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YEARNING FOR A DREAMED REAL:
THE PROCESSION OF THE LORD IN THE TAMIL ULĀS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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For my beloved parents, Carl M. Wentworth and Carolyn S. Wentworth

அவர்கள் க்கான ஆன்மையுடைய நூற்றாண்டுகளுடைய வாழ்வு
எனது சிறக்கிய காலத்திலும் புராணத்திலும்
He wore a garland in his hair, the bees hummed around it while the new moon turned above as its light melted in the sky. A dark raincloud armed with a longbow, he took my soul that day filling his eyes and drinking it away, this is the truth in my heart now, to be in my heart always.

Fierce Kāma took my soul when he raised his conquering longbow, his cruel arrow ripped my heart as a flame will rip through cotton. But the man who does not come when women are in turmoil and tell them, “Do not fear, do not fear,” what kind of manliness is that?

—Sitā, alone after first seeing Rāma

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TRANSLITERATION SCHEME

Texts are cited according to the prevailing transliteration conventions for the language in which they were composed. The orthography of a Tamil text such as Vikkīrama CōḷaṆ Ulā, therefore, is preserved in favor of the Sanskritic Vikrama Cōla Ulā. Names of authors follow the orthography of the language in which they wrote, hence Antakakkavi Vīrarākava, rather than Andhakakavi Vīrarāghava, and Campantar rather than Sambandhar. Other names are given in the spellings most familiar to Indological scholarship: Rājarāja Cōla rather than the Irācarāca CōlaṆ of Tamil orthography, and Śiva rather than the Tamil CivaṆ. No assertion of cultural primary is intended here, simply a desire to make the text accessible. Because they take different honorific endings, Tamil names present a special challenge. I have tried to use the forms most common to scholarship, ceding precision to custom: the honorific Oṭṭakkūttar rather than the familiar Oṭṭakkūttan, for example, but the prevalent usage KampaṆ over the honorific Kampar.

Unless they are transliterated in the running text, primary source quotations are given just as they are found in the editions consulted. This lets the ambiguities of standard phonic coalescence remain, offering readers the chance to assess whether or not I have disarticulated them correctly.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

He feels nothing for me in my waking life, I stay alive by seeing him in my dreams.

Tirukkuṟaḷ 1213

Paradoxalement, l’intimité est la violence, et elle est la destruction, parce qu’elle n’est pas compatible avec la position de l’individu séparé.

Georges Bataille, Théorie de la Religion

The world has known different ways to show power. In India, dominance over human beings has long been asserted as the effect of physical beauty. A hero displays himself—mighty, unapproachable, stunning; his body captivates the women who behold him. They desire him, and succumb. This vision of gendered control, set in the most intimate terms of emotional yearning, has had a profound influence on the history of South Asia. Men the rulers, women the ruled:

1 நீக்கல் மண்டி தற்கொலை பாக்கிணாயக்குரும்சிவாலயம் | வாழ்த்து அக்கனின் அலம்கை. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

relations of power set forth as a function of beauty and desirous longing, and bound together in a flow of dominance and submission held to order the totality of life.

1.1 The Command of Beauty in Movement

Power excites the erotic desire. The qualities of personhood that flow from this premise are varied and fluid, traits of a self among others, which soon pass beyond exclusive notions of gender. Rāma, in the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki, “captures the gaze and hearts of men with his good looks, his noble bearing, and other fine qualities.” Kampan, the twelfth-century poet who crafted Valmiki’s tale of Rāma into a deeply Tamil work of genius, emphasizes this provocative quality, describing in clear terms how a man beholding this heroic lord would feel at such a moment. Rāma has shoulders, Kampan tells us, “that make men want to be women when they see him with their own eyes.” In giving himself in service to a lord, a man can stand as woman to his master, while his masculinity stands foremost to the subjects he himself might govern. The premise, however, remains constant. Womanhood is a nature that responds to the bewitching radiance of power, instinctively yielding its promise of a nourishing fertility to a display of might experienced as natural, total, and right. Across its vast sweep of regions, eras, and cultures, India has always maintained a tightly welded bond between the sexual and the political.

From the beginning, the literatures of South Asia have been filled with scenes like these, though the reasons why have not been put to much question. The Mahābhārata, one of India’s earliest texts to pass beyond the confines of the sacerdotal, describes the origins of the legendary dynasties it traces by turning to the story of an ancient king, Duḥṣanta. He meets his destined bride Śakuntalā in a hermitage in the forest wilds, and with her has a son, Bharata, the ruler of the continent that now bears his name: Bhāratavarṣa; India itself. When Janamejaya, the king whose

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3Rāmāyaṇa 2.3.12: रूपां दृष्टिविततापहारिणम्.
4Irāmāvatāram 1.380: क्रमांतः कलाेत्रेषु। युज्यं वाहेत्तताम बलावेत्त् धर्म.
questions guide the *Mahābhārata*’s epic tale, asks the sage Vaiśampāyana to narrate the history of his ancestors, the sage responds by describing how Janamejaya’s ancient forebear Duḥṣanta once rode out from his palace to the forest wilds, where he would meet his future queen.

Once upon a time, this strong-armed man set out to the dense forest along with a great host of troops and mounts, ringed by hundreds of elephants and horses. Hundreds of valiant warriors accompanied him on his journey, armed with lances and swords, maces and war clubs, javelins and throwing spears. The noise was intense as the king moved out: warriors roared like lions, the conches and war drums rang out, the metal rims of chariot wheels ground their way forward, huge elephants bellowed, horses brayed, and men slapped their arms while sounding war cries. Women stood in the balconies of their grand mansions to watch him as he came, a hero in the heights of regal beauty, a man who creates his own fame. As they gazed upon him there, the equal of Śakra, slayer of his adversaries, a man capable of repelling enemy elephants, crowds of women were captivated by the armed warrior before them. The women called out with love for their king, singing his praises as they showered his head with flowers. “A tiger among men, incredibly dominant in battle!” they cried. “No host of foes alive could withstand the power of his arms!” The entire way, eminent brahmans arrived from all directions to praise him, and he journeyed to the forest with the greatest delight, anxious to hunt game. From town and country alike, people followed him for a great distance, returning only after the king had bid them farewell.

This is but a brief episode in the narrative of India’s mythic lords, and one easily passed over, perhaps, by readers keen to enjoy the love story of Duḥṣanta and Śakuntalā that Kālidāsa was later to make so famous in his *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (*Śakuntalā and the Ring of Remembrance*). But it is a scene of great interest, for within its short run of lines emerge thematic currents that have never stopped flowing in South Asian literature when it speaks of the powerful.

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5 *Mahābhārata* 1.62.2: “I am most eager, Brahman, for you to tell me the ancestry of the Kurus, right from its beginnings.”

6 Indra, the king of the gods.

7 *Mahābhārata* 1.63.1–10: 

A man is proclaimed exceptional, a great hero who has rare mastery over the world he inhabits. Duḥṣanta, as the sage Vaiśampāyana tells Janamejaya, was a manujeśvara, a lord of men who “enjoyed hold over all four quarters of the earth.”8 Such qualities of being next turn to their active expression in the world, as the tale shifts to a spectacular procession that takes the hero beyond his conventional domain and into the land beyond. His stately progress into the realm of deeds is carefully told, with detailed attention paid to the sights and sounds of the parade. Drums pound, conches blare, grand animals bellow, and the chariots grind loudly forward. The advance, we should note, is formidably martial. The hero is girded with the tools of war, and ringed with a military escort. This is a person, Vaiśampayana declares, who is an ātmayaśaskara, “a man who creates his own fame.”

And then, an intriguing turn. Women ascend to the balconies of their luxurious homes to behold the hero as he passes them by. They crowd together, calling out in praise of the warrior in battle array, and a narrative of impending war becomes charged with the signs of desire. The womens’ cries of love focus on the hero’s military prowess, as the sight of his muscular body sparks feelings of yearning in their hearts. Significantly, their voices are presented in direct quotation (…iti vāco bruvantyaḥ tāḥ striyaḥ premṇā narādhipam), turning the narrative eye away from the hero and towards the women themselves. They drink him in with their eyes and shower him with flowers, but the hero appears to respond not at all to their demonstrations of feeling. On he proceeds, even though the people long to see him still, and they trail behind him for a great distance. He dismisses them, anxious to hunt game. A cultured audience would know, however, that his real prize will be the doe-eyed Śakuntalā, a surpassingly exquisite woman whose effortless, natural beauty, evocative of the sylvan world she inhabits, draws him surely to her arms. The presence of the hero’s intimate body will go on to transform the world she represents, for the couple’s lovemaking brings forth Bharata, the consummate model of rule over the entirety

8Mahābhārata 1.62.4: चतुर्भूमि भूवः कृत्वा स भुक्तं मनुजेश्वरः.
of India.

To be sure, the facets of this tale participate in a much broader ideology of gender and power in India. The patriline confers identity, woman the fertile substrate that nurtures it. The reach of this view is not total—matrilineal societies play important roles in South Asia—but the association of maleness with qualities of worldmaking agency and womanhood with the nourishing field that allows these qualities to manifest have demonstrated an enduring hold. As the Mānavadharmaśāstra (Manu’s Principles of Law) declares,

The woman is held to be the field, and the man to be the seed
the birth of physical beings results from the union of field and seed."¹⁹

A ruling king, in particular, is wed to the feminine earth. He takes it, protects it, and enjoys it as a wife, and the earth responds with life-giving rain—when his rule is just. The royal marriage articulates this pairing, a point emphasized in heightened ritual moments like the aśvamedha (royal horse sacrifice), an assertion of territorial dominion in which the queen embodies the world her husband controls."²⁰

The expression of political control in sexual terms is by no means limited to the Indian subcontinent. Marshall Sahlins’s essay on Hawaiian society, “Supplement to the Voyage of Cook; or le calcul sauvage,” offers an influential case in point. Sahlins examines tropes of sexual yearning centered on the body of the chief, mediated through the witnessing eye, which hold remarkably true to the texts considered in this dissertation. The fact that such close ideological parallels have arisen in vastly different cultures, however, should not be cause for surprise. No single society has a lock on noting the intimate realities of human life, and extrapolating beyond them a cultural order declared to be just as certain. Sahlins phrases the matter with style:

"Seen from the vantage of the libidinous subject, sex is a consuming interest, not only for

¹⁹ Mānavadharmaśāstra 9.33: क्षेत्रभूता श्मृता गारी बीजभूता: श्रमृत: पुमान । क्षेत्रीजसामायोगातू समभव: सर्वदेहिनाम्।
its own sake, but for its many practical benefits. Yet from the global perspective of society, these subjective ends become means of constituting a definite economic, political, and spiritual order. And although the individual choices seem free, or at least very liberal, the global outcome is by no means culturally aleatory. It expresses in a valid way the customary distinctions and relations between men and women, chiefs and people, gods and mortals; in sum, the traditional cosmic scheme of things. The structure resides precisely in these distinctions and relations, themselves (relatively) invariant, rather than in the shifting arrangements formed and reformed on them. Social system is thus constructed out of passion, structure out of sentiment.\textsuperscript{11}

This dissertation proceeds from my belief that the projection of political might through the lens of sexuality has had a profound effect on India’s history. The inquiry proceeds through texts; its aim to illuminate one of this trope’s most impressive paths. The materials on which I will focus stand in the rich tradition of literature composed in Tamil, a language of south India whose written works extend back some two millennia. In its long and varied history, the narrative of a beautiful hero in procession, who overwhelms the gorgeous women who behold him as he expresses his rare effect on the world, grew to assume great importance. The purpose of this study is to understand the reasons why, and to investigate the effect this trope of power has had in its most prominent mode of expression.

The Tamil \textit{Ulās}

The narrative has a consistent form that extends back to the beginnings of Indian literature. Here are the consistent features of such a tale:

- A male hero, human or divine, is introduced and his glorious qualities praised.
- Clad in special garb, the hero begins a procession out of his customary domain and into the world beyond.
- His beauty while moving in procession is astonishing, and women rush to behold him.
- The women respond with an overwhelming sense of yearning, which they express before him with dramatic revelations of desire.

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Sahlins 1985: 29.}
• The hero remains impassive before them, and progresses ever forward.

The most popular of the Tamil literary genres devotes itself to these themes. Its name is ulā, “procession,” a poem that exalts a hero in motion. Specifically, it is a grand procession, a digvijaya, or triumph over the quarters of the earth, performed by ruling kings and temple gods. As the hero rides his elephant, or is carried forward by the faithful, he journeys across the land, asserting the worldmaking order he embodies over the soil beneath and endorsing the authority of those who escort him. Ulā appeared early in the Tamil south, when poetry began to speak of the god Śiva in the late centuries of the first millennium, and the genre has been favored ever since. Ulās have been written about the gods of great temples, and about twelfth-century Cōḷa kings ruling over a vast empire. They have been written in the twentieth century about influential political leaders like Peruntalaivar (“The Great Leader”) K. Kāmarāj (1903–75) and Kalaiñar (“The Artist”) M. Karuṇānidhi (b. 1924). Although this study does not extend to the current day, I have become increasingly convinced that contemporary democratic practice in Tamilnadu, with its dramatic processions over city streets to claim the oratorical stage, its minutely detailed regimentation of space in public events, and the imposing militarism of its regalia and prominent actors, reveals deep similarities with the ulās’ time-honored performance of power. Tamil political strength has been beautiful to those whom it affects for a very long time.

How can power be total yet intensely personal? For the ulā genre, the defining quality of the extraordinary moment when power arrives is to be found alone, when it changes a life irrevocably. A hero, utterly removed in degree and kind from the normal paces of life, touches the heart of one who watches as though his physical presence had swept over it by force, and that heart is never the same. Why are the bystanders women? What did the Tamil poets see in the world of the experience that made women the fitting representatives of all that it contains? Time

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12Bate 2009: 68–96 provides a careful, sensitive analysis of these features of the Tamil political arena.
and again, women are described in terms of verdant lushness, their bodies compared to thriving plants, their sexuality to the land’s fertile richness.

Kampan, the aforementioned author of the Tamil Rāmāyana, echoed these views quite strongly when he turned to the birth of Sītā, Rāma’s perfect wife, and a tale that is undoubtedly India’s most famous case of womanhood epitomizing the land’s generative fecundity. As the story is told by Śatānanda, royal preceptor to Sītā’s father Janaka:

A pair of bullocks with long dark horns like iron, and on their mighty necks a yoke was secured, pulling a golden plow inlaid with countless jewels fixed with a diamond plowshare, to prepare the field of sacrifice and so we plowed many ceaseless furrows in the surpassingly powerful earth.

On the face of the tilling plowshare, as though the earth goddess herself had revealed her own form, alive with the light of the dawning sun a queen of women was born, her qualities so splendid even the goddess who rose from the sea with the rising clear ambrosia was humbled, and fell back to worship at her side.

What words are there to describe her virtues? They came into new life each vying with the other, when they met that blooming branch of a girl. Beauty did its penance to reveal itself in her! After she was born, this girl with heavy earrings, all others lost their wholesome beauty, like rivers when the goddess Ganges came down from the sunlit sky.13

Who, the ulāś ask, are the men fit to till? We read of warriors and kings in the Tamil tradition referred to as ulavar, “plowers,” who make the land fertile through its proper control. Vāḷuṭai ulavaṇ ḍr maṇṇaṇ, Kampan writes of the ancient king who proved a suitable recipient of Śiva’s own divine bow, “a true king, a plowman with his sword.”14 Why was this term used to describe men of violence? Such are not, to my knowledge, questions that the Tamil literary tradition


\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}}\text{Pālakāṇṭam vv. 755.}\]
chose to ask of itself. But they arise, again and again, upon close reading of its most valued texts when care is paid to their artistic composition. Ulās have generally not been studied as coherent narratives in modern scholarship, since the genre’s most famous instances, the twelfth-century ulās on Cōḷa kings, offer rare glimpses of underlying historical figures and events that have helped to establish an important chronology. It is worth paying attention, however, to the design of these texts as literary works, which used the stories they told to say something of importance about their authors’ world.

Method and Sources

My aim in what follows has been to study texts that have not been overworked by scholarship, to read them closely, and to discuss them alongside cited primary sources available to the reader in the original and in translation. I seek to explore what these texts mean in their style and structure, and to understand what these meanings achieved over time. The logic of power that they demonstrate is set out in their narratives, as verses build to craft a dramatic work of art. It is not to be found in summary displays of a text’s contents graced with name, date, and author, but in the shaping of poetic words.

This study attempts to trace a genealogy of ulā texts that took the relationship between sexuality and political power as their guiding principle. It centers on Śaiva materials. The discussion could certainly be developed further through an investigation of the Tamil Vaiṣṇava texts that also reflect on these themes. My work on this project, in fact, began in earnest after first reading Friedhelm Hardy’s Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India. This monumental study explores the passionate love in separation that colors the poetry of the Vaiṣṇava Āḻvārs and the Kṛṣṇa worship of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, a Sanskrit text deeply influenced by the Āḻvārs’

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15 As for example G. Thirumavalavan’s 1991 Political, Social and Cultural History of the Chōḷas as Gleaned from Ulā Literature. Ali 1996, by contrast, explores the abiding ideals of Indian lordship advanced in the Vikkitrama Cōḷaṉ Ulā.

own verses on their god. When speaking of Nammāḻvār, the most famous of the Āḻvār saints, Hardy writes,

The richness and variety of his language and symbolic repertoire is matched by the intensity with which he explores every corner of his emotions, and in the final analysis his greatness lies in his total surrender to the impossible: to reach out for the transcendental while fully immersed in the natural order, or in his own words ‘to see Kṛṣṇa with his eyes.’

Such judgments gracefully describe the imagery of the ulā poets, who set their own meditations on power in the hearts of women who behold a living god. Parallels like these make a shared vision of the experience of power that extended across sectarian identities appear certain. This work nonetheless confines its Tamil sources to the Śaiva materials.

Is this a reasonable circumscription of the data? Hardy considers the Śaiva expressions of passionate yearning to be largely imitative of southern Kṛṣṇa worship; I have not decided. What is clear, however, is that the ulā genre was almost totally a Śaiva phenomenon. Of the ninety or so ulās known to scholarship, three were written on Viṣṇu: the Tiruvēṅkata Nātar Ulā, the Ciṟupuliyūr Ulā, and the Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi Aḻakiya Nampi Ulā. None are to my knowledge extant, and nothing is known of their dates and authors, all fairly clear suggestions that these poems did not gain any lasting currency. We know of a Jain ulā, and modern ulās have been written on a variety of figures, as I noted in my mention of the twentieth-century political instances of the genre. But these are outliers which have never defined the genre’s trajectory. Ulās are texts written over centuries about the god Śiva and about Śaiva kings, making the limits I have set on sources both productive and warranted.

The ulās are elite productions, representative of the people who were invested with the power to describe their world in a way that lasted. This makes the resulting work a survey of a rarefied

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17 Hardy 1983: 361f.
18 Hardy 1983: 45, 121.
set of views, well removed from any general sense of how the great majority of Tamil people have understood their own lives through the millennia. Yet it does examine the discourse of the presiding actors who sought to dictate how those lives would be lived.\textsuperscript{20} With most of the Tamil literary tradition still largely unknown to the world beyond, and still inaccessible to those without expertise in the classical language, this remains a pressing goal.

1.2 Plan of the Dissertation

Chapter Two, “Women’s Bodies, Earthly Kingdom,” discusses the first \textit{ulā}, the \textit{Tirukkailāya Nāṇya Ulā} of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ Nāyaṉār. It observes the arrangement, style, and concerns of this inaugural text, which would be followed in every \textit{ulā} thereafter. The tradition of the text’s period and author are reviewed, as well as the religious currents of Śaiva temple worship that gave rise to the invention of the genre. The essential topics of an \textit{ulā} poem are elaborated, with careful attention paid to the importance of sensorial detail, the narrative focus on the woman’s voice, and the association of womanhood with a blooming, fertile land awaiting cultivation. The practices of beautification and physical refinement are understood in this context as exterior layers of protection, which fall away as the generative presence of the hero appears before his female subjects and they reveal the full nature of their essential fecundity. A discussion of the performative conditions implied by the narrative of the first \textit{ulā} concludes this chapter, signs drawn from the text’s confident placement in the Tamil land and language, and the resultant topography that maps Śiva’s presence onto the place where the text is read.

Chapter Three, “Sanskrit Models for the Power of Beauty,” considers the early textual accounts that inspired the \textit{ulā} genre, turning to the Sanskrit materials that first developed the

\textsuperscript{20} As Sheldon Pollock notes with regard to the depiction of power in Sanskrit, “if concentrating on elite representations means we miss the role of ‘the people’ in history, we do capture something of the ideas that ultimately transformed the people’s world. Moreover, to believe truth to be a kind of solid is to misconstrue the power and real consequentiality of representations, which can create what they appear merely to designate.” (2006: 7)
trope of procession in Indian literature. We explore Arjuna’s triumph over the quarters in the
Mahābhārata, a conquest of land articulated most dramatically through his union with the ser-
pent princess Ulūpī. The discussion then turns to instances of the processional trope in grand
works of Sanskrit poetry, developed by the first court poet Aśvaghoṣa in his Buddhacarita and
most famously by Kālidāsa in paired verses found in his Raghuvamśa and Kumārasambhava, the
text which directly inspired the creation of the first ulā.

Chapter Four, “Bringing the Naive to Order,” turns the inquiry back to the Tamil poetic world,
and its own portrayal of the bond between sexuality and power. We explore the role of the female
voice in the early Tamil caṅkam literature, and then move on to a decisive text in the history of
processional literature, Muttoḷḷāyiram. This collection of verse, only partially extant, is the first
Tamil work to develop the processional theme as a means of declaring royal power. The text’s
depiction of parading kings watched by adoring women demonstrates the emergence of courtly
culture in the Tamil lands, and sets the stage for the great royal ulās that would follow.

Chapter Five, “Shaping the Past in the Cōḷa Twelfth Century,” considers the decisive turn to
the Tamil vernacular that took place under the rule of the imperial Cōḷas, and the role this eleva-
tion of Tamil’s literary stature had in ordering the language’s past. The discussion traces the rise
of Citamparam as the religious heart of the Tamil Śaiva world, and the renown of the royal court
poet Oṭṭakkūttar, who was to reshape the ulā from its hallowed status as a model of Śiva worship
to a majestic tribute to the power of the kings he served.

Chapter Six, “Oṭṭakkūttar Proclaims the Ulā for Kings,” engages in a close reading of the poet’s
most famous works, the ulās written to glorify three successive generations of kings who ruled
in the wake of the unification of the Cōḷa empire: Vikrama (1118–35), in the Vikkirmaṇa Cōḷaṇ Ulā;
Kulottuṅga II (1133-50), in the Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṇ Ulā; and Rājarāja II (1146–73), in the Irācarāca Cōḷaṇ
Ulā. Ulās written about living men create vexing difficulties regarding the identity of the women
who behold them in procession, and the chapter explores the potential identification of these
women as dedicated royal servants or prostitutes. It describes the innovations that Oṭṭakkūttar brought to the genre, and contemplates the significance of ulā poetry as a political act of triumph.

Chapter Seven, “Singing the Lord into Being,” studies an ulā in praise of Śiva written in the early seventeenth century, the Tirukkaḷukkuṇṟattu Ulā of the great wandering poet Antakakkavi Vīrarākava Mutaliyār. The inquiry reflects on what it means to write in a genre with fixed conventions and an august history, and how novel views on the nature of Tamil poetry can vivify an established tradition. We follow Antakakkavi’s voice as he inserts himself into the procession of a temple god, bringing devotees with him as he sings Śiva into motion around his temple home on the revered mountain Tirukkaḷukkuṇṟam. As the poet weaves a grand history of Tamil Śiva worship into his text, we discern how his call to poetic artistry is invoked to inspire Śaiva devotees to bring the god into their own hearts through a love for beautiful words.

Chapter Eight, the conclusion to this dissertation, looks at moments when Tamil authors have embraced the processional trope in order to subvert the order it proclaims, revealing that the dominant expressions of power contain delicate joints that allow for their own undoing. Though couched in the beauty of poetic verse, ulās make tenuous claims about the sure destiny of power that prove vulnerable when challenged, and confrontation provoked on the texts’ own terms can open the way for other voices to make themselves heard.
CHAPTER 2

WOMEN’S BODIES, EARTHLY KINGDOM

Protect your womanhood!
Protect your two lithe arms!
Cinch tight your hidden girdle!
The Vagabond, the lord with the battle axe
draped with the crystal waters of the Ganges
and cassia flowers born of the rains
comes riding his bull in procession!

TIRUKKAILÄYA NÄṆA ULÄ¹

2.1 The Advent of the Tamil Processional Genre

In this concluding kāppu, or “safeguard,” the Tirukkailāya Nāṇa Ulā calls to its readers as women, describing Śiva as a god against whom they must guard themselves. For a text included within the canonical works of Tamil Śaivism, it is worth pondering the fact that its ardent expression of devotion to Śiva ends with the warning that devotees need to be careful when the god arrives

¹V. 198: திருக்குளளாய நான உள்ளாய் சோதாய்டய்க் கோளேந்தை | திருக்குளளாய சோதாய்டய்க் சோதாய்டய் -
தோத்தய்க் | பார்வு சோதாய்டய்க் கோளேந்தை பார்வு | பார்வு சோதாய்டய்.
before them. This canon, the *Tirumurai* (*Holy Canon*), is known chiefly for the famous hymns composed by the four great Tamil Śaiva saints, Appar, Campantar, Cuntarar and Māṇikkavācakar. These men sing of loving Śiva with ecstatic passion, and their graceful hymns urge their readers to share in this love.\(^2\) As a popular Tamil saying about Māṇikkavācakar’s most famous poem, *Tiruvācakam*, has it, “No words at all can melt the heart that does not melt for *Tiruvācakam*.\(^3\) These poets, their words steeped in the spiritual joy they felt, yearn for the moment when the god’s presence stands revealed and he overcomes them completely. As Campantar sings,

> Those who can cry, dancing and singing,  
> Who can rise up, and fall at the feet of our father,  
> Those who worship the lord of Viḍimilalai,  
> They are the worthy, the truly devout!\(^4\)

The ecstasy that Śiva inspires may be anguished, these poets warn, it may be terrifying, and it is often overwhelming, but devotees should want nothing less.

The *Tirukkailāya Nāṉa Ulā* appears to speak of a different experience. The poem invites its readers to understand Śiva’s presence as a force so overwhelming that it demands an apprehensive vigilance. It does so, moreover, by aligning its audience with the women it describes, abruptly shifting from the secure terrain of a narrated tale to the direct admonition of its final verse: the first time that the text calls out directly to those who are listening. Be cautious, for Śiva approaches.

Why would a Tamil poet take an ominous sense of Śiva’s power as inspiration for a poem of praise? And why does the poem do so by styling the god’s power as something so frankly sexual? As its inclusion within the *Tirumurai* suggests, the Tamil tradition of Śaivism has long held the

\(^2\)Peterson 1989: 12–18, 55–59 gives a useful account of the canonization of literary works in the *Tirumurai* and its role in consolidating a distinctly Tamil brand of Śaivism.

\(^3\)தெவாரம் 1.35.3: அழுவத்தைள், அழுவக் கண்டன | அறுக் கண்டன, கல்வை அழிய வை | அறுக் கண்டன, கல்வை அழிய வை | அறுக் கண்டன, கல்வை அழிய வை | அறுக் கண்டன, கல்வை அழிய வை | அறுக் கண்டன, கல்வை அழிய வை | அறுக் கண்டன, கல்வை அழிய வை!
Tirukkailāya Ūṇa Ulā to be an expression of bhakti, the emotionally-charged expression of religious devotion that first took shape in South India, and certainly the poem’s accounts of women’s heartfelt love for Śiva make this designation credible. Bhakti texts are no strangers to the erotic, indeed it is a regular feature of the great masterworks. But the Tirukkailāya Ūṇa Ulā takes its attention towards female sexuality to a vividly graphic degree. We learn of the overpowering sexual yearning that women feel for Śiva, and the terrible consequences they suffer as a result. For many Tamil readers, the poem’s candid sexuality is awkwardly licentious. In order to make it an appropriate vehicle for bhakti sentiments, a fairly broad swipe of the allegorical brush has been of service, but even then some readers may rest uneasy. As the authors of a standard work on Tamil literary history remark, “The poem has been interpreted as the presentation of God and the soul as Lover and Beloved. It must have been so intended, but we have to be told this to recognize it as such. We are first struck only by a rather detailed study of the graces of womanhood, in different stages, at times even overstepping the bounds of good taste.” Candid sexuality, the havoc it creates, and Śiva’s role in setting it all in motion: though this text may not appeal to some readers now, clearly it once did. How does what it says relate to the place where it was composed and the people it addressed?

5The term bhakti needs to be marshalled with care, given that it has often served as a blunt functionalist sword to cut through interpretive tangles. When used to explain historical events as disparate as anti-Brahmanic social upheaval, the rise of vernacular literature, and antinomian movements, bhakti shoulders a burden it cannot support. The term is advanced typologically here, following, most importantly, the lead of the Tamil Śaiva tradition itself, and also in recognition of the Tirukkailāya Ūṇa Ulā’s dominant subject matter: the pronounced exhibition of affective religious feeling, which, as Friedhelm Hardy’s work on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa has demonstrated, is a product of South Indian religiosity (Hardy 1983: 36–48, 556–69 et passim). This is not to say that bhakti refers to a single, undifferentiated concept. It is, as Ronald Inden has stressed, an embracing term that comprises a wide variety of devotional stances. (Inden 2000: 30–31)

6Jesudasan and Jesudasan 1961: 92.
Writing a Tamil Procession

Before turning to an analysis of the poem that will provide the opportunity for such questions to be considered properly, we might note that for the poets who followed in its wake, there was much in the Tirukkailāya Ēṉa Ulā to admire. Today it is generally known as the Āti Ulā, The First Ulā, and is taken by the Tamil literary tradition not only as the earliest instance of the prolific genre of ulā poetry, but by Tamil Šaivas as a poem with a divine audience. As Na. Vī. Ceyarāman, the only scholar to have offered a general survey of ulā literature, has emphasized, “In a way unlike any other ulā, this text has the great distinction of first being formally presented in the august presence of Lord Šiva while he sat in state on the holy mountain Kailasa.” The text was, moreover, well received, as Šiva is said to have invited its author to join him in heaven. Before turning to interesting tales such as these, however, and there are many that surround this text, let us consider the Tirukkailāya Ēṉa Ulā itself. “Ulā” simply means procession, the activity the genre contemplates and takes as its ordering theme. Ulās are the foremost of the numerous minor Tamil genres, traditionally counted as ninety-six in total. These are commonly known as the pirapantam genres, the term pirapantam (Sanskrit prabandha) signifying a composition of multiple verses that treats a single coherent theme. As a whole, pirapantam texts are commonly referred to as ciṟṟilakkiyam, “brief [works of] literature.”

The structure of an ulā consists of two parts. The poem, composed in the kaliveṇpā meter, begins with the description of a male hero, recounting his glories and exceptional achievements. This encomium, which can range from the hero’s own deeds to praise for the entirety of his lineage, then descends from this broad sweep over time into a specific moment, when the hero graciously receives the attentive service of his court. Particular attention is always given to his

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7Ceyaraman 1966: 47: நா. வி. சேராமன் 1966: 47: பெப்பர் பால்கோபால்கோங் பழக்கமறுதல் பல்கன்றல் உலா குருநீதியால் பல்கனர் பல்கார் உலா குருநீதியால் பல்கன் பல்கர் உலா குருநீதியால் பல்கன் பல்கன் உலா குருநீதியால் பல்கன் பல்கன் உலா குருநீதியால் பல்கன் பல்கன் உலா குருநீதியால் பல்கன் பல்கன் உலா குருநீதியால் பல்கன் பல்கன் உலா குருநீதியால்

8Ciṟṟilakkiyam is itself a term worth analyzing: a compound in which the prior member ciṟu (small) modifies the term ilakkiyam (Sanskrit laksya, “subject to [literary] norms”).
adornment, meticulously discharged with an eye toward his movement out of his customary palatial seclusion. The first part of the text then ends with a description of the mighty hero as he emerges in splendid procession into the world beyond, surrounded by his retinue as they parade in all their finery.

The second part of an ulā makes an abrupt narrative shift, taking leave of the hero as it turns its attention to the women who rush to see him as he passes by their homes. Once they sight the hero in the distance, the women become completely overcome with passion, and they describe in heart-rending terms their desire to gaze upon him and take him in their arms. This part of an ulā adopts the perspective of the women themselves, as verses describe their inner experience of emotional turmoil. Readers are invited within the women’s private turns of mind, which they strive to hide even from the close friends who surround them.

This narrative technique introduces a powerful feature of ulā poetry: the arrangement of its descriptions of women into subsections based on conventionalized phases of womanhood, divided according to the sort of potential they have for sexual experience. These are stipulated in the Tamil literary tradition as seven successive stages, ranging from a child of five years of age, who lacks any knowledge of sexual identity, to a woman forty years old, for whom sexuality has begun to fade into memory. This second section constitutes the majority of an ulā, and the true measure of poetic skill in this genre lies in one’s ability to portray the distinctive charms of the different stages of womanhood, above all the erotic sentiments appropriate to the woman’s age, working creatively within these strict formal parameters.

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9This brutishly attenuated timespan for a woman’s sexual life gives a good idea of the male hands at work on this project of definition, and how little ulā texts care for realism when articulating such erotic fantasies.

10The prescriptive definitions for an ulā, we should note, are all subsequent to the Tirukkailāya Ńāga Ulā. The literary norms for an ulā poem are first laid out in the tenth-century metapoetic treatise Paṇṭiru Pāṭṭiyal (reviewed in Chapter Five, p. 157), while the first documented use of the term pirapanta to refer to such genres occurs late in the twelfth century, by the commentator Aṭiyārkku Nallār. (Aruṇācalam 1980: 7)

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18
The First Ulā

Turning to the Tirukkailāya ṆāṆa Ulā’s design, we find a tightly constructed poem of 197 couplets that takes Śiva as its hero. He is, however, not the fearsome anarchic yogi familiar from Purānic legend, but the majestic ruler of his snowy home on Mount Kailasa. The poem opens with the assertion of Śiva’s unrivaled supremacy, praising him through a series of paradoxes that both emphasize his transcendent power and place him at the heart of human action. Although he lies far beyond the comprehension of the gods themselves, the text declares, he is uniquely close to his devotees, granting his divine favor to minds that dwell ceaselessly upon him.

The brisk swing from descriptions of Śiva as beyond any limiting predication of qualities, on the one hand, and Śiva as the repository of every auspicious quality, on the other, is then followed by a progressively detailed framing of his physical location. He presides over a palatial court in his heavenly city on his holy mountain, itself the axis of his divine world Śivaloka. There, as he sits in state, the gods assemble in his outer courtyard, begging him to emerge from his palace and grant them the vivifying favor of his appearance before them. Śiva heeds their request, and his wife Pārvatī then carefully begins the process of adorning him, decking him with flowers, applying luxurious unguents and powders, clothing him in fine silk, and arraying him with a spectacular range of gold and jewels. Now properly beautified, Śiva emerges from his palace, and his divine retinue convenes around him as they prepare to advance around the city in procession.

The splendor of this parading host is described in sumptuous terms, and the Tirukkailāya ṆāṆa Ulā takes great care to identify who the participants are, and where they will be situated in the parade. Despite the attention to local detail, however, this procession assumes a markedly cosmologic scope. The eight gods who oversee the cardinal directions arrive to take part, as does Agastya, the portly sage whom Tamil tradition aligns with the Tamil language and the land where it is spoken. Next, prime elements of the phenomenal world arrive to make their presence known,
adopting ceremonial roles appropriate to their character (the rain, for instance, sanctifies the parade ground with water, while the waves along holy fords behave like chowries to fan the processing god). Standing before these august participants, the gods Indra, Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Murukan, Śiva’s distinctively Tamil son, together serve as his personal escort. And there at the head of the parade, Kāma leads as marshal, the god of erotic love at the ready to kindle the ardent passions of onlookers. Once he starts the event off, the procession issues out from the palace, an immense range of instruments sound forth, and marching celestials of all sorts sing their praises to Śiva’s glory. The procession then begins in earnest, and Śiva’s divine favor spreads out over the land, spreading goodness and enlivening its inhabitants as heavenly rains of flowers fall.

Concurrently, in the city’s stately mansions, women hear the parade approach, and rush to get dressed and ascend to the high windows and rooftops, where they will be able to catch a glimpse of the god himself. The very thought of seeing the god, however, bewilders them completely, and their attempts to beautify themselves before they appear in public results in utter confusion. They put necklaces in their hair and flower garlands on their necks, for instance, spread red lac dye on the images of their feet in their mirrors, and mistake flower balls for their caged parrots. Once they have finished, and wait impatiently for the parade to arrive, the women lose their usual polished decorum, and end up surrendering themselves completely to the irrepressible flood of desire that Śiva provokes. Here, the Tirukkailāya Ṇāṇa Ulā begins to structure its narrative according to the seven stages of womanhood, which I translate as follows: the child (pētai), five to seven years old; the young girl (petumpai), eight to eleven years old; the nubile girl (maṅkai), twelve to thirteen years old; the ingénue (maṭantai), fourteen to nineteen years old; the graceful woman (arivai), twenty to twenty-five years old; the experienced woman (terivai), twenty-six to thirty-one years old; and the older woman (pērilampeṇ), thirty-two to forty years old.¹¹

¹¹The precise ages for the various stages differ slightly depending on the metapoetic treatise, a point to be explored in Chapter Five (p. 159).
In each of these subsections, the poem describes a heroine who ideally represents her stage of life in terms of beauty, adornment, leisurely pastimes, and most dramatically, her erotic response to the sight of Śiva. Although the way the āḷā develops these features depends upon the heroine’s age, the overarching pattern remains constant. First, her inherent female beauty is exalted and metaphorically compared to the usual array of natural phenomena that one finds called upon for such purposes in Indian poetry: the moon, stars, elegant flora, and the like. Then, her various adornments are described, from perfumes and lotions to the golden ornaments and gems that she puts on to accentuate her natural splendor properly. The poem then depicts her enjoying herself in pastimes characteristic of her stage of womanhood, from playing with dolls to singing and gambling, but these are activities that she abruptly forgets as soon as Śiva approaches. With the exception of the child, who is described almost entirely in terms of what she does not yet have—sexual maturity and practiced skill in the arts of love— but soon will, the narrative drama reaches its peak as it vividly describes the woman’s passionate love for the god and the suffering it causes her, its quickening pace brilliantly crafted to echo her building rush of desire. The description ends with the woman’s utter capitulation to her emotions as an uncontrollable surge of lust overwhelms her. The entire poem then ends with the kāppu that began this chapter, a safeguard that is itself an admonition, warning us to protect ourselves from Śiva’s seductive power.

The Author as Ideal Exemplar

As is the case for so many Indian texts, attempts to establish the Tirukkōllaiya Nāṇa Ulā’s author and date with any certainty come down to wishful thinking. Chronology and authorship are serious concerns, particularly when dealing with a text that inaugurated a new field of Tamil literature, and it is hard to veer from the view that a clear knowledge of these facts will form a bedrock upon
which we can discern what the tradition saw in this poem as being worthy of study, circulation, and appropriation. But in the case of the *Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā*, the belief that a text will not yield up its insights unless we can nail down the precise conditions of its production seems to me to be obstructive. It imposes demands on the text that its audience and author did not appear to share for several centuries at the least. The poem itself does not reveal who wrote it, and the tradition of authorship that its audience assigned to it takes us little further.

This is a detail to take seriously, for, to echo the caution that Sheldon Pollock has stressed, “we cannot orient ourselves to a text without first grasping how its readers oriented themselves—unless we want to read it in a way that no South Asian reader ever did and abandon the attempt to know what literary culture meant in history.” And so, though I will discuss the authorial figure behind the *Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā*, and seek to establish the text’s *termini a quo* and *ad quem*, there lies scant reward in trying to force past that point in order to assign it to a specific year in the creative life of an individual. The poem and the hagiography surrounding it do not lend themselves to this endeavor, and in practical terms, it misconstrues the idea of authorship we find linked to the text. The most we have, in this regard, is an intriguing hint in the penultimate verse of Cēkkiḻar’s *Periya Purāṇam* that the text may have a close relationship to a Śāstṛ (now Aiyaṉār) temple in Tiruppiṭavūr. The question worth raising in its place is why the Tamil literary tradition has linked the *Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā* with a legendary, historically elusive author, and how this conditions the role the text may have played: the work, that is to say, that it did in the place where it was read and shared.

As its verses course through a city filled with mansions, gorgeous women decked with fabulous jewels, and the courtly pursuits of leisure, our text does in fact give a sense of its author, who certainly knew the fine points of a life of wealth and privilege. The tradition asserts this

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13 See Chapter Five, p. 182.
identification strongly, naming the poem’s author as Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ, a king of the fabled Cēra dynasty. The author of three poems (the Tirukkailāya Ňāṉa Ulā, the Tiruvārūr Mummaṇikṉkōvai and the Ponvaṇṇattantāti, all of which are included in the eleventh Tirumuṟai) Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ is hailed by Tamil Śaivas as a Nayanār, one of a group of sixty-three saints collectively known (using the Tamil plural) as Nāyaṉmār, “leaders.” He is best known for his role as the friend and traveling companion of the great Nayanār Cuntaramūrtti, or Cuntarar, for which he is also named Cuntarartōḻar, “Cuntarar’s friend.”

The first to enumerate the list of these sixty-three saints (excepting himself), as he does in his brief poem Tiruttoṇṭat Tokai,¹⁴ Cuntarar is an enormously important figure in the Tamil Śaiva tradition. The events of his own life serve as a framing narrative for the magisterial version of the lives of the sixty-three Nāyaṉmār given in the Periya Purāṇam, the tour de force of the twelfth-century poet Cēkkiḻār. The life of Cuntarar, that is to say, comes to embrace within itself the hagiographical pedigree of the Tamil Śaiva saints in their entirety.¹⁵ That Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ accompanies him in Cēkkiḻār’s masterwork, both on a trip to Cuntarar’s hometown of Tiruvārūr via the great Śaiva center Citamparam and on a final journey to Śiva’s heaven as the two friends ride off together, reveals how closely the tradition binds him to Cuntarar’s own life as a devotee (Figure 2.1).

As for what sort of relationship this might be, we find that Cuntarar speaks of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ only once in his hymns, through a single phrase in Tiruttoṇṭat Tokai, where the king is described as “generous as the clouds.” Cuntarar, a Brahman, is paired with a royal benefactor, the saintly Cēra king, and together they gain Śiva’s paradise. Their association is mutually fruitful,

¹⁴Tiruttoṇṭat Tokai is dense and its references cryptic; for an English translation accompanied by explanatory notation, see Shulman 1990: 239–48.

¹⁵On the role of Cuntarar in the Periya Purāṇam, see Shulman 1990: xvi. The Periya Purāṇam echoes an accepted view of Cuntarar when it elevates him to this superordinate rank, following in this regard a text it directly cites as an influence: Nampiyāṇṭār Nampi’s Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāti (v. 49). Earlier by about a century, Nampi’s brief poem uses Cuntarar’s life as a refrain in twelve of its eighty-nine verses on the Nāyaṉmār.
yet in the end we have to acknowledge that Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ gains more from the partnership than Cuntarar, whom the Periya Purāṇam clearly sees as leading the way on their path to heaven. Within the scale of devotees, the king is ultimately a subordinate, a man who depends upon his Brahman counterpart for guidance, and it is only through this guidance—and this in the most physically immediate sense—that he enters Śiva’s paradise. The stories that circle around his legend are marvelous, from his ability to understand the speech of every animal (for which he is called Kaḻaṟiṟṟu Aṟivār, “the man fluent in all tongues”) to his conversion to Islam and pil-
grimage to Mecca, but his association with Cuntarar lies at the center of his biography. Indeed, once we turn away from the tales committed to text in the Cōḷa period, when authors knew the Tirukkailāya Nāṇa Ulā as a venerated work, his association with Cuntarar is all that we have of his life.¹⁶

The Periya Purāṇam gave everyone who followed a lens for viewing the past that was never discarded, and its focus proved irresistible. As François Gros has cautioned,

The standard account of Cēramāṉ’s life owes everything to Cēkkiḻar, and beyond it lie only shadows.¹⁸ Cuntarar’s brief mention of the king yields but a faint note, and it must be granted that once we leap over the centuries to Cēkkiḻar’s manner of telling, we join him in his venture as he brings a host of religious tales under a unified Śaiva mantle. It may not have always been so, but it is within this projection of Śaiva power that the tradition has located him and embedded his texts.

Within this world, Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ is a great devotee, but nonetheless a follower, led by another man whose dealings with Śiva are profoundly more direct. The hymns of Cuntarar call Śiva

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¹⁶Tēvār 7.39.6. If we attempt to disentangle the lives of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ and Cuntarar from the strands of the Periya Purāṇam, it is worth noting that in the decade of hymns that Cuntarar sings about Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ’s presumed royal capital, Tiruvaṅcaikkāḷam, the king himself is never once mentioned.

¹⁷Gros 1984: xi-xii.

¹⁸See, for instance, the only work I am aware of that attempts a comprehensive study of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ, Ku. Mutturācaṉ’s Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ Nāyaṉār Pāṭalkal: Ōr Āyvu, which, after noting the rarity of sources contemporaneous with Cēramāṉ’s own life, begins its account in earnest by stating, “even so, two sections of Cēkkiḻar’s Tiruttoṇṭar Purāṇam, the ‘Ancient Lore about The Knower of Tongues’ (Kaḻaṟiṟṟaṟivār Purāṇam) and ‘The Chapter on the White Elephant’ (Veḷḷāṉaic Carukkam) reveal his life fully.” (1982: 3: இயற்பு வைவானாசனம் பொருந்தோ கவளை; டைருவான்காலகல் பொருந்தோ கொரளோயுவவானாசனாகு பொருந்தோ கவளை; வீற்பு காருககம்)
a friend: a trying one, to be sure, who can be capricious and at times impenetrable, but a constant friend all the same. In the Tirukkailāya Ēṉa Ulā, by contrast, we learn nothing of Śiva’s moods and thoughts. He is an opaque figure, who effects change in the world while himself remaining unchanged, at all times impervious to the reader’s curiosity. By naming Čēramāṉ Perumāḷ as the poem’s author, the tradition is in effect describing him as a witness. He is eminent, to be sure, a king who is close enough to Śiva to describe him beautifully, but the narrative perspective the text adopts stresses that he, like the audience for the text itself, is a spectator when God is on procession. With his eyes towards subjects, just as a king’s would naturally turn, he knows the thoughts of the women who watch Śiva, and has access to their innermost desires and suffering, but he says nothing of Śiva’s motives. As figures given life through the texts that praise them, Cuntarar and Čēramāṉ Perumāḷ are worlds apart. Cuntarar needs no mediation in his relationship with the god; Čēramāṉ Perumāḷ is the model participant in an experience that someone else has arranged for him.

Can this paradigmatic figure be identified with an individual acting in history? The possibility cannot be ruled out, but Čēramāṉ seems to denote an idealized set of qualities above a distinctive personality.19 He is a type, the royal benefactor, who by supporting the piety of others can follow the path they set. The man’s very name appears to stress this reading, as “Čēramāṉ” means no more than “Čēra king,” while “Perumāḷ” is a ubiquitous title that does little to distinguish a particular ruler.20 There is no definitive evidence that a Čēra polity over which this king would have ruled actually existed. As Rich Freeman has argued, the Čēra lineage of kings held by some scholars to have governed the southwest coast from the ninth to twelfth centuries may well be the product of superimposing legends of the ancient Čēra kingdom on the sparse data that is

20 We might further note that the author who precedes Čēramāṉ Perumāḷ in the Tirumurai is another royal figure with an equivalently generic name, Kāṭavarkōṉ, “Pāṇṭiya king.”
actually available. What we have in Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ, I believe, is a figure who successfully cleaves an archetypal king from the particulars of historical reign. He is a model: the pious Śaiva ruler, unfailingly generous, who gains paradise with his Brahman confidante. Though the consideration of authorship may urge us to pry from the Tirukkailāya ṉāṉa Ulā the historical agent who wrote it, Cēkkilār laid the path for doing so, and his is a world of the Śaiva ideal. Within it, Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ is the chronicler of perfection, Śiva’s world, a model to which rulers might set themselves and strive to equal.

Making this point does not obviate historical methods, though it helps introduce the right questions. And so, although Śaiva tradition has cloaked the Tirukkailāya ṉāṉa Ulā’s author within the realm of the ideal, it is of course true that the poem is a material record of a single or composite author acting in history, and there are clues to be put in service of assigning a date to its composition. First, we find among its verses two quotations from Tirukkuṟaḷ, that acclaimed collection of Tamil verses on principle, governance, and pleasure. Tirukkuṟaḷ’s own uncertain date (perhaps the sixth century) thus serves as the terminus a quo, while the terminus ad quem stands as the time when Cēkkilār describes Cēramāṉ singing his ulā in his Tiruttoṇṭar Purāṇam (The Ancient Lore of the Holy Servants, better known as the Periya Purāṇam, The Great Ancient Lore), composed sometime during the reign of Kulottuṅga Cōḻa II (r. 1133–50). As so often happens when dealing with premodern Tamil materials, the date is ill-defined, but we must allow this very real vagueness to speak to the demand for precision.

There is still, however, the matter of Cuntarar. If we do not reject out of hand the tradi-

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21 Freeman 2003: 444–45.
22 See Chapter Five, p. 178.
23 Tirukkuṟaḷ 752 and 1101, cited in the Tirukkailāya ṉāṉa Ulā 136 and 173 respectively.
24 The dating of Tirukkuṟaḷ moves into political contest, given the text’s ascent to the status of an ancient standard-bearer for the Tamil identity politics of the past eighty years. Historians sympathetic to this viewpoint tend towards an extremely early date of composition; more likely is a date in the late fifth to early sixth century, prior to Maṇimekalai, which cites it verbatim.
25 See Chapter Five, p. 177.
tion’s view that Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ lived in Cuntarar’s time, most likely the ninth century, and was indeed the author of the first ulā, this narrows the possibilities a good deal. And there the appraisal must rest, with the Tirukkailāya Naṉa Ulā bounded by Tirukkuṟaḷ and the Periya Purāṇam, with a strong call in favor of the ninth century if we accept the association of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ with Cuntarar. This is a long stretch of time, but it does allow us to set out the major social forces at play in the Tamil-speaking region where the poem was composed.

The Ascendancy of Temple Worship

The span of centuries in question fits rather neatly into what has been called the bhakti period, a blunted term, given the immense range of religious—let alone cultural—activity that extends across it. We might focus, however, on the physical structures that underlie what this term seems to suggest, and things begin to grow clearer. With the attention it gives to waiting on Śiva, adorning him, and viewing him on procession, the text speaks to a world focused on the practices of temple worship. Temples assumed a new centrality in south India after the founding of the Pallava dynasty in the mid-sixth century, whose kings increasingly demonstrated political will through their support of Brahmanic communities and the institutions they served. Temples, in contrast to the intricate Vedic fire sacrifices of old, became the prime arena of religious worship, with the rituals centered around them concentrating on services (upacāra) and worship (pūjā) performed for the temple image, or mūrti. The ulā genre takes as its creative inspiration perhaps the most dramatically magnificent of these practices: the procession of a mūrti out of the temple and into the surrounding streets, where the god and the crowds are brought in direct contact

26 Following Shulman 1990: xxxv-xlii and Gros 1984: xii. This abuts quite closely the first epigraphic evidence for the recitation of the Tēvāram in temples, (arguably the late ninth century, See SII 3.43), but, as Gros argues in his discussion of this point, such attestations can refer solely to the hymns of Campantar. (Gros 1984: xii)


with one another. 29

The time when such practices were on the rise was also one of Buddhists and Jains. Jain literati, in particular, produced a large number of works, and judging by their subsequent renown they found a large audience. Accounts of the Śaiva nāyāmār are laced with tales of their strong resistance to these rival creeds; Campantar’s conversion of the Pāṇṭiya king in Maturai to Śaivism, for instance, concludes with eight thousand Jains being put to the stake, a feat praised more than once by the compiler of the first seven books of Tirumurai, Nampiyāṉṭar Nampi:

As he approaches
devotees circle, bees circle,
women, their hair falling in wreathing curls,
follow with their minds,
and the unwashed bodies of the Jains
their canes set with circled fans of plumage that peacocks let fall
wreathe the bamboo stakes,
clever one, you caused them to be impaled!30

Texts were accessible both to those who sought them and those who resisted them, with transactional links between cultural centers well established. As Indira Viswanathan Peterson’s work has emphasized, the hymns of the Tēvāram are bound to locale, revealing a deep absorption with pilgrimage between various temple sites in the Tamil country.31 The textual currents in which the Tirukkailāya Nāṇa Ulā flowed, then, converge on a Śaiva creed that was promulgated in contradiction to its rivals, whose denigration is tied to the physical reality of Śaivism’s success as a Tamil geography. In Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ’s poem, the physicality is crafted through verses with the care of a master artisan, building a temple city of words in which every prosperity, every cultural richness has attained perfection.

29Hardy 1983: 207ff. explores the new centrality of the temple in the various prabandha genres.
30Āḷuṭaiya Pillaiyār Tiruvantāti, v. 6: அளூடையா பிள்ளையார் திருவாண்டாதி | அளூடையா பிள்ளையார் திருவாண்டாதி | அளூடையா பிள்ளையார் திருவாண்டாதி | அளூடையா பிள்ளையார் திருவாண்டாதி | அளூடையா பிள்ளையார் திருவாண்டாதி.
31Peterson 1982.
The palatial homes, fantastic jewels worn by exquisitely refined women, and idyllic lives of pleasant diversion emerge from the poem to call forth a city: the best of cities because it is Śiva’s city. Everything is delightful here, with no mention of work or hardship, simply the magnificently attired Śiva and his dazzling host, and the breathtakingly alluring women who rush to see the procession. At every turn we find the public display of refinement, demonstrated through a set of practices that both depended upon and proudly affirmed a life of cultured leisure. The sophisticates in the Tirukkailāya Īṉa Ulā enjoy activities that take an unhurried ease for granted. Women dance, sing, arrange flowers, and appraise precious jewels. They compose poems in the acrolect of centamiḻ, the “polished Tamil” of the normative grammars. The author of this sparkling vision? A ruler, whom readers could well imagine once stood at the apex of such urban magnificence. The figure of the royal author effects a successful narrative collapse, in which the poem’s vivid portrait of Śiva’s city merges with expectations about how its own author must have lived. The city of heaven, a reader of the poem will certainly find, never strays far from the ideals of a city on the ground.

2.2 Moving a World in Motion

As it describes Śiva’s host on parade, his emergence out of his palace, and his movement through the city streets where women rush to behold him, the Tirukkailāya Īṉa Ulā reveals a deep interest in the representation and mapping of space. The topography it describes is hierarchically ordered, flowing out from the axial convergence of Śiva’s own body. The picture grows more complicated, however, because Śiva is on the move, and this dynamism provokes remarkable effects the minute he breaks from his accustomed stasis. Before this launch into motion, we first encounter the god at rest within his palace:
As he abides in the lovely palace in Śiva’s city within the undying excellence of Śiva’s world...  

This order underlies the whole of the text: god within the palace, palace within the city, city within the world. The first part of the poem, where Śiva is readied to proceed out beyond the confines of his palace, describes his preparation to pass through these successive domains. In the second part, when Śiva enters the city streets, the Tirukkilāya Ŋāṇa Ulā embeds the strict confines of his palace within a larger area marked out by the god’s emanation and return. In doing so, it evokes the kinetic act of marking space central to the temple procession, when the festival image of a deity is paraded out of the temple, through the streets, and back into the temple once again, creating, like a vital breath, a rhythmic tide of emergence into effective view and a return to interior seclusion. Śiva flows, following this metaphor of breath, between an incipient and thereby abstracted power removed from direct participation in the world, and a spirited force that works within it.

Śiva Takes Form

The Tirukkilāya Ŋāṇa Ulā begins with a verse that artfully evokes this opposition:

When he arose as the pillar of fire, blessed Māl and the four-faced god were mystified, unable to discern him...  

In the famous myth this verse invokes, Viṣṇu (Tirumāl) and Brahma argue over who is superior. As they debate between themselves, Śiva appears before them as a vast pillar of fire, and they propose to resolve which one of them is supreme by racing to the ends of the flaming column.

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32 vv. 8–9: Ellipses in verse citations serve to distinguish a clause from a complete sentence, and are used in this study to acknowledge the complexity of an ula’s syntax, in which every sentence incorporates a large number of clauses (a feature to be discussed subsequently; see p. 39).

33 Ellipses in verse citations serve to distinguish a clause from a complete sentence, and are used in this study to acknowledge the complexity of an ula’s syntax, in which every sentence incorporates a large number of clauses (a feature to be discussed subsequently; see p. 39).
Brahma mounts his goose and flies off to find the top, while Viṣṇu assumes the form of a boar and delves into the earth to find its bottom. Śiva is not so easily apprehensible. The pillar is boundless, and ultimately lies beyond the capacity of the senses. Humbled, Brahma and Viṣṇu return to acknowledge Śiva’s supremacy. Introducing this myth right at the outset, the poem succinctly establishes the contradiction between Śiva appearing in the world yet being of a different, surpassing order, and—crucially—affirming the reality of their coexistence.

The text then introduces a beautiful series of contradictions that expand upon this theme, alleging that the gods themselves are subordinate creations of Śiva’s unfathomable power:

The lord appeared without being born, sees without being seen, renounced his body without forsaking it,
He is profound without being immersed, as is his right, removed without having left, eminent without being exalted by deeds,
He understands without reading books of knowledge, he is subtle without being minute, close to all without being near to anyone,
As Hari, the beginning, he protects, as the unborn god he creates, as Hara he is the sure destroyer,
His appearance transcends the knowledge of the lofty gods whom he himself created according to his own design,...  

Though separate from the world, Śiva acts within it, and the allusion these verses make to his manifestations as other gods elegantly depicts his engagement with the material world. For his subjects, Śiva is removed from existence even as he is its precondition, separate and encompassing, uninvolved and occupied. Despite the heterogeneity of his material forms, he remains apart, eternally changeless and constant. Indeed, the poem concludes the series of contradictions it has developed by stressing the inability to transcend this paradox from a human perspective. It

34vv. 2–6: உடலானாம் || நூற்றண்கள் சூழையில் இருந்து வந்துவிட்டான் || குன்றுந்த தருமான துடுப்பு || இருந்து வந்துவிட்டான் || பெரும் முன்னில் இருந்து வந்து || உடலானாம் இந்தியன் || இருந்து வந்து || நூற்றண்கள் சூழையில் இருந்து வந்து || பெரும் முன்னில் இருந்து வந்து || உடலானாம் இந்தியன் || இருந்து வந்து || நூற்றண்கள் சூழையில் இருந்து வந்து || பெரும் முன்னில் இருந்து வந்து. ||
shifts its vantage point to human consciousness itself, where a worshiper depends upon the idea of form even as Śiva’s grace transcends it:

But to those who think of him ceaselessly, in whatever guise, he bestows his grace and appears within their hearts,

For whatever form in which he appears, our lord cannot be seen by anyone in any form other than his own...

This graceful passage further suggests that Śiva’s apprehensible form is bound, in a way that the formless power standing transcendent behind it is not, to his bestowal of favor. His activity in the world is imbued with a sense of religious participation, which for the Tirukkailāya Ṇāṉa Ulā is achieved through sensory experience, primarily sight. When the god enters the world, he presents himself to be viewed by his devotees, and at the same time recognizes those who stand before him. This act of vision (Sanskrit *darśana*, Tamil *kāṭci*) is nothing if not a familiar aspect of temple worship, and unsurprising given the text’s concern with procession, but what strikes the reader nonetheless is the scale to which it drives the entire poetic narrative, engendering a moment that lies far beyond the range of ordinary experience. As they share a common presence with the god, the adoring women both see and are seen, participating in a reciprocative act of sight that affirms and sustains Śiva’s activity in the world.

Śiva leaves his palace sanctuary for this reason alone, after the gods “crowd in his outer courtyard / begging him, ‘Favor us by showing yourself before us’” (v. 10). He arises, is garbed with items that accentuate his body, and then emerges into the world to present himself. Every movement thereafter heightens the role of physicality and space. The god does nothing himself, but is adorned by his wife Pārvatī, who selects all the ornaments, lotions, and finery appropriate for the event (vv. 12-21). Śiva’s entry into the world is dependent on his Śakti, who here dramatically

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*vv. 7-8: ஒவாேத || எÆċĉÝÅ யாĺாĉவ ĉÈþவாÄ உÈள¿ĄÈ | அÆċĉವாÿ ŌாÊà அĉÈ-ĭாĂÁபாÊ – எÆċĉċ || தாேனயாà ×ÊறßÁபாÊ தÊáÉ ØàĄĉவ | ஏŎாĹþº கா¾பÛய எÂெபĉமாÊ.*

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plays out the temple rite of āvāhana, in which the deity is invoked into a material representation in order to be worshiped.36 Once his wife has adorned him, expressed him, we might even say, so that he can begin the procession, Śiva’s body becomes the focal point of all sensorial experience, and the entire material world begins to turn towards his presence. His retinue marshals together, and seven of the eight guardians of the cardinal directions—Agni, Yama, Nirṛti, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Soma, and Īśāna—come forth to join him, placing him, it appears, in the role of the eighth guardian usually reserved for Indra, the king of the gods and lord of the east. The heavens, too, begin to converge:

The clouds in the visible sky became the chariot awning, lightning the circled banners, and the thunder pounded as drums...37

Gods and natural forces intensify the experience, bringing the world itself into the vibrancy of the parade. Vāya, the wind, sweeps the streets, while Agni, fire personified, burns the incense; thunder and lightning are the drums and banners, and Soma, the moon, gives shelter to Śiva as his immense royal parasol. We are brought with them from the universal to the local, as Śiva glorifies the assumption of place. For the world to turn and meet him, the god must assume a locale, and the poem submits the ritual of procession as the method.

The Display of the Sensual Body

Once Śiva presents himself, the world takes his body as its point of convergence. Yet, given the reciprocity inherent in the act of beholding, we should expect to see an emanation out from this body, corresponding to the inflowing gaze of the women. The Tirukkailāya Ŋañṉa Ulā describes this as the favor (aruḷ) that Śiva extends, suffusing everything that lies before him as it impels it towards transformative change. In a fitting counterpart to the world’s cosmological alignment

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36See Brunner 1992: 12.
37vv. 31–32: அருள் தெரிவித்து நிற்பட்டு நீலகிரி முருக நீலகிரி | காலை கடலை முருக நீலகிரி
towards the god, the emanation of arul is figured through the impact it has on the senses, with the poem introducing sound, smell, and most importantly light to give its radiant quality iconic representation. In a detailed passage that expresses this radiance as it seems to draw us into the surrounding crowds, using the minutiae of processional ritual to spark the illusion of proximity, the poem lists all the instruments—cymbals, seventeen kinds of drums, a variety of conches, flutes, lutes, and other stringed instruments—that sound forth in all directions as the procession commences (vv. 44-47). They are joined by voice, as mantras are intoned, choristers sing forth hymns, and celestials praise the advancing god. Smell, too, becomes crucial, as a fragrant rain of flower petals traces Śiva’s effect in the world:

And as they praised and praised his form, a rain of flowers fell bewildering the senses, and goodness spread across the quarters...  

In essence, however, Śiva’s activity in the world is paired with light. The Tirukkālāya Nāṉa Ulā is simply awash in light imagery, with almost every verse harboring some mention of gleaming jewels or ornaments, lustrous unguents or shimmering bodies. Śiva is its wellspring, the “supreme light” (parañcōti, Sanskrit parañjyotis, v. 142). As he rides on his bull Nandin, he shines “like the sun sitting nobly on a towering silver mountain” (v. 107), while garlands and necklaces make his powerful chest shimmer in their light (v. 19). This imagery of radiance perfectly conveys Śiva’s favor as it sweeps across the material world, touching everything with its enlivening warmth. Can light touch? The metaphor is resourcefully precise. Light, directly tangible, still ultimately passes beyond the human ability to experience it in and of itself: we do not see light, we see because of light. And so the world is affected by Śiva at an enigmatic remove; it is only

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38 vv. 55-56: கைலோாலிக்கைலோடு | கம்பேகைலோடு குமரி முயலி மூந்தாலை | பாரான்சோடி போல் பாலை்

39 This trope is pervasive in Indian poetics, particularly in the context of procession. Consider, for instance, the way Nala is introduced in the opening verse of Śrīharṣa’s Naiṣadhīyacarita: “Once there was Nala, shining with festivals, a force of power whose fame encircled him as his white parasol.” (तनस्तितच्छोभिरकामिनिष्यस्य राजिणातिकहस्माः महत्वन.)
through him, the poem appears to suggest, that we experience anything at all.

After the rains of flowers fall, and goodness spreads throughout the world, the first section of the text concludes with a pivotal set of verses that herald the way the god’s power will transform the women who will soon rush to see him:

With the flag of the bull, the battle standard, the royal parasol, and the beautiful hanging decorations surrounding him,

Lovely women, with scent drifting from their flowered dark braids feel a newness in their hearts when the beautiful lord approaches.  

Women are the sole recipients of Śiva’s effect on the world in this poem. No men, no animals, and no elements of the natural world receive narrative attention. Rightfully so, for the women essentialize an order that includes them all: women, for this text, are the condensed embodiment of the earth in full. And as they feel passion stir within them, Śiva’s presence washing over them like the rain of flowers that marks his favor, they respond with a radiance of their own, the “fragrance drifting from their flowered raven braids.” Flowers, with their spreading petals and wafting fragrance, are expansion made tangible. Indeed, common Tamil words for flower, malar and alar, have just this verbal meaning. Paired with the spreading rain of flowers that flows out from where Śiva rests on his bull, the flowers on the women’s braids demonstrate the reciprocity involved in their mutual act of vision. It is an evocative scene: Śiva, immensely powerful and surrounded by an awesome host, overflowing with sound, smell, and color, causes a miraculous display of raining flowers that spreads out beyond him, while the women, in their own small way, respond as their own flowers delicately unfurl and release their scent.

These counterposed moments of radiance, one supernaturally powerful, the other delicate and fragile, condition the drama that unfolds in the second half of the text, when each of the seven stages of women react to Śiva’s presence. By introducing the flower as a paired standard of
comparision between women and the god, The Tirukkālaiya Nāṉa Ulā insists on the point that Śiva’s
effect on the world is closely aligned with fecundity. In sum, we could say, the flower articulates
three overarching features of the poem’s topology. Its expansive release of petals and fragrance
depicts the paired experience of beholding, where the women and the god present themselves
to each other. Further, the role Śiva plays in triggering this expansion reveals the way his fa-
vor causes the natural world to thrive. And lastly, the flower metaphorically creates the sexual
imagery that envelops the women when they lust for the god in the second part of the text. At
every step of the way, flowers are bold signposts on this terrain.

2.3 The Feminine and the Earthly

Adorned, dressed, and revered by Pārvatī, Śiva begins his passage into the world with the actions
of a woman. This is a pervasive motif in Indian theist traditions, where a transcendent male prin-
ciple is paired with an earthly female counterpart. The Tirukkālaiya Nāṉa Ulā regularly invokes
this relationship by comparing women to ambrosia. The young girl (pētai) is “like sweet ambrosia
churned from the sea” (v. 91); the limbs of the experienced woman (terivai “seem like they were
born from addictive ambrosia” (v. 149); and the older woman (pērīḷampeṇ) has breasts that arise
“like the ambrosia that torments all who see” (v. 177). The recurrence directs our thoughts to the
churning of the oceans, when the gods and anti-gods worked in concert to first distill ambrosia
from the primordial sea. Once the ambrosia has been refined from the swirling waters, the anti-
gods manage to steal it away from the gods, who are desperate to regain it for fear that they will
lose its life-giving powers. In order to capture it once more, Viṣṇu assumes the form of a lovely
woman, Mohini, and the anti-gods, compelled by their desire, abandon the ambrosia to embrace
an earthly pleasure—and give up the key to immortality. Femininity draws these transcendent
beings to the earth; ambrosial women are paired with Śiva as he appears in the world. But unlike
Mohini, these women will never succeed, and Śiva inevitably passes them by as he makes his way to the next street.

Women as Flora

The *ulā* describes Pārvatī as a “delicate tendril whose knowledge grants well-being” (v. 12), a sylvan metaphor that nicely ties the divine couple to the text’s pairing of Śiva with the onlooking women. Like the goddess, they are always compared to elements of the natural world. Consider in this regard the verses on the ingénue (*maṭantai*), a young woman who is the very expression of sexual allure:

The bow of the glorious lord, precious shining coral,
the spear in young Murukān’s right hand, rounded pearls,

The verdant creeper, bamboo, the blooming lotus bud,
and the round shining moon emerging from the clouds

suggest her graceful brow, red mouth, eyes,
teeth, graceful waist, delicate arms,

Lovely tight breasts, and luminous face,
her red feet are like well-formed lotus buds,

Her thighs are like the glistening stem of the plantain tree,
hers mound is like the dais of a splendid royal chariot,

It seems as though the brilliant asterisms surround her face
mistaking her for another lovely waxing moon...⁴¹

As the poem introduces plants, flowers, heavenly bodies, and iconic weapons to craft its chain of similes, the compact sequence evokes a deep sense of taxonomic contiguity. The woman becomes a condensed substance of nature, an effect repeated as the stages of womanhood progress.

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⁴¹vv. 112–18: பாடல் || கார்த்திகை கண்ணல் மல்லிகை | தொழிலக்கூட வெளி மீதுறை - புராணம் || அருசை பூங்கா அருள் பல்லவரினால் | வேதிப்பற்றி மாற்றினால் பல்லவரினால் - முடி - || பல்லவர் வேதிப்பற்றி குரு போராடி | என்னும் உருண்டம் குறிப்பிட்டு - குறிப்பிட்டு || வேதிப்பற்றியும் மற்றும் உணர்ச்சி செய்திகள் | மேலே வேதம் வேதையும் | முடியவில்லையே வேதையும் | முடியவில்லையே வேதையும் | முடியவில்லையே வேதையும் | முடியவில்லையே வேதையும் | முடியவில்லையே வேதையும் | முடியவில்லையே வேதையும் | முடியவில்லையே வேதையும் | முடியவில்லையே வேதையும் | முடியவில்லையே வேதையும் |
The floral standards of comparison that the poem employs, moreover, all evince rapid and flourishing growth. The women’s lithe arms, for example, are continually likened to bamboo (vv. 80, 102, 114, 159, 178). Creepers and rattan, tender furled leaves, and the stem of the plantain tree, likened respectively to the waist (vv. 102, 114, 175), ears (87), and thighs (v. 117), mature at an incredible pace, literally growing before your eyes. They are intensely verdant—one thinks perhaps of the almost unearthly green of the plantain tree, for instance—reminiscent of the hot season when they grow most quickly. Take with this the steady mention of blossoming flowers swarming with bees, and the text begins to well over with fecundity. The structural organization of the poem heightens this mood still further, leaping swiftly from one successive stage of womanhood to the next, as we range over some forty years in less than one hundred verses. And most dramatically, that syntactic hallmark of an ulā: the fact that the entire section on women comprises but a few intricate sentences, ramified with extraordinary complexity as clause after clause is loaded onto a handful of declined verbs. A reader flows through these verses, pulled ever forward as the final word of each verse, syntactically bound to the verse to follow, makes every pause suspend the mind in thought. Within this blooming world, tropes, subjects, sentences and topics are effusion within effusion, sparked into motion with the first step of Śiva’s bull.

To be green in this world is to be nubile, with every woman charged with sexuality. Lissome arms, full breasts, lightning-thin waists, rounded thighs: these are the incessant objects of attention in Indian poetry.\(^{42}\) By aligning all of these features with green, thriving plants, the poem forges the link between female sexuality and nature, and invests them both with a dynamic of expansion that responds to Śiva’s own radiant power. Turn, then, to the flowers that cascade from the sky and from each woman’s hair, and it becomes hard to imagine a more forceful expression of this process of cause and effect. Female sexuality, emanating away from the woman’s body as

\(^{42}\)This is why the Tirukkālaiyā Naṇa Ulā describes the child as a potential; not yet possessed of a sexually mature body, she is distinguished by what she does not have.
a concentrated process of floral maturation, responds in countless unique instances to that one cascading moment of goodness that Śiva provokes on earth.

The Vital Balance of Adornment

Yet the women are also dressed and adorned, exquisitely at that, and this fact significantly conditions the idea of womanhood that the Tirukkailāya Ṛṇa Ulā advances. For each of the seven stages of women, accounts of what we might call a woman’s natural, inherent beauty are invariably followed by involved descriptions of the ornaments and clothes she wears. Ornamentation acts as a centripetal force, opposing the radiant nature of her sexuality by highlighting its source. With each mention of women busy at the arts of physical beautification, the expansion that the poem advances as the distinctive feature of female sexuality is met with a powerful expression of its containment. By describing women in this way, the ulā effectively portrays them as inhabiting a balance: on one side, sexuality moves outward; on the other, beautification compresses it inward. This balance is achieved through practice and technique, the poem affirms, not inborn nature. Physical appearance, though central to this condition, is only femininity’s outer display. Attitudes and comportment are at its subtle heart. Bound to this condition is kaṟpu, a Tamil term that designates a complex set of values that in sum typify a woman’s decorum. The verbal root kal, from which this term is derived, helps to sharpen this general definition. Kal signifies learning, or developing a skill; kaṟpu results from a social process of refinement, rather than a natural state of affairs. The Tirukkailāya Ṛṇa Ulā, by focusing on the physical dimensions of this state, presses us to see the opposed pair of forces behind it. The women refine their looks by controlling the radiant potential of their sexuality, but in so doing also concentrate it for the viewer’s attention.

Though kaṟpu is often described as a woman’s chaste fidelity, this meaning appears to be a later extension of the term, as V. S. Rajam has argued (Rajam 1992: 6–9). The valence of this word, which can apply to both women and men, turns on learned behavior.
By concentrating on the women’s bangles, the text puts a regular trope in Indian poetics into service to develop this conceit. When we first encounter the women of Śiva’s city (vv. 59–75), their bangles are linked overtly to their sexuality, jingling as they make love in the city’s mansions (v. 64). Later, when Śiva approaches and the women lose their karpu, their bangles slip off their hands as desire overcomes restraint (vv. 71, 99, 194). Should one manage to keep her bangles on, her sexuality finds other ways to escape, as this verse cleverly relates:

She guarded her bangles by lifting her bright, graceful hands in worship but they could not hold her dress—even she surrendered her virtue.\(^{44}\)

The imagery is familiar and effective, with the bangles’ circular design a useful means of indicating enclosure and containment. For the culture that so employs them, their attraction lies in the erotic tension they create, announcing the wearer’s sexuality even as they lock it away. And this is by no means limited to bangles. The pattern of striking a balance between suppression and release extends over the practice of beautification as a whole. The women in this poem are so exquisite precisely because of the balance they have achieved: the appeal of their physical features is captivating, and the adornments they wear are so magnificent that they can hold the allure of their bodies captive while still tacitly asserting their erotic appeal.

The *Tirukkālāyā Nāga Uḷā*’s description of the experienced woman (terivai) provides an unusually stark example of this process:

She knows anklets are like drums, proclaiming “Refined men may stay, but those who are not must go!”

So she correctly puts them on her splendid feet, knowing there must be no unguarded movement to her loins

She binds them in a fine dress and girdle, knowing her charming breasts bewitch young men

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\(^{44}\) v. 147–48: காளாய்தாவா வைள்பர்காவா காளகாவா | நைக இவள்பர்காவா காளா கைலகாவா | நைக இவள்பர்காவா காளகாவா | நைக இவள்பர்காவா காளகாவா.
She locks them fast in an elegant bodice,
and protects her arms thin as bamboo with golden bangles,

She screens her lovely neck with a fine necklace
and gleaming earrings shelter her ears,

As if cooling the passion of her lily-dark eyes
she quells them with highlights of kohl,

Her beauty torments everyone,
she has the goose's stride and the cuckoo's sweet voice...

Only after the poem registers the tension between her body and its manipulated display does it declare that “her beauty torments everyone.” The acts of restraint are what call attention to their supposed necessity, and this is what a sophisticated reader would savor. In this concentrated irony of distance, the containment of beauty seen in the verses, contained by the verses, transforms an impossible fantasy into something real, a possibility, as this imagined vision of female sexuality is sublimated into a hidden potential. Counteracting what never was gives, so long as the distance is maintained, the real promise that something indeed lies concealed.

A woman’s hair also plays its role in this logic of sexuality. When the women are within their rooms, making love, the poet describes the way their “burnished hair cascades down their backs” (v. 64). But once they leave their home, the hair is tied, and the corresponding overtones of sexuality are likewise controlled.46

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45vv. 155–62: மாÀதÄ || அந்தாள் உண்மையில் அறாக்கி வந்து கொண்டு || வல்லாருள் வந்தும் மூன்று கதைகள் – வேலூரால் || விளக்கத்தில் வருகின்றோம் நீங்கள் அப்படி || ஒரு வேலூர் சாவாது தாட்சியாக போல் || கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு || கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு || கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு – வேலூரால் || என்னின் நடைகள் கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு – வேலூரால் || என்னின் நடைகள் கொண்டு கொண்டு கொண்டு – வேலூரால் ||

46Inversions of this motif, which place the unbinding of hair in the context of rage instead of romance, yield compelling moments of drama. In the Tamil context, the mind leaps immediately to Kaṇṇaki, who burns down Maturai in fury with her hair whirling loose about her (see Shulman 1985: 58–63); in the Sanskrit, Draupadi’s refusal to bind her hair until it has been dipped in the blood of her persecutor Duḥśāsana. Veṇīsaṃhāra (“Tying the Braid”), a dramatic rendition of this latter tale, aligns the link between braiding and sexuality with the promise of violence to come: When Draupadi (Yājñasenī) has a confrontation with Duryodhana’s queen Bhānumati, for instance, Bhānumati taunts her, “So, Yājñasenī, why have you still not braided your hair?” Draupadi’s maidservant, in a mocking
Once more, the child, who does not yet evince sexual characteristics, is described in the negative: she is “unable to braid her hair” (v. 80). Late in the poem, as a woman teeters between modesty and her desire to unite with Śiva, her vacillation is expressed through the way she repeatedly unties and reties her braid (v. 146). The flow of her hair is controlled, then tied up and ordered into sleek combed strands, which calls attention to its length and silken luster. Flowers take the fore once more, now as the garlands that seamlessly extend this sense of poise. Garlands simply pervade the *Tirukkailāya Nāṇa Ulā*, mentioned twenty-two times in just under two hundred verses.\(^{47}\) The flowers are synecdochic expressions of the woman who wears them, an association deep enough in the language that a common term for garland, *kōtai*, frequently refers to the woman herself. As an emblem of emissive fertility, the garland of flowers ably expresses a woman’s sexual desire; the way these flowers are bound into a controlled series—routinely, as the text indicates, with golden thread (vv. 72, 140)—just as ably expresses the control placed upon it. Is it any wonder that the garland finds such favor with our poet? We would be hard pressed to find a more convincing symbol for the idea of womanhood that the *Tirukkailāya Nāṇa Ulā* advances, which like the garland so artfully participates in the qualities that it represents.

Undisciplined Fertility

Adornment undeniably fills the text with a hue of sophisticated opulence. Yet behind this rather trivial point lies a more important one: these women, despite the comparisons always made between their bodies and elements of nature, are on no account unmediated embodiments of the natural world. They do serve to essentialize the world at large, but the poem’s attention to their clothing and ornaments reveals that this world is itself collapsed into its symbolic representative:

threat about Bhānumatī’s impending widowhood, replies “Listen, Bhānumatī, how can my lady’s hair be braided when yours has not been loosed?” (first act, following v. 20: अथि याज्ञवल्क्य अवश्यकतमाक्षरार्थितै न संयमस्वस्य कौलवानुमाति् अथि भानुमाति् यन्न कर्मासुक्ते यक्षहस्ते कर्मसमाक्ष दैव्यः केलाएः संयमस्वस्य इति).

\(^{47}\)Garlands are mentioned explicitly sixteen times, and six times more in oblique phrases such as “fragrance drifting from their flowered raven braids” (v. 58).
the urban center. The women of these verses have cultured bodies. They concentrate what the poet sees as a natural world of fertility and the control that is necessary to be placed upon this world in order to sustain it. Consider what happens when Śiva appears in procession before the women. At the climactic moment of exchanged vision, when the positions of generative source and receptive vessel are fully grounded, the result is unbearable. After the god appears before the young girl,

Passion stirred her, and the goodness that moralists profess yielded modesty yielded, conscience yielded, composure yielded,

Her fine bangles slipped off, her bee eyes raced, her dress fell loose, and as the damp blossoms on her braid unfolded, she stood completely helpless.48

Śiva’s presence kindles her desire, and she loses any sense of balance as her passion gains momentum. This loss of equilibrium presents itself in the expected ways: she loses her adornments (bangles and dress), and the damp blossoms of the garland on her braid unfold. This, we note, is a girl who is eight to eleven years old, viewed within the poetic tradition as not yet capable of sexual experience, though; the reactions only become more extreme in later stages, as for the experienced woman:

“For isn’t it Śiva, indescribable god of gods? Will he leave without giving me his scented garland of cassia flowers?”

And with the thought, “When I see him, I will know,” she wilted and this fragrant garland swarmed with bees surrendered her fertility.49

As involuntarily as the garland, she assumes its qualities, wilting as her fertility rushes out along with her desire.
Once this moment has arrived, the women lose all awareness of social context. Friends might leave her side (v. 127), or, as in this passage, culture and language themselves quit her:

The woman like golden Śrī felt desire
for the king of the gods, and took up the sweet-voiced vīnā,
And as she began to sing, the Supreme Light
appeared before her on his mighty, perfect bull,
The soft pleasing tune, her breeding, sweet precious Tamil,
and the enduring vīnā all slipped from her hands...

At the end of the text, when desire has truly overcome her, the older woman collapses on the ground, utterly spent:

“Master, you came!” she cried, “You carried off my bangles!
But you gave me passion and torment, is this fair?”
And suffering, she came undone, her body swooned, her skin blanched
and the lady with the blooming garland fell down, delirious.

She responds as inevitably as a plant to light, yielding up in the force of her sexual desire any possibility for sustaining it, and collapses like a frail blossom in the midday sun.

Śiva’s activity in the world, rendered as the driving force behind the maturation of life, is unequivocally laid out in the Tirukkālāyā Ṇāṇa Ulā as a benevolent act. Yet the women who face its full intensity are not gratified. They experience terror, unable to fathom what is happening to them in the face of the god’s sheer power. Beneath the ulā’s account of Śiva’s majesty and his effect on a glorious world runs a deeper, cautionary tale, inscribed on the bodies of women given no hope of escape: the potential for upheaval when Śiva’s power is not properly employed.

50 vv. 140–43:
51 vv. 193–95:
ritual of procession becomes the women’s lone salvation, as the god passes by and they are left (or so we trust, for the text does not say) to recover. The women grieve because Śiva leaves, but they suffered because he first came.

Without the structuring intervention of the temple ritual, the poem suggests, the energy that Śiva unleashes would quickly expend itself, its generative potential consumed in one fleeting moment of release. And these women, as the text continually presses us to understand, are the land itself. Give this land the proper order, however, by invoking a temple and its associated rituals as the vital conditions for Śiva to act productively in the world, and the land will flourish. The unbelievable sophistication of the urban culture that the poem lovingly describes is there for the taking, so long as the temple is patronized and its rituals performed. Conversely, is this grandeur not the obvious affirmation that Śiva has favored a particular place, and its earthly ruler has taken advantage of this favor perfectly?

2.4 Forging Words of Place

The procession described in the Tirukkailāya Ṇṇa Ulā is bound to nowhere. Indeed, the ulā makes no reference to a temple at all; Śiva rules from his palace at the center of his divine world Śivaloka. The link between his world and ours is made through its author, the royal benefactor Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ, and he, like Śivaloka, is a figure freed from the limitations of history. Nonetheless, the poem and the tradition of authorship surrounding it offer a persuasive account of where the god’s procession will actually occur. Once the text has been given a place, a setting in which it is held to effect its ideal of divine rule over living people, the text’s themes of erotic domination become linked to questions of political control.
Grounding a Template

This poem was composed in Tamil, anchoring it to a specific region. The actors within the poem reinforce this identification. Agastya, whom the Tamil literary author takes as the author of the first Tamil grammar (and in some tellings the Tamil language itself), stands proudly among the guardians of the quarters when the assemble in formation around Śiva. Just as Agastya’s presence signals the language he champions, so too does the poem’s frequent mention of pearls and sandalwood, classic treasures of the south. Sometimes, as one verse declares, the sandalwood comes from the Potiyil Mountain, Agastya’s own mountain abode (v. 90).

The women who wear these precious goods are unmistakably Tamil: they do not just speak it, they are the language given form:

She is the divinity of shining, polished Tamil given form
an ingénue full of perfected virtues,...

Polished Tamil, perfected virtues: these are the sophisticated, women who embody urban refinement. From the first mention of Śiva’s palace, in Śiva’s city, in Śiva’s world, the text grounds itself in the city. Its verses make constant reference to wealth and cultured practices, and in one of the most striking moments of the poem, a set of paranomastic (śleṣa) verses transforms the women’s splendid homes into the body of the god himself:

Because they give shelter from waters housed in the brilliant sky, shelter what is hidden,
Because he bears the dazzling heavenly Ganges, protects the Vedas,
are graced with flawless decorations, touch the heavenly crescent moon,
bears the flawless trident and the heavenly crescent moon,

53 v. 112: ஒலையா தம்மையை வெளியாய்வு வாக்கிகள் | தமிழ் தமிழ்த்தாகர் சம்பாதிக்கு.
54 Although, to recall Alexander Pope, paranomastic verses are occasions when a word speaks twice as much by being split, Śleṣa verses give primary and secondary readings. I provide the secondary reading offset and italicized.
And are covered with bright whitewash,

\ And is adorned with purifying ash,

glittering mansions are like the generous lord who wears the elephant skin...  

This intricate passage is worth observing in some detail, for much is revealed in the comparison it proposes. Why, for instance, should Śiva be described as wearing an elephant skin? Just as his cloak, made from the flayed hide of an elephant demon, conceals the god within a coarse external guise, the tall mansions “shelter what is hidden”: the women making love with their husbands. By eliciting the comparison in this way, the verses stress how both Śiva and the women are sources of a creative power that is both prominent and concealed. Comparing the mansions to Śiva’s grisly cloak, the Tirukkailāya ṇāṉa Ulā shapes them into veiled expressions of the god’s presence. Though they provide no obvious view of him, their stately presence reveal Śiva’s generative power at work, creating splendor by enriching the flourishing agricultural regions that make them possible at all.

This is an attractive proposition, but the Tirukkailāya ṇāṉa Ulā makes clear that Śiva is not compelled to appear in the Tamil lands; it is up to those who require his presence to induce it. He is largely the object of others’ agency in this text, with his own motives beyond the text’s purview. Other gods entreat him, Pārvatī adorns him, women desire him, but the poem gives no indication of how he reacts to any of this but for the all-important fact that he deigns to set out on procession. The women who see him are enchanting, but Śiva does not seem to need them as they need him, and the text plays on this disparity to great effect:

She looked at the garland of the radiant lord, then looked at her own
she looked at his splendor, then looked at her own beauty,

She looked at the arms of the gracious lord, and then at her own,
she looked at the broad span of his chest, and let out a long sigh,
Her heart melted, showing no care for her modesty
awash in a flood of surging desire, her breath came in hot sighs.\textsuperscript{56}

She knows he is not torn by the same emotions, since Śiva captivates her in a way she cannot
equal. One verse in particular develops this contrast wonderfully:

Casting their eyes, their nets toward the lord,
raven-haired women threw open the bolts on the doors of their resolve.\textsuperscript{57}

The imagery is vivid, with eyes searching for prey like a fisherman with his net; they haul the net
in, hoping to have made a catch. But like the net, which at times comes up empty, the women’s
rare beauty makes no guarantee. The \textit{Tirukkailāya} ŉāṇa Ulā, that is to say, is a project, not a chron-
icle: its verses do not document Śiva’s presence on Tamil soil, but call for those who hear them
to make them a reality.

Calling the God to the Land

Let us return to the poem’s title. The translation of \textit{Tirukkailāya} ŉāṇa Ulā presents challenges. It
is a compounded phrase in which the relations between terms have been elided: “Holy-Kailasa-
Knowledge-Procession.” How should we understand the relationship between the procession,
knowledge, and Kailasa? The ways to interpret the phrase are of consequence, for they suggest
the role this poem actually played in the region where it was created. First, there is a religious
understanding of the phrase, which hearkens back to the view that this ulā has the distinct merit
of an \textit{arankēṟṟam} (ascension to the public stage) in front of Śiva himself. As the Tamil literary his-
torian Mu. Aruṇācalam recounts, “Its title has the following provenance: It is called \textit{The Procession}
of Knowledge because its subject is the experience of God himself; it is called the The Procession of Knowledge on Holy Kailasa because it was sung before the Lord while on Kailasa, and it is called The Original Procession because it is the very first instance of the genre.  

The phrase, however, admits of multiple possibilities. The procession, for instance, also provides knowledge of Kailasa. As the text describes Śiva in motion, and the effect this has on the world, its audience learns how this world is structured. It provides a model for understanding space: where the center lies, how this point relates to the region at large, who participates, and to what degree. Everyone depends on Śiva’s presence, the poem argues, but there are those who directly structure it (Brahman specialists who carry out the rituals and maintain the temple); those who provide for this structure (rulers and patrons); those affected by it (everyone within this regnant culture). Participation is collective but graded. In the same way, the idealized figure of Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ is the model against which Tamil rulers should measure themselves. Do they patronize a Śaiva temple, and through their unrivaled generosity stand like this legendary king in an exclusively close relationship to the god? Or do they continue to support Buddhists and Jains, forsaking the opportunity to cause their lands to flourish?

The Tirukkailāya Ŋañça Ulā encourages its audience to know Kailasa by taking it as a model. If the text succeeds, its readers will accept the view of the world it lays out as correct, and work to institute its order, using the topology it offers to understand the space they inhabit. These are political goals. A king should understand his role in promoting the correct way to worship Śiva in his territory, patronizing Śaiva temples and supporting the Brahmans who administer them. As for the rest, they should know the temple as the focus of their world, and revere those who directly orchestrate Śiva’s life-giving power. When all this is achieved, the ulā counsels, the rewards are immense: harmony and prosperity abound, and—most importantly—they last. For
rulers who knew all too well how unsteady their position could be, this is no small point. In the world our text describes, Śiva’s power, inexorable and timeless, merges with the conditions of political rule, strengthening a ruler’s claim to authority on the unanswerable basis of its metaphysical necessity. Since the text and the tradition of authorship connected to it are free from claims to historical particularity, they are really empty vessels, waiting to be filled by real actors who want the rewards that their models promise to give.

Reception, Intent and Audience

Who needed to be persuaded that the Tirukkailāya Ėṉa Ulā’s account is true? Answers to this question remain no more than assumptions, for the Tirukkailāya Ėṉa Ulā, at least for now, is a text drifting above the surface of lived history, offering only the most sparing glimpses of what once lay below. A few judgments nonetheless appear reasonable. Who would have been moved to care for this text? Those, first of all, who had the ability to make it real, and who had to be convinced of the rewards that Śaiva temple worship and its patronage hold out. This poem is to a large degree about women, but that does not mean that it was intended for them. In this poem, their role is unenviable and their agency feeble; they are introduced so that they can be worked upon. We could read this poem across the grain, resurrecting their agency, and if the text held a more powerful role in cultural memory, such a project could make a difference. But to be successful, there would be much remodeling to do: this is a text that speaks most directly to those who have power and want to maintain it. All of this conditions the notion of bhakti attached to the poem, so much of which really stems from the Periya Purāṇam’s characterization of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ as a great bhaktr. The idea of bhakti as a visceral folk reaction against Brahman hegemony, developed in the vernacular, has nothing to do with this text. The work of these words sets the love of Śiva within the practices of Brahmanic temple worship, and aims to turn those who can support it

away from rival creeds. The text as we know it now—a poem that became important, inspired other authors to build upon its themes, and was ultimately canonized within the Tamil Śaiva tradition—was the collaborative work of those who gained as a result. The people who valued it, the people who performed it, and the people who shared it all took a hand in making this text.

They were, we may surmise, those who supported the temples associated with āgamic Śaiva worship, where practices ran counter to standards of Vedic supremacy. The first ulā stands centuries before the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta of Mēykanṭatēvar’s Cīva Ṛṣṭrīya Pōtam, a culminating moment in the long history of convergence between the Śaivāgamas and Vedism. It was not always so; the worship of temple images had opponents closer to the fold than Buddhists and Jains. It would be incorrect to assign to early āgamic practice a specific doctrine, and it is also true that the association of āgamas with temple worship was an ancillary development. The broad currents within the Śaivāgamas’ own indistinct history will serve nonetheless: we stand with the Tirukkālaiya Ṛṣṭrīya Ulā at a moment when the champions of upacāras performed for an embodied god were vulnerable in a way that seems unimaginable today, with the south’s extraordinary monuments to Śiva worship raised in towering stone.

They were adherents to a faith whose path was not certain. They were the rulers who promoted this faith, and saw in their relationship to it a validation of the power they wielded and a way to keep it. “A man who takes the āgamas as his authority”; “follower of the āgamas”: these birudas of the eighth-century Pallava king Rājasiṃha, inscribed on the walls of the Kailasanātha temple in Kāñcipuram, were not idle titles. Their words placed him at the head of a movement of Tamil Śaiva worshipers who understood themselves as uniquely close to the god who makes the world what it is.

These were champions of Śiva, moreover, who succeeded. The Tirukkālaiya Ṛṣṭrīya Ulā was cel-

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60 Bhatt 1988: 34.
62 SII 1.25 (36th and 37th niches): Śrīआगमप्रमाण:; Śrīआगमानुसारि: (read ‘सारी烟台).
ebrated, and inspired a thriving genre. The view of the world that the Śaivas upheld put deep roots in the Tamil soil, and later kings would take it as their own. As these early worshipers brought this poem to life by performing what it describes, uniting real and narrated worlds, they strengthened its claim to truth: the view that the land where Tamil is spoken is really at the heart of things, Śiva’s own home, where his power is put to its highest use. As a living text, admired by people who saw themselves in its verses, the poem helped to institute on earth the topology of devotion it sets forth for the heavens. Is a culture vulnerable, like everything else, to change, decay, and adversaries, or is it, as the Tirukkailāya Nāṇa Uḷā would have it, as certain and timeless as a woman’s love for Śiva?
Chapter 3

Sanskrit Models for the Power of Beauty

The sun roams the parched forest
searching each crack in the heat-scarred ground,
his rays cling to all they touch
wondering which path
his love, his Shadow, has taken.

Kaliṅkattup Paraṇi¹

Like any work of art that becomes a touchstone, when the Tirukkailāya Ōnā Ulā opened new paths for future authors to pursue, it also illuminated its past. Once we begin to trace the ulā genre’s literary history, we find a history that reaches beyond the glorification of Śiva, beyond the refinements of urban life, and outside the Tamil language. The Tirukkailāya Ōnā Ulā stakes its portrayal of Śiva’s enduring order on a woman’s intimate hopes, suffusing her desire for the god with an encompassing claim to his political authority. But this moment of confluence, when the full power of a ruler’s claim over his world flashes across the private depths of an individual life, first appears in the Sanskrit Mahābhārata, as the Pāṇḍava heroes strive to bolster their precarious

¹v. 79: இல்லை கட்டுரையில் அமர்வு | மூடி வாழ்க்கை விளக்குமை | மகிழ்ச்சியின் இரண்டு விளக்குமை | கூடிய வாழ்க்கை விளக்குமை. 54
claims to universal rule. And even there, in the nascence of Indian poetic expression, the way this tale is told is remarkably similar to the style of ulā poetry. This rich ancestry of the Tirukkailāya Āṇa Ulā is where we now turn, seeking to understand how the ulā reacted to the culture in which it was written, and how it sought to change it.

3.1 Preparatory Limitations

This is a reasonable objective, but it quickly leads to difficulty, for the simple fact that so little is known about the first ulā’s historical context. The Tirukkailāya Āṇa Ulā, as I argued in the previous chapter, is a text thickly cloaked in the ideal. The vision it sets out for its audience, the flawless world of a perfect god, is paired with an understanding of authorship similarly divorced from the untidy particularities of the world where the text actually resides. Trying to pry historical facts from this text runs directly counter to the standard of Śaiva rulership and patronage that the text’s own historical momentum impressed upon those who cared about it. Whether or not its putative author, the legendary Tamil king Ceramāṉ Perumāḷ, indeed lived and wrote, there is almost nothing of evidential consequence in the text’s collected history that can be used to specify an individual acting in a definite time and place. To the extent that material evidence can be drawn into a productive line of questioning, the Tirukkailāya Āṇa Ulā’s history is a history of texts, and not of the people who engaged with them.

Much of the work, then, falls to elucidating conclusive patterns of repetition, citation, and allusion in the literary record, following a path that is by no means continuous. What remains are the text archives that people, for whatever reason, decided to preserve, rework, or extend.2 What guided these turning points, however, is lost, from ephemeral inclinations of motive—emulation, adulation, resistance, confrontation—to the individual touches of creative genius. If we succeed

in laying out a history of the ulā that lets good questions be asked and answered, we may hope with the fifteenth-century historian Biondo Flavio to be “thanked for having hauled ashore some planks from so vast a shipwreck, planks which were floating on the surface of the water or nearly lost to view, rather than be required to account for the entire ship.”

Texts Without Authors

A history of the ulā calls on truly great works of Indian literature, traversing Sanskrit and Tamil through currents that did not see the two languages as exclusive shores. Though I am intent on taking a close look at the texts themselves, where their subtle narratives and artistic imagery can do more to engage the reader than preparatory abstractions, let us take a short time to lay out the hazards in this project of reconstruction. To paint the picture in broad strokes, the challenges that attend a historical appreciation of Indian texts are often harsh. Within the sweeping range of works that have endured, many cannot be bound to a precise time or place of composition, making the goal of a refined, inclusive chronology fragile at times, contentious at others. There is no reason, all the same, for chronological transparency to serve as the primary standard for gauging a text’s importance, given that so much needs to be reintroduced to an enquiring readership in the first place.

