

None of these comments should detract from the accomplishment of this work. It is the result of unusually thorough scholarship and sets a high standard that few will meet or even aspire to meet. The emergence of the Paippalādasamhitā in reliable editions over the past couple of decades is one of the most signal developments in Vedic studies, and this edition may well turn out to be the most fully realized product of this scholarship.

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A Critical Edition and an Annotated Translation of the Akanānūru (Part I—Kaḷḷiriyānainirai), vol. I: *Introduction, Invocation–50*; vol. II: *51–120*; vol. III: *Old Commentary on Kaḷḷiriyānainirai KV–90; Word Index of Akanānūru KV–120*. By EVA WILDEN. Collection Indologie, vol. 134.1–3. Critical Texts of Caṅkam Literature, vol. 4.1–3. NETamil Series, vol. 1.1–3. Pondichéry: ÉCOLE FRANÇAISE D'EXTRÊME-ORIENT and INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE PONDICHÉRY, 2018. Pp. cl + 323, 324–787, 470.

These three volumes are the latest installments in Eva Wilden's massive project of constructing critical editions for all of the *caṅkam* Tamil anthologies. The three volumes contain a critical edition and translation of the first 120 poems of the text in question, the *Akanānūru*, the "Four Hundred on *Akam*," the poetry of the "interior"; namely, that of the inner lives of men and women in love, accompanied by the voices and feelings of friends, mothers, rivals, bards, and passersby. The *Akanānūru* is one of the canonical eight anthologies in Old Tamil, and as Wilden notes, "it probably belongs in significant parts, to the oldest stock" (p. iii). The poems range in length from thirteen to thirty-three lines and are divided into three books, the *Kaḷḷiriyānainirai* ("Row of Bull Elephants," poems 1–20), the *Maṇimīṭaipavaḷam* ("Coral Interspersed with Gems," poems 121–300), and finally the *Nittilakōvai* ("String of Pearls," poems 301–400). The present three volumes are solely devoted to the *Kaḷḷiriyānainirai*, with future volumes to follow to accommodate the remaining two books.

Wilden has "chosen to reconstruct the early editing procedures and keep alive both strands" of transmission. She refers here to U. Vē. Irā. Irākavaiyaṅkāṅ's work on his own retrieval and reassemblage of the text from "two different defective transmission strands." Both strands "go back to palmleaf manuscripts as ancient as we can find them in the South" (p. i). The *caṅkam* corpus as a whole can be dated to the first three centuries of the Common Era (p. vi). Wilden provides good notes here on the bardic "repertoire of formulae" (p. vi) and supplies her readers with the basics on *caṅkam* literary convention. While otherwise treading over well-trodden ground, she has insightful things to say about the tradition's "speakers" and "listeners" from a literary-historical point of view. She writes, "Their situations of speech and their modes of social interaction become more complex in the course of time until they reach a stage of conventionalisation into a complete series with the early medieval poetics, which give a frame of a love-story for the *kōvai* genre, a form of poetry still *en vogue* until the nineteenth century" (p. xi).

The poems of the *Akanānūru* are notoriously difficult. As Wilden notes, "its style is dense, its language obscure" (p. iii). The text is also unique in its organization. It is divided into decads, which follow a specific *tiṇai* sequence as specified in the colophon (*tiṇai* is the system of the five landscapes, devised to evoke modes of reciprocal love in *caṅkam* poetry). In the *Akanānūru*, all of the odd-numbered poems are *pālai*, those of the wasteland, which treat themes of estrangement, discomfort, separation, and elopement. The poems ending in "2" and "8" are *kuḷiṅci*, those of clandestine love before marriage, usually set at night in the hills or under the cover of millet fields. The poems ending in "4" are *mullai*, set in fragrant forests in the rainy season, treating themes related to patient waiting after marriage, most usually as the wife, accompanied by her girlfriend, awaits the return of her husband from the *pācaṅai*, or "war camp," where he is in service to his king. The poems ending in "6" are *marutam*, set in cultivated riverine tracts and largely concerned with infidelity and sometime voiced by the *parattai*, the wife's rival. Finally, the poems ending in "0" are *neytal* and are composed on themes

related to anxious separation and lamentation both before and after marriage and set at the seashore. The *Akanānūru* is by no means the only *caṅkam* anthology to be arranged according to *tiṇai* (Wilden argues that it is the first), but it is “the only one with so palatable an imbalance between the settings” (p. xii), referring here to the fact that fully half the poems are set in the *pālai* context.

