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Translating Tamil Caṅkam Poetry: Taking Stock

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1. The available translations of Classical Tamil Caṅkam (from Sanskrit *saṅgha-*, “community”) poetry¹ can be divided into roughly two types, one comprising poetic translations which but for a general introduction to the poetic tradition should speak for themselves, and the other annotated, literal translations. For the first category the tone has been set by A.K. Ramanujan. Ramanujan was a poet in his own right and his translations from Caṅkam poetry were meant to be savoured and enjoyed just like that, without introduction; the poetic tradition is explained

in an “Afterword” in each book.² His translations are a true pleasure to read and have no doubt attracted many students to the study of Classical Tamil. A sense of the same ambition may be gained from the translations by George L. Hart III,³ Hart and Hank Heifetz⁴ (henceforth HH), M. Shanmugam Pillai and David E. Ludden,⁵ and Martha Ann Selby,⁶ as well as, to a lesser extent, from those by J. V. Chelliah,⁷ V. Murugan⁸ or A. Dakshinamurthy⁹. This does not mean, however, that these translations are accurate. Their authors tend to follow the commentaries, old ones if available, and, if not, modern ones produced by the nineteenth- or twentieth-century editors of the texts. What is striking is the seemingly complete absence on the translators’ part of an urge to question the interpretations offered in this secondary material, even in the face of an impossible meaning or ungrammatical construction. As a discipline, Classical Tamil studies appears to lack a philological tradition such as has developed in its neighbour Sanskrit studies.

In this respect the translations of the second, literal type, show no improvement. An early example of this type is N. Kandasamy Pillai’s translation of the *Narriṅai*, completed in the 1960s but published only in

2 *The Interior Landscape. Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology.* (UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, Indian Series.) Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press 1967. — *Poems of Love and War. From the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems of Classical Tamil.* (UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, Indian Series.) New York: Columbia University Press 1985.

3 *Poets of the Tamil Anthologies. Ancient Poems of Love and War.* (Princeton Library of Asian Translations.) Princeton: Princeton University Press 1979. — *The Four Hundred Songs of Love. An Anthology of Poems from Classical Tamil. The Akanāṅṅūru.* (Regards sur l’Asie du Sud 7.) Pondichéry: Institut français de Pondichéry 2015.

4 *The Four Hundred Songs of War and Wisdom. An Anthology of Poems from Classical Tamil. The Puṟaṅṅūru.* (Translations from the Asian Classics.) New York: Columbia University Press 1999.

5 *Kuṟuntokai. An Anthology of Classical Tamil Love Poetry.* Madurai: Koodal Publishers 1976.

6 *Tamil Love Poetry. The Five Hundred Short Poems of the Aiṅkuṟunūru, an Early Third-Century Anthology.* (Translations from the Asian Classics.) New York: Columbia University Press 2011.

7 *Pattuppattu. Ten Tamil Idylls.* Second edition. Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society 1962. (First edition Colombo: General Publishers 1946.)

8 *Kalittokai in English. Translation with Critical Introduction and Glossary.* Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies 1999.

9 *The Narriṅai Four Hundred.* Chennai: International Institute of Tamil Studies 2001.

1 According to the indigenous literary tradition the poems are the work of the members of an ‘academy’ established at Madurai.

2008.¹⁰ At present Eva Wilden thus has the field all to herself. So far, critical editions and translations from her hand have appeared of all 400 poems of each of the *Narriṇai* and *Kuṟuntokai*, and the first 120 poems of the *Akanāṇūru*. These are part of a project of publishing critical editions, with translations, of the complete Caṅkam corpus – the first of their kind, based on manuscripts and earlier editions – so we may expect to see more of them. However, if we should look forward to them is another matter. In translating the poems Wilden has decided to ignore the commentaries as well as the traditional poetical tradition accompanying the poems, which, she claims, would only blur our vision of the original text. Instead, she provides literal translations (“as literal as possible”) together with notes and “a host of question marks (a punctuation mark that has, in my opinion, been used all too sparingly in Caṅkam philology as a whole)”, and “avoids” to go into the “possible implications” of the words of the poems; if the outcome is unintelligible, she writes, which it often is, the “exercise ... might teach [us] the limits both of a mere philological approach and of the traditional approach guided by poetics” (Wilden 2010: 30 f.).¹¹ It seems that Wilden calls her approach a philological one (in the Continental meaning of the term). This is not the place to quibble about definitions of philology. However, if for traces of philology we have to turn to Wilden’s notes and question marks, expressly lacking any investigative intention, then these can hardly be called philology by any standard. Furthermore, if her approach is indeed meant to be didactic, she fails to offer guidelines on how to tackle problems; the many question marks, for instance, if at all relevant, time and again prove to be mere dead-end streets. But Wilden’s lack of interest in the meaning of the poems also affects her work as an editor, for how else can one select from among available variant readings than on the basis of the meaning of the text?

These are grave allegations, which of course need to be substantiated. The aim of the following¹² is this very substantiation, as well as to offer suggestions on how the poems should be approached.

¹⁰ *Narriṇai. Text and Translation*. (Publications hors série 7.) Pondichéry: Institut français de Pondichéry 2008. Cf. on this work Herman Tieken’s review in *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 63 (2009): 771–774.

¹¹ See also Wilden 2018: lxxii.

¹² In my translations, round brackets mark explanations to and square brackets insertions within the translation. But in extracts from someone else’s translation, round brackets mark insertions from other portions of the same translation, and square brackets my own insertions; if these latter are explanations, then they are inside round brackets within square brackets.

2. For determining the meaning of a Caṅkam poem it is important to realise that the poem does not exist in isolation, but is one of a group of poems dealing with similar themes, situations and expressions. The Caṅkam corpus falls apart into two categories, that of Akam, or “the inner world”, and of Puṟam, or the “exterior world”. While Akam is often equated with love poetry, it is better to speak of poetry about village life, depicting the unhappy love lives of people living in small villages in the countryside. Akam poems have been fruitfully compared to the Prakrit poems of Hāla’s *Sattasāi*.¹³ Puṟam, on the other hand, is characterised as heroic poetry, but as in the case of Akam that description covers the poem’s content only partly. In the Puṟam poems we hear wandering bards praising kings and begging these to support them and their families.

Caṅkam poems present someone speaking to someone else (or to one’s self), in the Puṟam poems a poor bard, in the Akam village poems an unhappy lover. The auditor’s or reader’s task is to identify the problem the speaker is experiencing or commenting upon and what her (in most village poems it is a woman) or his intentions are. This is also the main task the traditional poetical tradition had set itself. It is simplified by the fact that the more than 3000 poems revolve around a restricted number of situations in the villagers’ love lives or the kings’ roles as warriors or patrons of bards. Therefore, in the case of an unclear poem it might help to look at other poems dealing with a similar theme.

Furthermore, we now have several grammars of the language of the poems,¹⁴ which tell us in full detail what is grammatically possible and, by implication, what is not. There is, moreover, a good dictionary,¹⁵ and there are two word indexes covering the entire corpus,¹⁶ the

¹³ See George L. Hart III: *The Poems of Ancient Tamil. Their Milieu and their Sanskrit Counterparts*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press 1975, and, with different conclusions, Herman Tieken: *Kāvya in South India. Old Tamil Caṅkam Poetry*. (Gonda Indological Series 10.) Groningen: Egbert Forsten 2001 (reprint with new preface New Delhi: Manohar 2017).

¹⁴ E.g. V. S. Rajam: *A Reference Grammar of Classical Tamil Poetry (150 B.C.–Pre-fifth/sixth Century A.D.)*. (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 199.) Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society 1992, and, Thomas Lehmann: *Grammatik des Alttamil unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Caṅkam-Texte des Dichters Kapilar*. (Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung 159.) Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 1994.

¹⁵ *Tamil Lexicon*. Published under the authority of the University of Madras. Six volumes and Supplement. Madras: University of Madras 1924–1939 (reprinted 1982).

¹⁶ *Index des mots de la littérature tamoule ancienne*. (Publications de l’Institut français d’Indologie 37.) Three volumes. Pondichéry: Institut français d’Indologie 1967–1970, and, Thomas Lehmann, Thomas Malten: *A Word Index of Old Tamil Caṅkam Literature*. (Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung 147.) Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 1992.

older of which also includes many compounds and word combinations. For determining the meanings of words and expressions one is therefore not restricted to the one context under consideration. It is strange to see, however, how little use is made of all these tools, which explains the many *ad hoc* solutions found in the translations that have recently been produced.

Before turning to Wilden's translations I think it apposite to discuss some examples from the translations by Ramanujan (note 2 above), Selby (note 6), and Hart, or rather, Hart and Heifetz (note 4).¹⁷ The samples will be discussed in some detail to exemplify the issues that need to be tackled and that the abovementioned authors as well as Wilden have ignored.

As indicated, with Ramanujan translating Caṅkam poetry became from the very beginning the preserve of poets, or scholars with ambitions in that direction. What Selby and Hart (or HH), who all followed in Ramanujan's footsteps, share with him is a lack of interest in any form of philological investigation into the poems. Only HH provide more than cursory notes to the translations; however, these hardly ever deal with textual problems or questions of interpretation, but mostly with realia, or just quote explanations found in the old, or not so old, commentaries to the texts.¹⁸ As far as her own avowed low expectations of philology¹⁹ are concerned Wilden thus appears to stand in a tradition.

Puṛaṇānūru 82 is translated by Ramanujan 1987: 123 (see also pp. 233 f.) as:

With the festival hour close at hand,
his woman in labor,
a sun setting behind pouring rains,
the needle in the cobbler's hand
is in a frenzy
stitching thongs for a cot:
swifter, far swifter,
were the tackles of our lord
wearing garlands of laburnum,
as he wrestled with the enemy
come all the way
to take the land.

¹⁷ For practical reasons, when quoting Tamil words in isolation I shall dissolve the sandhi, thus, e. g., *iriyiṅ* and not *yiriyiṅ*, *āyitai* and not *yāyitai*, or *irutta* and *ēṇi* and not *viṛutta* and *vēṇi* (in *vāyppaṭa viṛutta vēṇi*), as well as *mēl nilā* instead of *mēṇilā*.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, the editors of these Tamil texts do not distinguish, e. g. by using different fonts, between the old commentaries and their own explanations.

¹⁹ Strangely, she studied Sanskrit and Tamil at Hamburg under two eminent philologists, Albrecht Wezler and Srinivasa Ayya Srinivasan respectively.

Elegant though this translation may be – HH's more recent translation (1999: 61) differs only in details –, it is wrong. Ramanujan apparently saw no reason to doubt the information found in the commentary, according to which *cāru* in the first line of the poem (*cāru talaikkonṭeṇa*) would mean "festival". However, he might have asked what festival we are dealing with, which starts at sunset in the wet rainy season, when the nights are, moreover, extremely dark. More importantly, a study of the other instances of the word *cāru* in the Caṅkam poems would have shown that here it means not "festival" but "mud"; *cāru* is just one way of spelling /*cāru*/, the other being *cēru*, "mud" (also "pulp, juice").²⁰ The man depicted in the poem is hurrying to finish the raised bed before sunset so that his pregnant wife can lie upon it, as otherwise she would have to lie on the ground muddy due to the rain. In this connection it should be noted that we are dealing with a poor couple; the man is *iḷiciṇaṅ* "low-caste, uncivilised". Such people do indeed usually sleep on the ground, and the earthen floors of huts do tend to become muddy or even water-logged through seepage from outside when rains are heavy.

