta pariūttāḷ muḷumutal*  
*nārpoti vayirri nīrpoti meṅmuḷai*  
*tantuniṛut taṅṅa tōṅramoṭu kavipeṛat*  
*tirintuviṭ taṅṅa tiṅkelu nuṅcuruḷ*  
*ūḷi nūḷilai yuyariya varaipurai*  
*kaliṅka mēyppa vākiya nekiṅtu*  
*vāḷiṅaṅ karukkiṅ avvayi ṛaḷuṅkac*  
*cūlcuman teḷunta cemmūk kaṅikulai*  
*mūṅkā mūkkēṅat tōṅriyāṅ keyti*  
*alaraṅ kōtai yāyilai makaḷir*  
*paricara mēyppap palapōtu potuḷi*  
*nāycirit taṅṅa tōṅramō tuṭumpiṅ*  
*tōḷurit taṅṅa pūḷpaṭu paṭṭaik*  
*kiḷicciṛa kēykkum pāvaiyam pacuṅkāy*  
*iḷuti ṅṅaṅ iṅkaṅi ēnti*  
*vāḷaitaṅ ṅakalilai maṛaikkuṅ ūraṅ*  
*muraṅkoḷ yāṅnai muttuppaṭai aḷuṅka*  
*araṅkoḷ mākkalir ṛōṅṅum nāṭaṅ*  
*aṅputara vanta eṅpuruku pacalai*  
*taṅimarun taṅiyāḷ aṅṅai uruvukiḷar*  
*antaḷi reṅṅumen ṛaṭameṅ tōḷē*  
*Virutti commentary on Yāpparuṅkalam 96, p. 543*

<sup>182</sup> *Virutti commentary on Yāpparuṅkalam 96, p. 541.*

<sup>183</sup> The example is cited as a *pāta mayakku* song sung by Pākkāṅār who sang his own line with three lines.

Taken out of context and in some cases, stripped even of their original subject,<sup>184</sup> these verses are fragments of meaning. They require a poet who completes the poem with the following final verse which endows the poem with its “hidden” meaning.

I pick flowers for that girl as my heart melts (*malarkoya luvateṅ maṅamavaḷ māṭṭē*)

The completed poem (functional translation):

I pick flowers for that girl as my heart melts, flowers of the gold-colored bamboo  
blooming on the day deemed auspicious by the Brahmin who dresses himself, having  
washed his clothes on a rock used to break open a termite mound.

The meaning of the first three verses is now “read” in the context of the last verse. This example reflects the felicitous flexibility with which the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator wields the akam tradition. Unconcerned with the possibility of violating the original meanings of these poems, the commentator transforms individual lines from the Caṅkam corpus into fertile material for new poetic composition.

By introducing these akam poems as literary examples of “hidden meaning” poems, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator associates the use of akam conventions with genres explicitly identified with a tradition outside the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam poems. These “hidden meaning poems” are described by the *Yāpparuṅkalam* as having been composed by poets who fully understood (them) after looking at examples gathered from the sea of Northern texts” (*vaṭanūr kaṭaluḷ orukkuṭaṅ vaitta utāraṅam nōkki virittu muṭitta miṛaikkavip pāṭṭē*).<sup>185</sup> More specifically, these poems appear to be Tamil versions of the Sanskrit meta-genre of “poetry of wonder” (*citrakāvya*), defined by a focus on complex embellishment of structure and meter that prevents easy interpretation. However, the Northern texts to which the commentator refers are not obvious. With the exception of the *kōmūttiri* form, none of the genres discussed by the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator appear in the most influential Sanskrit treatise on poetics, the seventh-century *Kāvyaḍarśa*, despite their inclusion in the twelfth-century

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<sup>184</sup> In *Akanāṅṅuru* 8, the bear is the subject mentioned in the next line of the poem.

<sup>185</sup> *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam* 96, p. 525. The commentator adds “(poems composed) by those who have expressed in Tamil the nature of hidden meaning poems such as *akkarac cutakam*, *māttiraic cutakam*, *pintu mati* and *pirēḷikai* which appear in the great dark sea that is “*āriyam*.” (*āriyam eṇum pārirumpauvattuk kāṭṭiya akkarac cutakamum, māttiraic cutakamum, pintu matiyum pirēḷikaiyum mutalākavuṭaiyaṅavum ipperriyē tamilākac collum miṛaik kavikaḷum aṅintu koḷka eṅravāru*) *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam* 96, p. 547.

*Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram*,<sup>186</sup> a Tamil “version” of the *Kāvyaḍarśa*.<sup>187</sup> There is even significant variation between the *citrakāvya* genres found in the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* and those in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti*, indicating that there was no standard interpretation of the meta-genre at this time. The relationship between these genres and a “Northern” tradition is further complicated by the use of distinctly Tamil terms for these genres. Although several, like the *kōmūttiri* and the *ēkapātam* are Tamilized Sanskrit words, the majority of the genres are either “translations” into Tamil, such as the *kātai karappu*, the *mālai mārru* and the *oru poruḷ pāṭṭu* or expressed in a mix of Tamil and Tamilized Sanskrit, such as the *pāta mayakku*.

Although the provenance of many of these “hidden meaning” poems remains unclear, they clearly participate in a poetic system outside the tradition articulated in the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam poems. Like the alliterative poems used to illustrate the verses in the *Ceyyūḷiyal* and the *poruḷkōḷ* poems with their emphasis on syntax, these poems draw attention to their own artificiality in a move that suggests a shift in what constitutes the literary in Tamil poetics.

This shift in emphasis helps explain the “strangeness” of the *Virutti akam* examples, which were not meant to be read as examples of *akam* as the genre is understood in the *Tolkāppiyam* or the later *kōvai* treatises. However, given the commentator’s lack of interest in *akam* poetics, why would he include poems that use the *akam* conventions, albeit in strange and confounding ways? The scope of the examples familiar to the *Virutti* commentator indicates that he could have chosen from a wide range of Tamil literary conventions outside the *akam* corpus, including literary conventions that more closely reflected the aesthetic shift in which he was interested.<sup>188</sup> While a detailed answer to this question awaits further research, including the role of these *akam* examples in other commentaries from the same period,<sup>189</sup> the choice to draw on the *akam* conventions reflects the central status of this tradition in the history of Tamil language and literature. Although Zvelebil’s formulation that “*akam*” becomes a secondary meaning for

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<sup>186</sup> The two texts even share literary examples, although the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* does not include the two genres for which the *Virutti* gives examples based in the *akam* conventions.

<sup>187</sup> The relationship between the Sanskrit *Kāvyaḍarśa* and the Tamil *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* is far from a clear instance of translation. Little scholarship exists on the topic. For a discussion of the relationship between the two texts, as well as an discussion of the influence of the *Kāvyaḍarśa* on Tamil poetics, see Monius 2000.

<sup>188</sup> Such as the later *kāvya* tradition, in which not only the new meters, but the focus on alliteration, plays a more central role.

<sup>189</sup> Given the insistence by these commentators on the strict delimiting of the Tamil tradition, it is not surprising that the neither Pērācīriyar nor Nakkīrar include the examples found in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentary. However, these poems appear to have circulated in other commentaries, indicating that they were acknowledged as part of the Tamil literary landscape by the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator’s contemporaries. The twelfth-century commentary on the *Nēminātam*, for example, contains several of the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* *akam* examples, as does Ilampuranar’s commentary on the *Tolkāppiyam*. The poems are also found in the seventeenth-century *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*, which synthesizes the various positions on Tamil literature discussed in the first part of the dissertation. The *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* and its project of synthesis is the subject of the last chapter.

“Tamil”<sup>190</sup> may be overstated, he correctly observes the relationship between attempts at defining the Tamil tradition and *akam* poetics, most dramatically in Nakkīrar’s commentary on the *akam* treatise *Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ*, where we find the first articulation of the classical Tamil past and the divine origins of Tamil literature.<sup>191</sup> In fact, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti akam* poems are not the first examples of innovation in the *akam* tradition subject to debate in Tamil literary scholarship of this period. While the story of their composition and compilation has never been adequately explored, the *akam* poems of the *Paṭiṇēṅkīḷkaṇakku*, (Eighteen [Short] Works),<sup>192</sup> a compilation better known for its poetry on moral behavior, including the well-known *Tirukkuraḷ*, display many of the qualities of the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti akam* examples, including an emphasis on alliteration and rhyme over the complex use of suggestion in the *Eṭṭuttokai*.

Oh lord! Do not come this way!  
 The men of our family who live on this mountain  
 speak harsh words, and they carry bows, spears and fast arrows.  
 These men protect the ripe fields on the fragrant hillside.

*viraikamiḷ cāral viḷaipuṇaṅ kāppār*  
*viraiyiṭai vāraṇmin; aiya! -uraikaṭiyār;*  
*villinar vēlar viraintucel lampiṇar;*  
*kallitai vāḷna remar.*

This *Tiṇaimoḷi Aimpatu* 5 poem, for example, spoken by the heroine’s friend to the hero, contains minimal suggestion other than the obvious correlation between the men as protectors of the fields and protectors of the heroine’s virtue. However, like the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti akam* examples, this short poem, in the “new” *veṇpā* meter foreign to the early Caṅkam *akam* poems, has been constructed to display its deft manipulation of phonetics, including second syllable rhyming and extensive repetition of syllables. Similarly, in *Tiṇaimoḷi Aimpatu* 9, spoken by the heroine’s friend to the heroine so that hero can overhear, the suggestion is limited to conventional knowledge of the Veṅkai flower, said to bloom at the advent of the marriage season.

Oh friend!  
 Won’t our man of the beautiful mountains come back to us,

<sup>190</sup> According to Zvelebil, using evidence generated by M.S. Venkataswamy, “Tamil = a culture-specific manner of love-relationship (i.e. the spontaneous love of *kalavu*) particularly as reflected in literature and typical theme of classical Tamil poetry” Zvelebil 1986: xvii.

<sup>191</sup> In Nakkīrar’s commentary, it is *akam* poetics that is restored by Shiva when the knowledge of Tamil poetics is lost. According to Zvelebil, not only Nakkīrar but also the *Paripatal* and the *Cilappatikaram* “try to perform a deeply significant task: to equate, to identify the *kalavu* mode of love with Tamil itself” (Zvelebil, 1986: 14).

<sup>192</sup> Often translated as “minor,” this reveals the lack of status of these poems in recent histories. According to the *Pāṭṭiyal*, where the division of *mēl* and *kīḷ kaṇakku* is first established, the distinction refers to line length.

freeing us of our lovesickness<sup>193</sup> and returning the plumpness to our bamboo-like arms<sup>194</sup>  
in the evening, dark as deep sapphires,  
when bees swarm around the blooming Veṅkai trees,  
their flowers marking the season?<sup>195</sup>

*pininīran tīrantu perumṇaittōḷ vīnka  
manimalai nāṭaṇ varuvāṅko rōḷi!  
kaninīrai vēṅkai malarntuvaṇ ṭārkku  
maninīra mālaip polutu*

However, this poem reflects not only second syllable rhyming in each of its four lines, but also the sonic effect of the repetition of “*nīran, nīrai* and *nīram*” in the first, second and fourth line respectively. In *Kār Nāṛpatu* 6, in which the heroine’s friend tries to comfort the heroine at the advent of rainy season, there is accord between the second syllables of the first three lines (*tī, tu, tī*), as well as the echoing of the third and fourth syllable of those lines (*[y]iṭa, [v]iṭai, tiṭi*).

Oh friend with wide eyes that divide the tender mango (of your face);  
Don’t suffer so, watching your arms grow thin,  
unable to keep bangles on.  
The cruel rain clouds thunder,  
telling that man who has gone far away  
not to extend his absence.

*toṭiyiṭa vārrā tolaintatō ṇōkki  
vaṭuvuṭaip pōḷntakaṇra kaṇṇāy! varuntal  
kaṭitiṭi vāṇa muraru neṭuvuṭaic  
ceṇṇārai nīṭaṇmi ṇeṇru.*

The use of second syllable rhyme and alliteration is not just an experiment in several poems, but occurs in virtually all of the *Paṭiṇeṅkīlkaṇakku akam* poems, indicating a new aesthetic priority. While these poems do not challenge interpretation in the way that many of the *Yāpparuṅkala Vīrutti* akam examples do, they too occupy an ambivalent position vis a vis the Caṅkam

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<sup>193</sup> Lit. “so that the color of suffering goes away.” This is a reference to the greenish pallor (*pacalai*) that is said to spread over the body of a woman in love.

<sup>194</sup> A reference to the weight lost by the heroine as she pines for the hero. The slipping off of her bangles is a common indicator of her lovesickness.

<sup>195</sup> Lit. “the Vēṅkai which are like astrologers.” Referring to *Akananuru* 2, Dakshinamurthy points out that the blossoming of the Venkai flower signifies the advent of the marriage season. Dakshinamurthy 2009: 100.



tradition.<sup>196</sup> On the one hand, they are excluded from the Caṅkam story first articulated by Nakkīrar and do not appear as literary examples in Pēracīriyar’s commentary.<sup>197</sup> On the other hand, the entire compilation of the *Eighteen [Short] Works* is mentioned by Pēracīriyar as an acceptable “later text,” indicating his familiarity with all the poems in the compilation, and the poems are included in the *kōvai* commentary of the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*. At some point there was a concerted attempt to associate the compilation with the Tamil tradition: the preambles of the *Aintiṇai Aimpatu* and the *Tinaimoḷi Nūrraimpatu* identify them as defenses of the Tamil tradition of stolen love (*kaḷavu*) and later poems associate the compilation with a Madurai Caṅkam.<sup>198</sup> These references have been understood by contemporary scholars as reflections of a reaction to the anti-Tamil (Jain) culture of the Kalabhra period associated with a Dark Ages of the Tamil historical imagination.<sup>199</sup> However, the lack of historical information surrounding this compilation raises the question of whether the addition of the *akam* poems to this compilation could be in fact a product of this later period as a way to exercise control over the alternative articulation of the *akam* tradition.<sup>200</sup>

Whether or not the compilation was a later attempt to domesticate the *akam* poems of the *Patīṇēṅkīlkaṇakku* by associating them with the classical tradition, the debates over these poems, as Zvelebil suggests, reflect a specific concern with the role of *akam* poetics in the correct interpretation of the Tamil tradition. Similarly, the reference to the *akam* conventions in the *Yāpparūṅkalam Virutti* examples signals to the Tamil reader the compatibility of his new ideas of literary language (including those derived from Sanskrit) with Tamil literature and situates his work within a tradition in which those conventions were themselves a central part of what could be considered literature.

These different positions on the possibility of innovation within the *akam* tradition reflect the debates over the definition of the Tamil literary tradition that define Tamil intellectual culture

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<sup>196</sup> However, they have been critiqued as inferior poetry by contemporary scholars. See Zvelebil, 1974: 118-119. They have also been seen as an attempt to keep the dying *akam* tradition alive.

<sup>197</sup> The status of the *Patīṇēṅkīlkaṇakku akam* poems in Pēracīriyar’s commentary is unclear. On the one hand, Pēracīriyar does not draw from these poems throughout his commentary, despite his frequent reference to the moral poems in the same collection, except as an example of violation of literary usage (Pēracīriyar’s commentary on *Marapiyal* 90). However, he does refer to the both the *Patīṇēṅkīlkaṇakku* and more specifically to the *akam* collection of the *Kār Nārpātu*. See Pēracīriyar’s commentary on *Ceyyūḷiyal* 235.

<sup>198</sup> The preamble of the *Tirikataku*, a moral text in the compilation, identifies his author with a Madurai Caṅkam.

<sup>199</sup> Some scholars have tried to date the compilation by identifying the Caṅkam with the Dramida Caṅkam established by the Jain Vacciraṇanti in Madurai in 470 CE. This is said to be the “fourth Caṅkam.” See TP. Meenakshisundaram, *Camanaṭ Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru* (Kōvai: Kalaikkatir Veḷiyiṭu, 1965), 53-4. The identification of these poems with Jainism further complicates their relationship to the Tamil tradition and is a subject for further research.

<sup>200</sup> After all, the first mention of the compilation appears in Pēracīriyar. Additionally, these poems are understood by Tamil literary tradition to be composed by Jain authors, in part because of their association with the *Tirukkural* and the *Nalatiyar*, but both the veracity and the implications of this identification warrant further research.

between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries. On the one hand, scholars such as Pēraciriyar and Nakkīrar propose a monolithic interpretation of Tamil associated with a canon, divine origins and an authoritative original text. On the other hand, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* represents a style of scholarship associated with Jain (and possibly Buddhist) vision of Tamil as able to accommodate innovation without concern over violation of the old tradition. For these scholars, the *akam* conventions of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the early poems were not incongruous with new attitudes about what constituted literary language, including the use of sound-based poetic ornament and the complex poetic structures of *poruḷkoḷ* and *citrakāvya*. By using *akam* conventions to illustrate this new aesthetics, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentator signals to his Tamil readers that such new theories of language did not replace the old tradition, but rather that, just as the tradition of Tamil poetics could accommodate a range of conflicting scholarly perspectives, so too could the parameters of the Tamil literary tradition accommodate diverse theories of what constituted the literary.

## Chapter 3

### Theorizing the Power of Poetry: *Pāṭṭiyal* Grammars and Literature of Praise

At the same time that Pērācīriyar and the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* commentary were debating the role of the Caṅkam past in the definition of Tamil literature, a branch of poetics emerged that would eclipse both scholars in influence and popularity over the next seven hundred years. These treatises, called *pāṭṭiyals* (treatises on the nature of poetry) eschew both the conventions of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the *Yāpparuṅkalam* in favor of a system that theorizes both Tamil language and literature in terms of its capacity to praise a royal patron. By integrating theories about the power of language situated in both the Tamil and Sanskrit traditions with a classification of praise genres from throughout the Tamil literary universe, the *pāṭṭiyals* claim praise of a royal patron as a central condition of what constitutes the literary and demonstrate the suitability of both Tamil language and literature for such a project. This chapter looks at the two earliest examples of the *pāṭṭiyal* genre, the twelfth-century *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* and the thirteenth-century *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*,<sup>201</sup> to better understand this shift in literary culture which would dominate the Tamil literary world until the nineteenth century ushered in other aesthetic and social concerns.

Despite their significant role in Tamil poetics, the *pāṭṭiyals* have received little attention from contemporary scholars. Reviled for “do(ing) great violence to the genius of the Tamil language,”<sup>202</sup> or at the least rejected for their “foreign” status,<sup>203</sup> the poetics of the *pāṭṭiyals* have almost completely disappeared from Tamil scholarship.<sup>204</sup> However, if the number of *pāṭṭiyals* produced between the twelfth and the nineteenth century are any indication, this tradition represented the dominant paradigm in Tamil poetics until recent times.<sup>205</sup>

The neglect of the *pāṭṭiyals* is due in part to their failure to perform what contemporary scholars of South India expect from a treatise on poetics. Nowhere do they offer a coherent definition of poetry, either in terms of a list of internal linguistic and semantic characteristics (as we see in the *Tolkāppiyam*),<sup>206</sup> poetic language and figures of speech (as we see in the *Taṅṅiyalaṅkāram*) or the effect of those poetic conventions on an educated audience, as we see in

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<sup>201</sup> Also known as the *Vaccaṅanti Mālai*, after the author’s teacher.

<sup>202</sup> AC Chettiyar 1977: 188.

<sup>203</sup> The *pāṭṭiyals* are critiqued in part for the impression that they follow a Sanskrit tradition (*vaṭacol marapu*). See Jayaraman 1977. Kovintaraja Mutaliyar, in his introduction to the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal*, refutes this “foreign” origin, and tries to associate the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* with the Caṅkam tradition.

<sup>204</sup> The degree to which this knowledge has been lost is a reminder of how dramatically Tamil scholarship has changed over the last hundred years, influenced in part by the “renaissance” of literature associated with a “pure” Tamil past. Y. Manikantan at Madras University is one of the few contemporary scholars who works on *pāṭṭiyals*; he has authored an edition of the later *Citampara Pāṭṭiyal*.

<sup>205</sup> The tradition identifies eleven major *pāṭṭiyals* produced between the twelfth and the nineteenth centuries. See Jayaraman 1977 for an overview of these materials. Also see Cuppiramaniam and Thomas 1982: 19-25.

<sup>206</sup> See *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyuliyal* 1.

the Sanskrit *alaṅkāra* tradition after Anandavardhana. Although they are associated with metrics in the later grammars of the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam*, the *Mūttuvīriyam* and the *Cuvāminātam*,<sup>207</sup> the *pāṭṭiyals* do not offer a description of metrical variations, either in terms of the four “original” meters outlined by the *Tolkāppiyam* or the later metrical system introduced by the *Yāpparunkalam* and its commentary.<sup>208</sup> They also do not discuss the traditional thematic division of love/domestic life (*akam*) and war/ethics (*puram*) explored both in the *Tolkāppiyam* and in the later treatises of the *Iraiyāṇār Akapporuḷ*, the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* and the *Purapporuḷvenpāmālai*.

In absence of these theoretical frameworks familiar to scholars of South India (and India more generally), what do the *pāṭṭiyals* do? This chapter looks at the two earliest examples of the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, the twelfth-century *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* and the thirteenth-century *Vaccaṇanti Mālai* (also known as the *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal*) to argue that the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition represents a way of interpreting literature wholly new to the Tamil tradition: one based not on the paradigms listed above, but rather understood through a system of rules that marshal both the content and the special language of poetry in service of praise of a royal patron.

The *pāṭṭiyals* do this through the inclusion of two seemingly disparate sections: a section correlating the magic powers of the first word of a poem with identifying characteristics of the poem’s patron, and a section consisting of verses that list and describe a range of literary praise genres that differ in content, meter and style. In the case of the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal*, the section on phonetics contains in eighty-four verses, divided into the subjects of Phonology (*Eḷuttu*) and Morphology (*Col*). Although these divisions echo the first two books of the *Tolkāppiyam*, the similarity with the ancient grammar ends there. The second section, the section on literary genres, contains one-hundred-and-thirty-three verses in a chapter called *Iṇaviyal*, or Chapter on Divisions.<sup>209</sup> The *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal* contains a clearer exposition of the subject matter shared by both *pāṭṭiyals*, organizing its material into fifty-four verses<sup>210</sup> in *venpā* meter in two chapters entitled Chapter on the First Word (*Mutaṇmolīyiyal*) and Chapter on Poetics (*Ceyyūḷiyal*). However, to an uninitiated reader, the relationship between these two sections is not clear in either *pāṭṭiyal*; if the two sections did not consistently appear together throughout the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, one might be tempted to suggest they had been stuck together by a confused editor. As for contemporary scholars of Tamil poetics, most focus primarily on the content in one section or

<sup>207</sup> The later “five-division” grammars include the traditional categories of Phonology (*Eḷuttu*) and Morphology (*Col*) and Poetics (*Poruḷ*), but introduce the fields of Meter (*Yāppu*) and Poetic Figure (*Alaṅkāra*, *Aṇi*). Although the twelfth-century *Vīracōḷiyam* is the earliest of such five-fold grammars, it is not until the seventeenth century that the subjects covered by the *pāṭṭiyals* are incorporated into the chapters on meter.

<sup>208</sup> Jeyaraman points out that in later texts, the terms *ceyyuḷ*, *pāṭṭu* and *yāppu* are all synonymous (Jeyaraman 1977: 12).

<sup>209</sup> The first thirteen verses of the *Iṇaviyal* cover subject matter more appropriate to the first two chapters. The mixing of topics, which is not repeated in later *pāṭṭiyals*, comes from the dual meaning of “*iṇam*” both as “division” and as the more technical term of “metrical subcategory.”

<sup>210</sup> This number includes the invocatory verse, the *avaiyaṭakkam* and an independent *venpā* verse praising his teacher.

the other, without investigating the relationship between the diverse material covered by the *pāṭṭiyal*.<sup>211</sup> However, the relationship between these sections becomes more clear when we understand both sections as participants in an integrated theoretical system of praise poetics in which both semantics and phonetics play an important role.

To begin with the content addressed by the *pāṭṭiyals* that is more accessible to most contemporary readers, the second section, the section on literary genre, contains descriptions of an extensive array of praise genres that range in content, meter and style. The majority of the genres listed in both the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* and the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* can immediately be identified as genres of praise, either through their descriptions in the *pāṭṭiyals* themselves or through a survey of extant examples of the genre. Several genres praise the patron's martial prowess, such as the *parani*, which describes "the excellence of a man who has killed great elephants in a fierce war"<sup>212</sup> and the *cerukkaḷavañci*, which "describes in *vañci* meter the [patron's] ability in battle (*moyyiṅ tīram vañci pāviṅ muṭitturaitta ceyyiṅ cerukkaḷavañci*)." The *taṇaimālai* also praises the excellence of his army (*paṭaittiṅ*).<sup>213</sup>

The *mēykkīrtti* and the *kayaṛamōtāppā* "sing (more generally of) the deeds of a beautiful king" (*eḷil aracar ceyti icaippar*).<sup>214</sup> The body of the patron is also celebrated in the genres of the *aṅkamālai*, the *pātātikēcam* and the *kēcātipātam*, which praise him from toe to head and head to toe in different meters.<sup>215</sup> The *ulā* praises his beauty in the voice of women who admire him on procession.<sup>216</sup> The patron is also the romantic hero of the *maṭal*, defined in the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* not by its more familiar description of a rejected lover who tries to woo back his love by publicly mounting a horse made of palmyra stems, but as a poem "about love, (a poem which brings) pleasure and eschews (the other *puruṣārthas*) dharma, wealth and moksha, (in order to) elevate the resplendent name of the patron" (*aṛamporuḷ vīṭelli yuyarttiṅpam [...] kāṭar poruṭṭākāp [...] maṭalīraiva ṇoṇpēr niraṭta [...]*)<sup>217</sup> He is also the hero of the *kāppiyam* and the *peruṅkāppiyam*.

A number of genres praise the constituents of the patron's domain, including his town (*ūr nēricai veṅpā*, *ūrinnicai veṅpā* and the *ūr veṅpā*),<sup>218</sup> the beauty, power and loyalty of his elephant

<sup>211</sup> Most contemporary scholars focus on the second section to understand literary genre in Tamil. Many of these discussions ignore the first section altogether. Zvelebil 19, Thomas (*Tamil Prosody*) both include brief section on *pāṭṭiyals*). Even Jeyaraman, who has published the most widely on *pāṭṭiyals* and *prabandham* literature, treats the two sections separately with no reflection on the relationship between the two in his *Pāṭṭiyal Tiranayvu* and *Pāṭṭiyalum Ilakkiya Vakaikalum*.

<sup>212</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 38, p. 55. Later *pāṭṭiyals* specify that the hero of the *parani* is one who has killed a thousand elephants. (See *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* v. 78)

<sup>213</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 31, p. 49.

<sup>214</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 34, p. 52.

<sup>215</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 29,

<sup>216</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 27, p. 46.

<sup>217</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 28, p. 47.

<sup>218</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal*, v. 13, p.34 and *Veṅpā pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 22, p. 41. The description of the first two explicitly refers to the patron as the leader, "mutavaṅ."

(*yāṇaivañci*)<sup>219</sup>, and the deeds and quality of his royal umbrella (*kuṭai veṅpā*). The *tacāṅkam* (poem celebrating the ten constituents [of the patron]) describes without using inauspicious letters<sup>220</sup> the (patron's) mountain, river, country, town, well-crafted garland, horse, murderous elephant, flag, drum, and strong staff.<sup>221</sup> Similarly, the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* contains a verse on various descriptive poems in *viruttam* meter, including those on (the patron's) unwavering royal umbrella, his spear, his sword as well as constituents mentioned in the *tacāṅkam*.<sup>222</sup> The *ūcal* praises the patron's family (*currattaḷavā*)<sup>223</sup> and the *purāṇam* describes “the origins of (his) family” in *kārikai* meter (*kulavaravu kārikai yāppir purāṇamē yām*).<sup>224</sup> As symbols of the king's virility and power; the women of the court are also subjects of praise poems; the *nayanappattu* and the *payōtarappattu* both praise a woman's eyes and chest respectively,<sup>225</sup> while the *pukaḷccimālai* provides a more general description of women.

Other genres serve more directly as a benediction addressed to the patron, such as the *yāṅṅu nilai* which requests that “the king rule forever over the world and that he last for years” (*vaiyaka maṅṅavaṅ maṅ...[.] pal yāṅṅu eytuka*) and the *kaṅpaṭai nilai*.<sup>226</sup>

The status of the patron is invoked not only in the content of praise genres, but also the form, as in the case of the *kalampakam*, a genre of mixed subject matter that appears in all of the major *pāṭṭiyals*, in which the number of stanzas is determined by the social status of the patron whom it praises. If dedicated to gods (*īcar*), the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* explains, the *kalampakam* should contain one hundred verses; ninety-five if dedicated to brahmins (*aiyar*);<sup>227</sup> ninety verses without defect (*kācarra*) for fierce kings (*ikal aracar*); seventy flawless verses for ministers (*amaiccar*); fifty for the tradespeople (*vaṅikar*); and thirty for everyone else (*ēnaiyōr*).<sup>228</sup>

<sup>219</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 33, p. 51.

<sup>220</sup> This is one of the few generic descriptions that incorporates the subject matter of the first part of the *pāṭṭiyal*. The verse refers more specifically to “poison letters” (*nañcu eḷuttu*), which will be explained later in the chapter.

<sup>221</sup> *pullum malaiyāru nāṭṭir puṅaitārmā  
kolluṅ kaḷiru koṭimuracam - vallakōl  
eṅrivai nañceḷuttō ṭēlā vakaiyuraippa  
niṅṅra tacāṅkameṅa nēr.*

*Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 19, p. 39. The *ciṅṅappū* and the *tacāṅkappattu* are variations on this genre (v. 20, p. 39)

<sup>222</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 21, p. 40.

<sup>223</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 23, p. 42.

<sup>224</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 43, p. 58.

<sup>225</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 25, p. 44. Also see the *tārakaimālai* and the *maṅkalavaḷḷai* (*Veṅpā pāṭṭiyal*, v. 42, p. 50) as well as the *pukaḷccimālai*.

<sup>226</sup> *Panṅiru Pāṭṭiyal*, v. 119, p. 131.

<sup>227</sup> The commentary interprets “*aiyar*” as “sage” (*muṅivar*).

<sup>228</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 12, p. 32.

