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Editorship and History Making:
On Historicizing Modern Editions of *Tiruniḻalmāla**

SUMMARY: In the following essay I am going to comment briefly on the intersection between literary and performative genres that originated in early modern Kerala and to some extent continue till date. More specifically, on their relationship with the rich tradition of representing the past through producing works that follow recognizable patterns of composition and conventions of presentation. This more general consideration shall appear here as a backdrop to a study on contemporary editions of an early Malayalam work named *Tiruniḻalmāla*. The editions follow the relatively recent discovery of the work in question and its subsequent reinstatement in the history of Malayalam

literature.[1] I shall argue that the specific ways this reinstatement was presented by the editors, including a particular place they claimed for this work within the formation processes of Malayalam literature, constitute competing acts of general history writing concerned with the ongoing debate on how should the cultural identity and regional history of Kerala be best represented.

Several different types of narrative texts, or modes of writing from Kerala, can be indicated as traditionally recognized forms of representing the past.[2] For the immediate context of this essay, I am tempted to select three of them and to think of each as a distinct genre, though not necessary exactly in the same sense. These are [*sthala*]*māhātmya(m)*, *kiḷipāṭṭŭ* and [*keraḷa*]*utpatti* (lit.: the *glory of the place*; the *parrot's song*, and the *origins of Kerala*).[3] Each one of them has developed its own tradition

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[1]   I thank Abhilash Malayil for inspiring me with ideas that turned my thinking about *Kēraḷōlpatti* in this direction.

[2]   For the immediate purpose of this essay, I understand genre in the sense proposed by Bakhtin 1987, and more specifically, as "a metadiscursive label for a class of recurrent entextualizations (…) that goes along with a set of prescribed speech roles and a specially organized physical space of speaking" (Silverstein and Urban 1996: 8).

[3]   Taking *kiḷipāṭṭŭ* in the sense of a genre may be problematic since it has been referred to rather as a narrative technique or a telling template. However, a literary genre of *kilipāṭṭu* has been recognized, among others, in Devadevan 2010. See remarks on the concept of *kiḷipāṭṭŭ* in relation to historical writing: "A tacit truth-claim inheres in its use as a genre. The parrot is known to repeat whatever it has heard, without being able to consciously manipulate or distort the narrative" (Devadevan 2010: 122). The list is not meant to be complete here and plenty of other examples can be cited including a quasi-genre represented by a group of works focused on sacred geography, or territoriality. The latter remains important for the present study since *Tiruniḷalmāla* happens to be counted as one of them. For a recent enumeration of Kerala's historical 'genres,' see Devadevan 2020: 248–250. The same author indicates Sanskrit *sthalamāhātmya* as a pan-Indian paradigmatic historical genre that "inspired numerous works in the genre in several Indian languages for over a millennium" (*ibid*.: 153). Hybrid titles are in

and continuity and its own conventions, areas of circulation and recognition. More names could be easily thrown in, take for instance such as *caritram*, *granthavaḻi*, *utbhavam*, to name just a few. Only the first of the selected three could probably pass muster as a quasi-genre of historical writing.[4] Likewise, only the second happens to be recognized as a literary genre.[5] The last one, the *kēraḷōlpatti*, has been the most often noticed by modern historians and happens to stand for a whole family of quasi-historical works resorting to a similar strategy of presenting their material. I select the three for the immediate purpose of this essay focused on a work named *Tiruniḻalmāla* which appears to embody an early instance of imaginative deployment of literary conventions otherwise recognized by one of the three 'genres.'[6] However, I shall limit myself only to one of them, namely the *kēraḷōlpatti*, for reasons that shall become clear below. Scores of works bearing (or referred to by) these names have been preserved, still more noticed, some edited, and the number of discoveries seems to grow further. Some of them, although marked by different titles, varied contents, place and time of provenance or area of circulation, actually appear to have been largely complied with the conventions recognized as embodied by *Kēraḷōlpatti*. Related or functionally cognate works include texts such as *Kēraḷanāṭakam* or *Kēraḷa Varttamānam*.[7] Some were

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abundance, like *Kēraḷōlpatti Kiḷipāṭṭŭ* or *Vaiśākhamāhātmyam Kiḷippāṭṭŭ,* to name just two instances among the rich traditions of early modern history writing from Kerala.

    [4]   See, for instance, *ibid*.: 153.

    [5]   See Devadevan 2010: 122–127.

    [6]   Note that *Tiruniḻalmāla* happened to be recognized as embodying an early instance of literary deployment of one of the three 'genres' or paradigms set probably by the Sanskrit *Skandapurāṇa*, i.e., that of *sthalamāhātmyam*. See Devadevan 2010: 110, which, interestingly, includes among its examples also a later work connected, just like *Tiruniḻalmāla*, to the cultural memory of the Āṟanmuḷa temple, namely the *Āṟanmuḷavilāsaṃ Haṃsappāṭṭu*.

    [7]   These three are not to be taken as co-substantial. The character of relationship of each to *Kēraḷōlpatti* is different. For *Kēraḷavarttamanaṃ*, see Kooria 2019. According to Kooria, it may have been a Malayalam rendering of an earlier Arabic text named *Tuḥfat al-mujāhidīn* by Zayn al-Dīn al-Malaybārī (d. ca. 1583) testifying

believed to have been part of an 'original' *Kēraḷōlpatti* that happened to be addressed even by the philologically and historically loaded term 'urtext' (Devadevan 2020: 249).[8] Other, also those penned in Sanskrit, used to claim authority of a bigger whole, often some allegedly ancient Purāṇa.[9] The earliest specimens are notoriously difficult to date; most historical genres show their mature forms around 16th/17th century CE, with the latest having been composed, compiled, or (re)edited quite recently.[10] Each of them developed its own set of conventions pertaining both to the form as well as the type of the contents. Among them, by

to an understudied relationship between the Arabic and Malayalam history writing. See Kooria 2019: 424. For *Kēraḷōlpattikiḷipāṭṭu*, see Haridas 2016. For *Keralōdaya,* modern Sanskrit 'historical' *mahākāvya* (published 1977), see Adat 2003. The list is not intended to be complete, with important instances left out for the lack of space, including also works of a different convention, like that of the descriptive *varṇana* (*Syānadapuravarṇana*).

[8] Devadevan sees even Sanskrit *Kēralamāhātmya* and Tamil *Kēraḷadēśa-varalāṟŭ* as texts that "draw upon the *Kēraḷōlpatti* ur-text" (Devadevan 2020: 249, fn. 73).

[9] One such instance is a work which calls itself *Kēraḷamāhātmya* and claims to be a part of a bigger whole named *Bhūgolapurāṇa*: see Winternitz 1902: 204 (Wish No 149, F. 131b: *iti śrībhūgolapurāṇe umāmaheśvarasamvāde keralamāhātmye saṃkṣepo nāma prāthamoddhyāyaḥ*; or: *iti keraḷotbhave sthāleṣamāhātmye catus-sastissatatamodhyāyaḥ. śubham bhāvatu*). Another instance of a Sanskrit work named *Kēraḷamāhātmya* claims to be a part of *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*. See Śēṣuśāstrīkaḷ 1912: colophons to all *ādhyāya*s, for instance: 8 or 99.

