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Towards an Internal Chronology of Old Tamil Caṅkam Literature
Or
How to Trace the Laws of a Poetic Universe[*]

The chronology of classical Tamil Caṅkam texts appears, judging from the literature available on the subject, to be quite a problematic affair. Two works containing serious approaches have been published in recent years, the lack of consensus between which seems to have gone largely unnoticed – which is in itself archetypical for this area of study. One of them, Champakalakshmi 1996, has a historical approach, the other, Takahashi 1995, a philological one, and the flow of information between the disciplines is notoriously slow. While Champakalakshmi, in a study of urbanization processes in Southern India, sees the core Caṅkam age in the period between 300 B.C. and 300 A.D., Takahashi, investigating the development of poetic themes in poems and poetics, dates the early anthologies roughly to the first three centuries A.D.[1] This means that there is a difference of about 300 years, maybe not overly disturbing (at least to Indologists) with respect to a period for which the density of information is rather low, but nevertheless notable, though it is certainly partly to be explained by a difference of interests, i.e. either in the period or in the texts documenting it. But the affair becomes downright disconcerting with the publication of Tieken 2001, a study

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    [1] One further approach might be mentioned here, namely the one established by Zvelebil 1973a (the most influential "standard work" on early Tamil literature), which has been elaborated upon in Zvelebil 1992: 97-128. The technique employed there is quite remarkable. After resuming all possible kinds of evidence both internal and external and summing up the relevant discussions, he seems to opt for a sort of mid-course (which might be justified as a common sense estimation?) between the differing temporal schemes, resulting in the proposal of "roughly between 100 B.C. and 250-300 A.D." (ib., p. 128) as the period of composition of the Caṅkam corpus.

that redates the whole Caṅkam chronology from still more or less pre-historic times, by about one millennium or somewhat less, up to the well-recorded period when South India was dominated by the Pallavas and the Pāṇṭiyas, i.e. the late 8th and the 9th centuries.

How is it possible to account for such deviations? Part of the answer to this question will have to be personal, another factual. As for the personal part, the work of Tieken in several respects represents negligent scholarship of a kind that has been criticized in recent years, that is, scholarship less careful than may be duly expected. To give just one example, Tieken completely overlooks (or ignores) the debate on Caṅkam chronology in the archaeological and historical field, including such basic works as Champakalakshmi 1996 and even Maloney 1975.[2] His off-hand statement as to the current dating being based entirely on internal evidence (ib., p. 2) results in his discussing matters, for the early centuries, almost exclusively from a textual point of view, which is doubly unfortunate, as his own philological work, at least in the area of Caṅkam Tamil, is not one of the strong points of the book.

But this is certainly not the whole story. Which pre-conditions in the discipline make such work possible? What are, actually, the criteria for dating Caṅkam texts and which methods have been employed to do so? Tieken demonstrates quite convincingly that the foundation of many common scholarly arguments is not too stable. Put briefly, Tieken manages to unsettle quite a lot of the *opinio communis* concerning Caṅkam literature, but his own approaches toward a solution are totally unacceptable. This brings the present reviewer into the awkward position of having to re-think the actual state of knowledge and the desiderata. Accordingly, this paper will be divided into two sections, one concerned with the work of Tieken and the pre-suppositions, mostly unstated, of other recent approaches, the other dealing with the possible external and internal criteria for dating Caṅkam texts.

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[2] Tieken himself states in his introduction (ib., p. 9) that one important criterion for the selection of secondary literature has been "easy accessibility to scholars not specialized in Tamil", which is a problem indeed with a good part of the literature in the field, but rather obviously he has avoided anything that could have brought him into difficulties.

1. TIEKEN AND THE STATE OF RESEARCH

To begin with, a summary of Tieken's claims and arguments shall be given. Afterwards, the way he reaches some of his conclusions will have to be examined more closely. This can only be achieved partly here, because the scope of Tieken's book deserves to be called enormous: not only the whole range of Caṅkam literature and Sanskrit and Prakrit Kāvya, but also epigraphical, poetological and Bhakti literature both in Dravidian and in Indo-Aryan languages. The focus of the presentation here will be on what Tieken has to say about Caṅkam literature, and so several interesting theses of Tieken will have to remain undiscussed; but it should be stated that the light thrown in what follows on Tieken's way of working does not encourage blind trust in his conclusions as to Alaṃkāraśāstra or Bhakti poetry.

Tieken's perhaps not totally unjustifiable, but nevertheless undefended claim that there is no certain external evidence for the dating of Caṅkam literature, opens up the field for a new perspective on the whole matter. His main contention is that Caṅkam literature is not an original Tamil achievement, but an attempt to emulate in a local language various genres of Sanskrit and Prakrit Kāvya literature. The political and social conditions that gave rise to the demand for such an undertaking he sees emerging with the Pāṇṭiya dynasty of the late 8th century, documented in inscriptions starting with the Velvikudi grant. The beginnings of Bhakti literature, usually situated in or even before that period, would accordingly have to be shifted to the 9th and 10th centuries.

The first part of his argument is that the parallels between the lyrics of the four so-called old Akam anthologies, i.e. the Kuṟuntokai, the Naṟṟiṇai, the Akanāṉūṟu and the Aiṅkuṟunūṟu, and Prakrit poems of the Sattasaī are much more far-reaching than has been acknowledged until now (ib., chapters 2 & 3). While a stock of common themes, motifs and images as well as overlappings in the inventory of protagonists have been noted already earlier,[3] certain basic structural features have not: both lyrical traditions, according to him, represent the views of sophisticated urban poets – expressed for a like-minded audience – on poor villages and their uneducated inhabitants. Far from belonging to an aristocratic leisure class, these villagers are characterized by the need to work and the inability to reconcile work with the claims of love, and

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[3] That is, in the works of Lienhard 1974, 1976 et al., and Hart 1975, 1976.

thus depicted as utterly unhappy in love. At least as far as Akam is concerned, this picture clearly is at odds with the general opinion which is based, according to Tieken, on the poetological tradition rather than on the poetry itself. To illustrate this, a wealth of textual material from both traditions has been adduced. The concept for Tieken was drawn from the literary background of the Kāmasūtra, i.e. the Sattasaī as a kind of bad-example poetry illustrating the need for worldly experience in matters of love (a practical part complementing theory as laid down in the Kāmasūtra), and the Caṅkam poems as remodelled counterparts in Tamil.

Tieken's treatment of Puṟam poetry is basically similar and yet different in impact (ib., chapters 4 & 6). If Akam poems are the product of a highly educated urban élite, the poets cannot be identical with the poor bards depicted in the Puṟam poems, as tradition will have it: the *patikam*s of the Puṟanāṉūṟu convey the impression that the poets are describing their own and their royal patrons' circumstances of life, and the poets' names are to a significant extent identical with those added to the Akam poems. In other words, the general belief that the Puṟam poems present a picture of a contemporary society is highly questionable. It seems much more probable that the bards figuring in the poems and named in the *patikam*s are *personae* in the poems, just like the villagers in the Akam poems. Especially in chapter 6 Tieken puts forward several examples of obvious literary constructions.

