

# Myth *versus* concocted empiricist histories

David Shulman's reconstruction of the history of Tamil Caṅkam Poetry

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## *Introduction*

The title of this review of David Shulman's *Tamil. A Biography* (2016) has been borrowed from Shulman himself.<sup>1</sup> When reading this biography it does not take long to find out on which side the author stands. Though not a historian by profession, I feel obliged to take up the challenge, not to put forward once again my own arguments for a late date of Caṅkam poetry – doing so is unnecessary, especially as shortly a reprinted edition of my book on that topic will appear with Manohar Publishers in Delhi – but primarily to show that by basing oneself on myths, which by their nature are “false” (Plato), one creates only other unverifiable myths.

In his *Biography*, which covers Tamil literature from its beginning to the modern period, David Shulman could of course not avoid the question of the dating of the earliest literary corpus in this language, the so-called Caṅkam poems. Caṅkam poetry had been dated roughly between the third century BC and the third century AD. It must in any case hail from the period before the sixth century, when the Pallavas entered upon the scene in the south, a dynasty which does not play any role of importance in the poems. These early dates, however, were questioned by me already in 2001 in *Kāvya in South India. Old Tamil Caṅkam Poetry*. I showed, among other things, that the Caṅkam poems share the same historical interests and the same use of Tamil as seen in the inscriptions of the Pāṇṭiyas of the eighth and ninth centuries, and I argued that the poems should consequently be dated in the latter two centuries. My starting point for doing so was that there is no hard evidence of the use of Tamil as a literary language from before the eighth century – unless the Caṅkam poems were indeed that early, which, however, is something which in my opinion still had, and still has, to be proved.

Shulman thinks that he can do precisely that. Out of the few coincidences between the various available sources, i.e. quasi-historical colophons, medieval legends, a Tamil-Brāhmī inscription, a few coins and several Pāṇṭiya inscriptions from the eighth and ninth centuries, Shulman manages to construe, in a way only he is able to do, possible scenarios, filling in the period of South Indian history before the eighth century with some spectacular literary activities, a period which as far as literature in Tamil is concerned is otherwise a complete blank. At the start (p. 68) he writes that it will not be possible to “solve the dating problem definitively with the information available” but that it should at least be possible to formulate some “logical probabilities”. However, what Shulman calls “logical probabilities” are just personal convictions put forward with strong, intensifying adjectives which are often completely misplaced.

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<sup>1</sup> “This tradition [consisting of legendary material] commands respect. Its claims are of a different order than the mostly concocted empiricist histories that modern historians have produced with so much toil” (Shulman 2016: 87).

### *The colophons to the poems*

Before summarizing Shulman’s scenario I need to say something about the colophons attached to the poems, and in particular those of the so-called heroic (*puram*) poems, as they play an important role in his reconstruction of the history of Caṅkam literature. In my interpretation, the heroic poems present speech events imagined to have taken place at some time in South India’s past. Only in rare cases are the speakers or the persons addressed identified by proper names. This type of information is supplied in the colophons, which provide the names of the poets, or rather wandering bards, speaking in the poems in question and those of the kings whom they address. We may assume that for the first generations of readers in the eighth and ninth centuries these names sounded familiar enough to fit the historical setting of the scenes. In particular the names of the kings may have included those of real kings or chiefs from the pre-Pallava period, which were still current at the time or else were still remembered. Whether these colophons were added to the poems later or had been there from the very beginning, they are part of the fictional world created in the poems. It is difficult to maintain that the poets *in* the heroic poems are also the poets *of* the poems. While the latter were learned poets producing carefully grafted, “stylized and formalized” texts (Shulman 2016: 81), the former were wandering bards who produced poems on the spot wherever they happened to find themselves, in the palace, the “battlefield or the execution ground”.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, occasionally the voices in the poems are those of ordinary persons, like the queen whom we hear speaking in *Puranānūru* 255 while she is dragging her husband’s dead body away from the battlefield. According to Shulman, though, “[i]t seems not unlikely that at least some, perhaps many, perhaps most of the *puram* colophons record some sort of traditional information associated with their respective poems” (p. 73). Shulman goes even further than that. While he does not “think it is at all impossible that poets removed in time from the actual events they describe were capable of composing poems about those events”, he discusses one poem in which, he believes, the relationship between the poet and the king mentioned in the colophon goes back to the very moment the poem was composed in the second or third century, or else in the fourth or fifth.

It is interesting to present Shulman’s discussion of the poem in question, *Puranānūru* 78, *in extenso*, for it is exemplary of how he deals with the available material (pp. 80-1). He sees things in the poem which ordinary mortals do not see. George Hart’s translation of the poem reads (Hart 1979: 156):

His legs strong and lithe,  
His bravery fierce and unyielding,  
my lord is like a tiger living in a cramped cave  
who stretches, rises up, and sets out for his prey.  
But they did not think him hard to fight against.  
They rose up bellowing,

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<sup>2</sup> The *akam* poems present “soliloquies” of, or “conversations” between, village types and do not feature poets as speakers. The poets mentioned in the colophons to these poems, many of whom also have heroic poems to their names, are therefore to be taken as the poets *of* the poems, which, if we are dealing with wandering bards, they cannot have been.

“We are best, we are the greatest.  
Our enemy is young and there is much plunder.”  
Those foolish warriors who came with contempt  
ran with dim eyes, showing their backs,  
but he did not let them be killed then.  
He took them to the city of their fathers,  
and as their women with fine ornaments died in shame  
and the clear *kiṇai* drum sounded,  
There he killed them.

Then Shulman takes over:

The colophon tells us the name of the speaker, *Ṭaiḱkuṇṛkiḷār*, and the name of the warrior king: *Neṭuñceliyan*, the greatest of the ancient Pandya heroes. It makes little sense, to me at least, to insist that the “real” poet was someone reimagining the words of *Ṭaiḱkuṇṛkiḷār* [which is what I would have suggested, according to Shulman], and assuming the latter’s identity [Shulman seems to refer to the scenario developed by Hart in 1975 here], centuries after the little skirmish and its ruthless conclusion. Why not go the simple, economic route and assume that, unless proven otherwise, *Ṭaiḱkuṇṛkiḷār* composed this poem in some public space close to the moment he describes? He has, of course, stylized and formalized the text, as do all the poets (who are certainly capable of taking the voice or persona of someone in the dramatic situation they are describing). We are not talking about poems improvised on the battlefield or the execution ground. These are grafted, artistic works meant for performance. But listen to the vivid description, the resonant voice speaking in this poem; note the direct, personal relation between the speaker and the king (“my lord,” *ennaḱai*); observe the sparseness of the lines, which reveal no need to explain anything or to elaborate a context<sup>3</sup> – they are telling about something we, the audience, already know. It feels as if the attack and its outcome happened only last week.

