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Naming the Author: The Taṇṭi Motif in the Margins of the Tamil Poetic Tradition

Abstract: One of the most important early treatises on the figures of speech in Sanskrit, the *Kāvyaḍarśa* ('Mirror of Poetry', eighth century CE), was adapted into Tamil for the first time in about the eleventh century CE as part of a bigger treatise, and then again a century later as *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* ('Ornaments of Taṇṭi'). The author of the *Kāvyaḍarśa*, Daṇḍin, became 'Taṇṭi' in Tamil and remained a sort of tag for the tradition concerned with the figures of speech in poetry; in fact he left his trace as an author's name as late as the sixteenth century in the preface to *Māraṇalaṅkāram* ('Ornaments of Māraṇ'), in the form of a dialectal variation, Teṇṭi. The preface to the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* that informs us about 'Taṇṭi' does not have a broad basis of sources; it is apparently transmitted only in a limited number of the manuscripts that contain the frequently copied and important text *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*. Consequently the preface has found entry only into few of the editions. Recently a new manuscript has come to light (MSSML 631) which gives additional information which might have been deliberately suppressed in the print tradition. The parentage and education of 'Taṇṭi' in the paratexts of this Tamil sub-school of poetics thus may teach us a lesson not only about the fluidity of transmission but also about the arbitrary choices of editors and their possible political agendas.

1 Introduction

1.1 The preface as a paratext in the process of transmission

Information about authors is notoriously rare in the whole of Tamil literature. Literary history in the Western sense started only during the colonial period in the nineteenth century when a new genre was created, or rather imported, namely, a narrative interspersed with verse quotations that gives (traditional) chronological accounts of the lives and works of poets and scholars. The most well known of these works is Casie Chitty's *Tamil Plutarch. A Summary Account of the Lives of the Poets and Poetesses of Southern India and Ceylon*, first published in 1859.

For the earlier period, the sources are references and quotations in the commentary literature and occasional inscriptions,¹ but first of all the mostly anonymous verses that are transmitted in the wake of the written transmission. Those verses may be part of textual colophons, even rarer than scribal ones, which are preserved for about only 10 per cent of the surviving manuscripts. They may be satellite stanzas added at the beginning of a bundle on an unnumbered folio. They may have become an integral part of the textual tradition, in which case they may be found at the beginning of the first numbered folio as a ‘protection’ (*kāppu*) or a ‘preface’ (*pāyiram*). The important thing to note, however, is that as soon as printing comes into play they are invariably relocated to the beginning of the book, either as a part of the editor’s preface (quoting or only summarising the information contained in the verse) or as a ‘laudatory preface’ (*cirappuppāyiram*). A detailed discussion of the subgenres involved may be found elsewhere;² it suffices here to say that it appears impossible to reconcile the theoretical discussion about prefatory material with either manuscript usage (which in our case, however, may mirror only the late premodern usage of, say, the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries) or with print usage (which unsurprisingly simplifies and standardises complex and fluid states of transmission).

The aim of the present article is to explore, on the one hand, the degree to which such anonymous stanzas dealing with authorship have become part of literary subgenres, or in other words, the degree to which they are conventionalised and follow a model once they are established in a certain tradition. On the other hand, the article focuses on the way that tradition can be manipulated and information changed or even suppressed, and what the possible reasons for doing so might be.

1.2 Tamil schools of poetics and the ‘ornaments’ of *Taṇṭi*

When trying to understand how tradition functions in terms of affiliation and community, the best example is the numerous schools that developed in the most fruitful theoretical domain of the Tamil people, namely, grammar in the wider sense, which includes not only phonetics, morphology, and syntax, but also poetics, metrics, and rhetoric – in other words, most of the language-related disciplines that were needed for training future generations of poets and the connoisseurs to appreciate their skills.

¹ Collected in Govindasamy 1977.

² Wilden 2017, 170–174.