[10] The earliest probable date for the compilation of extant instances of works named *Kēraḷōlpati* has been recently cautiously approximated to ca. 17th century (See Devadevan 2020 and Veluthat 2019). Unusual in the wider group of cognate works is *Kēraḷanāṭakam* from the Gundert collection, featuring a colophon with precise dating: K. E. 772 (corresponding to 1596 CE). The group of *Kēraḷollpatti*es proper includes the best known *Kēraḷōlpatti* by Gundert (edited in 1843 on the basis of manuscripts compiled probably not more than a century earlier) as well as a number of works compiled or written throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Instances of continued tradition of local historiographies reach even later, e.g., 19th century *Āṟanmuḷa vilāsam maṇipravālam* of Vilvaṭṭattu Rāghavannambyār (unpublished) or *Tiruvāṟanmuḷakṣētramāhātmyaṃ* of Bhāskara Mārār composed around 1960 (see Sreeranganathan 2019: 61, 116). There are grounds to argue that in a number of cases like that of *Kēraḷōlpatti* (Gundert's version included) and other early local print editions of historiographical works belonging to the 19th and early 20th century, we may

far the best known, though still under-studied, remains the *Kēraḷōlpatti.* The misleadingly innocent case of *Kēraḷōlpatti* should have drawn the attention of book historians much earlier. And not only for the fact that many, if not all, of its "versions," used to claim (or were believed) to have been penned by Tuñcattŭ Eḻuttacchan and to be the abridged versions of an earlier, supposedly more authoritative work. Also, it is not only the nature of its historicity that is problematic.[11] The very basic problem starts with the very use of the appellation *Kēraḷōlpatti* as such. On one hand it may well appear as a title, or proper name, of a work, but we may also find it in the function of a convention, or a tradition of writing, if not a genre, on the other.[12] At the extreme, it seems that almost any allegedly ancient text, or part of the latter, dealing with the past of what constitutes today's Kerala, or one of its regions, might have been labelled *Kēraḷōlpatti* by copyists, editors, performers or readers/listeners. A rather hypothetical 'original' *Kēraḷōlpatti* has never surfaced. Its existence, however, happens to be taken for granted by some, believed by others, and cautiously entertained as a possible theoretical idea by the rest. Suppositions concerning its existence allow speaking of 'versions' with reference to what we actually have as extant texts, either in the form of manuscript copies, early print editions, quotations, or hints to a performance tradition that might serve as a vehicle for their circulation. The best-known 'version' of *Kēraḷōlpatti* (popularly accepted often as the *Kēraḷōlpatti*), was compiled and successively published, at first in lithographed form, at Mangalore Mission Press,

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confidently speak of their editors as the actual authors, albeit not necessary in the modern sense of the term. See Venkatachalapathy 2018: 657.

    [11]   Cf. Madhava Menon 2003: 13, "Though perhaps useless as a source of historiography, it is a great store of information for the social history of a formative period of Kerala."

    [12]   An interesting instance of how the identity of *Kēraḷōlpatti* could be conceptualized can be seen in a colophon to Part 1 of *Nedungadu Kēraḷōlpatti* in which a copyist declares what he is writing to be *Keraḷolpatti śāstram*, or "A treatise of Keralolpatti" (*iti keraḷolpatti śāstram rāmeṇa likhitaṃ*). See Raghava Varier 1984: 53.

by Hermann Gundert in 1843.[13] Gundert rendered its title into English as *The Origin of Malabar*.[14] Its better known second edition came out also in Mangalore, in 1868. A partial translation, prepared apparently from a different manuscript source than that used by Gundert, appeared in print earlier in Calcutta, in 1828, as *Kerala Utpatti* and referred to two different manuscripts in the Mackenzie collection. It was followed by a short description of another manuscript copy containing a work called *Kalikota Kerala Utpatti*.[15] *Kēraḷōlpatti* has been notoriously difficult to define or even circumscribe as a type of text. More recent attempts at articulating what a *kēraḷōlpatti* could be include such formulations as "legendary texts of Kerala called Keralolpattis" (Sarma 1996), "a narrative in a stylized, heavily Sanskritized, Malayalam prose" (Veluthat 2009), "the traditional legend on the origin of Kerala" and "a textual tradition on the making of Kerala" (both Devadevan 2020).[16]

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[13] For the context of the heroic phase of early printing in Mangalore based on a single tiny lithograph device purchased by the Pietist Missionaries in Bombay, see Shaw 1977. The rather poor quality of Gundert's first edition of *Kēraḷōlpatti* translates into the circumstances of this initial phase. For reasons not known to me Gundert did not opt for commissioning the printing on the letterpress in Kottayam which started operating around 1832 and was run by another group of Protestant missionary enthusiasts of the technology of print.

[14] See Gundert 1868 (2nd edition): title page. My copy of the first edition of 1843 does not feature a title page, hence it is not possible to ascertain whether Gundert's original idea was the same.

[15] See Wilson 1828: 73–93. A still earlier evidence to a probably indirect encounter with *Kēraḷōlpatti* can be seen in the contents of Duncan's lecture delivered to the Literary Society of Bombay in 1804. The speech was itself a reworking of an earlier account by Francis Wrede of 1793 (see Duncan 1819: 1–5). For the unpublished translations of *Kerool Puttee* by Alexander Walker, preserved in manuscripts in National Library of Scotland, see Menon 2020. Other editions include among else Gundert 3rd edition of 1874, Zacharia 1992, Raghava Varier 2013, Paṇikkaśśēri 2015.

[16] Devadevan elaborates on the concept of *Kēraḷōlpatti* as a tradition of history writing "adapted in the realms of Malabar chiefs (…) in order to produce narratives of their own" and rightly indicates that "this tradition continued to define the region and produce the most influential account of Kerala's past for close to three centuries" (Devadevan 2020: 249).

If not as a quasi-genre of historical writing, *Kēraḷōlpatti*, with its numerous versions, could make an excellent case study of an unstable, blurred "textual identity" for book historians. Neither a title, nor a proper name, its multiple uses show various intentions of authors, patrons, compilers, editors, users and interpreters. *Kēraḷōlpatti* remains a peculiar cultural concept of identity resembling those labelled elsewhere as "ghost titles."[17] According to this metaphorical formulation, a ghost title actually does not refer to one specific text (though it may strongly suggest so) but remains an instrument of ascription for a culturally shared memory of a supposedly important text of great relevance to a community which happened to have lost memory of its actual title or/and author or finds itself in need of ascription. In extreme cases, a ghost title of that sort might be filled by almost any narrative provided it meets a set of generic characteristics that are to be recognized as such. Something of the kind can be actually seen in a dozen of known instances of *Kēraḷōlpatti*. Apart from the very name *Kēraḷōlpatti*, the characteristics include a quasi-evolutionary sequence of events emerging in time in the shape of division into three broadly defined periods: the first shows Paraśurāma as cultural hero creating the land by reclaiming the sea, the second portrays the imperial power of the Perumals, and the third describes the times of scattered political authority of the many Tampuran-lords that emerged after the abdication of the last Perumal ruler. All instances share also one formula of closure. The formula claims the narrative to be based on the work named *Kēraḷanāṭakam* allegedly penned by Tuñcattŭ Rāmānujan Eḻuttacchan (the author well-known to literary historians as a 17th century Malayalam poet of a popular appeal credited with vernacular versions of *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* composed in one of the *kiḷippāṭṭŭ* metres).

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[17]   For the concept of "ghost titles," see Goudrian and Gupta 1981: 24. For another example, see Galewicz 2017: 341.

