

Notes and News

Obeisance to Viṣṇu-Tirumāl: Vaiṣṇava Transmission for a Caṅkam Manuscript

Among the roughly 150 surviving manuscripts on palm-leaf and paper of the earliest Classical Tamil literature, the Caṅkam corpus (consisting of two hyper-anthologies of erotic and heroic poetry which dates back perhaps to the beginning of the Common Era), the larger part appears to have been transmitted in a Śaiva surrounding. Well-known is the role institutions such as Tiruvāṭuṭurai Mutt, a Śaivaite monastery in the Tañcāvūr area, played for Tamil literary history. But even though the exact pronunciation of many manuscripts is not known today, their Śaiva affiliation is visible in the numerous small invocations of Śaiva deities predominantly at the end, but also in the margins of manuscripts. The function of these invocations is not immediately obvious, but it stands to reason that, apart from being simply auspicious signs, they might have been seen as a minimal justification of copying a secular text in a religious institution. Sources from the 18th century onwards testify to a rather militant consciousness of religion which had little to say in favour of older non-Śaivite poetry. Quite frequently, the invocations are also marked by a change of script; while the poetic text and its colophon are written in Tamil, what follows is written in Grantha script.

However, in a number of cases the short invocations and blessings are not of Śaiva, but of Vaiṣṇava denomination. Next to nothing is known about the share that Vaiṣṇava institutions might have had in the transmission of the corpus. The following case is noteworthy, firstly for the fact that the manuscript begins (not ends!) with four fully-fledged devotional verses in various metres, followed by the usual series of minimal invocations. Secondly, the manuscript in question constitutes the major witness of a second strand of transmission available for one of the old anthologies, the Akanāṅṅūru, the 400 long Akam (love) poems. Since the manuscript is incomplete, it is not clear whether it also contained the otherwise well-attested traditional end colophon. The manuscript is on palm-leaf, well-preserved and beautifully written, and is stored at the U.V. Swaminathaiyar Library in Chennai [no. UVSL 107] (abbreviated as C3 in the critical edition prepared by the Caṅkam project). The four verses, on a first, separate leaf, are dedicated to Nammālvār (the most important of the early Vaiṣṇava poet-saints), to the spiritual teacher, to Viṣṇu-Tirumāl and to a goddess (Śrī or Sarasvatī), in a row with several short prose invocations of various Vaiṣṇavite entities (among them again Nammālvār). This part ends with some minimal information on the copying of the manuscript and a short characterisation of its content, naming as the title of the anthology ‘*neṭuntokai*’ and referring to the miniature commentary, traditionally named *kiḷavi-s*, by the term *tuṟai*. This shows that

apart from the well-attested vulgata, mostly transmitted in Śaiva institutions (such as Tiruvāṭuṭurai mutt), there is a second line which appears to have been transmitted in a Vaiṣṇava context. As is usual, the manuscript is not dated, but both the script and the state of preservation make a date before the early 19th century look improbable.

In what follows metrical transcript and translation of the four stanzas are presented. The first among them is found in the laudatory preface (*ciṟappuppāyiram*) of a late poetological treatise, the Māraṅalaṅkāram (16th c). The others are not yet identified and, to my knowledge, have not been printed before. The slightly irregular metres are presumably Ācīriya Viruttam(?), then two four-line Venṇpās, finally an Ācīriyam.¹

*tēṇ arā makil to- taiyalum mauviyūm tiru kiḷar kuḷai kātum
kāṇ arā malar tiru muka cōti- yūm kayi- rava tu- var vāyūm
mōṇam ākiya vaṭivamum mārpamum muttirai tiru kaiyūm
ñāṇa tēcikaṇ caraṇam tā- maraiyūm eṇ nayanam viṭṭ’ akalāvē.*

“The nectar garland of unending sweetness
and the hair tuft and the ears with lustre-emitting ear rings
and the light of the sacred face, an ever-fragrant flower,
and the water-lily coral mouth
and the form that became silent
and the chest and the sacred hands posed in worship
and the feet lotuses of the teacher of spiritual knowledge –
[they all] do not leave my eye.”

*pārāta kalvi pirapanta poruḷ aṇaittu
nēr:āka muṇ vantu niṟkumē tērātu
tēviṟu koṇṭa tiru mālai mu tamil
tērnar vīr’ a[ll]aitt’ utitta nāl.*

“All the meaning of the Prabandha’s of unseen erudition
came straight before [me and] stayed, unsought,
on the day that arose, summoning with distinction those who examine
the three[-fold] Tamil of the sacred garland that distinguishes god.”