There are two obvious ways of describing and analysing school formation. One is the traditional Indian way of tracing a lineage beginning with a treatise and continued by a succession of commentaries. The other is to examine the development of curricula, a line of investigation recently pursued by Giovanni Ciotti.³ To reconcile these two approaches is not easy, as, put in a nutshell, we would expect the followers of a school in the sense of the former model to read the texts belonging to their own tradition, instead of mixing the works of multiple schools as is done in many of the manuscripts representing a curriculum. A possible answer may have to take into consideration two aspects, both equally important. One is the fact that not all the grammatical schools include texts for all the necessary sub-domains of grammar enumerated above, so that for a complete education students had to resort to material outside their immediate tradition. The other aspect is the temporal restriction of our extant sources, which allows access only to witnesses from the late Premodern Period, when most of the schools had ceased to be alive and active, which might have made it easier for scholars to choose freely from what had been inherited.

Table 1: Tamil schools of grammar.

century CE	comprehensive	phonetics+ morphology/syntax	figures of speech
1 st – 10 th	<i>Tolkāppiyam</i>		
11 th	lāmpūraṇar		[<i>Vīracōḷiyam</i>]
12 th	Pēraciriyar		<i>Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram</i>
13 th	Cēṇāvaraiyar	<i>Naṇṇūl</i> Maiyilainātar	
14 th	Nacciṇārkkiniyar		
15 th	Teyvaccilaiyār Kallāṭaṇār		
16 th			<i>Māraṇalaṅkāram</i>
17 th		Āntipulavar Caṅkaranamaccivāyar	
18 th		Civaṇanamūṇivar	
19 th		Irāmāṇucakkavirāyar Kūlaṅkaitampirāṇ	

3 Ciotti 2021.

Table 1 shows examples of what such schools could look like, giving the names of treatises in italics followed in the same column by the names of their commentators. Even when a school became inactive in so far as it did not bring forth new commentators, the transmission and, presumably, the teaching continued, as is proved by the simple fact that today there are still numerous (in the cases taken up below very numerous) manuscript copies available.

The *Tolkāppiyam* (i.e. a treatise composed by somebody from the family of that name) is the oldest surviving comprehensive grammar, an enormous treatise in three books that was compiled and rearranged probably throughout the first millennium and then followed by a commentarial tradition of six commentators (not all of them on the complete work) from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. This work became the role model for all that followed, as will be shown in the next section with respect to its preface, even though as a description of language the *Tolkāppiyam* was superseded by the second school, the *Naṇṇūl* ('Good Treatise'), composed in the early thirteenth century, with a commentary tradition extending right into the nineteenth century. This, however, was not a comprehensive text, which means that for teaching purposes it had to team up with other branch schools. One such partial school was that of Taṇṭi, which is the focus of this discussion, and its tradition is also noticeable for organising its credentials in a slightly different manner.

The treatment of the figures of speech or 'ornaments' (*alaṅkāra* in Skt., *aṇi* in Tamil) might have entered the Tamil tradition as a treatise in its own right, but if so, that treatise has been lost.⁴ The first extant and quite terse Tamil version goes back to a Sanskrit source, the *Kāvyādarśa*, composed by Daṇḍin in about the eighth century.⁵ It is found in the eleventh-century *Viracōḷiyam* (named for its patron from the Cōla royal dynasty), a considerably less successful attempt at rewriting Tamil grammar by using Sanskrit technical terminology throughout. The section on ornaments appears as its fifth part. This arrangement may be the most obvious reason why school formation in this case did not work by means of a line of commentaries. About a century later, a fresh adaptation is found; one hesitates to call it a translation simply because it is describing the ornaments used in Tamil poetry, which could not have been achieved by a mere one-to-one re-rendering in the target language. This fresh adaptation is

⁴ For an attempt at tracing the pre-Daṇḍin history of the 'ornaments' in Tamil, see Chevillard 2019, as yet unpublished but available online at <<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-02179709>> (accessed on 10 May 2021).

