

THE PANTHEON OF TAMIL GRAMMARIANS: A SHORT HISTORY OF THE MYTH OF AGASTYA'S TWELVE DISCIPLES¹

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Introduction: Ideology and Philology

The present article explores one of the motifs in the mythology of Akattiyaṇ (Sanskrit Agastya), a cultural hero who has long been associated with a particular Tamil mountain, the Tamil religious sphere, the Tamil language and Tamil grammar, although his original milieu is the corpus of Vedic Sanskrit texts, because his name is associated with 27 *R̥gveda* hymns (numbered from 1.165 to 1.191²) and he even appears in one of them (1.179) dialoguing with his wife Lopāmudrā. The Sanskrit origin of Agastya appears somehow in sharp contrast with the depth of his roots in the present Tamil psyché, as exemplified by the fact that in 1975, the DMK-led³ Tamil government gave its blessings and financial support for the building of a temple devoted to Tamiḷttāy “Mother Tamil”, a divinity personifying the Tamil language, and that, as narrated by Sumathi Ramaswamy (1997: 133):

(1) The temple was finally opened to the public in April 1993. Its central sanctum houses, in addition to Tamiḷttāy, the images of her two most ancient “sons”, the grammarians Agastya and Tol-kappiyar. Three subsidiary sanctums carry the images of Ilango, Tiruvalluvar, and Kamban, three of Tamil’s most famous poets. The temple itself is shaped in the form of a triangle, the three angles signifying the three most ancient kings—the Chera, the Chola, and the Pandya, Tamiḷttāy’s oldest patron-sons; alternatively, they also represent the three branches of Tamil, *iyal* (literature), *icai* (music), and *nāṭakam* (drama).

This short description of the temple gives a clear idea, in a nutshell, of how part of the Tamil-speaking world officially sees its past. But when going to the sphere of textual facts, as we shall try to do in this article, rather than remaining in the sphere of ideological statements, certitudes fade and powerful symbols, like *muttamīl* “the three branches of Tamil”, mentioned in (1), which is said to have been the subject of Agastya’s elusive grammar, are replaced by scanty textual data scattered on a memory map which has many blank spots. Much remains indeed to be done for obtaining a satisfactory account of the beginnings of the

1. For discussing this article with me, for providing me with important information, and for making useful suggestions, I wish to thank here T. V. Gopal Iyer, Eva Wilden, N. Ganesan and Thomas Lehmann. I am also grateful to Denis Matringe who was my discussant when the preliminary version of this paper was presented by me on 19th of November 2005, and to all the participants of that meeting, for their feedback.

2. References are based on Geldner’s German translation (pp. 237-274).

3. The acronym DMK (alias *Ti.Mu.Ka.*) designates a political party, the *Tirāviṭa Munṇērrak Kaḷakam* (litt. “Dravidian Progress Association”).

Tamil grammatical tradition, for which the most ancient extant work is the *Tolkāppiyam*⁴, attributed to the grammarian Tolkāppiyāṇ, whose name appears in the above Tamiḷttāy temple description. In this field, the difficulties are manifold: (A) the available texts are difficult to understand; we often do not know the date of their composition or have a clear idea of their genesis, and for most of them we do not have really satisfactory critical editions; (B) the former existence of a number of “lost works” can be hypothesized because one occasionally finds in extant works (B1) a reference to an author, or (B2) a reference to a title, or (B3) a fragment quoted, these three possibilities not being exclusive of each other;⁵ (C) in the technical literature, a number of passages from the medieval period containing references to grammarians and to grammars seem to be borrowed from puranic⁶ literature, because they involve divine or semi-divine characters who are said to have played a role in the obtaining of a grammar for Tamil. This gives an occasional mixed-genre flavor to these technical texts but makes it difficult to draw direct conclusions from them regarding the genesis, the historicity and the content of the works which are referred to.

Three modern short presentations of Agastya

Concerning Agastya, the *Madras Tamil Lexicon* (MTL, six volumes plus supplement, 1924-36, 1939) has the following to say in three entries (vol. I, pp. 9 & 10):

(2a) AKATTIYAM akattiyam, n. < *Agastya*. Tamil grammar by Agastya, of which little is extant; AKATTIYA MUṆIVARĀL CEYYAPPAṬṬA TAMILILAKKAṆA NŪL. (TOL. PĀYI. URAI.)⁷

(2b) AKATTIYAN akattiyāṇ, n. < *Agastya*. 1. Name of a sage, author of several Vēdic hymns, said to have founded a Brāhman colony in South India, written on medicine and composed the first Tamil grammar; ORU MUṆIVAR (*KAMPARĀ. AKATTIYAP.* 26.) 2. The star Canopus, of which Agastya is the regent; AKASTIYA NAKṢATTIRAM. AKATTIYA NENṆU MĪN UYARNTA TANNITATAIK KAṬANTU MITUṆATTAP PORUNTA (*PARIPĀ.* 11, 11, URAI).

(2c) AKATTIYANĀR akattiyāṇār, n. See AKATTIYAN. 1. (TOL. PĀYI. URAI.)

As stated by these entries, there is in Tamil Nadu a traditional association between a Tamil grammatical text called *Akattiyam*, of which we only have fragments, and a legendary character, called Akattiyāṇ. It is interesting to compare the MTL 1924 Tamil-English

4. The grammatical field is usually referred to in Tamil today as *Ilakkaṇam* (Skt. *lakṣaṇa*), and has among its primary sources such works as the *Tolkāppiyam* and the *Nannūl*, the two most well-known traditional Tamil “grammars”. In the case of *Tolkāppiyam*, the word “grammar” has to be understood in a wider sense than when it renders Sanskrit *vyākaraṇa*, because it includes poetics. See for instance the 17 volumes of the *TIP (Tamil Ilakkaṇap Pēr Akarāṭi*, Thesaurus of [Tamil] Grammar) compiled by T. V. Gopal Iyer (2005). As for Agastya’s grammar, if it ever existed, it is said to have had an even wider scope and to have dealt with *muttamiḷ*.

5. A pioneering book by Mayilai Cīṇi. Vēṇkaṭacāmi (1900-1980), *Maṇaintu Pōṇa Tamiḷ Nūlkaḷ* (1967), examines the available evidence for 196 lost Tamil works. Among those, 117 works come under the heading *ilakkiyam* “literature”, 10 under *icait tamiḷ* “musicology”, 24 under *nāṭakat tamiḷ* “theatre” and 45 under *ilakkaṇam* “grammar”. We will refer to that book as MCV.

6. The *Purāṇas* narrate the myths related to that sphere.

7. In the quotations, the passages in capitals are transliterations of passages printed in Tamil script, so as to distinguish them from the passages that are already transliterated Tamil in the original.

entries with what was probably the first report in a European tongue, Latin, about Agastya as a Tamil grammarian, by C. J. Beschi, in 1730:

(3a) Primo arte conscriptis regulis hujus elegantioris linguae auctorem dicunt monachum quemdam Agattien (seu) Agastien dictum AKATTIYAN seu AKASTIYAN, de quo ineptissimas narrant fabulas. [...] Praecepta quae primo Agastien dedit aliqua citantur quidem ab auctoribus, sed quos ipse scripsit libros nullibi invenire jam possumus (Beschi, 1730, MS).

(3b) The first person who wrote a grammatical treatise on this dialect, and who is therefore considered as its founder, is supposed to have been a devotee named Agattiyan, concerning whom many absurd stories are related. [...] A few of the rules laid down by Agattiyan have been preserved by different authors, but his works are no longer in existence (1822 translation by Babington).

The “ineptissimas fabulas” to which Beschi refers could be the puranic accounts. Agastya is for instance prominent in the Tamil *Kanta Purāṇa*.⁸ Or they could be the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Kampan (9th or 12th cent.), with which he was familiar. But they were probably not of much interest to Beschi. We find more details about Agastya in the *Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary* published in 1862 by the American missionary Miron Winslow (1789-1864).⁹ The entry, longer than the one in the MTL,¹⁰ says:

(4) AKATTIYAN — AKASTIYAN, s. A poet and sage celebrated in the Ramayanam, Skandam and other works of antiquity. He is regarded as the former of the Tamil language which he is said to have learned of Skandā the son of Śiva. He is also the reputed author of several works, still extant, in whole or in part, in the Tamil language; such as, a Grammar, Materia Medica, a work on Astrology, Astronomy, and several essays on the unity of the divine being, as opposed to the popular system of polytheism, &c. He is regarded as the son of both Mythra and Varuna by Urvasi; is represented to be of very short stature, and to have been born in a water jar. He is famed for having compressed and swallowed the ocean, for the sake of the celestials. Other wonderful stories are also told of him, and received with undoubted credence. He is considered as the regent of the star Canopus, KURUMUNI. Wils. p. 5, AGASTYA.

The distinction which Winslow seems to be drawing between “the popular system of polytheism” and “the unity of the divine being” (as supposedly emphasized by Agastya) might well be an enthusiastic echo of his own Christian convictions. Throughout the ages, Agastya seems to have been claimed by several religions.¹¹ Why should the Christians not have taken an interest in him?¹² However, there was little risk that the Hindu traditional scholars would abandon their heritage to them. A clear token of their devotion to Agastya is seen in the following passage, excerpted from the Autobiography of U. V. Swaminatha Iyer

8. “The authoritative canonical text of the myths of god Murukan” (Zvelebil 1995: 329), variously dated between 1400 and 1625 A.D.