I am unable to follow Shulman when he claims that the poet must have personally witnessed the incidents described, as if they had taken place only the week before.<sup>4</sup> The evidence he provides is merely a characterization of good fiction, in this case, of good historical fiction. In this connection one may also ask if it would have made any difference for the fictional quality of the poem if in the colophon the poet had been identified as *Neṭumpalliyattaṇār* and the king as *Palyākacālai Mutukuṭumip Peruvaḷuti*, known from *Puraṇāṇūru* 64. As I see it, this poem does

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<sup>3</sup> I wonder if Shulman is equally enthusiastic about Hart’s 1999 translation (Hart and Heifetz 1999: 77-8), for why does he quote the 1979 one?

<sup>4</sup> In the case of *Puraṇāṇūru* 74 this scenario collapses altogether. The poem evokes what a king thought, or may have thought, when treated disrespectfully by his captors. However, the king had died in prison and it is unlikely that before that he had been able to pass on these thoughts to a “poet” (see Tieken 2001: 114-9)

not provide an argument, which Shulman assumes it does,<sup>5</sup> against the possibility “that some of the colophons are arbitrary editorial interventions long after the period of composition – that is, that well-known ancient names were recycled by creative editors” (p. 76), though I should add that in my view the colophons are not “arbitrary editorial interventions introduced long after the composition [of the poems]” but were created in the eighth century, maybe even simultaneously with the poems, to provide them with concrete historical settings.

#### *Shulman’s historical reconstruction*

Let me proceed by summarizing Shulman’s reconstruction of the history of Caṅkam poetry, beginning at the end, namely the legendary account of the origin of the poetic tradition found in the Nakkīraṅār’s commentary on Iṛaiyaṅār’s *Akapporuḷ*. According to the legend, the present Caṅkam corpus is the product of the last of three *caṅkams*, or “academies of poets”, instituted and patronized by successive Pāṅṅiya kings in their respective, shifting, capitals (see also Tieken 2010). The commentary is dated in the eighth or early ninth century on the basis of the stanzas that supply examples of the poetic figures discussed in it. Shulman agrees with R. Nagaswamy’s identification of the king featuring in these stanzas as the Pāṅṅiya Arikēcari Asamasamaṅ Māravarmaṅ, known from inscriptions, who would have lived in the seventh or eighth century. For the *Akapporuḷ* commentary this results, according to Shulman, in a date one century later, namely the eighth or early ninth century. Apparently he assumes that the stanzas, which have collectively come to be known as the *Pāṅṅikkōvai*, had an independent existence before being inserted into the *Akapporuḷ*.

Nakkīraṅār’s commentary was according to the same legend commissioned by the last king of the third Caṅkam, Ukkiraperuvaluti.<sup>6</sup> Going by the colophons found with the poems, the commentator Nakkīraṅār, or Nakkīrar, was a prolific poet as well, of both village<sup>7</sup> and heroic poems (e.g. *Kuruntokai* 105 and *Puranānūru* 57). The king, in his turn, is said to have patronized the compilation of the *Akanānūru* collection of poems.<sup>8</sup> He is mentioned in the colophons to *Puranānūru* 21 and 367 as the king addressed (as in most cases, his name is not found in the poems themselves). He is also credited with the composition of *Akanānūru* 26 and *Narriṅai* 98 in the colophons to these two poems. The version of Nakkīraṅār’s commentary as we now have it is said to have passed from Nakkīraṅār living in the Pāṅṅiya capital through a *paraṅparā* of eight teachers to

<sup>5</sup> If Shulman had a point, future scholarly arguments would be reduced to quibbles among self-proclaimed aficionados, a doom scenario which, if he had been aware of it, he had precluded by extending his interpretation of *Puranānūru* 78 to all *puram* poems in the following passage already quoted above: “[i]t seems not unlikely that at least some, perhaps many, perhaps most of the *puram* colophons record some sort of traditional information associated with their respective poems” (p. 73).

<sup>6</sup> Actually, the text of the legend is not clear on this point.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the so-called *akam* poems, which are generally characterized as “love poems” are, like those of the *Sattasāi*, about the love lives of villagers (see Khoroche and Tieken 2009). This justifies the exclusion of the *Pattuppāṅṅu* collection from the Caṅkam corpus, as some of the *Pattuppāṅṅu* poems deal with the love life of queens living in palaces (see Tieken 2001: 196-200 and below).

<sup>8</sup> I have been unable to find a direct source for this information. Marr (1985: 331) refers to K.N. Sivaraja Pillai, *Chronology of the Early Tamils*. Madras 1932, p. 28, which book is not available to me.

Nīlakaṇṭhaṅgār living in the harbor town Muciṛi on the Kerala coast. These ten generations would according to Shulman add up to three centuries. As said, the commentary is dated in the eighth or early ninth century (pp. 63-4) on the basis of the stanzas providing examples of the poetic figures, which are dated in the seventh or early eighth century (p. 105) on the basis of the king being praised in them, who has been identified with (in Sanskrit) Arikesari Parāṅkuṣa Māravarmaṇ, son of (in Tamil) Cēntaṅ, of the Vēḷvikuḍi inscription, who is taken to have reigned in the second half of the seventh century (p. 63). Nakkīraṅgār and his contemporary, King Ukkiraperuvaluti, would accordingly have lived, and worked, three centuries before the commentary (p. 62) or “some two centuries, at least, before the stanzas” (p. 105). In this way Shulman arrives at the fourth and fifth centuries (pp. 82 and 105), without, however, explaining the intervals of one century between the king and the stanzas, on the one hand, and between the stanzas and the commentary, on the other. The fourth and fifth centuries would have witnessed the first attempt to compile the poems in anthologies and to codify the poetic tradition, a process which was finalized in the eighth and ninth centuries.

In addition to these two stages in the fourth and fifth centuries and the eighth and ninth respectively, Shulman constructs a third one in the second and third centuries. In support of this early stage he refers to Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions and coins from the first and second centuries, which contain names some of which are known from the Caṅkam corpus. Shulman refers to the Pugalur inscriptions with names which would resemble those found in the *Patirrupattu*, to Atiyān Netumāṅ Añci mentioned in the Jambai inscription, which name is found (as Añci, Neṭumāṅ Añci, Atiyamāṅ and Atiyarkōmāṅ) in several *Puranānūru* poems, and to two coins from the first or second century mentioning a certain Kolli (Irum)purai(yaṅ), who Nagaswamy has identified as Peruñcēral Irumporai, the king praised in the 8<sup>th</sup> *patikam*, or decade, of the *Patirrupattu* (Nagaswamy 1995: 9 ff.). To this Shulman adds Palcālai Mutukuṭumi, “Mutukuṭumi of many sacrificial halls”, the king of Maturai known from the *Maturaikkāñci*, one of the texts included in the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, and from the colophons of *Puranānūru* 9 and 15. He identifies this king as Palyāka Mutukuṭumi, mentioned in the Vēḷvikuḍi Grant as the last in the series of “mythic” Pāṇṭiya kings who reigned before the interruption by the so-called Kalabhras and the “historical” Pāṇṭiya branch beginning with Kaṭuṅkōṅ and ending with King Neṭuñcaṭaiyaṅ, who commissioned the inscription.