Above all, the analysis must show that the situation is not hopelessly disorganized, or that too little remains to understand the ulā genre’s past in any useful way. There is no point in drawing connections between texts that audiences of the past never made, rather than ceding the point that too much has been lost to make sense of the ulā’s genealogy. The fact, however, that the ulā’s literary past consists of texts that have been carefully preserved and transmitted stands in our favor, and should lend confidence that the course traced between them will not be myopic. Though the precise links between the individual works that led the way for the Tirukkailāya Ēna

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3 Flavio 2005: 5.
Ulā are not fully clear, those that do present themselves are not scattered at the edges in the literary world. They are masterpieces at the core of Indian writing, which have left lasting cultural impressions precisely because they were prized by the people who knew them. The poetry that influenced the ulā genre is found in prestigious texts, whose continued relevance to their audiences speaks to the fact that they have been appreciated and taken seriously for a very long time.

The question of prestige raises another issue. While the textual forebears of the Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā now offer a history, for the text’s author, they provided a background. We look back on what is essentially a closed whole, a set of great works in the Indian literary world, which is cut off from new writing. For an author in the first millennium, the conversation was far from over, and these were texts to be embraced as one’s own. The force of prestige that a great book generated could be harnessed to new projects, lending them an honored lineage and a gravity of purpose if the artist had the skill. Given that the Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā appeals to prominent texts in its creative landscape, its author was joining a literary conversation that these texts helped shape, taking up their concerns in a recognizable form and plying them to original, creative ends. Though disruptions can very quickly sweep aside what was once considered great, and there is always the possibility that what was once a must-have vanished without a trace, discerning a general path of influence gives a good sense of the way the ulā’s subject matter has moved through the centuries.

The ulā’s textual history has no inevitability. The texts that precede the Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā are not pale shadows of what this poem would come to fulfill; they had their own designs, complete in themselves. The Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā is an elegant poem that lays out a compelling vision of Śiva’s world-making power, and it is a poem that has much to say, but it is not one of the stars of the Tamil literary world. There are poems like this, and then there are masterpieces like the Rāmāyaṇa of Campaṇ, which stand at the core of the tradition. This text may once have
been out in the hinterlands, far from the real action of the day. There was never a clear path from early hints of the ulā’s subsequent themes to a moment when they were fulfilled. Texts do not have destinies; they are handed down with care, in fragile circumstances where competing visions may well have won out instead.

It is quite reasonable that a literary history should center on texts, and reasonable to argue that texts have a role in the flow of events that should not be collapsed into the agency of the human beings who wrote, read, or heard them. To dispense with these people, however, as can happen when discussing a history such as the ulā’s, where no record remains of their lives of actions, confers the hue of agency entirely on the texts, or—more subtly—on the languages in which they were composed. When it comes to Sanskrit and Tamil, two languages that have long been subject to imputations of discernment, will, and divinity, this remains a significant problem.

Languages are not Speakers

Accounts of the relationship between Tamil and Sanskrit run from real erudition to outright agitprop, but no matter the tenor, this body of writing is substantial, and over the course of these accounts the languages themselves have often become the personalities at war. That the two languages have a relationship is a truism, but once the relationship is characterized, the problems often begin. The scholarly consensus, as Norman Cutler concisely portrayed it, is that “the earliest documented stratum of Tamil culture was, in its essentials, quite distinct from Sanskritic or Brahmanical culture, and that much of Tamil history can be read as an amalgamation or interplay between elements of archaic Tamil culture and imported Brahmanical elements.”4 The reality behind this eminently fair statement is that for many people who care about this history, culture is identified with language, and language becomes invested with every cultural trait. In heavy-handed strokes, the positions are as follows: For the Tamil partisan, a sinister, encroach-

4Cutler 1983: 381.
ing Sanskrit has tainted a gentle, harmonious Tamil and denied its expressive potential; for the
champion of Sanskrit, this uniquely perfect language has graciously honored Tamil with its aes-
thetic refinement and poetic treasures.

The results of this project of anthropomorphism always seem to be the same: two sets of
elaborate, grouped cultural elements with their own inconsistencies and contradictions are con-
densed into individual, undifferentiated languages that essentialize them. Once more, like the
idea that texts have their own futures bound up within them, people have not taken much part in
their history. Texts that draw from both Sanskrit and Tamil literary cultures, such as the Tirukkai-
lāya ṇāna Ulā, become reduced to the effect of the two languages running into each other, rather
than the creative work of people who actually had something to say. This does not dispute the
idea of language as a coherent object of analysis, particularly in the case of language traditions
like Sanskrit and Tamil, both of which were shaped by people who made great efforts to set up the
boundaries between what was part of the language and what was not. But languages are always
subject to tension, shot through with their own moments of dissent and fracture.5

These are the hazards that complicate the pursuit of the materials that shaped the Tamil ulās.
The texts are all that remains, enduring signs of a vibrant cultural exchange that echo a much
fuller tale, in which people advanced what they cared about while living with others who no
doubt had other things to say. The intentions they had are in a very real way gone: while a text
can proclaim the conditions of its use, it cannot impose them. What we know about how they
were viewed is from those traces given textual permanence, consciously or otherwise. As we
turn over the details that mark the ulā genre’s history, the messy reality that brought them forth
has largely passed from view.

5A perspective, in the case of Tamil, advocated by Norman Cutler; e.g. 2003: 292.
3.2 The Seductive Allure of Heroic Men

In the case of the ulās, the Mahābhārata can be taken at its word when it makes its famous claim, “if what is here is elsewhere, what is not here is nowhere,”\(^6\) for the first coherent narrative expression of the genre’s themes is to be found in this vast text. The tale in question makes its way through a larger meditation on the interplay of governance and ethics in the Ādi Parvan, after the Pāṇḍava brothers have reached an insubstantial settlement with their agnate Kaurava foes over the disputed kingdom to which both lineages make claim. Once they have founded their ruling city of Indraprasthā, the Pāṇḍavas set about expanding their realm by subduing neighboring kings through force of arms. Some time thereafter, a Brahman whose cows are being stolen by thieves appeals to the Pāṇḍavas for help, and Arjuna hastens to respond.\(^7\) His weapons, however, are in a room where Yudhiṣṭhira and their mutual wife Draupadī are enjoying privacy, and Arjuna finds himself in the awkward position of having to either ignore the Brahman’s helpless pleas, or walk in on his older brother. Both are violations of principle, since the Pāṇḍava brothers have pledged not to interrupt each other when one is with Draupadi, yet Arjuna chooses to break this pledge rather than let his obligation to protect the citizenry falter. The penalty is a year’s pilgrimage in celibacy.

Arjuna Meets Ulūpī

Yudhiṣṭhira entreats Arjuna not to consider his intrusion as a violation of their pledge, given the situation, but Arjuna will have none of it, and proclaims the truth of his word as an absolute that will not shift with circumstance. His view of things, it seems, is as unquestioning as his resolve: despite—or more likely, because of—its contested, tenuous beginnings, the Pāṇḍava realm shall

\(^6\)Mahābhārata 18.5.38: यदीहािŵत तदĭयǮ यĭīहािŵत न तü¯विचत्.

\(^7\)Mahābhārata 1.205.
be uncompromisingly lawful, and so Arjuna sets off for the required year’s pilgrimage in the forest. As he roams in exile through that wild domain, the story begins in earnest. Accompanied by a vast retinue of Brahmans, bards, and followers, Arjuna makes camp at the Gate of the Ganges, the northernmost border of the cultural world he inhabits, and prepares to bathe in the river.

Arjuna descended into the Ganges for his ritual bath. After bathing and making offerings to his ancestors, he started to rise from the water, intending to perform the rite, but the mighty-armed man was dragged back into the water by Ulūpī, daughter of the serpent king, who was filled with lust. There, in the renowned palace of the serpent Kauravya, the Pāṇḍava saw a well-laid fire, and in it Dhananājaya, son of Kuntī, performed the fire rite. Since the offering was given with no hesitation, the fire was pleased.

Once he had finished the fire rite, the son of Kuntī spoke to the serpent princess with a laugh. “What a timid girl! Why have you been so bold, lovely? Who are you, who is your father, and what is this flourishing land?”

Ulūpī said, “I am the serpent maiden Ulūpī, Pārtha, the daughter of the serpent Kauravya, born in the lineage of Airāvata. As soon as I saw you entering the river to bathe, Kaunteya, I was overwhelmed by the stirring god of love. Please me, son of Kuru, now, secretly, by offering yourself—I am a woman who wants nothing else, churned by the bodiless god of love because of you!”

Arjuna said, “My lady, I am not subject to my own will, for my brother, King Dharma, has ordered me to be celibate for twelve months. Though I want to do your pleasure, lady of the watery realm, I have never before spoken falsely in any way. If I were to do your pleasure, serpent maiden, wouldn’t that be deceitful, a compromise of my dharma?”

Ulūpī said, “I know how you are wandering the earth, and how your guru ordered you to be celibate. Your agreement pertains to you and your brothers who live together only as it affects your relationship with Draupadī, namely, that whichever one of you mistaken

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The meaning of this term, which centers on aligning oneself with a life order held to be normative, is left untranslated here because its meaning is pointedly ambiguous within the narrative. Action is certainly its expressive mode (Brockington 2004: 656). Patrick Olivelle, who stresses the abstract, effective sense of dharma in his analysis of its early uses, argues, “It is likely that dharma was part of the specialized vocabulary associated with royalty, especially because of its frequent use within the royal consecration (rājasūya). In all likelihood, dharma referred to social order and the laws of society that the king was obligated to enforce. Dharma thus becomes an abstract concept and entity, a cosmic force that stands above the king; it is called kṣatrasya kṣatram, the power behind the royal power (2004: 503).” Using “law” as a simple calque of dharma, however, is problematic because of the proclivity to identify law in toto with the technical processes that now constitute it, to the exclusion of religion. But if law, as Donald R. Davis Jr. phrases it, is “a socially determined set of rules enforced by authoritative sanctions,” the distinction between law and religion is atypical: “The tortuous and still incomplete project of creating two separate categories in the West demonstrates the exceptionality of such a dichotomy in the comparative world history of religion and law. In most parts of the world and in most times in history, religion and law were intimately connected and largely not distinguished from each other.” (2007: 243, 261)
walked in on another brother should wander the forest in celibacy for twelve months. Your exile from the others is because of Draupadi, and what you did for the sake of dharma in that situation does not undermine dharma in this one! Rescuing those who are suffering is essential, broad-eyed man. Dharma is not harmed by rescuing me! Or even if there were some transgression of that dharma, it would be very slight indeed, and giving me back my life should really be your dharma, Arjuna.

You must take me, Pārtha, a woman who has taken to you—this is the doctrine of principled men, lord. You must realize that I am dead if you do not! By saving my life, strong-armed one, follow the dharma that is supreme. Best of men, I have now surrendered to you as my refuge! You always protect the vulnerable and the wretched, Kaunteya. I am one who comes to you for refuge, and I am crying bitterly in pain! I beg you, I am filled with longing, so give me pleasure—you must satisfy me by giving yourself!”

Hearing this, the Kaunteya gave himself to the daughter of the serpent king, taking dharma in its entirety as the reason. The brilliant hero spent the night in the serpent’s palace, and when the sun rose, he emerged from Kauravya’s home.\(^9\)

Despite differences in setting, Arjuna’s encounter with Ulūpī has much in common with Śiva’s stately procession in the Tirukkailāya Ṝṇa Ulā. After having been prepared especially for the occasion, Śiva sets out from his palace to process around his city, moving with an elaborately arrayed retinue, and passes before the women of the city, who are filled with desire for him. Arjuna also sets out from his capital in a special condition, his formal vow of wandering in celibacy. Like Śiva, he is accompanied by a retinue, in this case the sundry Brahmans and storytellers who travel with him to the Gate of the Ganges, where the river enters the plains from its mountainous source. Both heroes move from their established residence out into territory that is comparatively unfamiliar with their presence, at which point their effect upon onlooking women drives the rest of the narrative.

Ulūpī, moreover, has much in common with the women of the ulā. She sees Arjuna from afar, having watched him enter the water to bathe, and is overcome with lust simply by the sight of him. In the Tirukkailāya Ṝṇa Ulā, the heroines are quite forthright about their desire not simply for Śiva, but for his body, describing the attractions of a figure that projects its ability to effect

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power. Though the Mahābhārata’s account does not make this point overtly, the fact that Ulūpī becomes infatuated when she sees Arjuna stripped down to bathe in the river makes the point clearly enough. At heart, both narratives center on a woman’s expression of her desire once she has seen the hero, as her passion overpowers the normal restrictions of self-control and is presented outwardly before him, in tribute.

Like the women of the ulās, Ulūpī is quite bold in her desire. Arjuna notes this immediately, and gently taunts her lack of modesty. “What a timid girl!” he says, “Why have you been so bold, lovely?”

She explains herself, as do an ulā’s heroines, by describing how she has been transformed by the powers of the love god Kāma. And in both narratives, the women become obsessed, knowing nothing but their own desire. Ulūpī, like some of the ulā heroines, envisions her own death as a sure result of failure: “Take me, Pārtha... you must realize I am dead if you do not!”

The Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā, in a similar passage, describes how the women “worshiped heartsick with longing as their passions rose, thinking, 'If the one crowned with matted locks doesn’t give me his garland of strung cassia blossoms, the midnight hour will surely destroy me!'”

Most importantly, all of these women feel and tell of a distinct rightness about their passion, which appeals to an order far greater than the caprices of personal whim. The hero, they insist, has a duty to protect and care for those who call out to them for relief from their suffering.

Humans and Serpents

Does the tale of Arjuna and Ulūpī, like the Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā, align this moment of personal encounter with much broader claims of submission to a dominant political will? For what the Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā seeks to accomplish in the world through its verses is precisely this careful alignment: the heroine’s expression of her desire for the hero and his resultant obligation to take
her as his own, and the political claim to Śiva’s unique prerogative over the Tamil land. Here, too, the encounter between Arjuna and Ulūpī forges a relationship of master and subject between two broad domains: the human world ordered through Pāṇḍava rule, and the world of serpents that lies beneath it.

As a simple tale of romance, this story does not make much sense. Ulūpī is not one of the Mahābhārata’s finely sketched characters. She appears only thrice in the epic, and though her presence marks pivotal moments in Arjuna’s life, it is the fact of her presence itself, rather than any rich details of her character, that drives the story onward. In the scene at hand, Ulūpī conveys Arjuna to a submarine world, reveals her desire for him and convinces him to sleep with her, then immediately disappears. What little is known of her in this scene comes from three sources: the details she chooses to provide about herself, her ability to bring Arjuna around to her expedient view of his celibacy, and—far more than these—the fact that she is a nāga, a serpent, who represents a different order of existence in the Mahābhārata’s view of the world.

Arjuna, too, comes to stand for much more than a handsome man bathing in the river. Ulūpī sees him from the watery depths where she lives, and describes herself as being overcome with an abrupt rush of desire: “As soon as I saw you entering the river to bathe, Kaunteya, I was overwhelmed by the stirring god of love.” Yet she knows a great many things about this man, up to the most minute details of the arrangement he has made with his brothers to grant each other the necessary time alone with their mutual wife, as well as the penalty to be exacted if one of them violates this agreement. Her character jumps seamlessly from a narrated framework grounded in realistic detail to an omniscient narrative frame that understands the Mahābhārata as a whole. Through the effective collapse of these narrative dimensions, Ulūpī’s desire for Arjuna surpasses the herculean body she has seen from a distance. Her character leaps from a rather unremark-
able moment in the forest to embrace the Mahābhārata as a whole: the sweeping history of the lunar lineage, in which Arjuna’s glorious deeds have paved the way for the five Pāṇḍava brothers to establish righteous governance over the entirety of India.

In the spirit of this ascent from individual lives to panoramic themes, the tale embeds its stylized portrayals of Arjuna and Ulūpī within a predictable interest in lineage. When he first speaks to the serpent maiden, Arjuna immediately asks not just who she is, but who and what she represents: “And who are you, who is your father, and what is this flourishing land?” Such stereotypy marks classical South Asian texts of every kind, as personal identity telescopes out from an individual to a generalized essence. Levels of identity become keys to each other, reflecting out to shared traits of the group, or condensing in towards any member. Arjuna is a Kuru prince, whose Pāṇḍava kingdom has successfully dominated the earth since the five brothers established their kingdom in Indraprasthā. Ulūpī is not of his kind. While Arjuna, as the text relates, is wandering the earth, Ulūpī is a denizen of the lower world, who moves in the watery realm (jalacāriṇī). Her father is the nāga king Kauravya, scion of the ancient serpent Airāvata. While Arjuna is a royal hero among humankind, his mastery takes the earth as its stage. Ulūpī is his perfect counterpart: a royal princess among the serpents, the emblematic masters of the lower depths. Her nāga kin maintain a social structure commensurate with the ranked gradations of humankind, and within their own dominant lineages, she, like Arjuna, stands at the top.

Nāgas lie at the heart of the Mahābhārata. As D. D. Kosambi has argued, “The interweaving of and outside in which each strand is autonomous but interacts (probably synergistically) with all the others. The braid is always open in manifold ways to bringing in the outside and bringing out the inside” (2006: 257). The way Handelman embraces the messiness of such framing is particularly useful here, giving what could be a rather lifeless typology of narrative styles its own flowing dynamism: “In the language of braiding, the frame is the composition, framing itself simultaneously from inside and out, thereby doing away with any fixity of inside and out. The frame stretches within itself, beyond itself.” (2006: 260)

15Mahābhārata 1.206.17: कः यां युभानी देशः कः च त्वं कम्य चामुज्जा.
16This partition of worlds is a pervasive feature of Indo-European mythology as a whole, with serpents being the most prominent creatures of the lower realm, identified with aqueous depths. See Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1995: 408–11.
17Doniger 1986: 16–44.
nāga-myth into the Mahābhārata was essential to the fabric and the pattern, not merely the result of some mental quirk of the bards.”18 The vast arc of the epic is ensconced in a rite of sacrifice that King Janamejaya, Arjuna’s great-grandson, has set in motion for a novel, bizarre end: to rid the world of the nāgas as a whole, vengeance for the death of his father Parikṣit. Yet these serpent beings, as the Mahābhārata never fails to remind its audience, are categorically different beings, belonging to a different world. They are, in effect, the perfect candidates for questions of dharma that test the limits. How far does dharma extend? Who recognizes its order, and is recognized in turn? In Arjuna’s pairing with Ulūpi, the Mahābhārata sets up an intersection of realms that must join if an embracing order is to be created.19

Ordering the Cosmos

On the scale of human events, worlds of a different order reveal themselves in the Mahābhārata when cosmological features announce their presence in individuals. When Arjuna spends the night in Ulūpi’s home, he rises out of the waters together with the sun. The comparison is deftly executed, if formulaic: the sun rises from the sea where he spends the night to go about his day; while Arjuna, the brilliant hero, emerges from the waters after doing much the same, though after a more eventful stay. The sun, full of radiant power, bonds with the waters, full of enveloping darkness.20 Arjuna is fiery brightness instantiated, the worker of “wondrous deeds,” as the tale tells us, whose fame will sweep across the earth as brilliant and incorruptible as the sun’s rays. In her desire, Ulūpi is the water and all it represents, begging to be fulfilled by his presence. The

18 Kosambi 1964: 32.
19 The act of grounding a dynasty in a particular place through the union of a human lord and a nāga princess becomes a common trope in later royal genealogies; as for instance the Cōḷa king Śūrāvāditya’s marriage to the nāga Kāntimati in Oṭṭakkūttar’s Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṉ Ulā (Chapter Six, p. 193).
20 This pair is both ancient and everywhere in Indic mythology, effecting creation through a union intimately bound up with sacrifice. One thinks, for instance, of the golden embryo (hīranyagarbha in the famous Vedic hymn of creation, Āy Veda 10.121, where a cosmic egg emerges as the synthesis of deep waters and sacrificial fire, worshiped by humankind by pouring liquid over fire. (Doniger 1981: 27–28)
sun embraces daylight, human affairs, the earth, and the protection of truth; the waters embrace night, otherness, alien domains, and the punishment of deception.\textsuperscript{21}

Qualities that surpass individual lives make Ulūpī’s argument that Arjuna must fulfill her desire convincing. If at first sight her pleas are self-serving, it is only because the narrative is presented through Arjuna’s eyes, which is to be expected given that the \textit{Mahābhārata} foregrounds his life’s trajectory. But Arjuna does not sense his role in the larger partnership he is to form with her. He is consumed by the responsibilities that his understanding of \textit{dharma} demands of him, to the extent that an amusing moment of hesitation occurs when Ulūpī first drags him down to the \textit{nāga} palace. Instead of turning to see who has so ably captured him, a consummate fighter, he proceeds directly to the palace hearth and completes the fire rite for which he was purifying himself in the Ganges. When he does at last engage Ulūpī in conversation, his understanding of \textit{dharma} does not extend to the claims she puts upon him. He refuses her advances by appealing to codes that relate entirely to the land he is wandering, established in relation to his wife, his brothers, and their venture to rule the earth. Ulūpī, however, artfully transposes Arjuna’s sense of \textit{dharma}, which he believes to be exhaustive, and declares it merely partial. As she explains,

\begin{quote}
I know how you are wandering the earth, and how your guru ordered you to be celibate. Your agreement pertains to you and your brothers who live together only as it affects your relationship with Draupadī, namely, that whichever one of you mistakenly walked in on another brother should wander the forest in celibacy for twelve months. Your exile from the others is because of Draupadī, and what you did for the sake of \textit{dharma} in that situation does not undermine \textit{dharma} in this one!\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

In the encompassing scale she attributes to the relationship between herself and Arjuna, prime rules come into play, guiding the union of the two realms these individuals represent. Ulūpī sees her completion in him alone, and calls him to the duty of stewardship that his own essential


\textsuperscript{22}Mahābhārata 1.206.24–26: जानाॆह पाैॆव यथा चरे मेदनीम् । यथा च ते ब्रह्मचर्यमिद्माद्याद्वानुः ।। परस्परं बर्त्तानानुपरस्परम्यों मृदा प्रति । यो नोरुपविशेषोहल्स नो हर्षपतिप्रिमम् । जने चर्र्याचर्यमिति । समयः कुतः ।। तदसं ध्रीपदोऽतिर्योष्मस्य प्रवासनम् । कृतं वस्त्र धार्मिकम् धर्मां न उपययति.
qualities demand of him. Fulfilling the wholeness of the paired domains they represent, she suggests, commits Arjuna to action: the privilege he is being granted is also his obligation. “Follow the dharma that is supreme” (cara dharmam anuttamam), she urges him, and when Arjuna accepts her, the tale carefully notes that he credits her argument, and goes to her “taking dharma in its entirety as the reason” (tathā sarvaṃ dharmam uddhiṣṭya kāraṇam).

To say, however, that the union of Arjuna and Ulūpī instantiates the ordained pairing of these two broad domains does not address the most evident dimension of this narrative. Here, too, the parallels with Śiva’s power over the women of the Tirukkailāya Ṛṣa Ulā are instructive. Arjuna is dominant at every turn, while Ulūpī portrays herself as vulnerable, and completely at his mercy. It is up to Arjuna to take or refuse her, and her own future, she emphasizes, lies in his choice.

The earlier partnership has been graded, with the sun overwhelming the watery underworld. For the epic, this is the next consistent step for the Pāṇḍava’s claim to universal dominion, now that Arjuna and his brothers have triumphed over lesser kings who opposed them on earth. The impending battle with the Kauravas remains a terrible problem, and once the nāga realm has been aligned with Pāṇḍava fortunes, it too is drawn into the devastation.

Responding to Desire

The sense of progressive mastery over increasingly vast areas should raise the question of whether or not Arjuna’s encounter with nāga territory represents the forceful domination of an unwilling subject. He has, after all, been exemplary at doing just this when confronting neighboring kings. But here, at the juncture between familiar terrain and the beyond, the forces driving this union pass well outside of either principal’s intentions, to assume a fittingly universal scope. With Ulūpī, Arjuna is the most reticent of lovers. He gives in only when she has turned his mind from concerns internal to his own family outward, arguing that an encompassing scale of lawful

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23Mahābhārata 1.206.30; 1.206.33.
action will make their union ethical. This is not, moreover, a man unwilling to take a woman by force. As soon as he completes his period of exile, in fact, he sees Kṛṣṇa’s sister Subhadrā, and in one of the epic’s harsh ironies, himself feels the stern hand of Kāma guiding him forward. Being a very strong man in a deeply patriarchal world, however, he is on familiar terrain, and taking the advice of Kṛṣṇa—Subhadrā’s own brother—he simply abducts her from her family.\(^{24}\)

If Arjuna is a most reluctant partner, neither is the affair a matter of Ulūpī’s own choosing. She is willing, certainly, hopelessly so, but she describes this as the result of a transformation that has precipitously fallen upon her as if from above. Kāma, the mind-churner, has overwhelmed her, and now drives her helplessly on. Though Ulūpī makes strategic choices to further her own ends, she has no hand in what defines these ends in the first place. When Kāma descends on her, the narrative frame breaks open, inwards as much as out, awakening depths in Ulūpī that also extend beyond her. As Don Handelman notes in his discussion of braided framing, at the edges of experience, distinguishing outside from in loses substance:

\[\text{Perhapscertainkindsofpossessionarenotsimplythetakingoveroftheselfbysomeexternal sourceofpowerbutratherthediscoveryofdepththatleadsfurtherinward,thediscoveryof adeepothernesswithinoneself.}\]

\[\text{Ina sense, being taken over, being possessed by one’s own self, within which the now expansivesothernesswithinoneselfencompassesself,therebyopeningnewpossibilitiesthatwerenotintegraltothisself.}\]\(^{25}\)

Like Arjuna, Ulūpī submits to the larger drama that is taking place. She grounds her supplication in the logic of a universal order that binds her to the man she desires, and Arjuna submits.

The language she uses here is telling, and hints at the religious devotion that such narratives would later come to extol in \textit{ulā} poetry. “You must take me, Pārtha,” she exclaims, “a woman who has taken to you.” The Sanskrit here is \textit{bhaktāṃ bhajasva māṁ pārtha} (\textit{Mahābhārata} 1. 206.29), that is, she is Arjuna’s \textit{bhakta}, his adherent. By calling herself this, Ulūpī insists to Arjuna that she

\(^{24}\text{Mahābhārata} 1.211–12.\)
\(^{25}\text{Handelman 2006: 261}\)
has, in a way that she is experiencing most wretchedly, given herself up to him. She is no longer whole unless he comes to her, for her identity now depends on him as well. Her plea, moreover, demands the same of him. *Bhajasva māṃ*, she orders him, “take me” (or more literally, “take a share in me”). This is a demand for ordered reciprocity, made because Arjuna’s presence was the spark for her own transformation, and its imperative mode speaks to the normative order that obligates him to fulfill it. As she goes on to say, “This, lord, is the doctrine of principled men” (*satām etan mataṃ prabho*).

Ulūpī finishes with a moving appeal for Arjuna to accept the duty that stands before him:

> By saving my life, strong-armed one, follow the *dharma* that is supreme. Best of men, I have now surrendered to you as my refuge! You always protect the vulnerable and the wretched, Kaunteya. I am one who comes to you for refuge, and I am crying bitterly in pain! I beg you, I am filled with longing, so give me pleasure—you must satisfy me by giving yourself!

Again, the Sanskrit is illuminating. *Śaraṇam ca prapannāsmi tvām adya puruṣottamāḥ... sāham śaraṇam abhyemi*. “Best of men, I have now surrendered to you as my refuge... I am one who comes to you for refuge.” The linked terms *śaraṇam* (refuge) and *prapanna* (surrendered) will come to assume great significance in later religious traditions, but such is not the case here: Ulūpī’s appeal is to human values of lordship and service. Ulūpī is helpless, dependent on Arjuna, and he alone has the ability to save her. In this textbook instance of making words do what they say, Ulūpī’s open pronouncement of taking refuge is an explicit performance that itself effects the deed, laying the entirety of the responsibility for her salvation on Arjuna’s shoulders.²⁷ Though the context is new, this is for him a familiar expectation, and his lordly place in a ruling family obliges him to fulfill it.

Once Arjuna heeds the claim she makes on him, the union of earthly prince and *nāga* princess

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²⁶ *Mahābhārata* 1.206.30–32: प्रणादानायामहाबाहो चर धरमस्तम्मम्। शरणं च प्रपणनस्मि तबस्मिन शुद्धितां || 

is achieved. Not for long, for Arjuna returns to his period of wandering after spending but a single night in Kauravya’s marine land, but what needed to be done has been done. Arjuna’s heroism, its radiance sweeping over the earth, reaches its accustomed boundary and provokes reaction in the world beyond. Ulūpī is this aquatic realm personified, responding involuntarily to his presence with the absolute need to join it. She surrenders to him, achieving the wholeness that he alone can provide once desire has risen in her heart. The two realms they represent are different because they are also paired. Here and beyond, native and foreign, light and dark: the terms require each other. Arjuna accepts difference not as an equal but as his subject, extending his power of asylum in return for devoted service. Once this has happened, and the waters have reached their fulfillment in Arjuna’s brilliant glory, the relationship between the two domains is cast, and the hero processes onward.

Mapping a Ruled World

The bond between Ulūpī and Arjuna marks a greater process of mapping, binding the order that the hero’s various wanderings over the subcontinent effect to a specific topography. As Sheldon Pollock has argued, the Mahābhārata can itself be viewed as the articulation of a “dominant macrospace”:

This vast spatialization, largely bounded by the subcontinental sphere, accompanies, even constitutes, most of the key narrative junctures in the epic tale itself: when the hero Arjuna departs on his exile at the beginning of the tale; when his brother Yudhiṣṭhīra dispatches his four brothers to conquer the four directions in preparation for his imperial consecration; when war is declared and troops gather; when, after the war, the victors perform the horse sacrifice to confirm their universal dominion; and lastly, when the brothers renounce their overlordship and begin their “great departure,” performing a last circumambulation of the world—of the sort repeatedly described and charter—to gain power over which their family has been destroyed and which they fittingly take leave of as they prepare to die.28

In the critical moment when the Pāṇḍava first meets the nāga princess, he is at the northernmost point on his journey, Gaṅgādvāra, “The Gate of the Ganges,” where the river flows out from the Himalayas and onto the deltaic plains. An ideational boundary beyond which Indic customs did not extend, this is the place where Arjuna’s retinue of priests hold the fire sacrifices that publicly affirm the range of the territory where their shared cultural order holds sway. They cast flowers into the river that drift back into the land of Bhārata, beyond which its heroes do not venture. Arjuna enters the liminal space of the river, in sight of the Brahmans who exemplify his world, and Ulūpī, who represents the other. Even as he begins to act in this new domain, performing the fire rite at Kauravya’s palace hearth, the pleasure that the fire takes at his offering shows just how quickly the lower world has begun to respond to his presence there. By the time he leaves, Ulūpī, the nāga realm personified, has been freed from her anguish by taking refuge with the same man who caused it.

Ulūpī’s expression of her inner torment once she has seen Arjuna is the driving force in the narrative, a fact that ulā poetry will seize upon with great intensity. Just as the Mahābhārata narrates Ulūpī’s tale from her perspective and through her words, ulā poetry focuses on the reactions of a heroine to gauge the measure of a hero. An ulā’s heroine sees her emotions pass beyond private interiority, and become public as they are offered up before the hero. The effect of this trope is significant, for it drives the hierarchy that such texts seek to naturalize to a level where readers can both see it at work, and situate it within their own experience. Once Ulūpī is swept up in a tide of spontaneous exhibition, passing beyond the boundary of her own thoughts—where judging by her later bewilderment they had never crystallized beyond the level of fluid, inchoate instinct—they become the object of survey, offered up to view. Unwillingly consigned to an outsider’s gaze, Ulūpī’s feelings take a form she has had very little hand in crafting. They become

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29The sacrifices, as the text informs us, are done prādus, “publicly”: अप्रकटाराणि विप्रास्ते प्रादुष्ट्वंतः (Mahābhārata 1.206.8).
available not only to the hero’s judgment, but to the reader’s as well.

The audience is drawn into Arjuna’s act of observation, seeing the woman controlled by the hero’s presence just as he does. When she surrenders to him, it occurs in a moment of narrative conflation that brings the order of heroic dominance and feminine submission out from a legendary past and into the telling of the tale. The vast scope of the Mahābhārata follows Arjuna from the divine circumstances of his birth in a famous lineage to his passage out of the world and death, whereas Ulūpī comes and goes in verses. For early readers who regularly took Arjuna as their own ancient paterfamilias, identification with the Pāṇḍava would have run deep. His ascendancy over Ulūpī and her world becomes their own, her passion for him an expression of the fact that the land and people he represents are superior to those who lie beyond. The story does not cease to be meaningful if readers of a different time do not make this identification, but neither does it do all that it can and once did.

Ulā poetry takes up the close narrative focus on a woman’s expression of desire, but readers are called to identify with the women, rather than the hero. In the Tirukkailāyā Nāṇa Ulā, Śiva is an unknowable, stylized figure, who passes by but never responds to the women’s pleas. The women are evocatively rendered, with the poet’s attention devoted to every fold in their dress, every nuance in their struggle to keep control over their passion for the god. Śiva is immensely powerful, but ultimately distant. The women’s experience, an ulā argues, is one readers share. Their instinctive response of love for Śiva in the Tirukkailāyā Nāṇa Ulā speaks to the lives of Tamil Śaivas. The shift of focus to the women is a crucial link in the ulā’s genealogy, for it sets readers in a posture of reverence where they, too, are urged to participate in the effects of heroic greatness. This is the next step in the history of the genre, which leaves the epic Mahābhārata and enters the refined world of Sanskrit court poetry.
3.3 Poetry for Courtly Life

From its earliest beginnings, Sanskrit court poetry embraced the trope of a processing hero who dominates the world through his radiant beauty. The very nature of mahākāvyas, epic poems whose sweeping breadth provided a grand medium for authors to concern themselves with the truly worldmaking acts of a culture’s imagined past, lends itself to the theme. Certainly the procession of a heroic man through a gazing world of women took extraordinary significance in the hands of the first known courtly poet, Aśvaghoṣa (1st c.), in his portrayal of the life of the Buddha, Buddhacarita.\(^\text{30}\) Following in his stylistic wake, that most celebrated of Sanskrit poets, Kālidāsa (first half of the 5th c.), incorporated virtually identical processional scenes in both of his mahākāvyas.\(^\text{31}\) By the time that Sanskrit authors wrote literature, they wrote of the power of procession.\(^\text{32}\)

_Buddhacarita_ of Aśvaghoṣa

Like the procession of a hero over the world, Aśvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita (The Tale of the Buddha) is a tale of transformation. The poem speaks of the future Buddha’s life as a youthful prince, sheltered within a world of regal splendor that shields him from any awareness of misery. The fantasy is shattered when he leaves the confines of his palace, and sees the famous triumvirate of old age, sickness, and death, which compels him to the path of renunciation and eventual enlightenment. In this excursion, which Aśvaghoṣa treats as a highly condensed figuration of worldly experience that foretells the prince’s subsequent rejection of its values, women become the primary symbol of his provocative effect on the world around him. They rush forth in their uncontrollable desire

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\(^{31}\)On Kālidāsa’s date, see Bakker 2006; Ingalls 1976; Saloman 1998: 233.

\(^{32}\)On the literariness of _kāvya_ in contradistinction to the “primary orality” of the earlier epics, see Pollock 2006: 86–88.
to see him and admire his beauty.

After hearing from the servants that the prince would be leaving the palace, the women were filled with a desire to see him, and went up to the mansions’ top floors after receiving permission from their elders.

Their eyes still bleary from sleep, they put on their jewelry at the news, tripping on the trailing strings of their girdles as they ran about wantonly in their curiosity.

As they bumped into one another in their haste, the slap of their feet on the mansions’ stairs and the jingling of their girdles and anklets frightened the birds that had flocked on the houses.  

Some voluptuous women, their haste growing with their eager desire, found their pace slowed by the heaviness of their full breasts, and their wide, chariot-like hips.

One unassuming woman, however, restrained herself and did not rush in haste, though she was able to move swiftly, and she shyly concealed the jewelry she had put on in private.

The windows were tumultuous with women who crushed against each other, their ornaments jingling and earrings clinking in the press of the crowd.

As the women’s lots faces emerged from the windows, their earrings pushing against each other, they seemed like lotuses clinging to the mansions.

The faces of these exceptional women looked like tied bouquets of lotuses, their earrings resting on each others’ cheeks because the windows were so narrow.

As they looked at the prince on the road, the women seemed as though they wanted to descend to the earth, while the men, looking at him with upraised faces, seemed as if they wanted to rise to heaven.

Seeing the prince so dazzling in his body and in his glory, the women sighed, “His wife is so fortunate,” and this pure thought held their minds spellbound.

For they placed great importance in him, as it was said that this man with long, sturdy arms, like the flower-banneed god of love given manifest form, would abandon royal glory and practice dharmam.

33Taking the Nepali ms. reading गा।।

34Buddhacarita 3.13–24: ततः कुमारः ख्रुु गण्डरीति शुच्या ख्रियः प्रेम्यजास्त्रृतिम्। दितुष्या हर्म्यंत्वानि जम्मुखे नान्य मान्येन कुतास्मन्तः।। ततः ग्रन्दृक्षुपुणिण्विन्ताधु सुन्द्रसुधाकुलोचनाधु। वुत्तानंदविन्यस्विभुषणाधु कौतुहलनाथवः। परिवु। प्रामादीपानतिल्यणाधुः काशौरूप्युपलमिन्वा। ग्रामायणन्ति पृथ्विभाजानायन्यवेवाधु समाधिनन्तः।। कामाचारानां तु बराडानानां जात्यामृतमां सोल्यानामः। गति सुरलाज्ञुज्ञुविश्वालः अष्णार्थः। प्रार्थत्याभ्रवः श्रीद्रश सम्भविः तु गन्तभयां गति निजियाह यथो न तृणमः। हिंयाप्रस्थान विनुभुमनान रहप्रयुक्तानि विभूषणानि। परमप्रतीहनस्विदानां संस्कारसिभित्कुष्मानामः।। ततान तदा सर्वनमुष्णानां बातायनेवप्रणामो
The parallels with the *Tirukkailāya Ṣāṇa Ulā* are obvious and everywhere. A magnificent city, “glorious in every way,” teeming with elegant women who forget everything else in their rush to see the parading hero. They find their senses overwhelmed as they dash to the windows and rooftops, adornments in disarray. They are compared with plants, with faces like lotuses emerging from the windows. And the parading hero, in a decisive turn in South Asian literary history to be repeated endless times by kings proclaiming their power, is compared in his beauty to Kāma, the “flower-banneered god of love.”

Aśvaghoṣa, though he may well have been the inventor of the *mahākāvya* literary form, seems to have appreciated this processional scene as an established trope, to be drawn into service and reworked for its clear dramatic potential. In the fourth canto of the poem, once the prince has seen men suffering from old age, sickness, and death, he reaches his destination: the pleasure gardens, where crowds of shapely women (*varāṅganāgaṇa*) await him still. Once more, the women, who appear to be courtesans, rush to him and are overwhelmed by the beauty of the man they identify as Kāma, god of love (vv. 4.3–4). Stirred to action by drunkenness and passion, paired realms of consciousness that coalesce throughout the history of this trope, they attempt to seduce the prince with all their skill. He rebuffs them, moving forward with impassive

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35 Pollock 2006: 70.
36 The garden takes on enormous importance in courtly works as the proving grounds for erotic desire. As Daud Ali has discussed (1996: 84), “Rejection, wooing, pouting, hiding, and seeking—all considered the modalities of erotic pleasure—unfold in the garden as the sport of love. Botanical imagery forms a crucial register in the representation of this love play, and garden forms perhaps the most important repertoire of signs in courtly poetry.”
37 When they are subsequently chastised by the prince’s companion Udāyin for standing transfixed, he urges them to demonstrate their mastery of the erotic arts by comparing their powers to legendary courtesans of old; see vv. 4.9–23.
resolve as he vows to triumph over the earth and rise above its limits. The procession continues on, and the prince will depart the palace, driven forward by the sight of a soured world. Once again, Aśvaghosa portrays experience of the world in the guise of movement through women, who now lie sleeping and disheveled on the palace floor, their beauty fallen in their snores and gaping mouths (4.46–57).

When the prince leaves his city forever, the poet turns to the processional trope a last time, in a captivating inversion of the parade that first took the prince beyond the confines of his shuttered world. The prince’s mighty horse Kanthaka returns unridden and despondent, led forward in a cheerless march by the weeping groom Chandaka (8.1–8.4). They enter a city devoid of the radiance of its hero, a city, as Aśvaghosa declares, that was śūnyam iva... divākareṇa iva vinākṛtaṃ nabhas, “as empty as the sky without the sun” (8.5). The women rush out to the windows to gaze upon the prince, see the unridden horse in its moroseful parade, and close their windows, sobbing (8.14). But they then hear the despairing horse Kanthaka neigh, and mistake its cries for joy. They rush outside in the belief that the prince has returned. But this is a mockery of procession, and they cry out in anguish as they see their hopes dashed.

Aśvaghosa plays with the conventions of the processional trope, upending its conceits to heighten the sense of a world turned upside down. The women wear dirty clothes, no makeup, and none of their adornments (8.21–22), collapsing in despair rather than passion. Some stand transfixed, this time in wretched sorrow (8.25). Their faces are again like lotuses, but now they pour with tears, like lotuses pummeled by the monsoon rains (8.27). In the end, they are left with nothing, and turn on each other, fighting among themselves. The prince has gone on to become the Buddha, and they have been left alone.
Raghuvaṃśa and Kumārasambhava of Kālidāsa

To judge from the identical set of verses he employed to portray royal processions in his two mahākāvyas, Kālidāsa seems to have viewed the trope of procession as a stock ingredient in the depiction of heroic power. Both are marriage processions, with a bridegroom riding in through the city streets, watched by crowds of adoring women, on his way to a wedded union that will inaugurate a renewed world order. In Raghuvaṃśa (The Lineage of Raghu), the procession marks the wedding of prince Aja and Indumatī, who would give birth to Daśaratha, father of Rāma, Hinduism’s ideal king. Kumārasambhava (The Birth of the Prince) depicts the union of Śiva and Pārvatī, who produce Kārtikeya, general in the war against the asura Tāraka, who had tyrannized the gods in the confidence of a divine boon that assured he could only be killed by a son of Śiva. The paired scenes are particularly striking given a conspicuous moment of invention: for Śiva’s marriage procession, Kālidāsa had to invent an entire city to provide the appropriate staging ground for the processional trope. Nowhere else do we learn of Oṣadhiprastha, the Himalayan capital of Pārvatī’s father Himavat where Kālidāsa has Śiva ride in to wed his bride.³⁸ An act of procession, it would seem, had become essential for such occasions.

In the seventh canto of Raghuvaṃśa, Aja marches in procession to the royal palace of King Bhoja of Vidarbha, where he is to wed Bhoja’s sister Indumatī.

³⁸A point brought to my attention by Lawrence J. McCrea, in personal conversation.
Still another, her eye fixed on the window, let her belt slip undone in her haste, and the gleam
of her bracelet lit up her navel as she held her dress together with her hand.

Another caught her half-tied girdle underfoot as she started from her chair, with no care for
the jewels that trickled down.

Crowded with such eager faces with eyes that roved like bees, the round windows seemed to
bloom with lotuses, awash with the scent of honeyed liquor.

These women knew of nothing else as they drank in the son of Raghu with their eyes, all other
senses consigned to the needs of sight.

“It’s quite right,” said one, “that this desirable woman, pursued by distant kings, thought
making her own choice best. How else could she obtain a husband worthy of herself, as Padmā
did Nārāyaṇa?”

“Those two long for each others’ charms; if they were not brought together, the labors the
Creator took to shape beauty in these two would have been for nothing!”

“These two must have been Rati and Smara, for this young woman has chosen her one true
partner out of thousands of kings; the heart, after all, knows the unions of previous lives!”

Hearing these words voiced by the women of the city, so pleasing to the ear, the prince
reached the house of his father-in-law, which was trimmed with auspicious decorations.39

Kumārasambhava alters the scene minimally, as required for narrative contiguity (changes are
here noted in capitalized text):40

JUST THEN, IN ROWS OF MANSIONS, the city’s lovely women dropped all they were doing,
leaving their pursuits unfinished in THEIR EAGERNES TO SEE THE LORD.41

One rushed hurriedly to the window without a thought of tying back her hair, flower garlands
shaking loose as she swept it back with her hand.

39vv. 7.5–16: तत्सर्वदासकपूतपराणाः सीधीयायामाननायाः सौधं चामीकरजालवस्। बभजिुरिणां त्यक्तायष्ठे निवेदितस्वामि।
आधोकामण्याशया जन्तुयाक्ष्मिन्दुराणवनामालयः। बहुः न समावेत एव ताब्लकरण ष्ट्रीपि हि केवापालः।
प्रसाधिकलमिभिन्तमापाद्वायुवह काठ्युद्रवाणेव। उत्तुष्टालागारामवशाधलाकाण्डको पदस्ती ततानः।
विलोचनं दक्षिणमूलनैन समावेत त्रुव्स्तिवामनेत्रा तैवेव तात्यान्वनस्मृताय यत्स्तत्कामपं बहुलौ।।
जालान्त्र्प्रशास्तीयप्याय प्रव्यावहिद्विन्नान न बहुः नीवीमुः।
नामिन्नविशये प्रभाणेण हलन्य तथावलन्य बासः।। अध्यातिता सत्वाविज्ञायायाः पदं पदं दूरकिष्ठये गलन्या।
क्षमाधिदासोऽद्र तदनीम्श्मूलनापितस्तुत्त्रेणा। तात्सां मुखिरामण्यमेवापितोऽत्तरा। मान्द्रकुंभकालानामः।
विलोचनं अर्यरनेवातः सहस्प्राणारणां इवानु।। ता रावयं वृद्धिमिधारिणवन्यो नायों न जमुवियाशान्यायाः।
तथा हि शैक्षमिधारुंत्रां वर्जयान्ना सचिविर्च प्रविग्धः।। स्वाते
वृत्ता पूर्पित्तिः। परीक्षेतः स्वयंवर्ष मृदाममत्ती भौज्या।
पचिंचे नार्यायनमयानाम सम्बं ततानं कथामात्मान्यम्।
परस्यपरे गृहुजिवोऽभिस्तः।। ततस्मृतं नृत्यमार्चितृसति राजाः सहस्त्रुपु तथा
हि भाला। गोदेवमात्रप्रतिरूपे मनो हि जगमात्रसंगतिर्योऽम्।
इत्युत्तरं। पौर्वधुमुखेयम्। शुष्कज्ञा। श्रोत्सुङ्खा। कुमारः।
उद्भवितं
मम्मातिवविधायः। सव्विन्न्यः सचा समासाद्यः।
40The passage also occurs in the seventh canto, vv. 56–68.
41v. 56: तस्मिन् दूररूपसर्वन्द्रियार्यामरसनयैधानासमानाः।
प्रासा। बभजुरिणां त्यक्तायष्ठे निवेदितस्वायाः।
Another, her toes still wet with lac, pulled her foot away from her chambermaid, abandoning her graceful pace as she left a red-stained path to the window.

Another raced to the window with her eye pencil still in hand, her right eye made up, her left untouched.

Still another, her eye fixed on the window, let her belt slip undone in her haste, and the gleam of her bracelet lit up her navel as she held her dress together with her hand.

Another caught her half-tied girdle underfoot as she started from her chair, with no care for the jewels that trickled down.

Crowded with such eager faces with eyes that roved like bees, the round windows seemed to bloom with lotuses, awash with the scent of honeyed liquor.

These women knew of nothing else as they drank in their fixation with their eyes, all other senses consigned to the needs of sight.42

"It's quite right," said one, "that Aparṇa, so delicate, endured such cruel self-torture; mere service to him would gratify a woman, let alone the warmth of his embrace!"43

"Those two long for each others' charms; if they were not brought together, the labors the Creator took to shape beauty in these two would have been for nothing!"

"Of course it was not his towering rage that burned the body of the god with flower arrows! I think that after seeing him, Kāma cast off his own body out of shame!"44

"How wonderful, my friend! Having gained the alliance with the Lord that he craved in his heart, the mountain king, who holds his head high to protect the earth, will hold it even higher!"45

Hearing these words of the beauties of Oṣadhiprastha, so pleasing to the ear, the three-eyed god reached the home of Himālaya, where the handfuls of grain being thrown were ground into dust by all the golden armbands.46

The paired scenes match Aśvaghṛṣa’s depiction of procession nearly point for point, though Kālidāsa adds touches of emphasis. The women drop what they are doing in their race to see the hero, and are given more space to express their admiration. But the narrative is essentially the same: women race to behold the hero, half-dressed in their haste, and their faces are compared to lotuses as they emerge from the windows of their mansions. Their minds become completely...
absorbed in gazing upon the hero, and they call out in praise, comparing him to the beautiful god of love, Kāma. And in all three cases, the hero is not described.

Why did Kālidāsa, a prolifically creative poet, find it so critical to include this scene, and preserve it with such minimal alteration? Like the ones that had come before, his processions mark turning points in history. Duḥṣanta progresses toward Śakuntalā, and sires Bharata, ruler of India; Arjuna progresses toward Ulūpī, and through their union enacts Pāṇḍava ascendancy over the nāga realm at the turn of the cosmic age; a young prince progresses toward the women who catalyze his rejection of temporal pleasures, precipitating the vow that will lead him to pronounce a new normative order as the Buddha. Kālidāsa drew upon the established representation of heroic glory in procession to render narratives that shared its motivating subject: how a sudden and profound enactment of power can sweep over the earth and change it. None of these three mahākāvyas attend to the nature of that power once it has arrived. They were far more interested in how it came to be.

The Poetics of Desire

Kālidāsa made a critical move in the history of the processional trope when he incorporated it into Kumārasambhava, for his was the act that transposed the relation between gender and power that it articulates to the context of theistic devotion. Others favored this move, for textual parallels suggest that the author of the first Tamil ulā knew Kālidāsa’s Sanskrit mahākāvya on Śiva. Take, for example, the process of Śiva’s adornment before his wedding parade. In Kālidāsa’s poem, Śiva is decked with gems and ornaments before he leaves his palace, and in this process the antinomian aspects of his character are transformed into refined objects of beauty. The white

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47 *Buddhacarita*—accepting the fourteen cantos preserved in Sanskrit—ends with the Buddha’s enlightenment, not the promulgation of his message. Taking *Raghuvaṃśa* and *Kumārasambhava* as works of eight cantos, both end before the transformative moments they presage. *Raghuvaṃśa* concludes with the death of Aja and the installation of Daśaratha as king; *Kumārasambhava* with Śiva and Pārvatī’s lovemaking to consummate their marriage.

48 A metamorphosis important to the purānic accounts of Śiva as well; see O’Flaherty 1981: 238–51.
ash that covers his body becomes a perfumed salve, and his grisly elephant-hide cape turns into exquisite silk (v. 7.32), while his mystic third eye transforms into a tilaka, the Śaiva sectarian mark (7.33). The snakes that coil around his body change into gem-covered ornaments (7.34). Śiva’s adornment in the Tirukkailāya Ōḷa follows the sequence closely. He is dusted “with fragrant wholesome powders” (v. 14) and clothed in fresh silk (16), and his forehead is then covered with “a shining plate bright with gems” (17). He is then beautified with ornaments on his ear, chest, arms, and belt (18–20), all places where Śiva traditionally wears snakes.

Once the procession begins, the identity and spatial position of the various participants in the parade are described with care, and the correspondences between the two poems clearly begin to emerge. Kumārasambhava describes Śiva being followed by the seven mothers, with Kālī behind them (7.38–39). The Tirukkailāya Ōḷa, for its part, states that “the seven mothers surrounded him / While Dūrgā rode on her powerful lion” (42). Kumārasambhava has the Ganges and Yamuna rivers coming to fan Śiva with chowries (7.42); the Ōḷa declares, “Suffused with the waters of the Yamuna and the peaceful Ganges / the holy ghats fanned him with billowing chowries” (30). The gods Brahma and Viṣṇu arrive to venerate him in both poems (7.43; 37–38), as do the Lokapālas (guardians of the quarters) and the seven sages (7.45, 47; 24–28). The vehicle for both processions, moreover, is Śiva’s faithful bull Nandin (7.49; 34).

The first Ōḷa shares more than textual equivalences with Kumārasambhava, it shares the ideals of its world. Kālidāsa’s texts are immersed in the ethos of courtly life, its values, ambitions and perils. The Tirukkailāya Ōḷa arises from this ethos, developing the seven stages of womanhood it portrays by relying on two central motifs that were already apparent in Kālidāsa’s verses. First, refined, beautiful woman enjoy leisurely pastimes in the city; they are then overwhelmed by an escalating wave of desire that tears them away from these activities as they rush to gaze upon Śiva. Kumārasambhava invokes these motifs in brief in its short processional scene; the Tirukkailāya Ōḷa—as South Asian works of literature so often did—expands the brief scene
into an involved work of literature. The attempt depended upon a defined set of cultured pastimes, a defined progression of erotic desire, and most tellingly, the belief that erotics and cultured arts are inseparable.

These assumptions arise from kāmasāstra, the principles of erotics, articulated most famously in the oldest extant example of the genre, Vātsyāyana’s Kāmasūtra. Likely composed in the second half of the third century in North India, the Kāmasūtra represents itself as what its best translators have termed it, “a distillation of the works of a number of authors who preceded him, authors whose texts have not come down to us.”\(^49\) But as Daud Ali has cautioned,\(^50\)

Though these texts certainly represent the culmination and refinement of previously existing traditions of knowledge (which are frequently cited on numerous points), the importance of their compilation in the early Gupta period should not be lost sight of. They together represent a sort of ‘enunciative moment’ for the concerns they take up.\(^50\)

Vātsyāyana’s text, then, can be taken as broadly indicative of the cultural stage that shaped the artistry of the related interpretations of Śiva in procession; one in Sanskrit, and its heir in Tamil. The Kāmasūtra is a long and complex text, and here I want to touch only on the qualities of urbane life that it espouses as they bear on the depiction of the procession as it moves from its Sanskrit expressions to Tamil verse, where it grows to take major importance.

The Kāmasūtra speaks to urban aesthetes about their world.\(^51\) The practices it describes compose a way of cultured life, a model for behavior that would allow a person with the right parentage, wealth, and talent to move successfully in the society of the powerful. At its top stood the royal court, where as Daud Ali has argued, the protocol of manners outlined in the Kāmasūtra was far more than an overlay of affect floating above the workings of state, it constituted the relations of government. “The activities of the court,” he emphasizes, “in an important sense were


\(^{50}\)Ali 2004: 72.

the activities of state.”

Rulers, be they human beings or temple gods, had public lives acted out through these practices. Following Ali,

The evidence for the origin of early medieval religious ideas points instead to significant interaction with contemporary practices and conceptions of lordship, and the rise and proliferation of many important ideas in both contexts seems to have been broadly contemporaneous. In fact, religious and political notions of lordship differed more in degree than in kind. They formed part of a continuous and homologously structured ‘chain of being’ that linked the entire cosmos. This, on the one hand, meant that the king’s authority and mystique resembled and participated in that of the temple god, giving a theological dimension to relationships at court. On the other hand, however, it meant that the life of the gods, housed in their sumptuous palaces, shared striking resemblances to those of princes.

Kālidāsa’s ability to effectively appeal to the processional trope to proclaim the worldmaking mastery of heroes in both his mahākāvyas depended upon this fundamental interconnection. Aja is a human king imbued with divine fortune; Śiva is a god charged with the powers of royal rule. The fact that ulās were written for both gods and kings flows from the inherent likeness of their agency in the world.

The hero sits at the peak of a tradition of practices that enact his power, and procession stood as one of the most potent ways to enact their order in a spectacular ritual moment. The hero, when he advances over the land, is not simply mapping out the territory he controls. The ritual of procession maps out human beings. The hero in motion asserts a set of relationships that all who accept his power, whether willingly or not, participate in hierarchically as total subordinates to their master. It is that heightened moment in the ideological order when subjects with complex identities, expressive of the mingled qualities of deference to some and dominance over others, become fully servile. They may be masters later, but not in the ritual of procession. When the hero passes by, he alone will be a master, and all others will instinctively yield.

52 Ali 2004: 7. Indeed, as Doniger and Kakar observe (2004: xi), the Kāmasūtra appears to have been closely modeled on the seminal text on statecraft, Kauṭilya’s Arthaśāstra.

This maximal assertion of cultural dominance is why the only onlookers in the processional trope are women. It is a sexist vision to the core, playing off the deep cultural logic of male authority and its tractable, nurturing female substrate. They are, however, not just any women, but narrative characters rendered to embody the very heights of the culture that the hero governs. They are wealthy, leisured, and refined, epitomizing with their bodies and practices the ideal set of relationships that constitute their society. The women in an ulā are always absorbed in artistic pursuits before the hero arrives, pursuits which the Kāmasūtra frames as a prescribed set of sixty-four ancillaries (aṅgāvidyās) that are to be studied in conjunction with its own principles of erotics. In sum, they are:

singing; playing musical instruments; dancing; painting; cutting leaves into shapes; making lines on the floor with rice-powder and flowers; arranging flowers; colouring the teeth, clothes, and limbs; making jewelled floors; preparing beds; making music on the rims of glasses of water; playing water sports; unusual techniques, making garlands and stringing necklaces; making diadems and headbands; making costumes; making various earrings; mixing perfumes; putting on jewelry; doing conjuring tricks; practising sorcery; sleight of hand; preparing various forms of vegetables, soups, and other things to eat; preparing wines, fruit juices, and other things to drink; needlework; weaving; playing the lute and the drum; telling jokes and riddles; completing words; reciting difficult words; reading aloud; staging plays and dialogues; completing verses; making things out of cloth, wood, and cane; woodworking; carpentry; architecture; the ability to test gold and silver; metallurgy; knowledge of the color and form of jewels; skill at nurturing trees; knowledge of ram-fights, cock-fights, and quail-fights; teaching parrots and mynah birds to talk; skill at rubbing, massaging, and hair-dressing; the ability to speak in sign language; understanding languages made to seem foreign; knowledge of local dialects; skill at making flower carts; knowledge of omens, alphabets for use in making magical diagrams; alphabets for memorizing; group recitation; improvising poetry; dictionaries and thesauruses; knowledge of meter; literary work; the art of improvisation; the art of using clothes for disguise; special forms of gambling; the game of dice; children’s games; etiquette; the science of strategy; and the cultivation of athletic skills.  

Many of these practices concern the refined presentation of the body—a body, in the case of the processional narrative, that will start to shed these refinements to reveal the generative fertility

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54 Kāmasūtra 1.3.15; translation by Doniger and Kakar 2002.
The Kāmasūtra also specifies the abodes that should serve as the appropriate venues for praxis, describing them as luxurious residences in an urban area, graced with an array of elegant furnishings.\textsuperscript{56} Not surprisingly, considering the Kāmasūtra’s declared subject, attention centers on a bed reserved for lovemaking.\textsuperscript{57} Such a home is described as owned by a man styled as a nāgaraka, the urbane man upon whom the Kāmasūtra focuses, but for a poetic account of procession, in which the man moves through the streets, the homes become those of women alone. Ulās, in fact, can usefully be viewed as the poetic interpretation of kāmaśāstra’s dictates from a woman’s point of view. And in matters of sexuality, the Kāmasūtra gives the foundational account of the nature of erotic passion that would guide the ulā poets as they wrote of women who succumb.

Sexuality takes place within a larger world of refined practice, as Vātsyāyana’s treatment of the ancillary cultural arts affirms. As in battle, lovemaking involves aggression and defense, enjoyable in both roles. A resistance that relents is not always, under these idealized principles, an unwilling capitulation, but can also be a deliberate act of its own, accomplished to maximize pleasure. Lovers use practiced techniques to maneuver over the terrain of battle and gain advantage. The aim is to enjoy the delights of sexual pleasure without being held captive by their ultimate motivation, while simultaneously deploying erotic tactics to best advantage in order to provoke the desire of the partner. The Tirukkailāya Ōṉa Ulā invokes these principles from the outset, using paranomastic verse to compare kāmaśāstra’s imagery of battle to compare the lovemaking that takes place in the women’s beds before Śiva arrives to the first charge of war. As they make love inside their mansions,

\textsuperscript{55}Ali 1996: 76 considers the pronounced emphasis on bodily adornment in the sixty-four aṅgavidyās as an aspect of the role of bodies in the practice of courtly life.
\textsuperscript{56}Kāmasūtra 1.4.1–4.
\textsuperscript{57}Kāmasūtra 1.4.4.
...the beds of flower-decked women
are taken as sexual battlefields,

Fine anklets are drums, red-streaked eyes the arrows
and long arching eyebrows become the bows,

Burnished hair cascades down their backs, bangles jingle,
lustrous mounds are the war chariots that buck and sway,

Round, glowing breasts are rearing elephants, enchanting their masters,
as graceful jeweled women move their bodies to make love in battle...\(^{58}\)

When Śiva arrives, there will be no battle, and the women are swiftly overcome. They collapse
in their desire almost immediately. Here, the ulā poets turn to a typification of sexual attraction
that kāmasāstra enumerates as a set of ten progressively overpowering stages of desire. As the
Kāmasūtra describes them,

Now, there are ten stages of desire, and their signs are: love at first sight, the attachment of
the mind and heart, the stimulation of the imagination, broken sleep, weight loss, revulsion
against sensual objects, the loss of all sense of shame, madness, loss of consciousness, and
death.\(^{59}\)

In the ulās, where dominance through sexuality is asserted with maximal force, the poets stress
the mastery of the hero by condensing the stages into an incredibly concentrated experience
of passion. The women are introduced busily engaged in artistic pastimes drawn from the aṅ-
gavidyās, perhaps enjoying music or teaching a pet bird to talk. When the hero approaches, the
poet describes them as they pass through the ten stages of desire in minutes, leaving them col-
lapsing unconscious in the arms of their companions as the hero moves impassively forward.

When their condensed vital energy has expended itself and they lie at the brink of death, the

\(^{58}\)vv.62–65: மலரா அம்மய | டோய ஓா்கள மாு்ஷா் பைறயாக» ேசயÛ¹க¾ அÂபா | Ýலºþ ĭாĂÂĆĉவÂ ÝÅலா – னலÀÖகČÂ || ĐைழØÊ தாழ வைள ஆÄÁப¹ ைகŏாÀĄ |
ேகÇÐளĉÂ அÅþலாÀ ேதĉÀÖ» – Ēľாßய || ĭாºைகமாÁ ķாºக¹ ĭாČநÄ மனºகவர | அºகÂ கâ் தாழயாÄ.

\(^{59}\)Kāmasūtra 5.1.4–5; translation by Doniger and Kakar 2002.
hero moves forward, taking the narrative focus with him and leaving what happens next beyond the boundaries of the text.

3.4 Expressions of Interiority

At this nascent point of the literary depiction of procession, marked in this study by its passage into Tamil verse, what is there to be learned about the poetic depiction of desire that lends itself to an understanding of the subject heart? In the Mahābhārata, very little, for the good reason that the text does not absorb itself in this question. In Arjuna’s encounter with Ulūpi, a transformation of the self is certainly at work, for Ulūpi feels herself to have radically changed, and describes herself as being overwhelmed, held captive to a desire that cruelly pains her and has driven her to the point where she fears for her life. She reflects this plight, however, only in the substance of her words: their delivery is measured and careful. If she has been overwhelmed, it is not in her capacity for reason, which she calls on relentlessly. We learn little about how her encounter with Arjuna, and the desire it kindled within her, affects the later course of her life. Arjuna rises with the dawn to leave her, taking the narrative focus with him. If Ulūpi has changed, if her encounter with the Pāṇḍava hero has altered her self-understanding in any way, the Mahābhārata leaves the answer hidden in the shadows of the text. Its pressing concern is to show the extent of the Pāṇḍavas’ dominion over the earth after the founding of their capital, and Ulūpi’s response to Arjuna demonstrates how potent their dominance can be.

A Mind Transformed by Passion

Ulūpi has an answer, as do the women in the processions found in Buddhacarita and the mahākāvyas of Kālidāsa. The mind-churning power of Kāma has caused her obsessive passion. Ulūpi’s desire for the processing hero is not a matter of her own choosing. Certainly she is willing, quite hope-
lessly so, but she describes this as the result of a transformation that has descended on her as if from above. In all instances of this trope, women who behold a passing hero feel and speak of a distinct rightness to their passion, which appeals to an order far more organic, and more central to the flow of existence than any fleeting personal whim.

As the processional narrative moves into the world of Sanskrit court poetry, however, the hero and heroine will never meet, nor converse with one another. And unlike so many of the great romances in Sanskrit literature, there are no messengers to send. The gulf between the actors has become substantial, even forbidding, and the narrative perspective cleaves to a new side. The focus has now turned to the women who watch. As we observe their response to the hero, who through this narrative device becomes as distant to readers as he is to the women themselves, we are increasingly drawn into their emotional response as they watch. Arjuna’s encounter with Ulūpī kept the narrative focus closely on him, as but one cursory incident in a life of heroic deeds. In the early Sanskrit mahākāvyas, the reader is moved quite abruptly from attention to the hero, and turned to the response of those who watch. The maneuver gives the poets far greater opportunity to explore the women’s actions as they break from their pastimes, and reveal their consuming desire. What emerges in consequence is a far more promising space to depict the transformation of selves in the presence of power.

The women become precipitous, heedless of anything else as their need to gaze upon the passing hero takes over their sense and casts discretion to the winds. They trip, half-dressed, as they race forward, forgetting themselves in their urgency. These are not women, such details suggest, who would be capable of engaging in the sort of cogent persuasion at which Ulūpī proved so adept. As Kālidāsa stresses, “These women knew of nothing else as they drank in their fixation with their eyes, all other senses consigned to the needs of sight.”

In contrast to the passion that drives Ulūpī, which impelled her towards Arjuna but whose

60Kumārasambhava v. 63.
broad effects on her personality cannot be distinguished, the women in these Sanskrit court poems shift away from much of what characterized them before, hallmarks such as careful adornment, gracefulness, and modesty. The sight of the hero carries them to a new experiential reality, singularly focused and quite alien to the demands of social grace or reasoned justification.

Creating a Sense of Passage

Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa depict this transformation as a sense of passage through space. When the prince makes his way through the city streets in *Buddhacarita*, no one is where they want to be: their awareness begins to flow out away from the place where their bodies are physically located, along with all the usual considera-tions of social prestige and segregation that an individual’s place in such a ceremonial event would carry with it. “As they looked at the prince on the road,” Aśvaghoṣa writes, “the women seemed as though they wanted to descend to the earth, while the men, looking at him with upraised faces, seemed as if they wanted to rise to heaven.”61 The women dash to their outer edges of their inhabited world, their physical movement seeming to provide momentum for their self-awareness as it arcs out beyond the confines of their bodies and immerses itself in the sight of the hero. Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa employ a shared motif to develop this sense of acceleration, and one that was to become pervasive: the windows from which the women emerge. Kālidāsa speaks of them again and again, as *gavākṣa*, *vātāyana*, and *jālāntaram* in the first few verses alone. The women burst forth through the windows, and crowd themselves into the open air outside. And there, poised between their routine world of carefully measured self-presentation and conduct, and the impossible fragility of the air where their inner selves would travel if only they could pass, they bloom like lotuses, flourishing in the radiant light that flows outward from the hero.

The nature of the self in the face of power had become important to the poets, who increas-

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61 *Buddhacarita* 3.22.
ingly emphasize the protean nature of a self that is thrust from routine and out to somewhere else, where habituated identities cannot follow. But what is this newness, the place such selves rush toward? We are not granted access to the women’s consciousness at this early point, a real difference with what was to follow. The reader is given clues, in the reflexive spontaneity of their transition and in the way they flourish once they cross the interstice that the poets mark with windows, but is still kept from the private reshaping of thought and awareness.

Have the women changed through this experience, and become something new, as such a dramatic moment of experience might set in motion? Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa suggest not, and indeed create something of a jarring moment of interruption as they turn the women’s minds back from where they have gone and deposit them back into an attitude of formulaic praise. Immediately after Kālidāsa describes women who know of nothing else as they drink in the hero with their eyes, “all other sense consigned to the needs of sight,” they launch into the predictable tributes of a placid observer. The early Sanskrit instances of procession intimate that something drastic can occur when passionate desire strikes, casting the self beyond its accustomed limits into newness, but they do so only in flickers, and quickly pull readers back from a point where they might have learned more. The self has become more malleable, and upon to untold possibility in these texts, but towards what end and with what effect is a path not given to follow. To trace how a self may change in the heightened moment of the processional encounter, we must turn to the Tamil precedents for ulā, and seek answers in Tamil poetry’s own associations of the earthly and the feminine.
CHAPTER 4

BRINGING THE NAIVE TO ORDER

From the bright spear that King Kōtai throws
his garland loose with open blooms
drifts the scent of sandalwood
and the reek of raw flesh.
On one side, honeybees twirl with their drones
on the other, little jackals romp in thanks.

MUTTOĻṆĪYIRAM

4.1 Seduction is Violence

When the Sanskrit court poets removed their narrative lens away from the hero himself, and turned it instead on the women who yearn for the hero as he moves in procession, they developed a remarkably persuasive means of demonstrating his profound effect on the world around him. We are no longer an audience watching the narrative unfold with distanced eyes, as we did in

1 Mutoḷḷāyiram lacks established verse numbering.)
Arjuna’s encounters with Ulūpī over the course of the Bhārata war. When Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa portray their heroes in procession, they press us to recognize ourselves in these women. Their descriptive strategy makes us appreciate the power that heroes have to transform their domain because we participate in the women’s moments of privacy, and see in the most personal detail how their lives are overwhelmed by the desire the hero provokes. The emphasis in these accounts is on a single heightened moment of transformation, when the women pass from their routine lives and on to something new, where previously unforeseen possibilities seem to lie just out of reach. Since this narrative stance aligns us not with the cause but rather its experiential effect, readers stand with the women, distanced from the hero but open to the newness that his presence sparks into life.

A great deal, however, still stands between the women watching a hero in procession whom we find in Buddhacarita, Raghuvamśa, and Kumārasambhava, and the intense focus on a woman’s own understanding of her emotions that makes the Tirukkaḷaṉaiya Ṇāṇa Ulā such a compelling work of art. The ulās do not stop where Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa leave us, amidst the private world of women yet outside their own understanding of how they experience this world. We must move, therefore, to the Tamil poetry that heralded this change, a set of texts and artistic ideals that saw the inner life of women as its canvas, a view that passes beyond what can be seen as an observer in order to approach all that can be known by the heart. In this journey, moreover, a potent feature of the encounter between woman and processing hero, lost for a time in the celebratory exultations of the Sanskrit texts discussed in Chapter Three, emerges quite forcefully back into view: the doubled guise of the erotic moment, where sexual pleasure is unmistakably bound to violence. For the Tamil poets, gaining access to a woman’s emotions as she responds to her desires means joining her in seeing this doubled edge, struggling to sort out how the two sides of desire interact, even as she is overcome with a passion that she often takes for cruelty. They are, as the Tamil verse that begins this chapter suggests, two sides of the same keen blade.
The Caṅkam Beginnings

In the rich world of Tamil poetry, any discussion of the feminine has to start at the beginning, with the body of texts known as caṅkam literature. The name speaks to a fabled series of events that collected these poems into anthologies, for “caṅkam” (Sanskrit saṅgha) means “academy,” a reference to the three literary academies traditionally held to have composed and judged the poems. These three academies of scholars, said to have convened for a total of 9,990 years, extend into the deep recesses of mythical time.² The first two reach back to an antediluvian past, in two cities, Southern Maturai and Kapāṭapuram, that “the seas took” (kaṭal koṇṭatu); prominent at the first were the sage Agastya, the legendary author of the first Tamil grammar (now lost to the tradition), the gods Kubera, Murukaṉ, and “the god with fanning dreadlocks, who burned the triple city,” Śiva himself.

The founding presence of gods, ancient cities swallowed by the waters (a common trope, also associated with Dvārakā and Hastināpuram), and the sweeping flow of mythic time leave almost nothing for the historical eye to glean, and the controversies involved in attempting to date caṅkam poetry still have a dispiriting tendency to overwhelm any broader discussion of Tamil literature. None of the problems involved in dating this literature, however, nor the reasons why they give rise to such acrimony, bear much on what actually stands before us as caṅkam literature today: a body of roughly 2,300 poems that in the legacy of Tamil poetry are of exceptional value both for their content and for their form. The poems speak to, but may not actually reflect, an ancient past in which Brahmanic values held but minor sway, and the craft of their design stands as the first articulation of literary conventions unique to Tamil poetry. Disputes about

²The *locus classicus* for the myth of the three Tamil caṅkams is Nakkīraṉār’s prose commentary on the first nūrpā (verse) of Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ, a treatise on standards for Tamil love poetry. The text’s date is uncertain, with the *terminus a quo* associated with a King Netumāṟañ of Maturai, held to have ruled in the late seventh century, who is praised in the text’s illustrative verses. An eighth-century date has commonly been assigned to the work as a whole (Buck and Paramasivam 1997: xi; Aruṇācalam 2005: vol. 3, pp. 166–183), though the attribution rests on fragile premises.
caṅkam poetry arise because both of these features have the potential to reveal a southern culture that was largely independent of values conveyed in Sanskrit texts, and to demonstrate this culture’s independent sophistication. Not surprisingly, given this state of affairs, the study of caṅkam literature has attracted strong views, anywhere from championing the glories of an idyllic Tamil past that existed before Sanskrit came along and ruined everything, to the conviction that so far as Tamil goes, Sanskrit and culture should be seen as one. A protracted legacy of struggle between brahman and non-brahman parties in Tamil Nadu over the past 150 years or so has regularly turned discussions of caṅkam literature into a forced choice between these two extreme positions. This being the case, much more than a set of ancient poems can hang in the balance when questions about the antiquity of caṅkam literature arise.3

Since the purpose of this study does not turn on modern politics of Tamil identity, however, the challenge lies in addressing the seminal question of how accurately these poems reflect the world they depict, not in showing how they are routinely used to advance contemporary fortunes. Even when we exclude the fantastic claims made by partisans, the dates that have been advanced for caṅkam poetry can differ by many centuries, which, perhaps suggestively, tend to spread out from that most insistent anchor of dating, the Christian era. The need to continue searching for evidence that can shed new light on caṅkam dating is of course a real desideratum, but neither do involving questions of date change one clear fact: there were many Tamil texts composed prior to the Tirukkailāya ṇāna Ulā, and such texts made important contributions to the history of the ulā genre itself. The issue of caṅkam dating is introduced here purely in service of that inquiry, namely, how the norms of early Tamil poetics might condition themes that ulās took up as their own.

The prevailing date for caṅkam literature runs to the early centuries CE, generally from the

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3Many studies take up the question of caṅkam literature’s role in contemporary Tamil politics; see for instance Irschick 1969, Sivathamby 1978, Kailasapathy 1979, and Ramaswamy 1997.
first through third centuries, though their compilation into anthologies is held to have occurred some centuries later. The case can be made, however, for caṅkam literature to have been composed far, far later than the world it purports to describe, perhaps even later than the Tirukkālaiyā Naṇa Ulā’s own time. Were this to be the case, the poems may be describing an archaic past that never in fact took place, written for reasons that spoke to contemporary struggles for power rather than faithfully portraying a society that was already many centuries distant.

The problem that scholars who assert an early date for caṅkam literature have to confront is a very serious one: there are simply no indisputable historical ties that assign the poems to the early centuries CE. The well-known “Gajabahu synchronism” that is regularly adduced to link the Gajabahu of Cilappatikāram with the caṅkam-era Cēra king Čeṅkuṭṭavaṅ is of questionable validity, and the identification of names in three inscriptions from Pukalūr with Cēra kings praised in the caṅkam anthology Patirṛuppattu remains, in the absence of any corroborative evidence, too slight to carry the entire weight of this chronology.

The revisionist account, however, meets with its own serious difficulties, for it introduces a further set of confounding mysteries. Most conspicuously, caṅkam poems display extensive,

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4 Sastri 1975: 115–118 provides a well-known summary of this position. Poems in the akam anthologies are organized on the basis of length, rather than subject matter, which gives credence to distinct periods of composition and compilation.

5 The account offered by Herman Tieken, in which he argues that the terminus a quo for caṅkam poetry cannot be earlier than the revival of Pāṇṭiya rule towards the end of the eighth century, asserts this view (Tieken 2001, esp. 128–151). The caṅkam poems, in his account, were written to strengthen the ruling claims of Pāṇṭiya kings by manufacturing ancestral continuity with the Pāṇṭiya kings of a mythic past, to whom the latter Pāṇṭiya line bore no actual relation.


7 This identification, which has been described as “celebrated since 1968 as the new sheet-anchor of Caṅkam chronology” (Wilden 2002: 124), was first set forth by the pioneering Tamil epigraphist Iravatham Mahadevan. In his view, “The identification of the Irumpōrai princes of the Pugalur inscriptions with those celebrated in Patirṛuppattu yields one of the most important synchronisms found so far to determine the dates of the contemporary princes and poets of the Caṅkam Age from about the middle of the 1st century to the middle of the 3rd century A.D.” (2003: 117). The two sets of names are not identical. In the Pukalūr inscriptions, the three names are Kō Ātaṅ Čēl Irumpōrai, Peruṅkantarōṅgō, and Kaṭuṅkōṅ Iḷaṅkantarōṅg, which are to be respectively identified with Celvak Kaṭuṅkō Vāli Ātaṅ, Peruṅcēral Irumpōrai, and Iḷaṅcēral Irumpōrai.
systematic differences in grammar and vocabulary from other Tamil genres, and many lexemes that appear consistently in the development of the Tamil language bear meanings in the caṅkam poems that differ a great deal from later usages. Still further, the earliest metapoetic treatise to lay out the guiding principles for caṅkam poems, Tolkāppiyam, speaks of meters and styles not found in the extant corpus, suggesting that what we now know as caṅkam literature does not reflect the full extent of what was once available. K. Sivathamby’s discussion of this point merits quoting at some length:

The question is, are the poems that we have in the collections now all that were available for compilation? Could there have been the possibility of some poems being left out because of some policy decisions, about which we know nothing now, of the one who commissioned the compilation? Tōlkappiyam has provided enough clues to raise these doubts. In Ceyyuliyal we find reference works which have a length limit and those which have no limit of length (Ceyyuliyal, 63). They are Nul (Treatises), Urai (Prose), Pici (Riddles), Mutumoli (Proverbs), Mantiram (Magical utterances), Kurippu (Satire or it could even be charms), and Pannatti (Lyrics)... we do not have instance of many of these in the preserved literature. Those preserved are largely of the akam and puram type. Of that, the preserved akam poems are in a metre (Akaval) not referred to as, at least, the most suitable for that. The suitable metres, it is said are Kali and Paripattu (Akattinai Iyal, 53). Even the poems collected under akam theme have a strong political bias. All these raise the question whether we are basing our historical deductions on an anthology which was highly selective and not representing the entire literary production. The highly schematized anthologies seem to indicate that they are more selections and not collections.

Tolkāppiyam’s own date, particularly that of its final section Poruḷatikāram, is uncertain, but this has no real bearing on the argument, since if caṅkam literature is a late creation intended to have an archaizing effect, the poems should be expected to accord with the treatise supposed to explain them, be it descriptive, prescriptive, or an admixture thereof.

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8Tieken’s account is particularly susceptible to criticism when close attention is paid to the style and grammar of the caṅkam poems. Eva Wilden’s review of Tieken’s work, for example, demonstrates how he attributes definite readings to highly ambiguous grammatical constructions in service of his larger claims (Wilden 2002). George Hart has also shown that Tieken errs in his calculations when he argues that the caṅkam collections reveal a coherent, systematized pattern of arrangement at the level of the lexeme, and are thus not “anthologies” at all (Hart 2004). Still further, V. S. Rajam makes a convincing argument that the reason commentators on caṅkam poems treat many words as acai, euphonic filler, is that the words themselves had already become obsolete (1992: 3–5), which if true makes a very strong case against assigning a late date to caṅkam literature.

More importantly, if cañkam literature indeed serves to fabricate a glorified past, what would have been the interest in doing so?\textsuperscript{10} There is no clear reason why authors removed by many centuries from the world described by the cañkam poems would choose such a convoluted—and highly uncertain—way to assert their own relationship to power, and there is no clear idea of how such a strategy would work. The interests involved in such a project are not transparent, nor are they self-explanatory.\textsuperscript{11} In my view, those who propose a late date for cañkam literature have to tackle this challenge head-on, and give persuasive, historically demonstrable reasons for why writing a considerable amount of exceptionally difficult poetry, devising a complex poetic system that such poetry would fulfill, and then completely obscuring its real origins would actually be worth anyone’s time.

As this telegraphic presentation suggests, my judgment, given the state of the evidence available to us, is to accept provisionally an early date for the poems, but stress that the limitations to confidence on this point are robust enough to reject an early date for cañkam literature as the basis for any faithfulness to the social world it depicts. Fortunately, certainty in this regard is not a binding precondition for understanding the literary currents that flow into the ulā genre, regardless of whether or not cañkam literature is relatively early or late, and whether or not Sanskrit literary models influenced its own development. By the time that the Tirukkailāya Ūṇa Ulā was composed, the cañkam poems were consciously understood by their audience as a coherent body of texts that expressed a identifiably Tamil literary sensibility. Coherent, because the cañkam poems were either in the process of being compiled or had already been compiled into thematically arranged anthologies by the time of the first ulā, and Tamil, because the treatises

\textsuperscript{10} A point noted in reviews of Tieken’s account of the date for cañkam literature, as for example Monius (2002: 1406).

\textsuperscript{11} Terry Eagleton remarks on the ascension of “interest” as a patently reliable category with typical esprit: “In some such styles of thinking, a transcendentalism of truth is merely ousted by a transcendentalism of interests. Interests and desires are just ‘givens,’ the baseline which our theorizing can never glimpse behind; they go, so to speak, all the way down, and we can no more inquire where they actually came from than we could usefully ask the Enlightenment ideologues about the sources of their own Olympian rationality.” (1991: 172–73)
on hand to explain the poetic techniques found in caṅkam poems, Tolkāppiyam and Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ, describe them as bound to Tamil regions, and make no manifest appeal to Sanskrit poetic norms.12

As Sivathamby’s work has emphasized, the collection of a wide variety of poems into the caṅkam anthologies reveals a rich consciousness of Tamil literary heritage, a discernible moment when old texts were relevant to the present.13 The colophons appended to the anthologies occasionally give not only the names of the kings who sponsored the poems’ compilation, but also the names of the compilers, suggesting that the larger project of textual consolidation and transmission was intimately bound up with the royal court.14 The life of the court, as argued in the previous chapter, is a heritage that the Tirukkailāya Ċaṅa Ulā knew well and used to fashion its own imagined world, and it is not hard to imagine that caṅkam literature could have conferred a wealth of techniques for developing its regal vision of Śiva and the power he extends over the women who behold him.

Poetry of the Heartland

What, then, would caṅkam poetry have offered to the author of the first ulā? A way of portraying the world through conventional patterns of representation that an audience would know as their own. Caṅkam poems bisect their representations of life into two broad divisions, known as akam and puram, interior and exterior. Both geographic and experiential in nature, these categories are relative, addressing life from contrasting perspectives. The various shades of meaning for the word akam found in the caṅkam poems themselves demonstrate quite well what is at stake here: the house, the fortified region of a country, and the people who live within that region.15

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12See, for example, Tolkāppiyam II.9, and Nakkiraṉār’s commentary on the first nūṟpā of Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ, describing the loss and rediscovery of the significance (poruḷ) of poetry in the Tamil country.
13Sivathamby 1986: 30–35.
14Cutler 2003: 305.
poetry, that is, describes what lies within the familiar boundaries of the characters’ own land and home, centering on an inner world of personal experience and reflection. It meditates on emotions, family life, and above all sexual desire. Puṟam, by contrast, describes what lies beyond the limits of home, a land where danger and the opportunity to confront it present themselves to the bold. It explores the acts of kings and heroes, glorifying their courage and skill in combat, and praising the righteousness of the order that such men set in place.

The division between these two views of the world can be drawn in a variety of ways: exploring the emotions that arise during intimate, familiar experience versus mapping an outer world of the unknown; knowledge of the self versus accounts of the famous; family and domestic life versus confrontation with strangers; and, in the broadest terms, a domain of established cultural ideals versus a domain where these ideals are not shared or have yet to be imposed. As such possibilities imply, akam and puṟam differ in their apprehension of time and the nature of events. While the puṟam world concerns itself with historically transformative actions grounded in a distinct time and place, the conditions of akam infuse a sense of recurrence, and a distance from events that often reaches into the formal world of archetype. Personal names, for example, are not to be used in akam, only in puṟam. In terms of theme, we find in puṟam poems great men praised in bardic song, celebrated for glorious deeds that shaped the past and inspire reverence, while in akam the sensibility transcends historical contingency in order to advance the idea that there are essential, unvarying dimensions of human experience.

Just as there is no interior without an exterior, akam and puṟam do not address two independent domains but are different perspectives on a dynamic whole. The perspectives are blended

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16Themes, as many have noted, closely shared by the Prakrit gāthās of Hala’s Sattasaī, as well as much of Sanskrit poetry, so if by the “uniqueness” of akam poetry one really means its difference from Indo-Aryan conventions writ large, the attribution turns on formal technique rather than content (cf. Hart 1999: 252–280).

17Tolkāppiyam III.56–57: “When people are mentioned in connection with the five broad landscapes, the name of an individual is not to be employed. It may be suited for applying to the puṟam mode, but certainly not for applying to the akam mode.” (ம¹க േதுய வகைனா எண்டுள் | அம உரியவு உரியவு எண்டுள் | உரியவு உரியவு எண்டுள் | உரியவு உரியவு எண்டுள். | அம உரியவு உரியவு எண்டுள் | உரியவு உரியவு எண்டுள் | உரியவு உரியவு எண்டுள் | உரியவு உரியவு எண்டுள்.)
from the beginning, and poets regularly address political concerns within their treatment of akam themes. Indeed, as a system that could happily be blended with other elements while maintaining its own structured integrity, akam appears to have had greater currency with Tamil poets even by the time that the anthologies were compiled: while the akam collections include records of the circumstances of their compilation, no such evidence remains for the puram materials.\textsuperscript{18} Akam, to a degree that is not matched by puram, realizes the Tamil poetic spirit. It is what is known to the self, a self, particularly, that is transforming into newness through the experience of love. Though moments of passionate joy are exceptional and fleeting, by transcending the details of individual lives, the Tamil poets saw in these moments a constancy representative of the profound depth of human experience; what it means, in short, to be a self. When the commentator Nakki\text{ra\text{\`{a}}}r begins to describe akam, to take a famous example, his choice of words is striking. He does not call this poetic world akam, but chooses instead a far more telling appellation. “Next, the subject matter,” he declares, “which is to say the contents of the text. What does this book consider? It considers Tamil.”\textsuperscript{19} Tamil is akam and akam is Tamil, the world of the heartland, from the principles shared by an entire culture to the deepest, most individual expressions of human feeling.

If non-specialists know one thing about Tamil literature, it is that caṅkam poets draw upon a carefully arrayed system of indicative symbols, ranging from natural phenomena such as plants and birds, to characteristic social activities such as raiding an enemy’s cattle, or going abroad to seek wealth. Appreciating a caṅkam poem depends both on knowing the symbolic system, and understanding how the connections drawn between the various elements imply other aspects of the system as a whole. When competent readers encounter a symbolic element in a poem, they will understand the broader patterns that this discrete element calls upon, from trees or fish to

\textsuperscript{18}Sivathamby 1981: 106.

\textsuperscript{19}Commentary on the first nūṟpā of Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ: இந்த தலங்களின் குறிப்பிட்டு—தலங்களின் குறிப்பிட்டுக்கான வரலாறு வரலாறு. இந்த தலங்கள் குறிப்பிட்டுக்கான வரலாறு வரலாறு.
a meticulously typified experience of the love that develops between a hero and heroine over the course of their lives. Though both the akam and puram perspectives embrace such systems, the akam taxonomy assumed far greater importance for the poets, a system that marked the distinctive genius of Tamil literature even as it left the caṅkam world of akam itself and began to be applied to other poetic contexts.

The organization of the akam system, given in the Akattinai (“Landscape of the Heartland”) section of Tolkāppiyam, stipulates five fundamentals (mutal, “primary”) associated with particular seasons and times of day. Most prominently, as A. K. Ramanujan highlights in his description of akam poetry, these are described as landscapes, or tinai. But the landscapes involve more than set pieces upon which the real affairs of a poem take place. A caṅkam landscape embraces a coherent system of things that are native to it (karu), which can be called upon in a poem to evoke the system in its entirety. Along with the people who live in the region, these native elements, as Tolkāppiyam explains, are gods (teyvam), foods (uṇā), animals (mā), trees (maram), birds (puḷ), drums (paṟai), livelihoods (ceyti), musical modes (yāḷiy pakuti), given in accordance with the season. The regions, along with their native elements, are each represented by an emblematic flower: mullai (jasmine); kuṟiñci (conehead flower); marutam (queen’s flower); and neytal (blue lily). Mullai indicates forest and grazing lands, kuṟiñci the mountain slopes, marutam farmland, and neytal the seashore. As Tolkāppiyam declares,

Mullai is the world of the forest, right for black Viṣṇu
Kuṟiñci is the world of dark mountains, right for youthful Murukaṅ
Marutam is the world of cool waters, right for Indra the king
Neytal is the world of broad sands, right for Varuṇa.

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20 Tolkāppiyam III.4: “Those who know the nature of things hold that a fundamental (mutal) consists of place and time.”
22 Tolkāppiyam III.19:
23 Tolkāppiyam III.5:
The fifth landscape, associated with pālai (ironwood tree), arises when one of these regions is parched by the fierce heat of spring and summer.²⁴

Mindscape and Landscape

The most striking aspect of akam poetry is the alignment of these environments with “what is appropriate” (uri) to them, human emotions. These are the most important elements of a poem, as Tolkāppiyam instructs: “When investigating the practices of poetry, the mutal (fundamental), karu (native elements), and uri (appropriate emotions) are the three [parts], taken in increasing importance when composing.”²⁵ The various appropriate emotions, Tolkāppiyam states, are lovemaking (puṇartal), separation (pirital), waiting (iruttal), distress (iraṅkal), and conflict (ūṭal). Though Tolkāppiyam does not explicitly link them to the tiṇais, the tradition holds that these are successive stages of a relationship between lovers, and are matched to the various landscapes (Table 4.1). The landscapes set forth a comprehensive spectrum in which time and place, native species and cultural traits, and appropriate human emotions all imply each other as they come into play. As a result of these connections, caṅkam poems cut right through what might to us seem to be profoundly different orders of being: conscious reflection and experience, and the physical things that affect this consciousness. In this mutually determinative order that contains both the objects of consciousness and consciousness itself, the akam taxonomy allows a skilled reader to flow effortlessly between where a character in a poem is situated, and what she experiences.

Puṟam poetry, for its part, maintains a corresponding taxonomy, but in its case, connections between the elements in its landscapes grant the human actions that puṟam poems praise the

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²⁴This landscape is only termed nāṭuvā nilaittiṇai, “the landscape amidst them” (Tolkāppiyam III.11) in the Akattinai section, but is explicitly called pālai in Purattiṇai. (Tolkāppiyam III.11.72)

²⁵Tolkāppiyam III.3: puṇartal, pūṇartal, urī, urī, iruttal, iruttal, iraṅkal, iraṅkal, ūṭal, ūṭal.
Table 4.1: The Akam System of Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flower</th>
<th>Landscape</th>
<th>Appropriate Emotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kuriñci</td>
<td>mountains</td>
<td>lovemaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pālai</td>
<td>wasteland</td>
<td>separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mullai</td>
<td>wooded pasture</td>
<td>waiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neytal</td>
<td>seashore</td>
<td>distress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marutam</td>
<td>farmland</td>
<td>conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

hue of sanction from the world itself, where everything converges in the deeds of great men. Champs are named, battles praised, and valorous deaths commemorated; these climactic moments in individual lives, akin to the ephemeral moments of passion in the akam world, speak to the abiding nature of what it means to be a hero. Yet akam, far more than puram, speaks to the way things are and always will be. The akam poet writes from the perspective of an anonymous, model heroine, adopting her voice to portray the quintessential experiences of human life. As would become so crucial to the ulā genre, the use of the female voice infuses the portrayal of human awareness with gender, and just as importantly, a woman’s expression of love invokes the entire complex taxonomy of the akam landscapes. The effect is very powerful: given this view of the basic interconnectedness of life, everything in the akam world takes on an embracing female identity, even as femininity reflects back metonymically to invoke the world in its entirety.

The way that Tamil poets expressed this rich continuity between the elements of an akam poem demonstrates how deep the ties between them were understood to be. The technique they used, latent simile (uḷḷurai uvamam), allows elements of the akam taxonomy to be drawn into alignment with others without any explicit statement of comparison being made. The absence of

27 Tolkāppiyam III.50: “Latent simile is the introduction of something so that the thing linked with what was introduced is made possible.” (உள்ளூரை உவமம் | உள்ளூரை உவமமிட்டையே உவமம் நேர்ந்தே உவமம்)}
explicit comparison makes reference to the underlying system of *tinais* available through bonds that are presupposed, rather than explicitly formulated. The world available to latent simile, that is, has necessary relationships, not ones that are set in play by a poet's choice. As if to emphasize this point, *Tolkäppiyam* discusses such latent similies in the sections that codify the *akam* mode and the *puram* mode, not in the section on simile (*uvamai*). As Sivathamby remarks, “...it could be said that in the opinion of Tolkäppiyar [the text’s author], and very rightly so, this manner of handling an 'inlaid imagery' is confined only to those themes which depict nature-ordered life and not to those which order nature.”

For one who embraces the *akam* system, its taxonomy is not arbitrary. Poetic allusions call attention to real connections in the world, which the poems highlight rather than produce. A *kuṟiñci* flower, the emblem of the mountain slopes, participates in the qualities of sexual love that it represents, so it naturally evokes the lovers' unions that occur where it grows. The technique of referring to elements of the *akam* landscapes through latent similes insists on the system's givenness. The bonds between various elements take on a life of their own, which poets artfully call to our attention. A great *akam* poet, then, is one who consummately evokes the way that things really are.

Though the treatises on *caṅkam* poetics make no mention of *ulā*, the structures governing *ulā* poetry regularly invoke *caṅkam* ideals. First, the seven stages of women are found in *caṅkam* poems, though not in the determined stages that the *ulās* invoke. *Tolkäppiyam* also incorporates a discussion of the progressive conditions of passion (*kāmāvasthā*) into its treatment of the clandestine affairs of young lovers, embedding the description of these states within *caṅkam* poetic

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29 As the Tamil historian Mu. Aruṇācalam explains, “The names of the seven stages of women are current in *caṅkam* literature in various circumstances. They are not, however, schematized as a group of seven as they were later. We do in fact see all seven, but of the seven titles for them, *petumpai*, *terivai*, and *pērilampen* very rarely appear. Generally, when specifying a woman, the poets employ the term *pētai*.” (1980: 21: சைஞக்கோ�்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோக்கோ.
Similarly, the ulā poets found in the puṟam mode a well-established tradition for eulogizing the glories of heroes, the landscape of praise (pāṭāṇṭiṇai). Their real innovation, however, lay in repositioning the akam world’s use of the female voice, bringing the timeless world of akam experience squarely within the world of heroic deeds. To be sure, the use of akam elements in other contexts was nothing new for Tamil poets, who had been weaving them into devotional hymns well before the Tirukkailāya Ṇana Ulā. But pairing the voice of a female lover with a hero who would never join her in the course of love that the akam landscapes represent took the ulās far from the well-matched couples of the caṅkam world. For the woman who gazes at Śiva from afar only to watch him pass by, the whole world also waits with longing, yearning for a touch from the god who remains distant.

4.2 Akam Eyes Upon the King

Well before the Tirukkailāya Ṇana Ulā took such women for its own, however, Tamil poets brought the theme of women desperately longing for a passing hero into the caṅkam world, pairing the legendary kings of the caṅkam poems with admiring women who act remarkably like their ulā counterparts. Indeed, some of the women in these verses would not be out of place in the procession scenes penned by Aśvaghoṣa or Kālidasa, for they too stand at latticed windows to watch a ruler on parade:

   The Cōla mounted his royal horse and rode in procession
   the leaves of his spear gleaming bright
   as women with fresh gold bangles watched.
   Every eye at the latticed windows stayed bound to him

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30 Tolkāppiyam III.97; Vaiyapuri Pillai (1956: 14) notes the passage’s dependence on Kāmasūtra. See Chapter Three, p. 87 for a discussion of the ten stages of desire stipulated by the Kāmasūtra.

31 Norman Cutler’s exploration of how Tirukkōvaiyār, the most famous instance of the Tamil genre of kōvai, adopts caṅkam principles examines such a process. (1987: 81–110)
like kayal fish sparkling in a dark net.\textsuperscript{32}

The text containing this verse, \textit{Muttoḷḷāyiram}, is the first Tamil text to adopt the trope of a hero on procession as a central subject. It is still something of a neglected text within scholarship, yet it merits more attention than it has received, since in addition to being fine poetry it provides a rare perspective on Tamil poetry’s transition away from the bucolic world of small, close-knit kingdoms portrayed in \textit{caṅkam} literature towards the disciplined order of courtly culture that proceeded to sweep across the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Muttoḷḷāyiram}, “Nine Hundred Verses on the Three,” praises the kings of the three legendary dynasties of Tamil history, the Pāṇṭiyas, Cōḷas, and Cēras.\textsuperscript{34} These are the great rulers of \textit{caṅkam} literature, the \textit{mūvēntar}, “three crowned kings.” All three dynasties are mentioned in the Second Rock Edict of Aśoka as bordering Aśoka’s own domains, giving a good sense of their antiquity, but other than that, attempts to evaluate the actual details of their rule runs up against all the problems that \textit{caṅkam} literature presents as a historical source.\textsuperscript{35} The text’s verses on these kings fall under two broad themes: praise of martial prowess, a genre familiar from the \textit{pāṭāṇ ṭiṇai} landscape in \textit{caṅkam} literature; but with it something new, the anguished love that young women have for the kings who display this prowess, termed \textit{kaikkilai}. As a supposed totality, the text is no longer fully available, with its remaining verses recovered from later works. Of the nine hundred verses that its title suggests it once had, over one hundred verses have been recovered

\textsuperscript{32}Ulrike Niklas’s monograph \textit{Einführung in das Muttoḷḷāyiram} is the only engaged study of \textit{Muttoḷḷāyiram} of which I am aware.


