

## Making Order in the Vaults of Memory: Tamil Satellite Stanzas on the Transmission of Texts

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The Tamil intellectual universe, like so many others, underwent a profound change in the course of the 19th century, the period when print, although not unknown before, became available for the first time on a large scale, which allowed the publication and dissemination of a variety of text corpora from the Tamil poetic and religious traditions. This process has been described in recent years, for its material and political impact, from a number of sides, be it manuscript studies, print studies and literary or general social history. An understudied aspect seems to be the sources of continuity in this transformation, and an important part of these is a type of free-floating stanza, most often a four-liner in the *Veṅpā* metre, transmitted in the paratextual margins of texts, orally handed down from teacher to student and figuring large in prefaces and introductions to the early prints. It is these little verses of mostly indeterminable date and origin which helped to shape the form today's corpora and canonic works are printed in. They have to be understood, on the one hand, as a way precarious knowledge was preserved in periods of instability and perishable media, and on the other hand as specimens of a literary genre by itself. Moreover, there are reasons to believe that they were deemed important enough to supply them in cases where transmission failed.

### 1. The core of the classical corpus on the verge of the print era: *Caṅkam* and *Kīlkaṅakku*

Tamil, India's second-oldest classical language after Sanskrit, looks back on a literary history of roughly two thousand years. In this long and often politically unstable period its different branches – religious and secular, learned and poetic – underwent varying fortunes. As elsewhere in India, the processes of transmission were shaped by peculiar forms of interaction between oral tradition and manuscript culture. It is only in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and largely by colonial impulse, that print began to play a major role in the preservation and dissemination of texts, which resulted in changes in the perception of texts and their interrelations (Blackburn 2003, Trautmann (ed.) 2009, Ebeling 2010, and Venkatachalapathy 2012).

The most prominent case in point is the so-called *Caṅkam* (“academy”) corpus, made up by two hyper-anthologies of erotic and heroic poetry, named *Eṭṭuttokai* (“the Eight Anthologies”) and *Pattuppāṭṭu* (“the Ten Songs”), in their core probably going back to oral predecessors from about two-

thousand years ago, collected and presumably written down for the first time around the 6<sup>th</sup> or early 7<sup>th</sup> century, and since then transmitted on palm leaf.<sup>1</sup> Roughly around the same time, or slightly earlier, other collections were initiated, in many ways following the conventions of the first, but innovative with respect to metre and of predominantly moral-didactic content, although some also continued the older heroic and erotic tradition. At some point these were put together into a corpus, mirroring that of the *Caṅkam* in number – that is, eighteen (eight anthologies plus ten songs) –, called the *Paṭiṇeṅkīlkkāṇakku*, the Eighteen Minor Classics.

The development of an exegetical apparatus and a commentarial tradition suggests that by the turn of the first millennium those collections had become canonised and associated with the court of the southernmost royal house situated in the city of Maturai, the Pāṇṭiyas. After a peak in classical learning and commentary-writing around the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century the texts themselves began slowly to fade out of general consciousness, to be replaced, however, by widely told and prolific stories about the lives and deeds of poets belonging to the “academy”. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the whole *Caṅkam* corpus and most of the *Kīlkkāṇakku* had vanished completely from the canon of Tamil literature and had to be rediscovered, a process that took the form of editing and bringing out in book form what was soon perceived as the most precious Tamil literary heritage and strongly promoted by rising Tamil nationalism.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. A glimpse into the vaults: Nampi’s *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarpurāṇam*

For a period of about two thousand years of transmissional history we have direct sources in the form of palm-leaf manuscripts dating back only some three hundred years, because in the South-Indian climate manuscripts do not survive longer. Of course it is possible to follow the traces of our texts through the network of quotations and references left in the exegetical and theoretical literature, and also to some extent in the intertextual play and allusions of later literature still aware of those classics. But this tells us little about the every-day task of preserving them, which meant, concretely: keeping the manuscripts in a safe and (comparatively) dry place, oiling them regularly to keep the insects out, renewing regularly the strings that bound them, and recopying every single text at least

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<sup>1</sup> To be precise, this is just a hypothesis, since no palm-leaf from anywhere near that period survives. It seems justified, however, given the fact that from early times onwards there are literary references to the use of palm-leaf in writing, followed up, for the first millennium, in Wilden (2014°).

<sup>2</sup> For a reconstruction of this long and varied transmissional history, see Wilden (2014b); for the development of Tamil nationalism see Nampi Arooran (1980).

once every hundred years, because within that span the first holes will appear and the first bits of textual information stand in danger of getting lost.

In fact the anxiety of such a transmission process is well captured in a foundation legend belonging to the somewhat later devotional tradition of the Śaivas. Preserved in a hagiographic text from perhaps the 15<sup>th</sup> century (the *Tirumuraikaṅṭapurāṇam* attributed to Umāpati Civaṅ)<sup>3</sup>, it tells the story of the resurrection and subsequent preservation of the *Tēvāram*, the most important portion of the Śaiva bhakti canon (7-9 c.). It is the king Apayakulacēkaraṅ who listens to a song in a temple, presumably from oral tradition, and is so touched that he wants to have the whole corpus preserved. But where to find it? He instigates Nampiyāṅṭārnampi, the compiler of the *Tirumuṛai* (the holy books of the Śaivas), who in a meditation on Gaṇeśa receives the answer: in Śiva's temple in Citamparam there would be a locked chamber containing a heap of dilapidated, disordered and insect-eaten palm-leaves. The salvage from this former abundance was meant to become what is today known as the *Tēvāram*.