Like the *kalampakam*, several other genres include in their definition praise of a god, although this is almost always in the service of a human patron. For example, the description of the *piḷḷaikkavi* (poem describing the hero as a child) includes an invocation to god, asking (him) to protect the hero and his family from murder (*piḷḷaik kaviteyvaṅ kākkaveṇa koṇṭuraikkun tēvar kolaiyakarri [...] curratṭaḷavā*<sup>229</sup> [...])<sup>230</sup> The *aṭṭamaṅkalam*, the *navamaṇimālai* and the *tacappirāturpavam* all praise the various births of Vishnu, although the commentary interprets these in the service of protection of the patron (*kaṭavuḷait tutittu avar kākkak kaṭavar*).<sup>231</sup> The *aimpaṭai viruttam* mentioned in the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal*, which praises the five weapons of Vishnu, probably served a similar purpose.<sup>232</sup>

In cases where the *pāṭṭiyal* descriptions give no indication of eulogistic content, many genres can be identified as praise literature through a survey of extant examples of the genre. The *kōvai*, described in the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* as four hundred verses on love (*akapporu!*) in *kalitturai* meter, is, as Cutler points out in his discussion of the *Tirukkōvaiyār*, equal parts akam and praise, as the patron appears in each of the four hundred stanzas.<sup>233</sup> Similarly, the *uḷatti pāṭṭu* and the *kuratti pāṭṭu*, both described by the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* without referring to a patron, “embed” the patron in the metaphors and symbolic vocabulary of the poems.<sup>234</sup>

Deviating from the Tamil (and Indian) tendency to include and exclude literature based on the different contexts in which they were produced and performed, the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* and the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* also include genres associated with the Shaivite and Vaishnavite devotional corpi of literature.<sup>235</sup> Many of these genres are exclusively defined by their meter, such as the *antāti* genre, defined only as “one hundred *antāti* verses, in which the last word of one verse is used as the first word of the subsequent verse,”<sup>236</sup> the *iraṭṭaimaṇimālai*, defined as “twenty *antāti* stanzas in *veṅpā* and *kalitturai* meters”<sup>237</sup> the *mummaṅikkōvai*, defined as “thirty *antāti* verses in

<sup>229</sup> The use of “*aḷavā*” here is not entirely clear. Also used this way in v. 23.

<sup>230</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 6, p. 28.

<sup>231</sup> See commentary on *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 24, p. 43.

<sup>232</sup> This verse contains a mix of Sanskrit and Tamil words for these terms: *cakkaram*, *taṇu*, *vāḷ*, *caṅku*, *taṇṭu*.

<sup>233</sup> Cutler 1987.

<sup>234</sup> However, no particular patron is implicated in these discussions of genre, nor do the *pāṭṭiyals* include literary examples that celebrate a patron, as does the *Tantiyalankāram*. Rather, these praise genres serve as templates into which the name of any patron can be inserted.

<sup>235</sup> Cutler makes this point in his discussion of the exclusion of devotional genres from the fifteenth-century compilation *Puṇṭirattu*. Cutler 2003: 307. The *Tolkāppiyam* commentators also exclude this corpus from their classification of the literary, claiming that these poems are not of this world and are therefore outside the realm of literary theory. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>236</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 9, p. 30. The verse mentions both *veṅpā antāti* and *kalitturai antāti*, distinguished by the use of different meters.

<sup>237</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 27, p. 37. The *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* gives an alternate description in v. 36, p. 53.

the meters of *ācīriyam*, *veṅpā* and *kalitturai* respectively”<sup>238</sup> and the *patikam*.<sup>239</sup> While the descriptions of these genres do not explicitly refer to a patron, all appear as devotional poems praising Shiva in the tenth-century compilation of the *Tirumuṟai*.<sup>240</sup> However, in the schematic presented by the *pāṭṭiyals*, these genres are removed from their original provenance as poems to god and transformed into poems in service of a royal patron.

In their exclusive focus on praise genres from throughout the Tamil literary universe, including the Caṅkam *puṟam* tradition,<sup>241</sup> the bhakti corpus, and courtly narrative genres,<sup>242</sup> the *pāṭṭiyals* reflect a shift throughout Tamil literary culture to the central role played by praise of a royal patron in both the theorization and production of literature.

Praise has played an important part in Tamil literature since the earliest poems. In fact, praise is a defining characteristic of one of the two generic categories of the Caṅkam poems, the category of *puṟam*, which treats subjects of the external world, such as kingship, war, and ethics.<sup>243</sup> Many of the *puṟam* poems of the *Puṟaṅṅūru* and the *Patirruppattu* contain direct or indirect praise of a king, and describe the mutual dependence between a king and his poet.<sup>244</sup> *Puṟam* 186 illustrates the importance of the king in these early poems.

Paddy is not life,  
 water is not life.  
 The life of this broad world  
 is the king,  
 and to know  
 “I am life”  
 is the duty of the king  
 with his many-speared army. (transl. G. Hart & H. Heifetz)

The *Tolkāppiyam* reflects this early categorization, dedicating one of the chapters of the section of poetics (*Poruḷatikāram*) to the *puṟam* genre (the *Puṟattiṅaiyiyal*). However, this chapter,

<sup>238</sup> *āṅṅakaval muṇmuṟaiyē veṅpā kalitturaiya vantāti mummaṅikkōvaikku mutal. Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal Ceyyūḷiyal* v. 13, p. 34.

<sup>239</sup> *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal*, v. 111, p. 121.

<sup>240</sup> The *navamaṅimālai* appears slightly later as a Vaishnavite praise genre in the work of the fourteenth-century Vedānta Dēṣikar.

<sup>241</sup> The *puṟapporuḷ tuṟais* that feature in the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* and the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal: varalāṟru vaṅci, cerukkaḷa vaṅci, vāḱai mālai, kaṅpaṭai nilai, tuyileṭai nilai, kaikkilāi, ceviyaṟivurū, vāyurāi vāḷttu, puṟanilai vāḷttu, ciṅṅappū, kaiyaṟu nilai* (Jeyaraman, *Pāṭṭiyal Tiranayvu*, 11)

<sup>242</sup> Several of the verses also describe genres that are no longer extant, such as the *kaikkilāi*, the *alankāra paṅcakam*, the *kuḷumakaṅ*, *varukkamālai*. Many of these appear only in the nineteenth century.

<sup>243</sup> The other category is *akam*, or poetry of love and domestic life, discussed by the previous chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>244</sup> For more on praise in the *puṟam* poems, see Hart 1975; Marr 1985.



which lays out the conventions acceptable for a *puṛam* poem. deals specifically with the *puṛam* poetic system, and not with praise poetry more generally.<sup>245</sup>

By the twelfth century, praise poetry in Tamil had expanded to many genres beyond those represented by the *puṛam* poems. This development first occurred in the devotional (*bhakti*) poems of the Shaiva *Tēvāram* and the Vaishnavite *Divyaprabandham*, which incorporated many of the early *puṛam* tropes into the new poetic forms of the *maṭal*, *antāti*, *ulā* and *kōvai* genres included in the *pāṭṭiyals*' typology.<sup>246</sup>

Beginning in the eighth century, and expanding significantly in the period of the *pāṭṭiyals*, the praise genres developed by the *bhakti* poets transition from temple to court literary forms, and begin to be applied also to kings. While these courtly genres, later called *prabandhams* or “minor literatures” (*ciṛṛilakkiyam*), are significantly less studied by contemporary scholars than the Caṅkam or *bhakti* poems, they were, as Zvelebil has pointed out, “extremely productive over the centuries, offering standardized templates that a poet could readily deploy in the praise of a chosen subject or patron.”<sup>247</sup>

Simultaneously, beginning around the ninth century, another major literary genre affiliated with praise appeared in Tamil: the courtly epic, or *kāppiyam* (Sanskrit *kāvya*). While long narrative poems had existed in Tamil since the fifth-century *Cilappatikāram* and the sixth-century *Maṇimekhalai*, these early “epics” lack key features associated with the category of “*kāvya*” and are only characterized as such by later theoreticians. In contrast, the *kāvyas* of the ninth through fourteenth centuries self-consciously identify with the larger discourse around *kāvya* as found in the Sanskritic literary and literary theoretical tradition, including the norms established by the Sanskrit theoretician Daṇḍin, who composed the earliest and most well-known grammar on the form. While the little existing contemporary scholarship on the *kāvya* tradition in Tamil emphasizes the proselytizing features of a genre dominated by Jain and Buddhist poets, these poems were not considered didactic, but rather participated in a wider, non-sectarian courtly literary milieu. In the case of the tenth-century<sup>248</sup> Jain *kāvyas* *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* and

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<sup>245</sup> One section of the *Puṛattiṇiayiyal*, the section on *Pātaṅṭiṇai*, contains references to a larger corpus of literature. As this section differs considerably from the rest of the *Puṛattiṇiayiyal* and is not well understood by the commentators, I have not included it in this chapter.

<sup>246</sup> See Cutler 1987. Cutler argues for a poetics of *bhakti* that reinterprets even those poems in the *akam* mode as *puṛam* poems because of the relationship they establish between god, poet and community of devotees, echoing the relationship between king, poet and other subjects found in the earlier poems.

<sup>247</sup> Zvelebil 1974: 193-219.

<sup>248</sup> As we have little biographical information about the authors of these Jain and Buddhist *kāvyas*, the dates are highly speculative. Zvelebil claims a date of mid-tenth century for the *Cūḷāmaṇi*, based on its mention in the Malliṣeṇa Epitaph at Śravaṇa Beḷgoda, and in stanza 186 of the *Rajaraḷaṇ Ulā*. (Zvelebil 1974). Po. Vē. Cōmacuntaraṅ, pointing out the strong position of the Jains in this text, wants to date the *Cūḷāmaṇi* before the *Tēvāram* hymns. See Cōmacuntaraṅ's introduction to *Cūḷāmaṇi*. This dating is more difficult to support.

*Cūlāmaṇi*, as well as the ninth-century Buddhist *kāvya* *Kuṇṭalākēci*,<sup>249</sup> this courtly context is made explicit in the address to the royal court (*avaiyaṭakku*), a standard introduction to the *kāvya* genre. As for the Jain *Valaiyāpati*, for which no complete version exists, references to the text show up in such diverse literary contexts as the thirteenth-century commentary of the Shaivite literary scholar Aṭiyārkkunallār, the eleventh-century Jain *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* commentary, as well as the fifteenth-century Shaivite collection of the *Purattiraṭtu*. The Chola court poet Kampan, composer of the Tamil Ramayana, was closely familiar with the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, borrowing imagery and prosody from the Jain *kāvya*. Cēkkiḷār, minister to the Chola king, was said to have composed the Shaivite *Periya Purāṇam* to mitigate his king’s interest in the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, indicating the popularity of this poem in courtly circles. While *kāvya* does not praise a king as explicitly as do the *prabandhams*, the *kāvya* genre, as Sheldon Pollock has argued, has been a genre associated with royal power from its Sanskrit beginnings. Although, unlike Sanskrit, the history of Tamil literature does not begin with *kāvya*, these *kāvya*s of the ninth through the fourteenth centuries are, like their Sanskrit counterparts and the *prabandhams*, participants in a courtly literary world established to support a royal patron.<sup>250</sup>

The first treatises to reflect these developments in praise poetry are not *puṛam* grammars, but the grammars of *akam* which cover the subjects of domestic life and romantic love. Beginning with the grammar *Iraiyāṇār Akapporuḷ* and Nakkīrar’s eighth-century commentary, the *akam* grammars rearrange the short independent vignettes of the early *akam* poems into a chronological narrative sequence represented by the “new” *akam* genre of the *kōvai*. Central to the definition of the *kōvai* is the presence of the patron, who appears in all of the four hundred verses not as a participant in the action of the main anonymous characters, but “embedded” in the imagery and metaphors that make up the symbolic landscape for which *akam* literature is known. Often associated with images of fertility and death, the mention of the patron provides further depth for the *uḷḷurai*, or suggested meaning, of the poem as the reader struggles to interpret the juxtaposed images of the erotic and the king’s world. This crucial role of the patron in the *akam kōvai* has led Cutler, in his discussion of the ninth-century *kōvai Tirukkōvaiyār*, to observe that while “it is obvious that the *kōvai* is a descendant of classical *akam* poetry, (it) is less well recognized that the classical tradition of heroic or *puṛam* poetry also contributed a great deal to this medieval genre.”<sup>251</sup> Cutler observes that in each verse of both the *Tirukkōvaiyār* and the eighth-century *Pāṇṭikkōvai* “there is a ‘slot’ that is reserved for a reference to the poem’s (patron).”<sup>252</sup> Cutler concludes that “from this point of view the *kōvai* poet’s first concern is to honor the (patron) and the *akam* framework is an instrument to this end.”<sup>253</sup>

<sup>249</sup> While we do not have a complete version of this text, the Invocatory verse identifies it as Buddhist. Also, the Jain *kāvya* *Nīlakēci* is said to have been a rebuttal to this poem; the commentary on the *Nīlakēci* is the main source for our knowledge of the *Kuṇṭalākēci* itself.

<sup>250</sup> For Pollock on the development of *kāvya*, see Pollock 2006.

<sup>251</sup> Cutler, 1987: 83.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 83. Ebeling draws on Cutler’s schematic in his discussion of the interplay between *akam* poetics and praise in the nineteenth-century *kōvai* *Kuḷattūrkkōvai* (Ebeling 2010: 90-101).

The importance of the patron's role is recognized in the *kōvai* grammars. The commentary on the *Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ* addresses the possible conflict in having two heroes in one poem by suggesting the superiority of the patron to the anonymous primary hero. The text states that “if you say that it would conflict with the title 'hero' to say that (the primary hero) unites with (the heroine) in the land of another hero (the patron), it would not.” The commentary alleviates any doubts by elaborating that while the hero who participates in the love drama is “not the greatest among the gods, just the greatest of humans,” the patron is a Pantiyan king, and therefore belongs to a divine lineage.” This dual identification of the two heroes eliminates any possible conflict in the hero's romancing the heroine in the land of another man.<sup>254</sup>

However, while the *akam* grammars are the first to provide the theoretical vocabulary with which to discuss praise outside the context of *puram* poetry, their project is limited to the *kōvai* genre.<sup>255</sup> Additional genres, even those that draw on the *akam* conventions, such as the *kalampakam*, are outside the purview of these grammars.<sup>256</sup> The *pāṭṭiyals* expand the central role of praise in the *kōvai* grammars to a framework that makes praise of a royal patron the defining characteristic of what constitutes the literary in genres from throughout the Tamil literary universe, including the Caṅkam *puram* tradition, the devotional literature of the Shaivite and Vaishnavite compilations and the later courtly *prabandham* genres of the *kāvya*, *ulā* and *paraṇi*, among many others. In doing this, the *pāṭṭiyals* create a space in the Tamil literary world for the theorization of royal praise outside the conventions of the *puram* poems and the *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Buck & Paramasivan, 2001: 42.

<sup>255</sup> And, as the second chapter discussed, they participate in a larger attempt to associate *akam* poetics specifically with the Tamil literary tradition.

<sup>256</sup> The *puram* tradition also produces a new grammar in the tenth century, the *Purapporuḷvenpāmālai* (discussed in the first chapter), but these poems remain within the Caṅkam *puram* conventions, albeit in new meters, and do not address other praise genres or praise as a theoretical category more generally.

<sup>257</sup> This expansion of Tamil poetics also allowed for the first substantial discussion of literary genre in Tamil. In the *Ceyyūḷiyal*, the *Tolkāppiyam* mentions seven types of literature that have been understood as a discussion of genre, including poetry (*pāṭṭu*), grammatical treatise (*nūl*), commentary (*urai*), riddle (*pici*), magical utterance (*mantiram*) and proverb (*mutuḷol*); however, whether or not these terms were meant to refer to different uses of language within a single poem or to poetic categories is unclear. Similarly, the eight “beauties” (*vaṇappu*) discussed by the *Ceyyūḷiyal* probably refer to types of language, rather than reference to “genre.” See Pērācīriyar's commentary on *Ceyyūḷiyal* 1 for a discussion of the difference between these eight and the previous *uruppu*. Although the categories of *akam* and *puram* are frequently used to refer to early genre in Tamil, these are more accurately interpreted as thematic conventions that can be used in a range of genres. The *Taṅṅiyalankāram*, as Anne Monius points out, provides a more concrete schematic for the discussion of genre in its definitions of the poetic categories of *kāvya* and *mahākāvya*, “incorporat(ing) into Tamil (the Sanskrit descriptions discussed in Dandin's *Kāvyaḍarśa*) to define categories of literature not accounted for in earlier Tamil literary traditions as exemplified by the *Tolkāppiyam*” (Monius 2000: 16). While the classifications of *kāvya* and *mahākāvya* may have, as Monius suggests, provided a means of including texts such as the long narratives *Cilappatikāram*, *Maṇimēkalai*, and *Civakacintāmaṇi*, these categories do not help make sense of the numerous additional genres that had appeared in Tamil since the time of the Caṅkam poems. Not only do the *pāṭṭiyals* expand this corpus significantly, but their flexible structure allows for the facile inclusion of new genres, as a comparison between the genres covered by the *pāṭṭiyals* attests.

Not only do the *pāṭṭiyals* reflect this shift towards praise *content* in Tamil literature, but they also reflect a shift in *form*, in which the independent stanzas of the Caṅkam poems are replaced by poems made up of multiple stanzas. By the sixteenth century (and probably earlier),<sup>258</sup> most new literary production in Tamil is identified in terms of a hypergenre<sup>259</sup> called *prabandham* literature. Despite its ubiquitous use by contemporary Tamil literary scholars, this term, which is used to refer both to “an abstraction (as well as to its) concrete manifestations”<sup>260</sup> is not well understood.<sup>261</sup> As Zvelebil’s much-cited formulation articulates, “it is extremely difficult, probably impossible, to provide a formal definition of the Tamil *prabandhas* (...) on the classical model by identifying the ‘essence’ of this ‘super-genre.’ However, since one can group these literary forms under the heading of a single super-genre, they must obviously have something in common which distinguishes them from all other poetic genres (...).”<sup>262</sup> Unable to go beyond what he admits is a “rather vague definition” of *prabandham* as “contain(ing) a narrative and a descriptive component (with) the character of a connected discourse about an event, or a series of events, or of connected description of an item or a person,” his conclusion is to “follow the good old Indian way of avoiding definition by taking recourse to a simple enumeration or classification of a wider class into a number of sub-classes.” This strategy ultimately results in an unsatisfying (Zvelebil admits as much) typology of the content of various *prabandhams*.<sup>263</sup> However, in his “vague definition” of the *prabandham* in terms of its “principle of internal cohesion and connectedness, either formal or based on unity of content,”<sup>264</sup> Zvelebil highlights an important but overlooked characteristic of this poorly defined category.

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<sup>258</sup> Aṭṭiyārkkunallār’s thirteenth-century commentary on the *Cilappatikāram* uses the term.

<sup>259</sup> I borrow from Zvelebil here. See Zvelebil 1974: 193.

<sup>260</sup> Marina Muilwijk points out confusion over relationship between *prabandham* and comprehensive definition of literature. While on the one hand, Muilwijk points out that in secondary sources, not all literature has been considered to be “*prabandham*” but on the other hand, “it is not explicitly stated that *prabandham* is only a part of literature, not literature as a whole” (209). re SV subramaniam and N V Jeyaraman, *prabandhams* refer to all literature, including epics. (marina, p.218-219) She distinguishes between *Prabandham*, “an abstraction, a general term which refers to all the *prabandhams* together, to the ‘*prabandhamness*’ of genres. One could say that *Prabandham* is a type of literature, of which the *prabandhams* are the concrete manifestations” (Muilwijk 1996: 209).

<sup>261</sup> Indira Manuel provides a useful overview of the range of interpretations of “*prabandham*” in Tamil scholarship. Manuel 1997:178.

<sup>262</sup> Zvelebil 1974: 193.

<sup>263</sup> Ranging from “heroic narrative” to “erotic narrative” to “descriptive genres.” Ibid., 194.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 193.

The *prabandham*, as its name suggests,<sup>265</sup> does not consist of prose and solitary stanzas,<sup>266</sup> but requires multiple stanzas connected both by meter and/or by content.

The *prabandhams* share another important characteristic, noted elsewhere by Zvelebil, but (strangely) not included in his typology. While the *prabandham* genres range significantly in content, they all share the common status as poems of praise, or, in Zvelebil's words, as "standardized templates that a poet could readily deploy in the praise of a chosen subject or patron."<sup>267</sup> Other scholars have noted this distinguishing quality of the *prabandham*, which Mu. Arunachalam clearly defines as "panegyric in nature praising a local deity or chieftain."<sup>268</sup> Muilwijk concurs, stating that "*prabandham* works always have a hero or heroine. In other words, mere descriptions of, for instance, a mountain, cannot be *prabandhams*. Descriptions should always be connected to the hero/heroine. A *prabandham* is always a 'story about somebody.'"<sup>269</sup> In the footnote to this passage, Muilwijk further explains that "in many cases, the *prabandham* work is dedicated to the hero. Originally, the work was performed (recited, sung, danced) in the presence of this hero."<sup>270</sup> In her attempt to produce a definition of the hypergenre, she concludes that the *prabandham* is "(...) verse; the (multiple) stanzas are connected by their content (and often by their form as well); (and it was) written in honour of a person (divine or human), who is, in name at least, the hero of the work."<sup>271</sup>

Ebeling's work on nineteenth-century Tamil literary culture reflects this understanding of the panegyric nature of the *prabandham* hypergenre. He argues that pre-modern literary production of the nineteenth century, which "almost entirely consisted of *pirapantams*,"<sup>272</sup> was "firmly embedded in (an) economy of praise which included poets, audiences, and patrons, each with their respective interests."<sup>273</sup> According to Ebeling, praise, which "served to secure a poet a place with a patron on whom he depended to earn his living (was) 'circulated' or 'traded' in (the)

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<sup>265</sup> From the Sanskrit "*pra+bandham*," "well constructed, put together." The Tamil equivalent is *toṭar nilai ceyyul*, or "connected poetry."

<sup>266</sup> As Muilwijk forcefully points out, "prose and solitary stanzas can never be *prabandhams*," Muilwijk 1996: 216.

<sup>267</sup> Zvelebil 1974: 193-219.

<sup>268</sup> Muilwijk, 1996: 211.

<sup>269</sup> Muilwijk points out that according to this formulation, even *citrakavi* can be defined as *prabandham*, as we see in the *Pirapanta Tipikai*.. "From literature we know that *citrakavi* stanzas can be combined to works on one hero and one subject, ie to *prabandham* works. An example of this is *Kantaṅ cittira pantaṅa mālai* by KCRN Kalyāṅacuntara Kavunṅar (from *Cittirakkavikal*, Tamil Ilakkiiya Kolkai 8, p. 149-247) (marina, 226)

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>272</sup> Ebeling, 2010: 56.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

hypostatized, palpable form - the lines of the poets' verses."<sup>274</sup> "Praise, in its various manifestations, may be called the one unifying element, the common thematic thread running through almost all of these works."<sup>275</sup> Like the genres described by the *pāṭṭiyals*, these nineteenth-century *prabandhams* reserve a place for the "insertion" of the patron, whether the poem is a *kōvai* in the *akam* mode or a poem describing the constituents of the patron's kingdom.<sup>276</sup> Although the economy of praise in which these poems functioned had expanded beyond the courtly context of the *pāṭṭiyals* to include both temple deities as well as a range of people "under whose sponsorship literature was created,"<sup>277</sup> the genres are recognizable from the early *pāṭṭiyals*. In his survey of the most conspicuous literary patrons of the nineteenth-century, Ebeling provides a catalogue of *prabandham* genres composed to praise under their sponsorship, including the genres of the *kōvai*, *ulā*, *mummaṇikkōvai*, *nāṇmaṇimālai*, *piḷḷaikkavi*, *kalampakam*, *patikam*, and *antāti* familiar to the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* and the *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal*.<sup>278</sup>

Although Ebeling's discussion of the *prabandhams* is historically situated in nineteenth-century networks of patronage and can not be uncritically projected back onto twelfth-century Tamil literary culture, when seen in connection with the *pāṭṭiyals*' project, his work gestures towards a diachronic emphasis on multi-stanzaic poetry as the ideal vehicle for praise. This identification is more explicitly born out in the later *pāṭṭiyals*, which clearly identify the *prabandham* corpus as the subject of their analysis, either in their titles (*Pirapanta Tipika*, *Pirapanta Tiraṭṭu*, and *Pirapanta Tipam*) or in their announcement of their subject matter, as in the *Pirapanta Marapiyal*, the *Muttuviriyam*, *Cuvaminatam*, and *Prabandha Tipikai*.<sup>279</sup>

What about the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* and the *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal*? Although these early *pāṭṭiyals* do not use the term "*prabandham*," they hint at this early predilection for interpreting praise literature in terms of poetry composed of multiple stanzas. This constraint is identified in the closest the *pāṭṭiyals* come to a general definition of poetry. The Chapter on Genres (*Inaviyal*) of the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* begins with a verse that states that genre (*iṇam*) can be divided into three types, defined as: a genre composed of one meter (*ōṇrē ākiya iṇam*), a genre composed of many meters (*ōṇru palavākiya iṇam*) and a genre made up of many poems (*pala onrākiya iṇam*). The subsequent verses define these types by example: the *ulā*, *maṭal* and *ārruppaṭai* serve as examples of the first type, the *kōvai* and *kāppiyam* serve as examples of the second type, and the

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 73. In a later section, Ebeling emphasizes the role of the invocatory verse (the *ciṟappu pāyiram*) as an ideal "currency" in this economy of praise. The *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal* also recognizes the special function of the invocatory verse, and dedicates several verses to its definition and description.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 116-132.

<sup>279</sup> Muilwijk 1996: 210.

Caṅkam compilations of the *Kalittokai*, the *Kuruntokai* and the *Neṭuntokai* serve as examples of the third.<sup>280</sup>

With the possible exception of the *ārruppaṭai*<sup>281</sup>, all the genres invoked by the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* in this section are multi-stanzaic, either in the form of a long poem or in a compilation of independent poems. The *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal*'s list of genres supports this. Excluded are independent stanzas, either those found in the Caṅkam anthologies or the wealth of anonymous poems found both in various commentaries as well as those better known independent poems (*tanippāṭals*) of Auvaiyar, Kampan and Ottukkuttar.<sup>282</sup> The *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal* replaces the definition of genre (*inam*) with a typology of poets (*kavi*), identified as those “who compose (impromptu) verses according to the letters, words, content, meter and alaṅkāra requested by (someone else)” (*ācukkavi*), “those who compose (poetry) using sweet content and sound and the best words” (*maturakkavi*), “those who compose *cittiram* (poetry) such as *māḷaimārru*, etc.,” referring to what must have been a well-known list of *cittirakkavya* shared by the *Yāpparuṅkala Vīrutti* commentary and Pērācīriyar. Finally the *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal* describes the *vittārakkavi* (Skt. *vistāra*), who “composes (poetry) of two types: the beautiful stanzaic poem (*pāṅku āṛ toṭarnilai pā*) and the independent stanza made of many feet, both identified as extended verse (*akalakkavi*). While the reference to the independent stanza here is not entirely clear, both the word *vittāram* and *akalam* refer to long poems and appear to be synonyms for the later “*prabandham*.” As for “*toṭarnilai pā*,” which literally means “connected verse,” the term appears to be a Tamil “translation” of the Sanskrit “*prabandham*.” The literary genres discussed in the remaining verses of the *Potuviyal* are understood by the *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal* to be examples of *vittārakkavi/akalakkavi*, and while this identification is not made explicit in the verses themselves, the commentarial tradition interprets the description of the context of courtly recitation to pertain specifically to the recitation of an *akalakkavi*'s poem.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> The inclusion of these compilations, which are not praise genres, is not entirely clear, but probably suggests the tendency of the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* to include all Tamil literature in its typology. Presumably, like the *akam kōvai* genre, even these *akam* compilations could be transformed into praise poetry with the addition of an invocatory verse that follows the rules of the *poruttam* system. If true, this would be further evidence for the later addition of the invocatory verse, a point discussed in the following chapter. The *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* also includes as an example of the third the *kalampakam* and the *mummaṅnikkōvai*.

<sup>281</sup> Although the *ārruppaṭai* is a long narrative poem, because it is composed in the old meter of akaval, it is not stanzaic in the way that the other examples are. However, as a genre covered by all but one of the major *pāṭṭiyals*, including those that identify as grammars of *prabandham* literature (see *Pirapanta Tīpika* introductioni, p. 22), the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition recognized the genre as a “connected” poem.

<sup>282</sup> However, in contrast to the *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal* or other later *pāṭṭiyals*, the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* reserves a place for the “compilation” genres of *kaṇakku* and *pāṭṭu*, perhaps reflecting a need to incorporate the Caṅkam compilations in this schematic.

<sup>283</sup> Why would Tamil literary scholars focus on multistanzaic poetry to exemplify their poetics of praise? Are they drawing from Dandin's theorization of *kāvya*, defined in the same terms (*toṭarnilaicceyyu!*) used to describe the *prabandham* hypergenre? Or are they reflecting the influence of the devotional poems of the Shaivite *Tirumuṟai* and the Vaishnavite *Nalāyirativaprabandham*, in which the term “*prabandham*” first appears? While an answer to these questions awaits more details regarding the relationship between these diverse traditions, the association between praise poetry and multi-stanzaic poetry represents an important turning point in Tamil literary culture.

If the second sections of the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* and the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* address the ways in which the *content* of various genres can be marshaled for praise of a patron, through eulogistic description, benediction or the embedding of a patron's name, in the new *form* of the multi-stanzaic poem, the first section goes beyond the use of semantic language to theorize the power of Tamil *language* to transform any poem into a poem capable of benediction (or curse) of a royal patron.

This highly codified discussion is known in the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition as the section on “*poruttam*,” defined by the Madras Lexicon as “joining,” “propriety,” “harmony,” or in its most common contemporary usage, as “the agreement of horoscopes between the two parties” in the determination of a marriage. Other English-language scholars have suggested the equivalents “augury”<sup>284</sup> and “concord.”<sup>285</sup> However, as these translations fail to elicit the range of meanings involved in the term, I have decided to retain the term “*poruttam*” throughout this chapter.

From the first verse, both the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* and the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* immerse the reader in the secret code-like language used to discuss the *poruttam* system. According to the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal*, “if one talks about the nature of phonology (discussed) in the texts praised (by scholars), it is necessary to discuss (these phonemes’) birth (*pirappu*), varṇa (*varuṇam*), path through stages of existence (*kati*), the two types of food (*iruvakai uṇṭi*), the three divisions of gender (*mūvakai pāl*), incomparable life-stages (*poruvil tāṇam*), time units (*kaṇṇal*), birds (*puḷ*), and the excellent astrological signs (*nayam peru nāl*).” The *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* is slightly more explicit, announcing that “the excellence of the first word<sup>286</sup> expresses the qualities of the ten (*poruttams*), here listed together as: auspicious (first) word (*maṅkalam*), word (*col*), letter (*eḷuttu*), life-stage (*tāṇam*), gender (*pāl*), food (*uṇṭi*), varṇa (*varuṇam*), astrological sign (*nāl*), nature (*kati*) and time unit (*kaṇam*).”<sup>287</sup> The obscurity of these terms, which are used throughout the majority of the *pāṭṭiyals*,<sup>288</sup> but not elsewhere in Tamil poetics, indicates that the *pāṭṭiyals* expected a readership familiar with this system. Although the ensuing verses expound on this system, they remain within the closed world of this shared language, and would be unintelligible without the assistance of a commentary or learned teacher.