\textsuperscript{34}The inscription does not name the Cēras directly, but instead refers to them as Keralaputras. The relevant phrase of the inscription reads, “And in all conquered realms on the frontiers of King Piyadasin, beloved of the gods, such as the Cōḷas, the Pāṇḍyas, the Sātīyaputras, the Keralaputras, up to the Tāmrapārṇī border...” (सवसत बिजितमिठ देवनामि(प्रि)मस नियदनिमो राजो एवमपि प(प्र)चतेंयु यथा चीढ़ा पाड़ा सतियपुटो केलपुटो आ तंबरणि). See Sircar 1965: 17–18.
(the precise number is in dispute), 44 of which are found in a fifteenth-century anthology of verse, *Puṟattiraṭṭu* ("A Compilation of Puṟam Verses"), and 65 of which are found, interestingly enough, only in a purported abridgment of this text, *Puṟattiraṭṭuc Cuṟukkam* ("An Abridged Version of A Compilation of Puṟam Verses"). Yet *Muttoḷḷāyiram* is also cited in commentaries, suggesting its continued relevance to the Tamil literary tradition as it turned its eyes on the literary hallmarks of the past. The great commentators Nacciṉarkkiṉiyār (14th c.) and Pērāciriyar (13th c.) employ its verses in their commentaries on *Tolkāppiyam*, and Aṭiyārkku Nallār (12th c.) draws upon it for his commentary on *Cilappattikāram*.37

**Kingship in Transition**

*Muttoḷḷāyiram* itself provides few historical clues as to its date and author. Two lexical points bear mentioning: the text refers to Maturai as “Kūṭal” (lit. “Joining”), a name that alludes to a mythical gathering of clouds over the city to protect it from Indra’s rainstorms, and speaks of *muttimēl*, “threefold Tamil.” Both of these terms also appear in *Paripāṭal* (*Tender Song*), a text included in the *caṅkam* anthology *Eṭṭuttokai* (*The Set of Eight*), though it is clearly later than its fellows. Its focus on the terrible suffering that women experience when the king does not reciprocate their desire, however, makes a strong case for a date subsequent to the great works of *caṅkam* literature, since unreciprocated desire is a rare subject in these texts. *Tolkāppiyam*’s discussion of unreciprocated desire (*kaikkilai*) does not take women as its subject, but presents it as an *akam* genre entirely from the viewpoint of a young man who lusts after a woman too young to understand his advances.38

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36 On *Puṟattiraṭṭu*, see Cutler 2003: 307–319, though he does not address the important fact that *Puṟattiraṭṭuc Cuṟukkam* does indeed address the topic of *kāma*, drawing primarily from *Muttoḷḷāyiram* verses and, to a lesser extent, *Tirukkuṟaḷ* verses.


38 See Chapter Five, p. 155, for a fuller discussion of this point.
indicates a proximity to *caṅkam* works, though evidence of this kind, of course, is not in and of itself particularly strong.

What really marks *Muttoḷḷāyiram* as a work closely linked to the *caṅkam* literature is its content. Its verses reveal no familiarity with the devotional works of the Ālvār and Nāyanmār, which center on pilgrimage and temples. *Muttoḷḷāyiram*, in fact, makes no mention of temples whatsoever, and takes only brief note of religion, mentioning Śiva, Murukaṉ, and a southern version of Kṛṣṇa in four of its verses. Though the author or authors of this text were probably acquainted with the institutions of temple worship and *brahmadeya* grants—the Pūlāṅgurichi inscriptions of roughly 500 CE indicate that such practices were already developed—*Muttoḷḷāyiram* straddles what had been and what was coming in its textual portrayal of the world, asserting the values of courtly culture on a *caṅkam* setting that had already passed.39

*Muttoḷḷāyiram* is a work fascinated with the qualities of kingship, and the courtly culture that serves as their stage. Again and again, it introduces conventions well-known to Indian literature at large: the tribute offered to a ruler by neighboring kings; their presence in the royal court as they show their devotion to a lord by publicly demonstrating their subjection; the favor that a powerful ruler shows to submissive kings who proclaim their allegiance in this way. This is a different world from the one envisaged in *caṅkam* poetry, with its depictions of chieftains who maintain a rather fierce autonomy. What *Muttoḷḷāyiram* reveals is a political order that organizes power across an encompassing hierarchical scale, in which individual dominions are bound to one another in relations of dominance and servitude. Consider, for instance, this verse, which describes the neighboring kings’ terror that their Pāṇṭiya overlord (here called by the Pāṇṭiya royal title “Māṟaṉ”) plans to attack, rather than accept tribute:

The parasol of Māṟaṉ
wearing a garland of water lilies

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39The Pūlāṅgurichi inscriptions are translated and analyzed in Subbarayalu 2001: 1–6.
rises like a full moon on the elephant’s back. 
The kings of the earth come to him and gather round 
fighting for room as they ask, 
“Will you not take tribute, lord? Is that not fair?”

The neighboring kings see in the public tour of the Pāṇṭiya’s royal parasol the possibility that he will attack, and rush before him to offer tribute. The fact that he is wearing a garland of water lilies, rather than the nettle garland (tumpai mālai) indicative of war, does not allay their fear: they know that they must appear before their lord, physically demonstrating their obedient service.

Principles such as these resound with the courtly ethos that informed ulā poetry from its beginnings, most famously articulated in the fourth-century Allahābād pillar inscription in praise of the Gupta emperor Samudragupta. Composed by a high minister of state, Hariṣeṇa, who, describing himself as “a slave whose mind has blossomed in the royal favor of wandering in the presence of his master’s feet,” knew what it meant to demonstrate lived service, the inscription provides a clear expression of this ideal of lordship:

His vast fortune has merged with the brilliance that was created through the favor he showed in capturing, then freeing, all the kings of the southern region...
The might of his power has poured forth as he violently uprooted countless kings from Ār-yavarta... all the chiefs of the forest tribes have been made his servants...

His determined command was fulfilled as kings from bordering lands came to bow down, carry out his orders and give all their tribute...

His fame, which had grown weary as it roamed the world, has risen through restoring numerous broken dynasties whose rule had slipped from them...

Fortifying the earth against the torrent of his heroism has been done through service, achieved through the standard strategies: offering oneself in service, giving a daughter in marriage, and requesting a charter for enjoying the rule of one’s own territory under his Garuḍa seal...

No one on earth can oppose him in battle, he wipes away the fame of other kings with the surface of his foot, through outpourings of countless kinds of qualities that are adorned with...
hundreds of worthy deeds...42

_Muttoḷḷāyiram_ stands firmly in this world, with the same rules in play: sole attention on the figure of the king as the physical embodiment of political power, the domination of other kings through military might, and their restoration as subordinates who must publicly affirm the status of their ruler as overlord. As another verse on the Pāṇṭiyaṉ warns,

> The land that does not heed the Southerner's word
> has fallen into ruin,
> where kings lived joyfully in tall mansions
> wearing mimosa garlands of victory,
> the cries now fall from owls and horrid ghouls.43

Most prominent of all is the shared obsession with fame, both the stunning deeds of the king that extend it (_yaśas_) and the praise that such deeds return to him (_kīrti_):

> The stylus is his tusk
> the palm leaves are the trembling chests
> of kings whose spears are burning with wrath.
> The elephant of Māṟaṉ
> who holds a broad-leaved spear
> writes, “the entire splendid world is ours!”44
As the work of Daud Ali has stressed, the culture that the Allahābād pillar inscription and 
Mutollāyiram shared extended over a vast range in space and time. From the fourth century to 
the rise of the Delhi Sultanate, when a new standard of political expression became the foremost 
means of asserting power, India was marked by a common political culture that revolved around 
courtly practice. 45 Kings become figures whose own lives mapped out the relations of power over 
which they presided, with the spatial proximity of bodies standing as the means to demonstrate 
closeness to this mastery, be it patronage or violence. As Ali notes, “the publicness of the royal 
household derived from the fact that the political identities of kings and lords who attended 
court could not be clearly set apart from some inner realm of ‘private’ identities or associations. 
All aspects of their ‘private’ lives signified their ‘public’ status as men and women of rank and 
title.” 46 The acts that grounded this logic of power cloaked themselves in an ideal of beauty: 
“something like a worldview, an idea through which people conceptualized relationships with 
both themselves and others.” 47 Rulers become surrounded by women, both in the court and in 
the mind, as they claimed possession of the goddesses of worldly success, always fickle enough 
to have to be encouraged to stay. This is the understanding of the king as bhoktr, the enjoyer of 
the earth; or, as the Allahābād inscription reflects, the overlord who lets his subordinates enjoy 
small parts of it on his behalf. Given the doubled turn of sexual attraction displayed so effectively 
in the Mahābhārata, however, we can anticipate a violence to lie couched within erotic desire, a 
worldview of beauty far removed from a life of aesthetic idyll. The kings of Mutollāyiram do two 
things in its verses: they dominate women with their unsurpassed beauty, and they dominate 
neighboring kings with their unsurpassed will.

The Rise of a Tamil Courtly Ethos

*Muttaḷḷāyiram* does not, however, participate in some of the larger concerns that define the courtly culture Ali describes. Most importantly, it is a Tamil work. The text shows very little Sanskrit influence, almost as if—though this remains but a suspicion—the author sought to pull the verses down from the cosmopolitan and set them firmly in the Tamil land.48 The courtly culture bound up with the rise of the Guptas took Sanskrit as its own, and Sanskrit courtly texts distributed its values. Still further, *Muttaḷḷāyiram* reveals no great interest in the opulence of urban splendor, or the expert use of erotic technique that *kāmaśāstra* imparted to descriptions of courtly love. Sanskrit court poetry foregrounds sophistication when it turns to desire, invoking the ideals of noble bearing suitable for people of rank. These are, as noted in the previous chapter, the men and women who participate in the refined activities that *kāmaśāstra* lays out in such detail—composing verses, playing music, fastidious attention to self-presentation—and Sanskrit court poetry always makes room for these pastimes to take a role in the love affairs it depicts.49 References to urban life in *Muttaḷḷāyiram* are negligible, perhaps a stray mention of a mansion here and there, and its verses take no account of how the women are passing the time when they are overcome with desire for the king. Neither do they reveal a defined series of emotional responses that the women pass through; in contrast to the *daśāvasthās* of *kāmaśāstra* and the carefully orchestrated progressions of the *Tirukkailāya Ōna Ulā*, passion is an all-or-none affair, and one that strikes quickly and deep.

As the evidence now stands, *Muttaḷḷāyiram*, like the *Tirukkailāya Ōna Ulā*, is a text that lacks historical anchors that bind it to a determined time and place. Yet given the textual clues—the given state of affairs that *Muttaḷḷāyiram* takes for granted as it develops its own vision of the

48 One clue, perhaps, implies a Sanskritic influence: the use of the word *muttamiḻ* (“threefold Tamil,” see above p. 108), which designates literature (*iyal*), music (*icai*), and the performing arts (*nāṭakam*). *Muttamiḻ* was never an operative category in the Tamil arts, and appears to map onto parallel Sanskrit categories.

49 See Chapter Three, p. 86.
world—I believe that Muttoḷḷāyiram marks a point in Tamil literary history when the pan-Indic courtly ethos had fully penetrated the Tamil lands, with the Pallava and perhaps even Pāṇṭiya courts having asserted its values for generations. Yet the author of Muttoḷḷāyiram chose to cast his view back into time, embedding this ethos in the world of heroes glorified by caṅkam texts. The three crowned kings described in Muttoḷḷāyiram’s verses are not historical men. They are ideal embodiments of past glory, called by titles but never by name. The text is a view of the past made relevant to an audience deeply familiar with the ground rules for courtly lordship. It was not written to praise the Pāṇṭiya, Cōḷa, and Cēra kings of old; their legendary prestige was the background that Muttoḷḷāyiram invoked to do its own work. They are figures as vessels, treasured paragons of culture whose imagined lives would exalt courtly values.

4.3 Trials of the Self

Pairing a ruler’s political command with his intense erotic appeal seems quite straightforward until an important question is asked of this text: what does a lesser king gain from aligning himself with a more powerful overlord, and what does this have in common with the tortured anguish of the women who long for their ruler? Within the courtly order, inferiors gain security and patronage for their own limited sphere of mastery further down the chain. The women, however, appear to gain nothing but pain. What qualities might these women have that make their passion suitable for comparison with the obedience of a dominated king? It seems clear that Muttoḷḷāyiram is playing on an association between erotic attraction and political subjection that its audience would have understood, but if lesser kings are to find their counterpart in tormented women, it is not clear why anyone would want to take part unless they stood at the top. When taken in sum, however, Muttoḷḷāyiram’s verses offer a compelling argument for why a king can reach his full potential for mastery only when he submits to one of the muṭṭi uṭaiya vēntaṉ, the three crowned
kings of the Tamil lands. By sketching the portraits of women who are overwhelmed by their
desire for the king, the text urges a paradoxical assertion upon its readers, which the ulās later
adopted to serve their own idealized order: the fulfillment of womanhood requires a woman to
lose what she earlier saw as her own essential qualities.

This interpretation of the text is not the only one possible, and is not advanced in order to
deny that others have interesting things to say. Yet I do believe that the arguments in favor of this
interpretation are strong enough that it takes precedence. Muttoḷḷāyiram is a elite work through
and through, fixated on royal prestige, the expression of state power, and the adulation of heroic
kings. One might take an alternate approach and read this text against the grain, seeking, for
example, to recover an understanding of women’s agency as they look upon the king. Muttoḷḷāyi-
ram’s author drew on contemporary understanding of gender in order to make the women rec-
ognizable to an audience, and they are not vacuous shells who lack the ability to respond to their
situation. But neither can they be said to be richly developed characters, and any reading that
strives to understand Muttoḷḷāyiram’s portrayal of their agency has to recognize this. These are
women who are presented in color but nonetheless two-dimensional. At heart, the text’s verses
develop a narrative where things happen to women because of the king’s presence, and they re-
spond instinctively, with very little room for choice available to them, let alone strategies that
would gain them advantage.

The Pangs of Lovesick Women

Interpreting this text demands attention to what is both its most obvious feature and its basic
conundrum: women are aligned throughout with men made subservient to an overlord. A read-
ing that strikes against Muttoḷḷāyiram’s profound elitism could easily miss the real power at work.
Let us begin at the end, by discussing a verse that speaks to many of the themes I will go on to
pursue more closely. We find in the following verse the words of an older woman, speaking to her peers about the young girls who are in their charge, and who are desperate to see the king:

Throw open the doors, and we’ll worry later,  
the crime would be great if these girls died!  
Let them gaze at the lord of the Tamils  
king of the people of Uṟantai  
with a garland cool upon his chest.

The verse is an anxious response to an emergency, as older women find themselves torn between two dangerous situations. The girls they care for are lovesick, to the point where the speaker fears that they will die. If the women release them from their protective care, and let them rush to see the king, it appears that this would provoke another crisis. There are also the doors, which appear frequently in Muttoḷḷāyiram. Since the speaker in this verse insists that the doors be thrown open, there must be others who would just as soon keep them closed. This highlights a state of affairs that runs throughout this text: the girls are physically confined, perhaps even locked in. If they are going to be able to see the king, they will have to be freed. Here, another curious detail presents itself. Even if they are freed in this way, the speaker does not apparently expect them to rush upon the king and embrace him in their passion. They simply want to look at him. The challenge is to fit these pieces into the way that Muttoḷḷāyiram frames the erotic appeal of royal power, and see how they take part in a coherent account of the text.

Some of the narrative elements in this verse are quite familiar to Indian poetic conventions. The longing of a lovesick heroine, for instance, is a theme that has been around as long as love poetry itself. Others, however, are more puzzling, such as the girls’ protectors’ strong desire...
to lock them away from even seeing the king at all. Let us begin with the overarching theme of this verse, straightforward in its development. Like all Muttollāyiram’s love verses, this one expresses kaiikkilai, the passion for another that can never be returned, since the social standing of the characters involved is so unbalanced. The women in this text see the king and become completely infatuated, losing control of their emotions as passion bursts forth to reveal itself. One verse, extending its praise of a Pāṇṭiya king (here called by the Pāṇṭiya title Vaḻuti), develops this rushing moment by playing on the common association of passion with fire:

Like a lamp under a basket,  
lissome women do not reveal desire.  
Yet when Vaḻuti sets forth in procession  
wearing a flower garland  
it blazes like a fire on a nearby mountain  
at evening when the cows return,  
spreading gossip that everyone will hear.52

As the metaphor of conflagration suggests, the effect of the women’s yearning is bitterly physical; the gossip they will endure only adds to the pain of desire itself.

The Ruling King as Thief

Quite understandably, considering what they are forced to endure, the women in Muttollāyiram complain bitterly about the hero who tortures them in this way. He is unjust, they proclaim, a harasser, a thief. As one woman declares, the royal insignia and the parasol of the king bespeak righteousness, yet her increasing frailty due to lovesickness disagrees:

You have to go, chill northern wind  
to tell the righteous scepter and the full moon parasol  
of the king who kills his enemies in war

52 வாழக்கு செய்தலையான் செயலையான் கைத்தும் | திரவம் பாதுகாக்க வேண்டும் - செய்தலையான் | அவ்வடையை  
செய்தலையான் கைத்தும் | வாழக்கு செய்தலையான் கைத்தும்.

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that I have lost my bangles.
For I love the king of the lovely Potiyam Mountain
where they cook rice with fires
kindled with sandalwood logs.\(^{53}\)

The king should protect order, they remonstrate, but for the women who love him, he creates nothing but disorder. When Kālidāsa praises the brilliant reign of Dilipa, paterfamilias of the exemplary kings of *Raghuvaṃśa*, he takes pains to note the justice of his taxation:

> He levied taxes on his people purely for their welfare,
> for the sun collects water to give back a thousand virtues.\(^{54}\)

Contrast this with *Muttoḷḷāyiram*, where a woman protests that instead of taking his customary one-sixth of the land’s yield, the Cōḻa king is taking everything she has:

> My friend, your mound as wide as a cobra’s hood,
> a king should take but one-sixth as his own
> so what can I do?
> Our king, lord of the river country
> has seized my heart, my modesty, my virtue!\(^{55}\)

Suffering from his presence, the women accuse the king because they sense he is not righteous.

In one remarkable verse, the poet’s deft wordcraft allows a woman to hint that the Cōḻa king’s rule is as fragile as the bangles that now slip from her wrists:

> The drums announce his presence, the elephants come,
> and there he is, wearing a swaying garland.
> I know they say that Kiḷḷi rules well, my friend
> but my jeweled bangle, so finely turned
> is slipping past each line on my fingers,

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\(^{53}\) *Raghuvaṃśa* 1.18: जाना०व भळयथ भषजलां सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। रसः।

\(^{54}\) *Raghuvaṃśa* 1.18: प्रजानामेव भूत्येः से तास्यो वलिंमवहीत। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। हि रसं रवः।

\(^{55}\) नतःधारः ग्रहं ग्रहं वलिंमवहीत। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्। सहवणुणम्।
and that does not tell us
the way of his righteous scepter
is really all that straight.\textsuperscript{56}

There is wordplay in this verse, which speaks obliquely but clearly delivers the message. The king’s scepter (kōl) is straight because it is righteous, but the fate of the woman’s bracelet draws this into question. By employing a string of uncommon, emphasized words, the poet aligns the bracelet with the scepter when he describes it, hinting that it might be similarly vulnerable. The bracelet possesses kōl, a homonym for scepter, here meaning workmanship (which I have translated as “turned”). This finely turned (ān kōl) bracelet is iṟai-y-iṟanta, “slipping past the lines on the fingers,” an oddly arcane description for what is really a stock situation, losing one’s bracelets due to lovesickness. \textit{iṟai-y-iṟanta} has a much more obvious meaning, however, particularly when aligned with kōl: iṟai means kingly rule, \textit{iṟai-y-iṟanta} the loss thereof.

A paired set, the scepter and the bangle, are thrown into question. The bangle slips from the woman’s wrist, catching, perhaps, on the lines on each finger as she tries to save it; the king’s scepter is challenged by the woman’s accusation, and the words that draw it into parallel with the bangle, \textit{iṟai-y-iṟanta}, speak to the withdrawal of its symbolic power should she be right. The woman accuses, and her intriguing choice of words dams the king more than she might be aware, but as we continue to explore Muttoḷḷāyiram’s understanding of a woman’s tortured passion, we find that the woman in this verse has yet to fully understand her situation. That opportunity, such wordplay stresses, falls to the readers if the text.

\textsuperscript{56} அறையெச்செய்மக்கு பலையை வைத்து பறியும் லால் | பறைவையெச்செய்மக்கு சீழ்வு - எச்செய்வு | எச்செய்வு

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4.4 Life at the Interstice

When the women reveal their passion, Muttollāyiram portrays this expression of emotion as the anguish they feel over losing their accustomed sense of self. The approach, again and again, depends on instituting a deep split between a woman’s understanding of what she actually is in contrast to what she thinks she should be. The provocation for this moment of crisis, the presence of the king, makes her suffer terribly even as she tries to suppress what is happening. A woman’s true nature, Muttollāyiram effectively proposes, is being thrown up against her own self-understanding. This is a terrible moment of loss, in which her deepest sense of self has lost its footing. But in contrast to the Sanskrit court poetry surveyed in the previous chapter, where Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa turned us back from a private view into the inner workings of this transformation, Muttollāyiram brings us right within the emergence of a new self as the old one falls away. We know the women’s thoughts as they see their lives being rent apart, we are with them, not the king, to feel rather than see their despair.

The Self as a Sexual Being

What, then, do these young women assume themselves to be before the king causes everything to go awry? Given their complaints about the king’s cruelty, it is a state of being they understand to be the proper order of things, and one they are frightened to have lost. From outside the text, however, readers can place this condition within the larger perspective of transformation that Muttollāyiram offers. From this vantage point, looking out over the women in these verses even they offer access to their thoughts, it might better be typified as a youthful, naïve view of a woman’s nature, sustained by an equilibrium between sexuality and reticence. Sexual desire plays a role in this understanding, but never to the point where it passes beyond the woman’s
ability to contain it. In these verses, her sexuality is an innate part of femininity that moves at a level far deeper than social custom: Muttolḷāyiram has no place for notions about the social construction of sexuality itself. Although desire is expressed within the dictates of culture, in this poetic world, desire is what shapes them, not the other way around. Consider, in this regard, a verse that employs the highly suggestive sexual imagery of a mortar and pestle to describe how a woman’s longing colors her actions as she thinks of the Cōḷa king:

I take my turn at the pestle
thinking I will not think the name of Kiḷli
anklets on his feet
golden necklace on his chest
What can I do?
Nothing but the name of the lord of the river country
of Kōḻi with its flowing waters
comes from my heart and falls from my lips.⁵⁷

What a reader today may find more surprising, however, is that the restraint this heroine fails to preserve does not appear to be the product of stern cultural mores. As one young woman speaks of her love for the Pāṇṭiya king, she agonizes over the fact that even were she able to go to him, she would not be able to show even a modest sign of her passion:

When I do not see Māṟaṉ
who dominates his enemies in the heat of cruel war
I have a thousand things to say,
and when I do see him
here I am with my inborn modesty!
could I even think to join him
and tell him to give me his garlanded chest?⁵⁸

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⁵⁷ This verse is not found in Puṟatiraṭṭu, the later anthology that contains the certain extant Muttolḷāyiram verses, but is a taṇippāṭal found in commentary that Na. Cēturakunātaṉ, the editor of the South India Saiva Siddhanta Works edition of Muttolḷāyiram, included on stylistic and thematic grounds.

⁵⁸
A women’s modesty, as Muttoḷḷāyiram would have it, is a quality just as instinctive as sexual desire.

Taken in concert, these two inherent traits achieve a balance: an expressive sexuality, on the one hand, and a modest reticence to allow its full expression. This is the state of affairs that the young women see as genuine, the normal way of things. The entirety of their upbringing has to this point been in service of reinforcing this balance, a state of being affirmed by her self presentation, through habituated manners of conduct and dress. The state of a woman’s mind is announced through her outward presentation, and once her mind slips from its customary steadiness, her physicality immediately reveals this passage through its own disarray. By building on prior instances of what by then was a familiar trope, the Tirukkailāya Ēṇā Ulā develops it further in order to show how women respond differently to this moment of crisis depending on their age and worldly sophistication. For Muttoḷḷāyiram, however, the moment when a woman loses her balance between sexuality and reticence is a decisive moment of transformation, when her self-understanding first begins to tumble beyond her conscious grasp.

This moment arises through the convergence of two factors. First, the woman’s own youth, a time when her own sexuality is most insistent and least likely to be willed into obedience; second, the triggering presence of the king, whose beauty is so overpowering that it completely overwhelms whatever resistance to her desire she might have had. The metaphor of violence is quite intentional here, constantly supported by Muttoḷḷāyiram’s own paired structure. Just as the king, in his puram aspect, confronts his enemies outside his own territory as a hero who can wipe them effortlessly from the earth, once he turns inward to the realm of akam, he annihilates a woman’s sense of who she really is. She is thrown into a moment of isolation when her senses are heightened, self-reflection is incessant, and the state of being she previously took for granted is now viewed with new, questioning eyes.
Journeys of the Heart

The verses that develop the moment when a woman’s self-understanding starts to slip its moorings are some of the most personal in what remains of this text, urging its audience to share in her uncertainty as she feels herself come out of balance. In a poignant example, one woman laments how few her possibilities really are given the danger she faces should she fall to one direction or the other:

Modesty pulls me to one side
but pleasure relents to the other,
my eyes ache for Kiḷḷi and his inviting arms.
Midnight is here
and my heart gets pushed back and forth
like an ant trapped on a torch
as it burns at both ends.59

The moment is terrifying, even a cause for despair. Here, for instance, a woman fears that even if her mind does not relent in the presence of the Pāṇṭiya king, her body will still betray her:

If I stand before him without shame
my virtue will be lost,
If I do not look
my bangles will slip from my wrists!
When Vaḻuti appears on a mighty horse
his garland alive with thirsty bees
I see no way to end my own.60

The social demands a woman feels pressing on her as all this occurs, moreover, worsens her plight cruelly, for they remain just as pressing and severe:

59 நாணா¹காÅ ைகவைளĈ¼ ŇாĉமாÅ – காணா¹காÅ ைகவைளĈ¼ ŇாĉமாÅ – காேணனாÊ | வ¾ெடÆவÀ íÄதாÄ வயமாÊ வČÖைய¹ | க¾ெடÆவÀ íÄவŌாÄ ஆĎ.
60 காேணனாÊ | வ¾ெடÆவÀ íÄதாÄ வயமாÊ வČÖைய¹ | க¾ெடÆவÀ íÄவŌாÄ ஆĎ.
Mother beats me with a stick
neighbors wound me with their gossip
all because of the king who rules this fertile land.
Like the frog said to eat the tender coconut
here I am, blamed for what I never did.\textsuperscript{61}

The girls’ mothers know all too well what is going on, despite their daughters’ protestations to the contrary, and go to great lengths to enforce the proper decorum.\textsuperscript{62} Their inflexible demeanor and harsh measures suggest, perhaps, that they may recall such powerful moments of desire in their own lives, and understand how irrepressible a young woman’s passion can be. They lock their daughters in the house, so that they cannot go to the king or even see him, a tactic that their daughters resist as if they have fallen behind enemy lines. As one declares,

We are women with no idea when we might win him
so I’ll walk over the ones who hold me close,
to make love with the king of Maturai
where mansions are caressed by rolling waves.\textsuperscript{63}

Schemes like these, however, remain in the world of fantasy, and the young women stay trapped on a tightwire between their own desires and a mind that still wants to hold them back. In place of the balance between sexuality and modesty that they formerly inhabited, a more encompassing set of boundaries starts to appear. Their own sense of self is shaken to the core when a passion for the king emerges, yet even as this happens, cultural forces epitomized by the figure of the mother—more aware, \textit{ Muttoḷḷāyiram} suggests, of what womanhood truly is than the heroine could possibly be at her young age—step in to ensure that the expected steadfastness prevails.

\textsuperscript{61} Hardy (1983: 344–50) notes the important role of this trope in the Vaiṣṇava poetry of the Āḻvārs.
Seeing the young woman poised at the interstice, no longer at ease with her youthful self, but also not yet awakened to the fulness of what Mutтолїyiram views as womanhood, the metaphors its verses employ to heighten the dramatic savour of this tension fall into place. We find the young woman constantly at the boundary point between confinement and release, both within her environment and within her own mind. She may be locked in the house and peer through the window. She may stand at the locked door, as in this verse, but still be able to see through the keyhole:

My mother thinks she must keep me safe
and she ran to bolt the door
locking me up in this sheltered house. 
How can I now repay the carpenter
who drilled this hole in the door,
so I can see the splendor
of the great king Kaţünkōṇ.64

Be it window or door, the marker of the boundary between a controlled interiority, the akam world of the familiar, and the puram world of revelatory newness, collapses as the two domains begin to flow into one another. Will the door stay open or closed, as this verse asks:

I went to see King Kōtai
whose necklaces sway
with choice gems and fresh gold
but quickly shut the door.
My heart is modest,
it wavers between coming and going
like a beggar at a rich man’s door.65

64 See Sattasaï v. 220 for a similar conceit; the tension between a woman’s confinement and release on view in Mutтолїyiram participates, certainly, in larger trajectories of poetic expression in south India.

65
The logic of the door is taken to an even greater extreme in this verse, which focuses on the hinge of movement itself:

When Kōtai processes down the beautiful street
riding a chariot pulled by strong horses
as bees parade on the choice flowers of his garland
girls open the doors
mothers shut them fast
and the bolts through the hinges
are ground down to nothing.⁶⁶

Trapped in this way, unable to physically flow where their hearts want to lead them, the lovesick heroines of Muttoḷḷāyiram respond by displaying fractures in the self that find ways of lasting. A common theme is for their hearts to pass out of their bodies, and travel to find the object of their love. Here, a young woman’s body remains trapped by her mother, but this is no longer the sense of self that she identifies with:

Yearning for the king of Kūṭal
enclosed by lush coconut groves
my heart went to find him
hoping to make love.
My mother knows none of this
and keeps me safe, an empty cage,
like a hunter whose quail has long since flown.⁶⁷

Yet the heart will not find its resolution, either, and wanders at the boundaries, further accentuating the fragmentation of the self.

⁶⁶As Na. Cēturakunātaṉ explains in his commentary to the South India Saiva Siddhanta Works edition, the verse draws upon the hunter’s technique of trapping a quail then raising it as a caged bird. When hunting, he sets traps around the bird, whose calls spur potential mates to approach.
Has it left to find him?
Is it coming back?
Or does it wait for a moment to win him
hands on its delicate waist?
My heart is gone, striving to find Māṟaṉ
wearing a garland of bee-swarmed flowers
whose rutting elephants bellow in his courtyard.  

The most beautiful of such verses describe the voyage of the heart to a place of boundary even
as that boundary is crumbling beneath it, pictured here as the crumbling edge between land and
water:

Giving way to those who enter
shrinking from those who leave
hiding in shames from those who laugh in scorn,
my heart went after the king of Kūṭal
and now it waits like an arrow-struck doe
on a riverbank crumbling beneath it.

The most powerful of these experiences, from the heroine’s perspective, take place in dreams,
which become the place where life can truly be lived as she seeks the king’s passionate love. “My
eyes see waking life in the face of dreams,” as one laments, “and I face my modesty in waking
life.” Some verses go farther still, to illustrate how the young woman tries to hold on to that
ethereal moment between dreaming and wakefulness when she still has the king in her mind’s
eye but can also begin to feel the sensuous reality of her body:

The southern king who rides a rutting elephant
appeared in a dream and gave his love to me
I think, it was not clear.
I stroked the bed with lily-soft fingers

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68 ஓவியற்றுக்கு காந்தவாலான வரல் வாழ்க்கையின் புரட்சியில் | புனிதத்தில் தமழினைத் தவறுவின் - மறுவதில் | முன்னாக வாழ்க்கை முழுமுள்ளுரையான மறுவதில் - வரல் வாழ்க்கை தவறுவின் - 
69 படை காந்தவாலான வரல் வாழ்க்கை | குளித்துடன் வாழ்க்கை - முழுமுள்ளுரை | வரல் வாழ்க்கை தவறுவின் - 
70 காந்தவாலான வாழ்க்கையின் புரட்சியில் | வரல் வாழ்க்கையின் புரட்சியில் -
Bodies remain a restrictive space of confinement, clinging to an accustomed social identity, while the desire within prompts new self-understandings to bloom. The women’s hearts have become ethereal conduits to where their bodies cannot go, and unlike the women described by Aśvaghoṣa or Kālidāsa, they do not come back. Now, the driving force to newness lies beyond their ability to condition it at all, let alone hold it in place. *Muttoḷḷāyiram*, that is to say, gives us a trajectory whose end we can apprehend and typify even as the fracture in the self is taking place in the poetic moment.

As the women in these verses break through the confines of youth and authority in the face of their love for a Tamil king, they call attention to edges, the boundaries between what is argued to be inherent in a woman and what is overlay. Knowing where these edges lie reveals how the *ulās* will follow in *Muttoḷḷāyiram’s* wake. The key is to see the voyage being taken. At the starting point stands an inadequate self-understanding, the culmination is the realization of one’s true nature. For these young women, the emotional upheaval is brutal, but from a distanced view it is an extraordinary moment of fulfillment. Were we to understand their transformation only as a fall from a woman’s true qualities, we would be missing what the text is pushing us to see. This is an experience of consummation, when the qualities of womanhood that the text presents as true are first being realized. By fulfilling what was once an unimaginable depth of passionate love, the women reveal the breadth of subjective potential. Through the life-giving presence of the hero, they emerge from an awareness of what they were to what they can be, as what initially seems terrifying becomes a larger drama in which the full possibilities of a woman’s feeling, knowing, and self-expression rise into view.

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71 காலைஞ்சைன் எதையன் கனைன் கனைன் | நாய்ம் எதையன் மூவைன் – எதையன் | என்ஸ்டைல் எண்டையன் என்றன் புருநைன் | என்றன் புருநையல் புரண.

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Lesser Kings as Women

Is the king’s awesome power over these young women as terrible as these poems first seem to suggest, with their steady refrains about the king’s injustice and the need for a mother’s watchful care? Or are mother and daughter given to us as dramatic characters who understand the first experience of real passion only partially, and do not fully see their role in the larger narrative that the audience can grasp? The deeper structure of these verses, pairing the love of young women with the subservience of subject kings, and the women’s own discovery of the breadth of feeling and experience they are capable of, points to the latter view. Muttoḷḷāyiram presents a king’s power of transformation, whether directed inward towards the akam world of home and femininity, or outward towards the puṟam world of combat and subjugation.

The links that bind the women who watch the king in procession and the kings who face him as their master are everywhere. When one of the heros of this text, the three crowned kings of the Tamil lands, comes out of his palace, it is either to go on procession or to go to war. In both situations he dominates those who face him, and it lies far beyond the capacities of either the opposing king or the passionate woman to resist. Yet in terms of the courtly culture that defines relationships of lordship and devoted service, the opportunity to see the king is an honor, testifying to the beholder’s worth as he or she participates in a relationship of closeness with a mighty lord. If the woman’s suffering as she watches the king in procession is a transitory element of pain that nonetheless opens up broad vistas of experience, as an immature understanding of self is expanded into a richer, more complex one, Muttoḷḷāyiram calls on its audience to understand the dominated kings as subject to one of the three crowned kings in the same way. For the samanta kings who offer tribute to their lord, this is already understood. But what of the adversary kings in Muttoḷḷāyiram who remain foolhardy enough to oppose one of these great lords? They are, the text effectively insists, naïve young girls, who resist because they do not yet understand.
The complaints of the young women and the grievances of a rival lord would not sound that
different. The king tries to take everything from them, he is a harasser, a thief; he speaks of order
but brings only mayhem. But among this text’s audience, women are not the ones who would
have harbored such thoughts. The great Tamil kings, this text argues, are relentless against their
enemies. They appear even in dreams. To draw parallels the text does not overtly make, a rival
king’s ministers correspond to the fretful mothers who try to protect their charge from what
they cannot defend against, bound by conventions that make no sense in the face of a mighty
king’s power. Just like women, such adversaries will always yield, and when they do they will be
drawn into a fuller sense of balance. Once attached to their lord through devoted service, they
will live freely under his protective sway. Given the great Tamil king’s power of transformation,
what might seem terrifying is really just a moment in a larger drama of redemption. Thus the
most beloved verse in Muttoḷḷāyiram, unique among its fellows in that it describes neither kings
in battle nor women in love, embraces them both within the vision of the text. The verse speaks
of nature, where a moment of terror stands poised to resolve into a scene of timeless beauty.

There is no distress in the land of King Kōtai
who wields a poison spear
except when red lilies bloom on flooded fields,
and the waterbirds
who fear this surging fire
draw in their nestlings
to the shelter of their wings.72

72இந்த பெண் தருணமானதை பற்றி அசை | வெள்ளையூளில் அடல்களில் பலியல் – பலகைக் -
கையாருயர் நயமறையியலும் வலையாட்சியை - தாக்கையால் சன்மட்சிப்பவுடன்.
Chapter 5

The Past in the Cōḷa Twelfth Century

The Cōḷa line has its source in the light that was born of Mukunda’s eye, fixed abode of Tridhāman, split into twelve, a path high above that ends in liberation.

In the acts of sacrifice by the kings who live where the lord who transcends perception perceptibly bears what is sacrificed to him May they protect the earth!

Anbil Copper Plates of Sundara Cōḷa

5.1 The Vernacular Turn in the Tamil South

The twelfth century was an extraordinary time in Tamil literary history. New forms of textual expression arose throughout South Asia, and in the Tamil lands, no exception to these currents,

\[1\] v. 5: मूलं यथं मुकुन्दनेत्रार्जुननि:न्यायमकाव्यं नित्यादरणं विभक्तंमब्रविमन्वयांवृंवन्माणं व: [1\*] वर्त्तावनिपालानां विनियं प्रत्यक्षमभा देखस्वरं हृदिराविभांजजगतः पायाः पायाः चोळाः (El 15 no. 5, following the emendations of T. A. Gopinatha Rao)
the ulā emerged as a celebrated expression of royal power. This was the age of the later Cōḷas, kings who had grown in strength from their ninth-century origins in the fertile Kaveri river delta to become the foremost lords of peninsular India. With its vast inscriptional record, exquisite bronzes, and grand imperial monuments such as the Bṛhadīśvara temple, Gaṅgaikōṇṭacōḷapuram, and Dārāsuraṃ, the Cōḷa empire set the stage for a period of cultural efflorescence that has made the dynasty the most closely studied in south Indian history. In the field of literature, this explosion of creativity surely resulted from original minds seeking new ways to write, but it also stemmed from a growing ambition to look back and order Tamil’s own past. The dominant model for asserting the order of history lay in the Cōḷa’s professed creed of Śiva worship. As earlier texts were brought under the Śaiva mantle, nothing short of a literary colonization took place as scholars close to the Cōḷa court specified a Tamil Śaiva canon. The deep commitment to understanding the past set the fortunes of Cōḷa rule within a broad, purposeful flow of time, proclaiming Cōḷa kings as the divine agents of Naṭarāja, Śiva in Citamparam, who through their perfect service and devotion to the dancing god were born on earth to usher in a new Golden Age.

Yet by turning the lens of power towards history in order to infuse it with a triumphalist Śaiva vision, the times also offered new catalysts for inspiration and originality. The lives of early worshipers of Śiva became central to Tamil Śaivas’ own sense of themselves, and the poets took notice. A small, innovative experiment from centuries past, Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ’s Tirukkailāya Ňāṇa Ulā, sparked the imagination of one of Tamil’s great poets, who saw in its identification of political domination with sexual yearning an elegant means to glorify the kings he served. This man, Oṭṭakkūttar, court poet for three successive generations of Cōḷa kings—Vikrama (r. 1118–35), Kulottuṅga II (r. 1133–50), and Rājarāja II (r. 1146–73)—brought the ulā out of the pristine isolation of Śiva’s world and set it forth as a declaration of power within the warring arena of kings.

When Oṭṭakkūttar took up the ulā to exalt living men, he moved an emergent genre into difficult terrain. Muttolḷāyiram offers us models, not people, stock heroes of the past who from their
inception were free of history’s perils. For a king gliding in procession high above the struggles
of a disheveled world, name and place yield nothing but a burden. The brutalities of power are
limitations of an individual life, which for Muttoḷḷāyiram do nothing to enrich a king’s purpose.
His presence alone illuminates the earth, and his movement in procession effects this presence
in time. The Cōḻa kings that Oṭṭakkūttar honors present a challenge because they were more than
their texts, or to be precise, much less. No one could have fulfilled the ulā’s ideal of mastery. Yet
ideals have their own effects, suffusing lived deeds with meaning, and Oṭṭakkūttar’s texts strive
to cast in the certain truths of sexual desire the political dominance that Cōḻa kings maintained.

The aesthetic expression of command was an instrument as much as it was a veneer. In his
three ulās, together known as Mūvar Ulā (Procession of the Three), Oṭṭakkūttar asserts the finality
of the Cōḻas’ hold on the earth with confidence, portraying the violence they had used to seize
it as the true nature of royal beings born to deliver the world from famine and pain. How his
poems actually affected perceptions, setting forth the terms of understanding sovereign power,
grounding the convictions of believers, or swaying those who did not believe, is a record lost to
time. But the traces of this record that remain suggest that his ulās were viewed as texts of con-
sequence. There are very few premodern commentaries on poetic texts from the Cōḻa period, and
Oṭṭakkūttar merited two: one on his late masterwork Takkayākap Paraṇi, and one on the second
text in his Mūvar Ulā, Kulōttuṅka Cōḻaṇ Ulā.2

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2Mu. Aruṇācalam writes, overlooking, it would appear, the commentary on Takkayākap Paraṇi, “Beginning in
the fourteenth century, the political landscape of Tamilnadu experienced dramatic upheavals... the consequences
of which are clearly reflected in the field of literature. People returned entirely to religious devotion. As a re-
sult, stotras, śāstras, and śāstric commentaries abounded, while authors do not appear to have turned their attention
to commentaries on poetry. We encounter only two commentaries on poetic works: one on the Kulottuṅga

The commentator on the ulā, who tends to favor a Sanskrit vocabulary, appears to have been a Vaiṣṇava, as Aruṇācalam notes (1972: 52), using
terms such as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Garuḍāḻvār, and śrīpīṭham; Aruṇācalam dates him tentatively to the sixteenth century.

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More importantly, the Tamil tradition has long held Oṭṭakkūttar to be a kavicakravartin, a king of poets at the peak of his field, and his mythic biography comprises a sizeable part of the early Tamil literary histories Tamil Nāvalar Caritai (A History of Tamil Poets) and Aṣṭāvatāṉam Vīrācāmi Ceṭṭiyār’s Vinōtaracamañcari (A Bouquet of Entertainments to Savor).3 Both volumes gather long histories of popular views on poets, tales of legendary greatness which, though far from histories, provide a fine sense of who and what was considered important to the Tamil literary tradition. Oṭṭakkūttar is prominent in these chronicles, a fact that testifies to the cultural value his texts were accorded. While the poet’s refined style offers a reason for his fame, his vision of mighty lords who dominate women through their beauty is the subject that Tamil literature truly embraced, making the ulā the most favored pirapantam genre in the centuries that followed.4

The Cōlas in the Sphere of Power

The beginnings of courtly culture on display in Muttoḷḷāyiram stand at the heart of the Mūvar Ulā, which presents its Cōla overlords at the pinnacle of the circle of kings. In this Oṭṭakkūttar marks no new ground. The life of lordship, the “common culture of ‘worldliness’—a set of commensurable values and codes of meaning shared from one lordly household to the next—which had penetrated all nuclear regions of the subcontinent by the end of the seventh century,” as Daud Ali has described it, was one the Cōlas fully embraced.5 Procession was the most spectacular means of asserting control over other kings, a movement over territory that performed through

(2005: vol. 11, 66–69)

3The author and date of Tamil Nāvalar Caritai are unknown, but the text was likely composed in the eighteenth century (Sivathamby 1986: 48). The stories it collects, however, are older than this, perhaps contemporaneous with the Telugu cāṭu stories of the seventeenth century (David Shulman, in personal conversation). Viṉōtaracamañcari, a collection of popular stories about Tamil poets that Aṭṭāvatāṉam Vīrācāmi Ceṭṭiyār began publishing in the periodical Tiṉavarttamāṉi in 1856, was published in 1891; together, it appears, with some half dozen pieces that may have been penned by other hands. I am grateful to A. R. Venkatachalapathy for bringing its publication history to my attention.

4On the pirapantam genres, see Chapter Two, p. 17.

the composure of ritual the dominance that could be, or had been, achieved through war. When Oṭṭakkūttar appointed Cōḷa kings as the ulās’ heroes, moreover, he appealed to a notable continuity between his texts and their original model, the Tirukkālāya Ṇāna Ulā. The actors differ, but the hierarchy advanced by the earlier text remains constant. The Cōḷas are the unrivaled masters of the earth, the kings of kings, but they are also servants, moving in the world as the consummate instruments of Śiva’s own distanced will. The god honors his masterful agents by securing their reign, and they enact his procession around the divine city of Śivaloka on the Tamil soil, asserting the enlivening force that he spreads in heaven directly on earth, where humankind is to flourish.

Beyond the ritual of procession itself, the Cōḷas’ sexual domination of women in Oṭṭakkūttar’s poetry shares in this broader courtly ethos. Though we have been tracing the genealogy of the ulā through the Tamil materials, the ancient pairing of sexual attraction with political control was a foundational value of noble life across the subcontinent. Soon before Oṭṭakkūttar composed his ulās, a donative order issued in the sixth year of Rajendra Cōḷa’s reign (1112-44) described the founding of the Cōḷa dynasty in Taṅcāvūr in just such terms, using paranomastic verse to portray the first imperial Cōḷa, Vijayālaya, taking the region with the same ease he enjoys with his wife:

Vijayālaya was born in that noble line
made great by his power and dominance,
crowns smashed against the footstool of his throne
as great kings of the earth vied with each other to be first when they bowed at his feet.

This light of the solar line took Taṅcāvūr like his own wife, to enjoy her,
with her beautiful eyes, pretty curls, and dress wrapped around her,
with marvelous sights, as charming as Alakā, it fills the sky,
she is a woman as fine as the ambrosial moon.

\( where \text{women wear creams bright as whitewash on mansions.}\)

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7समजनि विजयालयः [read महनीयवजयालय] विक्रममेव। अहमदाबाद वर्णमालात्मकतारमाणिक्य-विवरणांतः। [४४२] सत्कान्तारामान्य्रामाल्य-व्याालाय-व्यालायमर्यामाल्य-तत्साह-वर्णमालात्मकतारमाणिक्य-विवरणांतः। [४४२२] तत्साह-वर्णमालात्मकतारमाणिक्य-विवरणांतः। [४४२२२] (SII 3.3 no. 205, vv. 44–45, following H. Krishna Sastri with emendation). Alakā is the splendid
The idea of dominance portrayed through sensuality was a familiar one to the Cōḷas’ imperial predecessors, the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. In a charter issued under Kṛṣṇa III in the middle of the tenth century, to choose a ready example, the regions of the earth tremble with pleasure at the moment of Kṛṣṇa’s coronation as if they were young women taking his hand in marriage. And so it was for those who followed the Cōḷas, such as the Hoysala king Narasimha, who in an inscription composed in 1173 is described as “the saffron paste on the firm, jug-like breasts of Cōḷa women.”

Further north, poets from the Sena court also employed this trope at the Cōḷas’ expense, as in the Sanskrit verses found in the deśāśraya (“taking lands”) section of the courtly anthology Saduktikarṇāmṛta (Ambrosia to the Ear: Fine Verses), compiled in 1205. Jayadeva of Gītagovinda fame, to choose the best, offers his praise to the Sena king Lakṣmaṇasena by punning on other meanings for the names of rival kingdoms, such as “blouse” for Cōḷa:

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You delight in sweeping her blouse aside
\ You delight in making the Cōḷas shudder
You pull on her hair
\ You bring the Kuntalas low
You prevail, and pull down her girdle
\ You prevail, and make Kāñci kneel
You make love with fierce strength
\ You confront the Aṅgas with violence

Yes, lord of kings, when the bards sing your praises
the hearts of your foes, as well as your women
tremble through and through, and move to worship at your feet.
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Yet even from the perspective of a courtly world that took the erotic hue of rule as a basic tenet of political life, the Cōḷa ulās took this potent imagery to a level not seen outside the Tamil city of Kubera, lord of wealth.

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10 Knutson 2009: 49–53. I thank Jesse Knutson for sharing his analysis of these verses with me.
11 v. 1445: चोलोशलोललीलय कलयेस कुर्षण कुंतलानय चोलोशश्चनाय प्रभवसि रथमार्धकंसिये करोपि। इथं रजेजन् वन्निततितितिुहिफलोकमर्गव दीर्घनारोणमयीयायं हृदयमुख्त्ते लब्ध्यदाराधनाय।
country. Oṭṭakkūttar was developing more than a timeworn artistic conceit when he composed his texts. Tamil writing, newly ascendant as the beacon of southern power, held the true promise of authority, which Oṭṭakkūttar saw moving in the delicate currents of the language’s own history.

The Cōḷas’ move to Tamil as the language of command did not coincide with the early years of the royal house, but began instead with Rājarāja I (r. 985–1014), born with the fitting name Aruṇmōḷivarman, a Tamil-Sanskrit compound meaning “defense of gracious speech.” Rājarāja began to promulgate the inscriptive preludes to donative orders known as mēykkīrtti, Tamil compositions, consistent for each king, that recorded royal triumphs. This move to Tamil in the artistry of power increased steadily over the next century, and by Oṭṭakkūttar’s time, the Cōḷa kings had embraced the language in a way their ancestors never had. Whereas Rājarāja and his son Rājendra (r. 1012–44) spoke through monuments of stone to commemorate legends of Cōḷa might, the Cōḷas of the twelfth century honored themselves and their family deity, Naṭarāja, lord of the ancient temple city of Citamparam, by sponsoring elaborate building projects for Śiva and splendid Tamil texts for themselves.

Rājarāja’s great temple in Tanjavur, the Bṛhadīśvara (Rājarājeśvara) temple, celebrates the grandeur of a founding city that never existed when Vijayālaya captured a sweep of hamlets there in the ninth century, raising the Cōḷa standard as a seat of authority. It was, as a later inscription would style it, navīnatāśeṣaguṇapravṛddha, “enhanced by virtue of being new, and all that this entails.” His son Rājendra built the temple of Gaṅgaiṅṭacōḷapuram to commemorate his forces’ northern march through Oḍra and Kaliṅga, an expedition that culminated in taking water from the Ganges and bringing it back to the south, thereby proclaiming through force of

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12 The turn to a vernacular idiom evincing hallmarks of the older Sanskrit language regime follows broader trends of vernacular language use throughout the subcontinent, as ruling lords sought to remap the vision of culture relayed through Sanskrit onto the local ground of their own polities. This is the model advanced by Sheldon Pollock (e.g. 1996, 1998, 2006), who argues that South Asia witnessed an axial turn from a prevailing cultural order dependent upon Sanskrit textuality to a localized imposition of this order in the vernacular languages of place, as regional languages superseded a universalizing Sanskrit ethos beginning around the second millennium CE.

13 TAS 3.1 no. 34, v. 54. See also Champakalakshmi 1996: 62–63.
arms Cōḷa rule over much of the subcontinent. These ritual centers of authority, set respectively on the southwest and northern borders of the Kaveri delta, were cities to celebrate victory and map the world anew. As Ronald Inden has described the construction of such a temple,

> The institution of a temple was something no ordinary king could do because it was an act that presupposed the successful conquest of the quarters. Indeed, the construction of a temple was the crowning glory of a king's conquest of the quarters, the act that completed it. Only a king who had made himself the lord of other kings, who had constituted the kings around him into a proper hierarchy, was competent to serve the cosmic overlord by erecting his image in a great temple and instituting his liturgy there.\(^{14}\)

Markedly absent from the two kings' declarations of supremacy, however, are Tamil texts. In the reigning years of Vikrama, Kulottuṅga II, and Rājarāja II, by contrast, Citamparam was the highest seat of God, the Cōḷa kings fulfilled his will, and Tamil poetry was the vehicle that proclaimed their deeds to the land where it was spoken.

**Heirs to a Unified Throne, 1118–1173**

Vikrama Cōḷa took the throne after the long reign of his father Kulottuṅga I (r. 1070–1122) bound the fortunes of the Eastern Cāḷukyas to the Cōḷa dynasty, thereby quelling the most pressing site of potential turmoil in the royal succession and consolidating the Cōḷa realm.\(^{15}\) Over his half century of reign, Kulottuṅga concentrated patronage on Citamparam as no king had before, and the temple city became a center of worship and learning prominent far beyond the boundaries of the Cōḷa empire. Earlier Cōḷa rulers had honored the temple, to be sure: Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi's eleventh-century poem *Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāti* (*Linked Verses on the Holy Devotees*) describes Vi-jayālaya's successor, Āditya I (r. 871–907), gilding the roof of the Little Hall (*Ciṟṟampalam*), Naṭarā-

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\(^{14}\)Inden 1981: 156.

\(^{15}\)This most famous of Tamil dynasties has received much scholarly attention, though most of their vast inscrip-tional record still remains unpublished. Major studies on the Cōḷas include: Nilakanta Sastri 1955; Catācivapaṇṭārat-tār 1967; Subbarayalu 1973; Stein 1980; Karashima 1984; Champakalakshmi 1996; and Heitzman 1997.
ja’s celebrated sanctuary at Citamparam, and his son, Parāntaka I (r. 907–955) is also associated with gilding the roof of the famous shrine, his deed praised by the genealogies of Cōḷa copper plate grants and in the short Śaiva hymn Tiruvicaippā, traditionally held to be composed by his son Gaṇḍarāditya. It would be too much to state definitively that the Cōḷas were the first to roof the Hall with gold, since Appar seems to describe it in those terms, but there is no doubt this grand royal act became crucial to the Cōḷa heritage, revisited time and again in inscriptions and poetry to the extent that the gold on the roof must have grown quite thick if the proud gilders of Citamparam actually did what their texts declared, and were not claiming the titular right to someone else’s deed. While the sponsors of the Bṛhadīśvara temple and Gaṅgaikoṇṭacōḷapuram, Rājarāja I and Rājendra, do not appear to have involved themselves in service to Citamparam, Naṭarāja’s presence was important enough that both of these temples bear images of the dancing god in subsidiary positions around the main shrine.

After Kulottuṅga I ascended to the throne, unifying Cōḷa and Cāḷukya fortunes to consolidate the empire, the turn of royal favor to Citamparam elicited a flood of lavish gifts made for temple improvement and restoration, as kings and lords made proud demonstrations of their renown by

\[^{16}\] v. 65: “Āditya used the Koṅku gold to gild the roof of the Little Hall / for the god who savaged the man-lion, / His forefather sounded the drums to give his wealth / to the people of the god with knotted locks, who wears the crescent moon, / He was Itaṅkaḻi, an irukkuvēl king, who is a lord to me.” (Pāṇṭiya date: 918 CE (Asokan period) | Tamil date: 925 CE | Tamil language: Tamil inscription | Tamil script: Tamil script: Tamil inscription | Tamil language: Tamil script: Tamil language: Tamil inscription) “The god who savaged the man-lion” refers to Śiva, who in his form as the wondrous beast Śarabha is said to have defeated Viṣṇu in his form as the man-lion Narasiṃha. On Nampiyāntar Nampi’s date, see below, p. 159.

\[^{17}\] v. 8: “Will I ever reach the one I call / my lord, the supreme, my king in the Hall at Tillai / where women with fine round bangles dance and sing / its roof gilded by the Cempiyāṉ, king of Kōḷi, the Cōḷa with straight scepter / who had the might to take Īḻam and the land of the Southerner, king with crooked scepter.” (Pāṇṭiya date: 918 CE (Asokan period) | Tamil date: 925 CE | Tamil language: Tamil inscription | Tamil script: Tamil script: Tamil inscription | Tamil language: Tamil script: Tamil language: Tamil inscription) Tillai – the ancient name for Citamparam; Kōḷi – the Cōḷa’s harbor capitol Uṟaiyūr; Īḻam – Sri Lanka, the Southerner – the Pāṇṭiya king. Parāntaka I began his war on the Pāṇṭiya king Rājasiṃha soon after his accession, and then went on to assault Sri Lanka. (Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 121–24)

\[^{18}\] As for instance Tēvāram 5.2.8, which attributes the golden roof to divine hands: “Every god in the heavenly world / worships him and praises him / they painted his roof with bright fresh gold, / How will I live, a fool who forgets / the dancer in the Little Hall?” (Tamil language: Tamil inscription | Tamil language: Tamil inscription | Tamil language: Tamil inscription | Tamil language: Tamil inscription | Tamil language: Tamil inscription | Tamil language: Tamil inscription | Tamil language: Tamil inscription)
adorning the home of the dancing god. In a new turn, moreover, Tamil was made increasingly central to the pageantry of rule, and patrons’ acts were paired with substantial works of poetry that glorified their largesse. The three texts that comprise the Mūvar Ulā are the most grandiose of these displays, and the processions that set into motion the world-making radiance of the kings they glorify all start with the worship of Śiva in Citamparam. A bit, therefore, needs to be said about the royal ventures in monument building that Oṭṭakkūttar would have witnessed, displays of power and fame that moved in concert with the aims of his own craft.

The poet would have seen the temple blossom from an esteemed but rather modest shrine into an vast complex fit for the royal audience, the result of a sixfold increase in size within a matter of decades. Vikrama was a respected military commander who won distinction in the Kaliṅga war prosecuted in 1110 CE under his father’s reign, and who then moved south from his earlier residence in Vēṅgī in order to assume the throne. As an inscription in the Bṛhadiśvara temple complex declares,

> Crowned in right succession with the jeweled crown, royal and holy, he removed any common hold on the goddess who dwells in the sweet-scented lotus in the South, and ended the loneliness of the fine Earth Goddess who wears the Ponni [Kavēri] River as her dress.

About a decade after his coronation, Vikrama’s mēykkīrti began to include a new royal triumph, a gift made on April 15, 1128 that consigned to the Citamparam temple an abundance of gold he had received in tribute, in order to gild the temple enclosure, gopurams, halls, and structures.

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19 A full analysis of the royal turn to Tamil would have to look to the fragile royal succession that immediately preceded Kulottunga’s reign, and address Vīračōḻiyam, a Tamil grammar modeled on Sanskrit linguistic categories that was composed by the Buddhist author Puttiramittiraṉ (Sanskrit Buddhamitra) under the reign of Vīrarājendra Cōḷa, who ruled for less than a decade between 1060 and 1070. In her analysis of the text, Anne Monius draws attention to its explicit link this text makes with the Cōḷa throne, noting that “not only is the text… named after a local king, but the Tamil language under discussion is defined specifically as ‘the pure Tamil spoken by the Cōḷa king, Vīrarācēntiraṉ, whose white umbrella of victory rules over the entire world.’” (2001: 122)

20 Balasubrahmanyam 1979: 184–86.

21 SII 2.3 no. 68: ‘...’... see also SII 2.2 no. 58, an inscription of Vikrama’s father Kulottunga I that reiterates this history.
surrounding Naṭarāja’s shrine, as well as the altar itself. The gift also provided gold ritual utensils and a solid gold likeness of a celestial *kalpa* tree, gold and strings of pearls to decorate the temple chariot, and funds to develop a royal avenue of homes appointed with jewel-trimmed facades that would bear the king’s own name.\(^{22}\)

The gift’s precise date notwithstanding, its proper attribution is a difficult matter, but one that nonetheless speaks to the reverence accorded to the temple at this time. An inscription by one of Kulottuṅga’s generals in the Kaliṅga war, Naralokavīra, appears to claim much the same endowment as his own,\(^{23}\) and Oṭṭakkūttar’s *ulās* on Kulottuṅga II and Rājarāja II describe it with meticulous detail as a gift of Vikrama’s son, Kulottuṅga II.\(^{24}\) So too does a more famous text, the consummating record of Tamil Śaivism known as the *Periya Purāṇam*, which Kulottuṅga II, the “bee at the lotus feet of Naṭeṣa in the Golden Hall,”\(^{25}\) may well have heard in Citamparam while giving a royal audience in the rājasabhā likely built during his reign.\(^{26}\)

The Tamil masterpieces composed in the time of these three kings are for many admirers the greatest works of the classical tradition. Cayaṅkoṇṭar’s rendition of the Kaliṅga war in his *Kaliṅkattup Paraṇi*, Čēkkiḻār’s *Periya Purāṇam*, Oṭṭakkūttar’s *Mūvar Ulā* and *Takkayākap Paraṇi*, and the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Kampan all appear in this period, and all take care to voice their link to the Cōḷa throne. This is not to say that the Cōḷas were exclusive in their tastes, for their inscrip-

\(^{22}\) SII 5 no. 458; an English translation of this *mēykkārti* is given in SII 3.2 no. 79.

\(^{23}\) Naralokavīra’s bilingual Sanskrit and Tamil inscription is rife with problems, and awaits a satisfactory published edition. Cox 2006: 45–49 discusses this endowment and provides a critical presentation of the verses that describe the Citamparam donations.

\(^{24}\) *Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṇ Ulā* vv. 40–57; Irācarāca *Cōḷaṇ Ulā* vv. 29–34. For the attribution of the gift to Kulottuṅga II, see also ARE 1926–27, p. 81; 1928–29, p. 76.

\(^{25}\) SII 2.2 no. 38.

\(^{26}\) On the construction of the rājasabhā, see Younger 1995: 103. Kulottuṅga’s association with the *Periya Purāṇam* is discussed below, see p. 177. Kulottuṅga’s son Rājarāja II does not appear to have shared his family’s passion for building in Citamparam, turning instead to the construction of a splendid monument in his secondary capital of Rājarājapuri, a temple to Śiva in his guise as Airīvateśvara at Dārāsuram. The renowned frieze around the base of this temple, however, honors in a sequence of sculptured panels the cultural apex of Rājarāja’s father’s reign, the *Periya Purāṇam* likely to have been premiered in the Citamparam temple. On the Dārāsuram frieze as an interpretation of the *Periya Purāṇam*, see Marr 1979.
tions in Andhra regularly employed Telugu, and Sanskrit works tied to the Cōḷa throne also premiered during their years of reign. The Cidambaramāhātmya, a treasury of lore on Citamparam, appears to have been composed at this time, and Keśavasvāmin, the author of the Sanskrit lexicon Nānārthārṇavasaṃkṣepa (also known as Rājarājiya) presents his text as a direct commission of Rājarāja II. But the real legacy of the Cōḷas is in Tamil, distinguished works of poetry that spoke to cultured readers in the Tamil south. The fact that the Tamil literary tradition tends to emphasize the role of great poets such as Kampaṉ, Oṭṭakkūṭtar, Auvaiyār, and Pukaḻēnti in the twelfth-century Cōḷa court—despite, for instance, Pukaḻēnti’s true date a century or so later—speaks to the dynasty’s vaunted place in the literary culture. Like Bhoja of Kanauj, who would grow in memory to become the legendary patron for seemingly every great poet who wrote in Sanskrit, the Cōḷas praised in Oṭṭakkūṭtar’s Mūvar Ulā would come to stand as the paragons of cultured rule, royal patrons who saw in Tamil a beauty and elegance that went far beyond its practical ability to mythologize their lives.

27 As for instance EI 6 no. 21, a Telugu inscription of one of Vikrama Cōḷa’s mahāmaṇḍaleśvara that provides for a perpetual lamp in the Kumārasvāmin temple in Chebrolu.

28 On the Cidambaramāhātmya, see Kulke 1993, which argues that its tale of the legendary king Hiranyavarman is a roman à clef for the accession of Kulottunga I. Nānārthārṇavasaṃkṣepa describes Rājarāja’s commission to the text’s author, Keśavasvāmin, in stylized direct quotation: “There was a king in the Cōḷa line named Śrī Kulottunga Cōḷa, who drove Kali far from Bhāratavarṣa... his son was King Rājarāja, a lord of unique majesty, who spurned the indiscretions of kings. Even in his youth, this heir to the solar line dominated other kings because of his perfect maturity... One day, the king consulted with [me,] his servant, for he had thought of something he had long wanted, and he issued his command. ‘Arya! I have a keen interest, apt to delight my subjects, for nouns in all their meanings, regular and arcane, together with their genders.’” (vv. 1, 3–4, 15–16: Ṣष्ण्युपुरुषुभान्तावर्षाभरसार्यामि, ये: कलि भारतावर्षावर्षाभरसार्यामि, महीपति। अभूतपूरभा सत्यकिरि राजचार:। यामें वत्मानोपि सूर्यवंशशुद्रवान्। अश्वेत स राजे:नाल परिपक्वतया भुगम्। तं केशापति समाधन सक्षमनय महीपति। चिलङ्किलिंगिंक वस्तु स्मृत्याशालयवद्यदानम्॥ आयः। वस्तुसारायें कर्तृहलमतीम में। सूर्यवंशमादुतान्न मान्मा नानार्थवाचिनिम्॥) Vogel (1979: 346–47) notes that the identification of Rājarāja with Rājarāja Cōḷa II is not certain, since the name could also refer to to Rājarāja III, or to two of the sons of Kulottunga I, Rājarāja Mummaḍi Cōḍa and Rājarāja Cōḍaṅga, both viceroy in Vēṇgi. In my view, the identification with Rājarāja II is credible. Keśavasvāmin’s encomium to his patron suggests that he resided in the Cōḷa heartland rather than Vēṇgi, and describes him as a king of kings, not a feudatory. If Rājarāja III was his patron, it would be a serious character departure for a figure often branded as obtuse and incompetent.
5.2 Critic of Poets, Confidante of Kings

Oṭṭakkūttar was a man who enjoyed tremendous success, and who had little doubt about his own talents. Only three poets in the Tamil tradition, Cayaṅkoṇṭar, Kampaṉ, and Oṭṭakkūttar, are graced with the title kavicakravartin, an emperor of poets. Oṭṭakkūttar, it is worth noting, claimed this title for himself. In his finest work, Takkayākap Paraṇi, written during the reign of Rājarāja II when the poet was in his elder years, he concludes:

Let the goddess who makes riches flourish!
Let the goddess of speech on the riverbank flourish!
Let the whole range of Tamil works flourish!
Let Kūttar, king of poets, flourish!\(^{29}\)

As this verse also intimates, the poet’s given name was Kūttar, or “dancer,” a Tamil epithet for Śiva Naṭarāja. The first part of his name, deriving from the Tamil verb oṭṭu, meaning either “join” or “wager,” is a peculiar word for a name, and behind it lie stories that bring the myths surrounding him to life: a man of great poetic talent, formalist to a fault; punctilious and irascible when confronted by more expressive poets; a trusted friend of kings.

The Mythic Life of Oṭṭakkūttar

We must attend to such tales to gain a sense of Oṭṭakkūttar, for there are few certainties to his biography that would illuminate the context of his work. A Śaiva devotee with tantric leanings,\(^{30}\) for most of his life he served the three Cōḷa kings his verses celebrate. Kūttar was a wide-ranging author, heralded for his work across the Tamil genres, among them ūla, paraṇi, kōvai, and pillait-tamil. His surviving works are: the Vikkirama Cōḷan Ulā (The Procession of Vikrama Cōḷa), the Ku-

\(^{29}\) 813: முடலை மாசத் பெருக்க அறுவி புரோஷ்பா எழுத்துகள் மூட்டுவோம் | வேறுபட்ட மறியான கூறுகள் அறுவி அழைக்கும் கூறுகள் மூட்டுவோம்
\(^{30}\) Takkayākap Paraṇi, more intimate than the detached style of the Mūvar Ulā, is a text in praise of Vīrabhadra that is steeped in Śaivatantra.
lōttuṅka Cōḻaṉ Ulā (The Procession of Kulottuṅga Cōḷa), and the Irācarāca Cōḻaṉ Ulā (The Procession of Rājarāja Cōḷa), which together comprise the Mūvar Ulā (The Procession of the Three); Takkayākap Paraṇi (The Rout of Dakṣa’s Sacrifice); and 104 verses from the Kulōttuṅkaṉ Piḷḷaitṭamiḻ (A Tamil Song for the Child Kulottuṅga). A work most regrettably lost, considering the light it could shed on Cōḷa history, is his paraṇi on Vikrama Cōḷa’s triumphs in the Kaliṅga War, apparently entitled Kaliṅkap Perum Paraṇi (The Grand Rout of Kaliṅga). Other texts regularly ascribed to Oṭṭakkūttar are either not extant, such as Arumpait Toḷḷāyiram, a work perhaps modeled on Muttoḷḷāyiram, or two texts in praise of Rājarāja Cōḷa II, Kaṇṭaṉ Kōvai (A Garland for Gaṇḍa) and Kaṇṭaṉ Alaṅkāram (An Adornment for Gaṇḍa), or else they are specious attributions, like Īṭṭiyeḻupatu (Seventy Verses on the Spear) and the Uttarakāṇḍa of Kampaṉ’s Rāmāyaṇa.

Contemporaneous literature reveals a bit more about the man, such as the names of a few patrons that he cites in Takkayākap Paraṇi, and his partiality for Campantar’s hometown of Cīrkāḻi. Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram, the twelfth-century Tamil rendition of Daṇḍin’s Kāvyādarśa, contains an illustrative verse that attests to the reputation Oṭṭakkūttar’s poetry had already gained by that time.

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31 vv. 27–28 of the Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṉ Ulā appears to mention this text by name: “The king who lit the cruel flames of sacrifice at the fortress dear to his enemies | and received the Kaliṅkap Perum Paraṇi.” (ேவாறா || கூளோதுங்கா கோழ்லான் உளா | கலிங்கப் பரும் பரணி தக்காயகப் பரணி வெள்ளேயுடன்.) Takkayākap Paraṇi v. 776 also refers to this text.

32 Dependent on legends about the poet’s tense relationship with Kampaṉ, the attribution of the Uttarakāṇḍa to Oṭṭakkūttar is implausible, as the contrast in style between this text and the poet’s acknowledged works is patent. (Mu. Aruṇācalam, who accepts the attribution, argues that this contrast is due to Oṭṭakkūttar’s passage from youth to maturity; see 1972: 81, 106.) The attribution, however, says much about how the tradition viewed Oṭṭakkūttar’s relationship to the superior poet Kampaṉ. As Viṉōtaracamañcari tells the tale (see below, pp. 149–151), Kampaṉ allows Oṭṭakkūttar’s version of Uttarakāṇḍa to append his own rendition of the first six books of the Rāmāyaṇa “because Uttarakāṇḍa doesn’t have anything interesting in it except stories about the rākṣasas’ births and early years, so I don’t have to sing it myself… and if we keep it, the whole world will see the difference between his words and mine.” (Viracāmi Ceṭṭiyār 1999: 62: இராமாயணத் காப்பட்டாள் பற்றிய காப்பட்டாள் மற்றைக்குறிவிளையானது பார்க்கவும் காப்பட்டாள் கலையாளர்களுக்கு காரணமாயிருக்கும் அக்காம புது கூறியும் காப்பட்டாள்... குலோத்துங்கா கோழ்லான் பரணி ஐவனுடையமுக்குட்டாக பார்க்கவும். ஐ இக்காப்பட்டாள் ஐ காரணமாயிருக்கும் பார்க்கவும் ஐக்காப்பட்டாள்.) Īṭṭiyeḻupatu is a much later text that only became associated with the poet in recent times. The Tillai Ulā, a Cōḷa-period text that Aruṇācalam also credits to Oṭṭakkūttar, and which is only partially extant, remains unattributed insofar as I have been able to ascertain.

33 Takkayākap Paraṇi describes Bhairava as wearing a black coat, a likely reference to Caṭṭainātar in the Cīrkāḻi temple. (Aruṇācalam 1972: 14–15)
and also names his birthplace:

Among the things that give endless pleasure
meted out to the ear, and filled with a beauty
that keeps them in your thoughts,
one, the glance of women with long flowered braids
another, the words of Kūttaṉ from Malari.\(^{34}\)

The verses that inspired such accolades were apparently rewarded, for according to the Caṅkara Rācēntira Cōḷaṇ Ulā (The Procession of Śaṅkara Rājendra Cōḷa), Rājarāja II gave the poet one thousand pieces of gold for every verse in the ulā that praised him,\(^{35}\) and endowed him with a village on the Aricil River (a tributary of the Kaveri), today known as Kūttanaṟ.\(^{36}\)

The rest of Oṭṭakkūttar’s biography swirls in the currents of legend. His story is preserved in the independent verses (taṉippāṭal) attributed to the poet in Tamil Nāvalar Caritai, which appoints these verses with brief codas that describe the circumstances of their composition, and in the delightful tales of Aṣṭāvatāṉam Vīracāmi Ceṭṭiyār’s Viṉōtaracamaṉcari. While these narratives can in no way be assumed to provide transparent historical facts, they do show the way that Kūttar has been understood by the literary tradition itself, and bring to light consistent traits in his personality that color his relationship with the Cōḷa kings for whom he sang.

How, for instance, did the poet receive his full name? Some say that Kūttar became Oṭṭakkūttar after winning a bet (oṭṭam) made in a contest of poetry, but other tales give voice to his character, revealing a man who understood the ways of hierarchy and maneuvered deftly within them. Several of these stories revolve around the poet’s close relationship with the kings he served,

\(^{34}\) v. 178: ெசÊĎ ெசÝயள¹þ ெசÂைமயவாû ÒÀைதĈÈேள | ×ÊறளÝÅ இÊப ×ைறÁபவÉĎÈ – ெதÈßயதÊ || ćÊநாய கÛÊஅவÊ ęĄலா¹ க¾ÕĴாĎ | ķாÊஆ ÚரÂįாÛÀத ĘபÖĈÂ.

\(^{35}\) vv. 25–26: “He received his garland of ulā, sung in the bright kali meter | and also his garland of pilḷaittamiḻ || And like the wise kings of days gone by, the king showered him with gold | one thousand pieces for each verse in his old ulā.” (பாÔய || ெவÈைள¹ கÜĈலா மாைலõாĂ ð¾Ă | ØÈைள¿ தÙÇமாைல ெபÉœாď – ெதÈßயதÊ || ćÊநாய கÛÊஅவÊ ęĄலா¹ க¾ÕĴாĎ | ķாÊஆ ÚரÂįாÛÀத ĘபÖĈÂ.)

\(^{36}\) This appears to be where the temple to “the goddess of speech on the riverbank” praised in Takkayākap Parāṇi (see above, p. 143) is located; as Mu. Aruṇācalam comments (1979: 6–7), this is the only temple dedicated solely to Sarasvatī in Tamilnadu, and an inscription there bears the name of a probable descendant, Ōvāta Kūṭtar.
describing how he quickly finished a half-verse offered to him in challenge by the Cōla, or transformed one of his own two-line kanṇi verses into a four-line verse at the king’s request.\textsuperscript{37} As Tamil Nāvalar Caritai tells it, Oṭṭakkūttar had just finished singing the final lines of the Vikkirama Cōlaṉ Ulā before his lord, praising him as Tirumāl (Viṣṇu) in the guise of his avatar Trivikrama, who measured out his dominion over the universe in three magical steps:

\begin{quote}
You measured out the earth, dark Tirumāl
red hands, flower feet, eyes, and ripe fruit mouth
\end{quote}

Vikrama then commanded him to join a harmonious verse to it, and Oṭṭakkūttar did so at once, this time calling Vikrama by his biruda Akaḷaṅka, “The Tranquil.” Again he praises the king as Viṣṇu, but this time in his peaceful slumber on the waters of time at the end of each cosmic age, leaving us with the kāppu (safeguard verse) to the ulā we know today, and giving the poet the name Oṭṭakkūttar, “Kūttar who joins [the verse]”:

\begin{quote}
You measured out the earth, dark Tirumāl
red hands, flower feet, eyes, and ripe fruit mouth
You thrived in sleep on a banyan leaf, Akaḷaṅka
and this poor doe has languished.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

Oṭṭakkūttar becomes, in these narratives, more than a poet in service. He is a confidante to these rulers, trusted with the private turns in their lives. Right before Vikrama dies, according to Viṉōtaracamaṅcari, he entrusts the poet with a charge that must succeed if his honor is to remain unchallenged: he must travel to Maturai and gain the hand of the Pāṇṭiya princess for his son and heir, the future king Kulottuṅga II.\textsuperscript{39} The poet does not fail. And on the occasions when

\textsuperscript{37}Aruṇācalam 1972: 8.

\textsuperscript{38}V. 124. The coda reads, “This is the verse that Oṭṭakkūttar sang when he was singing the Vikkirama Cōlaṉ Ulā, after being told to join another kanṇi verse to the first one.” See also v. 121, a variation on this theme, whose coda reads, “Vikrama Cōla, who had seen Oṭṭakkūttar come and sing Arumpait Toḷḷāyiram, then told the poet to sing a different verse to match a verse in the poem. He sang one out without delay, and was thus given the name Oṭṭakkūttar.”\textsuperscript{39}Vīracāmi Ceṭṭiyār 1999: 178.
he does stumble, the Cōḷa kings are quick to assist him. Viṇṭaracamañcari contains a verse that Oṭṭakkūttar is said to have begun, and the king himself finished off, singing a beautiful gift of praise when he recognizes that the poet’s verse does not quite fill out the meter. Kūttar begins,

The lord who bears the whole earth under his wide parasol
so the clapper on the swaying bell of justice never rings...

and Kulottuṅga takes up the line:

I call myself Kulottuṅga Cōḷa, crowned with the lotus feet
of Oṭṭakkūttan, renowned among poets who sing on this broad earth.⁴⁰

Rājarāja, who would have known Oṭṭakkūttar as a senior poet in his court, treats him as something of a father figure. On one occasion, the story is told, the poet was seated in the court in a position of prominence near the king, as to be expected given his status. After conversing with others in the royal assembly for some time, he grew tired, and struggled when at last he tried to rise from his chair. Down from the lion throne came Rājarāja, who offered the poet his hand to help him up.⁴¹ Kūttar is there, we are told, when the king ascends the scales to perform the tulādāna,⁴² and is there when the king provokes the ire of his queen, and tries to coax her into opening the locked door of her chambers. He appeals to the poet to sing a verse that will sway her, and Kūttar invokes his skill in pairing amorous hopes with martial valor with the following verse, referring to Rājarāja with the appropriate biruda Gaṇḍa, “Hero”:

Gaṇḍa has an elephant with a head and trunk that dance in rut,
He has come, now open your door, my lady, I beg you—
In the cities of Laṅkā, Kapāṭa, and Kalyāṇi

⁴⁰Viracāmi Čeṭṭiyār 1999: 177–78. [Oṭṭakkūttar:] ஆதும கைடம் நாவைச யாம லலெமலா கைடுற்றி பாருவித்து பிண்பிள்ளிக்கும் சுட்டையில் கைடுற்றும் | குளூள்துஞ்ஞா வாழ்கள் பாருவித்து பிண்பிள்ளிக்கும் | குளூள்துஞ்ஞா ரோஜா பாருவித்து பிண்பிள்ளிக்கும். Tamil Nāvalar Caritai v. 132 offers a slightly different rendition of this verse.
⁴¹Aruṇācalam 1972: 16.
⁴²Tamil Nāvalar Caritai v. 128.
the doors of chests and heads lie split open.\textsuperscript{43}

Veiled threats aside, the poet was unsuccessful on this occasion, for the queen delighted in the verses of another poet, Pukaḻēnti, who had fared poorly in his own tussles with Oṭṭakkūttar and had been cast into prison through the elderly poet’s wiles.

Fictional though it surely is, for Pukaḻēnti lived a century or so later, this tale neatly introduces the other side of Kūttar’s storied character: quick-tempered, imperious, and inwardly convinced that his own technically expert verses fail when compared to the expressive clarity that come naturally to his rivals. He is, in some tellings, a brutally violent man. The Vīraciṅkātaṉa Purāṇam (17\textsuperscript{th} c.) speaks of an occasion when the poet hears a Śaiva yogi from the Vīraciṅkātaṉa monastery singing a Tēvāram hymn of Campantar’s, and interrogates him by demanding that he explain its meaning. Chagrined, the yogi replies that he does not, and that Oṭṭakkūttar is not capable of understanding its subtleties either—a riposte the poet answers by beating him to death with a horsewhip.\textsuperscript{44}

The poet’s taste for blood, in fact, gives rise to the most popular story behind his strange name, a tale, told in Viṉōtaracamañcari, that stresses the poet’s resistance to composing works for

\textsuperscript{43} Tamiḻ Nāvalar Caritai v. 129: கர¿יא¼ Òர¿יאº கܹìைட¹ க¾டÊவÀதாÊ | இர¿יאº கபாட Ùá¿ÖறÁபாÃப¾ Ôவனணºேக | உர¿יא¼ Òர¿יאº கபாடÀ Ö crefÀÖ½ட Ą¾Ôலºகா | Ćர¿יאº கபாட Ćர¿Öɗேம. Kapāṭa is the ancient Pāṇṭiya capital, Kalyāṇi the Cāḷukya capital. This verse, as David Shulman has kindly reminded me, echoes the second chapter of Cayaṅkoṇṭar’s earlier Kaliṅkattup Paraṇi, Kaṭai Tiṟappu (“Opening the Gates”).

\textsuperscript{44} The rest of this tale note Oṭṭakkūttar’s fabled comraderie with kings, as the other yogis of the Vīraciṅkātaṉa monastery rush to the poet’s house to take revenge, but find that he has already taken refuge with the Cōḻa king. The yogis proceed on to the Cōḻa’s palace and demand that Oṭṭakkūttar be handed over, but in a convoluted ruse, instead of producing the poet himself, the king sends his own son out to the yogis in a screen palanquin. The yogis make it all the way back to the monastery before checking on their captive, and realizing they have been outwitted, rush back to the palace in frustrated rage. This time, Oṭṭakkūttar presents himself before them and asks for asylum, but the yogis rush upon him, and the poet begs, as a last request, to be allowed to finish his purifying ablutions. They consent, and he heads to the Aricil River, where he takes refuge in a goddess temple, bolts the doors, and prays for her divine aid. She grants her blessing, inspiring him to compose Takkayākap Paraṇi, which he hands over to the yogis through a window as dawn breaks. The yogis take the text gratefully, accepting it as just recompense for the life Oṭṭakkūttar took. The condensed story is given in Aruṇācalam 1972: 100–103.
anyone other than grand patrons. Here we find a man as high-handed to those beneath him as he was deferential to his masters. Oṭṭakkūttar’s Mutaliyār kinsmen, noting the immense success he has enjoyed through praising Cōḷa kings, approach him with an appeal. Now that he has sung poems to great lords and gained fame, they tell him, it is time to remember his roots, and praise the Mutaliyārs. They offer him fine treasures, but with haughty disdain, Oṭṭakkūttar tells his caste brethren that they have not shown the valorous spirit required to merit his verses. If they want to be exalted by him, he declares, they must give him seventy heads taken from their first-born sons. The Mutaliyār do as told, and bring the heads to the Cōḷa palace. Oṭṭakkūttar climbs atop them and sits regally upon this throne of horror, where he then declaims Īṭṭiyeḻupatu (Seventy Verses on the Spear). At the end of his recitation, he sings a verse to Sarasvati, and the decapitated heads are rejoined to their bodies to live anew: a deed that makes Kūttar famous as Oṭṭakkūttar, “Kūttar who joins [the heads].”

Feuds: Formal Technique and Natural Gifts

The most famous stories about Oṭṭakkūttar’s temper, however, turn on his feuds with two other master poets: Kampan, author of the Tamil Rāmāyaṇa, and Pukaḷēnti, author of Naḷaveṉpā. These tales, some of the best in Viṉōtaracamañcari, show a man driven by his need for recognition, tireless in his labors yet relentlessly insecure, shielding his own vulnerabilities with a mulish insistence on grammatical perfection. Here, Kampan is an older poet with an independent streak, perfectly willing to quarrel with his lord in a way that would be unthinkable for Oṭṭakkūttar, who never challenges a superior worth pleasing. Kampan’s individual spirit leads him to shirk on a commission he has received from a lord in Tiruveṇṇeynallūr named Caṭaiyappa Mutaliyār: to translate the Rāmāyaṇa from Sanskrit to Tamil. As the poet has done nothing, Caṭaiyappa brings

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46Viracami Ceṭṭiyår 1999: 35.
the matter to the king’s attention, and Kulottuṅga decides to commission the Tamil rendition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* from both Kampaṉ and Oṭṭakkūttar, in order to have the text completed as quickly as possible. Kūttar, ceaseless worker, drafts the entirety of the first five books and is at work on the sixth, having reached the *Kaṭalkāṉ Paṭalam* (*The Chapter on Sighting the Ocean*) by the time the Cōla demands to hear what the two poets have accomplished. Kampaṉ, anything but a ceaseless worker, has done nothing, but claims to have finished the *Tiruvaṇaip Paṭalam* (*The Chapter on the Holy Bridge*).

The king orders Kampaṉ to recite the chapter, and the poet sings out seventy verses in extemporaneous brilliance. Stunned, Oṭṭakkūttar latches onto a point he hopes will ruin the performance. In one verse, Kampaṉ has used a word for “droplet” that grammarians have not noted in their lexicons, *tumi* rather than the sanctioned *tuḷi*.

> The grand mountain that Kumuda hurled in the sea seemed like a dancer, plunging into rhythm, the spray of water [*tumi*] off the sea’s reeling waves entered heaven, and the gods leapt up greedy for the ambrosia sure to emerge once more.48

> “*Tuḷiyait tumi enṟīrē!*” crows Oṭṭakkūttar, “You’re using *tumi* for *tuḷi!* Do you find that in the thesaurus, in *Tivākaram*? Have you ever seen it used in literature at all?”49 “*Avaikaḷil ellām il-lai, ulakavalakku,*” responds Kampaṉ. “Not in those books, no, it’s a word people use.” Oṭṭakkūttar makes it clear that he does not find this credible.

Disconsolate, Kampaṉ prays to Sarasvatī for help, and she comes to him in a vision, instructing him to bring Kūttar and the king down to the street the next day at dawn. The goddess then conjures a *mise en scène* in front of an empty house to save him, transforming the sacred words

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48 *Yuttakāṇṭam* v. 657: துளி வெள்ளை விளக்கும் கேட்கவும் | இயற்கை வெள்ளை விளக்கும் | துளி வெள்ளை விளக்கும் கேட்கவும் | அந்த வெள்ளை விளக்கும் கேட்கவும். 
49 வெள்ளையும் இயற்கையும்! இவ்வரிகா, இவ்வரிகா என்னும்? அந்த வெள்ளை விளக்கும் தன்னனை விளக்கும் கேட்கவும்?” (Viracāmi Čeṭṭiyār 1999: 61)
she protects into a small pastoral. The Vedas turn into a churning pot, the Vēdāntas into yogurt, the śāstras into the churn, the itihāsas and purāṇas into little children, and she herself turns into a milkmaid. When Kulottuṅga and the two poets approach as the sun rises, she calls out, “Stand back, children, drops [tumi] of buttermilk are about to splash up!”50

Oṭṭakkūttar accepts his defeat, but knows very well that no one was living in that house before. He goes back, and finds that the entire scene has disappeared. Perceiving that Sarasvatī herself must have instigated the affair, he recognizes that she has chosen Kampaṅ, and his own poetry will fail by comparison. He works on his own text for six more months, completing it, but ultimately bursts out in frustrated despair and tears it into pieces as Kampaṅ looks on in horror, crying out, “The only true poet is the best there is, who cares about anyone else?”51 Kampaṅ manages to stop him only in time to save the last remnants of his work, the Uttarakāṇḍa often attributed to him today.

The poet experiences similar anguish in the story Viṉōtaracamañcari tells of his skirmishes with Pukaḻēnti.52 Arriving at the Cōḻa court in the company of the Pāṇṭiya princess whom Oṭṭakkūttar had brought from Maturai for Kulottuṅga to wed, Pukaḻēnti soon becomes the victim of the fractious poet’s intrigues, and is cast into prison. Kūttar, walking in the king’s company, sees him in his cell, and Kulottuṅga asks whether the jailed poet is indeed a master of Tamil. Oṭṭakkūttar responds,

What is this, my king?
A deer, waiting in front of the tiger with sharp fangs?
A parched forest, waiting in front of the blazing fire?
A fish in the heavy sea, waiting in front of the cruel-eyed shark?
He is the drifting fog, and I am the rising sun, my king!53

50“பிள்ளைச் சுண்டி அம்மா உயிர்ப் பேரார்க்கும் அதி பிள்ளைகளில் ஏகள் கேள்விகள்!” (Vīracāmi Ceṭṭiyār 1999: 62)
51“உண்மையா ஆயிக், புரோமான் என்பர் தொரா?” (Vīracāmi Ceṭṭiyār 1999: 62)
53மாந்த் பார்ச்சேல் ஆனாயிக் கொர்? பார்ச்சேல் கொர் எல்லா கொர் தொரா என்பர்? கொரால் என் பார்ச்சேல் கொர் தொரா என்பர்? தொரா என்பர் பார்ச்சேல் கொர் தொரா என்பர்?
Pukalēnti quickly asks the king whether his answer should be crafted in his own words, or if he should use Oṭṭakkūttar’s words against him. Kulottuṅga tells him to use Kūttar’s words, and Pukalēnti sings out the same poem, but with a few clever shifts:

He is the deer, and I am the tiger with sharp fangs
He is the parched forest, and I am the blazing fire
He is the fish in the heavy sea, and I am that cruel-eyed shark
He is the drifting fog, and I am that rising sun, my king!

Delighted with the quick riposte in identical meter, the king frees him from jail.

Now free, Pukalēnti stews in hatred for his oppressor, and resolves to murder him. Unbeknownst to the aspiring killer, however, Kūttar is in torment, convinced that he will never equal Pukalēnti’s gift for verse. He lies in miserable resignation on his bed, refusing food and drink, unable to sleep. When Pukalēnti creeps in to his house at night, carrying a heavy stone to crush his rival’s skull while he sleeps, he hears Oṭṭakkūttar cry to himself, “I can do penance backwards and forwards my whole life, and I will still never be able to sing verses like Pukalēnti’s! I have mastered so much, but all I can do is make empty threats. What glory will I ever have?” Aghast, Pukalēnti approaches Oṭṭakkūttar and confesses all that he planed to do, then lays the stone at his feet. The two poets embrace, and head forth to present themselves before Kulottuṅga, who celebrates their newfound friendship.

54 மாற்றுமனிது அவனை நாயிராளிக் கால்கள்களாக தவும் முறாுக கருளும் சின்னமாக கைதிண்ட வலைத்துயர்த்துவாராய்க்கும் புறமுடி வருவானுடைய வருவானுடைய! (Viracāmi Cēṭṭiyār 1999: 188)

55 நீங்க என் கவிதே வசதியான வருவானுட்கள் தான் போற்றும் புறானுடி வருவானுடி வருவானுடி வருவானுடி வருவானுடி! நாசார்கள் முன்னழுத்து தொடர்வலைத்துயர்த்துவாராய்க்கும்! அவர்கள் என் கவிதே வசதியான வருவானுடி வருவானுடி வருவானுடி! (Viracāmi Cēṭṭiyār 1999: 203) The dispute erupts over the criticisms Oṭṭakkūttar raises against Pukalēnti’s Nalaveṇpā. Shulman (2010: 292–93) examines the fabled conflict between these two poets, contrasting Pukalēnti’s natural grace with Oṭṭakkūttar’s minute demands for formal perfection, which in truth mask his own appreciation for Pukalēnti’s lyrical phrasing. As in the case of Kampan (see below, p. 149), Oṭṭakkūttar’s elevated style is humbled before the unaffected sweetness of a rival’s poetry.
5.3 Building a Canon

These tales of Oṭṭakkūttar’s life accord well with the thousand or so verses that make up the Mūvar Ulā. Formally elegant, they are nonetheless rarely brilliant in their creativity, though moments of genius do come. His ulās do not show the poet revealing himself. They are a project of power, and Oṭṭakkūttar remains behind the curtain. Rather than the poet’s own distinctive experience, the Mūvar Ulā calls on texts that were gaining a new recognition in the Cōḷa south, studied, collated, and edited in the crystallizing moment of the twelfth century, when Tamil Śaivas worked to amass the foundational texts of their creed under the patronage of the Cōḷa’s tiger banner. These hymns, poetic sagas, and treatises on the theory of language were texts written in Tamil, the inheritance of a vernacular in ascendance. Oṭṭakkūttar’s working conditions in the Cōḷa court make for the envy of scholars in any age, with the work he valued not only knowing prestige, but taking pride of place among the guiding hallmarks of culture.

Construing the Vernacular

Oṭṭakkūttar was surrounded by a wealth of literary theory on Tamil, from normative treatises and commentaries that predated him by many centuries to roughly contemporary texts that attempted to systematize an emerging set of genres. Tolkāppiyam, the principal authority on Tamil grammar and the essential standards of literature, makes no specific mention of ulā. Commentators, however, took its principles for what constitutes literature as definitive, and sought to connect its terse—and sometimes obligingly malleable—sūtras with the living world of texts that lay before them.56 In the late eleventh century, Iḷampūraṇar, author of the oldest extant com-

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56As Sivathamby argues, “The importance of the commentators should be seen in the fact, they; (a) made intelligible texts which were becoming unintelligible to their contemporaries. and/or (b) made the works concerned relevant to their own time by indicating that what was mentioned by the author of the work had great implications [sic]” (1986: 45).
mentary on Tolkāppiyam, connected just such a verse with the seven stages of womanhood that guide an ulā’s composition. The sūtra in question is found in the Porulatikāram, in its description of pāṭāṇ tinai, the puṟam landscape of praise for a hero:

And arising on the part of the town is held to be appropriate if the classification agrees with the practice.

Ilampūraṇar explains this cryptic phrase as follows:

Here is what it means: “And arising on the part of the town is held to be appropriate” means that the poets hold that it is appropriate for the theme of desire to occur in the town, while “if the classification (vakaimai) agrees with practice” means that it depends on whether the classification accords with the practice in effect at the time.

“Arising on the part of the town” means the range from the child (pētai) up to the older woman (pērīḷampeṇ). “Practice” means the prevailing conditions of expression. “Class” (vakai) means a section of verse that is composed in conformity with these respective stages. Diverse examples may be cited.

By referring to the seven stages of womanhood when he considers the literary forms used to praise a hero, Ilampūraṇar seems to have known texts that, if they were not the very ones that have come under our consideration here, would have shared their model. The procession scenes in Cīvakacintāmani and Perurkatai are likely candidates, given his probable Jain background, and it is possible that the Tirukkailāya Nāṉa Ulā and the Āḻuṭaiya Pillaiyār Tiruvantāti also informed his views. The seven stages of womanhood had been recently codified in the tenth-century thesaurus Piṅkalam (Piṅkala’s Text), which lists them as follows:

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58v.83: ஊвлечен் உண்மையில் பாண்டைய் போருளிகளம் | அமைப்பு பிரிவுக் காட்டுவர். (Verse numbering varies slightly in different editions of the text.) Though some have argued that this verse itself refers to ulā, this is an ex post affirmation of the consequent that misses the innovative reading of Ilampūraṇar and, following him in the fourteenth century, Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar. See in this regard Ali 1996: 184–185.

'சுருக்கு அலையும்' காண்நே வருகையை சுருக்கியதை குறிப்பிட்டு வந்துள்ளே. 'அமைப்பு' காண்நே முடிக்கும் பழுப்பு வந்ததை குறிப்பிட்டு வந்துள்ளே. 'அடுத்து முடிக்கும்' வருகையை நேர்வு காண்நே குறிப்பிட்டு வந்துள்ளே. 

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Child, young girl, nubile girl, ingénue, youthful woman, discerning woman, and older woman: these are the seven stages with regard to how women look, aged up to seven, eleven, thirteen, and nineteen, twenty-five, thirty-one, and forty.\textsuperscript{60}

The names Piṅkalam gives for the seven stages were not new, but they do not appear to have been viewed as stages of an ordered system before the development of the processional trope in Tamil literature. As Mu. Aruṇācalam explains, “The names of the seven stages of women are current in caṅkam literature in various circumstances. They are not, however, schematized as a group of seven as they were later. We do in fact see all seven, but of the seven titles for them, petumpai, terivai, and pērīlampen are very rarely seen. Generally, the poets employ the term pētai when referring to a woman.”\textsuperscript{61}

Other literary treatises had also emerged by Oṭṭakkūttar’s time, and by recognizing themes that Tolkāppiyam’s dictates for caṅkam poetry had not, embraced new developments in literature that spoke to the ulā’s concerns. This had not always been the case. Like Muttolāyiram before them,\textsuperscript{62} ulās are classified by these treatises as kaikkilai texts, that is to say, texts that explore the theme of unreciprocated desire. For Tolkāppiyam, this sort of desire is neither a puṟam subject, nor is it expressed by a woman. Tolkāppiyam’s discussion of kaikkilai states,

\begin{quote}
\textit{Kaikkilai} is indicated when a suffering that has no limits arises toward a girl who is too young to know desire. He discusses the experience of pleasure, divulging its virtues and harms,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{60}v. 5.216: மூலா உலாநிலை மன்னன் மன்னன் | அருணா உலாநிலை உலாநிலைப்பூச்சிலாயன் | மூலா உலா முரயே உலாநிலைப்பூச்சிலாயன் | கிருஷ்ண சாத்ரு உலாநிலைப்பூச்சிலாயன் | மூலா உலா பெரே உலாநிலைப்பூச்சிலாயன்
\textsuperscript{61}சேக ஞாக்ன ஏகாதமாக ஏகாதமாக ஏகாதரர் ஏகாதரர் ஏகாதரர் ஏகாதரர் ஏகாதரர். ஏகாதமா:
\textsuperscript{62}See Chapter Four, p. 107.

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but she does not answer with what he expects will occur between them.  

The ulā meets none of these criteria. It is a kaikkilai text about desirous women that falls, as Ilāmpūraṇar’s discussion of the seven stages of womanhood suggests, in the puṟam division of pāṭāṇ tīnai, praise for a hero.  

What then had changed? In his study of the cankam anthology Eṭṭuttokai, John Ralston Marr draws attention to the way an early poetic treatise, Aiyaṉāritaṉār’s Purapporuḷ Venpāmālai (A Garland of Verses on the Puṟam Topics), shifted kaikkilai to the puṟam mode. The text (which predates Ilampūraṇar, for he cites its verses and at times echoes its reasoning) not only brings kaikkilai into this new domain, it extends its range to women. Its fifteenth sūtra gives the method for writing of a woman’s unreciprocated desire, and makes clear that the visible signs of this experience are marked by pain:

Beholding, desiring, total absorption,  
weakening, growing lean from that weakness,  
suffering at the mere sight of him,  
declaring hatred for the day, wishing nights were long,  
wailing out in dreams, weakening in the heart:  
this is what kaikkilai means for a woman.