A similar scene with respect to the classical corpus seems to have survived in the earliest chronicle of Maturai, a narrative that entwines the so-called sixty-four “sports” (Tamil *viḷaiyāṭal*, Skt. *līlā*) of Śiva with a (legendary) account of the exploits of the Pāṅṭiya dynasty, for which today there exist many versions in three languages, Tamil, Sanskrit and Telugu. Into this cycle belong five episodes where Śiva deals with the poets belonging to the academy (*Caṅkam*) in Maturai. The earliest extensive version, Nampi's *Tiruvīlaiyāṭarṭapurāṇam* (14<sup>th</sup> c.?), still lacks narrative smoothing over and preserves the cracks and redundancies that betray the integration of formerly independent elements. The context is a poetic meeting in the said academy, with a lapse of time after Śiva had granted the famous bench of judgement (*caṅkaṭ palakai*), which allows only true poets to sit on it and thus put an end to the everlasting quarrels in the academy hall set up by the Pāṅṭiya king in Maturai. For a long time poets had been sitting on that bench, blissfully composing poetry, and putting down the palm-leaves they had written on in the middle of the hall. That system had its drawbacks, as the following stanzas reveal:

TVP(N) 15.6.

*cāṅṟavar tērtu tammuṭai teḷivāl cayam uṟak kōtta cen tamīlai*  
*tōṅṟiya caṅkam maṅṭapattiṅkaṅ cōrv' ara vaittu vaitt' ēka*  
*āṅṟava ceyyuḷ kālam niḷattāl aḷav' ila-v-āy talaimayanṅki*  
*vāṅ toṭa uyarnta āṅk' avar tiraṅṭu vantaṅṟar maṅṟ' oru kālam.*

<sup>3</sup> For a recent translation and discussion of the legend, see Pechilis Prentiss (2003a; 2003b).

As the worthy [scholar-poets] went on examining, ever putting diligently down in the academy hall what appeared as refined Tamil, victoriously arranged by their clarity, because of the length of time, [their] worthy verses, unnumbered, became confused, [and] in that place where [the pile of palm-leaves] had become so high as to touch the sky, at another time, they (the later-time scholars) came together in a meeting.

The words “palm-leaf” or “manuscript” are not explicitly employed here, but the context unequivocally demands them. One cannot put down texts in the academy hall, but only the leaves they are written on. These are piled high, even sky-high, with a familiar poetic hyperbole, and they are in disorder, which either means they were not tied in bundles or that the strings, the weakest point in the construct that is a manuscript, had been worn away by time. This is the situation that scholars of another – later – time are faced with.

TVP(N) 15.7.

*col arum collin takutiyāl tammiṅ toṭar viṭā valakkiṇuḷ malaintu  
vel arum tirattai kaṇṭu “nam tamiḷuḷ viḷakkam illātana viṭṭu  
nallaṇa kollā kaṭavam” eṇr’ iyaintu nayan-taru paṇuvalār āyvāṅ  
ollaiyil aḷakār caṅkam maṅṭapattuḷ ēriṅār ura tamai matittu.*

After looking at those elements difficult to conquer since they were at variance with [modern] custom, without, [however,] losing their coherence, because of the appropriateness of words rarely spoken, those with pleasing compositions agreed: “we will proceed by leaving off those that are not clear in our Tamil [and] then take those that are good”, [and] mounted [the bench] in the academy hall beautiful in antiquity in order to investigate [the verses], thinking themselves to have [found the solution].

Their natural first reaction is the wish to make order. The next obstacle that meets them is language. Poetic conventions and vocabulary have undergone changes, and what they find is only partly intelligible to them. They decide to discard the incomprehensible portions.

TVP(N) 15.8.

*vantavar kulaintu muṅṅamē kalaintu varai ara kiṭantavai eṭuttu,  
muntavar āyumu aḷav’ ila paṇuval muṇai talaimayaṅkalāl aḷintu,  
“cintai ākulattōṭ’ eṇ ceykēm” eṇa tam ceḷu mukam vāṭalum karuṇai  
entai nāyakaṇum vantaṇaṅ tāḷāt’ iṅ tamiḷ pulavaṅ āy irāṅki.*

Those who had come were upset, and when they took up the [leaves] lying about unrestrained, formerly untied [and] dispersed,

they were desolate because the order of the countless compositions selected by the former ones was completely confused,  
 [and] as their resplendent faces turned pale, saying “what shall we do with what is empty to the mind?”,  
 my compassionate father, the lord felt pity [for them and] came as a scholar of non-declining, pleasing Tamil.

But even that pragmatic compromise is not sufficient to solve their problem, because the leaves are in disorder. It is at this point that divine intervention saves the situation and the classical Tamil corpus. Śiva in person descends as a poet and takes his place in the learned circle. He, of course, can both find the leaves that belong together and understand obsolete words and phrases. To be sure, the story cannot be taken at face value, even when one discounts the appearance of the god who with a turn of his hand solves the problem. But many other elements of the situation have a ring of truth about them. Once the oral tradition and line of transmission is disrupted, palm-leaves are a very imperfect medium, because they are vulnerable to damage, fall into disorder very easily and, before the era of commentaries at least, do not carry on the explanations of difficult words and phrases. Not to mention the fact that the older Tamil script is not free from ambiguities and has to be complemented by the mind of a reader who already knows the text. And, how, even if one understands what is written, will one recognise a text, how will one know whether it is complete, especially if it is a collection, and how can one know of an even greater structure such as a corpus or several of them that may make up a literary canon?