Equally problematic is Selby's translation (p. 29) of *Aiṅkuṇūru* 20.²¹ The 500 poems of the *Aiṅkuṇūru* are arranged in groups of ten, the poems of each decade sharing the same word or phrase. For instance, those of the second all contain the word "bamboo". In her translation Selby follows this division and to each decade has added an introduction briefly indicating the situations dealt with in the individual poems. About *Aiṅkuṇūru* 20 she writes (p. 27) that "the heroine describes the dashing of her domestic hopes, blaming her ruin on the hollow reeds. Her bangles slip from her wrists because her anxiety has caused her to grow thin – this is a common convention throughout the anthology, and throughout South Asian literature as a whole." The translation runs:

Thinking of that man
from the place near the riverbank
where tubular reeds as hollow as bamboo
rip out eggs laid in a hundred-petaled lotus
by a tiny-legged dragonfly with iridescent wings,
the beautiful, gleaming bangles
slip from my wrists.

²⁰ See Herman Tiekens: "Cāru, "Festival", in Caṅkam Poetry", in: O. Vechevina, N. Gordiychuk, T. Dubyanskaya (eds.): *Tamiḷ tanta paricu. The Collection of Articles in Honor of Alexander M. Dubyanskiy*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Pero" 2016, pp. 101–123.

²¹ For a review of Selby's translations see Herman Tiekens: "On a Recent Translation of Classical Tamil Love Poetry", *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 66 (2012): 811–832.

It is basically a paraphrase of the commentary of Po. Vē. Cōmacuntaraṅār, the editor of the text.²² It is also a good example of what can go wrong by relying too much on such secondary sources. However, I would like to begin with what seems to be Selby's own contribution, namely the translation of *tumpi* "bee" with "dragonfly".²³ Probably she opted for this more exotic insect because bees do not lay eggs in flowers. But neither do dragonflies, who lay their eggs in the water. For the rest Selby's translation is based on a failure to understand the grammatical structure of the passage *tumpi nūrritaḷt tāmaraip pūccinai cīkkum*,²⁴ which she obviously analyses as "where reeds rip out (*cīkkum*) egg(s) (*cinai*) of the dragonfly (*tumpi*) in the flower (*pū[c]*) of the hundred-petalled (*nūrritaḷ*) lotus (*tāmarai*)", but which should have been translated as "where a bee brushes against (*cīkkum*) the swollen pistil (*cinai*) of the flower (*pū*) of the hundred-petaled lotus"; the bee is the subject of the participle *cīkkum*, not the reed (*vēḷattu*). It is an open question, though, if the participle *cīkkum* is dependent on "reed" or on the "village", i. e. *ūr* in *ūraṅai* "the man from the village" ("in which bees [fly around] brushing against ..."). In either case, the reed cannot be blamed for the woman's marital problems, as Selby would have it; it has a purely decorative function in the poem. The woman is not complaining about her husband, but about her lover (the bee) who is unwilling to leave his pregnant wife (the lotus with swollen pistil) for her.

3. *Puṛaṅānūru* 343 offers a variation on the common theme of a king who refuses to give his daughter in marriage to a warrior with royal ambitions. The latter takes the refusal as a challenge, which results in an all-out war between the two. As in the poem concerned, this war usually ends in the destruction of the king's town. HH's translation (pp. 195 f.) reads:

"In Muciṛi²⁵ with its drums, where the ocean roars,
where the paddy traded for fish and stacked high
on the boats makes boats and houses look the same

²² Tinnevely: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society 1966.

²³ According to the *Tamil Lexicon* (see note 15), p. 1971 the meaning "dragonfly" is found only in "other" dictionaries, i. e. is not substantiated by the evidence of the texts used for the lexicon.

²⁴ The complete Tamil text of *Aiṅkūruṅūru* 20 reads:

*aṛucil kāla vañcīrait tumpi
nūrritaḷt tāmaraip pūccinai cīkkum
kāmpukaṅṅaṅṅa tūmpuṭai vēḷattut
tuṛainai yūraṅai yuḷḷiyen
nūraiyeṛ elvaḷai nekilpōtumṅē.*

²⁵ A seaport town in present-day Kerala on India's west coast.

and the sacks of pepper raised up beside them
make the houses look the same as the tumultuous
shore and the golden wares brought by the ships
are carried to land in the servicing boats,
Kuṭṭuvaṅ its king to whom toddy is no more
valuable than water, who wears a shining garland, gives out
gifts
of goods from the mountains along with goods from the sea
to those who have come to him. Even if you humbly bring
and bestow as much fine and copious wealth as that city pos-
sesses,
she will not marry someone who is unworthy of her." So says
her father and will not grant her hand. Think! Will the tall city
suffer where sighing kites sleep on the middle wall of the fort,
the roads hard to conquer are filled with weapons,
but ladders have been thrown up by men who have come to
force their way in!

The notes to this poem (pp. 324 f.) concern mainly realia, such as the type of drums (line 1) and the nature of the sea trade and the storage of goods in the harbour (lines 2–7). On lines 14–17 they say: "the kite is meant as a bad omen, and the men with weapons on the roads belong to the enemy king". But are there really men with weapons on the roads? Moreover, we are most probably dealing not with kites, but with vultures,²⁶ taking a rest after having eaten their fill on the dead bodies of the soldiers who had in vain tried to prevent the enemy from entering the town.

The translation of the last six lines of the poem need closer consideration for other reasons as well. They read:

*puraiyar allōr varaiyalaḷ ivaḷ eṅat-
tantaiyuṅ koṭāṅ āyiṅ vantōr
vāyppaṭa viṛutta vēṅi yāyīṭai
varuntinru kollō tāṅē paruntuyirt-
ṭiṭaimatiṛ cēkkum puricaip-
paṭai mayañkariṭai netunalūrē.*

In HH's translation, the (bolded) expression *āyīṭai* at the end of the third line is ignored. However, as the approximately 25 instances in the Caṅkam poems show, *āyīṭai* invariably heads a new sentence, referring back to the preceding sentence or sentences, and meaning something like "in the middle of that".²⁷ This can be substantiated by examples of the use of *āyīṭai* in some other Caṅkam poems.

²⁶ For *paruntu* the *Tamil Lexicon*, p. 2522 does give the meaning "common kite", but, according to T. Burrow and M. B. Emeneau (*A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* [= DED]. Second edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984, no. 3977), regional Tamil varieties of the term refer to vultures, and its counterparts in other Dravidian languages refer to eagles, vultures and falcons as well.

²⁷ In Rajam's (see note 14) treatment of *āyīṭai* among the case markers and postpositions (p. 311), this particular use of the word is lost.

A good example is found in the preceding *Puṛaṇāṅṅuru* 341. This poem begins with two sentences, each ending on a finite verb, *pukkaṇaṇē* “he entered” and *toṭṭaṇaṇē* “he touched, laid his hand on” respectively. Its theme is the same as that of 343: The girl’s father, to prepare himself for battle has bathed in a reservoir (*kayam pukkaṇaṇē*), and the chieftain, while laying his hand on his weapon (*paṭai toṭṭaṇaṇē kuricil*), vows (HH: 194 f.): “Either tomorrow I will marry that girl ... or else ... I will go to the world from which no one returns”. The following passage paints the consequences of the coming battle (HH: 195): “This cool city by the river with its fertile tracts of land, will surely lose its great beauty ...”. However, it is introduced by *āyītai*, not represented in the translation. With *āyītai* we obtain: “In the middle of that (= Caught between these two warriors), this cool city by the river ...”.

Another clear example of *āyītai* is found in *Narriṇai* 284, in which two sentences are followed by one introduced by *āyītai*. The following translation by E. Annamalai and Harold F. Schiffman²⁸ speaks for itself:

My heart says, “Go to her, unbind the thongs
of suffering from her soul”.
She of the cool-lidded eyes,
whose outlines are dark *kuvaḷai* blossoms,
and long black tresses hanging low.
My mind: “A job undone will bring disgrace;
rush not”.
My body bears the tension of these two [(*āyītai*)] –
a worn-out rope pulled from both ends
by elephants
with bright upswinging shiny tusks.²⁹

Puṛaṇāṅṅuru 343 differs from these two poems in that *āyītai* is preceded not by two sentences but only by one, concluded by the finite verb *koṭāaṇ*. Moreover, it is turned into a conditional sentence by the addition of *āyīṇ* “if [he] is/had been” after *koṭāaṇ* “he does/did not give”. Constructions of the type *koṭāaṇ āyīṇ ... āyītai* are found elsewhere too, for instance in *Kuṟuntokai* 111.

In this poem a young girl speaks to a friend. The girl has fallen in love with a man from the mountains who after their first meeting seems to have lost interest, or the courage, to come down to her village. As a result she has become ill and grown thin. Her worried parents have consulted a village priest dedicated to Murukaṇ. In most poems where this priest occurs he has no inkling of the real cause of the girl’s illness, but has both a standard diagnosis – the girl is possessed by ‘his’ god Murukaṇ – and a standard cure, sacrificing a goat. The girl’s mother is quick to accept the priest’s diagnosis in order to allay the other family members’ suspicion that her daughter has fallen in love with a stranger. Through her friend the girl lets her lover know that if he wants to meet her he should come now, as her family, fooled by the foolish priest, is off guard, which, however, will

not be for long, for they both know all too well that the remedy will not work.

The poem starts with two sentences each ending with a finite verb, *eṇṇum* “he (the priest) will say” and *uṇarum*, “she (the mother), will think”: *meṇṇōṇekīṭta cellal vēlaṇ veṇṇi neṭuvēl eṇṇum* “The *vēlaṇ* priest will say that the illness, which makes my shoulders droop, is caused by the victorious long spear [of Murukaṇ]”, and *annaṇiyum atuveṇa vuṇarum* “and mother will believe that that is indeed what is the matter with me”. After *uṇarum* stands *āyīṇ* “if”, literally “if that happens”, the conditional of the verb *ā-* “be, occur”. After that, as the last word of the line, we find *āyītai*, heading the following sentence:

... *āyītai*
kūlai yirumpiṭik kai karantaṇṇa
kēḷirunturukaṇ ceḷumalai nāṭaṇ
vallē varuka tōḷi namm
illōr perunakai kāṇiya cīṟitē.

In this case *āyītai* “in the middle of that” is best reproduced simply with “then”:³⁰

Then the man from the (that) high mountain, which is covered with shining black stones resembling ever so many small elephant cows which have hidden their trunks, should come immediately to have a quick (*cīṟitē*) look at the great joy enjoyed by the people in our house (about the priest’s diagnosis).³¹

From this account of the meaning of *āyītai* it will be clear that the words *vantōr vāyppaṭa vīrutta vēṇi*³² in *Puṛaṇāṅṅuru* 343 have somehow to be fitted into the sentence *tantaiyuṅ koṭāaṇ (āyīṇ)* “(if) her father (*tantai*) ... will not grant/had not granted (*koṭāaṇ*)”, i. e. the sentence about the ladders has somehow to be included in the one governed by the finite verb *koṭāaṇ*. This verb *koṭu-* is indeed most commonly used in the meaning “give”, which led HH to supply the king’s daughter’s hand as its object (“her

²⁸ As quoted by Kamil Zvelebil: *The Smile of Murugan. On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: E. J. Brill 1973, p. 76.