In this list of the progressive symptoms of lovesickness, which—though its individual stages vary slightly from earlier lists given in Kāmasūtra and Tolkappiyam—maintain the now-standard pattern of ten, the verse marks a real shift in literary theory. Aiyaṉāritaṉār may not have been

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63Porulāṭikāram v. 52: காசாட னய¿த Ċ½Ņா¾ ெமÜதÅ | ெமÜĿாĂ ைவகÅ கா¾டÅ வÜ¿தÅ | பகÊćá ċைர¿த ÜĉċîĂ பĉவரÅ | கனÝ னரÉற ென¼įாĂ ெமÜதÅ |ெபÊபாÉ ĐÉĎ¹ ைக¹Ðைள யாþÂ.  
64Cēyarāmaṉ1966:33. Tolkappiyam gives pāṭāṇ as the puram counterpart to the akam tīnai of kaikkilai, but does not, as Marr notes (1985: 45), give a definition of what pāṭāṇ itself signifies.  
65Marr 1985: 45–51.  
66Cāminātaiyar 2003: vi.  
67கா¾ட னய¿த Ċ½Ņா¾ ெமÜதÅ | பகÊćá ċைர¿த ÜĉċîĂ பĉவரÅ | கனÝ னரÉற ென¼įாĂ ெமÜதÅ |ெபÊபாÉ ĐÉĎ¹ ைக¹Ðைள யாþÂ.  
68See Chapter Three, p. 87.
the first to advance it, as Purapporu Venpāmulai stems from an earlier text, Paṇṇiru Paṭalam (The Twelve Chapters), which is no longer extent. But his is the text that would last, and in the many normative texts on poetic composition that followed, all uphold the view that a poet can make a woman’s hopeless passion, and the resultant displays of her pain, the stage for a hero’s glory.

By far the most important of these treatises, Paṇṇiru Pāṭṭiyal (the name is obscure, perhaps The Twelve [Elements of Poetic Theory]), presents itself as a compilation of the views of earlier poets, fifteen of whom it cites by name. Its date is not certain, with estimates given anywhere from the tenth to twelfth centuries. It contains a detailed record of principles that distinguished the emergent pirapantam genres, literary norms that would have guided the course of Oṭṭakkūttar’s own labors if the text is indeed earlier than his own ulās, or—as seems more likely—marked the success of his effort, if Paṇṇiru Pāṭṭiyal was responding to them. The description of ulā that it gives, while fairly involved, merits translating, for the care it takes to note the range of scholarly interest in the genre attests to its importance in Kūttar’s time.

Ulā is a poem in the kalivenpā meter that describes the first through seventh stages. According to Poykai,

The nature of the hero being praised, as he goes on procession
and the longing of a young woman who has suitable desire,
sung in kalivenpā, a type of kali meter
where the final three feet have the form of venpā.

Another has also said,

Sung in kalivenpā, it considers the way desire takes effect
when the seven stages of women, beginning with the child,
have seen a man of high status who has outstanding qualities.

The first scene consists of the hero’s lineage, righteousness, and established conduct, his acquisitions and magnanimity, his bath in pure water at the break of day, his adornment with beautiful jewelry, his reception in an ancient city, and his procession on a rutting elephant on

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a long fine road. Some poets of consummate learning also hold that the first scene includes the gathering of crowds.

A poet, when describing the next seven scenes, must write with an eye towards the range of women, classified as child, young girl, nubile girl, ingénue, graceful woman, experienced woman, and older woman.

According to Poykai,

The child (pētai) is between five and eight years old.
The young girl (petumpai) is between nine and ten.
The nubile girl (maṅkai) is held to be between eleven and a mature fourteen.
The ingénue (maṭantai), between fifteen and an assured eighteen.
The graceful woman (arivai), up to twenty-four.
The experienced woman (terivai), up to twenty-nine.
The older woman (periḷampeṇ), up to thirty-six.

Some poets of established repute specify ages, names, and characters for males, set in an established pattern. The boy (pālan) is held to be up to seven years old, the youth (mīḷi) is up to ten, the brave youth (maṟavōṉ) is up to fourteen, the sturdy youth (tiṟalōṉ) is fifteen, the young man (kāḷai) is sixteen, the valorous man (viṭalai) is up to thirty, and the older man (mutumakaṉ) is older than that. The hero being praised, they say, falls within such an age when composing an ulā. In the puṟam mode of ulā, the age of the man is held to be up to forty-eight years old.

Sand castles, dolls, molucca bean pawns, a beautiful swing, a green parrot, a lute, bathing in fresh water, playing in a park, enjoying fine liquor, and other such activities are held to be correct for women at each successive stage.

Kings, gods, and men who follow the conduct prescribed in texts on ethics are the correct subjects for the ulā, sung in the kaliveṇpā meter. The poets say that the ulā genre extends across all four varṇas.70
The pāṭṭiyals and associated normative texts that followed Paṉṉiru Pāṭṭiyal would follow its model closely, though none with the level of detail that Paṉṉiru Pāṭṭiyal took care to lay out (Table 5.1). For Oṭṭakkūttar, the ulā was no longer an innovation, it was a framework on which a poet’s innovations could be staged. The genre had been acknowledged, and set forth as a literary model.

Reclaiming the Śaiva Saints: Tēvāram

About one hundred years before Oṭṭakkūttar glorified Vikrama Cōḷa with the first of his royal ulās, another poet had engaged in a massive project of textual collation for the Cōḷa court. Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi, an Ādiśaiva priest, is said to have anthologized the Tamil hymns of the three great Śaiva saints, Appar, Campantar, and Cuntarar at the behest of his royal patron, who had heard some of these Tēvāram hymns sung in his court and wanted them collected and ordered. The first verse of Tirumuraikaṇṭa Purāṇam names this patron as Rājarāja Abhaya Kulaśekhara, whom I, concurring with most historians of the period, take as Rājarāja I.71

The identification of Rājarāja Abhaya Kulaśekhara with Rājarāja I is not certain, but other hypotheses rest on very fragile premises. Younger (1995: 155) understands Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi as a contemporary of Āditya I (r. 871–907) because of a verse that praises this king in Nampi’s Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāti (see above, p. 138), but the mention of Āditya, though noteworthy, provides no surety in dating. Identifying the Āditya of this verse with Āditya I is also not without its difficulties, for the citation has been argued to refer to the later Gaṇḍarāditya, the purported author of Tiruvicaippā (Subramanian 1985: 71–72). The mention of Āditya using “Konku gold” to gild the Citamparam shrine, however, would appear to indicate Āditya I, who took the Konku region from the Western Gaṅgas (Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 114–15). Neither of these identification, however, is strengthened by any corroborative evidence. The interest Rājarāja I showed in Tēvāram, by contrast, is plain. Images of Appar, Campantar, and Cuntarar were installed in his great Brhadīśvara temple, the famous murals in the passageway surrounding the temple’s sanctum portray deeds of the Nīyaṉmār (see below, p. 168), and provision for singing the saints’ hymns in temple ritual is noted in the inscriptional record. (Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 637–8)
### Table 5.1: Stipulations for the Ulā Genre After Paṉṉiru Pāṭṭiyal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
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| Vēṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟ tamil
| 12th c.               | “Ulā is known as the genre in which women, in the recognized classes from child on up, forget their activities and swoon when a man comes down the street, rendered in the kaliveṇpā meter.”
|                       | “When described, the demarcation of the various ages for women, from child on up is given as follows: five to seven; on to eleven; on to thirteen; on to nineteen; on to twenty-five, on to thirty-one, and on to forty.”
| Navanītip Pāṭṭiyal   | 14th c. | “The ulā is a rich genre in which the seven stages of women, beginning with the child, praise a man who is in the street. Like the messenger poem, it is in the kaliveṇpā meter.”
|                       |        | “When stating the ages of the seven stages of women, beginning with the child, the first is from five to seven, then up to eleven, then thirteen, then nineteen, on to twenty-five, then thirty-one, on up to forty; this is what the poets who know the old texts all maintain.”
| Citamparap Pāṭṭiyal  | 16th c. | “Composed in the kaliveṇpā meter, the ulā is about a procession that is worshiped by the various stages of women who feel intense passion as they enter the street: the beautiful child, who is up to seven; the young girl, up to eleven; the nubile girl, up to thirteen; the ingénue, up to nineteen, the lovely graceful woman, up to twenty-five; the experienced woman, up to thirty-one; the older woman, up to forty years of age.”
| Ilakkaṇa Vilakkam     | 17th c. | “After describing a young man in terms of his eminent lineage, and so forth, an ulā narrates how he comes in procession on a decorated street that is crowded with beautiful women adorned with jewels, and women from all of the seven stages worship him. It is composed in the kaliveṇpā meter. The child is between five and seven years old. The young girl is between eight and eleven. The nubile girl is between twelve and thirteen. The ingénue is between fourteen and nineteen, while the graceful woman is up to six years older than that. The experienced woman is between twenty-six and thirty-two, and the older woman is up to forty years old. This is what has been given for women at each stage.”
| Cuvāminātam           | 18th c. | “The ulā genre is a composition in the kali style of verse about the seven stages of women who praise the fame and the procession of a ruler as he comes into view.”

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\(^{a}\) p. 46: அைலாத குளமாறு வைநையாைலாஷ | எச்சைலாத பவாைலாஷ – வைநையாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ .

\(^{b}\) pp. 44-45: ஆழமாக மெலாழமாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ வைலாைலாஷ .

\(^{c}\) v45: வைலாைலாஷ வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ .

\(^{d}\) v. 46: வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ .

\(^{e}\) v. 36: வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ .

\(^{f}\) Porulakkāram vv. 486-91: ஆழமாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ .

\(^{g}\) Pirapantamarapu v. 167: வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ | வைலாைலாஷ .
The Tēvāram hymns, which by Oṭṭakkūttar’s time represented an essential part of Śaiva temple ritual, record the processions of earlier days, climactic moments in the grand temple festivals that the three saints celebrate through song.⁷² Campantar offers a vivid sense of the moment:

His knotted crown is soaking wet
his throat dark with poison, his tongue filled with the Vedas.
While devotees and siddhas dance and sing
of a fame that covers the world,
the roar of a festival filled with drums
on the streets where the chariot rolls
travels far and wide.
There he is, lord of the Citticaram shrine
in the town of Naraiyūr
made beautiful, shining, and holy.⁷³

Appar, Campantar’s older contemporary, sang a decad of verses on the procession of Śiva at the great Tiruvārūr temple. A selection from these hymns reveals how magnificent these occasions were, even in the early years of temple-based Śiva worship:

Canopy trimmed with pearls, chowries set with gold and gems
processing in their right order,
surrounded by women and pious men, following the offerings,
ascetics in their honored garb, wearing garlands of skulls,
the Father is in Tiruvārūr, on the day of Ātirai.

Every street is alive with light
from canopies and white banners,
bright with the luster of shining, heavy gems,
garlands of coral and pearls, the best of their kind,
the First One is in Tiruvārūr, on the day of Ātirai.

Conches white as moonlight and the parai drums sound,
the beat of ringing anklets spreads everywhere
as the crowds never come to a stop,
peacocks think they hear the roaring clouds

⁷³Tēvāram 1.71.5: வராட்டிக்கைக்கு கைற்றிய மைறக கைற்றிய நாவா
பாராச்சி வைராம்போனே புரான் எல் நேரே | புராணை புரொமண்டு வைராம்போனே | புராணை புரொமண்டு வைராம்போனே | புராணை புரொமண்டு வைராம்போனே. Tēvāram contains numerous references to procession in its hymns, e.g. 1.27.7; 4.50.2; 6.96.7.
and spread their tails to dance in joy,
coming to whirl in Tiruvārūr, on the day of Ātirai.

Women with lips like scarlet coral
meditate on the red lotus feet of the lord,
nubile girls are overwhelmed, and pair with the young men,
the gods led by Indra and the siddhas all send up their praise,
the Divine Heart is in Tiruvārūr, on the day of Ātirai.

The undying gods lead the way, heads bowed low,
Gorgeous celestial women follow behind, with arms lean as bamboo,
Devotees smeared with holy ash sing hymns on each side,
all slaves of the lord in Tiruvārūr, on the day of Ātirai.  

Appar’s careful description of women being overwhelmed by the sight of Śiva in Ārūr and
their pairing with young men (maintarkalōṭu maṅkaiyar kūṭi mayaṅkuvār) is striking, a fleeting
instance of the themes that would later suffuse the ulās. Oṭṭakkūttar could well have sensed
the power of this trope in his study of Tēvāram, and understood, too, the possibilities that a close
focus on a woman’s inner emotional transformation would bring to his praise for Cōḷa kings.
For Appar himself tightens his narrative focus on Śiva in procession to do just this, evoking a
woman’s private world of infatuated desire in a different set of verses on Vītiṉaṅkāṇ, Śiva’s
festival image in Tiruvārūr, as a woman’s wet nurse grows anxious over her ward’s impassioned
response to the god:

\[\text{\textsuperscript{74}Tēvāram 4.21, vv. 1, 3, 5, 7, 8:} \]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{75}A difficult name, most clearly “the handsome lord of the street,” but also perhaps “the lord who goes to the end of the street”; see Rajamani and Shulman (forthcoming).}\]
She sees him, the totality of all the gods, who tore through Dakṣa’s sacrifice. She sees the master of disciplined souls, and loves him, wants him this girl of mine, she has lost control.

She starts to tell me all kinds of things And when I say different she just says, “Hara, in Ārūr…” She has seen him in procession, Vītīvīṭaṅkaṇ and she burns for him this beauty of mine.⁷⁶

_Tēvāram_ would have been a distinguished text in Oṭṭakkūttar’s library, a treasury of devotion composed by the greatest saints in the Tamil Śaiva tradition. Their hymns informed his religious practice and grounded his literary art. But what must not be overlooked when granting the vital role that the _Tēvāram_ hymns had for Kūttar’s generation of writers is the reverence that Tamil Śaivas increasingly had for the chronicle of Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi’s miraculous resurrection of the hymns, and their subsequent anthologization.⁷⁷ In the Tamil literary efflorescence of the twelfth century, Nampi was more than a scholar, he was a saint who had walked the path, and through his devotion to gods and the Cōḻa king had recovered the greatest hidden treasures in the history of Śiva worship, reviving them to lead Tamil Śaivas toward their chosen future. He was, moreover, an author of devotional texts that were canonized in _Tirumuṟai_. Among Oṭṭakkūttar’s influences, Nampi seems particularly close to him in spirit, to judge by an affinity of texts. But both poets cared deeply for the history of Tamil verse, and were inspired by these labors to reach their own artistic heights. As Oṭṭakkūttar looked to the past to develop his own work in Tamil verse, he saw

⁷⁶_Tēvāram_ 5.7.7–8: தெவாரம் வாஸ்கையணயா ராகிணா சத்தைந்தா | செழிமா கொண்டை ஓரஞ்சைதா கயல்கள்பால் | கேள்ள கூற்று கொண்டை அரின்சை | கேள்ள கூற்று கொண்டை அரின்சையைதா கயல்கள்பால் கயல்கள்பால் செழிமா கொண்டை ஓரஞ்சைதா கயல்கள்பால் | அரின்சை கொண்டை அரின்சையைதா கயல்கள்பால் | கேள்ள கூற்று கொண்டை அரின்சையைதா கயல்கள்பால் | கேள்ள கூற்று கொண்டை அரின்சையைதா கயல்கள்பால். “She has lost control” translates koṇṭi, a difficult word centering on waywardness that can also mean a rascal or a prostitute. My translation benefits from David Shulman’s discussion of these verses in Rajamani and Shulman (forthcoming).

⁷⁷Sivathamby 1986: 42.
The Poems of Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi

Key here is the fact that Nampi was drawn to ulā. His ouevre glorifies the hagiography of Campantar, whom he honors as āḷuṭaiya pillaiyār, “the ruling child.” Campantar’s life is not known for relationships with women, yet Nampi tends to focus on the woman’s narrative gaze when he writes of the saint’s renowned deeds. This is true both in glimpses—individual verses reminiscent of Appar’s hymns on the suffering women who behold Śiva in procession—and in an extended work that conveys his appreciation for ulā. Consider in this regard a verse in his Āḷuṭaiya Pillaiyār Tiruvantāti (Linked Verses on the Ruling Child), which—in the ulā’s classic union of violence and sexuality—sets Campantar’s gruesome victory over the Jains of Maturai in the narrative eyes of a woman who aches with desire for him:

She will arise,  
suffering as she is burned by the moon  
with rising tears she will worship.  
You had the unwashed bodies of men impaled  
ones who pluck out their hair and eat from their hands  
Facing them at the holy river Vaigai.  
Will you not grant your favor to her now,  
you heavenly wish-giving tree?78

The real expression of the ulā’s guiding themes, however, comes in Nampi’s Āḷuṭaiya Pillaiyār Tiruvulā Mālai (A Garland on the Holy Procession of the Ruling Child). As its title suggests, this is a text entirely driven by procession, focusing in this instance on a procession Campantar makes around his hometown of Cīrkāḻi. The text begins with a charming pastoral scene, as a water buffalo arrives at the local tank at dawn, scaring off the birds and fish. Flowers begin to bloom,

78v. 28: என்றும் என்றும் போன்றும் முன்னோ சுருங்கக்காமல் | என்றும் என்றும் கொல்லும் முன்னோ சுருங்கக்காமல் | என்றும் என்றும் முன்னோ சுருங்கக்காமல் | என்றும் என்று கொல்லும் முன்னோ சுருங்கக்காமல். See also v. 6, discussed in Chapter Two, p. 29.
and the sap from banana plants and sugarcane groves pours out over the fields (vv. 1–10). The trees seem like gems, areca palms like beautiful women, and the mango trees are as compact as sturdy elephants (11-15). The town’s gardens are exquisite, making the whole scene bright, and the land beyond the city walls could not be finer (16–26). Nampi then moves beyond his evocation of the land’s rich, feminine lushness, and turns to the city of Cīrkāḷi itself, praising its walls (27–30), fine sights (31–34), inhabitants (35–38), and particularly its wise scholars, the “four hundred brahmans of Cīrkāḷi” (39–44). Next comes the artistry of the city’s women (45–48), the sounds of daily life (49–52), the city’s proud wonders (53–55), and its twelve names (56–58).

Thus far, Nampi’s ulā mālai differs from the Tirukkēḻaiya Ŵēṟa Ulā, taking as its subject the delights of life in a blessed town rather than a history of lordly deeds performed by the text’s hero. When the poet turns to his next subject, however, and speaks of the great events in Campantar’s life, the textual echoes become clear. He speaks of the auspicious omens that surrounded his birth (59–63), and his lordly merits (64–71), including his divine role as the nemesis of the Jains, besting them in miraculous contests to end their hold on power in Maturai (72–74):

The brahman who had the Jains impaled
so a river of blood flowed from their open wounds,

To end their power, in the conflict that began in Kūṭal
noble city of the southern king with a spear and a bright garland.79

Nampi pays tribute to the miracles Campantar wrought while on pilgrimage (75–82), and the types of verses he composed (83–85), then brings the first half of his ulā to a close by describing how local brahmans, 48,000 sages, and the gods all crowd to his presence and worship him. In what appears to be a direct reference to the Tirukkēḻaiya Ŵēṟa Ulā’s own depiction of the gods begging for the favor of Śiva’s appearance, the assembled masses ask the saint to come out to

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79 Kūṭal is an old name of Maturai; see Chapter Four p. 108.
the streets and deliver his favor (86–89).\textsuperscript{80} They adorn his head with a variety of flowers (90–95), dress him in fine garments and gems (96-100), and bring forth an elephant for him to ride, which they adorn as people offer words of blessing (101–114).

In contrast to Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ’s earlier ulā, the portion of the text that depicts the actual procession is quite brief when compared to its lengthy preamble. The majority of the poem attends to Cīrkāḻi and Campantar’s hagiography, not the women who respond to the saint in procession. Indeed, the seven stages of women are not presented in sequential order, but are laid out elliptically to be treated as a united group, “from the child up to the noble older woman.”\textsuperscript{81} Once the parade begins, “gentle women wearing bangles rejoice in their hearts, their desire growing strong as they gather everywhere.”\textsuperscript{82} They fill the dance halls, palaces, and streets, and as the procession draws near, they worship and become overwhelmed, losing their ornaments, clothes, and sanity as they cry out in praise (120–30). They call to the saint, begging him for his favor and lamenting their misfortune (131–39), and fall apart completely, losing their decorum and shame (140). They then engage in the formulaic activities that reveal their lust, such as dressing incorrectly and calling their playthings by the wrong name (141–42), as Campantar passes them by to bring his procession to an end (143).

In addition to taking Cēramāṉ Perumal’s poetry as inspiration for his ulā mālai, Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi also revered the legendary king himself. In his short poem Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāti (Linked Verses on the Holy Devotees), an account of the Nāyaṉmār that celebrates their extraordinary devotion to Śiva, Nampi mentions Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ three times—more than any other saint save Cuntarar, who is invoked throughout the poem as a narrative refrain.\textsuperscript{83} Cēramāṉ first appears when the saints are all listed, in a verse celebrates his reverence for all Śaiva devotees even when

\textsuperscript{80}See Chapter Two, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{81}v. 118–19: பெண்கள் பெண்கள் கூடிய தெருளிய மாணவைகள் கூறுகின்றன.
\textsuperscript{82}v. 117: நம்பியாண்டவர் தியளுள்ளோர் கூறுகின்றன | கொன்று வேறுகூறுவார்களே.
\textsuperscript{83}See Chapter Two, p. 23
his fervor trumps his accurate judgment:

A washerman faced the king of kings
his body smeared with soda ash,
which made him seem a kinsman of the lord
who rules all who wear the holy ash.
The king bowed down as he drew close,
“I am a washerman,” he said, “a servant, you are our lord!”
“And I, the Čēra, am a servant to you,”
said the Čēra king, lord of the south,
called Kaḷarirru Ārivān, the man fluent in all tongues.84

But Nampi goes on to praise Čēraṁaṉ Perumāḷ beyond his turn in the register of saints, turning to him twice more in order to laud his close bond with Cuntarar, a pairing of brahman and royal patron that guided the king to Śiva’s world.85 In a notable use of the first person, Nampi sings of the two saints’ final journey to heaven. The Čēra king, excited now, spurs his horse out in front of the stately elephant of Cuntarar, the “man of southern Nāvalūr”:

You did well, my heart, when you became a slave
to the Čēra, a hero who rode his stabled horse
before the grand rutting elephant that Śiva gave
to the great man of southern Nāvalūr,
the conqueror of the hero who wields
the conquering sugarcane bow.86

Once more, as he draws to the conclusion of his text, Nampi returns to Čēraṁaṉ and Cuntarar, to glorify their unique achievement:

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84v. 44: மனப்பன்னுடனுள் தமசின் எண் வந்த வந்தானுடன் | தமசின் விளக்கம் வரல முறையில் | தமசின் விளக்கம் வரல முறையில் | தமசின் விளக்கம் வரலாம் முறையில்.
85See Chapter Two, p. 23.
86v. 45: ஊர்லிங் ஆராயல் முழுவதை முடிய விளக்கம் | மை மேற்பழவில் புத்த ரீதியில் | மை மேற்பழவில் புத்த ரீதியில் | மை மேற்பழவில் புத்த ரீதியில்.
We know of none but the Cēra and the sage of Ārūr who kept their living bodies when they joined the host of great ascetics on northern Kailasa in the palace of the lord, where even the gods with dazzling jewels have little hope of entrance.\textsuperscript{87}

These two episodes are precisely the scenes chosen to illustrate Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ’s life in the frescoes that line the inner prakāra of the Bṛhadīśvara temple constructed by Rājarāja I (a point, incidentally, that in conjunction with another scene that appears to depict Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi singing to Rājarāja’s court, suggests his date and patron). These epic works, rising some fifteen feet high, are still vibrant with life and color even though they are quite worn, for they are now one thousand years old and were covered for centuries by later Nāyaka-period murals.\textsuperscript{88} The panel’s center shows Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ and Cuntarar riding over the ocean waves to Śiva’s heaven. The Cēra king rides eagerly ahead, just as in Nampi’s description of the moment in Tiruvanadu Tūnṭar Tiruvantāti, and looks back with tender affection at his lifelong friend while a celestial host watches from above (Figure 5.1). The portrait just above it, which consummates their mystic voyage, portrays Cuntarar and Cēramāṉ at lower left, sitting in blessed repose before Śiva and Pārvatī. The two saints join a host of ascetics and celestial beings as voluptuous apsarases and impish bhūtas dance (Figure 5.2). As P. S. Sriraman’s study of the panels has suggested, the scene portrays the first rendition of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ’s Tirukkailāya Nāṉa Ulā, when the king sang his poem of procession in order to gain admittance to Śiva’s palace.\textsuperscript{89}

It is not certain that Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi’s ulā mālai on Campantar directly inspired Kūttar to compose his own ulās on the Cōḷa kings, following the earlier poet’s lead by taking men figured as

\textsuperscript{87}N. 86: ஞானவா எளைரஅப்பரை யட்டர் யல்லா நாமல் யாவைருமையால் | வருமா செறியை யன்பாற்றும் யாந்தைல் யாலாட்டும் | நான் இட்டலும் யாலும் யாமதாரயால் | செறியை யல்லா மூலங்களை யழியினை மல் யா தாமா.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{88}I am grateful to P. S. Sriraman, Assistant Superintending Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India, who generously shared the ASI’s digital image of this long-inaccessible panel with me for use in this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{89}Sriraman, e-mail message to author, July 21, 2010.
Figure 5.1: Center detail from Ćeramāṉ Perumāḷ fresco panel, Bṛhadīśvara temple murals

For both poets, Campantar is the avenging scourge of the Jains. In the prefatory kāppu verses to Takkayākap Paraṇī, the saint is the only human being included among Oṭṭakkūttar’s verses to the gods, praised in three stanzas that set the tone for his later characterization as an incarnation of the war god Murukaṉ. The first of these verses declares that the execution of the Jains was the very reason for Campantar’s birth, a portrayal that rings true with

90vv. 169—221.
Nampi’s own rendition of the saint:

I sing to the feet of the master, born so the tongue-tied Jains would die
raised on each impaling stake on the sandbanks where the river changed its course
north of Kūṭal in the west, where their heresies were raised.\textsuperscript{91}

The Processional Trope in Jain Writing

A pronounced irony here, given this disdain, is that the Jain literature of earlier centuries in-
cluded short depictions of procession that likely influenced these later treatments. \textit{Cīvakacintā-
mani} (\textit{Cīvakā}: \textit{A Wishing Jewel}), a grand poem composed by Tiruttakkatēvar in the ninth century,
includes four passages that describe processions made by the hero Cīvakaṃ over the course of

\textsuperscript{91} v. 7: சுப்பிரமணியர் சன்னிப்பியச் வெளியிட்டு தந்த நீதியிலிருந்து | சுப்பிரமணியர் சன்னிப்பியச் வெளியிட்டு தந்த நீதியிலிருந்து
his bold endeavors. In the first (vv. 456–72), Civakaṉ is celebrated after rescuing the royal cow herds that have been stolen by māṟavar hunters. As he moves in triumphant procession through the city, women run to their windows and out to the street, desperate with lovesickness as they watch him pass by. The portrayal is a standard instance of the processional trope earlier developed in the Sanskrit works of Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa, though its relation to the Tirukkailāyante is unclear, given the two texts’ general contemporaneity. In an interesting reversal of this procession of triumph, the second incident (vv. 1095–1112) takes place when Civakaṉ, now the captive of the evil usurper Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṉ, is paraded through the streets into captivity, and once more the women of the city swoon before him. The final two passages (vv. 2328–2336, 2536–2558), marking Civakaṉ’s later victory over Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṉ and his marriage to his eighth and final wife, return to standard processional fare.

Another Jain composition, the tenth-century grand poem Peruṅkatai (The Great Tale) of Koṅku Vēḷir, also makes use of the processional trope in its version of the Udayana legends popular throughout Indian literature. Towards the end of the text, after Udayana has wed the princess Vāsavaddattā, Koṅku Vēḷir offers a fairly conventional description of the hero’s procession through the streets of Jayantī and the women who rush to behold him. In addition, the text contains a lovely description of a water festival not found in any other version of the Udayana story, in which the seven stages of womanhood typical of an ālā are briefly invoked as women enjoy bathing in the local waters.

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92 I would like to thank James D. Ryan for bringing these passages to my attention and for providing me with the relevant verse citations.
93 2.7: Nakar Valam Koṇṭatu Kātai.
Oṭṭakkūttar and Kampan

There is also the matter of Kampan. Kampan’s Irāmāvatāram, commonly known as Kamparāmāyaṇam, stands for many readers as the high point of classical Tamil literature. Vinōtaracamañcari describes Kampan as an older, worthier contemporary of Oṭṭakkūttar, though real evidence for his date is slight. Thoughts on when he lived vary, based on pairing names recorded in the text—themselves subject to their own interpretation—to historical figures, and range anywhere from the ninth century to the close of the twelfth.95 While Kampan’s text falls largely beyond this study, I want to touch briefly on Kamparāmāyaṇam, for a comparison of his text with Oṭṭakkūttar’s ulās clarifies the ulā genre’s history, and supports dating Kampan to the reign of Kulottunga II.

Kamparāmāyaṇam contains a beautiful ulā towards the end of its first volume Pālakāṇṭam (Sanskrit Bālakāṇḍa, The Book on Youth), when Rāma comes in procession to Ayodhyā to wed Sītā.96 This section of the text, Ulāviyalpaṭalam (The Chapter Describing the Procession), has no parallel in Valmīki’s Sanskrit text, though Kampan describes his own effort as a translation of this earlier work.97 Rāma’s wedding procession is of Tamil design, the incorporation of a trope that Kampan’s audience would have recognized as a standard, even necessary, technique to describe this moment. This is not to say that the chapter imitates worn themes. Its verses are quatrains, more generous and complex than the tight two-line kalivenpā verses characteristic of the ulā genre, and they are occasionally colored by Kampan’s own voice. The tinge of authorial presence is not found in Oṭṭakkūttar’s ulās, nor in other verses on procession that had come before. When he describes the women who have gathered to behold Rāma, for instance, Kampan uses the first

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95Zvelebil 1973: 208 presents in brief the range of evidence behind these assignments.
96vv. 1140–93. See also Ayōttiyakāṇṭam vv. 54–60 for another brief processional scene (with thanks to David Shulman for this reference), and Pālakāṇṭam v. 1139 for Kampan’s reference to the seven stages of womanhood.
97Pālakāṇṭam v. 6: “The world will despise me, my character fouled / was this poem worth voicing at all? / Only in taking the divine, great tale / sung by a man of poetry, his learning beyond flaw / and making its majesty clear.” See also v. 10, in which Kampan declares that he follows Valmiki’s idiom (ural).
person to convey a sense of what he wants to keep beyond words, developing themes of mystery and doubt that Oṭṭakkūttar will also heighten.

We’ll never be able to say how it happened, did those long, potent eyes of each red-fingered woman suffuse the color of the lord’s dark body, or did the sapphire hue of his thundercloud body darken the women’s inked gaze?  

The touch of the author’s own hand within verses, though the lifeblood of devotional verses from Appar to Āṇṭāḷ, is fresh to ulā poetry, a note of confident reworking. Kampanṭ anticipates trends the ulā would show in later times, long after the age of universal lordship had passed and poets rose to advance themselves in the texts they composed. But Kampanṭ also stays true to the processional motif that Tamil poets had developed before him. He keeps the narrative lens tight on the women’s own experience of the dramatic moment as Rāma passes before them, reveals their fear, and has them wonder if this great hero is actually evil.

“He goes,” one woman said, “and then just keeps on going, a man who wants nothing from women left stunned by their fantasies! What is he, a man with no hint of compassion? Some perfect mystic? Or some brutal killer?”

The verse is remarkable, given its protagonist. Who is Rāma, uniquely perfect embodiment of virtue, to the ones he rules?

Kampanṭ takes the tension further, enjoying the play between Rāma’s manifestation of justice and the dismay he causes women. The language is bright, personal, and frankly erotic:

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98v. 1149: புத்தாய்வு சிறு வேறு வல்லுண்டு கொண்ட முழுவது | தாங்கூர் தன்னுடமை வணிகிய குடியார்களும் மூங்க மக்களும் | மக்கள் வீட்டு பாக்கியாளர் புர்வாக | அன்னை கொரியம் குண்டாய்வுக் குரல் முழுவது.  
99v. 1174: மற்றும் மனது மாண்டும் பாந்து | சரணாயிர வணிகிய வீட்டு | குரிய வணிகம் கொரியம் புர்வாக | புருஷை கொரியம் பிணைகால் புர்வாக.  

173
One woman with hair black as ink, red mouth and bright brow
felt her heart giving way, and called out to her friend,
“This rogue has come, made his way to my heart!
I’ve trapped him there, closed the door to my eyes
and now I feel ready for bed.\(^{100}\)

As before in such accounts, the women turn to hopes of ethereal passage that will bring them
to the man before them, seeking Rāma as the women of Muttoḷḷāyiram sought the Tamil kings of
legend, in the private reveries of sleep.\(^{101}\)

“Maybe he’ll come alone,”
called a woman with tears pouring from her eyes
loins wrapped in a girdle of fresh gold
suffering terribly, ruining her looks,
“away from crowding sages, crowding noble kings
if only in my dreams?”\(^{102}\)

Yet Kampanṭ accents things the earlier poets did not. They are touches of an ethos he and
Oṭṭakkūttar shared, which viewed the axis of a rājamaṇḍala spread across the entirety of Bharata
as fixed in the Tamil south. When Rāma arrives at the wedding canopy and his assembled host
gathers close, the poet takes great care to name the kings who are present, mapping out a hier-
archy of lordship which—though certainly idealized—maps Rāma’s sphere of rule firmly on the
soil. He moves outward, circling from the dynasties of the southern peninsula out to the lands
beyond:

The Gaṅgas, the Koṅgus, Kaliṅgas and Teluṅgus,
the rulers of the Sinhalas, the Cēras, the Southerners,\(^{103}\)

\(^{100}\)v. 1153: அகாதாரம் கிருட்டம் வரிசைமான உடைய வருடகாய்பாலனம் | நூல்லலா அக்யூ வார்த்தை அகாதாரமான
மூசம் அடுக்கு | புல்லலா சர் வரிசைமான உடைய வருடகாய்பாலனம் வருடம் | திங்கள் அகாதாரம்
உரையாய கோர்நூலாக்குநர்.

\(^{101}\)See Chapter Four, p. 127.

\(^{102}\)v. 1167: நூலை வையு கிருட்டம் வருடம் | நூலை வார்த்தையான வார்த்தையானம் | புல்லலா சர்
அடுக்கு வருடகாய்பாலனம் | திங்கள் அகாதாரம் வருட மூசம் அடுக்குநர்.

\(^{103}\)The Pāṇṭiya king and his underlords.
the kings of Aṅga,104 Kuliṅga, and Avanti,105 the Vaṅga106 kings, the Malwa kings, the Cōḷas, and the Marāṭhas,

The mighty kings of Magadha, the Macca107 kings, and foreign kings, and still more, the heroic Lāṭa108 kings, the kings of Vidarbha, the Chinese kings, the Cēkuṇa kings, the Sindhi kings, the Pañcāla kings,109 the Cōṅaka lords, the Turkish kings,110 the Kuru kings,

Joined by armed Yādavas, the seven valiant Koṅkani kings, and the kings of Cēdi, the finest of men all crowded close kings with bright and shining crowns beaming light into the sky.111

Kampaṉ sets Rāma above names known to history. He brings his ulā down from the abstract, timeless models that had come before, and grounds its expression of dominance on an earthly field of power. This was Oṭṭakkūttar’s great innovation in his Mūvar Ulā—a set of texts, perhaps, to which Kampaṉ responded when he crafted his own procession for an earlier lord of the solar line.

The mention of historic kings is not enough to demonstrate Kampaṉ’s contemporaneity with Kūttar, but there are other clues. First, the well-known correlation of the ruler Kampaṉ styles “Amala” (“Free from Stain”) with the title Oṭṭakkūttar credits to Kulottuṅga II in his ulā on the king:

104 Eastern Bihar.
105 Western Madhya Pradesh.
106 Central-southern Bengal.
107 Central India.
108 southern Gujurat.
109 Cōṅakar.
110 Turukkar.
111 vv. 1186–88: மான மாகத முசலசகா மாணஸகா | ஓேன தெனாக வெண்ணெயாலா ஓேட. ஏற்றதை வைக்கதாகவே மேலையோலளா கைப்பதையே மாலையோலளா வைக்கதாகவே வரலையோலளா. வடித்து வாணையோலளா வைக்கதாகவே வரலையோலளா வைக்கதாகவே வரலையோலளா. வடித்து வாணையோலளா வைக்கதாகவே வரலையோலளா வைக்கதாகவே வரலையோலளா. வடித்து வாணையோலளா வைக்கதாகவே வரலையோலளா வைக்கதாகவே வரலையோலளா. வடித்து வாணையோலளா வைக்கதாகவே வரலையோலளா வைக்கதாகவே வரலையோலளா. ١٧٥
Husband of the earth shielded by the golden mountains, Anagha, Atula, Amala...\textsuperscript{112}

There is another intriguing piece of evidence. All three of Oṭṭakkūttar’s ulās give involved genealogies for these kings of the solar line, but they are not uniform. In the first, the Vikkiramā Čōḷaḷ Uḷā, when Kūttar gives Vikrama’s heritage he nowhere mentions Rāma, the sūryavamśa’s most famous heir. Yet for Vikrama’s son Kulottuṅga, the list of ancestors suddenly expands to include the most famous kings of Rāma’s storied line.

The king of kings who brought down Mandākini, returning bodies and lives to those who were burned in blazing fire, giving them the joys of heaven,

The mighty king who triumphed in a single chariot in a war long ago against ten others in ten fast war chariots,

The bowman whose arrows sheared off the ten heads of the warrior like thunderbolts shearing off ten mountains...\textsuperscript{113}

These three rulers, Bhagīratha, Daśaratha, and Rāma, return to appear in Kūttar’s ulā on Kulottuṅga’s son, Rājarāja II, in an expanded genealogy that goes on to include Bhagīratha’s father Sagara and Rāma’s great-grandfather Raghu.\textsuperscript{114} Something appears to have happened during Kulottuṅga’s reign, of which Oṭṭakkūttar took note, and praised his lord accordingly. That something, I believe, was Kamparāmāyaṇam.

\section*{5.4 A Purāṇa to Capture the Past}

The years that account for much of Oṭṭakkūttar’s working life in the Cōḷa court, when Kulottuṅga II ruled from the lion throne, mark the appearance of one last text that must be addressed, for it went on to sweep across the world of Tamil Śaivism and define its history like nothing else

\textsuperscript{112}Kulottuṅka Čōḷaḷ Uḷā vv. 156–57: வைலய || கனக சுலவாணி கணவணி | அனக னளனமலன.
\textsuperscript{113}vv. 7–10: காரெத்து || கெவல புலியின் கல்கல்பு விளக்கம் | மாறு தெய்வராய்வு வெள்ளிக்கு செல்லும்- வைலய || செல்வகீர்தநீ வீரர் விளக்கம் | செல்வகீர்தநீ வீரர் வீரர் – கீறு || மலாச்சூட்டு வீரர் புலியின் விளக்கம் | கெவலே வீரர் வீரர் வீரர்.
\textsuperscript{114}Irācarāca Čōḷaḷ Uḷā vv. 7–12.
before or since. The Periya Purāṇam, Cēkkilār’s account of the lives of the Śaiva Nāyaṉmār, forged community from disparate tales, drawing from Tēvāram, Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi’s brief catalog of the Nāyaṉmār, Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāti, as well as Jain purāṇic lore and what must have been a lively world of popular legends about the Śaiva saints not yet committed to writing. While the much later report that Cēkkilār composed his masterpiece in order to divert his lord Kulottuṅga’s attention away from an unhealthy interest in Cīvakacintāmaṇi is likely a sectarian recasting of later centuries,115 the Periya Purāṇam stands close to the royal court, and must have electrified the literary world that moved under the Cōḻa aegis when it first premiered, singing out in reverence for Śiva Ampalattāṭavaṉ, “The Dancer in the Hall.”116

In the eighth verse of the text’s prologue, Cēkkilār first identifies his patron, as Anapāya, “The Imperishable One”:

They yearned to receive this account, to taste of it, in the assembly of the Cōḻa who used bright fresh gold to adorn the sacred Great Hall of the True One, Anapāya, whose fame abides on earth throughout the long eons.117

To identify the Cōḻa king who used the biruda Anapāya, we need look no further than Cēkkilār’s contemporary Oṭṭakkūttar, who also enjoyed his patronage. In his ulā on Kulottuṅga II, he uses the same title to describe the Cōḻa ruler appearing in procession:

The lord surrounded by the halo of his command, Abhāya, Anapāya appeared on a rutting elephant, its head draped in festive cloth...118

Though the biruda does not in itself establish Kulottuṅga II as Cēkkilār’s patron, as the title was used by other Cōḻa kings, the fact that Kulottuṅga’s son Rājarāja II sponsored a temple that

115The story is given in the Cēkkilār Purāṇam (14th c.), one of many texts that circulate around the name Umāpati. Cox 2006: 86–89 makes a good case that Kulottuṅga’s delight in unseemly Jain poetry is a product of this later time.
116v. 1.
117ேமய ÝÆċைர ĭா¾Ă ÝĉÂĆமா | ேசய வÊàĉÁ ேபரÂபல¼ ெசÃய | Ėய ķாÊனÕ Ňாழø ĕÞபாÄ | ஆய éரந பாய னசைவ.
118vv. 158–59: வாÒைக || ஆÞÁ ெபĉமா னபயன னபாயÊ | ĒÞ¹ கடாயாைன ŌாÊĎதĊÂ.

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committed Čēkkilār’s masterpiece to stone confirms Anabhāya’s identity. Oṭṭakkūttar stands alongside this poet in time, space, and interest. Both men were moved by texts that spoke of a Tamil Śaiva past now grounded firmly in Citamparam. Čēkkilār’s purāṇam runs to more than 4,200 verses; it was not a casual project. The text represents a lifework, a toil of years that drew deeply from contemporary thought on the Nāyaṉmār. These were attitudes that Kūttar would have recognized, the themes that had caught the literary eye of his generation. Ĉēramāṉ Perumāḷ, formerly little more than a name in the texts, had ascended to the main stage, and with him the poems ascribed to his hand.

Čēkkilār and Ĉēramāṉ Perumāḷ

Judging from Periya Purāṇa’s treatment of the legendary Čēra king, he had continued to gain admirers since the days when Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi sang of him in Tiruttonṭar Tiruvantāti and his image was painted on the inner corridor of Rājarāja’s Bṛhadīśvara temple. He merits a fairly substantial cycle in Čēkkilār’s work, roughly the same length as Kaṇṇapar’s, and his virtuous rule of the Čēra country, his close friendship with Cuntarar, and his sojourns to hallowed Śaiva shrines in the Tamil country are all plotted with care. Ĉēramāṉ becomes a full human being in Čēkkilār’s telling, no longer a figure sketched with a quick verse or phrase. The poet casts him in two separate narratives, following, it would seem, the multiple verses accorded to the king by Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi, whom Čēkkilār praises as his exemplar (nātha) in the design of his own text.¹¹⁹ The first, the Kaḷaṟairṟru Arivār Purāṇam (The Ancient Lore on the Sage Fluent in All Tongues) gives the biography of the Čēra’s earthly life, detailing a rule so saintly that he seems, in the end, to pay scant attention to the actual effort work of governance.¹²⁰ The second, Vellāṇaic Carukkam

¹¹⁹ Periya Purāṇam v. 49.
¹²⁰ This dreamy innocence, which leads Ĉēramāṉ Perumāḷ to proclaim his servitude to a lowly washerman streaked with the soda ash he takes for Śaiva vibhūti (as described in Nampi’s verse of praise to the saint in Tiruttonṭar Tiruvantāti, see above p. 167), grounds David Shulman’s analysis of the saint’s ludic personality (1985: 246–56). This
(The Chapter on the White Elephant), which brings the massive Periya Purāṇam to its end, recounts Cuntarar and Cēramāṉ’s final journey to Śiva’s heaven.

Cēkkiḻār’s biography of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ is thoughtful and complex, and merits its own close study. There are, however, fundamental aspects of his character in the Periya Purāṇam that merit emphasis, for they bring a Śaiva devotee who before this time had only a minor presence in the textual record deep into the practice of Naṭeśa worship championed by the Cōḷa kings. Cēramāṉ is defined, in Cēkkiḻār’s telling, by his worship of the dancing god and by his bond of friendship with Cuntarar, which opens his path to heaven. Citamparam plays no role in the earlier textual accounts of the Cēra king’s legend. The Periya Purāṇam is the text that brings him to the temple, and into the symbolic field that Oṭṭakkūttar’s lords had chosen as their public testament to well-ordered power.

While on the throne in the mountain country, Cēramāṉ perceives that “true friendship, the wealth one seeks, total austerities, and the rewards that come from an ancient right to lordly rule are all found in the ankleted foot that dances in the holy Little Hall in Tillai.”\(^\text{121}\) He worships the foot of the dancing god with such ardor that Naṭarājaj jingles his anklet in the king’s heart, filling him with pious rapture. One day he does not hear the sound, and the anguished king prepares to plunge his sword through his heart. He is stopped by the chime of the anklet and Śiva’s divine voice, informing him that the god had lingered in Citamparam to hear Cuntarar sing his hymns (vv. 3789–92). The king immediately resolves to meet this exceptional devotee, and leaves for Citamparam in full procession, traversing forest and wasteland until he reaches Citamparam and stands before its Golden Hall.

\(^\text{appealingly comic side to his nature is not, I believe, incompatible with the qualities of comraderie and devotion accented here, but rather makes the king’s deference to Cuntarar all the more vital to his spiritual progress.}\)

\(^\text{121}\) v. 3770: சூரிய உடம்பின் விசாலம் குசம்பு | சூரிய உடம்பின் விசாலம் குசம்பு மாதிரிமாடுகளை அலந்து அச்சாலை.
When the great dancer, the endless joy, revealed the foot raised up in dance, his heart and his senses flowed as one, he worshiped, and he was freed.

He praised the compassion the Lord has shown, not just setting poison in his throat to give the ambrosia to the gods, but setting his foot in the hall to give ambrosia to the world with his holy, nurturing dance.\(^{122}\)

In this flood of ecstasy, he composes the poem *Ponvaṇṇattantāti* and sings it before the god, then proceeds on to the southern temple city of Ārūr in order to meet Cuntarar, worshiping at shrines along the way.

**Two Souls Becoming One: Cuntarar and Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ**

When Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ at last meets Cuntarar, the king falls before him to grasp his feet, only to be raised up by the saint of Ārūr and held in a close embrace. The two, Cēkkilār insists, are one.

> Perumāḷ fell before him, and he fell down too, then raised him up in a rush of feeling he held him, and the king in his love held him close, like two men washing on the waves in a flood of joy, never to emerge, their bones melted, their spirits joined, and they bonded as if bodies were one.\(^{123}\)

They walk hand in hand to the Tiruvārūr temple, and worship Śiva in his presence there as Vi-tiviṭaṅkaṇaḥ, where Cēramāṉ sings his *Tiruvārūr Mummanikkōvai*. The two travel on, touring the land’s Śiva temples, to part only briefly before they make their final journey to Śiva’s heaven.

Cuntarar is immediately welcomed inside Śiva’s palace when he arrives, but Cēramāṉ is not. He is ushered in only after the saint of Ārūr tells the god that another devotee is waiting outside the gates. Śiva bids the Cēra king enter, then asks him with a smile, “How is it that have you

\(^{122}\) v. 3802: அருணம் வருவதாக மலை காட்டும் பக்தர், | நடத்துவால் ஓட்டமிட்டுவாரச் சேர்க் வருவதாக பதிவேற் | கனவு மன்னர் தன்னால் குருமின் வருவதாக பதிவேற் | அருண் சுல்பாவை குருமின் வருவதாக பதிவேற்.

\(^{123}\) v. 3812: கண்ணல் வருவதாக சேர்க்களே மலை காட்டும் பக்தர் | அருணத் தயாரிப் பிறகு வருவதாக பதிவேற் | ஹாமால் தன்னால் குருமின் வருவதாக பதிவேற் | அருண் சுல்பாவை குரும் வருவதாக பதிவேற்.
reached me here, when I did not call you?” Cēramāṉ responds with declarations of servitude to his lord and his intercessor Cuntarar (Nampi Ārūr, here also called vaṉṟoṇṭar, “the harsh devotee”). He entreats Śiva to listen to his Tirukkailāya ŉaṉa Ulā, and hear the devotion that should grant him entry:

The king pressed his hands together in reverence and spoke, “I am your slave, I praise the holy feet of Nampi Ārūr, and rode before his haltered elephant in service. I received the boon of your holy presence because I was led within, carried here by the clear waves of the flood of compassion that you pour down. Lord with matted locks, decked with fragrant cassia blossoms, I make my appeal to you now.

You are great, Lord, beyond the praise of sages and the replete Vedas! In my love for you, I composed a puṟam poem, a holy ulā, Give it your holy ear, you must accept it! You were the one who joined me to the harsh devotee, to drive off the fetters of death.” “Please recite it,” said the gracious lord, and his follower sang it out.125

This is the life-giving moment for Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ the Nāyaṉār. An ulā that had been associated with little but a name becomes, in Ċekkiḻār’s verses, paired with a full human being. Cēramāṉ’s love for Śiva moves through his love for his intercessor, who is called to heaven before him yet looks back and asks for his companion to be accepted. And Cēramāṉ, through the poetry of his ulā on Śiva in Kailāsa, is welcomed. He is to live forever in Śiva’s company as Śivagaṇanātha, the leader of Śiva’s host, joining Cuntarar (here called Ūraṉ, after his hometown of Ārūr) in his true eternal form as Hālālasundara, Śiva’s personal manservant.

The lord who is half woman accepted the holy puṟam ulā that the defender of the Cēras recited to him out of love,

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124v. 4273: தேதி முத்துகையில் கையில் முழும் களாமல் வாடி வாழி வாழி வாழி வாழி.
and gladly showed him the holy favor that makes welfare abound.
“Remain with Ūraṉ, who is Hālālasundara, you both are joined together,
stay here in ascendancy as the leaders of my troop.”

A Divine Gift of Verse

The ulā, however, continues on, for the god Mahāśāstṛ hears Cēramāṉ recite his poem, and establishes the text on earth, installing it in Tiruppiṭavūr, from where it advances in its own procession of fame.

Great Śāstṛ heard that holy puṟām ulā on Kailāsa’s white slopes
when the defender of the Ćēras presented it as his appeal,
his brought it to earth and established it there out of his goodwill
delivering it in the holy town of Piṭavūr, where brahmans dwell,
so it would shine all over the world, which is bounded by liquid seas.

Cuntarar lies at the heart of the Tamil Śaiva tradition. He is a founder, an immortal who lived on earth and knew Śiva’s presence directly. The canonical texts, and physical records such as the Brhadīśvara frescoes, stand as the lasting traces of a reverence for Cuntarar that those who held power in the Cōḻa period took care to uphold. Nampiyāṇṭar Nampi cast the saint’s biography as the framing narrative that structures the rest of Nāyaṉmār history; Cēkkiḷar grounds that history in a Citamparam glorified by Cōḻa kings, where Naṭeṣa lifts his foot to dance in the Golden Hall. Cuntarar was, for the Tamil Śaivas in Oṭṭakkūttar’s time, the most intimate personification of an irruption in history, when devotees loved Śiva beyond measure and the god responded, ennobling

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126 v. 4276: செரற்காவல்டேசர் குள்ளாம்பதை ரேயாவார் பொய்டூடளாலாய் குளாறு சோர்த்தொட்டான் பொய்டூடளாய் குளாறு சோர்த்தொட்டான் பொய்டூடளாய் | கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று | கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று | கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று | கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று 
127 Māhaśāstṛ (Tamil Mācāttaṉ), “the great teacher,” is Hariharaputra, the son of Śiva and Viṣṇu in the latter’s female guise as Mohini. He is now worshiped in Tamilnadu as Aiyaṉār. There is an Śāstṛ temple in Piṭavūr (a small town in Tirucirāpaḷḷi district) which bears inscriptions from the time of Rājendra Cōḻa.
128 v. 4280: செரற்காவல்டேசர் குள்ளாம்பதை ரேயாவார் பொய்டூடளாலாய் குளாறு சோர்த்தொட்டான் பொய்டூடளாலாய் குளாறு சோர்த்தொட்டான் பொய்டூடளாலாய் | கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று | கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று | கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று | கொள்ள மாற்று மத்தியும் என்று 

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their lives and hallowing their southern land. Oṭṭakkūṭtar was an inheritor of this history of worship, for him a vision of pastness.

Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ and the first ulā, his compelling appeal to Śiva, would have offered potent models for a poet to kings. The Cēra, though mentioned only once in Cuntarar’s hymns, had by Oṭṭakkūṭtar’s time become the saint’s inseparable companion. He had given his life over to Cuntarar, an incomparable devotee whose bond with Śiva was more immediate than his own, and gained heaven as the result. Cēramāṉ sings out, like the trio of saints in Tēvāram, the Mūvar, had done before him, to open doors with his verse. He offers his ulā, and removes the last divide between his god and himself. The text is then brought down to the world, so that it may spread across the earth.

When Oṭṭakkūṭtar sings his ulās on three Cōḷa kings, he too sings of Mūvar, associating his lords with a hallowed name for the Śaiva great. The three kings he served composed no texts of their own. Their very being, Oṭṭakkūṭtar suggests in his verses, is their expressive power. He is their poetic voice, binding them with his own ulās to a legendary ruler’s message: follow the perfect agents of Naṭeśa, and join him.

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129 Cuntarar’s patikams on worshiping Vītiviṭaṅkaṇ in Tiruvārūr (Tēvāram 7.59) and opening a path through a flooded river to reach Tiruvaiyāṟu (7.77) seem opportune moments to speak of Cēramāṉ, as the two are in Ĉēkkiḷār’s narrative together on both occasions, yet neither make any mention of him.
And so they ascended up to the halls, like graceful peacocks of gold
with a madness that would not relent, they cried out he had done them harm,
As the lord with the single parasol that protects the earth
seven worlds clothed in seven great seas, went away in procession.

KULÔTTUŇKA CÔLÂ NG ÛLÂ¹

6.1 The Procession of Rule

When Oṭṭakkūttar shifted the ulā out of mythic time and into the living world of Cōḷa kings, his
great innovation lay in setting the poems’ display of heroic beauty, with all its relentless effects,
in a contested sphere of power. The Mūvar Ulā self-consciously hearkens back to the past. Its
three texts channel the deep interest in history and chronicle that so dramatically shaped the
twelfth century for Tamil Śaivas, committing over to those abiding measures of royal authority,

¹vv. 385–87: திந்து || தோல்ல்வி வர்ண்சோடெய்வி வர்ண்சோடெய்விய தொல்ல்வி || தோல்ல்வி வர்ண்சோடெய்விய தொல்ல்வி –
தொல்ல்வி || தோல்ல்வி வர்ண்சோடெய்விய தொல்ல்வி || தோல்ல்வி வர்ண்சோடெய்விய தொல்ல்வி.

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praise and fame, a processional trope that until that point had been used only for mythic figures. These are political texts, which advance Cōḷa dominance as the order of nature.

Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ sang his Tirukkailāya Nāṇa Ulā as a petition, a poetic appeal to gain his admission to Śiva’s heavenly court. It returns to earth through divine intercession, grounding Śivaloka on the Tamil soil both in the content of its verses and in the site of its dispensation. Oṭṭakkūṭtar’s texts are not appeals, they are declarations of mastery. The Cōḷas he praised, following Cēramāṉ’s model, were cakravartins, lords of the earth, who had already asserted rule over the landscape described in Kūttar’s poems. They ruled in the wake of the territorial unification that Kulottuṅga I had wrought in his eastern campaign against Kaliṅga, and they faced no concerted military violence against the state during their years on the throne. But control was never certain; indeed the Cōḷa empire had already lost its hold on Sri Lanka by the time of Vikrama’s accession. Kūttar’s ulās proclaimed dominance, and they also worked to maintain it. By drawing on the homology advanced in Muttoḷḷāyiram, where the effect a hero has on enemies reveals itself in the effect he has on women, Oṭṭakkūṭtar’s ulās send poetic digvijayas into motion. And like the mūvēntar, the “three crowned kings” of Muttoḷḷāyiram, within these verses, these three crowned kings cannot fail.

The Mūvar Ulā closely follows the model that the Tirukkailāya Nāṇa Ulā laid down, though each of the three individual poems is substantially longer than what had come before, averaging about three hundred and fifty verses. Though they appear to have been written at different times, the three texts are uniform in structure and style, allowing them—as the literary tradition does—to be considered as a coherent whole. Diction, tropes, and narrative pacing remain consistent, and there would be no obvious breaks if verses were pulled from one text and placed in another. The

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2There has been not been a great deal of scholarship on the Cōḷa ulās in English; Ali 1996 studies the Vikkīrama Cōḷapuram Ulā as a significant expression of the courtly culture the author traces, while Shulman 1985: 313–24 explores the narcissistic qualities of south Indian kingship in the Mūvar Ulā and, to a greater degree, the Caṅkara Rācēntira Cōḷapuram Ulā (The Procession of Śaṅkara Rājendra Cōḷa), an ulā of high literary merit sung on a younger brother, it appears, of Kulottuṅga III. (1985: 246–56)
women’s experience of the hero still matures with advancing age; bangles and dresses rain down; we are brought into their inner turns of mind as the Cōḷa kings pass; the heroes stand impassive. Yet with the turn to living kings, Oṭṭakkūttar makes decisive changes in the prescribed structure. Čēramāṉ’s ulā begins by honoring Śiva’s everlasting role in the world, a timeless presence that manifests itself in glorious deeds. Kūttar makes an ingenious revision, honoring the Cōḷas by turning to a kindred blend of deeds and the timeless. He turns to the model of royal genealogies, which by his time represented a core dimension of kingship.

The Tamil Genealogies

To judge by the massive copper-plate inscriptions that have so far been unearthed—some weighing in at well over two hundred pounds—these assertions of lineage, while a pan-Indian phenomenon, appear to have been particularly important to the Cōḷas. Six copper-plate texts that range from the time of Sundara Cōḷa to Vīrarājendra have been published, giving elaborate genealogies in Sanskrit verse.³ By the twelfth century, these proud declarations of the Cōḷas’ descent from the mythic heroes of the sūryavamśa had extended into a novel form, and one that would have made a deep impression on Kūttar, the Tamil court poet. Kaliṅkattup Paraṇi, Cayaṅkoṇṭar’s celebration of the victorious Kaliṅga campaign waged by Kulottuṅga I in 1110, includes a substantial Cōḷa genealogy composed in Tamil, not Sanskrit.⁴ Oṭṭakkūttar took up this new, local mode of writing history in his own work, describing a family line that, while following the traditional pattern of tracing descent from the royal histories of the Purāṇas, is deeply bound to

³They are, in chronological order of inscription and titled according to publication, “The Anbil Plates of Sundara-Chola” (EI 15 no. 5); “The Larger Leiden Plates (of Rajaraja I)” (EI 22 no. 34); “The Tiruvalangadu Copper-Plates of the Sixth Year of Rajendra-Chola I” (SII 3.3 no. 205); “The Karandai Tamil Sangam Plates of Rajendrachola I” (Krishnan 1984); “Esālam Copper Plates of Rajendrācōḷa I” (Nagaswamy 1987); “The Kanyakumari Inscription of Virarajendra” (TAS 3.1 no. 34).

the Tamil language. The genealogies given in the Mūvar Ulā, in fact, have been the only parts of these texts to receive a fair amount of scholarly attention. V. Kanakasabhai Pillai, who in 1893 published a translation of the royal genealogy that begins the Vikkirama Cōḷaṅ Ulā, appears to have spoken for many when he dismissed the verses that followed. “The rest of the poem,” he writes, “is of no value to the student of history, and is besides of too licentious a character to be rendered into English.” Though the line of Cōḷa rulers descended from Vijayālaya now rests largely complete, these texts have more of historical value to offer. The lineages they provide, for instance, are not identical. This is a common feature of royal genealogies, as George W. Spencer noted with regard to the Cōḷas:

Yet in spite of evident attempts at standardising royal eulogies in certain periods, their authors exercised considerable latitude in appropriating materials from a variety of sources, notably the Puranas in synthesising such narratives. Even for a single dynasty, genealogical accounts of varying generational depth and organisation coexisted without overt challenges to each other’s authenticity.

When the genealogies in question are the product of one author, moreover, the point merits careful consideration.

As Daud Ali has written, a royal genealogy of this kind “inscribes the submission of kings to a vision of history,” but the history in question traces a path upward, over an ascending bridge between present and past that gives a choice of stepping stones. Oṭṭakkūttar’s pliant sense of royal

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5Kampaṅ, as discussed in the previous chapter (pp. 172–176), followed suit, incorporating a chapter of genealogy (Kulamuṟai Kiḷattu Paṭalam) in his Tamil Rāmāyaṇa.
6IA 22 no. 4.
7Spencer 1984: 415.
8Ali 2000: 170. Sahlins’s account of traditional Hawaiian lineage offers instructive similarities, as when he argues, “Hawaiians in fact do not trace descent so much as ascent, selectively choosing their way upward, by a path that notably includes female ancestors, to a connection with some ancient ruling line” (1985: 20), and further notes that the “time of society is calculated in dynastic genealogies, as collective history resides in royal traditions. In the state rituals and political councils of the elite, the cultural schemes are subject to manipulation and comment by specialists, such as priests and genealogists, attached to the ruling interests” (49).
lineage, I believe, results from quite a different priority than Spencer’s argument that “present practices are thereby firmly rooted in past events.” Instead, past events are charging a body alive in the present to consummate their effects. The conceit is idealized, but these are texts of ideals. The arrival of the king returns these genealogies of the solar line to their beginning, ingraining their chain of ancestors in a single being. He appears before the world as the sun. Indeed, when Kulottuṅga processes, he is for Oṭṭakkūttar a solar god, replacing the twelve suns formerly on hand.

The faces of the host of suns hardened, and turned away in bitterness, he embraced it, and came through the street to spread his royal beauty...

What do the genealogies reveal about those who pursued power in twelfth-century south India, and the qualities they considered essential to political dominance? First, a pairing of ancestors with archetypal deeds that epitomize their lives. Śibi, a legendary king whom the Cōḷas had long taken as their model forebear, is renowned for the virtuous protection of all his subjects, offering his own flesh to save the life of a dove pursued by a hawk. Another early ancestor, Ceṅkaṇāṉ, lives in memory as the king who released the Cēra king Cēramāṉ Kaṇakikkāl Irumpoṛai from captivity in exchange for a poet’s verses:

The king who long ago received Poykai’s poem Kalavali and released the mountain king he had placed in harsh confinement...

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9Spencer 1984: 428.

10vv. 237–38: இனமான ஆபரண ஒக்கடி பவர்பேசி வாத் | பூனோ தண்ணீர் செண்டே. The premodern commentary on this text takes the verse as follows: “Seeing the radiance of his host of gems, and so on, the faces of the twelve suns who came to be of service to the procession changed and hardened. Accepting their enmity, he came through the street to present his beauty.”

11Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 11; Kulottuṅka Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 17; Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 6.

12Kulottuṅka Cōḷaṉ Ulā vv. 19–20: அனோய் || பாய்கை காலவளி பாய்கையுள் | பாய்கை கருளமண்டல் புரவோரை. See also Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 14; Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 16. The episode is also described in Puranāṇūṟu v. 74.
The pattern continues to hold as the genealogies transition away from Cōḷa heroes praised in caṅkam poetry, and turn to the true ancestors of the three kings of the Mūvar Ulā (no historical connection, it should be stressed, exists between the two dynastic lineages). Rājarāja I, for instance, is celebrated for crossing eighteen wastelands in a single day, and razing a stronghold called Utakai in order to retrieve a captive messenger.\(^\text{13}\) And it continues, king paired with quintessential deed, until the three kings of the Mūvar Ulā arrive, poised to unite this series of transformative acts and perform it in lived time through procession.

Another critical point: the ancestors are rarely named. Kūttar employs participial nouns (viṇaiyāl aṇaiyum peyar), or generic terms for king (mannaṉ, pūpati, tarāpati, etc.) closely bound with adjectival participles (peyareccam) to identify the heroes of the Cōḷa line. Rāma, a king known to all, is nonetheless given in the Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā simply as vaiṭṭōṉ, “one who placed,” a masculine noun that bids the reader to link it with the deeds assigned to this man just to be able to identify him. One must take the phrase as a whole, porutu cilaiyāl vaḻipatu tel tiraiyaip paṇṭu malaiyāl vaḻipaṭa vaiṭṭōṉ, “The one who placed boulders long ago, to lay down a path over the clear waves, which honored him for his warring bow.”\(^\text{14}\) Names are subsumed by deeds, bursts of heroic action that changed the world. They gather in the collected force of sequence until the point when the kings of the Mūvar Ulā are named.\(^\text{15}\) When this moment of transition to the living world does come, the shift is dramatic, as quick phrases turn to involved verses of praise for the hero.

Take, for example, a representative move from past to present in the Kulottuṅka Cōḷaṉ Ulā, moving from Kulottuṅga I to his grandson, Kulottuṅga II, the hero of the poem.

\(^{13}\) Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 17; Kulottuṅka Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 24; Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 21.

\(^{14}\) Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 12.

\(^{15}\) In the Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā, the turn to proper names and titles occurs with the introduction of the king’s father, the eminent Kulottuṅga I: a suggestion, perhaps, that the text was composed soon after Vikrama had taken the throne, and his aged father was still alive (Kulottuṅga I lived for four years after Vikrama’s accession), or had recently passed.
Our lord, king of the kings of the earth, who did away with taxes that had not been omitted since the first Manu,
The great man praised by the king of poets, and after him, Akalaṅka, who carries the earth on his royal shoulders,
The king who lit the cruel flames of sacrifice at the fortress dear to his enemies, and received the Kaliṅkap Perum Parani,
His son, the reigning Kulottunga Cōḷa, the dark-hued lord who fully protects the worlds,
Born of a royal family in the lunar lineage from golden Tuvarai whose hands, fresh buds, nurtured the lineage of Manu,
He is the elephant born of this lovely elephant cow, Kaṇakalapaṉ, an affectionate name for that elephant,
After being invested with the royal crown wreathed with the royal garland that is Fortune herself, so dear to the touch,
He freed crowned kings, rivals who had lost the right to their lands released them from prison and restored their rule,
Rescinding taxes, as the eight cloudy mountains, the eight superb rutting elephants, and the eight hooded serpents are relieved of their burden,
And following after his father, clearing this world of the blinding weight of ignorance that even the fiery sun cannot defeat...

Kūttar describes Kulottuṅka I, now long dead, by emblematic deeds rather than name: he is the king who defrayed taxes—a consistent note of glory for this king, for this deed is mentioned by all three ulās—17—and was praised by “the king of poets” (kavicakravartin), in this case Cayaṅkoṇṭar in his Kaliṅkattup Parani. After him, Akalaṅka, a biruda for Vikrama Cōḷa, who is praised for his
valor in the Kaliṅga war and the *parani* poem he received as a result. And then, the shift to the hero of the text, Kulottuṅga II. In contrast to the telegraphic presentation of kings who have come before him, Kūttar carefully presents the facts of his birth, for he is the being who will be asserted to shine over the living earth as he moves in procession. What has come before is a swelling prelude to this moment. He is born to a princess from Tuvarai, or Dorasamudra, capital of the Hoysala Ballālas (modern Halebid). His coronation is noted, as are the classic acts of overlordship: ordering crowned kings beneath him in the hierarchy of lordship that he commands as the king of kings; decreasing taxes; establishing the light of *dharma*. He alone will support the earth, enough to relieve its established bearers, the elephants and serpents at the world’s cardinal points, of their burden. Then at last, before the text continues with a long description of his charitable deeds, Oṭṭakkūttar makes a pivotal return to the sun, the first of Kulottuṅga’s line, who will live in the body of the king when he moves out into the world.

The Field of Cōḷa Power

The genealogies further emphasize the range of the field over which Cōḷa rule extends. It is striking, as the genealogies gradually shift from *purāṇic* ancestors whom kings throughout India claim as their forefathers to the dynasty’s actual rulers, how quickly territorial markers of the realm come into play. The process is wrought with a focus that tightens as the generations pass. We move from the sun, a universal lord of the heavens, to ancestors widely held, such as Kāśyapa or Dilīpa, as well as great kings known to Indian mythology whom the Cōḷas took for their own, such as Śibi, the aforementioned paragon of charity, and Mucukunda, the king who sleeps across the transition to the Age of Strife, and who, for the Cōḷas, brought Śiva Tyāgarāja from heaven to

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18 The *Kaliṅkapat Perum Paraṇi*, now lost, also apparently written by Oṭṭakkūttar. See above, p. 144.

19 As Pollock (2004: 259–60) argues for kings of vernacular-based polities, “the limits of their geopolitical sphere are articulated clearly, consistently, and even insistently in their public records. It is in fact immaterial whether these limits were actualized—as they most certainly were not always; the point is that limits were set.”
The sphere of Cōṭa power then begins to be mapped with real specificity, as kings master their territory through dramatic acts of conquest. Initially, these are victories not over rival lords, but over nature itself, to ensure the life-giving flow of water. All three ulās speak of a Cōṭa king who razed the western mountains in Coorg so the Kāvēri River would flood the fertile fields of the Cōṭa heartland:

Then the one who let the Poṉṉi with its leaping waves descend as he cut through the tall Coorg mountains in the west...21

His descendent, Karikālan, is perhaps the most famous Cōṭa king of ancient days, celebrated in the caṅkam text Paṭṭinappālai (The City and The Wasteland) and in Cilappatikāram (The Authority of the Anklet) as a ruler who asserted control over south India. For a king extolled in the grand terms of universal lordship—his most prominent deed was travelling the extent of Bharata to inscribe the Cōṭa’s tiger emblem on the slopes of Mount Meru—it is noteworthy that the Mūvar Ulā gives equal importance to his efforts to control the Kāvēri. Like his ancestor who secured the river’s passage through the mountains, Karikālan turns his eye to guiding its waters by raising the river’s banks. As the Kulōttuṅka Cōṭaṉ Ulā tells the tale, Karikālan yoked his feudatories to the task and punished one who did not turn up:

Ceṉṉi Karikālan, who took the eye of the one who did not come to raise the banks of the Poṉṉi, piling earth head-high...22
The Mūvar Ulā pairs these exemplary deeds of agricultural mastery with another paradigmatic act: the Cōḷa dynasty binding itself to the earth it rules by marrying into an autochthonous Nāga lineage. A Cōḷa king named Śūravāditya, whom the Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṉ Ulā calls Kiḷḷi Valavaṉ, weds the Nāga princess Kāntimati, identified by the old commentary on the ulā as the daughter of the serpent lord Uvaccēṉaṉ. The trope is an ancient one, hearkening back to Arjuna’s sojourns in the Mahābhārata, during which he joins with the serpent princess Ulūpī while projecting Pāṇḍava dominance over the quarters of the earth. Kūttar describes the Cōḷa marriage to a Nāga princess in parallel terms:

Then the king who entered the underworld
and through his great splendor took a Nāga princess for his own...

The principle remains the same, deepened by the long tradition of myth it invokes. A lord moves over the earth, projecting his will through movement, and the earth responds through a serpent maiden’s desire, condensing the earth’s love in an iconic pairing of bodies. As the Cōḷa genealogy moves from the general histories of mythic time to local acts of dominance over land, the marriage with a Nāga princess is as dramatic a sign as the golden Kāvēri, both river and woman responding to the Cōḷa kings’ plans to enhance her.

As the generations pass from mythic lords of the past to the later Cōḷas known to history, the ulās’ genealogies shift the work of mastery from control of nature to control of rival claimants...
to power. The portrait of Vijayālaya, founder of the dynasty, begins this process by marking the ruler’s body with wounds of war, styling him as “the king with cruel scars on his body / ninety-six made on his fine chest in battle after raging battle.”

Parāntaka I (r. 907–55) extends Cōḷa rule southward as “the king dominant in war, who took Īḻam and the Tamil soil of Maturai / going foremost while lords of men bow.”

Rājarāja I, now chiefly known for his royal temple in Taṅcāvūr, is here praised not for building but for spreading Cōḷa dominance westward. After crossing eighteen wastelands, the ulās declare, he burns the fortress of Utukai, a citadel probably situated in the western ghats of Coorg.

Rājendra I (r. 1012–4) widens the sphere of Cōḷa rule beyond south India, marching through Kaliṅga to take waters from the Ganges, and sending a fleet to Śrivijaya, where his forces subdue Kaṭāram.

Rājādhirāja (r. 1018–54) subdues the Cēra fleet and prevails over the Cāḷukyas in Kalyāṇi, and his younger brother Rajendra II (1052–64) wrests Cāḷukya submission from a near defeat in the battle of Koppam.

The king who took Koppam with his superb elephant and received a parāṇī feeding hundreds of murderous elephants to a famished ghoul...

Virarājendra (r. 1063–70) continues the Cōḷa record of triumph over the Cāḷukyas in the battle of Kūṭalacaṅkamam, waged at the confluence of the Tungabhadrā and Kṛṣṇā rivers, and Kuloṭtunγa I, heir to both Cōḷa and Eastern Cāḷukya houses, secures total Cōḷa hegemony in the

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25 Kulōttunγa Cōḷaṉ Ulā vv. 20–21: அருதைத்திய || போலை ஓர்கையை ஒருவருளையை | அருவிய ஓர்கையை அரசியையே. See also Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 15; Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 19.

26 Kulōttunγa Cōḷaṉ Ulā vv. 22–23: கொரையையை கொரையையை கொரையையை | கொரையையை கொரையையை. See also Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 20.


28 Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 18; Kulōttunγa Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 25; Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 22. Kaṭāram (now Kedah) was located on the west coast of the Malaysian peninsula.

29 Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 19; Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 23.

30 Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā vv. 23–24: ஓர்கையையையையை | ஓர்கையையையையையை | ஓர்கையையையையையை. See also Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 20. On the Koppam campaign, where Rājendra crowned himself king on the field of battle after Rājādhirāja was slain, see Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 256–61.

31 Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 22; Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā v. 25.
south. As his son Vikrama’s *ulā* describes him, Kulottuṅga conquered the Pāṇṭiyas and the Cēras, destroyed the Cēra fleet at Cālai, took the Arabian Sea, the Koṅkan coast, and Karnataka, and triumphed over the Marāṭha king, thereby setting a stage of royal supremacy for the processions of his next three descendants.\(^{32}\)

The specific chronology in each *ulā* varies, and the progression of Cōḻa rule described here differs in the details of each text. These are modal changes, allowing for a poet’s improvisation at the level of individuals. But the general pattern of tightening focus holds true, consummating in a focused stage of power that the living body of the king will set into motion when the time for procession arrives. There is, however, an important exception to the trend. All three *ulās* mention a king particular to the Cōḻas at the start of their genealogies, right after the sun himself. This is Manunīti Cōḻa, whose archetypal deed resonates deeply with the *ulās*’ own subject of procession. Manunīti, the *Kulottuṅka Cōḻaṇ Ulā* states, is

The strong-willed king who drove his chariot forward to end the anguish of a cow, astonishing the world…\(^{33}\)

The cow, in this famous myth, rang the bell that hangs from the palace tower, a bell of justice (*ārāyccimāṇi*) set in this public space so that citizens who have suffered wrong can make public appeal to their king. The king’s feckless son, it is said, killed the cow’s infant calf while driving wildly in his chariot, and then fled the scene. The silent cow rings the bell that will give her voice, and alerts Manunīti to the crime.

The king effects swift judgment on the heir to his throne, driving his chariot forward in the street to crush his son under its wheels. He thereby stands, as the *Irācarāca Cōḻaṇ Ulā* styles him, as a guardian of normative order, “the one who drove his chariot over his son, turning the wheel of *dharma*.\(^{34}\) Kūttar’s regard for Manunīti is not new. When Kaṇṇaki berates the Pāṇṭiya king of

\(^{32}\) Vikkirma Cōḻaṇ *Ulā* v. 24–25.

\(^{33}\) vv. 1–2: *মঙ্গল|| অক্ষপাত মন্দীরায়নি মন্দাদরিতি ম্যূ|| মায়া মেয় মায়া মেয় মায়া মেয় মায়া মেয়।

\(^{34}\) vv. 2–3: *বেলি|| অভয়ার্চি প্রজাভীষ্টি অভয়ার্চি অভয়ার্চি।

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Maturai in *Cilappatikāram*, she contrasts his venal realm with the Cōḷa’s harbor capital of Pukār by referring to Śibi and Manunīti, whose acts of righteous kingship epitomize the Cōḷa line:

“Pukār is my city, and great is its name! A king once ended a dove’s suffering there, amazing the gods with a greatness beyond flaw. Another crushed his only son under his chariot wheel, when the clapper swung in the bell of justice at his gates, and his heart was seared by the tears that fell from the eyes of a cow.”

Oṭṭakkūttar, moreover, would have known the lengthy (and now canonical) rendition of this tale that Cēkkiḻār offers in his description of the glory of the southern city Tiruvārūr (Tiruvārūrt Tirunakarac Ćirappu) in the *Periya Purāṇam*. Yet Manunīti’s place at the head of the Mūvar Ulā’s genealogies bespeaks his deep ties to the action that will follow. Now as before, Kūttar stresses, a king is rolling forward to crush degeneracy. The wheel of his chariot advances as a force of rule, the wheel of his command (ājñācakra) that brings order to the earth. Manunīti’s procession makes the world the way it should be, guided by a morality beyond favor for birthright and privilege. For genealogies that attest to exactly the opposite, Manunīti’s place at their peak sets the Cōḷa line rolling forward under a banner that denies the privilege of birth is a privilege, but is rather a meritorious entitlement. The Cōḷa kings are born, the legend stresses, not for selfish advantage but to secure dharma in the world.

The Three Cōḷa Kings of the Mūvar Ulā

The kings of the Mūvar Ulā effect this dharma, the ulās declare, by returning the Golden Age to earth. Take for instance Kūttar’s description of Vikrama Cōḷa when he begins his parade, and approaches the pētai to begin the exposition of the seven stages of womanhood:

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35 Maturaikkāṇṭam, Valakkarai Kātai ll. 51–56: மாறுலோகம் வெறுமல் விளைவையும் வாணை | என் மறை என்று உடம்புடன் எஞ்சுப் | அவன் அல்லாஹ்ப் முதல் பிறந்தது | ஆறார் என்றும் ஆறார் என்றும் | அறியார் துண்டு கொண்டு முதல் பிறந்தது | உழங்காட்டும் பார்த்து நன்மை.

36 vv. 98–135.
She entered the street where the women shine with gold and while she was playing, “The Golden Age comes marching in! The greatest of the great, who drove Kali from her tenacious hold on the earth!” roared the thundercloud of his three drums...

Such verses present the king as the Golden Age embodied, a living vessel who manifests the epochal deeds of his fathers to benefit the world he rules.

For Kulottuṅga II, whom Oṭṭakkūttar presents as the architect of the many impressive renovations at the Citamparam temple, his renewing presence is first articulated in a substantial passage that lists the projects he sponsored to beautify the home of his family’s god:

And following after his father, clearing this world of the blinding weight of ignorance that even the fiery sun cannot defeat,

With his peerless queen, who has a supremacy among women proper for the right to be consecrated together with her king,

the great lady Puvaṇimulutuṭaiyāl,

while the gods on earth chanted the Vedas,

He scattered the nine gems, and worshiped the dance of boundless ecstasy of the god who is offered praise,

He uprooted the galling nuisance, the minor god on his animal mount in the front courtyard of the Sacred hall of Tillai,

He laid out rows of fertile pots made of the fresh gold that flows from the great rose apple, cool with its rich fruit,

He inlaid the planks with fine diamonds from countless mountains until they overflowed the fresh gold on the throne,

He rained down pearls from the seven seas protected by his unfurled parasol like the high mountain streams that pour into the splendid Ganges,

He set up a holy lamp set with wish-fulfilling gems taken from Śeṣa, whose heads captivate the eye,

With a heap of pure diamonds like a temple tank,

37 vv. 119–21: மார்க்கநேதரனார் || உண்மையான விலகநேதரனார் விளக்காட்சிகள் | யுத்த பற்கள் விளக்காட்சிகள் –

Cf. the commentary for the U. Vē. Cāminataiyar edition, which takes poṟkoṭiyār vīti as “the street filled with golden flags.”
large emeralds scattered like green leaves,
Thick white pearls like raindrops,
rubies like magnificent red lotuses,
And sapphires of the highest grade like clustered bees,
he sets gems as a temple service, to achieve a beauty beyond words...\(^{38}\)

As Kulottuṅka’s lavish gifts suggest, the Cōḷas process as agents of Śiva, glorifying him in Citamparam before setting forth on parade. Kulottuṅga’s partiality, the above passage suggests, was extreme enough that he removed from the temple grounds an image of Viṣṇu—“the galling nuisance, the minor god on his animal mount”—that had previously resided there, and as the Irācarāca Cōḷuṇ Ulā picks up the tale, “cast out the alien nuisance / and had it submerged in the moat that is the facing sea.”\(^{39}\) Such partisan measures aside, Oṭṭakkūttar takes care to emphasize that all three kings turn to Naṭeśa in Citamparam to ground their presence in the world before starting the involved rites of procession. After Vikrama wakes,

He takes his cleansing bath with water from the unfailing Poṉṇi
and is decked with the holy shoots of grass picked by the gods on earth,

Then to the lord who on his crown keeps the branch of crescent moon
the branching stream from the silvery mountain, and the branching ancient Vedas,

To this divine and perfect flame, the rosy clouded sky that is his poisoned throat,
the three-eyed sweetness, he bends his head in worship...\(^{40}\)

\(^{38}\) Kulottuṅka Cōḷuṇ Ulā vv. 34–46:

\(^{39}\) v. 33:

\(^{40}\) Vikkirmā Cōḷuṇ Ulā vv. 40–43:
Kulottuṅga, after waking to the day and bathing, worshiped “the golden feet of the god with red locks, the foundation of his line,” while Rājarāja “applied the three white stripes of ash prescribed / for the worship of the god with twisted locks like heaping coral,” and “meditated on the sacred dance at Tillai / the divinity of his family for that entire ancient lineage of kings.”

The god remains still in his temple, and the kings march in his stead. They are presented, in Kūttar’s verses, as living expressions of a divine will that are not subject to the vagaries of time. Śiva responds by suffusing them with a power that is expressed in beauty. At the end of Vikrama’s long process of adornment,

...the grand jewel is placed on his fitting regal body crowing a beauty of endless vivid hues,

As if, when he bends his garlanded crown in worship the three-eyed god gives the beauty gained once Kāma bent his bow...

The dancing god confers a beauty revealed, Kūttar hints, when Kāma struck him with his arrow to spark his desire for Pārvatī, and thereby turned the god’s interest to care for the world. It is a fine moment of textual allusion, reaching back to Kumārasambhava and the poem it inspired, Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ’s ulā, which takes Pārvatī’s intimate care for the god as the prompt for his movement in procession. The god’s parade in the Tirukkailāya Ṇāṉa Ulā, a celestial ideal, has now been deputed to kings whose processional texts ground them in place and time.

Oṭṭakkūttar sets this temporal frame by praising the kings’ most prominent deeds. For Vikrama, a victorious commander in the Kaliṅga war prosecuted by his father, the poet gives a long list

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42 vv. 44–45; 46–47: பாவ்பட்டர்ளை || பொளேதரிஎண்டு பாத்திரட்டேய்டே || உராண்டுபாட்டு தொளிங்சூ || பாங்லாமல்பேயடே பொளியலே பட்டர்ளை.

43 See Lincoln’s discussion of the authority of prophecy. (1994: 47)

44 Vikkirma Cōḻaṉ Ulā vv. 49–51: பூங்கைய || ஆணன்குமாதே அலங்கரித்தக் || ஆனங்குமாதே அலங்கரித்தக் – அலங்கரித்தக் || என்ற திருக்கிவட்டு காணே கோப்பு || உரு புரவாணம்ச குற்றக்கை.
of fellow participants in the procession who also have triumphed in martial conquest, including such luminaries as Karuṇākarat Toṇṭaimāṉ. Kulottuṅga, as was noted above, is praised for his generous patronage of the Citamparam shrine, with the charitable works assigned to his name listed in careful detail. Rājarāja, interestingly, garners no such praise for his building activities at Dārāsuram, perhaps indicating that his ulā was composed before the grand Airāvateśvara temple had been built.45 He is hailed, by contrast, largely through hyperbolic tropes of identification with Viṣṇu, which though effusive, probably did not hide a discomfiting silence about his own achievements, particularly when contrasted with the ulās of his predecessors.

Rājarāja’s identification with Viṣṇu, however, is nothing out of the ordinary, for the Mūvar Ulā emphasizes that all three kings fulfill their role in the world as mortal shares of this royal god. As in the genealogies that set the ulās in motion, the past becomes the present as Oṭṭakkūttar aligns the heroic exploits of Viṣṇu and his avatars with the Cōḷa kings on parade. Vikrama, for instance, is “Dark Tirumāl, red on his fine lotus hands, / flower feet, eyes, and ripe fruit mouth.”46 Kulottuṅga is at the same time Kṛṣṇa, “the powerful lord who smashed through the two arjuna trees / bringing them down with a single angry blow,” and the mischievous child who stole milkmaids’ clothes.47 Rājarāja, in one of Kūttar’s fine passages, is Vāmana, taking possession of the universe in three steps. When they behold the king, the women call out,

“Aiming to imprison the Asuras who had spread over the earth
he thought to take three steps as alms, protecting her,
And the earth who received this unique service,” they say, “now won’t release his red feet, so he will be hers alone...
O ladies, we raised our hands in worship to his lotus eyes
we worshiped the red lotus that tastes the sound of all the Vedas,

45See above, p. 141.
46Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā vv. 157–58: அºகமல¹ || கைய மலரÔķ க¾ăº கáவாĈ | ஥சãய கÛய ெசÃய கûய.
We worshiped the lotuses with rich bangles
and we will worship his navel, the lotus that is hidden, so reveal it!
His lotus foot might well take in that lotus,” they say,
“but for lotus eyes streaked with kohl it is nothing that easy!”

The poet sees the right praise to offer his king, knowing that Vāmana, too, claims a universe that
was already his.

6.2 Women in a Living World

When Oṭṭakkūttar took living men as the heroes for his ulās, he created what for modern comment-
tators became a pressing problem: were the other principals of the texts, the women who
watch the hero in procession, similarly historical? Mu. Arunācalam offers a representative view:

We should consider the final two verses [of Paṇṭiru Pāṭṭiyal] carefully. They dictate that kings,
gods, men who adhere to Śāstric norms, and men of the four varṇas are the appropriate sub-
jects of praise in an ulā. This rule appears to be in grave error. An ulā should be composed
about gods, and moreover only about a great god who is of serious consequence. Composing
one about a king, or a man from one of the four varṇas is a grave error, contrary to the Tamil
ethos that chaste women have... Oṭṭakkūttar’s text contradicts this literary norm right from
the outset. He composed his Mūvar Ulā about three Cōḻa kings who lavished him with honors:
Vikrama Cōḻa, the patron who made him a great poet; his son Kulottunga Cōḻa II, who was
Oṭṭakkūttar’s student, and Kulottunga’s son Rājarāja II, who ruled when Oṭṭakkūttar was in
his old age...[Many literary qualities] give proof to his poetic genius, yet by basing the com-
position of an ulā on a king, we would have to say that he in fact violated the norm. In his
wake, we find no end to the ulās composed about various eminent men or sages, lacking any
restrictions whatsoever, and this is a grievous state of affairs.
The concern that seems to lie behind such censorious judgments is that the women portrayed in Kūttar’s ulās were prostitutes. The eleventh-century commentator Ilampūraṇar, as we have seen, makes no such identification in his commentary on the Tolkāppiyam sūtra he takes as a warrant for the literary portrayal of the seven stages of women.\(^{50}\) Nor, more tellingly, does Paṇṇiru Pāṭṭiyal, whose standards for ulās precisely correspond with Oṭṭakkūttar’s in all other respects. If prostitutes were the inspiration for the adoring women in Kūttar’s poems, no text of his day reports it.

Centuries later, however, the fourteenth-century commentator Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar built on Ilampūraṇar’s analysis to link ulā explicitly to Tolkāppiyam, and to identify the women involved as potumakāḷir, or prostitutes. He reads the sūtra that declares, “And arising on the part of the town is held to be appropriate,” as follows:

This describes the kind of puṟam theme for an overt expression of desire that is not appropriate. Here is what it means: the author states that for the pāṭāṉ (“praise for a hero”) theme, even the portrayal of an overt expression of desire abiding in the prostitutes of the town is appropriate. The word “arising” means a portrayal where this desire is directed toward gods or human beings. This is ulā poetry, composed in the kalivenpā meter, structured in accordance with the seven stages of women.\(^{51}\)

Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar contrasts the sūtra with one four verses prior, which speaks of purai tīr kāmam, “desire free from stigma,” thereby setting ulā under the theme of ill-matched—and thereby unre-
quited—love. His typification of an ulā’s adoring women is unambiguous and significant, a clear indication of the social conditions he took ulās to represent. Yet Nacciṅarkkiṉiyar lived some three centuries after Oṭṭakkūttar, and it is possible that his understanding of the historical figures behind the ulās was vague. What is certain is that neither the Mūvar Ulā nor any other ulā I have read identifies the women in its verses as prostitutes. Keeping them anonymous and emblematic, figures ready to be inhabited by the reader’s own perspective, seems to have been a principle not subject to variation.

Living Models for Ulā Poetry

Were the women of Kūttar’s ulās palace women, specially dedicated to the role of royal encomium? The poems do not say, nor does any other contemporary record. The Cōḷa period did witness the dedication of temple women, a practice recorded most famously in an inscription of Rājarāja I, dated 1014, that records the donation of funding and housing in a restricted quarter (cēri) to four hundred women brought to perform ritual temple service for the Bṛhadīśvara temple. Yet even if we grant parity between women dedicated to serve a divine lord in the temple and those who served a human lord in the palace, as a host of identical upacāras, honors, titles, and grand processions would suggest, evidence aligning the women in the Mūvār Ulā with prostitutes is absent.

The Śaiva Āgamas do refer to women who take prominent roles in festival processions, where they danced before the movable image (nityotsavabimbam) of the god and performed other related ritual tasks. The terms used for such women, ganikā or rudraganikā, do have an association with prostitution, though whether this was true for the women described in these texts remains

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52 SII 2.3 no. 66. Leslie Orr (2000: 33) regards the commission of temple women found in this inscription as atypical of the Cōḷa period, despite the scholarly interest that it has attracted.
far from certain.\textsuperscript{54} The \textit{kriyāpāda} of \textit{Rauravāgama} and the \textit{pūrvabhāga} of \textit{Kāmikāgama}, for example, list the requisite physique, training, and attire for such women, give staging directions for their dances during the festival event.\textsuperscript{55} Such injunctions, however, could well postdate the Cōḷa \textit{ulās}. In his work on early \textit{Śaivatantra} material, Dominic Goodall persuasively argues that specifications for temple worship (\textit{parārthapūjā}) are later accretions to the \textit{āgamic} corpus, which was above all concerned with the private, individualized (\textit{ātmārtha}) worship of initiated practitioners.\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Kāmikāgama} is a late text, and though the \textit{Raurava} is an early \textit{Śaivāgama}, its \textit{kriyāpāda}, as Goodall has shown, is a subsequent addition.\textsuperscript{57}

The most famous handbook on procession, \textit{Mahotsavavidhi}, provides a detailed picture of \textit{gaṇikās’} roles in the festival parade, and is traditionally held to have been composed by the \textit{Śaivatantra} adept Aghoraśīvācārya in 1157 as part of his \textit{Kriyākramadyotikā} (\textit{A Light on the Method of Practice}).\textsuperscript{58} Were the date correct, \textit{Mahotsavavidhi} would provide a most valuable counterpart to \textit{Oṭṭakkūṭtar’s} \textit{ulās}, yet here, too, as with the \textit{parārthapūjā} sections now attributed to early \textit{Śaivāgamas}, the available evidence suggests that the association of \textit{Mahotsavavidhi} with Aghoraśiva was a later work of synthesis.\textsuperscript{59}

Ultimately, the link between prostitution and the women of the Cōḷa \textit{ulās} rests on the weight of Nacciṅārkkiṉiyar’s fourteenth-century commentary. This is an important but distanced source, and relevant sources closer to Oṭṭakkūṭtar’s time prove elusive. Since the \textit{āgamas’} sections on

\textsuperscript{54}Davis and Orr 2007: 82.
\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Rauravāgama} vv. 19.1–8; see also \textit{Kāmikāgama} vv. 4.390–99. A manuscript copy of \textit{Rauravāgama} from Kuṇrakkuṭi contains an additional verse after v. 19.1 that declares, “The supreme dance is held to be the dance of the courtesans of Rudra (\textit{rudrasya gaṇikā}). The dance of his slaves (\textit{taddāsyā}), though of middle rank, is also renowned.” (रूद्रस्य गणिकान्तून तूमुखमःसुर्खिलयं। तादायाश्वतू नन्तू तू मध्यमः चैति कीतित्वम्)
\textsuperscript{56}This argument, which builds on the work of Hélène Brunner and Alexis Sanderson, is well presented in Goodall’s introduction to his translation of Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary on the \textit{Kiraṇatantra} (1998).
\textsuperscript{57}Goodall 1998: xi.
\textsuperscript{58}Davis 2010.
\textsuperscript{59}In his analysis of the text, Richard Davis (2010: 22) accepts \textit{Mahotsavavidhi} as an authentic part of \textit{Kriyākramadyotikā} penned by Aghoraśiva because of the colophon to the \textit{Gotrasantati} of \textit{Kriyākramadyotikā}, which gives author and date. Goodall finds much to contradict this view, and offers evidence for a later date of composition (1998: xiii).
temple worship describe the roles of temple women, not palace women, commonality must be granted if we are to treat the descriptions of gaṇikās as relevant to women of the Cōḷa palace; the association of the texts’ use of the term gaṇikā with prostitution is obscure; and the sections of the āgamas that address women’s roles in a procession are later additions to the texts (though this does not entail that the ritual practices detailed therein were not occurring during Oṭṭakkūttar’s time). One is left with the ulās themselves, and they do not clarify the matter.

There are, however, scattered clues. In its praise of the ingénue (maṭantai), the Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṉ Ulā appears to refer to the marriage thread around her neck:

Her necklace is made of pearls from the right-turning conch
which surrendered to her neck, rich with the cord that gives her standing...\(^{60}\)

As women dedicated to a king as palace women remained unmarried, this single verse—out of the thousand or so in the Mūvar Ulā—offers the slightest of evidence against such an identification. There are also signs to the contrary. The women in the ulās seem to live in areas specially reserved for them, and they are surrounded only by other women, as friends, elders, and maidservants. The Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā, for instance, describes the child who comes out to see the king as “entering the street where the women shine with gold”: an ambiguous statement, but one that does seem to point to a residential quarter particular to women, such as is detailed in Rājarāja I’s oft-cited inscription regarding the temple women of the Brhadīśvara temple.\(^{61}\)

The Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā, moreover, describes the women who flock to see the processing king as having been captured in legendary Cōḷa victories of the past, an echo, perhaps, of historical accounts that describe palace women being obtained in this way:

The women who appeared on earth the day Mucukunda returned

\(^{60}\)vv. 230–31: அதுறு இல்லை || கையைரி வெவ்வேறு வைக்கும் செய்திகள் கோண்டாடப் பொருளி இலியானும் || கையைரி வைக்கும் வைக்கும் பொருளியானும். The conceit here involves the comparison of her neck with the conch, as both are said to bear three lines upon them.

\(^{61}\)vv. 119–20: முன்னூரின் வெளியில் பெறிய பொருள் || அதே வெளியில். As noted previously (above, p. 197), the expression can be read differently, to take poṇ koṭiyār vīti as “a street filled with golden flags.”
after protecting the celestial world with steadfast courage,

The charming women of the Cakravāla mountains
which the Cōḷa toured with his horse to dominate his enemies,

The celestial beauties obtained in the sea once churned
by the two arms of a king of the Cōḷa lineage in Kōḷi,

Next came the celestial mountain women who were taken
from the renowned peak through the triumphant power of a king’s bow,

The pure women from both ranges of the world of the Silver Mountain
where a king travelled all alone and wielded his bow,

The divine women who came to serve the daughter of the serpent lord
who gave her to a king in marriage due to his affection,

The celestial mountain women carried off on the day a king returned
from the Meru mountain, a plaything he inscribed with a tiger,

Women lovely as peacocks, whom Vaḷavaṇ̄ carried off from a floating citadel
their eyes as keen as the spear once given to a heroic son

The many women taken in the capture of Alakā, city of the lord of wealth
along with his precious treasure...

The list draws to its conclusion with a verse that offers the strongest evidence for associating the
women of the ulās with palace women:

And many others, groups of divine, beautiful women
who have rights in the palace kept by their holy ancestors...

The allusion is intriguing but exceptional, and bears no indication of prostitution. The resonance

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62 vv. 69–78: நகாமா || அல்லா இல்லை பாட்டு விம்பையல் | காலா கேண... புடுக்குயல் – பல்கையரின் || போன்றை முன்பையிலிருந்து தம்பு அலங்கார் | காலா கேண... புடுக்குயல் – பல்கையரின் ||

63 vv. 78–79: நகாமா || சாய லரமக்கன் தொட்டு பாட்டியன் | காயல் சிறிய ேழாக்கு. 206
with palace women is present in the Cōḷa ulās, but Oṭṭakkūttar, like those who preceded and followed him, was careful to keep the women in his verses open to interpretation.

From the start, ulās have been texts written about women who quickly become symbols. Oṭṭakkūttar stays true to the vision that has always guided the ulās’ genealogy: women are lands taken, gardens cultivated, rival kings crushed, then restored to subject rule. The body of the Cōḷa carries the history of his lineage, transformative deeds that bring righteousness and fertility, to a land condensed in the woman who beholds him. Oṭṭakkūttar thus hews closely to a tradition that has marked the ulā’s genealogy from its beginning when he likens women to plants. He offers the standard conceit of a woman’s face as a lotus, opening in the sun:

He seemed like the sun to her when she saw him pass by, body filled with light and her face blossomed like a lotus...⁶⁴

But Kūttar takes the association further. He makes it more frankly sexual, as for instance in a verse that pairs the usual depiction of a woman as a bough newly budding with leaves, with an entwined mussel-shell creeper (*clitoria terneata*), a plant whose flowers resemble female genitalia.⁶⁵ And he accents the twinned lives of women and plants, setting them in parallel dynamic arcs to reveal their symbiosis.

She went into a garden of flowers, plucked for the shower of blossoms rained on the one who protects the earth out to its surging, roaring waters,

Her beautiful curled earrings flashed, and so flashed the tender furled leaves that sprout from the sweet mango tree, to be plucked and eaten by the cuckoo,

This creeper with dangling earrings smiled, and the jasmine creeper that she had approached opened up its blossoms,

Broader than a cobra’s hood, her soft mound widened, and the red-tipped lily next to where she sat spread apart its petals,

⁶⁴ Vikkīrama Cōḷan Ulā vv. 257–58: காககாÅ || ஏப ெவÖÄவÀ ÖரÝ ĈĉவĿாß | வாÃÁப ćகபº கயமலÄÀதாÈ.