### 3. Verses as corpus organisers

The starting point of the Tamil renaissance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not dissimilar to the one narrated in the *Tiruvilaiyārṭarpurāṇam*. Editors were confronted with scattered and mutilated manuscripts with contents they knew next to nothing about. How did they proceed in their reconstruction of the classical corpus? One of the answers has been given incidentally, without eliciting much scholarly attention, by the most famous among the early editors, the great U.V. Cāminātaiyar himself, in his autobiography, entitled *eṇ carittiram* (“My life”). He recalls his first encounter with the *Caṅkam* manuscripts in the mutt library of Tiruvāṇṭur, some of which survive to this day:

I began to search among the bundles of old palm leaf texts which were there. Some of the palm leaves were very old; when one touched them, they felt sticky and fragile. On one bundle was written ‘*Eṭṭut tokai*’, and ‘seems to be *Caṅkam* books’; it was Kumāracāmit Tampirāṇ [one of the *mutt*’s scholars] who had tied up the bundle separately and

inscribed it. When I took it and looked at it I found it to be *Narriṇai* and other *Caṅkam* books – the plain texts. I had guessed that *Eṭṭuttokai* ('Eight Anthologies') had become *Ēṭṭuttokai* ('Collections of palm-leaves'). The eight texts of *Narriṇai*, *Kuruntokai*, *Aiṅkurunūru*, *Paṭirruppattu*, *Paripāṭal*, *Kalittokai*, *Akanāṇūru* and *Puranāṇūru* make up the *Eṭṭuttokai* Anthology. **I knew the name of the anthology from an old verse.** In that bundle I found palm leaf manuscripts of the basic texts of all the collections. *Kalittokai* and *Paripāṭal* were not in it.<sup>4</sup>

The important piece of information is printed here in bold letters. Cāminātaiyar had never read, let alone learned any of the old texts, but he knew of their existence from an old anonymous stanza he presumably learned from one of his teachers, be it in his youth at the village school or later from the poet-scholar Miṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai. Of such verses there exist many in the Tamil tradition, most of them in terse four-line *Veṅpās*, and they preserve essential information about the external and internal order of literary works, their contents, their authors or their commentaries. They are easy to recognise as a genre, following a simple scheme and easy to memorise, indeed if a designation should be chosen on the basis of their function, it might be best to call them mnemonic stanzas. For all the three of the early collections mentioned above such a stanza survives, rarely on manuscript – perhaps these verses were rather a part of the oral transmission, as Cāminātaiyar's remark suggests – but in virtually any preface to an early edition of the respective texts. As one would expect with such material, the wording is fluid in little details, abounding not in semantic variants concerning the actual information imbedded in the verse, but formulaic, morphological and dialectal variation. For the sake of readability that aspect has been excluded here and only one version per stanza will be quoted.

Here is the one for the *Eṭṭuttokai*, the Eight Anthologies, the venerable scholar refers to:<sup>5</sup>

*narriṇai nalla kuruntokai aiṅkurunūr'*

<sup>4</sup> Thus translated into English by Zvelebil (1994, vol. II: 385 f.); the Tamil original is to be found in chapter 92 of *eṅ carittiram*, *vēru paḷaiya tamil nūlkaḷ: nāṅ aṅkirunta paḷaṅ cuvaṭik kaṭṭukkaḷaip purattik pārkkalāṅēṅ. ēṭukaḷellām mikap paḷamaiyāṅavai; eṭuttāl kaiyil oṭṭik koḷḷak kūṭiyavai. oru kaṭṭil 'ēṭṭut tokai' eṅrum 'caṅkanūlpōl tōrrukiratu' eṅrum eḷutik kumāracāmit tampirāṅ kaṭṭi vaittiruntār. atai eṭuttup pārkkaiyil narriṇai mutaliya caṅkanūlkaḷiṅ mūlam eṅru terintatu. eṭṭut tokaiyenpatu tāṅ ēṭṭuttokai āyirreṅru uṅarntēṅ. narriṇai, kuruntokai, aiṅkurunūru, paṭirruppattu, paripāṭal, kalittokai, akanāṅūru, puranāṅūru eṅra eṭṭu nūlkaḷum eṭṭut tokaiyākum. oru paḷaiya pāṭṭiliruntu anta eṭṭiṅ peyarkaḷum eṅakkut teriyavantaṅ. ellāvāriṅ mūlattaiyum cērttelutiya eṭṭuc cuvaṭi oṅru akkaṭṭil akappaṭṭatu. atil kalittokaiyum, paripāṭalum illai.*

<sup>5</sup> It is found today in three palm-leaf manuscripts *Kiḷkkaṅakku* (UVSL 885, UVSL 603, UVSL 1078), in a paper manuscript of an unpublished study of the *Kalittokai*, entitled *Kaliyārāycci* (GOML R-5780), in in Tāmōtaram Piḷḷai's and Aṅantarāmaiyaar's editions of the *Kalittokai*, in Rākavaiyaṅkār's *Akanāṅūru* edition, as well as in Cāminātaiyar's *Kuruntokai* edition.

*otta patirrupatt' ōṅku paripāṭal*  
*karr' arintār collum kaliyōṭ' akam puṛam eṅṛ'*  
*it tiratta eṭṭuttokai.*

“*Narriṅnai*, good *Kuruntokai*, *Aiṅkurunūru*,  
 even *Patirrupattu*, high *Paripāṭal*,  
 along with *Kali Akam* [and] *Puṛam* praised by learned  
 knowledgeable people:<sup>6</sup> these parts [form] the *Eṭṭuttokai*.”

So here we see a simple enumeration of the single anthologies that make up the hyper-anthology of the *Eṭṭuttokai*. It is metrical restraints that lead to the uneven treatment of the single titles. In the first two lines, three of five titles receive an adjective. Line 4 names the remaining three collections, and here abbreviation becomes necessary. The shorthand designations *kali*, *akam* and *puṛam* have to be restored into *Kalittokai*, *Akanānūru* and *Puṛanānūru*. This is done by Cāminātaiyar in his list of works cited above, and this means he either retained the verse along with his teacher's explanations or he was helped by his familiarity with the grammatical tradition where both the short and the long titles for the respective texts are mentioned.<sup>7</sup>

The same principle governs the following stanza, which enumerates the works collected in the *Pattuppāṭṭu*:<sup>8</sup>

*muruku porunāru pāṅ iraṅṭu mullai*  
*peruku vaḷa maturaikkāñci - maruv' iṅiya*  
*kōlam neṭunalvāṭai kōl kuriñci paṭṭiṅap-*  
*pālai kaṭātoṭṭum pāṭṭu.*

Muruku, Porunāru, the two Pāṅ, Mullai,  
 Maturaikkāñci of growing luxuriance, jointly pleasing  
 [and] beautiful Neṭunalvāṭai, exquisite Kuriñci, Paṭṭiṅap –  
 Pālai along, finally, with Kaṭām [constitute the] Pāṭṭu.