⁵ On the importance of Daṇḍin's work (particularly the Sanskrit and Tamil versions) for Indian poetics as a whole, see Monius 2000.

called the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, no doubt after the author of the Sanskrit original, Daṇḍin, as mentioned above. The name remained so powerful that the Tamil author-translator himself was called by the name of that Sanskrit scholar – in Tamil, Taṇṭi – a fact that may be explained as conferring a badge of honour on the Tamil scholar: he is as eminent as his Sanskrit counterpart.⁶ To cut a long story short that has not yet been explored in the detailed manner it deserves, in the Tamil treatment of *alaṅkāras* or *aṇis*, the sense of tradition is bound up with this name of the founding figure, Taṇṭi. It is still found in the later treatises on the topic such as the sixteenth-century *Māraṇalaṅkāram*. Before going into crucial references to this Taṇṭi in the Tamil tradition, especially the preface to the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, it is necessary to look into the model preface provided by the *Tolkāppiyam*.

2 The matrix of a preface in the oldest grammatical treatise

Larger than life looms in the background of the Tamil grammatical tradition the figure of Tolkāppiyaṇ, the author of the earliest extant treatise, the *Tolkāppiyam*, just as is the case with Pāṇini in the Sanskrit tradition. Tolkāppiyaṇ was, according to grammatical lore, one of the twelve disciples of the Tamil ur-grammarian Akkatiyaṇ, member of the first literary academy whose work has been lost in the course of time.⁷ At first glance it is surprising that nothing of this relationship has found entry into the famous preface of the *Tolkāppiyam*, perhaps the oldest of its kind and an integral part of the textual transmission (included by the commentaries), printed today as a laudatory preface (*ciṟappup-pāyiram*), and in the manuscripts also simply called a preface (*pāyiram*). The explanation is delivered by one of the commentators, Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar, in his own preface to the commentary on the first part of the *Tolkāppiyam*, which deals with phonetics: there was a quarrel between master and student, and Akattiyaṇ unjustly cast off his first disciple, with the consequence that his own

⁶ For another example of this kind, consider the early poet names in classical literature where the poet is henceforth called after a powerful image created by him, such as Cempulappeyaṇṇār for the author of *Kuruntokai* 40, that is, ‘He who [sang about] red earth and pouring rain’.

⁷ A brief but succinct history of the legends surrounding this founding figure is given in Chevillard 2009.

work was lost and his student's treatise became the 'primary', i.e. the foundational treatise (*mutal-nūl*) of the tradition.

The preface, quoted and translated below in Table 2, with fourteen lines of verse of medium length, tells us everything that tradition expects its adherents to know about the great scholar:

Table 2: The preface of the *Tolkāppiyam*

<i>vaṭa vēṅkaṭam teṇ kumari</i> <i>āy iṭai, tamil kūru nal ulakattu</i>	range	From the Northern Vēṅkaṭa hills to Southern Kumari, in the good world where Tamil is spoken,
<i>vaḷakkum ceyyuḷum āy iru mutaliṇ</i> <i>eḷuttum collum poruḷum nāṭi</i>	content	examining letters, words, and meanings, beginning with the two [types of] worldly and poetic [speech],
<i>cem tamil iyaṅkai civaṇiya nilattoṭu</i> <i>muntu-nūl kaṇṭu muṇaippaṭa eṇṇi</i> <i>pulam tokuttōṇē pōkk' aṟu paṇuval</i> <i>nilantaru tiruviṇ pāṇṭiyaṇ avaiyattu</i>	credentials	seeing, with the field that is intimately related to refined Tamil, the previous treatise, thinking it through, he compiled the work, a faultless discourse in the assembly of Nilantaru Tiruviṇ Pāṇṭiyaṇ,
<i>aṟaṅ karai nāviṇ nāṇ maṇai muṇṇiya</i> <i>ataṅkōṭṭācārṅ' aril tapa terintu</i>	corrector	scrutinised, for errors to come to an end, by Ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ, who was accomplished in four Vedas, [his] tongue a bank of virtue,
<i>mayāṅkā marapiṇ eḷuttu muṇai kāṭṭi</i> <i>malku nīr varaippin aintiram</i> <i>niṇainta</i>	tradition	showing a method [for writing] letters in an unambiguous manner, replete [with the knowledge of] Aintiram, bordered by the abundant water,
<i>tolkāppiyaṇ eṇa taṇ peyar tōrri</i> <i>pal pukaḷ niṇutta paṭimaiyōṇē.</i>	author	manifesting his name as Tolkāppiyaṇ, he who is the model that is established in great fame.