Kēraḷōlpatti has a difficult history of criticism of its own: stigmatised by William Logan as "farrago of legendary nonsense,"[18] it used to be neglected, labelled as ideology-loaded or dismissed altogether by earlier generations of regional historians. This attitude changed remarkably in recent decades, especially after M. G. S. Narayanan's studies of epigraphical evidence which incidentally confirmed a good number of statements found in *Kēraḷōlpatti*. More recent studies see it as "perhaps useless as a source of historiography" but "a great store of information for the social history of a formative period of Kerala" (Madhava Menon 2003: 13). Today, it makes its comeback not only as an intriguing source of data that finds more and more corroboration from the increasing studies of epigraphy and archaeology, but as an important embodiment of an indigenous concept of writing history and a form of expressing historical consciousness.[19] Expressions like 'means of validation,' or 'legitimation' recur time and again. Yet *historicity* and *historical consciousness* happen to be two formulations contrastively juxtaposed by Kesavan Veluthat in order to reflect a sort of new thinking and a conceptualizing effort with respect to the challenges posed by the bulk of historicizing genre of *kēraḷōlpatti* and the like (see Veluthat 2019 and 2018b).[20]

Along with the growing evidence and discovery of more versions of *Kēraḷōlpatti*, a new kind of interest in the nature of its historical function animates interpretations informed by the performative turn in contemporary historical theory as well as a dispute concerning performative character of premodern literary forms specific to South India

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[18]   The whole passage reads: "What is substituted for the real history of this period in these traditions is a farrago of legendary nonsense, having for definite aim the securing of the Brahman caste of unbounded power and influence" (Logan 2000 [1887]: 244).

[19]   On corroboration of historical claims by *Kēraḷōlpatti*, see Narayanan 2013; Veluthat 2004, 2009; Devadevan 2020: 120.

[20]   The idea of pairing notions of historicity and historical consciousness has already appeared in earlier of Veluthat's writing. See Veluthat 2004.

and Kerala.[21] As strongly suggested recently by Veluthat, there are tangible grounds to speak of *Kēraḷōlpatti* as history writing and performance at the same time. A close reading of the recently published manuscript, from the Hermann Gundert Archive, named *Kēraḷanāṭakam* (Sreenathan 2016), allowed Veluthat to identify passages suggesting that the whole must have been composed with the aim of being performed by a commissioned professional reciter within a convention of the performance genre known as *pāṭhakam* (Veluthat 2019).[22] Parallels identified by Veluthat between elements of diction of *Kēraḷanātakam*, and indeed most of the versions of *Kēraḷōlpatti*, and those of *pāṭhakam* and *kūṭṭŭ* in terms of opening and closing formulae, are striking. So is the evidence linking the alledged performative dimension of *Kēraḷōlpatti* tradition to the world of North Malabar performative tradition of the Teyyam possession dance. It includes surprisingly extensive parts from *Kēraḷōlpatti* identified as being ritually recited by the professional Teyyam performers (Veluthat 2019: 360–361). Thus, an intriguing link suggests itself between the two apparently oposing fields of cultural production, seemingly exclusive of each other and belonging to groups that historically situated themselves on the two extremes of the social stratification model predominat in the region. This brings us right into the centre of the puzzle posed by the work named *Tiruniḻalmāla* and its own links to the world of Teyyam and the community of its performers.

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[21]   Among a number of attempts at articulating this dimension, the formulation by Rich Freeman seems still most convincing: "Most of the 'texts' (the actual artifacts) that constitute the region's 'literature' (the artefactual assemblage) seem not to have been primarily intended as objects for contemplation through private reading, but rather as scripts designed to guide and motivate cultural performances" (Freeman 2003a: 438).

[22]   See Veluthat 2019: 360. *Pāthakam* refers to a performing art of Nambiyār group (otherwise *miḻāvu* drummers in Kūṭiyāṭṭam temple theatre) during which Purāṇic stories are said to be narrated in imitation of Cākyār *kūttu*. The narratives are said to be based on *prabandha* works in possession of Cākyār families (Verghese 2018: 237).

The *Tiruniḻalmāla* rediscovered by modern editions

Although the much earlier *Tiruniḻalmāla* (henceforth TNM) does not
belong to the period of modern writing as understood by the editors of
the present volume, its modern editions do, and very much so. Acknowl-
edged as a specimen of an early Malayalam literature of 13th century
CE and long considered to be a lost work, TNM surfaced to the con-
sciousness of the scholarly world only recently. At the time of writing
this paper, we can speak of three editions of TNM. What is not without
significance, all three are in the form of academic publications backed
by the authority of university press publishers. Its *editio princeps* of
1981 was prepared by M. M. Puruṣōttaman Nāyar (henceforth PN 1981).
Known for his efforts as an indefatigable researcher into the still abun-
dant archive of the unidentified and unedited literary treasures of early
Malayalam works in private and community collections, Puruṣōttaman
Nāyar seemed best positioned for the job.[23] He is credited with locating
TNM in a palm-leaf manuscript copy acquired from a monastic institu-
tion in Northern Malabar (now in the collection of the Department of
Malayalam, University of Calicut) and the subsequent unveiling of its
text to the academic and literary world with his scholarly edition of
1981. A new edition of TNM by the same author, with a reworked and
extended introduction and additional notes as well as a number of emen-
dations in the TNM text, appeared in 2016 (henceforth PN 2016), also
from Calicut University Press. The third edition, of a somewhat com-
plicated history in itself, was prepared by R. C. Karippath for Kannur
University Press in 2006 (henceforth KP 2006).[24] Each of the three

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[23]   The Manuscript Library of the Department of Malayalam at the University
of Calicut holds a set of extensive handwritten catalogues documenting location of
Malayalam literary works in palm-leaf manuscript form remaining in private hands.
This invaluable archive (last seen by the present author in 2018) remains in need of
urgent and careful study.

[24]   Apparently, all the three surviving manuscript copies of TNM known
so far are of similar provenance: they appear to have been found in the region of
North Malabar, roughly in the area between Kannur and Kasaragod. The first to

editions follows its own logic in presenting the text of TNM to the readers, a logic only partly disclosed by the editors. Among its components, a historically oriented intention can be seen across all three editions to structure the edited text according to an adopted organizational principle which must have included dividing the *scriptio continua* of the palm-leaf manuscript(s) copy of the TNM into apparently thematic sections with head-titles and section numbering (absent in the manuscripts). The resulting metatextual apparatus no doubt facilitates navigation but may confuse the less prepared reader, the more so that the editorial intentions have not been communicated to him. While the sectioning and numbering in PN 1981 and 2016 remain generally the same, the KP 2006 differs largely, due, among others, to variant readings and a number of additional stanzas in one of the manuscript sources used by the editor. Following, by and large, the order of sections adopted in PN 1981, the edition of KP 2006 offers widely different section titles and summaries. Another conspicuous feature of all three editions is their tendency to introduce emendations decided upon judgments that may look like intentional archaization (or retro-Tamilization/Dravidization) of language forms actually to be seen in the extant manuscript copies. At least some of these forms might in the eyes of the editors look like inscribed with a hand favouring Sanskritized forms rather than more Dravidian, pre-/old Malayalam (or Tamil), i.e., meeting the standard of

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reach the attention of the scholarly world (and the single one used for PN 1981 and PN 2016) had been found in Vellūr Cāmakkāvu Dēvasvam (north of Payyanūr) in 1980 (See Puruṣōttaman Nāyar 2016: 17). The other, near Kannur and Kasaragod, in the vicinity of Taḷipparampu and Tāyannur (See Karippath 2006: 6). Incidentally, a much more precise location of the latter two has been given by Sreeranganathan (Sreeranganathan 2019: 56). According to his account, both MSS remained in the possession of rich joined family (*taṟavāṭŭ*) households whose names indicate clearly their identity as connected to the community of Pēru-Malayars (*pērumalayanmār*). What is more, Sreeranganathan notices more copies of TNM remaining in the hands of those prominent families of the sub-group of Pēru-Malayars who are known for their connection to the tradition of secret knowledge and practice of healing, and exorcism rites executed with the help of singing songs named *kanneṟṟupāṭṭŭ*.