This problem is interlinked with another, namely the question of orality (ib., chapter 5).[4] Part of the argument put forward against an oral origin[5] has been elaborated by Tieken, thus with the stylistic feature of long sentences which can make up a whole poem of 31 lines, a trait judged to be highly unlikely in oral composition. Tieken adds that similar sentence structures can be found in Sanskrit prose Kāvya and even in some early inscriptions (ib., p. 107f.), all of which have never

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[4]   In this regard scholarly opinion is not unanimous. While it seems rather certain that the Caṅkam texts with their extensive use of formulae and themes represent a transitional phase from oral composition to written literature, it is less clear where exactly to locate the transition. Are the poems of the "old" anthologies already written texts modelled on earlier songs, as is propounded for example by Hart 1976, or do they, at least partly, form the last layer of an oral bardic tradition, as Zvelebil (1992: 128) seems to think? Tieken here once again argues against what he represents as a uniform front of *opinio communis* (consisting, in this case, of the admittedly still extremely influential Zvelebil 1973a).

[5]   See especially Hart 1975 against Kailasapathy 1968.

been suspected of an oral origin. His main argument however, moves in another direction. It concerns the arrangement of the poems in those anthologies where there is no obvious sequence, i.e. the Kuṟuntokai, the Naṟṟiṇai and, with reservations, the Puṟanāṉūṟu.[6] With an impressive number of examples (complemented by charts given as appendices I-VI) he shows that there is some sort of arrangement, namely an associative one based on catch-words re-appearing in subsequent poems, a technique also known from anthologies of Prakrit poetry, viz. the Sattasaī and the Chappaṇṇayagāhāo. From this feature Tieken draws the conclusion that they cannot be oral poetry, but that the single poems must have been composed with a view to their place in the respective anthology, and being persuaded of this makes it easier to date them later.

In short, the main result of the investigation up to this point is the refutation of the general belief that the so-called older part of Caṅkam poetry must have been based on an oral tradition describing contemporary events. Tieken then proposes a new dating for the "old" anthologies (ib., chapter 7). The facts, according to Tieken, are the following: 1. conclusive external evidence for the existence of the Caṅkam corpus is missing. 2. The first list naming the single anthologies now making up the Eṭṭuttokai (but not including the Pattuppāṭṭu) occurs in the enumeration of works belonging to the third Caṅkam given in the preface to Nakkīraṉ's commentary on the Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ, the second great poetological treatise (after the Tolkāppiyam). So the upper limit provided by this list would be roughly 1000 A.D., while the lower limit can be deduced indirectly from the mentioning of sea-trade with the western world in the poems themselves, i.e. the 2nd century A.D. Now Tieken professes to find two overall characteristics in the texts, on the one hand an interest in local history, on the other an ambition to promote Tamil as a literary language. Historical evidence for both these interests is to be had from the later Pāṇṭiyas. In contradistinction to the Pallavas who are culturally and linguistically oriented towards the North, the Pāṇṭiyas, as documented in the inscriptions of the late 8th and early 9th centuries A.D., evince that an attempt was made at political and cultural restoration after the Kalabhra interregnum.[7]

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[6] The Puṟanāṉūṟu contains groups of poems arranged according to the ruler to which they are dedicated. All other anthologies show an obvious order, for example *tiṇai*-wise grouping, as in the Aiṅkuṟunūṟu and the Kalittokai.

[7] The analysis of the epigraphical material of the said period and the considerations connected with it (i.e. ib., p. 128-138) form, in the present reviewer's

For Tieken, what then remains to be done is to fit the other anthologies into this scheme. As for the Kalittokai and the Paripāṭal, traditionally the two youngest anthologies, these could simply represent different genres (ib., chapter 8). Their organization into subsequent stanzas as well as an affinity to drama and song place them into the literary sphere of certain Prakrit genres, i.e. the *lāsya* described in the Nāṭyaśāstra for the erotic scenes of the Kalittokai, the *uparūpaka* for the festival songs of the Paripāṭal. A special similarity can be found, according to Tieken, between the Kalittokai and the Gītagovinda, the latter being an adaptation of the Prakrit genre *lāsya* to Sanskrit.[8] The defining characteristic which still allows, Tieken argues, to include the Kalittokai and the Paripāṭal under the common heading Caṅkam literature is their use of the Tamil language, that is, as a local equivalent to Prakrit in opposition to Sanskrit.

A special position is assigned to the Pattuppāṭṭu (ib., chapter 9). For Tieken this text should not be included in the Caṅkam corpus at all. The main argument for this contention is that the Pattuppāṭṭu is missing in the earliest extant list of Caṅkam texts (see above, p. 109). Apart from this, there are several features that set the Pattuppāṭṭu apart from the other anthologies, above all length, since this anthology contains the only long poems, comprising between 103 (the Mullaippāṭṭu) and 782 (the Maturaikkāñci) verses. Further peculiarities are the role of religion (one of the songs, the Tirumurukārrupaṭai, being devoted to Murukaṉ), the combination of Akam and Puram elements in two songs (the Neṭunalvāṭai and the Mullaippāṭṭu), and the mention of the Pallavas in the Perumpāṇārruppaṭai. Tieken sees here a regionalization of Sanskrit Mahākāvya, which is concerned with epic stories and epic/ puranic mythology, such that it reflects Pāṇṭiya interests and was in Tamil, not Sanskrit.

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opinion, the most interesting and useful part of the whole book and could be termed an elaboration of Vaiyapuri Pillai 1956: 58f. The rest of the chapter (ib., p. 138-151), devoted to the criticism of the criteria for internal chronology as developed by Caṅkam philologists, suffers so badly from the author's own weakly founded assumptions, omissions and prejudices that it would take a separate paper to disentangle fact from fiction. Quite a few points, however, will be taken up in the general outlook of the situation concluding the discussion of Tieken's book.

    [8] The niceties of the argumentation concerning the poetological classifications to be found in the Nāṭyaśāstra and a few younger Alaṃkāra treatises and their application to a variety of poetic texts should be unravelled by a specialist.

The Patiṟṟuppattu too has, for Tieken, special characteristics (ib., chapter 9). On the one hand it is unequivocally a Cēra text, not a Pāṇṭiya one. This is interpreted by Tieken as an attempt on the part of the Cēras to draw level with the Pāṇṭiyas as the representatives of Tamil culture. A similar move is to be discerned, he says, in the story of the epic Cilappatikāram where the Cēra king Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ imports the Pāṇṭiya cult of the goddess Kaṇṇaki/Pattiṉi into the Cēra country. On the other hand its arrangement in decades concluding with a *patikam* is similar to the decades concluding with a signatory stanza known from Bhakti poetry. This makes probable a comparatively late origin; in fact the Patiṟṟuppattu could be seen as a post-Bhakti revival of Caṅkam poetry with the Cēras.

One consequence of the redating of the Caṅkam corpus is, of course, that there arises conflict with the dates proposed for Bhakti literature (ib., chapter 10). Tieken's arguments concerning the current attitude towards Bhakti are rather similar to those he puts forward about Caṅkam. Here too external evidence is weak. The first explicit mention of works belonging to this corpus of devotional literature is to be found in the Cōḻa inscriptions from the end of the 9th century. Moreover, he draws attention to the fact that there is no necessary correlation between Bhakti and temple worship. The scenario of an oral tradition being committed to writing in the course of time is questionable too. The ascetics in ecstasy speaking the poems were, for Tieken, rather poetic *personae*, like the bards in Puṟam, in other words Bhakti too seems to be a learned literary tradition heeding Kāvya conventions.

Chapter 11 finally sums up the chronological conclusions and attempts a general cultural–historical explanation. What Tieken sees with the Pāṇṭiyas, beginning from the late 8th century A.D., is a vernacularization process for Tamil not basically different from that of literary productivity in other South Indian languages such as Kannaḍa. While in the beginning Tamil was used as an equivalent to Prakrit for emulating certain genres of Kāvya (the Eṭṭuttokai), subsequently it was employed to create regionalized versions of Sanskrit Mahākāvya (the Pattuppāṭṭu) and to record local history (additional *praśasti*s in Tamil in the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions),[9] and in a third stage Tamil finally gains a position similar to that of Sanskrit (Bhakti poetry).