⁶⁵ Kulōttunika Cōḷan Ulā v. 198.
She carried a wooden doll admired by her companions and the bottle-flower shrub carried its blossoms,

The musk wafted from the garden that is her braided hair and the milky sap of the ironwood tree spread its fragrance,

The woman with bright brow spouted fresh liquor strained through a cloth and the milkweed responded by pouring out its nectar,

There in the garden that thrives in the springtime, all was brought forth by the beauty of a woman so beautiful that Lakṣmī grows concerned...

Kūttar’s pairing of womanhood with flora reaches its heights when the poet employs śleṣa, and gives voice to both aspects within a single run of phonemes. He sets the process within a young girl’s recollection of her dream, where a self both illusory and true awakens to desire:

She awoke from sleep without being roused by her friends or mothers, rose from her bed and went softly out,

“Oh, a perfect young creeper, thriving and draped with leaves,
\ "a perfect girl who is growing up, her dangling earrings swing on her ears, yielding to whichever direction it takes as it hangs gently down,
\ and her delicate waist gives way,

Its bright, tender new leaves and countless budding flowers bring forth its beauty,
\ a beautiful girl with a garland of countless bright, tender new leaves, it climbs high so that its branches can rise and flourish,
\ rising to go upstairs amidst the clamor of her family,

It takes a partner, embracing the strong limbs of a fine kōṅku tree,
\ falling into the strong limbs of the Cenṉi, her partner, its crown thick the gold of honey-filled flowers, worthy of worship,
\ sturdy as a kōṅku tree, adorned with gold and perfume, worthy of worship,

The bees that rest there hum as its fragrance drifts,
\ The conches around him blare, he’s waiting there to marry me,

\ Irācarāca Cōḻaṉ Ulā vv. 199–207:
\ ķாºĭாÜîÄ || காவலÉþÁ ெபÃĈ மலÄமைழ¹þ¹ |
\ ĭாÃķாÞÅ ெசÊĎ þĎÐனாÈ – ெசÃய || ĭாĂºþைழ ÙÊன¹ þÚÅியாČத¹ Ņாத | ÝĂºþைழேதமாÝÊ ÙÊன – ெநĂºþைழ || வÅܹ ĭாÔĈ ćĎவÜÁப ெவÀெதÖÄ | ćÅைல¹ ĭாÔயćĠவÜÁப – ெமÅÜயÉ || பாÀதčÀ ŌாÉþ பக½டÅþÅ ைகÂமலர¹ | காÀதč ×ÊெறÖÄைகÂமலரÁ – ŏாÀதாÄ || பரċ மரÁபாைவ ĭாÈளÁ பயÀத | þரċ மரÁபாைவ ĭாÈளÁ – ĆÛþழÉ ||
\ ŇாைலÚÊ மாÊமத¼ ĒÇவர ேவÞைலÁ | பாைலÚÊ பாÊமதÂ பாÛÁப» – ேசைலÚÊ || வாºþÂĆĄமĄ வாăதÅ ĭாÁĆßÁப¹ | Ņாºþ மĄெவÖÄ ĭாÁĆßÁப – ஆºþ¿ || Öĉவ¼Ā Ņால¿தாÈெசÆÝயா ெலÅலாÂ | பĉவ¼ெசÃ Ňாைல பயÁபÁ

\ 66Iruṭarū Cōḻaṉ Ulā vv. 199–207:
I saw it and rejoiced, in my dream,” she said,
\ I saw him and rejoiced, in my dream,” she said...\67

As the paired meanings emerge, distinct and yet one, the poet lets their essential identity speak for itself. The conceit, woman as lithe creeper supported by a lordly tree grounded firm in the earth, is a ubiquitous trope. But the śleṣa enlivens it, binding a metaphor for enduring masculine power and feminine dependence to the moment when it is enacted in the girl’s life.

Kūttar also follows tradition by likening the women of the Mūvar Ulā to armies on the march to war, steeping their preparations for the Cōla lord’s procession in the long-held battle metaphors of sexuality.

Women with golden bracelets ascend to the balconies
crowd into the formal halls, gather close on every rooftop,

Both sides of the long street are filled completely
as many others arrive to stand and watch,

Dark quivering brows are strong bows, eyes the flower arrows
that capture the broad earth to its end,

The bees hum in row after row, as the throngs of dark braids
resound like herds of noisy elephants,

Bees put their mouths to cloud-dark hair
blowing on scented curls as if sounding forth the trumpets,

On cheeks scented with pleasing hair oil, long earrings sweep down to the shoulder
presenting the shimmering sea-monster banner...

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\68 Kulōttuṅka Cōlān Ulā vv. 102–8: பாºகெற ఆ்டே பாºகெற பறெெலெ | மாßைகÚேலĎவாÄ | அாட மாடÀ ĴாĎÀĄĎவாÄ – îč | இைர¾Ă ம才干 பலெரÖேர ெசÊĎ – ĴாČÀதைகய | எைளாெலகÜÁப | ×ைர¹þ ×ைரćரல îல¹ þழாºகÈ | இைரÁØÊ ĸாþĸாþ ெவÊன – Ýைர»ĀĉÈ || காகாள ெமÊď பÔகÜÁபÁ – ŏாக¿ || தகரº கமÇகĄÁØÉ றாÇþைழ ŌாடாÇ | மகரÂ ØறÇĭாÔÚÊ வாÃÁப.
When the king actually confronts them, of course, they collapse as quickly as the rival kings whom the Cōḷas have dominated.

The troops of the warring bodiless god have arrived
and the air glitters as if filled with the dust of the army they face,
The perfumed powder comes raining down, and at once bangles rain down too they lose their color, they lose their minds...⁶⁹

Beholding the Cōḷa King

It is no surprise that the women of Kūttar’s poems give voice to their anguish, their pain a stage for the king’s exaltation. In their plaintive appeals to their ruler, they speak of the real forces at play, mapping out the world that they embody. When the Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā draws to a close, and the older woman (pērilampen) faints away, her companions cry out in remonstration against the Cōḷa lord:

You are the discus, my king, for Pukār with its mansions
for Vañci, for Kānçi, for Kūṭal, for Kōḷi,
You are the sun, who protects the seven distinct worlds,
turning the wheel of command your enemies depend on,
You are Meru among all the noble mountains who are kings
your parasol and no other shelters the eight directions, its protection never wavers,
You are Tyāgasamudra, Ocean of Giving, whose army rose in war
to take the seven districts of Kaliṅga, that and even more,
You are the crest jewel on the pure gold crown made up of hostile kings
who rule the seven realms of the sphere found in this world, waging noble war,
So many gems are found in your land, my lord,
pearls found in the waters of your oceans,
Diamonds in your Nēri Mountain, and so many embroidered dresses,
all among the plenty of your Cōḷa land, my king,

⁶⁹Kulōttunka Cōḷaṉ Ulā vv. 108–10: இகலனºகÊ || ேசனா சćகÀ ெதÛÁப வதெனÖÄ | ேசனா பராகெமன¿ÖகழÁ – ĘநாĎ || ¾ண ெமÖÄĖ Ĉடேன ĴாÔĈÀĖஉà | வ¾ண ÙழÁபாÄ மனÙழÁபாÄ.
She worships you, then you take from her! Her unshakable balance, the rich gold streaks on her breasts, her dark mango leaf hue,  
The sleep she used to know, stolen away! How does this agree with the sacred books that the kings of your ancient line study?  
His arrows are from the rich, enduring Toṇṭai land, lord as generous as the clouds, and his sugarcane bow from the fertile country of the Poṉṉi,  
His chariot is from the blessed land of the Kaṉṉi, if you keep these things in plenty, then this bashful, simple woman,  
Will she be spared for even one day by the king of springtime? His wrath is crushing the life of this good woman with the blue lotus eyes!  
If this goes on, a bell hangs in your tower, it should be called a mountain, and will that one bell ever pass from this world?  

The blend of territorial dominion and seductive appeal draws to its climax, mirroring the flood of desire that overwhelms the women who stand before the king. While the Tirukkailāya Nāṇa Ulā renders Śiva’s territory as a superimposable ideal, ready to be given substance by any Tamil Śaiva temple where the poem is sung, the land is now plotted through historic landmarks of triumph.

The king is the discus, a doubled sign of his status as cakravartin and as a mortal share of Viṣṇu, the discus’s master. But the range of this wheel of command has boundaries. They are marked in this passage by the ancient cities of Tamil kings: Pukār, the Cōḻa’s harbor capital on the eastern coast; Vañci, the base of Cēra rule to the west (perhaps Karūr); Kāñci, the old Pallava capital in the northeastern Toṇṭaimaṇḍalam region; Kūṭal, or Maturai, the home of the Pāṇṭiya...
dynasty; and Kōḷi, or Uṟaiyūr, the ancient seat of the early Cōḷas of caṅkam poetry fame located in central Tirucirāpaḷḷi district. Vikrama is still exalted as the sun and the ocean, the axial Mount Meru, the crest jewel on a crown made up of bested rivals that extends across the earth, but these conventional indexes of rule are wholly vested in the region. Oṭṭakkūttar takes care, in this regard, to set the predictable tributes to universal command alongside the Cōḷa conquest of Kaliṅga, a real measure of power that still would have been within living memory when he first premiered his ulās. Notably absent, too, is any mention of Sri Lanka, now forever lost to Cōḷa control.

The women go on to praise the richness of Vikrama’s lands, then turn to the time-honored trope of the king as thief, put to such rich use in Muttoḷḷāyiram, where there as well the king takes everything away from those who serve him. Their pain, they sense, is unavoidable. The radiant presence of the king has aroused a verdant fertility in his land, ensuring that the cycle of despairing love will continue. Everywhere, the arsenal of the god of love is bursting into bloom. His flower arrows are from the northern reach of Toṇṭaimaṇḍalam; his sugarcane bow, from the Cōḷa heartland where the golden Kāvēri (Poṉṉi) flows; his chariot is the cool southern breeze, the teṉṟal wind that blows up from the southern tip of India, where the Kaṉṉi River is said to lie. They close by returning to the beginning, invoking Vikrama’s progenitor Manunīti Cōḷa and his bell of justice, which had once set another procession in motion. Like the cow who rang this bell, they are also mothers, worried about the woman in their arms.

Ultimately, the king passes beyond understanding. The women see him displayed before them, yet his power carries him beyond the bounds of coherence. He is, they sense, Viṣṇu himself. In a creative stroke that later ulā poets will emulate, Kūttar heightens the tension between perception and the unfathomable, and stresses the women’s doubts. The concluding verses of

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71 On the king as thief in Muttoḷḷāyiram, see Chapter Four, p. 117.
72 See above, p. 195.
the Irācarāca Čōḷaṉ Ulā describe the older woman seeing both the Čōḷa king and the transcendent Viṣṇu, and embracing the wisdom that she cannot comprehend the mystery. “My awareness,” she begins, “never knows the truth.” This lord flew upon Garuḍa, yet he now rides on an elephant’s back, she muses. He should wear yellow garments and a tūlasī chaplet, and carry the śrīpāṇcājanya conch, but he is wearing handspun cloth and an ātti garland, and carries the war conch. Where once he slept on the milk ocean, he now sleeps in war camps. The serpent Ādiśeṣa once gave him shade, now it is his pearl-decked parasol. “Because of these qualities,” she concludes, “you are greater than thought can grasp.”

Oṭṭakkūttar is at his best when he delves into the twists of consciousness provoked by the king’s presence, and the women’s self-understanding is brought to a place where it turns to know itself but cannot recognize its object. The tropes for such fragmentation, used to fine effect in Muttoḷḷāyiram and by now well established, play their expected part: the women lose their accustomed sense of feminine balance, believe themselves isolated and alone, and seek refuge in their dreams. But Kūttar goes further, and turns to the experience of drunkenness in order to wrap the questioning self in another veil of inconstancy. In the best of these passages, the woman reflects the nature of the king’s body that faces her and sparks her moment of transformation: she too is physically present yet also something more. Kūttar stages the scene with meticulous detail, heightening the vivid experience of her senses:

At the time when the strong, pungent toddy flows
to the tips of the young palm spathes, and the runoff hums with bees,
A maid poured some off and filled a palm-leaf cup,
she wiped off the bee-swarmed froth, then offered it to her with praises,
She glanced at it, her mind in pain, flicked away a drop with her sharp nail,

73v. 375: சட்டாதடைம் | மூன்று பரிமா அபர்யங்கியம்.
74vv. 384–85: திருச்சித்திருட்டு நில தொட் திறந்தன்| முப்பாறாதொடாத தொடா. The comparisons between Viṣṇu’s traditional appearance and Rājarāja’s costume on the processing elephant are given in vv. 379–84.
75See Chapter Four, pp. 124–128.
and drank it down, then collapsed in the arms of her maids,

And in the drunkenness that followed, the best of the best of Manu’s line came to her, offering a dream suited for her lust,

Ecstasy was in that dream, but also the hunger to make love, they arose together, each striving to drive the other off,

She sees her own reflection at her side cast on a high wall of shining, pristine crystal,

The bright girdle of fine coral wrapped around her loins becomes her only dress, her blouse falls away as her arms grow lean,

The fragrant garland she wears breaks apart on her neck, the traced sandal paste designs on both her breasts are ruined,

Her red, full lips blanch white, her dark eyes flush with red, her shining brow burned hot, beading up with sweat,

In her dream she saw these things, and took them as real life, gushing with happiness as she tried to tell everyone,

But for this woman whose garland was fragrant with nectar, swarming with bees, the true joy that suffused her mind turned into a lie,

Under a parasol decked with garlands, wide open to give shade, the terrible rutting elephant of Jayatununga approached,

“I am ruined!” cried the woman with sweet honey words when she saw this, “All that happened was nothing but liquor, I took my dream for real life!

Can any of this actually come true for me, so full of bad karma, when I have done no penance at all in this ancient world?”

She raised her hands in worship, and began to recover, but a second wave of delusion arose, this time deadly, and she was overwhelmed...
Moments of collapse keep falling into one another, so that by the end, the woman is left with no perspective from which to make a division between what is real and what is not. Her passion impels her to drunkenness, which pushes her to dream, and within the dream self, a dreamed contentment and a dreamed passion arise in conflict. As if in response, she finds herself doubled, echoing her movements on a reflective wall. When she awakes, and begins to sober up, the poem states she understands her true joy to have become a lie—but, as the verse notes, this joy was indeed real. Must a reader agree with her, and brand it false? Past and future rush together, displacing time, as she wonders whether the course of her life will keep her from sating her desire. But in the end she cannot know, and waves of confusion rise, then crest to overcome her. The experiencing self has moved beyond the potential to conceive of itself as whole, and it is here, to follow the logic of transformation that guides ulā poetry, that it will find its true nature.

The Glance of the Passing King

Kūttar savors the heightened moment when the presence of the king causes minds to eclipse themselves, and the sureties of truth and falsity begin to slip their moorings. He recognizes the ambiguity inherent in the dramatic peaks in ulā poetry, with each woman left in crisis. In terms of sheer desire, her yearning is never reciprocated, and the king will always leave. Yet in other ways, the ruler indeed remains. He abides in her thoughts, shapes her hopes, and within her inner heart, transforms the way she will understand her own nature. He transcends, in Oṭṭakkūttar’s texts, any easy idea of presence. It seems fitting, then, that Oṭṭakkūttar draws one of the signal features of the ulā’s long history into question, and plays with the trope of an impassive, unknowable hero, who offers the world his body but nothing of his mind. The experience of togetherness, when the Cōḷa lord stands before a woman and sees her subjection as a visible expression of desire, can now touch his thoughts as well. These are rare moments in his texts: the Cōḷas almost

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never break from their unmoved, dispassionate calm. A scant handful of times, however, Kūttar
turns to the king’s own mind, and lets ephemeral hints of shared attraction flash out from his
verses. Even here, he folds the traces of mutual desire in doubled possibilities that do not offer
clear resolution.

Consider, for instance, the prismatic wordplay on the nature of giving that occurs when Rā-
jarāja’s procession approaches the nubile girl (maṅkai), and the king contemplates the blooming
flowers she has offered him as a reflection of her own newly-mature body:

He thought of what the nubile girl had offered, her body as a gift
and the master was also enchanted,
She felt shy because of the enchantment she so often caused
with her gossamer gown of silk, cotton dress, bangles, and coin girdle around her loins,
As if he were giving her his bright shining crown,
his elephant, and the fourteen worlds,
He gave her the look of favor he does not often give
but he did not give it fully, and he left on his elephant...77

The Cōḻa holds back, yet he gives; the maṅkai gives herself but does not succeed. In the ulās’
poetic world, the subtle ties of union come from these doubled turns; they are always rethought,
and imagined anew. The taste of a moment beyond, which always defies finality, spurs the desire
that will go on to order a life. The attraction between subject and master is expressed physically
in these texts because the master governs bodies, but the bond surpasses the physical. It is pri-
vately held but common to all, as the repeated narrative of desire in each stage of womanhood
makes clear.

Whether or not the king shares a conscious sense of this bond, and also holds his subjects in
his thoughts, lies at the edges of the narrative. Given their established focus on the women’s per-

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77 Irācarāca Cōḻa Ulā vv. 211–215: முனைக்கு போடி பார்ந்து வந்து வந்து | அழிக்கலாமை கூறிசலும்
உடலையும் - வருமாறு || உடலும் உடலும் வந்து வந்து | அழிக்கலாமை கூறிசலும் -
வை || வையும் அரசரும் போடி வந்து | வையும் அரசரும் போடி - வந்து || வையும்
முடியலாமை கூறிசலும் | வையும் முடியலாமை - வந்து. 

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spective, ulās shield the king from such analysis. When the text is successful, he should provoke
wonder in those who behold him. Kūttar offers one hint of his thoughts on the matter, when
Kulottuṅga passes by the experienced woman (terivai):

And the great lord arrived beneath his ruling parasol
on the triumphant, rutting elephant that seemed like northern Meru,

They held each others’ eyes, and gazed at one another
matched in desire as though a single being,

His splendid inner mind reached out with a long-forgotten love
for the goddess who arose when the ocean was churned,

Then he left, placing this fine woman on the lotus that is his inner mind
as the goddess who lives on his mountainous chest,

With her childlike gaze, this young doe beheld Māl
who took the earth in one stride, and placed it on his shoulders,

The scent of his beauty drifted out, and she drank it with both hands…

As the poet’s choice of verbs reveals, the Cōḻa’s presence leads to synesthesia. Eyes hold (paṟṟutal),
beauty drifts as a smell (muruku kamaḻtal), and the terivai drinks it with both hands (mukuntu
mukuntu parukutal). The woman still stands as the focus of this sensory upheaval, but here, for
the first time in ulā poetry, both woman and king are “matched in desire as though a single being.”

The phrase in question, oruvar ena vētkai ottār, leaves little room for doubt, though the patent
reading appears to have deeply troubled the premodern commentator, who bends over back-
wards to assure his readers that desire arises only in the woman, as is proper for an ulā. He
explains,

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79 On the old commentary for the Kulottuṅka Cōḻa Ulā, see Chapter Five, p. 133.
At the time of beholding, when the hero fixes his glance on the heroine and the heroine fixes her glance on the hero, the act of beholding on the woman’s part is expressive of *kaikkilai*, and causes pain. The act of beholding is fit for the man as well, and this is what it means to say that “they are matched in desire.” Both are beholders, having become possessed of this single quality. “Desire” (*vēṭkai*) means unrequited love in a stage of womanhood (*paruvak kaikkilai*); were it otherwise, and there were a mutual passion (*anurākam*, Sanskrit *anurāga*), it would be a lexical flaw in the text’s landscape (*tiṇaivaḻu*).\(^8^0\)

Kūttar instead shows how Kulottunga would share the moment of beholding as a loving Viṣṇu, the husband of Śrī. He is figured as Māl, the Tamil name for Viṣṇu. He takes the beholding woman as one who was already his own, and places her in the goddess’s proper abode, the lotus, which Kūttar here identifies as his *tiruvuḷḷam*, the inner mind of a lord. The process of conscious perception reshapes the details of this individual woman’s life into essence, and this is what the king will take.

6.3 The Staging Ground of Power

The Cōḷas were no gods, though their *ulās* would have it otherwise, and beautiful though these verses are, they also glorify servitude. The power asserted in the desirous act of beholding subjugate lives to the mastery of the strong, where the only path to human fullness lies in domination.

If the Cōḷa *ulās* were effective texts, shaping events as they moved in the world, their aesthetic charm was also a political act. The precise history of how these texts may have helped keep the Cōḷas in power is lost, and command over an army would have done more to change minds. But neither were these texts as passive reflections of the real causes at work. The *ulās* helped to shape the field of action, asserting the limits of conceived power as an order beyond question.

\(^8^0\)Commentary on vv. 330–31: தைல்யேம் தைலவேம் தைல்யேம் தைலவேம் தைல்யேம் தைலவேம் தைல்யேம் தைலவேம் தைல்யேம் தைலவேம் தைல்யேம் தைலவேம் தைல்யேம் தைலவேம் தைல்யேம் தைலவேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யே�் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யே�் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யே�் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேம் தைல்யேmem-

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Avoiding Resistance

Oṭṭakkūttar gives voice to an authority claiming permanence. Yet because this is in fact not true, his poems cloak potential sites of resistance, which serve as good indications of the kind of political work these texts actually performed. Ulās depend on a high degree of realism to achieve success, and Kūttar is very skilled. He paints the scene of procession in minute strokes to heighten the moment of shared encounter, and brings the reader into the overwhelming sensory impressions that focus on the king. Yet there are breaks in this perspective, inconsistencies in the painstaking eye for detail which suggest that some things are kept beyond the range of this poetic art. These are the joints in the vision of power behind these ulās, kept hidden for its fictions to be presented as truth.

An ulā constructs a stage of power and sets it in motion in the world. The process of constructing this stage is a central part of the spectacle, as the time-honored instruments of kingly rule are brought into play to sustain the actors’ work. The moment when Kulottuṅga II ascends his elephant to begin his parade offers a useful example:

The king beholds this peerless golden mountain, dancing with power and ascends to his neck, gracing it with royal fortune,

The garden of royal golden emblems overwhelms the daylight, the white parasol rises up above,

The lone bright right-turning conch blows countless other conches roar in return,

The thick chowries sweep back and forth, the heavenly war drums roar like the sea dancing under the full moon,

The gleaming sword, conch, discus, śārṅga bow and mace cast their light everywhere, banishing the darkness,

The bow banner of the Koṅku land and the banner with the carp are arrayed at the sides of that one golden tiger banner,\(^{81}\)

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\(^{81}\)The standards, respectively, of the Cēra, Pāṇṭiya, and Cōḷa kings.
The cool breeze arrives from the south
heralding the arrival of the god with the longbow of fine sugarcane,

A thick cloud in the sky gently releases a constant mist
heralding the arrival of Vāsava,

He has come,\(^82\) so it is clear they have all arrived
for who among the gods would be bold enough to stay away?\(^83\)

When Kulottuṅga is invested with the regalia of power, his body—the flawless agent of heroic acts—is girded with the symbols of an authority that passes beyond his own life. The parasol, conch, chowries, weapons and royal banners aloft in graded array are the visible signs of an order that stands beyond human interests, which the king takes on to fulfill, not enact. The number of weapons that surround him is telling in this regard, for they are the five weapons of Viṣṇu, as reference to the sārṅga bow makes clear. Kulottuṅga will pass away, but the ideal of Viṣṇu endures. As was the case for Śiva in the Tirukkailāya Ṛṇa Ulā, the earth, led by the gods, begins to turn to the Cōḷa king as he reveals his body.\(^84\) Kūttar specifies two gods in particular, Kāma and Indra, in their guise as natural elements. As the cool southern wind and the rain, these divine representatives of erotic and royal qualities come to join the king.

In details such as these, Oṭṭakkūttar’s close attention to the narrative structure of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ’s poem does more than follow a model. Ulā would not have been an imposing genre when Kūttar was writing his verses; if the crucial text on Tamil literary genres, Paṉṉiru Pāṭṭiyal, was composed after the poet first premiered his works, it could well have been Kūttar who brought

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\(^82\) Almost certainly a reference to Vāsava (Indra) introduced just prior, though the old commentator names the referent of this pronoun as Nārāyaṇa.

\(^83\) vv. 81–90:

\(^84\) See Chapter Two, p. 20.
ulā within the emergent sense of Tamil literary genres in the first place. By contrast, Oṭṭakkūttar is interested in textual authority, capable of eliciting reverence. When he places Kulottuṅga on a textual procession earlier performed by Śiva, he imbues the Cōḷa king with the authority of his divine exemplar. Śiva embodied the entirety of his cosmogonic powers in his ulā, yet in the Mūvar Ulā he remains still in the Little Hall of Citamparam, appearing only to bless the Cōḷa kings as they prepare for the act of procession. Though the actors differ, the roles in the ritual event endure. By directing his performance of the Cōḷa ulās on a stage that draws from the power of an admired Śaiva text, he aligned his own verses with the authority of a religious past.

Within the ulā’s conjured world of sensory richness, however, with its costumes, musical instruments, and marching troops, much is left out. One of the marked narrative moments in an ulā comes when the hero appears before the onlooking women, and the world falls away. Once the second half of the text begins, and the king passes before the seven stages of women, no one else is acknowledged to be there at all. The woman stands alone before the lord, and she will suffer alone. All the mustered participants have vanished, and apart from the occasional horn blast that marks the procession’s arrival, the moment when king and woman actually face one another mirrors the intimate encounters of Muttoḷḷāyiram. A king rides on his processional mount, and a woman stands before him. Never in the Cōḷa ulās, nor in any other, will a reader meet the walking servants who guide the processional mounts, hoist the banners high, or pull the festival chariots. No one will jeer the processing king, or even turn their back. There is, in short, no response short of surrender.

Sundar Kaali, whose study of the Tiruppuvaṅgam Ulā explores the invasive progression of ideology that ulā effects in subaltern consciousness—and the opportunities for subaltern power to erupt into the elite domain as a result—lays out the stakes were things to be otherwise:

85 On Paṇṟiru Pāṭṭiyal’s date, see Chapter Five, p. 157.
All elite discourses, like the ulā discourse in the Tamil context, tend either to exclude and efface the subversive moment or... domesticate it by incorporation. Festive occasions, more than any others, however, bring to the fore the forces of disorder by providing them with a marked visibility. These are occasions when the dominant forces allow for authorized transgressions, but are vigilant enough to contain them in case they exceed the limits. Things, however, do not always work out accordingly and, in quite a number of cases, subaltern forces seize upon the moment to assert themselves and thereby effect significant transformations in the terms of negotiation between them and the elite.  

The Cōḷa ulās offer no such possibilities, even though prominent features of procession were likely to have been left out in consequence. The ritual space of procession offers one of the foremost opportunities in Tamil culture for the public display of privilege, as a wealth of anthropological studies have observed. With its gathered crowds and highly regimented organization of space, the festival parade provides an impressive stage for the recognition of honor. While the distribution of honors extends beyond the processional itinerary, as for example in a local lord’s distribution of wealth to celebrate the festival occasion, displays of social distinction occur throughout the processional route. Not all who come to behold and revere the processing lord are equal. The procession may halt for a time before a particularly honored host, or rest under a festival awning specially constructed by an influential group. This is not, moreover, a recent development. In medieval Tamil inscriptions, as Richard Davis and Leslie Orr report in their study of temple festivals, “by far the most commonly encountered people of the festival are those honored devotees who are provided with meals at the temple during the festival.”  

The Vikkirama Cōḷaṇ Ulā gives some sense of the kind of people honored in a Cōḷa royal procession. Unique among the three poems that comprise the Mūvar Ulā, this text contains a special section—and one that has proved moderately useful for the reconstruction of Cōḷa political organization at this time—that describes the king’s fellow participants in the procession.  

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87 See, for instance, the discussions of temple honors (mutalmai, “precedence,” or mariyātai, “respect”) in Breckenridge 1977; Appadurai 1981; Fuller 1984; Dirks 1987; Mines 2005.
88 Davis and Orr 2007: 94.
89 vv. 68–90.
of consideration for Vikrama’s recent return from the hard-fought Kaliṅga war, all those recognized are men, and all are described in terms of their military victories. For a body of texts that rarely treats such matters, it is noteworthy that Oṭṭakkūttar makes sure to use their names, and often to specify their triumphs. A short excerpt gives a representative sense:

The lord of Vatsa, whose frenzied elephant destroyed the three walls of northern Maṇṇai, when warriors clashed in the great battle,

Then the royal lord of Cēti, the warrior who crushed the defenses of the strong Karunāṭa fortress, killing so that headless bodies jumped back up,

Then the lord of Kārāṇai, wearing battle anklets to make belligerent kings on the earth tie up their hair in matted locks,

Then Atikaṉ, who sliced through the Kaliṅka army in the north so that great kings ran away in defeat,

Then generous Nuḷampaṉ, the warrior with a deadly rutting elephant who took Kollam and Kōṭṭāṟu from the king with the fish emblem,

Then Tikattaṉ, whose red-trunked elephant leveled the Kuṭaka peaks, and demolished the great fortress of Koṅkai...

Once Vikrama starts moving, however, and the intimate moment when his power is actually asserted over the world draws near, these champions have long since disappeared.

The demonstration of intimacy, as Daud Ali has argued, was an ennobling activity in Indian courtly culture, at no time more so than in heightened ritual moments such as procession. Being close to the king substantiated closeness to his power, and closeness meant participation. Yet for ulās, intimacy is the mode of subjection. The honor and power that result from the encounter between hero and woman in these texts arise in the symbolic realm, where the women stand for

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90 vv. 82–88: வரவை || புதன் முத்தை என்றுசொருவி பும்பிக்கு || பிளெசு பக்காட்சி முக்கியாமை - பிளெசு || அரச கைல் புரூணம் தொடர் || களித்து பலகை செய்ய இவர்களை இவரால் - பிளெசு || பிளெசு பக்காட்சி முக்கியம்வலம் - பிளெசு || பிளெசு பக்காட்சி முக்கியம்வலம் - பிளெசு || பிளெசு பக்காட்சி முக்கியம்வலம் - பிளெசு || பிளெசு பக்காட்சி முக்கியம்வலம் - பிளெசு || பிளெசு பக்காட்சி முக்கியம்வலம் - பிளெசு || பிளெசு பக்காட்சி முக்கியம்வலம் - பிளெசு.

the land’s fertile response to proper rule. The women may be honored by the king’s gaze, but it must be emphasized that they experience deep pain, cry out in bitterness, and are left near death. The corrosive discourses, as Bruce Lincoln has termed them, which might arise from the field the king seeks to dominate through his advancing march—be this field spatial or psychic—are excised completely.92 No one bears the moving stage on a servile back or pulls it forward with great ropes, the procession never stops (nor is it, in a dramatic show of conflict, caused to stop), and no one ever chooses not to look.

The Silent Lord

The ulā’s spectacular ritual of procession would seem to provide an ideal venue for authoritative speech, where all the appropriate instruments and props necessary to manufacture a compelling discourse are in full array, and the king rises high before the crowds. Yet the king never once opens his mouth. If, gesturing to Bourdieu, authority is an impostor endowed with the skeptron, the impostor in an ulā is the body of the king.93 Its semiotic act passes through the gaze. The king’s body transcends poor expression or strategic avoidance. Added provision of words would at best be redundant, and more likely an impoverishment of the purity of the scene.

When the women describe what they see before them, they immediately sense that the adorned body of the Cōḷa lord presents more than living flesh clothed in ornaments and weapons. The mystery of the king’s immanent body leads to heartfelt questions, asked though not resolved. When the young girl ponders Kulottuṅga, she turns to her pet parrot and begs it for answers:

“Does he take the seven shielding oceans as tubs for his bathing?
Are the seven formed rivers his garlands? I offer you blessings!

Are the seven rich modes of music his earrings?
And his armbands the seven isles mapped out long ago?

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Are the seven groves, misted with cool, sweet nectar, his garlands? And the seven defending mountains really play ball for his games? Are his lamps the seven planets, their favor shaped by his command? And the seven raining stormclouds his war drum?

And as this delicate creeper asked other real questions believing those things said of the world are really these…

The parrot is Kūttar’s touch of artistry, a guarantee that the only response the girl might receive would echo the queries themselves. Yet Kūttar stresses that the questions are very much worth asking. They are, he observes, taṉiviṉavu, “real questions.”

Thewomenseethatthebodytheydesireiscladinsignsthatassertphysicalforce. Theregalia of the lord who rides before them, which captivate them with beauty, have also fought battles. When Rājarāja advances before them, the women cry out with the realization that the weapons he carries summon mythic time, indexing the determining acts of conquest said to have transformed the world. Kūttar reaches back to the fabled deeds of gods and to his own genealogies for this purpose, joining the deeds of the gods, and the history of martial valor that advanced Cōḻa fortunes, to the ruler’s living body.

“Look at his bow, you women with shining jewels, Indra’s thunderbolt bent back at its ends, it destroyed ten million mountains!

Look at the sword that sliced to hew a path. The rippling Kāviri so the Cōḻa land would thrive. The women see that the body they desire is clad in signs that assert physical force. The regalia of the lord who rides before them, which captivate them with beauty, have also fought battles. When Rājarāja advances before them, the women cry out with the realization that the weapons he carries summon mythic time, indexing the determining acts of conquest said to have transformed the world. Kūttar reaches back to the fabled deeds of gods and to his own genealogies for this purpose, joining the deeds of the gods, and the history of martial valor that advanced Cōḻa fortunes, to the ruler’s living body.

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In quick turns of phrase, Oṭṭakkūttar links Rājarāja with Indra clipping the wings off the mountains, Rāma burning through the ocean with the force of his bow, the early heroics of Cōḻa ancestors when they controlled the Kāvēri and had vassal kings carry earth on their heads to build its banks, Paraśurāma ridding the earth of Kṣatriyas, and more. The declaration of command has been issued, and those who face it will yield.

Garlands of Victory and Desire

The women in Oṭṭakkūttar’s verses, like the women in all ulā poetry, yearn for the garlands that adorn the lord’s shoulders. The flowers he wears all bear their own meanings, and the king wears
more than one garland to suit the occasion of his presence. White deadnettle, the garland of war; mimosa, the garland of triumph; crepe jasmine, the garland of fame; and so on—but always with the ātti, or mountain ebony flower, the garland of Cōḷa supremacy. When the crowds of women gaze upon Kulottuṅga, they call to each other,

“He seems like all eight of the divine lords of the directions with a beauty that binds our eyes with desire,” they say,

“For mortals, for gods, for Nāgas, for divine sages, for everyone, he is the safeguard,” they say,

“If he would only offer us the sweet garlands he wears of mādhavi creeper, red water lilies, crepe jasmine and ātti,” they say... 

The gift of a man’s garland is the gift of his chosen devotion. The culminating sign in a rich attire of symbols, the garland is an emblem of his achievements, his worth, his design for the world. Oṭṭakkūttar honored the three Cōḷa kings he served with garlands of text, essentializations of their mythic lives to beautify them and make others desire their favor. The Mūvar Ulā offers a record of deeds, but more than that, it sought to weave deeds into a procession of time, enacted each time the text was read and praised.

Ulās beautified these kings and made them more. Kūttar’s texts efface the details that do not participate in this project, stripping the moment of anything that could hinder and anyone who did not believe. Its scope bound by the Tamil tongue, the Mūvar Ulā claimed the world for itself, but would not be heard by those outside the Cōḷa realm. For those who could listen and understand, perceiving the Cōḷas’ claim to supremacy while enjoying a graceful verse, the women in the ulās held before them a model.

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Chapter 7

Singing the Lord into Being

A group of lutes played by lively hands,
Discarding their old lives kept sheathed within
they sounded forth to touch the heart,
making their home in songs to our lord.

Tirukkaḷukkuṉṟattu Ulā¹

7.1 A Poet at Home in Tamil

How does a Tamil poet breathe a new spirit into the language of the past? The poet Antakakkavi Vīraṟākava Mutaliyār² sings of lutes in the verses that introduce this chapter, wooden instruments used to praise Śiva as he sets out from his home on Kaḻukkuṉṟam, “The Vulture Mountain,” and begins the procession that Antakakkavi brings to life in his Tirukkaḷukkuṉṟattu Ulā. It is a familiar scene for admirers of the ulā genre, yet Andtakakavi’s creation is filled with newness. As

¹vv. 105–06: கசமகர» சசயாǹ கண்ச− உக¿த ஊஅைற ப¾ைட ĈÚÄெசÊெறைமĈைட− யாÊ | பாஅைற ஆு்அ்பயாட்பக்கைட− பயாட்பாயா் | கசெலுமெலுசல்கேசலுல்கேசலு.
²In Sanskrit orthography, Andhakavi Vīrarāghava Mutaliyār.
the drama of Śiva’s passage through the world starts to gather momentum, Antakakavi sings of lutes, turning to the possibilities of the past. What were these instruments before they reached this consummating moment, sounding forth to celebrate the god? They were trees, which grew, as the ulās states, in the radiance of the god who makes them flourish. Their past still moves with them.

When Antakakavi Vīrarākava Mutaliyār premiered his works in the seventeenth century, more than four hundred years had passed since Oṭṭakkūttar had offered his verses to the Cōḻa court. A sea of changes that had taken place in the Tamil vision of the literary. Oṭṭakkūttar’s poems would have been classics to Antakakkavi as much as they are now, touchstones at the core of the tradition, which were followed by a distinguished history of gifted poets who had wrought their own changes on the language. The Tamil that Antakakkavi shares with us is not the Tamil of the Cōḻa world, and this is a point worth emphasizing now that his work is not regularly studied—though it was in years not that long past. It demands different skills from its readers, different orders of literary competence, and it offers a different vision of the poet’s gift.

The formal parameters that the pāṭṭiyals stipulated for the ulā genre had been around for centuries, and though poets always did more with their words than the dictates of the pāṭṭiyals might suggest, they did acknowledge the presence of formal definitions for a pirapantam work. Tamil writers had taken the specifications for an ulā poem as a test for their artistry for centuries by Antakakkavi’s time, and the ulās composed after the Cōḻa period read like a history of poets who await their own full studies: Iraṭṭaiyār, the twin poets (the Ekāmpara Nātar Ulā, 15th c.); Kāḷamēkappulavar (the Tiruvāṉaikkā Ulā, 14th c.); Cēṛaṅk Kavirāca Piḷḷai (the Cēyūr Murukaṉ Ulā, the Tirukkāḷatti Nātar Ulā, and the Vāṭ Pōkki Nātar [Irattiṅakiri] Ulā, 16th c.), just to name the foremost. A full survey of this history, seeking clear beginnings for changes that reshaped the idea of what in Tamil is good, lies outside the breadth of this study, but Antakakkavi ably shows the ef-

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3Chapter Five, pp. 157.
fect these changes in their maturity. Oṭṭakkūttar was a poet of the court whose verses were bound to Cōḷa fortunes; Antakakkavi lived the life of a wandering poet whose fortunes were tied to the Tamil language itself. He was at home in any town where people valued the choice of words and patrons were ready to pay for the privilege of hearing them.

Antakakkavi Vīrarākava Mutaliyār’s major works praise gods: the Śiva of his Tiruvārūr Ulā, Tirukkaḷukkuṉṟattu Ulā, Tirukkaḷukkuṉṟap Purāṇam, and Tirukkīḻvēḷūr Ulā, and the Murukaṉ of his Cēyür Murukaṉ Piḷḷaittamīl, to name those still extant. In the Cōḷa-period ulās, Oṭṭakkūttar’s relationship with the kings he glorified is unambiguous: they are the texts’ motivation and subject. This is not the case for Antakakkavi’s work, in which the men who commissioned the texts do not appear. Oṭṭakkūttar advances the three Cōḷa kings of the Mūvar Ulā as the highest devotees of Naṭarāja, matched to the lord of Citamparam’s will so that they can serve in his stead. Antakkakkavi’s patrons, though they do not appear within the ula’s own verses, stand impressively close to them.4 They were powerful men who used wealth to demonstrate their devotion, recognizing and harnessing the talents of a poet whose words would last. The Cōḷas covered Śiva’s roof with gold because, like their closeness to the god himself, it would not fade; Antakkakkavi’s patrons covered Śiva with formal speech for the same reason.

The patron’s relation to his wordsmith had changed, and he no longer appeared within the verses. When he was acknowledged as the man who had sponsored them, however, he drew close. As regional lords, Antakakkavi’s patrons were given prestige when a text took to the stage, and poet, patron, and verses were publicly recognized. As the creators whose words had brought the god forth, the poets advanced where the patrons had receded. They appeared as important figures in their own verses, ready to engage their skill wherever Tamil was admired. Antakakkavi, his legend tells us, employed his skill all over the Tamil country; his patrons could never have

4Antakakkavi is said to have composed an ula on one of his patrons, the lord of Kayattāṟu, whom Nilakanta Sastrī identifies as Mātait Tiruvenkataṉāṭar, but insofar as I have been able to determine, a copy of this Kayattāṟaracanī Ulā has not been found (Śrīnivācaiyyar 1980: 82).
done the same. They remained outside the words, and the way they wanted their own lives to be magnified by them has largely slipped out of view.

Antakakkavi in the Tamil Tradition

As the word antaka (Sanskrit andhaka) suggests, Antakakkavi was blind. He offers his audience vistas that his eyes had never seen, painting them with such careful, minutely detailed strokes that today his verses come to life in bursts of confident imagery. U. Vē. Căminătaiyar, who appreciated Antakakkavi’s genius, remarked, “He saw everything that he could not see with his external eyes with his inner eye (akak kan), and experienced the sights of this ulā just as if he had really seen them. His eye was his gift for poetry, and it allowed him to see these sights.”

Antakakkavi’s abilities are further grounded in the patron’s words: “Pararācacēkaraṉ composed this verse after hearing Antakakkavi Vīrarākavaṉ’s Ārūr Ulā.”

Our poet Vīrarākavaṉ truly knows the Śiva consciousness, he composed the Tiruvārūr Ulā, giving beauty to the world so every poet’s ear will taste the essence.
The poetry he sings is virtuosity itself
the poetry of others is just a lintel for the door.  

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5 Căminătaiyar 1938: 5:  பொக்கர்நாயக் என்று என்று என்று உலம்தோறுமிங்கு வருகிறேன் என்று காண்பது கான்பது காண்பது தோறுமிங்கு தோறுமிங்கு தோறுமிங்கு தோறுமிங்கு தோறுமிங்கு. வருவாது வருவாது வருவாது வருவாது வருவாது.  

6 Tamil Nāvalar Caritai v. 259: பாராசாக்தி காவி என்று காவி என்று காவி என்று காவி என்று காவி என்று காவி என்று காவி என்று காவி என்று. The coda reads, “Pararācacēkaraṉ composed this verse after hearing Antakakkavi Vīrarākavaṉ’s Ārūr Ulā.”

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The poetry that precedes him is *karkavi*, a lintel for the door, which a reader must pass through to gain access to Antakakkavi’s own *narkavi*, virtuosic poetry. His work is intensely allusive, but the allusions are marked by his own voice. For Pararācacēkaraṇ, the blind poet’s art has a consuming quality, where what has come before led him to the competence necessary to appreciate the text he commissioned.

Antakakkavi is no longer an important figure in the Tamil literary world, but this is a loss, for his approach to Tamil verse offers an exceptional view of what superior poetry looked like to admirers such as his patron king, and just as importantly, how much this ideal had changed since the great works of the Cōḷa period, which remain far better known today.

Antakakkavi was born Vīrarākava Mutaliyār, son of Vaṭukanāta Mutaliyār, in a Caiva Vēḷāḷa family from Uḻalūr, a village near Kāñcipuram in the Toṇṭai country (though his name is also associated with two other towns where he spent several years of his life, Pūtūr and Poṉ Viḷainta Kaḷattūr). His seventeenth-century date is substantiated by reference to individuals whom Tamil Nāvalar Caritai names as his patrons. He was, tradition holds, blind since birth. Early in Antakakkavi’s childhood, his father Vaṭukanāta Mutaliyār sought out a teacher to foster his son’s gift

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7 M. S. Purnalingam Pillai’s influential Tamil Literature, an examination primer first published in 1929, gives some sense of how far Antakakkavi had drifted to the periphery by that time, affording him two brief paragraphs in an unenviable category, “Minor Poets.” (1985 [1929]: 290–91)

8 This discussion of Antakakkavi’s biography draws upon three Tamil sources: Tamil Nāvalar Caritai, Au vai Cu. Turaićāmippillai’s 1949 commentary upon that text, and U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar’s preface to his edition of the Tirukkalukkurattu Ulā (1938). As was true in the case of Oṭṭakkūttar’s biography (p. 145), Tamil Nāvalar Caritai cannot be argued to provide definitive historical facts about the poets it surveys, but it provides a clear sense of how these poets were understood as individuals who developed the literary tradition.

9 Au vai Cu. Turaićāmippillai gives 1635 as the date when Antakakkavi’s patron Oppilāta Maḻavarāyaṉ began ruling over Ariyalūr (Ariyilūr); see Tamil Nāvalar Caritai v. 250: பிரமர ஸ்வாத்ஸ் தோன்ற முரக்கசன் மற்றும் கூறு செய்திகள் (A. R. No 88 of 27). K. A. Nilakanta Sastri identifies another patron, the lord of Kayattāṟu (a town in Tirunelvēlī district), as Mātait Tiruveṅkaṭanātar, a seventeenth-century officer of the Nāyak ruler of Maturai and author of a Tamil rendition of Kṛṣṇamiśra’s Prabodhacandrodaya (1975: 385, 389). Cf. U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar, who dates him to the latter half of the eighteenth century (1938: 20), and M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, who dates him to the sixteenth century: “Some scholars assign him to the close of the 17th C. This is contradicted by his Pillai-Tamil in which [Small Car, St. 6] he refers to the rebuilding of the local Murugan temple in 1521 A.D. [Sakaptham 1443]. As his patron was Para-raja-Singan, he must have lived in the first half of the 16th C.” (1985 [1929]: 291)
for Tamil, and brought the boy to Kāñcipuram to study under Kacciyappa Civācāriyar, a teacher whose appellation places him in the lineage of the author of Kantapurāṇam (c. 15th c.), the Tamil counterpart to the southern Sanskrit text Śivarahasyakhaṇḍa. The role of Kantapurāṇam in his lineage is important, for by Antakakkavi’s time, this text, a treasury of lore on the god Murukaṉ, had become central to the expression of Tamil Śaivism, and one from which Antakakkavi drew deeply.

As his knowledge of the Tamil literary and grammatical tradition deepened, Antakakkavi developed the ability to perform avadāna, the public feat of memory in which the performer composes a set of full poems, a quarter verse at a time, by calling on the audience one by one and composing lines of improvised verse to fulfill their requests. All the while, an objector attempts to make the performer stumble by distracting him with irrelevancies. In successive rounds, a new line is added to all of the prior rounds’ compositions, so that after four rounds of questioning the event has prompted the performer to compose complete four-line poems, one for each member of the audience. Tamiḻ Nāvalar Caritai notes Antakakkavi’s masterful performance of Rāmāyaṇa avadāna in Pararācēkaraṉ’s court. The poet also studied music during his time in Kāñcī, and became an accomplished player of the vīṇā. A verse said to have been composed by his teacher Kacciyappar gives an evocative depiction of Antakakkavi’s artistic development:

Take flowing Tamil and two great men
the king of Pūtūr and Vīrarākavar:
The king can trace his family line
from Daśaratha who lived in Ayodhyā,
Vīrarākavar traces his own line back
as the son of noble Vaṭukaṉ.
One man closed in on a stag up there

10 Antakakkavi’s teacher, though named by Tamiḻ Nāvalar Caritai as “Kantapurāṇaṅ Kacciyappar,” cannot have been the Kacciyappar who wrote Kantapurāṇam; see Aruṇācalam 2005: vol. 8, 51–52.
11 On the importance of Kantapurāṇam, see Aruṇācalam 2005: vol. 8, 39ff.
12 I am grateful to David Shulman for discussing the performance of avadāna with me.
13 Tamiḻ Nāvalar Caritai v. 247.
and that lord of the earth received a curse,
The other approached the Deer of Many Arts right here
and gained his fame through poetry.\textsuperscript{14}

The verse juxtaposes the king of Pūtūr—Kacciyappar’s patron, it would seem—with Antakakkavi through their relation to \textit{poniku tamil}, “flowing Tamil,” which in addition to referring to the language means “sweetness,” “refinement.”\textsuperscript{15} Yet the multivalent possibilities of Tamil, this verse suggests, works differently for poets and kings. Daśaratha shot an arrow without looking, and sowed the seeds of disaster when he killed a boy that his ears had taken to be a stag (\textit{kalai māṉ}); Antakakkavi, who cannot see, approaches the right deer, the “Deer of Many Arts” (\textit{pala kalai māṉ}), and gains glory when he does not miss.

The poet eventually marries, but in a wry touch for a man whose parading heroes leave home so that they can be seen by women, Antakakkavi leaves his own home to escape one. As the tale goes, he returns home with nothing to show for his talents, and his wife insults his ability to provide. The poet responds by leaving, and sets out to wend his way through the Tamil country, eventually making it all the way down to Yāḻppāṇam, where he enjoys the patronage of the aforementioned Pararācacēkaraṉ. The tradition’s portrayal of his interactions with women does little to suggest that the descriptions of feminine grace and beauty in his \textit{ulās} have any basis in his own experience. The town of Śrīvilliputtūr, where he was surrounded and robbed by prostitutes, inspired him to compose a particularly bitter verse:

\begin{quote}
Śrīvilliputtūr is a town full of whores
whenever those devious women come and say something
they’ll cast their nets and drag you in,
a town that is locked in greed and lust
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
14\textit{Tamil Nāvalar Caritai} v. 245: கொன்டுபுராணன் காசீயப்பார் கல்லூரிக் கேலகூரா முடிய்கும் படுவு கோதில் முதல் கோதில் | கொன்டுபுராணன் காசீயப்பார் கல்லூரிக் கேலகூரா முடிய்கும் படுவு கோதில் | கொன்டுபுராணன் காசீயப்பார் கல்லூரிக் கேலகூரா முடிய்கும் படுவு கோதில் | கொன்டுபுராணன் காசீயப்பார் கல்லூரிக் கேலகூரா முடிய்கும் படுவு கோதில். Coda: “Kantapurāṇaṉ Kacciyappar composed this verse while Kavi Virarākavaṉ was studying in Kāñcipuram.” (இங்கு அல் கொன்டுபுராணன் கசியப்பார் கல்லூரிக் கேலகூரா முடிய்கும் படுவு கோதில்.)
15\textit{Piṅkalam} 10:580, பிங்காலத்தின் பிங்காலத்தின் பிங்காலத்தின் பிங்காலத்தின்
snatching away what you have in your hand
and thrusting out the begging bowl
that’s what drives this town.\textsuperscript{16}

Yet he also found success as he toured the land, receiving gifts from grateful patrons—\textit{Tamil Nāvalar Caritai} mentions the gold he received from Pararācācēkaraṇ\textsuperscript{17}—and composing fine verses along the way. Cāminātaiyar’s autobiography \textit{En Carittiram}, which contains an engaging account of one such incident, indicates how Antakakkavi’s life story was understood at the close of the nineteenth century:

Antakakkavi spent time in Ariyilūr, and received gifts there. The zamindar at that time was a man named Kiruṣṇaiya Oppilāṭa Maḻavarāyar, who showed real concern for the poor. He was also a patron who supported poets. He considered it his primary duty to treat people as his guests, whether they approached him or not, and provide them with what they needed, ensuring that provisions were distributed to all of them. Kavi Virarakava Mutaliyār arrived on one such occasion, and he saw how the zamindar distributed food, and how long it took because of the sheer number of people being assisted. The poet was astonished when he realized this, thinking, “I can’t believe it, he must have distributed food to a hundred thousand people today!” There is no question that poets think differently from the rest of us, and this impression of his blossomed into poetry. Consider the following verse, which asks whether Mahāviṣṇu can really equal Oppilāṭa Maḻavarāyar, since Tirumāl only dealt out three steps (\textit{paṭi}), while this man deals out a hundred thousand free meals (\textit{paṭi}) a day:

\begin{center}
Can the god with eyes so red they shine like a red lotus
really equal that unequalled man who visits Cēy’s fine mountain?
The dark god adorned with tulasi deals out three steps
and Kruṣṇaiya Māmaḻavarāyaṉ deals out a lakh of meals a day.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Tamil Nāvalar Caritai} v. 249: கோயில்புத்துரைப்பிட்டுரைப் பொழுது ஓடியும் மண்டலம் | பெண்டல் மேற்பொருள் சோமுக்கு - புறாலைப் பொழுது ஓடியும் மண்டலம் | சித்திரிய இல்லாத புரி. Coda: “Antakakkavi Virarakava Mutaliyār composed this verse in Civiliputtūr.” (இங்கானது கோயில்புத்துரைப்பிட்டுரைப் பொழுது ஓடியும் மண்டலம் | பெண்டல் மேற்பொருள் சோமுக்கு - புறாலைப்பொழுது ஓடியும் மண்டலம் | சித்திரிய இல்லாத புரி.)

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Tamil Nāvalar Caritai} v. 246.

\textsuperscript{18}Cāminātaiyar 1997: 65: அபதானப் கோயில்புத்துரைப் பிட்டுரைப் பொழுது ஓடியும் மண்டலம் | பெண்டல் மேற்பொருள் சோமுக்கு - புறாலைப்பொழுது ஓடியும் மண்டலம் | சித்திரிய இல்லாத புரி. Coda: “Antakakkavi Virarakava Mutaliyār composed this verse in Civiliputtūr.” (இங்கானது கோயில்புத்துரைப்பிட்டுரைப் பொழுது ஓடியும் மண்டலம் | பெண்டல் மேற்பொருள் சோமுக்கு - புறாலைப்பொழுது ஓடியும் மண்டலம் | சித்திரிய இல்லாத புரி.)
The signifier “paṭi” serves as the pivot of this verse, meaning both “step” and “a distributed share of food.” How can Viṣṇu really be superior, Antakakkavi asks, when he only deals out (āḷakkum) three paṭis after receiving a boon from Bali, given that Antakakkavi’s patron deals out a hundred thousand paṭis every day?

The performative quality to Antakakkavi’s art also marks the occasions when he metes out caustic words, as we see in his talent for vacaikkavi (“derisive verse”), motivated by patrons who did not meet his expectations for appropriate reward:

I composed a poem believing Ciraiyaṉ Tiṉakaraṉ to be a gentleman worthy of polished Tamiḻ.
He acted just like a drunk, giving no thought at all to generosity, and gifted poets.19

A Changing Sense of Authorship

Words can double back on themselves, bending to the poet’s intent. Antakakkavi makes his intent known because he is not afraid to speak of himself. Be it a taṉippāṭal about a brief concern like Ciraiyaṉ Tiṉakaran’s tightfisted ways or a grand poem like the Tirukkalakkunṟattu Uḷā, Antakakkavi inserts his own authorial personality into the narratives he creates.20 He does so by careful

19Tamiḻ Nāvalar Caritai v. 264: “இஃĄ அகைத உணாத கயாக மலையா இவை அளத புேய (பே–உலக) இவை அளாபா ஒனள் லாதல நாைள்கட லாக்கயா. The verse is Tamiḻ Nāvalar Caritai v. 250. I read “cēyceṅkuṉṟai varum oppilātikku” as “that unequalled man who visits Cēy’s fine mountain”; cf. Auvai Cu. Turaicāmippiḷḷai, who in his commentary on the verse takes cēy as “distance” and cēṅkuṟu as a sanctuary in Vāṇakappāṭi.

20A quality, as David Shulman has argued (2004), that is fundamental to the post-Cōḻa poetic ideal.
design, using his distinctive voice to further his craft. Sometimes his words are acerbic, sometimes they are full of devotion to his god, but when he speaks of himself, it is not just because he seeks to advance his own fortunes. He takes a role in his texts as the man who draws the right signified forth from the signifier, and pushes his audience to see the poet’s role in instantiating the relationship between them. There is a person behind this ability to use words well, the figure of the poet declares, and his verses ask readers to recognize the talent of the individual who composed them.

The Tamil works considered in previous chapters reveal a completely different vision of the author at work. Oṭṭakkūttar and Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ efface themselves from their poetry; their texts work to present an air of timeless certainty. Antakakkavi wants his audience to know that words have a source and a moment of beginning. In this he has more in common with the Vaiṣṇava Āḻvār and Śaiva Nāyaṉmār who sing of themselves in relation to their god than he does with the authors of the great Cōḷa texts. For the unfortunate Ciraiyaṉ Tiṉakaraṉ, the fact that this verse tells us everything known about him today attests to Antakakkavi’s skill. He was spurned, and he reminds the ingrate that generosity and poets can work both ways. Powerful words are sparked by occasions; they can honor great men or they can torment them. Antakakkavi is no court poet, wedded to the fortunes of a lord he can never reproach. His allegiance lies with the language itself.

Consider for instance a letter that Antakakkavi sent to a patron in order to inform him that a text was complete and about to be publicly inaugurated in the ceremony known as araṅkēṟṟam, “ascending the stage.” The patron was Timmaiya Appaiyaṉ, who had commissioned the poet to compose a Tamil sthalapurāṇa on Tirukkalukkunram, here called by the Sanskrit name Vedaśaila:

Their ulās, for example, lack an avaiyaṭakkam, “expression of humility before the audience,” where a poet would customarily present himself as a figure within the text.

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This letter is sent by Vīrarākavaṉ, who is distinguished by his mastery of both parts, the great old part of ancient times and the great new part of the current day.

It is for Timmaiya Appaiyaṉ, who is a flood of meals and other gifts, an avatār of endless Śeṣa at oratorical performances (piracanka, Sanskrit prasaṅga), the light of the universe, to delight his soul as he reads it with pleasure.

This letter is for you to keep, and once you have read it, be sure not to miss coming to the first public staging (arangēṟṟuvatu) of the Vedaśaila Purāṇa, which I have been working on for all this time.

After hearing it in the company of fine poets (naṉṉāvalōr), kindly provide for me to go to the Cōḷa country. Please do not disregard this letter I have composed, and be sure to come here this Friday.22

The letter is itself a poem, a ciṭṭukkavi, or epistolary verse. When Antakakkavi informs Timmaiya, “This letter is for you to keep” (taṉṉāḷumōlaiyum), it is not an empty gesture. His correspondence is set in verse, as well-crafted as the purāṇa he was commissioned to write, and it too was intended to last as ready proof of the enduring bond between Timmaiya and Antakakkavi’s poetic tribute to Śiva in Kaḻakkunṭram. It seems to have succeeded, for it still exists today.

Guiding the Past

Antakakkavi calls to the literary past to ground his own creativity, letting his own work participate in a chronicle of poets. In the avaiyaṭakkam (“expression of humility before the audience”) to his Tiruvārūr Ulā, he declares,

The lord of Ārūr’s heart melted because of the Āti Ula
and I am just a simple man who ventured to melt his heart
by singing an ulā of my own,
like a lonely earthworm, gnawing away

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on the great Meru mountain that was already softened
by the mighty serpent and the lord’s own radiant hand.23

He presents himself as someone moving over terrain that has already been covered, a poet who
can sing his ulā because Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ, author of the first ulā, has been there before him. Yet
the simile hints that things are not so simple. In what may be a reference to his blindness, the
poet is the earthworm, able to chew through Meru because it was made pliant long ago, when it
served as the churning shaft during the churning of the primordial ocean and when Śiva bent it
as his bow to destroy the triple city. He asks his audience to see how ancient things can be put to
new use.

His contemporaries found much in this quality to admire. Tamil Nāvalar Caritai states that
when the king of Kayattāṟu heard the Tiruvārūr Ulā, he was moved to compose a verse of praise:

The poetry of Oṭṭakkūṭtaṉ and the eminent poetry of Kampan
 dwindle like a lamp in broad daylight
 once they’ve heard the poetry that the Vēḷāḷa recites,
 Virarākavan, whose poetry spreads throughout the eight directions.24

The poet’s audience knew the ulās of Oṭṭakkūttar, knew Kampan, the high-water mark of the
Cōḷa literary world, and appraised the works of their own time through the lens of past masters.
Antakakkavi draws upon the strength of these expectations, and sets his own work in a field
of literature that recognized and celebrated its depth. His self-conscious engagement with the
literary past is everywhere in his texts, offering the accomplished reader a vision of Tamil that is
always turning back in order to ground its own creative possibilities.

23 ஒட்டக்குட்டன் அடையுள் முக்தவந்தைக்கும் | ஒட்டக்குட்டன் அடையுள் பன்தையின் - உரூவாக்கு | உரூவாக்கு பரச்சாழும் மலை உரூவாக்கு | முறையுடன் பூங்காவழும் மலையின்.

24 Tamil Nāvalar Caritai v. 260: அந்தக் காக்காணையில் உரூவாக்கு பரச்சாழும் | மலையுடன் மேலுள்ள மலையின் | அந்தக் காக்காணையில்
 அருள் - ஆர்வாக்கு | தெற்கு விளங்குவதற்கு உரூவாக்கு | உரூவாக்கு அருளில் வைத்தாங்கவெய். Coda: “The king
of Kayattāṟu composed this verse when Antakakkavi recited his ulā.” (அந்தக் காக்காணையில்
உரூவாக்கு அருளிலும் உரூவாக்கு அருளிலும் வைத்தாங்கவெய்)}
Such references can occur in passing, such as in his avaiyatkam in the Tiruvārūr Ulā, or they can crescendo, building upon themselves until they rise up to the point where his own words start to turn inwards, and speak about themselves, calling on earlier texts to join in the moment of performance:

Come and play, moon!
You can chant the six syllables25 as you take the path to Murukan which ends all karma without fail,
You can flourish as you praise the meters of Arunakirinātaṉ’s Tirupukāḷ in the presence of the lord,
You can gaze on the holy lord of Kāḷakkunram the thriving city of our beloved, the king of the world,26
You can see the ocean that is Kantapuruṇam where the story of the battle with hostile Śūra emerged,27
You can study the kalivenpā verses in the holy ulā that Kavirāca wrote about this god and let it melt your heart,
You can give a critical ear to the kalampakam poem and the pillaittamil poem recited by the poet Vīrarākavaṉ,

Enter the bright golden temple and you can enjoy yourself,

Come and play, moon, with Skanda riding on his peacock, a spear in his able hand.28

This set of verses comes from Antakakkavi Vīrarākavaṉ’s Cēyūr Murukan Pillaittamil, and each line speaks to a Tamil literary heritage.29 It begins, following the conventions of a pillaittamil,

25Skanda’s mantra, “namah kumārāya.”
26Reading vaḷavaṉ as Sanskrit vallabha, and taking “vaḷamaipuripuṇṇiyantaricikkālām” as puṇṇiyaṉtaricikkālām, “you can gaze upon the holy lord.” Alternatively, “vaḷamaipuri puṇṇiyam taricikkālām,” “you can gaze upon the holiness of the thriving city.”
27See Zvelebil 1991: 43, 59. The celebration of Śūrasamhāra, Skanda’s destruction of the asura Śūrapadma, is particularly associated with Murukan’s coastal temple at Tiruccentūr.

with an invitation for the moon to come and play with the child god Skanda at his home in Cēyūr. The moon’s journey is then laid out as a path of texts. It can chant the six syllables of the god’s mantra, and “take the path to Murukan” (murukāṟun taritt’): this is an allusion to Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai, Nakkīrar’s poem in the Pattuppāṭṭu anthology that maps out Murukan’s āṟupaṭaivitu (“six camps of the forces”), the six principal Murukan temples arrayed over the Tamil country.30 The moon can wax as it enjoys the ambrosia of the various meters used in Tirupukal, Āruṇakirinātar’s fifteenth-century poem to Skanda. Though Antakakkavi mentions no text when he tells the moon that he can gaze upon Kaḻakkuṉṟam, his choice of the verb (tarici, cf. Sanskrit dṛś), his description of the mountain as a “thriving city,” and his portrayal of Śiva as a “beloved” (vaḷavaṉ) who is the “king of the world” (puvirāca) calls to mind the poet’s own Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟattu Ulā, an allusion left oblique, perhaps, because he saves the act of self-reference for the moment when he introduces his own texts about Murukan of Cēyūr.

The poem continues as the moon is told it can shine over an ocean, Kantaṟpurāṇam, the text in which the myth of Skanda’s battle with the asura Śūrapadma is told, and then it reaches its destination, Cēyūr, where the poet introduces the texts that praise Cēyūr Murukan himself. Antakakkavi calls attention to Čēṟaik Kavirāca Piḷḷai’s sixteenth-century Cēyūr Murukan Ulā,31 then, after speaking of his own earlier kalampakam poem on the god, inserts a reference to his Cēyūr Murukan Piḷḷaittamil into its own verses and allows the text to speak of itself. The verb he uses here is well-chosen: “viṉavu,” meaning “listen,” but also “judge, appraise.” The audience would have followed the orator as Antakakkavi’s verses brought them along on the moon’s progress through a literary history of Murukan worship, and then the text breaks forth to appeal to them directly—listen to the pillaittamil recited by the poet Vīrarākavaṉ and “give a critical ear”—affirming their role in the process of making a text.

30 Tiruttaṇi, Tiruccentūr, Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, Paḷamutircōlai, Paḷaṇi, and Tiruvērakam.
31 Čēṟaik Kavirāca Piḷḷai’s date is assigned by the fact that he composed verses in praise of Ativirarāma Pāṇṭiyaṉ, who ruled from 1564 to 1604. (Aruṇācalam 1980: 35)
7.2 Tirukkalukkuṇram

Tirukkalukkuṇram Ulā offers the poet’s highly intricate Tamil on a grand scale. Kaḻukkuṇram, or Pakṣitīrtham in Sanskrit, is one of Śiva’s abodes in the Toṇṭai country, a hill temple just north of the Pālār River about fifteen kilometers inland from Māmallapuram. Its name, “Vulture Mountain,” arises from a myth of penance in which two sages are cursed to take the form of vultures. They fly in to Kaḻukkuṇram, where they worship Śiva and redeem themselves. The myth corresponds to the regular appearance of vultures on the mountain, where they consumed food offerings that have been laid out for them; a practice, as U. Vē. Cāminataiyar noted in 1938, that seems to have occurred since ancient times. Indeed, the story of birds flying to the temple finds mention in the Tibetan monk Tāranātha’s (1575–1634) history of Buddhism in India, rGya gar chos ’byuṅ, and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja’s sixteenth-century Caitanyacaritāmṛta notes that Caitanya made a trip to the site and worshiped Mahādeva there during his pilgrimage from Pūri to the south (and in contrast to the description of his time in Kāñci, appears not to have converted the local populace to his own brand of Kṛṣṇa worship).

32 In the Kṛta Yuga, the sages are Caṇṭaṉ and Piracaṇṭaṉ (in Sanskrit, Caṇḍa and Pracaṇḍa); in the Tretā, Campāti and Jaṭāyu (Sampāti and Jaṭāyu); in the Dvāpara, Campukuttaṉ and Mākuttaṉ (Śaṃbhugupta and Mahāgupta); in the Kali, Campu and Āti (Śaṃbhu and Ādi).

33 இÊĎ ÖனÀŌாĎ ìஉ»Ò¹கால¿ÖÅ இர¾Ă கČþகÈ இºேக வÀĄ தம¹þ¹ ĭாĂ¹கÁபĂÂ (Cāminataiyar 1938: 8).

34 rGya-gar-chos-’byuṅ, p. 334: “During the period of *Śuklarāja and *Candraśobha—the kings of *Kāñci in the south—the Garuḍa and other common birds of the small island were brought under control and these birds used to bring medicine, gems and various marine creatures. With these treasures, each of the kings worshiped two thousand monks. A temple was later built for the birds and it was called the *Paṅkhi-tīrtha temple, where a few birds from the small island still come and live.”

35 Caitanyacaritāmṛta: Madhya Līlā 9.66.
A Site of Royal Interest

Also known as Vedagiri, in virtue of a myth that states that the four Vedas came there and assumed the form of a mountain, Kaḻukkuṉṟam has been home to Śiva worship since at least the fifth century, with a monolithic cave temple on the side of the mountain, today known as the Orukal Maṇṭapam, that may well be the oldest temple in South India. In an inscription that orders land be set aside for the maintenance of worship there, the Pallava king Narasiṃhavarman I (630–68) proudly affirms his victory over his father’s tenacious foe, the Cālukya king Pulakeśin II, in the Cālukya royal capital of Bādāmi (Vātāpi), and calls the site by its current name, Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam, “The Holy Vulture Mountain.” An inscription of the Cōḻa king Āditya I (870–907), who through his triumph over the Pallava monarchy took possession of the Toṇṭai region where Kaḻukkuṉṟam is located, takes care both to note this endowment, which he sustains, and to specify its institution by the fifth-century Pallava king Skandaśiṣya:

&Svasti– Śrī– In the twenty-seventh year [of the reign] of king Rājakēsarivarman:
Given that Skandaśiṣya remitted taxes [on a revenue unit of land] for the revered lord of the holy original shrine (mūlasthāna) of Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam, a royally-patronized development zone (taṉkūṟu) in the Kalattūr agricultural region (kōṭṭam);
And given that the Pallava king Narasiṃha, conqueror of Vātāpi, preserved that grant without emendation (appatiyē);

Hence a host of associated names, such as Vedācalam, Vedaśaila, and the like.

Pride of place as the oldest temple in South India usually goes to the cave temple at Maṇṭakapaṭṭu, excavated under the reign of the famous Pallava aesthete Mahendravarman I. Michael Rabe (1987: 55–58, 61–79), however, has presented evidence that the interior section of the cave temple at Kaḻukkuṉṟam was excavated during the reign of Skandaśiṣya Pallava, rather than its usual assignment to Mahendravarman’s successor Narasiṃhavarman I (e.g. Gopalakrishnan 2005: 46). Narasiṃha’s inscription in the Orukal Maṇṭapa, discussed immediately following, has led some to reach this conclusion, but as Rabe notes, the inscription’s location, the fact that it is in Tamil rather than Sanskrit, and its failure to mention the inauguration of worship there suggest otherwise.

By the eleventh century, Kaḻukkuṉṟam was a thriving area with substantial royal patronage, boasting its own nagaram (marketing center) and three temples: the Orukal Maṇṭapam, the eighth-century Vedagiriśvara shrine at the top of the mountain (Figure 7.1), and the ninth-century Bhaktavatsala complex at its foot. The four principal saints of Tamil Šaivism, Appar, Campantar, Cuntarar, and Māṇikkavācakar, all sang hymns of praise to Śiva at Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam, and inscriptions by rulers of the area found on the walls these temples range from the Pallava king Narasiṁhavarman I, the Rāṣṭrakūṭa Kṛṣṇa III, every major Cōḷa king, Cuntara Pāṇṭiya, seven Vijayanagara kings up through Kṛṣṇadevarāya, all the way up to an array of Dutch oppenhoofden of Masulipatnam and governors of Coromandel, who had their names inscribed in the Orukal Maṇṭapam in the seventeenth century—all of which make clear how important it was for a ruler who asserted control over the Toṇṭai country to verify a recorded presence at Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam.

More recently, in one of nature’s gentle twists of fate, U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar, the great Tamil scholar who wrote movingly of Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam, died there in 1942 during the wartime evacuation of Cenṇai.

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40 On the nagaram, see Champakalakshmi 1996: 212.

41 Campantar: Tirmuṟai 1.103; Appar: Tirmuṟai 6.92; Cuntarar: Tirmuṟai 7.81; Māṇikkavācakar: Tirmuṟai 8.30.


43 Vēṅkaṭācalapati 2005: 146: இச்சிக்கு சூழ்ந்திருந்தான் பயணத்துவம் வெண்யுடன் பயணம் செய்வது குறிப்பிட்டுகோள் வெண்டும் இல்லாது. இச்சிக்கு சூழ்ந்திருந்தான் பயணத்துவம் வெண்யுடன் பயணம் செய்வது குறிப்பிட்டுகோள் வெண்டும் இல்லாது.
Myths of the Vulture Mountain

As with any temple complex in South India that has maintained a tradition of worship for many centuries, Tirukkalukkunram has a complex array structures, features, and mythological events, and Antakakkavii assumes that a competent reader of his ulā would know them all. His own Tirukkalukkunrap Purāṇam describes many of them, and doubtless many more stayed current in the tales of priests, locals, and pilgrims. Worship at the site is said to have been instituted by காலக்காலம் மையற்றிய 1942இல் வைத்து.
Suraguru Cōḻa, a legendary figure whom Cōḻa kings claimed as an early ancestor in their royal genealogies. Antakakkavi’s sthalapurāṇa describes the event, noting the three important shrines on the hill:

Heeding the call of the two vulture sages
the king installed three pristine liṅgas
at the base, midpoint, and peak of the mountain entire
and worshiped as a follower of Āgamic ways
offering his reverence and praise.45

His act of worship frees him from the pernicious karma of cow-murder, a misfortune he suffered when he mistakenly killed a cow who was actually the temporary embodiment of the apsaras Tilottamā, thereby freeing her from her curse. His evil karma assumes the physical form of a

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44Beyond a cryptic triumph over the god of death, I have found little in the way of mythology surrounding the name Suraguru. The Anbil Plates of Sundara Cōḻa Parāntaka II (EI 15: 44–72), dated 960 CE, make no mention of this king, but he appears consistently in subsequent Cōḻa genealogies. “Then Suraguru appeared in this line, the lord of kings, ruin of his enemies, the standard of the solar lineage. Having triumphed over invincible Mṛtyu [Death] himself on the field of battle, he obtained the exceptional title Mṛtyujit” (20 ... तद्विनिर्मित मृत्युवर्धनी तदेहि वति।). Larger Leiden Plates of Rajaraja Cōḻa I, 1005 CE, EI 22: 239); “Then Suraguru appeared in this line, the noble abode of the maiden goddess Vi-jayēndirā, the conqueror of Death through his inherent power, this lord of men who received the title Mṛtyujit” (71 ... तदेहि वति।). Tiruvalangadu Plates of Rājendra Cōḻa I, c. 1018 CE, SII 3.3: 383–439); “A king named Mṛtyujit was born in this line, the ruin of his enemies, delighting the gods through his lavish sacrifices and toppling foes through his ardent command” (206 ... तदेहि वति।). The Vikkirema Cōḻaṉ Ulā and the Kulōttuṅka Cōḻaṉ Ulā juxtapose the triumph over Death with Suraguru’s institution of the practice of placing the elderly in urns (a reference, perhaps, to a contemporary Cōḻa understanding of ancient burial practice?): “Then the king who placed the elderly in urns / and made Death take flight, his malice spent” (विक्किता कोल्ला 
ulā v. 8); “The originator of urns for old people / who always defended the entire creation of the god in the lotus” (कुलोत्तुक्का कोल्ला 
ulā v. 12).

The Intiracālam canto of Kaḷiṅkattup Paraṇi (The Rout of Kaḷiṅga) mentions Suraguru in its description of an unfortunate ghoul whom the king sent as an ambassador to Yama: “Perhaps your highness recalls that small group of ghouls, an elderly ghoul asks Kaḷi, “who went into hiding / after beheading the ghoul who had cut off and eaten the head of the ghoul who had gone to serve as Suraguru’s messenger to Yama?” (कुलाकाली काली कसोटी 
ulā v. 157; the incident is again noted in v. 176).

45Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟap Purāṇam, Curukuruc Carukkam v. 8: कुलाकाली काली कसोटी 
ulā v. 157; the incident is again noted in v. 176).
crow and flies off, depositing itself a bit south of Kaḻukkuṉṟam in the form of a barren hill named “Crow Mountain” (Kākkaikkunram).\textsuperscript{46}

Kaḻukkuṉṟam’s most prominent shrine is the Vedagiriśvara temple atop the hill, where lighting is said to strike every twelve years to herald Indra’s devoted worship of Śiva. The shrine houses a svayambhū linga in the form of a plantain flower, sheathed within a stone cover.\textsuperscript{47} A bit below this upper shrine lies the Pakṣitīrtham, a pool on the hillside where a dog and a Cōḷa minister named Iraniyacēṭā (Hiranyacetas) are said to have been cured of leprosy after bathing in its healing waters.\textsuperscript{48} The Bhaktavatsala temple complex stands down at the foot of the mountain, with important shrines for Śiva Bhaktavatsalesvara, the goddess in her local guise as Tripurasundari, Māṇikkavācakar, and Vaṇṭuvaṉa Vināyakar, alternatively interpreted as “Vināyakar by the Conch Tank” or “Vināyakar of the Bee-swarmed Grove.”\textsuperscript{49} To the east of this shrine lies the Śaṅkhatīrtha, a vast tank associated with the miraculous production of conches every twelve years. As T. Ramakrishna wrote in 1881,

\begin{quote}
the water assumes a frothy appearance, and makes continually a roaring noise. The people of the place watch carefully, and then with due ceremony and pomp take up the shell, when it comes floating to the shore, and place it on a silver vessel. Then a festival takes place in honour of the event, when the shell is taken round the town in procession with tomtoms, and afterwards deposited with the other shells in the temple at the foot of the hills. But they
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46}This association between Suraguru and Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam also appears to have been observed in the dramatic arts, for in his volume on the temple written in the 1920s, Kumarasāmi Mudaliyar remarks, “from time immemorial a drama entitled ‘Suraguru Nāṭaka’ had been enacted annually here, but had been stopped prior to my assuming charge of the Trusteeship.” (1923: ii)

\textsuperscript{47}Kumarasāmi Mudaliyār 1923: 19.

\textsuperscript{48}The cure of the leprous minister is an inflection of a common myth, one famous instance of which is set in Citamparam, where the unfortunate, in this case a ruler from Gauḍadeśa named Hiraṇyavarman, is cured after bathing in the Śivagāṅga tank. He then goes back to Bengal, hands his kingdom over to his son, and returns, this time permanently, to Citamparam, where he builds the Naṭarāja temple. (Kulke 1970: 155ff)

\textsuperscript{49}Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟat Talapurāṇacciturkkam of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu Irāmalillīka (Kirusṣacāmi) Mutaliyār asserts the former interpretation (p. 14), while M. M. Kumarasāmi Mudaliyār, a former trustee of the Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam Devasthānam who published a handsome volume of local legends about the site after assuming the trusteeship, writes, “The image in the shrine dedicated to Vināyaka is said to have been discovered in a place overgrown with plantains, and when it was dug up, it was found to be surrounded by innumerable bees, which circumstance, we are told, led to its being called Vaṇḍu Vana Piḷḷaiyār” (1923: 29).
say that the shells diminish in size every time owing to the sins of the Kaliyugam.\footnote{IA 10: 198.}

Wondrous conches aside, the true hallmark of the mountain is the daily appearance of the two vultures as they fly in and alight to consume food offerings (Figure 7.2).\footnote{In English writing on the subject, the birds have been variously identified as vultures, kites, falcons, and hawks, an ambiguity that results from the fact that the Tamil word for them, \textit{kaḻuku}, encompasses all of the family \textit{Accipitridae}, the largest family in the order \textit{Falconiformes} (diurnal birds of prey). The birds are Egyptian vultures, also known as scavenger vultures (\textit{Neophron percnopterus}).}

The sojourn of the vultures no longer occurs, for the birds have not returned to the temple for some years now.\footnote{An attempt was made in 2002 to import birds from Australia in order to restore the temple’s most famous spectacle (”Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam Kōvilukku Āstirēliya Kaḻukukaḷ”), but as of the end of 2006 was unsuccessful (Venkatesh 248).} In his 1693 tome \textit{Op- en Ondergang van Coromandel} (\textit{The Rise and Fall of...}
Coromandel), the Dutch traveller Havart describes a visit that he and ten companions made in 1681, noting that the birds were fed by a temple custodian (the paṇṭāram, incorrectly identified as a priest) around noon on the third of January.\footnote{Jagadisa Ayyar 1982: 143.} Centuries later, a special report published in 1924 by the Madras correspondent for *The Times of London* describes the ritual and the number of pilgrims who would regularly travel to behold it:

Shortly before 10 the first vulture had flown over the temple to the great content of the pilgrims. A young woman, who seemed anxious to make something out of her mythological learning, informed us that twice of late years Indra had visited the temple, doubtless to pay his respects to Shiva, in the form of a thunderbolt. The temple was struck by lightning in 1889 and 1901, which explains this picturesque tale of the visit of the Storm God.

Then the temple door was opened and the pilgrims crowded in to chant and pray to the sound of cymbals and flutes. We descended, guided by an agreeable Brahmin, to the place behind the temple where the birds are fed. It was a bare rock fronting a ruinous summerhouse and a shrine containing a cistern from which a Brahmin ladled holy water for the pilgrims. It came, I was told, from a rock fronting a rock pool on the hillside into which a Prime Minister and his dog, who were both afflicted with leprosy, once tumbled and were instantly cured! Here we waited and watched and at 11:20 the first of the sacred birds appeared and perched upon the rock in front of the summerhouse. It was obviously an adult Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), white, with bright yellow bill and legs and black pinions, a scavenger common in many parts of India, known in various tongues by briefer and less civil names than the Latin by reason of its repulsive diet and habits. Pilgrims hurried down to watch, and the bird hopped about the rock, preened itself, and finally stood watching us with an alert and beady eye.

Presently the feeder of the birds arrived bearing a brass food carrier and several little bowls. After bidding the crowd keep back from the rock he climbed upon it, stood up with his hands joined behind his head, and then bowed down and prostrated himself, muttering a prayer, while the vulture sidled nearer. The prayer over he rose and looked at the sky. The second vulture was in sight; for a time it soared high above us and the feeder, a stout, bald, merry-looking fellow dressed only in a loin cloth, improved the occasion by a brief address which drew pious ejaculations from the 80 or 90 pilgrims, who crowded the floor of the summerhouse or sat under the trees.

And now the second vulture was flying lower. The servitor mixed the food, rice and brown sugar and ghi (cooking butter), and placed it in the brass bowls, and the first vulture, walking comically up, thrust his beak into a bowl and ate contentedly. Two minutes later its

\footnote{As the Tamil scholar Gift Siromoney noted in an entry dated 4/27/77 in his birdwatching diary, the vultures did not always come regularly even when they were believed to be making daily appearances, so it is difficult to say if the recent years of absence are unprecedented. (Siromoney 1992: 213–218)}
companion dropped upon the rock, a wilder bird and apparently a younger, for its wings were more heavily marked with black. Soon it, too, was feeding, while delighted pilgrims recited texts. Then suddenly the two white birds rose into the air, circled around the hilltop, and vanished into the blue.54

Guidebooks to the temple, which generally include a synopsis of Antakakkavi’s sthalapurāṇa and the verses on the temple composed by the great Saiva poets, contain beautiful woodcuts that also celebrate the visit of the birds (Figure 7.3).

7.3 The Procession of Lived Time

Antakakkavi’s Tirukkalukkunṟattu Ulā is a text confident in its aims, celebrating a rich history of annual chariot festivals held by the temple and the wealth of purānic mythology. Centuries before, the Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā and the Mūvar Ulā had set out to do something new, drawing upon their literary pasts to align Śiva and Cōḻa kings, respectively, with the ritual of procession. The Tirukkalukkunṟattu Ulā displays a Śaivism assured of its ascendancy, a faith that has no need to glorify a god who might not otherwise be glorified. What matters here is the place. The Tirukkailāya Ōṇa Ulā offers a genealogy of Śiva’s cosmic deeds before grounding him in the Tamil soil; the Mūvar Ulā provides a Cōḻa genealogy of heroism reaching back through the ages, and embodies this history in the living person of a king who processes to express its power; and the Tirukkalukkunṟattu Ulā sings of a temple where Śiva has long ago made his uniquely intimate relationship

54“At the Shrine of Shiva: Feeding the Sacred Vultures.” T. Ramakrishna’s 1881 account of the event provides details of the ritual text that accompanied such a feeding, which our aforementioned European correspondent would not have understood: “The Paṇḍāram with due reverence gives the food to be eaten and the ghī to be drunk. When the birds are satisfied they go away. The Paṇḍāram then turns round to the people who have witnessed this scene, and makes a speech which is delivered with much fluency in three languages, Tamil, Telugu and Hindustāni (for Hindus from all parts of India go to the place daily), ‘Righteous men,’ he says, ‘the holy birds have come sooner to-day, and have partaken very heartily of the meal set before them. Yesterday they came late as there were some sinners here. But as you are righteous men—(no doubt these will become sinners the next day)—they have come to-day sooner, and have taken very freely the meal given them. Hasten therefore, and take each of you a handful of the holy food which will purge away all your sins.’ All the people go to him, and after paying him get the much-coveted holy food from his hands. In this way the Paṇḍāram makes a very good income, and gets on an average Rs. 500 a year” (IA 10: 199).
Figure 7.3: The panṭāran feeds two vultures next to the Vedagiriśvara shrine atop the mountain. The Bhaktavatsala temple and the Śaṅkhatīrtha tank are laid out in profile below. At lower right stands Māṇikkavācakar.
to the place clear. Its genealogy is a record of Śiva insofar as it is a record of Kaḻukkuṉṟam itself. As the poem’s first verse proclaims,

He established all the splendid Vedas
as a sacred mountain in this flourishing world...\(^55\)

The mountain is itself the Vedas, the place where the tradition in its entirety has taken physical form.

The Provenance of Action

Śiva has other abodes, and Antakakkavi draws on their names and histories, weaving Kaḻukkuṉṟam into the fabric of Śiva worship at temples throughout the Tamil heartland. For this text, however, Kaḻukkuṉṟam is the best. This is not always the case: Antakakkavi wrote other ulās on other temples, most notably Cuntaramūrtti’s hometown Tiruvārūr, and in the Tiruvārūr Ulā, Tiruvārūr takes pride of place. But perspective is important. Readers of the Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟattu Ulā are there at the mountain, on the ground with the women in its verses, and the poem assures them that this is the right place to be. When the experienced woman (terivai) chides the birds who move so effortlessly through space because they do not bring her the emblematic tokens of Śiva’s presence at “the outer shrines,” she plots a map of devotion in which the birds should be flying from the periphery to the center, bringing the tokens of Śiva to their central axis, “this mountain” that is better than all the others:

You peacocks, you parrots, living in those outer shrines
where the lord abides, flood surging on his crown,

Even though you use fresh leaves given from a hunter’s hand there on Kālahasti,\(^56\)
you do not bring them to me daily, to cool me,

\(^{55}\) The hunter is Kaṇṇappa Nāyaṉār.

\(^{56}\) The hunter is Kaṇṇappa Nāyaṉār.
Even though there is a sweet chrysanthemum blossom on Śirāmalai every day,
you do not do me service, and fight against the night,\footnote{That is, the golden chrysanthemum should with its bright color resist the onset of the night that is so painful for the terivai to endure.}

There is cool water on the renowned Himalaya,
but you do not draw it forth, to pour upon my hair,

You do not offer the stream of civet musk pressed out on Aruṇagiri,\footnote{Aṉṉāmalai.} where our lord will always stay,

You do not shower me with the water from his bath,
a faint trickle down the Ruby Mountain,\footnote{Ratnagiri (Vāṭpōkki). Antakakkavi echoes a textual ancestor here; cf. vv. 329–30 of Cēṟaik Kavirāca Pillai's \textit{Vāṭpōkki Ulā}: “For someone who receives a faint trickle with honor / the tears of a woman are a confidence never betrayed.” (\textit{செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை \textit{Vāṭpōkki Ulā}}: “நூற்றாண்டுக் குறிப்பிட்டு வெளியீடு, நன்றால் வெளியீடு போனவுடன் / வேறொரு குழ்ந்தையின் கலந்து / செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை ஏனெனென்ன?”)} so hard to reach,

Now you do not go to this mountain,
better than any of Sthāṇu's other mountains...\footnote{vv. 329–336: \textit{செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை \textit{Vāṭpōkki Ulā}}: “நூற்றாண்டுக் குறிப்பிட்டு வெளியீடு, நன்றால் வெளியீடு போனவுடன் / வேறொரு குழ்ந்தையின் கலந்து / செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை ஏனெனென்ன?”} \footnote{vv. 329–336: \textit{செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை \textit{Vāṭpōkki Ulā}}: “நூற்றாண்டுக் குறிப்பிட்டு வெளியீடு, நன்றால் வெளியீடு போனவுடன் / வேறொரு குழ்ந்தையின் கலந்து / செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை ஏனெனென்ன?”}

History is not denied at Kaḻukkuṉṟam, for Śiva is still the dancing lord of the Cōḷas at Citamparam, and the \textit{Tirukkalukkunrattu} Ulā worships him in this form as “The lord of the Open Hall” (“\textit{Viṭattampalattāṉ},” v. 25). Yet when Antakakkavi invokes the dignified majesty of places like Citamparam (Tillai) or Tiruvarūr, he does so to give Kaḻukkuṉṟam its own grand depth:

Even as he prospers during the afternoon ceremony in Ārūr
and the midnight ceremony at holy Tillai,

Our lord takes his place on golden Kaḻukkuṉṟam
with the Mountain’s Daughter and his two young sons...\footnote{vv.166–68: \textit{வி.166–68: \textit{செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை \textit{Vāṭpōkki Ulā}}: “என்றும், யாருக்கு செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை / என்றும், செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை ஏனெனென்று / என்றும், செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை / என்றும், செறைக் கவிராச பிள்ளை ஏனெனென்று.”}
The hill grounds pastness, anchoring the myths of Śiva’s deeds on earth in the physical reality of Kaḻukkuṇṟam itself. Action presents itself to place, not the place to action; even the Cōla king Suraguru, the founder of worship at Kaḻukkuṇṟam, had to make his way there before he could be freed.

The ulā insists on the subservience of action to place in its grammar. As was the case for Oṭṭakkūttar’s genealogies of kings in the Mūvar Ulā, the history of Śiva’s actions at this site, his presence in other shrines, and his glories, are all conveyed through participial nouns that bind the action to descriptions of the god it praises. Time does not begin to advance until the proper moment for the great festival of procession arrives, and the sun breaks through its cycle to achieve a moment of vision in which it is redeemed:

...amidst the land of Tuṇṭirāṉ and the land of the gods on the day in the holy time in the month of Āṭi, when the time had come for the festival of the lord with the axe, the sun came running through the sign of Cancer, and arose there, thinking, “I am first in this procession, I am saved! I have gained a birth greater than the twelve suns”...

The ritual then begins, and Śiva is prepared for the procession that will soon take place.

The god is honored with the customary ministrations, as ancient traditions are called forth to prepare for his journey into the world. He receives “the noble worship that the Kāraṇāgama dictates / from the teachers of the Śaiva Vedas,” and is adorned with all the appropriate ornaments and jewels, a process which Antakakkavi describes carefully enough to read like a ritual manual for image worship. He introduces appropriate myths for each ornament, pulling them

62 Auerbach’s discussion of the Provençal poets informs my understanding of this point; see especially 1961: 21–25.
63 See Chapter Six, p. 189.
64 Tuṇṭirāṉ is a legendary, ancient king of Kāñcipuram; his land refers to Toṇṭaināṭu.
65 vv. 34–36: அமைத்தே வசிக்காரியில் | வரத் பூஜையில் அனுமானக்கூறு – அய | அனைவுக்கும் முன்னேக் காணிதி | அவன் எளிதில் மையில் – அவன் எளிதில் | அருங்கு பெருங்கள் தோட்ட முறையில் | அவன் எளிதில் முறையில்.
66 vv. 43: மாஞ்சு சத்தியா ஆர்யன்கு பாது மின்னையில் சரியாக்கியதே.
all together into the forward drive of the procession. In a meditative passage, the poet invites his audience to question this moment, asking if the garland placed upon the god’s chest also something more.

The radiant hue of the guru who worshiped him⁶⁷ so that Maghavān, who came with ill will, was released from jail?

The curving image of Mount Meru on his chest the day it was raised and bent upon the city of hostile asuras?

The flowing way of a melting golden ring adorning the fire of an ancient holy body filled with pride?

The embrace of the daughter of mighty golden Himavat, embracing him with abandon as her husband?

The hue of the profuse turmeric on the breasts of the mountain’s lovely daughter, who favors us with her rule?

A garland of fragrant blossoms casts its scent as gods look on and worship, knowing how rare it is to perceive him many times...⁶⁸

Śiva gazes upon himself in a mirror once he has been adorned, and hears the sounds of hymns that mark the commencement of the procession, and then begins his movement forward:

And after gazing in a mirror to see his fine attire for the festival in Āṭi, when he shows himself to those who look,

He turned his holy ear to the Vedas sounded forth in song, and the Tamil of our four gurus...⁶⁹

Ancient texts are voiced to take place in history, and the Vedic hymns are now paired with the Tamil verses of the four gurus, Appar, Campantar, Cuntarar, and Māṇikkavācakar, in a depiction

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⁶⁷Brhaspati.

⁶⁸vv. 56–62: முகந்தனை || மேலே மேலே வெண்மையாக்கு || சம்பா துளை அணுவூறியும் - முன்னையும் || தோர்களணல் விளையாடும் உடம்பு || மூன்று நெறிகள் நெறிகள் - வேண் || ஓட்டு நெறிகள் நெறிகள், நெல்லும் || கூடிய வானுக் வானுக் - முன்றா || தொல்லாம் நெறிகள் நெறிகள் - வேண் || மூன்று நெறிகள் நெறிகள் - வேண் || இரும்பு வானுக் வானுக் - முன்றா || தொல்லாம் நெறிகள் நெறிகள் - வேண்.⁶⁹

of Tamil Śaivism distinguished by its own canonical texts. This Tamil, we might also note, is “ours”: Antakakkavi inserts himself and his audience into his vision. He will do so repeatedly in this text, exploring the relationship between poet, community, and worshiped God.

The God Passes Into the World

Once Śiva begins to move and ascends to his chariot, Antakakkavi continues to draw ancient myths into the present action through a set of śleṣa verses that describe how the other great gods marshal around him, aligning the features of Śiva’s grand chariot with the attendant gods and their own mythic deeds:

Next comes peerless Acyuta, the god on the banyan leaf who has Lakṣmī
\ Next comes the unique enduring chariot, which has substantial ropes
with a discus and beautiful conch, a shining crown, who sleeps on a ruby-hooded,
\ made of axles with turning wheels, canopy shining, bells ringing on its trim,

And Brahma, extolled in the Vedas,
who was trusted as a charioteer
\ it is guided by a charioteer
who created the abiding earth on his mighty lotus,
\ and has a central platform and a grand lotus dais,

And the god with the thunderbolt banner, which is linked to the heavens,
\ it has a roaring bull and flags, which flutter in the sky,
wed to Indrāṇi and the stormclouds
\ amidst the moon, storms, and clouds,

The King of the gods was superb,
and before the exalted, lordly seat
\ there were noble sacrifices to the gods in front
many eyes constantly glittered as they sought him,
\ and many splendid mirrors kept flashing,

He ascended the holy chariot without equal

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70 Contrast this with the analogous moment in the Tirukkailāya Nāṉa Ulā vv. 21–22, which given its emergent status, makes no such reference to an established Tamil religious corpus: “To the sound of the Rg Veda being chanted by the Vasus, he rose to his feet, / and advanced through the gateway formed by Nand in and sturdy Kāḷar.”

71 See Chapter Two, p. 47.
as the three ancient forms of God faced him as one...\textsuperscript{72}

The text does not treat these pairings as metaphorical.\textsuperscript{73} The śleṣa aligns the deeds of the gods with Śiva’s movement in procession, drawn together through the poet’s skill.

Once the Tirukkalukkurattu Ulā turns to the women who gather to watch the parade, Anta-kakkavi turns to the classic trope of women who watch from their mansions, the pivotal scene in the representation of procession in South Asian textuality,\textsuperscript{74} and brings this scene to a narrative peak, collapsing past into present as he compares the women’s thighs to the banana grove where Śiva rested after dancing in furious contest against Kālī in Tiruvālaṅkāṭu.\textsuperscript{75}

And crowds of mortal women, in the towers, in the latticed windows, and on top of golden mansions crowded on each side,

They and their servants gather together, submerging the courtyard and dancing pavilion in a sea of women,

Because of their golden thighs, the pristine banana grove, they take ancient times in a distant past and make them new...\textsuperscript{76}

It is women, the sexuality latent in their thighs, who draw Śiva into motion. The grammar follows, for it is with this last phrase, “they take ancient times in a distant past and make them new” (“tollaināṭ pōya pālamai putukkuvār”), that Antakakkavi moves his text out of the grammatical past and into ritual time.

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\textsuperscript{72}vv. 79–84: இமோற்றவ்வம் || தாம்சலமோல்குகைன் நிப்புற நொரோகையும் || அல்ல காட்சியே ஓர்துடையும் - 

\textsuperscript{73}See Auerbach 1961: 42.

\textsuperscript{74}Cf. Chapter Three, pp. 90; Tirukkailāya Nōya Ulā vv. 67–69.

\textsuperscript{75}Shulman (1980: 212–18) discusses this famous myth and translates the relevant passage of the Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu Purāṇam in his exploration of the dance as a means of cleaving the goddess’s violent aspect from intimacy with Śiva.

\textsuperscript{76}vv. 113–116: நூற்று || கல்லு கோவல் மார்ங்கும் மணையன் || கால்வு கவலையும் கையன் - 

\textsuperscript{257}
7.4 Insulating Text

Who would have joined the women as an audience for Śiva’s procession around Kaḻukkuṉṟam? Tamil aesthetes, given the intricacies of Antakakkavi’s verse. But mastery of language would not have been enough. To savor this text would require, in a very real sense, already knowing its subject: the long history of Śiva worship in the Tamil south, its gods and saints, its beliefs, practices, and aims. The Tirukkalukkunṟattu Ulā does not ease gently into its complexities. Consider how much one must know even to reach the poem’s third verse:

He dispelled the evil karma pronounced because of a young girl’s ball on the god with the long thunderbolt banner...77

Listeners would have to know that Indra (the god with the long thunderbolt banner) is said to have stolen a ball from a young girl, and that Śiva imprisoned him at Kaḻukkuṉṟam for his crime, releasing him after the hapless king of the gods prayed for Śiva’s mercy. They would be listeners who knew the details of Śiva’s presence on this mountain, or people who had come as a community of worshippers eager to hear it recited and explained in formal presentation. The myths are conveyed so telegraphically, in such rapid succession, that understanding the text presupposes a community of Tamil Śaivas—the text would not create one. The ulās of this age enact a community by celebrating the fact it has already arrived.