9. According to K. Meenakshisundaram’s sketch of Winslow’s life, “Like his other counterparts and contemporaries, he studied Tamil with the aid of Tamil scholars” (1974: 66). What he writes is thus a condensation of what those scholars transmitted to him, and is not necessarily based on his own reading of Tamil sources.

10. This is despite the fact that the MTL is much more voluminous than Winslow’s dictionary, which it recognizes as one of its sources.

11. Agastya is a familiar figure in Śaiva literature, and notably the *Tēvāram*. The preface to the commentary of the *Irāiyaṇār Kaḷaviyal* has him sit in the company of Śiva and Murukan in the 1st academy (see Buck & Paramasivam 1997: 5). Moreover, the preface of the *Vīracōḷiyam*, a Buddhist Tamil grammar, states that Agastya learnt Tamil grammar from Avalokita.

12. An interesting episode is the publication of the *Akattiyaṇ Nāṇam* (Wisdom of Agastya) by the American Mission Press in 1837 (see Young & Jebanesan 1995: 71-72).

(1855-1942), the most important Tamil philologist. This reproduces a public discourse¹³ he had made in his youth:

(5) Akattiyar has been specifically mentioned as Kuṛumuṇi (Short sage). He has as much importance as Vacīṭṭar has. Akattiyar is a supreme devotee of Śiva. He is almost as great as Lord Śiva himself. More than this, it is due to him that Tamil has received as much respect and fame as Sanskrit. In fact, if Parañcōti Muṇivar had not mentioned Akattiyar specifically in his poem, it would have been a great incivility. This is how great Tamil poets praise the great teacher of Tamil, Akattiyar. The visible Akattiyar now, my master Śrī Piḷḷai, is being worshipped now by everybody as a God. When Śrī Piḷḷai is so great how great would have been Akattiyar! I have decided to go back to Śrī Piḷḷai who, like the sage Akattiyar, is a supreme devotee of Śiva and a supreme teacher of Tamil. (p. 262 in the translation by K. Zvelebil, 1990).

It might be added that it is clear, through the above quotations, from the 18th to the 20th century, that precisely categorizing Agastya in a European tongue is a difficult task. What is he? The English passages in MTL refer to him as a “sage”, while the Tamil passages call him a *muṇivar*¹⁴ (skt. *muni*). Beschi uses “monachum” and his translator “devotee”. Winslow calls him “a poet and sage”. And Ziegenbalg, in his 1713 *Genealogie der malabarischen Götter*, refers to the category he belongs to as “Propheten, *Rischigöl* genannt”, which he contrasts with the category of “Göttern, *Dewergöl* genannt”.¹⁵ This vocabulary connects us with the universe of Vedic Sanskrit texts, its *ṛṣis* and its *devas*, where Agastya makes his earliest appearance. We shall come back later to the problem of Agastya’s nature, but we shall first concentrate on his official role as a grammarian.

The motif of the twelve disciples

As should be stated very clearly, the two grammarians who had their statues recently installed in the temple of “Mother Tamil” do not stand on equal footing. An edition of the three books of *Tolkāppiyam* (T), *Eluttatikāram* (TE), *Collatikāram* (TC) and *Poruḷatikāram* (TP), along with all the available commentaries, was recently published in 14 volumes (See: KÖPÄL AIYAR TI. VĒ. [2003]). On the other hand, the grammatical fragments attributed to Agastya, and available as quotations inside various texts, could easily be printed on a few pages. But when it comes to anecdotes and stories, the reverse is true. There are a great number of stories told about Agastya,¹⁶ whereas only one story has Tolkāppiyar as a protagonist and that story, told by Naccinārkkiniyar (probably 14th cent.), also involves Agastya, described as the teacher of Tolkāppiyar. An expanded version of the teacher-disciple relationship is the “twelve disciples” motif, which will be the central topic of this article and which we shall try to trace in several texts. We see it mentioned for instance in P. S. Subrahmanya

13. It was the last in a series of edifying lectures he had been invited to make on the *Tiruvilaiyāṭar Purāṇam* “Purāṇa of the Sacred Sports (of Śiva)”, by Parañcōti Muṇivar (17th cent.). The references to Śrī Piḷḷai are references to his master Makāvittuvāṇ Śrī Mīnāṭcūntaram Piḷḷai (1815-1876).

14. MTL translates *muṇivar* by 1. “hermit, ascetic, ṛṣi”; 2. “a class of sages, one of *paṭiṇeṇkaṇam* (the 18 classes of celestial hosts)”.

15. Ziegenbalg does not say anything about Agastya as a grammarian. He presents “Agestier” as the second best-known among the 48000 prophets. The chapter about prophets follows a chapter devoted to the “Dewergöl, welche 330000000 kleine Götter sind”. See the new edition by Daniel Jeyaraj (2003).

16. Much has been written on Agastya, and a useful summary of the literature can currently be found in Zvelebil 1995: 13-16. For a wide survey, a recommended reading is the 1930 book *Agastya in the Tamil land*, by K. N. Sivaraja Pillai.

Sastry's 1934 book, *History of Grammatical Theories in Tamil and their relation to the grammatical literature in Sanskrit*, which was originally a Ph.D. thesis,¹⁷ and where we find the following statement (p. 1):

(6) The Grammarians mentioned in Tamil Language are:—

(1) Agastya with his twelve disciples Tolkāppiyaṇār, Ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ, Turāliṅkaṇ, Cempūṭcēy, Vaiyāpikaṇ, Vāyppiyaṇ, Paṇampāraṇ, Kaḷāraṃpaṇ, Avinayaṇ, Kākkaipāṭiṇiyaṇ, Narrattaṇ and Vāmaṇaṇ who are said to have lived in the pre-Christian Era.

(2) Iḷampūraṇar, [...] probably of the 10th century, the earliest known commentator on *Tolkāppiyam*.

(3) Puttamittiraṇār of the 11th century, the author of *Vīracōḷiyam*.

[...]

(6) Pavaṇanti of the 13th century, the author of *Naṇṇūl*.

[....]

P. S. Subrahmanya Sastri was in any case not really interested in the disciples of Agastya, as he states elsewhere:

(7) The author of *Tolkāppiyam* may be said, for all practical purposes, to be the father of grammatical theories in Tamil Language, since the works of his teacher Agastya and of Agastya's eleven other disciples are not now available (*ibid.* p. xvii).

However, he must have felt compelled to mention them for the sake of completion. It is not clear, however, on which authority he based the list he gives of the 12 names. As we shall see, a majority (but not all) of those names occurs in primary sources, many of which had already been edited from the manuscripts at the time of his writing, but as far the full list of 12 names is concerned, although it was already available in a number of printed books before 1930, some of them in Tamil and some of them in English, and could thus be considered as common knowledge, all of these books seem to present themselves as "secondary literature", the puzzling fact being that, in this particular case, the primary source for our supposedly second-hand information is not to be located.

A good example of a compiled source of information (in Tamil) that contains the full list of 12 names is Ciṅkāravēlu Mutaliyār's 1050 pages *Apitāṇa Cintāmaṇi* (*Abithana Chintamani, The Encyclopedia of Tamil Literature*, first edition in 1910¹⁸). It devotes a long article to "Akattiya Muṇivar", subdivided into many sub-articles. Among these, one starts in the following way (sub-article 40 in the 2nd edition, 2001 reprint, pp. 4-5):

(8) IVAR TAMMĀṆĀKKARKAL, TIRAṆATŪMĀKKIṆI ALLATU TOLKĀPPIYAMUṆIVAR, ATAṆKŌṬṬĀCĀṆ, TURĀLIṆKAN, CEMPŪṬCĒY, VAIYĀPIKAN, VĀYPPIYAṆ, PAṆAMPĀRAN, KAḷĀRAMPAN, AVINAYAN, KĀKKAIPĀṬINIYAṆ, NARRATTAN, VĀMANAN MUTALIYAVARKAL. ("His disciples are those whose list starts with Tiraṇatūmākkiṇi

17. According to P. N. Natarajan, in his biographical sketch "Dr. P. S. Subrahmanya Sastri (1890-1978)", which is included in the 1997 reprint of the book, the author "was the first to be awarded a Ph.D. degree in Tamil by the University of Madras" (in 1930). The thesis was originally published as a supplement to the *Journal of Oriental Research*, before appearing in book form in 1934. It was "highly commended by scholars of repute like Profs. R. L. Turner, L. D. Barnett and J. Bloch."