<sup>6</sup> Or those who have acquired knowledge by learning, that is, “educated people”.

<sup>7</sup> For detailed documentation concerning the representation of the corpus in the grammatical tradition, see Wilden (2014b: chapter III.5).

<sup>8</sup> Preserved in the same manuscripts of the *Kiḷkkaṅakku* (UVSL 885, UVSL 603, UVSL 1078), in Tāmōtarāṅ Piḷḷai's *Kali* edition and in Cāminātaiyar's edition of the *Pattuppāṭṭu*.

Here the distribution between ornamentation and abbreviation becomes slightly more unbalanced, and the task is more difficult because ten titles have to be incorporated. In this case neither the stanza alone nor the shorter titles known from the grammatical tradition would be sufficient for the reconstruction. In the first four titles the genre designation *ārruppaṭai* is missing, but it is easy to recognise *Tirumurukārruppaṭai* and *Porunarārruppaṭai*. Only for someone familiar with the anthology the two *Pāṇ*-s are easily restored into *Cirupāṇārruppaṭai* and *Perumpāṇārruppaṭai*. *Mullai* and *Kuṛiñci* are established shorthand for *Mullaippāṭṭu* and *Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu*, *Kaṭām* is, less obvious again, *Malaipaṭukaṭām*. And though it is notoriously difficult to give an age to a *Veṅpā* verse, since the metre was in use from about the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the early *Kīlkkāṇakku* anthologies onwards, there is reason to believe that this one is not particularly early, for the older name of the *Malaipaṭukaṭām*, both in the grammatical tradition and in the extant manuscripts, is *Kuttarārruppaṭai*.

The wish to retain all the necessary information in a single stanza of four lines becomes a liability with the *Kīlkkāṇakku*, because here it is necessary to integrate a full eighteen titles into this very limited space:<sup>9</sup>

*nālaṭi nāṇmaṇi nāṇārpāt' aintiṇai muṭ-  
pāl kaṭukam kōvai paḷamoḷi – māmūlam  
iṇṇilai col-kāñci-uṭaṇ ēlāti eṇpavē  
kainnilai avām kīlkkāṇakku.*

The *Nālaṭi*[yār], *Nāṇmaṇi*[kaṭikai], the four *Nārpātu* (*Kaḷavali Nārpātu*, *Kārnārpātu*, *Iṇṇānārpātu*, *Iṇiya Nārpātu*), the *Aintiṇais* (*Aintiṇai Aimpātu*, *Aintiṇai Eḷupātu*, *Tiṇaimālai Nūrraimpātu*, *Tiṇaimoḷi Aimpātu*), the one in three parts (= *Tirukkuraḷ*), [*Tiri*]kaṭukam, [*Ācāra*]kōvai, *Paḷamoḷi*, *Māmūlam* (= *Cirupaṇcamūlam*), *Iṇṇilai*, with the *Colkāñci* (= *Mutumolikkāñci*) the *Ēlāti*, they say, the *Kainnilai* – those are the *Kīlkkāṇakku* (the minor classics).

Here the amount of reconstruction that is needed to make the stanza functional is made visible by complementing the all too minimal titles already in the translation. There is no way the verse could have been understood without the explanations given by a teacher, and one wonders how to visualise this instruction in a time when only two of these eighteen text were still widely known and

<sup>9</sup> Preserved in the same manuscripts of the *Kīlkkāṇakku* (UVSL 885, UVSL 603, UVSL 1078), and in *Tāmōtaraṇ Piḷḷai*'s *Kali* edition.

read or recited, namely the *Tirukkuraḷ* and the *Nāḷaṭiyār*.<sup>10</sup> That the verse was important in the reconstruction of the corpus, however, is testified by a scholarly dispute about the exact list of texts included here [Zvelebil 1994: 251f.]. For, if one counts, the enumeration contains not eighteen but nineteen titles. The solution agreed upon today is to read *Inṇilai* not as the title of a text, but as an attribute (*iṇṇilai*, “of sweet constitution”) to the subsequent *Colkāñci*. However, a text of that title exists, and even if there is reason to believe it might be later than others, because of its deviation from the *Veṅpā* that is the standard metre of the *Kīlkkāṇakku*, the argument is not incontestable, for the *Inṇilai* is quoted in the *Yāpparūṅkalavirutti*, generally attributed to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, which is not so far off the *Kīlkkāṇakku* period.

In sum, would it have been possible to reassemble the respective corpora without these verses? There were other sources, to be sure. The grammatical tradition does not only preserve quotations and references that name particular texts, but also the famous *Caṅkam* legend (cf. note 10) with the list of the works from the third academy, containing all the titles that make up the *Eṭṭuttokai*, but notoriously silent about the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, not to talk about the *Kīlkkāṇakku* which are supposed to be a later offspring of the same tradition. The ubiquitous and fluid Śaivite legends about the poets of the academy could not be of help because the few works they mention are, with the exception of a single stanza, devotional poems to lord Śiva or to *Murukaṅ* and incorporated into the Śaiva canon.

The other most obvious source of elucidation are naturally the manuscripts. Serial manuscripts exist even today, and presumably some of the ones that are lost today, although they are still mentioned in the early editions, were of that type. Usually they are kept under the name of the hyper-anthology (with luck that name is written on the wooden cover), while they give the names of the single anthologies as marginal inter-titles and in the final colophon.