the so called 'Dravidian phonology' or *saṃghātākṣaram*.[25] In the context of the present volume, I take such 'emended' readings to be motivated by a specific sense of historicity, or historical ideology in search of authentication for the contested collective memory of the region.[26] Part of the phenomenon may have resulted, in my opinion, from the intention of making the edited text look like a true representative of the long missing example of the class of early Malayalam works named *pāṭṭŭ*. Especially by making it meet the requirements for *pāṭṭŭ* as defined in the normative manual of *Līlātilakam* of 15th/16th century AD.[27] We must remember that until the discovery of TNM practically only one single extant work, namely that of *Rāmacāritam*, used to be recognized

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[25] The term comes from *Līlātilakam*, perhaps 15th century; it has been adopted in contemporary scholarship discourse for representing the process of gradual change in the phonological representation of Sanskrit loanwords in Malayalam. The process of change has been understood as a gradual tendency spread over time to represent more Sanskrit loanwords according to *talsamam* ('same as that,' Sans. *tatsama*) principle (Sanskritized phonology) in contradistinction to allegedly earlier prevailing *talbhavam* ('similar to that,' Sans. *tadbhava*) principle (Dravidianized form). Two 'competing scribal traditions' (Gamliel 2020: 245) are believed to have evolved over time favouring one or the other. See *Līlātilakam* 1.1 commentaries. Cf. Freeman 2003a: 459 and Ramaswami Aiyar 2014: 43–44.

[26] For a different interpretation, see Freeman 2003a: 459. Incidentally, the new improved edition by Puruṣōttamam Nāyar (PN 2016) refrains from informing the reader on the decisions made in this respect by the editor: the *varietas lectionis*, however limited in PN 1981, to one single manuscript, is conspicuously absent in PN 2016, while some of the editor's decisions can be seen accommodated into his glosses below. See, for instance PN 1981: 27 and PN 2016: 43. For the idea of constructed collective memory, see Guha 2019.

[27] All the three editions quote a definition of *pāṭṭŭ* poetry to which *Tiruniḷalmāla* should comply after *Līlātilakam* 1.11: *dramiḍa-saṃghātākṣara-nibandham etuka-mōna-vṛttaviśēṣa-yuktaṃ pāṭṭŭ* (Kuññan Piḷḷai 2016: 71). A somewhat disturbing fact about *Līlātilakam* is that nothing seems to have survived to indicate that it has ever been commented or referred to by any Malayalam literary work from the time of its inception till its rediscovery in the beginning of 20th century. The textual history of *Tiruniḷalmāla* looks not much different in this respect. On the weakness of evidence for *Līlātilakam* manuscript transmission, see Freeman 2003: 202.

as the full-fledged representative of the literary class of early *pāṭṭŭ*.[28] The very name of *pāṭṭŭ* (lit.: "song") had also been understood by the dominant perspective on reconstructing the historical process of evolution of Malayalam literature, as referring to one of the two major driving forces for this process. The other of the two, conspicuously richer in evidence, was that named *maṇipravāḷam*.[29] While the latter tended to be presented by many of the literary historians as heavily socially-biased (brahmanized) in contents and form, the former used to be taken as representative of a countermovement of the more popular, or at least less class-oriented literature. In this situation the discovery of TNM could fit well the long-held expectations towards finding more examples and proofs of the robust strength of *pāṭṭŭ* "genre" to balance the ideology of allegedly single social class oriented *maṇipravāḷam*.[30] And indeed, TNM as the newly discovered work needed explicit markings to support its commitment to the "genre" of *pāṭṭŭ* recognized as such and understood to be embodied in its early variety by only two other

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[28] The two classificatory categories of *maṇipravāḷam* and *pāṭṭŭ* happen to be understood by contemporary scholars as "genres" or "registers." See, for instance, Gamliel 2020: ch. 16. We must keep in mind that from a historical point of view one needs to distinguish two meanings of *pāṭṭŭ*, one referring to the class of texts, irrespective whether we acknowledge or not that they constitute a genre or register with a clearly manifest aspirations to literary norms looking up to classical Tamil, and the other—to the use of the same with respect to a more informal expression understood in broad sense as a "song." See remarks by Freeman: "From a historical perspective, however, *pāṭṭŭ* means simply 'song,' and many of the subsequent works and forms of Kerala literature bear this name in their titles" (Freeman 2003a: 449).

[29] Literary "Ruby and Coral" as understood by *Līlātilakam* 1.1 to be a specific type of union (*yōgam*) of [Kēraḷa] Bhāṣa and Sanskrit. Cf. Freeman's concept of "projected dichotomy" of *pāṭṭŭ* and *maṇipravāḷam* (*ibid.*: 448).

[30] The ideological positions of such judgments betray their different historical perspective and could perhaps be broadly mapped on the modern, regionally situated state institutions engaged in 'producing' historical memory and authoritative historical knowledge of the region. More broadly, this phenomenon has recently been theorized by Sumit Guha who remarked that "historical memory—of which history is itself a part— is embedded in and constrained by the social institutions that produce knowledge" (Guha 2019: 4).

works: the probably slightly earlier *Rāmacāritam* dated to 13th century and
a bit later *Pāyyannūr Pāṭṭŭ* dated to 14th /15[th]century CE. The more so,
as neither TNM nor the other two actually identify themselves as *pāṭṭŭ*,
though self-reflection and identity-seeking no doubt permeates, in their
own respective ways, all three texts on many levels.[31] In these circum-
stances, naturally enough, the more ancient and *pāṭṭŭ*-like the newly
re-discovered TNM looked, the better it fitted the expectations. All three
editions in their respective introductions quote from the 15th century
Līlātilakam the definition of what *pāṭṭŭ* is, or rather, ideally should be.[32]
The definition features in all three editions and reads: *dramiḍa-saṃghātā-*
kṣara-nibaddham eṭukamōna-vṛtta-viśeṣa-yuktaṃ pāṭṭŭ (PN 1981: 1).
The three works taken by the modern literary historians to represent
the early variety of *pāṭṭŭ* genre (understood also as a kind of literary
movement) appear to have hardly anything in common, save for the use
of non-Sanskritic metres. With perhaps one rather unnoticed and prob-
ably meaningful exception: two of them do appear to make a similar
claim to the nature of their textuality, albeit apparently it was by no
means *pāṭṭŭ* that their authors had on their minds. Both TNM and
Pāyyannūr Pāṭṭŭ put their diction into the ritual context of a specific
type by declaring to embody either the type of poetical diction suited
for a ritual named *niḻal* (Mal.: "lustre, mirror, shade") or to actually
constitute or express the working of the ritual of that name.[33] We can
see this declaration recurring in the initial part of the latter, in *Pāyyannūr*
Pāṭṭŭ 4 (Antony 2000: 3). The very name of TNM (*Tiru-niḻal-māla*)

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[31]   In most cases, TNM tends to identify itself either generally as a "poem"
(Mal. *kavi/kavita*) of particular qualities, or, more specifically, as a "[piece of poetry in
connection with the ritual construction of a] "glowing image" (Mal. *niḻal*), and we fail
to see *pāṭṭŭ* in this function throughout the text. See also Freeman 2003a: 449.