18. A prospectus, with recommendation by V. Kanakasabai Pillai, author of the famous 1904 book *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, was circulated as early as 1899, for subscribers to give their financial support to the work in preparation. The second (and posthumous) edition, with a preface by Ciṅkāravēlu Mutaliyār's son, appeared in 1934, contains 1634 pages and has been reprinted several times.

alias Tolkāppiya Muṇivar, Ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ, Turālīṅkaṇ, Cempūtcēy, Vaiyāpikaṇ, Vāyppiyan, Paṇampāraṇ, Kalāraṃpaṇ, Avinayan, Kāḱkaipāṭiṇiyaṇ, Narrattaṇ and Vāmaṇaṇ.”¹⁹

Another, slightly earlier occurrence is found in a 1905 book, also in Tamil, by Aracaṇi Caṇmukaṇār, which has for its title page TOLKĀPPIYAC CAṆMUKA VIRUTTIYIN / MUTALĀVATU PAKUTTIYĀKIYA / PĀYIRA VIRUTTI. We read there (on pp. 103-104):

(9) INI, ĀCIRIYAR AKATTIYARKU MĀNĀKKAR PAṆNIRUVAR. CAMATAKKINIYIRU-
TṬIYIN PUTALVARUḶORUVANUM PARACURĀMAṆCĪTARANUMĀKIYA TIRANATŪ-
MĀKKINIYENNU MIYARPEYARUTAIYA TOLKĀPPIYANU, MATANĀKŌṬṬĀCĀNUN,
TURĀLĪNKAṆUṆ, CEMPŪTCĒYUM, VAIYĀPIKANUM, VĀYPPIYANUM, PAṆAMPĀ-
RANUN, KALĀRAMPAṆU, MAVINAYANUN, KĀKKAIPĀṬINIYU, NARRATTANUM,
VĀMAṆANUMENA. AVARULĒ TOLKĀPPIYA NAVINAYAN MUTALĀYINĀR MUTTA-
MILUM VIRAVAKKŪRIYA MUTANŪLĀKIYA VAKATTIYATTININ RIYARRAMILAI
VĒRUPIRITTU VALINŪL CEYTĀR

“Furthermore, the teacher Agastya had 12 disciples: (1) Tolkāppiyan, who had for his personal name Tiraṇatūmākkiṇi and who was one of the sons of the ṛṣi Camatakkiṇi and the brother of Paracurāmaṇ,²⁰ (2) Ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ, (3) Turālīṅkaṇ, (4) Cempūtcēy, (5) Vaiyāpikaṇ, (6) Vāyppiyan, (7) Paṇampāraṇ, (8) Kalāraṃpaṇ, (9) Avinayan, (10) Kāḱkaipāṭiṇi, (11) Narrattaṇ and (12) Vāmaṇaṇ. Among them, Tolkāppiyan, Avinayan, etc. at variance from *Akattiyam* where the three branches of Tamil were exposed jointly, separated [the branch of] literary Tamil and composed secondary works.”

Still a much earlier occurrence is found in the 4th volume (printed in 1865) of the work *Pāla Pāṭam* which Ārumuka Nāvalar composed for children, and where he says:

(10) *akattiyamuṇivarukkuc civaperumāṇēyaṇri murukak kaṭavuḷum tamiḷaic ceviyaṇivuruttiiyarul-
liṇār. avvakattiya muṇivarukku mānākkar paṇṇiruvar:- tolkāppiyar, ataṅkōṭṭācīriyar, turālīṅkar,
cempūtcēy, vaiyāpikar, vāyppiyan, paṇampāraṇār, kalāraṃpaṇār, avinayaṇār, kāḱkaipāṭiṇiyār,
narrattaṇār, vāmaṇar. akattiyamuṇivar tāṇceyta akattiyattai appaṇṇiraṇṭu māṇavarkaḷukkum
kaṇṇittaruḷiṇār.*²¹ (p. 264, in 2003 reprint) “The sage Agastya was instructed in Tamil not only by Śiva but also by Murugaṇ. He had 12 disciples: Tolkāppiyar, [...] The sage Agastya taught his 12
disciples [the book] *Akattiyam* which he had composed.”

The list is also found in books in English, with of course special spelling strategies when they have to cite Tamil words. We find it for instance in the 3rd volume (or *Glossary*) of the *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency*, edited by C. D. MacLean and first published in 1893. It has an entry “Agastyan” (pp. 9-10), which reads:

(11) He had twelve disciples to whom he taught the arts and sciences: — Adancottay asiriyar, Avinayan, Caukkayapudinyan who wrote a standard grammar, Cazhaubamban, Nuttattan, Panambauran who wrote the preface to Tolgauppyam, Shempootcheyan, Tolgauppyan who wrote the celebrated grammar, Tooralangan, Vauman, Veiyaubigan, and Vyepiyan.

19. This is reproduced from a reprint of the 1934 edition, where the AKATTIYA MUNIVAR entry takes 4 pages. I have not been able to check whether the 1910 edition already contained the same text.

20. The proper names Tiraṇatūmākkiṇi (skt. Tṛṇadhūmāgni, according to Zvelebil [1995: 706]) and Camatakkiṇi (skt. Jamadagni) seem to be taken by Aracaṇi Caṇmukaṇār from Naccinārkkīṇiyar’s commentary on the preface (*pāyiram*) to the T. The conclusion he draws that Tolkāppiyan is the brother of Paraśurāma derives from the fact that they have the same father. Interestingly, since Paraśurāma has been chosen by modern times brahmin movements as their standard bearer, his brother could share some of that aura, although that does not seem to be the case.

21. This information was recently obtained through the kind help of my friend N. Ganesan (from Texas).

Another earlier list in English spelling is found in the *Tamil Plutarch* which Simon Casie Chitty (Kācic ceṭṭi) wrote in 1859,²² and where he states about “Agastiyer”:²³

(12) His treatise on Tamil grammar is said to have contained no less than 12,000 sutras or aphorisms; but with the exception of some fragments which have been preserved in quotations by Tolka’piyana’r, in his work on the same subject, it is not now extant. Agastiyer wrote both in Sanscrit, and in Tamil. He is reputed to have written a lakh of verses on the theology, an equal number on alchemy, and two lakhs on medicine, but most of the Tamil works commonly ascribed to him are in reality not his productions. [...] (p. 1)

“Agastiyer is said to have had 12 disciples to whom he taught the different arts and sciences, and who were afterwards employed by him in instructing the people. The names of these disciples are tolka’ppiyana’r, adanko’tta’si’ri’yana’r, tura’lingana’r, sempu’tche’yana’r, vaiya’bigana’r, va’ippiyana’r, panamba’rana’r, kazha’rambana’r, avinayana’r, ka’keipa’diniyana’r, nattattana’r and va’mana’r; but few particulars are known respecting them.” (p. 3)

Apart from the fact that C. D. MacLean’s list is in alphabetical order whereas the other three all follow the same canonical order, there are other differences which I shall now examine, after gathering the data in 6 columns in the following chart:

Disciple rank	<i>Tamil Plutarch</i> (1859)	Āṟumuka Nāvalar’s <i>Pāla Pāṭam</i> (1865)	C. D. MacLean (1893)	Aracaṇ Caṇmukaṇār (1905)	<i>Apitāṇa Cintāmaṇi</i> (1910, 1934)	P. S. Subrahmanya Sastri (1934)
AD1	tolka’p-piyana’r	tolkāppiyar	8. Tolgaup-pyan	tiraṇatū-mākkiṇi <i>alias</i> tolkāppiyaṇ	tiraṇatūmākkiṇi <i>alias</i> tolkāppiyamuṇivar	tolkāppiyaṇār
AD2	adanko’tta-si’ri’yana’r	ataṅkōṭ-ṭācīriyar	1. Adancottay asiriyar	ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ	ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ	ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ
AD3	tura’lingana’r	turālīṅkar	9. Tooralingan	turālīṅkaṇ	turālīṅkaṇ	turālīṅkaṇ
AD4	sempu’t-che’yana’r	cempūṭcēy	7. Shempoot-cheyan	cempūṭcēy	cempūṭcēy	cempūṭcēy
AD5	vaiya’bigana’r	vaiyāpikar	11. Veiyaubigan	vaiyāpikaṇ	vaiyāpikaṇ	vaiyāpikaṇ
AD6	va’ippiyana’r	vāyppiyar	12. Vyepiyar	vāyppiyaṇ	vāyppiyaṇ	vāyppiyaṇ
AD7	panam-ba’rana’r	paṇampāraṇār	6. Panambauran	paṇampāraṇ	paṇampāraṇ	paṇampāraṇ
AD8	kazha’rambana’r	kaḷārampaṇār	4. Cazhauramban	kaḷārampaṇ	kaḷārampaṇ	kaḷārampaṇ

22. The book was republished in 1946 with copious notes added by T. P. Meenakshisundaram. It is nowadays available as an AES reprint.

23. My special thanks to N. Ganesan for providing me with this reference.

AD9	avinayana'r	avinayanār	2. Avinyaut nayar	avinayan	avinayan	avinayan
AD10	ka'keipa'-diniyana'r	kāḱkaipā-ṭiṇiyār	3. Caukkay-paudinyan who wrote a standard grammar	kāḱkaipāṭiṇi	kāḱkai-pāṭiṇiyan	kāḱkai-pāṭiṇiyan
AD11	nattattana'r	naṭṭattaṇār	5. Nuttattan	naṭṭattan	naṭṭattan	naṭṭattan
AD12	va'mana'r	vāmaṇar	10. Vauman	vāmaṇan	vāmaṇan	vāmaṇan

CHART 1

Disregarding the fact that the English spelling used here for representing Tamil words is clumsy because a number of distinctions are blurred, the most significant difference between the names as appearing in the 6 lists lies in the plural endings and in the honorific used. Among them, only 2 dare to use the singular form "Tolkāppiyaṇ" for referring to the 1st disciple. Others prefer to use the honorific plural "Tolkāppiyaṇār". Some even pay more (religious) respect to him by using the expression "Tolkāppiya Muṇivar".