This preface famously starts with the region in which the language that the grammar deals with is spoken, namely, Tirupati in the North (now in Andhra) and Cape Comorin in the South. The preface then gives us the content of the work, that is, three chapters on phonetics, morphology or syntax, and poetics that describe both worldly and poetic language. Next the preface moves on to the credentials of the work, that is, the court of the king in which it was presented and approved. It identifies the corrector and the tradition from which the book comes, here naming the Northern school of Aindra, not its own legendary

predecessor, the work of Akkatiyaṇ. And finally the preface adduces the name of the author, Tolkāppiyaṇ. One might also have expected the name of his father and his birthplace, but they are not mentioned here. The end brings a single line of praise for the scholar, not much according to the standard followed by many later verses of this type. Almost all the elements that make up this preface will be found again in a slightly different arrangement in the verse that plays the corresponding role in the Taṇṭi tradition.

3 Taṇṭi as an author in the printed versions

The first mention of Taṇṭi in the Tamil tradition is found in the aforementioned first adaptation, the *Viracōḷiyam*. In this case the reference does not come as a paratext but is integrated into the first aphorism of the section on ornaments which, following the general pattern of rhetoric employed in this book, addresses a girl as the putative listener of the teaching:

உரையுட லாக வுயிர் பொரு ளாக வுரைத்தவண்ண
நிரைநிற மாநடை யேசெல வாநின்ற செய்யுட்களாந்
தரைமலி மானிடர் தம்மலங் காரங்க டண்டிசொன்ன
கரைமலி நூலின் படியே வுரைப்பன் கனங்குழையே!

urai ~uṭal āka ~uyir poruḷ āka ~uraitta vaṇṇam
nirai niṟam ā naṭaiyē celav' ā niṇṟa ceyyutkaḷ ām
tarai mali māṇiṭar tam +alaṅkāraṅkaḷ taṇṭi coṇṇa
*karai mali nūlin paṭiyē ~uraippan kaṇam-kulaiyē!*⁸

I shall expound, oh lady with heavy earrings,
in the very manner of the treatise that spreads to the [other] shore [of knowledge],
which Daṇḍin uttered on the ornaments of human beings, abundant on earth,
that are poems in which words stand as [their] body, meaning as [their] soul,
the series of alliterative patterns as [their] complexion, style/[rhythmic] motion as [their] walk.

Befittingly, the section on figures of speech, or ornaments, starts with a convoluted image that depicts a text which is beautified by such figures of speech, as a human body is decorated with ornaments. Apart from the content of the section which introduces, with heavily Sanskritised terminology, something that of course already existed in Tamil poetry (as in any other), it is this reference to the Sanskrit source which allows us to make the direct connection with

⁸ Viracōḷiyam 143.

the *Kāvyādarśa* and its author. Here the Tamil *taṇṭi* definitely has to be understood as a direct reference to Daṇḍin. The topic of translation from Sanskrit into Tamil is not yet introduced here, and the text itself rather bears testimony to an effort at understanding a concept.⁹