²⁹ Wilden (2008: 627) seems to take *āyītai* as a kind of postposition, if “At the time” indeed represents *āyītai*: “At the time [my] heart ... says ..., but [my] knowledge ... says ..., – will my body perish ...?” (the square brackets are hers). It is unclear whether here “at the time” pertains also to “but [my] knowledge”, as it should.

³⁰ Wilden (2010: 301) translates (the square brackets being hers): “Quickly he may come ... in order to see the great laughter among those in our house on the occasion of the priest’s saying ... ‘[it is] Murukaṇ ...’ and mother realises: That[’s it].” However, I fail to understand the note appended to “on the occasion” (*āyītai*): “My proposition is to read *vēlaṇ eṇṇum + aṇṇai uṇarum* as dependent on *āyīṇ āyītai* (parallel construction: subject plus habitual future positioned at the end of the preceding line), and connected by *-um*”. Does she mean that *-um* in *eṇṇum* and *uṇarum* is the ending of the habitual future (it is!) or the particle *-um* “and” (it is not!)?

³¹ Not directly related to the poem’s structure is the question of the message contained in the description of the mountain, that makes up Ramanujan’s “interior landscape” (cf note 2 above). As I see it, where the man comes from people know how to hide their true nature, a quality he should use when he comes down to the girl’s village. He need not fear that her family will notice that he is her lover.

³² In HH’s translation: “but ladders [(*ēṇi*)] have been thrown up [(*īrutta*)] by men who have come [(*vantōr*)] to force their way in [(*vāyppaṭa*)].”

father ... will not grant her hand”). In the text, however, there is no word for “daughter”. However, the action of giving also includes that of permitting or allowing, in this case the ladders: “if he (the girl’s father) had not permitted the ladders, raised by those who had come (for his daughter) to climb over the walls”. However, before being able to properly translate the whole passage, the words *puricai*, *paṭai* and *iṭaimatil* need to be discussed.

puricai denotes a wall around the town protecting it against enemy attacks;³³ it is high, touches the sky,³⁴ and lamps lighted by the watchmen stationed on it resemble the stars high in the sky.³⁵ What then does *paṭai* mean? As we saw above, Hart connects *paṭai* with *mayāṅkāṭai* and translates it with “weapons”: “roads [(iṭai)] hard to conquer [(ār)] are filled with [(mayāṅku)] weapons [(paṭai)”. However, as the phrase *pal(a)paṭai puricai* in *Puraṇāṅṅuru* 224,7 (see below) and *Maturaiṅkāṅci* 352 (*viṅṅura vōṅkiya palpaṭaip puricai*) shows, we have to do with a part of the *puricai* construction: in the town the streets (*iṭai*) are difficult to pass through (*ār*) as they are “crowded” (*mayāṅku*), that is blocked, by the *paṭai* of the *puricai*.

In this connection let us look at two instances of *puricai* in which the word refers to a Vedic altar, a raised platform made of several layers of bricks (*iṭṭikai*, Sanskrit *iṣṭikā*). The first instance is *Akanāṅṅuru* 287,6–8 in a description of a deserted town:

*nāṭpali maṅanta naraikkaṅ iṭṭikaip-
puricai mūḷkiya poriyarai yāḷattu
oru taṅi neṭu vīl utaitta kōṭai.*

The west wind blows against a single aerial root of a banyan tree, of which the trunk is completely dried out [by the sun] and which has undermined the raised platform (*puricai*) made of bricks (*iṭṭikai*) with greyish spots because the daily offerings are no longer made.³⁶

The second example is *Puraṇāṅṅuru* 224,7–9, where we also find *paṭai*:

*paruti yuruvir palpaṭaippuricai
eruvai nukarcci yūpa neṭuntūṅ
vēta vēḷvit toḷiṅ muṭṭittatūm.*

... performed the Vedic sacrifice (*veta vēḷvit toḷil*) which consisted of a feast for the vultures (*eruvai*)³⁷ at the high sacrificial post (*yūpa*) on the altar made of many layers (*paṭai*) [of bricks] [and] has the shape of a *paruti*.

³³ Note *vaḷaii*, “encircling”, in *viṭu muṭ puricai yēmuṅa vaḷaii* (*Mullaippāṭṭu* 27).

³⁴ *vāṅṅōy puricai* (*Akanāṅṅuru* 181,20).

³⁵ *vāṅ tōy puricai / yāmaṅ kolpavar nāṭṭiya naḷicuṭar / vāṅakamīṅṅiṅ viḷaṅkitōṅṅum* (*Akanāṅṅuru* 114,9–11).

³⁶ In his translation (see note 3) Hart (2015: 292f.) disregards the order of the text, making it difficult to correlate his translation with the Tamil text: “(a village) ..., its empty [(naraikkaṅ?)] altar [(iṭṭikai), which does not mean “altar”, but “brick”]) no longer receives its morning sacrifice ... (In this broad, rainless place,) a banyan tree with a parched trunk spreads [?] like a wall [(*puricai*?)], and as the west wind blows against a single aerial root ...”.

³⁷ These devour the sacrificed animal.

paruti, translated here by HH (see note 4): 140 as “circle”, must be a corruption of *paruntu* “falcon” (Skt *śyena*-) (cf. note 26 above), which indeed is the form of a major Vedic altar.³⁸ Regardless of that, that *paṭai* means “layer”, is substantiated, e.g., by *paṭai(y)amai cēkkai* “bed made of (several) layers” in *Akanāṅṅuru* 289,12, *Kalittokai* 10,10 and *Cilappatikāram* 13,70, and *paṭaiyamai yiṭṭikai* “bricks in layers” in *Peruṅkatai* 2,5,41.

In the passage of *Puraṇāṅṅuru* 343 under consideration the streets were, therefore, blocked by layers of material (bricks?) fallen down from the rampart.³⁹

The last expression which needs clarification is *iṭaimatil*, which HH translate as “middle wall”.⁴⁰ But what is “middle wall” supposed to mean: a wall in the middle of what? The outer wall and the centre? In fact, for *iṭaimatil* there are two possible interpretations. It may be compared with *iṭaiccuvār*, “intervening wall, barrier, impediment” (*Tamil Lexicon*, p. 286), or with *iṭaimulai* “cleavage, the space between a woman’s breasts” (*Narriṅṅai* 202,8,⁴¹ *Kuruntokai* 178,4; 325,6,⁴² *Akanāṅṅuru* 73,4; 362,11⁴³). HH has adopted the first option in translating *iṭaimatil*, but I would adopt the second, to denote *intra muros*. In either case the wall in *iṭaimatil* is the same wall which subsequently is called *puricai* and is said to have fallen apart.

So apparently the girl’s father had challenged her suitors to come and get her if they could, and as a result the fighting moved from outside the town to inside:

³⁸ HH’s translation is: “he performed the Vedic sacrifices ... within the circling [(*paruti uruvir*)] many-layered [(*palpaṭai*)] wall where the towering post of sacrifice rises next to the kite to be fed!”. “Circle” is indeed one of the meanings of *paruti* (= *pariti*, Sanskrit *paridhi*-) given in the *Tamil Lexicon*, pp. 2513 f.; *paridhi*- also denotes the sticks laid round the sacrificial fire to delimit it. I fail to see, though, how this meaning fits the combination with *uruvu* “shape”.

³⁹ This answers the question of the construction of the *puricai*, or walls, only partly, as in two instances the *puricai* is decorated, or strengthened, by things made of copper (*cempu*): *Puraṇāṅṅuru* 201,9 (*cempupuṅaintiyarriya cēṅeṭum puricai*) and 37,11 (*cempuraḷ puricaic cemman mūtūr*). Note also *viṭu muṭ puricai yēmuṅa vaḷaii* in *Mullaippāṭṭu* 27 (note 33 above) describing a fort in the jungle protected by a “wall” (*puricai*) of thorny bushes (*muḷ*).

⁴⁰ The choice is not explained, but HH may have had the compound *puramatil* “outer wall” in *Puraṇāṅṅuru* 387,33 in mind. However, the translation of that poem (pp. 227 f.) leaves *puramatil* unaccounted for (“the resounding Porunai River that washes the city [(*puramatil*?)] of Vaṅci”).

⁴¹ Wilden (2008: 475): “Sobbing ... so that [your] breasts become wet in between”.

⁴² Wilden (2010: 435 and 729): “between my breasts”.

⁴³ The *Akanāṅṅuru* 73 passage Hart (2015: 84) translated with “Between your breasts a single strand of pearls shoots out its light”. In the *Akanāṅṅuru* 362 passage he leaves *iṭai* in *iṭaimulai* untranslated: “like the pearl necklace that covers the lovely blush on my ample breasts” (p. 364).

Would our large town have suffered less if (*āyin*) the girl's father, saying that she will not marry someone unworthy of her, had not permitted (*koṭāan*) the ladders, raised by those who had come [for his daughter] to climb over the walls – our town within the walls of which vultures are taking a rest after a day's hard work (*uyirttu*) and the streets are blocked by layers [of bricks or stones] broken off from these same walls?

4. These exercises exemplify the perils of neglecting philological methods, as do all the translations mentioned, whether poetic or literal. With this understanding of the setting that informs Wilden's publications, we may now turn specifically to these latter, beginning with an exemplary discussion illustrating how she works, namely that of the participle *irutta*; this occurs also in *irutta vēni* of *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 343 above, translated as “ladders thrown up” by HH, by me as “ladders raised”.⁴⁴

DED (see note 26), partly basing itself on the *Tamil Lexicon*, distinguishes altogether seven different verbs *iru-*: “draw, drag, absorb” (no. 504), “die, end” (no. 514), “break” (no. 520), “pay” (no. 521), “strain, percolate” (no. 522), “tarry, stay” (no. 523) and “fling (as a spear)” (no. 859). In *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 343 we clearly have *iru-* “stay”, giving *irutta* “stayed” (as used in technical English), i. e. “set in place”.

A similar use of the verb to refer to something set in place is found in *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 19,8f.:

kuṇṛattirutta kuriyiṇam pōla
ampu cenṛirutta varumpuṇyāṇai
a wounded elephant hit (*cenṛu*) by arrows (*ampu*) lodged [in his body] (*irutta*), which look like a flock of birds settled (*irutta*) on a hill.

Puṛaṇāṇūru 294,1f. has:

veṅkuṭai matiya mēnilāt tikaḷṭarak-
kaṅkūṭirutta kaṭaṇmaruḷ pācaṛai
The military camp, vast like the ocean, in which so many (*kaṅkūṭu*) white parasols (*veṅkuṭai*) were raised (*irutta*) that together they produced more moonlight than (*mēl*) the moon.⁴⁵

And in *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 398,7f. we find:

⁴⁴ The modern commentary glosses *irutta* with *cārttiya* “placed upon/against”, i. e. “ladders (*ēni*) set up against (the walls)”; this meaning, however, is not among the ones supplied in the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 363).