For the *Eṭṭuttokai* we still find two, one from the U. V. Swaminathayar Library (UVSL) Chennai, distributed over three sequential bundles 1076, 1075 and 237, beginning with *Narriṇai*, then *Kuṟuntokai*, followed by the beginning of the *Aiṅkuṟunūru*, followed after a break by *Patirrupattu*, another break, followed by the *Akaṇāṇūru* and finally the *Puraṇāṇūru*. *Kalittokai* and *Paripāṭal* are missing. A different sequence seems to have been observed by the incomplete single *Eṭṭuttokai* manuscript still found in the library of the Tiruvāṇaṭuturai Ātīṇam (TVM), namely the last hundred-and-two of the *Akaṇāṇūru* followed by *Aiṅkuṟunūru* and *Patirrupattu*. The catalogue still includes the

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<sup>10</sup> One clear instance of tradition going on with mere titles is the works of the first and the second academy as they are enumerated and said to be lost in the *Caṅkam* legend from the preamble to Nakkīraṅ’s commentary on the *Iraiyāṇār Akapporuḷ*, faithfully handed down through subsequent versions, and ironically it is the texts still extant, those of the third *Caṅkam*, where there is variation; cf. Wilden (2014 [in print], chapter III.4.2).

*Kuruntokai* in the self-same manuscript, and we have already seen Cāminātaiyar’s testimony as to the presence of *Narriṇai* and *Puṛanāṇūru* as well, though again not the *Kalittokai* and *Paripāṭal*. Precarious evidence, but it suggests that the customary serial manuscript of the *Eṭṭuttokai* contained only the six older anthologies, not the late-comers *Kalittokai* and *Paripāṭal* which are moreover always transmitted with commentary. So, in order to make up the number eight that is suggested by the title *Eṭṭuttokai*, probably manuscript evidence would not have been sufficient. The enumeration of the *Caṅkam* legend would have helped, but there more works than just eight are enumerated for the third *Caṅkam*. The place that puts just the eight titles together is the stanza.

The exercise could be repeated for the *Pattuppāṭṭu* and *Kīlkkāṇakku*, but for the argument it is enough to do so summarily. For the *Pattuppāṭṭu* we currently dispose of five serial manuscripts, all of them incomplete, four from the UVSL<sup>11</sup> and one from the national Library in Kolkatta. Only one of them contains the *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*, otherwise with currently fifty-seven manuscripts the best-attested classical text of all, grace to its integration into the Śaiva canon and its popularity as a devotional hymn to Murukaṇ. With respect to the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, as already mentioned, the *Caṅkam* legend is silent, and all manuscripts but the most fragmentary one seem to follow the sequence of the stanza. For the *Kīlkkāṇakku* the situation is less clear because the manuscripts have not been properly catalogued as yet<sup>12</sup> and so there is no reliable statistics as to the distribution of texts. What can be said at the moment is that serial manuscripts are frequent (at least twelve have been found so far) and that none of them contains either the *Tirukuraḷ* or the *Nālaṭiyār*, the two most popular texts in the collection. However, it is only in three of these serial *Kīlkkāṇakku* manuscripts (UVSL 885, UVSL 603, UVSL 1078) that the anonymous stanzas for the threefold corpus as quoted above have survived in the form of a prepositioned folio.

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<sup>11</sup> Among these fours, one comes in three batches, for *Tirumurukārruppaṭai* up to *Neṭunalvāṭai* with commentary (UVSL 1074), one text only for *Cīrupāṇārruppaṭai* up to the later parts of *Malaipaṭukaṭām* (UVSL 184), one with commentary for *Porunarārruppaṭai* up to the end (UVSL 579), and a fragmentary one with the colophon of *Cīrupāṇārruppaṭai* plus the *Perumpāṇārruppaṭai* and part of *Maturaikkāñci* (UVSL 166). The Kolkatta manuscript (BL 3112), which so far I have not been able to see, contains, according to the catalogue, four songs from *Porunarārruppaṭai* to *Mullaippāṭṭu*. Mention should be made here of a composite manuscript containing part of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* and of the *Kīlkkāṇakku*, but here the principle is different, as becomes clear from the table of contents: this is a copy from various disintegrating palm-leaf bundles that have since been given up.

<sup>12</sup> And also because the digital collection of the Pondicherry *Caṅkam* project might have gaps.

#### 4. Verses pertaining to content and inner structure

Revealing the organisation of a corpus is by no means the only function fulfilled by our anonymous stanzas. Some deal with the contents and inner structure of an anthology, and the two quoted here are important, because they alone preserve crucial bits of information that is not available elsewhere.

A simple case is that of the verse enumerating the topics treated in the *Paripāṭal* along with the number of hymns devoted to each topic. Since today what remains of the text itself is only a fragment, there is no way of knowing whether the information provided is genuine, although the overall number of hymns mentioned, that is, seventy, corresponds to the figure named in the *Caṅkam* legend:<sup>13</sup>

*tirumāṅk' iru nāṅku cevvēṭku muppatt'  
oru pāṭṭu kātukāṭk' oṅru - maruv' iṅiya  
vaiyai iru patt' āru mā maturai nāṅk' eṅpa  
ceyya paripāṭal tīram.*

For Tirumāl eight, for Cevvēṭ thirty one  
songs, for her who guards the forest(?) one, for the Vaiyai,  
pleasing to unite in, twenty six, for great Maturai four, they say,  
[are] the constituents of perfect Paripāṭal.

Today of eight hymns to Tirumāl-Viṣṇu seven are available, of thirty-one hymns to Murukan only eight, the one for Kāṭukāl is lost, of twenty-six for the river Vaiyai nine survive, and of the four hymns to the city of Maturai a few fragments remain.

Impressive is the example of the following, very well-attested stanza pertaining to the sequence of songs, the *tiṅai* arrangement of the *Akanāṅṅūru*:<sup>14</sup>

*viyam ellām pattām paṅi neyṭal  
nālum naṅi mullai nāṭum-kāl - mēlaiyōr  
tērum iraṅṭ' eṭṭ' ivai kuṅiṅci cem tamīṅ  
ārum marutam avai.*

<sup>13</sup> The verse is found in the manuscript UVSL 1077 and has found entry into Cāminātaiyar's edition.