For the next version in line, the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, things are in the process of being normalised and a verse preface has been produced; only here that preface does not seem to have taken a very firm hold in the textual tradition and its transmission. Speaking of the printed text, none of the early editions, as far as I could get hold of them (see bibliography), contains this preface at all. The first version I could trace is found in the edition of Cuntaramūrti (my book of 2016 presumably being a reprint of the 1967 edition), and he quotes the verse in his introduction instead of putting it as a preface to the text itself. In the popular edition by Tamiḷaṇṇal of 2004, the preface is printed, as would be expected, as the ‘laudatory preface’ (*ciṛappupāyiram*). Such a state of affairs may well be regarded as suspicious, and a look into the manuscript transmission seems to offer some explanation: of the five manuscripts currently at my disposal, only one contains the preface (on which more below). The two print versions available at any rate agree with each other on the wording:

Table 3: The ‘*ciṛappupāyiram*’ of the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*

<i>vaṭa ticai iruntu teṇ malaikk’ ēki</i> <i>mati tavaḷ kuṭumip potiya māl varai</i> <i>irum tavaṇ taṇ-pāl arum tamīl</i> <i>uṇarnta</i> <i>paṇṇiru pulavarin muṇṇavan</i> <i>pakarnta</i> <i>tolkāppiyam neri palkāppiyattum</i>	lineage and tradition	After – from the <i>Palkāppiyam</i> on the path of the <i>Tolkāppiyam</i> that was composed by the first of twelve scholars, who had understood difficult Tamil from the great ascetic on the vast Poti mountain of him in whose top the moon crawls after going from the northern direction to the southern mountain –
<i>aṇi perum ilakkaṇam aritiṇ</i> <i>terintu</i>	content	he had understood with difficulty the grammar that pertains to ornaments
<i>vaṭa nūl vaḷi muṇai marapiṇ</i> <i>vaḷāat’</i>	Sanskrit heritage	without swerving from the custom, sequence, [and] way of the northern treatises, without transgressing the twice two boundaries,

⁹ On the development of the trope of a Sanskrit origin for Tamil texts, see Wilden 2021b.

Table 3 (continued).

<i>ir-iraṇṭṭ' ellaiyiṇ ikavā mummaip pārata ilakkaṇam paṇṇuṇat taḷiit tiruntiya maṇi muṭic cempiyaṇ avaiyatt'</i>	credentials	in a metrically suitable way he assigned difficult meaning in the assembly of Cempiyaṇ, with a jewel crown, that was perfect
<i>arum poruḷ yāppiṇ amaiv' ura vakuttaṇaṇ nāṭaka maṇṇattu nāṭakam navirrum vata nūl unarnta tamil nūl pulavan</i>		in encompassing excellently Indian grammar threefold, a scholar of the Tamil treatises who had understood the northern treatises, having also proclaimed a drama in the drama hall
<i>pū viri taṇ polil kāviri nāṭṭu</i>	place	in the land of the Kāviri with flower-spread cool groves,
<i>vamp' aviḷ teriyal ampikāpati mēvarum tavattiṇ il payanta</i>	father	brought forth by the house of penance that is befitting for Ampikāpati with a wreath on which new [flowers] open,
<i>tā arum cirttit taṇṭi enṇavaṇē.</i>	author	– the one who is called Taṇṭi, of a fame difficult to generate.

A comparison with the *Tolkāppiyam* preface quoted in the last section should make the dependency obvious as far as the informative elements are concerned, with the addition that here we also get the birthplace and the father's name.¹⁰ But there is subtle play on some of the details. The reference to the Northern and Southern boundaries of the area where Tamil is spoken is cleverly employed to evoke another strand of grammatical folklore, namely, the ur-grammarian Akattiyaṇ (who was summoned by Lord Śiva to Mount Kailash in the North and then sent to the South to sit on Mount Potiyil in order to make a counterweight to Śiva's assembly of sages in the North so that the earth would not tilt). The version of the tradition according to which the *Akattiyam* (the lost work of Akattiyaṇ) is followed by the *Tolkāppiyam*, which in turn is followed by the *Palkkāppiyam*, can be traced back to another commentator on the *Tolkāppiyam*, namely, Pērācīriyar. In other words, the anonymous author of the

