

Herman Tieken, *Kāvya in South India: Old Tamil Caṅkam Poetry*, Gonda Indological Studies, Vol. 10, Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2001, 270 Pp. € 60. (Paperback)

In the "Introduction" (pp. 1-10) to his "Kāvya in South India", the author summarizes his main thesis concerning the datation and character of Caṅkam literature. Caṅkam is considered by Tamilologists as classical Tamil literature, called also bardic, and dated into the first centuries A.D. But Tieken's whole book goes against all the accepted opinions, historical and cultural facts, against all the authors who have been working in the field for decades (Zvelebil, Hart, Lienhard, Gros, Takahashi, *et al.*). He also criticizes the existent translations (Hart, Ramanujan, Zvelebil, Shanmugam Pillai, Ludden, *et al.*) judging that their translations represent paraphrases of the commentaries (p. 42). The book is critically reviewed by Hart (*JAOS* 124.1, 2004, pp. 180-184) and some others.

The author states that the Old Tamil Caṅkam literature consists of eight anthologies of short poems called the *Eṭṭutokai* (the *Aiṅkurunūru*, the *Kuruntokai*, the *Narrinai*, the *Akanānūru*, the *Puranānūru*, the *Patirrupattu*, the *Paripāṭal*, the *Kallitokai*) and a work on grammar and poetics (the *Tolkāppiyam*). Traditionally the *Pattuppāṭṭu* (Ten Songs) is also considered as a part of Caṅkam literature but Tieken disagrees with this view saying that it is absent from the traditional list. (p. 1) It seems that Tieken excludes Ten Songs because of their length of more than 100 lines while poems from anthologies range between 4 and 30 lines. In my opinion length cannot be a measure because the songs of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* represent a mixture of Akam (interior or love poetry) and Puram (exterior or heroic poetry) as do the anthologies of the *Eṭṭutokai* excepting two of them, the *Patirrupattu* and the *Puranānūru*, which belong to Puram. He first gives a number of approximately 2364 poems (p. 1), later he mentions 2381 poems attributed to 473 poets. (p. 92) He says that "Akam and Puram appear to belong to one and the same literary tradition" (p. 81); the poets used the so-called formulae, common technique, they drew on same set of incidents. Still, Tieken decides "that the bards in Puram cannot possibly have been the poets who composed Akam." (p. 82) Till now it has been commonly accepted in scholarly world that Caṅkam literature represented an authentic Tamil literary tradition. Tieken argues that it was not so and "... that it cannot be earlier than the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century. As a result Caṅkam literature must be situated in the period well after the introduction of Sanskrit literature into Tamilnadu." (p. 2; *passim*). He argues that the various genres of Caṅkam poetry are adaptations or elaborations in Tamil of particular genres of Sanskrit Kāvya literature. In fact, Caṅkam poetry is the outcome of the attempt to write Kāvya poetry in Tamil." (p. 2; *passim*) Tieken says that "the poems, and in particular the so called 'historical' Puram poems, do not depict a contemporary society at all, but instead a society from the past. Consequently, the poetry should be dated not *in* but *after* the period it describes." (p. 3) He also mentions "The possibility of deliberate archaization as a stylistic feature of Caṅkam poetry ..." (p. 3, fn. 9) From the first pages the reader finds himself/ herself in a controversial situation

where the knowledge acquired of the history of Old Tamil literature comes to naught and one easily believes author's words when he says that his findings are "diametrically opposed to those of earlier scholars of Tamil literature." (p. 4) Incredulity and disbelief were feelings that arose in me while reading the following statement; "... it will appear necessary to distinguish between the origin of the poetic tradition and that of the Caṅkam corpus. The corpus as we now have it seems to be much later than the eighth or ninth century." (p. 5) Before proceeding to next chapters one may object the author and editors for not giving a chart of Caṅkam corpus, a description of the main characteristics of Caṅkam literature (the interior landscape or *tiṇai*, different situations or *turai*); historical map of South India with its complicated dynastic picture and general index could also have been very useful while struggling through a jungle of names, concepts, hypothesis.