The same remark applies to the other disciples and has interesting consequences in the case of the 10th disciple. Aracaṇ Caṇmukaṇār is the only one to use the form "Kāḱkaipāṭiṇi", which seems to be a combination of "Kāḱkai "crow" and Pāṭiṇi "songstress". He probably considers that 10th disciple as a woman and possibly identifies her with the Samgam age poetess Kāḱkaipāṭiṇiyār Nacceḷḷaiyār "Nacceḷḷaiyār, She who sang of the crow". Three other authors use a masculine form, which can be either Kāḱkaipāṭiṇiyan or the honorific Kāḱkaipāṭiṇiyaṇār. Finally, Ārumuka Nāvalar has an honorific plural form Kāḱkaipāṭiṇiyār, which is most probably for him a feminine plural, but which might have been the basis for the backward formation of a masculine by the others.

Among the other variations, which might be useful for tracing influences, one must note the differences in the treatment of the 2nd disciple. All except MacLean take the 1st part of the name to be Ataṅkōṭṭu (oblique case of the place name Ataṅkōṭu), but the second part is variously mentioned as āciriyaṇār, āciriyaṇ, āciriyaṇ or ācāṇ, all of them meaning "teacher". The first 3 forms are modern forms (with various degrees of politeness), and the last one is archaic.

The spelling of the names of the 9th and 12th disciples also shows variations: the use of intervocalic dental "n" is traceable to a Sanskrit origin, whereas the use of intervocalic alveolar "ṇ" appears to be more in line with the phonological reality of Tamil. Finally, the name of the 11th disciple, when it is written with the English alphabet, is ambiguous, as will appear presently when we continue our explorations of other lists of names of grammarians. What is spelled as "nattattana'r" or as "Nuttattan" could be an approximate rendering either of Naṭṭattaṇār or of Nattattaṇār. We shall come back to that point later.

The age of printing and the Tamil renaissance

The data we have just been examining is, to some extent, representative of the whole of printed traditional Tamil knowledge, because that stage only goes back to Ārumuka Nāvalar,

the well-known pioneer in the field: for the help he had given to missionaries in the translation of the Bible into Tamil (1845-1850), he received a printing press, which he used to print a number of books, starting with a traditional lexicon (*Cūṭāmaṇi Nikanṭu*, 1849), the first part (1850) of a reader for children (see ĀRUMUKA NĀVALAR [2003: p. 8]) and the *Tirumurukārruppaṭai* “the Path to Murugan” (1851). This means that earlier occurrences of the list of 12 names would have to be looked for in texts preserved not in printed books but on palm-leaf manuscripts. Of course, many early texts were progressively edited but only after the list appearing in Ārumuka Nāvalar’s reader for children had become current.

As things stand, I have not been able to discover an occurrence of the list of twelve names which would be earlier than the 1859 *Tamil Phutarch*. What we find in earlier texts are, as we shall see:

- individual occurrences of some (but not all) of the twelve names, with sometimes a mention that this was a disciple of Agastya;
- statements of the fact that Agastya had 12 disciples;²⁴
- statements concerning Agastya, his Śaiva credentials and his learning grammar from a god;
- the counter-claim by the Buddhists that Agastya had learned grammar from Avalokiteśvara.

An earlier attestation of the list of the 12 grammarian disciples of Agastya might of course still be found, but the possibility must also be considered that separate elements were connected together, in order to create a more systematic narrative, easier to teach in the Śaiva schools which were at that moment newly established by Ārumuka Nāvalar. Having a complete list of 12 disciples for a holy character like Agastya would be an act of creative scholarship. That invention, if it was one, should be seen in the context of a religious competition between Christians²⁵ and Hindus. Having translated the Bible, Ārumuka Nāvalar knew the importance of giving to Hinduism the equivalent of the spiritual weapons with which the Christians were equipped: books. That being said, it is interesting to note that whoever first gave that list seems not to have been familiar with Aṭiyārkkū Nallār’s commentary on the *Cilappatikāram* which was to be first edited by U. Vē. Cāmināta Aiyar only in 1892. Otherwise, he would have included in his list a scholar called Cikaṇṭi, mentioned by Aṭiyārkkū Nallār, who is supposed to have been the author of *Icai Nuṇukkam*, a lost musical treatise, and who is explicitly said to have been one of the twelve disciples of Akattiyaṇ.²⁶ In what follows, we shall consider him as the 13th disciple and refer to him as AD13.

24. The topic of Agastya / Akattiyaṇ having 12 disciples is an ancient one. We find for instance inside Iḷampūraṇar’s commentary on the 274th sūtra of TC the example “*yā paṇṇiruvar uḷarpōlum māṇākkar akattiyaṇārkkū*” *eṇa*, *yā vantavāru kāṇka* in order to illustrate the use of the expletive particle *yā*. However, this does not say anything about those disciples being grammarians. One is however surprised that the 12 disciples are not mentioned in the 12th chapter of *Tivākaram*, which enumerates groups of items characteristic of the successive numbers: the three fires, the nine gems, etc.

25. If Jesus had a complete list of 12 disciples, why should not Agastya have one?

26. The text says: *tēvavirūṭiyākiya kuṟumuṇipār kēṭṭa māṇākkar paṇṇiruvaruḷ cikaṇṭi yeṇṇum aruntavamūṇi*. “The *deva-ṟṣi* called Cikaṇṭi, [who is one] among the twelve who studied near the ‘short ascetic’ who is a *deva-ṟṣi*.” (p. 10 in the 1955 6th edition). See further references on pp. 104, 188, 228.

The MTL's implicit position concerning the twelve disciples

The printing of Tamil Books by Ārumuka Nāvalar and others is an act full of consequences and marking the beginning of a Tamil Renaissance, which would have as one of its most important manifestations the birth of Tamil philology thanks to U. Vē. Cāmināta Aiyar (UVS) and Ci. Vai. Tāmōtaram Piḷḷai. Another milestone is seen in the 20th century, with the printing of the very important Madras Tamil Lexicon (MTL), already mentioned. The printing of the MTL, which was completed in 1939, with the 7th (supplementary) volume, gives all scholars a powerful tool for navigating the literature. The quotations it gives as authority for the various usages of its *circa* 120 000 entries contained in its more than 4000 pages, are taken from more than 500 printed Tamil books. Concerning the 12 disciples of Agattiyar, it is as revealing to ponder on what the MTL does not print as it is to examine what it prints. It does not ignore altogether the 12 disciples story, as can be seen on some occasions, but it handles it very carefully, retaining only what it considers as real evidence, i.e. ancient textual evidence.

As far as the "1st disciple" is concerned, we have the following entries (vol. IV, p. 2098):²⁷

(13a) TOLKĀPPIYAM tol-kāppiyam, n. < TOLKĀPPIYAṆ. The most ancient Tamil grammar extant, by Tolkāppiyāṇār; MIKAP PAḷAIYATUM TOLKĀPPIYAṆĀR IYARRIYATUMĀNA TAMILILAKKAṆA NŪL.

(13b) TOLKĀPPIYAṆ tol-kāppiyaṇ, n. < TOL + KĀPPIYAṆ. See TOLKĀPPIYAṆĀR. *TUNNA-RUṆ CĪRTTIT TOLKĀPPIYAṆMUTAR PANNIRUPULAVARUM (PU; VE; CĪRAPPUPPĀ.)*²⁸

(13c) TOLKĀPPIYAṆĀR tol-kāppiyaṇār, n. < TOLKĀPPIYAṆ. Author of Tolkāppiyam, reputed to be a disciple of Agastya, as born in Kāppiya-k-kuṭi; KĀPPIYAKKUṬIYIR PIRANTAVARUM

27. The quotations cited as authorities are given in italics, as in the original.

28. The authority quoted here for the occurrence of the singular (Tolkāppiyaṇ) comes from the special preface (lines 4-5) to the *Puṟap Poruḷ Venpā Mālai* (PPVM), first edited by UVS in 1895, and means "the twelve scholars, starting with Tolkāppiyaṇ, of fame difficult to approach". This citation is one of the primary sources for the count of 12, but it does not give a list of 12 names. However, Pope understands the citation differently: he says that the work which the PPVM follows was composed "by one of the disciples of Agastya" (p. 1 in *Tamil Heroic Poems*, rep. 1973). He seems to rely on a note by Ci. Vai. Tāmōtaram Piḷḷai in his 1885 edition of TP. The reference given by him is "Nacchinarkkiniyar, Porul-athī; ix, 94 (C. V. Tamoṭharam Pillai's edition p. 807, Madras 1885)". According to present scholarship, the attribution to Nacchinarkkiniyar is wrong; this is in fact Pēraciriyar's commentary. It should be added that tradition tells us that PPVM is an abridgement of a work called *Panniru Paṭalam* "The 12 chapters" (that work is mentioned for instance in Mayilainātar's commentary on Naṇṇūl 48 (*aḷaviṇār peyarperṇaṇa pannirupaṭalam, nālaṭi nāṇūru mutalāyina*). The traditional commentary to the PPVM explains that "the 12 scholars" were the 12 disciples of Akattiyaṇ and composed one chapter each in the *Panniru Paṭalam*. However, only the first disciple, Tolkāppiyaṇ, is mentioned by name. The eleven others are not named inside the PPVM. It should moreover be noted that it does not seem sound, when one examines the heterogeneous table of content of the PPVM, to imagine it to be the abridgement of a work composed by 12 scholars: its first 9 sections are an extension of the 7 *tiṇai* scheme of the "*Puṟattiṇai Iyal*" of the *Tolkāppiyam* (with 2 "new" *tiṇais*: *karantai* and *nocci*); the 10th section is a "general section" (*potuviyal*); the section 11 and 12 seem to be devoted to extraneous *Akam* topics (*kaikkilai* and *peruntṇai*). It seems difficult to see this as a concerted global task, completed by the joint effort of 12 scholars. The 12 disciples' authorship does not look like a very practical method of composition. It is likely that this legend was grafted on an already existing book, for reasons difficult to trace now.