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[9] For details as to that second *praśasti* in Tamil to be found only in certain Pāṇṭiya inscriptions of that period see ib., p. 137f.

In order to attain such a Sanskrit-like status, Tamil Bhakti poetry was in need of a veritable Caṅkam corpus which could function as a kind of justification for regarding Tamil as a classical literary language. Accordingly, so Tieken, it would be reasonable to assume that the Caṅkam corpus as it stands has been compiled by the Bhakti poets, making use of existent Pāṇṭiya texts and possibly adding the Kalit-tokai and the Paripāṭal, both of which show affinities to Bhakti. This would explain the exclusion of the Pattuppāṭṭu, which rather belongs to the genre of Mahākāvya, while Bhakti poets would be interested in stanza poetry. As for the Patiṟṟuppattu, its addition seems to testify to the Cēras also having had a hand in the final redaction. Unclear remains the position of the Tolkāppiyam. This text makes prescriptions that apply to all types of poems to be found in the corpus, and as such it might either be a late product or an early one subsequently subjected to much revision.

Thus far Tieken. There are a number of more or less obvious points of criticism to be made against this. The first and most weighty one is overstatement. There is next to no signalling discernment between fact, probability and possibility. Tieken hardly ever expresses doubts, and yet so much of what he treats remains hardly investigated, let alone properly understood. Doubt, to be sure, is not to be confounded with scepticism, which is uttered continuously, though in an indiscriminate and utterly arbitrary way. There is absolutely no attempt to establish criteria for the relative value of different arguments and sorts of evidence. In consequence the main characteristic of Tieken's style is an unmarked and strangely elliptical juxtaposition of simple facts, tendentious assumptions and insufficiently supported conclusions. A rather typical example of this is the very first paragraph of the introduction (ib., p. 1). Here the reader is informed that the Caṅkam text corpus consists of the eight anthologies of the Eṭṭuttokai and the grammar Tolkāppiyam, the title of the latter being explained by a simple apposition to mean "The Old Kāvya". Far from being an established fact, however, this etymological interpretation (*tol* = Tam. "old" + *kāppiyam* = Skt. *kāvya-*) is just one of the possibilities considered by scholars.[10] Tieken neither acknowledges the existence of a discussion nor does he justify his own standpoint or give at least an explanation why a treatise on grammar including a part on poetics should be termed an "old piece

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[10]   For a recent discussion with further references see Takahashi 1995: 29f.

of poetry". In the very next sentence "a medieval commentary" is said to contain a list of the texts of the third Caṅkam (academy) in Madurai, which two sentences ahead has become "the traditional list" of Caṅkam works (including besides the said nine texts also several that got lost, but not the Pattuppāṭṭu). Apart from this stunningly innocent application of the term "medieval", one or two words ought to be said about that commentary. It is Nakkīraṉ's on the Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ, which is the second (in status) great poetological treatise of the Caṅkam era. Now the list in question is contained in the preface to the commentary, which gives an account of the famous Caṅkam legend, and which is very likely to be a later addition (and as such even harder to date than the commentary itself).[11] It is still the first enumeration of Caṅkam works we have, and since this is so one might assume that it must belong to a very important text that ought to figure somewhere in a reconstruction of the compilation of the Caṅkam corpus. But apart from supplying that delphic traditional list, Tieken makes no further reference to either the Iṟaiyaṉār or its commentary.

This brings me straightaway to the next point: ahistoricity. For someone purporting to put back Caṅkam literature into a context of historical fact, Tieken has a strange way of sorting out sources: of selecting some and discarding others. While he draws invaluable information concerning the status of Tamil from the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions of the late 8th century A.D. onwards, he is completely silent about the whole range of epigraphical and archaeological source material from the times before that, as well as about the corresponding discussions in secondary literature (see above p. 106). That he cannot be completely unaware of its existence becomes clear from his n. 5 (ib., p. 2) where he refers to Zvelebil's 1992 survey of the state of affairs. So the puzzled reader is left wondering what might be the criteria underlying Tieken's dictum on p. 2 that "the current dating of Caṅkam poetry has been based entirely on internal evidence". This statement appears to make sense only if read in an extremely narrow way, namely to the extent that there is no mention of or quotation from the Caṅkam texts in the epigraphic

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[11] Tieken refers in a footnote to Zvelebil 1973b, but omits Aravamuthan 1930 who gives a much more cogent presentation of the whole matter (discussed distortively by Zvelebil, taken up again in Wilden 2003 [under preparation]). Later (ib., p. 129), without resuming the discussion, he nonchalantly assigns Nakkīraṉ to 1000 A.D., adding that the date was "anybody's guess" (while Zvelebil, ib., p. 123f., had dated the text tentatively to about 700 A.D.).

material (or an independent literary source) before the end of the 8th century A.D. True as this may be, it is for one thing not stated explicitly, and moreover it largely applies also to the sources acknowledged by Tieken. Apart from a few general allusions to the establishing of a Caṅkam (discussed ib., p. 133) there is only one possible epigraphical quotation of the opening line of the Maturaikkāñci, one of the Pattuppāṭṭu songs (discussed ib., p. 210f.), and the Pattuppāṭṭu is, according to Tieken himself, no Caṅkam work proper. Another question, then, could be put: Is the requirement of such a form of testimony, after all, reasonable? How many literary works are testified in inscriptions and why should they be?

As for the material brought together by Tieken in favour of a Pāṇṭiya renaissance beginning in the late 8th century A.D., it would seem suited indeed to throw some light on the process of anthologization, all the more since it happens to fit in with the colophon tradition of the anthologies (see below p. 125f.). The arguments adduced for equating the anthologization with the time of composition, however, are not sufficient. There is certainly reason not to believe that the poems of the so-called early anthologies are describing the different aspects of the life of a contemporary, aristocratic élite (as is indeed still widely assumed), and there might be reason not to regard them as oral poetry. Also Tieken's analysis of the arrangement technique is (to my knowledge) new and absolutely convincing, but this isn't enough to allow for conclusions as to composition–compilation process. It seems plausible that the compiler should have been either consciously or sub-consciously guided by literal associations and even echoes when he stringed the poems together, but that does not mean he composed them in the given order to achieve the echo effect. On the contrary, given the high share of formulaic elements in the language of the Caṅkam poetry, it would be difficult completely to avoid echo effects.[12]

Since much of what Tieken has to say against the usual attitude towards Caṅkam texts is backed up by his own analysis of the textual material, it is necessary to take a closer look at his philological work. Now this is a sore point in Caṅkam philology in general, as has been reiterated several times in recent years.[13] In accord with his own

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[12] It might be revealing to analyse from this perspective for example the Kuṟuntokai poems in the sequence given in the translation of Ludden – Shanmugam Pillai 1976.