The question whether the persons mentioned in these inscriptions and on the coins could be the kings or chiefs mentioned in the Caṅkam poems Shulman answers in the affirmative. Next (p. 80 ff.), he asks if this also means that the poems must belong to the second and third centuries as well. He starts cautiously, referring to the Homeric poems, which describe the twelfth-century BC Mediterranean world, but which are generally taken to have been composed in the eighth century at the earliest. This later date is based on, among other things, the references in the poems to iron weapons in a Bronze Age setting. However, even if such anachronisms had been available for Caṅkam poetry – Shulman proceeds as if they were not – he claims that in that case three centuries would almost certainly be too great a gap. After this he discusses *Puranānūru* 78, which, as already

pointed out above, would have been composed not more than a week after the event it describes. Shulman concludes (p. 82):

By far the strongest argument, in my view, in favor of an early date for the *puram* poems is precisely this overwhelming atmosphere in the poems of an intimately known set of circumstances along with the typical heroic values that make those circumstances somehow bearable.

Next (p. 82), he summarizes his reconstruction of the history of Caṅkam poetry in what he calls three “clusters”, with one being possibly dated as early as the second and third centuries, one more likely in the fourth and the fifth, and, an entirely historical one supported by inscriptions in eighth and ninth-century Madurai. We see that the first cluster is not placed exactly in the slot of the Tamil-Brahmī inscriptions and the coins, which he dates in the first and second centuries. Something similar, though in the opposite direction, we have seen above in the case of the second cluster, which was moved from the fifth and sixth centuries to the fourth and fifth. In this second stage in the fourth and fifth centuries not only the colophons were appended to the poems, it was also the time that the poems would have been recorded in writing (p. 87). It is from the Pāṇṭiya inscription of the third period that we get a picture of a class of literary scholars, mainly Brahmins, who, according to Shulman, “can be assumed to have internalized the great names, and probably some of the great texts, from the past; they were part of a chain of transmission going back in all likelihood to the fifth century or beyond. ... [T]hese literate carriers of the tradition were Brahmins conversant, to some degree at least, with Sanskrit knowledge” (p. 88). I do not know what other knowledge beside that of Sanskrit Shulman has in mind here. If he means “Tamil knowledge”, there is no evidence that such knowledge existed before that time; but now I am running ahead at things.

#### *Scenes from the past*

As seen, in support of his early dating of Caṅkam poetry Shulman mentions several early Tamil-Brahmī inscriptions and two coins which contain names which are also familiar from the poems (pp. 79-80). Two of the inscriptions are from Pugalur, in which we find the names of three generations of Irumporai kings (the Irumporai seem to be a branch of the Cēra “dynasty”), which would correspond to a similar list in the *Patirrupattu*. Elsewhere, I have shown that the names do not correspond (Tieken 2008: 591-2). To show that that is so let me quote the respective sets of names again (Mahadevan 2003: 405-7):

Inscriptions	<i>Patirrupattu</i>
Kō Ātaṅ Cel Irumporai	Celvakkatuṅkō Vāliyātaṅ (7 <sup>th</sup> decade)
Peruṅkaṭuṅkōṅ	Peruñcēral Irumporai (8 <sup>th</sup> decade)
(Kaṭuṅkōṅ) Iḷaṅkaṭuṅkō	Iḷaṅcēral Irumporai (9 <sup>th</sup> decade)

Shulman referred to this material earlier on p. 23 and I got the impression from his discussion there that he considered it irrelevant for the question of dating Caṅkam poetry. However, I was mistaken and should not have been so surprised when later he came back to it again, for on closer consideration Shulman had left all options

open. He writes: “It appears at least possible, despite cogent objections by Krishnan and Tiekēn,<sup>9</sup> that Perum Ceral Irumporai is to be identified with one of the three kings (father, son, and grandson) mentioned in the Pukalur inscription,” and goes on with: “Whether these identifications are correct or not, you can easily understand the excitement the finds initially generated”. What he should have written instead is that the identifications are untenable and that we are dealing with a hoax, and that this is all the more to be regretted since the identifications have for so long polluted the attempts to date Caṅkam poetry. This leaves us with Atiya(mā)ṅ Neṭumāṅ Añci of the Jambai inscription and Kollippurāi and Kolli Irumpurāiyan of the two coins.<sup>10</sup> According to Nagaswamy the latter two coins would refer to Peruñcēral Irumporai praised in the 8<sup>th</sup> decade of the *Patirruppattu* and would commemorate this king’s conquest of the Kolli mountain, a feat described in the introduction to the 8<sup>th</sup> decade.<sup>11</sup> It should be noted, however, that in the poems themselves this conquest is not mentioned. In poem 73 the king is merely described as living on the Kolli mountain (*kollipporuna*, line 11), and it cannot be ruled out that this description applies to all Irumporai kings (or chiefs). This is anyhow also the case with the words *valuti* and *neṭuñceliyan* found in the Tamil-Brāhmī inscription from Mangulam (Mahadevan 2003: 315 and 317). These are titles or family names common among the Pāṅṅiyas. The same applies to the Mākkōtai found on several coins; this name is common among the “Cēras” (Nagaswamy 1995: 12-6). It is curious to note that the coins with the titles or family names *valuti*, *neṭuñceliyan* and *mākkotai* are not mentioned by Shulman, while they should affect the interpretation of *kolli (irum)purai(yan)* on the other two contemporary coins. *satiyaputo atiyān neṭumāṅ añci* of the Jambai inscription (Mahadevan 2003: 399) seems to be the exception, in that it refers to a particular king known in *Puranānūru* as *añci* (e.g. 103), *neṭumāṅ añci* (92) and *atiyār kōmāṅ ... añci*, or “Añci, the king of the Atiyār” (91). What Shulman announces as “impressive archaeological finds” (p. 67) are after all a meager harvest: two inscriptions (Jambai and Mangulam) and a few coins. Apart from that, in the majority of cases they yield only titles or family names, which, moreover, may have had a long life after their first attestations.<sup>12</sup> A good example is the “ethnic” name Atiyān/r found in the Jambai inscription, which is already known from Aśoka’s Rock inscriptions from the middle of the third century. Another example is the “family name” of the fourth-century Guptas, who by adopting that name, traced themselves back to the Maurya dynasty begun by Chandragupta in the third

<sup>9</sup> Tiekēn 2008: 591-2. At the time I was not aware of Krishnan’s publication (K.G. Krishnan, “Cēra Kings of the Pukalūr Inscriptions”. *Journal of Ancient Indian History* 4 (1970-1971), pp. 137-43) and I regret to have to say that it is not available to me now.