In the first chapter "The Old Tamil love poems" (pp. 11-53) Tieken is against the accepted opinion that Caṅkam poetry was aimed at a public made of people described in the poems. He is critical of Zvelebil's opinion that Akam poetry described erotic life of elite and gave an idealized picture of ordinary people and says that: "The protagonists are poor and primitive villagers. It is thus a poetry *about* the village, which functions as a stereotyped setting for everything backward and foolish." (p. 11) He thinks that Akam presented the point of view of the *nāgarakas* what he must say because of his hypothesis that Caṅkam literature cannot be early, as commonly accepted, but that it belonged to the eighth or the ninth century. He brings examples of poems to support his opinion but in the songs I find sensitive descriptions of peoples' everyday life, worries, love and love's pains, relations between man and wife — pictures different of those found in Kāvya poetry the way Tieken sees them. Some conventions are present in Kāvya (husband on the trip, coming of monsoon and he is not home, wife pines away, grows thin, her bracelets slip off, grows palid, cannot sleep, crying constantly; there is the role of messengers, etc.). They are akin to the *gāthās* of Hāla's *Sattasāi*. As the author goes against every opinion he states that "... while Akam has been transmitted to us as it were in a vacuum, the *Sattasāi* presents itself as a satellite-text of the Kāmasūtra, thus providing a clue as to the literary context in which it originated." (p. 52) He says that Akam is not earlier than the eighth century and that the *Sattasāi* is usually dated in the first centuries A.D. and adds "that means that if there exists a genetic relationship between two traditions it is most likely Akam which was the borrower." (p. 53) My question is why should some poets composing Akam in the eighth century borrow from the *Sattasāi* when there was a temporal gap of six or seven centuries, as well a language gap between Tamil versus Prakrit Māhārāṣṭrī. Why would Akam authors need to borrow from a literary Prakrit, not from their own living language? In Akam Tieken finds that 'the persons speaking in the poems are not the poets of the poems nor the intended audience; they are 'merely' *dramatis personae*." (p. 51) He finds *dramatis personae* also in the *Sattasāi* and in the following chapter "Hāla's *Sattasāi* and Akam" (pp. 54-80) he says: "The 'village' types are invariably stupid, poor and frustrated." (p. 55) and "... the village is merely a

literary setting selected in the first place to illustrate the effects of poverty, foolishness and lack of sophistication.” (p. 63) Judging *ex cathedra* in Leiden can sometimes show little compassion towards common people. While *nāgaraka* as described in the Kāmasūtra studies Sanskrit, the illiterate villager is made to speak Prākṛit. (p. 78) And what about queens speaking Prākṛit in Nāṭya which is Kāvya *par excellence*?! He continues. “The use of this worn out literary dialect in the Sattasāi can not be accidental but would, together with the occasional so-called *deśī*-words, seem to be part of the attempt to give colour to the monologues of the backward villagers and unhappy lovers”. (p. 78) Tieken’s suggestion is “... that the poetry of the Sattasāi was composed as a direct answer to the Kāmasūtra.” (p. 79) This idea is unclear to me because there is a time discrepancy: while the *Sattasāi* is dated into the first centuries A.D. Vātsyāyana’s *Kāmasūtra* presumably took its present form during Guptas.

The conclusion of his next chapter entitled “Puram” (pp. 81-91) is that it is “highly unlikely that the bards in Puram are the poets of Akam or Caṅkam poetry in general.” (p. 91) He thinks that the long oral tradition which has been written down and compiled in anthologies never existed.

Follows “The arrangement of the poems and their style”. (pp. 92-112) The poems in the anthologies are arranged in different ways (in decades, according to their *tinai*, in random order, according to the hero praised). He pays special attention to the *Kuruntokai* and observes that in it “... each poem echoes certain words from the preceding poem ... . Each poem appears to be tied to those preceding it by set of verbal associations of its own.” (p. 95) He thinks that “this type of concatenation” shows “that the poems were composed only at the moment of their inclusion in the anthology, which involves a radical departure from the current interpretation of the *Werdegang* of Old Tamil poetry.” (p. 103) Though Tieken mentions Hart who drew attention to the occurrence of long sentences and their structure and the phenomenon of embedding sentences within sentences and according to whom the construction in Tamil and in Sanskrit is different because “determined by the nature of the respective languages” (p. 106), the author goes on with describing the ornate Kāvya prose style and the inscriptions (Girnār in Sanskrit, Nasik in Prakrit). Then, without any real arguments and connection with Caṅkam literature, he boldly says: “One is tempted to explain the Tamil style as an imitation in Tamil of Sanskrit style, or, vice versa, the direction of the borrowing depending on the dating of Tamil poetry.” and decides “that until proven otherwise Old Tamil poetry is to be taken as a written poetry transmitted in a written form.” (p. 109) He ends the chapter by saying: “... the compilation of the *Kuruntokai* and the other anthologies presupposes a proficient poet-compiler working within a flourishing poetic tradition.” (p. 112) My question is how could some Tamil author write, under Kāvya influence, in a style of old Tamil literary tradition if that tradition never existed before.