[13] A methodological debate has been started by Tieken himself (Tieken 1997) and taken up by Wilden 1999.

demand from an earlier article Tieken at least gives also the Tamil text when discussing the poems. And in this he is to be commended, for, strange as it may seem, this is not yet common practise.[14] But there is virtually no annotation: about 40 pages of analysis in chapter 2 (concerned with Akam poetry) are allotted 15 notes that are philological in a broader sense of the word, and only 8 of them contain some discussion of grammatical and interpretational problems. Given the complexity of the texts in question and the amount of unsolved problems this is ludicrous.[15] So the claim to furnish "literal" translations, in contradistinction to those of, for example, Ludden – Shanmugan Pillai 1976 for the Kuṟuntokai (KT), which are half-literary and draw heavily on the (moreover partly modern) commentatorial literature, remains absolutely unjustified. The same lack of care mars his argumentation, and one random example might suffice to illustrate the point.[16] KT 106 is adduced as an example for a poem misunderstood by scholars as ending happily (ib., p. 39f.). Incidentally, Tieken's definition of what is, according to the poems, a happy ending (ib., p. 38) is heavily biased by poetics, a reproach he likes to raise against all his predecessors, and this is the main reason why he is hard-pressed to find any examples. It is the *tuṟai*s (the short commentaries added to the single poems) that are replete with the notion of the urge to marry (and with the question of whether the couple is married or not). The poems are much more concerned with the lovers being together (and undisturbed by outward interference) or with the prospect of being together, and from that perspective KT 106 certainly deserves to be counted among the happy poems.[17] But

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[14] Such a usage, i.e. a text discussion only on the basis of pseudo-translations, would simply be unthinkable for example in Sanskrit philology, where at least some scholars add a translation to the original only as a special favour to uninitiated readers.

[15] Of course it can be felt to be tiresome to be bothered with questions of morphology, semantics and syntax when one is interested in a discussion of contents, but who is to say what these contents are as long as we do not even understand the wording? The natural consequence of this seems to be either to keep silent about concepts and cultural implications until the philological ground-work is done or to put up, for the time being, with long and complicated footnotes weighing the possible alternatives of understanding.

[16] A few of the examples adduced in chapter 2 (KT 146, 40, ib., p. 38f., 43f.) had already been part of Tieken's 1997 methodological analysis and are extensively discussed in Wilden 1999: 234f., 239ff.

[17] There are a number of other poems in the KT, obviously overlooked by Tieken, that even by his narrow criteria could be termed happy, e.g. KT 193.

this is not the point I want to make. In the case of KT 106 Tieken refutes the translation/interpretation offered by Ludden – Shanmugam Pillai on the basis of his own understanding of a syntactically mostly unmarked and semantically very laconic image. His only argument against the traditional interpretation[18] is that a similar image has been used in a different sense in the Rāmāyaṇa(!).[19] Then follows his own translation, professedly a literal one, but without any philological explanation, and on the basis of this alone he draws far-reaching conclusions of a cultural-historical nature, namely that the image testifies to the (otherwise unattested) brahmanic marriage ceremony of circumambulating the fire. Let us take a look at the text and Tieken's translation.

KT 106.2-6

> …   *nāṭaṉ*
>
> *tūti ṉeñcattuk kiḷavi namvayiṉ*
>
> *vantaṉru vāḻi tōḻi nāmum*
>
> *neypey tīyi ṉetirkoṇṭu*
>
> *tāṉmaṉan taṉaiyameṉa viṭukaṉ tūtē.*

Tieken renders this (ib., p. 40) as follows:

> Word has reached us saying that his heart is faultless. We too will send a message, saying that we are so too once we have received him at the side of the (sacred) fire into which ghee is poured (i.e. once we have been (officially) married).

The wording of the first sentence is just a little imprecise. Besides simplifying the *nāṭaṉ* (the man from the mountain, whose land is described in the first two lines of the poem) to a "his" and omitting the vocative phrase *vāḻi tōḻi* (a traditional, formulaic address to the confidante of the female speaker),[20] it contains the interpretation of the oblique *neñ-*

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[18]   Ludden – Shanmugam Pillai, as they usually do, follow closely the commentary of Caminataiyar.

[19]   Now this would not be a decisive argument even if he had found another example in the KT itself: images everywhere are used in different connections and with different connotations. But the Rāmāyaṇa would be a far cry even if Tieken had already established the mutual dependance of Kāvya literature in Tamil and in Sanskrit, which so far in the book he has only announced and not defended.

[20]   Ludden – Shanmugam Pillai's rendering with an independent sentence ("My friend, may you prosper.") is semantically all too weighty.

cattu as a genitivus subjectivus. More literally it would be: "Word has come to us, o friend, of/from the faultless heart of the man from a land (...)", that is, *neñcattu* could either be genitive or ablative. What is hinted at, in any case, is the well-known topos of HIS messenger coming to HER to announce his imminent arrival. The second sentence is less straightforward, and here Tieken's rendering is not literal but nothing short of arbitrary. We have a main sentence *nām-um ... viṭukan tūtē* "We too send a message (or a messenger)" with an embedded sentence of direct speech ending in *eṉa*, i.e. containing the wording of the reply message, the extent of which, however, is unclear. Does it include line 5 with the fire simile, or is this to be connected with the main sentence? The relation between *ney* "ghee" and *tī* "fire" is minimally marked by *pey*, a verbal root either intransitive, "to rain", or transitive, "to pour", but not passive "to be poured", so it could either be "fire [into which] Ghee rains/flows" or "fire [into which someone] pours ghee". The *-iṉ* of *tīyiṉ* can either be an oblique marker (Tieken) or comparison particle (Caminataiyar and Ludden – Shanmugam Pillai). The absolutive *etirkoṇṭu* leaves open two possibilities of construction. It can either be read as coordinating with the verb of the main sentence, *viṭukam* (Caminataiyar and Ludden – Shanmugam Pillai), or with the verb of the embedded sentence (Tieken). This verb, however, poses a morphological problem. It could be analyzed as *maṇantu aṉaiyam* (absolutive plus adjectival base *aṉai* "such" plus suffix of the 1.pl. = appellative noun in denominative function), as *maṇanta aṉaiyam* (participle of the perfective aspect with a special *sandhi*, the occurrence of which in such a position would have to be established, plus appellative noun in denominative function) or as *maṇantaṉaiyam* (a compound of uncertain morphology and sense). In every variant, however, the exact meaning and temporal implication of this is anybody's guess. In spite of the *sandhi* problem, I prefer the second possibility, i.e. the participle plus denominative, because it is most easy to make sense of: "we are [still] those he united with". Tieken's rendering by "we are so too once we have received him" invents the "too", mixes up the *etirkoṇṭu* with the *maṇanta*, and accordingly neither pays heed to the active and transitive force of *maṇanta*, marked unequivocally by *tāṉ* (which is nominative and not the oblique *taṉ*), nor to the temporal priority of this participle. Caminataiyar is the one who brings in the temporal implication when glossing *avaṉ eṉṉai maṇanta kālattil* "at the time when he united with me" which becomes "the day he married us" with Ludden – Shanmugam Pillai. The idea of marriage is actually not expressed at all by the

text. *maṇa-ttal* is a quite frequent verb for emotional and physical union, and especially used in connection with the still secret states of love.[21] And if the poem does not talk about marriage at all, the proposal of a locative meaning of the *tīyiṉ* ("at the side of the (sacred) fire") is unnecessary – unless we want to form a theory that Caṅkam couples made love by camp-fires. So, to the best of our present knowledge, the following translation would be approximately literal: "After having received [his words], like fire into which ghee is flowing, we too send a message saying 'we are [still] those he united with'." In other words, SHE is awaiting HIM eagerly. As for the syntactical integration of the fire image, i.e. the line dependent on *etirkoṇṭu*, I would not want to rule out the possibility that it has been left open on purpose, furnishing the text with an erotic double entendre. The embedded speech can also be constructed with the absolutive *etirkoṇṭu* coordinate to *maṇanta* (which unfortunately sounds a little awkward translated into English): "we are [still] the ones whom, after having received [him] like fire into which ghee is flowing, he united with".