As the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* suggests, these *poruttams* are the basis of a highly codified system of rules pertaining to the first word of a poem, called the “*maṅkala col*” or “auspicious word,” “invocatory word.” The *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* begins with a sample list of such benedictory words, a list that includes words traditionally associated with auspicious qualities, such as excellent (*cīr*),

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<sup>284</sup> Chettiyar 1977.

<sup>285</sup> Thomas 1999.

<sup>286</sup> The construction of this verse appears to contain a double meaning, in which “*cīr*” can refer to either “excellence” or “metrical foot,” an important feature of the *pāṭṭiyal* system.

<sup>287</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal, Mutan Moliyiyal*, v. 2, p. 7. The first verse is the standard invocatory verse, which praises both Sarasvati and the Jain arhat in the same verse. The author does this through embedding the Jain arhat in a metaphor describing Sarasvati's feet, which are like the (lotus) flower of Vāmaṇ, who (sits) under three umbrellas (that shine) like the moon.

<sup>288</sup> The introduction to the *Pirapanta Tipikai* offers a helpful chart to see how these terms were used throughout the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition.



gold (*poṅ*), flower (*pū*), auspicious/beautiful (*tiru*), jewel (*maṇi*), water (*nīr*), moon (*tiṅkaḷ*), rain (*kār*), sun (*pariti*), elephant (*yāṅai*), sea (*kaṭal*), world (*ulakam*), chariot (*tēr*), mountain (*malai*), horse (*mā*) and land (*nilam*). The list also includes less predictable words, such as letter (*eḷuttu*), word (*col*) and the river Ganges (*kaṅkai*).<sup>289</sup> The second *poruttam*,<sup>290</sup> the *Poruttam* of Words (*Col Poruttam*), further delimits the possibilities for the *maṅkala* word, stating that “it must not be split between metrical feet, it must not lack beauty, it must not have multiple meanings,<sup>291</sup> it must not be meaningless and it must not utilize the poetic strategy of *vikāram*, (in which the poet has freedom to break grammatical rules regarding consonant and vowel usage).” These discussions of the nature of the *maṅkala col* straddle the worlds of semantic and phonetic power. On the one hand, the list of words provided by the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* elicit pleasant images that might contribute to the sweetness of a poem’s content, and the rules of *Col Poruttam* are considered to be standard markers of good poetry.

However, the power of these words extends beyond their aesthetic potential. As V. Narayana Rao points out in his account of the Telugu literary tradition, these auspicious words have the capacity to protect a patron against danger. According to Rao, “all literary texts that were dedicated to a patron began with the (auspicious) syllable *śrī* (in order) to ward off all evil.”<sup>292</sup> This danger, as Narayana Rao explains, originates in the poem itself, in the power of a poet “(who) could curse the kings out of their kingdoms by uttering an inauspicious combination of syllables and (bring) them back to prosperity by uttering the syllables in auspicious combinations.”<sup>293</sup>

The power of these syllables and the effects of their utterance make up the the subject matter of the next nine *poruttams* of the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*. These verses shift focus from the first word of the poem to the first syllable, considered to be the most potent phonetic unit. Several of these rules apply generally to all patrons, such as the “food” (*uṅṭi*) *poruttam*, which differentiates between the letters that have the effect of “nectar” (*amutam*) and “poison” (*naṅcu*) on the patron.<sup>294</sup> The *Paṅṅiru Pāṭṭiyal* specifies that “if one uses those (letters) that are poison in accordance with a name (*oru peyar maruṅku aṅaiya nīrpiṅ*), (they will) cause death (*tuṅcal*) and suffering (*naṅukkum*) resulting from disgrace (*navai uru*).<sup>295</sup>

<sup>289</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal, Mutan Moliyiyal*, v. 3, p. 8.

<sup>290</sup> Here I follow the order given by the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*. While the *Paṅṅiru Pāṭṭiyal* covers much of the same material, the verses are split up among the three chapters.

<sup>291</sup> This rule is problematic, as many of the *maṅkala* words have multiple meanings. Could this be a remark prohibiting *slesa* in the the first word in order to protect the patron from “hidden” meanings?

<sup>292</sup> Narayana Rao 2001: 144.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>294</sup> The *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* associates this rule with the literary genre *tacāṅku*.

<sup>295</sup> *Paṅṅiru Pāṭṭiyal*, verse 22, p. 11. The commentary on *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* identifies a poem that utilizes poison letters as *aṅakkavi*. He directs the reader to the collection of poems called the *Taṅippāṭal Tiruttu*, in which the poet Kāḷamēkappulavar curses the villages of Kayirṅāru, Āṅṅūr and Āṅṅumukamaṅkalam (see commentary on *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal Moliyiyal* v. 6, p. 14).

However, the majority of the *poruttams*, as their name suggests, require a “match”<sup>296</sup> between the first syllable of the first word and the patron being addressed. In the case of “gender (*pāl*) *poruttam*, the gender of the patron determines the choice of vowels. If poem praises a man, male letters should be used (short vowels). If a poem praises a woman, female letters should be used (long vowels).<sup>297</sup> In the case of *varuṇa* (*varṇa*) *poruttam*, the “match” depends on the patron’s social class, (*varṇa*). The astrological sign (*nāḷ*) *poruttam* is a complex system which assigns astrological signs to letters in order to “match” the first letter of the poem with the first letter in the patron’s name. Likewise, the stage of life (*tāṇam*) *poruttam* uses the first letter of the patron’s name to assign certain letters to the various stages of life, including *pālan* (youth), *kumaraṇ* (adolescence), *irācan* (kingship), *mūppu* (old age), and *marāṇam* (death) According to the *Vēṇpā Pāṭṭiyal*, to being about auspicious effect, the first letter of the poem should be associated with youth, adolescence or kingship. If the letter is associated with old age or death, the poem will result in a curse. The *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* interprets this *poruttam* slightly differently, assigning the relationship of friendship (*naṭpu*), neutrality (*utācīṇam*) and enmity (*pakai*) to the letters. The relationship the poet desires with a particular patron determines the letters he chooses.

Later scholarship has been critical of the *poruttam* system, decrying it, as Annie Thomas does in her treatise on Tamil prosody, as “unnecessary and ridiculous.”<sup>298</sup> Thomas goes on to attribute this system to “a period of religious upheaval and caste feelings and creed differences, (when) even the language suffered certain restrictions and regulations (such as the *poruttams*), which cannot be accepted as logical or scientific.”<sup>299</sup> In her brief overview of *poruttams* in a larger study on Tamil poetics, Indira Manuel suggests that “(other than the verses on the benedictory word and its aesthetic qualities [*col poruttam*]), the rest have no aesthetic base at all. They are just some sort of manipulations.”<sup>300</sup> In his overview of Tamil grammar, Civaliṅkaṇār completely excludes the *poruttam* system from his discussion of *pāṭṭiyals*, despite their presence in all extant *pāṭṭiyal* treatises.<sup>301</sup> Even scholars who attempt to explain the *poruttam* system, such as Jeyaraman and P. Kuḷantai, gesture towards the importance of the patron in this system, but include little more than a brief description of the major *poruttams*,<sup>302</sup> without providing a

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<sup>296</sup> Here the more common definition of “*poruttam*” as “the agreement of horoscopes between the two parties” in the determination of marriage is more fitting.

<sup>297</sup> see commentary on *Vēṇpā Pāṭṭiyal Molīyiyal* v. 5.

<sup>298</sup> Thomas 1999: 15.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., p. 15

<sup>300</sup> Manuel 1997: 80.

<sup>301</sup> Civaliṅkanar, *Tamil Ilakkaṇa Unarvukal*.

<sup>302</sup> Jeyaraman, *Pāṭṭiyal Tiranayvu*, p. 20. Pulavar Kuḷantai, *Ceyyul Ilakkaṇam*, p. 34.

guide to understanding this poetic system in a literary or literary historical context.<sup>303</sup>

Particularly in the case of Kulantai, writing in the late nineteenth century at a time before the knowledge of the *pāṭṭiyal* system had been lost, this absence of interpretive guidance may have been due to the assumption of a readership already familiar with its conventions or perhaps the intended secrecy of the system.

However, despite the absence of contemporary knowledge in Tamil about this theoretical approach to the power of poetic language, the *poruttam* system draws on a long history of the relationship between language and magical effect in South India and India more generally. On the one hand, this endowing of Tamil with magical powers casts it in the role traditionally associated with the Sanskrit language and its long history of ritual use. From its earliest use in Vedic ritual to its use throughout India in temple practice, Sanskrit is a language theorized both in its capacity to represent the world as its capacity to act upon that world. As a language with such powers, the use of Sanskrit has always been controlled, from the strict training in pronunciation to the grammars that dictate correct usage to the injunction on who had access to the language. In their positioning Tamil as a language with such powers, the *pāṭṭiyals* invest Tamil with the mantric power of Sanskrit.<sup>304</sup>

On the other hand, the theorization of Tamil as a language capable of effect on the world has deep roots in Deccani concepts of poetic language. Many of the Caṅkam poems describe a relationship between a king and his poet as one of mutual dependency, in which the position of the poet is derived not only from his “status as a broker of fame,” but also to his “power to curse, to mock, even to destroy.”<sup>305</sup> In his discussion of the power of the Caṅkam bard, Shulman gives as an example *Puṛam* 202, in which the poet Kapilar threatens King Iruṅkovel after the king has rejected Pari's daughters in marriage. Kapilar warns that:

(...)

This town of Araiyaṃ is long established: but hear  
how once it was ruined,  
Pulikaṭimāl with your dense garland,  
worthy scion of your father-  
one of your ancestors,  
brilliant like you,  
scorned Kaḷāttalai's fine words of praise,  
and that was that, master of lovely chariots (...)" transl. Shulman (94)

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<sup>303</sup> Jeyaraman, *Pāṭṭiyal Tiranayvu*. Jeyaraman follows AC Chettiyar in associating the *poruttam* tradition with the Northern tradition (*vaṭacol marapu*), and adds that this “foreign” system was first introduced into Tamil by the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* commentary (Jeyaraman, *Pāṭṭiyal Tiranayvu*: 22).

<sup>304</sup> The role of Sanskrit in the theorizing of the power of Tamil warrants further investigation, especially the question of how this project relates to other similar efforts in South India, such as the introduction of Tamil as a ritual language in the Sri Vaishnavite tradition.

<sup>305</sup> Shulman, David. “Poets and Patrons in Tamil Literature and Literary Legend.” In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, edited by Barbara Stoler Miller. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992: 93.

In this poem, Kapilar warns the king not to offend him by reminding him that in former times disrespect of a poet led to the ruin of the kingdom of one of his ancestors. Although an interpretation of this poem depends in part on recognizing the relationship between its documentary and rhetorical use of language, the concept of the power of poetic language (and the special status of poets) is a significant part of the Tamil cultural imagination.<sup>306</sup>

Similar stories exist in other South Indian traditions.<sup>307</sup> Narayana Rao points out that in the informal literary tradition of Telugu *cātu* verses, recited and exchanged among communities of poets, many stories exist about the magical powers of poetry. In these stories, “a poet is not one who has merely learnt the skill of making verses; he or she has the power to make reality conform to his or her speech.”<sup>308</sup> The poet Bhīmakavi, for example, is “(...) famed in the *cātu* tradition as *śāpānugrahasamartha* (capable of cursing and blessing); he is said to have cursed kings and destroyed and restored thrones.”<sup>309</sup> His powers extend outside the world of his royal patrons; insulted when he was excluded from a Brahmin feast in the village, Bhīmakavi composed a verse that “cursed the Brahmins” and turned their “fried cakes into frogs, their rice into lice, and all the side dishes into fishes. When the Brahmins, witnessing these transformations, begged his forgiveness, Bhīmakavi sang a second verse” and turned their food back into food.”<sup>310</sup>

Although they draw on a long existing tradition of formal and informal attitudes towards magic and phonetic power in South India and India more generally, in their formalizing of this power in the theorizing of Tamil, rather than Sanskrit, the *pāṭṭiyals* represent something new in Indian thinking about language and literature. How do we understand this dramatic new

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<sup>306</sup> Also see the well-known account of the recital of the *Nanti Kalampakam*, in which the king burns to death as he listens to the final verse of the poem dedicated to him, unable to pull himself away from what he realizes is a magical incantation aimed at his destruction. The poet Kalamekappulvar is also known for his powers to curse. Implicated in the destruction of several Tamil villages, he is also known for cursing a king to be swallowed up by dust because he refused to recognize the poet’s superiority. See *Abitana Cintamani* for a discussion of this poet.

<sup>307</sup> Hallissey (2003) points to the existence of a similar “occult” tradition in Sinhala literary culture. The relationship between the texts mentioned by Hallissey and the Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti is striking and warrants further research.

<sup>308</sup> Rao 1998: 11.

<sup>309</sup> The full story is as follows: Bhīmakavi’s mother was a widow living at her parents’ house. One day she went with a group of pilgrims to the Shivarātri festival at Dakṣārāma, the temple to Bhīmeśvara-Śiva. She saw her fellow pilgrims praying to the god for boons. Skeptical herself, she said to him: ‘If you give me a son like you, I will give you a tank of water as oil for your lamps and four tons of sand for your food.’ The god was pleased at this challenge and visited the widow that night; he slept with her and promised her a son, whom she was instructed to name after him. She called the boy who was born Bhīma. One day his playmates mocked him for being a bastard. HE ran to his mother and threatened to hit her with a rock if she didn’t reveal the name of his father. She said: ‘That rock in the temple is your father; go ask him.’ Now the boy went into the temple and threatened to hit the god with a rock. Bhīmeśvara-Shiva, afraid, appeared before him in his true form and announced that he was, indeed, the boy’s father. “In that case,” said the boy, “from now on whatever I say must come true.” The god granted him that boon. Rao 1998: 11.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid, 12.

theoretical system in the context of Tamil (and Indian) literary culture? Historically situating the *pāṭṭiyals* is fraught with the usual problems associated with premodern Tamil literary history. To begin with, the dating of the *pāṭṭiyals* is highly tentative. The *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* in particular does not include any mention of an author, let alone a patron or other identifying characteristics.<sup>311</sup> Attempts to date it based on the literary genres it describes are unsatisfactory, in part because of the lack of extant literary examples of many of the genres.<sup>312</sup> The *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal* offers a slightly more helpful picture, in part because of the existence of an old commentary, which identifies the author as Guṇavīra Pantitar who lived in the time of Tirupuvaṅ Tēvaṅ, identified with Kulottunga III (1178-1218). Guṇavīra Pantitar was also said to have composed the grammatical treatise *Nēminātam*, a detail corroborated by the invocatory verse of the commentary on that text and by the poem on the history of Toṅṭai Nāṭu (the *Toṅṭai Nāṭu Catakam*). Informal tradition associates him with the famous Chola court poet Oṭṭukkūttar, although this detail does not correspond with the more common dating.<sup>313</sup> The *Virutti* commentary, itself tentatively dated to the early twelfth century, is aware of the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, although the *Virutti* commentator does not share the technical vocabulary of the *poruttams*.<sup>314</sup>

David Shulman’s recent work on Southern Sanskrit and Telugu *alaṅkāraśāstra* provides an important clue to historicizing the theory of magical phonemes found in the *pāṭṭiyals*. In an attempt to challenge the dominant account of *alaṅkāraśāstra* as a coherent teleology culminating in the “climax” of Anandavardhana’s “magisterial synthesis at the turn of the eleventh century,”<sup>315</sup> Shulman points out that the Southern tradition articulated both in Telugu and Sanskrit reveals the diversity of ideas in the tradition, a diversity that, though marginalized by later scholars, has consistently invigorated *alaṅkāraśāstra* across India. He focuses on the concept of *camatkāra* (wonder, clicking sound) because of its association with “a highly charged use of language, which, when properly controlled or mastered by the poet, is capable of astonishing transformative effects.”<sup>316</sup> This acknowledgment of the importance of phonemes in poetic composition, Shulman argues, can be seen throughout the *alaṅkāra* tradition, but most visibly in the Southern texts such as Viśveśvara’s late fourteenth-century *Camatkāracandrikā*,

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<sup>311</sup> The dating of the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal*, though highly contested, is usually based on correspondence between the description of *meykkirti* found in the text and the characteristics of *meykkirti* during Rajaraja Chola’s reign.

<sup>312</sup> Many of the genres discussed by the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* show up only much later, in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, despite the tradition’s consensus that the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal*, is the first *pāṭṭiyal*.

<sup>313</sup> Mu Arunachalam, *Tamil Ilakkiya Varalaru*, v. 6, p. 110. Also see *Tamil Navalar Caritam*. Ottakkuttar was the court poet of Kulottunga II, and would have predated Kulottunga III.

<sup>314</sup> See *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam* v. 96.

<sup>315</sup> Shulman, David Dean, and Shaul Migron. *Language, Ritual and Poetics in Ancient India and Iran : Studies in Honor of Shaul Migron*. (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2010), 249.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

composed at the court of Siṅgabhūpāla II in Telangana.<sup>317</sup> From its invocatory verse, which characterizes the goddess of speech, Vāc, “in terms of the primary phonemes and the technical process of their articulation, even before they achieve syntactical coherence and potential meaningfulness, on one or more levels, in the complete sentence,” the text concerns itself with the “pride of place” held by phonemes in poetic composition. Shulman likens the poet’s role in linguistic manipulation to the ritual awakening of the divine from its “prior, latent or potential state - in stone, or mind, for example.”<sup>318</sup> This process of awakening the power of the divinity is outlined in a series of rules on “useful meta-phonetic properties” of the first word of a poem. In Shulman’s translation, “these phonemes generate *rasa* and so on, when appropriately used; placed at the beginning of a poem, each has its own divinity and can cause auspicious and inauspicious results, as the case may be, for the author, the patron and the listener. The sound *a* confers pleasure, unless used in negation (prohibition) when it effects the opposite. *Ā* gives joy; it is not appropriate for contexts of anger and suffering. *l, ī, u,* and *ū* make for satisfaction and the fulfillment of wishes. (...) *c* leads to a loss of fame. *ch* and *j* remove disease. (...)” The verse continues in this fashion. According to Shulman, “this list is fairly standard and recurs, with some significant variation, in the works of all the major Andhra *ālankārikas* (...).”<sup>319</sup>

The similarities between this system and the system of *poruttam* outlined by the *pāṭṭiyals* are striking. Both are concerned with the phonetic power of the first word of a poem, and the role of both patron and poet in this linguistic manipulation. The similarities extend beyond shared theoretical concerns; both systems draw from the same technical vocabulary in their common identification of letters with certain gods (called “birth/origins” [*pirappu*] in the *Pañṇiru Pāṭṭiyal*) as well as the identification of certain letters as “poisoned food.” And the Telugu variations of this system, like the Tamil *pāṭṭiyals*, associate the first phoneme of the poem with a social class (*varṇa*) which should match the social class of the patron to whom the poem is addressed.<sup>320</sup>

Shulman’s brief essay, which gestures towards a shared Deccani preoccupation with “linguistic metaphysics” but does not address the *pāṭṭiyals* specifically, generates more questions than it does answers. If the *Pañṇiru Pāṭṭiyal* and the *Veṅṇpā Pāṭṭiyal* are accurately dated to the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, in what form, if at all, would they have come into contact with the Sanskrit and Telugu materials? Or does the material discussed by Shulman force us to

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid; 267. Shulman points out that this system is not limited to “normative, rule-oriented discussions” but also appear in literary analysis. He points to the example of the commentary of Carla Venkaṭasūri, “an eighteenth-century commentator on the *Sāhityaratnākara* - from West Godavari District, and thus naturally immersed in the Andhra *ālankāra* way of thinking” (Shulman 2010: 270). Venkaṭasūri questions how a invocatory verse to Vināyaka could begin with the word *āliṅgya*, when “as everyone knows, initial *ā* is a source of some slight discomfort, while *l* burns and brings disaster. Even worse the *ta-gaṇa*, which has empty space as its divinity, means emptiness and destruction. Neither the *varṇa* nor the metre is proper to the beginning of a book.” I have yet to find a comparable example in Tamil literary commentary.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 268.

rethink the *pāṭṭiyals*' dating? While answers to these questions must await further collaborative work on Deccani poetics, Shulman's work on phonetics in *alankāraśāstra* points out the scope of these ideas throughout South India.

Endowed with the luxury of more confidently dated material, Shulman associates this development in poetics with specific shifts in patronage and the aestheticization of kingly rule during the Nayak period. According to Shulman, "one clear innovation widely represented in the new Deccan *alankāra* works is the elevation of the author's patron to the role of the exemplary Nāyaka, the hero of most of the (...) verses. (...) We could argue that the post-Kākatīya period of Velama rule in Rācakoṇḍa and the Reddi kingdoms of Koṇḍavīḍu and Rajahmundry produced the most far-reaching aestheticization of the political domain ever seen in South India. In effect, an entirely new basis was laid down for kingship, now legitimized in largely aesthetic terms."<sup>321</sup>

While Shulman's essay does not address the implications of language choice in such an aestheticization of kingship, this has been the focus of Pollock's recent work on premodern South Asian literary culture. Like Shulman, Pollock argues for a political theory of South (and Southeast) Asia in which political power came not from coercion or Brahmanical legitimization, but from participation in an aesthetic world associated with a particular use of language. In particular, Pollock demonstrates how the introduction of literary languages ranging from Kannada to Tibetan to Khmer around the beginning of the second millennium indicate what he refers to as the "vernacular revolution," in which the articulation of royal power shifted away from the cosmopolitan language of Sanskrit to regional languages, albeit modeled after Sanskrit language and literary theories. Thinking in terms of the role of Tamil language and literature in such a new vernacular aesthetic of the court helps us better understand the *pāṭṭiyal* project. On the one hand, the introduction of formalized rules demonstrating the capacity of both Tamil language and literature to express royal power reflects the vernacularization process described by Pollock, a process in which the institutions of grammar and poetics play a central role. On the other hand, the *pāṭṭiyals* complicate Pollock's thesis with their incorporation of non-Sanskritic theories of both language and literature in that project. Just as the *poruttam* system reflects a synthesis of theories of the power of Sanskrit with attitudes about linguistic power rooted in the Tamil and larger Deccani tradition, likewise the section on genres capable of royal praise are primarily not genres derived from Sanskrit but genres that in many cases occur only in Tamil.

Praising the royal patron using the magical language of Tamil is at the center of the theoretical system presented by the *pāṭṭiyals*, as the "subject" of the praise genres and the intended "object" of the poet's linguistic manipulations. Despite the origins of many of the genres in devotional corpus of Shaivite and Vaishnavite literature, the *pāṭṭiyals* are not theories of devotional literature. The poet to whom the *pāṭṭiyals* are addressed should not, despite their mantric powers, be confused with the poet-saints of the Shaivite and Vaishnavite tradition, whose power comes from their ability to experience and articulate the divine.<sup>322</sup> In contrast to these poet-saints, who distinguish themselves by the surrender of poetic knowledge, the power of

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>322</sup> See Shulman 1993 for a discussion of the distinction between these types of authors in Tamil literary history.

the *pāṭṭiyal* poets is clearly situated in the world of grammatical rules and institutions associated with a royal court.

This courtly context is made explicit in a series of verses in the last chapter of the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, the Chapter on General Rules (*Potuviyal*), which situate the work of the poet in the world of the courtly assembly. In these verses, the author describes the requirements for the auspicious recitation of a poem before a courtly assembly. The section begins with a description of the poet, who must:

come from the four varṇas (*kulams*) free of disgrace, [be] well read in all subjects, [...] have a divine nature (*teyvam*),<sup>323</sup> [exhibit] dharma (*aṛam*) and good behavior. (He must also be) capable in the three fields of Tamil, and must “recite (*kavi urai*) excellent poetry.”<sup>324</sup>

The courtly assembly for whom the poem is recited is also described. The good court (*nal avai*) consists of:

those who persist on the path of famed dharma;  
those who are without hatred (*ceṛram*), anger (*ciṇam*), shame (*ikaḷ*), lust (*kāmam*) and lies (*poy*),  
and those who know all the arts (*nikalḷkalaikaḷ*)

The *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* further distinguishes an “excellent court” (*niṛai avai*), made up of that audience (*kētpōr*) that “has virtue (*nalaṇ*), self-control (*aṭakkam*), excellence (*cemmai*), balanced nature (*naṭuvuṇilai*), wisdom (*ñāṇam*), noble birth (*kulaṇ*) [and who] are free of blemish (*kōṭil*) and who have conquered their senses (*pulaṇ illōr*).”<sup>325</sup> This verse stands out for the association of the court with ascetic qualities, in contrast to the sensual noble connoisseur described by the *Kama Sutra*.

The *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* also describes a bad court (*tīya avai*), which the commentator convincingly suggests is unfit for the auspicious recitation of poetry. Those in the bad court “do not recognize excellence (*avaiyiṇ tiṛam aṛiyār*)” and “do not speak with deep knowledge suitable [to the court] (*āyntamarntu collār*).” They are also guilty of “not discussing without [first] eliminating defects (*navai iṇri tām uraiyār*),” and they are immodest (*nāṇār*). They do not recognize poetic flavor (*cuvai uṇarār*) and they do not understand the subtle arts (*āya kalai teriyār*).” The last quality of the bad court also stands out as unusual in its description as “those without fear (*añcār avar*)”.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> The commentary interprets this term to refer to the poet’s devotion to god.

<sup>324</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Potuviyal*, v. 7.

<sup>325</sup> The significance of distinguishing between the good and the excellent assembly is not clear.

<sup>326</sup> *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, *Potuviyal* v. 9. This section stands out for its discussion of the criteria for poetic appreciation, a topic familiar to Sanskrit aesthetics, but foreign to the Tamil tradition.



The next several verses of the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* outline the auspicious times (*muhūrttam*) at which the recitation of such (praise) poems should occur. In keeping with the *pāṭṭiyal*'s emphasis on the first letter of the poem, the auspicious time is dependent on the phonemes that begin a poem. Poems beginning with the vowels *a* and *ā* should be recited during the *kaṭikai* (time measure of twenty-four minutes) of the Sun (*katirōṇ*), and so on in that order. Of these, the *pāṭṭiyal* explains, the first three *kaṭikais* are the most beautiful.<sup>327</sup>

Here the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* uses the term “beauty” (*aḷaku*) to refer to a poetic quality not limited to the aesthetic. “Well-researched (use) of beauty in the first word (of a poem),” the *pāṭṭiyal* explains, “is not just a matter of saying something in a beautiful manner. It is good to make (poetry) by saying things beautifully so that all evil is removed from a poem. If not, that is bad.”<sup>328</sup> The next verse explicitly addresses the relationship between the first word of the poem and the absence of defect/evil (*tītu*) from both the poem and the assembly, stating that “among those attached to the learned assembly, those who are without fault, whose actors are without fault and who recite without fault, the many [possible] meanings diffused through recitation depend on the first word.”<sup>329</sup>

The transformation of a praise poem into an auspicious benediction extends to the rituals surrounding the recitation as well. In the next verse, the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* describes the proper worship of Sarasvati at such a recitation.

Worshipping the Goddess of Speech (*nāmakaḷ*),  
 (who sits) on the great seat (*cāl tavacu*)-  
 by lighting lamps hung on strings,  
 so that they shine, appearing like shining golden jewels,  
 spreading (their light).  
 (Such worship) is good.<sup>330</sup>

<sup>327</sup> The whole verse reads as follows:

*kaṭaṇā makaravā kāraṇ katirōṇ*  
*uṭaṇā yeḷuṅkaṭikai yōrāru - iṭaṇāki*  
*ēṇai yuyirkkūru miṅvakaiyāl vantutittāl*  
*āṇamutaṇ mūṇru maḷaku. (Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal, Ceyyuliyal, v. 26, p. 75).*

<sup>328</sup> *aḷakāk muṇmolikkaṇ ārāyantaṇavum*  
*aḷakākac collinaṇavum aṇri - aḷakākac*  
*ceyyuṭku uraittaṇavum ellām ceyirtīrc*  
*ceyyiṇ naṇru aṇrāyiṇ tītu. (Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal, Ceyyuliyal, v. 27, p. 75).*

<sup>329</sup> *tītilā nūluraitta tītilāc ceyyulait*  
*tītilōr nallavaiyir cērtatarpiṇ - āticol*  
*pāvīr kiyaiya vuraikkir palaporuḷum*  
*tāvil poruḷōṭuṇ cārntu. (Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal, Ceyyuliyal, v. 28, p. 75)*

<sup>330</sup> *cāntiṇ meḷukit taraḷat tiraḷparappik*  
*kānti maṇi kaṇakaṇ kaṇṇūrī - vāyntalarnta*  
*tāmamu nārri viḷakkiṭṭuc cāravicil*  
*nāmakaḷai yērruvitta naṅku. (Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal, Ceyyuliyal, v. 29, p. 75).*

Finally, the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* stresses the importance of grammatical knowledge in the proper execution of this system. According to this verse, “the power (held) by good people to recite poetry well in front of (other) good people who have having composed (poetry) only after fully understanding the *pāṭṭiyal* treatises which have been compiled in line with the good tradition of Tamil treatises studied by those with excellent knowledge. -- that is intellect/(true) knowledge (*mati*).<sup>331</sup>

The courtly provenance of the *pāṭṭiyals* is also revealed by the inclusion of two standard accessories to a courtly test: the invocatory verse (*kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*) and the address to the court (*avaiyaṭakku*), in which the poet expresses his humility and debt to those who have preceded him. In these verses, in which the author praises Sarasvati, the Jain *arhat* and his teacher, Vaccaṇanti Muṇivar, for whom the text is named, he exhibits his familiarity with the conventions of a larger intellectual culture associated with courtly literature.

Despite rules that presumably applied to the proper performance and composition of literature, neither the *Paṇṇiru Pāṭṭiyal* nor the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* contain literary examples to help us understand the relationship between this system of literary theory and specific literary production of this period.<sup>332</sup> Narayana Rao’s informal example from the Telugu tradition gives the best sense of how this system may have operated outside the world of theoretical treatises. This story, which recounts the dedication of the narrative poem *Vasucaritramu* by the poet Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa to his patron King Krishnadevarāya, centers around the importance of the proper syllables in the first word of a poem. When Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa went to present the poem to his patron king, the jester-poet Tenāli Rāmalingaḍu, also of Krishnadevarāya’s court, warned the king against accepting the poem. In order to illustrate the danger that awaited the king if he accepted, Tenali wrote the syllable “*śrī*” on his hand with vibhūti ash and began to recite the first stanza. Upon recitation of the bilabial syllables of this stanza (*srībhūputri vivāhavela*) the vibhuti ash was blown off Tenali’s hand. “Your *śrī*,” said the jester-poet to the king, ‘will be blown off just like this if you receive dedication of this book.’<sup>333</sup> The moral of this story, like many stories involving Tenali, centers around the double meaning of both the words *śrī* and *vibhūti*, which can also mean “wealth” in Telugu. Without knowing it, the poet Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa had composed a poem that threatened his patron’s prosperity.

