

The picture that emerges is one of an evolving system that left space for active disagreement and criticism of authority, albeit in forms distinct from those familiar to some readers from the Western classical tradition. Anyone who has read much in the *Han shu* or *Hou Han shu* knows that officials argued with each other and, on occasion, with their monarch, in different contexts and to varying ends. Loewe's extensive treatment and analysis of methods shows the variety of forms the individual moments of criticism took and the greater historical context in which they existed. They are of intrinsic interest as examples, but Loewe's presentation shows the larger significance of them as a set. Some scholars tend to give much weight to the position of the emperor and its theoretically inviolate status. Loewe reminds us that in reality the position of emperor and the power of the man who held it were subject to criticism, with all that entailed.

I mentioned at the start of this review the theme that seems to me to bind the three sections of this book together, and perhaps it has already become clear: all of them deal with imperial power in various ways. The rituals of imperial ancestral offerings and the practices associated with them served as means to evince, to create, to claim, or to arrogate the authority connected with the imperial lineage. The control of weights and measures is another case in which the effective reach of government power becomes evident. The forms and topics that criticism took most evidently relate to the power of the imperial government. Loewe's three-part study informs us about three aspects of the forms and workings of power during the Han period, in the Xin interregnum, and beyond. Anyone with an interest in the time or in the specific topics Loewe treats will gain from reading this book.

CHARLES SANFT  
UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

---

*My Sapphire-hued Lord, My Beloved! Kulacēkara Ālvār's Perumāl Tirumōḷi.* By SUGANYA ANANDAKICHENIN. Collection Indologie, vol. 136. NETamil Series, vol. 2. Pondichéry: ÉCOLE FRANÇAISE D'EXTRÊME-ORIENT, 2018. Pp. xi + 604.

The Divya Prabandham ("The Divine Collection," in Tamil the *Nālāyira Tivviya Pirapantam*) collects the nearly 4,000 verses of the canon of Vaiṣṇava sacred verses in Tamil, the works of the twelve ālvārs plus the one hundred verses of the *Rāmānujanuṣṭāntāti* in honor of Rāmānuja, the foremost ācārya of the tradition. This remarkable body of religious poetry is grounded in the old caṅkam poetry of Tamil Nadu, flourished in the seventh to the ninth centuries, and has gradually worked its way into the consciousness of modern scholars and a wider range of readers. Partial translations began appearing as in the early part of the twentieth century, while the last four decades have seen a flood of new work: A. K. Ramanujan's *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981); Norman Cutler's *Consider Our Vow: An English Translation of Tiruppāvai and Tiruvempāvai* (1979); John Carman and Vasudha Narayanan's *The Tamil Veda* (1989); Archana Venkatesan's *The Secret Garland: Āṅṅāl's Tiruppāvai and Nācciyār Tirumōḷi* (2010) and *A Hundred Measures of Time: Tiruviruttam* (2014). Friedhelm Hardy's encyclopedic *Viraha Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India* (1983) has proved invaluable context and a plausible story line for the roots of bhakti in the Tamil south, while this reviewer's theological explorations, *Seeing through Texts: Doing Theology among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas of South India* (1996) and *His Hiding Place Is Darkness: An Exercise in Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics* (2013), may be of interest as well. Still, Anandakichenin is right in insisting that the ālvārs need still more attention, given the beauty of the poetry, its rich cultural and religious meanings, and the impressive body of commentary and consequent literature arising from their songs. She aims to chart the forward path by this scholarly volume of context, text, and translation, fittingly included in the new NETamil Series as its second volume.