¹⁰ I will not go into the details, used in arguments about the date of the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, of the popular stories connected with the name of Taṇṭi's father, Ampikāpati, putative son of the poet Kampaṇ, illicit lover of the Cōḷa king's daughter, and put to death by that king. The stories are told in the *Ampikāpatikōvai* (for a summary, see *Apitāṇa Cintāmaṇi* 2001, 74.1+2). At any rate, the connection between the two names, Taṇṭi and Ampikāpati, seems to go back to our preface.

current preface gives his Taṇṭi the *crème de la crème* of the tradition as antecedents. This is duly followed by an allusion to the Sanskrit heritage (here called ‘the northern treatise’). The credentials in the form of a royal assembly where the work was presented are ascribed to the Cōla, not the Pāṇṭiya dynasty. There follows a sentence about Taṇṭi’s education both in Tamil and in Sanskrit, making Sanskrit his secondary field of expertise; the sentence is underlined because we will find a different version of it in the next section. Sadly, the allusion to Taṇṭi’s familiarity with drama is not backed up by anything we know; no dramatic text in his name appears to have survived.

The verse, although clever and charming, is in itself unremarkable; dozens of this type have been transmitted. Noteworthy is the previously mentioned fact that no trace is left of what may have been the proper name of the man called ‘Taṇṭi’.

In order to show how tradition moves on, based on the same pattern but modifying and extending for the purpose of accommodating new trends in theory and poetic practice, a brief glimpse into the preface of the next treatise that still bears the name of *alaṅkāraṁ*, the *Māraṇalaṅkāraṁ*, shall conclude this section. This text goes back to the sixteenth century and is Vaiṣṇava in leaning, as can already be gleaned from its title, which evokes one of the names of the poet saint Caṭakōpaṇ. This is a considerably bigger book, including, among other things, a bulky first chapter on the theory of prefaces, so far mostly neglected by modern scholarship, apart from the 2005 edition by Ti.Vē. Kōpālaiyar, which contains not only the old commentary but also the explanatory notes of the great scholar.

This preface is much longer, beginning with the iconic reference to the area between Tirupati and Cape Comorin, mentioning the assembly of the learned and ending with the name of the author, Perumāḷ Kavirāyaṇ, but in the current context lines 11–16 suffice:

முதுமொழித் தெண்டி முதனூ லணியோடும்
புதுமொழிப் புலவர் புணர்த்திய வணியையுந்
தனதுநுண் ணுணர்வா றருபல வணியையு
மனதுறத் தொகுத்தும் வகுத்தும் விரித்தும்
பொதுவியல் பொருள்சொ லணிநெச்ச வியலெனச்
சதுர்பெற விரண்டிந் தழீஇய சார்பெனலாய்க்

mutumolit teṇṭi mutanūḷ aṇiyōṭum
putu molip pulavar puṇarttiya aṇiyaiyum
taṇṭu nuṇ uṇarvāl taru pala aṇiyaiyum
maṇāt’ uṇat tokuttum vakuttum virittum
potuviyal poruḷ col aṇi eccaviyal eṇac
catur peṇa iranṭi’ iṭam taḷīiya cārp’ eṇal āyk

Bringing together, dividing and expanding,
 so as to be taken in by the mind,
 with the poetic figures (*aṇi*) from the primary
 treatise of Teṇṭi with ancient wisdom,
 the poetic figures (*aṇi*) brought together
 by scholars in new words
 and the many poetic figures (*aṇi*) given
 by his own subtle perception
 as a tertiary treatise (*cāṛpu*) that encompasses
 two sections while obtaining four [chapters in one of them],
 namely, *Potuviyaḷ*, *Poruḷ*-, *Col*-, *Aṇi*- [and] *Eccaviyaḷ*

These lines describe both the content and the tradition in which the new treatise stands, and with respect to both there are a couple of new elements. First, the words ‘bringing together, dividing and expanding, so as to be taken in by the mind’ refer to the fact the work has gained considerably in size, and the reason given here is didactic: for the sake of easier understanding, the author has changed the arrangement and extended the presentation. The content is described not only by chapter titles (last two lines), but also by the antecedents that have provided the material presented here. The poetic figures or ornaments taken up are said to have three sources, alluding to the common concept of primary, secondary, and tertiary treatises, where the primary treatise founds a tradition – the role played for the whole of grammar by the *Tolkāppiyam* – the secondary treatise follows in its wake and expands but does not deviate from the master, and finally the tertiary treatise goes into even more detail.