Already the analysis of KT 106 was bound to betray another weakness of the book, namely an at times astonishing lack of aesthetic receptivity. Obvious as many of the basic observations are, such as that the protagonists certainly do not belong to an aristocracy – most of the conclusions drawn from them demonstrate a remarkably naive realism in dealing with literary concepts: poor and stupid villagers, depicted in unhappy love affairs and unable to cope with the basic necessities of life. The picture Tieken presents and ascribes both to the Akam anthologies and the Sattasaī – the picture of the sophisticated urban poet illustrating (for mockery or for didactic purposes) the need for discrimination and moral fibre in matters of love by showing a whole lot of strange people totally incapable of coping with love and life[22] – is not only unproven, in fact, as far as Akam is concerned, simply unprovable. It is unsuitable as an explanative model. Understanding what

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[21] Two other poems which illustrate the connotations of *maṇa-ttal* quite clearly are KT 25 and 193 (for a not wholly satisfactory analysis of the idiom *tōḻ maṇa-ttal* see Srinivasan 1977: 206ff.). The socio-cultural implications of the word are a different question. The noun *maṇam* has certainly come to mean "marriage", and one explanation could be that the first physical union can be an equivalent of or a preamble to official marriage.

[22] Tieken even goes so far as to call the Sattasaī a "satellite-text of the Kāmasūtra" (ib., p. 52).

happens in the poems is much easier if one bears in mind what the poems are dealing with, namely emotions: shades of feeling and their ambiguities. And in depicting emotions, a literary truism, language is not used as a mirror image of physical reality. In a poem like KT 2 in which a man asks a bee whether it knows flowers as fragrant as the hair of his beloved, we do not have an (ironically distant) poet depicting a man so deeply in love as not to be aware any more of the difference between a rational and a non-rational being, but a poet who expresses a certain state of emotion in a forceful (and transculturally intelligible) image.[23] The "speakers" and "listeners" are part of the calculus – that is, constructive elements and not the poetic product – just like, for example, the types of landscape described. The poems aim no more at making statements on the love habits of Caṅkam villagers than on the actual state of Tamil mountainous regions (which is not to deny that both are made use of to supply the subject matter).[24] This point is of special interest, because it concerns one of the most important objections Tieken has made against the general tendencies prevalent in Caṅkam interpretation, namely that it confuses poetics and poetry and mistakes the conglomerate for social reality. I think this reproach is on the whole justified, only that Tieken himself does not do any better – his biases are just of a different kind.

One could go on and on correcting many smaller and less small inaccuracies of detail that are to be found on nearly every page, but I will close the account with one of these details, a momentous one, i.e. the evaluation of the testimony of the Tolkāppiyam (ib., p. 143ff.). In this case Tieken wipes away the whole discussion about the internal structure of the text with the – taken for itself of course legitimate – argument that the concurrence of different strands of thought (influence of Sanskrit poetics) is not a sufficient basis for chronological conclu-

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[23] Already the Alaṃkāra tradition, in terming this figure of speech *bhrāntimad-alaṃkāra* (see ib., p. 56) – the proverbial example being the cloud messenger of the Meghadūta – does not seem overly responsive. Will it really suffice as an explanation to say that Kālidāsa wants us to realize that the *yakṣa* is confused when he addresses the cloud?

[24] I would be as careful about deducing any cultural customs from the texts as about setting up an atlas of Tamil flora and fauna with their characteristics and habits: mango-eating fishes, lily-eating herons, trees flowering and bearing fruit at the same time – if we come across these we say it is, or may be, poetic licence (as is in fact justified by a Tolkāppiyam *sūtra*); now can we assume that anything people do in the poems closely reflects folklore or history?

sions. What raises the reader's suspicion is, again, that Tieken's "scepticism" is so very convenient for his own chronological contentions: the testimony of the Poruḷatikāram, and other parts of the poetological tradition such as the Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ and the *tuṟai*s (which, as already mentioned, he totally ignores), appears to be clearly at odds with his own "findings". True, there is as yet no detailed, philological investigation of the early poetological sources, let alone of the composition of the Poruḷatikāram,[25] but even a superficial look at the text, and another look at the investigation of poetic themes given by Takahashi 1995 (including a rough but cogent segregation of the Poruḷatikāram), should be enough to feel prevented "from taking it as a uniform text" (ib., p. 144).

The preceding pages of hard and often fundamental criticism should not, however, obliterate the fact that this book is an important one: thought-provoking, interesting and widening our perspective on the texts. One serious impediment to its critical potential is the fact that what and how its author writes sounds so often virtually like a caricature of the manner of working that he rightly censures. Still what he has to say on Caṅkam philology in general contains several points that deserve to be considered seriously.

- The whole edifice of secondary scholarship is raised on a fundament of inherited and ill-attested *dicta*.

- The texts have never been read in their own terms, but always through the lens of the poetological tradition.

- Caṅkam texts, especially of the Puṟam genre, have been taken in a very naive way to portray contemporary social reality.

- The texts as we have them clearly show traits of archaization, in short, the amount of Sanskrit vocabulary and the Sanskrit influence in the poets' names stand in marked contrast to the lack of allusions to Indo-Aryan culture particularly in the Akam poems.

All these are still problems even in the most recent literature. Among historians of the Caṅkam era, there is to be observed a clear shift in

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[25] The foundation for such an investigation of the different strands of poetological thought, their interrelation and their early development will be given in Wilden 2003 (under preparation). Tieken's reference to Srinivasan's (1980) work on the Nāṭyaśāstra produces the impression that in the investigation of Sanskrit poetics the situation would be very different, but in fact this attempt at stratification has not been followed up at all.

perspective, namely one away from the kind of historiography concerned with royal genealogies, prevalent from the beginning of the 20th century, to a broader description of cultural developments, notable in Champakalakshmi 1996 and even more in Veluthat 1997; but as for the literary part of the sources these scholars are still almost totally dependent on Zvelebil 1973a. Thus Champakalakshmi gives an up-to-date picture of the material culture of 300 B.C.-300 A.D., but a distorted one of the literature (and the "society" depicted there). Since, for her, literature is only an incidental concern, she does not even attempt to insert the Caṅkam anthologies into her time frame. As for Takahashi's dating to the first three centuries A.D., he explicitly follows Zvelebil's *Tamil Literature* of 1975, which might be termed a common-sense decision combined with reasonable scepticism: the emphasis is on internal chronology, which for convenience's sake has somehow to be fixed externally.[26]

2.1 External Chronology

Quite contrary to Tieken's assertion, there is and has been a lively debate on the external chronology of Caṅkam from the beginning of the 20th century onwards. At least two things, however, should be kept apart (which has not always been done): the chronology of the Caṅkam era as a historical period on the one hand, and that of the Caṅkam texts on the other. As to the latter it is further necessary to distinguish between the age of the poems and the time of anthologization. Quite a lot of external evidence is under discussion, some of it already a little worn from extensive use, more turning up even recently in the course of new excavations. I do not want to go through all of it all over again, but it might be useful to classify. There are basically four types of evidence: archaeological (still mainly small artefacts like coins and bits of pottery), epigraphical (inscriptions, inscribed potsherds, hero stones), literary (other texts, especially from other traditions such as the Indo-

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[26] The problem with Zvelebil is that he changes his opinion so often (perhaps in accord with the situation): when one compares the dates only in his three most important approaches, *The Smile of Murukan̠* from 1973, *the Companion Studies to the History of Tamil Literature* from 1992, and the *Lexicon of Tamil Literature* from 1994, one finds deviations of centuries, and even inside the lexicon there are, depending on the rubric searched, differences of even several centuries for one and the same work or person (see for example the commentators on the Tolkāppiyam under "Tolkāppiyam" or under their personal names).