Kulacēkara Ālvār was a ninth-century Vaiṣṇava poet, one of the twelve ālvārs and, as tradition holds, a local king. Nonetheless, he is also a figure regarding whom details are hard to pin down. Anandakichenin does all she can to narrow down his identity. Though he is often reputed to be from Kerala,

Anandakichenin finds the evidence in that regard inconclusive (p. 18). Rather, after a review of all available sources and opinions, she concludes he was “a Tamil chieftain belonging to the Koṅku-Cēra clan ruling from Kolli, who wrote solely in Tamil [and hence did not write the Sanskrit *Mukundamālā* sometimes attributed to him], including the signature *pācurams*, although many of the pieces of information he gives about himself seem to be of a hyperbolic nature” (p. 69). He lived around 900 CE, and thus was probably a rough contemporary of two other ālvārs, Periyālvār and Āṅṅāl, and before Tirumaṅkai Ālvār, whose songs expand the sacred geography of Vaiṣṇava India (p. 69).

The *Perumāl Tirumoḷi* includes ten songs. Five pertain to temples, three on Śrīraṅgam, one each on Tiruveṅkatam and Virruvakkōṭu. Five pertain to deities, two on Kṛṣṇa (the anger of the gopis, the lament of his mother) and three on Rāma (a lullaby; his father’s lament; a recapitulation of the epic which also identifies Rāma as lord of Tiruccitrakūṭam).

Included too is an eighty-page glossary of key terms, as well as a full bibliography and indices. Particularly valuable is “A Note on Translation and the Translating Process” (pp. 73–79). After a review of translation theory, Anandakichenin gives as an example *Tiruvāymoḷi* VII.4.1 (using *Tiruvāymoḷi*, since it has been translated a number of times, unlike the *Perumāl Tirumoḷi*). She compares the work of AK Ramanujan (the famed translator of Tamil poetry, who thought of himself as translating the poems, but also, as Anandakichenin quotes, “trying to translate a foreign reader into a native one” [p. 77]) and Srirama Bharati (who did a respectable translation of the whole of the *Divya Prabandham*), and then offers her own. Though respecting their work, she charts her own course: “No one can doubt the beauty of Ramanujan’s poetic rendering of the *pācurams*. But there is a pressing need to produce more scientific translations of the NTP [*Nāḷāyira Tivviya Pirapantam (Divya Prabandham)*] that are as accurate and close to the original text as possible without compromising its comprehensibility in the target language,” for scholars dependent on translations who wish “to study or do research on the NTP to do so without worrying about the accuracy of the translation they will be using” (p. 79).

Anandakichenin’s own translations are efficient, meticulous, successful in giving a clear sense of each verse, adding little, and omitting nothing. She does not block the way to Kulacēkara Ālvār’s words, perhaps leaving to readers to “translate themselves” into the saint’s world. Consider just the first three verses of the fourth song, on Tiruveṅkaṭam:

I will not desire birth in a body, the wealth of which [consists in having] flesh that builds up,  
 But the state of servitude for Him who subdued the seven bulls.  
 I shall be born as a heron living on the Kōṅṅēri [lake] in Veṅkaṭa of Him who has a conch that is  
 curved to the left. (4.1)

I shall not desire the wealth of ruling over the celestial world with Rambhā and the like with unending  
 wealth surrounding [me], nor an earthly kingdom.  
 I shall possess the good fortune of being born  
 as a fish in the mountain spring of the sacred Veṅkaṭa with groves [full of] honey-filled flowers.  
 (4.2)

[Going] along with [temple servants],  
 carrying the gold cup in which spits the King of Veṅkaṭa,  
 who has a discus that glows [like] circular lightning,  
 I shall get to enter  
 the lofty entrance of Vaikuṅṭha, which Indra, Brahmā and he with plaited matted locks,  
 pushing [each other], [find] difficulty to enter. (4.3)

No translation will be entirely satisfying, and Tamil poetry can overwhelm even the best of conscientious translators into our more austere English. Readers knowing Tamil will be tempted to putter with her fine efforts, changing words here and there: “I shall not” rather than “I will not” in the first verse; for “groves [full of] honey-filled flowers,” one might try, “flowering groves where honey abounds”; for the “discus that glows [like] circular lightning,” perhaps the “discus shining with rounds of lightning”; perhaps the clunky “he with plaited matted locks” might be rendered, with only a bit of expansion, “the lord with plaited, matted locks”; and in verse three we should try to keep the climactic last words of the Tamil—“I shall get to enter”—last in the translation too. And so on. But the key point is that

Anandakichenin very reliably sets forth Kulacēkara Ālvār's words in each verse, giving us what we need, in the Tamil and English, to trace his themes over the song's eleven verses.