<sup>14</sup> This verse is attested in the six manuscripts that contain the traditional textual colophon, namely in the one of Tiruvāṭuturai, in UVSL 237, in UVSL 11/73, in UVSL 4/66, in UVSL 5/67 and in GOML R-5734/TR1050; in two further mss., NL 3141/S.V.P. 91 and UVSL 6/68 the quality of the current reproductions does not allow deciphering the colophons, but it is highly likely that the verse is present there too.

Pālai [will be] all the odd ones, the tenth dewy Neytal,  
all the fourth, upon examination, abundant Mullai, to the former ones  
are known these second and eights [as] Kuṛiñci, in sublime Tamil  
all those that are sixth [will be] Marutam.

So, out of every ten poems in the anthology, with every odd one five will be situated in the inner landscape of the desert region (*Pālai*), every second and eighth will play in the mountain region (*Kuṛiñci*), every fourth in the woodland (*Mullai*), every sixth in the rice-growing plains (*Marutam*) and every tenth, finally, on the seaside (*Neytal*). There is nothing surprising in a *tiṇai* arrangement as such; on the contrary this is quite customary for any but the oldest Akam anthologies, although this one is by far the most complicated: in all the other examples, beginning with *Aiṅkurunūru* and *Kalittokai*, the *tiṇais* are simply separated into groups or sections. But, in the by far predominant strand of the manuscript transmission, currently represented by eight witnesses, the sequence is broken by a mistake which indeed can be counted as the first diagnostic feature of this strand I have called the Śaiva vulgate.<sup>15</sup> It is only in the two incomplete manuscript witnesses of a second strand that the sequence is still in good order. Thus the information given in this verse confirms the arrangement preserved in the minority strand and is adopted from the later paper copies onwards, where the two strands are conflated for the first time in the wake of preparing the anthology for print in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 5. Verses naming authors

Another very current function of the mnemonic stanzas is to provide the name of an author, or authors, or of a commentator, and here one may wonder whether in their origin they are related to the signature verses that appear with the earliest devotional collections and soon begin to form the traditional ending verse for a *bhakti* decade, that is, a group of ten poems that is the poetic unit above the stanza but within a text for many of the canonical devotional anthologies. Examples can be given not only from the classical corpus, but also from the Vaiṣṇavas *Tivyappirapantam*. These names too

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<sup>15</sup> In short, the point of origin for the confusion is AN 107, which includes the last 8 lines of 108, while the first 10 lines of 108 are missing. The result is that from this point onward (i.e., No. 109), the number given for each poem is one less than its original number. This is kept up until No. 387. Then the No. 388 is skipped, so that for the final 11 poems we are back to the traditional numbering. For a first description of the AN manuscripts and their interrelation, see Wilden 2014, chapter IV.4.3; the critical edition of the *Akanānūru* is under preparation but will take a few more years.

constitute most precious pieces of information, because for many author names such a stanza is the only indication that can be found, apart from occasional references in the commentarial literature, and, in a very few cases, in inscriptions.<sup>16</sup>

The first example comes from one of the smaller Akam collections among the *Kīlkkāṇakku*, the *Aintiṇai Aimpatu* and is probably an early one, since its features show elements both of a signature verse and of a mnemonic stanza so that it is apparent that the two genres were not yet distinct:<sup>17</sup>

*paṇṇu ulli niṇṇa periyār payaṇ teriya*  
*vaṇṇu ulli māraṇ poraiyaṇ puṇarttu yāṭta*  
*aintiṇai aimpatum mātavattiṇ ṭātār*  
*cen tamīl cērātavar.*

Those who do not recite the sweetness of the whole *Aintiṇai Aimpatu*,  
 joined [and] strung<sup>18</sup> by *Māraṇ Poraiyaṇ*, [always] thinking of generosity,  
 so that [its poetic] yield be clear to great people that permanently remember quality,  
 have not joined with refined Tamil.

To begin with, the verse does not really make clear whether it talks about an author or a mere compiler; in fact both might be possible. Also the name is slightly puzzling because it is a combination of the titles from two royal houses, *Māraṇ* pertaining to the *Pāṇṭiyas*, *Poraiyaṇ* to the *Cēras*. So is he rather a patron? That sort of problem is not unusual, especially in cases where the only mention of the respective name is found in the stanza. Another element is slightly less associated with the mnemonic stanza and more with the signature verses, always written in the third person, namely the concern with what gain is to be derived from learning and reciting the text – what would, in Sanskrit, be called the *phalaśruti*. And this can be expressed in positive or in negative form (by reciting one gets something, by not reciting one does not). Here the result to be expected of course cannot be heaven or the view of the lord, as is the customary reward for a devotee reciting a *bhakti* decade. What is at stake here is being accepted into the circle of connoisseurs of higher Tamil literary culture.

<sup>16</sup> For a survey of such materials, see Govindasamy (1977).

<sup>17</sup> It is found in the manuscripts GOML D.205/TD.84, GOML D.206/TD.53 and GOML D.207/D.137.

<sup>18</sup> *puṇarttu yāṭta*: my late teacher, the pandit T.S. Gangadharan, suggested that the abs. refers to the composition of the poems and the subsequent *peyareccam* to the sorting according to *tiṇai*.