In “Puram as historical fiction” (pp. 113-127) he repeats his opinion that “Puram is thus not a poetry of a contemporary society but on *about* an heroic period in the past.” (p. 114) He interprets the colophons of some poems and finds that “the detailed personal information found in the colophons is not matched by

the poems themselves, which are virtually anonymous.” (p. 122) For me this means that the early original oral poetical tradition was put to writing some time later. That is contrary to Tieken’s hypothesis that the authors were well educated in Sanskrit literature and that they wrote the Caṅkam corpus in the eighth or the ninth century emulating the old style while living under patronate. How could some poet understand or how could he have imagined or felt the destiny of the real bards of Puṛam with their existential problems living centuries before?

Follows “The dating of old Tamil Caṅkam poetry” (pp. 128-151) where he repeats the motto of his book, namely, that “Caṅkam poetry has to be dated after the period it describes”. (p. 128) He starts with two assumptions: that this poetry was interested in the particular past and that it had a goal to promote Tamil as literary language. I ask again — how can one promote a language as literary if there was no literature in that language before the eighth century? Tieken continues by giving a short picture of Pallavas who were not present in Caṅkam corpus explaining that “... if Caṅkam is indeed an historical poetry, the absence of the Pallavas from the scene may only mean that the authors aimed to depict a period in which the Pallavas did not, or not yet, play a role.” (p. 131) What could this mean? My conclusion is that Pallavas are not present in Caṅkam literature because Caṅkam was much earlier before this dynasty came to power. For Pāṇṭiyas, Cōlas and Cēras Tieken says that they “... did show a keen interest in the past.” (p. 131) But why would they present “... themselves as the successors of the very same dynasties described in Caṅkam poetry.” (p. 131) if that Caṅkam poetry was the fruit of work of the poets from the eighth or the ninth century?! The author states “... that the present Pāṇṭiya line is not a direct continuation of the earlier Pāṇṭiyas ... By assuming this dynastic name the Pāṇṭiyas are so to speak forging history.” (p. 132) It is difficult to understand Tieken why does he insist to date Tamil literature so late when it is a historic fact that all three dynasties were there in South India during Aśoka’s reign in the third century B.C., what he explicitly states. (pp. 134-135) Why can he not accept the fact that Tamil civilization possessed its own literature much earlier not showing any influence of Sanskrit culture? He himself mentions that in Caṅkam poetry the references to Hindu gods as Śiva and Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa are rare (p. 14); he notices that there is “the rareness of loanwords from Sanskrit ...” (p. 142). He also states that “For poets the process of archaization must have consisted in reconstructing or fabricating forms which to them sounded archaic.” (p. 143) But how would they know how the archaic Tamil language sounded like if there were no specimens of literary sources written in Old Tamil before the eighth or the ninth century? In the *Tolkāppiyam* he sees a uniform text, composed by one author what is contrary to all we know about this important book on Tamil poetics. If the society of Caṅkam was primitive, as the author keeps repeating, why would Pāṇṭiyas wish to affirm their status by ordering an anthology of primitive poetry?

Follows chapter “The Kalittokai and Paripāṭal, and their counterparts in Indo-Aryan literature”. (pp. 152-195) These two anthologies belong to the *Eṭṭutokai* but differ from other six anthologies because they “... are adaptations in Tamil of specific opera-like genres of the dramatic Kāvya literature.” (p. 152) He

