Trying to Make Sense of the Apparent Absence of a Clearly Marked Arrangement of the Epigrams in the Decades of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*.

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The *Tirukkuṟaḷ* consists of 1330 epigrams, 380 on the topic of *aṟam*, or *dharma*, 700 on *poruḷ*, or *artha*, and 250 on *kāmam*, that is, love. Each "book" is in its turn made up of groups of 10 epigrams, or decades. While the decades form separate units, their distribution is not entirely random. For instance, the 38 in the *aṟam* book go from family life to ascetic practices, and after an enumeration of the personal qualities required of a king, the decades on *poruḷ* switch to a list of elements of statecraft in general. The commentator Parimēlaḻakar divides the epigrams on love into two broad categories, namely those dealing with love before marriage, or *kaḷavu*, in 109-115, and those dealing with married love, or *kaṟpu*. in 116-133. This latter part ends with the pleasures of reconciliation. Other commentators make different divisions.[1] However, I do not intend to go into the various factors that may have been at work in the arrangement of the decades. Instead, I would like to turn to the arrangement of the epigrams in the decades.

I have to begin by noting that this is not considered a promising topic of study. As François Gros wrote: "The distribution of distiches in each chapter is probably largely arbitrary".[2] Further down on the same page Gros continued: "It must certainly be remembered that each distich must be treated ... as an isolated and independent poem and that the important thing is the grouping by chapter, and not the progression within each chapter where nothing happens, neither development nor dramatic action". The addition by Gros of the adverb "probably" in "probably largely arbitrary" shows that it was merely an impression he had. In fact, as he himself noted, it had not been an issue yet.[3] It is not difficult to see why. For one thing, the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is not the only ancient Tamil text lacking an obvious or explicit type of arrangement of its stanzas – so why bother. As examples I may refer to the Caṅkam texts *Kuṟuntokai*, *Naṟṟiṇai* and *Puṟanāṉūṟu*. Furthermore, there is Nammāḻvar's *Tiruvāymoḻi*, which likewise consists of decades, called *patikam*s here. The individual songs within the *patikam*s are connected by *antāti*; so the order is fixed.[4] On the other hand, Francis X. Clooney notes: "We are led to expect that the succession of one song after another means something and it is not surprising when a reader finds meaning in the sequence, reasons for the order and (posited) progress of the songs as we find them, one after the other. ... Still, one is often left with the sense that had the songs been

1 For instance, the commentators Paripperumāḷ and Maṇakkuṭavar divide the book of love into three parts: 1. embraces [109-111], 2. embraces after a period of separation [112-129], 3. embraces after a quarrel [130-133] (see Gros 2009[a]: 139). Another ancient tradition divides the decades on the basis of the speaker: the man in 109-115, the woman in 116-127 and man or woman in 128-133. The latter tradition is represented by the commentator Kaḷiṅkar and in an anonymous poem preserved in Tañcāvūr (Gros 2009: 138). Gros added his own division into five sections on the basis of the five main *tiṇai* of Caṅkam love poetry (Gros 2009[a]: 141-3)

2 Gros 2009: 162.

3 "[E]ven this [the arbitrary distribution of the epigrams in each decade] is not much remarked!" (Gros 2009[b]: 162).

4 Clooney 1996: 83.

arranged differently, we would find that arrangement quite appropriate too."[5]

In the case of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* there is a specific problem. While, as said, the order of the songs in Nammāḻvar's *patikam*s is fixed by *antāti*, that of the epigrams in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* has proved to be highly unstable. While the texts available in the various commentaries agree on the number and sequence of the decades and on the choice of the epigrams within each decade, the arrangement of the epigrams seems to differ with each commentator.[6] The variation seems to be considerable. According to Gros, who looked into the matter for the book on love, out of the 250 epigrams of that book only five are in the same position in all the commentators.[7] However, as far as I know, the situation has not been studied in any detail yet.[8] For a study of the arrangement of the epigrams we will have to do with the individual texts of the individual commentators. For the moment, to what extent they represent the original text, the one reputedly produced by Tiruvaḷḷuvar, cannot be established. On the other hand, the variation shown by the commentators suggests that in the original version there was no explicitly marked arrangement or one which was easily recognizable. Otherwise, subsequent commentators would not have felt free to shuffle the epigrams. Interestingly, this rearrangement does not seem to have resulted in an explicitly marked or easily recognizable arrangement. An apparently random order was replaced by another apparently random order. In this way the order of the epigrams in the later commentaries might tell us something of the method, or methods, that had been at work in the arrangement of the epigrams in the original version. As said, for the moment we have to do with the texts transmitted in the commentaries. In what follows I will have a closer look at the text of Parimēlaḻakar, which has developed into vulgate edition. I should add that what follows is not a thorough, in-depth study of the arrangement of the epigrams in the decades, but consists only of a few observations based on a few randomly selected passages.