<sup>10</sup> For *purai* beside *porai*, see Tiekēn 2008<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Nagaswamy 1995: 9-19. Note, however, that in *Akanānūru* 209 the Kolli mountain was conquered by Kāri from Ōri and next given by him to the Cēra king. The Cēra king did not take the mountain himself.

<sup>12</sup> In this connection I like to point to the references in Caṅkam poetry with the Roman world, which flourished in the beginning of our era. These would be descriptions of contemporary events and have as such been advanced in support of dating Caṅkam poetry in that early period. However, similar references are still found in the *Daśakumāracarita* of the seventh-century South Indian author Daṅḍin. Speaking about a long memory! Apart from that, as I have shown elsewhere (Tiekēn 2003<sup>b</sup>) the foreign participants in this trade mentioned in the Caṅkam poems, the so-called *yavanas*, wear Arabic dresses.

century BC The family name Mākkōtai may be mentioned here as well. Found in first or second-century coins (and the colophon of *Puranānūru* 245), it was adopted by the Cēra Perumāḷ dynasty in “Kerala” in the ninth century.

### *Anachronisms*

As already noted above, Shulman does not date the first cluster of Caṅkam poems in exactly the same period as the inscriptions and the coins in which the names of the Caṅkam kings are found. The poems have been shifted from the first and second to the second and the third, allowing an overlap of one century. Probably, Shulman would like to leave open the option that many poems look back at events that had taken place much longer ago than the one week in the case of *Puranānūru* 78. As I see it, it is more than just an option, as there are several references in the poems which do not agree with a dating in the first and second centuries, or, for that matter in the second and third.<sup>13</sup> In this connection I would like to draw attention to the references in *Akanānūru* 213 and *Kuruntokai* 260 to the Toṅṭaiyar, who occupy the very same area as the Pallavas and whose name is a synonym of that of the Pallavas, *toṅṭai* denoting a kind of creeper (see Marr 1985: 231-2).

Another such anachronism concerns the references in, for instance, the *Paṭṭinappālai*. In line 284 of this text King Karikāḷaṅ is praised for having dug tanks (*kuḷan toṭṭu*). Archaeological evidence of such irrigation works is available only from the eighth century onwards. It is, incidentally, interesting to see how historians explain these anachronisms away. Nandi writes: “Towards the close of the Sangam period we also hear of sluices and shutters used for controlled drainage of fields. All this would *anticipate* the great expansion of agriculture during the three closing centuries of the first millennium” (Nandi 2000: 89; my italics). Champakalakshmi explains the absence of archaeological evidence as a temporary situation: “archeological corroboration is *at the moment* non-existent” (Champakalakshmi 1999: 94 and 141, note 7; my italics). To these two “anachronisms”, which I have dealt with before (the Toṅṭaiyar in Tieken 2001: 2 and the irrigation works in Tieken 2003<sup>a</sup>: 277-8), I may now add a possible third, namely the so-called hero stones. The Caṅkam poems refer to stones erected to the memory of heroes who had died in cattle raids. However, the hero stones, or *naṭukals*, found in present-day Tamilnadu do not date from before the fifth century AD (Rajan 2000). Admittedly, since Rajan’s publication more archeological material has become available. Mahadevan, in the second edition (2014) of his monumental book on the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions, presents four new inscriptions on stone slabs, which on the basis of the script he dates in the second and first centuries BC and which he identifies as hero stones.<sup>14</sup> However, this identification may be questioned. To begin with, in three of the four cases (Pulimāṅkōmpai 1 and 2, and Tātappaṭṭi<sup>15</sup>) it is impossible to make out if we are

<sup>13</sup> By his remark that “it might be well worth looking more closely to similar anachronisms [that is, similar to those found in the Homeric poems] in the Sangam poems” Shulman shows that he was not aware of any. Anachronism were noted before, but, as I will show, are generally glossed over.

<sup>14</sup> I am very grateful to M.V. Bhaskar, a member of Jean-Luc Chevillard’s Classical Tamil List, who has drawn my attention to the new, second edition of Mahadevan *Early Tamil Epigraphy from the Earliest Times to the Sixth Century A.D.* and supplied me with screen shots of the relevant pages. For my review of the first edition, Mahadevan 2003, see Tieken 2007.

<sup>15</sup> The reconstructed Tātappaṭṭi text reads: ... *ṇ aṭiōṇ pakal paḷiy kal*, which Mahadevan translates as “The (memorial) stone (at) the grave (*paḷli*) of (*pakkaḷ*, lit. “to”) the servant (of) ... *ṇ*”.

indeed dealing with “heroes”. Only in the case of Pulimāṅkōmpai 3 we can, the reconstructed text of which reads: *kūṭal ūr ā kōḷ peṭu tīyaṅ antavaṅ kal*. The hero, a certain Tīyaṅ Antavaṅ, had died while stealing cattle. It should be noted, though, that the term *ā kōḷ* for the stealing of cattle is peculiar to this inscription. In fact, we may well have to do with a loan translation of Sanskrit *gaviṣṭi*. Furthermore, in all the four cases the texts have been written along the length of the stone slabs, which is strange if they were indeed meant to be placed upright (see the verb *naṭu-* in *naṭu-kal*, and in *naṭṭa kal* in *Malaipaṭukaṭāam* 388, line 9 and *naṭṭanarē kallum* in *Puranānūru* 264, line 4). More likely we have to do with stones to cover dead people’s bodies or else with so-called cap stones placed on top of the urns containing the dead persons’ ashes. In the Caṅkam poems we do indeed hear of stones piled up to cover the bodies of people who had died in fights. These heaps of stones are called *patukkai* (see *paral uyar patukkai* in *Akanānūru* 91-10) from the verb *patukku-* “to hide, conceal”. They are distinguished from the *naṭukals*, which are placed upright near or on top of the *patukkai*. Thus, in *Akanānūru* 35 people decorate with a peacock’s feather the *naṭukal* on top of, or next to, the *patukkai* which covers the hero-god who had died while recovering stolen cattle. Moreover, if the poems mention inscriptions, the inscriptions are incised in the *naṭukals* (see *Puranānūru* 264) and if the dead hero is are worshiped the worship is direct at these stones (*naṭukar kai toḷutu*, *Puranānūru* 306, line 4) in which he is believed to be present (*naṭukal āyiṅaṅ*, *Puranānūru* 221, line 13).