The Work of Reception

The presentation of myths in this fashion makes Antakakkavi’s audience active partners in the process of textmaking, linking the poet’s allusions to the myths they signify. Miss the allusions, and the text falls beyond grasp.78 When Antakakkavi sings,

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77 vv. 2–3: ஈடு || அச்சை நீதியுறு தோலிருந்தால் நிற்க பாலே திருக்குறுமந்திரம் ॥

78 I am certainly no exception, and would not have been able to work deeply in this text without the associations others made for my benefit, from Capāpati Mutaliyār’s commentary on the Tirukkalukkunṟap Purāṇam, the explana-
The relentless dust from the sweet earth made every jeweled crown like the crown that stopped the Vaigai long ago,79

he insists that his audience must not be passive. They are called to remember a myth associated with the biography of the saint Māṇikkavācakar. Śiva assumed the guise of a contract laborer and agreed to do the work required of the old woman Vanti, helping to dam up the flooding river Vaigai, in exchange for some of her cakes. An inattentive workman, Śiva sleeps when he should be busy, lying down by the river, yet his hair, muddied from carrying loads of earth, catches the raging waters and holds them at bay. This is not an unprecedented feat: another myth speaks of a time when the god caught torrents of water in his knotted locks, and saved the world from destruction as the river Ganges poured out of heaven to the earth below. Antakakkavi lays the path for Śiva in procession around Kaḻukkuṉṟam; his audience’s ability to understand the text brings the god forth.

When Antakakkavi calls upon his readers to actively make the text in this way, he makes brief appeals to popular myths in the Tamil Śaiva literary tradition, and sets them in quick succession. In one instance, the poet develops a standard scene in the genre, the host of participants in the processional array, by calling the Śaiva devotees of the Periya Purāṇam into action, once more using participial nouns to make actions inhere in individual beings:

The child who governs us and the gods who eat ambrosia
son of the man who ate stones for food in harsh austerity,

The son who raged against his father, so that those who direct their minds to the master will understand that even cruelty can be good,

The man who long ago allowed water, fire, venom, bone,
a palmyra tree, a door, and a fever to understand Tamil,

The loving man who took as friendship

79vv. 99-100: தன்னை எைவைய க,portent notes that U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar’s atelier composed for his edition of the Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟattu Ulū, and David Shulman’s instruction as we read the text together.
the elephant, poisoned food, slake lime oven, and deep sea of his enemies,
The man who employed in friendly service the Kāviri and Maṇimuttāṟu rivers, the troop of ghouls, the crocodile, and the lord’s two feet,
The eminent man who had earth placed even on the Ganges-decked crown praising the feet of the king of the gods on a horse that is a fox,
The man from Pūḷi who rides on a horse as the man from Tirunāvalūr, thread flashing on his chest, rides a white elephant,
The Cōḻa who worshiped the Light to drive off in the form of a crow the crime of rashly killing a cow,
The Pāṇṭiya king of the lunar line, who gave to the lord of Iṭaimarutu an amorous princess from an ancient line,
And after them, a flood of holy devotees to serve his body, and a sea of holy devotees who do the temple work,
The men from the lineages of the three-toned Vedas, respected everywhere, and masters in ascetic dress who keep the Śaiva knowledge,
A sea of ghouls, who hold up the entire earth as if playing with a ball, and the rest of his troops, an ocean with clear waves,
And surrounded by yet another retinue of living beings, he set out through the golden tower as praise resounded everywhere...

Who could interpret this, linking each reference to mythic lore, but a member of the community that preserves these saints as its own? Just to lay out the basic associations (Table 7.1) draws on an established culture of Tamil Śaivism, to say nothing of the involved tales of worship, trial, and redemption that each of these associations would trigger in listeners’ minds.
### Table 7.1: The Ritual Participants in the *Tirukkalukkuntattu Ulā*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The child who governs us and the gods who eat ambrosia”</td>
<td>Nandin, Śiva’s vehicle and steward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the man who ate stones for food in harsh austerity”</td>
<td>Nandin’s father Cilātamunuṉivar (Śilāda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The son who raged against his father, so that those who direct their minds to the master / will understand that even cruelty can be good”</td>
<td>Canṭēca Nāyaṉār (Caṇḍēsvara), who cut off his father’s leg when the father tried to kick the liṅga the young saint was worshiping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The man who long ago allowed water, fire, venom, bone, / a palmyra tree, a door, and a fever to understand Tamil”</td>
<td>Campantar, who directed these things by the power of his speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The loving man who took as friendship / the elephant, poisoned food, slake lime oven, and deep sea of his enemies”</td>
<td>Appar, who placidly endured tortures contrived for him by Jains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The man who employed in friendly service the Kāviri and Maṇimuttāṟu rivers, / the troop of ghouls, the crocodile, and the lord’s two feet”</td>
<td>Cuntarar, who wielded authority over these things—the last by using Śiva as his go-between when trying to return to his first wife Paravai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The eminent man who had earth placed even on the Ganges-decked crown / praising the feet of the king of the gods on a horse that is a fox”</td>
<td>Māṇikkavācakar (see p. 258); fine horses that Śiva delivers on his behalf to the Pāṇṭiya king are actually enchanted foxes that soon return to their original state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The man from Pūḷi who rides on a horse / as the man from Tirunāvalūr, thread flashing on his chest, rides a white elephant”</td>
<td>Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ, riding to Śiva’s heaven in the company of Cuntarar (see Chapter Two, p. 23; Chapter Five, p. 168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Cōḷa who worshiped the Light to drive off in the form of a crow / the crime of rashly killing a cow”</td>
<td>Suraguru Cōḷa (see p. 246)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Pāṇṭiya king of the lunar line, who gave to the lord of Iṭaimarutu / an amorous princess from an ancient line”</td>
<td>Varaguṇa Pāṇṭiyaṉ, who worshiped Śiva at Tiruvitaimarutūr (Iṭaimarutu) and was thereby freed from the crime of Brahmanicide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To follow one reference, the brief mention of “the Pāṇṭiya king of the lunar line, who gave to the lord of Iṭaimarutu / an amorous princess from an ancient line,” invokes the temple of Tiruviṭaimarutūr (“the holy town of Iṭaimarutu”), where a Pāṇṭiya king named Varaguṇa is said to have worshiped Śiva in order to escape the sin of accidentally killing a Brahman with his chariot. Varaguṇa is mentioned in Tirukkovaiyār as “Varaguṇa, the Southerner who praised the lord of the Little Hall”\(^{81}\) and “Varaguṇa, master of towering, frenzied rutting elephants, who praises the Little Hall of the god who bears the flooding waters in his noble spreading locks.”\(^{82}\) Ciṟṟampalam, the Little Hall, is the famed sanctum of the Citamparam temple complex). Here, Varaguṇa takes his place as a legendary ruler whose worship of the god parallels that of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ and Suraguru, the processional figures who precede and succeed him in this passage: three legendary kings of the three ancient dynasties, Cēra, Cōḻa, Pāṇṭiya, who bring the world of caṅkam poetry into a telling of history now focused on the god Śiva. In one verse, temples, texts, and the caṅkam world of ancient kings come into play, given the knowledge of Śaiva myth. Without it, the verse would not mean much.

This is not to argue that the culture of Tamil Śaivism was a constant that the Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟattu Ulā depended on but to which it could contribute nothing, as if the text were a reflection of cultural processes that had already been settled. A Śaiva text like the Tirukkailāya Jñāṉa Ulā, which inaugurates the ulā genre, and the Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟattu Ulā, which appears in the maturity of a respected tradition, have different presuppositions. The first ulā speaks of a god whom any Śiva worshipper in India would recognize. It transcends region, drawing from revered Sanskrit texts to define its own form. Such are the foundations for its constructive project: to root the god in the southern soil through emergent āgamic temple rites, using a clear, accessible Tamil to bind the text to place. The Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟattu Ulā takes the success of this effort for granted, as it does

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\(^{81}\) v. 306: சார்க்காளை | சார்க்காளை வளுகின்ற விளக்கம் படுத்து.
\(^{82}\) v. 327: மும்மெடின் பார்க்க கோடையன் விளக்கம் விளக்கமாக்கும் | மும்மெடின் விளக்கம் முன்போற்ற விளக்கம்.
the dominant ordering practices of the Cōḷa period, when the Tamil Śaiva texts were canonized, the lives of their authors beatified and standardized, and the favor of Śiva was invested in Cōḷa kings through texts like the Mūvar Ulā. Its own textual work brings the history of this religious culture into play and savors its complexities.

Delighting in Tamil

The entirety of this text, over four hundred verses long, consists of just a few sentences. They break over verse after verse as participles stack up on top of the ulā’s characteristic enjambment. This is a feature of the poetic technique of antāti (“the last is the first”), in which the final word of a verse, the taṉiccol (“detached word”), is syntactically bound to the following line, on and on to unroll a chain of verses that cannot be separated individually. The technique allows the phonic quality of the poem to overload the message, as Antakakkavi uses the combinatoric possibilities of language to create sound effects. This poem does not express a narrative in compact phrasing. It takes pleasure in the sound of Tamil.

Consider the section of the ulā in which Antakakkavi describes Śiva’s other abodes, using the poetic technique of maṭakku (Sanskrit yamaka), “doubling over,” in which a verse contains two identical strings of phonemes that bear entirely different meanings:

\[\text{āṭakatti yākattentī yārūrāñ mēlvilailikum} \]
\[\text{āṭakatti yākattentī yārūrāñ – cūṭakiyār} \]

Shining on his fine bull on parade, a wife who dances on crowded waves on its chest, He is the lord of southern Ārūr, Tyāgarāja, Hāṭakeśvara,

\[\text{kāma ramalīyicai kāciyā yēnkavarul} \]
\[\text{kāma ramalīyicai kāciyāñ – nēmivāy} \]

His favor relieves my vice when I sing on the charming beds of bangled girls, He is the lord of Kāci, where the bees hum in cikāmaram song,\(^{83}\)

\(^{83}\)Cikāmaram is a marutam paṇ (agricultural mode).
añc añamē kāṇṭavīṭat tampalattāṉ muttitarum
añc añamē kāṇṭavīṭat tampalattāṉ – kaṅcattu

He has beautiful power, viewed by the beautiful people on the sea-girt earth,
He is the lord of The Open Hall, kohl-dark poison on his throat, granting liberation,

vācat tiruvāla vāyiṉāṉ pōṟṟiceyum
vācat tiruvāla vāyiṉāṉ – vīciyakai

Praised by the one who rests on the coiled snake with its tail in its mouth,
and Śrī who rests on a lotus, he is the lord of fragrant Tiruvālavāy,

māṉārat taṇṇā malaittalaiyān mālyāṉai
māṉārat taṇṇā malaittalaiyān – ācāta

On his head runs the cool wave-dashed Ganges, a deer sits in his upraised hand,
He is the lord of red Aṉṉāmalai, filled with deer and rutting elephants,

māmayirkā lattī varaiyīṭattāṅ mitātu
māmayirkā lattī varaiyīṭattāṅ – yāmattu

He has taken the dark woman with endless beauty as his left side,
He is the lord of the Kāḷatti Mountain, where fine peacocks dance,

māṉā niḻaṟkāñci māviruppāṉ ṛaṅkaitoḻu
māṉā niḻaṟkāñci māviruppāṉ...

Adored by the younger sister of the one who loves Lakṣmī, whose girdle sparkles in the night,
He sits under the mango tree in Kaṅci, where the shade never disappears...  

The technique has a Sanskrit ancestry, but this is a celebration of Tamil sounds.

A close look at the last of these verses gives a sense of Antakakkavi’s skill with phonic play. There are two identical strings of phonemes, one in each line of the verse. When such a verse is first heard, it hinges on the repetition, the “doubling over” of sound, and the coherent meaning for the entire verse lies nested within the sound pattern. “Yāmattu / māṉā niḻaṟkāñci māviruppāṉ raṅkaitoḻu,” runs the first phrase, followed by “māṉā niḻaṟkāñci māviruppāṉ” to provide the repetition in the second. The first phrase, once the words are broken out of a spacing pattern de

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84 Citamparam.
85 Maturai.
86 vv. 23–39.
87 This includes the taṉiccol (“detached word”) of the previous verse; see p. 263.
dependent on metrical arrangement and set out individually, accounting for sandhi (shifts of phonic coalescence), runs as follows:

\[
yāmattu \text{ māṟā } \text{nīḷal } \text{kāñci } \text{mā } \text{viruppāṇ } \text{taṅkai } \text{toḻum}
\]

at night does not change light girdle Lakṣmī man desiring younger sister adored

Starting from the back of this phrase—Tamil being an agglutinative language, a quality emphasized in its literary forms—and linking the elements, one reads, “adored [by] the younger sister [of] the man desiring Lakṣmī [whose] girdle [has] a light [that] does not change at night,” or, given some polishing, “adored by the younger sister of the one who loves Lakṣmī, whose girdle sparkles in the night.” The second phrase, by contrast, offers a different meaning:

\[
māṟā \text{nīḷal } \text{kāñci } \text{mā } \text{v} \text{iruppāṇ}
\]

does not change shade Kāñci mango tree man sitting

“A man sitting [under] the mango tree [in] Kāñci [where] the shade does not change”; with polishing, “He sits under the mango tree in Kāñci, where the shade never disappears.” Taking the two phrases together gives the verse in its entirety: “Adored by the younger sister of the one who loves Lakṣmī, whose girdle sparkles in the night / He sits under the mango tree in Kāñci, where the shade never disappears.”

Knowing the appropriate meanings for these words demands real skill from an audience, as “mā” for “Lakṣmī,” or “nīḷal” for “light,” for example, are rare meanings. This insulates the text, as verses like these call for someone previously initiated into their meaning to share what they know with those who do not yet understand. The teaching process binds the community together, so that the enjoyment of such poetry is not a solitary pursuit, but one shaped by being together with others. More about the verse contributes to this effect, for it also displays the telegraphic presentation of myth that demands interpretive work from its community. Śiva is adored by Miṅākṣī, famed goddess of Maturai, who is the younger sister of “the one who loves Lakṣmī”: 265
Viṣṇu in his manifestation as Aḻakar (“The Handsome One”) who abides in a temple just outside the city. The reference to the mango tree in Kānci, for its part, draws the listener’s mind to the Ėkāmparanātar temple in Kāncipuram, where the goddess is said to have worshiped Śiva in the form of a sand linga under a mango tree, which Śiva blasts with withering heat before appearing there in person to reward her with his presence.

Taken together, the technique of maṭakku and the telegraphic presentation of the god’s other abodes found in these verses creates a dense mixture. For a text that presents Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam as the consummation of Śiva’s presence even as it extends to other abodes, the sounds of this ulā on Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam yield multiple possibilities. The poet’s verses turn inward on themselves, insulating the text, appealing to Tamil Śaivas to open them up and discern their meaning. Sound delights with its own rhythms and powers of expression, brief phrases gesture to the grand myths that stand behind them, the taṉiccol of one verse moves forward into the next, and the verses, which do not offer individual resolution, always call for the next one to be read so they can be understood.

7.5 Surpassing the Self

The poem does, however, occasionally accelerate to heightened moments in the text when the action dramatically changes. These center on the instant that a woman first beholds the god, and consummate in the moment when she is overcome by her own passion and the god moves forward. The scene is familiar:

They wander about, their golden clothes falling free, 
descrediting how Tāṭakai held up her dress in Tiruppaṉacai,\(^8\)

\(^8\)Tāṭakai, when presenting a garland to Cevvēṉippiññakar (Aruṇaṭeśvara), Śiva at Tiruppaṉantāḷ (Tiruppaṉacai), felt her dress slip and grabbed it to keep it from falling off. Śiva then leaned over and took the garland from her hand (Cāminātaiyar 1938: 28–29). The myths surrounding this temple, praised by Campantar as Tāṭakaiyiccaram (Tirumuṟai 3.62), describe the linga there as leaning to one side. (Marr 1979: 277; Dehejia 1988: 167–68)
They crowd about, their eyes arrayed like dark flowers, 
which seem to flow to the beauty on his neck, covering the poison held within,
They feel vast pain, their jewels and their inborn modesty fall away...

Antakakkavi is working with a classic pattern here, yet in his characteristic spirit of seeing newness in what has already been well defined, he puts it to question. What does it mean for a single life to reflect what is held to be a universal experience?

Being Alone Together

Antakakkavi concentrates on the misperceptions that occur when the woman are no longer themselves. The young girl (petumpai) plays her childhood games, and suddenly the action intensifies:

A woman rushed up, “The conch is blowing! The golden trumpets blare! 
Amidst a sea of drums, the kettle drum pounds!
Hymns flow out before the chariot, sung from the mouths of devotees from the Toṇṭai land, where righteous Suraguru reigned,
the heartwarming hymns of the Vedas resound,” she cried, “God’s holy procession has come to our street!”

The shift is paralleled in the poet’s grammar, as the woman cries out in a quick succession of conjugated verbs. Yet the petumpai does not seem to know how to act, and Antakakkavi follows with a fine passage on the conditions of knowledge that can bring one to God.

The girl rises with her mothers after hearing the woman’s cry, but tries to hold back her pet animals, who long to stay in her presence. The mothers tell her that she is wrong to try and hold back creatures who need her for their own happiness:

89vv. 156–59: பிரிவளசக்க | நடட மாறாமல் உள்நியர் வாழ்நாக | உட் அவல் மாற்றுமதால் - அடுத்து அது வாழ்நியரிடுவையால் | ஐன் மாற்றம் வாழ்நியரிடுவையால் - அடுத்து எழுத்துரியும் வழியாளவென | எனவுடன் இன.

90vv. 194–97: காண்பதால் | செய்து என்பா செய்து அசைத்தே சைந்தே | செய்து செய்து சைந்தே - செய்து | செய்து செய்து சைந்தே | செய்து | எனவுடன் மல்லர் மல்லர் மல்லர் - ஐன் | முன்னிலம் வாழ்நியர் மல்லர் | எனவுடன் பிரிவளசக்க மல்லர்.
The girl with fragrant hair arose along with her mothers, but she held back her bird and pair of fawns,

Her little creatures took awkward steps, then stood and wept, and her entire group of mothers gave her a stern glance,

“Look how the goose delights in the Bhagīrathī, and how the cakora delights in the crescent moon, upon the Dancer’s head,

Look how the cakravāka takes joy in his shining right eye, and the deer of the pastures takes joy in his left,

Look how the pigeons join the smoke around the mighty lord with the battle axe, believing it is of their kind,

Look how all the parrots are joyful, mistaking the gold of the flowers on his garland for golden millet,

Look how the stag goes to see the deer at his left side, and how others, skylarks and peacocks, approach, thinking his neck is a raincloud,

Was the promise of true favor from the one who wears the bones of gods as jewels only an inheritance for one born as an eagle?

Was the uplifting joy of friendship with our king only a share for the two birds of Kūṭal?\(^\text{91}\)

Was searching for the foot and crown of the fine god lauded in the Vedas only a right for the goose and the boar?

Was soaring Mount Kailāsa, long ago, only a share for the long-legged spider, the snake, and the fierce elephant?

Is it a crime, gentle lady, for a living soul to be attached to you, for a life to find its pleasure because of you?”\(^\text{92}\)

\(^{91}\)Kūṭal is Maturai; the two birds are a blackbird and a heron who received boons in that city.

\(^{92}\)vv. 197–204: காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெமÅலா – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெமÅலா – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெமÅலா – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெமÅலா – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெமÅலா – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெமÅलா – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெமÅலா – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெமÅலா – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெமÅலா – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | ŅாடாĄ ōா¹Ð¹ þழாெ�åகா¾ – காணைடேய || îடாĄ ŏாதĈÂப ØÈைளக ÕÊாரºக¹ | Ņாடா Angus.}
The final verse echoes the question so many women have asked in the Tamil poems on processing heroes: when the need to be with someone is so instinctive, so consuming, how can anyone speak of it as wrong? Love for the god, these verses suggest, does not have to be fully understood. The cakravāka bird delights in the god’s right eye not because it is Śiva’s but because it is the sun, heralding the end of a night’s separation from its mate; the deer loves his left eye because it is the moon, in whose light it will roam the pastures. The pigeons join Śiva because they feel an affinity with the grey smoke rising from the incense around him; the parrots mistake his flowers for millet; skylarks and peacocks confuse the darkness of his stained neck with a raincloud. Yet they come to Śiva all the same, seeing in him what their own natures want.

As the women lose themselves to their desire, there is nothing they can do. Mundane reality slips away in the face of passion, and the women feel their ability to act as they would choose slip away from their control. They have become more than themselves, in Antakakkavi’s verses, as their need to unite with the god pulls them into a timeless pattern of desire for the god. Antakakkavi plays on convention at these points, setting out tableaus common to all ulās.

Her golden belt slipped off as she was filled with desire,
and all the soft, gentle arts she had learned fell away as well,

Right away she gave up some bangles that had cracked,
and some that slipped off for the king of the broad earth to take,

The noble lord guided his chariot down another street,
and the beautiful girl went back inside her mansion with her friend,

She saw the sight of her soul’s own true light
endlessly in waking life and endlessly in dreams...93

The conclusion of the action carries this nubile girl (maṅkai) beyond herself, to the subtle energy that lies at the core of being: “her soul’s own true light,” Śiva, the nātāntacōti (Sanskrit nādānta-...93
jyotis), “the light at the edge of sound.”

Seeing nothing but this, she sees what for Antakakkavi would be common to all Śaiva devotees, and the poet plays with this condition by emphasizing possibilities of mixture and blending even as the maṅkai suffers because there is still distance. He puts experience into doubt, ending this section of the ulla with misperceptions that will not be answered as the girl stands at the brink of union with the god:

Seeing all those eyes of women with goose-like strides, and thinking them a sea, “Does our lord’s beautiful coral forest enter into it?

From the crown of our lord who has one thousand names, does the thousand-faced Ganges run into it?

Is the liquid moon given a place?

Are the great tortoise and the fish acclaimed due to the parts that perfect them?

Does his brilliant earring, the sea monster, make his home there?

Does Tirumāl, the bull who rests on the snake, join it?

Does the poison on his lovely neck blend into it?”

As she thought of all these things, the tears poured streaming from her eyes.

The liquid imagery is fitting, as the maṅkai’s own tears flow into her description of the other women’s eyes as a sea, joining her with the whole.

Realization from a Finite View

Questions suffuse this text, asked time and again by women struggling to express a desire they cannot fathom. Though they grow older, and their maturity contributes a greater recognition

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94 The coral forest is Śiva’s knotted locks.

95 Śiva gave the tortoise its shell, and the fish its eye.

9vv. 241–246: அனநைடயா || க¾ண¿ தைனĈº கடெலÊப ெதÂெபĉமாÊ | வ¾ணÁ பவள

வனÂùŅா – ݾணவÛÉ || ேபரா Úரćைடய ெபÂமாÊ ćÔ¹கºைக | ஓரா Úரćக¿Ōா ŊாÔőா –

ஈரÁ || ØைறĈ ćÞதÀŌா ேபராைம ðன | ×ைறĈ ćĎÁபா áவÀŌா – ெசàÝÉ || þைழயா மகரº

þÔĭா¾Ŋா நாக¿ | Ąைழயா Ýைட¿Öĉமா ĊÉœா – அழÐய || க¾ட Ýடîலº ைககலÀŌா

ெவÊெறÊĎ | ݾட கҪÞ ÝÞķாÞÀதாÈ.
of what is happening to them, in the end, the questions remain. In one passage, Antakakkavi develops a series of questions to reveal how far the graceful woman (arivai) is from asserting any control over Kāma, the god of passion. Before the procession reaches her street, the arivai can answer everything that Kāma (here called by his Tamil name Vēl) asks of her; and quite derisively at that:

She called over Vēl, who was standing nearby, and asked, “What should we play, young man, tell me?” And Kāma, bowing at her feet, said, “Ammaṉai.” “Make the ammaṉai balls,” she told the bodiless god, “and give them to me at my own playground.”

“Is a pearl granted by the wishing cow good to use for ammaṉai?” he asked. She replied, “It’s good for me to scorn.”

“Then a pearl from the moon, the home of clear ambrosia?” She replied, “Is that moon anything special to me?”

“A pearl from the tusk of the elephant like a cloud up above, is that your aim?” She replied, “That’s fine for the king of the gods.”

“Tell me, a bright pearl from the boar who wears cool tulasī, or the lotus of the unborn god?” She replied, “anything from this world would be a crime.”

“Tell me, a pearl from the bow in my very own hand, which shoots the five arrows?” She replied, “Far from it! You are just a minor god.”

“Tell me, then,” he asked, “would a pearl that had grown inside bamboo be nice?”

“The very form of the father with three holy eyes, they say!” she exclaimed, 97 Mataṉ made them with those pearls, and gave them to her with a bow, and the woman with the garland in her hair took them, and played...

97 Because Śiva appeared in bamboo in Tirunelvēli and Tiruppācūr, the pearls that Tamil mythology describes as growing within hollow bamboo segments are what she wants.

98 vv. 286–295: ćைட×Êற || யேவைள யசகைழ¿ ேதĄÝைள யாĂĄÂ | காைள ÝளÂெபÊன¹ காமď –
ெதÈளćத» || ŇாமÁ பதć¿Ōா ெவÊறான» Ňாமபத | ஏமÁ பதŐா ெவம¹ெகÊறாÈ – ðÙைசÚÉ || îĈ Ćற¹கடċ ì¹ெகÊறாÈ – யேவñÊற || ć¿த ÙáŌா
ĸாÞெகÊறாÊ ć¿Öĉ¹க¾ | அ¿தÊ வÔÝĄேவ யாெமÊறாÈ – ć¿ததனாÉ || ப¾Õ¿ ÖĉćÊ பÕÀĄ மதďதவ¹ | க¾Õ¹ þழÜ கவÄÀதாட.

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When Śiva arrives, however, she feels Kāma’s true power, and it is the arivai’s turn to question:

The lord of the assembly, lord of Suraguru Cōḷa, lord of all, lord of the mountain, came in procession, Her people leapt up and ran to worship, and she ran too, she felt desire, great desire.

She fell at the feet of the lord of Gaṅgācalam, master of the trident, a head in his hand, the lord with waves of the river Ganges in his fanning matted locks.

She saw the holy face that flows with compassion of the lord who presides there while eagles worship, and she was overjoyed—

Her eyes misted with tears—“Look,” she pled, “I have reason to speak, lord of the Śiva world, beautiful god of the land, whose beauty is so great,

You commanded a crore of Rudras with ease in the war against the raging asuras, won’t you now go to war with the night-roaming moon?

Does the curse of the sage furious with the strong young rākṣasa who takes lives not extend to the son of the god with blood-red eyes?

Is the trouble that your white bull makes for Garuḍa, who has countless victories, not also for the nightingale and the sweet cuckoo?

A minister once finished off his silver color by means of a clear tīrtha, isn’t it possible to finish off the gold color on me, whose karma is so cruel?

Your great tīrthas are seen holding the countless rivers in the world, can’t they be seen holding the river of my tears?

My God!” she cried—she collapsed—she was carried off by her friend—and laid on a flower couch.
When the arivai calls out to Śiva, asking if he will ease her suffering, she lays out a series of assertions and pleas that demonstrates her knowledge of the god’s actions at Kaḻukkuṇram. “I have reason to speak,” she declares, for she knows that Śiva has displayed his power many times at this temple, and she urges that he should do so again for her. But why would her knowledge of a mythic deed compel him to come to her aid? “You commanded a crore of Rudras with ease in the war against the raging asuras;” she cries in one verse, “won’t you now go to war with the night-roaming moon?” The crore of Rudras, as Antakakkavi’s Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟap Purāṇam explains, finished off the asuras who were tormenting the earth in ancient times, then appeared before Śiva at Kaḻukkuṇram to expiate their sin. But why would this make Śiva feel obligated to dispel the power of the moon, which torments the arivai as she lies awake? The answer for Antakakkavi lies in poetry. “Nī ciṟitu // kōva nicācarap pōr kol kōṭi ruttirarai / ēva,” runs the first phrase:

\[
\text{nī ciṟitu kōva nicācara pōr kol kōṭi ruttirarai ēva}
\]

And the second, “nicācarap pōr ēkātō”:

\[
\text{nicācara pōr ēkātō}
\]

The phonic quality of the arivai’s question effects the necessary doubling. The asuras are called by the term “night-roamer,” nicācara (Sanskrit niśācara), yet so is the moon, monstrous because it is causing her so much pain. Śiva has fought a war (pōr) against nicācaras before; he should do so again. Each verse in this passage is bound together in the same way, using the echoes of homonymy to bind the present action to Śiva’s mythic deeds.

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103 Tirukkaḻukkuṇrap Purāṇam, Uruttirakōṭiccarukkam.
7.6 Moving God with a Woman’s Song

The fact that Antakakkavi fills his own poem with the poetic speech of others is important to this text. The women speak at length, conveying the intensity of their experiences out of the narrative frame and into readers’ minds. They question, they seek clarity, and they use their own skill with words to try and compel Śiva to come to them. One such tale in particular deserves close attention: the legend of a courtesan, Nāccimuttu, whom Śiva pulls from worldly life into heaven.

The Force of Poetic Words

Nāccimuttu is said to have lived at Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam, where every day she worshiped Vedagirīśa by reciting a verse from a text called Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟa Mālai composed by a resident Vaiṣṇava. One day a terrible storm blew in, and Nāccimuttu was unable to go to the temple. Despairing because she could not worship in Vedagirīśa’s presence, she began to compose a verse of her own, singing, “Won’t you come and stand in my courtyard?” (“muṟṟattilē vantu muṉṉirkilō”). As soon as she finished the first half of the verse, Śiva appeared before her on his bull. Overcome with joy, the courtesan finished the verse and worshiped. As Śiva began to leave, she grabbed hold of the bull’s leg, unable to bear his parting, and the god set off to take her with him to Kailāsa. The Vaiṣṇava author of Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟa Mālai, who saw what had taken place, quickly grabbed Nāccimuttu’s leg as she was swept off, and he, too, gained paradise. Kaņcipuram Citampaṇa Muṉivar provides a beautiful treatment of the story in his Cuppiramaṇiyak Kaṭavuḷ Kṣēttirakkōvaip Pillaittamil:

Naccimuttu, a dancer filled with tender love performed the Kaḻakkunra Mālai an elegant work composed by a Vaiṣṇava one verse at a time, She went and sang before the lord ambrosia, milk mixed with sugar
up there on the mountain top,
One day a fearful storm beat down
and the lord that the dancer praised

appeared on his bull like a thousand crores of suns,
she grabbed the bull’s leg
the Vaiṣṇava grabbed hers
and off they went, carried along
to Kailāsa where they would live.

O Muruka at Vēdagiri, the Holy Eagle Mount of this tale,
please bang your little drum
so a man as poor as I can hear
the subtle sound of your favor, lord
Please bang your little drum!\(^{104}\)

Nāccimuttu first appears in the *Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟattu Ulā* as the ceremonial trumpets blare out the god’s approach, and the women call out in celebration:

He is coming, the very god who came to a courtesan’s courtyard desiring a song so her unceasing karma would ripen away...\(^{105}\)

It is a dramatic moment, when narrative layers converge and the women who are eagerly anticipating Śiva’s arrival describe a time when he once appeared before a woman and took her as his own.\(^{106}\) Nāccimuttu’s verse is never completed. Only its first half is preserved in texts like Antakakkavi’s, which embed this moment of poetic improvisation within their own lines. What the courtesan sang after Śiva appeared before her is not known. Nāccimuttu gained salvation when she sang words of her own, although she had sung the words of *Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟa Mālai* many times.

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\(^{104}\)Cirupaṟi Paruvam 2: உĉ¹கćள ĿாĉதாÖ நா»Òć¿ ெதÊďமவÈ ஒĉவÚ ணவÊபாÔய | உயÄகȹ þÊறமா ைலÁரபÀ த¿ÖனாÈ ஒÊàď¹ ĭாĉகÝைதயாû || சĉ¹கைர கலÀத பாலćதெமன

\(^{105}\)v. 109: ஜாைலயா || ÝைனćÉறÁ பா½IJாÊĎ ேவ½ŊாÄ கÕைக | மைனćÉற¿ ேதவÀதாÊ

\(^{106}\)A woman, perhaps, like themselves; though the *Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟattu Ulā* never specifies who the women are, carefully preserving their archetypal character, the parallel here is suggestive. On the question of identifying the women in *ulās* as prostitutes, see Chapter Six, p. 202.
The act of performance is the key, and it is quite fitting in this regard that the Vaiṣṇava author of *Tirukkalukkunra Mālai* reaches Kailāsa only through the courtesan herself: he is worthy, the myth intimates, but requires the mediation of the woman who has brought his text to life.

The verse is left for the audience to finish, inspired to the creative act by the joy that is held to flow from Śiva’s presence. Half-finished verses left hanging, waiting for another poet to bring them to resolution, are common in the South Asian literary world, set as Nāccimuttu’s is within compelling stories about the circumstances of their production. And as Narayana Rao and Shulman have described in their study of such verses, much can change between the verse’s two halves. When one poet starts a verse and another finishes, as they argue, “between the two voices there is a creative, and tension-filled space—and it is in this space that the poem, and often the world, are transformed. The discontinuity allows movement, and often the elevation or the intensification of the poetic voice, which may also work its magic outside the verse.”

Nāccimuttu brings Śiva forth through her song, a half-verse nested in an *ulā* that seeks to do the same.

**Songs of Poetic Desire**

The women in Antakakkavi’s text know Nāccimuttu’s tale, referring to it when Śiva approaches, and they desire her experience for their own. Her tale provides a poetic stage, a mythic deed that the women can replicate through their own poetic song. The ability to craft such words, moreover, comes with the experience of age. Śiva passes by the younger women in the poem without so much as a glance, but the older women in this poem gain solace. The experienced woman (*terivai*), in fact, is directly compared to Nāccimuttu, “the woman who composed verses like honey,” as she calls out to the passing god. Śiva heeds her words, and presents her with a token that delivers her from her anguish:

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107 Narayana Rao and Shulman 1998: 162; see their sustained discussion of the paired poetic voices revealed in these texts, pp. 152–69.

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And while she spoke like the woman who composed verses like honey, saying “You won’t come back to this doe-eyed woman, so at least give me the blooming cassia that you wear,” He gave it, and they brought and gave it to her; and that delicate woman wore the garland with a lovely golden color, and released from the golden color upon her, she flourished once more.\textsuperscript{108}

The older women feel a depth of passion no less than younger women do, but they have the ability, conferred by experience, to articulate their desire with poetic words that make it active in the world. The result is a moment of union with Śiva that they hold in their hearts after he has left them.

The child (pētai), as is standard for an ulā, knows nothing of erotic desire, and her mothers—older women who understand their love for a god who will always continue on—strive to teach her how to keep him close:

“Jeweled woman, to sing to him or love him, to keep adorning both his feet, to reflect on him in solitude, to walk around him, to seek him, to behold him, to touch him and enjoy him, how is it possible, apart from the sweetness that dwells within?”\textsuperscript{109}

The women are asking the child, but Antakakkavi is also asking his audience, guiding them to see how his own work can bring the god into their hearts.

The poet also speaks of himself, inserting himself into the verses of his ulā just as he inserts himself into his tanippāṭal verses as an active figure in his narrated world.\textsuperscript{110} “The lord of Kaḻakkuṇram, who has taken us as slaves,” he sings; “the Veda Mountain, home of the lord who has made me his own”; “the god who suddenly takes us as his devotees”: Antakakkavi is there...
with the women he describes, bringing his audience into the narrated text with each careful use of the first person. The association is a complex one, and it is not a pure identification. Antakakkavi retains his own character when he aligns himself with the women who love the god, describing in one instance how Śiva “relieves my vice when I sing on the charming beds of bangled girls.” Yet he describes himself as a lover here, and a mature one who understands his passion, not a youth who does not.

Before the terivai sees Śiva in procession, she is praised by the vīrali, a female singer whose presence in Tamil poetry stretches back to caṅkam literature. The vīrali sings with the voice of the tradition in its entirety, in direct exclamations that are at once a female poet speaking to the terivai and Antakakkavi calling to his audience:

The fine singer praised the woman with lips like the bright coral tree many times, calling her long hair the pine forest,

The goose-like woman worshiped, saying, “Girl with bee-swarmed locks, will my love be clear, so the pure lord who delights in love will go there?”

The singer said, “Know that the lord with twisted locks will favor your subjection when he sees the holy desire that he loves!

Know that all the world says we will obtain him out in the open, a reward not even received in The Hall, we will obtain him on the Hill!

What’s more, know the certain pledge made in the song of the last verse, ‘Kalukkunram, the temple that makes passion!’

Know that this sphere of ten miles adores him, my lady, increasing the passion that the whole world adores!”

She finished, “You must arise!”

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111 v. 233 (கȹþÊĎைடயா ெனைமயÔைம | ĭா¾டாÊ); vv. 45–46 (கȹþÊĎைடயா ெனைமயÔைம | தெதÂைமயாறிகிளை); vv. 189–90 (கȹþÊĎைடயா ெனைமயÔைம | தெதÂைமயாறிகிளை).

112 v. 23–24; காமுரசயா வாரளகÀ தாசகனÂ | எÊனÁ பலகா.C ேம¿ÖனாÈ – ெகČºĭாெலனÁ ŏாÉàனாÈ – 278

113 That is, Śiva is being invited to roam through her hair.

114 Citamparam.

115 This is the refrain of Campantar’s patikam on Tirukkalukkonram, Tirumurai 1.103.

116 vv. 321–28: காமோமயாக்குாளைடயா | காமோமயாக்குாளைடயா | காமோமயாக்குாளைடயா | காமோமயாக்குாளைடயா | காமோமயாக்குாளைடயா | காமோ ஒன்றைடயா | காமோ ஒன்றைடயா | காமோ ஒன்றைடயா | காமோ ஒன்றைடயா | காமோ ஒன்றைடயா | காமோ ஒன்றைடயா | காமோ ஒன்றைடயா |
“Arise,” Antakakkavi calls to his audience; Śiva will give his favor “when he sees the holy desire that he loves!” The Śaiva poets of old—Campantar in this passage—have promised it of this very place. He gathers the circle of Śiva worshipers through his call, setting the passion of the women in his ulā before them. Allegory is not his aim; the listener is asked to follow his lead and move towards the inner transformation, the “sweetness within.”

An Ulā to Move Words and Hearts

This is a text that is what it represents, creating a procession of Śiva towards listeners’ hearts by describing a procession through its words. Śiva is the source, and Śiva is the goal. The metrical form of antāti verse, impelling each phrase to the next, moves readers along with the god. The motion is circular and unending, as a community is enacted and reforged through the expression of performed text.

Antakakkavi calls language to its limits to express this doubled nature, employing śleṣa to bind the beginning of the journey to the end. The child (pētai) asks her mothers who Śiva is as he approaches in parade, and is given the answer “Karappukattī” (“Sugarcane”), one of his names at Tirukkalukkuṇram. The child sees, but thinks only of sugarcane itself; she understands, but not fully.

She sees the ancient one with a crown of matted locks the color of bright coral, and says, “Please tell me who he is!”

“Look at Sweet Sugarcane, bound to greatness,
Look at the piece of sugarcane, nicely pressed,
proper for his side which is made of the goddess,
it is right that its juice is condensed by a woman,

See p. 263.
See how the one who bent his heavy bow of pure sugarcane was killed,

\frac{\text{See how the pure, sweet thick body of the sugarcane available was destroyed,}}{\text{Look at what has passed beyond the harmful crime,}}\frac{\text{look at the fine leftover remains,}}{\text{Girl with the lightning waist,}}\frac{\text{look at how puzzled Mannmathan’s body withers up due to enmity,}}{\text{look at the pot of sweet liquid dry up, stirred until it is transformed,}}\frac{\text{see how he passes beyond measure when you describe him,}}{\text{see how it almost entirely surpasses any standard of flavor,}}\frac{\text{See how his throat bears the poison that emerged,}}{\text{See how it was made where it grew, in a place with a sugarcane press,}}\frac{\text{Look, the chariot is the sea-girt earth itself,}}{\text{Look, the flavor truly equals the sugarcane sea,}}\frac{\text{Look at the excellent state of the master with eight hands, who is perfect,}}{\text{Look at its many uses, eightfold when thickened into syrup,}}\frac{\text{Look, lady, at the consummation of heartfelt dance,}}{\text{Look, lady, at how it is reckoned with weights and scales,}}\frac{\text{Look at him surrounded by the hoods of the serpent king,}}{\text{look at it surrounded by gunny sacks for the lord of the Mountain,}}\frac{\text{Worship, young lady,} \text{ the mothers explained with truthful words,}}{\text{“Is the jaggery coming on the chariot here for poor little me,}}\frac{\text{so I can take a bit and eat it from my hand?” the lovely girl asked…}}{\text{The child understands one half of the whole, yearning only for the taste of sugarcane. Her mothers have offered the other half, describing to her the greatness of Śiva and the perfection of his deeds. Antakakkavi asks his audience to follow śleṣa’s bitextual embrace and see both sides as one.}}\frac{\text{Reading this text maps out a space for Śiva’s role in the world that is directly perceptible to}}{\text{}}\frac{\text{vv.} 169–77:}}{\text{}}
an audience with the necessary cultural knowledge. In the performative moment, the reader—perhaps the poet himself—presents the god to the world, reading the text to a crowd of appreciative listeners as he explains its difficult passages, answers the cascade of questions from erudite listeners, responds to their challenges, and accepts their acclaim. The command performance with patron in attendance would have taken place at Kāḻukkuṉṟam itself, on the occasion of the temple’s own festival of procession. It is possible, as well, that the saturation of the text’s performance with the elements of festive ritual goes even further, and the text of the ulā itself was carried around the temple in procession.

7.7 Maturity

The Tirukkāḻukkuṉṟattu Ulā builds over successive narrative peaks, which occur as each stage of womanhood passes on to the next. The final section, when the older woman (pērilampeṇ) beholds the god, draws together the elements developed in its earlier sections into a finale designed to overwhelm. Rich in years, the pērilampeṇ is the representative of every woman who has come before her. When the god overcomes her in procession, she succeeds at drawing him within her heart.

Demands for a Competent Readership

This passage asks more of its audience that what has come before. The work that Antakakkavi demands of his listeners, linking allusive references to proper referents, peaks along with every-

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119Hardy sees precisely this effect in the poetry of Nammālvār: “[Krṣṇa] is the song and is therefore experienced by the listening bhakta; the rasa-like sentiment engendered by the song is therefore the modality in which Krṣṇa can be comprehended.” (1983: 368)

120U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar describes such an celebration following the araṅkēṟram of two of Miṅāṭcicuntaram Pillai’s texts, Tirukkuṭantaippurāṇam (1866) and Tirupperuntuṟaippurāṇam (1874); see Cāminātaiyar 1933: 274ff; 1940: 192. I thank Sascha Ebeling for providing me with these references.
thing else as the text draws to a close. Here, let us trace how the themes discussed in this chapter merge in harmony as the text arrives at its endpoint. To briefly recapitulate the principal features of the mature ulā tradition exemplified by Antakakkavi’s text:121

• PRIMACY OF THE TEMPLE SITE The text maps out a topography of sanctity with Kaḻukkuṉṟam in the center. Other shrines fulfill crucial dimensions of Śiva’s presence in the world that Kaḻukkuṉṟam consummates.

• DIVINE ACTION AS DEPENDENT ON PLACE Kaḻukkuṉṟam is a nexus where the totality of Śiva’s mythic deeds converge with present action.

• RELIGIOUS CONFIDENCE The ulā takes a flourishing tradition of Tamil Śiva worship for granted, taking its hallmarks and the tales of its great saints as the foundations for its own narrative.

• TEXTUAL INSULARITY The cultural knowledge necessary to interpret the ulā demands an audience already versed in its style and themes. The ulā forges community by celebrating this insularity.

• EMBEDDED LITERARY REFERENCE The ulā is a poem that speaks of the poems of other poets, drawing upon Tamil Śaiva classics to develop its own vision.

• ENGAGED PARTICIPATION IN CREATING TEXT The interpretive work demanded of the ulā’s audience renews the Tamil Śaiva community on the occasion of its performance. The text in its entirety is the poem being enacted in the community (including such lasting forms as written commentary).

121This list draws inspiration from the features of Iraṭṭaiyar’s Tillaikkalampakam explored in Shulman 2004: 158–60.
• **Phonic Overload of Narrative**  Play with music, sound, and troped phonic effects are inseparable from the message being conveyed. Distanced from its Tamil sounds (as in a translation), a verse loses some of its vitality.

• **Narrated Aligns with Narration**  What the text is saying is also what it is doing. It is poetry sung by a poet about poets who sing poetry, and all are expressing their love for Śiva with heightened words that are meant to draw him near.

• **Questioning Perception**  What the women feel, what they believe they are experiencing, is thrown continually into question through voiced doubts and inquiries, mistaken acts of reference, and speculative homologies.

• **Union with Śiva Through Poetic Speech**  Poetry is capable of expressing the instinctive, private experience of passion for the god in a way that speaks to shared experience. It affect the world beyond the individual, and bring the god to the poet.

• **Performance is Procession**  The performance of the ulā itself creates a procession, sending Śiva to the audience, and creating—if successful—an experience within listeners that is guided by the experiences of the women in the narrative.

The action begins with the pērilampen surrounded by singers and dancers. She questions what music really is, and lays out a complex series of associations that equate poetic song with Śiva himself:

Dancers and female singers came and bowed before her, surrounding her as they sang all the while;

"Entering both of Hara’s ears, hoisting firewood on his matted locks, bearing the palm-leaf letter to give to the Cēra,\(^{122}\)

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\(^{122}\)"Entering both of Hara’s ears” refers to the music of the Gandharvas; “hoisting firewood on his matted locks” is
Rāvana, who wields a cruel sword, once sang the Vedas to receive a boon, and Nārada danced before him in heaven, collecting ambrosia for the light that rules us and the goddess of the ancient kadamba grove, who keeps a lute at hand,

opening the northern wall of Tiruvārūr at midnight out of love, sitting under the shade of a banyan tree that pleasantly sways,

he is really the one like music, when you think about it deeply,” she says, resisting the songs that people like them have sung about her every day...  

The allusions to myth come quickly as the pērilampen throws song into question, sensing that the union of word and sound is deeply linked to Śiva. Experience is challenged, the pērilampen’s active engagement with the myths of the past (corresponding to the work an audience must do to interpret the verses) reveals the divine nature behind the song she is hearing, and the god is associated to performed text. Next, she brings the mythic past into the present, likening the dance being performed for her to “the dance to the rhythm of song” of Śiva himself, and associating various aspects of her environment with references to the hallowed actions of great Śaiva devotees, mostly drawn from the sixty-three nāyaṉmār:

and she starts to praise the dance of the artists performing before her as the dance to the rhythm of song performed by the True Being of the Kali Age, She praises the flute of humble bamboo as the flute at the mouth of Āṉāyar long ago,  

and she starts to praise the dance of the artists performing before her as the dance to the rhythm of song performed by the True Being of the Kali Age,

She praises the flute of humble bamboo as the flute at the mouth of Āṉāyar long ago,

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123 The “ancient kadamba grove” is the goddess’s antaḥpurasthala in Maturai.  
124 “Opening the wall” refers to Vanmīkanātar, a form of Śiva who performs this deed for Īlakaṇṭhayāḻppāṇa Nāyaṉār, the last one to know the paṇ system in full, in order to hear his music; “sitting under the banyan tree” refers to Śiva as the musician Vīṇādakṣiṇāmūrti.  
125 vv. 362–68: தாÇÀĄ || வĉபா ÔáயÄ வÚÛயÄ தÉĒÇÀ | ÖĉபாĂ பாĂÂŏாெதÅலாÂ – அரáĉகா || இதàயĄÂ ேவÕÝற ேகÉàயĄ¼ ேசரÉþ¹ | ĐàயதÊ Ŏாைலதர¹ ĭா¾டĄċ – பாÖÚரா || ஆëÄ வடĆÛைச யÊபாÉ àறÀதĄċ | ஏëÄ வட×ழÉç ெழÃÖயĄÂ – ஆராÚÊ || இÊனவÄ çதெமÊ ேற¿Ö தைனÖனć | அÊனவÄ பாĂதைல ய¼ĀவாÈ ।  
126 Āṉāya Nāyaṉār, who expressed his devotion to Śiva through the music of his flute while he herded cows.
When her maids comb her beautiful hair, she happily speaks of the garlanded hair that Māṇakkañcāṟaṉ gave,127

When she discusses the cruel eye of fate she has pity, saying that it is really the left eye of Kaṇṇappaṉ,128

When she wants hot food, she calls it the fine work of the woman who cooked sprouts, of the woman who cooked pastries, and the woman who killed and cooked her child,129

When she plays in the water of the tank with her lissome friends, she honors the beautiful Pacupati from the south,130

When she desires gold, she praises Naraciṅkamuṉaiṉ, when she sees golden paddy, she praises fearless Itaṅkaḻi,131

When she sees a golden lamp, she sings in great praise to Kaliyāṉ, Naminanti, and Kaṇampullaṉ for their devoted service,132

When she plays in the water of the tank with her lissome friends, she honors the beautiful Pacupati from the south,130

When she desires gold, she praises Naraciṅkamuṉaiṉ, when she sees golden paddy, she praises fearless Itaṅkaḻi,131

When she sees a golden lamp, she sings in great praise to Kaliyāṉ, Naminanti, and Kaṇampullaṉ for their devoted service,132

When she picks clustered flowers buzzing with bees, she craves flower garlands made by the hands of Murukaṉ and Kaṇanātaṉ,133

When she sees smoke with pure fragrance, she honors Kalaiyāṉ, when she sees clothes, she honors stylish Nēcaṉ,134

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127 Māṇakkañcāṟaṉ Nayāṉār gave his daughter’s braid to serve as a śikha for Śiva, who had come in the form of an ascetic and asked for it on the eve of her wedding.

128 Kaṇṇappa Nayāṉār tore out his own eye to offer it to Śiva atop Kāḷatti (Kālahasti) Mountain after he saw the god bleeding from his eye socket, and prepared to repeat the act to staunch the subsequent flow of blood from the god’s other eye when Śiva stopped him and granted him liberation.

129 “The woman who cooked sprouts” is Iḷaiyāṅkuṭimāṟaṉ Nayāṉār’s wife, who cooked half-germinated seeds to feed Śiva in the guise of an old sage, despite the fact that Iḷaiyāṅkuṭimāṟaṉ’s crops had failed and they were starving; “the woman who cooked pastries” is Vanti, who gives the cakes she sells to Śiva in exchange for his work as a laborer; “the woman who killed and cooked her child” is Ciṟuttoṇṭa Nayāṉār’s wife.

130 Uruttira Pacupati (Rudra Paśupati) Nayāṉār, a temple priest who repeated the Rudra mantra each day in water up to his neck.

131 Naraciṅkamuṉaiṉ Nayāṉār was the munificent king of Tirukkuṭalūr, who loved the child Cuntarar and persuaded the boy’s parents to let him be Cuntarar’s foster-father, so that the boy was brought up as a prince. Itaṅkaḻi was king of Koṭumpāḷūr, who provided all the essentials for the Ārūr temple. After a thief was caught in his granary, he freed him once he learned that the thief’s motive was to feed Śaiva devotees.

132 Kaliyāṉ Nayāṉār was an oil merchant who exhausted his wealth by lighting hundreds of oil lamps at the Tyāgarāja temple at Tiruvorriyūr. He attempted to then use his own blood as lamp oil, but is stopped by a divine hand just as he started to cut his throat over the oil can. Naminanti Aṭikaḷ Nayāṉār was a temple priest from Emappēṟūr, who used water to light a lamp to worship Śiva at Tiruvorriyūr after he is refused oil by Jain vendors.

133 Muruka Nayāṉār was a temple priest from Tiruppukalūr who prepared garlands for Śiva in the temple while reciting the Śiva mantra. Appar and Campantar both stay at his ashram during their visits to the town, and he becomes a close follower of Campantar. Kaṇanātaṉ Nayāṉār was a temple priest from Ēmappēṟūr who prepared garlands and trained people to maintain the flower gardens there.

134 Kalaiyāṉ is Kuṅkiliyak Kalaya Nayāṉār, a temple priest from Tirukkaṭavūr, who performed daily offerings of kuṅkiliya incense to Śiva. Destitute after spending all his money on incense, his wife give him her tāli so that he
When she sees green mangos, she sings in memory of Tāyaṉ,
When she sees the sweet one, she sings for Pēyammai.¹³⁵
When there is radiant sandalwood she praises Mūrtti,
When there is sweet milk, she praises Taṇṭi...¹³⁶¹³⁷

As the notation required to make sense of this passage attests, understanding this text requires more than knowing its words. Listeners draw upon the history of Tamil Śaivism to make sense of this passage, and in so doing, align themselves with what the pērīḷampen is doing to make sense of her own experience.

¹³⁵Tāyaṉ is Arivāṭṭāya Nāyaṉār, a Vēḷāḷa from Kaṇamaṅkalam who offers his crops to Śiva. Poor harvests reduce him to poverty, yet he persists in offering his crops to the god, ultimately fainting and collapsing on the offerings, polluting them. He decides to kill himself since he can no longer make pure offerings, and prepares to cut his throat with his sickle when Śiva intervenes and tells him that even polluted gifts are welcome. Pēyammai is Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, who reduced herself to a wraith-like form and travelled to Kailāsa, where she was welcomed by Śiva.

¹³⁶¹³⁷Mūrtti Nāyaṉār was a merchant from Maturai who prepared sandalwood paste for the temple. After a Jain king seized the throne and forbade Śiva worship, preventing Mūrtti from obtaining the sandalwood he needed, he ground his own arm on the grinding stone to prepare the holy paste. The hostile king dies, and Mūrtti is chosen to rule the kingdom, restoring it to Śaivism. Taṇṭi is Caṇṭēca Nāyaṉār, who cut off his own father’s leg when his father tries to kick down the linga his son worships.

vv.368–380: தாÇÀĄ || வĉபா ÔáயÄ வÚÛயÄ தÉĒÇÀ | ÖĉபாĂ பாĂÂŏாெதÅலாÂ – அரáĉகா || இெவÆவா ßராவணÊćÊ ேவத¿ÖÉ பாÔயĄÂ | அÆவாá னாரதÊமா½ டாÔயĄÂ – ைகôைண || ஆÖ¹ கதÂபவன¿ தÂைமநÂைம யாčைடய | ŇாÖ¹ கćேத ĀரÁபĄċ – பாÖÚரா || ஆěÄ வட×ழÉç ெழÃÖயĄÂ – ஆய || வÔயளகº ŅாĄºகாÊ மான¹க¼ சாறÊ | ĭாÔயளகÁ ேவÚÉ þழைலĈ ேமனாளா னாயÄத | ஏëÄ வட×ழUEç ெழÃÖயĄÂ – ஆய || வÔ�ளகº ŅாĄºகாÊ மான¹க¼ சாறÊ | ĭாÔ�ளகÁ ேவÚÉ þழUEç ெழÃÖயĄÂ – ஆய || வÔயளகº ŅாĄºகாÊ மான¹க¼ சாறÊ | ĭாÔயளகÁ ேவÚÉ þழைலĈ ேமனாளா னாயÄத | ஏëÄ வட×ழÉç ெழÃÖயĄÂ – ஆய || வÔயளகº ŅாĄºகாÊ மான¹க¼ சாறÊ | ĭாÔ�ளகÁ ேவÚÉ þழUEç ெழÃÖயĄÂ – ஆய || வÔயளகº ŅாĄºகாÊ மான¹க¼ சாறÊ | ĭாÔயளகÁ ேவÚÉ þழைலĈ ேமனாளா னாயÄத | ஏëÄ வட×ழÉç ெழÃÖயĄÂ – ஆய || வÔ�ளகº ŅாĄºகாÊ மான¹க¼ சாறÊ | ĭாÔயளகÁ ேவÚÉ þழUEç ெழÃÖயĄÂ – ஆய || வÔயளகº ŅாĄºகாÊ மான¹க¼ சாறÊ | ĭாÔ�ளகÁ ேவÚÉ þழைலĈ ேமனாளா னாயÄத | ஏëÄ வட×ழÉç ெழÃÖயĄÂ – ஆய || வÔ�ளகº ŅாĄºகாÊ மான¹க¼ சாறÊ | ĭாÔ�ளகÁ ேவÚÉ þழUEç ெழÃÖயĄÂ – ஆய || வÔ�ளகº ŅாĄºகாÊ மான¹க¼ சாறÊ | ĭாÔயளகÁ ேவÚÉ þழைலĈ யறெமÊď  – பாĂதைல ய¼ĀவாÈ – ćÊனÔ¹þ  – க¾ăளÄ Đ¿Ąº கÜĈக¿Ą | ெப½டாÊ ćைளசைம¿தாÈ Ø½டைம¿தாÈ ØÈைளயĎ¿ | த½டாள½ Ĕேண யறெமÊď  – ப½ட¿Ą || ÙÊனா ĉடøÄ Ýைளயா½ டயĉºகாÅ | ெதÊனாÄ பĀபÖைய» – ķாÊனாÔÉ || ெச¼சாÜ பாĹÐனர Òºக ćைனயைன | அ¼சா ÝடºகÞைய யாதÛ¹þ  – ஆய || வÔயளகº ŅாĄºகாÊ மான¹க¼ சாறÊ | ĭாÔ�ளகÁ உடCAரºþ  – அĂÀĴாÞைலÁ || ெப½டாÊ ćைளசைம¿தாÈ Ø½டைம¿தாÈ ØÈைளயĎ¿ | த½டாள½ Ĕேண யறெமÊď  – பாĂதைல ய¼ĀவாÈ – ćÊனÔ¹þ  – க¾ăளÄ Đ¿Ąº கÜĈக¿Ą | ெப½டாÊ ćைளசைம¿தாÈ Ø½டைம¿தாÈ ØÈைளயĎ¿ | த½டாள½ Ĕேண யறெமÊď  – பாĂதைல ய¼ĀவாÈ – ćÊனÔ¹þ  – க¾ăளÄ Đ¿Ąº கÜĈக¿Ą | ெப½டாÊ ćைளசைம¿தாÈ Ø½டைம¿தாÈ ØÈைளயĎ¿ | த½டாள½ Ĕேண யறெமÊď  – பாĂதைல ய¼ĀவாÈ – ćÊனÔ¹þ  – க¾ăளÄ Đ¿Ąº கÜĈக¿Ą | ெப½டாÊ ćைளசைம¿தாÈ Ø½டைம¿தாÈ ØÈைளயĎ¿ | த½டாள½ Ĕேண யறெமÊď  – பாĂதைல ய¼ĀவாÈ – ćÊனÔ¹þ  – க¾ăளÄ Đ¿Ąº கÜĈக¿Ą | ெப½டாÊ ćைளசைம¿தாÈ Ø½டைம¿தாÈ ØÈைளயĎ¿ | த½டாள½ Ĕேண யறெமÊď  – பாĂதைல ய¼ĀவாÈ – ćÊனÔ¹þ  – க¾ăளÄ Đ¿Arial perpendicular text
Next, Antakakkavi concentrates attention on poetic song, its relationship to Śiva, and its power to draw the god forth, voicing through the traditional figure of the viṟali the question that lies at the very heart of this text:

And while this lovely goddess passed the time in songs like these, resting on a golden seat in a place she enjoys, 

the singer sang in the cevvaḻi mode, crying out to know what pure Tamil song would make the lord who hid from Nampi come?\textsuperscript{138}

This is the poet’s art, and Antakakkavi crafts words aimed at drawing Śiva close. He uses grammar to accentuate the moment, inserting one of the text’s rare conjugated verbs, ētiṉāḷ (“sang”), when the viṟali calls out the pivotal question. The pērilampen answers by citing a suggestive pair of poets. First she turns to Māṇikkavācakar, whose Tiruvācakam represents for many Tamil Śaivas the height of touching devotional verse. “You revealed yourself,” the pērilampen sings, beginning the phrase that concludes each of Tiruvācakam’s verses on the Vulture Mountain: “You revealed yourself right there in Kaḻakkuṉṟam” (“kāṭṭiṉāy kaḻakkuṉṟile”). Second, she cites Nāccimuttu the courtesan.

And the impassioned woman said, “Is there any song except for Tiruvācakam, perceived by the man who sang ‘you revealed yourself’?\textsuperscript{139}

Are there any other words except for the words of the desirous woman who asked, ‘won’t you come to the courtyard and stand before me?’\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{138} vv. 380–82:

\textsuperscript{139} vv. 382–384:

\textsuperscript{140} The refrain of Tiruvācakam’s thirtieth patikam.
The *periḷampen* then makes the identification of Tamil literature and Tamil poets with the divine, and immediately plunges into a surge of passion for Śiva as his grand procession arrives:

And when on that day she recognized the divinity of those who know the ancient Tamil texts, and also of the poets,

She said, “Sing, jeweled lady,” and the singer bowed, then played on a well-tuned lute, raining drops of fresh honey,

The flowing stream from her two wide eyes never stopped, and poured over the nipples of her curved breasts, babbled words came to her mouth, she glowed with sweat, and as her heart began to tremble,

The broad war drum roared, the ringing trumpets and a host of conches in raised hands blared,

The whole world cried out, “Is he here, Hara, Śiva, Śaṅkara?” and the dark god and the unborn god pressed their lovely hands in worship,

A rain of flowers from the gods, a rain of eyes from devotees, and a rain of arrows from the warring king all vied with one another,

The soft white chowry, the parasol, and the banner of the bull rose high in the sea of the chariots of the gods, and the lord of crores of Rudras on parade, the supreme lord of Nandīn, the lord of the vultures’ Veda Mountain,

the dancer at holy Tillai appeared on the street, the crowned lord whose foot jingles with a noise in the dance that calls me...\(^{141}\)

Antakakkavi’s use of the first person in the last verse of the passage is just as striking, as he, and with him his audience, join the text, prompted by the rhythmic cadence of Śiva’s own dance.

A Call to Lived Poetry

The woman rises and worships, just as those listening to the text at Tirukkalukkunram would themselves go on to do during the festival occasion. Her passion sings forth in poetry, as she aligns the emblematic flowers of various Śaiva shrines in the Tamil country with the flower arrows of Kāma that are overcoming her, each more powerful than the last. All that she might hear that would torment her, she declares, would heal her if she knew it belonged to Śiva:

And the beauty who had been receiving song hurried out with all her friends, fell before the true lord without lies and worshiped,

“Noble lord, sinless one, lord of the Śruti Mountain, bearing wreaths of serpents, lord of the maiden from the golden mountain,

I won’t change my mind even if angry Kāma shoots no arrows elsewhere, but takes an Aśoka flower from your Veda Mountain and turns his rage on me,

I won’t worry if he shoots a lotus from your Nandi Tirtham instead of cruelly shooting a sharpened lotus from another world,

I won’t lose my life if he shoots a bright blue lily from a spring on your mountain instead of another cool lily,

I won’t collapse if he shoots a mango blossom growing in your home in Ēkampam instead of a mango blossom in a beautiful garden,

I won’t be afraid if he shoots a jasmine blossom from your home in Tirumullaiyil instead of the lovely jasmine that brings delusion,

I won’t be lovesick if a bamboo flute from Nelvēli or Pācūr blows instead of a new flute from jasmine fields where cows roam,

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142 Amarakośa, appended verses following 1.1.27: “The five arrows of the five-arrowed god are lotus, aśoka, mango, jasmine, and blue lily; the five arrows of Kāma are named Intoxication, Burning, Wilting, Paralysis, and Unconsciousness.”

143 A tīrtha adjoining Tirukkalukkunram, north of the Bhaktavatsala temple at the base of the hill.

144 Campāti Tīrtham at Tirukkalukkuṉram.

145 Ēkāmaparam, in Kāncipuram.

146 A holy site in northern Toṇṭaināṭu.

147 Towns where Śiva appeared at the the base of a bamboo tree; see v. 294.
I won’t suffer if the milk ocean, which was your kitchen, roars instead of the surging blue sea,
I will not burn if the approaching bells from your herd of bulls rings, instead of the bells of a herd of cows,
If you will not speak to me even in that way and cure me, there will be no life in this soul,” she said.\textsuperscript{148}

The beauty of her words, the craft of their poetic expression, and the purity of her passion end in fulfillment, as the god takes her as his own. Antakakkavi then expands this intensely private moment of apotheosis outward, covering the entirety of the Tamil country as grounded in the god’s foremost shrines. He dissolves the intensity of the \textit{pērilampeṉ}’s salvation back over the land that his words have filled with Śiva’s presence.

While Vēḷ and the others feared, he possessed this fine woman, showing favor to her from the corner of his eye.

Spread out down the long street, this is how the seven kinds of women worshiped the lord of Tiruviṭaimaratū, lord of Cōṇai, lord of Corṟuttuṟai, lord of Arattuṟai, lord of Kōṇai, lord of Taṇṭalai, lord of Kōljili, lord of Tōṇi, lord of Kacci, lord of Kāci, lord of Kāḷatti, the lord of Kaḻukkuṉṟam who went in procession.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{148}vv.394–405: \textit{பாÔய || சதயÅ ÝைரÀĄ தமŒாĂ ķாÃயாத | ஆமÃயÊ àĉćÊனÄ ôÇÀெதČÀதாÈ – \ஐயா || அனகா ĀĉÖநகா வாரÁ பனகா | கனகா சலமடÀைத காÀதா – ċáகாமÊ || மவĎĴாடா ĄÊĀĉÖ ெவÉØ லŇாெகĂ¿Ą | மாĎĴாĂ¿ தாலàċ மாàேலÊ – வ¾காÝÉ || Ēதமலைர» įாÛயாĄÊ ேனகÂப | சாதமலÄįாÛÀதாÉ றாÇÐேலÊ – வ¾கைழ ĚதாĄÊ பாĒÄெநÅ ேவÜÚÊ | வ¾கைழ ĚÖனாÊ ெமÃŇாேரÊ – ķாºÐய || îலாÞ யாராĄ ×ÊமைடÁ பÈßெயď | பாலாÞ யாÄ¿தாÉ பĉவேரÊ – காÜ» || ĀரÝ மÕĹாÜயா ேதÉĎ¿ ĴாþÖ | ÝரÝ மÕĹாÜ¿தாÅ ெவÂேபÊ – பÛகÛ¿ || ÖÆவைக ேயď ெமன¹þÁ பÕ¿ÖைலேயÅ | உÃவைக ÚÅைல ĈÚĹெகÊறாÈ}

\textsuperscript{149}vv.405–09: \textit{எÃவைகÚÊ || இவč Øறċ ெவĉவÁ ெபĉமகைள | ஆčº கைட¹க ணĉÈெசÃதாÊ – \িč || ஆதĉவ¿ Öைனய ÖறÙற¼Ò ேயČ | பĉவ¿ தவĉ பரவ – மĉத¿தாÊ || ŇாைணயாÊ įாÉĎ¿ Ąைறயா னர¿ĄைறயாÊ | ŅாைணயாÊ ற¾டைலயாÊ ŅாßÜயாÊ – ŌாÕயாÊ || க»ÒயாÊ காÒயாÊ, காள¿Ö யாÊகȹþÊ | Ď»ÒயாÊ ŏாÀதா ďலா}
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

True, they did give thanks, but how passive it was, how sluggish, how ungrateful a thanksgiving! This time, as always, people fell on their faces when the procession drove by, but how could it ever compare to the old falling? In the old days, my friend, it used to be a real falling—sinking to the point of losing oneself, falling into dust, into ashes, into a shivering, quivering fit on the ground, hands reaching out and beseeching mercy. And now? Sure, they fell, but it was such an unanimated falling, so sleepy, as if imposed on them, as if done only for the sake of peace—slow, lazy, simply negative. Yes, they were falling negatively, awkwardly, grimacing. It seemed to me that, even as their bodies fell, deep down they were standing.

—A courtier describes the fall of Haile Selassie I, Ryszard Kapuściński’s THE EMPEROR

Ulās are fictions written to have real effects. They envision, through a narrative of heroic procession and feminine desire, the consummation of an order that does not require the stern discipline of war that the procession mirrors. But things can be otherwise, and the landscapes of power these texts uphold have never been free from challenge. The Cōḷas faded from view little more than a century after the reign of the kings Oṭṭakkūttar praised in his Mūvar Ulā, and Tamil Śaivism has always had its rivals. In most ways, we cannot know how these poems were

1Kapuściński 1983: 118-119.
embraced, disputed, enjoyed, or ignored, since almost nothing remains for us to understand how they shaped the subjective realities of those who knew them. What does remain is a genealogy of texts. The world of Tamil poetry, with its own principles for a gendered topology of land and history, proved rich soil for a hero on procession who could change the world as he overwhelmed women with his beauty. The sheer length of the _ulā_ genre’s history, the number of times its core themes have been reworked to make the processional trope speak to an author’s own interests and time, and the ways that poets like Antakakkavi Virarākava Mutaliyār suffused their texts with a reverence for the genre’s literary past all give clear testimony to the power that the _ulā_ has held for Tamil and its speakers. The challenges they may have faced are no longer clear.

### 8.1 Who is Pulling the Chariots?

By nature, _ulās_ are elite texts. They champion dominant ideologies: Brahmanism, the Śaiva temples that were built to endure as religious and economic centers, and the rule of men whom the _ulās_ styled as gods. The nature of the truths they claimed, however, require elisions and silences, adaptations and distortions, to declare them timelessly sure. Such gambits leave textual traces that prove susceptible to question, offering other ways to read these texts and discern the points where their authors thought their narratives vulnerable. _Ulās_ are poems that seek to bring their readers to certain conclusions, yet because the triumphalist messages they offer demand an ideal world, the discord between the perfection of the text and the contingent paths of lived experience opens up the potential to talk back. As with any story, the trope of a hero in procession gives people valuable resources to compose a different ending.

_Ulā_ poetry develops its scenes of heroic glory by rendering a detailed world. The conches blare, the drums pound, the scent of incense drifts, and gold and gemstones sparkle in the sunlight as the procession rolls forward. Musicians play, singers raise their voices high, and priests
intone hymns as the grand beast bearing the hero aloft strides forward into the pressing crowds. When the narrative turns to the women who behold him, the sensorial imagery is just as intense. The audience is brought into the turns of a woman’s heart as she is overwhelmed with desire for the man passing by, into the experience of her inner transformation once the rest of the world has fallen away and she stands before him alone. As Oṭṭakkūṭtar’s praise of the Cōḷa kings glorified in his Mūvar Ulā makes clear, however, much must be left out of the narrative for the ulās to stage their performance of heroic power.² Given a style that is otherwise attentive to the most minute details, there are many blank spaces on the ulās’ expressive canvas.

A point worth considering, given the dissonance of a careful portrait that nonetheless leaves much of its context out, is that the poets had good reasons to depart from their characteristic eye for detail when portraying some of the elements in their texts. Take for example the hero’s seeming indifference to the spectacle occurring around him. In many cases, the hero of an ulā would indeed be impassive and emotionless because he is a statue, the image of a god. Whether or not believers see in this image a living deity, a statue carried in procession will not move. Yet the detachment of the parading hero flows from deeper reasons than this. As the ulā’s textual history suggests, royal processions and temple processions are structurally consistent, employing the same ritual symbolism to fashion their effects. A god in procession is figured royally, and when kings are glorified by ulās, their figurative identity as amśas (mortal shares) of the god Viśṇu is regularly stressed. The hero’s impassivity is a relational quality of affect. This bearing suggests more than an idealized show of detachment, though his surpassing distance from the world he rules is indeed always accented. It is also a form of refuge.

The intimate moment when an onlooking woman stands before the processing hero marks the constitution of a larger order. The hero is the condensed physical embodiment of the entire history of his lineage, enacting through his movement a succession of transformative deeds that

²See Chapter Six, pp. 221–224.
are held to bring goodness to the land. The woman is this land personified, responding to his overpowering presence by yielding up the depth of her fertility in a rush of desire. Her artistic pastimes, friends, language, adornments, and clothing fall away, and the protective refinements of culture that have kept the generative powers of rule in stable balance with her own natural fecundity collapse, leaving her exhausted, delirious, even close to death. Were it a war between armies, a ruler’s enemies would themselves be these women, dominated and stripped of self-determination as they are brought to realize their true place in the natural order of things. They will then flourish, this logic suggests, governed by a ruler with the radiant might to set their works to purpose in an ordered series of wills.

As the hero moves forward, he maps this cosmology of regal mastery onto the local territory marked by procession, ruling the terrain he governs through his control over rivals and nature. The land flourishes under its proper rule, as the āḷās regularly emphasize when they praise the quelling of discord and the control of water. Śiva destroys the Asuras’ ethereal triple city and brings the Ganges down from the heavens; the Cōḷa kings crush their foes and build channels for the Kāvēri River to water the fields of their homeland. Procession announces the order of things. The ritual drama peaks, and there is no one else there when the two stand before each other, no one else who could get in the way. The āḷās seek at every turn to make the danger of this intimate moment appear one-sided. the hero advances forward, unmoved and untouched, while the woman succumbs before him. In so doing, they leave other possibilities silent. If no one else is present before the expression of heroic might when it reaches its most intense expression, it is just as true that no one else is there to remedy catastrophe if things go wrong, and power is challenged at the moment of its foremost staging.

The moment of intimate encounter in an āḷā is never less than total because it is never actually fulfilled. Consummation is left suspended in the female heart, provoking a transformation in its own self-knowledge. What response could a processing hero make that could ever fully
acknowledge the depth of a woman’s giving in these texts? How could he demonstrate a perfect love, when the desire he faces is bound up with submission? The potential for disruption is always there if one of his actions falls short of an impossible perfection. If the act of love is answered, it finds completion, and this is a love that must never be finished. Ulās most often spoke to readers about their gods. The experience of loving a hero in procession, for these texts, is an experience of mystery, held in the privacy of self-understanding. “To seek him, to behold him, to touch him and enjoy him,” Antakakkavi sings, “how is it possible, apart from the sweetness that dwells within?”

A ruler in an ulā’s procession needs women to behold him; without them he is not a ruler. The moment of fulfillment thus creates the potential for transformation. The question of who these women are, and more tellingly, how others might choose to write them to be, is no idle one. There are good reasons why the ulā poets kept the women of their texts archetypal shells, reflective of a society’s cultured heights, yet lacking in complexity. They are characters used to fill a servile role, imbued with abstract qualities without fear that a woman’s own voice will rise up to say otherwise. The woman’s role in an ulā offers a position from which to read against the grain, but doing so pushes against the narrative its author has imposed. The fact that ulā poetry reduced a woman’s nature to such partial strokes clearly implies the patriarchy from which these texts emerged, and its ability to maintain certain silences.

Ulās erase more than they reveal. Effaced are the people too busy to watch, the ones who had no role in this display of power, or who might have laughed at the sight of it. No one blocks the processional road, or stages a rival event. This is, as Sundar Kaali has argued, an invasive discourse, where indifference, autonomy, and hostility are given no place to stand. Femininity, as he argues, is for ulās the prelude to submission. “The discursive feminization of the devotee-subject, in this way, prepares the ground for an invasion of the Lord’s procession into territories

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3Tirukkaḷukkuṟṟattu Ulā vv. 177–79.
hitherto untouched by his faith, subaltern mindscapes that have remained at the peripheries of elite discursive formations.” Yet the moment of invasion, with all of the symbolic elements of a ruling order maximally on display, places the authority of this order in a heightened moment of danger. When the entirety of a genealogy of unfailing mastery is set forth in the body of a living man, any challenge at all can scuttle the illusion. The merest shift in focus can change everything.

If, as the ulās maintain, intimacy to power opens the way to human fullness, being close also yields powers of its own. This is not a quandary new to ulā poetry, though the inflexibility of its ritual staging does open up many paths to resistance. When Vātsyāyana lays down the Kāmasūtra’s rules for the erotic life of men in power, he decrees,

> Kings and ministers of state do not enter into other men’s homes, for the whole populace sees what they do and imitates it. The three worlds watch the sun rise and so they too rise; then they watch the sun moving and they too start to act.

Therefore, because it is impossible and because they would be blamed, such men do nothing frivolous.

The very next sentence pulls away the curtain, for things are not so simple. “But when they cannot help doing it, they employ stratagems.” And a short while later, Vātsyāyana appraises his earlier dictum in a different light, and one far more self-interested in its motives:

> But the man in power should not enter another man’s home in this way. For when Abhira, the Kotta king, went to another man’s home, a washerman employed by the king’s brother killed him. And the superintendent of horses killed Jayasena the king of Varanasi.

It is not just about showing the world the proper way when the king stays at a distance.

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4 Kaali 1999: 152.
5 Kāmasūtra 5.5.1–3; translation by Doniger and Kakar 2002.
6 Kāmasūtra 5.5.28–29; translation by Doniger and Kakar 2002.
8.2 Staging Opposition

As Vātsyāyana’s satisfying disruption of his ideal indicates, the vulnerabilities of a totalizing power that is credited to an individual man have never been a secret. Authors knew the fragility of the processional trope that Tamil literature took for its own, and they have used it to undermine the order it asserts. This study draws to a close by looking at two moments, one old, one new, when others have thrown the dramatic staging of a hero in procession into crisis.

Kampan Portrays the Churning of the Seas

The first is drawn from the Rāmāyaṇa of Kampan, Irāmāvatāram. The great sage Durvāsa has just been given a garland blessed by the goddess Lakṣmī, and realizes that the gift marks his passage to heaven.

Thought he, “All the unthinkable penance I’ve done for this garland that crowned the gods’ queen!”
The fierce sage danced full with longing
then wrapped it around his own head.
“Deeds are gone,” he saw, “this is the path of liberation,”
and rejoicing, rejoicing, he attained the land of the gods.7

He is greeted by a magnificent sight, as Indra, king of the gods, approaches in procession before him.

A vast storming raincloud on a silver mountain
blossomed with a thousand bright red lotuses,
He shone on the elephant Airāvata
with a body so brilliant it seemed as if he held
the condensed light of the sun’s crimson rays,

Rambhā, Menakā, Tilottamā, and Urvaśī drew near him on the street

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7Pālakāṇṭam v. 478: துணல்லிய சுண்டாள் வரண்ட உள் வெளியர் | உள் வெளியர் மூழ்வர்கள் வரண்டாள் | உள் வெளியர் மூழ்வர்கள் வரண்டாள் | உள் வெளியர் மூழ்வர்கள் வரண்டாள்.
dancing, singing songs full of longing
with voices to make even cane sugar seem bitter
enriched by the anklets they wear on their feet,
flowerbuds in the quiver of the bodiless god
for him to rain down as arrows.

The chowries rolled in like waves, brushing him on both sides
as the moon’s thick rays sweep past a vast dark mountain,
and his supreme white parasol shone like the grand moon itself
full and unfading, alive with light as it soars up above.

The conches, cymbals, woodblocks, and pounding royal drums
made such a din, they engulfed the auspicious hymns,
and like the roar of the powerful ocean
the four Vedas thundered out to swallow up the world.
He beheld the majesty of the lord coming in procession
and his heart was struck with wonder.⁸

Kampan sets up the trope beautifully, but he is also crafting a tension that readers will already
have begun to sense. Something is awry, for this is no adoring woman or worshipper feminized to
accord with the narrative moment, but a peevish sage famously prone to explosions of anger. And
things indeed go wrong. Durvasa comes too close, pressing the god to acknowledge his reverence,
and Indra enforces distance.

In his joy, the sage beyond equal held up the lovely garland
to place it in Vāsava’s hand, but Indra took it with his goad
and draped it on the neck of Airāvata, a beast of sudden power.
With a trunk as thick as a palmyra tree,
the elephant snatched it up and ground it underfoot.⁹
An audience unacquainted with the centrality of the processional scene in Tamil literature might be unprepared for what will follow. But those who know the urahan’s ways, and recognize in the trope of a parading hero the moment when a heroic body enacts the order that nature is to follow, will see the danger ahead. Power has been drawn into question, and now it will be challenged.

As the great sage watched, the hot rage flowed from his eyes, and the gods feared the entire world would be reduced to ash. They quit their places and fled, the sun and moon stopped shining the eight directions went dark, all worlds spun out of true.

Smoke rose up with each breath, he gave a thin smile like the one Śiva wore when he shattered the fortress, his eyebrows arched high on his shining brow and the jets of flame that arose from his eyes were enough to stagger lightning. “Hear me,” he raged, “Śatamagha, so swollen with pride!

I was given that garland by the lady who won it a gift to cherish, given to her by the supreme goddess who reigns sweetly on her throne, the chest of the lord, lord of all beings, lord of the earth goddess, the incomparable lord of the Vedas!

I saw you just now in all your splendid beauty, and in my joy I offered this fragrant garland to you, but you disdained it! All your great treasures, and the riches that you alone have held will enter the sea and lie there hidden,” he raged, “and you will become feeble, you will suffer pain.”

The celestial women, the divine wishing trees, Surabhi with her ambrosial milk, his prancing steed, his rutting mountain of an elephant, and all the rest quit his retinue, leaving nothing of value behind and ran off in terror, to enter the sea and lie there hidden like the enemies of Kaṇṇaṉ, who lives in Veṇṇēy.

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10 Kampan here describes Śiva by referring to another moment when a world is destroyed and order remade, the god’s annihilation of the floating triple city of hostile asuras.
11 Surabhi is the kāmadhenu, the divine cow of plenty who manifests any object desired.
12 This is an important reference to Kampan’s patron, Caṭaiyappa of Tiruvenṇēynallūr (Veṇṇēy), here called by one of his honorific titles, Kaṇṇaṉ (Sanskrit “Kṛṣṇa”).
All the worlds suffered famine, from heaven on down because of the wrath of the furious sage.\textsuperscript{13}

The center is remade and Indra is brought low, humbled before a different voice that refuses to be silent. A new order will be forged, and one, as Durvāsa hints to Indra, that will have a different lord at its peak. The king of the gods rebuffed a garland that links Durvāsa to a higher power still, the “lord of all beings, lord of the earth goddess, the incomparable lord of the Vedas,” whom Kampanā glorifies in his text: Viṣṇu, who will ascend as Indra falls. The world now imperiled by the sage’s wrath, Indra and the other gods rush to Viṣṇu for sanctuary, and declare themselves his own. Viṣṇu responds with directions that will remake the world, bringing life-giving order out of chaos by churning the primal seas. In a well-known cosmogonic myth, the axial mountain Mandara is to be the churning pole, and the serpent who supports the earth, Vāsuki, the rope, as the gods and asuras whip the seas until the ambrosia of immortality appears.

Indra, who once clipped the wings of mountains, four-faced Brahma, and the rest of the gods approached the god with a mole on his chest the abode of Śrī who dwells in the red lotus.

The grandfather in the blossoming lotus and the other gods described what the furious sage had done through his curse, “We have no safe haven, we take your feet as our only refuge!” “Do not fear, do not fear, no need to be troubled,” said the god who measured out the worlds.

\textsuperscript{13}Pālakāṇṭam v. 484–89: செல்ல பார்வுரி மித்ருப்பு வெல்லுசோழ் காலம் | அருள் வெள்ளறு கருமண் வாழ்பகுதியின் எல்லாம் | தெளி வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் பெர்மேய் வாழ்பகுதியின் எல்லாம் | அருளும் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் தெளி | பெர்மேய் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் வாழ்பகுதியின் எல்லாம் | செல்ல பார்வுரி வெல்லுசோழ் காலம் | அருள் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் தெளி | பெர்மேய் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் வாழ்பகுதியின் எல்லாம் | செல்ல பார்வுரி வெல்லுசோழ் காலம் | அருள் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் தெளி | பெர்மேய் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் வாழ்பகுதியின் எல்லாம் | செல்ல பார்வுரி வெல்லுசோழ் காலம் | அருள் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் தெளி | பெர்மேய் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் வாழ்பகுதியின் எல்லாம் | செல்ல பார்வுரி வெல்லுசோழ் காலம் | அருள் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் தெளி | பெர்மேய் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் வாழ்பகுதியின் எல்லாம் | செல்ல பார்வுரி வெல்லுசோழ் காலம் | அருள் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் தெளி | பெர்மேய் வெள்ளறு மன்னரார் விதித்தின் வாழ்பகுதியின் எல்லாம்.
“Use Mandara as the churning pole, Vāsuki as the rope, and the full moon will be the balance weight. The gods and the Asuras, split into sides will take both end and grab hold of the rope, then add the herb, and churn the crashing sea so from the roiling waters, the ambrosia will emerge.

I too will come, so arise, be quick now, go,” he said, and as soon as the immortals received his favor they worshiped him and offered their praise, “We have nothing to fear,” they cried, “our hardship has ended!” and they trembled with an ecstasy that roused them to dance.

Kampan’s interpretation of this tale is especially successful because the poet has situated it so well. In a knowing turn, he takes Tamil’s foremost literary idiom for the maximal display of ruling power and turns it on its head, casting low the ruler of an outworn age so that Viṣṇu will rise exalted. The depth of his appreciation for the stylings of power, and his confidence that readers would know the weaknesses in its brittle veneer, let the procession stand forth as a decisive moment of change.

Cuntara Rāmacāmi Writes an End to the Travancore Kingdom

Cuntara Rāmacāmi (commonly rendered in English as Sundara Ramasamy) inaugurated a new era in Tamil writing with the publication of his novel Oru Puliyamarattin Katai (The Story of a Tamarind Tree) in 1966. The book’s meditations on the changing nature of a hometown through time, the shared experience of pastness, and the meaning of community amid struggle, enmity, and con-

\[14\] U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar, in his commentary, identifies this herb as amṛtavalli.

\[15\] Pālakāṇṭam v. 489–92: வா Ŏாĉ | ைசய ðÄÀÖĂº þÜசď¼ சĄćக¿ தவď | ெசÃய தாமைர¿ ÖĉமĎ மாÄபைன» ேசÄÀதாÄ || ெவ¼įாÊ மாćá ெவþßயாÅ ÝைளÀதைம ÝளÂØ¹ | குெச

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lict opened up a narrative breadth hitherto unseen in modern Tamil fiction. As the town’s past, articulated through remembered tales and their bonds with local places, is reshaped under the modernizing advance of bureaucratic authority, Rāmacāmi draws upon classic literary tropes to illuminate the town’s long history. Given ulā’s importance to Tamil literature, the author is able to draw upon a wealth of processional imagery when he depicts the rule of the Travancore princely state as it nears its end.

The story begins as the maharaja of Travancore prepares to visit the Kanyakumari seashore at southern tip of India, a processional tour that called for six months’ of preparation in the towns he would visit along the way.

Every street was repaired. The king often took ceremonial baths, so new tanks were dug in every place he stayed. Every tank was filled with fresh water. The day the maharaja arrived, every child in school would be given delicious treats, and every poor child would receive new clothes.

It was a mesmerizing sight, the maharaja arriving in a golden chariot, driven by six horses. The king would draw near, his diwan following behind him. The diwan’s chariot, however, would only have four horses, and his chariot was silver. Everyone in town watched no one but the maharaja. The diwan watched them in return.

The majaraja would pass by, hands pressed benevolently together in front of him, nodding most politely to each side. His hands were always together, his head was always nodding, until he was completely out of sight. Once the king had left, fights would break out in the crowds, as groups of people insisted that the king had looked at no one but them.16

As the procession nears town, and the people wait with eager anticipation, Rāmacāmi captures a scene that every ulā strives to capture: the sheer magnificence of the occasion, the thrill of the crowds, and the building anticipation. But nature, this time, does not acquiesce, and the spell is soon broken. The men in charge of preparing the town for the maharaja’s grand visit have forgotten to drain a stagnant tank of water that lies off in the distance, and a wild countryside has not been sufficiently tamed.

16Rāmacāmi 2003: 44.
The fireworks began at four o’clock. The flood of people stretched from Vadaseri all the way to Ithamozhi. Children, teenagers, old men, old women... the entire road seemed awash in silks and gold. If you told someone who had not seen it for themselves how many women, how many kinds of dresses, and how much gold and jewels were actually in that town, there is no way they would have believed it. And then the people from other towns started to file in! So many faces, so many jewels, so many smiles, so much brilliance, so incredible! In every eye along that street, so much desire! Eyes seemed to strain forward until they were ready to pop out and roll away.

The procession was approaching Meenakshipuram. It was so quiet that people could hear each other breathing.

The maharaja passed the Vadivamman temple. The temple bell rang. Standing in his chariot, the king pressed his hands together in front of him, his eyes alive with rapture.

Just then, a savage wind began to blow, getting stronger by the minute. It seemed to be choked with a strange, horrible smell. At first, no one could quite make it out. It did not take long for people to start turning to look at one another, their faces wincing in disgust.

The wind bore down even harder, whipping women’s saris hard across their faces. The decorations hanging from the storefronts fell down in a crumpled mess.

There was now no way that anyone could miss the nauseating stench brought in by the wind. It was as if every fish in the sea had washed up to rot on shore.

A small army of functionaries did everything they could think of to solve things. Bonfires of incense were set ablaze. The ritual fire was piled high, and stoked with fragrant resins. Despite it all, the only thing that thousands of noses smelled was that one nauseating stench.

The maharaja’s secretary, Sthanunatha Iyer, climbed down from his brass chariot and took more than a few local functionaries to task. But who can order the wind to stop?

Wanting to remain proper to the last, the maharaja struggled as best he could. He tried to keep a smile on his face, as if nothing at all was amiss. He looked out over everyone, and forced a laugh. But it was not long before the severity of his trial proved too much. In any case, his sense of smell was delicate, and he had never experienced anything such as this before. When even ordinary people who were constantly assaulted by bad smells couldn’t bear it, how could there be any hope for a lordly king?

Within a few moments his smile had failed him, and his face grew dark with wrath. His face contorted in an expression of utter tragedy, as though all of this horrid smell, drifting far and wide, had its source in his own face. After all, when he had first set out, two Brahmans had been summoned before him, as usual, and he had started only when the omens were right. Yet the Brahmans, who had left after divining the maharaja’s omens and receiving their payment, were now sitting in a quiet row of the choultry eating nice hot food, while it was quite clear that fate had not been so kind to the maharaja, now only halfway down the road and overcome with suffering.

“Drive, drive!” screamed the maharaja. The horses surged forward, quick as the wind. The maharaja had wanted to reach Suseendiram Palace by nine o’clock that night; he and his entourage were there by five.17

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17Rāmacāmi 2003: 45–46.
Gone are the Cōḷa kings praised in Oṭṭakkūttar’s Mūvar Ulā for controlling water; it is now water’s turn to answer. The winds which in the classical poems gently sweep the processional streets clean now reveal the fury of their unbridled power. The maharaja does exact retribution, for the tank is filled in to prevent any such future occurrence, but his is a fleeting triumph. The procession, as it always has, stands for far more than itself, and its ruin heralds a dark turn in the kingdom’s fortunes. Within a few years, the maharaja will lose his princely state to a new order instituted by British rule.

8.3 Moving Forward

The Tamil ulās are beautiful poems, which sparkle with the artistry of a tradition that cared deeply for language and its ways. They are filled with the emotion of writers who lived what they wrote. As is often true for texts of a former age, it can be difficult to reconcile an appreciation for the lasting genius that made them classics with a candid acknowledgement that the social order they praise left few people capable of participating in the deeds that shaped their world. There is much to admire in the ulās, and there is also ugliness. If the ulās can still speak to us today, it is because they express ideas that matter to our own lives and time. This is true for their darker side as well as for their charms. The poetry offers much to appreciate and enjoy; the bad is understood as such because it is still relevant. The procession of a heroic man who demands adoration has not yet met its end, but past imaginings of his conquests do reveal certain vulnerabilities. As Tamil authors have long seen, there are fragile planks on the stage that such a man ascends, which when pressed can open the way for new voices to be heard.
APPENDIX A

Muttoḷḷāyiram

As the preserved text now stands, Muttoḷḷāyiram has no established verse order. What follows is a translation of the Teṉṉintiya Caivaçittānta Nūṟpatippuk Kaḷakam (South India Śaiva Siddhānta Publishing Association) edition of 1958, with numbering given accordingly. Editors have differed on the inclusion of additional verses that they believe on lexical, grammatical, and stylistic grounds to be part of the original text, although they are not confirmed as Muttoḷḷāyiram verses by the anthology Puṟattiraṭṭu. Numbers in parentheses indicate the Puṟattiraṭṭu verse numbers of established verses. Numbers marked with an asterisk indicate verses which are not established as genuine, but which have been included in the translated edition. The editor does not state the principles of selection that were applied to these verses, nor in almost all cases their provenance, so there is scant basis from which to judge their authenticity. Some display theistic conceits, such as an identification of the Cōḷa king with Viṣṇu, that are not thematically consistent with established verses; others fit well. I have included them here so that others may judge for themselves.
In Praise of God

1 (1). He is the first
creating at the first
the enduring constellations, sun, and moon.
The world enclosed by rolling waves
calls, “Ātirai, Lord of Ātirai,”
even as the younger,
giving him a name
in its reverent delusion.

The Pāṇṭiya King

2 (1464). The song I sing, using lovely Tamil,
for Māraṇ,¹ his gleaming spear full of victory
    shining as it holds fast in advancing battle
is like the kaṭampa² flower offered in the day’s worship
to the unyielding youth who rides a peacock.

3 (1465). Like seeing the flowers appear
on the master of the bright-eyed white bull
though the chariot warrior³ had used them
to try and crown the red-eyed god,
the flowers that grace the crowns of each ruling king
appear at the feet of the Māraṇ
    his garland swarming with bees.

¹ A title of the Pāṇṭiya kings.
² Neolamarckia cadamba.
³ Arjuna.
4 (1466). When you were a cowherd
and you killed the horse with a flowing mane
danced the dance of the pots
and married the girl with lovely bracelets,
it was surely there.
But now, Southerner, chariot master,
king of Kūṭal and its clear waters,
where have you hidden the mole on your chest?

5 (1469). Pure gold in the earth
the threefold works of Tamil in the towns
white conches and pearls in the waters
elephants on the mountain slopes.
The chest of a garlanded king
on the honed spear of conquering Māṟaṇ.

6 (1470). With five heads set with precious gems
the roaming cobra dreads approaching thunder
and hides himself away.
As for the kings of this broad fine earth,
the furious spear of Māṟaṇ
glowing eyes, shoulders tall in war
even in their dreams.

7 (1472). Open your imposing doors, you enemy kings
unharness your elephants, let chariots rest
and your horses with silvery gaits run free.
When the moon is home in Uttarāṣāḍha
The Southerner, the warring king, lord of charioteers
will never enter battle.

\(^{4}\text{Maturai.}\)
8 (830). The land of the Southerner
    pears gleaming on his white parasol
is a fine place where
the fresh spawn of conches
the rounded buds of laurel trees
and spathes within the leafy shade
    of young areca palms
lie scattered like bright pearls.

9 (864). The Southerner’s home is a treacherous place
for all over Kūṭal, city of mansions
the ground is slick with mud
    kumkum and cool sandalwood
that women wipe off and flinging away
when quarreling with their men.

10 (1286). Why do the unblinking gods, with all their gold and jewels,
ever touch the earth with their perfect feet?
By order of the Southerner
who has taken the earth on his own proud shoulders,
the Guardian, with garland shining
beneath the charming beauty of his open parasol.

11 (1287). The parasol of Māṟaṇ
    wearing a garland of water lilies
rises like a full moon on the elephant’s back.
The kings of the earth come to him and gather round
fighting for room as they ask,
“Will you not take tribute, lord? Is that not fair?”

\[^5\text{Maturai.}\]
12 (1331). Māṟaṉ has a brilliant spear that is cruel in war
he burns with rage in battle,
when his war drum pounds
    crashing down like blinding thunder
kings run off like fleeing snakes
beyond the nearby hills where the wild cows range
their stomachs aflame with churning hunger.

13 (1380). Kings have come to challenge Māṟaṉ
  his rows of gleaming spears,
  the ropes snap from their elephants’ necks
as his horses surge forward
 rearing up on their hind legs,
and hooves become touchstones
kicking the fallen crowns
that lie everywhere before them.

14 (1390). The stylus is his tusk
the palm leaves are the trembling chests
of kings whose spears are burning with wrath.
The elephant of Māṟaṉ
  who holds a broad-leafed spear
writes, “the entire splendid world is ours!”

15 (1391). The Southerner with the beautiful garland
has a grand imposing elephant
and both of his tusks have their own line of work.
One for plowing the chest of his enemies,
one for smashing the walls of his unbending foes.
16 (1395). The size of a mountain
roaring like the sea
pouring rut like a storm cloud
rising up to fly like the wind,
death himself takes these hallmarks on loan
from the elephant of Māraṇ
our king with the dazzling spear.

17 (1396). Too ashamed to stand before their mates
with tusks shattered in the rush on enemy walls
the elephants of the Southerner
the king a with fiery blaze of a spear
hide them quite well
in the guts of other crowned kings.

18 (1430). The field of battle is filled with the dead
slain by the Southerner’s blade,
One look at the cruelly knitted brows
of those who fell, spears shining,
in the heat of fearsome war
and the jackals leap back in alarm
howling to mates who stand off in the distance.

19 (1433). Garlanded Vaḻuti⁶ looks at the battlefield
as the wives of his foes plunge into the fire
and he covers his eyes with his cape.
Elephant cows cry out in despair
mourning for all their dead mates
and his elephants keep their eyes closed.

⁶A title of the Pāṇṭiya king.
20 (1281). The land that does not heed the Southerner’s word has fallen into ruin, where kings lived joyfully in tall mansions wearing mimosa garlands of victory the cries now fall from owls and horrid ghouls.

21 (1282). When a king withholding what he must give in rightful tribute to Pañcavar\(^7\) whose deadly elephant is announced by drums his land will surely change. The cows go first the women are next and last of all the men from a land that is now haunted by a newborn brood of ghouls.

22 (1456). Seeing enemy kings yet standing their lips still curled eyes fixed on the target for their outthrust spears still cradled in their hands toppled in sleep against elephant couches, the garlanded Southerner stands under his banner feeling nothing but defeat.

23 (1457). There is a remedy that puts an end to the bloodied eyes of Māraṅ garland shining on his neck. The wives of kings who heat his spear to a blade of burning fire clutching his anklets, begging on the ground pushing their naive sons before him to worship.

\(^7\)A title of the Pāṇṭiya king.
24 (1528). The southern king who comes on a rutting elephant appeared in a dream and gave his love to me. I think—it was not clear. I stroked the bed with lily-soft fingers, and all I found was myself.

25 (1529). The blue lotus smells so lovely in the rain, is that its penance, in that fragrant pool standing in the water every day? What a reward it gains, chosen by Valūti with a cruel-tipped spear a galloping horse and a garland licked by bees.

26 (1530). We are women with no idea when we might win him so I’ll walk over the mothers who hold me close, to make love with the king of Maturai where mansions are caressed by rolling waves.

27 (1534). My wrists are graced with conch I wear the choicest pearls that fine oysters bear all pulled from his seas, my body is covered with sandalwood found on his tall hill, the Potiya Mountain of Māraṅ whose spear crushes kings yet my arms keep getting thinner, what can they still need?
28 (1535). If I stand before him without shame
   my virtue will be lost,
   If I do not look
   my bangles will slip from my wrists!
   When Vaḻuti appears on a mighty horse
   his garland alive with thirsty bees
   I see no way to end my own.