Understanding the poetics of the *pāṭṭiyals* allows for the possibility of theorizing literature not in terms of its expressive qualities, its aesthetic effect on a willing connoisseur, or even its role in political representation, but rather in terms of its extra-semantic magical power to

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<sup>331</sup> *naṅkuṇarntō rāynta tamiḷnūliṅ naṅṇeriyai*  
*muṅpuṇarntu pāṭṭiyānūṅ murrūṇarntu - piṅpuṇarum*  
*nallārmuṅ ṅallāy nalamār kavīyuraikka*  
*vallāta laṅrō mati.* (*Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*, Ceyyūḷiyal, v. 30, p. 76)

<sup>332</sup> As far as I know. For the most part, the commentarial tradition on the *pāṭṭiyals* provides grammatical examples from other *pāṭṭiyals* to help explain the verse, but does not provide literary examples. although the commentary on the fourteenth-century *Navanīta Pāṭṭiyal* draws from the *Vikkrama Chola Ulā* to show that the first line “*cīrtanta tāmaraiyāḷ kēḷvan*” adheres to the requirements of the “life stage” (*tāṅnam*) *poruttam* because the relationship between the “*vi*” in the name “Vikkirama” and the syllable “*cūr*” results in an auspicious “match” associated with “youth” (*pālan*)” (Jeyaraman, *Pāṭṭiyal Tiranayvu*, 34).

<sup>333</sup> Rao 1998: 144.

transform the patron in ways that must be carefully controlled.<sup>334</sup> More specifically, by theorizing both Tamil language and literary genres as the ideal vehicles for literature composed for a royal patron, the *pāṭṭiyals* participate in a larger shift in the use of language in the expression of royal power, albeit informed by non-Sanskritic elements that complicate Pollock’s vernacularization theory.

The schematic of the *pāṭṭiyals* reveals the range of literary interpretive traditions in Tamil over the last thousand years. Despite the important role played by Tamil in both the theorizing of language and the selection of genres, neither the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* nor the *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal* explicitly refer to language choice, either in defense against a perceived threat or as a source of new literary developments.<sup>335</sup> The Caṅkam poems have no pride of place here,<sup>336</sup> nor are they explicitly excluded as in the infamous invocatory verse of the eighteenth-century *Ilakkana Kottu*, which declares that the reading of classical literature, including the Caṅkam poems, is a waste of time.<sup>337</sup> Rather, the *pāṭṭiyals* represent an alternative way of thinking about Tamil literature, one that, as Ebeling’s work reveals, resonated in Tamil culture until new economies associated with print technologies and university education as well as a new interest in “purifying” Tamil literature, rendered the *pāṭṭiyal* poetic system obsolete.

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<sup>334</sup> Moreover, the identification of a corpus of literary genres defined in part by the context of their recitation reflects a larger pan-Indian predilection for distinguishing genres based on their performative context. As Bronner has recently argued for *stotra* literature, an equally poorly defined literary genre, “their mode of consumption as well as their function in delivering public messages to certain groups or communities may be taken as important components of the definition of the *stotra* genre, beyond the the minimal formal features identified at the outset” Yigal Bronner, “Singing to God, Educating the People: Appayya Diksita and the Function of Stotras.” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127, no. 2 (2007):128.

<sup>335</sup> The only reference to other languages in *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* is in a verse on the genre “*tēva pāṇi*,” which is defined as the equivalent of “*tēvap piraṇavam*” in the “northern language” (*vaṭa mōli*). As for references to Tamil, the *Venpā Pāṭṭiyal* identifies the *pāṭṭiyal* as belonging to a tradition of Tamil texts. The only genre defined by its use of language is the “garland of pure Tamil” (*centamiḷ mālai*), is described by the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* as coming in one of twenty-seven varieties of meter? genre? (*pāṭṭu*) on any subject matter, in contrast to the “garland of the earth” (*tārakai mālai*). See *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* 193-195. Given the lack of literary examples, this distinction is unclear. This lack of emphasis on language choice is especially significant given what Shulman demonstrates was a tradition spanning multiple linguistic traditions.

<sup>336</sup> Although the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* include the genres of *kaṇakku* and *pattuppāṭṭu*, understood by later scholars to refer to the Caṅkam compilations of the *Eṭṭuttokai*, the *Paṭiṇeṅkīlkanakku* and the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, as these descriptions refer only to metrical limitations and not content, it is unclear what they were originally intended to describe. The *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* also differs from other *pāṭṭiyals* in its inclusion of exemplary grammatical verses associated with grammarians whose names are familiar to the Tamil literary and grammatical world, including those who share names with the Caṅkam poets. (Convention attributes authorship of the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal* to the twelve disciples of Agastya, giving rise to the mention of “*panṇiru*” (twelve) in the title). Although this phenomenon has elicited debates on the relationship between these *pāṭṭiyal* grammarians and the Caṅkam past (see Introduction to the *Panniru Pāṭṭiyal*), no convincing evidence exists to shed light on the provenance of these grammars, which were probably composed several centuries after the early poems.

<sup>337</sup> See Venkatachalapathy 2005: 551 for a discussion of this text in the context of the diversity of canons privileged by interpretive communities of premodern South India.

## Chapter 4

### Praising God in the Court: Theorizing (Devotional) Praise Poetry in the *Tolkāppiyam* Commentaries

While the grammatical verses of the *Tolkāppiyam*'s chapter on poetry (*Ceyyūḷiyal*) theoretically address all Tamil literature,<sup>338</sup> the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators, in their interpretation of these verses, primarily draw from a particular corpus of poems identified by their association with the Caṅkam past and the authority of the grammarians Tolkāppiyaṅār and Agastya.<sup>339</sup> This deliberate privileging of the old tradition includes the explicit rejection and/or omission of theoretical perspectives seen as deviations from the *Tolkāppiyam*, including the new theories of language presented by the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* and the *pāṭṭiyal* treatises. However, despite their position excluding new literary developments that might threaten the status of the older tradition, the commentators are not immune to the changes that had occurred in Tamil literary culture since the earlier period. If a survey of the texts privileged by the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators reveals the interpretive choices involved in the defining and canonizing of Tamil literature, the moments of deviation from that standard corpus reveal the literary world outside that canon, a world that was too important for the commentators to ignore completely.

The most striking deviation from the standard corpus can be found in the interpretation of praise genres introduced in the *Ceyyūḷiyal*. In their discussions of these verses, both Pērācīriyar and Nacciṅārkkīṅiyar refer not to the Caṅkam poems, but to a range of post-Caṅkam and contemporary literary genres including the invocatory verse (*kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*), the *prabandham paraṇi* genre, the later epic (*kāvya*) and others. These references to new literary forms are not isolated references scattered amidst Caṅkam examples; rather, this section highlights these new literatures in place of the Caṅkam examples. At first glance, these new literary examples are not clearly related; the structure and form of the genres of *paraṇi* and *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*, for instance, share little in common. However, the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators understand these diverse

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<sup>338</sup> The first verse of the *Ceyyūḷiyal* provides a list of the poetic components (*uruppu*) that are elaborated in verses throughout the chapter. These components, which range from basic metrical elements (beat-count, syllable, foot, line) to poetic content, are not limited to a particular set of literature despite their application to a limited corpus by the later commentaries. I have added “Tamil literature” here because although the *Ceyyūḷiyal* does not specify acceptable language for literature, other sections of the *Tolkāppiyam* suggest that the grammar pertains exclusively to Tamil. See the prefatory verse (*pāyiram*), which identifies the grammar as covering “[...] usage [of language] in the good world where Tamil is spoken, between Veṅkatam [mountain] in the North and Kumari in the South” (*vaṭavēṅkaṭan teṅkumari āyīṭait tamikūru nallulakattu vaḷakkuṅ ceyyūḷum āyiru mutaliṅ*) and *Collatikāram Eccaviyal* 1-7, which identify the four types of language as different idioms of Tamil, including Northern words (*vaṭa col*), “made Tamil” by the omission of letters foreign to the Tamil alphabet. As for the list of what constitutes literature provided by the first verse of the *Ceyyūḷiyal*, several of the components refer to poetic categories specific to Caṅkam literature, including *tiṅai*, *kaikōḷ*, *kūrru* and *tuṟai*. Others are more ambiguous, such as *kaḷaṅ*, *kālam* and *meyppāṭṭu*, and many are general, such as the metrical elements mentioned above. For a discussion of the poetic components introduced in the *Ceyyūḷiyal* and their relationship to *akam* literature, see Manuel 1997.

<sup>339</sup> As discussed in the first chapter.

poems as participants in a common literary genre: that of praise (*vāḷttu*). While they do not borrow the theoretical framework of the *pāṭṭiyals*, the aesthetic category of praise, discussed across the commentaries to over seventeen verses in three sections of the *Ceyyūḷiyal*, allows the commentators to address developments in literary production that demand accommodation in the theorizing of the Tamil literary world, even one as conservative as that of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators. This chapter looks at the theorizing of praise poetry in the commentaries on the *Ceyyūḷiyal*, and what this theorizing reveals about the importance of this aesthetic category during this period.

If new literary genres in Tamil were in part defined by the emphasis on praise,<sup>340</sup> this development in Tamil literature did not go unnoticed by the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators. In fact, of the body of literary examples that fall outside their standard canon, the majority are affiliated with these courtly genres of praise, including the *kāvya*, the *prabandham*, and the introductory poems which accompany these genres, such as the address to the court (*avaīyaṭakku*) and the invocatory verse (*kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*). As these are not Caṅkam poems, they do not, for the most part, appear as literary examples in the majority of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries, including those on the *Purattinaiyiyal*. However, this introduction of new genres in the commentaries on the *Ceyyūḷiyal* is possible in part because unlike the *Purattinaiyiyal*, the *Ceyyūḷiyal* does not explicitly refer to the *puṛam* category (or *akam*), but rather provides a more general theory of literature, including verses that introduce praise genres without specifying which literature they are describing. The flexibility of these verses allows for the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators to include these new literary developments while still remaining within the poetic system of the original grammar.

The discussion of praise poetry in the *Ceyyūḷiyal* begins with a general verse on *vāḷttu*, or praise, poems. Situated in the middle of a set of verses which introduce the four major meters, this verse states that “the types of *vāḷttu* come in (all of these) four meters [*vāḷṭṭiyal vakaiyē nārpākkum urittē*].” The commentaries on this verse establish a basic and important distinction that will be referred to throughout their commentaries on this and related verses. The commentators distinguish praise poems that treat worldly subjects, identified as sages, kings, brahmins, cows, country, and rain, from poems that praise god (*kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*). This distinction is in itself a commentarial invention; nowhere does the *Tolkāppiyam* refer to two types of *vāḷttus*, and in fact the term “*kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*” is never used in the original verses of the *Ceyyūḷiyal*.<sup>341</sup> For the poems that praise worldly subjects, the commentators present familiar examples from the Caṅkam and post-Caṅkam poems of the *Patirrupattu* and the *Tirukkuraḷ*. For example, to illustrate praise of sages, Nacciṅārkkīṅiyar gives *Kuraḷ* 24, which likens “men who master their five senses with the goad of self-control” to “a seed meant for the earth of the supreme.”<sup>342</sup> He draws from *Patirrupattu* for his praise of kings, and returning to the *Tirukkural* for praise of

<sup>340</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>341</sup> The term shows up once, however, in a verse in the *Purattinaiyiyal* section on *pāṭāṅ tinai*. As I mention in the previous chapter, the section of commentary is problematic for several reasons.

<sup>342</sup> *uraṅ eṇṇun tōṭṭiyā nōraintuṅ kāppāṅ  
varaṅ eṇṇum vaippukkōr vittu*

Nacciṅārkkīṅiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 109, p. 134.

rain, he cites *Kural* 19 which states that “if raindrops don’t fall from the sky, green blades of grass are difficult to find.”<sup>343</sup> As for praise of brahmins, cows and country, the commentator doesn’t give specific examples, suggesting that the reader identify these poems when they come.<sup>344</sup>

The next four verses introduce *vāḷttus* distinguished by their subject matter as well as by their metrical limitations,<sup>345</sup> describing the generic categories of *purānilai*, *vāyurai*, *avaiyaṭakkam* and *ceviyarivuru*. Unlike the more general *vāḷttu*, which can refer to sages, rain, etc., these types of praise poems all refer to a king or patron, identified by the commentators as “*cāttan*”. Several of these themes are familiar to readers of the *puram* poems. The poet’s mixing of praise with the giving of truthful advice, difficult to hear, (*vāyurai*, which is interpreted by the commentators as “medicinal advice”) is a common theme in the *puram* collections, as seen in *Puram* 363, used by both commentators to illustrate *vāyurai*. In this poem, the poet offers harsh advice to the king, suggesting that he accept the impermanence of life and renounce the world. Although the poem does not directly praise the king, the commentators interpret this as a praise genre, as the poet alludes to the greatness of the king before reminding him of the temporary nature of this greatness.<sup>346</sup> *Ceviyarivuru*, or “the suggestion to exhibit modesty despite one’s greatness” is also a *puram* theme. To illustrate this genre, the commentators give *Puram* 6 and

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<sup>343</sup> *vicumpir ruḷivīli nallānmarrāṅkē*  
*pacumpur ralaikāṅ paritu*

Nacciṅārkkīṅiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyuliyal* 109, p. 134.

<sup>344</sup> *oḷintaṅa vantulīk kāṅka*

Nacciṅārkkīṅiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyuliyal* 109, p. 134.

<sup>345</sup> According to the *Tolkāppiyam*, this set of genres only comes in *āciriyaṅpā* and *veṅpā*, not in *kali* or *vañci* meters. Nacciṅārkkīṅiyar distinguishes this set of four from the previous category *vāḷttu*, called “natural” (*iyarkai*), presumably because of its lack of metrical limitations.

<sup>346</sup> *Puram* 363 (transl. George Hart & Hank Heifetz):  
Blissful kings who have protected and ruled over the vast earth  
encircled by the dark ocean so that not even a speck of land as large  
as the center of an umbrella thorn leaf belonged to others  
have gone away to their final home on the ground where corpses burn,  
more of them than the sand heaped up by the waves. All of them  
have gone there and have perished as others took their land.  
And so you too should listen! There is no life that endures  
with the body and does not vanish! Death is real and not  
an illusion! Before the grim day comes when on the burning ground  
where thorn bushes grow wound together with spurge  
on that broad site where the biers rise up and a man of a caste  
that is despised picks up the boiled,  
unsalted rice and does not look  
anywhere around him and gives it  
to you so that you accept a sacrifice for which you have no desire  
with its dish the earth itself, before that  
happens, do what you have decided to do  
and utterly renounce this world whose farthest boundary is the sea!

40,<sup>347</sup> which praise the martial victories of a king before advising him to “never boast of (these) victories” and “lower (his) head with respect before the hands raised in blessing by those Brahmins who chant the four Vedas!”<sup>348</sup>

However, the other two genres, praising king under the protection of a god (*puranilai vāḷttu*) and address to the royal court (*avaiyaṭakku*) are not found in the early poems. In the absence of available Caṅkam examples, the commentators introduce new poems to illustrate this verse. For *puranilai vāḷttu*, Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar gives two unfamiliar examples:

May you and your sons flourish with unending wealth, a result of your blessed duty,  
protected by (Vishnu), who stays on his snake bed in the sleep of knowledge,  
oh king of the Pūḷiyar!<sup>349</sup>

As the sons of the lord of sweet Tinkalūr flourish  
like the young rays of the moon,  
may you prosper, unwavering, your joy growing,  
protected by Shiva.<sup>350</sup>

Pērācīriyar adds another example.

Oh Nandi, who is generous as a thundercloud,  
may you and your many relations and friends live long,  
for more years than the stars in the great dark sky,  
in the middle of the seven seas which reside in the shade  
of your one royal umbrella, (this part unclear?)  
protected by Shiva, whose consort is Umā,  
and who holds the young moon,

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<sup>347</sup> Pērācīriyar adds *Kural* 10.5.

<sup>348</sup> *Puṟam* 6, transl. George Hart.

<sup>349</sup> *aṟituyi laravaṇai yamarntōṅ kāppa*  
*aruṭkaṭam pūṅṭa vakalāc celvamoṭu*  
*nīyum niṅ putalvaruṅ cīraṅtu*  
*vāḷiya perum pūḷiyar kōvē*  
Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 110, p. 135.

<sup>350</sup> *tiṅkaḷ iḷaṅkatirpōṟ rēntiṅka lūrttēvaṅ*  
*maintar cīrappa maḷiḷcīraṅtu - tiṅkaḷ*  
*kalaiperṟra karraic caṭaikkaṭavuḷ kāppa*  
*nilaiperṟru vāḷiyarō nī.*  
Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 110, p. 135.  
This poem is also given by Pērācīriyar.

and whose three eyes never blink.<sup>351</sup>

Like the other poems in this section, the *puṛānilai vāḷttu* poems are praise poems to a royal patron. However, as the verse describes, these poems introduce god (*vaḷipaṭu tēyvam*) into the relationship between the poet and patron. Despite god's being the reason (*ētu*) behind any actions undertaken by the patron (*eṭuttukkoṇṭa kāriyam*), the commentators are quick to point out that the king is still the primary object of praise in these poems.<sup>352</sup> While many of the *puṛam* poems reference a particular king, none invoke god's protection in this way. These examples herald a new type of praise poem, in which the poet marshals the power of the god described in the bhakti poems to support his royal patron.<sup>353</sup> This set of poems also introduces a literary historical problem that pervades the examples in this section. In contrast to many of the commentaries of this period, including the commentaries of the *Vīracōḷiyam* and the *Taṇṭiyalankāram*, which can be historically identified by their praise of one royal patron, the praise examples in the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries reference a range of kings from the three major dynasties of the Cholas, Cēlas and Pāṇṭiyas, as well as the “new” Pallava dynasty, which does not figure in the Caṅkam poems.

The last praise genre in this section, the *avaiyaṭakku*, also references the world of the royal patron. In these poems, the poet praises the members of the court, speaking modestly and using sweet words so that the court will accept (his poem) (*avaiattār aṭaṅkumārṛāl iniyavākac colli avaraip pukaḷtal*). Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar gives the introductory verse from the Jain courtly epic *Cīvakacintamaṇi* as an example.

If one doesn't polish a diamond, spit from a stone,  
its beauty is ruined.  
Just so, those who accept this flawed (work), emerging from language as perfect  
as the beautiful white moon,  
and make it beautiful by polishing it with their knowledge -

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<sup>351</sup> *imaiyā mukka ṇilaṅkucuṭar vāynta*  
*vumaiyōru pākat toruvaṅ kāppaniṅ*  
*palkiḷaic curramoṭu nalliti ṇanti*  
*nīpala vāḷiya vāyvāṭ ceṇṇiniṅ*  
*ṇorukuṭai varaippi nīḷal perruk*  
*kiṭanta veḷukaṭa nāppa*  
*ṇakaliru vicumpiṅ mīṇiṇum palavē*  
Pērācīriyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 110, p. 288.

<sup>352</sup> The commentators consider this to distinguish these poems from the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*, in which god is privileged, even if a patron benefits.

<sup>353</sup> The “newness” of this example is also highlighted by the introduction of a historical king who postdates the Caṅkam poems. The earliest reference to a King Nanti is to the early sixth-century Pallava king Nantivarman I.



they are indeed great scholars.<sup>354</sup>

The commentators also give another *avaiyaṭakku*, identified as that of Pūtattār.

Neither the examples given for *puṛānilai vāḷttu* nor for *avaiyaṭakku* belong to the corpus of poems used throughout the majority of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries.<sup>355</sup> However, because the *Tolkāppiyam* verses provide fairly detailed descriptions of these praise genres, including poems outside the standard corpus does not threaten the *Tolkāppiyam*'s authority. For the genres represented in the Caṅkam corpus, they use the older poems as examples; for genres which have no Caṅkam counterparts, they create their own examples or draw from other literature. Even though these poems may lie outside the parameters of Tamil literature displayed throughout the rest of the commentaries, they are made acceptable by their description in the *Tolkāppiyam* itself.

The second category, that of praise of god, is not so well defined by the *Tolkāppiyam*. As a result, these verses are more open to commentarial interpretation, allowing for the introduction of literary developments not addressed by the verses themselves. Although the commentators distinguish these praise poems to god from their worldly counterparts, the literary examples given by the commentators reveal this distinction to be more a question of emphasis than a strict demarcation. On the one hand, the commentators understand this category, called alternately *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* (praise of god) and *tēva pāṇi* (song to god), to include praise of a particular god, both in the form of second person address and third person description. On the other hand, it is in the examples to these sections that we see the influence of the courtly praise poems of the *prabandham*, *kāvya* and related genres. Pērācīriyar and Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar break from their usual canon to include a vast range of post-Caṅkam genres associated with the court, including the *prabandham paraṇi*, the invocatory verse, the courtly epic (*toṭarnilaicceyyuḷ*) and over thirty uncited poems and excerpts which are not found outside these commentaries. Many of these poetic examples draw from tropes found in the bhakti devotional poems, but they ultimately belong to the world of the royal patron and the literature of the court.

The bulk of the discussion of praise poems to god takes place in a series of verses on *kalippā*, one of the old Tamil meters best known for its use in the late Caṅkam *akam* collection *Kalittokai*. The *Tolkāppiyam* itself identifies four major types of *kali*, defined for the most part by their metrical characteristics (*ottāḷicai*, *kali veṅpā*, *koccka kali* and *uṛāḷkali*). Of these, the *ottāḷicai kali* receives the most commentarial attention. The commentators understand this genre to be further subdivided into two major categories: *ottāḷicai kali* poems treating the *akam* (love) theme, and *ottāḷicai kali* poems praising god in the second person. They make this distinction in part because of the existence of a puzzling verse which says that “the other is praise of god in second person (*ēṇai yonrē*, *tēvarp parāya muṇṇilaik kaṇṇē*).” While it is unclear which body of

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<sup>354</sup> *kaṛpā lumilnta maṇiyuṅkaḷu vātu viṭṭā*  
*ṇarpā laḷiyu nakaivenmati pōṇi raina*  
*corpā lumilnta maṇuvu matiyār kaḷūuvip*  
*porpā viḷaittuk koḷarpālar pulamai mikkār*  
Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 113, p. 138.

<sup>355</sup> While Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar is not as conservative as Pērācīriyar, he too mainly includes Caṅkam poems. However, he does refer to the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* in his commentary, and in fact provided a commentary on the text itself. However, the inclusion of the *avaiyaṭakku* is specific to this section.

literature the original rule may have been describing, this is the only such mention of such limits on subject matter in the section on *kalippā*, and nowhere does the grammar mention the distinction between *akam* poems and praise poems suggested by the commentaries. Not only that, despite any such clear indication in the *Tolkāppiyam*, the commentators interpret the following thirteen verses to refer to a larger category of praise poems, including those we would not identify as divine praise poems, poems in the second person, or poems in *kali* meter.

Not surprisingly, for the *akam kali* examples, the commentators exclusively use poems from the Caṅkam *Kalittokai*. The examples used to illustrate the praise poems to god, however, are primarily outside the literary world expected of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators. The first set of praise poems to god, identified as *vaṇṇakam ottāḷicai kali* poems by the commentators, are poems to Shiva, Vishnu and other Brahmanical gods in the *kali* meter. Because they are *ottāḷicai kali* poems, they contain the poetic components also found in the *akam* poems of the same meter, including the introductory stanza (*taravu*), refrain (*tāḷicai*), connecting word (*taṇiccol*) and concluding stanza (*curitakam*). The following poem illustrates the use of *kalippā* components in an *akam* poem.

**Kali 54 (Kapilar)****introductory stanza (taravu):**

koṭiyavum kōṭṭavum nīr iṅṅi nīram peṛa,  
poṭi aḷal puṛantanta pūvāp pūm polaṅ kōtai  
toṭi ceṛi yāppu amai arimuṅkai, aṇait tōḷāy!  
aṭi uṛai aruḷāmai ottatō, niṅakku?" eṇṇa,  
narantam nāru iruṅ kūntal eṅcātu naṅiparri,

**refrain x 3 (tāḷicai):**

1. polam puṅai makaravāy nuṅkiya cikiḷikai  
nalam peṛac curriya kural amai orukāḷ  
viral muṛai curri, mōkkalum **mōntaṅṅ**;  
2. narāa aviḷntaṅṅ eṇmel virāṅ pōtu koṅṭu,  
ceṛāac ceṅkaṅ putaiya vaittu,  
paṛāak kurukiṅ uyirttalum **uyirttaṅṅ**;  
3. toyyl ilamulai iṅṅiya taivantu,  
toyyal am taṭak kaiyiṅ, vīḷpiṭi aḷikkum  
maiyaḷ yāṅaiyiṅ, maruṭṭalum **maruṭṭiṅṅ**.

**connecting word (taṅiccol):**

ataṅṅāl,

**concluding stanza (curitakam):**

allal kaḷaintaṅṅ, tōḷi! namnakar  
aruṅkaṭi nīvāmai kūriṅ, naṅru' eṇa  
niṅṅoṭu cūḷval, tōḷi! 'nayampurintu,  
iṅṅatu ceytāl ival' eṇa,  
maṅṅā ulakattu maṅṅuvatu puraimē.

**Kali 54 (Kapilar) transl. AKRamanujan****introductory stanza (taravu):**

O you, you wear flowers of gold,  
their colors made in fire,  
complete with pollen,  
while the flowers on creeper and branch  
are parched, waterless.  
Your lovely forearm stacked with jeweled bracelets,  
shoulders soft as a bed of down,

is it right not to let me  
live at your feet?

he said.

And didn't let go at that,  
but stayed on to grab  
all my hair  
scented with lemon grass,

**refrain x 3 (tāḷicai):**

1. my hair-knot held together  
by the gold shark's-mouth,  
and with a finger  
he twisted tight  
the garland in my hair  
and smelled it too (**mōntaṅṅ**).

2. Not only that, he took  
my fingers  
(unfolding now  
like crocus buds,  
I suppose)

to cover his bloodshot eyes  
and fetched a huge sigh,  
blowing hot like a blacksmith  
into his bellows (**uyirttaṅṅ**).

3. And,  
like a deluded bull-elephant  
fondling with his trunk  
his beloved female,

he fondled my young painted breasts  
till the paint rubbed off  
on his rough hands.  
Then he stroked me all over,  
just about everywhere (**maruṭṭiṅṅ** - lit. "bewitched"?).

**concluding stanza (curitakam):**

Yet (*translator included connecting word*) friend,  
with that act of his  
I was rid of all my troubles.

And I tell you this  
only so that you can go  
and persuade Mother:

May the sweet smells  
of my marriage in our house  
cling to no man  
but him,  
and that will be good.

It will guarantee a lasting place for us  
in this world that doesn't last.

In an *akam* poem, these divisions of *kalippā* can designate shifts in meter and/or content. In this example, the break between the introductory verse and the refrain allows for both the repetition of the three lines as well as for the placement of the hero's actions at the end of the line, resulting in the powerful identification of the hero as one who "smelled", "blew", and "bewitched". Five of the six lines of the introduction are addressed to the heroine in the hero's voice, although the next line "*eṇ cātu naṇi parri* [grabbing large handfuls of my hair]" reveals that this is in fact the heroine's retelling of the story using direct discourse. The concluding stanza returns to the second person address, only this time the heroine addresses her friend, telling her to tell their mother that this man has ended her suffering and that they should now get married. Like most of the Caṅkam *akam* poems, the *kali* poems are vignettes centering around the relationships of a series of stock characters: the heroine, the hero, the friend, the mother, etc. The *Kalittokai* is distinguished from the other *akam* collections by the inclusion of these unusual metrical components, which the poets use to craft a poem that emphasizes the dramatic elements over the complex embedded imagery found in the *Akaṇānūru* and the *Narriṇai*.

Although these *akam* examples remain the reference point for discussing the *kali* components in the praise poems, the commentators identify important differences in their composition. In particular, the various *kali* components serve particular functions in a praise poem, in contrast to their less specified function in an "*akaṇilai*" *kali* poem. Nacciṇārkkiniyar points out that in a praise poem, the introductory stanza praises god in the second person, while the refrain stanzas praise god through description. He goes on to say that the refrain stanzas of *akam* poems, on the other hand, do not serve this function of descriptive praise.

After a long sequence of commentary that establishes such distinctions between the *akam* and divine praise poems with no literary examples, the commentators finally provide a display of divine praise examples in their commentary on verse 458. These examples retain the *kali* components seen in the above *akam* poem, but with significant differences in content. Consider the following example, directed at an unspecified god.<sup>356</sup>

**Introductory stanza (*taravu*):**

There are those who name you when they see the god whose forehead contains a fiery eye (Shiva), he whose consort is the young creeper (Parvati)  
and when they seek the god who sits on a lotus (Brahma)  
and when they seek the Dark One (Vishnu) who is seated, holding in his two hands the shining discus, and the swirled conch, the color of milk, while Lakshmi rests on his great chest, glowing like a jewel.

If one says that you take a form other than the forms in those people's minds,  
you are that other form as well.

You are difficult to know even by the immeasurable Vedas.

**Refrain stanza 1 (*tāḷicai*):**

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<sup>356</sup> The references to "color of milk", "the cool moon", "hot fire", "the *ālamaram*" suggest that Shiva is the object of praise. However, the poem also includes references to the god's "dark color" and his "six faces", descriptions which usually refer to Vishnu and Murugan. The other verses do not further identify the god being praised.

Your job is to be the life for all living things.  
But after joining with those beings, you abstain from giving your grace.  
As they drown in the sea of cruel births, suffering from the evil karma they have  
accumulated,  
You stand there, and don't remove that karma.  
Is this your compassion?

**Refrain stanza 2 (*tālīcai*):**

They say that it is your nature to create all life.  
Trapped in the web of cruel karma, the pain of living beings grows sharper.  
So is this your compassion, abstaining from removing this suffering which makes them  
tremble,  
teaching them good conduct,  
so they don't drown in misery?

**Refrain stanza 3 (*tālīcai*):**

They say that your job is destruction.  
But if you destroy all living beings, you also destroy all emotions,  
and teach them the way to be forever without sin,  
is this really destruction?  
Is this your grace?

You are the ritual action of the tireless brahmins  
who perform their sacrifices and act according to the rules.

You are the salvation of the sages  
who do sublime penance to remove their karma.

“You are not” for slanderers who say you don't exist;  
“You are” for believers who say you exist;  
You have form for those who say you have form;  
You are formless for those who say you are formless;  
You are the radiant knowledge which removes obstacles.

You are the color of milk;  
You are the god who has the cool moon;  
Your body is a dark color;  
You are hot fire;  
You are the unique god of six faces;  
You are the god of the *ālamaram*;  
Your body is that which obtained Śrī;  
You are the desired birth;

You are earth; you are sky; you are the mountains; you are the sea; you are numbers; you are letters; you are night; you are day; you are paṇ; you are meter; you are song; you are a sentence; you are the best;<sup>357</sup> you are pure; you are compassion; you are meaning.

**Connecting word (*taṇiccol*):**

so...