AKATTIYAṆĀR MĀNAKKARUM TOLKĀPPIYAMIYARRIYAVARUMĀKIYA ĀCIRIYAR.
 IṬAICCAṆKAMIRUNTĀR AKATTIYAṆĀRUN TOLKĀPPIYAṆĀRUM (IRAI. 1, PAK. 5).²⁹

The position which is advocated by the MTL in these 3 entries can be summarized as follows: there is a work called *Tolkāppiyam*; it derives its name from the name of its author, which can appear in sources either as a singular form (Tolkāppiyaṇ) or as an honorific plural (Tolkāppiyaṇār); the author's name itself is derived from the name of a *kuṭi* (clan or gotra?), the *Kāppiya-k-kuṭi*.³⁰

Concerning the other disciples, there are 3 or 4 for whom we do not find information inside the MTL, as if they had been blacklisted.³¹ What we find is the following (comparing MTL with the 3 earlier Tamil sources already mentioned in Chart 1):

	1865 / 1905 / 1934	MTL (1924-1936)	MCV
AD1	tolkāppiyar / tolkāppiyaṇ / tolkāppiyaṇār	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOLKĀPPIYAM (vol. 4 p. 2098) [See above] • TOLKĀPPIYAṆ (ibidem) • TOLKĀPPIYAṆĀR (ibidem) 	
AD2	ataṅkōṭṭācīriyar / ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ / ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ATANĀKŌṬṬĀCĀṆ (vol. 1, p. 70): ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ, n. < ATANĀKŌṬU + ācārya. A Brāhman scholar of the town of Ataṅkōṭu to whose criticism Tolkāppiyar first subjected his work; ORU PULAVAR. ATANĀKŌṬĀCĀR KARIRAPAT TERITTU (TOL. CIRAPPUP.). 	
AD3	turālīṅkar / turālīṅkaṇ / turālīṅkaṇ	MISSING	
AD4	ceṃpūṭcēy / ceṃpūṭcēy / ceṃpūṭcēy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEMPŪṬCĒY (vol. 3, p. 1596): A disciple of Agastya, author of Kūrriyal [...] (IRAI. 56, URAI.) 	

29. The authority quoted here for the occurrence of the honorific plural (Tolkāppiyaṇār) is extracted from the well-known passage inside the commentary on the *Iraiyāṇār Kaḷaviyal* (first edited by Ci. Vai. Ārumuka Nāvalar in 1883), which contains the legend of the three academies or Sangams (*caṅkam*). It says that “Akattiyaṇār and Tolkāppiyaṇār [...] sat in the Middle Sangam” (or “were members of the second academy”). The list, which ends in *piṇavum* « etcaeteri », explicitly mentions 8 names. See the English translation by Buck and Paramasivam (1997, p. 5).

30. That position seems to be in agreement with explanations by Mu. Irākavaiyaṅkar (1938, p. 97-98). An argument for thinking that *kāppiyam* might well be the name of a *kuṭi* (clan or gotra), whatever the original derivation of the *kuṭi* name, is that the same *kāppiya* component is seen in the name of another character (Veḷḷūrka Kāppiyaṇ), mentioned in the Sangam legend (see Buck and Paramasivam, 1997, p. 5.) and in the name of another book (*Palkāppiyam*), cited in Pēraciriyar's commentary on TP 650 (p. 329 in the corresponding vol. of T). It can be added that inside the *Karandai Tamil Sangam Plates* (see Krishnan, K. G. 1984), twelve different brahmins (among the 1083 ones who are enumerated) have “kapi” as their gotra (namely the Brahmins numbered 167, 201, 225, 237, 239, 306, 439, 906, 929, 937, 939 & 954), and that Pāṇini (4.1.107) explains that *kāpya* can be derived from *kapi* (see Renou [1966, p. 306]: « *kāpyah* “petit-fils de Kapi, des Āngiras” »). I am grateful to Charlotte Schmid for introducing me to the *Karandai Tamil Sangam Plates* and to Jan Houben for locating the Pāṇini reference for me.

31. It is very unlikely that their not appearing inside the MTL be due to ignorance on the part of the compilers.

AD5	vaiyāpikar / vaiyāpikaṇ / vaiyāpikaṇ	MISSING	
AD6	vāyppiyar / vāyppiyan / vāyppiyan	• VĀYPPİYAM (vol. 6, p. 3597): A treatise on Tamil grammar, now not extant, by Vāyppiyan [...] (YĀP. VI. PAK. 536.)	pp. 218-221 (icait tamiḷ - 10)
AD7	paṇampāraṇār / paṇampāraṇ / paṇampāraṇ	• PAṆAMPĀRĀM (vol. 4, p. 2571): A treatise on grammar by Paṇampāraṇār [...] (NAN. 52, MAYILAI.) • PAṆAMPĀRĀNĀR (vol. 4, p. 2571): A disciple of Agastya, author of a treatise on grammar and of the preface to Tolkāppiyam [...] (TOL. PĀYI. URAI.)	pp. 333-334 (ilakkaṇam - 30)
AD8	kaḷārampaṇār / kaḷārampaṇ / kaḷārampaṇ	MISSING	
AD9	avinayaṇār / avinayaṇ / avinayaṇ	• AVINAYAM (vol. 1, p. 157): avinayam, n. < abhi-naya, [...] 2. Name of a treatise on prosody by Avinayaṇār. ŌR YĀPPILAKKAṆAM. (NAN. 369, MAYILAI.) • AVINAYANĀR (vol. 1, p. 157): avinayaṇār, n. < id., Name of the author of the <i>Avinayam</i> . AVINAYANŪLĀCIRIYAR. • AVINAYAM (vol. 1, p. 158)	pp. 268-281 (ilakkaṇam - 4)
AD10	kākkai-pāṭiṇiyār / kākkai-pāṭiṇi / kākkai-pāṭiṇiyaṇ	• KĀKKAIPĀṬIṆIYAM (vol. 2, p. 842): An ancient work on Tamil poetry by Kākkai-pāṭiṇiyār, not extant, only a few sūtras of which are found quoted in the old commentaries. • KĀKKAIPĀṬIṆIYĀR (vol. 2, p. 842): The author of an ancient work on Tamil prosody (TOL. PO. 650, URAI). • KĀKKAIPĀṬIṆIYĀR NACCEḷḷAIYĀR (vol. 2, p. 842): A famous poetess, author of the sixth section of <i>Patirṇu-p-pattu</i> , so named because she vividly described the cawing of a crow.	pp. 288-302 (ilakkaṇam - 10)
AD11	naṟṟattaṇār / naṟṟattaṇ / naṟṟattaṇ	• NATTATTANĀR (vol. 4, p. 2149): A Sangam poet, author of <i>Cirupāṇārruppaṭai</i> , one of <i>Pattu-p-pāṭu</i> , q.v. • NARRATTAM: (vol. 4, p. 2185): A treatise on prosody by Naṟṟattaṇār [...] (YĀP. VI.). • NARRATTANĀR: (vol. 4, p. 2185): The author of Naṟṟattam, said to be one of the 12 disciples of Agastya (YĀP. VI. 1, PAK. 18)	pp. 319-322 (ilakkaṇam - 23)
AD12	vāmaṇar / vāmaṇaṇ / vāmaṇaṇ	DOUBTFUL*	
AD13	cikaṇṭi	• CIKAṆṬI (vol. 3, p. 1401): A sage, author of <i>Icai-nuṇukkam</i> (CILAP. URAIPPĀṬṬUMAṬAI.)	pp. 209-212 (icai - 2)

CHART 2

* There are entries for Vāmaṇaṇ (Viṣṇu in his dwarf incarnation) and Vāmaṇācāriyar (a Jaina poet, author of *Mēru-mantara-purāṇam*, 14th cent.) in the MTL (vol. 6, p. 3592). Additionally, the commentator for the Jain poem *Nilakēci* is called Camaya Tivākara Vāmaṇa Muṇivar.

As is seen in this chart, the compilers of MTL found textual evidence only for the names of 8 of the 12 disciples (and also for the 13th disciple).