29 (1536). They may be as tempting as palmyra fruit
   swelling on the tall graceful palms,
   but what good is that to me?
   The Southerner
   whose elephants have piercing tusks
   has a chest smeared with cool sandal paste
   which my breasts have never plowed.

30 (1537). If I plunge in and bathe as I should
   they treat it like a scandal,
   and when I don’t
   they say I have something to hide.
   It all brings me so much pain,
   my friend with spearing eyes,
   these cool waters, this river Vaigai
   of Māṟaṉ, the master of fierce elephants.

31 (1538). She looked ready to begin the kūṭal game
   eyes closed, a drawn circle in the sand
   “Will I get to make love with Kūṭal’s lord,
   the king of the people of Kūṭal?
   Then let this circle join!”
   But how could she ever start
   perhaps to fail
   and know she never would.
32 (1540). Don’t tell him who I am
Don’t tell him my name
Don’t tell him my hometown
Don’t tell him who my mother is
None of it at all.
Tell the lord of the Tamils
whose elephant is never cool
the way I cannot sleep.

33 (1542). My mother says not to even look at him
Māṟañ, with a spear that burns with wrath
armies that take the land
and a garland that opens into bloom.
So tell me, my friend
your eyes like swords
bangles high upon your slender arms
has she always been this old?

34 (1543). And what about me?
Will I get to pound the capped pestle
grinding the grain in front of this shabby house
singing of his banner
singing of his chariot
singing of his crown
singing of his stranded pearls
Māṟañ, with a garland of fresh-picked buds?
That mother of mine
she’s got me under guard.
35 (1546). Yearning for the king of Kūṭal
   enclosed by lush coconut groves
my heart went to find him
hoping to make love.
My mother knows none of this
and keeps me safe, an empty cage,
like a hunter whose quail has long since flown.  

36 (1548). Mock the king with the rutting elephant
calling the Southerner far too young
and his sneering foes will lose their land.
But must I lose my skin’s fine tone
like a newly plucked bud of the sweet-smelling mango?
I worship his garlanded chest!

37 (1549). My eyes see waking life in the face of dreams
and I face my modesty in waking life,
if my eyes act like that
my dear with all your jewels,
will there ever be a time
when the eyes of the great Māṟaṉ look at me?

38 (1550). You may be my mother
with your garland of opening buds,
but even if it kills me
I won’t uncover my eyes!
Māṟaṉ came into my eyes last night
a hero armed with sword
making away with my bangles.

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This verse refers to the hunter’s practice of trapping a quail and then raising it as a caged bird. He will then set traps around the bird, whose cooing spurs other quail to approach in order to mate, so that they are snared in the traps. The first quail is saved and nurtured by the hunter; the others are eaten.
Right when my eyes closed in sleep, somehow Māṟaṉ, the king with the well-honed spear came and took my hand, then I came to and waking life came. I must have no good deeds to speak of the way I’ve even lost my dream.

My heart waits for word from the king of southern Koṟkai where the oyster weary from yielding its radiant pearls lies atop the tall sands of the crumbling shore waiting for the coming waves to return it to the sea.

You have to go, chill northern wind, to tell the righteous scepter and the full moon parasol of the king who kills his enemies in war that I have lost my bangles. For I love the king of the fine Potiyam Mountain where they cook rice over fires kindled with sandalwood logs.

Giving way to those who enter shrinking from those who leave hiding in shame from those who laugh in scorn, my heart went after the king of Kūṭal and now it waits like an arrow-struck doe on a riverbank crumbling beneath it.
43 (1560). I’m terrified, dear friend with sparkling jewels, 
it seems like sickness, the way it worsens on a birthday. 
That north wind comes 
its cold gales burn me 
when Māṟaṉ, when Vaḻuti 
on an elephant alive with bells 
does not come to join with me 
in these nights of mystery.

44 (1563). When I do not see Māṟaṉ 
who dominates his enemies in the heat of cruel war 
I have a thousand things to say, 
and when I do see him 
here I am with my inborn modesty! 
Could I even think to join him 
and tell him to give me his garlanded chest?

45 (1565). “Break soon now, dawn,” 
think those who haven’t joined with him, 
“Stay here, night, keep lasting,” 
think the ones who have. 
Māṟaṉ’s broad chest 
sandalwood bright 
a garland of fine mixed flowers 
favors some | arouses others⁹

⁹A paranomastic verse, in which the final line offers both meanings.
46 (1566). Shimmering pearls are not only found
born of the oysters
in the port of Koṟkai,
but in the eyes of women too
when they dream of Koṟkai’s lord
Māraṇ with the blood-drenched spear
his cool, sandalwood-sweared chest.

47 (1569). I felt sullen and he tried to soothe me
but there was no soothing me
and he grew sullen,
I tried to soothe him
but he would not be soothed.
There went the whole night
and no touch of Vaḻuti’s chest
graced with cooling sandal paste
and a fresh garland of honeyed flowers.

48 (1506). I’ve heard that even when you’ve lost all hope
dear friend with shining jewels
family comes through in the end
I’ve seen it for myself, it’s true.
The king of Vaigai’s people came
as his whorled conch shell blared
and my stack of conch shell bracelets heard
and stayed right on my wrists.
49 (1509). My mother thinks she must keep me safe and she ran to bolt the door locking me up in this sheltered house. How can I now repay the carpenter who drilled this hole in the door, so I can see the splendor of the great king Kaṟuṅṉōṅ?

50 (1510). Elephant with feet like drums ears like shields, a swaying trunk and a hanging open mouth, once you enter my people’s street with the one as red as cinnabar who wears a fragrant garland walk right by my window.

51 (1511). Now look, young elephant you’re a woman like me, though I cannot help but doubt it. When the king of Kūṭal rides in procession Māṟaṅ, whose long fine spear knows flesh you have no idea how to walk with gentle steps.

52 (1514). You leap forward on the battlefield, horse, but won’t you give me some help and walk slowly here at home? I too want the chance to worship the chest of Māṟaṅ his rutting elephant cruel and proud when I come to my door.
53 (1515). Should I bathe in it?
Should I take it as my crown?
Should I mix it as a stylish paint
and trace designs on myself with a flower-petal brush?
When Vaḻuti comes in a golden chariot
with a garland of flowers from the broad mountain slopes
his horse Kaṉavaṭṭam kicks up such blessed dust.

54 (1516). Like a lamp under a basket
lissome women do not reveal desire.
Yet when Vaḻuti sets forth in procession
wearing a flower garland
it blazes like fire on nearby mountain
at evening when the cows return,
spreading gossip that everyone will hear.

55 (1519). Māṟaṉ came down our pristine street
and stole the beauty of my arms
from me, who worshiped him!
Who can I see now
and make my grievance known
except for him, there’s none but him
guardian of Koṟkai
where waves from the dark sea roar.

56 (1521). His duty is to protect living souls
and my life is one among them.
So how is it right for Ceḻiyaṉ
whose righteous scepter flows with fame
to single out my life like this
like a mother who lets milk flow for one child
and water for another.
57 (1523). If he is the only ruler to spread his parasol and guard all earth beneath the sky, I am helpless, a woman all alone. What if Māṟaṉ does not protect me, who then would say a word?

58.* Two friends stood on the broad street with me in Maturai, Kūṭal with many mansions, and one of them said how much she liked the elephant’s golden forehead plate. What a good girl! The other said the elephant was just right for the gold forehead plate it wore, a girl to match her friend. But I am wicked, and savored the blessed garland of the Southerner whose spear has a brilliant blade as he rode on the elephant’s neck.

59.* The vicious king who took the goodness from the girl with the honeyed garland and will not give it back is no lord of Vañci. He is the king who follows the noble rule of the five great Tamil lands and never swerves from the path.

60.* My eyes have gazed on Valutī yet it’s my nice round arms that turned pale! It is like when a calf has roamed through the fields grazing on the black gram dal and the donkey gets its ears docked.
61.* Has it left to find him?
Is it coming back?
Or does it wait for a moment to win him hands on its delicate waist?
My heart is gone, striving to find Māṟaṇ
wearing a garland of bee-swarmed flowers
whose rutting elephants bellow in his courtyard.

The Cōḷa King

62 (1468). Mandara is its shaft
the emerald sky its palm-leaf cover
and the moon is its central disc,
the parasol of Kīḷḷi\(^{10}\)
victorious in war
gives shade to the whole world
encircled by the seas.

63.* I know it was there
the day you broke the lime tree,
my lord of the river country
where the water flows fresh
and the herons doze on paddy stacks
instead of taking to the trees
so show me how you’ve hidden
that mole you had on your chest.\(^{11}\)

\(^{10}\)A title of Cōḷa kings.
\(^{11}\)Identifying the Cōḷa king as a share of Viṣṇu, the mole refers to the mole of Kṛṣṇa’s chest. Nacciṅāṟkkinniyar cites this verse in his commentary on the Puṟattinai iyal section of Tolkappiyam, and Na. Cēturakunāṭaṇ considers it a Muttolḷāyiram verse.
64.* The king who is lord of the river country
and Māl with his tulasī garland
are distinguished through their actions.
The lord of the river country won the earth
by raising it up after driving off enemies,
while Māyavaṉ, the dark god
had to stretch out his hands and ask. 12

65 (831). In the land of King Kiḷli
who rides a fine elephant
the cries of the farmers, “Nāvalō Navall”
from high atop the paddy stacks,
directing the work when the day for harvest comes
are just like the cries of soldiers
from high atop their elephants.

66 (863). Evening is a wondrous time
when flower merchants have thrown aside
so many petals from trimmed blossoms
they overflow the street.
Morning dawns in Uṟantai
a home awash in beauty
for triumphant Vaḷavaṉ
like a rainbow fills the sky.

12 Another reference to the Cōḷa king as a share of Viṣṇu, this verse alludes to Vāmaṉa accepting atīthya water from Bali and requesting as much land as he could pace out in three steps.
67 (1288). You must wait, you kings,
there were kings who came here yesterday
to offer up their tribute
as their crowns came crashing down.
His perfect foot is wounded still
and the tender king of Uṟantai
gives no audience today.

68.* Great Vaḷavaṉ, lord of the river country
where sluices are blocked with sheaves of cut paddy
his broad hands are rolling clouds,¹³
has a horse as swift as the wind.
Its hooves are like touchstones
kicking at the crowns of kings
and grinding the gold on their chests in the dirt.

69.* The rutting elephant of Kiḷḷi
   whose shoulders bear the earth
has effaced in his fury
the white parasols of enemy kings.
The trembling moon must wonder
will it rush into the heavens?
For it stays there, waning on its own
up in the clear evening sky.

¹³That is, they give as liberally as the rainclouds.
70.*  Kiḷḷi with his honored spear
       feet dressed with long anklets
       wide hands like generous clouds
has a mountain with a hanging lip
and a trunk that’s wide and hollow.
When it stretches out its leg,
are those the thick links of its chain
or the holy cords around the necks
of women as timid as deer?\textsuperscript{14}

71 (1389).  Breaking down the iron doors
to grind them underfoot
then piercing through the fortress gates
    of great and mighty kings
and hoisting them up with his tusks.
The elephant of Kiḷḷi
    our king with fiercely burning spear
looks just like a ship set sail
out on a bitter sea.

72 (1392).  Tusks splintered from the rush on fortresses
where unruly kings hoisted their banners,
nails worn away from kicking off their crowns,
the elephant of Kiḷḷi
    with shoulders hard as rock
waits outside the gates,
ashamed to stand before his mate
with all these imperfections.

\textsuperscript{14}Na. Ėṭurakunāṭan identifies this as a \textit{Muttoḷḷāyiram} verse found in \textit{Yāpparuṅkalak Kārikai}; I have not been able
to locate it.
73 (1393). The elephant of Kiḷḷi
    the king of our city of Kōḷi
tramples Kāṇći with one foot,
lush Ujjain and its heaving waters
he tramples with another,
and with the third
he goes and tramples Īḻam.

74.* (1394) There goes the elephant of Kiḷḷi
    whose spear has a brilliant blade.
A flock of vultures croaks
the kites spread out in line
the jackals howl, racing in from far and wide,
and a ghoul wrapped in a garland
revels in her dance.

75.* Cracked heads, brains, fat, flesh, bones, and guts
are caught up in a swollen torrent of blood,
the ghouls crowd in to perform their great dance
on the battlefield where Kiḷḷi, victorious in war
routed the Karnāṭaka king.

76 (1432). Bowls of skull made from crowned kings
the butter made from brains
swollen guts will serve as wicks
for ghouls who want to light their lamps
on the battlefield once war is through
for the lord of the Cempīyaṉ line.
77 (1280). In the land where no reverence is paid
to Cempiyaṉ and his honor,
mothers put to flight give birth
on beds of dried out leaves,
where infants with their helpless legs
rosy and still wrinkled
sleep throughout the midnight hour
to the cries of hooting owls.

78.* The lord of the fertile land where the Poṉṉī flows
holds a spear in his hand that is the moon
and when it shines
the bangled hands, red from their largesse
of kings who have risen against him in war
tremble and fold together before it
a hundred thousand lotuses.

79.* Conquered by a warring spear
covered with abundant fame
held up by powerful, garlanded shoulders
protected by the discus, the harsh sharpened weapon
of the lord of the river country,
this is the world that red-eyed Māl
set under his single foot.

80.* The bands are fastened tightly
on the feet of the rutting beasts
of the lord of the blooming Kāviri
always filled with water, even when
no showers come from the roaring clouds.
The lotus feet of enemies
who rose against him in war
are fastened in their fetters.
81.* Once they have seen the face of Ceṇṇi, king of southern Uṟantai whose spear is honored in war the eyes of men who bow in need will never see another on this earth when hoping for reward.

82 (1473). The brahmans received gold and cows, the poets came away with elephants as stately as Mount Mandara. So why, when the moon is home in Revati, on the birthday of Kiḷḷi our lord whose spear has a brilliant blade must the spiders lose their homes?

83.* Taking so much wealth from mighty kings unhappy with their lot, and the crowding poor will always leave with offered gifts in hand, What a fortune, Ceṇṇi, king with a brightly glowing spear a sum that transcends reckoning.

84.* After cutting off parts of his own holy body to match the weight of a sheltering dove he climbed up on the scale. Heroic generosity Unfailing honor Heroic soldier’s courage? Natural for Ceṇṇi.
85 (1507). Throw open the doors, and we’ll worry later, 
the crime would be great if these girls died! 
Let them gaze at the lord of the Tamils 
king of the people of Uṟantai 
with a garland cool upon his chest.

86 (1512). Vaḷavaṉ rides atop you, elephant cow 
wearing a garland of long blue lilies 
yet you walk with no delicacy at all!
You have none of the ways of women here 
in the land where the Kāviri flows 
and the clouds look like long blue lilies.

87 (1513). The Cōḻa mounted his royal horse and rode in procession 
the leaves of his spear gleaming bright 
and women with fresh gold bangles watched. 
Every eye at the latticed windows stayed bound to him 
like carp sparkling in a dark net.

88 (1520). “My eyes saw him, my heart got caught up in him,” 
she said, “but my curves are what gets punished!” 
You see all of that fairness he shows 
when Vaḷavaṉ, lord of Uṟaiyūr 
come down the street in procession?
89 (1522). My friend, your mound as wide as a cobra’s hood, 
a king should take but one-sixth as his own 
so what can I do? 
Our king, lord of the river country, 
has seized my heart, my modesty, my virtue!

90 (1524). My eyes do not open to see him 
all throughout my dreams, 
my modesty keeps me from approaching him 
all throughout the day, 
and both condemn the righteous sceptre 
of the great king of Pukār, 
where fleets of ships cut the billowing sea.

91 (1525). He took my dress and off he went! 
Should I tell it all to his retinue 
when Killi, wearing a cool blossoming garland 
broad, generous hands raining elephant bulls and cows 
approaches on the broad street?

92 (1526). If Ceṇṇi, young prince Valavaṇ 
fragrant garland of blossoms from cool waters 
is really the protector of our home on earth, 
can the protector of our home on earth 
be a protector to me as evening falls 
when the flute is at the cowherd’s lips?
93 (1527). The drums announce his presence, the elephants come and there he is, wearing a swaying garland. I know they say that Kiḷḷi rules well, my friend but my jeweled bangle, so finely turned is slipping past each line on my fingers and that does not tell us the way of his righteous scepter is really all that straight.

94 (1531). Mother beats me with a stick, neighbors wound me with their gossip, all because of the king who rules this fertile land. Like the frog said to eat the tender coconut, here I am, blamed for what I never did.

95 (1533). When we quarrel, I turn my back when he holds me, I can’t look at him and when we make love, I see nothing at all. I’m so drunk with joy I can never seem to figure out how to see Vaḷavaṉ, whose fame endures, whose just scepter rules the earth.

96 1539. If you go south to Uṟantai young heron with red legs, I touch my hands to your feet and beg. Won’t you tell the lord of the Kāviri country where fish glitter in the water as they rub its fertile banks?

15 Misshapen tender coconuts are sometimes known as “frog-eaten,” or “frog-smelled.”
97 (1544). When I was at the age of babbled words my mother told me that when I married I would have the king of Kōḷi. It was a lie, it turns out now shimmering water in a mirage, burning heat drawing a deer in to drink.

98 (1545). She looked at the strong, beautiful arms of Cempiyaṉ, his garland swaying even though I warned her against it from where I stood off in the distance. For a young girl who has lost her health her body bleaching pale with desire words from my mouth are a fire kindled on water.

99 (1552). I won him in my dream, my friend as lovely as a garland, the young man from the flowing river country where tall coconut trees hold toddy in their spathes, Some reason for a quarrel arose we stayed apart I lost the chance for making love.

100 (1554). Modesty pulls me to one side but pleasure relents to the other my eyes ache for Kiḷḷi and his inviting arms. Midnight is here and my heart gets pushed back and forth like an ant trapped on a torch as it burns at both ends.
101 (1555). When you see him come, bold heart
make sure you are not shy!
Are the eyes of kings just wooden eyes?
Pray to the lord of the fine river country
with the tiger banner, shining with victory
worship so he knows
the depth of my caress.

102 (1561). Chilling winter wind
I thought you were a demon!
What, you think the women here
are subjects for your rule?
You must wait for that moment
when Kili
    swift horses for his chariot
    his elephant mad with rut
takes a pause in showing favor.

103 (1562). Don’t come near me, chilling wind!
The bee came here at midnight
massaging lotus and blue lily
in the Cōla land of Nalaṅkīlī
whose long spear creates dread,
those days are gone
and this harbor town is safe.
104.* I take my turn at the pestle, 
  thinking I will not think of the name of Kiḷḷi, 
    anklets on his feet 
    golden necklace on his chest 
What can I do? 
Nothing but the name of the lord of the river country 
  of Kōḻi with its flowing waters 
comes from my heart and falls from my lips.

105.* I looked at his feet and he was 
  the god the color of the deep dark sea, 
I looked at his body he was 
  the god who wears bright konṟai flowers, 
Then I looked at his head 
  and saw the ātti\textsuperscript{16} garland on his crown 
and knew he was Vaḷavaṉ, chariot warrior.

106.* My friend with the golden bangles, 
Kāma with his bee-strung bow 
  and Kiḷḷi the Cōḻa lord, victorious in battle 
each have a different hue. 
The son of the god with the discus is dark 
  and the son of the lord of Kōḻi 
could not be more fair.

107.* They worship the horse of Kiḷḷi 
  tall shoulders like a mountain 
and gentle women cry 
  but say otherwise to their friends. 
  “It’s all this dust that flies up 
when his troops come rushing past— 
it keeps getting in my eyes.”

\textsuperscript{16}Mountain ebony (\textit{bauhinia racemosa}).
The Cēra King

108 (1467). The earth overwhelms the heavens
brave lords like the stars above,
and like the moon that roams
throughout those stars,
there is Kōtai the Cēra
lord of the people of Kolli hill
which soars up to the sky.

109 (1471). From the bright spear that King Kōtai throws
his garland loose with open blooms
drifts the scent of sandalwood
and the reek of raw flesh.
On one side, honeybees twirl with their drones
on the other, little jackals romp in thanks.

110 (829). There is no distress in the land of King Kōtai
who wields a poisoned spear
except when red lilies bloom on flooded fields,
and the waterbirds
who fear this surging fire
draw in their nestlings
to the shelter of their wings.

17 A title of Cēra kings.
111 (862). Strong drinks are passed out to drinkers who scatter bright drops of liquor as they sweep off the froth with their hands. Fine towering elephants stomp past and here at home in Vañci the gardens are turned into mud.

112 (1285). Kings with elephant armies, Give your rightful tribute and thrive! Emblazon his curved bow on your solid high fort walls! Even the gods whose flowers never wither flourish when they trace Vāṉavaṉ’s bow across the sky.

113 (1388). The rutting elephant of Kōtai the king with fiery eyes is used to tearing down white parasols spread wide and decked with pearls to make the warring kings flee. Seeing no difference he stretches his trunk up to the moon.

114 (1431). On the battlefield of the fallen Pūliyan in their eyes lie kings wearing emeralds and jewels. Young jackals pull off their hands bite diamond bracelets, slipped shoulder bands and scream out in pain suffering from their wounds.

\[18\] A title of Cēra kings.
115 (1278).  Everywhere the earth lies scorched
bushes with cruel thorns grow thick
and the jackals gather from far and wide
once the fire has passed.
In the land of kings who fill Kōtai with rage
    with his bright-eyed rutting elephants
    with his shoulders that end hostility
and make his red eyes burn.

116 (1279).  Bermuda grass spreads back from its roots
bitter gourds grow everywhere
and the spider flowers bloom
no one would know it as home.
This land whose people heated the spear
    its leaves shining bright
of Kōtai, the king of Muciri’s people
who wears the garland of opening buds
in the aftermath of war.

117 (1508).  When Kōtai processes down the beautiful street
riding a chariot pulled by strong horses
as bees parade on the choice flowers of his garland
girls open the doors
mothers shut them fast
and the bolts through the hinges
are ground down to nothing.
118 (1517). Is it right, King of Māntai
chest broad as a mountain
spears arrayed in rows
so enemies will bow
to wrest away the beauty
from girls with stacked bangles
and make their mothers say
you show no even rule?

119 (1518). Do the women who see
Kōtai on his chariot,
horses swift before him
truly lose their beauty?
This paleness on my body
like flecks of pouring gold
a hundred thousand flaws?

120 (1532). All of you here in the village
who are like water and shade
in your enduring kindness,
bear me up so I can live!
My heart keeps burning
for Kōtai, the king of Pūḻi’s people
his rutting elephant eager for war.

121 (1541). My mother keeps my eyes from Kōtai
his army like the sea
she shuts our only door in vain.
She can shut it
dear friend with well-made jewels
but can she ever shut
the mouths of those
who keep linking me with him?
122 (1547). The lord of this fine land
Māntai, with its waters and palms
surrounded by laurel groves
surangi trees in blossom
stroked my body
in my dreams one night.
How do they all know?

123 (1553). I went to see King Kōtai
whose necklaces sway
with choice gems and fresh gold
but quickly shut the door.
My heart is modest,
it wavers from coming to going
like a beggar at a rich man’s door.

124 (1557). My heart has gone to see King Kōtai, friend,
with his garlands shaking
a fine gold necklace with choice gems
and his long and raging spear,
it must be standing at the tall gates
in the month of bitter cold,
covering itself with its hands.

125 (1564). “Let him come,
this lord of Coorg, this king of Vañci!”
said the girl with shining bangles
with a fight at the ready
as everyone around her knows.
Then she saw him
and forgot all complaints she had.
“He’s the thief who stole my virtue!”
“He’s the thief who wrecked my steady heart!”
On every path he goes
dear friend with lovely words,
does Kōtai, king of the Cēra line
always take so much blame?

If my mother placed me on the ritual grounds
sprinkled the blood of a black goat
and then bathed me
telling the demon who possesses me to leave,
would it really?
The disease that has taken the field of my heart for its own
is for Kōtai with a cruel and raging spear
who takes the field of victory in battle.

Even though he is a strict ruler
we have to speak of our grievance
to the lord of the people of Māntai
where fertile waters flow.
For, dear friend
fine tilaka on your lovely brow
that is the nature of things.

The god who rides a bull
and Vāṇavaṇ, fearless in cruel war
are equal in their power and their rule
but differ in one way.
The lord with an axe like death has three eyes
and the master Vāṇavaṇ only two.
130. Is this Indra?
He has only two eyes—
Is this the subtle lord who rides a bull?\textsuperscript{19}
There is no crescent moon—
Is this the lord with the rooster on his soaring banner?\textsuperscript{20}
He has but one face—
Know him as Kōtai,
this commanding lord.

\textsuperscript{19}Śiva, whose vehicle is the white bull Nandin.
\textsuperscript{20}Murukaṇ, whose flag has a rooster as its emblem.
Praise for the Hero

1. When he arose as the pillar of fire, blessed Māl and the four-faced god were mystified, unable to discern him,

2. The lord appeared without being born, sees without being seen, renounced his body without forsaking it,

3. He is profound without being immersed, as is his right, removed without having left, eminent without being exalted by deeds,

4. He understands without reading books of knowledge, he is subtle without being minute, close to all without being near to anyone,

5. As Hari, the beginning, he protects, as the unborn god he creates, as Hara he is the sure destroyer,

6. His appearance transcends the knowledge of the lofty gods whom he himself created according to his own design,
But to those who think of him ceaselessly, in whatever guise, he bestows his grace and appears within their hearts,

For whatever form in which he appears, our lord cannot be seen by anyone in any form other than his own,

As he abides in the lovely palace in Śiva’s city within the imperishable excellence of Śiva’s world,

The keen-eyed immortals crowd in his outer courtyard begging him, “Favor us by showing yourself before us,”

The Lord is Adorned

And there, while the goddess in the flower, the guileless Earth, the famous goddess¹ and the goddess of speech revered her,

The daughter of the Mountain King, Nyānakōḻuntu who gives good health adorned his bee-swarmed locks

With woodland flowers free from any flaw and one hundred thousand red lotuses from the banks of the Ganges,

She decked him with a garland fashioned by the irrepressible god of love and dusted him with wholesome fragrant powders,

Taking up cool sandalwood prepared by ladies skilled in their art she applied it to his worthy chest,

She clothed him in silk fresh with the scent of wish-giving trees and tied golden anklets on his feet,

She placed on his head a crown with a sparkling crest-jewel and on his forehead a shining plate bright with gems,

She graced his ears with sea-monster earrings made of unpierced rubies and taking up a necklace of large diamonds,

A fine necklace of huge pearls threaded with gold, and a shining victory garland, she wreathed his holy chest and it shimmered in their light,

¹Durgā.
She tied armbands around his eight mighty arms
and buckled on a belt that delights all who see,

She bound a waist-cord about him, placed bracelets on his hands
and adorned his body with elegant designs,

The Lord Comes Forth

To the sound of the Ṛg Veda chanted by the Vasus, he rose to his feet
and advanced through the gateway flanked by Nandin and sturdy Kālar,

The seven sages, whose glory is endless, their fame beyond measure
gave their blessings to the great one,

The twelve brilliant Ādityas sang their benediction
and deathless Agastya played on his lute,

Golden Agni burned incense
and Yama arrived, giving his praise with auspicious words,

Red-eyed Nirṛti held up the mirrors
and Varuṇa carried the jeweled pot of holy water,

The wind swept clean the processional route, good rains sprinkled it with water
and Soma, pure in fame, raised the parasol,

Īśāna, his fame renowned, came bearing the betel purse
and the Aśvins honored the Lord with chanted mantras,

The faithful Rudras gave their praises
as Kubera scattered rich treasure like flower petals,

Bathed in the waters of the Yamuna and the peaceful Ganges
the holy ghats fanned him with billowing chowries,

Out at the cardinal points, eight hooded cobras held up the lamps
and eight young, fearless elephants bowed to his feet,

The clouds in the visible sky became the chariot awning,
lightning the circled banners, and the thunder pounded as drums,
Tumbaru and Narada were delighted and began to sing while slim-waisted girls with willowy bodies danced all around,

As the celestials worshiped him, our lord ascended his mount the tall, young bull, its body a brilliant white,

And while a troop of devoted bhūtas stood watch he passed out beyond the seven holy gates.

Proud Murukāṇ rode before him on his peacock
And steadfast Indra rode on his elephant in the rear,

Riding on his faithful goose, unborn Brahma escorted him on the right and riding atop Garuḍa, whose shoulders are firmer than rock,

The immortal Māl rode with him on the left.
Five flower arrows at his left shoulder, soft sugarcane bow at his side,

Invested with those flower darts filled with pollen, for him to aim at lovely maidens with full breasts and bangles on their hands,

Kāma, master of the five arrows, came before these bannered troops and fierce Aiyaṉār followed closely on his beautiful horse,

Keeping the nervous elephant-faced god named Vināyaka in their midst, their hands bright with bangles, mouths red as kōvai fruit, eyes like carp,

Hair falling low, the seven mothers surrounded him as Durga rode along on her powerful lion,

The resident vidyādharas, yakṣas, kinnaras, kimpuruṣas, cāraṇas, asuras, and rākṣasas surrounded them all,

Cymbals, the tāḷam, takuṇitam, tattalakam, kallalaku, kallavaṭam and montai drums,

The rhythmic taṭṭali drum, the conch, the calaṅcalam conch, the immense taṇṇumai drum, the unbreakable kettle drum, the hand drum,

The resonant pot drum, the kokkarai drum, the vīṇā, the flute, the lute, the echoing hourglass drum, the earsplitting war drum,
The powerful *mattalam* drum, the *dundubhi* kettle drum, and the superb *muruṭi* drum sounded forth in all directions,

Choristers came to sing his praise, with auspicious hymns in fine harmony while servants and wrestlers hastened all around,

The six abiding seasons, the astral synchronisms, difficult austerities, the immutable *mudrās*, the mantras,

The three phases ending in destruction, the moments, the qualities and the *vālakhilyas* assembled together,

The unblinking gods glorified him, praising, “Great Lord!” Praising, “Beautiful husband of Umā!”


Praising, “Pure, flourishing Śaṅkara!” Praising, “Father with dreadlocked crown!” Praising, “Golden serpents, fine gold anklets on your feet!”

Praising, “Feet that rewarded the might of Arjuna with the Pāśupata missile in a great battle long ago!”


And as they praised and praised his form, a rain of flowers fell bewildering the senses, and goodness spread across the quarters,

With the flag of the bull, the battle standard, the royal parasol, and the beautiful hanging decorations surrounding him,

Lovely women, with scent drifting from their flowered dark braids feel a newness in their hearts when the beautiful lord approaches.

**Gatherings of Women**

Hearing the roar of troops for the king of the glorious, pure celestials the beautiful lord who rides the bull,
Because they give shelter from waters housed in the brilliant sky, and shelter what is hidden,
\[ Because he bears the dazzling heavenly Ganges, \]
\[ and protects the Vedas, \]
are graced with flawless decorations, touch the heavenly crescent moon,
\[ bears the flawless trident and the heavenly crescent moon, \]

And are covered with bright whitewash,
\[ And is adorned with purifying ash, \]
glittering mansions are like the generous lord who wears the elephant skin,

inside them, the beds of flower-decked women are taken as sexual battlefields,

Fine anklets are drums, red-streaked eyes the arrows and long arching eyebrows become the bows,

Burnished hair cascades down their backs, bangles jingle, lustrous mounds are the war chariots that buck and sway,

Round, glowing breasts are rearing elephants, enchanting their masters, as graceful jeweled women, who move their bodies to make love in battle,

Refresh their faces with shimmering water from a golden bowl and cover themselves with magnificent jewelry,

From the golden child to the older woman they all gathered together in joyful crowds,

And dazzling ornaments on their brows flashed with gold, the cūḷikai, cūṭṭu, cūḷikai, cuṭṭikai, and vāḷikai,

Climbing to the rooftops, they stood and worshiped heartsick with longing as their passions rose,

Thinking, “Midnight will surely kill me if the god with matted locks does not give me his garland strung with cassia blossoms!”

Some thought him Kāma, others denied it, and they wrung their hands in doubt slipping off their bangles along with their earlier modesty,

They tied thick flower garlands strung with golden thread around their necks and wrapped their necklaces in their hair as if they were garlands,
They pencilled one eye with kohl and forgot to do the other, then ran to the street and stood there dazed,

They spread red lac dye for their feet on the mirror in front of them and tried to teach flower-balls to speak with their musical words,²

Casting their eyes, their nets toward the lord, raven-haired women threw open the bolts on the doors of their resolve.

The Child

A flawless girl in the shining years of childhood plays at cooking rice, putting white sand in a small pot,

She will not be proud of her faultless waist, she cannot touch hearts even with her fine clothes,

She does not make young men sick with longing through her walk, she does not try to cause suffering with radiant breasts,

She does not know heart-rending glances, though her eyes touch her ears, she does not beguile others with words from scarlet lips,

Although her flower-decked hair looks lovely, she cannot braid it, she does not make young men faint with arms like young bamboo,

Every day, this girl with fine jewels says one thing and thinks another and she ends up doing something else as her mind wanders off,

She plays with her doll under an ornate awning, placing a fine wedding pendant around its neck,

Coating it with sandalwood and dressing it in a blue dress, then she asked it who its father was,

And as she said, “The lord without end, the fire dancer,” she saw him on a peerless bull that approached in fevered wrath,

She did not see the truth of what she said while playing mother but she will like her, well-versed in love’s arts in just a short while.

²That is, they mistake the flower-balls for parrots.
The Young Girl

86 She has reached the age of a young girl, a vision of golden radiance as beautiful as a peacock that has seen the rainclouds coming,\textsuperscript{3}

87 On a single brilliant lotus are two leaf ringlets, two darting carp, and a red kōvai fruit,\textsuperscript{4}

88 Glistening pearls, a cruelly bent bow, a jewel for her brow, and a coral-red tilak, so her moon face seems,\textsuperscript{5}

89 Her shining hands are graced with matching bracelets her charming feet with anklets of bells that jingle with bright gems,

90 Her swaying mound is wrapped in fine, bright cloth and sandalwood from the honored Potikai mountain coats her shoulders,

91 Her breasts have emerged, rising up like sturdy mountain peaks, she is like sweet ambrosia churned from the sea,

92 Her braid is entwined with a garland of blooming flowers, her speech is bright like a young parrot in a fragrant grove,

93 She devotes her skill to her bewitching eyes, enhancing them with highlights of kohl,

94 She puts on a necklace of impeccable jewels, puts rings on her soft fingers, and bands set with jewels shine bright on her arms,

95 Together with her friends, she drew the form of Kāma drawing lines with handfuls of sparkling white sand,

96 As she drew him, immersed in her portrayal of his flower arrows, chariot, and sugarcane bow,

97 The king of Śiva's heaven, the holy one, approached on his tall bull wearing a garland of cassia flowers whose nectar ripens desire,

98 Passion stirred her, and the goodness that moralists profess yielded modesty yielded, conscience yielded, composure yielded,

99 Her fine bangles slipped off, her bee eyes raced, her dress fell loose, and as the damp blossoms on her braid unfolded, she stood completely helpless.

\textsuperscript{3}Peacocks are said to fan their tails and dance at the sight of rainclouds.  
\textsuperscript{4}Lotus – face, leaf ringlets – ears, carp – eyes, kōvai fruit – mouth.  
\textsuperscript{5}Pearls – teeth, bent bow – eyebrows
The Nubile Girl

100 She is a nubile girl of endless splendor with a navel like a whirlpool in the Ganges that falls from the sky,
101 Her lovely hands are lotuses, her feet are lotuses, her breasts are lotuses, her face with a doe's gaze is a lotus,
102 Her bright waist is a creeper, her lithe arms are bamboo, her silken mound is the chariot dais,
103 Her perfumed braid is black sand, her red mouth is coral, and the teeth that shine in her mouth are lustrous pearls,
104 Made beautiful by the chain around her neck she puts on a lash garland crowded with lively bees,
105 Hoops grace her ears, a heavy girdle refines her, and the exquisite designs traced on her body gleam,
106 She took a mynah bird from its golden cage and was teaching it to talk, but as she spoke,
107 He came riding in on a grand shining bull like the sun sitting nobly on a towering silver mountain,
108 And as the twisted locks of hair that crown the Lord came into view streaming with the clear waters of the Ganges, she was overwhelmed,
109 She looked at the garland of the radiant lord, then looked at her own she looked at his splendor, then looked at her own beauty,
110 She looked at the arms of the gracious lord, and then at her own, she looked at the broad span of his chest, and let out a long sigh,
111 Her heart melted, showing no care for her modesty awash in a flood of surging desire, her breath came in hot sighs.

The Ingénue

112 She is the divinity of shining, polished Tamil given form an ingénue full of perfected virtues,
The bow of the glorious lord, precious shining coral, the spear in young Murukan’s right hand, rounded pearls,

The verdant creeper, bamboo, the blooming lotus bud, and the round shining moon emerging from the clouds

suggest her graceful brow, red mouth, eyes, teeth, graceful waist, delicate arms,

Lovely tight breasts, and luminous face, her red feet are like well-formed lotus buds,

Her thighs are like the glistening stem of the plantain tree, her mound is like the dais of a splendid royal chariot,

It seems as though the brilliant asterisms surround her face mistaking her for another lovely waxing moon,

A necklace of shining pearls adorns her neck and many gems crowd together, ringing to make a clamor,

She artfully scents herself with flower essences, musk, and salves, to achieve perfection both within her and without,

She puts on shimmering garments to increase her brilliance and puts a circlet set with a crest jewel on her brow,

She takes up cooling, fragrant sandalwood, and puts it on her arms and the bright sandal lends her its own color,

Surrounded by her devoted friends, this woman with a shining brow went up to her seat, and invoked the cikāmaram mode on her lute,

And as she sang a mata poem in praise of the lord of the Vedas whose throat is stained with the lasting hue of poison,

She heard the bells that grace the mighty bull of the valiant spear fighter the great Bowman who forever enthralls tender women,

She looked over and she saw the lord his shoulders held high, and full of beauty,
Her jeweled friends left her and she arose, showing her radiant face, her brow blushed red, and her mouth glowed even brighter,

Afraid that the lord would be harassed again and again by the evil eye, as the townsfolk looked upon him,

She advanced toward him carefully with faltering steps and described her anguish, but as she spoke she fell apart,

Her eyes brimmed with tears at the sight of his fine chest and free from the modesty she presents to others,

She embraced her own jeweled breast. “The lord will not offer his hand,” she thought, and wept in pain from her deep sorrow,

As she longed for the touch of his garland of cassia flowers her tender body assumed their tawny shade as she grieved.

The Graceful Woman

Another, a graceful woman of exquisite beauty her small feet stained red like the lotus,

As the shining moon, the stars, the rainbow, the gathered clouds, and the glowing red planet,

The brightness of her face reflects the dazzling sky awash in surging light, none can compare with her,

Everyone derides those with nothing, it is always said while the wealthy are exalted by all,\(^6\)

Because of this saying, she clothes her loins in a girdle and smears her lovely breasts with fragrant sandalwood,

Her exhausted waist seems ready to fold, she surpasses the goose in her graceful stride,

She adorns her feet with a pair of anklets, and on her wrists she stacks heavy bangles thick with set gems,

\(^6\)A quotation from Tirukkural 752.
She decks her hair with a perfect garland strung with gold thread and delights her neck with jewels,

The woman like golden Śrī felt desire for the king of the gods, and took up the sweet-voiced vīnā,

And as she began to sing, the Supreme Light appeared before her on his mighty, perfect bull,

The soft pleasing tune, her breeding, sweet precious Tamil, and the enduring vīnā all slipped from her hands,

“O queenly friend!” she exclaimed, “Will beauty achieve its end today? If I cannot have him, what use have I for womanhood?”

Smeared with the ash worn by the processing lord her face shone as her eyes affirmed this, quaking like baby elephants,

She braided her dark hair and unbraided it, rearranged her dress, cinched up her sandal-glossed breasts,

She wrapped herself in an elegant gown then removed it, worshiped him and cried, moaning in lovesick grief,

She guarded her bangles by lifting her bright, graceful hands in worship but they could not hold her dress—even she surrendered her virtue.

The Experienced Woman

She is an experienced woman, so refined her limbs seem like they were born from addictive ambrosia,

She is like the dawn as the darkness thins, speaking her words in a sweet childish prattle that implies she does not understand,

Through her rare grace which enflames young men she appears as the noonday sun,

Through the redness of her feet and fine hands, like a mango leaf once the day’s heat is gone, she has the beauty of the evening sky,
The glorious moon face of this lovely jeweled woman
gives her the charm of heart-stirring nights,

Her soft, delicate waist, and her breasts graced with lovely nipples
give her the splendor of a cooling fresh raincloud,\(^7\)

A body bright like the young mango leaf, and mouth red like the coral tree
give her the lushness of summer’s mild days,\(^8\)

She knows anklets are like drums, proclaiming
“Refined men may stay, but those who are not must go!”

So she is correct to put them on her splendid feet,
knowing there must be no unguarded movement to her loins

She binds them in a fine dress and girdle,
knowing her charming breasts bewitch young men

She locks them fast in an elegant bodice,
and protects her arms thin as bamboo with golden bangles,

She screens her lovely neck with a fine necklace
and gleaming earrings shelter her ears,

As if cooling the passion of her lily-dark eyes
she quells them with highlights of kohl,

Her beauty torments everyone,
she has the goose’s stride and the cuckoo’s sweet voice,

Carefully tied, raven-hued,
with millions of flowers worked into the plaits,

No longer veiled within her dress, falling low
free to cast its scent, her black hair releases misted fragrance,

She clothes herself in silk as red as the shining waterlily
and paints a beautiful lily of saffron on her brow,

\(^7\)The comparison stems from the term used for breast, \textit{payōtaram} (Sanskrit \textit{payodhara}) literally means “water-bearer,” and the term for “delicate waist” \textit{nuṇ iṭai}, which also means “soft place”

\(^8\)The mango and coral trees bud during the cooler half of the hot season.
As she rolled the golden dice, and on a silver board
moved jewel chits in a battle of careful moves,

They appeared, the twisted strands that wreathe the lord with bright shoulders
his feet grounded in creation, preservation, and destruction,

“Away my family of modesties!” she cried, “No place for virtue!
Leave me, firm resolves! Leave me, beauty!”

“Depart, my watchful family! Troublemakers come!
Virtues, please remember me!

For isn’t it Śiva, indescribable god of gods? Will he leave
without giving me his scented garland of cassia flowers?”

And with the thought, “When I see him, I will know,” she wilted
and this fragrant garland swarmed with bees surrendered her fertility.

The Older Woman

The older lady seems like the radiant queen of women
she speaks modestly, with sweet, melodious words,

“While in this world, our five senses, sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch
are found in a bright-bangled woman,” say the wise,

And she embodies this saying perfectly.
Her soft fingers have fine burnished nails, shining like mirrored spheres,

Her mound flares like the hood of a frightened cobra,
her slight waist trembles like prime rattan,

Like two auspicious water pots made of everlasting gold
crowned with gems, verdant, firm, proportioned,

Spread with pale streaks and beauty marks
arising like the ambrosia that torments all who see it,

Her breasts rub against each other in rhythm. She is the best of women,
a beauty without peer among beauties, with arms like young bamboo,

*A quotation from *Tirukkuṟaḷ* 1101.*
Her lovely hands shame the family of the glory lily, 
she is Kāma’s passion, her breasts shine with sandalwood,

Sumptuous, balanced, rounded, and full, 
both corners upturned, glossy, trembling, red as coral,

Bearing honey and glittering pearls, her crimson mouth 
demands tribute even from the thoughts of sages,

Streaked with even lines, accented with kohl, 
shaped like gems at their center,

The image of the cool, fresh carp and the right-turning conch 
her piercing eyes are like the gleaming sea,

Her ears are graced with sparkling earrings, 
her moon face is like the cool sphere of the moon itself,

Her bee-swarmed braid wafts its fragrance for miles, 
a circlet adorns her radiant brow,

Flawless from her tresses to her immaculate feet 
she scents her body with well-chosen frankincense,

Her charming friends blessed her in exquisite song, 
surrounding her in a deluge of flowing white chowries,

“My lustrous eyes see nothing but him, 
my ears hear no song but his praises,

My hands worship nothing but the lord’s ankleted feet,” she said, 
“Yes, I love the lord who holds fire in his beautiful hand!”

And as she sang her polished verse, the lord with the poisoned throat 
with his brilliant eye wide open on his brow,

The ancient god who once destroyed the city of his foes 
with serpents and the torrents of the Ganges twisting through his locks,

The lord who dances in the night of fire came down the street 
surrounded by crowds of immortals, and she saw him,
“He will drench me alone,” she thought, “in the drool that he tastes from envious envious women graced with bright, colorful anklets!”

“Master, you came!” she cried, “You carried off my bangles! But you gave me passion and torment, is this fair?”

And suffering, she came undone, her body swooned, her skin blanched and the lady with the blooming garland fell down, delirious.

With curling eyelashes, sweet melodious words, willowy arms, and coral lips, the turmoil of women began that day

On the street where the lord processed, with the crescent moon perched nobly in his matted locks, amidst the glowing clouds.

Protect your womanhood!
Protect your two lithe arms!
Cinch tight your hidden girdle!
The Vagabond, the lord with the battle axe draped with the crystal waters of the Ganges and cassia flowers born of the rains comes riding his bull in procession!
Appendix C

Vikkirama Cōḷaṉ Ulā of Oṭṭakkūṭtar

Ancestral Glory

1. The lotus goddess gives fame, her husband’s holy body is dark as a raincloud, in a lotus that grew from his navel.

2. Came the first, a god with a face for each direction, then from his lust came Kāśyapa, his noble son.

3. Then glorious Marīci, of vision without flaw, then the god\(^1\) whose red chariot revolves on its one wheel,

4. Then the mighty king\(^2\) who drove over his son in his chariot ending the anguished despair of a cow,

5. Then the triumphant king\(^3\) who moved a deer and a ferocious tiger to drink together at the same ghat, its water lapping the fresh green banks,

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\(^1\) Sūrya, the sun.

\(^2\) Manunitkaṇṭacōḷaṉ. Unless otherwise noted, attributions follow S. Kaliyāṇacuntara Aiyar’s notations for the U. Vē. Čāminātaiyar Nūnilaiyam edition of the text.

\(^3\) Māndhāṭṛ
6. Then the king⁴ who alone rose up to the vast realms of heaven, then the lord of the earth⁵ who protected Bhogapuri,⁶

7. Then the Cempiyaṉ⁷ who vividly argued his case against Death fetching cryptic mantras from heaven,

8. Then the king⁸ who placed the elderly in urns and made Death take flight, his malice spent,

9. Then the Cōḷa who razed the floating walls of his enemies,⁹ then the one¹⁰ who released the flooding western ocean into the eastern sea,

10. Then the king¹¹ who entered the underworld and through his great splendor took a Nāga princess for his own,

11. Then the pure one¹² who joyfully stepped onto the weighing scales for the sake of a little dove, protected for the world to see,

12. Then the one¹³ who let the Poṉṉi¹⁴ with its leaping waves descend as he cut through the tall Coorg mountains in the west,

13. Then the lord of the earth¹⁵ who mastered the Kaveri, turned the mountain,¹⁶ and raised the tiger banner on its summit amidst clear-running streams,

14. Then the king¹⁷ who released the Bowman¹十八 from his fetters, a kind favor in exchange for Poykai’s noble verse,

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⁴Triśaṅkhu?
⁵Mucukunda, who protected Amaravati while Indra traveled to enjoy himself.
⁶Amarāvatī.
⁷Perunarkili; Cempiyaṉ (“descendent of Śibi”?) is a title of Cōḷa kings.
⁸Suraguru, whom the old commentary on Kulottuṅka Cōḷaṅ Ulā refers to as “Nābhaṅga.”
⁹Ṭūṅkeyileṟinta Toṭittōṭ Cempiyaṉ, described in Puṟanānūṟu v. 39.
¹⁰Saṃharṣaṇa.
¹¹Cūravaṭitta (Śūravāditya) Cōḷa, who marries the Nāga princess Kāntimati.
¹²Śibi.
¹³Variously called Kāvēric Cōḷaṅ, Kāntaṅ, Kāntamaṅ, and Civūkaṅ.
¹⁴The Kaveri River.
¹⁵Karikālaṅ.
¹⁶Mount Meru. Cilappatikāram describes Karikālaṅ’s travel to the Himalayas in order to claim Meru.
¹⁷Ceṅkaṇāṉ
¹⁸Cēramāṉ Kaṇaikkāl Irumpoṟai; see Puṟanānūṟu 74
15. Then the victorious king with wounds all over ninety-six of them to hold the mind,

16. Then the king who out of his passion covered the roof with gold on the sacred hall where the lord dances, pure honey for the eye,

17. Then the one who conquered the mountain country long ago, crossing eighteen wastelands in a single day for the sake of his messenger,

18. Then the Cempiyaṉ who, from his lion throne, sent forth his army, capturing the Ganges and Kaṭāram,

19. Then the warrior who utterly subdued the fleet whose rare manliness led him to thrice march on Kalyāṇi and destroy it,

20. Then the one who, with just one elephant, took the enemy at Koppam killing a thousand elephants on the fevered pitch of battle,

21. Then the one who built the serpent couch, its flared hood set with many gems, for the lord of the southern Raṅgam, which rings with the intoned Vedas,

22. Then the one who sliced through countless elephants, huge and rutting, to receive a distinguished paraṇi for taking Kūṭalacaṅkamam,

23. And after him, the preserver of the whole world encircled by the sea known as Defender of the Earth, he understood protection,

19 Vijayālaya?
20 Āditya I or Parāntaka I
21 Rājarāja I; a reference to the capture of Utakai.
22 Rājendra I
23 Rājadhirāja I
24 The word in question is vaṅkam (“vaṅkattai mūṟṟum muraṇ atakki”); S. Kaliyāṇacuntara Aiyar glosses the phrase as, “the entire Cēra fleet, based in a place called Kāntalūrccālai, but it might instead mean Vaṅga [Bengal].”
25 Rājendra II; for the Koppam campaign against the Cāḷukyas, in which Rājadhirāja I was killed and his brother Rājendra crowned himself king on the battlefield, see Nilakanta Sastri 2000: 256ff.
26 Rājamahendra.
27 Vīrarājendra; for the battle of Kūṭalacaṅkamam (on the banks of the Tungabhadrā and Kṛṣṇa rivers) see Nilakanta Sastri 2000: 265.
28 Adhirāja, who “had a very short reign of some weeks’ duration” (Nilakanta Sastri 2000: 285).
24. Then the general who drove off the carp, hewed down the bow, and wiped out the fleet at Cālai for the second time,

25. He took the western sea, captured Koṅkana and Kannada, laid low the powerful Mārāṭṭa king,

26. Reversed the customs tax and the grim scarcities of old all the way up to the northern mountain,

27. Abhaya, his shoulders graced by ātti flowers whose righteous sphere of command had come to protect the sea-girt earth,

28. And after him, Vikrama Cōḷa, the king who appeared so the earth would shine, the three drums roar like thunderclouds as he wears the tumpai garland,

29. Crowned to protect the triple world with its enduring places a peerless, upright king to measure the range of the earth,

30. His glorious parasol takes it all in and more to cover the eight divine elephants of the directions,

31. Kings lay down their paired bright garlands and their crowns to give a coronation to his two feet,

32. The seven thickly swelling ocean spheres, and the seven spheres of earth he removes from any common sway through his outstanding sphere of war,

33. In the arms of Maiden Earth whose girdle on her loins is the ring of mountains that closes off the splendid outer sea,

34. And on the breasts of the noble lady unique in the seven worlds, flawless, her beauty alive with praise,

35. And in the keen eyes of the goddess who dwells in the flowerbud, one day in the days when he was home in all of these,

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29Kulottuṅga I; see Kaliṅkattup Paraṇi 9.70–72 for the destruction of the Cālai fleet.
30The Pāṇṭiya standard.
31The Cēra standard.
32The garland that signals the march to war.
33One garland is for identification, one for beauty.
34“The noble lady unique in the seven worlds” (Ulaṅkāḷēḻum Taṉittuṭaiya Kulamaṅkai) is a title of Tyāgapatākā, Vikrama Cōḷa’s second wife to become queen. His first wife, Mukkōkkilāṇaṭi, died in the fifth or sixth year of his rule.
wearing pearls the Southerner\textsuperscript{35} gave as tribute in the jingling anklets on his feet, adorned with a cream of sandalwood from the mountain of the south,

as the cool wind sent up from the south massages his feet and the women of his retinue praise him while their glances fly like swords,

On a bed like the long crescent moon, beneath a canopy of linked pearls, her shoulders draped with a garland of clustered blooms,

With full breasts and broad dark eyes, lies his darling goose Ulakaṅkaḷēḻuṭaiyāḷ, the essence of womanhood,\textsuperscript{36}

her hair decked with flowers, the universal ruler of womankind he now awakes from sleep with her,

He his cleansing bath with water from the unfailing Poṉṉi and is decked with the holy shoots of grass\textsuperscript{37} picked by the gods on earth,

Then to the lord who on his crown keeps the branch of crescent moon the branching stream from the silvery mountain, and the branching ancient Vedas,

To this divine and perfect flame, the rosy clouded sky that is his poisoned throat, the three-eyed sweetness, he bends his head in worship,

The Process of Adornment

Then, once the process of granting lavish gifts is through he calls for a choice of celebrated jewelry, right for the occasion,

Sea-monster earrings flash light across his face, a lotus crowded with bees, joining the noble goddess of speech,

Armbands set with sparkling gems go around his arms joining Maiden Earth, buxom and flourishing,

Gem-studded bracelets sparkle on his wrists joining the grand lady Fame, who spreads out without fading,

\textsuperscript{35}The Pāṇṭiya king.
\textsuperscript{36}Peṇṇaṇaniku.
\textsuperscript{37}Harialli grass (ăruku).
48. The shining gem from the ancient sea\textsuperscript{38} glows even brighter on his chest joining Śrī, who embraces him with longing,

49. His royal sword sits correctly at his waist joining the goddess\textsuperscript{39} who creates prized victories free of pain,

50. Then the grand jewel is placed on his fitting regal body crowning a beauty of endless vivid hues,

51. As if, when he bends his garlanded crown in worship the three-eyed god gives the beauty gained once Kāma bent his bow,

The Regal Elephant

52. Advancing dressed in handsome trim to stand before the palace the elephant then comes, trembling with the fever of his rut,

53. He roars throughout the world as he scrapes the clouds even as the clouds roar out above him,

54. Yet clouds have no capped tusk, no mighty trunk the kingly staff of Yama, which cools his anger,

55. His paired thick tusks are cruel and unforgiving escape from them is hopeless,

56. The fevered wrath of Time lies in these lethal tusks two peaks of a dark mountain, goring everything until it yields and crumbles,

57. Since he detests all other rut throughout the world so his alone can flow in sweeping waves,

58. The entire earth is released from any common hold, taken from the others who must bear it on their backs as their intolerable burden,

59. Once King Akālaṅka’s two triumphant arms have risen high to take it and the former pain that they once knew

60. Now entirely forgotten, the elephants of the quarters let their own rut pour down thickly,

\textsuperscript{38}The kaustubha gem.

\textsuperscript{39}Durgā.
61. He catches its sweet trace as it showers down, gives chase to grow calm only when he sees their backs in flight,

62. Our king has come, he has given them respite, so this joyful wind knows that they are happy,

63. He tramples other lands so they bend and fall and the lives of warlike kings who provoke churning battle

64. he feeds to Death, and he stands there now, Airāvatam, as the king takes mount as though this beast was an elephant cow,

65. The parasol of victory, right for ruling, provides its shade As two bound chowries send a cool and pleasant breeze,

66. The lone rightward-turning conch blows, its kindred conches follow and the drums roar out and thunder,

67. They set out ringed by swordsmen, other bold kings tremble and the fierce tiger rises high on the triumphant banner,

**Fellow Participants**

68. He marched on distant lands to defeat the Southerner, the Māḷava king, the Siṅhala king, the king of steadfast Utakai, and the mountain country,

69. Toṇṭaimāṉ, who had earlier waged a devastating war to give the crowning gift of a *paraṇi* within a single day,

70. Then, amid the wise ministers seen in the court of the faultless king whose feet adorned with anklets rest on many other crowns,

71. The famed lord of the Muṉaiyar, who gives him a fragrant *tumpai* garland and a new garment to put on when he marches off to war,

72. Then, the forceful ones, the Mārāṭṭas, the Kaliṅkas, the Koṅkus, and the other people of Coorg

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40The fortification in Coorg earlier destroyed by Rājarāja I; see v. 17.
41The Cēra kingdom.
42Karunākarat Toṇṭaimāṉ, who served under Kulottuṅka I in the Kaliṅka campaign described in *Kaliṅkattup Paraṇi*.
43*Kaliṅkattup Paraṇi*.
44S. Kaliyāṇacuntara Aiyar identifies them as Kaṇṇadār; perhaps Hoysalas?
feel his wrath when he bends his bow
along with his arching brow, he is Cōḻakōṉ,

Then, the arms of the lord of men, his armor, his retainers,
his triumphant battle sword, his strength, his wise minister,

Kaṇṇaṉ, who every day is all of these,
the holy brahman of walled Kañcai, where the thriving groves tear the clouds,

Then, ghouls take the flesh of kings who do not join him in cruel battle
while uncompromising Death takes their lives,

And simple wives bearing scant devotion remove their earrings
when he takes his bow to hand, he is Vāṇaṉ,

Then, the foes from Veṅkai, Viliñam, Kollam, Koṅkam,
unflinching Iriṭṭam, and Oṭṭam,

Or any other king who does not seek him out to grasp his feet is routed,
he is Kāliṅkarkōṉ, carrying the hero’s banner,

Then, on an elephant trembling in its rut, the Kāṭava,
lord of Ceñci, where the fortress has close-set ramparts with golden lookouts,

Then the king of Vēṇāṭu,
who drove savage, churning Kali from the earth,

Then Aṉantapālaṉ, the protector of the highest dharma
from the waters of Kumari up to the Mandākinī,

The lord of Vatsa, whose frenzied elephant destroyed the three walls
of northern Maṇṇai, when warriors clashed in the great battle,

Then the royal lord of Cēti, the warrior who crushed the defenses
of the strong Karunāṭa fortress, killing so that headless bodies jumped back up,

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45 Kaṅcāru Nagaram.
46 Perhaps Cuttamallaṉ Muṭikoṇṭāṉ, also called Vāṇakōvaraiyar, who fought with Karuṇākarat Tonṭaimāṉ in the Kaliṅka campaign (Nilakanta Sastri 2000: 347).
47 Veṅgi.
48 A coastal city in the Cēra country
49 Rāṣṭrakūṭa; the variant reading “Irāṭam” is Lāṭa.
50 Orissa.
51 Perhaps Caṅkaraṉ Ampalankōyil Koṇṭāṉ Aṉantapālaṉ, who made a grand endowment to Tiruvāṭutur (Nilakanta Sastri 2000: 347).
85. Then the lord of Kāraṇai, wearing battle anklets
to make belligerent kings on the earth tie up their hair in matted locks,

86. Then Atikaṉ, who sliced through the Kaliṅka army in the north
so that great kings ran away in defeat,

87. Then generous Nuḷampaṉ, the warrior with a deadly rutting elephant who took Kollam and Kōṭṭāṟu from the king with the fish emblem,

88. Then Tikattaṉ, whose red-trunked elephant leveled the Kuṭaka peaks,
and demolished the great fortress of Koṅkai,

89. Then the Vallavaṉ, the lord of Kōcala, the lord of Māḷava, the lord of Mākata,
the bowman, the lord of Kēraḷa, the lord with the fish emblem,

90. And the Pallava, crowned kings who opposed him in great war,
as well as petty lords, swarmed around him in front and on both sides,

Gatherings

91. Women gather in the street, each bangle shining bright
with so many gems that they subdue its shining diamond,

92. Like the inner quarters in thriving Dvāraka one day long ago
when the sage of great austerities arrived to give counsel to the lord,

93. Like the blessed land where only women give commands
long clothes wrapped high over their loins,

94. Like the army of treacherous Māra, gathered to kill
his enemies the sages, who had no thought of taking his path,

52 The phrase read as “deadly,” vāṭṭu ār, might also be taken as vāḷ tār, in which case Nuḷampaṉ “has an army of swordsmen” or “a garland of battle scars.”
53 Trikarttaṉ.
54 Vallabha (Cāḷukya)?
55 The Čēra king.
56 The Pāṇṭiya king.
57 Nārada.
58 Kṛṣṇa. Nārada comes to Dvāraka to inform Kṛṣṇa that his grandson Aniruddha, who had mysteriously disappeared, is safe and now married to Uṣa, delighting Kṛṣṇa and his wife Rukminī.
59 Māra’s army is composed of women.
Like a flock of geese on the sandy dunes where screw pines grow in salt marshes like clustered bolts of lightning in a rain cloud,

Like a host of Lakṣmīs rising up on close-set waves like peacocks flocking close together on the mountains,

All over the street, they arrive in haste, their moon brows glistening eyes roaming everywhere, thoughts roaming too,

They come crowding in, Lakṣmī ornaments shining on their heads jewelry glittering in their hair, linked diamonds glittering,

They come with their heads bent low in reverence breasts rising high, jars of ambrosia draped in pearls,

The harrowing glances that appear in that crowd drip poison Sharp teeth in mouths red as kiṃśuka blossoms scrape out empty thoughts,

Swelltering in crowds on the bottom floor of a spacious palace tall as a mountain like noble women of the Nāga underworld,

Their feet tap as the vīṇā, the lute, the tight-strapped drum and the flute all charming to the fingers, sound out the beat,

On the middle floor of a bright crystal palace, which soars through clouds high in the sky they crowd together like Vidyādhara women,

The gazes from kohl-streaked eyes not once even blinking flower feet never resting on the earth,

With everlasting garlands that will never wilt away, and beauty that will never die, gathered on the top floor, on a terrace under the moon,

In their form, their luster, their thoughts and their speech, they are like surpassing heavenly women,

"His royal shoulders, famous beyond measure, are more sturdy than the earth created by the unborn god," they say, crowding close together,

"Now look!" they say, "is the chest of this lord of the earth so ungenerous that it rules just a single perfect Śrī?" they say,
“Since he has only two arms, he can’t be young Murukan, Look!” they say, growing lean with desire, “He’s the god of springtime!”

“Has he come because he is thinking what I am thinking?” they say, “There is an ocean of compassion in his eyes!”

“The lineage of the first Manu, which protects the earth, has found its ideal in this generous lord, not just in part but completely!” they proclaim,

They crowd close together, breasts growing so pale they seem speckled with pollen and cup their red hands in worship as if protecting their finely-wrought bangles,

The Child

A child stood there, a newly-born moon just beginning to grow the fresh growth on a branch that has not yet blossomed into flower,

A peacock with no bright fanning tail, thriving sugarcane for the god burned in defeat so that he will soon wear a victory garland,

A newly-hatched cuckoo, a fledgling goose, a newborn parrot, a growing branch of coral,

A drop of honey whose wide eyes know no deceit a child at the age where she never parts from her mothers,

Fondly leaving behind her dolls, deer, and peacock her green parrot, mynah bird and goose,

Grabbing pearls from Pukār, the king’s city on the Poṉṉi, for the ammāṉai game and fine pearls from southern Nākai for her molucca-bean jacks,

Cool pearls from the Ceṉṉi’s city of Koṟkai to play at cooking rice, taking everything she needs in her hands,

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60Kāma.
61Cf. Irācarāca Cōḻaṉ Ulā v. 117.
62Nāgapatnam.
63Ceṉṉi is a title of Cōḻa kings; Koṟkai was traditionally the southern harbor city of the Pāṇṭiya kings, now part of the Cōḻa domain.
120. She entered the street where the women shine with gold⁶⁴ and while she was playing, “The Golden Age comes marching in!”

121. “The greatest of the great, who drove Kali from her tenacious hold on the earth!” roared the thundercloud of his three drums,

122. Her mothers came, best of companions, and she came too, she worshiped as they worshiped, saying exactly what her mothers said,

123. This youthful god’s⁶⁵ crown, which surpasses the sun and the moon never once kindled her heart,

124. She did not meet his lovely gaze, which melts the heart and the eyes of the goddess in the lotus, who delights in his physique,

125. Nor darted her eyes to the rosy glow of the lovely coral smiling with joy nor fell in the lovely spreading light of the moon,⁶⁶

126. Nor ran up to his lovely brow, broad as the world he sustains, nor fixed on his lotus face, a tilaka gracing the brow,

127. nor went to his lovely arms, pressing in from every direction, nor reached for his lovely, welcoming chest,

128. nor went to his pristine flower hands, nor stared at his flower feet, nor reached out for the dazzling light that is his flower body,

129. This daughter’s eyes and heart were just beginning to rest on the garland composed from the entire line of water lilies,

130. “Come here, mothers, get me that garland and give it to me!” she said, her heart melting, and her mothers said,

131. “Don’t be afraid of the king, my dear! We will go ourselves, sweet child and tell him to give us that lovely garland,

132. But do you think it’s easy for us to get a garland like that? It is very difficult!” And the little one, whose words are as sweet as honey,

133. As the tears ran down her breast then and there began that day to feel the desire that the all the others knew.

⁶⁴ Cf. S. Kaliyāṇacuntara Aiyar, who takes the phrase “poṟ koṭiyār vīti” as “the street filled with beautiful flags.”
⁶⁵ Murukān
⁶⁶ Vikrama Cōḷa’s teeth.
The Young Girl

134. Another girl, surrounded by friends, has completely forgotten her desire to feed the other little girls play-rice made of sand,

135. She has given her childish prattle to her parrot and carried off the sweet sound of the flute as her own,

136. Her jasmine has taken the radiant smile she once had and she now bears a smile of pearls,  

137. She has given the innocent gaze of her childhood to the deer she has raised and she now has two spears that bear a poison-tipped glance,

138. She has given the litheness of her bright body to her mātavi creeper  

and gained the shimmer of lightning in the clouds,

139. The lush kuruvu shrub holds her dolls, fragrant with its flowers, while this bright healthy girl holds a mynah and green parrot,

140. She once walked with the innocent gait of the goose, now she moves with the stride of a young elephant cow,

141. She wears her hair up in a bun tied with pearls on a band of red coral inlaid in clusters of shining gold,

142. Her red mouth takes men as brave as Murukan and destroys them completely and makes Māra’s eyes burn with rage against mighty ascetics,

143. Her breasts are like the kōṅku blossom, perfectly matched, Her neck now surpasses the beauty of a fine palmyra tree,

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67 That is, the pointed jasmine buds are her sharp milk teeth, and the pearls her adult teeth.
68 Hiptage benghalensis.
69 Webera corymbosa.
70 Hopea parviflora, which has pointed leaves.
She awoke from sleep without being roused by her friends or mothers, rose from her bed and went softly out,

“Oh, a perfect young creeper, thriving and draped with leaves,
\[ “a perfect girl who is growing up, her dangling earrings swing on her ears, yielding to whichever direction it takes as it hangs gently down, \]
\[ and her delicate waist gives way, \]

Its bright, tender new leaves and countless budding flowers bring forth its beauty,
\[ a beautiful girl with a garland of countless bright, tender new leaves, \]
\[ it climbs high so that its branches can rise and flourish, \]
\[ rising to go upstairs amidst the clamor of her family, \]

It takes a partner, embracing the strong limbs of a fine kōṅku tree,
\[ falling into the strong limbs of the Čeṉṉi, her partner, \]
\[ its crown thick the gold of honey-filled flowers, worthy of worship, \]
\[ sturdy as a kōṅku tree, adorned with gold and perfume, worthy of worship, \]

The bees that rest there hum as its fragrance drifts,
\[ The conches around him blare, he’s waiting there to marry me, \]
\[ I saw it and rejoiced, in my dream,” she said, \]
\[ I saw him and rejoiced, in my dream,” she said, \]

“Come here, come here, gentle parrot,
and give us each a kiss,” say her mothers,

Rushing to embrace her, loving her so much,
“Dear girl, breasts budding like flowers on your chest,

may you win that new marriage with the Čeṉṉi,” they praised her,
“to embrace his mighty arms, blooming girl, and never let go,”

Just then, the king, Anapāya, Akaḷaṅka, our lord,
went past on a rutting mountain with a halter around its neck,

Along with her mothers on the street where the drums roared,
she ran to the terrace of a mansion that soared as high as the roaring clouds,

And like golden Lakṣmī with broad carp eyes,
like a single flash of lightning graced with every beauty, she emerged,
155. And when she saw the soldier who took whip in perfect hand to turn the mountain,\(^{71}\) to establish the tiger\(^{72}\) who devours the lives of kings,

156. The man who holds the Earth Goddess close in his arms, ending her sorrow as she fell crying into the mouth of famine, its tenacious hold now gone,

157. The man who never parts with the goddess in the red lotus on his chest with her divine power that never parts from its seat on her breasts,\(^{73}\)

158. Dark Tirumāl, red on his fine lotus hands, flower feet, eyes, ripe fruit mouth,

159. The woman could not bring back her eyes, could not free hands cupped in worship she had no way to rescue her mind from obsession,

160. A passion she had never known before arose, and bewildered—braid slipping, garland slipping—she stood all alone,

161. While the Cēra and the Mīṉavaṉ\(^{74}\) worshiped, the hero of the Cempiya line left her sight and went on,

162. And Māra, shooting at a girl both right and not right for love, starting to make her collapse on the floor, checked his arrows and left.

**The Nubile Girl**

163. There is another, a dark-haired nubile girl, a joyful goose on a hill of sand, next to the flower-strewn Ganges,

164. She had seen our lord, the king, the ruler of kings, born as a gift of the gods, the Southerner, the Bowman, the Cempīyaṉ,

165. When she was a young girl, and the love she has kept in her thoughts has reached to the time to express it,

166. She inscribes him in her mind as a way to ease her passion, from his perfect lotus feet to his crown of rosy gold,

\(^{71}\)Mount Meru; a reference to Karikālaṉ, cf. v. 13.

\(^{72}\)The Cōḷa’s tiger banner.

\(^{73}\)Vīṟu, the divinity inherent in a woman’s breasts.

\(^{74}\)The Pāṇṭiya king
In the day, she sees him on a cloth portrait she has painted by hand, the whole night long she seems him revealed in her dreams,

Filled with desire, she sees nothing else but him, Jayatuṅga with a garland full of pollen, seated on his war elephant,

“He has come to our street,” she said, “Bring me everything, my gems, my jewelry,” and she took them and put them all on,

She put on a garland of blooming flowers, put on a golden dress, smeared on the sandal paste, and put on her finest necklace,

In a mirror held up by her servant her face glowed, blooming like a lotus,

As if the bodiless god had bid them to go, her spear eyes headed off like an army and then returned, going to their edges,

Checked from going further, they flashed with haughty beauty touching her ears, which sparkled with earrings and were draped with fine chains,

Her dark hair was luxuriant and thick, long enough to arrange it in the five hairstyles, such as wearing curls in front,

Graced with fine gold armbands set with rare and dazzling pearls, her arms had grown as full as thick bamboo,

Traced with designs in sandalwood paste, dusted by her garland, her breasts were bigger than the hills, bending her over

Covered by a girdle in the front, her mound spread with noble breadth and her punished waist quivered,

New kinds of beauty came crowding in together, so that even gods would fall, Her body had changed, and she felt herself afraid,

“I cannot see those charms that were so clear when I was younger, when Anagha, so generous, once recognized me before,

I’ve lost the body I once had, the one he used to know, looking at my face, I don’t even know myself, what can I do?
I have no idea how to go to him, to worship him,” this woman said, standing there among her friends,

The king, Akālaṅka, our lord, master of Kumari’s shore, best of the line of kings,

His flower hands, which churned the sea that he protects as his right, his feet wrapped with gold, which traversed the world that bloomed from his flower navel,

His chest, which holds Śrī as she looks upon him, the mountains that are his powerful shoulders, which terrify all enemy kings,

His ears, with the sea-monster earrings that make hearts melt, The gaze that sweeps along to consume the beauty of women,

His mouth, a vivid gem that captures the luster of pearls, his royal face, with a beauty that will never be spoiled,

His hue, that never changes in any form, and the color that contrasts to the hue of his body, she felt true desire for them all,

Like a blue lily once delighted by a bright new crescent moon now unfolding for a moon that has grown completely full,

She saw the king, felt the joy in her mind, in her life, but the deadly elephant carried him off just then,

What she used to see on her cloth painting in the days of waking life, what she saw as a gift of good dreams in the night,

Was a beauty that her eyes now saw could never have been drawn, making this adoring heart never close them in sleep,

She went back—fell into the long arms of her mothers and swooned—and this is the way she was left.

**The Ingénue**

She has a mouth like all the red taken from Kāma’s eyes

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75His dark color, again identifying the king as Viṣṇu.  
76Red, the color of his eyes, hands, and feet.
when he lost his body, burned up to foil his triumph,

194. She has eyes that end like the end of time,
collapsing the world together with the seven roaring seas,

195. She has round breasts that have come to join each other
like the cruel messengers of death, to end all deeds as they kill off the world,

196. She has a waist like Māra, with no substance to capture for a victory banner,
she ends the endless realizations of the sages,

197. She has a mound that spreads to the sides, as though it will never end
so that her waist will not simply collapse and break,

198. A perfect ingénue, her words as sweet as syrup,
pulled her friend hard by the arm as she raced up to the terrace,

199. “Let’s play ball, my dear, so the dancers can watch and enjoy it,
we’ll each take a side, and act as handmaids for each other,”

200. If I lose, you will take my garland, but if I win,
I will take the garland of our lord, that you will get and bring to me,”

201. Pledged this girl bright as lightning, as she tied back her hair,
tied the shining band to press her breasts tight, and then she took the balls in hand,

202. They made their wager, and on the battle went, but her maid wanted to stop the war,
so she tossed the balls from both sides all at once to the girl,

203. The balls inlaid with grand pearls swirled around her,
rising, falling, crowding together,

204. She seemed like the goddess in the lotus, who came up through the foam
of the waves that blew and sprayed upon the rising sea,\textsuperscript{78}

205. “Her palms out in front, like red glory lilies, are growing redder and redder!”
cried the bangles on her wrists, mouths hanging open,

206. “Her creeper-thin waist is swaying, it’s in pain, its bending!”
rang out the stringed girdle tied close around her,

\textsuperscript{77}That is, they will pass each other the play balls.
\textsuperscript{78}That is, the ingénue is Šrī, and the pearl balls form the circle of foam from which she arose on the ocean of milk
Next, her anklets cried in sympathy, mouths with sweet voices pleading for her pretty little feet,

And the bees on her dark, well-dressed hair hummed with pity for her outstretched hands, or her waist, or maybe for her lotus feet,

That garlanded girl played to the victory, and said, “now give me the garland that rests on the sandal-smeared shoulders of Akaḷāṅka, the sun,”

And as she harassed her maid, grabbing her bright new dress, there on his elephant, under the unrivaled parasol as the chowries waved,

As the ocean’s bounty crowds together, pearls and red coral gleam, 
As the forces gather, teeth and lips gleam, 
and conches blare out as one, 
and conch bracelets clink together,

A school of powerful sharks darts off, bodies lengthening, 
Alongside, the whole host of long eyes fierce as sharks, 
Flashing as they twist along the course they take, 
flash as they shift quickly to the street,

The drums of the seacoast pound together, and seated in their boats 
The drums pound together, and seated on their elephants the sailors crowd together in the front, 
the princes crowd together in the front,

In order to protect their community in its lowly work 
In order to protect their families in their work of homage, the prosperous fisherman crowd around him, approaching him with a shiver, 
fit dancers crowd around him, coming to him like Nāga maidens,

And bathed in rivers, the Kaṉṇi with its attractive whirlpools, the Narmada, the Gaṅgā, the Sindhu, and the Poṉṇi, Pukār shines,

This girl with the bright brow turned her head to the royal street and saw Tyāgasamudra, Ocean of Giving, whose rule is always just,

The bet she had made with her maid was entirely forgotten, her armbands and her tied girdle were not safe,

Approaching him, she worshiped—her strength failed—she trembled—she swooned—she wept—she was entirely alone,

The Kumari River.

376
219. Away went the immaculate dress that protects her, and her shining golden girdle and her loins called out, “you must clothe me!”

220. So her breasts offered their tight jeweled breastband and her splendid blouse, and when her long eyes saw this,

221. They called out, “This constant flow of tears is a pearl necklace suitable to wear so let them clothe her, along with these unfading flecks of gold,”

222. They gave them up and her breasts took them on, and she collapsed into nearby arms,

223. And her mothers grew angry, using worn-out words that missed the mark, not seeing her battle with the bodiless god who stole her mind,

224. Flustered, they ground a paste of sandalwood using cool water, and spread it all over her—then sprinkled her with water,

225. They fanned her—set her in the moonlight—placed her in the cool southern wind, but even then they burned her—made a garland of red lilies, and placed it on her neck,

226. But could they really free her? As surely as flooding torrent flows into a valley, he took her life, he took her heart,

227. And they went after the generous lord down the noisy street while this child remained caught in between, neither alive nor dead.

The Graceful Woman

228. Surrounded by her mothers, she is like ambrosia emerging from the sea, another woman, a fragrant garland full of nectar, surrounded by bees,

229. Growing so wide as to shame the dais of a powerful chariot under a heavy gold girdle set with emeralds,

230. Shining so brightly it darkens her gown and silken blouse, the mound on this graceful woman spreads out to her thighs,

231. Opposing each other, pressing together, chastising her waist, rubbing against one another, brimming with splendor,

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80 A reference to gold flecks in her eyes, which will become pacalai, the golden spots said to appear on a passionate woman’s breasts.
232. Proud and large, as if to make people say
a glittering creeper was standing there, holding up two water pots,

233. Full, perfectly matched, and quivering,
binding the hearts of young men, ending in broad peaks,

234. The breasts on this goose-like woman are bulging,
nothing on the earth surrounded by the roaring sea can compare to them in size,

235. Brilliant with darkness, casting sidelong glances,
determining their furthest limit on each side, stopping only at her earrings,

236. Luxuriant, streaked with red lines, striking young men in their vitals
to stop their hearts and make them collapse,

237. Her eyes surpass the charm of a blue lily in bloom
with all the fine qualities of a doe’s gentle eyes,

238. Entirely curly, tied back in a bun, combed with oil,
long, dark, and lush, scented with fine perfume,

239. Decked with a chain of flowers in a long drop, like a creeper bursting into bloom
scattered with new mango leaves, like a grove with treetops swaying,

240. Adorned with Śrī, like the lotus, her hair is cherished,
as thirsty bees race in to land with greedy thirst,

241. “In that utter solitude that the lord of Manu’s line brought to us
when he once rode his war elephant down the street,

242. The king of this land of proper Tamil charmed us and robbed us!
If he is going to come here, and give himself to us, then let him give!” they seem to say,

243. Two arms and a pair of flower hands, which will not carry bangles,
two eyes, which will not close in sleep,

244. Her hair bright as emerald, which has forgotten to wear flowers,
her hot breasts, which cannot stand the touch of a golden breastband,

245. Her mound, which has no regard for her fitted dress that shines with heavy gold,
her heart, which will not accept the clarity she faces,

81 A hair ornament embossed with the image of Lakṣmi.
246. She loses all sense of balance, melting in the fire that flares
from the arrows of the bodiless god, who carries a sugarcane bow,
247. No love any longer for her singing mynah bird
no fondness for her dancing peacock,
248. She cares no more for her friendly parrot,
or for the young geese she has raised, and she leaves them,
249. And enters a pleasant grove of young trees in a garden park
where the canopy of bottle-flower trees is exploding into blossom,
250. “You swim every day in the Ponṇi, you geese,” she despaired,
“the river that the king with the powerful elephant was born to rule,”
251. “And you herons,” she said filled with yearning,
“you get to go to the Cenṇi’s fine city, Pukär;”
252. “You flock of dark blue cuckoos,” she said as she languished,
“you seem to spend your time in the gardens in the Coḷa’s land,”
253. “You magnificent peacock, fanning your tail,” she sighed,
“you get to scale the Kolli and the Nēri,”\(^{82}\)
254. “You bees thrive,” she cried, overwhelmed,
“always stroking the huge, cool garland of the lord of the Nēri Hill,”
255. “You come, cool south wind, after sweeping over cool streams,” she cried, amazed,
“on the sandal-scented Malayas owned by the king of Toṇṭi,”\(^{83}\)
256. And as she waited there, strength gone, the conches blared
in front of the king of kings, Valava, Akalanka,
257. She ran over quick as lightning, and through her great desire
her admirable simplicity and ever-present bashfulness shrank away,
258. He seemed like the sun to her when she saw him pass by, body filled with light
and her face blossomed like a lotus,
259. She raced towards him so fast that her girdle did not come with her
as it slipped over her wide, spreading mound,

\(^{82}\)Hills in the Cōḷa country.
\(^{83}\)An ancient Cōḷa seaport on the Ramnad coast.
260. Her arms and her breasts swelled back to their former size, obscuring her waist and eclipsing its light,

261. She insisted that no one except for her was fit to receive the golden garland of the master of the unfailing Poṉṉi,

262. And she stirred a desire in the Cōḻa that had never been stirred by the earth goddess’s breasts or the lotus goddess’s arms.

The Experienced Woman

263. A rich sugar syrup that is truly pure, no flecks of dust at all, a golden branch filled with budding leaves, its flowers not yet blossomed,

264. A full moon not spoiled by the hare that marks its face, a new flash of lightning not spoiled by the clouds in the sky,

265. A painting sketched to surpass the bounds of convention, a branch of the wishing tree never chewed by bees who hum the seven tones,

266. A young peacock whose tail has not completely darkened, Liquor that gives a high that never returns to normal,

267. A ruby that cannot be purchased however hard the search, ambrosia that no one can ever eat enough of,

268. The fresh southern wind, which comes as a messenger in a perfect garden, at twilight, in a hall inlaid with jewels,

269. Drops of crisp water cling to the wide sea-monster waterspouts, dripping down from an open terrace under a moon as full as the sea,

270. The sandal paste spread carefully by her friends smelled beautiful, and the garland dotted with swarming bees wafted its fragrance,

271. And at that pleasant hour, a bard arrived, a great lute player from afar, along with a young female singer,⁸⁴

272. “The Nēri Hill, the city of Kōḻi,⁸⁵ the tiger banner, the three drums, the horse named Ghora, the mighty elephant Airāvata,

⁸⁴The virāli, a character whose presence in Tamil literature extends back to its earliest texts.
⁸⁵Uṟaiyūr.
The garland around the lord with the discus, the strength of his command, the Cōḻa land, the Kaveri, which surges up to cast its waves onto open shores,

Sing to me of these,” she said, and the bard took up his curving lute, and the lord of springtime, heated for battle, took up his bow,

The bard tested the honeyed tones of the strings on his lute, and Māra, heated for battle, stroked his bowstring,

The bard tuned the resonant strings, then chose the mode, and fierce Mada chose his arrows,

The bard composed a melody together with his singer, and furious Vēḷ strung arrows to his bow until his quiver was empty,

The songs from the bard’s lute were incredibly sweet, and the hands of the lord of springtime were incredibly fast,

Whether from the music rising swiftly from the lute, or the arrows of the lord of spring, the woman with a radiant brow collapsed, her senses overwhelmed,

“The wind from the Malaya mountains is as cold as the north wind blowing in from afar, and even that feels like the hot western wind,” she said,

“Is it fire, this cool water poured over my beautiful breasts, which chafe at their stretched breastband?” she asked,

“The drum that protects our hometown is really the drum struck by Māra, whose arrows destroy me,” she swore,

“It is the burning sunlight, this cascading moonlight delightful to every one in the thriving world when they take to bed,” she said,

“The righteous scepter of our king, Akaḷaṅka, the king of Kōḷi, protects the seven worlds, but for some, it is unjust,” she said,

She stayed there and grieved until dawn broke the night when, revered and praised by the crowd,

The lord who possesses the entire sea-girt earth appeared on his rutting elephant that wore a festive cloth on its head,
Unable to bear all her enemies, like the music grinding off the lute, she ran to him so that her tortured soul could thrive, a woman trying to heal,

“Divine elephants in rut, their ancient backs bound to the circle of mountains that butt up to touch the sky,

Eight to hold the earth, itself solely held by the king whom only you, Airāvata, can bear,

On all the northern mountains where the arrogant king of Kaliṅga who brought war, unwilling to ally, had run away to hide,

you were the true mountain that tread them down, pressing on them like the Vindhyas which lost their battle to the unswerving halo of the sun,

When they fought for the unfailing lunar line, for the divine Potiyil Mountain, and the ancient Kumari River with its beautiful terrain,

You were the single thunderbolt that flashed, descending to crush the serpents, kings fighting for distinction,

Your garlanded drum has given me the sense of balance I lost when the drum for the night watch was struck with a short staff,

The sound of the bells at your flanks healed my wounded ears tormented by the horrible sound of the cowbells,

The relentless windstorm from your ears turned away the vicious heat from the breeze of the Malaya mountains, unbearable on my full breasts,

The drops of rut you scatter gave me back my life after it had been cut off from me, carried away by drops of cool water,

The stormy ocean roars as rainclouds gather thickly overhead, but your roar frees me from the pain this brings, you supreme elephant,

The bodiless god wages war against me through the endless night, but when Anagha rides in upon you, you free me from my anguish,

Roaming mountain, with bees swarming at your sides, if you would protect my life from this moment on, right up to the end,

The cows returning home in the evening bode the onset of night, when the pain of unrequited love becomes unbearable.
301. I would bid you farewell, and let you trample the tank where you bathe, for you will foul the very tank that provides Māra with keen arrows,

302. Please hear me, except for the bees that swarm at your rut, which would shame a rain-cloud, you will smother the bees of Kāma's vicious bowstring,

303. Apart from the sugarcane in the red hand of the lord of the earth, your hungry trunk will want the sugarcane that serves the bodiless god's cruel hand,

304. There is no one like you, Airāvata, you are consciousness, body, and life to me!

305. You must stay, don’t leave!” she prayed, and there she remained. Another, an older woman with a brow like an arched bow,

The Older Woman

306. Her round thighs can slay, like the trunk of the rutting elephant ridden by the king of Korkai, Anagha, with mighty arms,

307. Her mound is like Śeṣa’s spread hood, set with a bright jewel curving out at the ends, latent with murder,

308. Her breasts are so full they make her bend over, lowering her face to redress the crime of overwhelming her waist, which supports them like a servant,

309. She must have plucked the lotus where pure Lakṣmī dwells, shattering hopes of comparison with her full, perfect beauty,

310. Wearing many garlands fragrant with nectar, her body traced with deer musk, adorned with pearls offered up by the sea,

311. Like deer and peacocks in a garden, she and her maids create beauty through their presence,

312. At the time when the strong, pungent toddy flows to the tips of the young palm spathes, and the runoff hums with bees,

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87 Trampling the enemies’ tanks with captured elephants is a battle tradition described in Puṟanānūṟu.
A maid poured some off and filled a palm-leaf cup,
she wiped off the bee-swarmed froth, then offered it to her with praises,

She glanced at it, her mind in pain, flicked away a drop with her sharp nail,
and drank it down, then collapsed in the arms of her maids,

And in the drunkenness that followed, the best of the best of Manu’s line
came to her, offering a dream suited for her lust,

Ecstasy was in that dream, but also the hunger to make love,
they arose together, each striving to drive the other off,

She sees her own reflection at her side
cast on a high wall of shining, pristine crystal,

The bright girdle of fine coral wrapped around her loins becomes her only dress,
hers blouse falls away as her arms grow lean,

The fragrant garland she wears breaks apart on her neck,
the traced sandal paste designs on both her breasts are ruined,

Her red, full lips blanch white, her dark eyes flush with red,
her shining brow burned hot, beading up with sweat,

In her dream she saw these things, and took them as real life,
gushing with happiness as she tried to tell everyone,

But for this woman whose garland was fragrant with nectar, swarming with bees,
the true joy that suffused her mind turned into a lie,

Under a parasol decked with garlands, wide open to give shade,
the terrible rutting elephant of Jayatuṅga approached,

“I am ruined!” cried the woman with sweet honey words when she saw this,
“All that happened was nothing but liquor, I took my dream for real life!

Can any of this actually come true for me, so full of bad karma,
when I have done nothing at all for penitence in this ancient world?”

She raised her hands in worship, and began to recover,
but a second wave of delusion arose, this time deadly, and she was overwhelmed,
She collapsed in the arms of her attentive friends—and they ran to the elephant that rose over twelve feet high,

“You are the discus, my king, for Pukār with its mansions, for Vañci, for K?ñci, for Kūṭal, for Kōḻi,

You are the sun, who protects the seventy distinct worlds, turning the wheel of command your enemies depend on,

You are Meru among all the noble mountains who are kings, your parasol and no other shelters the eight directions, its protection never wavers,

You are Tyāgasamudra, Ocean of Giving, whose army rose in war to take the seven districts of Kaliṅga, all that and still more,

You are the crest jewel on pure gold crown made up of hostile kings who rule the seven realms of the sphere found in this world, waging noble war,

So many gems are found in your land, my lord, pearls found in the waters of your oceans,

Diamonds in your Nēri Mountain, and so many embroidered dresses, all among the plenty of your Cōḻa land, my king,

She worships you, then you take from her! Her unshakable balance, the rich gold streaks on her breasts, her dark mango leaf hue,

The sleep she used to know, stolen away! How does this agree with the sacred books that the kings of your ancient line study?

His arrows are from the rich, enduring Toṇṭai land, my lord as generous as the clouds, and his sugarcane bow from the fertile country of the Poṇṇi,

His chariot is from the blessed land of the Kaṉṇi, if you keep these things in plenty, then this bashful, simple woman,

Will she be spared for even one day by the king of springtime? His wrath is crushing the life of this good woman with the blue lotus eyes!

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88 Maturai.
89 Kāma’s five flower arrows.
90 Kāma’s chariot is the southern wind, blowing up from the Pāṇṭiya country.
340. If this goes on, a bell\textsuperscript{91} hangs in your tower, it should be called a mountain, and will that one bell ever end in this world?”

341. And as they called out like this, offering reverence, the fierce bodiless god bent his bow for these women,

342. On a rutting elephant who gores to slay his enemies, the generous Cēṇṇi, highest of the high, went away in procession.

You measured out the earth, dark Tirumāl
red hands, flower feet, eyes, and ripe fruit mouth
You thrived in sleep on a banyan leaf, Akāḷaṅka,
and this poor doe has languished.

\textsuperscript{91}The āṟāyccimaṇi, “bell of justice,” rung to make a public appeal for redress.
APPENDIX D

A SELECTION FROM
THE KULŌTTUṆKA CŌLAN ULĀ OF
OṬṬAKKŪTTAR

The three ulās that compose Mūvar Ulā are quite uniform in style. This selection presents the distinct part of the text, its laudatory first portion.

Ancestral Glory

1. The god\(^1\) who seems to blossom over the violent ocean of milk
   A red lotus with green leaves, the leaping horses of his chariot,

2. The strong-willed king\(^2\) who drove his chariot forward
to end the anguish of a cow, astonishing the world,

3. The king\(^3\) who rode the thunder-wielding bull no other king could ride
to end the terrible enmity that could not be ended through divine means,

4. The king\(^4\) whose sphere of rule protected the city of the gods
tirelessly going without sleep to keep goddesses’ earrings from falling.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) The sun.
\(^2\) Manunīti Cōḷaṇ. Unless otherwise noted, attributions follow S. Kaliyāṇacuntara Aiyar’s notations for the U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar Nūnilaiyam edition of the text.
\(^3\) Kakuttāṅ, who rode Indra as a bull in order to triumph over the asuras.
\(^4\) Mucukunda.
\(^5\) He protected their husbands, hence the goddesses wear the signs of marriage.
The king who also sat on the gem-studded throne that glows hot like the sun to be praised even more than the king of the gods,

Valaven with the righteous scepter, who argued the case against Death to make him lift the bite of his huge roaring mouth,

The lord of kings who ruled a world where, at the same ghat, a deer ate with a tiger who left off from his nature,

The king of kings who brought down Mandākinī, returning bodies and lives to those who were burned in blazing fire, giving them the joys of heaven,

The mighty king who triumphed in a single chariot in a war long ago against ten others in ten fast war chariots,

The bowman whose arrows sheared off the ten heads of the warrior like thunderbolts shearing off ten mountains,

The king who long ago took the head of a ghoul for glory a general who took the head of the unyielding chieftain,

The originator of urns for old people who always defended the entire creation of the god in the lotus,

The king with the glittering sword who took the floating stronghold ruling the earth up to its encircling mountains to end any common sway,

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6Dilipa, who rules with Indra after his son Aja secures this boon in retaliation for Indra’s theft of the aśvamedha horse in order to keep Dilipa from becoming a śatakrāṭu.

7Perunaṟkīḷḷi.

8Māntātā (Māndhāṭr).

9Bhagīratha.

10Daśaratha.

11Rāma.

12Karikāl Cōḷa.

13Suraguru, whom the old commentator refers to as Nābhāgaṇ.

14Tūṅkeyileṟinta Toṭittōṭ Cemiyaṉ, described in Puṟanānūṟu 39.
The king who released the western ocean into the eastern ocean protecting the earth so that the ocean bedroom of lofty Māl recedes,

The king of kings who destroyed a mountain to make a path for the Kāvēri with its pitching waves that assail boaters’ poles,

The one who took down the central mountain by the strength of his bow turning the primeval roaring ocean into an encircling armband long ago,

The one who seemed like he was on a throne when he stepped up on the scales that would not balance even when he cut his body away to the point of a sure death,

Ceṉṉi Karikālaṉ, who took the eye of the one who did not come to raise the banks of the Poṉṉi, piling earth head-high,

Killi Vaḷavaṉ, who long ago married the royal daughter of the king crowned with many serpent hoods,

The king who long ago received Poykai’s poem Kaḷavaḻi and released the mountain king he had placed in harsh confinement,

The king with cruel scars on his body ninety-six made on his fine chest in battle after raging battle,

The king who split open the brahmarākṣasa’s chest to gain heaven and cared for Tillai, holy to the foremost,

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15 Saṃharṣaṇa.
16 Kāvēric Cōḷaṉ / Kāntaṉ / Kāntamaṉ / Civūkaṉ.
17 Prthu.
18 Śibi.
19 Mukari, also called Trilocana. The old commentary retains the feminine ending, and names the individual as Īḻattuppiṭari, “goddess of Śri Lanka.”
20 Vikkīrama Cōḷaṉ Ulā (hence VCU) v. 10 and Irācarāca Cōḷaṉ Ulā (hence RCU) v. 16 identify him as Śūravātita Cōḷaṇ, who marries the Nāga princess Kānti māti.
21 The old commentary identifies him as the nāga king Uvaccēṉan.
22 Čeṅkaṇāṉ, the old commentary names him as Taṅcai Vijālayaṉ. Compare VCU 14; RCU 16.
23 Čēramāṉ Kanaikkāḷ Irumpōṟai
24 The old commentary names him as Irācarāca; the Cāminātaiyar edition suggests Vijālaya (compare VCU 15, RCU 16).
25 The old commentary identifies him as Tirumuṭic Cōḷaṇ; Kaliyāṇacuntara Aiyar hazards no guess, but the reference to Tillai suggests Āditya I.
The king dominant in war, who took Īḻam and the Tamil soil of Maturai going foremost while lords of men bow,

The king who crossed through all the surrounding wastelands in a single day razing Utakai and taking back his messenger,

Then the Cempiya king who ruled upon the lion throne with the distinction of taking Kaṭāram and the Ganges,

Our lord, king of the kings of the earth, who did away with taxes that had not been omitted since the first Manu,

The great man praised by the king of poets, and after him, Akāḷānikaṉ, who carries the earth on his royal shoulders,

The king who lit the cruel flames of sacrifice at the fortress dear to his enemies, and received the Kaliṅkap Perum Paraṇi,

His son, the reigning Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṉ, the dark-hued lord who fully protects the worlds,

Born of a royal family in the lunar lineage from golden Tuvarai whose hands, fresh buds, nurtured the lineage of Manu,

He is the elephant born of this lovely elephant cow, Kaṉakaḷapaṉ, an affectionate name for that elephant,

After being invested with the royal crown wreathed with the royal garland that is Fortune herself, so dear to the touch,

He freed crowned kings, rivals who had lost the right to their lands released them from prison and restored their rule,

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26 The old commentary says Karikāl Peruvalattāṉ; this is Parāntaka I.
27 Irācarāca I. Compare VCU 17, RCU 21; see SII 2.1 par. 51; 7 no. 863; TAS 2 p. 4; Nilakanta Sastri 2000: 171ff.)
28 Rājendra I (Gangaikondacolaṉ).
29 Kulōttuṅka I. Compare VCU 26, RCU 26.
30 Vikrama Cōḷaṉ.
31 Cayaṅkoṇṭar, in Kaliṅkattup Paraṇi.
32 Vikrama Cōḷaṉ.
33 A text apparently composed by Oṭṭakkūttar; see Takkayākap Paraṇi v. 776.
34 Dōrasamudra, capital of the Hoysala Ballālās (modern Halebid).
35 “Young elephant like a raincloud”
34 Rescinding taxes, as the eight cloudy mountains, the eight superb rutting elephants, and the eight hooded serpents are relieved of their burden,

35 And following after his father, clearing this world of the blinding weight of ignorance that even the fiery sun cannot defeat,

36 With his peerless queen, who has a supremacy among women proper for the right to be consecrated together with her king,

37 the great lady Puvanimuluttaiyāḷ, while the gods on earth chanted the Vedas,

The Holy Services Performed in Tillai

38 He scattered the nine gems, and worshiped the dance of boundless ecstasy of the god who is offered praise,

39 He uprooted the galling nuisance, the minor god on his animal mount in the front courtyard of the Sacred hall of Tillai,

40 He laid out rows of fertile pots made of the fresh gold that flows from the great rose apple, cool with its rich fruit,

41 He inlaid the planks with fine diamonds from countless mountains until they overflowed the fresh gold on the throne,

42 He rained down pearls from the seven seas protected by his unfurled parasol like the high mountain streams that pour into the splendid Ganges,

43 He set up a holy lamp set with wish-fulfilling gems taken from Śeṣa, whose heads captivate the eye,

44 With a heap of pure diamonds like a temple tank, large emeralds scattered like green leaves,

45 Thick white pearls like raindrops, rubies like magnificent red lotuses,

46 And sapphires of the highest grade like clustered bees, he sets gems as a temple service, to achieve a beauty beyond words,

36 Viṣṇu on his vehicle Garuḍa.

37 Refers to the construction of the padmapīṭha.
47 The great and holy central hall where the god with the trident dances and the tall, spacious balcony with its gateway and terraces,  
48 Together seem like great Mount Meru with its golden peak circled by the sturdy ring of mountains,  
49 The massive seven-story towers crowd close to one another laid out like the seven mountains,  
50 The towers capped with sea monsters gleam like the roofs of heavenly chariots in the sky,  
51 The lovely holy porch glitters, extending out like a peerless wide hill that is glowing with gold,  
52 The cool water spilling over in golden cauldrons ripples like Meru’s beautiful, vast golden tanks,  
53 Billions of light rays reflect off karpaka temple cars to make daylight last forever,  
54 Noble ladies wearing ornaments of gold crowd together like celestial women who came for the right to give service,  
55 There is so much wealth that the mountain of grand Himavat, that incomparable birthplace is forgotten,  
56 He made the holy Kāmakkōṭtam shine, where the goddess gave birth to all the worlds, and all the Vedas beginning with the Ṛk,  
57 One after another, each house is laid out like a temple chariot shining with gold and jewels, as lovely as the suns,  
58 The four holy streets of the lord, which make the broad streets in the ancient city of the king of the gods blush in shame,  
59 And as the day began, the fourteen worlds surrounded by the rolling sea entered Gaṅgāpuri, beheld it and rejoiced,
He gave the order that the procession would begin to all the lords of the earth who had come to regain their lands,

Accompanied by his crowned queen, \textsuperscript{45} lovely as a gentle peacock, he awoke from sleep in his bedchamber

He was bathed, like a dark mountain accepts the waters of consecration from an enormous cloud,

After worshipping the golden feet of the god with red locks, the foundation of his line he distributed gifts to all the brahmans in accordance with their rank,

Like soft moonlight that blankets the fine Nilgiri mountains whose light spreads out in the sky,

He glowed in his royal clothing, a perfect white after removing the beautiful garment that cloaked him,

A sheathed sword is fastened at his side, the belt of fresh gold shines, adorned with the nine gems,

He is wrapped in the royal sash that surpasses the twelve suns and makes diamonds feel afraid,

Strings of bright pearls are spread on his royal chest like the milk sea placed upon the dark sea,

Just like the lotus-born goddess who appeared in the milk sea the divine jewel that it also gave\textsuperscript{46} sparkles,

The face of the armbands of wrapped celestial gold is like the crest jewel on a serpent’s sheltering hood,

Sea-monster earrings swing back and forth, dropping down his shoulders, shimmering like rays of light on the crest of Mount Meru,

The sunlight, the gems on his unique crown fights against the moonlight that streams from his pearl-decked parasol,

His incomparable shining bracelets, his crown, and the rest all gleam and he puts on the bright garland of golden fig leaves,

\textsuperscript{45}Tyāgavalli, also called Puvaṉimuḻutuṭaiyāḷ (see vv. 36–7).
\textsuperscript{46}The kaustubha gem.
The three stripes of sacred ash that cover his beautiful forehead trouble the minds of charming women,

Delicate civet musk and deer musk paste and the fragrant smoke of agarwood spread through the sky,

The garland of fragrant water lilies on his pleasing shoulders is more refreshing than the turning garland of bright planets,

As brahmans offered up praises to worship and honor him, the king with the fresh garland proceeded to the war elephant standing outside,

Who, to every unfailing cloud that was not restrained by the Yādava whom Śrī loves among kings, nor by the Mīṉavaṉ who crushes enmity,

To every mountain that was not sheared by pounding lighting nor the thunderbolt barely obtained by the king of the gods,

To all the full seas that were not taken up by the submarine mare with its ancient yawning mouth, nor by the twelve suns,

To them all he offers shelter, Airāvatam, a thunderbolt with two powerful tusks

The king beholds this peerless golden mountain, dancing with power and ascends to his neck, gracing it with royal fortune,

The garden of royal golden emblems overwhelms the daylight, the white parasol rises up above,

The lone bright right-turning conch blows countless other conches roar in return,

The thick chowries sweep back and forth, the heavenly war drums roar like the sea dancing under the full moon,

The gleaming sword, conch, discus, śārṅga bow and mace cast their light everywhere, banishing the darkness,

The bow banner of the Koṅku land and the banner with the carp are arrayed at the sides of that one golden tiger banner,

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47Krṣṇa; this refers to Arjuna and Krṣṇa burning the Khāṇḍava forest, see MahāBhārata 1.218.
48The Pāṇṭiya king, who restrains the clouds to make Maturai fertile, see Cilappatikāram 11.27–30
49These are the five weapons of Viṣṇu.
50The Cēra standard.
51The Pāṇṭiya standard.
52The Cōḻa standard.
The cool breeze arrives from the south heralding the arrival of the god with the longbow of fine sugarcane,

A thick cloud in the sky gently releases a constant mist heralding the arrival of Vāsava,

He has come, so it is clear they have all arrived for who among the gods would be bold enough to stay away?