*eṇṇum tirumārṅkē ālarvēṇ em perumāṇ
eṇṇum eṇṇakkē pirāṇ avāṇ eṇṇum
piṟavāta pēr āḷaṇ pēr ā- yiramum
maṟavātu vāḷttuka eṇ vāy.*

“Always I am the servant of Tirumāl, my great one.
Always he is my lord. Always,
without forgetting, let my mouth laud
the thousand names of the unborn great man.”

*tavaḷat tāmarait tāt’ ār kōyil
avaḷai porrutum arum tamil kuṟittē.*

“We shall worship her
in the pollen-filled temple of white lotus,
pondering rare Tamil.”

Eva Wilden | Hamburg

¹ For the metrical split, I am indebted to my EFEO colleagues T. Rajeswari and G. Vijayavenugopal; the one printed verse is scanned in a different way by the editor of the Māraṅalaṅkāram, T.V. Gopal Iyer. For its identification, I thank Jean-Luc Chevillard.

Notes and News

A Study of Old Kanembu in Early West African Qur'anic Manuscripts and Islamic Recitations (Tarjumo) in the Light of Kanuri-Kanembu Dialects spoken around Lake Chad

In early 2009, an international team of specialists were awarded funding to carry out a 36-month project as part of a joint framework of agreement between the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to support collaboration between German and UK-based humanities researchers. The project is headed by Professor Roland Kießling, Professor Michael Friedrich (Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg) and Professor Philip J. Jaggard (SOAS, University of London).

Despite the fact that a number of major languages of sub-Saharan Africa have a long and rich history of writing in Arabic script (Ajami), ancient manuscripts written in local languages are extremely rare. However, in the late 1950s, some copies of the Qur'an were discovered in northern Nigeria, written in Arabic, with commentaries in an archaic variety of Kanuri-Kanembu, an important West African language spoken around Lake Chad, dating back to the 16th century and representing one of the earliest written examples of a sub-Saharan language. Apart from

this variety of Old Kanembu, now represented in a corpus of 3,200 digital pages, there is another variety known as Tarjumo, which is regarded as sacred and survives in local (i.e. North-East Nigerian) Islamic recitations.

The aim of the project is to document and analyse this virtually unknown African manuscript culture in its linguistic and social setting, and explore previously unresearched phenomena, i.e. how Old Kanembu and Tarjumo relate historically to linguistically distinct modern Kanuri-Kanembu, and what they can tell us about the migrations and linguistic-cultural assimilation and integration in the Lake Chad basin. The project is drawing on preliminary results from an earlier AHRC-funded project ‘Early Nigerian Qur’anic manuscripts’ (<http://kanurimanuscripts.soas.ac.uk/>), and cooperates with the research group ‘Manuscript cultures in Asia and Africa’ in Hamburg.

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Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies (COMSt)

In June 2009, the European Science Foundation launched a five-year Research Networking Programme in Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies. The idea is to bring together European scholars working on manuscripts from different branches of Oriental studies (with the focus on the Mediterranean and North African cultural areas of the ‘codex’ manuscript culture) in order to compare experiences and research results in the history of written civilization, manuscript cataloguing, textual and material analysis as well as issues of manuscript preservation, conservation and restoration. The ensuing cross-cultural academic dialogue will increase awareness of what is being done in the field and make it possible to elaborate unified methodologies in Oriental manuscript studies.

The COMSt Network is guided by a Steering Committee formed by the representatives of all ten funding countries and chaired by Professor Dr Alessandro Bausi of the University

of Hamburg. It is coordinated by Evgenia Sokolinskaia of the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian Studies at the University of Hamburg.

More than sixty scholars from fifteen countries currently involved in the network work in five teams. (1) Material aspects: codicology and palaeography. (2) Manuscripts as text witnesses: philology as textual criticism. (3) Digital approaches to manuscript studies. (4) Manuscript cataloguing. (5) Manuscript preservation. The teams meet in regular workshops, and there is also an ongoing cross-team discussion. Two larger conferences are also part of the programme: the Launching Conference which took place in Hamburg on 1–3 December 2009, and the Closing Conference that will be held towards the end of the project in May 2014.

For more information, please see:

<http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/COMST/>

Evgenia Sokolinskaia | Hamburg

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