The role of the primary treatise is attributed here to the work of Teṇṭi (dialectal variant of Taṇṭi), while the further figures collected by later scholars implicitly have to be counted as the secondary treatise(s), because the tertiary treatise is adduced to the current author, Perumāḷ Kavirāyaṇ, who contributes his own figures to the collection. There are two possible interpretations for this series. The name Teṇṭi may refer to the original Sanskrit Daṇḍin, in which case a slight would have been committed here against the Tamil author known as Taṇṭi, because he would not have been mentioned by name and not have received the proper recognition. Or the primary treatise referred to here is the Tamil *Taṇṭiyaḷaṅkāraṁ*, and the subsequent scholars would be those who developed new poetry in the period between the twelfth and the sixteenth century, the time when the *Māṇṇaḷaṅkāraṁ* was conceived. In the latter case, the Sanskrit heritage would have been disavowed, something perfectly conceivable in the course of a long tradition, but less likely perhaps given the continued Sanskrit element in the very title. The most economic interpretation may be that by the sixteenth century the figure of Teṇṭi/Taṇṭi has become fully legendary and

the distinction between the author of the *Kāvyaḍarśa* and the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* is no longer made.

4 The new evidence from MSSML 631

As stated above, the manuscript transmission of the preface is narrow, as far as can be determined today. The *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* was a very popular text, and dozens of additional manuscripts no doubt are out there.¹¹ Of the five manuscripts currently at my disposal, what is possibly the oldest one, from Tiruvāṇṭuṭurai (TAM 330), is in such a bad condition that it is not even possible to ascertain whether the verse is there. The two manuscripts that went to Paris (INDIEN 205 and 206, one dependent on the other) clearly belong to a strand which does not transmit the preface. One beautifully conserved manuscript from Ceṇṇai (UVSL 181) comes with several pages of as-yet-unexplored satellite material, but the preface is not found.¹² The one witness available is a remarkable MTM of grammatical treatises found in the Sarasvati Mahāl library in Tañcāvūr (MSSML 631).¹³ The *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* begins on image 491 (identified by a marginal title) with the text of the preface, concluded by the words: *pāyiram muṟṟum*, ‘here ends the preface’. The first twelve lines are reasonably identical, but the printed line 13 differs significantly and is preceded as well as followed by one so far unknown line, and then the verse ends with the familiar last four lines containing the birthplace, the father’s name, and the name of the author.

Fig. 1: *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* in MSSML 631; © Mahārājā Serfoji Sarasvati Mahāl Library, Tañcāvūr.

¹¹ An impressive list of extant manuscripts is found in the as-yet-unpublished critical edition of M. Karunanidhi 2007, the author’s dissertation. He includes the preface but cites it in the known print version, although he lists MSSML 631 among his witnesses.

¹² For a first exploration of the devotional satellite material found in the grammatical tradition, see D’Avella 2020.

¹³ This manuscript, clearly an important witness for a local school of grammar, contains unusual material for more than one text; for its version of another treatise on poetics, the *Irāiyaṇār Akapporuḷ*, see Wilden 2021a. Since the folios are in disorder and the foliation disrupted, currently the best way of identifying a leaf is by referring to the image number.

Fig. 2: The lines of the preface that deviate from the print versions.