In Parimēlaḻakar's commentary the epigrams are clustered in groups of varying length. Groups of five epigrams seem to be the maximum. Occasionally, epigrams appear to stand on their own. In decade 10 on gratitude (*ceynnaṉṟiyaṟital*) Parimēlaḻakar distinguishes the following groups: 101-103, 104-105, 106-107, 108, 109, 110. As to this process of clustering two remarks may be made. First, while the division of the epigrams into smaller, more or less

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5 Clooney 1996: 85-6. It may be noted that in another Bhakti poet, Campantar, in a vast majority of the *patikam*s the songs adhere to a fixed schema: the first seven describe the temple site in question and praise Śiva, the eighth refers to Rāvaṇa's attempt to lift Mount Kailāṣa, the ninth to the legend of Liṅgodbhavamūrti and in the tenth the Jains and Buddhists are blackened. The eleventh song is an envoi, in which Campantar is identified as the singer of the songs (Gros in Iyer and Gros 1984: lxiv-v). In this connection I may also quote Indira Peterson: "In this study I have often treated *Tēvāram* verses as though they were independent poems. My justification for this, though, has been the fact that they are treated as such within the Tamil Śaiva tradition."(Peterson 1989: 86).

6 Gros lists, besides a modern gloss by Rāmānuja Kavirāyar, no fewer than eleven traditional commentators (all dates, if available, are approximate): Tarumar, Tāmattar, Naccar, Tirumalaiyār, Maḷḷar, Maṇakkuṭavar (950-1050), Paripperumāḷ (1000-1100), Kaḷiṅkar (1100-1200), Parimēlaḻakar (1250-1300), Parittiyār (1450) and an old anonymous commentary (Gros 2009[b]: 159).

7 Gros 2009[a]: 139.

8 As Gros noted: "It continues to be surprising that in a text so much studied that arrangement has not sparked off more interest amongst critics" (Gros 2009[b]: 162).

homogenenous groups is all too obvious, often there is scope for alternative clusterings, cutting through or encompassing those made by Parimēlaḻakar. Secondly, the dividing lines between the groups are not always as abrupt or absolute as one is made to think. Take the first two groups, 101-103 and 104-105. In the first one it is said that support offered spontaneously, at the right moment or without ulterior motives is invaluable. Compared to that the gift of heaven and earth, the world or the ocean counts for little. According to 104-105 the value of an act of kindness, and with that the question if one is entitled to gratitude and if so to how much, is determined by the receiving party. For, to the latter a small favor may mean much, or vice versa, a great favor may mean little to him. Whatever the differences between 101-103 and 104-105, they also have something in common: they both deal with the "amount" of gratitude. Gratitude cannot be vast enough, its size is determined by the other, the recipient. Apart from that, 104 seems to take up an idea dealt with before in 103. The latter epigram mentions people who offer support without having any expectations of personal gain. The keyword is *payaṉ* "profit, gain", in *payan tūkkār*, " those who do not weigh or measure profit". The same word is found again in 104, this time, however, in connection with the other party in the exchange, not the person who offers support but the one receives it.

After this, in 106-107, the text switches indeed to another aspect of gratitude. Gratitude is presented as a sacred obligation, to which one is bound for eternity. The keywords are *maṟa-*, "to forget", in *maṟavaṟka*, "you should not forget", and *uḷ-*, "to remember", in *uḷḷuvar*, "they will remember". 108, which Parimēlaḻakar sets apart, is most likely to be combined with this set . In 108 we are told that there is nothing wrong in forgetting (*maṟa-*) as long as we do not forget things which deserve our gratitude.

108 in its turn forms the bridge to 109. In 108 kindness (*naṉṟi*) and unkindness (*naṉṟallatu*) are contrasted. While acts of unkindness are better forgotten, acts of kindness should not. In 109 we are told that one good deed (*naṉṟu*) remembered (*uḷḷa*) will make people ignore any unpleasant thing you may do, including even a murder you have committed (*koṉṟaṉṉa iṉṉātu*).