Another genealogy of Tamil grammarians

While the standard version of the 12 disciples motif was being established in print for the Tamil public in the second half of the 19th century, other research activities were also going on, in other circles. They were the continuation of efforts which had been started earlier, and notably in the early 18th century by the Italian Jesuit missionary C. J. Beschi, the first European scholar to have really mastered classical Tamil. As far as the names of grammarians are concerned, we find in his 1730 *Grammatica Latino-Tamulica, ubi de elegantiori linguae tamulicae dialecto, CENTAMIL dicta*, ... (first printed in book form in 1917) the following passage (pp. xi-xii):

(14) Primo arte conscriptis regulis hujus elegantioris linguae auctorem dicunt monachum quemdam Agattien (seu) Agastien dictum AKATTIYAN seu AKASTIYAN, de quo ineptissimas narrant fabulas. [...] Praecepta quae primo Agastien dedit aliqua citantur quidem ab auctoribus, sed quos ipse scripsit libros nullibi invenire jam possumus. Subinde plures alii de hac dialecto scripsisse PALAKĀYANĀR, AKAIYANĀR,³² NARRATTANĀR (variant reading: KARRATTANĀR), MAYĒCURAR (MAKĒCURAR), KATTIYANĀR, AVINĀYANĀR, KĀKKAIYĀṬINIYĀR [sic], et alii multi, quorum nomina scimus, cum passim ab auctoribus citentur; caeterum nulla omnino extant jam eorum scripta. Quae autem de hac lingua scripsit quidam nomina TOLKĀPIYANĀR, quod idem est ac *auctor antiquus*, alicubi adhuc inveni; adeo tamen brevitate obscurus est ut operae pretium duxerit monachus alter, cui nomen PAVANANTI librum edere, quem NANNŪL inscripsit [...] dictus PAVANANTI in quo NANNŪL de litteris ac vocibus tantum diffuse scripsit; eoque morte absumpto, alter cui nomen NĀRKAVIRĀCANAMPI, extense quae ad PORUĻ spectant tradidit. AMIRTACĀKARAN autem, et ipse monachus, cujus nomen Ambrosiae more interpretatur, de YĀPPU sive de versibus scripsit librum quem KĀRIKAI nominavit. Tandem de ANI seu figuris egit quidam nomine TENTI.

Although that 1730 Latin text was handled between scholars as an unpublished MS until 1917, its English translation, by Babington, was available in print from 1822 onwards, and ran thus (p. 10):

(15) The first person who wrote a grammatical treatise on this dialect, and who is therefore considered as its founder, is supposed to have been a devotee named Agattiyan, concerning whom many absurd stories are related. [...] A few of the rules laid down by Agattiyan have been preserved by different authors, but his works are no longer in existence. After his time, the following persons with many others, composed treatises on this dialect, viz., Palacayanar, Ageiyanar, Nattattanar, Mayesurer, Cathiyanar, Avinayanar, Cakkeippadiniyar. The works of all these writers have perished, and we know that they existed, only by the frequent mention of their names in books which are now extant. One ancient work, written by a person called Tolcappiyanar (*ancient author*) is still to be met with; but from its conciseness, it is so obscure and unintelligible, that a devotee named Pavanandi was induced to write on the same subject. His work is denominated *Nannul* [...] Pavanandi not having completed his design, his Nannul comprises only the two first heads, viz. *Letters* and *Words*. On his death, a person named Nareccaviraja Nambi, took up the subject and wrote on the third head, or *Matter*. A devotee, called Amirdasagaren (sea of nectar), composed a treatise on the fourth head, or *Versification*, which he called *Cārigai*; and lastly, a person named Tandi wrote on the fifth head, or *Embellishment*.

32. This seems to be a misreading of the name Kaiyanār found in YV (pp. 24 and 27 in the 1998 edition).

This text was read by Western scholars, trying to understand the native system of grammar. We see for instance inside a book by A. C. Burnell, *On the Aindra School of Sanskrit Grammarians* (1875), a reference to it in the following passage (p. 55):

(16) The most important application of the Aindra system of grammar to a foreign language is undoubtedly to Tamil. Mention is made of a number of early works—by *Ayattiyān* (Agastya), who is said to have been the first Tamil grammarian, and his pupils.

[Here comes a footnote (n° 2) that reads: “See the long list of names in Babington’s translation of Beschi’s “*Sen-Tamil Grammar*”, Introduction.”]

It is interesting to note that although Burnell refers to “Agastya [...] and his pupils” and to “the long list of names in Babington’s translation”, Beschi himself does not seem to be trying to give a list of disciples of Agastya or even to be aware of the existence of such a list. He is simply mentioning the names of ancient grammarians. On the other hand, as we have seen, at the time when Burnell writes his book, in 1875, lists of the 12 disciples were already available in print. It is moreover known that Burnell used to work (in Tanjore) with traditional scholars, some of whom must have been familiar with for instance Ārumuka Nāvalar’s book. It is thus not impossible that two incompatible sources of information converge into Burnell’s statement. It is also possible that the reason why Burnell did not reproduce the Beschi-Babington list in full was that he realized there was a discrepancy between his two sources of information, Beschi and his Tamil pandits. That discrepancy will appear more clearly if we combine in a chart the names mentioned by Beschi with the list of names that we have examined until now. The result is:

	Beschi (1730) / Babington (1822)	1865 / 1905 / 1934
B1	AKATTIYAN seu AKASTIYAN / Agattiyan	akattiyamuṇivar / ācīriyar akattiyaṇ / Agastya
B2	PALAKĀYANĀR / Palacāyanār	
B3	AKAIYANĀR* / Ageiyanār	
B4 = AD11	NARRATTANĀR (KARRATTANĀR) / Nattattanār	naṟṟattanār / naṟṟattan / naṟṟattan
B5	MAYĒCURAR (MAKĒCURAR) / Mayēsurer	
B6	KATTIYANĀR** / Cathiyanār	
B7 = AD9	AVINĀYANĀR / Avinayanār	avinayanār / avinayan / avinayan
B8 = AD10	KĀKKAIYĀṬINĪYĀR / Cākkeippāḍiniyār	kāḱkaipāṭiṇiyār / kāḱkaipāṭiṇi / kāḱkai-pāṭiṇiyaṇ
B9 = AD1	TOLKĀPPIYANĀR / Tolcāppiyanār	tolkāppiyar / tolkāppiyan / tolkāppiyanār
B10	PAVAṆANTI / Pavanandi	
B11	NĀRKAVIRĀCANAMPI / Nārccavirāja Nambi	
B12	AMIRTACĀKARAN / Amirdasāgaren	
B13	TENṬI / Tandi	

AD2		ataṅkōṭṭācīyar / ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ / ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ
AD3		turālīṅkar / turālīṅkaṇ / turālīṅkaṇ
AD4		ceṃpūṭcēy / ceṃpūṭcēy / ceṃpūṭcēy
AD5		vaiyāpikar / vaiyāpikaṇ / vaiyāpikaṇ
AD6		vāyppiyar / vāyppiyaṇ / vāyppiyaṇ
AD7		paṇampāraṇār / paṇampāraṇ / paṇampāraṇ
AD8		kaḷāraṃpaṇār / kaḷāraṃpaṇ / kaḷāraṃpaṇ
AD12		vāmaṇar / vāmaṇaṇ / vāmaṇaṇ

CHART 3

* This seems to be a misreading of the name Kaiyaṇār found in YV (pp. 24 and 27 in 1998 edition).

** No scholar by this name seems to be known. The name could possibly be linked with *kattiyam* (see MTL, p. 708: “*kattiyam* < *gadya*. Prose in literary style, opp. to *pattiyam*.”).

The two lists appear quite independent from each other, although they have a common kernel which contains, apart from Agastya’s name, the 4 names of disciples 1, 9, 10 and 11. Otherwise, Beschi’s list ignores the 8 other names of our “canonical” list of Agastya’s disciples, which in its turn ignores 4 names of ancient grammarians quoted by Beschi: PALAKĀYAṆĀR, AKAIYAṆĀR (KAIYAṆĀR), MAYĒCURAR (MAKĒCURAR) and KATTIYAṆĀR.³³

Ancient grammarians quoted by Kuṇacākarar

It is difficult to say now which Tamil books Beschi had read when he made his brief sketch. In his days, there were no printed Tamil books. There existed good and bad manuscripts, which could contain one or several works, or fragments of works. On the other hand, the texts one read could mention the names of scholars or of other texts. They could also contain quotations, with or without mention of the quoted author’s name. And the books do not seem to have contained a bibliography section. However, we are now lucky to have printed editions of the works of several of the authors mentioned by Beschi (*Tolkāppiyam*, *Naṇṇūl*, etc.), and one among these seems to have been an especially important source of information to him, namely the treatise on prosody which he calls KĀRIKAI and which he attributes to AMIRTACĀKARAN. That work, which has for its full name *Yāpparuṅkalak Kārikai* (YK) and consists of 44 verses, is usually accompanied on the manuscripts by a commentary which goes back to Kuṇacākarar and which contains 247 fragments from earlier technical works.³⁴ For a number of these fragments, a specific work title or author’s name is mentioned, and the full list of these specific references runs as follows:

33. As far as the names B10 to B13 are concerned, they are in fact not ignored by the 19th and 20th century sources, although they are not, of course, counted among Agastya’s disciples.

34. It also contains 277 fragments from poetical works mentioned as illustrations. These two counts were done by U. Niklas, in her 1993 English translation of YK and its commentary. See p. vi.