Aryan or the Graeco-Roman) and ancillary (the colophons and commentaries attached to the Caṅkam texts themselves).

While evidence of the types 1-3 is indirect (i.e. making no mention of Caṅkam texts), that of type 4 is, in our case, unfortunately, not of direct chronological help: the colophons available do not date the texts. (And if they did, it would still be the date of the anthologies and not of the poems.) As for the other three, there are basically two problems with them. For most of them their own dates are far from uncontroversial, and this is one explanation for the astonishing differences to be observed in dating Caṅkam over the last century, i.e. not only in recent years, as stated at the outset of this paper. And, problematic again, the relation sought to the Caṅkam texts is that 1-3 are objects or describe cultural phenomena or mention persons also there in these texts – which rather leaves open the temporal aspect of the matter. It is true that a Caṅkam poem won't describe a Roman lamp before such items had been imported, or mention a king of the future, but it does not mean that people did not know Roman lamps if they do not describe them in their poems, nor is the mentioning of a king from the say 2nd century A.D. a sufficient reason to date the poem also to that time. So here external chronology rests on internal assumptions, for example the contemporaneity of poets and events described by them, and many of these, as Tieken rightly asserts, rest on weak foundations.

In other words, a discussion of external evidence might one day yield more reliable results as to certain dates concerning the culture that brought forth the Caṅkam texts. It might also throw some more light on the process of anthologization. But for the age of the poems themselves, we will have to rest content with a relative chronology, that is, a chronology resting on cumulative evidence of both external and internal kinds. And in order to render the necessary process of evaluation and re-evaluation more fruitful, it would be highly desirable for historians and philologists to join forces. Before trying to give an outline of the present state of the internal aspects of the matter, something done in a very distortive way by Tieken, it will be necessary to have at least a general picture of the frame, material and chronological, into which the internal evidence is to be fitted.

What is available in the archaeological field is, measured against the accounts of splendid cities to be found predominantly in the "late" anthologies, especially the Pattuppāṭṭu, still meagre. The capital cities and their ports have been located (i.e. Karūr and Muciṟi for the Cēras,

Maturai and Koṟkai for the Pāṇṭiyas, Uṟaiyūr and Kāvēripūmpaṭṭiṉam for the Cōḻas), but there are virtually no architectural remains of importance.[27] The findings comprise mainly different kinds of pottery (Roman, Northern Indian and local), numerous coins (mostly Roman, but also of late some with Cēra and Pāṇṭiya legends) and a few specimens of jewelry.[28] The latest(?) historical interpretation is that of an urbanization process and its decline in South India between the 3rd century B.C. and the 3rd century A.D., stimulated by the waxing and waning of overseas trade.[29]

Further, epigraphical testimony is still far from abundant. Aśoka's Girnar rock edict II (3rd century B.C.), which mentions among others the realms of the Cola, Pāṇḍya, Keralaputra and Satyaputra, has long been known of. Somewhat later comes the inscription of the Kalinga king Khāravela (2nd century B.C.), mentioning a confederacy of Tamil kings and especially the Pāṇṭiyas. Among the Tamil Brāhmī inscriptions interpreted in the late sixties are the two Mangulam rock inscriptions from the vicinity of Madurai, according to which under the Pāṇṭiya king Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ – so far not identified with one of several known from the Caṅkam texts – a monastery was granted to probably a Jain monk. These have been dated to the end of the 2nd century B.C., based on palaeographical comparison with the Arikamedu graffiti, which are held to be securely dated in the first two centuries A.D.[30]

The following two have more direct bearing on the Caṅkam texts. The earlier one is the Jambai cave inscription discovered in the eighties and dated by Nagaswamy very cautiously as "somewhat later than the Asokan period" (Nagaswamy 1995: 87). It states in a single line that Satyaputra Aṭiyaṉ Neṭumaṉ Añci had granted that abode (presumably to an ascetic? Jain or Buddhist?). Nagaswamy identifies the title Satyaputra with that naming a Southern dynasty in the Aśokan edict, interprets it as the Sanskrit version of the Kōcars known from Caṅkam literature and identifies Añci with the chief Añci of the Puṟanāṉūru.

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[27] Whether any of the numerous smaller places occasionally named in the poems and frequently connected with the poets' names can be identified is hard to ascertain for a philologist: since there are, at present, no relevant surveys one would still have to go through thousands of pages of archaeological reports.

[28] For surveys from the early seventies see Nagaswamy 1973 and Maloney 1975. For a comprehensive discussion of the excavated sites around Karūr see Nagaswamy 1995. A good recent survey is included in Champakalakshmi 1996.

[29] See Champakalakshmi 1996.

[30] See Mahadevan 1968, 1970.

The other is a set of inscriptions from Pukalūr near Karūr, and these
have been celebrated since 1968 as the new sheet-anchor of Caṅkam
chronology, datable, unfortunately, also only relative to the Arikamedu
graffiti, to about the end of the 2ⁿᵈ century A.D. (replacing in this func-
tion the famous Gajabāhu synchronism, on which see below). They have
been found in caves for ascetics with rock beds cut. In two of these,
three generations of Cēra kings (Kō Ātaṉ Cellirumpoṟai, Peruṅkaṭuṅkō
and Kaṭuṅkō Iḷaṅkō) are mentioned, the last of whom is recorded to
have granted this rock bed to a Jain ascetic also named in the inscrip-
tion. These kings have been identified with three kings celebrated in
decads of the Patiṟṟuppattu.[31]

All in all, this is not much, but since quite an amount of the epigraph-
ical material discovered so far has not been evaluated, and more turns
up every now and then, the records need not be closed.[32]

As for the literary accounts, there is hardly anything new in this area.
Besides a few often discussed references in Sanskrit grammarians
(which do not offer more than the names of Southern dynasties) the
Graeco-Roman accounts from the first two centuries A.D. (Pliny and
Ptolemy give descriptions of coastal South India and its ports) have
received quite a lot of attention. They testify to extensive maritime
trade, which is corroborated by archeological finds and Caṅkam litera-
ture. But most important has been, from the beginning of the last
century onwards, the Gajabāhu synchronism. In the Cilappatikāram,
the late Caṅkam epic, a Cēra king Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ is reported to have seen
on a festive occasion a king Gajabāhu, who is identified with the
Ceylonese king Gajabāhu recorded by the Ceylonese chronicle Ma-
hāvaṃsa to have reigned from about A.D. 113 − A.D. 125.[33] This has
been for quite a long time the one "hard" date in Caṅkam chronology,
despite the numerous conjectures it involves, beginning with the iden-
tity of the names Kayavāku and Gajabāhu.

Otherwise than the types of evidence discussed so far, the colophons of
the Caṅkam anthologies, providing us with the names of the compilers

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[31] See Mahadevan 1968, 1970, Zvelebil 1973a, 1992, Nagaswamy 1995: 82f.

[32] Nagaswamy's estimation in 1973 (p. 67) was that of 25,000 inscriptions
discovered in Tamilnadu only 6,000 had been published. I do not know how mat-
ters stand today.

[33] For an outline of the history of the Gajabāhu synchronism see Zvelebil 1992:
110ff., who still accepts it, though with caution. For a disbelieving account see
Obeyesekere 1984: 361ff.

and their patrons, have a direct connection with the texts we want to date.[34] What, to my knowledge, has not been tried in a systematic way (though there are many stray remarks) is to correlate this information with other sources, that is, to locate the phase of anthologization in a historical setting. And here it is possible to find interesting correspondences between the colophons and the situation in the Pāṇṭiya realm of the late 8th and the 9th century A.D. as described by Tieken in his chapter 7 (ib., p. 131ff.).