As far as their contents is concerned 109 and 110 may indeed not have much in common. In 110 we are told that of all forms of unkindness showing no gratitude is the worst type, leaving one no escape (from rebirth, I suppose). However, 109 and 110 share something else, namely the verb *kol-*. What is interesting is the use made of this verb in the respective epigrams: in 109 it is used in its concrete sense of "killing" or "committing a murder" and in 110 in the metaphorical sense of "ignoring", in "ignoring kindness", that is "being ungrateful". The compiler demonstrates his ability to juggle with word meanings here. The use of *payaṉ* in different contexts in 103 and 104 may well be an example of that as well.

What we see here in 103-104 as well as in 109-110 is well known from other anthologies. One such anthology is Hāla's *Sattasaī*, a collection of 700 poems in Prakrit about the unhappy love lives of poor people living in villages. In the so-called Vulgate version the poems have not been arranged according to their contents. What we see instead is that each poem echoes certain words found

in the preceding poem or in poems further back.[9] A simple case involving only a few words is found in 30-4:

30 *jāā gāmaṇi*
31 *jāā gāmaṇi* *magga*
32 *hiaa* *magga*
33 *hiaa* *muha*
34 *muha*

The use of the word *magga* in 31 and 32 is interesting and may be compared with that of *kol-* in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. In 31 it refers to the scars on the war-leader's chest, which form as it were a network of rough roads (*paharavaṇamaggavisame*) and disturb his wife; in 32 the same word refers to the honored course of action (*saṃbhāviamaggo*).

The same phenomenon is also amply attested in the *Chappaṇṇayagāhāo*, another anthology of Prakrit verses. In their edition Nalini Balbir and Mildrède Besnard write that this type of concatenation through words does not form a staircase covering the whole text from beginning to end but that it is common in small groups of 2 to 5 poems. The authors also refer to examples in which the compiler seems to play with the various meanings of a word as we have seen just now in the case of *payaṉ*, *kol-* and *magga*. An example they quote is the word *mitta*, which means "friend, ally" in 135 and "sun" in 136.[10]

The same type of concatenation is met with in, for instance the *Kuṟuntokai*, *Naṟṟiṇai* and *Puṟanāṉūṟu*. It should be noted that in these Tamil text the echoes involve a whole range of material (the following examples are from the *Kuṟuntokai*):[11]

nouns: *kuṟumakaḷ* (70, 71), *muḷ* (109, 110)
pronouns: *nammoṭu* (347), *namarē* (348), *nam* (349)
the interrogative pronoun: *yār* (75), *yāvatum* (77, 78)
verbs: *ceṉṟaṇar* (140), *celku* (141), *paṭutal* (340), *paṭṭa* (341), *paṭu* and *paṭāa* (342), *cālāvē* (101), *cāṉṟōr* (102)
suffixes: *ākumati* (18) and *iṉaimati* (19), *āyiṉum* (60, 61), *muṟiyiṉum* (62), *uṇīiyar* (27), *taḻīi* (29), *marīiyar* (30), *kuḻīiya*, *taḻīiya* (31)
particles: *kuruk*um (25), *kaṭavaṇum* (26)
phrase types: *varutalum varūum* (88), *nuvaṟalum nuvalpa* (89)

[9] Tieken 1978.
[10] Balbir and Besnard 1993-1994: 242-5.
[11] See Tieken 2001: 94-102, 109-12, and Appendices. See also Tieken 2008: 583-5 for a rejoinder of Hart's criticism (Hart 2004).

Kuṟuntokai 344 is almost entirely made up of words occuring in preceding poems:

336 *pirinticiṉōḷ*
337 *mulai nirai*
338 *aṇṇal ēṟu puṉkaṇmālai*
339
340 *kātalar peyar*
341 *kātalar*
342 *taṇ puṉkaṇ*
343 *aṇṇal ēṟṟai*
344 *aṇṇal ēṟṟoṭu taṇ puṉkaṇmālai kātalar peyarum mulai nirai pirintu*