⁴⁵ The translation of HH (p. 172) is: “the camp where the men had seeded an ocean flooded by the descending light of the moon like a white umbrella”. Instead of white parasols, the soldiers are taken as the subject of the participle *irutta* here, as explained in the corresponding note (p. 313): “camp [(*pācaṛai*)] like an ocean [(*kaṭaṇmaruḷ*)] where they gathered [(*irutta*)] all together [(*kaṅkūṭu*)]”. And instead of *mēl* “more than” (in *matiya mēl* “more than the moon”), *mēl* “above” is assumed and linked to *nilā* (i. e. “moonlight from above”), giving “descending light of the moon” in the translation.

paricilar ... pantar
varicaiyiṇ irutta vāymoḷi vañcaṇ
Vañcaṇ whose words are true (*vāymoḷi*), before whom in the pavilion (*pantar*) those in need (*paricilar*) stood,⁴⁶ arranged (*irutta*) according to rank (*varicaiyiṇ*).⁴⁷

Finally, we find in *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 391,7–10:

... pacittēna
iṅku vantirutta veṅṇirumpēr okkal
tīrkai viṭukkum paṇṇiṇ mutukuṭi
naṇantalai mūtūr ...
My large family, which, driven by hunger (*pacittēna*), has arrived (*vantu*) in this large, old town, expect to stay here (*irutta*)⁴⁸ as the ancient clans living in it are known for offering a helping hand (*tīrkai viṭukkum paṇṇiṇ*) (to the needy).⁴⁹

Turning now to Wilden, we find that for the meaning of *iru-* she seems to have relied on the *Tamil Lexicon*, which mentions *inter alia* the meaning “tarry, stay”. Of these two she has opted for the first, “tarry”, and introduced this in practically all instances. Thus, in *Narriṇai* 99 the rainy season is a period “when ... the clouds that have drawn [water] from the sea ..., tarry, [full to] the breaking point”, in 215 “sorrowful evening ... has come [and] tarries with loneliness”, in 257 there is a mountain-side, “on which clouds rise [and] tarry”, and in 287 “a king with green-eyed elephants tarried outside the fortifications”.⁵⁰ I do not intend to discuss the merits of these four translations other than by noting that because of the possibility of misunderstandings⁵¹ I would not use the English verb “tarry” to describe clouds clinging to mountains, and even less for a king laying siege to a fort.

⁴⁶ For the position of the *paricilar* in relation to the king compare that of the Sanskrit *anujivin-s*.

⁴⁷ Here *paricilar* is the subject of *irutta*, but to HH (pp. 237f.) this is King Vañcaṇ, sitting under the pavilion. To then grammatically fit in *paricilar* a word for giving is appended, and *paricilar* linked with *varicaiyiṇ*: “(where) under a pavilion ... sat [(*irutta*)] Vañcaṇ whose words are always true, who pays his debts according to the merit [(*varicaiyiṇ*)] of those who come to him in need [(*paricilar*)]”.

⁴⁸ See also *vantirutta* in *Akanāṇūru* 243,8, *Narriṇai* 215,3, or *puṛat-tirutta* “besieged” in *Narriṇai* 287,2.

⁴⁹ For the “helping hand”, see also *kai pōl utavi* in *Narriṇai* 216,3, literally, “helping like a hand”. —HH translate *tīrkai viṭukkum paṇṇiṇ* with “(this fine city whose clans are) of such worth that we never think of leaving” (p. 231). It is unclear how this relates to the Tamil text. Apart from that, the idea is redundant, as already covered by *irutta*.

⁵⁰ Wilden 2008: 257, 489, 573 and 633 respectively (the square brackets are Wilden's). In the paraphrase preceding the translation of *Narriṇai* 99, Wilden (p. 257) renders *irutta* with “broken”; the word is translated twice, once in “when ... clouds tarry” and once in “[full to] the breaking point”.

⁵¹ Cf. the following paragraph.

What is more serious, however, is that Wilden seems to think that both meanings of English “tarry”, namely the old, literary “stay in a place”, and the more recent “delay or be slow in starting, going, coming etc.”,⁵² are also applicable to Tamil *iru-*. Thus, in *Narriṇai* 387,6–8 she translates *irutta* with “tarry” in the sense of “hesitate or be afraid to proceed” (Wilden 2008: 833):

... *ceruvīrantu*
ālaṅkānattañcuvara viṛutta
vēlkeḷu tāṇaic ceḷiyaṅ pācarai,
 in the encampment of Ceḷiyaṅ with an army full of spears that
 tarried for fear to come to the banyan forest, crossing a conflict.

Why would a king, or his army, just emerged victorious from a battle (*ceruvīrantu*, Wilden’s “crossing a conflict”), be afraid to enter the banyan forest or, else, the place called *Ālaṅkāṇam*? Here Wilden appears to have fallen into her own trap of consistently translating *iru-* with “tarry”. In this case this strange decision has even led to yet another one, namely to take *añcuvara* to mean “being afraid”, even though in all instances in *Caṅkam* poetry this expression means “causing fear, terrifying”.

For instance, in *Narriṇai* 83 a woman bribes an owl with promises of food (a mouse) to be quiet as its shrieks terrify her (9: *añcuvarak kaṭuṅkural payiṛṛātīmē*),⁵³ in 319 in the spooky night the shrieks of an owl are scaring travellers (4–6: *kūkaiccēval ... añcuvarak kuḷarum aṇaṅku kāl*),⁵⁴ and in *Akanāṇūru* 77 vultures are sitting at the road junction, causing fear in the travellers (11f.: *eruvai añcuvara irukkum ... kavalai*).⁵⁵ These examples have all been drawn from texts edited and translated by Wilden herself.⁵⁶ In addition, the passage from *Narriṇai* 387 has an exact parallel in *Maturaikkāñci* 127, which describes a Pandya king, who, after destroying the country of his enemy with fire, encamped (*iruttu*)⁵⁷ at *Ālaṅkāṇam*, terrifying the people there (*ālaṅkānattañcuvara viṛuttu*). Cf. also *añcuvaru neṭuvēl* “terrifying long spear” in *Cīrupāṇārruppaṭai* 94, and *añcuvaru pēymaka!* “terrifying demonesses” in *Tirumurukārruppaṭai* 51.

⁵² See Paul Procter, Robert F. Ilson, John Ayto (eds.): *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. Harlow: Longman 1978, p. 1135.

⁵³ Wilden (2008: 225) (with her square brackets): “don’t use again [your] fierce voice for fears to come up”.

⁵⁴ Wilden (2008: 697): “at diffuse midnight, when the time of plagues comes up [(*aṇaṅku kāl*?)], where [sic] the owl ... shrieks ... for fear to come up”.

⁵⁵ Wilden (2018: 485): “crossroads ... where kites perch frighteningly”.

⁵⁶ See also *Puṇāṇūru* 41,7: *añcuvarat takuna puḷḷukkural iyampavum*, “bird calls that are terrifying shrieks” (HH 1999: 33).

⁵⁷ *iruttu* is a so-called verbal participle, functionally equivalent to the Sanskrit absolutive.

Narriṇai 387,6–8 may, therefore, be translated as follows:

The camp of Ceḷiyaṅ, whose army was well equipped with spears, who, after he had emerged victorious from the battle, encamped in *Ālaṅkāṇam*, terrifying the people there.

5. But perhaps a self-imposed limitation of no more than two pages per poem in Wilden’s editions-cum-translations did not invite detailed textual investigation. The works on both the *Narriṇai* and the *Kuruntokai* have the same layout: the page on the left has the reconstructed text of the poem, headed by the poet’s name and a brief indication of the situation in which the poem is spoken, information generally transmitted together with a poem’s text. After the reconstructed text, with an overview of the variant readings (both in the Tamil script), follows its romanised transliteration, with sandhis dissolved. The opposite page has first an English translation of the introductory matter and then a word-by-word ‘translation’ in a kind of coded language.⁵⁸ This is concluded by a ‘regular’ English translation.⁵⁹

However, in the edition of the longer poems of the *Akanāṇūru* this limitation was abandoned and the information is spread out over as many pages as required. The possibility this offers for more thorough discussions is, however, left unused, so that it seems not merely a matter of external constraints. This may be exemplified by a discussion of the first five lines of *Akanāṇūru* 24:

vēlāppāppāṇ vāḷaran tumitta
vaḷai kaḷaintoḷinta koḷuntin aṇṇa
taḷaipiniy aviḷāc curimukilppakanṇa
citaralan tuvalai tūvaliṅ malarun
taii niṅra taṅpeyaṅ katināḷ

Wilden translates (2018: 160):

On the last day of the cool raining that had persisted in the
 month of Tai,
 When the jalap with curly buds that had not [yet] opened [their]
 tight fetters
 Blooms because of the diffuse, miserable, spattering spray,
 like splinters(?) left behind, having been removed from the
 conch
 bangles that are cut by the saw of a non-sacrificing Brahmin.

⁵⁸ For instance “one-it [*onru*] word [*moḷi*] Kōcar [*kōcar*] be-similar [*polai*]” and “strength [*vaṅkaṭ*] deliberation^{um} [*cūlcciy* + particle *um*] is-necessary^{al} [*vēṇṭum* + particle *āl*] little-it^e [*cīritu* + particle *ē*]” (Wilden 2010: 108f.: *Kuruntokai* 73,4f.). The bracketed parts have been added by me.

⁵⁹ The empty lower spaces of both pages are for annotations, but could have been better filled.

If I understand the translation correctly, the rain drops on the bud of the jalap flower are compared to the tiny splinters left after sawing through conch shells for making bangles. However, *koḷuntu* does not mean “splinter”. This meaning is entirely Wilden’s own invention, an attempt, as she explains in a footnote, to make sense of the comparison. Now one of the meanings of *koḷuntu*, beside “tender twig, tendril”, is “the plume of the yak tail” (*Tamil Lexicon*, p. 1161). In the same footnote Wilden refers to an old gloss, *caṅkiṅ talai*, saying that *koḷuntu* refers to the tip of the conch here, which indeed looks like a plume. The bud of the jalap ends in a plume as well. Thus, the bud of the jalap flower is in our passage compared to the tip of a conch shell, which is cast away after having sawn through the shell, as for bracelets only its round, wider part is used.⁶⁰ Everything was, thus, already there: the dictionary, an old gloss. The only thing for Wilden left to do was to look for an image of the jalap flower! Instead she produces a ghost word, without, however, committing herself, as she puts a question mark after “splinters” and the meaning “tendril” in the word index in the third volume.

6. Wilden’s edition and translation of *Narriṅai* 324 read (2008: 706 f.):

antō tāṇē yaḷiyaṭāyē
nontali yavalamōṭeṇṇākuvaḷ kol
ponpōṇ mēṇit taṇmakaṇayantōḷ
kōṭu murriyāṇai kāṭuṭaṇṇiraitara
neypaṭṭaṇṇa nōṅkāl eḷkiṅ⁶¹
celvat tantai yiṭaṇuṭai varaippin
āṭupanturuṭṭunaḷ pōla vōṭi
yañcilōti yivaḷuṇum
pañci mellaṭi naṭai payiṇṇummē.
 Alas for it. Pitiable mother.

Aching, with destructive affliction – what will become of her?
 The one she longed for as for her own daughter, with gold-like
 body,

is practicing steps with the cotton-soft feet
 that she of pretty thin hair has,
 running as if she were rolling a ball in play
 on the border of the land of [her] wealthy father
 with enduring hard blades, as if smeared with ghee,
 while elephants whose tusks are mature fill up together the wild-
 derness.