The epigraphical evidence testifies to a phase of political and cultural restoration, be it after the interruption by the Kalabhra interregnum or in a period of fresh impetus due to economic and social changes.[35] Whether or not Tieken is right that the Velvikudi grant testifies to a broken dynastic line between the Pāṇṭiyas of this time and the earlier ones, what is clear is that they seek continuation. From the Larger Sinnamanur Copper Plate Grant and from the Dalavaypuram Copper Plate Grant we know that they exhibited a marked interest in the promotion of Tamil language and literature: they established a/the Caṅkam at their capital Madurai and even had the Mahābhārata translated into Tamil.

Let us see what the colophons have to say. For about half of the anthologies information is either absent or all too fragmentary.[36] The situation is better with regard to the remaining five Eṭṭuttokai anthologies, interestingly the hard core of the so-called old anthologies. The Akanāṉūṟu was compiled by Uruttiracaṉmaṉ, the son of Uppūrikuṭi Kiḷār of Madurai, under the aegis of the Pāṇṭiya king Ukkiraperuvaḻuti. The compiler of the Naṟṟiṇai is unknown, but the patron was the king Paṉṉāṭu Tanta Pāṇṭiya Māṟaṉ Vaḻuti. The Kuṟuntokai was compiled by Pūrikkō and the patron is unknown, but since these

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[34] A rather complete account of the information to be gathered from the colophons is given by Vaiyapuri Pillai 1956: 23ff., 49ff.

[35] For an exploration of a historical scenario that can do without the mysterious and ill-testified intruders from the North, the Kalabhras, see Veluthat 1997: 26ff.

[36] As for the Patiṟṟuppattu, the first and last decades are lost, presumably with the colophon, so that no compiler and patron are known, only the authors of the decades. The Paripāṭal too has come down only fragmentarily, so the information is lost. The Pattuppāṭṭu has no head colophon to the anthology, and the colophons to the single songs only name the author. For the Kalittokai the name of the compiler is known (Nallantuvaṉār who is also said to have been the author of its Neytal section), but no patron.

three anthologies are the closest from a literary point of view and are moreover the only ones to share a *turai* tradition (see below), the conclusion might not be totally unwarranted that the patron was again a Pāṇṭiya king. In contradistinction, the compilation of the Aiṅkuṟunūṟu, with its different arrangement and *turai*s, is ascribed to Pulatturai Muṟṟiya Kūṭalūr Kiḻār under a Cēra king, Yāṉaikkaṭcey Māntaraṉ Cēral Irumpoṟaiyār.

For the Puṟanāṉūṟu, again, we know only the compiler, Peruntēvaṉār, but there is something peculiar about this name. To all the five anthologies is prefixed an invocatory stanza (only in the case of the Puṟanāṉūṟu is this first stanza numbered 1, presumably because a few poems at the end have got lost) in praise of various gods, linguistically and from a literary perspective clearly distinct from the anthology poems (i.e. a different genre and maybe also of later origin), and all of these additional stanzas are attributed to Pāratampāṭiya Peruntēvaṉār, that is, Peruntēvaṉār who sang the Bhārata. Now we know from the inscription that it was the Pāṇṭiyas of the early 9th century who patronized a Mahābhārata translation into Tamil. A plausible explanation for this double coincidence of name and deed might be that the Pāṇṭiyas had first given instructions for the compilation of heroic poems that then came to form the anthology of the Puṟanāṉūṟu. If this really happened that late, it would account for the curious fact that one of the three dynasties had compiled poems in praise not only of themselves, but also of their enemies, the other two as well as some smaller rulers. This work was accomplished by Peruntēvaṉār. Now if this was the same man who afterwards translated the Mahābhārata, he might have acquired the epithet Pāratampāṭiya. The next step would be that he brought together also the Akam poems available, that is the Pāṇṭiya anthologies Akanāṉūṟu, Naṟṟiṇai and Kuṟuntokai plus the Aiṅkuṟunūṟu which was a Cēra text, and that he then wrote the invocatory stanzas to the corpus of five anthologies.

There are a few further hints that might be followed up and fitted into the picture. The Aiṅkuṟunūṟu has long been held to be the oldest of the anthologies, because its patron, the Cēra Yāṉaikkaṭcey Māntaraṉ Cēral Irumpoṟaiyār, has been identified with a king of that name mourned as dead in the poem Puṟanāṉūṟu 229. This is a bit daring, for it might only mean that Puṟanāṉūṟu 229 is one of the younger poems. However, it stands to reason that, if the two are really one person, the Puṟanāṉūṟu might well have been compiled later than the Aiṅkuṟunūṟu. Next, there

is a connection between the compilation of the Akanāṉūṟu and another part of the tradition, namely the poetological treatise Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ. According to the preface of Nakkīraṉ's commentary, the Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ had come to light under the Pāṇṭiya king Ukkirapperuvaḻuti, who then gave instructions to have it commented on, and the commentary of Nakkīraṉ was the one approved by Uruttiracaṉmaṉ, the son of Uppūrikuṭi Kiḻār of Madurai. The identity of these two with the patron Ukkiraperuvaḻuti and the compiler Uruttiracaṉmaṉ of the Akanāṉūṟu has long been suspected.[37] If this is correct, it might mean that the Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ and its commentary (as mentioned, dated tentatively around 700 A.D. by Zvelebil) were already there when Pāratampāṭiya Peruntēvaṉār collected anthologies and prefixed the invocations. Now this fits in with another part of recent evidence of the internal kind, namely the close connection between the Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ and the *turais* of the three Akam anthologies Akanāṉūṟu, Naṟṟiṇai and Kuṟuntokai.[38] One further possible link might be all too speculative to deserve serious attention, namely the Pāṇṭiya king mentioned in the Velvikudi grant as the ancestor of the actual king Neṭuñcaṭaiyaṉ, that is, Palyāka Mutukuṭumi Peruvaḻuti. If one assumes that Ukkira is rather an epithet ("fierce") than part of the name, then the king associated with the Akanāṉūṟu and the Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ would share the name Peruvaḻuti and might have been one and the same man. This would make the Akanāṉūṟu a later collection than the Kuṟuntokai and the Naṟṟiṇai, because the subsequent Pāṇṭiya kings can be named and dated. This had always been assumed anyhow, as it is the only one of the three to follow a kind of *tiṇai*-wise arrangement.

To summarize, the process of anthologization might have been roughly as follows: the Kuṟuntokai and the Naṟṟiṇai were compiled under the aegis of the Pāṇṭiyas. Somewhat later the Pāṇṭiyas also had the Akanāṉūṟu compiled, rediscovered or had the Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ written and arranged for it to be provided with a commentary. More or less simultaneously, the Cēras had the Aiṅkuṟunūṟu compiled. All this

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[37] See Aravamuthan 1930: 193, Zvelebil 1973b: 112, Gros 1983: 90.

[38] For an analysis of the interrelation of the Poruḷatikāram, the Iṟaiyaṉār and the *turai*s see Wilden 2000 and 2003 (under preparation), chapter III.1 & 2. In a part of the *turai*s there are clear references to *sūtra*s from the Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ and also the Poruḷatikāram. One is also tempted to argue that at least this part of the *turai*s must have already been completed before the invocatory stanzas were written, while the *turai*s of the Aiṅkuṟunūṟu, modelled on those of the other three Akam anthologies, but different in several ways, may be a later product.

must have been completed well before the end of the 8th century (the Velvikudi grant). About the beginning of the 9th century, in the course of a restoration process, the Puṟanāṉūṟu was compiled and the Mahābhārata translated into Tamil. Probably the same person then turned to the extant Akam anthologies also and wrote invocatory stanzas to all four of them as well as to the Puṟanāṉūṟu. To be sure, none of the arguments brought forward is strong enough in itself to be conclusive for such a scheme, but at least all elements can be integrated to form a plausible picture.