gives comparisons with the *Gītagovinda*, with *lāsya* as described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. His interpretation of the *Kalittokai* and the *Gītagovinda* as *lāsya*s did not convince me because *lāsya* was a solo dance, the *Kalittokai* is an anthology of poems, the *Gītagovinda* can not be subsumed under a dance-form because its text belongs to Kāvya and it is in Sanskrit, not in Prākṛit. When he writes about festivals the author forgets that dramatic scenes found in festivals have nothing to do with classical Nāṭya. He also argues that "... the Paripāṭal is an illustration in Tamil of the *uparūpaka* genre of Indo-Aryan literature." (p. 175) He compares some songs with *carcarī*, in the *Kalittokai* he finds examples of *kuravai* in which he sees "... merely *hallīsaka* scenes transplanted to Tamilnadu." (p. 186). For these two anthologies he states that they "... present two entirely different pictures of the worship of Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu in the Pāṇṭiya realm. In the Paripāṭal we see the Pāṇṭiyas from above attempting to introduce a Tirumāl religion in Tamilnadu, the *Kalittokai* presents, so to speak, the end of this development, namely a popular Kṛṣṇa cult." (p. 186) He continues with his comparisons with *lāsya* and because of the inclusion of the *kuravai* poems in the anthology, he identifies the *Kalittokai* poems as *lāsya*, what seems to me a far-reaching conclusion. As well as his statement in the last chapter: "... it has been argued that the genre of the *Gītagovinda* is a combination of the *catuspadā* and *lāsya* both mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. One of the earliest forms of *catuspadā* found in the Mālavikāgnimitra, testifies to the authenticity of the practice found in the *Gītagovinda* and Bhakti poetry of 'signing' the songs." (p. 225) It is not easy to go through the labyrinth of author's thoughts and these chapter rich in details would need a whole critical review for itself.

In the chapter "The origin of Caṅkam poetry" (pp. 196-212) Tiekens states that the *Pattuppāṭtu* belongs to the genre of epic Mahākāvya. (p. 199) His arguments did not convince me; when he says that "... the sources of Mahākāvya are the epic stories and epic and purāṇic mythology" (p. 199) he contradicts himself by saying: "The *Pattuppāṭtu* deals with gods, but only with a typically regional, indigenous South Indian god, namely Murukan." (pp. 199-200) While writing about the Tamil in the Pāṇṭiya inscriptions he concludes "... that Caṅkam poetry has been 'invented' by the very same poets who composed the inscriptions for the early Pāṇṭiyas of the beginning of the ninth century. In any case, with the Pāṇṭiyas, and only with the Pāṇṭiyas, we find evidence of the conditions for Caṅkam literature." (p. 201) Yes, with the Pāṇṭiyas, but with the early Pāṇṭiyas. And he continues with a statement which I do not understand: "... this conclusion applies in the first place to the origin of the poetic tradition, that is, the development of a written standardized poetic tradition. It does not automatically apply to the texts we now have." (p. 201) Further on, he is of the opinion that, though the Caṅkam anthologies reflect Pāṇṭiya interests, the *Patirruppattu* deals with the history of the Cēras and betrays the influence of post-Caṅkam Bhakti. (pp. 201-202). For the *Cilappatikāram* he says that it is also "... a text by the Cēras (Iḷaṅkōvaṭikal) and about the Cēras (Ceṅkuṭṭuvan)". (p. 205) Then he writes on the format of the *Patirruppattu* and about lost Caṅkam texts which, it seems mostly contained elements of drama, music, song and he concludes: "Rather than

for early, original Tamil texts of songs and dramatic poems, we may have to look for translations or adaptations of relatively late Sanskrit texts on drama, music or, for instance, Apabhraṃśa song metres.” (p. 212) Which texts, dated when? A careful reader is till now completely lost in the explanations without arguments.

In the chapter “Bhakti poetry” (pp. 213-228), as in his whole book, Tieken changes all accepted literary periodizations and dates Bhakti after Caṅkam. That is a well known fact, but as he dates Caṅkam to the eighth and to the ninth century, Bhakti for him does not start around 600 A.D. but only in the ninth century. Contrary to accepted views that Bhakti poetry belonged to wandering ascetics and poets, he rejects the oral theory and is of the opinion “... that the Bhakti songs which we now have are the product of a written literary tradition ... we are far removed from the way of life of the mad, wandering saints depicted in the songs ... the saints are not the poets of the songs, but ... *personae* in the songs.” (p. 222)

He connects Bhakti poetry with the *Gitagovinda* and *catuspadā* and says: “Bhakti poetry would thus appear to be part of the Kāvya tradition. As such it follows in the footsteps of Caṅkam poetry, which represents the first attempt to compose Kāvya poetry in Tamil. In this connection it should be noted that the simple style of the Bhakti poems, that is simple compared to that of Caṅkam poetry, is merely show. It is a form of art in itself, the result of a conscious effort to create something fitting a supposedly mad unskilled poet.” (p. 225) Not to mention the whole age-old tradition of wandering ‘lunatic’ poets, I shall mention only Bengali Bāuls! He thinks that the connection between Bhakti and Caṅkam literary traditions is best seen in Vaiṣṇava Bhakti poetry where the yearning for god can be compared to Akam conventions while the character of the wandering ascetic can be compared to the bard in Puṇam and states that the division of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava poetry coincides with those between Puṇam and Akam. (pp. 225-226) I do not see any conclusive evidence for this statement because these two types of literatures are too different to be compared.