As I see it, Rajan’s finding that in Tāmīlnadu there are no hero stones from before the fifth century still holds. Pulimāṅkōmpai 3 is not a hero stone in the strict sense of the word. Its texts does agree, if not literally, with those we find on the later hero stones, but, as said, its vocabulary is unique, compared to the Caṅkam poems as well as the latter hero stones. On final analysis it is doubtful if there is a direct link, or uninterrupted connection, between the Pulimāṅkōmpai inscription and the later hero stones. For how do we explain the gap of almost six centuries between the former and the latter?

It is, again, interesting to see how Meera Visvanathan deals with the absence of hero stones in what some scholars tend to call the “Caṅkam Period”. This historian, who rejects my late dating of Caṅkam literature as because of “its lack of incorporation of archaeological data”, also writes that while “the poems refer to *naṭukals* and *virakkals* ... no such finds are dated to this period” (Visvanathan 2009: 195, note 4 and 193 respectively). In the light of this evidence it is hard to maintain that Caṅkam poetry, or at least those poems mentioning hero stones, is older than the sixth century. In dating the poems it should also be taken into account that the custom of erecting these stones went on well into the thirteenth century.

*Nakkīraṅār’s commentary on Iraiyaṅār’s Akapporuḷ, and the Pāṅṅikkōvai*

With the hero stones we arrive at the sixth century at the earliest, that is, after Shulman’s second stage in the fourth and fifth centuries in which the poet-commentator Nakkīraṅār and the poet-king Ukkiraperuvalūti were supposed to

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Mahadevan’s interpretation of *pakal* as representing the dative postposition *pakkal*, for which he cites the medieval grammar *Vīracōḷiyam*, is too far-fetched. *pakal* is *pakal* “day, daytime” here and the stone marks the place where the dead person sleeps (*paḷli*), not only during the night but during the day as well.

have been active. As we have seen, this second stage has been arrived at by calculating backwards with ten generations, or three centuries, from the final version of Nakkīraṇār's commentary on the *Akapporuḷ* from the eighth or early ninth century, or two centuries from the stanzas quoted in the commentary, which Shulman dates in the seventh or early eighth century. The latter date, in its turn, is based on that of the Pāṇṭiya king mentioned in these stanzas, who Nagaswamy had identified with seventh-century King Arikēsari of the Vēḷvikuḍi inscription (Nagaswamy, n.d.). As already noted, in dating Shulman takes wide margins, as a result of which by deducting three centuries from the eighth or early ninth century he arrives at the fourth and fifth. The real problem, however, is the identification of the king mentioned in the stanzas with this King Arikēsari Asamasaman Śrī Māravarmman (in Grantha script) (Vēḷvikuḍi, line 62),<sup>16</sup> the son of (in Tamil) Cēntaṅ. To begin with, it may be doubted if the stanzas are indeed all about one and the same king. The names, or titles, Arikēsari and Māravarmman are found in the stanzas as well (Arikēcari, (Neṭu)māraṅ). Of the many battles mentioned in the stanzas three are in the Vēḷvikuḍi inscription attributed to Arikēsari, namely those at Pāli (line 53), Nelvēli (l. 54) and Cennilam (l. 56). However, if we turn to the Chiṅṅamaṅūr Plates of Rājasimha II, the battle at Cennilam (l. 118) is attributed to Parā(n)takaṅ Caṭaiyaṅ, the battle at Nelvēli to Parāṅkuśaṅ (l. 104) (the name Parāṅkuśaṅ is also found in the stanzas, but his position in the Pāṇṭiya genealogy in this inscription does not correspond with that of Arikēsari in Vēḷvikuḍi), and the battle at Pāli to one among the list of anonymous ancestors of the king Parāṅkuśaṅ just mentioned (l. 92).

Most of the other battles referred to in the stanzas are otherwise unknown. The few that are mentioned in the inscriptions as well are, however, ascribed to other kings than Arikēsari. Take the battle at Viḷiṅgam, for instance. It is mentioned in stanzas 62, 105, 113, 139, 185, 277, 281, 286, 290 and 295. Only in 139 is the victorious king mentioned by name, or rather, by a title which may be linked to Arikēsari, namely Neṭumāraṅ, but not exclusively to that king, for in the Erukkaṅguḍi Inscription of Śrīvallabha (c. 829 AD) Neṭumāraṅ refers to the latter king himself (line 5). In the Śrīvaramaṅgalam Plates of Jaṭilavarman (Varaṅga I) (785 AD) the battle at Viḷiṅgam was won by Neṭuṅcaṭaiyaṅ (l. 39) (see also the Perumbuḷḷi Inscription of Varaṅga II from c. 870 AD, ll. 3-4), and in the Dalavāypuram Plates of Parāntaka-Vīraṅarayaṅaṅ (910 A.D) it was won by Śrīvallabha (l. 105). It is not unlikely that these battles were recurrent events, but even then the references to them in the stanzas do not necessarily point to King Arikēsari, the son of Cēntaṅ.

In the stanzas Arikēcari and (Neṭu)māraṅ are only two of the names or titles assigned to the king. Other names are *ucitaṅ* (e.g. 193), *varōtayaṅ* (270), *vicāritaṅ* (206), *vicaya caritaṅ [eṅṅum teṅṅavaṅ]* (243), *catturu turantaraṅ* (175), *parāṅkucaṅ* (74), *pūliyaṅ* (6) and *nēriyaṅ* (19). Parāṅkucaṅ has already been discussed above; the name is found in the Chiṅṅamaṅūr inscription in a position in the genealogy different from that of Arikēsari in the Vēḷvikuḍi inscription. As to Pūliyaṅ and Nēriyaṅ, in the Vēḷvikuḍi inscription both epithets are reserved for Neṭuṅcaṭaiyaṅ (ll. 98 and 103 respectively).

<sup>16</sup> All references to the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions are to Krishnan 2002.

Furthermore, it is to be noted that the stanzas do not seem to praise a contemporary king. To paraphrase Nilakantha Sastri, their author seems to have brought together all the achievements of the Pāṇṭiyas, historical as well as legendary, which he could think of (Sastri 1972: 49, note 2). An example of legendary material may be found in stanza 91, in which the king, who resides on the Potiyil mountain, is said to have learned Tamil directly from the mouth of the seer Akattiyaṅ. In several stanzas the events described are indeed explicitly set in the past by words such as *munṇāḷ* (161, 230, 252), *paṇṭu* (198) and *muṇṭpu* (222). The word *anru* seems to have the same function (8, 32, 91, 93, 153, 155, 163, 191, 200, 280, 303).