⁶⁰ According to Wilden (2018: 160 note 97) the non-sacrificing brahmin (*vēlāppārppān*) is an early example of a brahmin making a living by cutting bangles when he is unable to do so by officiating at sacrifices. Though I have no definite solution for *vēlāppārppān*, he seems to be a *pārppān* distinguished from the *pārppān* who officiates at sacrifices.

⁶¹ *h* transliterates the Āyṭam.

Something needs first to be said about the situation the poem refers to, one among the standard themes of the village poems.⁶² The father mentioned is a wealthy man (here: *celvat tantai*); his daughter is brought up in great luxury by a so-called *cevilittāy*, a term usually translated as “foster mother”. This woman started her career in the family as a wet nurse and stayed on as a nanny. Her own daughters were friends and companions of her charge; cf. Hart 1975 (see note 13): 214 note. Most poems dealing with such a daughter refer to the worries she causes this foster mother, the main worry being that she will refuse to marry the man her parents have chosen for her, elope with someone below her station and as a result cannot continue to enjoy the same luxury. In the poems we meet the girl running away together with her lover along rough paths through unknown country, or, as in this poem, preparing to do so; or we hear about her foster-mother worrying about the spoiled girl’s subsequent fate in the stranger’s house in a small village with “only one cow in the front yard” (*Akanānūru* 369). As in *Narriṅai* 324, much is made of the soles of the girl’s feet, too soft and tender for jungle paths.

My first comment concerns Wilden’s translation of *taṇ makaḷ nayantōḷ* as “the one she longed for as for her own daughter”. In Classical Tamil other instances of the use of active participial nouns like *nayantōḷ* (“she who loves someone”) as passives (“the one loved by someone”) are rare, if available at all.⁶³ As seen, Wilden takes *nayantōḷ* as the subject of the verb *payiṇṇummē* at the end of the poem. To come into consideration for this function *nayantōḷ* must indeed be taken to have a passive meaning, for it is the wealthy father’s daughter and foster mother’s charge who is practicing steps here. This, however, brings me to my second comment: there is nothing in the Tamil text corresponding to “as” in “as for her own daughter”. In fact, most probably we do not have to do with the foster mother’s charge here, but with the woman’s own (*taṇ*) daughter, who as a friend has a great affection (*nayantōḷ*) for the

⁶² See Tieken 2001 (note 13 above): 24–28.

⁶³ In modern Tamil participial nouns may indeed occasionally have a passive meaning. Hermann Beytham (*Praktische Grammatik der Tamilsprache in Umschrift*. (Praktische Grammatik und Übungsbuch der Tamilsprache 1.) Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz 1943, p. 110) mentions *vāṅkiyavai* as meaning both “das, was gekauft hat” and “das, was gekauft worden ist”. Rajam (see note 14) quotes an interesting instance (p. 656): *varuṅṇaḷ aḷiyal nī pirinticiṅōḷē* “She, whom you (nī) had left (*pirinticiṅōḷē*), felt sad and is to be pitied” (my translation, with a relative clause for the passival participle). But comparable instances seem to be rare – neither Rajam nor Lehmann (see note 14): 137–144 (§ 6.2) mention the phenomenon –, and something like “she who is loved by her own daughter” would be unexpected in the passage from *Narriṅai* 324 anyway.

girl, and worries as much as her mother. The foster mother's daughter is the subject of the verb *ākuvaḥ*: “What will happen (*eṇṇ ākuvaḥ kol*) to her own daughter who has a great affection (for the girl)?”

As indicated, Wilden takes ‘passive’ *nayantōḷ* as the subject of the verb *payirrummē* (“is practicing steps”). Apparently, in the text as reconstructed by her she was unable to find a word that could come into consideration for that function. However, what about the pronoun *ivaḷ* “she” in (*y*)*añcil ōti ivaḷ uṛum / pañci mellaṭi naṭai?* But, if I understand Wilden's word-by-word paraphrase correctly, she takes *ivaḷ* as the subject in the phrase *ivaḷ uṛum ... mellaṭi*, i.e. “soft feet (*mellaṭi*), which she (*ivaḷ*) has (*uṛum*)”. This solution may, however, be questioned.

For one thing, the construction is rare; the only other example comparable to our phrase I could find is *nī yuṛum poyccūḷ* in *Kalittokai* 88,20.⁶⁴ Another problem is the meaning of *uṛum* in these two instances. For *uṛu-* the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 483) mentions quite a number of meanings, which, however, are all of a highly contextual nature and as such cannot simply be applied to the two contexts above.⁶⁵ By starting from the meanings “approach, gain access, reach” we might translate the *Kalittokai* passage as “false oaths (*poyccūḷ*) which you (*nī*) take recourse to (*uṛum*)”. But I doubt if among the meanings of both transitive and intransitive *uṛu-* there is one through which we could arrive at “have, possess”. Even then, the participle would be redundant, as its absence (*ivaḷ pañci mellaṭi*) results in the same meaning, namely “her (*ivaḷ*) feet soft as cotton (*pañci*)”. This is not to say that *uṛum* is superfluous, for metrically we need at least one more syllable after *ivaḷ*.

At this point I would like to draw attention to *ivaḷum*, one of the variant readings for *ivaḷuṛum*.⁶⁶ (*y*)*añcilōti* (*y*) *ivaḷum* may be translated as “she with beautiful, thin hair, for her part (*-um*)”, *-um* being functionally equivalent to Sanskrit *api*. The girl, for her part, is blissfully unaware of the anxieties she causes by her play in the minds of those

most close to her. Metrically, there are no objections to read *ivaḷum* instead of *ivaḷuṛum*. On the other hand, it is not easy to see how *ivaḷum* may have changed into *ivaḷuṛum*, unless one speculates that the eye of the copyist strayed to the following *payirrummē*. Nevertheless, this reading would speak for *ivaḷ* being the subject of *payirrummē*.

Wilden's “on the border of the land” translates *iṭaṇ uṭai varaippin*.⁶⁷ This is not only inexact and incomplete, but also says nothing about the nature of the space referred to. We are clearly dealing with a rich man's (*celvat tantai*) place, as also in other poems containing *iṭaṇ uṭai varaippu*; thus, in *Akanāṇūru* 145,17 the girl's father possesses great wealth (*kūḷ* in *kūḷ uṭait tantai iṭaṇuṭaivaraippin*). Those living in such places wear beautiful ornaments (*kalam*).⁶⁸ As to what the place looked like, *varaippu* “boundary” is also used for an enclosed space such as a courtyard, and such areas do indeed seem to have been surrounded by a wall with gates, as in *Porunarārruppaṭai* 64–67: “To end my poverty I silently enter his *iṭaṇ uṭai varaippu*, where loud drumming can be heard,⁶⁹ through its wide gate (*peru vāyil*) which is always open for those who come begging.”⁷⁰ It seems also to have been a palace-like building complex, as in its totality it is said to be as beautiful as a painting (*ōvattaṇṇa* in *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 251,1 and *Narriṇai* 181,2). As to *iṭaṇ* “place”, the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 280), referring to Naccinārkkīṇiyar's commentary on the *Porunarārruppaṭai* passage above, provides the meaning “wide space” (*akalam*).⁷¹ Interestingly, the possession of *iṭaṇ* by itself already marks a man as rich; see *Paṭirruppattu* 32,6: *ittāṇṇāṇā vīṭaṇuṭai vaḷaṇ*, “a rich man possessing *iṭaṇ*, who will never stop giving [to beggars]”.

The girl is living in a large manor house, a veritable golden cage, with no idea about the dangers that might befall her in the outside world. The house is surrounded by jungle where elephants with large tusks roam about: *kōṭu murriyāṇai kāṭuṭaṇṇaitara*. Wilden's translation of the phrase *uṭaṇ nīraitara*, “elephants ... fill up together the wilderness”, is, however, needlessly convoluted, as

⁶⁴ Cf. too *uṛum iṭattu* “a situation in which (something) is useful”, as in *cērtōrkku / uṛum iṭattuykkum utavi* “(extend) the right type of assistance (*utavi*) to those who have approached you” (*Akanāṇūru* 231,1f.) and *uṛum iṭattutavātuvārnīlam ūṭṭi*, “rain not helping (*utavātu*) where it would be useful, falling on saline earth instead” (*Puṛaṇāṇūru* 142,2). Instances such as *el uṛu mauval*, “a jasmine flower (in brightness) resembling the sun” (*Kuṛuntokai* 19,4) are doubtful, as it is uncertain whether we have here the participle *uṛum* or the verb stem *uṛu-*, for in sandhi the final *m* of *uṛum* is dropped before another nasal (similarly *uṛumuraḷai* in *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 98,16 and 292,2 and *uṛumuraṇ* in *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 135,21).

⁶⁵ Objects: soft feet (*mellaṭi*) or way of walking (*naṭai*), and false oaths (*poyccūḷ*) respectively.

⁶⁶ According to Wilden 2008: 24, the variant occurs in the two-volume *Narriṇai* edition by Turaicāmi Piḷḷai (Cennai 1966, 1968).

⁶⁷ Her word-by-word paraphrase reads “place [*iṭaṇ*] possess [*uṭai*] -border [*varaippin*] (the additions in square brackets are mine).

⁶⁸ *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 161,29f.: *iṭaṇuṭaivaraippinṇiṇ tāṇiḷal vāḷnar naṅkala-(m) mikuppa*.

⁶⁹ In *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 161,29, referred to in the previous note, “the noise of drums is heard in the courtyard” (*muraciraṅkum iṭaṇuṭaivaraippinṇiṇ*).

⁷⁰ *yāṇum avaṇ iḷumeṇ cummai yīṭaṇuṭaivaraippinacaiyunart taṭaiyā naṅ peru vāyil icaiyēṇ pukkeṇṇiṭumpai tira*.

⁷¹ In support of this traditional interpretation *iṭam* “place” too should be mentioned. Two of its many contextual meanings show that *iṭam* denoted the size of things, namely “cubit, in measuring the width of cloth” and “breadth, width, expanse” (*Tamil Lexicon*, p. 279).

the use of *uṭaṅ* here had already been dealt with before by Rajam (see note 14): 328; beside the passage under consideration, “as the elephants filled/occupied all over the forest”, Rajam quotes *Patirruppattu* 24,10 *nāṭu uṭaṅ viḷaṅkum ... nallicai*, “good fame which shines all over the country”.

The same characterisation applies to Wilden’s translation of *neypaṭṭanna nōṅkāl eḥkiṅ ... tantai* as “her father with enduring hard blades, as if smeared with ghee”. *eḥku* can refer to any sharp, pointed weapon, such as a spear. As to *nōṅ* in the compound *nōṅkāl*, rather than from the verb *nōṅ-* “endure, practice austerities” we should start from the abstract noun *nōṅmai* “vigour, strength, force, might”. It is also puzzling why of all the meanings of *kāl* Wilden opted for the one which the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 904), gives first, namely, “hardness, solidity”, instead of considering the following “pillar, rod, handle, stem”, especially in the light of *Puraṇānūru* 95,2 where *nōṅkāl* describes a separate part of a spear (*vēl*): *nōṅkāl tirutti ney yaṅintu* “having polished the strong shaft and anointed it with ghee”.⁷² The girl’s father thus owns an arsenal full of spears, probably as a guarantee against invasions of wild elephants, but also of strangers who are after his daughter.