[32]   See PN 1981: 1 and PN 2016: 17, KP 2006: 7. Cf. remarks by Freeman who
speaks of TNM as published in the form of PN 1981 as "a work solidly in the Pattu style,
complete with local meters and an *exclusively Dravidian orthography* [italics mine] that
probably predates the *Rāmacaritam by a century or so* (*ibid.*: 458)."

[33]   Cf. Devadevan 2010 which notices this with reference to *Pāyyanūr Pāṭṭŭ*
(Devadevan 2010: 88).

signalizes an important link to the ritual performance of that name. And indeed numerous instances within its text point to the decisive role of this association for TNM's own concept of identity, the fact that should probably inform also our understanding of the nature of TNM's textuality. Some of the instances suggest that TNM might have been conceived for the sake of the very rite of *niḻal* to be performed by the ritual specialists from the community named Malayan; other seem to point to the possibility that TNM, or its parts, should actually either be taken as a verbally performed ritual of *niḻal* or a stage-text ensuring the ritually effective working of the *niḻal*. At the same time TNM leaves no doubt that its alleged ritual effectiveness was meant to have something important to do with its literary qualities. While we are not sure of the exact nature of the ritual by that name, the extensive visionary descriptions of TNM leave no doubt that it must have been conceived as a powerful means of purifying, reinvigorating and otherwise positively affecting not only humans in need but also the divine, in this respect, the persona of Kṛṣṇa as the main deity of the Āṟanmuḻa temple on which the whole of TNM appears to be centred. With this focus, TNM can be seen as a work of a class strongly emphasizing territoriality and literary means of space-production. Further, elaborating on this interesting topic, however, does not fall within the scope of this paper which remains concerned with the historicizing of the editorial practices as seen in the modern editions of TNM.

Historicizing *Tiruniḻalmāla* through editing

For lack of space, I limit myself here to just two instances. Thus, both editions by Puruṣōttaman Nāyar, i.e., PN 1981 and PN 2016, read *kalacam* and *pācam* when their source manuscript reads the same as *kalaśam* (Mal. 'jar') and *pāśam* (Mal. 'snare').[34]

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[34]   See PN 1981: 57–58; PN 2016: 67, KP 2006: 66. Cf. also an instance of *pāca/ pāśa* in PN 1981: 28. For other occurrences, see for instance PN 1981: 27, PN 2016: 43, KP 2006: 33, all the three featuring the incipit to TNM with corrected readings of *vīci*
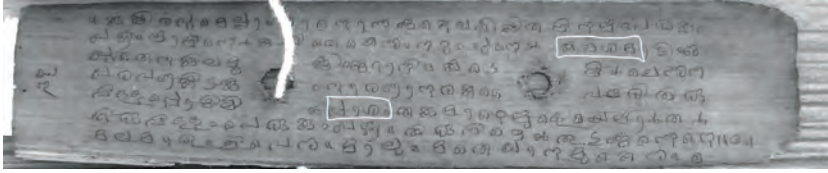
Fig. 1: TNM_CU_23r (folio 23r from MS No 284 preserved at Calicut Manuscript Library) featuring the forms *kalaśam* and *pāśam* (marked in white) corresponding to *kalacam* and *pācam* in PN 1981: 57–58 and PN 2016: 67. [photo by CG, 2019]

What is even more puzzling, PN 1981 and PN 2016 explain in their respective commentary sections the form *pācam* by glossing it with *pāśam* (i.e., the same form as the one read by the MS and corrected by their own editor to *pācam*!).[35] We can identify almost the same phenomenon of the archaization of the Malayalam text in the case of the edition by R. C. Karippath. KP 2006: 67–68 features similarly 'historically corrected' forms *kalacam* and *pācam* where the source manuscript reads more like the modern-looking *kalaśam* and *pāśam*.

(*vīśi*), *ceṭa* (*jeṭa*), *icēn* (*iśēn*), *vācam* (*vāśam*), all of which incidentally happen to be Sanskrit loan words, just as the above *pāca* (*pāśa*) is. The last case shows quite surprisingly a "broken" intention of the editor who not only corrects the scribe but also proposes a "new" meaning (PN 2016: 43 third line from the bottom). In more general vein, the new edition by Puruṣōttaman Nāyar (PN 2016) features instances of a quite reverse intention, namely, to "modernize" older forms. Thus, PN 2016: 50 reads *malanāṭṭil* (regular loc. of *malanāṭŭ* = "hill country") for *malanaṭṭin* (oblique form/unspecified case of the same) to be seen in the manuscript as well as in his own earlier edition (PN 1981: 35). Perhaps this might indicate a hesitation on the part of the editor towards his own position in the dispute concerning the proper way of representing the textual heritage of TNM understood as crucial for the construction of any meaningful history of Malayalam literature as such. Parallel instances can probably be indicated with respect to other Indian regional literary histories in the making.

   [35]   See PN 1981: 58. Cf. a contrastive view by Freeman. An altogether different evaluation of this evidence led Freeman to formulate the following remarks: "(…) many Sanskrit letters crop up intermittently in the manuscripts, suggesting that a process of substitution may have been under way in transcription, and showing that copyist knew the "correct" Sanskrit forms and had begun replacing what the Sanskrit calls *tadbhavas* and the Tamil tradition (and *Līlātilakam*, once) calls *āriyaccitavu* (deviations from the Aryan)"

In order to compare, see Fig. 2 showing the reading of the second out of the three KP 2006 source MSS (the first identified as the same as PN 1981, the third incomplete):
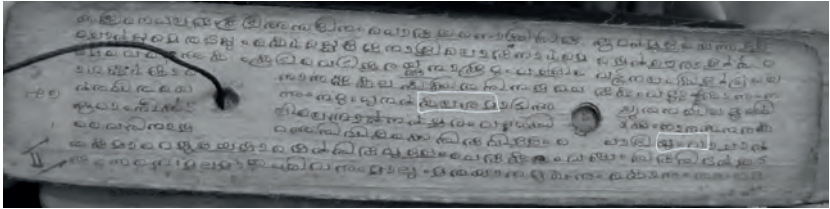

Fig. 2: TNM_KN Folio 17r from a MS preserved in a private collection near Payyanur, probably the primary source for KP 2003. *kalaśam* and *pāśam* marked in white [photo by CG, 2019].

This triggers a few questions as to our perspective on the historical process in Kerala after the alleged collapse of Mahodayapuram as a political centre towards the end of 12th century AD: in a somewhat simplifying way one can speculate that associating with Sanskrit might have meant new opportunities for an aspiring author, while associating with Tamil must have been thought of as siding with the old *ancienne régime* and following the previous order of references linked to the respectable but remotely ancient Tamil.[36] In this simplified image we must not forget

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(Freeman 2003a: 459). More on the 'ideologies' of literary Malayalam with reference to *Līlātilakam*, see Freeman 2013. Cf. Venugopala Panicker 2006: 53.