**Concluding stanza (*curitakam*):**

Oh lord who is all these things! We praise your feet, bowing with our heads low for many days,

so that we might reach (those) lotus feet,  
not difficult to achieve with dedication,  
you who gave salvation created by austerities,  
removing all ripened attachment so that it is destroyed,

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357 elder brother? (*annaṇ*)

wanting to remove the pervasive births from all the souls on this earth covered in flowers.<sup>358</sup>

In this example, the reader enters a world quite unlike that of the *Kalittokai* and other Caṅkam poems. The specific, localized descriptions that populate both the akam and puṅgam genres of the Caṅkam poems have been replaced with translocal descriptions of gods well known to the Shaivite and Vaishnavite world. There are no complex metaphors here, and little natural imagery. Although the poems retain the *kali* components of the *Kalittokai* akam poems, the poetic effect is quite different. The impact of the introductory stanza is in its invocation of a reality outside the material world and on the representation of god as simultaneously with form and formless. The refrain verses are characterized by a set of three questions addressed to god, retaining the dramatic quality of the *Kalittokai*. This section introduces a new tone into the poems, as the poet criticizes the god for acting in ways that he can't understand. "Is this your compassion?" the poet asks, "creating living things and letting them suffer from their karma?"

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*maṇivilaṅku tirumārpiṅ māmalarāl vīriruppap  
paṇitayaṅku nēmiyum pāṇiratta curicaṅku  
mirucuṭarpō lirukaratti lēntiyamar māyōṅnum  
paṅkayatti luraivōṅnum pākattōr pacuṅkoṭicēr  
centalaṅkaṅ ṅūtalōṅnum tēruṅkā ṅīyeṅpār  
kavaravarta muḷḷattu laṅvuvuvā yallata  
pīravuvuvu ṅīyeṅṅir pīravuvuvu ṅīyēyā  
yaḷappariya nāṅmaraiyā ṅunarttutar kariyōṅṅē  
evvuyirkku muyirēyā yiyaṅkutaṅṅiṅ roḷilāki  
avvuyirkk ṅāṅkiyē yaruḷātu ṅīṅraliṅṅāl  
vevviṅaicey tavaiyuḷantu vempīravik kaṭalaḷunta  
vavviṅaiyai yakaṅṅrāma ṅīṅpatuniṅ ṅaruḷaṅṅrē;  
palluyirum paṭaippatuniṅ paṅpeṅṅrē pakaliṅṅāl  
valviṅaiyiṅ valaippaṭṭu varuttāṅkū ruyirtammai  
nalviṅaiyē payilvittu naṭukkaṅcey pakaiṅṅikki  
yallalvā yaḷuntāma laṅaruvatu maruḷaṅṅrē;  
aḷippatuniṅ roḷileṅṅrē yaṅaintālu muyirellā  
moḷittavaṅṅru luṅarvukaḷai yoruvāma luṅaṅṅiruttip  
paḷippinṅrip palkālu miṅparicē payiṅṅrutali  
ṅaḷippatuvu millaiyā lāṅkatuvu maruḷaṅṅrē;  
vēḷvi yāṅṅri vitivali yolukiya tāḷvi lantaṅar tamviṅai yāyiṅṅai;  
viṅaiyi ṅṅṅki viḷuttavaṅ ceyyu muṅaivar tamakku mutti yāyiṅṅai;  
ilaṅṅeṅa vikaḷṅtōrk kilaiyu māyiṅṅai; ulaṅṅeṅa vuṅarntōrk kuḷaiyu māyiṅṅai;  
aruvuvu veṅṅpōrk kavaiyu māyiṅṅai; poruvaṅa viḷaṅkip pōta māyiṅṅai;  
pāṅṅira vaṅṅṅai; paṅimatik kaṭavunṅi; ṅiṅṅira vuvuvunṅi; yaṅumuka voruvunṅi;  
yāṅṅilar kaṭavunṅi; peṅṅutiru vuvuvunṅi; peṅṅaṅa pīravunṅi;  
maṅṅunṅi; viṅṅunṅi; malaiyunṅi; kaṭalunṅi; eṅṅunṅi; eḷuttunṅi; iravunṅi; pakalunṅi; paṅṅunṅi; pāvunṅi; pāṅṅunṅi; toṅarunṅi;  
aṅṅanṅi; amalāṅṅi; aruḷunṅi; poruḷunṅi;  
āṅka, iṅaiyai yākiya viṅaivaniṅ ṅaṅiyiṅṅai  
ceṅṅṅiyiṅ vāṅkip paṅṅṅāl paravutum  
malartalai yulakiṅ maṅṅuyirk kellā  
nilaviya pīraviyai ṅiṅṅal vēṅṅi  
muṅṅriya paṅṅroṅu ceṅṅra ṅikki  
muṅṅimai yākkiya mivā muttiyai  
mayalaṅa vaḷittaniṅ malarāṅi  
yariya vaṅṅṅā yuritiṅṅir peṅṅavē  
Nacciṅṅarṅkiṅṅiyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyuliyal* 146.*

The three refrain stanzas are followed by a section not found in the akam *kali* poems. This section, called *eṇ* or *ampōtarāṅkam*, is a comprehensive list of short descriptions of god, signifying the impossibility of describing something as comprehensive and contradictory as the divine. Here the god is described as simultaneously existing and not existing, as earth, as sky, as numbers, as letters, and as other gods. The poem then returns to components familiar to the akam *kali* poems, including the connecting word and the concluding stanza. The concluding stanza contains the most direct address to god, asking for his benediction. Here the poet inserts himself into the poem, with the conventional “We praise your two feet...” in order to receive whatever blessings have been requested.

The other examples in this section follow the same format. The second example celebrates Shiva as a beggar, whose “body, smeared with ash, shines like the hot midday sun” as he comes to beg at women’s doors on his bull. The introductory stanza begins with references to the story of Shiva’s burning the love god Kama and to conventional insignia associated with Shiva, including the moon, his sacred thread and his consort Parvati.

**Introductory stanza (*taravu*):**

Holding in your right hand the shining axe unfit for begging,  
 you loosen your beautiful belt, garlanded with young shoots, over your tiger skin.  
 The beauty of your white sacred thread splits in two the shining beauty of your body.  
 Cool soft petals cover your head, where the moon also rests.  
 Undisturbed by the women’s chatter, undefeated by their pretty smiles,  
 you destroyed his form with the power of your eye<sup>359</sup>  
 Now you go wandering around in Kanchi, near the joyful sea  
 adorned with the mark of [Parvati’s] breasts that shine like sweet young mangos.<sup>360</sup>

The first refrain stanza gently critiques Shiva’s choice to go begging, asking him if Parvati will be able to bear the suffering of such a lifestyle.

**Refrain stanza 1 (*tālīcai*):**

Your body, smeared with ash, shines like the hot midday sun.  
 Sitting on your bull you come to beg at every door.  
 When you come to beg, riding your bull,  
 she who shares half your body without leaving your side-

<sup>359</sup>This line is not entirely clear.

<sup>360</sup> *paliyuruvir kēlāta paṭaimaḷuvāḷ valaṅēntip  
 puliyurimēr paintalaitāl pūṅkaccāi virittamaittuk  
 kaṅkavarun tirumēṇi veṅṅūliṅ kavip̄pakaippat  
 taṅkamaḷpūn tāritālī talaimalintu p̄raitayaṅka  
 moḷivalattāṅ mayāṅkātē muṟuvalār rōlātē  
 viḷivalattā nuruvalintōṅ vēṭaṅkaṅ tuṅarvaliyāk  
 kalikeḷu kaṭaṅkaccik kamiḷiṅ tēmāvi  
 ṅolitaḷiru mulaiccuvaṭu muṭaṅcirappa valulavuṅkāl*



will she bear this?<sup>361</sup>

The second and third refrain stanzas shift tone, introducing line repetition that creates the effect of a simple song, rhythmically pleasing and easy to remember.

**Refrain stanza 2 (*tālīcai*):**

Taking on yourself the burden of begging, with your beggar's pot heavy with alms,  
you come and please the hearts of the girls with breasts that rise like hills,  
When you come and please the hearts of girls with breasts that rise like hills,  
should they offer grass to your fierce bull?<sup>362</sup>

**Refrain stanza 3 (*tālīcai*):**

When you go to beg from the shy women,  
Even if they grab the snake you wear, it won't puff up with anger.  
Even if we grab the snake you wear,  
will this royal snake, which doesn't hiss or puff up with anger,  
drink the milk we offer?<sup>363</sup>

This poem introduces another *kali* component not found in the akam poems, the *arākam*, which praises god in short two line stanzas, and acts as a transition between the refrain stanzas and the section of short epithets.

**Transitional descriptive section (*arākam*):**

Is it best that you wander around with your begging pot in your bent left arm?  
Begged by the gods, did you drink the poison from the roaring sea  
even when Uma stopped you?  
What did you teach to the seven worlds as your fierce bull stopped at each doorway  
for only a blink of an eye?

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<sup>361</sup> *nīrērun tirumēni neṭumpakalē nilaverikka*  
*vērērik kaṭaitōru miṭupalikku varutirā*  
*lērēri yiṭupalikku varumpoḷutu miṭaipiriyāk*  
*kūrērum pacumpākaṅ koḷḷumō koḷḷātō*

<sup>362</sup> *pallērra parikalattup paliyērraṅ mēliṭṭu*  
*vallērra mulaimakaḷir maṅamērra varutirāl*  
*vallērra mulaimakaḷir maṅamērra nīrvaruṅkāṅ*  
*kollērruk karukiṭaluṅ koḷḷumō koḷḷātō*

<sup>363</sup> *nāṅāka maṅantaiyarpār palikkenru naṅantakkār*  
*pūṅākan taḷīkkoḷi um poṅkātu pōlumār*  
*pūṅākan taḷīkkoḷi um pukaiyuyirttup poṅkāta*  
*kōṅākam yāntarupāl kuṭikkumō kuṭiyātō*

Hearing that you wanted to go begging, the gods suffered.<sup>364</sup>  
Did Gangai with her flowing waters hide in your matted hair in shame?

The section on epithets presents a list of elements traditionally associated with Shiva, including the bones he wears, his *tumpai* garlands, his *pūtams*, his role as teacher of the Vedas, and his role as dancer.

**Section on epithets (*eṅ/ ampōtaraṅkam*)**

You wear bones as ornaments; you are adorned with *tumpai* garlands; you rule the *pūtams* (ghosts); you taught the Vedas; many demons make music for you; you play the *viṅai*, your matted hair flows all around; your golden anklets chime.<sup>365</sup>

**Connecting word (*taniccol*)**

So...<sup>366</sup>

Finally, the concluding stanza introduces another character into the relationship between the god and the poet: that of the king, who features in half of these *kali* examples. In these poems that include a king in the concluding stanza, the blessings requested are not for the benefit of the poet, but for the king or patron. In this case, the poet praises Shiva so that “the glory of *Valavaṅ*/*Vaḷavaṅ* may last forever.”<sup>367</sup>

**Concluding stanza (*curitakam*):**

Oh beautiful one! Wanting to beg from women with shining bangles,  
you wander from door to door.  
We praise you -  
so that the glory of *Valavan* may last forever,  
*Valavan*, who protects the world along with *Jampudvīpa* that make up *Tamil akam*,  
like *Veṅkaṭam* which resounds with music.  
*Valavan*, whose powerful body conquered the southern lands

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<sup>364</sup> *erikala nimaikku miṭavayir roṭikkaip*  
*parikala nēntum paricīran tatukol*  
*umaiyavaḷ vilakkavu molikaṭa nañca*  
*mimaiyavar tammai yirantuṅ tatukol*  
*iṭaiyēlu poḷilkaṭku mimaippaḷavir kollērē*  
*kaṭaitōru matuniṅpak kaṅpitta vārevaṅkol*  
*irappunī vēṭṭatukēṭ ṭimaiyavareṅ paṭṭaṅarē*  
*parappunīrk kaṅkaiyō paṭarcaṭaiyir karantatē*

<sup>365</sup> *pūṅṭaṅa veṅpu; puṅaivatu tumpai; āṅṭaṅa pūtam; aṅaiyaṅ vētam; icaippana palapēy; eḷīiyatu vīṅai;*  
*acaippana vēṅi; atirvaṅa porkaḷal*

<sup>366</sup> *eṅavāṅku*

<sup>367</sup> This is an important distinction. Although the *Kaḷakam* edition reads *Valavaṅ*, a more general description of a powerful king, this could also read “*vaḷavaṅ*”, which would refer to a Chola king. This concluding stanza is unclear and difficult to construe.

after being crowned victor of the northern direction,  
wearing powder from a vessel decorated with flags.<sup>368</sup>

The third example praises the sun god, describing his emerging at dawn (“you make the sweet lotus buds bloom to announce your arrival”) his lightening up the stars, and his role as creator of the moon (“you created the moon to remove the darkness by flooding it with moonlight”). In the concluding stanza of this poem, the poet requests the god not for freedom from bad karma, or from suffering, but rather for “the power of flowing words” so that “(he) may shine with victory in the midst of good and learned poets”, “(his) successes growing for generations.”

**Introductory stanza (*taravu*):**

You emerge, revealing a discus of a thousand rays of light on one side.  
You make the sweet lotus buds bloom to announce your arrival  
as you open in all directions like the waking flowers.  
As the sleepless eyes of the gods stand witness,  
the gods who don’t disappear as you disappear in the west,  
telling the world that he is the one who illuminates the thick darkness.<sup>369</sup>

**Refrain stanza 1 (*tālīcai*):**

(first stanza unclear)

You attack with your blessed form so that those who worship different gods in the sky  
both as those who give and those who take contend with each other.  
They don’t know that you have given them (the gods?) in different forms.

**Refrain stanza 2 (*tālīcai*):**

Those who don’t realize that in the dawn you are the twinkling stars  
because your form looks smaller in the long sky  
don’t know that in the evening you brighten the stars that hide in the morning.

**Refrain stanza 3 (*tālīcai*):**

People think that you and the full moon appear as one,  
rising from the cool receding ocean, which swells to meet the moon.  
They don’t understand that you created that moon to remove the darkness

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<sup>368</sup> *elvaḷai maḱaḷi riṭupali nacaiip*  
*palkaṭai tiritaruñ celvanir paravutuñ*  
*koṭiyani yēnam poṭiyaniñtu kiṭappa*  
*vaṭaticai vāḱai cūṭit teṅricai*  
*veṅri vāyṭta vanrāl valava*  
*ṇimiḷicai vēṅkaṭam pōlat tamiḷakattu*  
*nāvaloṭu peyariya ṇālan*  
*kāval pōrri vāḷiya neṭitē*

Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 146.

<sup>369</sup> See Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 146 for complete poem.

by flooding it with moonlight.

**Section on epithets (*eṇ/ ampōtaraṅkam*)**

Becoming water, you created the earth;  
Becoming fire, you created water;  
You lift the wind of the end of time;  
You reveal the sky after granting light;  
You are a treasure; you are poverty; you are the rule; you are fate; you are form; you are formless; you are one; you are many;

**Connecting word (*taniccol*)**

so...

**Concluding stanza (*curitakam*):**

Oh primordial lord who appears to sink into the great sea with roaring waves!  
I praise you so that I should experience joy that knows no sorrows,  
removing my sins and holding dear my relations and my treasures,  
and that I may have the power of flowing words  
my successes growing for generations,  
so that I may shine with victory in the midst of good and learned poets.

The last two examples praise Vishnu in his various incarnations, including this introductory stanza that depicts his slaying of the demon Hiranyakaśipu in his avatar as Narasimha.

**Introductory stanza (*taravu*):<sup>370</sup>**

Great sages, free from blemish, rise up together and praise you.  
As a lion, you fought,  
your thick mane dense as the ocean, glowing with a rich light,  
and your red eyes flames of fire.  
Your broad murderous arms split the chest (of the raksasa) with your nails,  
scattering the crowns and garlands of enemy armies  
so that golden dust swelled up  
and streams of blood flowed all around.

The refrain stanzas use the mocking tone familiar to several of these *kali* examples.

**Refrain stanza 1 (*tālicai*):**

As the *muracu* drums resound throughout wide Madurai,  
Brave warriors clash in battle,  
their thick, strong arms decorated with stitched bands.

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<sup>370</sup> This poem also appears in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentary. See Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar's commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyuliyal* 146 for complete poem.

Heads and feet broken, they fall to the earth, spent of life.  
Is this your fame that fills the cruel battlefield as the dust rises?

**Refrain stanza 2 (*tālīcai*):**

As the great noisy earth trembles and shakes,  
your chakra, shining and strong, shatters the courage of your enemies, along with their  
bodies.

Is this destruction of men, their hostility shaken, weakened by ignorance born of enmity  
throughout the wide distant skies your anger?

**Refrain stanza 3 (*tālīcai*):**

The herd of cows scatter and flee, their little bells jangling.  
As the splendid lightning strikes and the rain roars down, raging with a fierce strength,  
fear and confusion spread and the cows' orderly lines disintegrate.  
Is this your great power - making them stay in the cowshed, full of fear?

**Transitional descriptive section:**

Oh dark one (Vishnu), with strong arms, which hold the swirled conch  
from the beautiful vast sea,  
Your color is like a shining emerald

When you slew the bull, your towering body burned with anger like the color of new gold  
or sprawling clusters of *kōṅkam* flowers.

**Section of epithets (*eṇ*):**

Your crowned head is a burning fire that attracts the eyes  
Your chakra destroys enmity with its cool flame  
Your flag, flying high, is the vulture, who is like the wind  
Your feet have the strength of a towering chariot.

You defeated the warring asuras; you split the two *marutam* trees; you measured the  
beautiful earth; yours are the five weapons which thwart protection;

You are the end of the world; you are the world; you are form; you are formless; you are  
the chakra; you are compassion; you are dharma; you are honor.

**Connecting word (*taniccol*):**

so...

The concluding stanza references King Accutaṅ, a Kalabhra king.

**Concluding stanza (*curitakam*):**

Oh great one with skill in killing! We praise you

so that the incomparable shining rule of our king Accutan  
 -who wields a great spear, his strong arms generous like a cloud, his warrior's anklets  
 well-formed,  
 [this line unclear]  
 [...] on his beautiful chest, decorated with curved ornaments-  
 will rule forever  
 over the ancient oceans and the entire world.

At first glance, this type of poem appears unlike anything we see in Tamil literature. The late Caṅkam collection *Paripāṭal* contains praise poems to Murugan and Vishnu, using several of the *kali* components, but the commentators do not draw from this collection, presumably because the *Tolkāppiyam* has established it as an akam genre. The *Tirumurukārrupāṭai* also contains praise of Murugan, but is not included, despite Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar's deep familiarity with it.<sup>371</sup>

They are also not poems of devotion, although they share many referents with the bhakti poems of the Shaivite *Tirumurai* and the Vaishnavite *Divyaprabandham*. If, as Ramanujan, Shulman and others have argued, the bhakti genre is characterized in part by the spontaneous outpouring of devotion, in which "the poet explores his emotions and gives them form in verse not for their own sake, nor for the sake of any individual self-realization, but because they are his only real gift to god"<sup>372</sup> these poems do not share that generic quality. By following so closely the *kalippā* structure, they self-consciously publicize their familiarity with meter, a poetic choice that the bhakti poets reject as contrivance. Also, these poems contain no references to the merging of poet and devotee characteristic of the bhakti poems, in which the emotional impact of the poem rests in the tension inherent in the impossibility of complete connection with the divine. Rather, the poets of these poems have earthly demands of the divine, whether they be fame for generations or a life without suffering. In their function of harnessing divine power in the service of a royal patron, they share more in common with the previously discussed *puṇṇilai vālttu*, in which the poet explicitly invokes the god in the blessing of his king.

In fact, if we look at other post-Caṅkam versions of this genre, we find corroboration of the courtly provenance of these poems. Perhaps the most striking example appears in the first verse of the *Nantikkalampakam*, a ninth-century courtly *kalampakam* poem that praises the Pallava king Nantivarman II.<sup>373</sup> This poem, which praises Shiva, retains the *kali* components seen in the *tēva pāṇi* poems of all three commentaries, while introducing variations to the form. The poem begins with an invocation to Shiva in three introductory (*taravu*) stanzas.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar, in his role as literary commentator, wrote a commentary on the entire *Pattuppāṭtu* compilation, in which the *Tirumurugārrupāṭai* is included.

<sup>372</sup> Shulman, 1990: xlvi. For more on what distinguishes bhakti literature from other genres, see Ramanujan 1973; Cutler 1987; Shulman 1993.

<sup>373</sup> The form is also used for the invocatory verses of the *Kalittokai* and the *Paripāṭal*.

<sup>374</sup> This verse is understood to be the first verse of the poem, following four additional invocatory verses in other meters. We do not know if these additional verses were originally associated with the poem, or added later.

Oh Shiva! Your holy body is the earth; it is the sky; it is the wind; it is the roaring flood; it is the brilliant light; it is both one form and three forms.  
Is it a dark form? a white form? a blue form? a shining form? a red form? a gold form?  
Oh Shiva! (your holy body is all these things)...

(second verse corrupt)

Oh lord with a shining trident! Leaving behind as insignificant Kuṛugiri, made in your image, the rare Vedas, and the cool sky, you (instead) play in the heart and the blessed crown of Nanti whose weapon is a shining spear, (Nanti) who is Nārāyaṇaṅ and who rules the earth.

The poem continues with a second person invocation to Shiva, in the *arākam*.

(The eye on your) forehead burned to ash the beautiful body of Maṭaṅ who shoots as his arrows bunches of fragrant flowers!

With only one finger you intervened, making the ten heads of the demon who raised the foot of the beautiful mountain tremble!

Only after the *arākam* does the poet introduce four refrain stanzas (*tālīcai*). However, these refrain stanzas do not take the form of a question, as we saw in the commentarial examples.

**Refrain stanza 1 (*tālīcai*):**

In your hair is the rich white moon  
resting amidst a garland of woven *konrai* and white *erukku* flowers  
in your matted hair, full of flowers.

**Refrain stanza 2 (*tālīcai*):**

You wear a belt of a a dark snake with a thousand mouths that spit fire.  
lying on the skin of a pouncing tiger, spots covering its entire body.<sup>375</sup>

**Refrain stanza 3(*tālīcai*):**

You wear as your shawl the skin of an elephant, its musk rising,  
as its flowing blood [...] drips down like pouring rain.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> It is unclear whether this verse refers to Shiva or to Vishnu. On the one hand, the reference to the snake with a thousand heads appears to describe Vishnu's snake *Adiśeṣa*; however, the reference to the snake as a belt (*kaccai*) and to the tigerskin indicate Shiva. Much of the interpretation of this verse rests on the last word "*acaittaṅa*", which can refer to Shiva's dancing, to Vishnu's resting, or to either god's embracing of the snake.

<sup>376</sup> Reference to Shiva's slaying of the elephant-demon *Gajāśura*.

**Refrain stanza 4 (*tālīcai*):**

The four directions<sup>377</sup> trembled at the sight  
of the powerful poison that you drank.  
All life trembled at the sight  
of cruel Death whom you kicked.<sup>378</sup>

Next is a familiar series of twelve epithets (*ampōtarāṅkam/eṇ*) depicting the contradictory nature of representing god.

You are the birth of all the worlds;  
you are the death of all the worlds;  
you are the sorrow of all the worlds;  
you are the joy of all the worlds;  
you are the father of the gods;  
you are the grandfather of those who have come  
you are the leader of the rest;  
you are the lord of all creatures;

You are the end of the world; you are the world;  
you are form, you are formless;  
you are the chakra; you are the nectar;  
you are dharma; you are honor;

**Connecting word (*taṅiccol*):**

so...

The poem concludes with a *curitakam* that asks for Shiva's blessing over King Nanti.

**Concluding stanza (*curitakam*):**

Oh unique great god! We praise you and ask you to show your grace so that our King Nanti, garlanded with fresh flowers, ruler of Mamallapuram, protector of Mayilai, born in the line of the Pallavas, may rule majestically in the shade of a wide unique umbrella, as his generosity and his auspicious victory spread from the Northern mountains to the Southern Pōti hills.

This poem, composed several centuries before the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries, hints at the possible provenance of these poems. While Shiva remains a major character in this poem, the context as well as the concluding stanza make clear that this is a poem of the court, composed for the blessing of the patron and of the literary work that he has commissioned. These *ottālīcai kali* forms also appear in the invocatory verses of the *Caṅkam* collections

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<sup>377</sup> “The directions” could be a metonym for “all beings in all four directions”

<sup>378</sup> This appears to be a reference to an episode in the *Mārkaṇṭeya purāṇam*.



*Paripāṭal* and *Kalittokai*. These verses, which were most likely added several centuries after the poems' composition (perhaps at the time that they were compiled and the explanatory colophons added), act as auspicious introductions to the poems, praising Vishnu and Shiva; by the time of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries, they had become a standard part of the Caṅkam collections.

In fact, the commentaries on an earlier verse on *vāḷttu* indicate that Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar and Pērācīriyar understood the invocatory verse to be a key example of the category of *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*, or “praise poem to god.”<sup>379</sup> In the introductory verse on *vāḷttu*, in which the commentators first distinguish between these poems and praise poems of worldly subjects, they present as examples of praise poems to god the invocatory verses from the Caṅkam collections *Narriṇai*, *Kalittokai* and *Aiṅkuṟuṇūru*, as well as from the *Patīṇēṅkīlkaṇakku* collections *Nāḷaṭiyār* and *Inṇā Nārpatu*.

These invocatory verses (*kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*), share little with the content of the poems which they introduce. The benedictory verse for the *akam* collection *Narriṇai*, for example, praises the comprehensive and creative nature of Vishnu, identifying his body with the creation of the natural world.

He made the great earth into his beautiful feet;  
 He made the roaring sea, with its conches and its pure waters, his dress.  
 He made the sky his body, the directions his hands.  
 And he made the sun and the cool moon his eyes.  
 They say that he is the primordial god of the Vedas,  
 who created all things, taking them into himself.  
 His shining chakra removes all evil.<sup>380</sup>

The content and style of this poem stand in sharp contrast to the poems on love and domestic relationships within the *Narriṇai* collection. While the *Narriṇai* poems may contain references to Vishnu, praise of the god is never central to the poem as it is in the invocation. Despite the frustratingly minimal amount of details given in the commentary on this verse, the commentators do reveal the following features of this important category. To begin with, despite the absence of any such description in the *Tolkāppiyam*, these poems are understood as invocations, in which the poet's praise of god can result either in benefits for himself (*taṅakkup payaṅpaṭutal*) or in benefits for others (*paṭarkkaip poruṭkup payaṅpaṭutal*). If the above poem to Vishnu is a rather unclear example of a poem that benefits the poet, the invocatory poem to the *Aiṅkuṟuṇūru*, in which Vishnu causes the orderly appearance of the three categories of the world, is a more apparent example of a poem that benefits not only the poet, but the entire world.

<sup>379</sup> The term “kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu” is now a common term for such an invocatory verse.

<sup>380</sup> *Mā nilam cēvaṭi āka; tū nīr  
 vaḷai naral pouvam uṭukkai āka;  
 vicumpu mey āka; ticai kai āka;  
 pacuṅkatir matiyamoṭu cuṭar kaṅ āka;  
 iyaṅṅra ellām payiṅṅru, akattu aṭakkiya  
 vēta mutalvaṅ enpa  
 tītu aṅa viḷaṅkiya tikiriyōṅē*

Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar's commentary on *Ceyyūḷiyal* 109

Because of the lack of reliable historical data surrounding the compilation of the Caṅkam poems, identifying a courtly provenance for these invocatory verses is not as simple as establishing that of the *Nanti Kalampakam*. However, by the time of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators, the genre of *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* was well established as a form intimately linked with the courtly literary genres of the *kāvya* and the *prabandham*. While we don't know when this tradition began, and whether it pre or postdated the addition of the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* to the Caṅkam compilations, the benediction, dedicated to the preferred god of the poet and/or patron, had become a standard feature in courtly narrative poems, across sectarian lines. Whether dedicated to the Jain god, as in the case of the tenth century *kāppiyams Nīlakēci*, *Cuḷāmaṇi*, *Vaḷaiyāpati* and *Cīvakaciṅṭāmaṇi*, the Buddha, as in the *Kuṅṭalakēci*, or the Brahmanical gods Shiva and Vishnu, among others, as in the ninth century *Nanti Kalampakam*, the twelfth-century *Kaliṅkattu Parani* and the twelfth century *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* had developed into a standard accessory to these courtly poems.<sup>381</sup>

Early South Indian literary scholarship addressed the courtly context of this new form; *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* was first theorized as a part of *kāvya* in the seventh-century Sanskrit *Kāvyaḍarśa* of Dandin. Tamil literary scholars writing after Daṇḍin but before the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators also recognized the importance of the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*; the commentators of the *Yāpparuṅkalam* and the *Yāpparuṅkalakkārikai* include praise of god (*vaṇakkam*) in their description of how a text should start. While their references to *paṇaval* and *nūl* indicate that they are in fact discussing how to begin a theoretical treatise and not a literary text, the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram*, a twelfth-century Tamil rendition of the Sanskrit *Kāvyaḍarśa*, follows the Sanskrit to explicitly associate the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* with the composition of a courtly narrative poem.<sup>382</sup> By the time of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators, inclusion of the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* was not limited to *kāvya* literature, but was also adopted for related forms of courtly literature, including the *prabandham* genres.

While the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* of the *kāvyas* and *prabandhams* can be more easily placed in a Tamil (and pan-Indian) literary historical context, the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* of the Caṅkam collections pose more of a problem. While the commentators clearly identified the invocatory poems to the Caṅkam collections as *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* poems, the historical relationship of these Caṅkam *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* to the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* of the *kāvyas* and *prabandhams* is unclear. The *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* of the Caṅkam collections are understood to predate the *kāvyas* by several hundred years, a dating supported in part because of the identification of the author as a Caṅkam poet (*Pāratam Pāṭiya Peruntēvaṅār*). If this is the case, how do we explain such an early appearance of the *kaṭavuḷ*

<sup>381</sup> While the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* does not appear in the *Cilappatikāṇam* or the *Manimekalai*, the Caṅkam collections obtained *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* sometime after the composition of the poems. The dating of these Caṅkam *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* is shaky, but it is striking that they would have had these addenda while the longer poems went without. Even though *Kamparāmāyaṇam* and *Periyapurāṇam* were also products of the court, and contained *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* (and in the case of Kampan, an *avaiyaṭakku*), these were not included in the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries.

<sup>382</sup> In verse 8, which outlines the components of a narrative poem, Taṅṭi suggests that “when we speak of the nature of the *peruṅkāppiyam* (*mahākāvya*), it is suitable to include a *vāḷttu*, a *vaṇakkam*, and an introduction to the subject which will be discussed” (*peruṅkāp piyanilai pēcuṅ kālai vāḷttu vaṇakkam varupporu livarriṇoṅ rērupūṭait tāki*).