The poem may, thus, be translated as follows:

Ah, pity on mother. What will become of the golden body of her own daughter, who will suffer and worry on account of the girl for whom she has great affection?

While grown-up elephants with large tusks roam around through the jungle outside, inside, in the wide compound of the mansion, where her wealthy father keeps his sharp spears with strong shafts, gleaming as if they have been polished with ghee, the little girl with beautiful thin hair, under the pretext of rolling a ball, is teaching herself how to run with her feet soft as cotton.

7. Wilden (2008: 590 f.) reconstructs *Narriṅai* 266 as:

kollaikkōvalar kuṟumpuṇaṅ cērnta
kuṟuṅkār kuraviṅ kuviyiṅar vāṅpū
vāṭuṭai yiṭaimakaṅ cūṭap pūkkum
akaluḷāṅkaṭ cīṟūrēmē
yatuvē cāluva kāmam aṅṟiyum
em viṭṭakaṅṟir āyir koṅṅoṅru
kūruval vāḷiyar aiya vērupaṭ-
ṭiriya kālai yiriyir
periya vallavō periyavar nilaiyē.

The woman speaking in the poem lives in a small village (*cīṟūrēm*) peopled by goatherds; she feels trapped, missing the luxury and exciting life she was accustomed to in her

parents’ house.⁷³ Here we see what happens to a girl like the one depicted in the preceding poem: she pays the price for having rejected the husband selected for her by her parents and eloped with a stranger. Most probably the *āṭuṭai iṭaimakaṅ* in line 3 is her husband. As a herdsman (*iṭaimakaṅ*) owning (*uṭai*) a flock of goats (*āṭu*), he is relatively wealthy, but that does not make him less of a village type. So far the woman has resigned herself to the situation, though it is not what she really wants (5: *atuvē cāluva kāmam aṅṟiyum*), but that has changed as her husband has announced that he is going away, leaving her behind in this dump of a village (6: *em viṭṭakaṅṟir āyir*). She replies (*koṅṅoṅru kūruval*), telling him what she will do if he leaves her.

The village is situated in an area in which slash-and-burn land cultivation is practiced, and dotted by fields called *kollai*. On these fields so-called *kollaikkōvalar* are employed. Who are these *kollaikkōvalar*? Wilden translates the word with “cowherds” having “small fields”, asking noncommittally in a footnote: “What kind of relation is intended between the *kōvalar* and the *iṭaimakaṅ*? Is this a movement from centre to periphery?”. In translating *kōvalar* with “cowherds”, Wilden was no doubt led by its derivation from Sanskrit *gopāla-*. However, a comparison with the one and only other instance of *kollaikkōvalar* in the Caṅkam corpus, in *Narriṅai* 289, seems to show that these persons are no herders at all, neither of cows, nor of goats. To ascertain what they actually are, we need first to ascertain what exactly *kollai* signifies, and to do so we will also have to consider two other sorts of field, called *puṇam* and *itai* respectively.

The term *kollai* has been investigated by Takanobu Takahashi, according to whom it refers to a clearing in a forest.⁷⁴ He derived *kollai* from the verb *kol-* “kill”, which would have been used both for the felling of trees in the forest and ploughing the field after that. The main thesis

⁷³ Her situation may be compared to that of the one speaking in Gāthā 164 from that other anthology of village poetry, Hāla’s *Sattasāi*. Peter Khoroché and Herman Tieken (*Poems on Life and Love in Ancient India. Hāla’s Sattasāi*. (SUNY Series in Hindu Studies.) Albany: Excelsior Editions 2009, no. 540 on p. 163) translated this as:

To whom can I give a sly glance,
 With whom can I share my joys and sorrows,
 With whom can I joke,
 In this dump of a village
 Full of yokels?

⁷⁴ “Is Clearing or Plowing Equal to Killing? Tamil Culture and the Spread of Jainism in Tamilnadu”, in: Whitney Cox, Vincenzo Vergiani (eds.): *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-Cultural Fertilisation: Sanskrit and Tamil in Medieval India*. (Collection Indologie 121.) Pondichéry: Institut français de Pondichéry 2013, pp. 53–67.

⁷² It is not clear to me for what purpose the shaft of the spear, which most probably was made of wood, was smeared with ghee. Does *nōṅkāl* refer to the iron tip here?

of Takahashi's study is that in the use of *kol-* for ploughing the Tamils had been influenced by Jainism, for whom ploughing involves killing animals living in the soil. The term *kollai* does indeed refer to a field in the forest on mountain slopes, the cultivation of which depends on rainfall, and the main crop of which is millet. All these aspects come together in *Narriṇai* 209,1–4, which describe a girl who neglects the task assigned to her, of chasing away the birds from the crop on the field:

*malaiyiṭam paṭuttuk kōṭṭiya kollait-
taḷipatam peṛra kāṇ uḷukuraṅavar
cila vittakala viṭṭuṭaṅ pala viḷaiṅ-
tiṅaṅkukural piṅaṅkiya vēṅal uḷḷāi ...*

After the *kollai* that the mountain people (*kuṅavar*) had cleared (*paṭuttuk kōṭṭiya*) in the forest (*kāṇ*) on the mountain slope (*malaiyiṭam*) had received sufficient rain (*taḷipatam peṛra*), they ploughed (*uḷu*) and sowed (*vittakala*) it, and as soon as they had left, everywhere millet (*ēṅal*) sprang up, glistening in the sun and its ripe ears hanging down.⁷⁵ But the girl did not care.

The forest was cleared for fields by burning down the trees and bushes; cf. *Akanāṅṅuru* 288,5: *eri tiṅ kollai yiṅaiṅciya ēṅal* “millet, bent down (from the weight of its ears), on the *kollais* eaten (i. e. cleared) by fire”.⁷⁶ After the fire, black becomes the prevailing colour on *kollais*. Thus the following passage from *Puṅanāṅṅuru* 159,15–20 describes unsophisticated forest people — commonly depicted as prone to such mistakes⁷⁷ — mistaking a *kollai*

(black after the fire) for a muddy field, black being the colour of mud as well⁷⁸:

*... kāṅavar
karipuṅa mayakkiya vakaṅkaṭ kollai
aiṅaṅam vittu maiyuraṅ kavini
iṅal cellā vēṅaṅkiḷumeṅak-
karuvi vēṅaṅ talaii yāṅkum
iṭta niṅ pukaḷ ēṭtit tokka ...*

Unfortunately, the text with its two dangling verbal participle clauses is grammatically a mongrel. Thus, while the subject of *vitti*, “having sowed”, in line 17 are the *kāṅavar* or forest people (line 15) – for who else could come into consideration for that function here? – these do not, contrary to what one might expect, return in that or a related function with any of the following verbs: the verbal participle *kavini* “having become beautiful”, or the negative participle *cellā* “(the summer) in which (sprouting) is not possible”. Another problem concerns the phrase *mai-yuraṅ kavini*. In Tamil poetry the combination of “black” (*mai-yura*) and “beautiful” (*kavini*) fits in particular the rainclouds (*iḷumeṅak karuvi vēṅaṅ talaii*), from which, however, the phrase is separated by *iṅal cellā vēṅaṅku*.⁷⁹ The following is, therefore, not a proper translation, but merely a paraphrase of what I think the poet had in mind. He compares the generous king to a raincloud, a standard topos in ‘heroic’ Tamil poetry.⁸⁰ The part which describes the *kollai* is grammatically clear:

Having assembled, singing the praise of your generosity which is like a massive (beautifully black), thundering cloud appearing (unexpectedly) in the summer, when the wild rice seed does not sprout [which] the forest people had sowed on the wide *kollais* (black after the fire) which they had mistaken for fields black (from mud).

This poem has in its entirety been translated by HH (see note 4): 101; the relevant passage reads:

... I praise you for the fame of your generosity, which is like a cloud coming with lightning and roaring thunder as it sheds its rain down on millet [(*ēṅal*)] not yet sprouting its ears of a lovely dark color [(*mai-yura kavini*)], after it has been planted among

⁷⁵ For *kollais* in the mountains, see *Cilappatikāram* 17,21,1 (*kollaiyaṅ cāraṅ kuruntocitta māyavaṅ* “Māyavaṅ (Kṛṣṇa), who pulled out the kuruntu tree on the mountain slope spotted with *kollais*”), *Kalittokai* 39,13f. (*kollai kural vāṅki iṅā malai vāṅnar alla purintu oḷukalāṅ* “because the people from the mountains misbehave the crops on the *kollais* have failed”) and *Akanāṅṅuru* 133,7 (*kollai itaiya kuṅumporai maruṅkiṅ* “on the slope of the small hill with its *itai* [fields] of the *kollai* type”). For millet, see *Akanāṅṅuru* 288,5 (*kollai yiṅaiṅciya ēṅal* “millet, bent down (from the weight of its ears), on the *kollais*”).

⁷⁶ The real work begins only after the trees and bushes have been burnt down, namely the removal of the roots and half-burnt tree trunks. See, for instance, *Puṅanāṅṅuru* 231,1f., which describes an upland field called *puṅam* after fire had been set to the trees on it: *eri puṅak kuṅavaṅ kuṅariyaḷ aṅṅa / kari puṅa viṅakiṅ iṅa voḷḷaḷaṅ* “the fire of the cremation pyre piled up with pieces of wood which are black (*kari*) on the outside like those the man from the hills collects from the *puṅam* he is hacking at”. Cf. too *Porunarāṅṅruppaṭai* 117f.: *kollai yuḷukoḷu vēyppap pallē / yellaiyum iravum iṅriṅru maḷuṅki* “from eating meat day and night my teeth have become as blunt as the ploughshare ploughing a *kollai*”.

⁷⁷ This is similar in Hāla's *Sattasāi*, the poems' counterpart from North Indian kāvya literature; see Tieken 2001 (see note 13), and Khoroché and Tieken (see note 73). Cf. too the Murukaṅ priest in *Kuṅuntokai* 111 (§ 3 above).

⁷⁸ As in *Akanāṅṅuru* 140,10–15, which describes oxen (*pakaṭṭiṅ*) pulling out a cart stuck in the mud (*aḷḷal*) which is as black as the smoke (*pukai*) produced by the farmer working on the *puṅam* (*puṅavaṅ*), attempting to make an *itai* (for *itai* fields, see below).

⁷⁹ Thus, in *Kuṅuntokai* 371 the word *mai* “blackness” all by itself stands for “clouds”: *mai paṭu cilampiṅ aiṅaṅam vittu / yaruviyiṅ viḷaikku nāṅaṅ* “the man, having sowed the wild rice on the mountain surrounded by blackness (*mai*, i. e. rain clouds), made it grow with the help of water from a waterfall”.

⁸⁰ Hart 1975 (see note 13): 249 f.

wild rice on a wide space of land new to cultivation [(*kollai*)] but burned over by men of the forest and transformed [(*mayakkiya*)] into a field [(*puṇam*)].