The next example is from the *Nālāyirat Tivyappirapantam*, the Four-thousand Holy Compositions of the Tamil Vaiṣṇavas. Such verses appear with every text within the *Tivyappirapantam*, each called a *taṇiyam*, a solitary stanza, and what is peculiar about them is that they come with an author, here Mutaliyāṇṭaṇ, who is said to have been a disciple of the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosopher Ramānuja:

*taṇiyaṇ mutaliyāṇṭāṇ aruḷicceytatu*  
separate stanza, made by the grace of Mutaliyāṇṭaṇ

*kaitaicēr pūmpōlilcūḷ kaccinakar vant' utitta*  
*poykaiṇ pirāṇ kaviṇar pōr ēru vaiyattu*  
*aṭiyavar vāḷa arum tamil antāti*  
*paṭi viḷaṅka ceytāṇ parintu.*

The lord Poykai, bull combative among poets who hails from Kaccinakar surrounded by flower groves joined by screw pines has lovingly made, for the genre to shine, [this] Antāti in precious Tamil so that the servants (of god) may prosper in the world.

The information given is simple, although adorned with a number of epithets: The author of the first *Antāti* (one of the earliest texts in the Tamil *bhakti* corpus) is named Poykai and comes from the place of Kaccinakar. It is written in “precious” or “difficult” Tamil and in praise of Kṛṣṇa. The fact, however, that the author of the *taṇiyam* is named makes one wonder. If the ascription is correct, it gives us a date, namely the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century and the heyday of Vaiṣṇava commentary production. At that time with the *Divyasūricarita* (in Sanskrit) and the *Guruparamparāprabhavam* (in Maṇipravāḷam) also the first saint hagiographies, an important genre, were probably already around. In other words, things do not look as if this stanza could have been composed for the sake of preserving precious information in a predominantly oral milieu. The rationale for the composition of such a stanza is that it was regarded as a desirable complement, if not as a requirement: many Tamil texts come with such a verse, though by no means all of them. Thus, the Vaiṣṇava *taṇiyam*-s could be seen as an indication that the genre of the mnemonic stanza was well established by their time.

The last example is a stanza which enumerates the commentaries written by the great medieval scholar Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar. It is quoted, for example, in Cāminātaiyar’s edition of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* (one of the texts commented on by Nacciṇārkkīṇiyār), and manuscript evidence has not yet been checked:

*pāra tolkāppiyamum pattupāṭṭum kaliyum  
āra kuruntokaiyul aiññāṅkum – cāra  
tīru taku mā muṇi cey cintāmaṇiyum  
virutti nacciṅārkkīṇiyamē.*

On the weighty Tolkāppiyam and the Pattuppāṭṭu and Kali  
and on five [times] four verses in the ornamental Kuruntokai and on the essential  
Cintāmaṇi made by the brilliant great sage<sup>19</sup>:  
[these five are] the elaborate commentaries attributed to Nacciṅārkkīṇiyār.

So, the commentaries attributed to Nacciṅārkkīṇiyār are five of which four are well-known: one on the bigger portion of the first known treatise on Tamil grammar, the *Tolkāppiyam*, one on the Ten Songs of the *Caṅkam* corpus, one on the *Kalittokai*, a *Eṭṭuttokai* anthology, and one on the huge Jain *Mahākāvya* poem, the *Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi*. Here the interesting part is the mention of a commentary on twenty poems of the *Kuruntokai*, one of the early *Caṅkam* anthologies for which no traditional commentary is extant. This stanza is our primary source for the information that Nacciṅārkkīṇiyār would have written such commentary, if only for twenty stanzas. So far no trace of it has been found, however.

## 6. Authorising recreated tradition

Just how important those stanzas were, is also revealed by another factor: there is evidence to suggest they were made up in cases where genuine traditional information was lacking or lost. A case in point is the *Aiṅkurunūru*, one of the intermediate texts contained in the *Eṭṭuttokai*, the earliest Akam collection to be sorted by *tiṇai*<sup>20</sup> in a series of five hundreds. The colophon testifies to its being an anthology from the south-western Cēra dynasty, but it became part of the first hyper-collection of five or six texts, as is documented by its invocation stanza composed by Pāratam Pāṭiya Peruntēvaṅṅār, a poet associated with the Pāṅṭiya court and author also of the invocations to

<sup>19</sup> I.e., the author, Tirutakkatēvar.

<sup>20</sup> The term *tiṇai* pertains to the construction of the poetical universe and refers to the five codified internal landscapes Kuṛiṅci (mountain), Mullai (forest), Neytal (seashore), Marutam (river valley), Pālai (desert).

*Kuruntokai*, *Narriṇai*, *Akanānūru* and *Puranānūru*.<sup>21</sup> Its mnemonic stanza enumerates five authors, one for each *tiṇai*:<sup>22</sup>

*marutam* *ōrampōki* *neytal* *ammūvaṇ*  
*karutum* *kuṛiṇci* *kapilar* *karutiya*  
*pālai* *ōtalāntai* *pal* *mullai* *pēyaṇē*  
*nūl* *aiyōr* *aiṅkurunūru*.

Marutam by Ōrampōki, Neytal by Ammūvaṇ  
imaginative Kuṛiṇci by Kapilar imagined  
Pālai by Ōtalāntai, many Mullai by Pēyaṇ:  
[such are] the string<sup>23</sup> masters<sup>24</sup> for the Aiṅkurunūru.

The older anthologies are supposed to have been random anthologies (where the length of the poem would decide its place in the collections), and each poem comes with an author name. How reliable that is, is an open question – the variation in the manuscript transmission is considerable, not only with respect to the spelling of a particular name but also for the name itself. The *Aiṅkurunūru*, if we take the stanza at face value, would have been the first text not only broken up into *tiṇai* sections (and into decades), but also with a single author for each section, thus suggesting that the whole was not based on a collection of widely scattered material from a partly oral background, but a premeditated composition. What arouses suspicion about such a claim is the choice of author’s names. All the five names are well-known from the earlier anthologies, Kapilar for one being among the most famous Tamil poets of all times. Thematic, structural and morpho-syntactical development, however, suggest that that *Aiṅkurunūru* poems would not have been composed at the same time as most of the material brought together in its sister anthologies. Be that as it may, the manuscript tradition proves that the stanza was well-embedded in the transmission of

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<sup>21</sup> The prepositioned invocation verse, in Tamil “praise of the deity” (*kaṭavul vāḷṭṭu*) is the counterpart to the Sanskrit *maṅgala* verse (cf. Minkowski 2008). For a detailed analysis of this group belonging to the *Caṅkam* works, see Wilden (2014b: chapter III.1).