*vāḷttu* in Tamil, particularly in light of the fact that neither the courtly epics of the *Cilappatikāram* nor the *Maṇimēkalai* include such invocatory verses? Might these *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* poems have been a strategy for transforming the Caṅkam poems into legitimate courtly literature in the later period, when the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* was a required (and well theorized) literary component?<sup>383</sup>

While these answers remain hidden in the frustratingly obscure early history of Tamil literature, by the time of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* of the Caṅkam collections were seen to participate in the same category of those poems more explicitly associated with a royal court. The praise poem to god in *ottāḷicai kali* appear to also belong to this category. While we don't have enough evidence to definitively claim that these *ottāḷicai kali* poems were a template for a type of *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*, the existence of the form in the first verse of the *Nanti Kalampakam*, as well as in the beginning of the *Paripāṭal* and *Kalittokai*, hints at such a possibility.

Furthermore, if we turn our attention to other commentarial traditions of the same period, we see that these poems participated in a larger body of *kalippā* poems that invoked god and king across sectarian communities. Versions of these types of poems dedicated to the Jain arhat and the Buddha show up in the commentaries on the Jain text on metrics *Yāpparuṅkalam* (discussed in the previous chapter) as well as in the commentary on the Buddhist grammar *Vīracōḷiyam*. In fact, the total body of such devotional poetic examples is significant: twelve in the *Vīracōḷiyam* commentary and approx. twenty-five in the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* commentary. Although these praise poems address different sectarian communities, they are clearly modeled after the same poetic tradition. And like the examples in the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries, many of these poems also invoke a king in their concluding stanzas.

*from the YKV Commentary:*<sup>384</sup>

**Introductory stanza (*taravu*):**

Decorated with jeweled diamonds and shining pearls from the sea with its waves,  
you sit happily on the jeweled throne carried by lions who stay on the mountain.  
as the three worlds together praise you in the holy city, filled with sound.  
As the supreme lord (*īsaṅ*) you remove the two types of karma  
and establish dharma as the dharma of grace/compassion (*aruḷ*),  
the sweet nectar for rishis and gods, so their ignorance will be removed  
and [establish this dharma] as delusion for enemies.

**Refrain stanza 1 (*tāḷicai*):**

You are the action which destroys the enemy of unattached karma  
with thoughts that burn like an enemy army  
and the shining light of knowledge without ignorance.

<sup>383</sup> There was in fact a later Peruntēvaṅār, who composed his *Pāratam* in the 9th century under the reign of King Nandivarman III. It is tempting to suggest that the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttus* of the Caṅkam collections may have been added during this time.

<sup>384</sup> For the full poem, see *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam Ceyyūḷiyal* 30 p. 308-310.

Is it your grace to give us grace so that we can attain grace?

**Refrain stanza 2 (*tālīcai*):**

Like one who sits blissfully in the cool shade  
presenting your face to devotees so they can reach kati, like a sun that rises on the  
mountain.

Is it your greatness that makes us realize that you sit happily in the shade of the umbrella,  
in order to destroy karma like a murderous battlefield?

**Refrain stanza 3 (*tālīcai*):**

If you want to take away stain (*malam*), you leave your home and enter the forest.  
Thinking that “excessive wealth is wrong for those who want to destroy karma,”  
is it your greatness to stay in the world, surrounded by kings and gods with limitless great  
wealth?

**Transitional descriptive section:**

Kings and gods sit in the shadow of your feet,  
you who are the words which contrast the roaring sound of the beating murasu drums.

Your color is [...]

Your speech is the sound of the rushing rain, the crashing waves, and the special roaring  
that comes from within a cave.

**Section of epithets (*eṇ*):**

You conquer the enmity that is karma along with its roots, difficult to conquer.  
You are the boat for those who want to conquer karma.  
Becoming one person, you came to realize the whole world.

You know the whole world  
You are the color of the moon  
You are the grandfather of sages  
You are the *piṇṭi* tree with its blooming flowers  
You are the protection for all lives  
Your body is cool like shade  
You blissfully sit on a flower  
You are the sage of sages

**Connecting word (*taniccol*):**

so...

**Concluding stanza (*curitakam*):**

Oh you whose grace is unique! We praise you so that

the upright scepter and powerful white royal umbrella of Nanti  
-decorated with his anklets, king of Nantimāl mountain, who gave many lands to praise a  
man  
who has strong legs, and who has a conch and a wheel that takes away darkness -  
so that his umbrella may spread its shade far and wide.

*From the Vīracōḷiyam commentary*<sup>385</sup>

**Introductory stanza (*taravu*):**

As the multitude of creatures that live on earth, the gods who live in the sky, and the  
*nākar* clans who live in the cavern rejoice,  
the heavenly *tuntumi* drums resound and the gods dance.  
As the ascetics sing your praises, you sit majestically on the lion throne  
under the shade of the wide royal umbrella, decorated with pearls,  
while divine beings (*intirar*) pour down flowers and the gods wield fans,  
oh great one with no equal!

**Refrain stanza 1 (*tālīcai*):**

You are the yogi who, never leaving, is a part of every womb that is born and that dies,  
[wombs] said to be limitless from the smallest ant until Brahma.  
Whatever sorrow arises for any life in any body,  
becoming the life for that body, your blessed body showers down compassion.

**Refrain stanza 2 (*tālīcai*):**

[...this part corrupted]  
As you explained to me one subject,  
your blessed rare words were received without confusion  
because of the true content.

**Refrain stanza 3 (*tālīcai*):**

On that day, and until this moment,  
you alone took on the burden of compassion, protecting all creatures,  
taking away their karmas, the burden of ignorance.  
Oh great one!  
Does your body, which is shared by all who come to worship at your honey flower feet,  
also belong to you?

**Transitional descriptive section:**

If you give your compassion in order to protect all precious lives,  
how can you protect [all of these] by giving your body to one creature?  
If you get angry with Kāmaṇ when you are in front of women  
like tender shoots, with eyes black as rain, and hair garlanded with fragrant flowers,

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<sup>385</sup> Peruntēvaṇār's commentary on *Vīracōḷiyam Yāppatikāram* 11, p. 143-144.

how is that compassion?

**Section of epithets (eṇ):**

You gave your nectar of dharma to the five demons in war;  
You gave the precious nectar to save the family of shining *nākaras*;  
You shared the right path with the kings of birds with wide wings;  
You taught the ten (?) on earth, without discrimination

You created the wheel of dharma;  
You abandoned the wheel of illusion;  
You understood the wheel of secrecy/mantras;  
You are an ascetic among ascetics;  
You are a god among gods;  
You are wise among the wise;  
You are blessed among the blessed;

You are the first; you are free of impurities [*amalan*]; you are brahma; you are rare; you are the sun; you are the lord; you are the chief of the seaside; you are god [*iraivan*]; you are compassion; you are meaning; you are the wise one; you are without blemish [*anakan*] you are perception; you are abundance; you are perfect;

**Connecting word (taniccol):**

so...

**Concluding stanza (curitakam):**

Oh blessed one (who sits) under the holy shade of the *pōti* tree,  
its green leaves shining like an emerald, thick with coral (colored flowers),  
its great golden branches reaching to the sky.  
We praise you so that  
the generosity, the beauty and the power of King Sundara Cholan  
who established a great Nanti  
may flourish with excellence in the world.

The similarities between these poems and the poems used by the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators are unmistakable. Not only do these poems use the same *kali* components of *taravu*, *tālicai*, *arākam*, *eṇ*, *taniccol* and *curitakam*, but other poetic modes seem to have been shared across the traditions.<sup>386</sup> The poet's gentle mocking of god seen in Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar's examples shows up in the refrain stanzas of the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* example as well as in the transitional descriptive section of the example from the *Vīracōliyam*. Although the individual poems may have reflected sectarian interest, the genre appears to have been a template recognized by grammarians and/or

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386 In fact, several of these poems are shared across the *Tolkāppiyam* and *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentaries, surprising given the competitive relationship between these two.

poets of all religious communities. Also, like the *kali* poems found in the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries, these poems bridge bhakti and court genres; despite the emphasis on the deity throughout the poem, many of the concluding stanzas return to the royal patron.

If there was any doubt about the courtly context of these *kali* praise poems to god, the second set of poems makes this connection more explicit. While the first set of *kali* poems are more strictly delimited by their inclusion of known metrical components, the boundaries of this second type are more fluid and inclusive. Drawing on a verse that defines this type (*koccaḱa oru pōku kali*) as a poem in which the *kali* poetic components are optional, but which is distinguished by “different” meter and content, the commentators take a liberal interpretation and include a range of examples, including many that would not ordinarily be classified as divine praise poems or *kalippā*. These poems include the *prabandham paraṇi* genre, the invocatory verse, the courtly epic (*toṭarnilaicceyyuḷ*) among many others.<sup>387</sup> The content of these poems covers diverse territory, from Kannaki’s lament over her murdered husband in the fifth-century epic *Cilappatikāram* to a short poem on Vishnu’s heroism to the gruesome worship on the battleground of the *paraṇi*. The poems refer to gods from different sectarian communities, including Buddhist, Jain, Shaivite and Vaishnavite.<sup>388</sup> Several of the examples, such as the excerpt from the Song of the Hunters in the *Cilappatikāram*, which contains three refrains addressed to a young girl from the hunter community, don’t even refer to god, despite their being classified as divine praise poems. With all these differences, how can they be understood as participating in the same aesthetic category?

The answer to this question lies in an important distinction, made by the commentators, between this collection of diverse poems and the devotional poems of the bhakti corpus. While both genres may be identified by their inclusion of divine praise, the commentators intentionally distinguish between the two, stating that the bhakti poems of the Shaivite *Tēvāram* and the Vaishnavite *Divyaprabandham* can not be considered here as literary examples because “they are not poetry of this world” (*avai ulakavaḷakkaṇmaiṅṅiṅ kātṭā māṅṅiṅāṅ*). In contrast, the poems used by the commentators, even those exclusively dedicated to praise of god, are poems of the world, and more specifically, poems of the court.

Of the forty-one examples given by Nacciṅārkkīṅṅiyar in his commentary on this verse on *koccaḱa oru pōku* poems, seventeen are explicitly associated with modes of courtly literary production. He begins his commentary on this verse by specifically identifying the *prabandham* genre of the *paraṇi* as a type of song for god (*tēva pāṅṅi*) poem in *koccaḱa oru pōku kali*, despite the fact that this genre is best known for celebrating the martial accomplishments of a king.<sup>389</sup> Later, when he introduces an excerpt from an unknown *paraṇi*, Nacciṅārkkīṅṅiyar addresses this categorical problem, claiming that even though the *paraṇi* praises a patron, including many *puṅṅam* elements, it is still a divine praise poem, in part because it includes the practice (of the ghouls) worshipping the goddess who stays in the burial ground with sacrificial porridge and the

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<sup>387</sup> See Nacciṅārkkīṅṅiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 149, pp. 175-189.

<sup>388</sup> While Nacciṅārkkīṅṅiyar includes poems from all of the major sectarian traditions, the majority of his unidentified examples are Shaivite.

<sup>389</sup> Nacciṅārkkīṅṅiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 149, p. 176.

*tunaṅkai* dance on the day of the *paraṇi* star.<sup>390</sup> He provides nine excerpts from the fifth-century. *Cilappatikāram*, which was considered a courtly *kāvya* by this time<sup>391</sup> and one from the tenth-century Jain *kāvya* *Cuḷāmaṇi*.

His examples are also drawn from the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*s of the Jain epics *Valaiyāpati*, *Cintāmaṇi* and the *Cuḷāmaṇi*,<sup>392</sup> as well as from the *avaiyaṭakku*, or modest address to the court. While not as ubiquitous as the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*, the *avaiyaṭakku* also shows up in many of the courtly poems, including the *Cintāmaṇi*, the *Kuṇṭalakēci*, the *Nīlakēci* and the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*. In describing the debut of the text to the royal court, the *avaiyaṭakku* makes explicit the courtly context of these poems.

Of the remaining examples, many are short two or four-line poems that follow a standard *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* form, asking the god for salvation or blessing. Although it is difficult to identify these poems, which do not appear in other collections of Tamil poetry, their inclusion in a section that privileges courtly forms indicates that they were understood as examples of *vāḷttu* in a courtly context and not as poems of the temple. The courtly context would also explain the leniency towards poems from the Buddhist and Jain traditions in a section of commentary that otherwise privileges Shiva. Despite the identification by later scholars of Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar as a Shaivite, neither he nor Pērācīriyar provide commentary on any of the sectarian features of these poems.

If we look back to the larger category of *vāḷttu* poems, we see the emphasis on courtly context extending beyond the specific examples of the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* to the larger category of *vāḷttu* poems. Although the initial verse gives examples of *vāḷttu*s to rain, sages, etc., the following four genres are distinguished by their placement of the king/patron as the central object of praise. As earlier mentioned, the commentators stress this central position of the king in their interpretation of the *purāṇilai vāḷttu*, emphasizing that it is he who is the main object of praise and not the god. As for the *avaiyaṭakkiyal*, like the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*, this genre is closely associated with the long narrative poems of the court. Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar acknowledges this use of the form, telling the reader “to occasionally accept *avaiyaṭakkiyal* for long narrative poems,”<sup>393</sup> giving the *Cintāmaṇi avaiyaṭakku* as his example.

Unlike the praise category of *puram*, which referred more specifically to poems in the Caṅkam corpus, the genre of *vāḷttu* could accommodate a range of new literary forms, as long as they could be justified by a flexible interpretation of the *Tolkāppiyam*. The commentators used this flexibility to respond to the most influential of these new forms, namely those associated with courtly production and praise of a royal patron. Even those poems identified as divine

<sup>390</sup> *marṛu paraṇiyāvatu kāṭukeḷu celvikkup paraṇināṭ kūḷum tunaṅkaiyum koṭuttu vaḷipaṭuvatōr vaḷakkupparrīyatu. atu pāṭṭuṭait talaivaṇaip peytu kūraliṛ purattiṇai palavum virāyīrēṇum tēvapāṇiyēyām*

Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 149, p. 176.

<sup>391</sup> As seen in the commentaries of Aṭiyārkkunallār and Mayilainātar.

<sup>392</sup> He also includes the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu* of the *Kalittokai*.

<sup>393</sup> *ariltapa eṇṛataṇār ciṛupāṇmai yāppiṇum poruḷiṇum vērupaṭṭa kockakattār kūṛun toṭarnilaic ceyyūṭkum avaiyaṭakkiyal koḷka*. Nacciṅārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 113, p. 158.



praise poems were interpreted within this larger understanding of *vāḷttu*, while poems of the temple were not considered appropriate literature for inclusion.

The category of divine praise in *kalippā* also allowed the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators to address (and reject) the most significant metrical development since the early poems: the subdividing of the original four meters into the categories of *iṇam*. While the four meters of the *Tolkāppiyam* refer to the poem as a metrical unit, the new *iṇam* system takes the stanza as its basis for metrical identification. This was an important shift since Tamil poetry, had transitioned from individual poems of ten to fourteen lines to larger poems with multiple stanzas, requiring new metrical classification.<sup>394</sup> A poem with ten stanzas could now contain multiple *iṇams*, a concept that was not part of early Tamil metrics. In fact, many of the poems used by the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators in this section would be not identified as *kali* poems either by contemporaries of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators or by modern scholars, but rather in terms of their various *iṇams*. Although the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators wanted to acknowledge these new poems, they refused to accept this new metrical system that would challenge the authority of the *Tolkāppiyam*, a metrical system that was first theorized in the *Yāpparuṅkalam*, a text considered by the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators to be a violation of Tamil tradition.<sup>395</sup> As a result, the commentators use the flexibility of the *kali* meter, particularly the *koccala oru poku kali* division, which allows stanzaic interpretation, to accommodate these new poems into the old metrical system laid out by *Tolkāppiyam*. Now all stanzaic poetry can be understood in terms of *kali* components such as introductory stanza (*taravu*) and refrain (*tāḷicai*) rather than accepting classification by *iṇam*.

For example, in his commentary on *koccala oru pōku kalippā* poems, Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar begins with an explanation of those *kali* poems that include only the refrain (*tāḷicai*) and not the introductory *taravu*. For a poem to fit this description, it must have a repeating refrain on one topic, and each stanza should not be more than three or four lines in length.. The *paraṇi*, Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar explains, belongs to this category because it consists of two line stanzas on a connected theme. If we look, for instance, at the best known version of this form, the *Kaliṅkattu Paraṇi*, we see that the text is broken up into thirteen sections of short stanzas on one subject, such as the nineteen two-line stanzas on the “description of the ghouls” (*pēykaḷaip pāṭiyatu*) or the twenty-four stanzas describing the Kāḷi temple. While the meters of the *paraṇi* are usually identified in terms of *iṇam*, the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators replace this system with the terminology of *kalippā* and remain within the framework of the original system.<sup>396</sup>

This way of understanding stanzaic poetry is also true for the the *patikams* of the Shaivite and Vaishnavite bhakti poems, which the commentators reference although they are not able to be used as literary examples. These poems consist of ten, eleven or twelve stanzas on one temple site, which are referred to throughout the decade. The import of this stanzaic structure extends

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<sup>394</sup> This may also explain the other context in which both Pērācīriyar and Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar accept new literary examples: the section on *vaṇappu*, a poorly delineated category in the *Tolkāppiyam* interpreted by the commentators to pertain specifically to multi-stanzaic poetry. See Pērācīriyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 235-252.

<sup>395</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>396</sup> Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 149, p. 176.

beyond common references to one temple site. As David Shulman has argued, understanding the poetic impact of the *Tēvāram* poems requires acknowledging the coherence of the *patikam* and treating the stanzas within as a whole. Using *Patikam* 9 of Tiruñānacampantar’s verse on Tiruvaricīrkaraipputtūr, Shulman points out how one *patikam* contains “themes (..which) enunciated in one verse tend to emerge again, slightly altered, in subsequent verses, (...) add(ing) contrapuntal tones.”<sup>397</sup> Without an understanding of the decade as a poetic unit, much of the richness and allusions within the individual stanzas would be overlooked.

Although the *paraṇi* and the bhakti *patikams* are the most obvious examples of this organizing of stanzaic poetry, Nacciṅārkkīyār extends this classification to other genres, including the long narrative poems of the *Cilappatikāram* and the *Cīvakaciṅṭamaṇi*.<sup>398</sup> The verse also allows for poems with only an introductory *taravu* and no refrain. For these, Nacciṅārkkīyār gives the invocatory verses from the *Cūlāmaṇi* and the *Valaiyāpati*, identifying them as *taṇittaravu* (solitary taravu). Epic is likewise classified; in Nacciṅārkkīyār’s commentary on the Jain epic *Civakacintamani*, he identifies the narrative poem as a *tēva pāṇi kalippā* poem.

In conclusion, the categories of praise, both the general category of *vālttu* and the more specific *kaṭavuḷ vālttu*, allowed the commentators to address two major anxieties in new literary development: the new literatures of the court, defined in part by an emphasis on praise, and the new meters associated with these literatures. The choice of praise as a site to introduce new literature to the canon defined by the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries was not random; rather, this inclusion reflected the increasing influence of the courtly praise poem in both the production and theorization of Tamil literature during this time. These moments of violation of the original grammar indicate the force of the influence of these developments; rather than being exemplary servants to grammatical rules, these developments force the commentators to reinterpret the rules in order to accommodate them. The flexibility of the *Tolkāppiyam* verses allows this interpretation to occur gracefully, without the acrobatics seen in other such examples (such as the application of Sanskrit grammar to Tamil language in the grammar of the *Ilakkaṇa Kōttu*, for instance).

However, the importance of theorizing new modes of literary production affiliated with the court was outgrowing even the flexible categories of the *Tolkāppiyam*. At the same time that the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators were attempting to maintain the relevance of the old grammar, the new grammars of the *pāṭṭiyals* were emerging to address these very developments. If the number of *pāṭṭiyals* produced during the twelfth through the nineteenth centuries is any indication, this type of grammar eclipsed the impact of the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries during this later period.

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<sup>397</sup> Shulman, 1990: xliii.

<sup>398</sup> See Nacciṅārkkīyār’s commentary to the *kaṭavuḷ vālttu* of the *Cīvakacintamani* for this discussion.

## Chapter 5

### Consolidation of the Tamil Tradition: Intertextuality and Integration in the Seventeenth-Century *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*

Whether through refutation, imitation or direct borrowing, Tamil texts on poetics produced between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries reflect the complex intertextual nature of literary scholarship during this time. The emphasis on praise poetry developed in the *pāṭṭiyals* appears not only in the section on *kali* meter in the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries discussed in the previous chapter, but also in the *akam* treatises of the *Iraiyāṇār Akapporuḷ* and the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*<sup>399</sup> as well as in the eleventh-century *Virutti* commentary on the list of topics with which a poet should be familiar provided by the *Yāpparuṅkalam*, a text that primarily treats meter.<sup>400</sup> Likewise, discussion of *akam* conventions appear in the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal* as well as in the metrical treatise of the *Yāpparuṅkalam* and its *Virutti* commentary. Commentaries on very different source materials share grammatical and literary examples, both those drawn from the Caṅkam “canon” identified by Nakkīrar and Pēracīriyar as well as those outside any identifiable compilation.

However, despite this recognition of both common conventions and shared material across the scholarly world, there were few attempts during this period at an integrated theory of literature that incorporated the fields of the study of literary language (phonology and morphology) and the individual fields of poetics, including content (*poruḷ*), meter (*yāppu*) and poetic figure (*aṇi*, Skrt. *alaṅkāra*).<sup>401</sup> Rather, beginning with the seventh-century *akam* treatise, the *Iraiyāṇār Akapporuḷ*, the fields of grammar and the various branches of poetics, seen as one integrated system in the *Tolkāppiyam*, were divided into individual treatises. Other fields are included within these specialized texts, but topics outside the treatise’s focus are relegated to the margin, usually included in chapters on Miscellany with no clear connection to the material

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<sup>399</sup> In their description of the new narrative genre of the *kōvai*, a poem in the *akam* mode that invokes the patron in all of its four hundred stanzas, both the *Iraiyāṇār Akapporuḷ* and the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* reflect the shift in Tamil courtly literary culture towards multi-stanzaic praise poetry. More specifically, *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* 245 and 246 refer to the *pāṭṭuṭaittalaivaṇ*, the technical term for the patron also used by the *pāṭṭiyals*. Also, the commentary on the introductory verse (*pāyiram*) of the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* identifies the author, Nāṅkavirāca Nampi, as one who has knowledge of the four types of poetry (*ācu*, *matura*, *cittira* and *vittāra*) discussed by the *pāṭṭiyals*. Nakkīrar’s commentary on the *Iraiyāṇār Akapporuḷ* also includes reference to the *pāṭṭuṭaittalaivaṇ*.

<sup>400</sup> As mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, the *Virutti* commentator interprets “tradition” (*marapu*) in terms of the insignia of the *pāṭṭuṭaittalaivaṇ*. See *Virutti* commentary on *Yāpparuṅkalam* 96.

<sup>401</sup> The twelfth-century *Vīracōḷiyam* stands out as a striking exception. This text, which revisits the “three-fold” division of the *Tolkāppiyam* into the subjects of phonology, morphology and poetics, deviates significantly from the *Tolkāppiyam* tradition in its integration of Sanskrit grammatical and literary theory into its interpretation of the Tamil tradition. While the text and its commentary inhabits the same textual world as the other scholars of this period, particularly the *Yāpparuṅkalam* and the *Virutti* commentary, the *Vīracōḷiyam* and its commentary reflect a Buddhist vision of Tamil language and literature, in which Sanskrit and Tamil are integrated. See Monius 2000.

covered by the rest of the text. As for a general definition of literature, in contrast to the *Tolkāppiyam*, which begins its Chapter on Poetics (*Ceyyūḷiyal*) with a verse that implicates these disparate fields in the production and interpretation of all poetry,<sup>402</sup> the later poetic texts do not reflect on the relationship between the limited field of their purview and the larger project of theorizing literature more generally.

Not until the seventeenth century does the Tamil tradition again see a poetic treatise that attempts to reconstruct the integrated system of the *Tolkāppiyam* and create a comprehensive theory of Tamil literature. This text, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*, along with its auto-commentary, composed by the seventeenth-century Shaivite scholar Vaidyanātha Desikar, ushers back in the genre of the integrated theoretical system seen in the *Tolkāppiyam*, an approach to poetics that is subsequently adopted by a number of treatises produced throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>403</sup> Despite its reputation for “bringing back the *Tolkāppiyam*,” earning it the name “Little *Tolkāppiyam*” (*Kuṭṭi Tolkāppiyam*),<sup>404</sup> the relationship between the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* and the *Tolkāppiyam* is more complex than such a moniker implies. While the poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam* hold an important place in the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*, the text also acknowledges the developments in the literary world since the time of the *Tolkāppiyam*’s composition. This chapter looks at the study of poetics in the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* to understand how this text explicitly tries to reconcile the poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam* with these later poetic systems. This chapter argues that in contrast to the strategy of canonization displayed in the commentaries of Pērācīriyar and Nakkīrar, or the strategy of compilation of various traditions shown in the commentary of the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* represents a different approach to the Tamil tradition, one that identifies an authoritative treatise for each major branch of poetics developed after the *Tolkāppiyam* and consolidates these perspectives into an integrated theoretical system informed by the structure and content of the ancient grammar. The difference between the strategy of intertextuality and integration adopted by the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* and the strategies seen in the commentaries of Pērācīriyar and the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* reflect larger shifts in the status of the Tamil tradition between the period of the earlier commentaries and the seventeenth century in which the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* was composed.

Like the *Tolkāppiyam*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* is split into three books, covering the subjects of phonology (*Eḷuttu*), morphology (*Col*) and poetics (*Poruḷ*). However, unlike the

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<sup>402</sup> The first verse of the *Ceyyūḷiyal* includes a list of components (*uruppu*) necessary for the composition of literature. The extent of this list reflects the Tamil integration of grammar and poetics; the first two elements on the list are *māttirai* (a unit of measurement of sound equal to the snapping of two fingers) and *eḷuttu* (letter). The next ten are what Indra Manuel identifies as “formal” elements, as opposed to the latter twelve, which are “thematic.” This identification is helpful for understanding the basic structure, but the verse itself does not accommodate such graceful categorization. Contrast this definition of literature with the concise Sanskrit definitions, such as Vamana’s claim that “style (*riti*) is the soul of poetry (*kāvya*)”.

<sup>403</sup> See the nineteenth-century *Muttuvīriyam* and what remains of the nineteenth-century *Cāminātam*. For a basic introduction to these texts and their place in the Tamil theoretical tradition, see Ilavaracu, Coma. *Ilakkana Varalaru*. (Citamparam: Tolkappiyar Nulakam), 1963.

<sup>404</sup> See Manuel 1997 for a discussion of the relationship between the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* and the *Tolkāppiyam*.

*Tolkāppiyam*, the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* interprets the Book on Poetics to include not only the chapters on the poetic conventions of *akam* and *puṛam* familiar to the *Tolkāppiyam*, but also topics outside the purview of the ancient grammar, including a chapter on poetic figure (*alaṅkāra*) explicitly indebted to the twelfth-century *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram*, the Tamil “transcreation” of the seventh-century Sanskrit *Kāvyaḍarsa*, as well as a chapter on the poetics of praise literature outlined in the *pāṭṭiyals*, a later poetic system not included in the *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>405</sup> This expansion of Tamil poetics in the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* presents a synthesis of all the major theoretical developments that had emerged since the *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>406</sup> However, in contrast to a text like the *Yāpparunkala Virutti* commentary, which presents a range of conflicting scholarly perspectives without any commentarial mediation, the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* consistently attempts to reconcile this new material with the poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam*.

As their names suggest, the first two chapters of the Book of Poetics of the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam*, the Chapter on Akam Conventions (*Akattiṇaiyiyal*) and the Chapter on Puṛam Conventions (*Puṛattiṇaiyiyal*) reflect the content presented by the *Tolkāppiyam*. The first chapter of the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam*, the *Akattiṇaiyiyal*, contains 225 verses on *akattiṇai*, or rules associated with the conventions of an *akam* poem (treating the themes of love and domestic life) covering the subject matter included in the five chapters of the *Tolkāppiyam* that relate to *akam* poetics: the Chapter on Akam Conventions (*Akattiṇaiyiyal*), the Chapter on Love before Marriage (*Kaḷaviyal*, lit. “Stolen Love”), the Chapter on Love after Marriage (*Karpiyal*) and the Chapter on General Akam Content (*Poruliyal*).<sup>407</sup>

For the most part, the topics covered by the *Akattiṇaiyiyal* are familiar to the *akam* tradition as it is articulated by the *Tolkāppiyam*. After a discussion of the general conventions of *akam* poetry, including an introduction to the five landscapes (*aintiṇai*) for which *akam* poetry is known, as well as the system of signifiers associating particular chronotopes (*mutal*) with related flora and fauna and other constituents (*karu*) to suggest the emotional state of the hero and heroine (*uri*), the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* introduces the scenes (*turai*) central to *akam* poetics, in which the *akam* poet expresses the stages of love between the young couple in the voices of stock characters, including the hero, the heroine, her girlfriend, and her foster mother.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> The subject of chapter 3 of this dissertation.

<sup>406</sup> The tradition identifies this framework as a “five-fold” approach to Tamil poetics, which includes phonology, morphology, poetic content (covering *akam* and *puṛam* conventions), meter and poetic figure. The *pāṭṭiyal* tradition is considered a subsection of meter (*yāppu*). This development is in contrast to the “three-fold” approach of the *Tolkāppiyam*, in which meter and *alaṅkāra* are seen as subsections of content (*porul*), and the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition is not discussed.

<sup>407</sup> The second chapter, the *Puṛattiṇaiyiyal*, attempts a similar synthesis of the other major theoretical category in the early Tamil tradition, that of *puṛam*, or poems on war, kingship and ethics. Although a detailed treatment of *puṛam* in the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* is beyond the scope of this chapter, the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* is said to have brought back the *Tolkāppiyam* system that had been changed in the tenth-century treatise on *puṛam*, the *Puṛapporuḷvenpāmālai*. See Manuel 1997: 590.

<sup>408</sup> See Chapter 2 for an extended discussion of the *akam* conventions as well as a short bibliography on scholarship on the *akam* tradition.