Name of author or name of book	Number of occurrences	Page references*		
Kākkaipāṭiṇiyār	27	pp. 13, 23, 27, 32, 41, 56, 64, 67, 71, 73, 81, 87, 90, 91, 98, 99, 99, 103, 107, 108, 116, 120, 120, 136, 143, 149, 157	B8	AD10
Tolkāppiyāṇār	8	pp. 17, 21, 45, 46, 128, 171, 190, 191	B9	AD1
<i>Yāpparuṅkala Virutti</i>	5	pp. 32, 72, 108, 117, 191		
Palkāyaṇār	4	pp. 45, 46fn, 144, 164	B2	
Nattattaṇār (var. Naṇṇattaṇār)**	5	pp. 45, 46, 77, 140, 149	B4	AD11
Mayēccurar	6	pp. 46, 85, 91, 99, 116***, 117, 139	B5	
Avinayaṇār	4	pp. 64, 67, 87, 149	B7	AD9
Cīru Kākkaipāṭiṇiyār ****	1	p. 87		
Anonymous	187*****			

CHART 4

* The page references refer to YK (see bibliography).

** The variant "Naṇṇattaṇār" is mentioned by the more scholarly edition by UVS (first edition [mutar patippu]: 1948; second edition [2ām patippu]: 1968).

*** According to a footnote in YK.

**** This name might be explained as follows. There was a (female?) scholar who composed a treatise which was named *Kākkaipāṭiṇiyam* after her. Another treatise (possibly an abridgement) was called *Cīru Kākkaipāṭiṇiyam* ("Small K."). The scholar responsible for that treatise is referred to as *Cīru Kākkaipāṭiṇiyār*.

***** This is only a very tentative count of course.

The correspondence between this chart and Beschi's list is of course not totally perfect but it is still remarkable. One can note moreover that one of the texts mentioned, the *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti* (YV), is the commentary to another text, the *Yāpparuṅkalam*, comprising 96 verses and of which the YK is said to be an abridgment. It is however probable that Beschi did not read the YV, otherwise the list of ancient grammarians that he mentions would have been longer, as can be seen from the indices to the 1960 edition of YV by Mē. Vī. Vēṇukōpālap Piḷḷai (p. 739). As far as the names from our list of "12 disciples" are concerned, we find references in YV of verses by:

Disciple	YV	Kuṇacākara (10th or 12th cent.)	Beschi (1730)	Standard list (1865-1934)	MTL (1924-1936)
AD1	Yes	Yes	B9	tolkāppiyanār	Yes
AD2				ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ	Yes
AD3				turālīnkaṇ	
AD4				cempūtcēy	Yes
AD5				vaiyāpikaṇ	
AD6	Yes*			vāyppiyanār	Yes
AD7	Yes			paṇampāraṇār	Yes
AD8				kaḷārampaṇ	
AD9	Yes	Yes	B7	avinayanār	Yes
AD10	Yes	Yes	B8	kākaipāṭiṇiyār	Yes
AD11	Yes	Yes	B4	naṇṇattāṇār (nattattāṇār)	Yes
AD12				vāmaṇaṇ	

CHART 5

* We meet with two variants: Vāyppiyanār and Vāyppiyamuṭaiyār.

The making of a grammarian

We are now left with two possible paths. One would lead us to conclude that someone (possibly Ārumuka Nāvalar, or Simon Casie Chitty) acted like a writer of *Purāṇas*³⁵ while telling the genealogy of Tamil grammar, and that he invented a few names. It is in any case difficult to transform into a historical account a narration which has Agastya learn Tamil grammar from two gods (Śiva and his son Murukaṇ) and then transmit it to twelve disciples, one of them being the author of *Tolkāppiyam*. The rational attitude would appear to be to decide that the history of grammar can only be established by studying real grammatical texts and that the most important task is to collect, edit, understand and translate the fragments that have been preserved of the works of ancient grammarians,³⁶ be they considered as disciples of Agastya or not. This, however, is of course the subject for independent articles and will not be attempted here.

35. Writing pūraṇas was quite an acceptable activity for someone interested in Tamil grammar, as can be seen in the case of the Civañāṇa Muṇivar († 1785), who was the author of the *Naṇṇil Viruttiyurai* and of the *Kāñci Purāṇam* (1st part).

36. The task was started by Mayilai Cīṇi Vēṅkaṭacāmi, already mentioned. Another important step is the study of Avinayanār's fragments in G. Vijayavenugopal (1968).

Another possible path is to try to understand the forces that were active for making Agastya into a Tamil grammarian, however unlikely such a transformation might have *a priori* seemed. This requires an elucidation of various parameters in the religious, social and linguistic context, and this is what we shall try to do in the remaining part of this article.

Agastya before he became a grammarian

Agastya has not always had the role of a grammarian and his name has not always been known to the speakers of Tamil. We may possibly gain an insight in the date when his name became quite current (during the 9th century?) from the fact that it is not listed in the *Tivākaram*,³⁷ but is included in the *Piṅkalam*,³⁸ which lists 3 designations.

(17) *kuṛumuṇi kumpa yōṇi yakattiyaṇ* “dwarfish-sage, pitcher-born, Agastya” (*Piṅkala Nikaṇṭu*, 315)

It is noteworthy however that this list does not include a reference to the most well-known item associated with Agastya, namely a Southern mountain called Potiyil, Potiyam, Potiyamalai or Potikai. For instance, in the *Paripāṭal* passage which is tentatively proposed by Zvelebil (1995: 13) as the first Tamil source³⁹ (indirectly) referring to Agastya, we have:

(18) *potiyiṇ muṇivaṇ* “the ascetic of [Mount] Potiyil” (*Paripāṭal*, XI-11)

This is extracted from an astronomical description,⁴⁰ because Agastya, as stated in (2b), has given his name to a star.

Mount Potiyil (or Potiyam) has been sung for itself in classical Tamil poetry, being sometimes associated with a chieftain called Āy, as in *Kuruntokai* 84, but it also appears as the southern counterpart of the Himalaya, as in *Puranāṇūru* 2:

(19) *porḱōṭ ṭimayamum potiyamum pōṇrē* “[may you never be shaken] like Mount Potiyam, like Himālaya, with its golden peak” (transl. Hart & Heifetz 1999)

The Tamil text where Agastya, explicitly mentioned by his name⁴¹ a number of times, seems to have for the first time a real local personality is the *Tēvāram*, a collection (usually dated to the 7th and 8th cent.) of *circa* 800 hymns to Śiva, who is said to be very fond of him and to have allowed him to stay on Mount Potiyil, as stated in:

(20) *akattiyaṇai ukappāṇai* “[Śiva] who is pleased with Akattiyaṇ” (*Tēvāram* 6-50, 3, transl. VMS)

(21) *akattiyartamakkuc [...] tirup potiyil cērvu nalkiya celvam kaṇṭu* “seeing that you granted to Agastya the fortunate state of residing in holy Potiyil” (*Tēvāram* 7-65, 5, transl. VMS)

37. K. N. Sivaraja Pillai (1930: 47) quotes an (introductory?) verse from “*Divākaram*” where *kuṛumuṇi* is mentioned, but that verse is not found in the 1990-1993 critical edition.

38. *Tivākaram*, a traditional lexicon, is dated “before c. 850 or later” and *Piṅkalam*, also a traditional lexicon, is dated “c. 850-900” by Zvelebil 1995.

39. Another possible (and not very clear) early occurrence is *Cilappatikāram*, XII (24).

40. *Potiyiṇ muṇivaṇ puraivarai kīri // mituṇa maṭaiya*, “quand le fameux sage du Poti, ayant franchi sa haute demeure // Jouxte les Gémeaux” (*Paripāṭal*, XI-11, transl. F. Gros, 1968).

41. He is also mentioned by name, as *amara muṇivaṇ akattiyaṇ* “the immortal sage Agastya” in the *Maṇimēkalai* (22:35) and in its foreword (*patikam*), where the Cōḷa king is seen asking for water from him for his land.

The permission granted to stay in the mountain looks like a transfer from Śiva to Agastya of one of his attributes because another passage states that:

(22) *vali cēr / kayilaiyum potiyilum iṭam eṇa uṭaiyār* “which is the abode of the god who has strong Kayilai and Potiyil as his places.” (*Tēvāram* 1-79, 1, transl. VMS)

Keeping the possibility of transfers in mind, it is striking to see the attribute of Śiva which is described in the following passage:

(23) *ēru palporuḷ muttamiḷvirakaṇē* “the expert in the three divisions of Tamil which contain many truths” (*Tēvāram* 3-115, 11, transl. VMS)

(24) *muttamiḷum nāmaṇaiyū āṇāṇkaṇṭāy* “See! He is the three classifications of Tamil and the four vētam-s” (*Tēvāram* 6-23, 9, transl. VMS)

It should be kept in mind that dealing with *muttamiḷ* “threefold Tamil”⁴² is, in modern traditional presentations, considered as one of the specificities of the grammar composed by Agastya, as was stated in (1). It is quite likely that he may have inherited it from Śiva, and he would not be the only one because Campantaṇ, one of the three saints who composed the *Tēvāram* (and who possibly lived in the 7th century) also presents himself as an expert of *muttamiḷ*, in:

(25) *muttamiḷ nāmaṇai ṇāṇacampantaṇ* “Nāṇacampantaṇ who knows the four vētams and the three divisions of Tamil” (*Tēvāram* 3-2, 11 transl. VMS)

Also noteworthy in these texts is the symmetry between the three-fold Tamil⁴³ and the four Vedas, which is parallel to the symmetry between the Northern mountains, original abode of Śiva, and the Southern mountain, which he leaves most of the time to Agastya.