A signal feature of this volume is a translation of the full commentary of Periyavācāṅṅai (c.1128–1322), the master commentator who was the only premodern commentator to elucidate the whole of the Divya Prabandham. While Anandakichenin does not write her own commentary on the songs, she makes it possible for readers to learn from the commentarial tradition that has preserved these songs for a millennium and more. Thus, regarding the same fourth song, we are given Periyavācāṅṅai's gloss on every word, as well as his magnificent theological introduction, which places these meditations on Tiruveṅkaṭam in the context of the Ālvār's slow journey of purification, meditation, and dawning clear vision, all for the sake of his desire simply to be with the Lord. In addition, regarding every verse she also footnotes the views of major twentieth-century commentators such as P. B. Anangarachariar, T. Uttamūr Viraraghavacarya, and Puttūr S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar. In a most welcome enrichment of the volume, she refers also to the 2008 oral discourses on the *Perumāḷ Tirumoli* by the respected modern teacher Velukkudi Krishnan. As is most appropriate to a Śrīvaiṣṇava text, a long and living tradition is allowed to come alive around each verse.

It is perhaps inevitable then that we are faced with many complicated pages with many notes, in a book over 600 pages. With the Tamil, the commentary, and the notes, the eleven verses of song four take up nearly forty pages. As a result, the verses themselves get a bit lost along the way, and there is a risk of losing sight of Kulacēkara Ālvār's intent and vision. It would have been good to include also an unadorned translation of the verses first, before the annotated version with the Tamil, notes, and commentary.

This very fine volume sets a new high bar for scholarly work on the ālvārs, and it will stand as a reliable reference work for decades to come. Nevertheless, as Anandakichenin would surely agree, it is just a beginning and not an end to our study of Kulacēkara Ālvār. In an exemplary fashion, she paves the way for the further work that must follow, regarding him and then too regarding the other ālvārs as well.

FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, SJ  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

---

*Surdas: Sur's Ocean, Poems from the Early Tradition.* Edited by KENNETH E. BRYANT; translated by JOHN STRATTON HAWLEY. Murty Classical Library of India, vol. 5; Cambridge, Mass.: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015. Pp. xlviii + 1010. \$35.

*Into Sūr's Ocean: Poetry, Context, and Commentary.* Translated with commentary by JOHN STRATTON HAWLEY. Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 83; Cambridge, Mass.: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. xvii + 1029. \$95.

It is not just a matter of apposite translation that the titles of both of these volumes—each weighing in at more than a thousand pages—contain the word “ocean.” Their subject is the copious body of sixteenth-century lyric poetry in the premodern Hindi dialect of *Braj bhāṣā* attributed to the legendary poet-saint Sūrdās (“servant of the sun,” or “Sūr” for short, as both he and the authors generally style him). This corpus came, by the mid-seventeenth century, to be called *Sūrsāgar*—literally, “Sūr's ocean”—and proliferating manuscripts with this title swelled, like a body of water fed by ever-growing streams, to include thousands of *pads* or songs—nearly ten thousand by the close of the nineteenth century (*Sur's Ocean*; hereafter *SO*, p. xii). Bryant and Hawley have chosen to present, through critically edited text, elegant and indeed lapidary translation, and copious commentary, only a fraction of such compendia, albeit one drawn (as they convincingly argue) from near its headwaters. Yet although they offer a mere (!) 433 poems, culled principally from seven early manuscripts dated to within a half century of the poet's probable demise in the second half of the sixteenth century (they consulted, for comparison, a score of others of slightly later provenance), their labors and achievements, as reflected