However, despite the discussion of these conventions in the *Tolkāppiyam*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* does not draw on the ancient grammar in its understanding of the *akam* tradition. Rather, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*'s interpretation of the *akam* conventions is informed by the later *akam* tradition of the thirteenth-century *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* by Nārkaṇirāja Nampi,<sup>409</sup> which reworks the individual vignettes of the earlier *akam* tradition into the chronological sequence of the narrative genre of the *kōvai*, reflecting the emphasis on multi-stanzaic poetry since the time of the *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>410</sup> In fact, beginning with verse 6 and continuing throughout the *Akattiṇaiyiyal*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* directly borrows from the grammatical verses of the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* with little to no variation of wording.<sup>411</sup>

In its borrowing from the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* draws on a text that, while better known for its articulation of *kōvai* poetics, itself represents a synthesis of the *Tolkāppiyam* *akam* tradition with that of the later *kōvai* tradition. The middle three chapters, the Chapter on Love before Marriage (*Kaḷaviyal*), the Chapter on Marriage (*Varaviyal*) and the Chapter on Love after Marriage (*Karpiyal*), clearly reflect the transition of *akam* poetry to a narrative schematic. The section on Love before Marriage (*Kaḷaviyal*), for example, begins with a verse that elaborates the sixteen stages associated with the consummation of the love between the hero and the heroine, beginning with the hero's deciding to beg for the heroine's love (*irantupinṇirrarkeṇṇal*) and passing through chronological stages such as the hero's attempts to touch the heroine (*meytottupayiral*), the heroine's hiding from the hero (*valipātumaruttal*), the heroine's smiling at the hero after he praises her beauty (*varitunakai tōrral*) and the hero's recognizing the intent behind the heroine's smile (*muruvarkurippuṇartal*) before ending with the hero's praising the heroine after they have consummated their union (*pukaḷtal*).<sup>412</sup> The rest of the verses in the Chapter on Love before Marriage, the verses in the Chapter on Marriage and the Chapter on Love after Marriage outline the scenes associated with the hero and the heroine as

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<sup>409</sup> According to the commentator, the name of this poet is a reference to the four types of poets discussed in the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, including poets who compose impromptu verses (*ācu*), poets who compose sweet poems (*matura*), poets who compose *cittira kāvya* (*cittira*) and poets who compose *prabandham* literature (*vittāra*). The *pāṭṭiyals* focus on the last type of poet in their analysis of Tamil literature. Such a description of a scholar on *akam* poetics suggests that these categories were known outside the tradition of *pāṭṭiyal* poetics.

<sup>410</sup> The *kōvai* is not only multi-stanzaic, but is more specifically a praise poem expressed in multiple stanzas, called a *prabandham* in the Tamil tradition. The emphasis on the multi-stanzaic praise poems of the hypergenre *prabandham* gives rise to a new branch of poetics, that of the *pāṭṭiyal* treatises. See Chapters 3 & 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>411</sup> However, while the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* includes four chapters on *akam*, *kaḷavu*, *karpu* and *olipu*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* discusses all material related to *akam* in the *Akattiṇaiyiyal* chapter.

<sup>412</sup> *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* v. 27, p. 66. In this schematic, excluded from the category of “stolen love” are several scenes which precede the meeting, including the first sight (*kāṭci*), the hero's wondering whether or not the heroine is a human or divine woman (*aiyam*), the resolution of this doubt as the hero notices the human characteristics of the heroine (*tuṇivu*) and the hero's noticing the signs that the heroine has also noticed him (*kuripparital*). As these stages happen before a relationship has been established between the hero and the heroine, they are not considered part of the five landscapes (*aintiṇai*) of love, but rather participate in the category of *kaikkilai* ([the hero's]one-sided love) until the heroine responds and they can enter a relationship of mutual love.

they lament being separated from one another, make plans to meet again, eventually decide to marry and then suffer through new forms of separation, as the hero temporarily leaves the heroine both to gain wealth and honor and to enjoy the love of other women (*parattai*).

Although many of these scenes are also discussed in the *Tolkāppiyam*, they appear in a different organizational framework. Rather than the narrative in which they are embedded in the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*, the *Tolkāppiyam* organizes its Chapter on Love before Marriage (*Kaḷaviyal*) in terms of the character in whose voice the poem is set. For example, *Kaḷaviyal* verses 98 through 100 enumerate the scenes vocalized by the hero, including his imagining his future with the heroine, and his asking his friend to help him meet the heroine again. Scenes such as the above mentioned “hero’s attempt to touch the heroine” and “hero’s recognizing the intent behind the heroine’s smile” are also included in this list, but whereas the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* list also includes scenes from the same chronological moment centering around the heroine and other characters, the *Tolkāppiyam* reserves discussion of those scenes for separate verses with no concern for violation of the narrative sequence. For example, verses 109 through 111 cover the scenes expressed in the heroine’s voice and verse 112 covers the scenes in the voice of the heroine’s girlfriend (*tōḷi*), while other verses are dedicated to the utterances of additional characters, such as the hero’s friend and the heroine’s foster mother. In this system, each scene is interpreted as an independent dramatic monologue (*kūr̥ru*). Understanding the “scene” relies on knowing the rules and limitations associated with a particular conventional character, rather than on knowing its place in a larger narrative.<sup>413</sup>

For the majority of its treatment of *akam* poetics, the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* eschews this system of independent dramatic monologues in favor of the organization of the narrative sequence of the later *kōvai* genre. However, the text reserves a section for *akam* poetics as they are articulated by the *Tolkāppiyam*. This discussion comes in the last chapter, the Chapter on Miscellany (*Oḷipiyal*) which addresses, among other topics, the components (*uruppu*) used to make an *akam* poem.<sup>414</sup> Both the term “component” (*uruppu*) and the list that follows are taken directly from the *Tolkāppiyam*’s definition of poetry, found in the first verse of the ancient grammar’s Chapter on Poetics (*Ceyyūḷiyal*). In this verse, the *Tolkāppiyam* defines literature (*ceyyuḷ*) in terms of the inclusion of thirty-two “components” (*uruppu*) beginning with the most basic metrical units of the shortest measure of time (*māttirai*) and the syllable (*eḷuttu*) and progressing through a range of topics related to content, poetic ornament and style. Although the list as it exists in the *Tolkāppiyam* theoretically applies to all literary production, the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* interprets twelve of the components to refer specifically to *akam* poems, including the components of landscape (*tiṇai*), major stage of love (*kaikōḷ*, further divided into “love before marriage” [*kaḷavu*] and “love after marriage” [*kaṟpu*]) speech (*kūr̥ru*), audience (*kēṭpōr*), place (*kaḷaṇ*), time (*kālam*), result (*pavaṇ*), physical manifestation of emotion (*meyp̥pātu*), suggested meaning (*eccam*), relationship between speaker and audience (*munṇam*), content (*poruḷ*), and

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<sup>413</sup> The colophons of the Caṅkam *akam* poems also follow this organizational system.

<sup>414</sup> This section also includes topics familiar to the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, including the conventions surrounding the *pāṭṭutaittalaivan*, or subject of praise poetry.

scene (*turai*).<sup>415</sup> Nowhere in this framework is there a discussion of chronological arrangement of scenes as is seen in the rules informed by the *kōvai*. Rather, these components provide a guide to the interpretation of a particular utterance within the system of independent dramatic monologues as they are presented by the *Tolkāppiyam*.

Although the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* discusses the material covered by the five chapters of the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* in one integrated chapter (the *Akattinaiyiyal*), otherwise the text closely follows this dual presentation of *akam* poetics. Throughout the sections on Love before Marriage, Marriage and Married Love, as well as the section on Miscellany, the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* follows the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* closely, both in the order and wording of individual verses, even in instances when the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* deviates from the *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>416</sup>

A comparative look at the grammatical verses of the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* and the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* reveals little substantial difference between the overall theory of *akam* presented by the two treatises.<sup>417</sup> Both use the sections on Love before Marriage, Marriage and Love after Marriage to interpret the *akam* tradition in terms of the later *kōvai* framework and both reserve a section for the discussion of the *Tolkāppiyam*'s treatment of *akam* in sections on Miscellany at the end of each treatise.

However, the literary examples used in the commentaries on each treatise reveal a difference in the way each text understands the relationship between the old *akam* system and the later development of the *kōvai* schematic. Throughout its commentary, the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*<sup>418</sup> integrates literary examples from two distinct sources: that of the *akam* poems of the classical corpus identified by Pērācīriyar (expanded to include the *akam* poems of the

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<sup>415</sup> The translation of these terms is approximate, given the different interpretations of the terms throughout the tradition of Tamil poetics. For a more thorough discussion of these terms, see Manuel. The earliest extant grammar on *akam*, the *Iraiyāṇār Akapporuḷ* and its commentary, appear to interpret these *akam* components as commentarial strategies for interpreting a verse. See Buck & Paramasivan 1997: 307-311.

<sup>416</sup> Besides the obvious reworking of the *Tolkāppiyam*'s poetics into the *kōvai* narrative framework, other deviations include the introduction of scenes not found in the *Tolkāppiyam*, such as the first two scenes of “the hero decides to plead for the heroine’s love” (*irantupinṇirarkēṇṇal*) and “the hero pleads for the heroine’s love” (*irantu pinṇilai nirral*), as well as the exclusion of scenes discussed by the *Tolkāppiyam*, such as the scene of love-making (*puṇarcci*).

<sup>417</sup> There are exceptions to this privileging of the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* over the *Tolkāppiyam*; Manuel points out several cases in which the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* opts for the treatment as given by the *Tolkāppiyam*. Manuel, 1997: 189.

<sup>418</sup> Although scholars such as Aravindaṇ (1968:506-509) suggests that the commentary was also composed by Nārkaivirāca Nampī, the invocatory verse that he cites as evidence, in which the author is said to have elaborated on the subject matter, in order to remove confusing, giving the text the name “*Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*” (*akapporuḷ viḷakkam enru atarṅku ōru nāmam pulappaṭuvatu iruḷarp poruḷvirittu eḷutiṇṇaṇ*) does not necessarily indicate that the author composed a separate commentary. Kā. Rā Kōvintarāca Mutaliyar, in his short introduction to the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*, says only that no identifying details are known of the old commentary (Kovintaraja Mutaliyar, 1948, 2001: 5-6).



*Patinenkilkanakku*)<sup>419</sup> and the *Tanjai Vanan Kōvai*, a thirteenth-century *kōvai* poem composed by Poyyāmoḷippulavar (lit. “the poet whose words are free of lies”) in honor of a general in the service of the king Kulacēkara Pāṇṭiyan (1196-1266). Throughout the chapters that describe the chronological scenes of the *kōvai*, including the *Kaḷaviyal*, the *Varaiviyaḷ* and the *Karpiyaḷ*, the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* includes at least one verse from the *Taṅjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai* as well as verses from the early *akam* corpus associated with the Caṅkam tradition.<sup>420</sup>

For example, to illustrate the verse enumerating the ways in which the hero comforts the heroine after their union (*vaṅpuraiyiṅ viri*), the commentary includes seven verses from the *Taṅjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai* as well as poems from the Caṅkam *akam* compilations of the *Kuṟuntokai* and the *Narriṅai*.<sup>421</sup> The commentary on the five ways that the heroine suffers once she is separated from her lover (*pirivuli kalaṅkaliṅ viri*) displays a similar set of examples, drawing from four verses from the *Taṅjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai* as well as poems from the Caṅkam *akam* compilations of the *Ainkurunuru* and the *Narrinai*.<sup>422</sup>

In the commentary on the Chapter on Miscellany, which more closely follows the poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam*, the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary does not include many literary examples, but the several examples that appear are also split between the early *akam* examples and the *Taṅjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai*. In its embedding the *Taṅjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai* within the corpus of “classical” *akam* examples, the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary presents the later *akam* tradition of the *kōvai* as a continuation of the *Tolkāppiyam* *akam* tradition, with no distinction between the two systems. Also, while the rules of the *kōvai* section of the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* theoretically address all *kōvais*, the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* includes only the *Taṅjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai* and makes no mention of the existence of other *kōvais* for which the rules might apply.<sup>423</sup>

The relationship between *akam* poetics as discussed by the *Tolkāppiyam* and the later *kōvai* tradition plays a different role in the commentary on the *Ilakkaṅa Viḷakkam Akattiṅaiyiyal*. In contrast to the commentary on the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*, which integrates the Caṅkam *akam* examples with the *Taṅjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai* throughout the commentary, in the choice of literary examples on the *Akattiṅaiyiyal*, the *Ilakkaṅa Viḷakkam* commentary acknowledges the existence of two related but distinct *akam* traditions, each with its own body of examples.

<sup>419</sup> An early compilation better known for its didactic poetry, including the well-known *Tirukkural*. While Pērāciriyar cites profusely from other collections in the compilation and identifies the compilation by name, he excludes the *akam* poems from his commentary. Possible reasons for such an exclusion are covered in chapter 2.

<sup>420</sup> Although the relationship between the text, the commentary and the literary examples still raises many questions, all extant manuscripts of the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* and its commentary come with the *Tanjai Vanan Kovai* and the “Caṅkam” examples. See M. V. Aravindan, *Uraiyaciriyarkal*. (Citamparam: Manivacakar Nulakam, 1968), p. 508.

<sup>421</sup> The commentary also includes a rare reference to the *Paripāṭal*. Not only is the inclusion of this poem to illustrate *akam* rules unusual, the commentary’s explicit reference to it as a *paripatal* poem raises the question of whether or not it is interpolation. See commentary on *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*, v. 128, p. 73.

<sup>422</sup> Commentary on *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*, v. 133, p. 77-79.

<sup>423</sup> The same is true of the earliest commentary on *kōvai* poetics, Nakkīrar’s seventh-century commentary on the *Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ*, which integrates verses from the *Pantikkovai* with Caṅkam *akam* examples.

In the sections that present akam *kōvai* rules, including the sections on *Kaḷavu*, *Varaivu* and *Karpu*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* commentary, like the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*, includes *kōvai* verses to illustrate this narrative reworking of the akam tradition. However, unlike the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary, which draws exclusively from the *Tanjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* commentary includes *kōvais* produced throughout the Tamil literary tradition, including the ninth-century Shaivite *Tirukkōvaiyar*, the thirteenth-century *Ampikapattikkōvai*, said to have been composed by the son of Kampan, author of the Tamil Ramayana, the seventeenth-century Shaivite *Tiruveṅkaikkōvai*, the sixteenth-century *Tiruppatikkōvai*, composed by the author of a Vaishnavite treatise on akam poetics, the *Mayūrakirikkōvai*, the *Tiruvārūrkkōvai*, the *Maduraikkōvai*, the *Kapparkōvai*,<sup>424</sup> among others. While the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* commentary is also aware of the *Tanjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai* used by the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary, it does not hold a privileged place in the commentary's choice of literary examples. Verses from the Caṅkam akam poems are not absent from the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* commentary but they are few in number, compared to the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary, in which the *Tañcai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai* verses and the Caṅkam akam poems appear in more equal numbers.

The difference in the range of the examples of the two texts is evident in the commentaries on the sixteen stages of the consummation of the love between the hero and heroine. For this verse, the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary provides twenty-five examples, including verses 5-19 of the *Tañcai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai*. The remaining ten examples come from the Caṅkam akam compilations of the *Akananuru*, the *Narrinai*, the *Kuruntokai* and the *Kalittokai* as well as the *Cilappatikaram* and the *Tirukkural*, both considered part of the classical corpus by Pēraciriyar. The *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* shares several of these examples, including the same *Kural* verses and the *Tañcai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai*. However, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* replaces the remainder of the Caṅkam examples used in the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary with other examples from the *kōvai* tradition, including the *Maduraikkōvai*, the *Tirukkōvaiyar* and the *Ampikapattikkōvai*.

For the verse elaborating the ways in which the hero consoles the heroine, for which the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* gives seven verses from the *Tañjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai* as well as poems from the Caṅkam akam compilations of the *Kuruntokai* and the *Narriṇai*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* includes eight *kōvai* verses, including one verse from the *Tañjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai*, five verses from the *Tirukkōvaiyar*, two verses from the *Ampikapattikkōvai* as well as two “Caṅkam” *Kuruntokai* poems. For the five ways that the heroine suffers once she is separated from her lover (*pirivuli kalaṅkaliṅ viri*), illustrated in the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary by four verses from the *Tañjai Vāṇaṅ Kōvai* and the Caṅkam akam poems of the *Ainkurunuru* and the *Narrinai*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* commentary includes three verses from the *Ampikapattikkōvai*, and two verses from the *Tirukkōvaiyar* as well as a verse from the *Ainkurunuru* and the *Tirukkural*.

The literary examples in the commentary on the section that reflects the akam tradition as it is interpreted by the *Tolkāppiyam* looks quite different. In contrast to the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary on this section, which contains minimal examples, divided evenly between the Caṅkam akam compilations of the *Narrinai*, *Akananuru*, *Ainkurunuru* and the *Tanjai Vanan*

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<sup>424</sup>Other than its publication by the UVS library in 1958, I could not find other details about this text.

*Kōvai*,<sup>425</sup> the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* commentary on this section eschews the *kōvai* examples in favor of a range of literary examples, all drawn from the “classical” corpus of Caṅkam poetry.

The difference between the literary examples in the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* and *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* commentaries reflects the different attitudes towards the relationship between the “old” akam poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the later poetics of the *kōvai*. While the literary examples used by the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* help create continuity in the akam tradition, the literary examples used in the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* commentary reveal a division of labor between the two theoretical models. For the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*, verses following the *kōvai* schematic are primarily illustrated with *kōvais*, while verses associated with the *Tolkāppiyam* are illustrated with Caṅkam examples. The *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* recognizes that different literature is associated with different theoretical frameworks with no concern for violation of tradition.

By identifying the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* as the authoritative voice for the section on akam poetics, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* draws on a text that explicitly identifies as part of the *Tolkāppiyam* tradition. Not only does the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* draw on the material of the *Tolkāppiyam* throughout the root text and the commentary, but the introductory verse (*pāyiram*) explicitly implicates the author in the mythical origins of the Tamil literature and grammar. In this verse the author is identified as having followed the content of akam poetics as it was elucidated in the *Tolkāppiyam*, student of Agastya who, at the request of the gods, took the great Vindya mountains in his hand, destroyed their greatness, controlled the raging ocean, and stayed in the (Potiyil) mountain. The author is also described as having read and collected the literature of flawless excellent poets (*ikapparuṅ cāṅrōr ilakkiya nōkkit*), using a term that Peraciryar identifies as referring to the Caṅkam poets.

The third chapter of the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*,<sup>426</sup> the chapter on poetic figure (*āṇi*, Skrt. *alāṅkāra*), also identifies an authoritative treatise for the basis of much of its content and commentary. However, if the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Akattiṇaiyiyal* draws on a text that self-consciously identifies with the tradition of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam poems, the chapter on poetic figure identifies a source clearly outside the *Tolkāppiyam* tradition: that of the twelfth-century *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram*, a Tamil “transcreation”<sup>427</sup> of the seventh-century Sanskrit *Kāyavādarsa*. Both in its subject matter and in its literary examples, the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* is outside the tradition of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the early Tamil poems. Nowhere does the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* discuss the Caṅkam poetics of akam and puṛam, nor does it identify *Tolkāppiyam* as an authority. In fact, the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* does not borrow from any extant Tamil grammatical tradition, but rather covers topics recognizable to the larger pan-Indian *alāṅkāra* tradition, such as the categorization of literary genres into *muttaka*, *kulaka* and *saṅghāta* (the latter replaced in the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* by the divisions of compilation [*tokaiṅilai*] and multi-stanzaic poem

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<sup>425</sup> One section stands out as an exception in the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary. This is the section on “acceptable deviation” (*valu amaiti*) which include Caṅkam poems. part of a larger trend in both the commentaries of the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* and the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* of justifying deviation from grammatical rules by pointing to usage in the early poems.

<sup>426</sup> The second chapter, the chapter on *puṛam* conventions, integrates rules from the tenth-century *puṛam* treatise *Purapporulvenpamalai* with *puṛam* poetics as they are articulated in the *Tolkāppiyam*.

<sup>427</sup> I avoid the word “translation” here because of the significant differences between the two texts.

[*toṭarṇilai*]) the discussion of style (*guṇam*) in terms of the divisions of *vaitarppam* (Skt. *vaidarbha*) and *gaudam* (Skt. *gaudam*), the extensive classification of poetic figures based both on meaning (*poruḷ*, Skrt. *artha*) and sound (*col*, Skrt. *sabda*), and the discussion of poetic flaws (*valu*, Skrt. *doṣa*). The examples, said to have been composed by the author of the treatise, known only as “Taṇṭi the Scholar” (Taṇṭiyācīriyar) after the Sanskrit Dandin, are short four-line verses composed primarily in *veṅpā* meter<sup>428</sup> in honor of the author’s patron, the Chola king Anapayan.<sup>429</sup>

Throughout the *Aṇiyiyal*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* closely follows both the rules and the literary examples of the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*. Just as the *Akattiṇaiyiyal* primarily consisted of quotes from the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam*, the majority of the verses in the *Aṇiyiyal* are direct citations of the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, with minimal to no change in wording. As for literary examples, in contrast to the commentary on the *Akattiṇaiyiyal*, which introduced different examples than those found in the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentary on the same verse, the vast majority of the examples found in the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Aṇiyiyal* reflect the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*’s use of the *veṅpā* poems to King Anapayan. Consistent with the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*’s indifference towards Tamil literature other than these dedicated praise poems, throughout the section of the *Aṇiyiyal* that draws on rules of the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* commentary does not include examples from the *Caṅkam Eṭṭuttokai* or other literature associated with the “classical” tradition.

However, just as the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* reserved a section of the *Akattiṇaiyiyal* to discuss the “old” akam poetic system of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the *Caṅkam* poems alongside the later narrative *kōvai* schematic, the text also dedicates a section of the *Aṇiyiyal* to the ancient grammar’s treatment of poetic figure. This section comes in the discussion of simile (*uvamai*, Skrt. *upamā*), considered by the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* to be the second type of poetic figure based on content (*poruḷ aṇi*). Of all the poetic figures covered by the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, simile is the only figure discussed by the *Tolkāppiyam*, which dedicates the seventh chapter (*Uvamaiyiyal*) of the *Poruḷatikāram* to the treatment of the subject. Just as the *Akattiṇaiyiyal* consolidated the study of akam poetics by including both the akam poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the later poetics of the *kōvai*, here the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* attempts to present the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* and the *Tolkāppiyam* as one integrated approach to simile.

The first verse in the section on simile in the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Aṇiyiyal* addresses this project of assimilation of the two systems. The main content of the verse follows the classification of simile as it is articulated by the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*.<sup>430</sup> According to the first three lines of both *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* verse 31 and *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* verse 267, “That which is called

<sup>428</sup> Several of the examples are in other meters, such as *kali viruttam*, *kalitturai*.

<sup>429</sup> In their sophistication as independent poems and in their distinct status from the grammatical verse which they illustrate, the examples of the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* differ significantly from their Sanskrit counterparts. Scattered references to examples from the *Caṅkam* corpus show up in the later commentary on the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* but we don’t know if they were associated with the original text or added later.

<sup>430</sup> The categorization of simile in this way in the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* is a deviation from the categorization of simile in the *Kāvyādarśa*, in which the author does not give such a general schematic but introduces a typology of similes, including those also covered in a later section of the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*.

simile is the comparison that arises from the juxtaposing of one thing with one or many other things (based on a common property) of nature (*paṅpu*), function (*toḷil*) and/or purpose (*payaṅ*).<sup>431</sup> This three-fold classification of simile is in contrast to the four-fold scheme of the *Tolkāppiyam*, in which the basis of comparison in a simile is divided into function (*viṅai*) purpose (*payaṅ*), color (*uru*) and form (*mey*).

The verse draws attention to the different classificatory schemes at work in the addition of a fourth line absent from the *Taṅṅiyalaṅkāram* verse. This line, which tells the reader to “accept the classification (*tiraṅ*) of simile as (it has been given) by those who are knowledgeable (of the subject)” (*uvamaiyā matanrira muṅarntaṅar koḷal*)” appears gratuitous in a text that primarily borrows verbatim from the verses of the *Taṅṅiyalaṅkāram*. However, by introducing this line, the *Ilakkaṅa Viḷakkam* draws attention to a possible contradiction between the classification of simile in this verse and the classification of simile in the *Tolkāppiyam*, a contradiction that is more explicitly addressed in the commentary on this verse. The commentary begins by identifying these “*uṅarntōr*” as “texts such as the *Tolkāppiyam* which understand these divisions in terms of the (united hypercategory) of ‘simile’, which is then elaborated upon.” (*ataṅ kūrupāṅkaḷellāṅ uvamaiyoṅraṅaiyē virittukkūrun tolkāppiyam mutaliya nūlkaḷāṅ [...]*).<sup>432</sup> The commentary then goes on to resolve any contradictions by saying that “If the reduction of the four categories of function (*viṅai*) purpose (*payaṅ*), color (*uru*) and form (*mey*) (found both in the *Tolkāppiyam* and in the *Ilakkaṅa Viḷakkam Akattiṅaiyiyal*) into these three seems wrong, it is not, because “color” (*uru*) and “form” (*mey*) can both be understood in terms of “nature” (*paṅpu*),” thus eliminating any contradiction between this classification and that found in *Tolkāppiyam*.

In the middle of the commentary on this verse,<sup>433</sup> the commentary introduces related verses on simile found in the *Tolkāppiyam* but absent from the *Taṅṅiyalaṅkāram*, such as a rule that “the object being compared (*poruḷ*, Skrt. *upameya*) and the object to which it is compared

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<sup>431</sup> *Taṅṅiyalaṅkāram* 31

*paṅpun toḷilum payaṅumenṅ rivaṅṅin  
oṅṅum palavum poruḷoṅu poruḷpuṅart  
toppumaḷ tōṅrac ceppuva tuvamaḷ*

*Ilakkaṅa Viḷakkam* 267

*paṅpun toḷilum payaṅumenṅ rivaṅṅin  
oṅṅum palavum poruḷoṅu poruḷpuṅart  
toppumaḷ tōṅrac ceppi ṅatuvē*

The wording of the third line in the *Ilakkaṅa Viḷakkam* is slightly different to accommodate the addition of the fourth line.

<sup>432</sup> Commentary on *Ilakkaṅa Viḷakkam Aṅiyiyal* v. 267, p. 361.

<sup>433</sup> The first part of this commentary is confusing, as the examples in this section are “Caṅkam” examples shared by the *Taṅṅiyalaṅkāram* commentary, which postdates the text. As little is known of the *Taṅṅiyalaṅkāram* commentary, we don’t know whether or not it predates the *Ilakkaṅa Viḷakkam* and which text first introduced these Caṅkam examples, a significant detail in understanding the choice of examples in this section.

(*uvamum*, Skrt. *upamāna*) should match,<sup>434</sup> a rule introducing the creation of similes that highlight the qualities of excellence (*ciṛappu*), virtue (*nalaṅ*) and love (*kātal*) in the upameya,<sup>435</sup> and a rule adding an additional type of simile based on a degraded upameya (*kilakkiṭu poruḷō tātaintu māḱum*).<sup>436</sup>

To illuminate these *Tolkāppiyam* verses, the commentary deviates from its standard inclusion of Taṅṭi's *veṅpā* verses and gives examples from the Caṅkam poems of the *Porunarrupatai*, the *Purananuru*, the *Pattinapalai* as well as several uncited examples. Although the division of labor is not as clear as that in the *Akattiṇaiyiyal* commentary, the commentary on this verse appears to reserve Caṅkam examples for the *Tolkāppiyam* rules while *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* rules are illustrated by *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* examples.

This division of labor between the *Tolkāppiyam* and the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* is even more evident in the commentary on the next two verses on simile. The next verse, which catalogues types of simile, is a more detailed version of *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* verses 32 and 33, providing more substantial descriptions of the same types of simile in the same order.<sup>437</sup> Consistent with the rest of the *Aniyiyal*, the literary examples used in this section are Aṅapayaṅ *veṅpā* examples drawn from the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram*.<sup>438</sup>

The subsequent verse, however, returns to the *Tolkāppiyam* in its list of particles that indicate comparison (*uvamai urupu*). Although the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* includes its own list of such particles, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* draws not on the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram*, but on the list provided by *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>439</sup> Consistent with the association of the rules of the *Tolkāppiyam* with early literature, twenty-two of the approximately fifty verses used in the commentary on this verse are drawn from the early compilations, including the *Ainkurunuru*, the *Akananuru*, the *Kalittokai*, the *Purananuru*, the *Murugarrupatai*, and the *Malaipatukatam*, providing a veritable illustration of the Caṅkam corpus given by Pērācīriyar.

At first glance, this apportioning of literary examples in the *Aniyiyal* appears to reflect that of the *Akattiṇaiyiyal*, which recognized two theoretical systems for akam, each with its own corpus of relevant examples. Whenever a *Tolkāppiyam* rule is invoked, the commentary eschews

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<sup>434</sup> According to the commentary, this verse implies that there are acceptable and unacceptable uses of simile. For example, one can say “hair like a peacock’s tail” (*mayiṛrokaipōlum kūntal*) but can’t say “hair as black as a crow’s feathers” (*kāḱkaic ciṛakaṅṅa karumayir*) and one can say “he leapt like a tiger” (*pulipōlap pāyntāṅ*) but can’t say “he leapt like a cat” (*pūcai pōlap pāyntāṅ*). (Commentary on *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* 267, p. 362)

<sup>435</sup> Like much of the *Tolkāppiyam Uvamaiyiyal*, this verse applies specifically to the use of simile in *akam* poetics, in particular the description of the characters of the hero and heroine.

<sup>436</sup> *Tolkāppiyam* v. 280.

<sup>437</sup> The *Tolkāppiyam* includes no such list, which explains the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*’s return to the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* for this verse.

<sup>438</sup> The exceptions appear in sections on grammatical deviations justified by use of the *Tolkāppiyam* verses and the Caṅkam poems. See fn 408, this chapter.

<sup>439</sup> The list given in the first verse of the Chapter on Simile differs from the list in the internal verses. The *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* draws on the list given in the internal verses.

the examples associated with the later rules of the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* in favor of an example from the classical corpus. However, a look at the uncited examples included in the commentary on this verse reveals a different logic behind the association of the Caṅkam poems with the *Tolkāppiyam*-based rules. Of the twenty-eight uncited examples, all but three come from the commentaries of Pērācīriyar and Ilampuranar on the original verse in the *Tolkāppiyam*. This borrowing from the *Tolkāppiyam* commentators is not limited to the uncited examples; the “classical” examples also come from Pērācīriyar’s commentary on the same section.

As such, in contrast to the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Akattiṇaiyiyal* commentary, which introduced new examples to *supplant* those given by the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* commentator, the *Aniyiyal* commentary adheres to the examples traditionally associated with a particular verse, whether it is the Anapayan *venpā* examples of the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram*, or the examples (Caṅkam and otherwise) provided by the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries. In its division of labor between examples, the *Aniyiyal* commentary is not so much a commentary on the scope of certain rules as it is a reflection of the way these grammatical rules were passed on from teacher to student, embedded in authoritative commentaries associated with specific literary examples.

Although the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* acknowledges both the rules and examples of the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram* as an authoritative voice on poetic figure, the *Aniyiyal* explicitly situates this introduction of material from the later Tamil tradition within the larger theoretical framework of the *Tolkāppiyam*, associating the entire study of poetic figure with the akam and puṇam poetics of the early grammar. The first verse of the Chapter on Poetic Figure defines poetic figure (*aṇi*) as “the elucidation of meaning (*poruḷ pulappatuppatu*),”<sup>440</sup> defined by the commentary as the conventions of akam and puṇam discussed earlier in the treatise. This announcement of the relationship between *ani* and *porul* stands in contrast to the beginning of the *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram*, which launches into an exposition of literary genres after the invocatory verse which announces that the author “will discuss poetic ornament (*aṇi*) after meditation on Sarasvati’s feet.” Despite its origins in the Sanskrit *alaṅkāra* tradition articulated by Dandin, the study of poetic figure is not considered by the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* to be outside the Tamil tradition, but rather is part of a consolidated vision of Tamil poetics, integrated through the framework of the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam*.