In all these cases the compiler of the text was inspired not so much by the contents of the preceding poems as by their verbal matter, making an entirely new poem on the basis of a word, or words, occurring in the preceding poems. It would seem that he did not start with definite ideas about the content of the text – other than that it was to be a collection of love poems – but went from poem to poem. It is tempting to apply this type of concatenation to the repetition of *payaṉ* in *Tirukkuṟaḷ* 103 and 104 and *kol-* in 109 and 110. If so, one may ask if this process might not also have been at work in the other passages, the compiler making new poems around motifs (rather than words) found in the preceding ones. Note in this connection the mentioning in 101-103 heaven and earth, the world and the ocean respectively as gifts given in return for support offered. Or note 273 and 274 in the 28th decade on hypocrisy. 273 refers to a weak and defenseless cow which protects itself by covering its body with a tiger skin; 274 describes a hunter who makes himself invisible by hiding behind a bush. What we see here is a switch between prey (cow) and hunter, both taking the same kind of measure. Or take 187, 188 and 190 in the 19th decade on slander: 187 features relatives (*kēḷir*) and 188 and 190 strangers (*ētilār*).

The point I want to make is that there is evidence to suggest that our compiler went from one epigram to the other and did not have a definite plan for the decade as a whole. In this connection I would like to come back to Gros's finding that in the decades indeed "nothing happens, neither development nor dramatic action". I do not know the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* well enough to be able to either confirm or refute this assertion. All I can do in the present context is have a closer look at one particular decade which I think is relevant to the question, namely no. 112. In this decade we hear a man describing the beauty of his lover. It contains two clearly marked sections of three epigrams each, 2-4 and 6-8. In the first one, 2-4, the woman's eyes are compared to flowers, in the second one, 6-8, her face is likened to the moon. In 9 the two groups are as it were brought together: the face of the woman, whose eyes are like flowers (*malar aṉṉa kaṇṇāḷ*), is said to be like the moon. Note also the phrase *palar kānat tōṉṟal mati* in 9 echoing *palar kāṇum pū* in 2. These two groups are embedded in, or rather encompassed by, three poems featuring the *aṉiccam* flower. In 1 the woman is said to be more tender and delicate than that flower, and in 10 it are her feet which are more tender. The two groups, 2-4 and 6-8, are separated by another *aṉiccam* poem, 5. Though I have to admit that its exact meaning is not clear to me, it does refer to the woman's

slender waist (*nucuppu*). It is possible to recognize in the decade the intention to create a top-to-toe description (*śikhānakhavarṇana*). Opening with a description of the woman's body in 1, it continues with her eyes, and via the middle in 5 it ends with the feet in 10. However, if that was indeed the intention, it is unclear why after the middle in 5 the text returns to the face in 6-8. It could also be argued that the final, 10th, poem was the result of a last moment decision: only at the very end it was decided that, having started with her eyes, it would be appropriate to conclude the decade with a poem on the woman's feet. This would show that the compiler was familiar with *śikhānakha* descriptions, but in this case thought of it only at the end.

The material discussed just now formed, as announced, just a random selection. Any conclusion drawn from it is therefore provisional. Nevertheless I would like to present some findings. In the first place it should be noted that the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is not the only anthology lacking a clearly marked arrangement. Other examples are found in both Tamil and Sanskrit literature. By the division into decades the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* – the same applies to, for instance, the *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* – stands halfway between completely unorganized anthologies and later versions of, for instance, the *Sattasaī*, in which the stanzas have been clustered in sections (called *paddhati*s or *vrajyā*s) on the basis of theme or topic. However, within the decades there does not seem to be evidence of a (dramatic) development leading to a conclusion of sorts. Instead, like those of, for instance, the *Kuṟuntokai* and *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, and the *Sattasaī*, the compiler of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* seems to have gone from epigram to epigram. The examples discussed just now may also give us an idea of the aim of this method. It was to surprise the reader with ever new possibilities of the theme or topic, or verbal matter, provided by the preceding epigram(s). The reader is constantly held in suspense of what comes next and, by implication, is to find out the connections for himself. This also implies that there are no absolute dividing lines. In the example discussed earlier I have not commented upon the seemingly abrupt transition between 105 and 106. On closer inspection it may not be as abrupt a transition as it might at first sight appear. We may have to do with different roles of the person receiving kindness: in 105 only he is said to be able to determine the amount of gratitude he is bound to. If so, in 106 he is warned under no circumstances to forget to return a kindness done to him by showing gratitude.

By way of conclusion I would like to return to a remark made by Francis X. Clooney regarding the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, namely that it may indeed not be too difficult to find something common in the meaning of two consecutive epigrams. This phenomenon, in turn, might explain the differences in the order of the epigrams in the various commentators: each might have seen different possible connections between the available epigrams.

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