[36] The specific problem of the way of representing the historical process of development of Malayalam literature as differentiating itself vis-à-vis the larger orders of classical formations of Tamil and Sanskrit literary cultures as its equally important points of reference inevitably touches on the more general problem of how to relate the regional to the transregional in the history of Indian subcontinent. Cf. Veluthat 2018b: 13.

that we are looking for suitable categories to represent and articulate the specificity of sharply variegated and competitive communities that used to live to large extent in separate, discrete worlds of their own, with tendency to develop their own forms of cultural expression, literary language being just one of them. In general perspective, one way of approximating this complexity is perhaps to keep our attention focused on what one recent study called "enhanced autonomy of community-based literary speech" (Shulman 2016: 259). When compared to the usual perspective we adopt with respect to other (mostly northern) regions of Indian subcontinent, this may look like reversing the order of things. Thus, when we think of Kulaśēkhara, known to Tamil *bhakti* tradition as a composer and saint, and accept, as some historians do, his authorship of certain Sanskrit theatre pieces (usually ascribed to a person of the same name and identified on historical grounds as Sthānu Ravi Kulaśēkhara of 9th century AD), we inevitably enter a disturbing zone of blurred relationship between the two.[37] In the centuries to follow, his Tamil works slowly receded from circulation in Kerala while his Sanskrit dramas gained in popularity by entering regular circuits of performance newly opened with the development of the theatre forms such as *kūttŭ* and *kūṭiyāṭṭam* (cf. Veluthat 2018b: 20). In an intriguing and important way for adopting a corrective to our perspective, the *Kēraḷōlpatti* can be seen rather as breaking with the past. Of course, a particular, specific past: that of the Tamiḻakam as the common historical identity for the whole southernmost part of Indian subcontinent (cf. *ibid*.: 19). All that, however, remains for the time being nothing more than a mere speculation.

Even though impossible to prove, this speculative perspective may destabilize the otherwise innocent appearance within the body of TNM of a somewhat puzzling passage which Puruṣōttaman Nāyar chose to

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[37]   For contesting view on the identity of the two authors, see among others, Anandakichenin 2018, Introduction.

name *Kēraḷōlpatti*.[38] It can be seen as making part of TNM's *bhāga* 1 in the section marked by all three editions as TNM 1.7., verses 56–62:[39]

> *i-m-malanāṭṭin*[40] *celvam-eppaṭi-y-ennum-ēṭaṃ*
> *y-en-manam aṟinta vaṇṇaṃ eḷuppamāy-urappen-ippōl*[41] 56
> *muraṇ-eḷuṃ tavaṃ polinta muniver-kōn parecurāmen*
> *varuṇanōṭ-irannu-koṇḍu-maṇimuṟam-eṭutt-eṟintu* 57
> *paravaye-t-taraṇi-y-ākki ppaṭattanan-ennuṃ kēlpū*[42]
> *aru-maṟeyaverkaḷkk-ākki y-aḷittanen-puvenan-tanne* 58
> *pālippān-āti munnaṃ*[43] *pariceḻum ayōtti-y-ennuṃ*
> *ñālattil-avatarittu narapati-kulattil ninnu* 59
> *arin-tavam polindirikkum aivar kanniyākenmār-va-*
> *nt-orumppeṭa-ppukunt-itattil uvantu*[44]*-tantānam-uṇṭāy…* 60
> *mumpināl a-kkulattil uditteḻum*[45] *kēraḷakkōn*
> *vampināl puvenan-tanna-vaṭivoṭu paripālittān* 61

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[38]   The logic of sectioning in all the editions is not revealed to the reader who might get impression that the names for sections, as well as their numbering, make part of the TNM text itself. They do not. All manuscripts present the text of TNM in the *scriptio continua* style in which only the boundaries of three broad parts are marked and tiny markers inserted at the end of what editors qualify (and which again cannot be seen in either of the manuscripts) as *pāṭṭŭ* songs (the TNM contains such *pāṭṭŭ* songs as well as portions of different structure and contents). The passage in question represents probably the earliest known early Malayalam version of the Paraśurāma story and the associated myth of the creation of Kerala. For the earliest Sanskrit sources of the same, as well as important remarks on the foundation myth of the Paraśurāma episode, see Vielle 2014: 24–25.

[39]   Passage transliterated following the edition of KP 2006. Variations given in references to follow. TNM 1.7.56–62 appeared earlier in translation of Freeman (however following the PN 1981 edition) in Vielle 2014: 23. Cf. remarks by Sreeranganathan who pointed to this passage for a different reason connected to the history of the Āṟanmuḷa temple (Sreeranganathan 2019: 46–47).

[40]   PN 2016 = *immalannāṭṭil.*

[41]   PN 1981 = PN 2016 = *ennum.*

[42]   PN 1981 = PN 2016 = *ppaṭattanen pinneyannē.*

[43]   PN 1981 = PN 2016 = *kālaṃ.*

[44]   PN 1981 = PN 2016 = *uyerntu.*

[45]   PN 1981 = PN 2016 = *uṇṭāy.*

kēraḷa puvenam-ennuṃ kēvalaṃ nāmaṃ peṟṟu
tāroḷi-makeḷ tanakkuṃ taṃkatam[46]*-āyi-tannē* 62

And if you want me to speak about the glory of this Malanāṭu land
Now I shall tell it briefly the way it's known to me:
Paraśuraman—that king of Munis—he heated himself up in greatest
tapas
And begging alms from Varuna [the ocean king] hurled [at the sea]
a finest winnow
And thus he made sea into a land—this is what you shall hear from me
And then he made that very land into a gift for superior *brāhmaṇa*s
Then, from the noble king's family in glorious Ayodhya
Descended to this land in order to protect [it]
The five fair ladies shining with great self-command
They came and each entered a union, rejoicing in love, to get her offspring
First born of to this house would rise [to be] the splendid king Kēraḷa
Who with great strenght protected this very land in a way most proper
And this indeed is how the land of Kēraḷa got its name[47]
It soon became home to the Lotus Lady of Abundance[48]

Taking a wider angle we can see that both PN 1981 and PN 2016
limit the section named *Kēraḷōlpatti* to verses 56–62 while propos-
ing quite another name to the part of TNM that immediately follows
and apparently continues the same narrative.[49] In spite of that, the new

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[46]   PN 1981 = PN 2016 = *taṃkayam.*

[47]   Speculation on the name 'Kēraḷa' as given to a land of a distinct geographical
and cultural identity developed into a *topos* of its own within the cognate genres. Cf. for
instance a version included in a chapter labelled (by the editors) *Kēraḷasaṃjñākaraṇaṃ*
in a probably later Sanskrit work named *Kēraḷamāhātmya* claiming to have been a part
of *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* (See Śēṣuśāstrīkaḷ 1912: 23).

[48]   Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

[49]   TNM 1.8.1–2:
   aṅṅene peruma pokuṃ añcu tāvaḻiyil tōnnum
   paṅṅu cēr mannar mannil paṭavīṭaviṭameṃkil
   taṭaṃ kōluṃ mulamār cillittaḷeyiṭṭu keṭṭi namma
   oṭuṃkāta matenattumpaṃ uṭenuṭen puṇarkkum ēṭam (KP 2006: 45)