In both the *Akattiṇaiyiyal* and the *Aniyiyal*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* and its commentary consolidate the Tamil tradition of akam poetics and poetic figure through the integration of an authoritative later treatise with the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam*. Whether as an illustration of the division of labor of two theoretical systems or as a standard corpus of examples associated with a particular verse, the literary examples reflect the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*’s acknowledgement of the important role played by both the classical literature associated with the Caṅkam corpus as well as literature from later Tamil traditions.

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<sup>440</sup> The entire verse stipulates that this elucidation of meaning is done through (*kuṇam*) and poetic ornament (*alaṅkāra*). Neither the definition of *kuṇam* nor the distinction between *aṇi* and *alankara* is made clear in the verse or the commentary.

*Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Aniyiyal* v. 1, p. 349.  
*aṇiyēṇap paṭuvatu tuṇipurak kiḷappiṇ*  
*kuṇamalaṅ kāra meṇaviru tiṇattār*  
*poruḷpulap paṭuppa teṇmaṇār pulavar*

In its theorizing of both *akam* conventions and of poetic figures, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* draws on the *Tolkāppiyam* when possible,<sup>441</sup> apportioning topics outside the purview of the ancient grammar to the later treatises of the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* and the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* respectively.<sup>442</sup> This strategy of reconciling the old poetic system with new literary developments acknowledges the role played by new grammars in the Tamil tradition while still recognizing the importance of the older text. Because both *akam* conventions and poetic figures are covered in some capacity by the *Tolkāppiyam*, such a reconciliation can happen with minimal commentarial contrivance.

However, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* must adopt a different strategy in the last chapter, the chapter on *pāṭṭiyals*, which introduces a theoretical system entirely outside the domain of the *Tolkāppiyam*. This chapter, as its name suggests, treats the subject matter common to the *pāṭṭiyal* genre of literary theory, including the “*poruttam*” system of investing the first word of a poem with the benedictory power as well as a catalogue of multi-stanzaic praise genres (*prabandhams*).<sup>443</sup> The *pāṭṭiyal* chapter also includes a discussion of the benefits of the reciting and hearing such poems, as well as a description of the court, the poet, etc. Unlike the *Akattinaiyal* and the *Aniyiyal*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Pāṭṭiyal* does not defer to one authoritative treatise, but is rather a presentation of general *pāṭṭiyal* rules, perhaps because *pāṭṭiyals* were still a productive genre of grammar in the seventeenth century. While these subjects are foreign to the *Tolkāppiyam*, they are familiar to anyone trained in the *pāṭṭiyal* poetic system.

In contrast to the *Akattinaiyiyal* and the *Aniyiyal*, in which an overlap in subjects covered by the *Tolkāppiyam* and the later grammars of the *Akapporuḷ Viḷakkam* and the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* allowed for a graceful integration of the old and the new systems, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*’s attempt to suggest continuity between the two disparate traditions of the poetic system of the *pāṭṭiyals* and the poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam* is more forced. The *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* integrates the two through an extended discussion of the term “*pāṭṭu*” (poem, song). Although the term appears in Caṅkam literature as well as in the titles of the long poems of the *Kurincipāṭṭu* (lit. “Song in the Kuriñci Mode”) and the Caṅkam compilation of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* (lit. “the Ten Poems”) the term is not frequently used in the *Tolkāppiyam*. Throughout the *Tolkāppiyam*, the

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<sup>441</sup> However, in its inclusion of the *Tolkāppiyam*’s discussion of simile, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* leaves out an important feature of the role of simile in the ancient grammar: the *Tolkāppiyam*’s explicit association of the poetic figure with the conventions of *akam* poetry. Seven of the thirty-five verses in the *Tolkāppiyam*’s *Uvamaiyiyal* are identified with *akam* poetics, either in their relationship with a particular character from the *akam* mode (heroine, hero, etc.) or in their connection with the poetic technique of suggestion (*uḷḷurai*) central to early *akam* poetics. The section on simile in the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* neither includes nor refers to this emphasis in the ancient grammar.

<sup>442</sup> While a detailed study of the fourth chapter, the chapter on metrics (*ceyyuḷiyal*), is outside the scope of this project, the strategy employed by the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* resembles the chapters discussed so far. In this case, it is the tradition of the *Yāpparuṅkalam* and the *Yāpparuṅkalakkarikai*, with its new metrical classification of the subcategories of *pā* and *iṇam*, that provide the authoritative “later” text to be integrated with the *Tolkāppiyam*.

<sup>443</sup> See previous two chapters for extended discussion of this poetic system. Identified here alternately as *toṭarnilai ceyyuḷ*, *akalakkavi* and *vittārakkavi*.



term “*ceyyu!*” (that which is made) is the general term used to refer to literature.<sup>444</sup> However, in a verse that introduces the seven literary genres (*eḷu nilam*), the *Tolkāppiyam* includes the term *pāṭṭu* as a genre that has metrical limitations (*aṭi aḷavu*)<sup>445</sup> in contrast to the genres of treatise (*nūl*) commentary (*urai*), riddle (*pici*), proverb (*mutumolī*), mantra (*mantiram*) and (poems made of?) suggested language (*kurippumolī*).<sup>446</sup>

The *pāṭṭiyal* grammars, on the other hand, as their name suggests, are entirely dedicated to the discussion of the nature (*iyal*) of *pāṭṭu*. However, despite the central position of the term across the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, the *pāṭṭiyal* treatises include no definition of *pāṭṭu*, and use alternate terms (*kavi*, *iṇam*, *prabandham*) in their discussion of literature.<sup>447</sup>

In spite of<sup>448</sup> the lack of a clear definition of this literary category in either the *Tolkāppiyam* or the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* combines these two under-theorized uses of the term “*pāṭṭu*” in order to integrate two poetic systems that have historically shared little in common. The first verse of the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Pāṭṭiyal*, which discusses the subject matter to be covered in this chapter, reflects this attempt to consolidate the two interpretations of the term. The first half of the verse introduces seven “remaining topics of grammar (that which were not covered in the previous chapters), including the nature of *pāṭṭu*, which is made with *māttirai* etc.<sup>449</sup> and put together sweetly, the nature of a treatise (*nūl*); the nature of commentary (*urai*); the nature of riddle (*pici*); the nature of proverb (*mutuol*); the nature of mantra (*mantiram*) and the nature of (poems? made of suggested language) (*kurippurai*). In its understanding of *pāṭṭu* in this section of this verse, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* draws directly from the *Tolkāppiyam*’s interpretation of the term in the verse on the seven genres mentioned above. However, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* verse does not end there, but introduces a second set of topics to be discussed by the chapter, including the nature of two types of tradition (*marapu*)<sup>450</sup> the nature

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<sup>444</sup> As in *Ceyyūḷiyal*, the Chapter on Poetics. The term is often juxtaposed with *vaḷakku*, or “colloquial usage.” Both the *Tolkāppiyam* and the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* claim to discuss both *vaḷakku* and *ceyyu!*, although the meanings of these terms are not clear in either text. A history of the significance of these terms and their place in Tamil theorizing about language and literature warrants further investigation.

<sup>445</sup> Although *aṭi aḷavu* literally means “line limit,” the term refers to rules surrounding meter.

<sup>446</sup> As the ambiguity of these terms suggests, the discussion of genre in the *Tolkāppiyam* is problematic. For one thing, this list differs somewhat from an earlier verse which replaces *kurippumolī* and *mantiram* with the genres of satire (*aṅkatam*) and true utterance (*vāymolī*). Although the list is understood by later commentators to refer to literary genres, the original meanings may also have referred to different uses of language within a poem. How *pāṭṭu* fits into this schematic, however, is not clear. However, although the literature referred to in this section of the *Tolkāppiyam* is not entirely clear, the list endures in the grammatical tradition, also showing up in the *Yāpparuṅkala*’ commentary.

<sup>447</sup> Although the term persists in marginal discussions in later grammars, it is not the preferred term for literature. However, the patron is consistently referred to as *pāṭṭutaittalaivan*, or hero inside a poem.

<sup>448</sup> or because of?

<sup>449</sup> Probably a reference to the poetic components (*uṟuppus*) discussed both by *Tolkāppiyam* and by the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Ceyyūḷiyal*.

<sup>450</sup> The commentary specifies that this refers to the tradition of poetic and colloquial language.

of caste (*varuṇam*); the nature of poets (*pulavar*); the nature of the courtly assembly; the nature of those who recite (compose?) (*koṭuppōr*) multi-stanzaic praise poetry (*akalakkavi*); and the nature of those who hear (*koḷvōr*) multi-stanzaic praise poetry (*akalakkavi*).<sup>451</sup> This second set of topics is drawn not from the *Tolkāppiyam* but rather from the theorization of multi-stanzaic praise poetry (*akalakkavi*, *prabandham*) in the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition.<sup>452</sup> As the commentary on this verses makes explicit, the justification of juxtaposing such seemingly unrelated subjects is in the interpretation of the term *pāṭṭu* as *akalakkavi*, an interpretive shift which explains the introduction of the latter topics. Not only does the interpretation of the term *pāṭṭu* as *akalakkavi* enable the introduction of the *pāṭṭiyal* poetics in this chapter, but in an interpretive sleight of hand, it allows for a theoretical model in which the rules for *akam* and *puṇam* also apply to *prabandham* literature.

If *pāṭṭu* is interpreted as *prabandham* literature in the first verse of the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*, the term is used in a different context in the second verse, which defines *pāṭṭu* more generally as “that which is made with the poetic component of metrical rhythm (*ōcai*)<sup>453</sup> brought about by meter in the cool Tamil land” (*pāṭṭenap paṭuvatu pāintamiḷ nāṭṭakatt tiyāppurac ceypā vuruppeḷun ticaikkum*)<sup>454</sup> This definition appears to return to the *Tolkāppiyam*’s emphasis on meter in the understanding of the term, a speculation encouraged by the fact that the commentator borrows from Pērācīriyar in this section. The third verse returns to the *pāṭṭiyal* poetics to introduce yet another definition, in which the term includes all four of the literary hypergenres identified by the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, including not only *prabandham*, but also improvised poems (*ācu*), sweet poems (*matura*) and poems that emphasize verbal and visual manipulation (*cittira*). This contradictory usage of the word as a general term for metrical poetry as is suggested by the *Tolkāppiyam*, a term for literature as articulated by the *pāṭṭiyals* and a term for the specific category of *prabandham* literature is not addressed by the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* or its commentary, nor is the question of how literature outside the *pāṭṭiyal* paradigm fits into this new definition of the term. And, as the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition does not include the use of literary examples to illustrate the verses, no corpus of commentarial examples helps resolve this problem.

Rather, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* appears to use the term to synthesize the definition in the *Tolkāppiyam* with the definition(s) in the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, an attempt that causes more confusion than clarification. In fact, the commentary justifies this shift in emphasis to *prabandham* literature by claiming that the *prabandham* hypergenre was in fact first introduced by the *Tolkāppiyam*. To make this claim, the commentary includes a verse from the *Tolkāppiyam*

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<sup>451</sup> *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Pāṭṭiyal*, v. 1, p. 1.

<sup>452</sup> For an extended discussion of the *prabandhams* and the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, see Chapters 3 & 4.

<sup>453</sup> This interpretation comes from the commentary on this verse. See commentary on *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Pāṭṭiyal*, v. 3, p. 2.

<sup>454</sup> *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam Pāṭṭiyal*, v. 3, p. 2.

that mentions the *prabandham* genre *ārruppaṭai*<sup>455</sup> as well as two verses on the construction of meaning (*māṭṭu*) that the commentary suggests refers to the composition of multi-stanzaic literature despite the ambiguity of the original meaning in the *Tolkāppiyam*.<sup>456</sup>

As for the *poruttam* system central to *pāṭṭiyal* poetics, in which the first word of a poem is endowed with benedictory powers, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* reinterprets this concept in terms familiar to the poetics of the *Tolkāppiyam*, more specifically the akam tradition. In verse 9 of the *Pāṭṭiyal*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* deviates from the standard interpretation of “*poruttam*” to a more general sense of the word as “match” between the heroine and the man she loves. According to the verse, “the (poet) must preserve the ten *poruttams* between the heroine of the *virittapā* and the man she loves” (*virittapā makaṭkum vēṭkum iraikkum poruttam īraintum pōrral vēṇṭum*).<sup>457</sup> Within the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, the ten *poruttams* are conventionally understood as qualities of the first word of a poem that match the name of the poem’s patron. However, here the *poruttams* refer to the qualities that make an appropriate match between the hero and the heroine, including their age, social standing, etc. However, after this attempt to make the *poruttam* system relevant to the *Tolkāppiyam*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* goes on to elaborate on the *poruttam* system as it is understood in the conventional *pāṭṭiyals*.<sup>458</sup>

Whether in the discussion of akam poetics, poetic figure, or the poetic system of the *pāṭṭiyals*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* consolidates the major developments in Tamil poetics through

<sup>455</sup> This verse does not actually belong to the *Poruḷatikāram*, but is the penultimate verse of the *Collatikāram* (Book of Phonology) of the *Tolkāppiyam*. The placement of this verse in the *Collatikāram* is unclear and may suggest an interpolation.

*Collatikāram* v 66

muṇṇilai cuṭṭiya orumaik kiḷavi  
paṇmaiyoṭu muṭiyiṇum varainilai yiṇṇē  
ārruppaṭai maruṅkiṇ pōrral vēṇṭum

<sup>456</sup> *Tolkāppiyam Ceyyūḷiyal* 218 and 219 discuss *māṭṭu*, one of the *uruppus* listed in the first verse of the *Ceyyūḷiyal*.

Verse 218 defines *māṭṭu* as a way of making and interpreting meaning in which the words of a poem are construed to make meaning, regardless of whether or not those words are spread apart or close to one another. In an unusual use of the term *pāṭṭu*, this verse identifies *māṭṭu* as pertaining to the nature of *pāṭṭu*.

akanruporuḷ kiṭappiṇu maṇukiya nilaiyiṇum  
iyaṇruporuḷ muṭiyat tantaṇa ruṇarttal  
māṭṭeṇa molipa pāṭṭiyal vaḷakkiṇ.

The following verse, which includes the term “multistanzaic” (*toṭarnilai*) adds that *māṭṭu* is not necessary for the composition of such a poem. It is not clear what the *Tolkāppiyam* refers to here.

The commentator also includes *Tolkāppiyam Puṇattinaiyiyal* 87 (*tāvi ṇallicai karutiya kiṭantōrkku*) which lists types of poetry associated with the category of eulogy (*pāṭāṇ*). As I have mentioned in other sections of this dissertation, both the verses and the commentary on this section are not clear, although the commentators appear to interpret this section as part of the same category of courtly praise poem as the *vāḷṭtu*, discussed in Chapter 4. As such, it would not be surprising that the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* commentary also interprets this verse as a discussion of *prabandham* literature.

<sup>457</sup> The verse replaces the more typical terms of *talaivaṇ* and *talaivi* with *makaḷ* and *irai*.

<sup>458</sup> Additionally, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* itself follows the injunction of the *pāṭṭiyals* in its choice of a first syllable.

the integration of an authoritative later treatise with the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam*. In its acknowledgement of poetic conventions outside the purview of the *Tolkāppiyam*, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* differs from Pērācīriyar’s rejection of later developments on account of their threat to the Tamil tradition. As for the origins of Tamil literature and the Caṅkam past, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* is mainly silent. While the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* contains one mention of Agastya as belonging to the first Caṅkam (*talaiccaṅkattār*) he does not give more details of the Caṅkam story, nor does he mention the mythical scholar in his definition of a primary treatise (*mutal nūl*). Furthermore, he includes verses attributed to a real grammarian Agastya that appear in the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* commentary. In this case, his mention of Agastya as belonging to the Caṅkam may be more of a reflection of his borrowing from a section of Pērācīriyar’s commentary, rather than a reflection on the Tamil past.

However, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*’s insistence on maintaining a privileged place for the *Tolkāppiyam* both in the inclusion of its poetic systems as well as in the adoption of its structure distinguishes the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* project from that of the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti*, where various conflicting traditions were presented with no attempt at an integrated coherent system for Tamil literature. While a detailed study of the shift in South Indian literary culture that produced the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* is a topic for future research, the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* reflects a new approach to the Tamil tradition in which the primary concern animating theoretical production is the desire for a theory of literature that can accommodate rules on language and diverse branches of literary theory in the service of literature from throughout the Tamil literary universe.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> As I argue in Chapter 1, the difference between the strategies adopted by the commentaries of Pērācīriyar and the *Yāpparuṅkalam Virutti* can be understood in terms of a larger network of sectarian scholarly approaches to the Tamil language and literary tradition. How do we understand the project of consolidation of the Tamil tradition effected by the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*? While a detailed answer to this question warrants further investigation, including a more thorough understanding of the relationship to other forms of theoretical production during this period, especially the other major Tamil grammars of the seventeenth century, the *Pirayōka Vivēkam* and the *Ilakkaṇa Kottu*, as well as the prolific tradition of Sanskrit scholarship produced in South India during this time. What we do know is that although the author of the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* is clearly identified with the Shaivite tradition, Shaivite scholarship of the seventeenth century is no longer identified with anxiety over a monolithic interpretation of the Tamil tradition, along with a origin story and one authoritative text. Rather, the two other major Tamil Shaivite grammars of the seventeenth century reflect a very different approach to the Tamil tradition, one in which Tamil is interpreted within the Sanskrit grammatical system. Both the seventeenth-century grammars of the *Pirayōka Vivēkam* and the *Ilakkaṇa Kottu* reflect helaim that Tamil and Sanskrit share the same grammar. The organization of both texts reflect this emphasis on Sanskrit.

Although the exigencies of contemporary Tamil scholarship may pit the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* and the *Ilakkaṇa Kottu* against one another as examples of Tamil versus Sanskrit approaches to the Tamil tradition, the relationship between these two authors seems to have been one of respectful dialogue, rather than hostile defense of a particular way of thinking about Tamil. In the seventeenth century, in contrast to the thirteenth century in which Pērācīriyar was writing his commentary, there appears to have been a space for dissenting perspectives on the Tamil tradition.

## Conclusion

Beginning with the nineteenth-century “discovery” of the Caṅkam poems, thought to have disappeared from Tamil scholarship after the composition of the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*, we enter more familiar territory in the history of the Tamil literary tradition. By the middle of the twentieth century, discourse on poetic figure and meter were replaced by a literary criticism informed by the analytical frameworks of literary histories and liberal humanistic inquiry. Although the texts featured in this dissertation continued to be printed well into the twentieth century, given the lack of serious scholarly interest in their content, this appears to have been more of a symbolic act than a sign of their continued relevance.<sup>460</sup>

However, in contrast to the almost complete disappearance of premodern Tamil intellectual history from twentieth-century Tamil scholarship, the classical literary past continues to occupy a central position in Tamil culture. In June 2010, the State Government of Tamil Nadu spent over eighty million dollars<sup>461</sup> on a World Classical Tamil Conference, meant both to celebrate the establishing of Tamil as a classical language by the Indian Government in 2004 and the imminent retiring of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Karunanidhi, himself a poet and Tamil scholar. Part cultural showcase, part ceremony for the worship of Tamil, part demonstration of political will, the conference drew scholars from around the world to discuss titles such as *Ancient Tamil Moral Literature* and *Was the Indus Valley Script Dravidian?*. Hundreds of thousands of people, including the president of India himself, attended the event, which was also televised around the world. The Tamil composer A R Rahman, better known for his work on Bollywood movie scores as well as the Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire*, composed a theme song, students and government workers were granted a holiday, and commemorative postcards were distributed as souvenirs. The spirit was festive, and after all, there was reason to celebrate: with the establishing of Tamil as a classical language, the government poured money into a new Center of Excellence for Classical Tamil, with opportunities for seminars, awards for Tamil scholars and fellowships for both Indian and international students. Throughout the week, the visitor was awestruck by the antiquity of the Tamil past and inspired to conduct further research on these materials. In an intellectual climate such as South India, where the humanities are under a greater level of threat than even in the West, seen as the best option for a student failing at more lucrative degrees, such support of literary study, and in particular premodern literary study, appears like a beacon of a new era of Tamil intellectual life.

In many ways, the cultural and political conditions that gave birth to such an event share key characteristics with those which produced the treatises and commentaries on poetics

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<sup>460</sup> As examples of the antiquity and excellence of Tamil intellectual culture, the commentaries of Pērācīriyar and Naccinarkkiniyar are celebrated for their scholarly prowess, although the little scholarship that exists on these commentators rarely extends beyond brief attempts at situating them in Tamil literary histories, much of it speculative. Scholarship on the *Virutti* commentary is even more limited, and despite scholarly appreciation of the vast literary corpus included in the examples of the *Virutti*, I was unable to find one scholar who had read through these poetic examples. As for the pāṭṭiyals and the *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam*, they have become rarefied knowledge.

<sup>461</sup> As reported by Delhi-based news conglomerate NDTV.

discussed by this dissertation. Both periods witnessed a rash of new ideas about the literary, many of them derived from sophisticated traditions in the translocal languages of English and Sanskrit respectively. Both periods saw considerable centralized political support for Tamil as well as support for scholarly production originating from a range of sectarian and caste communities. And as a result of this introduction of new literary and language developments, the “classical” becomes a central concept around which debates over authenticity and language identity can be framed in both cultural milieux.

However, with the erasure of the Tamil intellectual tradition, the Tamil literary world has erased a distinguishing feature of premodern Tamil literary culture. Contemporary support of classical Tamil masks a radically conservative intellectual culture, in which innovation, both in literary production and scholarship, is carefully managed, even censored, to reflect continuity with the ancient tradition. In contrast to the long history of multilingual scholarship in Tamil, today the Tamil scholar is predominantly monolingual, and in fact the study of comparative language and literary traditions, especially Sanskrit, with its association with Brahmins and the hegemonic "North," is discouraged. As this dissertation has pointed out, while there has arguably never been a time in Tamil scholarship when the influence of the classical past was completely absent, there have always been a range of approaches to the role of this corpus and its conventions in the definition of the Tamil literary tradition. Not only that, but if the intertextuality in the commentaries is any indication, there was an expectation of scholars to engage with different theoretical views, both those influenced by Tamil and those in Sanskrit and other languages.

The first chapter of this dissertation looked closely at these debates in Pērācīriyar’s thirteenth-century commentary on the section of poetics in the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam* and the eleventh century *Virutti* commentary on the metrical text, the *Yāpparuṅkalam*. By exclusively associating the rules of the *Tolkāppiyam* with a canon of literature identified with the divine origins of Tamil, Pērācīriyar contradicts his understanding of language and literature as capable of historical change. This chapter argues that this contradiction comes from his response to what he saw as the threat of multiple interpretive traditions to the authoritative status of the ancient grammar. Although Pērācīriyar represents the most conservative approach among Tamil theoreticians of the eighth through fourteenth centuries, even he acknowledges alternative scholarly perspectives throughout his commentary, if ultimately to reject those approaches. If Pērācīriyar introduces dissenting perspectives as part of a rhetorical strategy to support his own canonizing project, the *Virutti* commentator includes a greater range of interpretative approaches, with no judgement of hierarchy. For the *Virutti* commentator, the Tamil tradition is characterized not by its association with an authoritative school of thought, legitimized by an ancient grammar and a literary canon, but is rather informed by a range of diverse traditions, including those originating in other Indian language and literary traditions, none more legitimate than another. The first chapter provides a comparative analysis of these different approaches to the role of the classical past in the definition of the Tamil tradition and tries to situate these differences in larger sectarian approaches to literary scholarship of this period.

If Pērācīriyar participates in a group of scholars investing in controlling the interpretation of the ancient poems, the *Virutti* commentary opens up the classical conventions to new expressive possibilities. The second chapter looks at a set of literary examples in the *Virutti*

commentary that draw from the highly conventional system of the *akam* genre of poetry (poetry of love and domestic life) central to the classical Caṅkam poems and the *Tolkāppiyam*. Although these new “*akam*” articulations retain imagery and syntax and style recognizable from the early *akam* poems, they replace the poetic logic of the old poems, in which the conventions serve to elicit complex layers of suggested meaning, with new aesthetic priorities that emphasize alliteration and word play. These experiments with *akam* poetics, many of which were shared across the Tamil literary theoretical world, call into question the boundaries of the *akam* genre and highlight the different use of literary language between the Caṅkam poems and later Tamil literary culture.

At the same time that the *Virutti* commentary was experimenting with different applications of the *akam* conventions, the *akam* genre underwent a powerful transformation, one that, unlike the *Virutti* examples, would define the genre for the next thousand years. In this paradigm, the short vignettes of the early *akam* corpus are reorganized into a chronological narrative in which every stanza praises the royal or divine patron of the poem. In this transformation, the *akam* genre participates in a larger shift in Tamil poetics towards a system in which all literature is theorized in terms of its capacity to praise in multiple stanzas. This new poetics of praise is the subject of the third chapter, which looks at the earliest theoretical articulations of this new paradigm, the *Pañṇiru Pāṭṭiyal* and the *Veṅpā Pāṭṭiyal*. In these treatises, the concerns over authenticity and antiquity of the Tamil tradition are replaced by a poetics in which not only are Tamil literary genres theorized as ideal vehicles of praise, but the power of Tamil language is seen as capable of magical effect on the patron of the poem.

On first glance, the tradition of the *pāṭṭiyals*, though contemporaneous with the commentaries of the *Virutti* and Pērācīriyar, does not appear to participate in the same literary world. However, as the fourth chapter demonstrates, the shift towards praise poetry in Tamil literary culture permeates even the conservative commentaries on the *Tolkāppiyam* with their rejection of contemporary literary developments. The fourth chapter looks at the ways in which the *Tolkāppiyam* commentaries attempt to accommodate praise poetry without violating the interpretive rules of the ancient grammar.

Despite the recognition of the existence of discourse on a range of topics relating to Tamil literature, Tamil treatises and commentaries produced between the eighth and the fourteenth century were produced as specialized knowledge on one field. This specialization of knowledge was replaced in the seventeenth century by attempts at an integrated theory of Tamil literature that incorporated the major theories of language with the various fields of literary theory, including theories of meter, *alaṅkāra* and genre. The last chapter focuses on the first of such integrated treatises, the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* and its auto-commentary, which borrows from theories of literature in the commentaries of both Pērācīriyar and the *Virutti* as well as from the praise poetics of the *pāṭṭiyals* and the *alaṅkāra* theory of the twelfth century *Taṅṭiyalaṅkāram*. Although the *Ilakkāṇa Viḷakkam* introduces a range of new conceptual frameworks into its formulation of Tamil poetics, throughout the text and its commentary it attempts to integrate these developments with the conventions of the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Caṅkam poems. The reconciliation of theoretical positions seen as antithetical at the time of their composition reveals the ways in which perspectives seen as innovative themselves become representative of tradition in a new cultural context that does not share the same anxiety about the past.

The scope of this project necessitates leaving many important questions unanswered. None of the treatises in this study have received significant scholarly attention in Tamil, let alone in English, and there are even fewer translations to facilitate work across languages. The relationship between these texts and the South Indian tradition of Sanskrit scholarship has only begun to be explored, let alone the relationship between Tamil scholarship and other South Indian languages such as Kannada, Telugu or Malayalam. Tamil literary culture of the seventeenth century and its relationship to the development of the Shaivite mutt as center of scholarly production is a subject virtually unexplored.

However, my choice to present such a wide range of theoretical treatises highlights the multiplicity of interpretations of the Tamil tradition, a multiplicity that challenges the tyranny born of language nationalism. Such an emphasis on the complexity of the relationships between various language and literary traditions in premodern South India also highlights the limitations of Pollock's brilliant but highly problematic formulation of the development of South and Southeast literary culture. On the one hand, Pollock highlights aspects of literary development in Tamil that accurately reflect what he identifies as the vernacularization process, in which Tamil replaces Sanskrit as the language that articulated royal power, from inscriptional poetry to the poetics of praise discussed in this dissertation.<sup>462</sup>

However, in Pollock's definition of the vernacular as the creation of a local literature "according to models supplied by a superordinate, usually cosmopolitan, literary culture," he ignores a wide body of literature that challenges his thesis, choosing instead to focus on the development of Kannada literature, which illustrates this process beautifully.<sup>463</sup> While such appropriation occurs in Tamil, Pollock's emphasis on these texts ignores the complexity of cultural production during this period, flattening it to fit his argument. As this dissertation demonstrates, on topics ranging from poetic ornament (*alaṅkāra*) to the theorizing of magical language to literary genre, Tamil treatises produced during the time of Pollock's "vernacular revolution" were overwhelmingly characterized by their complex and often confounding integration of theories of language and literature derived from both Sanskrit and Tamil, as well as from language traditions which we have not yet begun to understand.

Pollock's failure to seriously consider and collaborate with Tamil scholars prevents him from asking the more interesting questions of choice introduced by this dissertation: why were

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<sup>462</sup> Pallava inscriptions reveal that until the Chola period, Tamil functioned only as a documentary language, while Sanskrit performed the duty of representation. Like the other vernacular languages that Pollock details, the literarization of Tamil in the inscriptions begins around 1000 C.E., when Tamil begins to replace Sanskrit in the prasastis. This "new" function of Tamil is accompanied by new forms of literature that support Pollock's thesis: the 9th century Mahabharata by Peruntevanar, and the 12th century Kamparmanayam. These new literatures, along with the grammatical and commentarial works of the period, participate in the phenomenon Pollock calls "territorialization", whereby Tamil culture is demarcated and localized using cosmopolitan models. See Pollock 2006 for the most detailed treatment of the subject.

<sup>463</sup> The first text on Kannada poetics, the 9th century *Kavirajamargam*, states such a purpose: to define, based on scraps of available Kannada literary material, a Kannada literature of Place informed by the cosmopolitan Way. This definition, which explicitly incorporates Sanskritic sources in its deliberate use of the terms "Place" and "Way", generates a local literature that also claims cosmopolitan status within a delimited area.



certain Sanskritic categories adopted, while others were rejected in lieu of alternative understandings of the literary? Although he frames his theory in terms of the significance of choice (the choice of the Śakas to use Sanskrit in an entirely new way), he fails to acknowledge literary systems that may have competed with Sanskrit.

By providing a comparative look at approaches to interpreting the Tamil literary tradition, this dissertation hopes to challenge the myopia of the literary critical vantage points of contemporary scholarship on world literature (both from the Euro-American perspective and from the perspective of the Sanskrit scholar) and bring attention to the important role played by comparative literary theory - both the intentional articulations of how to read, what to read and the benefits of proper reading as well as the unintentional but equally important cultural work of such theorization - in our approach both to the study of South Asian literature and to the study of world literature more generally.

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