The above is just a brief foray into the stanzas exemplifying the poetic situations defined in Nakkīraṅār's commentary. It should, however, suffice to show that the identification of the king in these stanzas with Arikēsari of the Vēḷvikūḍi inscription is, to say the least, premature, stanzas, which in Shulman's scheme of things form "the most convincing, perhaps the only real chronological 'sheet anchor' that we possess, at this point" (p. 79).<sup>17</sup>

Two more things need to be said about the stanzas. Collectively, they have come to be known as the *Pāṇṭikkōvai*, an anthology in its own right. Nevertheless, I think that the stanzas have been composed specifically for the commentary. They show little variety and as such are ideally suited to show the peculiarities which distinguish one poetic situation from the other. Though unlike Shulman I prefer not to argue on the basis of personal opinions about literary quality, I think I am not exaggerating when I say that as a collection independent of the commentary the *Pāṇṭikkōvai* is not very exciting poetry.

The second point is that the stanzas, like the legend of the *Werdegang* of the commentary which ends in Muciṛi, tell the story of the introduction, or adoption, of Tamil literature in Kerala. The stanzas are permeated with the so-called *mūvēntar*, or "three kings" ideology, according to which one of the three kings, the Cēra, Cōḷa or Pāṇṭiya, occupies the territories of the other two as well. Thus, stanza 119 features a king who wears the three wreaths on his head, namely those of the Cōḷas, Cēras and Pāṇṭiyas (*pūṅkaṅṅi mūṇṇṟuṭai vēntaṅ*). Stanza 254 describes the southern land of the three kings, the Cēra, Cōḷa and Pāṇṭiya (*vāṇavaṅ cempiyaṅ māraṅ tēṇṇāṭu*). In the stanzas the Pāṇṭiya is the dominant partner. An interesting example is found in stanza 120, in which the king is said to have subdued the Cōḷa king, the *vāṇavaṅ*, or Cēra king, and all other kings who did not obey him yet (*cōḷaṅ cuṭarmuṭi vāṇavaṅ tēṇṇaṅ tunṇāta maṅṅar tāḷa maḷaiyurum ēṅṅiya kōṅ kolli*). We thus seem to be dealing with the Pāṇṭiya king, who, as can be seen, had already made himself completely at home in Cēra country since he resides on the Kolli mountains. Besides appearing in the Pāṇṭiya (Kūṭal in, e.g., 101, the Vaiyai basin in 44) and Cōḷa countries (Pukār in 52 and Uṇṅantai in 116), the king strikingly often finds himself in towns or locations in the western part of south India, such as the mountains Potiyil (4) and Kolli (7) and the towns Vaṅci (16), Toṅṅi (11), Muciṛi (12), Māṅtai (113) and Pūḷi (6). Furthermore, when the owner of the place conquered by the Pāṇṭiya is mentioned or when the opponent in a

<sup>17</sup> "Sheet anchors" have a curious history in classical Tamil studies. The previous so-called sheet anchor (Wilden 2002: 124), which consisted of the names in the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions in Pugalur (see Wilden 2002: 124), proved to be a hoax. It is not unlikely that the stanzas of Nakkīraṅār's commentary fall into the same category.

battle is specified, it is a Cēra: *vānavaṇ ārrukkuṭi* in 6, *cēralar kōṇ kaṭaiyal* in 24, *vañciyar tam kōṇ ... kōṭṭārru* in 154, *cēralar cēvūr* in 16, *cēralaṇ tenṇaraiyārru* in 59, *vānavaṇ pūlantai* in 97, *vānavaṇ vāta viḷiṇam* in 295. In 221 the king wages battle against all those living on the west coast (*mēṛkaraiyērretrintār*).<sup>18</sup>

Unlike the Greeks, the Pāṇṭiyas were not feared for the presents they brought with them, the most important of which was “sweet Tamil”. The king is called the lord of “sweet Tamil” (*tīntamiḷ kōmāṇ*, 49), “who rules over the southern people who speak sweet Tamil” (*teṇ tīntamiḷnar perumāṇ*, 68), “who patronizes excellent Tamil poetry” (*pā māṇ tamiluṭai vēntaṇ*, 87, *paṇṇiya tīntamiḷ vēntaṇ*, 90, *pāvurra tīntamiḷ vēntaṇ*, 121), and “who supports the study of Tamil by poets on the basis of ancient treatises” (*tonṇūrpulavar āyum tamil arikēcari*, 170). See also stanzas 28, 46, 87, 91, 138, 141, 142, 185, 215, 219, 247, 291, 306 and 308.

The stanzas tell the same story as the introduction of the commentary, and, for that matter, the *Cilappatikāram*. As I have argued elsewhere, the *Cilappatikāram* is a text by Cēras (Iḷaṅkōvaṭikaḷ) and about the Cēras (Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ). In it they present themselves as instituting a particular religious cult which they had borrowed from the Pāṇṭiyas (Tieken 2001: 202-6; for the date of the *Cilappatikāram*, see pp. 206-8). As I have argued in my 2001 book, the Cēras not only adopted Tamil poetics and composed their own Tamil texts, such as the *Cilappatikāram* and *Patirruppattu*, but it is also thanks to them that the Caṅkam corpus has been preserved. In any case, the corpus as we now have it shows the hands of literary scholars from Cēra country.

This process of acculturation is unfortunately difficult to date exactly.<sup>19</sup> This spoils Shulman’s attempt to date the *Pāṇṭikkōvai*, and thus also his attempt to date the second stage in the history of Caṅkam poetry – if there ever was such a second stage. The first stage, situated in the beginning of our era, makes up the setting of the scenes in the poems before the rise of the Pallavas, and the third stage is secured by the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions, which testify to the existence of a literary tradition in Tamil. According to Shulman, the eighth-century scholars who produced these inscriptions “were engaged in a long-term cultural enterprise of codification, grammaticalization, and interpretation” (p. 88). It may be asked, though, if there is evidence of the existence of a literary tradition in Tamil older than, for instance, the Vēḷvikuḍi inscription. To prove this Shulman calls in support from two sides, namely from Kālidāsa and the Pallavas.

### *The Pallavas and Tamil*

In his *Raghuvamśa* (6, 61) Kālidāsa presents the sage Agastya officiating at the horse sacrifice of the Pāṇḍya king. “It is,” Shulman concludes, “as if we were glimpsing, from a vast distance, a still young political and literary culture situated

<sup>18</sup> See also stanza 100 in which the king is said to engrave the symbols of the Cōḷas (tiger) and Pāṇṭiyas (fish) above that of the Cēras (bow).