This is problematic. To begin with, *vēṇal* “summer” is erroneously read as *ēṇal* “millet”, with the initial *v-* in *vēṇarku* taken as a glide. But the seeds of wild rice (*aivaṇam*) do not normally bring forth millet. Therefore, the millet is here “planted among wild rice”, which, however, has no basis in the text. Moreover, here it is the millet which has acquired a “lovely dark color” (*maiyyurak kavini*), but as far as I know dark-coloured millet does not offer a “lovely” sight. Note also the translation of *mayakkiya* “which (the forest people) had mistaken for” with “transformed”. However, “transformed” as used here clearly implies a form of improvement,⁸¹ which the Tamil verb *mayakku-* “confuse (and the like)” does not.

In the texts discussed above altogether three types of fields are mentioned that have been cleared by first burning down the trees on it. For instance, beside *kollai* in *eri tiṅ kollai* in *Akanāṇṇūru* 288, there are *puṇam* and *itai*: *itai* in *itai muyal puṇavaṇ pukai niḷar kaṭukkum mā mūtaḷḷal*⁸² in *Akanāṇṇūru* 140, and *puṇam* in *eri puṇak kuṇavaṇ kuṇaiyal aṇṇa / kari puṇa viṇakiṅ ima voḷḷalaḷ* in *Puṇanāṇṇūru* 231 (see note 76, with translation).

It seems that *puṇam* is a general term for a field in the hills or mountains in any stage of the cultivation process. Thus, in *Akanāṇṇūru* 288 the farmer is still hacking at the burned roots and tree trunks (*eri puṇak kuṇavaṇ*), while in *Puṇanāṇṇūru* 159 the “black *puṇam*” (*karipuṇam*) is already ready for sowing. The term *itai* is rare; apart from the four instances in *Akanāṇṇūru* (133,7, 140,11, 393,4, 394,3), in which it is a kind of field, in its three other attestations (*Maturaikkāñci* 79, 376 and 536) it refers to the sail of a ship. But the two meanings “field” and “sail” may well be related, in the same way as in Dutch *lapje* (“small piece of cloth”) is used for a small piece of land. In fact, the meaning “small field” would fit perfectly in *Akanāṇṇūru* 133,7: *kollaiyitaiya kuṇumpoṇai maruṅkiṇ*, “on the slope of the small hill with small fields (*itaiya*) of the *kollai* type” (cf. note 75).⁸³ As for *kollai*, as *Puṇanāṇṇūru* 159 shows, the blackness of these fields is proverbial and does not need to be specified. Of the three words for “field”, *kollai* is also the only one which seems to have the action of burning in its name, for rather than with *kol-* “kill” we may be dealing

⁸¹ The same is the case with Takahashi’s (see note 74) “mixed (dug) up”: “Wild rice has been planted on a wide space of field [(*kollai*)] which was a dry upland [(*puṇam*)], burned over [(*kari* “black”)] and then mixed (dug) up by men of the forest” (p. 60).

⁸² “Mud as black as the smoke produced by the farmer working on the *puṇam* (*puṇavaṇ*), attempting to make an *itai*”.

⁸³ The compound *kollaiyitai* indicates that *kollai* and *itai* are not synonyms. In fact, *kollais* could be relatively large, as in *Puṇanāṇṇūru* 159,16, which describes the *kollai* as an *akaṅkaṅ* “wide place” (*akaṅkaṅ kollai*).

with the root also found in *kollaṅ* “blacksmith”;⁸⁴ as the blacksmith with the help of fire fashions unformed iron into useful instruments, so the farmer with fire turns a forest into fields (ultimately) fit for agriculture.

Narriṇai 289 tells us what the *kollaikkōvalar* do on the *kollai*. In the poem we hear what a woman says to a friend. Her husband has left her, making solemn promises to return before the rainy season starts. However, the rain clouds are already approaching and the husband has not yet returned. She is caught between (*āyiṭai*, see above) believing her husband or believing her own eyes, a Catch-22 situation. Lines 6–9 say:

... *āyiṭaik-*
kollaikkōvalar elli māṭṭiya
perumā vōṭiya pōla
varuḷilēṇ amma vaḷiyēṇ yāṇē.

... caught between these two choices I cannot expect any mercy and am to be pitied, like the wild animals (*perumā*), which while trying to escape (*vōṭiya*) (from the *kollai*) are driven back (*māṭṭiya*)⁸⁵ in clear daylight by the *kollaikkōvalar*.

Though I have been unable to verify this, I doubt if the expression *perumā* is used as a general term for domesticated animals such as goats, sheep or cows. Rather, we are dealing with wild animals, which, while trying to escape from the burning forest, are driven back into the flames. The *kollai* field is cleared of both trees and wild animals, the ‘domestication’ including both plant and animal life. For this we have a mythic prototype in the burning of the Khāṇḍava Forest described in *Mahābhārata* 1,214–225, in which Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa set the forest alight and prevented the animals from escaping by circling around it, thus making them stay in the forest to serve as food for insatiable Agni, Fire.⁸⁶ As to the Tamil poem’s mention

⁸⁴ For *kol-* “kill” and *kollaṅ*, “blacksmith”, see DED (in note 26), nos. 2132 and 2133 f. respectively. If this derivation holds, then *kollai* can be struck from the already short list of loan translations showing Jaina influence on Caṅkam poetry, for which see, e. g., Zvelebil (note 28): 137.

⁸⁵ The meaning assigned to *māṭṭiya* here follows the meanings 1–3 in the *Tamil Lexicon*, p. 3149: “fasten on, buckle, tackle, hook; fix, attach; put in, thrust (as fuel)”. Wilden has selected the eighth of the nine meanings, namely “light (as a lamp)”: “Just as the big animals running when the cowherds have kindled (*māṭṭiya*) light (*elli*) in the clearing, I am without [his] consideration, alas, pitiable me”. However, *elli* does not mean “light” (which can be kindled), but “daytime” (the additions within round brackets are mine, within square brackets Wilden’s).

⁸⁶ For this myth, see pp. 21–26 of Herman Tiekens: “The Mahābhārata after the Great Battle”, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens / Vienna Journal of South Asian Studies* 48 (2004) 5–46, and Alf Hiltebeitel: “The Burning of the Forest Myth”, in: Bardwell L. Smith (ed.): *Hinduism. New Essays in the History of Religions*. (Studies in the His-

of daylight, despite burning down the forest taking six days in the *Mahābhārata* (Tieken 2004: 24) Arjuna's and Kṛṣṇa's activities were, implicitly, set during daytime, for after they had chased away the rainclouds sent by Indra to douse the fire, "the foulness and darkness of the sky was appeased, ... the orb of its sun restored to normality".⁸⁷ Only during daytime could they see the animals trying to flee the conflagration.

The *kollaikkōvalar* in this poem are no ordinary herders who have their cattle graze on very poor grounds, which involves much extra work to keep the herd together on the *kollai* field. Instead, the term *kollaikkōvalar* describes farmers who are burning down a forest and driving back the animals trying to escape the flames. They are not protecting (*pāla-* in *gopāla-*) the herd from harm, but are protectors in the sense of being jailers.

In *Narriṇai* 266 the woman's village is likewise surrounded by *kollaikkōvalar*. It is a poor village, whose inhabitants subsist on slash-and-burn agriculture. At the same time the *kollaikkōvalar* evoke the image of the village as a prison from which it is difficult to escape. The key word is the verb *iri-* "flee" (*iriyiṇ*) in line 8.

But for a full translation of *Narriṇai* 266 several more remarks on the text are needed, one of which concerns *akaluḷāṅkaṇ*, if only because of Wilden's laborious translation of it as "that place-wide-inside". It is made up of two words, namely *akaluḷ* and *āṅkaṇ*. The meaning and use of *āṅkaṇ* are more or less clear.

Thus, though not very frequently, *āṅkaṇ* is an adverb of place, as in *āṅkaṭ ḥimpunāl iṅkaṭ parakkum* "where sweet water flows from there (*āṅkaṇ*) to this place here (*iṅkaṇ*)" (*Narriṇai* 70,7). It is also used to circumscribe the locative, as in *kūṭal āṅkaṇ* "in Kūṭal" (*Narriṇai* 298,9). Quite frequently it seems to function as a substantive, meaning "(that) place", which, like any substantive, can be described in more detail; a case in point is *niḷalil āṅkaṇ* "that place without shade" (*Narriṇai* 105,5). Often, these *āṅkaṇ* phrases are part of a larger descriptive passage, as *niḷalil āṅkaṇ aruṅcurakkavalai* "a crossroad in the impassable desert, that place without shade". The same is seen in *Narriṇai* 63,1–3: *paratavar / miku miṇ uṅakkiya putumaṅal āṅkaṭ / kalleṇ cēri* "the noisy quarter, where (*āṅkaṭ*) on the fresh sand the fishermen have laid out fish to dry". As in *viḷavuṭai yāṅkaṇ / ūrēm* "we (*-ēm*), living in a village (*ūr*), (that place) which celebrates (owns) festivals" (*Narriṇai* 220,6f.), in *akaluḷāṅkaṭ cīrūrēm* the *āṅkaṇ* phrase is found immediately before the village it describes.⁸⁸

As to *akaluḷ*, Wilden seems to analyse it as consisting of the verb stem *akal-* "(being) wide" and the noun

uḷ, "inside". I think, however, that we have to do with the suffix *-uḷ* as found in, for instance, *ceyyuḷ* "action, poetic composition" from the verb *cey-* "do, make". For *akaluḷ* the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 14) provides the meaning "width, breadth" (the meanings "greatness, earth, street" may be ignored here). As such *akaluḷāṅkaṇ* may be compared to *viyaluḷāṅkaṇ*, "in a wide open space", though *viyal* is a noun and not, like *akal*, a verb. *viyaluḷāṅkaṇ* is found in *Patirrupattu* 56,1: *viḷavu viṅṅirunta viyaluḷāṅkaṇ* "on the wide open space on which the festival takes place", and *Malaipaṭukatām* 350f.: *muḷavu tuyil ariyā viyaluḷāṅkaṇ viḷaviṇ* "a festival on a wide open space during which the drums do not know sleep".⁸⁹ For obvious reasons festivals require an open space, for which in *Puṛaṇānūru* 65,5 instead of *viyaluḷ* the word *akaluḷ* is used. In this example, however, *akaluḷāṅkaṇ* seems to be in the first place a descriptor of the village: *viḷavum akaluḷāṅkaṭ cīrūr marappa* "while the small village, which has a wide open space (where festivals can be held), forgets its festivals." Most likely the same is the case in *akaluḷāṅkaṭ cīrūrēm* in *Narriṇai* 266. In any case the village in question is not situated in a wide open space, but in a forest area gradually being turned into agricultural land.

A passage that has to be dealt with in some detail as well is line 5: *atuvē cāluva kāmam aṅṅiyum*. To begin with, for the third person plural *cāluva* in *atuvē cāluva* I suggest to follow manuscripts (and editions) C1, G1+2, ER and ET, and adopt the third person singular *cāluṇ*, corresponding to *atuvē* "that", though it is the *lectio facillior*. Wilden defends her choice in a note, which I am unfortunately unable to follow.⁹⁰ The supposed corruption of *cāluṇ* into *cāluva* may be a mistake made by a copyist in either reading or writing *ṇ* as *v*; indeed, it is possible to recognise a *v* in that part of *ṇ* which remains if one skips the right vertical and upper horizontal lines.