section 1.8 received in both PN 1981 and PN 2016 editions a separate, this time rather descriptive title: On the kingdom of Cēras, the four councils, the council of eight, the *sāmanta*s, sixty-four villages and village of Āṟanmuḷa (*Cērarājyam*, *nālutāḷi*, *eṇmar*, *sāmantar*, *aṟupattinālu grāmaṅgal*, *āṟanmuḷa grāmam*…). By this, it apparently highlights topics pertaining to the era of the Cēra kings' rule, the important institution of temple control board named *nālutaḷi*, the sixty four original brahmin community settlements, while signalling a narrowing of the focus to the location of Āṟanmuḷa. Incidentally, the order of succession of the topics here follows rather closely the generic convention of *Kēraḷōlpatti* with its recognizable architecture. As pointed by Veluthat (Veluthat 2004, 2009 and 2018a), the tripartite division of works either claiming to belong to the genre of *Kēraḷōlpatti* or following the very tradition should be viewed as one of the constitutive characteristics of the genre. The three blocks of textual matter recurring in most 'versions' of *Kēraḷōlpatti* are given by Veluthat as representing three 'broadly defined periods,' namely, the "Age of Parasurama," the "Age of Perumals," and the "Age of Tampurans"(Veluthat 2004: 25). In Veluthat's opinion it is the third 'period' that most often varies across versions and differentiates one 'version' of *Kēraḷōlpatti* from another. As Veluthat admits, and what is visible to the reader of specific versions, the various *Kēraḷōlpatti*s tend to differ in an important way in the matter of their claim to the historical role of specific social groups or castes. In this context the passage identified by the editor of PN 1981 and PN 2016 as *Kēraḷōlpatti* inscribed within TNM, features a rare example of highlighting the role of a ruling family of a clearly matrilinear structure (the five 'fair ladies' of TNM 1.7.60). This character continues to resound in the next section of TNM 1.8.1. The passage puts also into relief a noble origin of the five fair ladies presenting it as *narapatikula*

In that way a growing greatness [of this land] will be seen in five mother lineages
And if this place is the capital city of the kings to live in
so are there also most beautiful women to be seen
whose eyebrow movements immediately bring about men's endless love-afflictions.

(TNM 1.7.59 glossed in PN 2016: 50 as *kṣatriya*!). The latter sounds particularly striking when contextualized within the central charter myth of Nampūtiri brahmins' dominant role emphasised in the part labeled in the model by Veluthat as the "Age of Paraśurama." The nature of contemporary renewed interest in the forms of history writing among historians of Kerala appears to reflect as much a new attitude towards evaluation and making sense of quasi-historical genres from Kerala (especially those composed in Malayalam) with its ongoing (and politically loaded) heated dispute over the sensible reading of premodern works that emphasise historical role of one social group over the other as well as a sort of obsession with one's own history that characterizes probably most of the contemporary national historians.[50] Some of the questions seem to await being properly addressed. Among them such basic one as that pertaining to reasons that made Gundert render the title, *Kēraḷōlpatti*, in the edition he prepared, as the "Origin of Malabar" (and, surprisingly, not the "Origin of Kerala").[51] So is the case of the text-critical terms in which we should describe the nature of the editorial project of Gundert's *Kēraḷōlpatti* and the actual status of the sources from which it had been compiled. The answer to the latter seems to be encoded, at least partially, in the copyist's note [?] on page 79 of Sreenathan's edition of *Kēraḷanāṭakam*—a cognate text retrieved out of a single handwritten copy also preserved in Gundert's archive. The note was identified and translated by Veluthat who suggested upon examining the evidence that not only *Kēraḷanāṭakam* but also *Kēraḷōlpatti* must have been composed for public performance rather than private reading. The note, in Veluthat's translation, reads: "When a person expounds this

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[50] One would expect a contrastive comparative study to better understand the Kerala case. Parallel instances could be indicated for other regional literary cultures of India as well as numerous cases for European national history discourses, or a Japanese concept of *nihonjinron*—a genre of literature concerned with "speculations about the origins and nature of Japanese people and nation and debates over Japanese identity…" (Reader 2003: 103).

[51] Incidentally, most of the extant 'versions' of *Kēraḷōlpatti* appear to have originated in Malabar (I thank Abhilash Malayil for pointing this out to me).

prabandha, he should be given [the expenses for] oil, bath, food and a fee according to [one's] ability. Or else…[one] will incur the terrible sin equaling matricide (…)" (Veluthat 2019: 360–361).[52] A similar note can be seen in yet another section of the published *Kēraḷanāṭaka*. In both instances the term used for what stands in Veluthat's translation as 'fee' happens to be *dakṣiṇa*.[53] However, Keśavan Veluthat decided not to translate *dakṣiṇa* as a technical term referring to a ceremonial gift to a person of *brāhmaṇa* status. Had it been done so, the person who performed the *prabandham* should have been understood as a *brāhmaṇa* (rather than a Nambyār of the *pāṭhakam* tradition).

This coexistence of handwritten copying and public performance (supporting if not making wider circulation outright possible) of several regional and local 'versions' must have continued, though in uneven and more fragmentary forms till modern times. An additional evidence to the late continuation of producing hand-written copies of *Kēraḷōlpatti* even in the later period verging on the 20th century is to be seen in a colophon to MS 253 in the *Descriptive Catalogue of Malayalam Manuscripts* in GOML Madras which seems to suggest that circulation of hand-written copies of *Kēraḷōlpatti* did not cease with the appearance of the first printed edition by Gundert in 1843.[54] Additionally, it adds gravity to the argument for a complex relationship between the orders of the written and the printed in the early period of introducing the modern print technology and commercial distribution of printed material

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[52] The original passage (Sreenathan 2016: 79) reads: *ī prabandhaṃ kēlppiccāl avarkkŭ tēccŭ kuḷiyu bhakṣaṇavuṃ yathāśaktipōle dakṣiṇayuṃ koṭukku*. Cf. Menon 2020: 10. Cf. also the concluding passages of *Kēraḷōlpatti Kiḷippāṭṭŭ* (Raghava Varier 2016: 142–143), which seem to suggest a connection to performance practices as well.

[53] Sreenathan 2016: 79 and Veluthat 2019: 360–361.

[54] The GOML catalogue for Malayalam manuscripts features ten instances of MS called *Kēraḷōlpatti*, while the catalogue of the Manuscript Library of the Kerala University, Trivandrum, shows no less than forty such entries (I thank one of the undisclosed reviewers of this paper for this information).

in South India.[55] We are not sure, however, if the late copies remained to be produced in connection to anything like public performance of the sort suggested by the colophon in the section of *Kēraḷanāṭakam* mentioned above. Even more intriguing, however, are the findings of Veluthat concerning the performative versions of "episodes" from *Kēraḷōlpatti* to be seen in contemporary practice of Teyyam professional performers of the Malayan caste (Veluthat 2019: 361–362).[56] Another study places this practice among ritual performances connected to Teyyam possession dance tradition, especially those professed by Malayans as *Svārūpacaritram* ('Tales of the Chiefdom') or *Svarūpā-cāram* ('Customs of the Chiefdom'), the versions of which vary according to the locality where Teyyam happens to be actually performed.[57] We must remember that Malayans are the folk heroes of TNM which itself contains a 'version' of *Kēraḷōlpatti* along with a continuation of the latter in the form of a 'history of the place,' i.e. the Āṛanmuḷa village as a local centre with its Kṛṣṇa temple and a detailed description (*varṇana*) of its glory.

There is a good number of intriguing intertextual relations between different versions including verbatim inter-borrowings, sometimes also between Sanskrit and Malayalam works, like those between *Kēraḷaṇāṭakam* (section named *Kēraḷōdbhavam*) and another 'version' of *Kēraḷōlpatti* (Raghava Varier 2013)[58] All these, though supplying rich context for the present essay, remain outside its specific scope.

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[55]   The colophon to the undated MS 253 reads: *itu accaticciṭṭuṇḍu. pakṣe vaḷare pātha bhēdam uṇṭŭ*—"It has already been printed but there is a lot of different readings [in the printed one]" (Subrahmanya Sastri 1940: 272).

[56]   The parallel passages were identified earlier in Freeman 2003c: 324. For the more pronounced instances and wider context of the performative aspects of Malayalam literary genres of Kerala, see Freeman 2003b: 170–173.