<sup>19</sup> The so-called Cēra Perumāḷs (ninth to twelfth centuries) seem to present themselves as heirs of the Cēras portrayed in the Caṅkam poems. Things change with the *Keraḷolpatti*, which makes a *volte face* by introducing the Paraśurāma legend, which traced the ruling elite from the north (Veluthat 2010: *passim*). Unfortunately, the latter text is difficult to date. Note that in the *Lilātilakam* Kēraḷabhāṣā is (still) called Tamil.

in Madurai but known, at least by hearsay, to literati in the Gupta capital – a culture already attached to the emblematic name of this Vedic sage” (p. 26). In both the origin myth of Caṅkam literature in Nakkīraṅār’s commentary on the *Akapporuḷ* and the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions Agastya (Akattiyaṅ) does indeed feature as the first grammarian of literary Tamil. There is no evidence, however, that Kālidāsa had Agastya’s role as a grammarian in mind when writing his *Raghuvamśa*. In any case, this role was not part of the north Indian Agastya narrative, in which his connection with the south was of a different nature. The sage was sent to the south by the gods to reduce the Vindhya Mountains to their original size after they had risen to such heights that they disturbed the cosmic order.

The first evidence of Tamil as a literary language is found in the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions. In order to show that there was a literary Tamil before that time, Shulman, for lack of other sources, turned to the Pallava inscriptions. Referring to an article by Emmanuel Francis (2013), he writes that while “Pallava-period inscriptions are primarily in Sanskrit” they “also reveal strong Tamil elements, including Tamil verse forms and *biruda* royal titles” (p. 105). However, the adjective “strong” seems completely misplaced here, as does the word “impressive” in referring to archaeological finds (see above).

To begin with the inscriptions with Tamil verses, the date of the 24 stanzas found in Centalai is uncertain. The patron praised in the verses is not a Pallava king but a member of the Muttaraiyar family (Kuvāvaṅ Māraṅ alias Perumpiṭuku Muttaraiyaṅ) of unknown date. The inscription has not been dated either, for instance, with reference to one of the known Pallava kings. Paleographical features, however, seem to point to the first half of the eighth century, which for all the uncertainties clinging to this dating method, make the inscription contemporaneous with the Vēḷvikūḍi inscription. The same is the case with the inscriptions in the Vaikuṅṭhaperumāḷ temple at Kāñcīpuram, which narrate the events leading to the coronation of Nandin II depicted in the accompanying panels. Apart from being late, the text is in prose and not in the Tamil known from Caṅkam poetry. The language is a mixture of Sanskrit words in Grantha script and Tamil words and endings in the Tamil script. The only remaining verse is a *veṅpā* on a pillar in the back of the Taḷavānūr cave. As discussed by Francis this verse may be a Tamil rendering of a Sanskrit *anuṣṭubh* found on a pillar in the front part of the same cave. In the *anuṣṭubh* Śatrumalla, or Mahendra I, is mentioned as the king who had commissioned the construction of the cave. While this suggests a date in the first half of the seventh century, the Tamil stanza was composed by a local man and was not engraved by the same person who was responsible for the Sanskrit stanza. Its date is uncertain. Someone has suggested a date as late as the ninth century (Francis 2013: 372-6).

The remaining Tamil text from the Pallavas consists of *birudas*. The earliest set, dedicated to Mahendra I (c. 600-630 AD), is found in one of the caves in Trichy. There are at least 60 of them. They are in different languages, in Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil, and in different scripts: Grantha for Sanskrit and Telugu (and sometimes for Tamil as well), and Tamil for Tamil, though some of the Tamil characters are not much different from the corresponding Grantha ones. The existence and use of these *birudas* are clearly in need of further study. Here I would only like to point out that there does not seem to be any link between the

*birudas* and any literary tradition: after Mahendra I's Telugu *birudas* it took another five centuries for a Telugu literature to develop.

As said, Shulman exaggerates when he speaks of the presence of strong Tamil elements in the Pallava inscriptions. The inscriptions of that dynasty were first in Prakrit and later in Sanskrit. The few Tamil stanzas from the Pallava period had not been commissioned by the Pallavas but by local persons, and are all late or else of uncertain date. By that time the poetic tradition developed by the Pāṇṭiyas may already have spread to other parts of south India and been adopted by vassals who did not feel bound to follow the Pallavas in every respect and were more open to novelties.

In addition to all this it should be noted that the Pallavas were not only not interested in developing Tamil as a literary language. There is no evidence that they were interested in the period depicted in the heroic poems, with the three kingdoms of the Cōlas, Cēras and Pāṇṭiyas involved in continuous competition for hegemony, either. This changes with the Pāṇṭiyas. In the Vēḷvikūḍi inscription, for instance, King Tērmāraṇ, alias Rājasimha, is said to have renovated Kūṭal, Vañci and Kōli, the capitals of the early Pāṇṭiya, Cēra and Cōla dynasties (lines 86-8). Before him, his father Caṭaiyaṇ had carved the emblems of those three dynasties on Mount Meru (ll. 67-70). The same Caṭaiyaṇ is said to have “deleted the word ‘common rule’ (*potumoli*) from the country (bordering) on the roaring ocean” (l. 67), a passage which shows a striking resemblance to *Puranānūru* 357, 2-4: “kings who rule without sharing (*potumaiyinri*) the world which (before them) had been ruled jointly (*potumai*) by the three”. In their inscriptions the Pāṇṭiyas also bear witness to a great interest in the development of Tamil as a literary language comparable with the North Indian language (that is, Sanskrit). Thus, in the Chinnamaṇūr inscription one of the king's ancestors is said to “have investigated brilliant Tamil along with the northern language, so that these languages became perfect” (ll. 94-5), and to have “established the Madhurāpuric Caṅkam” (lines 102-3). In the Dalavaypuram inscription the king's ancestors “studied Tamil with Akattiyaṇ” (ll. 88-9) and “having founded Madurai in the south, set up here a good *caṅkam* [for the study] of difficult Tamil and in this way caused Tamil to flourish” (ll. 97-8).

#### *From three stages to two*

Shulman's suggestion for the existence of three stages in the history of Caṅkam poetry has largely been based on shakily dated legendary material and quasi-historical sources. Above, I have tried to show that the conclusions he draws on the basis of this material are not supported, if not downright contradicted, by “real” historical sources (e.g. Pallava inscriptions) or the absence of real historical sources (hero stones). The history of Tamil literature may be reduced to two stages: a period before the Pallavas, which functions as the setting of the scenes in the heroic poems, and the eighth century, when the Pāṇṭiyas developed an interest in this earlier period, reviving it in poetry. In this connection it may be noted once more that the use of Tamil in the *praśastis* of the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions is the same as that seen in Caṅkam poetry. In the inscriptions vernacular Tamil is used for local history and is as such contrasted with Sanskrit, which is used for mythological history. In Caṅkam poetry Tamil is likewise used for the description of local history (*Puranānūru*), as well as for village scenes (e.g. *Kuruntokai*),

dance scenes featuring singing women (*Kalittokai*) and street songs (*Paripāṭal*), genres which correspond to North Indian genres in Prakrit and Apabhraṃśa. In the North Indian Kāvya tradition these two literary dialects are pitched against Sanskrit (Tieken 2008<sup>c</sup>). The genres found in the Caṅkam corpus thus appear to have been selected in accordance with the position of Tamil, a vernacular, or “Prakrit”, after all, vis-à-vis Sanskrit. It may be noted that Tamil is not the only vernacular to have been treated as a Prakrit: Kannada and Old Javanese literally called themselves “Prakrits” (Tieken 2008<sup>c</sup>: 345-6).