The final chapter “Looking back at Caṅkam corpus” (pp. 229-235) recapitulates Tieken’s main thesis and hypothesis. One can hardly agree that Tamil functioned initially as an equivalent of Prākṛit (p. 229), “... Caṅkam poetry being original Prākṛit poetry, the Pattuppāṭṭu being Sanskrit poetry adapted in accordance with the Prākṛit-ness of Tamil ...” (p. 231) And at the end he states that his book aims “... to clear up some persistent misconceptions concerning Old Tamil literature. It has been shown that Caṅkam poetry does not present an early indigenous Tamil literary tradition but is a relatively late offshoot of the Sanskrit Kāvya tradition. Moreover, it is not a popular poetry but part of a learned tradition. The same applies to Bhakti poetry, which is a specialized development of the *lāsya/catuspadā* genre, which seems itself to have been revived on the basis of the available handbooks on drama and literature.” (p. 235) After all that has been said, I don’t think that there is any need to comment on such a distorted picture of old Tamil literature.

In “Appendices to Chapter 5” (pp. 236-247) Tieken presents the results of his screening for “verbal echoes” of some passages from the *Kuruntokai*, the *Narriṇai* and the *Puranānūru*. His conclusions were critically rejected by Hart

(JAOS 124.1, 2004, pp. 181-182). Book ends with Index locorum (pp. 248-254) and a Bibliography (pp. 255-270).

I shall add only some of my observations because the length of the review has its limits. The author did not pay attention to the development of Tamil language nor to the difference between the language of Caṅkam and that of Bhakti poetry. One is Old Tamil, the other is Middle Tamil but there would be no linguistic difference between them in case that both literatures belonged approximately to the ninth century. Caṅkam literature hardly shows any knowledge of Hindu gods while Bhakti poetry is imbued with love towards Śiva and Viṣṇu. Aesthetic feelings in Caṅkam differ from those found in Kāvya despite some common conventions which might have had the sources in the folk literary substratum found in the floating literature of Deccan. The poetical atmosphere is different, there is no elaborate concept of *tiṅaiturai* to be found in Kāvya. Ticken mentions the *Tolkāppiyam* and the *Cilappatikāram*, but he is not concerned with dating those works as well as the *Maṇimēkalai* or the *Tirukkuraḷ*. And when did Kampan's write his *Irāmāvatāram* or Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa*? If Caṅkam belongs to the ninth century how to date other Dravidian literatures? Ticken is more concerned with Puṛam than with Akam which is much more present in Caṅkam. When he says that *muktaka* is of Tamil origin how can he date Caṅkam so late? Preserved Sanskrit *muktakas* of Bhartṛhari and Amaru are in no way comparable to poems of Caṅkam. So how could Sanskrit Kāvya have made such a substantial influence on old Tamil literature? I see no argument for Sanskrit and Prākṛit literature being models for Tamil poetry. There was no Nāṭya in old Tamil literature and Puṛam in many ways differs from Mahākāvya. Bhakti poetry was *per definitionem* a religious poetry while Sanskrit Kāvya literature belonged to the realm of profane literature ...

Though in my opinion this book suffers from a basic methodological flaw i.e. preconceived theory which does not take obvious facts into consideration, the book is worth reading. It brings many interesting datas, insights and through its provocativeness can impel the reader to further study of the rich and stimulating Old Tamil literature.

University of Zagreb  
Croatia

Klara Gönc MOAČANIN

\*\*\*\*\*

Anna-Pya Sjödin, *The Happening of Tradition: Vallabha on Anumāna in Nyāya-tīlavati*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: South Asian Studies 1, Uppsala: Uppsala University, Interfaculty Units, 2006, 195 Pp. US\$ 55. (Paperback)

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika (or Navyanyāya) scholars who flourished from the twelfth century to the fourteenth century have enjoyed minimal attention from modern researchers who aim to draw out the history of this school. One of the main