<sup>22</sup> The verse is attested in the manuscript from Tiruvāvaṭuṭurai and in UVSL 98, as well as in the edition of Cāminātaiyar.

<sup>23</sup> Surprising is here the use of the word *nūl*, which normally refers to theoretical texts. This induces me to take it here in its literal meaning, “string”, which might be a reference to its being not only an anthology (like most *Caṅkam* texts), but an ordered anthology (in five hundreds that are made out of decades).

<sup>24</sup> The form *aiyōr* is in fact ambiguous. We can either take it as an honorific plural of *ai*, “lord, master”, or of the number five, which would make for five explicit scholars.

the text, because in the manuscripts that survive there are intermediate colophons stating the authorship of each hundred poems, and they confirm the stanza.

Different in this respect is the case of another stanza associated with the *Caṅkam* corpus, namely with one of the two late-comers in the set, the *Kalittokai*:

*peruṅkaṭuṅkōṅ pālai kuriñci kapilaṅ*  
*marutaṅ iḷanākaṅ marutam - aruñcōḷaṅ*  
*nalluruttiraṅ mullai nallantuvaṅ neytal*  
*kalvi valār kaṅṭa kali.*

Pālai by Peruṅkaṭuṅkōṅ, Kuṛiñci by Kapilar,  
 Marutam by Marutaṅiḷanākaṅ, Mullai by  
 Aruñcōḷaṅ Nalluruttiraṅ, Neytal by Nallantuvaṅ  
 – [such is] Kali seen by those proficient in learning.

So here we get the five names of the poets that would have composed a *tiṅai* section each of the *Kalittokai*. The first three names belong again to three of the very famous poets from the earlier anthologies. Kapilar figures yet again, and by this time he should have reached the ripe age of about 500 years. It is only the last two that could claim a semblance of likelihood, Aruñcōḷaṅ Nalluruttiraṅ because he is mentioned only in this stanza, Nallantuvaṅ because he is known as a late author also from the *Paripāṭal* and some late poem in the *Akanāṅūru*.

Moreover, this time the manuscript transmission does not back up the stanza. There are no intermediate colophons naming authors, and not even a single out of eleven surviving *Kali* manuscripts quotes the verse. However, T. Rajeswari has demonstrated that, on the contrary, there is manuscript evidence—in one old, incomplete palm-leaf manuscript that was kept in the GOML and has since vanished—for single-author ascriptions for *Pālai-Kali*, the first of the *Kalittokai*'s *tiṅai* sections.<sup>25</sup> The verse is not yet quoted in the *editio princeps* by Tamōtarampiḷḷai of 1887, but it figures in the later Aṅṅantarāmaiyar and Ceṭṭiyār editions; the earliest references for the time being is an undated, but undoubtedly late paper manuscript of the GOML, containing an unpublished study of the *Kalittokai*, entitled *Kaliyārāycci* (GOML R-5780). Here one cannot help but wondering whether the stanza in fact is a product of the editing phase in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when decisions

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<sup>25</sup> The EFEO photographs of that manuscript are proof of its existence; for the details and the author names see Rajeswari (2009).

had to be made as to whether *Kalittokai* and *Paripāṭal* were the two texts which make complete the eight texts of the *Eṭṭuttokai*, although none of the serial manuscripts included them there.

## 7. Conclusion

On the margins of Tamil literature a type of solitary, mostly anonymous stanza survives, of a type seemingly metrically homogenous – four-liners composed in *Veṅpā* metre, based at least on the evidence so far scrutinised – and similar in structure. A series of examples that could easily be extended suggests that there are three main types of information that could be transmitted in such a verse. Firstly, such verses may put together the single texts that make up a canonised collection, thus functioning as corpus organisers. Secondly, they may deal with the contents and/or the inner structure of a text or anthology. Thirdly, they may hand down the name, background and achievements of a poet or a commentator.

Peculiar is the place they have in the transmission of texts. Some appear integrated into colophons of the traditional type, that is, colophons related to the production of the text, not the manuscript: textual, not scribal colophons. These in particular are the ones that may reach back a very long way, such as the one pertaining to the arrangement of the *Akanāṇūru*, although the only thing we can say for certain is that none of them may predate the advent of *Veṅpā* metre which started with the early *Kīlkkāṇakku* anthologies, after most of the texts in today's *Caṅkam* corpus had been completed. Some, as the ones associated with the canon of the Tamil Vaiṣṇavas, appear before the text and are even ascribed to a particular author and appear rather to fill a genre slot than to have an active function in the transmission of texts.

Others, however, appear on separate leaves before or after the text. Most noticeably, although most of these stanzas have found entry into the early printed editions, only a minority of manuscripts preserves them. Additionally we have testimonies like the one of U.V. Cāminātaiyar, who “knew” the *Eṭṭuttokai* stanza for one “from an old verse”. In other words, here we seem to be at the intersection of oral and written tradition, and I believe we are justified in terming these verses as mnemonic stanzas. They represent the minimal version of literary history as it was handed down from teacher to student, also found in the same manuscripts, albeit a minority. Their wording was fixed and solidified only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when they invariably appear integrated into the prefaces of the early editions. They helped to reassemble and shape the corpora that today we know in print. In some cases, such as the *Kalittokai* discussed above, there is even evidence to suggest that they helped fabricate an order or information that was lost in the abyss of time. In any event they are deemed worthy of quotation and in these latter doubtful instances they

may even be used as a justification by editors, as in the case of the *Kalittokai* stanza. It would certainly be worthwhile to make a separate collection of all of them.

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