கான் முறை வணங்கு நான் மறைக் குரிசிலத் [] தமிழ் நூலுணர்ந்த வட நூற்
புல[வன்] [] தவித் தடப் புலமை கவுசிகப் பெயரோன் []
பூ விரி தண் பொழிற் காவிரி னுட்டு [] வம்பவிழ் தெரியல் அம்புகாபதி
மே வருந் தவத்தினிற் பயந்த [] தாவருஞ் சீர்த்தித் தண்
டி யென்பவனே – பாயிரமுற்றும் –

*kāṇ muṛai vaṇaṅku nāṇ maṛaik kuricilat [] tami nūluṇarnta vaṭa nūr
pula[vaṇ] [] #tavit taṭap pulamai kavucikap peyarōṇ []
pū viri taṇ poḻiṛ kāviri nāṭṭu [] vāmpaviḷ teriyal ampukāpati
mē varuṇ tavattiṇiṇ payanta [] tāvaruṇ cirttiṭ taṇ
ṭi yenpavaṇē – pāyiramurruṇ –*

It is very worthwhile to take a closer look at the new lines 11', 12 and 12':

கான் முறை வணங்கு நால் மறைக் குரிசிலத்
தமிழ்[] நூல் உணர்ந்த வட நூல் புல[வன்]
தவித் தடப் புலமை கவுசிகப் பெயரோன்

*kāṇ muṛai vaṇaṅku nāl maṛaik kuricilat
tami[] nūluṇarnta vaṭa nūluṇarnta
#tavit taṭap pulamai kavucikap peyarōṇ*

one Kaucika by name, of vast erudition,
a scholar of the northern treatises who has understood the Tamil treatises,
master in the four Vedas, who bows at the correct times.

To recall, this text block corresponds to the simple line 12 of the printed version:

வட நூல் உணர்ந்த தமிழ் நூல் புலவன்

vaṭa nūluṇarnta tamiḷ nūluṇarnta

a scholar of the Tamil treatises who had understood the northern treatises

What has changed and what has been added? The first additional line depicts Taṇṭi as a master in the Vedas, unlikely for anybody who is not a brahmin. Secondly, the modified line 12 makes him a Sanskrit scholar who has also mastered Tamil, and not vice versa, as in the printed line. The second additional line gives him another name besides Taṇṭi (following in the very last line), namely Kavucikam, which can reasonably be explained as the Sanskrit gotra name Kaucika; in other words, Taṇṭi is here positively identified as a brahmin. In the early print era as well as throughout the twentieth century, this provides another powerful reason either for not printing or for altering the transmitted preface, namely, nascent Tamil nationalism and its hatred of Sanskrit and brahmins.

5 Conclusions

To sum up the situation:

- The old editions do not contain the verse at all.
- More recent editions quote the verse either in their introduction or as a ‘laudatory preface’ (*ciṛappuppāyiram*).
- The manuscript transmission was fluid, and some manuscripts did not give a preface at all.
- MSSML 631 has a significantly different version called a ‘preface’ (*pāyiram*).

This leaves us with basically two options of interpretation. Either the manuscripts that have a preface vary according to context and region and possibly mirror differences of opinion in the local schools. In order to support such an interpretation it would be helpful to locate manuscripts that actually correspond to the print reading. Or, and this option cannot be ruled out until further manuscript evidence has been brought to light, the change and deletion in the recent editions have to be explained as an act of political correctness: Taṇṭi should not be considered either a Sanskrit scholar or a brahmin.

Of course there is one general feature of palm-leaf transmission that one should always keep at the back of one’s mind, namely, that it is difficult to add material: the dense layout mostly rules out the options of marginal or interlinear annotation. This means that if somebody wants to tamper with tradition (or even simply add a new gloss or a new piece of information) his basic means of doing so will be to make a fresh copy (needed anyway because of the limited lifespan of manuscripts in the South-Indian climate) and to integrate (or delete) according to his lights and prerogatives, with the consequence that the process in the copy will be virtually undetectable, unless philological and historical

analysis can bring forward arguments that make such interference likely, or other palm-leaf witnesses can be found that read differently. In that respect, palm-leaf copying in South India resembles print transmission: it has the power to create a *fait accompli* which can be reversed only with a lot of digging and luck.

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