[57]   For the geographical and historical interrelation of regional Teyyam performance traditions and their patronage bases, see Karippath 2012: 203, Karippath 2019: 141 and Freeman 2003c: 309.

[58]   See the initial part of the *Kēraḷōdbhavam* (Sreenathan 2016: 119) corresponding to the beginning of the text edited as the *Keralolpatti Grandhavari—the Kollattunadu Traditions* (Raghava Varier 1984).

What I am primarily concerned here with is a 'version' of *Kēraḷōlpatti* found within the *Tiruniḻalmāla*—the work considered to be one of the earliest specimens of Malayalam literature in general and of its *pāṭṭŭ* variety in particular. Especially when seen by the dominant modern histories of Malayalam literature as a crucial and rare representative of the group of *pāṭṭŭ* works that allegedly evolved as programmatically opposed (by their non-Sanskritic form and contents) to the other group of early medieval texts classified as *maṇipravālam* and believed to bear an unmistakably brahmanic and Sanskritic mark.[59]

Coming back to the historical orientation of the three modern editions of TNM as a work of critical importance for constructing the historical identity of contemporary Kerala, I would like to offer the following working hypothesis. What we get with the editions of PN 1981 and KP 2006 are two different visions of the critical impact of TNM on regional identity seen against the historical process of making Kerala a culturally distinct whole. Both visions are informed by editors' knowledge of *Līlātilakam* as a normative text. For both editors the norm of *Līlātilakam* proves to be critical in the sense that it affects most of their editorial choices and judgments. As a result, the modern Malayalam reader receives a long missing link in the form of an edited text that is a product of a tedious job of heavy editing process. This process must have entailed more than the bare reconstituting of a metrical text made of various metrical genres out of a manuscript copy inscribed with a sort of *scriptio continua*. With no hint to confirm the choice within the text of TNM itself (as well as in extant manuscripts) both editors decided to classify TNM as a representant of the genre of *pāṭṭŭ* as understood by the normative *Līlātilakam*. Accordingly, both editors decided to

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[59] All the three editions contain in their prefaces rather extensive sections concerned with placing TNM within the literary history of Malayalam named *Tiruniḻalmālayuṭe prādhanyam* (PN 1981: 18–23; PN 2016: 37–41) and *Sāhityam* (KP 2006: 22–26). For an attempt at a conceptualization of the socio-historical context for the modern reception of TNM, see Freeman 2003a: 448–449, 459–460 and 2003b: 159–160. For an attempt at conceptualising the literary-historical process that culminated in the development of the textual tradition of *Kēraḷōlpatti*, see Devadevan 2020: 249.

represent the received text (as it presented itself in extant MSS) as conforming to the normative prescriptions of TNM. While producing the text the editors decided to represent the phonic and metric regime of the *pāṭṭŭ* genre as embodied within TNM, at least those parts of it that (as seen in the extant MSS) conformed to the model more than those that did it to a lesser degree. That is why we received three edited representations of TNM text that reiterate the same representation strategy of marking those very stanzas of the text that conform to the exigences of *Līlātilakam* as *pāṭṭŭ*. As a consequence, we get *bhāga*s Two and Three of TNM made predominantly of concatenated *pāṭṭŭ* 'songs' while *bhāga* One features only two short *pāṭṭŭ*s interspaced with textual matter that apparently fulfils the *Līlātilakam's* requirements to a lesser degree.

It seems that with the three modern editions we receive also something like two distinct editorial projects strongly oriented towards regional histories. One (PN 1981 and 2016) grew out of the historical consciousness emotionally siding with cultural and historical process of the central and the southern regions of contemporary Kerala which remained connected to the history of the kingdoms of Calicut, Kochi (with Trichur contested) and Travancore to the South. The other project shows much stronger links to the regional identity of North Malabar and Kannur-Kasaragod region. The two projects produced two different histories of TNM transmission processes. Backed by the two regional authorities in the shape of academic institutions as publishers, they amount to two different representations of the shared regional past. The past that has always been fraught with competitive interests and points of view shaped by a historical sense of belonging that precedes that of the modern state. Their working remains to be seen very much in the contemporary Kerala—a region struggling to build its coherent identity out of much stronger localized ones. In this respect not quite different from the modern state of India and its ongoing effort to more convincingly articulate, if not forge, a more pronounced common denominator for its so much different regions in terms of a unifying civilizational dimension.

On closer look the two modern editors appear to side with two distinct visions of the historical and socio-cultural process without necessarily spelling it out. Such an attitude in both cases amounts to a tacit historicizing. I can see several hints to a radically different textual history of TNM implied by both editors as well as two opposed views on decisive factors in history making.[60] All these can be seen as region-related visions which bear also on the way both editors construct their own cultural identity as well as that of their homeland in terms of socio-historical memory. While both editions, KP 2003 and PN 2016 (PN 1981 sounds more neutral) admit strong performative connection in the textual history of TNM, both see it in a sharply distinct way. When KP 2003 speaks of a living connection to the cultural complex of Teyyam performances and the ritual expertise of the Malayan group in north Malabar as actual performers of TNM seen as performative text,[61] PN 2016 also admits a performative connection in its own terms but links it more to *āṭṭa* and *kūttŭ* performing art traditions of southern and central Kerala (Puruṣōttaman Nāyar 2016: 42). Neither gives us a clear clue to what should we make out of the disquieting and suggestive connection between the later performative histories of both TNM and *Kēraḷōlpatti* the passages of which still happen to be recreated verbatim in the ritualized practice of the Teyyam performers of the North Malabar. Perhaps one cautious corollary would be that the textual histories of both works benefitted from the same pattern of collective patronage persisting, though not without change, in modern North Malabar.

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[60]   I find it surprising, to say the least, that PN 2016 does not mention KP 2003. Did the author fail to notice its publication? It seems rather improbable that an acclaimed author of the edition princeps remained unaware of an alternative editorial project going on in Kannur.

[61]   See Karippath 2006: 9 where TNM is apparently understood as a work compiled for the ritual use during a specific cycle of exorcism and purification rites called *niḷal* and performed in a specific period of the year (*vāvu* days of the Karkaṭaka month) by a group of professionals from the caste of Malayans. The passage does not elaborate on possible evidence for linking this contemporary observance and its tradition with the distant past of TNM.

Editorial process has never and nowhere remained historically neutral. And the act of editing works of crucial importance for authenticating or contesting collective identity, works such as both TNM and *Kēraḷōlpatti* are to the Keralites, naturally remains sensitive to historical memory of the editors and their targeted audiences. It is visible very much also in the case of the best-known version of *Kēraḷōlpatti*, i.e., the 1843/1868 editions of Gundert. After all, was it not because of his historical understanding of the region and its recorded past in terms of either the then British Malabar (and its history-making process visible among others in a series of publications of partly ethnographic, partly historical character that proliferated in the second half of 19th century spilling over into the 20th) or the much longer tradition of using one and the same geographical name by Arabic traders and European travellers[62] that Hermann Gundert opted to translate the *Kēraḷōlpatti* as the *Origin of the Malabar* and not the *Origin of Kerala*?

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[62]   A tradition of using the name Malabar among Europeans (to be seen already in Marco Polo—I owe this and other helpful remarks to one of the two undisclosed reviewers of the present study) derives probably from a geographical concept of Arabic traders, later conceptualized in Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum's *Tuḥfatal-Mujāhidīn fī ba'd Akhbār al-Burdughāliyyīn*. See Veluthat 2019: 363, cf. Kooria 2019.

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