### *Kāvya in South India*

This brings me to an aspect dearly missed in Shulman’s *Biography*. A biographer normally deals extensively with his subject’s parents, brothers and sisters, and children. Shulman, however, pays hardly any attention to the counterparts of the Tamil texts in the North Indian Kāvya tradition. Admittedly, it is a problematical topic, as in each case he would have to decide who is the mother and who the daughter. In connection with the affinities existing between the Tamil village poems and the *Sattasaī* Shulman, on pp. 67-8, does not go any further than referring to what Hart said about it in 1975. He does not, however, comment on the latter’s explanation of the correspondences between the two traditions. According to Hart both the Tamil and the Prakrit poems are independent offshoots of a poetic tradition going as far back as the Neolithic cultures on the Deccan (Hart 1975: 252 ff.). For the *Sattasaī*, however, this scenario is untenable, as this collection assumes the existence of the *Kāmasūtra* and makes fun of some of the latter text’s scenarios (Tieken 2001: 54-80 and Khoroché and Tieken 2009). With the late date of Caṅkam poetry we could dispense with the awkward Neolithic Deccan scenario altogether by arguing that Tamil had simply borrowed from the North Indian tradition here.

Shulman (p. 68) seems to deny any form of direct indebtedness of the Tamil poems to classical Sanskrit Kāvya literature. The relationship between the *Kalittokai* and *Paripāṭal* poems and the Prakrit *lāsyas* and the Apabhraṃśa *carcarīs* respectively, all of them Kāvya texts, is conformingly relegated to a footnote, on p. 332 (note 65). It is, in fact, a relationship which is recognized by the tradition itself: the so-called *kuravai* poems, which are *carcarī/hallīsaka* poems, were wrongly included in the *Kalittokai*, which contain *lāsyas*, on the authority of Bhoja who in his *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* misinterpreted Abhinavagupta’s commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Tieken 2001: 154-195, 2003<sup>a</sup> and 2009). The Caṅkam corpus appears to consist of works belonging to the so-called Mukataka genre or longer genres made up of isolated stanzas of the Mukataka type. The *Pattuppāṭṭu* belongs, instead, to the Mahākāvya genre and has therefore not been included in the traditional list of Caṅkam works. Like a Mahākāvya the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, or the “Ten Songs”, includes descriptions of the worship, mythology and iconography of the god Murukan in the *Tirumurukārruppaṭai* and of royalty instead of villagers in the *Neṭunalvāṭai* and *Mullaippāṭṭu*. Furthermore, the *Perumpānārruppaṭai* describes the Pallavas as royal patrons, a role which in Caṅkam proper is reserved for the Cōlas, Cēras and Pāṇṭiyas. However, compared to Mahākāvya the *Pattuppāṭṭu* is still strikingly local: it includes a god, but a typically regional South Indian god. Also, the world it describes may be wider than the one described in Caṅkam poetry, but it concerns only the addition of

another local dynasty, namely the Pallavas. This regionalization of Sanskrit Mahākāvya in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* appears to coincide with the use of Tamil and may well be a consequence of that. It might be argued that, while the genres of Caṅkam were selected in accordance with the language, in *Pattuppāṭṭu* the genre was adapted in accordance with the language. In genealogical terms, then, the *Pattuppāṭṭu* is a half-sister of the village poems.

While the grammar of the mythical Akattiyaṅ is mentioned more than once – a grammar which is no longer available, if it ever was – Shulman does not discuss the *Tolkāppiyam*, a grammar which has been of great importance for the development of the tradition. One wonders if this was because the title of the grammar contains the word Kāvya? In any case, the text is from beginning to end indebted to Sanskrit sources. This has already been known for a long time for the grammatical topics dealt with in Books 1 and 2, which are based on the Aindra or Kātantra school of grammar, and for large parts of Book 3 on poetics. Recently I have shown that also the classification of poetry into 5 (or 7) *tiṇai*, which had been claimed to be a purely indigenous invention independent of any influence from the North, is based on the North Indian theory of music, which ultimately developed into the *Rāgamālā* system, and that the term *tiṇai* is a loan translation of the term *jāti* of that theory (Tieken 2013).

#### *Tamil and Prakrit*

As said, I am not going to repeat all the arguments, findings and conclusions presented in 2001, such as the position of the *Patirruppattu* within the Caṅkam corpus (see Tieken 2001: 208-10) or the dating of Bhakti poetry (Tieken 2001: 213-28). I do have something more to say, though, about the language of the poems, in addition to what I have written about it in Tieken (2004). Compared to the language of the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions, that of the poems looks archaic. According to Shulman, this would “rule out the possibility that they [i.e. the poems] could belong to historical Pandya times” (p. 79). In an accompanying note on p. 332 he adds that “Literary Tamil (as opposed to spoken Tamil) does not lend itself to genre-specific dialects spread over a wide cultural and social continuum, any more than old Telugu and old Kannada do”. How can he be so sure about that? What if the poems were indeed composed as late as in the eighth century? Classical Indian poets are amazing linguistic geniuses, so why deny them the ability to fashion a poetic language which differs from the Tamil prose of the inscriptions in the same way as Prakrit or Apabhraṃśa differ from Sanskrit? In this connection I would like to point to the absence in the poetic language of compound verb constructions, which may be compared to the absence of synthetic verb forms of Sanskrit in Prakrit and Apabhraṃśa. But then, students of Tamil seem to find it very hard to adapt themselves to new findings. In this connection I may refer to Eva Wilden, who in her recent book on, among other things, the transmission of Caṅkam poetry in manuscripts writes:

The coincidence between the start of the literary tradition and the beginning of the Christian era must be regarded as a mere ‘date of convenience’. To this day no hard facts establishing a connection between the inner, literary and the outer, historical sequence have been convincingly shown to exist. Nothing that is of relevance to the following argument can be regarded as

securely dated, before the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, all the dates proposed in Table 1 must be viewed in the first place as relative dates: important is the position of a text with respect to the other texts, not the actual century attributed to it in the network of correlations (Wilden 2014: 7-8).

For all that, in the Table the *Akanānūru* is placed, together with the *Kuruntokai*, *Narriṇai* and *Puranānūru*, in the first to third centuries, before the *Paripāṭal*, which is situated in the sixth, while *Akanānūru* 59 refers to the poet Antuvan of *Paripāṭal* 8. Welcome to the incredible world of Tamil studies!

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