The first edition of the *Akanānūru* was published in 1918 (that of Ve. Irājakōpālāryan), which Wilden has adopted as her “matrix text” (pp. xiv–xv). She provides lists and descriptions of manuscripts on palm leaf and paper, seventeen in total, with seven on palm leaf (the earliest is dated 1726) and ten on paper. What follows is an excellent and interesting essay that describes the detective work and processes in establishing the critical edition. She also discusses the discrepancies in authorial attribution and variant spellings in names (pp. liii–liv) and in the *kiḷavis* (liv–lv), the “statements” that provide the conversational contexts for most of the poems.

Wilden then provides an excellent discussion on the only old commentary that we have for the text, and only for the first ninety poems. She remarks on the commentary’s own discernible layers and includes a table, which lists the glosses for rare words, including those for *hapax legomena*. (Volume III contains a most valuable clean edition of the commentary itself, followed by a well-organized and useful word index for the *Kaḷirriyāṇai*.) I am just as grateful to Wilden and her team for providing an edition of this commentary as I am for the edition of the text, for, as Wilden writes, “a Tamil text as it is transmitted does not make sense by itself.” She continues: “What can be the meaning of the term ‘original wording’ when we deal with a kind of tradition where the oldest testimonies are no older than 200 or perhaps 300 years, while we are talking about texts that are supposedly nearly 2,000 years old?” (p. lxvi). What follows is G. Vījayavenugopal’s lucid Tamil translation of Wilden’s introduction.

As for the translations, I direct readers to George L. Hart’s 2015 *The Four Hundred Songs of Love: An Anthology of Poems from Classical Tamil: The Akanānūru* (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry), which I reviewed in this journal in 2017 (*JAOS* 137.3). Hart’s versions exhibit a much deeper level of poetic understanding than do Wilden’s. While the translations that Wilden presents here are vast improvements over her earlier, unreadable efforts, there is still a great deal that is lacking. Wilden also had help, and that assistance was no doubt considerable. It needs to be acknowledged much more fully than in just one fleeting phrase in the preface (I would like to thank Erin McCann personally). In a way it is good to see the poems naked, but it is most difficult at times to make any sense at all out of Wilden’s versions. Hart’s renditions also make for difficult reading at times, but they are full of the feeling that these poems were composed to convey. At times Wilden has committed herself so firmly to the literal that she appears to have committed herself to nonsense. Here is a very brief example. One of the alternative headnotes to poem no. 66 reads in Tamil, *anratu vallanō v-inratu māttānō v-enratu*. This note introduces a rather famous poem by Cellūr-k Kōcikan Kaṇṇanār set in the *marutam* landscape, in which the heroine speaks to her girlfriend at the doorway in anticipation of the arrival of the hero (her husband), who is returning home from a visit to the heroine’s rival. Hart translates, “Will he who was able to do it yesterday not do it today?” Compare this to Wilden’s literal but nonsensically cryptic “Saying, ‘that day, he was not that or this day can he not that?’” At times, I am not all that sure that Wilden even *understands* the poems. At worst, they seem to be only objects of analysis for her, rather than expressive human creations, emotionally rich and stunning in their imagery. Her versions are not reader-oriented in the least. While these volumes are superb reference works for specialists and advanced students, they are not at all designed for savoring, lingering, or for reading for understanding. The poems are rendered without much care for English syntax (in poem no. 5, for example, we read “she with a face contrariated”). As A. K. Ramanujan once said, “Only a poem can translate another poem.” Translation is an art, not a craft. Wilden sacrifices beauty for the literal at nearly every turn, and while I am most grateful for her editions, I wish that she would leave the art of translation to those among us who do it well.

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