On a huge, roaring elephant, which advances behind everyone the Southerner pays his due respect along with his company,

Arrayed out in front, riding on their horses the many lords of the marches in the world advance,

Apart from the eight elephants of the quarters The elephants come to assemble, flowing with rut that streams down like a river,

Apart from the seven that remain yoked to the sun the entire world of horses seems to be there,

Apart from the vehicle for the god of varied treasures The entire flood of humanity roars,

The dust that arose soars up to fill the sky, The golden dust that drifts down fell below,

And the worshiped world of heaven becomes the earthen world while the earthen world is transformed into a world of gold,

Minstrels beyond count, and bards who offer praise sing tributes like they have become natives of the Vidyādhara world,

Every king worships, raining down blossoms they have picked from lush celestial wishing-trees,

and covered by this golden rain, like showers from their upraised hands where mansions are coaked in dark clouds, lies the street where he begins;

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53 Probably Indra; the old commentary identifies him as Nārāyaṇa.
54 Kubera's vehicle is here Nara, “the human.”
Gatherings

101 Standing close every hall, fingers grasping the latticed windows,
then gathering up above on their rooftop terraces,

102 Some crowd all the verandas decked with garlands,
many others squeeze into the cupolas,

103 Women with golden bracelets ascend to the balconies,
crowd into the formal halls, gather close on every rooftop,

104 Both sides of the long street are filled completely,
as many others arrive to stand and watch,

105 Dark quivering brows are strong bows, eyes the flower arrows
that capture the broad earth to its end,

106 The bees hum in row after row, as the throngs of dark braids
resound like herds of noisy elephants,

107 Bees put their mouths to cloud-dark hair,
blowing on scented curls as if sounding forth the trumpets,

108 On cheeks scented with pleasing hair oil, long earrings sweep down to the shoulder
presenting the shimmering sea-monster banner,

109 The troops of the warring bodiless god have arrived
and the air glitters as if filled with the dust of the army they face,

110 The perfumed powder comes raining down, and at once bangles rain down too,
they lose their color, they lose their minds,

111 “He is the son of the king of kings, Akalaṅka,
the enemy of suffering on the earth,” they say,

112 “He is the son of the queen from the lunar line,” they say,
“born so great kings from the ancient lines would bend their crowns in worship,”

113 “He seems like all eight of the divine lords of the directions
with a beauty that binds our eyes with eager desire,” they say,

55 Ulakaṅkaḷēḷuṭaiyāḷ, compare VCU 40–41.
“For mortals, for gods, for nāgas, for divine sages, for everyone, he is the safeguard,” they say,

“If he would only offer us the sweet garlands he wears of mādhavi creeper, red water lilies, crepe jasmine and ātti,” they say,

“He is the man who broke the unique bow in Mithila, which caused a lady so much pain,” they say,

“Don’t waver, just go, fill up the roaring ocean and you will wipe away the crime that marks your noble line,” they say,

“Sleep is now lost, from this moment on,” they say, “today marks the day that poison starts frothing in the holes of shepherds’ flutes!”

“The southern breeze is cooler than the northern wind, lord of the five lands, but it burns us more cruelly than the summer’s heat,” they say,

Women with long honeyed braids called out to him so staring with blossoming eyes as if drinking him in,

Did warring Madana see them, did he flood them with arrows shot in volley after volley, what can we say?

He roared – he tormented them – he bent his sugarcane bow to join the tips – he rid the world of budding flowers –

Women grew weak and faded – and among the many who stood there shining was a girl, a mynah bird with small bracelets of pearls on her hands...

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56 Hiptage benghalensis.
57 Mountain ebony (bauhinia racemosa).
58 The roaring ocean is said to pain the ears of separated lovers.
Appendix E

A Selection from
The Irācarāca Cōḷaṇ Ulā of Oṭṭakkūttar

The three ulās that compose Mūvar Ulā are quite uniform in style. This selection presents the distinct part of the text, its laudatory first portion.

Ancestral Glory

1 In the bud of a golden lotus that rose from the storm-hued god, the son¹ who performed the work of creation,

2 Kāśyapa, one of the ten² who created all living things, The one³ whose golden chariot, yoked to seven horses, has a single wheel,

3 The one⁴ who drove his chariot over his son, turning the wheel of dharma, The one⁵ who protected the earth right to the outer sea,

4 The one⁶ who gave the goddess in the lotus and the goddess of the earth to the Brahman,⁷ for he was afraid to go back on his word,

¹Brahma.
²The ten praśāpatīs.
³The sun.
⁴Manunīti Cōḷaṇ.
⁵Dilipa.
⁶Haricandra.
⁷Viśvāmitra.
The one who caused a deer and a fierce tiger to approach the tank and drink together at the water’s edge,

The famous one who stepped up on the scales against a pretend dove which came to him for refuge, thinking, “If I weigh myself, the king will not refuse,”

The one who dug the seven oceans rolling with unfailing water giving them his name in his search for the sacrificial horse,

The one who ended the terrible curse of the master of the Vedas giving the revered celestial river his name,

The ancient king who protected the earth so that we say the lineage of Raghu is the dominant lineage of kings,

The one who transformed Indra into a bull and rode him into war finishing off the Dānavas to answer the plea of the anguished gods,

The one who destroyed his great enemy with a chariot from the heavens driving down ten chariots with his own single chariot to take the lead,

The one who long ago used boulders to lay down a path over the clear waves, which honored him for the valor of his bow,

The one who smashed the floating walls, which succumbed to his sword a peerless weapon, auspicious and triumphant, that culls without remainder,

\textsuperscript{8}Māntātā (Māndhātr).
\textsuperscript{9}Śibi.
\textsuperscript{10}Sagara.
\textsuperscript{11}In Sanskrit, ocean – sāgara.
\textsuperscript{12}Bhāgīratha.
\textsuperscript{13}Kapila.
\textsuperscript{14}Bhāgīrathī.
\textsuperscript{15}Raghu.
\textsuperscript{16}Kakuttaṉ; compare Kulōttuṉka Cōḻaṉ Ulā (hence KCU) 3.
\textsuperscript{17}Daśaratha.
\textsuperscript{18}Śambara.
\textsuperscript{19}Rāma.
\textsuperscript{20}Tūṅkeyileṟinta Toṭittōṭ Cempiyaṉ, see vv. 77, 86; compare Vikkirama Cōḻaṉ Ulā (hence VCU 9, KCU 13.}
The king who ruled from the southern sea to the northern sea
who gave the western sea passage to the swelling eastern sea,
The king of kings who razed mountains to link the seven seas
to the Ponnī River, flooding down to collapse its banks,
The one who married the Nāga princess after circling the marriage fire with the goddess of the earth,
The one who carved a tiger on the chest of the divine golden Mount Meru,
and the rock-hard chests of enemy kings,
The one who released the Bowman from his fetters
in exchange for Kalavali Nāṟpatu composed by the fine wordsmith Poykai,
The champion of champions, who had ninety-six scars on his chest
and made slaves of his enemies,
The king who in just one day travelled seven hundred leagues
to Īlam laid it low, took a tribute of elephants and returned home,
The mighty one who used elephants in battle dress
to destroy eighteen wastelands and burn Utakai down,
The noble lord who bathed with his queen
in the Kāviri, the Gauthamī, the Narmadā, and the ancient heavenly Ganges,
The king who ventured over all the oceans, which surge with crashing waves
cast his net for enemies and hauled them in like fish,

21 Saṃhārāṇa; compare VCU 9, KCU 14.
22 Kāvēric Cōḷaṉ / Kāntaṉ / Kāntaman / Civūkaṉ; see VCU 12, KCU 15.
23 Cūrvātitta (Śūravāditya) Cōḷaṉ, who marries the Nāga princess Kāntimati. Compare VCU 10, KCU 19 (in which
he is identified as Kiḷḷi Vaḷavaṉ.
24 Karikālaṉ.
25 Čengkanāṉ; compare VCU 14, KCU 20.
26 Karikālaṉ.
27 Vijayālaya.
28 Parāntaka I.
29 League – kātam (roughly ten miles).
30 Irācarāca I.
31 Rajendra I.
32 Vijayarājendra
The king who took Koppam with his superb elephant and received a \textit{paraṇi} feeding hundreds of murderous elephants to a famished ghoul,

The king who took Kūṭalakaṅkamam with his superb tusker and received a \textit{paraṇi} that will never meet its equal for a hero,

The mighty king who in years past protected the world straightening out the country, the conflict, taxes, and the famine,

A bright sun associated with the \textit{Kaliṅkap Paraṇi} who shelters many worlds under his superb parasol,

Vikkirama Cōḻaj, the unquestionable guardian of the universe the discus-wielding god and the sacker of cities combined,

Then, from this noble lineage, ancient and great taking the name Parantapa, protecting the whole universe,

The ruler who gilded the Little Hall, the large holy Great Hall, as well as many other halls,

The surrounding balconies, the pedestal for the god, the courtyard walls, the towers, the terraces, every streets, the entrance arches,

the holy Kāmakkōṭṭam at the temple of the lord who takes slaves, and the gateway arches at the entrance of that temple,

Covering them with the purest gold, and who cast out the alien nuisance and had it submerged in the moat that is the facing sea,

The Ceṇṇi whose blessed son, famous Rājarāja was reborn as the descendent of the sun,

As each of the principal births of great Tirumāl he destroyed half the enemies of the gods, and for the other half,
This great Meru has come to earth in Manu’s line
the goddess in the lotus reigning on his noble chest,

The noble king of kings, Vararājarāja, leads the way
bound to the fourteen worlds enclosed by the ring of mountains,

Krṣṇa with the lethal discus, Ghanakalabha, Gaṇḍa,
Jananātha whose parasol even cools the sun,

The tilaka of the eminent solar lineage,
who with his queen, Puvaṇamulututaiyapūvai,

The queen of the inner quarters, the queen of women
whose shared command stretches over the eight directions of the earth,

With this peacock of a woman, the jewel of both lineages
who fosters a joy that spreads over the earth, he rises from sleep,

The auspicious moment arrives, countless drums roar
and he is consecrated with the waters of the Kāvēri,

He fulfills the morning rituals to brahmans, to gods
and to the ancestors who had earlier wielded command,

The massive gem in the center of his crown
reaching the vast beauty of his ancestor at dawn,

He applied the three white stripes of ash prescribed
for the worship of the god with twisted locks like heaping coral,

Looking in the mirror at his beauty dark as a blue lily
he seemed to see himself adorned for war against his own son Kāma,

He meditated on the sacred dance at Tillai
the divinity of his family for that entire ancient lineage of kings,

Then, as the sound of each Vedas rose up together
he mounted the lord of elephants, surrounded by great warriors,

\[39\] Titles of Rājarāja II.
\[40\] The sun.
\[41\] The king is here figured as Viṣṇu, Kāma’s father.
The royal conch blared, a right-turning shell taken from the sea and then the three drums pounded,

The bright golden chowries sweep up like waves the divine parasol decked with hanging trim spreads wide,

The king of the gods, intent on war with the few Asuras left in the world was honored as the tiger painted on his banner,

Surrounded by the Southerner with his army of warriors, the Cēra king, the Sinhala king, the Koṅkaṇi king, the king of Mālwa, the king of Magadha,

The king of Gāndhāra, the king of Kaliṅga, and the king of Kosala, the lord of men advanced among them, wearing a garland of flowers,

He was splendid, worthy of the holy name Vēntar Poruvāṭa Pūpāla Kōpālaṉ, “The Herder of Lords, Eclipsing Other Kings,”

Then, as the day began, the clouds were freed from their captivity in rich Kūṭal and calmed the dust in Pukār, on the streets with golden mansions,

The king of the gods sent a storm of golden rain atoning for the crime of once pelting him with hail,

Then, among the seven mothers who protect the son of Kāma’s foe Kaumāri paved his way with a scattered rain of flowers,

The morning’s bright heat that ends the night was driven off, pushed away by clouds, and the clouds then left, driven off by the necklaces that make the bright heat return,

The fine short sword he wore at his side seemed like the huge tiger on the side of brilliant Meru,

The glitter of his sea-monster earrings, set with noble jewels dimmed the crowded series of the planets,

Are the two bands on his arms the two serpent kings who have both been relieved of their burdens?

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42The king figured as Viṣṇu.
43Ātiśeṣa and Vāsuki.
44Ātiśeṣa bears the earth; Vāsuki served as the churning rope when the primordial sea was churned.
Adorned with the supreme lord of gems, his crown shines like great Meru surrounded by the vast planets and the asterisms,

Above the moonlight that is his fame, shining to the ends of the earth, the moonlight of his parasol covers the Cakravāla Mountains,45

The five divine weapons revere him, fulfilling their duties by setting out from their place in his possessive hand,

A hail of arrows in the quiver on his back, bow at his shoulder bodiless Vēḷ leads the way, devoted to his master,

He is the Trikūṭam Mountain47 because of all his rubies the cool Kolli Mountain because of the holy goddess,48

The divine Potiyil Mountain where perfect Tamil ceaselessly resounds, Meru where the savage tiger roars,

Traversing the world on his horse Ghora, he is the golden mountains around the earth, The mighty Himalaya because of his long chowrie,49

Adorned with the garland of fresh, tender leaves and the crown upon his head, Cenṭi approached the street of the women who wear earrings of rolled leaves,

Gatherings

The women who appeared on earth the day Mucukunda returned after protecting the celestial world with steadfast courage,

The charming women of the Cakravāla Mountains where the Cōḷa toured with his horse to dominate his enemies,

The celestial beauties obtained in the sea once churned by the two arms of a king of the Cōḷa lineage in Kōḷi,50

45 The ring of mountains that encompasses the earth; see v. 37, 68.
46 Kāma; Tamil vēḷ – desire.
47 A mountain in Sri Lanka said to possess many rubies, including a lethal gem.
48 A mythical mountain that has the image of a goddess on its side, the side of which is said to be fatal.
49 The hair used for chowries comes from yaks native to the Himalayas.
50 Uṟaiyūr, the Cōḷa coastal capital.
Next came the celestial mountain women who were taken from the renowned peak through the triumphant power of one king’s bow,

The pure women from both ranges of the world of the Silver Mountain, where one king travelled all alone and wielded his bow,

The divine women who came to serve the daughter of the serpent lord who gave her to one king in marriage because of his affection,

The celestial mountain women carried off on the day one king returned from the Meru mountain, a plaything he inscribed with a tiger,

Women lovely as peacocks, whom the Vaḷavaṉ carried off from a floating citadel their eyes as keen as the spear once given to a heroic son,

The many women taken in the capture of Alakā, city of the lord of wealth along with his precious treasure,

And many others, groups of divine, beautiful women who have rights in the temple within their holy lineages,

Crowding the entrances, the balconies, the common rooms, the shrines, the halls, the terraces, the festive arches and every street,

The windows, the porches, mansions, the dancing stages and the man-made hills, so that nothing but them could be seen,

Holding each other, overwhelmed, quarreling in the street, worshiping, suffering, each and every one,

Voices from the Gatherings

“Look at his bow, you women with shining jewels, Indra’s thunderbolt bent back at its ends, it destroyed ten million mountains!”

51Udayagiri.
52The vīdyādhara realm, described as having a northern and southern range (vaṭacēṭi and teṉcēṭi).
53Śūravāditya Cōḻaṉ, who marries the Nāga princess Kāntimati. See v. 16.
54Karikālaṉ.
55Tūṅkeyileṟinta Toṭittōṭ Cempiyaṉ; see vv. 13, 86
56Skanda, given his spear by Umā.
“Look at the bow, triumphant and holy, which was once bent back to shoot a single arrow that burned up the surrounding sea,”

“Come look at the sword that sliced to hew a path for the rippling Kāviri so the Cōḷa land would thrive,”

“Look at the triumphant sword that cast the moon down to its death cast down the thundering clouds, cast down the floating city,”

“Look at the ancient drum of kaṭampa wood taken from the Čēra in Vañci, where the mighty walls were levelled,”

“Look at the war drum played when the Poṇṇi was mastered by using the heads of other kings, who came to reclaim their taken lands,”

“Look at the triumphant sword that cast the moon down to its death cast down the thundering clouds, cast down the floating city,”

“Look at the ancient drum of kaṭampa wood taken from the Čēra in Vañci, where the mighty walls were levelled,”

“Look at the war drum played when the Poṇṇi was mastered by using the heads of other kings, who came to reclaim their taken lands,”

“Look at the crown that was worn by Paraśurāma whose weapon was conquering, holy, and true,”

“Look at the crowns taken twenty-one times on the earth once twenty-one kings who made the world suffer were killed,”

“Look at the unique tiger, the thousand-eyed god that leaps out to enclose the perimeter mountains,”

“Look at the parasol established to protect us like the soaring dome of heaven, containing the sky below,”

“Come, lord who has come, mighty lord of Kūṭal arriving at the end, once all other kings have passed!”

“Look at the crown that crowns the three worlds to eclipse the halo of the sun as it rises above the great sea,”

“Look at the serpent armbands, so thick that thousands and thousands must have coiled in together,”

“Look at the jewel necklace a great Pāṇṭiyaṉ once wore after conquering the king of the gods as he laughed upon his throne,”

57 A deed performed by Rāma.
58 Kāvēric Cōḷaṉ; see v. 15.
59 Tūṅkeyileṟinta Toṭittōṭ Ĉempiyāṉ; see vv. 13, 77.
60 Neolamarckia cadamba.
61 That is, the kings carried earth on their heads to build the banks of the Kāviri. See VCU 13, KCU 18.
62 Kingdoms defeated by Paraśurāma, said to have been subsequently given to Kāśyapa and then passed down through the Čēra dynasty.
63 The Čōḷa’s tiger banner, here identified with Indra.
64 The necklace of Ukkira Kumāra Pāṇṭiyaṉ.
“Look at the anklet of the Pāṇṭiyaṉ, cut down in wrath on the day a Cōḷa wanted to grace it by wearing it for his own,”

“Look at the arrangement of his beauty,” they say, “This holy father of Madana, who has once more been refined!”

“The three banners of the foremost gods and every banner raised for the thirty-three have been taken to lead the way,

And because of those banners, he appears as them all, the kings of gods who chant the ancient forest books,” they say,

“After crushing his enemies, and ridding their crowns of war flowers, never mind those crowns with common water or ground-cover flowers,

Out of all the war flowers, the only haven for noble Koṟṟavai is the ātti flower that delights the lord of kings,” they say,

“Aiming to imprison the Asuras who had spread over the earth, he thought to take three steps as alms, protecting her,

And the earth who received this unique service,” they say, “now won’t release his red feet, so he will be hers alone,

Taken from the milk ocean once churned by a mountain cloaked in icy mists, suffering then so that it would suffer no longer,

Would the pure goddess of the red lotus now be anywhere apart from his holy chest,” they say,

“Show me, good lady, where Padmāvati lies upon that holy chest,” they say,

“How good it would be if the queen of the lord, Kamalā with lovely eyes appeared smiling before our eyes,” they said,

“O ladies, we raised our hands in worship to his lotus eyes we worshiped the red lotus that tastes the sound of all the Vedas,”

65 Vīra Pāṇṭiyaṉ, whom Karikālaṉ is said to have beheaded.
66 The king is here figured as Viṣṇu, the father of Kāma.
67 Mountain ebony (bauhinia racemosa).
68 The king figured as Viṣṇu, said to manifested the Vedas as food from his mouth.
110 We worshiped the lotuses with rich bangles
and we will worship his navel, the lotus that is hidden, so reveal it!”

111 Thinking of holding that lotus, they call, “Only his lotus feet have seen it!
Now would it be easy for our kohl-streaked lotus eyes?”

112 “When they start to move,” said some, “the two great chowries are there
to drive off the bees that swarm on that one grand ātti garland!”

113 “The two ears of Airāvatam are also chowries,” said some,
“to prevent them from approaching those waterfalls of rut!”

114 They quarrel with each other out on the street, their hearts uneasy,
as women with brows like the crescent moon become giddy...

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69 The king’s navel is hidden under his armor.
70 In this difficult verse, the women appear to be thinking of Viṣṇu as Vāmana, who took three strides across the universe (here figured as the lotus of Viṣṇu’s navel, the origin of the cosmos.
APPENDIX F

ULĀVIYAL PAṬALAM
IN THE RĀMĀYAṆA OF KAMPAṆ

KampaṆ’s treatment of ulā is found in the Pālakāṇṭam (The Book on Youth), the first volume of the Tamil RāmāyaṆa. This is a translation based on the U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar Nūnlāiyan edition of 1967; verse numbering follows accordingly.

1140. Approaching like a group of does
roving like a peacock flock
glittering like a set of stars
gathering like lightning strikes
    swarming bees hummed and buzzed
anklets shimmered everywhere
as women rushed into pressing crowds
their braids damp with fresh blossoms.

1141. No glance at braids that have fallen loose
no eye for girdles missing
no hold on fine dresses falling down
no respite for punished waists,
crowded in, they crowded more
    “Give me room, I need some room!”
Women as fine as gems pressed close
like bees swarm to gulp down nectar.
1142. Flower feet danced, anklets jingled, and slim waists suffered as women with lovely eyes ran like a stream runs to the valley blossoming like blue lotuses, vast as a flood pouring in as if he had dragged them close knowing their hearts had been caught.

1143. They see nothing but lust in each others’ eyes, “And now we obtain that reward,” they say, “that lies in store for good women!” They looked like herds and herds of does in summer’s heat, when the earth dries out and no rain falls from the skies seeing good water and racing.

1144. Like buzzing flies that swarm on honey women fell into the street to see the feet that redeemed Ahalyā body so rosy she could have drunk blood and the arms and shoulders broad as a mountain so proud and thick they broke the bow for the maiden with dark, sweet hair.\(^1\)

\(^1\)Sītā.
1145. Through the eyes of the women who stared never blinking as though he were walking right down in the street he came past on a chariot yoked to swift horses to make everyone realize the truth in the name that eminent men were singing to praise him, “He is here, a Kṛṣṇa for everyone!”

1146. “His chariot is racing past,” women cried to one another “Already here, to leave so fast, how can this be?” But as they wailed, crazed in their anguish one beauty stood out, trapping this man who passed beyond the earth passed beyond the home of the gods above holding nothing but him so he could not pass beyond the confines of her eyes.

1147. One woman stood there raining everything down her bangles and her rustling dress, culture and model virtue the glow of her skin, her reason and mind and her perfect, flowering beauty, her diamond jewelry, modesty, and childlike ways leaving nothing apart from her life.

1148. One woman stood raining tears like a cloud from glittering eyes that swept back to her earrings, her firm breasts, pressed together so tightly a thread could not pass were pierced through by the arrows that bodiless Vēḷrāja never stopped firing from his clean-stripped sugarcane bow, she could barely stand, as unsteady as her waist had been a lightning bolt freed from the clouds.

2Kāma.
1149. We will never be able to say how it happened, did those long, potent eyes of each red-fingered woman suffuse the color of the lord’s dark body, or did the sapphire hue of his thundercloud body darken the women’s inked gaze?

1150. One woman with a radiant brow and a dark glossy body like the mango leaf watched the battle that Mada was everywhere waging showering down a hail of clustered flower arrows, “Does he not see the army of the king of kings, he misses the manly power of his forceful bow? What kind of man is this, who rains down arrows on women with elegant jewels?”

1151. One peacock of a woman stood, heart melting skin blanching, sweat beading on the arched bow of her brow lighting up her surroundings with a lovely glow, her eyes fierce as Death, like triumphant, killing spears, saw nothing else but him, “This generous lord,” she asked, “is he all alone?”

1152. Another woman stood there as though an artist who had never tasted the savor of pleasure had painted the essence of passion long held as supreme into a single consummating form. She was true to the honor of womanly virtue but her jewels all fell off, her body collapsed and she kept up only her dress.
1153. One woman with hair black as ink, red mouth and bright brow
felt her heart giving way, and called out to her friend,
“This rogue has come, made his way to my heart!
I’ve trapped him there, closed the door to my eyes
and now I feel ready for bed.”

1154. One woman like a perfect sculpture
never saw Vēḷ’s arrows pierce her unbearably potent body
never felt her dress and knotted girdle come apart,
she stood watching all the women there
gaze at his perfect body
and the fire burned bright in her eyes.

1155. One woman who had eyes like spears
joyful, lush, so long they sweep back to her hair
concealing her guile and showing it too
plunging in to pierce the heart
so red, so white, so black
came to watch with delight in her heart
then took refuge back in her home.

1156. Thick tresses of hair, heavy tight-bound breasts, and girdle-clad loins
packed in so tight, nothing else could be seen.
One suffering woman with wide, full eyes
burned with desire to see this true beauty
but finding no room, saw the compassionate lord
through the open view between waists.
1157. The bodiless god, with sword at the ready
rained arrows deep in women’s hearts.
The heaps of fire-bright jewels, the falling girdles,
running sandalwood paste in the sweat on their breasts,
pearls, bangles, clusters of flowers slipped from long flowing hair
and left no trace of bare street to be seen.

1158. Those who looked at his arms could see nothing but arms
Those who looked at his lotus feet could see nothing but feet
Those who looked at his broad hands, just those and no more
Who, of all those women with eyes like swords
looked at his body fully?
They were like all those who looked
at his manifest form long ago.3

1159. So that one woman with flowing hair and a tiny waist
could truly live, he shrank to rest inside her heart,
who could ever be greater than this lord
who held the whole world in his stomach?

1160. One woman with long wavy hair and select jewels
walking like a perfect creeper that flows with life
anklets and girdle jingling
drew near, then went back
carried in the arms of her grieving friends.

3The viśvarūpa, “consummation of all forms,” that Viṣṇu revealed to Arjuna in the Bhagavadgītā.
1161. “For the sake of a poor woman,”
called one with select jewels and soft, bulging breasts
“you took a bow and crushed it into dust, you righteous man!
Protect me, even if you have an iron heart!
Break the sugarcane bow, and take me for your own.”

1162. “This man who has endured so much,”
called one woman with a radiant brow
dark eyes traced with black
“stops driving in his lone chariot,
then comes and stands right before me!
Is it all fake? Is it all a dream?”

1163. One woman, beside herself, no messenger to send
felt her sweet life slipping away, and called,
“This Sītā, with red-streaked eyes like flowers
golden earrings, and breasts graced with gold and jewels,
what penance did she do?”

1164. One perfectly-sculpted woman gasped and cried
panting with hot breaths, swooning
as she called out to her loving friend,
“Was it Kāma the mind-churner, then,
who drew this vision of a man?”

1165. “When you think about his qualities,”
said a woman with bright mouth and radiant brow,
“is there any man who comes close?
I tell you he is Kṛṣṇa!
Just look and you will see.”
1166. “This faultless man has come to this city!”
said a woman with a radiant brow
  golden anklets falling, bangles too
heartbreakingly frail from her lust,
“The reward for all the penance done
on Janaka’s behalf has arrived!”

1167. “Maybe he’ll come alone,”
called a woman with tears pouring from her eyes
  loins wrapped in a girdle of fresh gold
suffering terribly, ruining her looks,
“away from crowding sages, crowding noble kings
if only in my dreams?”

1168. One woman with gold bangles,
like a peacock glad of the clouds that sweep the high fields
thought she could conceal the lust
kept close within her heart,
but the bodiless god has seen it all before.
Can a face conceal a private truth
as well as someone’s heart?

1169. One woman with long, even eyes, wearing splendid jewels
lay down on her flower-strewn bed,
her breasts full and pressing, shining with health
boiled as she panicked, gasping her life’s breath
like a snake who feels coming thunder.
These women with crimson lips
like water lilies, flowing with nectar
trembled as their spirits reeled within,
they tasted nothing of the pleasure
felt by Śītā, with her slender, weary waist
but somehow or other they lived.

“This godly man,” one woman called,
“sees none of these women sobbing in pain
bodies sweating, spirits ebbing
not with his fine eyes, not in his thoughts,
has he no love within him at all?”

No end to the women obsessed with his chariot
no limit to the beauty of this noble lord,
so that even for Māra, shooting with his golden bow
what recourse could there be?
Arrows all spent, he clasped with his hand
the hilt of the sword at his side.

Not just the women with long fragrant braids,
for what can we say of the battle above
that Vēḷ, god of summertime, waged with sky dwellers
maidens who live in the heavenly land
as his arrows flew upward to plunge in their breasts.
“He goes,” one woman said,
“and then just keeps on going,
a man who wants nothing from women
left stunned by their fantasies!
What is he, a man with no hint of compassion?
Some perfect mystic? Or some brutal killer?”

One woman with a fragile waist
that both hot breasts, traced with painted lines
threatened to collapse
sensed nothing of her body, nothing of her hands
and as they said, “She’ll live, she’ll live!”
she gave way, and fell completely still.

Like people who swing back and forth
on planks tied to areca palms,
a woman with words sweet as syrup
went after the warrior’s chariot
coming and going, coming and going
till her flower feet grew rough,
now what a way to do things!

Among the women driven crazy by their lust
one glanced at another who was standing there
and thought, “Did she see where my mind just went?”
Doesn’t shyness always follow
after the taste of desire?
A woman standing there, a Lakṣmī said, “His people once gave up their own sweet lives so the people who loved them could live! But he will not give us sweet lives of our own, how did this cruelty develop in him?”

“When you wonder why he broke that shielding bow,” said a woman with a lovely brow overwhelmed by the sound of his name, “it wasn’t out of love for that peacock Sītā with speech so pure, and a long braid fragrant with incense just a show of expertise.”

Necklace falling, dress falling, all her jewelry falling as her sweet life fell away a woman with her long hair fallen free said, “He’s murdering me in front of this man with a dreadful bow! Who is stronger than Vēḷ, a god of death?”

As the women fell apart like this, the compassionate lord moved on surrounded by a crowd of local kings and approached the marriage hall where Vaśiṣṭha, sage of pristine mind and Kauśīka, master of the Vedas stood ready for the occasion.

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4Rāma’s ancestors in the solar line such as Śibi, who sacrificed his own flesh in order to save the life of a dove that had come to him for protection.
Like a vast cloud that sweeps down over the ground
Śrī’s lord lay himself down at their feet
his necklace of heavy, immaculate gems swaying
like a twisting bolt of lightning
and worshiped as tradition holds.

He worshiped, and at the word of those two great sages
the man who appeared in Ayodhyā
to keep dharma safe in the world
ascended to the special flower-covered throne,
and surrounded by his legendary brothers
so close they seemed like shadows
he glowed, how he glowed!

Then the king, leader of vast armies\(^5\)
accompanied by his retinue
reached the jeweled marriage hall,
just like the bright moon
trailed by all the constellated stars
that came to bring light to the sky.

He entered, then bent low to touch the sages’ feet,
as a rain of nectar-laden flowers
poured down from above,
and he ascended to the throne
as Indra turned his face away in shame.

The Gaṅgas, the Koṅgus, Kaliṅgas and Teluṅgus,
the rulers of the Siṅhalas, the Cēras, the Southerners,\(^6\)
the kings of Aṅga,\(^7\) Kuliṅga, and Avanti,\(^8\)
the Vaṅga\(^9\) kings, the Malwa kings, the Cōlas, and the Marāṭhas,

\(^5\)Daśaratha.
\(^6\)The Pāṇṭiya king and his underlords.
\(^7\)Eastern Bihar.
\(^8\)Western Madhya Pradesh.
\(^9\)Central-southern Bengal.
1187. The mighty kings of Magadha, the Macca\(^{10}\) kings, and foreign kings, and still more, the heroic Lāṭa\(^{11}\) kings, the kings of Vidarbha, the Chinese kings, the Cēkuṇa kings, the Sindhi kings, the Pañcāla kings,\(^{12}\) the Cōṇaka lords, the Turkish kings,\(^{13}\) the Kuru kings,

1188. Joined by armed Yādavas, the seven valiant Koṅkani kings, and the kings of Cēdi, the finest of men all crowded close kings with bright and shining crowns beaming light into the sky.

1189. Held by women who speak delicious words sweeter than fine sugarcane chowries glittered on each side, growing brighter and brighter like the brilliance of a noble fame laid out in an anthology.

1190. Women, their hair dark as black sand swarmed by whirling bees, honeybees drones and twirling dragonflies, sang out the benediction joining the flutes and the murmur of the lutes till music filled the air.

\(^{10}\) Central India.  
\(^{11}\) southern Gujurat.  
\(^{12}\) Cōmakar.  
\(^{13}\) Turukkar.
1191. The moon, the unrivaled white parasol of the king who appears as strong as an elephant with fiery eyes, came to see the regal wedding of young Sītā as the standard of her line, 
rising high, overflowing with grace looking like his family thrived.

1192. Packed in so tight no one could move the army stood as one, a vast and mighty sea, so that the entire country of King Janaka the lord of rutting elephants and battle horses seemed but one vast city.

1193. The father of that bright-browed girl followed the rush of his desire and handed over all his worldly wealth, rejoicing in the celebration of his guests.

Pure love, the same for Rāma and the lowest man what more is left to say?

\[14\text{Sītā is from the lunar dynasty.}\]
APPENDIX G

TIRUKKAĻUKKUNṆṆATTU ULĀ
OF ANTAKAKKAVI VĪRARĀKAVA MUTALIYĀR

Safeguard: Praise to VaṇṭuvaṆa Pillaiyār

As I sing a holy ulā
on the procession of the lord of golden KaḻukkuṆṟam
who is supreme in the world,
Let the elephant of VaṇṭuvaṆa, worshiped for so long
by the serpent on a serpent couch
who wears a beautiful garland of tulasi
guide the way of my poetry.

The Majesty of this Holy Place

1. He established all the splendid Vedas
   as a sacred mountain in this flourishing world,

2. He is worshiped by a crore of Rudras who arose in battle,
   he is revered by the bull Nandin, who came to him twice in sorrow,

3. He dispelled the evil karma pronounced because of a young girl’s ball
   on the god with the long thunderbolt banner
4. He is worshiped by Hari, the eldest, who came to be redeemed from taking the life of the wife,¹ foremost sage of Uśanas’s line,

5. He effaced the spiritual misery of the god who sits on a lotus, who was cursed by Sāvitrī,

6. He made the harsh pain of crime fade for the eight Vasus, who were cursed by the furious wishing cow,

7. He set the twelve fiery suns in their proper order among the twelve lunar months,

8. He is supreme, the one whom a host of sages revered long ago to learn Pāṇini’s grammar, as beautifully sweet as sugarcane juice,

9. Out of his desire, he married the daughter of the mountain, and made his home on the Veda Mountain for many years,

10. He was worshiped by eight vultures, a pair for each age of the world, who honored him with the sixteen ministrations,

11. A rākṣasa named Māyīkaṉ, cursed to become a boar by the sage² who has great insight

12. was shot by an arrow in the forest, where Curakuru, the Cōḷa heir, came hunting with his army,

13. all the karma that arose when he killed a cow herself Tilottamā, cursed by Nandin,

14. He removed from this king on the good mountain, He made the karma flee, a new crow that went trembling to a southern mountain,

15. He is the lord of Campāti Tīrtham, which cured the minister and the hunting dog when their entire bodies were covered with leprosy,

16. He is the lord of the sixteen tanks, revered by all the rivers right up to the fine deep Ganges, whose greatness runs unchecked,

17. He is worshiped by countless virtuous beings, first the thirty-six diverse Brahmās to create the seven worlds,

¹Puloma, the wife of Bṛgu.
²Markaṇḍeya.
18. He has ascended as high as a crore of dharmas being done, 
   He is excellent as the dharma banner\(^3\) that stands as his own land, 

19. He has taken one peak of the ancient mountain, shining Kailasa, 
   and placed it as the central mountain where the Vedas are heard,\(^4\) 

20. He is the lord of the Plantain Grove, where he shook off his fatigue 
   after dancing in the northern forest,\(^5\) praised beyond the reaches of the earth, 

21. He is the lord of Śivapuram,\(^6\) a town that gods surround 
   since anyone can be saved from death there, no matter what they’ve done, 

22. He arose for the ones who worshiped him long ago in the city where he dwells, 
   to make their name rise up and refer to this mountain,\(^7\) 

### Other Holy Places

23. Shining on his fine bull\(^8\) on parade, a wife who dances on crowded waves on its chest, 
   He is the lord of southern Ārur, Tyāgarāja, Hāṭakeśvara, 

24. His favor relieves my vice when I sing on the charming beds of bangled girls, 
   He is the lord of Kāci, where the bees hum in cīkāmaram song,\(^9\) 

25. He has beautiful power, viewed by the beautiful people on the sea-girt earth, 
   He is the lord of The Open Hall,\(^10\) kohl-dark poison on his throat, granting liberation, 

26. Praised by the one who rests on the coiled snake with its tail in its mouth, 
   and Śrī who rests on a lotus, he is the lord of fragrant Tiruvālavāy, 

27. On his head runs the cool wave-dashed Ganges, a deer sits in his upraised hand, 
   He is the lord of red Aṅgāmalai, filled with deer and rutting elephants,

\(^3\)Kalukkuṉṟam. 
\(^4\)Śiva, it is said, had Nandin take the three peaks of Kailasa and install them in the south as Śrīsailam, Kālahasti, and Kalakkuṉṟam. 
\(^5\)Tiruvālaṅkāṭu. 
\(^6\)Kalukkuṉṟam. 
\(^7\)This refers to the crore of Rudras who worshiped here to rid themselves of the sin of killing all the asuras to rid the world of suffering, and the mountain is therefore called Uruttirakoṭi, or Uruttirakoṭikiri. 
\(^8\)Viṣṇu. 
\(^9\)The cīkāmaram is a marutam (agricultural) musical mode. 
\(^10\)Citamparam.
28. He has taken the dark woman with endless beauty as his left side,  
He is the lord of the Kāḷatti Mountain, where fine peacocks dance,  

29. Adored by the sister of the god who loves Lakṣmī, whose girdle sparkles in the night,  
He sits under the mango tree in Kāñci, where the shade never disappears,  

His Other Distinctions  
30. He is the Pure One, the master of an army of ghouls,  
His raging standard has plowed the entire world,  

31. He is radiant, without flaw, highest of the high, the foundation of the world and more,  
The brahman of the highborn Veda Mountain,  

32. He is the earliest being, the ancient one, Rudra, God,  
The dancer red as blood,  

33. Faultless in his ascetic ways, his splendor, his power, his prestige,  
He dwells in Kāḷakkunṟam,  

The Festival  
34. With anklets on his lotus feet, in the land of Tuṇṭīraṉ and the land of the gods,  
On the day in the holy time in the month of Āṭi,  

35. when the time had come for the festival of the lord with the axe,  
the sun came running through the sign of Cancer,  

36. and arose there, thinking, “I am first in this procession, I am saved!  
I have gained a birth greater than the twelve suns,”  

His Holy Bath and Other Ministrations  
37. And then came the sun from the house of Aquarius, pot in hand,  
thinking, “I should bathe him well,”  

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11 Viṣṇu is the bull, so he has plowed the entire world as Varāha.  
12 Tuṇṭīraṉ is an ancient king of Kāñci; this refers to Toṇṭaināṭu.
38. He was consecrated with the fragrant water
from a row of pure gold pots set with rows of jewels,

39. the sight reminded the lord of the Ganges in flood, and he thought,
“there is nothing like marks from the bracelets on the two loving hands of my wife,”

40. Then, like being embraced by the feathers of two vultures,
their desire great because of their crime,

41. like the beauty of being cloaked in the skin of Narasiṃha,
born in the heart of a pillar because of his total delusion,

42. like a cloud moving low to shelter Meru from view,
he was dried with the bright ritual cloth,

43. Then, after receiving the noble worship that the Kāraṇāgama dictates
from the teachers of the Śaiva Vedas, proficient in a crore of rewards,

Adornment with the Holy Ornaments

44. He is adorned with sacred bracelets, aides to the eye in his brow,
eating the chariot that Manmatha drives and his parasol in the sky,

45. clothed in the garment made of four sorts of gold,
removing for purity’s sake the stench of garment he once owned,

46. adorned with a crown, like the twelve who came to join the peaks
of the Veda Mountain, home of the lord who has made me his own,

47. decked with sea monster earrings that shine like the sun
who rests on that day in the house of Capricorn,

48. then a necklace of pearls is hung on his dark neck,
streaming light like the clouds stream newborn pearls,

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13 This myth refers to Umā building a līṅga of sand on the banks of the Kampānādi, where the Ekambareśvara shrine is located. Śiva tests her by making the river overflow, and she embraces the līṅga to protect it, impressing upon it the marks of her bracelets. Hence, the pouring is like the flooding of the Ganges.

14 These are the vultures, 2 for each age of the world, who serve Śiva at Kalukkunram.

15 The bracelets are snakes, which eat the chariot he drives (the southern wind) and his parasol, the moon.

16 The twelve suns.
49. armbands of rubies and heavenly gold surround his lustrous arms, like the cobra with spots on his hood surrounds the mountain,\textsuperscript{17}

50. a choker of the pearls that stream from conches is put on his holy chest, giving beauty like the beauty of the shaking boar tusk,\textsuperscript{18}

51. fine bracelets of pure gold are slipped on his hands, like the discus he holds, which beheaded Jalandhara for his release,

52. with a band of pearls, shining to repel the dark for mortals and gods alike, who praise it as one,

53. the cummerbund is tied round his waist, like Caṅkāpālaṇ\textsuperscript{19} goes round the waist of his son the elephant,

54. and like blood was spilled when the elephant demon made the moon wane, when wrathful Yama was killed with a blow from his foot,

55. glowing waves of crimson light spring forth from the rubies on both of the rich gold anklets slipped on his legs,

56. the dark paste applied on his head proclaims the lustrous black of reverent Kṛṣṇa and the admiring lord of the gods;

57. The radiant hue of the guru who worshiped him\textsuperscript{20} so that Maghavān, who came with ill will, was released from jail?

58. The curving image of Mount Meru on his chest the day it was raised and bent upon the city of hostile asuras?

59. The flowing way of a melting golden ring adorning the fire of an ancient holy body filled with pride?

60. The embrace of the daughter of mighty golden Himavat, embracing him with abandon as her husband?

61. The hue of the profuse turmeric on the breasts of the mountain’s lovely daughter, who favors us with her rule?

\textsuperscript{17}The cobra is Śeṣa, the mountain is Meru.
\textsuperscript{18}Śiva wears a boar tusk on his chest.
\textsuperscript{19}The serpent that Gaṇeśa wears as a belt.
\textsuperscript{20}Bṛhaspati.
62. A garland of fragrant blossoms casts its scent as gods look on and worship, knowing how rare it is to perceive him many times,

63. Perfumed incense grows thick under the ritual arch drifting out to press against the lofty peaks,

64. He seemed to enter the desirous mind of the sun just like when the sun had meditated on his revealed body,²¹

65. And after gazing in a mirror to see his fine attire for the festival in Āṭi, when he shows himself to those who look,

66. He turned his holy ear to the Vedas sounded forth in song, and the Tamil of our four gurus,

Participants

67. The child who governs us and the gods who eat ambrosia son of the man who ate stones for food in harsh austerity,²²

68. The son who raged against his father, so those who direct their minds to the master will understand that even cruelty can be good,²³

69. The man who long ago allowed water, fire, venom, bone, a palmyra tree, a door, and a fever to understand Tamil,²⁴

70. The loving man who took as friendship the elephant, poisoned food, slake lime oven, and deep sea of his enemies,²⁵

71. The man who employed in friendly service the Kāviri and Maṇimuttāṟu rivers, the troop of ghouls, the crocodile, and the lord’s two feet,²⁶

72. The eminent man who had earth placed even on the Ganges-decked crown praising the feet of the king of the gods on a horse that is a fox,²⁷

²¹The sun once worshiped at Kaḻakkunṟam and received a boon there.
²²This is Nandin, who governs them because he is the door warden, and his father is Cilātamuṉivar.
²³Caṇṭēca Nāyaṉār (Caṇḍeśvara), who cut off his father’s leg when his father tried to kick the liṅga the young saint was worshipping.
²⁴Campantar.
²⁵Appar.
²⁶Cuntarar.
²⁷Māṇikkavācakar.
73. The man from Pūḷi who rides on a horse as the man from Tirunāvalūr, thread flashing on his chest, rides a white elephant, 28
74. The Cōḷa who worshiped the Light to drive off in the form of a crow the crime of rashly killing a cow, 29
75. The Pāṇṭiya king of the lunar line, 30 who gave to the lord of Iṭaimarutu an amorous princess from an ancient line,
76. and after them, a flood of holy devotees to serve his body, and a sea of holy devotees who do the temple work,
77. the men from the lineages of the three-toned Vedas, respected everywhere, and masters in ascetic dress who keep the Śaiva knowledge,
78. a sea of ghouls, who hold up the entire earth as if playing with a ball, and the rest of his troops, an ocean with clear waves,
79. and surrounded by yet another retinue of living beings, he set out through the golden tower as praise resounded everywhere,

His Ascension to the Holy Chariot

80. Next comes peerless Acyuta, the god on the banyan leaf who has Lakṣmī  
\ Next comes the unique enduring chariot, which has substantial ropes with discus and fine conch, a shining crown, who sleeps on a ruby-decked cobra,  
\ made of axles with turning wheels, canopy shining, bells ringing on its trim, 31
81. And Brahma, extolled in the Vedas, who was trusted as a charioteer  
\ it is guided by a charioteer who created the abiding earth on his mighty lotus,  
\ and has a central platform and a grand lotus dais,

28 Ceramāṉ Perumāḷ.
29 Curakuru, see v. 12.
30 Varaguṇa Pāṇṭiyaṉ.
31 The verses in this section are śleṣa verses, in which the same line of phonemes offers two simultaneous meanings. The primary meaning is given first; the second is offset and in italics.
82. And the god with the thunderbolt banner, which is linked to the heavens,
   \it has a roaring bull and flags, which flutter in the sky,
wed to Indrāṇi and the stormclouds
   \amidst the moon, storms, and clouds,

83. The King of the Gods was superb,
    and before the exalted, lordly seat
    \there were noble sacrifices to the gods in front
many eyes constantly glittered as they sought him,
    \and many splendid mirrors kept flashing,

84. He ascended the holy chariot without equal
    as the three ancient forms of God faced him as one,

His Parasol and Other Regalia

85. A parasol rises high to cover them, on a handle like a snake
    that has stretched up to go amidst the heavens, up above the moon,

86. With a great desire for the body that they think is fire,
    but also the fear that the snakes he wears will destroy them,

87. the winds created by the whisk and silk fan whirled about,
    approached and withdrawing as they brooded,

88. The bull banner covered the sun,\textsuperscript{32}
    in truth the god who churned the ocean that poured forth on behalf of the gods

89. First, the peacock of the god with the rooster banner, the rat of the elephant god,
    the eagle of the god with the discus, and the goose of the unborn god,

90. then the dog and the elephant of the pair who share the name Kārī,\textsuperscript{33}
    who are shown respect by all in the seven worlds,

91. the chariots of the smiling twelve, the war bulls of the eleven,
    a further two, and the chariots of the eight,\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32}Viṣṇu, the bull, covered the sun with his discus.
\textsuperscript{33}Bhairava and Ayaṉār are both called Kārī.
\textsuperscript{34}The suns, Rudras, Aśvins, and the Vasus, respectively.
the chariot made of fresh pearls, for the Moon beyond compare,
the chariot that is the cool southern wind, for Lakṣmī’s son,35

the elephants of the eight directions, the goat, the buffalo, the corpse, the fish,
the praiseworthy deer, the flower chariot, and the bull,36

all were driven forth by the command of Hara’s eye,
and beginning with the gods, the lords of the eighteen hosts worshiped,37

The whole of earth and sky roared,
the Seven Sages worshiped and pronounced their great blessings,

Like two silver mountains praising Śiva, the one gold mountain,
the two sages, Śambhu and Āti, praised his mountain,38

The goddess of speech, the goddess of fortune, the earth goddess,
the goddess who loves the mountains’ foe, the goddess who stands atop the buffalo,39

the united Seven Mothers, Kāḷi and her Ḍākiṇīs,
and the lovely maidens of the holy fords,

flocked to the goddess whose beauty needs no jewels
to worship in their love of service,

The relentless dust from the sweet earth made every jeweled crown
like the crown that stopped the Vaigai long ago,40

The rain of flowers from the flood of the four celestial hosts41
veiled the flood of raining tears from the flood of the ancients,

The tireless music of the two42 made his gems melt and flow
and the snakes on his holy ears faded away,

35Lakṣmī’s son is Kāma.
36After the elephants, the vehicles of Agni, Yama, Nirṛti, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Kubera, and Iśāna, respectively.
37The Tamil thesaurus Piṅkalam defines the eighteen celestial hosts as: gods, siddhas, asuras, daityas, garuḍas, kin-
naras, rākṣasas, kimpuruṣas, gandharvas, yakṣas, vidyādharas, bhūtas, piśācas, antaras, sages, nāgas, sky dwellers, and the
inhabitants of Bhogabhūmi.
38Śambhu and Āti are the two sages who worship Śiva in the form of vultures during the Kali Age.
39Sarasvatī, Śrī, Bhūdevī, Indrāṇī, and Durgā, respectively.
40Refers to the story given in Tiruvācakam when Śiva assumed the guise of a laborer and performed an old
woman’s work in damming up the Vaigai.
41The four celestial hosts are Ādityas, Rudras, Vasus, and Maruts.
42The two are the nāgas Kampaḷar and Acuvatarar, who sang beautifully to Śiva after receiving the boon of beau-
tiful voice from Sarasvatī.
Instruments

103. A host of drums, like the one-faced drum, kettle drum, hand drum, forest drum, and war drum crowded together,

104. A set of white conches, like the pure calañcalam conch and the right-turning conch that has a mellow light,

105. a group of lutes played by lively hands, the arched lute, the resonant lute, the supporting lute, and the tuneful lute with the sea monster tail,

106. discarding their old lives kept sheathed within they sounded forth to touch the heart, making their home in songs to our lord,

The Holy Trumpets

107. “He is coming, coming to dwell on that mountain, making the Vedas with their unerring words a peerless mountain,

108. He is coming, coming as the Balm of the Mountain, ambrosia from the ocean waves just right for the gods,

109. He is coming, the very god who came to a courtesan’s courtyard desiring a song so her unceasing karma would ripen away,” they said,

110. and the two blaring trumpets sounded before him in turn, as he came down the established holy road,

Gatherings

111. Saying, “the lord of our devoted state has truly arrived, it was proper for our current birth,” and coming near,

112. The enemy of darkness, the cool moon, Varuṇa, the lord of the gods, the god who paced out the regions, the lotus-born god, and women of every kind,

43Nāccimuttu, whom Śiva brought to heaven after she composed a verse asking him to come and stand in the courtyard of her own house.
44The sun.
like heavenly maidens, women from the ethereal city of Cēṭi, and excellent Nāga women swooned and praised,
and crowds of mortal women, in the towers, in the latticed windows, and on top of golden mansions crowded on each side,
they and their servants gather together, submerging the courtyard and dancing pavilion in a sea of women,
because of their golden thighs, the pristine banana grove, they take ancient times in a distant past and make them new,
they go with their hair loose about them and their waists exhausted, like a dark cloud and lightning, joining the lightning that approached the lord,
They flourish, their breasts pressed together like mountains who crowd together to see the Veda Mountain, their king come to earth,
They thrive like the cakora birds who approach him, thinking, “he will protect us like he does the two vultures famous to the world,”
each lustrous forehead like a bow fit for the Cōḷa, superb as a bent bow to end the torment of their relative through death;
The branchlike moon on the crown of ruling Malaikoḻuntu, the Mountain Branch, The branching waves of the great river, the chain of koṟṟai blossoms,
The moonlight of sacred ash on his holy forehead, which weakens self-control, the face that buds with teeth,
The light of his three holy eyes, rising above his sparkling earrings, his holy blue throat, which protects the ancient world,
His hands which hold the deer, axe and fire, generous to the assembly he creates, the thickness of his holy radiant arms,
His chest, with the triple threads in a trickling stream, the ancient serpent that girds his waist, his golden anklet and gold legband.

45 The celestial Vidyādhara city.
46 Lightning is said to worship Śiva at Tirukkalukkuṉṟam every twelve years.
47 Śiva has the moon in his crown, from which the cakoras drink ambrosia.
48 The Cōḷa is Suraguru, their relative is Tilottamā, whose curse to be born in the form of a cow is lifted when Suraguru shoots her; see vv. 12, 74.
49 The anklet would be on the left, female side; the legband on the right, male side.
All this holy beauty, like hundreds of bright new suns, they worship, captivated, as they come and rejoice,

the white pearls flow as joy abounds in their wide deer eyes, and they crowd together, stumbling over words of praise,

like the throngs of elephants, deer, and peacock rove on rich Mount Meru, they surround the chariot,

“Look at the holy chariot on procession, ridden by the god who took the earth itself for his holy chariot long ago,”

Look at the massive gem of the gods, bestowed when he was worshiped by the king of the celestial world,

Look at the necklace with a set of rubies from the milk ocean, placed on him by the dark god when he worshiped him long ago,

Look at the pearl that adorns the Supreme lord, from the place where worshipful Brahma was born at the beginning of time,

Look at the shining diamond, a surging waterfall on the eastern mountain bestowed by the twelve suns with the glowing way that drives off the night,

Look at the boar tusk, young women, so desired by his bangles, which mistake it for the crescent moon,

Look at the open mouth of the deer on his left, straining as it mistakes the luster of his garlanded left side for tender shoots,

Incredible! He yielded to the lustrous beauty of just one of Pārvatī’s longing eyes, but does not yield to the beauty of many millions of women,” they say,

“The one eye that Viṣṇu once set on the god with flowing matted locks,” they say, “is now endless, as women overcome by their passion set eyes on him,”

“Look, the one who once became too vast for Hari to see,” they say, “is seen so easily by beautiful women!”

Śiva takes the earth as his chariot when he burns the triple city.

I.e., a pearl born of the primal lotus that emerged from Viṣṇu’s navel.

Śiva’s bangles are snakes.
139. “We see nowhere that lacks this glory,” they say, “is the holy decoration of his body beyond our scope?”

140. “This master thief has held up the Vedas,” they say, “he stole away the fine old knowledge that tells no lies,”

141. “Is it wrong to steal him away,” they ask, “to marry and join the master thief of the earth bounded by lovely seas?”

142. “He’s made us hot, and even if he burns us, he will burn us, Mataṅ has no fear if he destroys us while we watch the parade,

143. Would Vēḷ fear anything anything else,” they ask, “if he knew the lord forgave the crimes held against the father when he came?”

144. “Night has become the single time, it came and does not leave,” they say, “He is the one who did not give both times to the sun!”

145. Going before his holy presence, they say “Balm of the Veda Mountain, who removes the pain and suffering of arising births for his devotees,

146. Gem Without Flaw, a different rainbow, approaching as the crest-jewel of the ancient gods,

147. Wish-Giving Tree, filling the eyes, releasing good and evil deeds, who grandly revealed his body to the man from Vātavūr,

148. except for the fragrant koṉṟai that adorns you, we know nothing to remedy the lust for your own desire,

149. You gave gold out everywhere in our prior lives, now take our sinful hands, you have caused gold to appear all over us,

150. Will Kāma here achieve this even a single time without fearing the cruel prison where the king of the wishing-tree garden, Indrāṇi’s love, was thrown?

151. Would the cuckoo seek refuge if this was the time when lightning worshiped him, proceeding around him thrice?

152. Inside the flutes at shepherds’ mouths, lord, you at times seemed like a body of fire,

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53The father is Viṣṇu, who killed Bṛṛgu’s wife Puloma; see v. 4.
54The man from Vātavūr is Māṇikkavācakar.
153. you took the discus that is the ocean of our eyes, and the lotus of the heart, so that we with our awful karma know you are Viṣṇu, are heavenly Brahma,

154. You forgave the murder of Tilottamā which enraged the cows, so like a calf, why not see how rare a bracelet is for the innocents of this world?

155. You immersed yourself in the fragrant sandalpaste on a man’s hands, honoring the mighty sun, does your body take on its bright rays?

156. You forgave the moon before your feet, and cleansed the evil eye,” they say, “Were you dancing in the fire?”

157. They wander about, their golden clothes falling free, discrediting how Tāṭakai held up her dress in Tiruppanacai,

158. They crowd about, their eyes arrayed like dark flowers, which seem to flow to the beauty on his neck, covering the poison held within,

159. They feel vast pain, their jewels and their inborn modesty fall away, and among them, one girl is enthralled,

The Child

160. Her hair seems as if the fearful night has left and cannot stay, taking the coming of the moon as a home to remain above,

161. Both her eyes are swords, over which her unconquered decency prevails, her speech is a teeming prattle that her mother understands,

162. Her teeth rise and fall like the golden sun, her swelling breasts are like the green spathes of a young coconut palm,

163. In her hand she holds a bright doll, a budding crimson bottle-flower, she is at the age when childhood is born,

164. She has a mouth that drinks from her mother’s swollen breasts, two mountains with clouds whose dampness never ends,

165. When the wind blows over her many sand castles, she appears like the beautiful woman from the ploughed land in Mithilā,

55Mūrttināyānār, who felt heat when he put sandalwood on.
56I.e., the moonbeams are burning them.
Thinking a hawk might catch the parrot she has drawn on the earthen street, she feels pity, and scoops it out in one piece so it is not destroyed,

Even as he prospers during the afternoon ceremony in Ārūr and the midnight ceremony at holy Tillai,

Our lord takes his place on golden Kaḻukkuṉṟam with the Mountain’s Daughter and his two young sons,

He moves through the street, and her honored mothers approach to worship his flower-strewn red feet, she worships with red hands,

She sees the ancient one with a crown of matted locks the color of bright coral, and says, “Please tell me who he is!”

“Look at Sweet Sugarcane, bound to greatness,
  Look at the piece of sugarcane, nicely pressed,
  proper for his side which is made of the goddess,
  it is right that its juice is condensed by a woman,

See how the one who bent his heavy bow of pure sugarcane was killed,
  See how the pure, sweet thick body of the sugarcane available was destroyed,
Look at what has passed beyond the harmful crime,
  look at the fine leftover remains,

Girl with the lightning waist,
look at how puzzled Manmathan’s body withers up due to enmity,
  look at the pot of sweet liquid dry up, stirred until it is transformed,
see how he passes beyond measure when you describe him,
  see how it almost entirely surpasses any standard of flavor,

See how his throat bears the poison that emerged,
  See how it was made where it grew, in a place with a sugarcane press,
Look, the chariot is the sea-girt earth itself,
  Look, the flavor truly equals the sugarcane sea,

Look at the excellent state of the master with eight hands, who is perfect,
  Look at its many uses, eightfold when thickened into syrup,
Look, lady, at the consummation of heartfelt dance,
  look, lady, at how it is reckoned with weights and scales,
176. Look at him surrounded by the hoods of the serpent king,
    look at it surrounded by gunny sacks for the lord of the Mountain,
    Worship, young lady,” the mothers explained with truthful words,

177. “Is the jaggery coming on the chariot here for poor little me,
    so I can take a bit and eat it from my hand?” the lovely girl asked,

178. “Jeweled woman, to sing to him or love him, to keep adorning both his feet,
    to reflect on him in solitude, to walk around him,
    to seek him, to behold him, to touch him and enjoy him,
    how is it possible, apart from the sweetness that dwells within?

180. You see, this is not something that people of this broad earth
    grow sick of once they have enjoyed,” her relatives joyfully explained,

181. Without giving to the bright-bangled girl a glance, an admiring smile,
    or the string of koṟai blossoms upon his thread-crossed chest,

182. without taking the fine bangles or tiny clothes of the ambrosial girl for himself,
    bathed in holy ash, he left that street and went on;

183. She went home, aware of nothing else,
    and the god who had strung his sugarcane bow turned aside and left.

The Young Girl

184. There is a young girl at the age of the siren goddess of the Kolli hills,\textsuperscript{57}
    who blossoms like a blooming branch

185. Like a picture, her features as suited to the gaze,
    but her beauty is not suited for meeting on a bed,

186. She has left the pert breasts of her mothers,
    and her doll is no longer placed at the breasts budding on her chest,

187. Her firm breasts are like the inside of a lotus,
    rising up to see how Manmatha’s lotus goes to war,\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{57}The kolliyampāvai is a stone image in the Kolli hills near Tiruchirāpālī, supposed to have been carved by gods,
    which enchants all those who see it.
\textsuperscript{58}I.e., the lotus that is one of Manmatha’s five arrows.
188. Her eyes have corners like the dark god,\(^59\) who reached out his hands for water, so he could measure out the world he bears for everyone,

189. She braids her hair as if filtering spilled honey, to the end, like great ascetics read Pāṇini’s grammar,

190. on the slope of the Veda Mountain, home of the god whose feet are worshiped by devoted Brahma and Hari, the god who suddenly takes us as his devotees,

191. come cool pearls from the tooth of a cow like Tilottamā, suffering a curse given by the bull of the lord,

192. and pearls born of the ancient, mighty tusk of the boar Māyika, which shines brighter than the light of the blossoming moon,

193. She sits grandly in a small house made of these pearls, gathered by her mothers, praised by these women with lightning waists,

194. and as she plays with large molucca beans made of gold, singing praises for the dance danced by the precious golden foot of the ancient one,

195. A woman rushed up, “The conch is blowing! The golden trumpets blare! Amidst a sea of drums, the kettle drum pounds!

196. Hymns flow out before the chariot, sung from the mouths of devotees from the Toṇṭai land, where righteous Suraguru reigned,

197. the heartwarming hymns of the Vedas resound,” she cried, “God’s holy procession has come to our street!”

198. The girl with fragrant hair arose along with her mothers, but she held back her bird and pair of fawns,

199. Her little creatures took awkward steps, then stood and wept, and her entire group of mothers gave her a stern glance,

200. “Look how the goose delights in the Bhagirathī,\(^60\) and how the cakora delights in the crescent moon, upon the Dancer’s head,

\(^{59}\text{Viṣṇu as the Vāmana avatar.}\)
\(^{60}\text{The Ganges.}\)
201. Look how the cakravāka takes joy in his shining right eye, and the deer of the pastures takes joy in his left,  

202. Look how the pigeons join the smoke around the mighty lord with the battle axe, believing it is of their kind,  

203. Look how all the parrots are joyful, mistaking the gold of the flowers on his garland for golden millet,  

204. Look how the stag goes to see the deer at his left side, and how others, skylarks and peacocks, approach, thinking his neck is a raincloud,  

205. Was the promise of true favor from the one who wears the bones of gods as jewels only an inheritance for one born as an vulture?  

206. Was the uplifting joy of friendship with our king only a share for the two birds of Kūṭal?  

207. Was searching for the foot and crown of the fine god lauded in the Vedas only a right for the goose and the boar?  

208. Was soaring Mount Kailāsa, long ago, only a share for the long-legged spider, the snake, and the fierce elephant?  

209. Is it a crime, gentle lady, for a living soul to be attached to you, for a life to find its pleasure because of you?"  

210. “Come on, come on,” she said, gathering her sweet friends, and led them to the holy chariot, joining her hands in worship as they watched,  

211. Drawn to the vast moonlight of holy ash spread thickly on his powerful shoulders, her bashful eye  

212. raced like a lovely carp, darting through the rippling ocean of milk, and jumping back from its banks,  

213. Like a golden doll bathed in a wide pool, her body was bathed in Kāma’s fire, and she instantly grew weak,  

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61 Śiva’s right eye is the sun; his left eye the moon.  
62 The Tamil literary tradition associates pigeons with smoke.  
63 Kūṭal is Maturai; the birds are a blackbird and heron, who received boons there.
He had nocked his flower arrow, but great Māra passed her by, and the Destroyer of the Triple City left that street, along with the gods;

As if moving a delicate flower into shadow, out from the raging heat, her mothers, absorbed in conversation, took the girl and walked away.

The Nubile Girl

There is another, a nubile girl, who wears a blouse that hides her breasts, whose spirited rhythm echoes the contestant in the northern forest, 64

Her eyes are plump carp, made for learning how to kill with a glance, her thoughts were made for learning the arts,

Flower-decked hair falls down over the back of her neck, her face falls down out of simple modesty,

Her room of shimmering rubies could be called the ancient golden lotus, 65

She is fit for the one who wears a snake with a thousand mouths for a garland, the lord of the beautiful mountain goddess, approaching the beautiful street,

She wants to play ball with her friend as her mothers look on, and in the to-and-fro of throwing and catching the balls with her hands,

this girl with beautiful jewels took one of the the balls that her friend had thrown and hid it, smiling at all of them crowded together,

Her friend had noticed, and also hid a ball from view, so that the girl with a moon-like brow laughed out loud,

Said a woman who stood before this beautiful Śrī, “The loss of a ball, and the anger of the king of gods, who has the lightning bolt,

Haven’t you heard the story they tell about this good place, about the crime he committed, and his harsh captivity?

You should appeal to no king who protects this earth except the one against whom you committed the crime,” she said.

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64 Śiva dancing the tāṇḍava dance in Tiruvalaṅkāṭu.
65 i.e., she is Śrī.
On they went in this delightful game they shared, stating his incomparable nature,

More than the large heavenly discus, which took the daytime that arose from the ocean home of Śrī and turned it into night,

More than the noose of the god who created many crores of lives, born from the navel of the god who secured the sea,

More than the diamond weapon that clipped the wings off mountains, that dropped Vala and cleaved Vṛtra,

More than the mighty staff of Yama, which strikes at living beings, sending their souls to the path of which every Veda sings,

There is unconquerable power in the trident he wields, in this sea-girt world, and in every other,

The drinker of poison, lord of Kaḻukkuṉṟam, who has taken us as slaves, approaches on the street,

Off her small bangles tumbled, carrying with them the stage of childhood when she had always been so humble,

Apart from the thought that her white dress would fall, she saw no fault at all to be atoned for later,

Before she had protection from the arrows that rained down, but now she cannot count on rescue from the arrows of the bodiless god,

Along with her friends who speak so sweetly, she went and worshiped, praising the lord of devotees with blessings.

Her golden belt slipped off as she was filled with desire, and all the soft, gentle arts she had learned fell away as well,

Right away she gave up some bangles that had cracked, and some that slipped off for the king of the broad earth to take,

The noble lord guided his chariot down another street, and the beautiful girl went back inside her mansion with her friend.

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66 When Viṣṇu covered the sun with his discus.
241. She saw the sight of her soul’s own true light\textsuperscript{67} endlessly in waking life and endlessly in dreams,

242. Seeing all those eyes of women with goose-like strides, and thinking them a sea, “Does our lord’s beautiful coral forest\textsuperscript{68} enter into it?

243. From the crown of our lord who has one thousand names, does the thousand-faced Ganges run into it?

244. Is the liquid moon given a place? Are the great tortoise and the fish acclaimed due to the parts that perfect them\textsuperscript{69}

245. Does his brilliant earring, the sea monster, make his home there? Does Tirumāl, the bull who rests on the snake, join it?

246. Does the poison on his lovely neck blend into it?” As she thought of all these things, the tears poured streaming from her eyes.

The Ingénue

247. Another young woman with shining bangles, a heavenly ingénue, comes first, while the perfected ingénue who lives in a flower follows,

248. A lavish swirling cloud where new lightning does not spread, lightning that shines out everywhere, where a cloud does not spread,\textsuperscript{70}

249. Tusks that have not reached the span of a long thick trunk, a strong trunk beyond the reach of the great span of those tusks,\textsuperscript{71}

250. A lute where no rich music arises, a richness of fine music that does not arise from a great sea-monster lute,\textsuperscript{72}

251. A peerless cobra that spits no poison, illuminating space, prolonged poison that was not spit from a cobra’s heart,\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{67}The “nātānta jyotis.”
\textsuperscript{68}I.e., Śiva’s knotted locks.
\textsuperscript{69}Śiva is said to have given the tortoise his shell, and the fish his eye.
\textsuperscript{70}Her hair and waist.
\textsuperscript{71}Her breasts and thighs.
\textsuperscript{72}Her forearm and speech.
\textsuperscript{73}Her pubic mound and eyes.
252. Her lovely body has proportions for this world to praise, each part made by Brahma to spark desire,

253. After sitting in a stormy garden on a perfect ruby swing, which rises to the beauty of the dark-necked lord,\(^{74}\)

254. “Earlier you gave the ammāṉai ball the gift of just one limb,” her mothers say, “now you’re giving everything.”

255. “so,” they ask, celebrating her from all sides, “what austerities did your swing do in its previous lives, my dear?”

256. Now they praise her to the limit, earnestly calling that lovely young woman Lakṣmī, born in a lotus long ago,

257. “The ancient Veda Mountain, the Pālār River, the cassia garland, Tuṇṭīraṉ’s country, Śiva’s city, the four horses,\(^{75}\)

258. the elephant with two thousand tusks,\(^{76}\) the great pounding drum, the bull that is his banner, with the whole vast world in his stomach,\(^{77}\)

259. and his holy rule, delighting crores of pristine worlds for endless years,” she sings, swinging on her swing,

260. dancers, singers, bards, servants, and maids joined their hands in praise, saying, “Long may this maiden be blessed!

261. Sweet goose, Lakṣmī from a lotus born on the earth, Kaustubha jewel born like the eye of that Lakṣmī,

262. Ambrosial woman, lovely maiden, if your body is harmed, would the lotus maiden, turned away in defeat, really go for a second?

263. If your waist breaks, worn out because it cannot bear your two large breasts and your swaying golden necklace, will there be another?

264. If your hair falls free when the garland around it falls, won’t the clouds run off, and the entire ocean fade away?

\(^{74}\)I.e., Śiva’s red hue. 
\(^{75}\)Tuṇṭīraṉ’s country is Toṇṭaināṭu (see v. 34); Śiva’s city is Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam; the four horses that pull his chariot are the Vedas. 
\(^{76}\)Airāvata. 
\(^{77}\)Viṣṇu.
265. Lady with round bangles, if your blouse and tight top fall down,
won’t the eight elephants of the directions grow bashful and run off?

266. If the girdle on your waist jingles so loudly,
won’t the serpent who holds up the vast earth suffer?\(^\text{78}\)

267. Lady with the fine tilakam, if you keep on with what you’re doing,
won’t the world feel pain?”

268. and as they were saying all these things, saying “enough, enough, my dear,”
the master of the heroic bow, golden Meru itself,

269. the lord of the holy mountain, who has come to rule us,
passes on the holy chariot, pulled by four horses,

270. She got off her swing, and ran outside to worship,
she does not turn away from a battle with Mataṅ,

271. She ached with desire—at once she lost her bangles and her dress—
the chariot passed her by—

272. “Do I have the right to tell him that it feels like fire,
the moon he has taken for his crown and his adorable left eye?

273. Will he accept it if I call the unbearable night a whole eon,
even if he opens his right eye just a little bit?\(^\text{79}\)

274. Would he respect it if I said that Kāma, burned to ash by his fiery eye,
has tormented me like Yama?

275. Will it please someone whose head quells the clear rushing waters
to think much of my own tears?

276. Would he accept it if I called the seven-toned scale evil,
as it rings under his lovely ears, arising from the well-tuned lutes?

277. Would he see the flute as a problem,
when his ear is used to the flute of Āṉāyar, who roams the nearby forest?

\(^{78}\text{I.e., Šeṣa would mistake the jingling girdle for the roar of thunder, which serpents fear because it is attracted to the mystic gems in their heads.}\)

\(^{79}\text{Śiva’s right eye is the sun; see v. 201.}\)
Would the heart of someone who goes begging on each street as that cowbell rings even understand how this cowbell burns me?

Is it fair that the cool southern wind, which gives his poisonous adornments food, feels like death to me?

Would it be wrong to call the cuckoo my enemy to someone who dwells in Kāñci under a mango tree, with its fine loving cuckoos?

Would the heart of someone who had a boy drink the entire surging milk ocean even consider the cruelty of the dark ocean?

Could someone who eats the food taken as alms in his begging bowl believe that my food is cruel poison?

My beauties, would a deceiver who did not fear a crime upon a child feel any shame for the crime of plundering us who were born as women?”

Thinking about somehow sending her message to the generous lord, somehow making him understand, somehow being fulfilled, she collapsed.

Another one, a graceful woman, came to that street, new diamonds, streams from the Veda Mountain

are in the lord’s matted locks, and before his procession came thundering down the golden street

she called over Vēḷ, who was standing nearby, and asked, “What should we play, young man, tell me?” And Kāma,

bowing at her feet, said, “Ammaṉai.” “Make the ammaṉai balls,” she told the bodiless god, “and give them to me at my own playground.”

“Is a pearl granted by the wishing cow good to use for ammaṉai?” he asked. She replied, “It’s good for me to scorn.”

80 Upamanyu is the boy who drinks the milk ocean; the ocean is cruel since the roar of its waves pains the ears of separated lovers.

81 Śiva called upon his devotee Ciṟuttoṇṭar to cook his only son for a meal.
“Then a pearl from the moon, the home of clear ambrosia?”
She replied, “Is that moon anything special to me?”

“A pearl from the tusk of the elephant like a cloud up above, is that your aim?”
She replied, “That’s fine for the king of the gods.”

“Tell me, a bright pearl from the boar who wears cool tulasi, or the lotus of the unborn god?”
She replied, “anything from this world would be a crime.”

“Tell me, a pearl from the bow in my very own hand, which shoots the five arrows?”
She replied, “Far from it! You are just a minor god.”

“Tell me, then,” he asked, “would a pearl that had grown inside bamboo be nice?”
“The very form of the father with three holy eyes, they say!” she exclaimed.

Mataṅ made them with those pearls, and gave them to her with a bow,
and the woman with the garland in her hair took them and played,

like the moon enters the night, or a cloud the sky,
they began to move, rising to her hair,

like the moon passes through the gentle ocean,
they reached her eyes, which provoke before they kill,

like the moon on the fine crown of his holy form, the wisdom without end,
they glowed upon her breasts,

like the moon amid the starry ether,
they whirled forever at her waist, bright with a girdle of shining pearls,

they circled like the clear moon circled Lakṣmī,
thinking, “She was born along with me, focused on my joy,”

and as the ammaṅai balls spun around
without missing even one of her body’s limbs,

The lord of the assembly, lord of Suraguru Cōḷa,
lord of all, lord of the mountain, came in procession,

Her people leapt up and ran to worship, and she ran too,

Śiva appeared at the base of a bamboo tree in Tirunelvēli and Tiruppācūr, so the pearls said to arise in the hollows of bamboo segments are what she favors.
she felt desire, great desire.

304. She fell at the lord of Gaṅgācalam’s feet, to worship the master of the trident, a head in his hand, the lord with the Ganges’s waves in his fanning matted locks.

305. she saw the holy face that flows with compassion of the lord who presides there while vultures worship, and she was overjoyed—

306. Her eyes misted with tears—“Look,” she pled, “I have reason to speak, lord of the Śiva world, beautiful god of the land, whose beauty is so great,

307. You commanded a crore of Rudras with ease in the war against the raging asuras, won’t you now go to war with the night-roaming moon?

308. Does the curse of the sage furious with the strong young rākṣasa who takes lives not extend to the son of the god with blood-red eyes?  

309. Is the trouble that your white bull makes for Garuḍa, who has countless victories, not also for the nightingale and the sweet cuckoo?

310. A minister once finished off his silver color by means of a clear tīrtha, isn’t it possible to finish off the gold color on me, whose karma is so cruel?

311. Your great tīrthas are seen holding the countless rivers in the world, can’t they be seen holding the river of my tears?

312. My God!” she cried—she collapsed—she was carried off by her friend—and was laid on a flower couch.

The Experienced Woman

313. Another one, an experienced woman, who easily captures the mind, is aching with pain for the lord of the world,

314. Filled with desire, she waits on the terrace, and while her friends and servants praise her, she takes up a large lute,

315. The singer arrives, and honors her with reverent words,
pressing her bangled hands before her,

316. she praised her, calling the golden mountain, Kailāsa, and the noble Nilgiri her breasts.

317. The good woman said, “Will the saffron, ash, and sandalwood paste that the great lord wears be upon my breasts?”

318. The singer gently sang that the words of this magnificent jeweled woman are as composed as music.

319. The thin-waisted woman cried out in passion, “I’m so alone! When I speak, does it fall on the ears of the lord with the battle axe?”

320. The singer sang that this woman whose teeth are white as jasmine has eyes that match the sea, which surrounds the whole earth.

321. The gorgeous woman said, “my eyes are surrounded by such beauty, can they surround the earth when they search for our king?”

322. The fine singer praised the woman with lips like the bright coral tree many times, calling her long hair the pine forest,86

323. The goose-like woman worshiped, saying, “Girl with bee-swarmed locks, will my love be clear, so the pure lord who delights in love will go there?”

324. The singer said, “Know that the lord with twisted locks will favor your subjection when he sees the holy desire that he loves!

325. Know that all the world says we will obtain him out in the open, a reward not even received in The Hall,87 we will obtain him on the Hill!

326. What’s more, know the certain pledge made in the song of the last verse, ‘Kaḻukkuṉṟam, the temple that makes passion!’88

327. Know that this sphere of ten miles adores him, my lady, increasing the passion that the whole world adores!”

328. She finished, “You must arise!” With a hill of gold, the woman gave her leave, and stood.

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86 I.e., Śiva is being invited to roam through her hair.
87 Citamparam.
88 This is the refrain of Campantar’s patikam on Tirukkaḻukkuṉṟam in Tēvāram 1.103 (1112–1120).
329. As a flood of friends circled around her she circled around the Veda Mountain, and she felt a joy that circled around her, within her and without,

330. “You peacocks, you parrots, living in those outer shrines where the lord abides, flood surging on his crown,

331. Even though you use fresh leaves given from a hunter’s hand there on Kālahasti, you do not bring them to me daily, to cool me,

332. Even though there is a sweet chrysanthemum blossom on Śirāmalai every day, you do not do me service, and fight against the night,

333. There is cool water on the renowned Himalaya, but you do not draw it forth, to pour upon my hair,

334. You do not offer the stream of civet musk pressed out on Arunagiri, where our lord will always stay,

335. You do not shower me with the water from his bath, a faint trickle down the Ruby Mountain, so hard to reach,

336. Now you do not go to this mountain, better than any of Sthānu’s other mountains,

337. You do not gather up the excess rains and pour them on me, after the consecration is done by the god with the white elephant,

338. You do not beat your wings, adding to the water the lotus nectar from the lake that wise Brahma reveres,

339. fanning the swirling flood of milk in the milk ocean that Mādhava worships, I’m so alone, and you do not ease my weakness!”

340. And as that woman worshiped at the foot of the mountain, crying, “There’s no more to say, I take you as my refuge with love!”

341. As if to give this very great boon, the lord who is halved by the best of all women came down the street, and this woman came too,

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89Kaṇṇappar.
90I.e., the chrysanthemum is golden, and will thus repel the night.
91Annapālai.
92The ruby mountain is Ratnagiri (Vāṭpōkki); cf. vv. 329–30 from Cēṟai Kavirāca Pillai’s Vāṭpōkki Ulā: “For someone who receives a faint trickle with honor, the tears of a woman are a confidence never betrayed” (“ேபÕ || காப்ட்டப்ளை காப்ட்டப்போட்டி புேல்மை வனியா | அண்ணவுள் கோவும் வண்டிய.”

451
342. like the twelve suns who destroy the rākṣasas, and joyfully reach the eastern mountain,

343. rubies set with pure gold that drives away the veil of night sparkled on her golden breasts, and she went before him.

344. She pressed her hands in worship—she praised him—her heart melted like wax in the primal fire—she faced him.

345. The white parasol, the war drum, the chariot, the mighty host, and the Ocean of Compassion passed by, and the women left,

346. “Made for all the reckoned worlds to shine, beginning with the earth, O sun, the true wisdom!

347. Roamed by the serpent king, the crescent moon, and the celestial river, O three-eyed, ancient mountain of coral!

348. Circled by the night of the elephant hide, by the stars of cowry shell strands, O red of the evening sky!

349. Touched by the poison on the milk ocean’s waves, as conches circle in the mud, O cloud that gives ambrosia to the gods!

350. Joined by crores of ancient rivers, the other creeds that circle the earth, O perfect ocean!

351. So full of life, you have made my lustrous breasts as afraid to enter your mountain as were the three saints,

352. The breeze from the southern mountain is still, and where is your help? The hot wind blows, yet you do not make it pass to help me!

353. Unless the beautiful sugarcane bow from your victorious battle is crushed and pressed into juice, you won’t join me, Sweet Sugarcane!”

354. And while she spoke like the woman who composed verses like honey, saying “You won’t come back to this doe-eyed woman,

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93 The Mandehas, who die each day as they attack the sun’s chariot, and are instantly reborn.
94 Appar, Campantar, and Cuntarar were afraid to ascend the mountain, and rather sang their hymns from below, in a location to the southeast of the hill.
95 The gaṇikā Nāccimuttu mentioned in v. 109.
so at least give me the blooming cassia that you wear,”
He gave it, and they brought and gave it to her,

and that delicate woman wore the garland with a lovely golden color,
and released from the golden color upon her, she flourished once more.

The Older Woman

“There is nothing like the procession of that chariot,” said a woman
facing the street where the chariot of the black-necked lord would turn,

She is an older woman, brought to perfection by the creator
in the same way he created in all directions long ago,

She has long hair, but has given up the flowers that graced it
like a garden whose blossoms have fallen away,

The nature of the fiery body on Mount Kailasa
and the white body of Śiva on Kaḻukkuṉṟam

would become like his black neck if it reached them, running off to see him,
so she puts no kohl on her wide doe eyes,

She has hot breasts, which look like a broad lotus that is now sinking,
having discarded everything around it, right up to its greenery,

Dancers and female singers came and bowed before her,
surrounding her as they sang all the while;

“Entering both of Hara’s ears, hoisting firewood on his matted locks,
bearing the palm-leaf letter to give to the Cēra,”

Rāvana, who wields a cruel sword, once sang the Vedas to receive a boon,
and Nārada danced before him in heaven,

collecting ambrosia for the light that rules us
and the goddess of the ancient kadamba grove, who keeps a lute at hand.

96 “Entering both of Hara’s ears” refers to the music of the Gandharvas; “hoisting firewood on his matted locks”
is described in Čēramāṉ Perumāṉ Nāyaṉār Pūrāṇam in Periya Purāṇam and in Tiruvilaiyāṭal Pūrāṇam; “bearing the palm-leaf letter” refers to a scene also described in Čēramāṉ Perumāṉ Nāyaṉār Pūrāṇam in which Śiva sends a message to Čēramāṉ Perumāṉ in response to which the king attempts to give him his entire kingdom.

97 The ancient kadamba grove is the goddess’s antahpurasthala in Maturai.
opening the northern wall of Tiruvārūr at midnight out of love, sitting under the shade of a banyan tree that pleasantly sways,\textsuperscript{98}

he is really the one like music, when you think about it deeply,” she says, resisting the songs that people like them have sung about her every day,

and she starts to praise the dance of the artists performing before her as the dance to the rhythm of song performed by the True Being of the Kali Age,

She praises the flute of humble bamboo as the flute at the mouth of Āṉāyar long ago,\textsuperscript{99}

When her maids comb her beautiful hair, she happily speaks of the garlanded hair that Māṉakkañcāraṉ gave,\textsuperscript{100}

When she discusses the cruel eye of fate she has pity, saying that it is really the left eye of Kaṇṇappaṉ,

When she wants hot food, she calls it the fine work of the woman who cooked sprouts, of the woman who cooked pastries, and the woman who killed and cooked her child,\textsuperscript{101}

When she plays in the water of the tank with her lissome friends, she honors the beautiful Pacupati from the south,\textsuperscript{102}

When she desires gold, she praises Naraciṅkamuṉaiyaṉ, when she sees golden paddy, she praises fearless Īṭaṅkaḻi,\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{98}“Opening the wall” refers to Vanmīkanātar, a form of Śiva who performs this deed for Nīlakaṇṭhayāḻppāṇa Nāyaṉār, the last one to know the paṇ system in full, in order to hear his music; “sitting under the banyan tree” refers to Śiva as Vīṇādakṣiṇāmūrti.

\textsuperscript{99}Āṉāya Nāyaṉār, who expressed his devotion to Śiva through the music of his flute while he herded cows. This verse begins an involved listing of Śaiva nāyaṉārs or “leaders,” who number sixty-three in total.

\textsuperscript{100}Māṉakkañcāraṉ gave his daughter’s braid to serve as a śikha for Śiva, who had come in the form of an ascetic and asked for it on the eve of her wedding.

\textsuperscript{101}“The woman who cooked sprouts” is Iḷaiyāṅkuṭimāṟaṉ’s wife, who cooked half-germinated seeds to feed Śiva in the guise of an old sage, despite the fact that Iḷaiyāṅkuṭimāṟaṉ’s crops had failed and they were starving; “the woman who cooked pastries” is Vanti, who gives the cakes she sells to Śiva in exchange for his work as a laborer; “the woman who killed and cooked her child” is Cīṟuttoṇṭa Nāyaṉār’s wife.

\textsuperscript{102}Uruttira Pacupati Nāyaṉār, a temple priest who repeated the Rudra mantra each day in water up to his neck.

\textsuperscript{103}Naraciṅkamuṉaiyaṉ Nāyaṉār was the munificent king of Tirukkōvalūr, who loved the child Cuntarar and persuaded the boy’s parents to let him be Cuntarar’s foster-father, so that the boy was brought up as a prince. Īṭaṅkaḻi was king of Koṭumpāḷūr, who provided all the essentials for the Ārūr temple. After a thief was caught in his granary, he freed him once he learned that the thief’s motive was to feed Śaiva devotees.
376. When she sees a golden lamp, she sings in great praise to Kaliyaṉ, Naminanti, and Kaṇampullaṉ for their devoted service,\textsuperscript{104}

377. When she picks clustered flowers buzzing with bees, she craves flower garlands made by the hands of Murukaṉ and Kaṇanātaṉ,\textsuperscript{105}

378. When she sees smoke with pure fragrance, she honors Kalaiyaṉ, When she sees clothes, she honors stylish Nēcaṉ,\textsuperscript{106}

379. When she sees green mangos, she sings in memory of Tāyaṉ, When she sees the sweet one, she sings for Pēyammai,\textsuperscript{107}

380. When there is radiant sandalwood she praises Mūrtti, When there is sweet milk, she praises Taṇṭi,\textsuperscript{108}

381. And while this lovely goddess passed the time in songs like these, resting on a golden seat in a place she enjoys,

\textsuperscript{104} Kaliya Nāyaṉār was an oil merchant who exhausted his wealth by lighting hundreds of oil lamps at the Tyāgarāja temple at Tiruvoṟṟiyūr. He attempted to then use his own blood as lamp oil, but is stopped by a divine hand just as he started to cut his throat over the oil can. Naminanti Aṭikal Nāyaṉār was a temple priest from Ėmappēṟūr, who used water to light a lamp to worship Śiva at Tiruvārūr after he is refused oil by Jain vendors.

\textsuperscript{105} Muruka Nāyaṉār was a temple priest from Tiruppukalūr who prepared garlands for Śiva in the temple while reciting the Śiva mantra. Appar and Campantar both stay at his ashram during their visits to the town, and he becomes a close follower of Campantar. Kaṇanāta (Gaṇanātha) Nāyaṉār was a temple priest from Cīrkāḻi who prepared garlands and trained people to maintain the flower gardens there.

\textsuperscript{106} Kalaiyaṉ is Kuṅkiliyak Kalaya Nāyaṉār, a temple priest from Tirukkaṭavūr, who performed daily offerings of kuṅkiliya incense to Śiva. Destitute after spending all his money on incense, his wife give him her tāli so that he can purchase food, but he sees an incense seller on his way and buys it to worship Śiva, who then fills his house with riches. Kuṅkiliyak Kalaya Nāyaṉār also manages to straighten the linga in the Tiruppaṉantāḷ temple simply by burning his incense, a feat that the Cōḻa king found impossible to achieve using ropes and elephants. Nēca Nāyaṉār was a weaver from Kāmpīli who gave away the clothes he wove to Śaiva devotees.

\textsuperscript{107} Tāyaṉ is Arivāṭṭāya Nāyaṉār, a Vēḷāḷa from Kaṇamaṅkalam who offers his crops to Śiva. Poor harvests reduce him to poverty, yet he persists in offering his crops to the god, ultimately fainting and collapsing on the offerings, polluting them. He decides to kill himself since he can no longer make pure offerings, and prepares to cut his throat with his sickle when Śiva intervenes and tells him that even polluted gifts are welcome. Pēyammai is Kāraikkāl Ammaiyaṅ.

\textsuperscript{108} Mūrtti Nāyaṉār was a merchant from Maturai who prepared sandalwood paste for the temple. After a Jain king seized the throne and forbade Śiva worship, preventing Mūrtti from obtaining the sandalwood he needed, he grinds his own arms on the grinding stone to prepare the holy paste. The hostile king dies, and Mūrtti is chosen to rule the kingdom, restoring it to Saivism. Taṇṭi is Caṇṭēca Nāyaṉār, who cuts off his own father’s leg when his father tries to kick down the linga his son worships; see v. 68.
the singer sang in the cevvali mode, crying out to know what pure Tamil song would make the lord who hid from Nampi come?109

And the impassioned woman said, “Is there any song except for Tiruvācakam, perceived by the man who sang ‘you revealed yourself’”?110

Are there any other words except for the words of the desirous woman who asked, ‘won’t you come to the courtyard and stand before me?’ ”111

And when on that day she recognized the divinity of those who know the ancient Tamil texts, and also of the poets,

She said, “Sing, jeweled lady,” and the singer bowed, then played on a well-tuned lute, raining drops of fresh honey,

The flowing stream from her two wide eyes never stopped, and poured over the nipples of her round breasts,

babbled words came to her mouth, she glowed with sweat, and as her heart began to tremble,

The broad war drum roared, the ringing trumpets and a host of conches in raised hands blared,

The whole world cried out, “Is he here, Hara, Śiva, Śaṅkara?” and the dark god and the unborn god pressed their lovely hands in worship,

A rain of flowers from the gods, a rain of eyes from devotees, and a rain of arrows from the warring king112 all vied with one another,

The soft white chowry, the parasol, and the banner of the bull rose high in the sea of the chariots of the gods,

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109 Nampi is Cuntarar (Cuntaramūrtti Nāyaṉār), who came to Tirukkalukkunram with the hope that Śiva would give him gold. Śiva instead went out of the western gopuram and hid without giving it to him. Cuntarar then proceeded out of the southern gopuram and caught sight of the god, who relented and gave him the gold. A festival procession at Tirukkalukkunram commemorates this event by taking the image of Śiva through the western gopuram on a serpent vehicle, with a bamboo flute serving as the sole musical accompaniment, while an image of Cuntarar is taken through the southern gopuram seated on an elephant, after which he is brought to the image of the god outside.

110 Māṇikkavācakar, who sings the phrase “you revealed yourself” (“kāṭṭiṉai”) in the refrain of the thirtieth patikam of Tiruvācakam, “you revealed yourself right there in Kaluṅkunram” (“kāṭṭiṉai kaḻukkuṉṟilē”).

111 The courtesan Nāccimuttu, see vv. 109, 354.

112 Kāma.
and the lord of crores of Rudras on parade, the supreme lord of Nandin,
the lord of the vultures’ Veda Mountain,

the dancer at holy Tillai appeared on the street, the crowned lord
whose foot jingles with a noise in the dance that calls me,

And the beauty who had been receiving song hurried out with all her friends,
fell before the true lord without lies and worshiped,

“Noble lord, sinless one, lord of the Śruti Mountain, bearing wreaths of serpents,
lord of the maiden from the golden mountain,

I won’t change my mind even if angry Kāma shoots no arrows elsewhere,
but takes an Āśoka flower from your Veda Mountain and turns his rage on me,

I won’t worry if he shoots a lotus from your Nandi Tīrtham instead of cruelly shooting a sharpened lotus from another world,

I won’t lose my life if he shoots a bright blue lily
from a spring on your mountain, instead of another cool lily,

I won’t collapse if he shoots a mango blossom growing in your home in Ēkampam instead of a mango blossom in a beautiful garden,

I won’t be afraid if he shoots a jasmine blossom from your home in Tirumullaivāyil instead of the lovely jasmine that brings delusion,

I won’t be lovesick if a bamboo flute from Nelvēli or Pācūr blows instead of a new flute from jasmine fields where cows roam,

I won’t suffer if the milk ocean, which was your kitchen, roars
instead of the surging blue sea,

I will not burn if the approaching bells from your herd of bulls rings,
instead of the bells of a herd of cows,

If you will not speak to me even in that way and cure me,
there will be no life in this soul,” she said,
While Vēḷ and the others feared, he possessed this fine woman, showing favor to her from the corner of his eye.

Spread out down the long street, this is how the seven kinds of women worshiped the lord of Tiruvitaimaratūr, lord of Cōṇai, lord of Corrutturai, lord of Aratturai, lord of Kōṇai, lord of Taṇṭalai, lord of Kōlili, lord of Tōṇi, lord of Kacci, lord of Kāci, lord of Kāḷatti, the lord of Kaḻukkuṉṟam who went in procession.

118 Anṉāmalai.
119 Nelvāyilaratturai.
120 Tirukōṇamalai.
121 Nīneri.
122 Cīkāḷi.
123 Kāṅcipuram.
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ABBREVIATIONS

ARE Annual Report on Epigraphy
ARSIE Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy
BSOAS Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
EC Epigraphia Carnatica
EI Epigraphia Indica
HR History of Religions
IA Indian Antiquary
IESHR Indian Economic and Social History Review
JAAR Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
JAS Journal of Asian Studies
JRAS Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JIP Journal of Indian Philosophy
KSS Kashi Sanskrit Series
SS Social Scientist
SII South Indian Inscriptions
TAS Travancore Archaeological Series
TSS Travancore Sanskrit Series
WZKS Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens
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Āḷuṭaiya Pillaiyār Tiruvantāti of Nampiyāṇṭār Nampi. See Tirumuṟai vol. 11.

Āḷuṭaiya Pillaiyār Tiruvulāmilai of Nampiyāṇṭār Nampi. See Tirumuṟai vol. 11.


Irācarāca Cōḷaṇ Ulā of Oṭṭakkuttar. See Mūvar Ulā.


Kulottuṅka Cōḷaṅ Ulā of Oṭṭakkūttar. See Mūvar Ulā.


Tirukkailāya Nāṇa �_PROXY_ of Cēramāṉ Perumāṉ Nāyaṉār. See Tirumuṟai vol. 11; also Patiṉōrān Tirumuṟai.

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