2.2 Internal Chronology

The foregoing discussion of the external evidence has rather underlined the supreme importance of internal evidence, at least from a literary point of view. While for a historian, depending on temperament, it might be satisfactory to build up a network of kings living before or after the Cēras of the Pukaḷūr inscriptions,[39] for a student of poetry the information is still scanty and mostly inconclusive, for the age of a king need mean nothing for the age of a poem.

Quite a few criteria have been developed in the course of time, pertaining to language, style and content of the poems. The state of the language has been analysed using different parameters, such as the general morphological development, the morphological state in comparison with the description of the language given by the Tolkāppiyam, the amount of Sanskrit/Prakrit loanwords. Questions of style are only now beginning to be formulated. Beside the classical arguments about the use of metre and principles of arrangement (i.e. *tiṇai*-wise, serial, with Tieken now also associative) there has been some investigation into the development of Akam themes. Contents have been discussed mainly in terms of the contrast between Dravidian and Indo-Aryan (and to a lesser extent Roman) elements. Influences are found especially in the religious sphere (Hindu theism and brahmins). Next come general considerations of cultural history, taking notice of the descriptions of big cities and allusions to foreign trade.

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[39] For the most recent specimen of Caṅkam royal genealogies I have come across see *ETL* I/25f.). Of course this kind of work also relies heavily on internal assumptions. Not only has a path to be cut through the jungle of proper names, family names, titles and epithets, but, if there is argument at all, it will mostly be of the following kind: we have to assume that king x was still alive at that time, because poem y speaks of him in the present tense.

Now Tieken's verdict that all such internal evidence is invalid (cf. the discussion ib., p. 143f.) is certainly not justified, but it is true that there are several problems. All of these investigations are still conducted on the level of the anthologies, not of individual poems. And another problem is more pressing, namely that all these criteria allow only a rather impressionistic judgement as long as the basic philological work is incomplete: mediocre editions, virtually no philological translations (for several texts no translations at all), no reliable statistics concerning grammatical/morphological/semantic/syntactic features.[40]

While this state of affairs cannot be changed overnight, it will, for the moment, be important to scrutinize and probably abandon a few of the assumptions that have governed the study of Caṅkam literature for all too long.

We will have to reckon with the trait of deliberate archaization at least for the early anthologies. There is a marked contrast between the many Indo-Aryan loan words in the poems, and the poets' names, which attest to urban surroundings and considerable Sanskrit influences, on the one hand, and the paucity of allusions to Indo-Aryan culture and the village setting on the other.[41]

It will be necessary to understand the literary concept(s) of the Caṅkam. How is the poetic universe constructed, and what is its relation to contemporary social reality? We have to recognize and evaluate the use of irony, face the possibility that there is a difference between fact and legend to be sought, and to see beyond the perspective supplied by the poetological texts (which are, moreover, far from uniform, and show unmistakable traces of the confusion of several concepts and different stages of development).

It will be very daring to make any generalizing statements as long as the relations between Akam and Puṟam, between different anthologies, between the short and long poems have not been sufficiently investigated.

In conclusion I want to list several further lines of investigation which promise, I believe, to be of help also in chronological matters. In order to put the discussion of orality on a firm foundation, statistics about

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[40] This is especially true with regard to the Indo-Aryan loanwords, which have become a kind of shibboleth in any discussion: everybody talks about them, but no one knows how many are actually to be found (or, for that matter, how to identify them with any certainty in some cases) and how they are distributed.

[41] For definitive statistics regarding at least one of the anthologies, i.e. the Kuṟuntokai, see Wilden 2003 (under preparation).

the use of formulae will be indispensable. It is the repertoire of formu-
lae which shows that we actually have one Caṅkam corpus, including
the Pattuppāṭṭu. After a first attempt in this sense, i.e. a search in the
Kuṟuntokai complemented by spot checks in other texts, I have the
impression that there is a kernel shared by the three Akam anthologies
Kuṟuntokai, Naṟṟiṇai and Akanāṉūṟu, less density of correspondences
in the Aiṅkuṟunūṟu, and less again in the Kalittokai, and then the
poems of the Pattuppāṭṭu. With regard to the kind of formulae shared
by Puṟam poetry, namely attributes of plants and heroes, the
Puṟanāṉūṟu seems to stand close to the Akam triad. A severe obstruc-
tion to this kind of work is the sheer mass of textual data. For the time
being no computer analysis seems possible, because of the *sandhi*s
(which even in the "cheap" editions are only partly, and arbitrarily,
resolved), in other words, such an enterprise entails considerable man-
ual (and mental) work.

Another factor hardly taken into consideration so far is the *tuṟai*s, the
miniature commentaries attached to the individual poems of the Akam
anthologies. Apart from being of help for determining the poetological
meaning of the individual poems (which has been made abundant use
of also by modern interpreters), the *tuṟai*s have a story of their own to
tell. On the one hand they are a further indication of the close affilia-
tion of the Kuṟuntokai, Naṟṟiṇai and Akanāṉūṟu, all of which have a
common tradition of *tuṟai*s (though still with marked peculiarities in
the individual anthologies), sharing a set of phrases and similar stages
of development. Those of the Aiṅkuṟunūṟu are still close to these,
though with several extra features, whereas those of the Kalittokai are
different. On the other hand they furnish clues as to the early develop-
ment of poetological thinking, which arguably mirrors the textual
formation of the treatises. It can be shown that the *tuṟai*s contain a
layer of phrases anterior to the treatises. The next stage is marked by
a congruence of phrases common also to the Tolkāppiyam Poruḷatikāram
and the Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ, connected with the development of dis-
tinct poetic themes. Subsequently a feedback of specific formulations
from the treatises to the *tuṟai*s can be observed. In other words, it seems
possible – for the time being in contradistinction to the anthologies
themselves – to reconstruct the process of textual growth of a good
part of the poetological tradition.[42]

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[42] The outline given above is, to be sure, a handy simplification of a very complex
process. For details see Wilden 2000, 2001, 2003 (under preparation).

The next pressing question is that of the chronology of texts within each anthology. Obviously we are dealing with considerable periods of time. The fact that, for example, Akanāṉūṟu 59 might contain a direct allusion to the Paripāṭal cannot be taken to mean that all the material in the anthology has to be that late (see Tieken, ib., p. 147). There has been no serious attempt to establish a relative chronology of the poems of any one anthology.[43] Most promising in this area might be the development and subsequent correlation of as many distinct parameters as possible. Conceivable would be, besides the customary considerations of morphology, cultural allusions and poetic themes, also the morphology of poet names and the different stages of *tuṟai*s. Two other criteria never employed before, though the phenomena are clearly traceable, are direct quotations and metrical–formulaic patterns.[44] Yet for the moment it is too early to decide whether investigations of this kind will yield wide-reaching and convincing results.

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[43] In accordance with their connections with royal genealogies there have also been attempts to distinguish generations of poets; such optimism is mirrored, for example, in the title of Zvelebil's analysis of Caṅkam syntax from 1967: "The Language of Peruṅkuṉṟūr Kiḻār".

[44] For experiments in this field see Wilden 2003, chapter IV.4 (under preparation).

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