For the verb *cāl-* the *Tamil Lexicon* (p. 1389) provides a number of meanings. In the present context I consider appropriate the meaning "be suitable, fitting", which has counterparts in Kannada *sāl-* "be sufficient or enough, suffice" and Telugu *cālu-* "be enough, sufficient".⁹¹ For the woman, living in a small village "suffices"; it is as it is and she won't complain. But she adds *kāmam aṅṅiyum*

tory of Religions (Supplements to *Numen*) 33.) Leiden: E. J. Brill 1976, pp. 208–224.

⁸⁷ Translated by J. A. B. van Buitenen: *The Mahābhārata. I. The Book of the Beginning*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1973, p. 419.

⁸⁸ See also *akaluḷāṅkaṭ cīrūr* in *Puṛaṇānūru* 65,5.

⁸⁹ It would here go too far to deal with similar expressions like *viyaṅkaṇ* (< *viyal-kaṇ*) and *akaṅkaṇ* (< *akal-kaṇ*), and *viyalāṅkaṇ* (there does not seem to be a corresponding *akalāṅkaṇ*).

⁹⁰ Wilden decides in favour of *cāluva* as it is found in the majority of sources. To explain the plural verb she suggests that the grammatical subject *atu* "it" is anaphoric and the verb cataphoric, referring to what follows. there being two subjects in the speaker's mind.

⁹¹ DED (see note 26), no. 2470(a); see also Kota *ca'km* "sufficiency" and Toda *so'k* "enough" in (b).

“though it is not what I really want”: if she had a choice, she would not be living there.

This leaves the last two and a half lines of the poem to be discussed:

... *vērupaṭ-*
ṭiriya kālai iriyiṛ
periya vallavō periyavar nilaiyē.

Wilden’s translation (2008: 591) runs as follows:

if the time that made us wait [(*irīya*, participle of the causative of *iru* “be somewhere, stay”)], changing [(*vērupaṭtu*)], retreats [(*(y)iriyiṛ*, conditional of the verb *iri-*), won’t [(*allavō*)] the state [(*nilai*)] of the great ones [(*periyavar*)] be great?

But time (*kālai*) is an unlikely subject of *iriyiṛ*, for time “flies” but does not “flee” (*iri-*). How should the passage then be interpreted? Just now we have seen that the woman has resigned herself to her situation. But this changes when her husband announces that he is going away, leaving her alone in the village (*em viṭṭakanṛir āyin*).⁹² She gives him a piece of her mind (*koṇṇonṛu kūruval*),⁹³ threatening him with the consequences:

If during the period (*kālai*) that I am forced to sit/stay here (*irīya*) alone (*vērupaṭtu*)⁹⁴ I run away, the (i. e. your) high status [in the village] will no longer be that high, will it (*allavō*)?

We have already seen that the husband as the owner of a flock of goats is better off than the majority of his fellow villagers, who make a living by slash-and-burn agriculture in the fields next to the village. In the first few lines of the poem he is described as showing off his success in life by parading through the streets of the village with a bunch of flowers in his hair. Marrying a woman from outside the village community is the final proof of his success. Therefore, by running away from him his wife would with one

⁹² In the village poems the husbands are practically always absent or on the point of leaving. In this case the husband has to leave his wife presumably to lead his goats to new pastures.

⁹³ The interjection *koṇṇonṛu* “one thing”, is mentioned in *Tolkāp-piyam*, Collatikāram 254; the grammar distinguishes altogether four attitudes on the part of the speaker expressed by it, namely *accam* “feeling fear”, *payamili* “feeling no fear”, *perumai* “feeling powerful, superior”, and *kālam* “deeming it the right time to say it”. Here the woman is clearly warning or threatening her husband, which comes close to “absence of fear” or “superiority”.

⁹⁴ The verb *vērupaṭu-* has a number of contextual meanings, “be alone” being one of them. The available sources seem to hesitate between the verbal participle *vērupaṭtu* and the infinitive *vērupaṭa*. The difference does not really affect the meaning: “remain here, being alone” or “so that I am alone”.

stroke destroy all his ambitions and make him the laughing stock of the village.

The above considerations yield the following translation of the poem:

We live in a small village surrounded by small fields cleared by *kollaikkōvalar* [who have burned down the trees and driven back the wild animals trying to escape from the conflagration], a small village with wide open spaces, where bunches of white flowers hang in the short *kuravu* trees, flowers which are worn by the herder, who owns a flock of goats. It (living in a small village) is what it is, though it is not what I really want. However, if you persist in going away, leaving me behind, I will tell you [this] one thing: May you live long, my lord. But if during the period that you force me to stay here all on my own I run away, not much will be left of your high status here, will it?

Compare below Wilden’s translation:

We [are] in [our] small village, that place wide inside, where the sky flowers of the short-trunked Kura-tree bloom in heaped clusters, close to the small fields of the cowherds, in the clearing, to be worn by the shepherd-son⁹⁵ with [his] sheep.
That alone is worthy, even apart from desire:
if you depart, deserting us, I tell
you one thing, may you live, lord:
if the time that made us wait, changing, retreats,
won’t the state of the great ones be great?

8. The translations discussed above are no result of a tentative selection. I randomly started with the poems about the *kollai* fields, and in my investigation of these poems had to consult other poems, necessitating consulting yet other poems, and so on. The translations I came across in the process are not what one would expect of scholarly work. One of the basic problems encountered in practically all translations, those mentioned above and others consulted, is that each poem seems to have been dealt with in isolation. A simple example of this is Selby’s translation (see note 6) of the word *punpulam* “waste land, dry land, arid barren place” (*Tamil Lexicon*, p. 2813). In *Aiṅkurunūru* 260, she translates *punpula mayakkattu viḷaintaṇa tinaiyē* with “the millet has now ripened in the land of arid fields” (p. 107). I suspect that the word “land” renders Tamil *mayakkattu* which, however, describes the poor quality of the field, consisting of a “mixture” (*mayakkam*; oblique form *mayakkattu*) of earth, stones and partly burnt roots of trees, which, as seen in *Porunarārruppaṭai* 117 f. blunts the ploughshare (see note 76). In *Aiṅkurunūru*

⁹⁵ *makan* “son” in *iṭaimakan* has the same function as Sanskrit *putra-* in *vaṇikputra-* “trader-son”, i. e. “man belonging to the trading caste”.

246, *punpulam vittiya punavar*, Selby translates *punpulam* with “millet field”: “farmers who have sown their millet fields” (p. 102). The translation may not be quite exact, but it is not wrong, in the sense that millet does grow on dry fields. However, in 283 from the very same collection she translates *punpulamayakkattuluta vēnal* with “the millet [(vēnal)] cultivated in grassy tracts” (p. 116), as if she had just realised that *pun* might stand for *pul* “grass”. But if we have indeed to do with *pul* here, it is, like Skt *tṛṇa-* “(dry) grass”, used to refer to something useless. Clearly, Selby did not go back to her earlier translations. In addition, in this translation *mayakkattu* is not accounted for, unless it is somehow, in combination with *uluta* “ploughed” (thus “ploughed and sowed”), included in the word “cultivated”. Compare the translation “transformed” by HH (see note 4): 101 of the participle *mayakkiya* in *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 159, said of a *kollai* field.

Yet another example of how in dealing with a word translators fail to take into account its other instances is HH’s translation of *paṭai* when combined with *puricai*. The translation of *palpaṭaippuricai* in *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 224 is “many-layered wall” (p. 140), even though, as already shown in § 3 above, we are not dealing with a wall here, but with a platform functioning as a Vedic sacrificial altar. *paṭai* in *puricai* in poem 343 of the same collection is translated with “weapons” and *puricai* with “fort”, in the process ignoring grammar by dividing one sentence into two, with *puricai* in the one and *paṭai* in the other. Taking the trouble, instead, to consult the available indexes covering Caṅkam poetry (see note 16) for *puricai* would have led to another instance of *pal(a)paṭaippuricai*, in *Maturai-kāñci* 352, which might have convinced HH that the *paṭai* is a part of the *puricai*.

It is curious, nay paradoxical, to see how little use translators make of these indexes. For, in the study of Caṅkam poetry the formulaic nature of the language, or the repetitiveness of the vocabulary, has been, and for some scholars still is, an important topic. According to K. Kailasapathy,⁹⁶ in the *Puṛaṇāṇūru* we have poetry produced on the spot by wandering bards who make use of a fixed repertory of topics, themes and formulae. This theory has been further elaborated by Hart 1975 (see note 13), according to whom the Caṅkam corpus is a type of poetry composed by learned poets who were the heirs of these earlier bardic poets from the Deccan. Whatever exactly be the case, *hapax legomena* are rare. When faced with a problematical passage, it is common practice among scholars to turn to other instances of the words or expressions in the corpus. However, in the study of Old Tamil poetry this

philological approach does not seem to have taken root yet. I hope I have been able to show that it should.

In the past few years a number of translations of Caṅkam poetry have appeared and more are in the pipeline. Maybe the projects are too ambitious. It is not difficult to see that the interpretation of a poem given in the commentary or by an earlier translator is not possible, for instance, for grammatical reasons. But to find out what the passage in question does mean may take days, if not months or even years. As it is, many such problems tend to be circumvented by *ad hoc* solutions. Because such solutions are not supported by the grammar of the original texts, they are difficult to reproduce. If grammar does not count, how can we claim that the study of Tamil poetry is a legitimate academic pursuit?

Unfortunately, the situation in Tamil studies is not unique. It is also met with in Schubring’s translations of the *Āyāraṅgasutta*, one of the early Jaina canonical texts. In *Worte Mahāvīras. Kritische Übersetzungen aus dem Kanon der Jaina*⁹⁷ one may come across several instances in which Schubring in his translation has joined together earlier and later text passages, something which in a note on p. 84 he justifies with: “Diese Wiedergabe ... beruht auf freiem Schalten mit den anzunehmenden Bruchstücken, deren heutige Folge sinnlos ist.” The problem with, for instance, Hart’s (and Heifetz’s) and Selby’s translations is that similar “freies Schalten” is done, as it were, secretly.

Wilden’s translations form a category in their own right. They are literal to the extreme, and therefore very difficult to follow, at times resulting in meaningless gibberish. It is as if Tamil poetry were passed through Google Translate. An example is her translation (2008: 591) of *atuvē cāluva* (or *cāluṅ*) *kāmam aṇṇiyum* in *Narriṇai* 266⁹⁸: “That alone is worthy, even apart from desire”. All the words are there, but the translation does not make clear how the sentence fits in the context, nor how its two parts are related, or whose desire (*kāmam*) for what we are dealing with.

The poems, and I refer in particular to the Akam poems about village life, are riddles of sorts. In these poems, a villager, usually a woman, says something, either to a friend, her mother or to herself, about her love life in the widest sense of the word. As indicated, it is to the reader to find out from the words spoken what the matter is or in what context they are spoken, and what the speaker intends to achieve with them. This is not an easy task, but it is what

⁹⁷ (Quellen der Religionsgeschichte 7,14.) Göttingen/Leipzig: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1927.

⁹⁸ Discussed extensively in § 7, and translated by me as “It is what it is, though it is not what I really want”.

⁹⁶ *Tamil Heroic Poetry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1968.

this poetry is all about. The riddle must be solved before offering a translation. By her own confession Wilden is not interested in the intentions the speaker in the poem might have. This disqualifies her as a translator. But it also disqualifies her as a text editor, for how can one know what the original reading is and what the secondary one, if one is not interested in the meaning of the text?