The duality between the two languages⁴⁴ will also be seen in the story of Tirumūlar, one of the 63 nāyaṇmār, or Śaiva saints, who is briefly mentioned in the *Tēvāram*, but whose full story is told later in the *Periya Purāṇam*. He is said to have been a yogī, a friend of Agastya, to have come from the North, and to have entered the body of a dead Tamil cow-keeper in order to console his cows. But using a Tamil body also makes him into a Tamil speaker, and he is tricked by Śiva to remain in this Tamil body, his original body having disappeared. He composes one of the sacred Śaiva books, the *Tirumantirām*, and is also considered as one of the representatives of the esoteric Tamil tradition of the cittar, where he also finds himself in the company of Agastya.

Grammar as a god-given gift

We have now examined both ends of the temporal interval during which Agastya, the Vedic Sanskrit ṛṣi, was made into a Tamil grammarian. On the modern end of the time

42. The concept of *muttamiḷ* is also known to the *Paripāṭal* (fragment 4): see F. Gros 1968, p. 159 and p. 305. Moreover, the *Cilappatikāram* is said to be a full application of the concept.

43. We do not know, of course, what Campantaṇ refers to when he speaks of *muttamiḷ*. It could be part of an esoteric initiation. See the following two lines, from *Tēvāram* (2-17, 9): *mūkam(m) aṇivār, kalai muttamiḷ nūl // mī kam aṇivār, vēṇupuramē* “Vēṇupuram, which is the place of those who know the value of silence (*mūkam*), who know the Superior world (*mī kam*) (of Civaṇ), by their knowledge of arts and works on the three divisions of Tamil” (adapted from VMS).

44. That this is an important element can also be seen in passage (5), when the young UVS tells his audience that “it is due to him that Tamil has received as much respect and fame as Sanskrit”.

interval, we see him in the 20th century, commissioned by the DMK-led Tamil government to have his statue erected in the temple of "Mother Tamil". On the ancient end of the time interval, his name has just become familiar to a people for which he was originally a stranger and which possibly already had a lore concerning its mountains, a literature (and a grammar?).⁴⁵ In between these two, what revolution may have happened, to accomplish such a metamorphosis?

We may first remark that, as far as we know, grammars are made by men. Gods and divine beings may be powerful on the symbolic plane, but their efficiency in a technical realm, such as grammar, remains to be proved. We should not be afraid to be considered as miscreants if we refuse to admit the idea of a grammar as being really a god-given gift. However, this is what a number of medieval scholars, who are generally otherwise considered as good scholars, seem to tell us. And this is not true only of Tamil grammar. Similar examples are seen in the history of Sanskrit grammar. As explained by Deshpande (1998: 22):

(26) Haradatta's *Padamañjarī* (*Kāśikāvṛtti*, Vol. I, p. 8-9) gives us some indications. According to Haradatta, Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, and Patañjali were *maharṣis* and were capable of viewing the entire eternal language. He then refers to the story of Pāṇini receiving his grammar—or rather the initial fourteen *Sūtras*—from Maheśvara (= Śiva). He refers to the tradition of Pāṇinian grammar as *trimunivṛtyākaraṇa*.

[...] The story of Pāṇini receiving his grammar from Śiva is known to the *Kathāsaritsāgara* (Motilal Banarsidass edition, 1970, p. 8) and could possibly go back to the original *Bṛhatkathā* of Guṇādhya. This story is also known to the 7th Century A.D. Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang who refers to the story of the Ṛṣi Pāṇini receiving his grammar from Īśvara Deva (*Buddhist Record of the Western World*, Samuel Beal, London, 1884, p. 114-115).

There is however a difference between the Tamil situation and the Sanskrit one. In the case of Sanskrit grammar, it is generally considered that Pāṇini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali are real historical characters who really composed real texts. The fact that they were later considered as *munis* and had to share their authorship with divine protagonists does not completely remove what is real in them and the technicality of their work. In the case of Tamil grammar, what we have seen of Agastya in the early strata of Tamil literature and what we read about him (A) in the legend of the three academies contained in the preface to the commentary, attributed to Nakkīrar,⁴⁶ to the poetological treatise called *Iṟaiyaṇār Kaḷaviyal* or (B) in the medieval narration by Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar, a 14th century Tamil commentator, which appears inside his commentary to the preface of *Tolkāppiyam*, or (C) in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Kampan, or in other stories,⁴⁷ does not really incite us to consider him as a flesh-and-blood character who could have composed a real text.

(A) In the legend of the three academies (or Sangam), it is stated that Agastya composed a treatise and that it was the reference grammar for the first Tamil Sangam, where 4449 poets presented their works, and where Agastya sat in the company of kings and gods for 4440 years. After that came the second and third Sangams, which were shorter, lasting only

45. For a presentation of the beginning of Tamil grammatical tradition, see Chevillard 2000a-c.

46. This Nakkīrar is possibly dated to the 7th or 8th century (see Zvelebil 1995: 462).

47. Another text, the *Tiruvilaiyāṭar Purāṇam*, narrates (in episode 54) the story of how Agastya, who has initially learnt Tamil grammar from Śiva, teaches it to a Tamil poet called Nakkīrar. Other versions have him learn Tamil grammar from the god Murukan, who is Śiva's son.

3700 and 1850 years, and in which the *Tolkāppiyam* makes its appearance, as an additional reference grammar.⁴⁸

(B) In the puranic universe which is the stage for the story narrated by Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar, we are first told of a very heavy gathering of many divine beings (*Tēvar*, Skt. *deva*) near Mount Meru, creating an imbalance of the earth, which has to be compensated by a departure of Agastya towards the South, where he is accompanied by a disciple, Tiraṇatūmākkīṇiyār, alias Tolkāppīyaṇār, who will later compose the *Tolkāppiyam*. Later the disciple has to accompany his master's wife Lopāmudrā (Ulōpāmuttiraiyār) on a journey and, while crossing a river, he saves her life, but in such a way that her reputation is compromised, and Agastya curses him. For that reason, there arises a permanent antagonism between the guru and his disciple, and that antagonism is, according to Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar, the cause for the event⁴⁹ referred to in the preface to *Tolkāppiyam*: “ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ karīrapat terintu”.

(C) In the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Kampan, we have a verse which says:

(27) uḷakkum maṇai nāliṇum, uyarntu ulakam ōtum
vaḷakkīṇum, matik kaviyīṇum, marapiṇ nāṭi, —
niḷal poli kaṇicci maṇi nerri umiḷ ceṇ kaṇ
talal purai cuṭark kaṭavuḷ tanta tamīl — tantāṇ.⁵⁰

(*Kamparāmāyaṇam*, 2671)

In all those cases, it is all very well to attribute a grammatical work to a supernatural character like Agastya, as long as he is not asked to really compose a text. And this is where the disciple (or 12 disciples) motif comes in handy because all the proponents of Agastya's supremacy had to do was to find existing texts and recast them as works derived from the teachings of Agastya. And the most prominent text to be captured in this way was the *Tolkāppiyam*, a text which was readily available⁵¹ and to which one only needed to give the stamp of the new respectability by making it the work of a disciple of Agastya.

Conclusions and open questions

We have so far reviewed the arguments for considering that Agastya need not have really composed a grammar, and that it was sufficient for him to serve as a symbolic intermediary⁵² between Śiva and texts that were already extant before the Śaiva bhakti wave. We find,

48. See Buck and Paramasivan 1997: 4-6.

49. According to Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar, when Tolkāppīyaṇār had finished composing his *Tolkāppiyam*, he wanted to submit it to a jury, comprising Ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ (“the teacher from [the town of] Ataṅkōṭu”). But Agastya had ordered the latter: *nī tolkāppīyaṇ ceyta nūlaik kēḷarka* (“do not listen to [the recitation of] the book composed by Tolkāppīyaṇ”). In order to escape the predicament, Ataṅkōṭṭācāṇ decided not to shun the recitation, but to find faults with the book. However, the candidate was able to satisfactorily answer all the objections, and this feat is recorded in the preface.

50. Tentative translation of [...] *kaṭavuḷ tanta tamīl — tantāṇ*: “he who gave [back] the Tamil that was given [to him] by the god who [...]”.

51. As regards the composition of the *Tolkāppiyam* itself, it is not altogether clear whether it was the work of a single author. The text we have nowadays is most probably the result of an accretion process, and it has frequently been said that it was in great part due to the efforts of Jain scholars. See Chevillard 2000a-c.

52. As we have seen, the role of Agastya as a mediator between the two spheres is not restricted to Hinduism. A Buddhist text, the preface to the *Viracōliyam*, an 11th century Buddhist Tamil grammar, evokes Agastya as having learnt Tamil from Avalōkitan, an important figure of Buddhism.

however, evidence for the real existence of a text called *Akattiyam*, although this evidence is very fragmentary. The richest collection of quotations from the work of Agastya the grammarian is found in Mayilainātar's (13th century) commentary to the *Naṇṇūl*, which contains 18 fragments. A thorough study of those fragments would be necessary and will not be attempted here. It seems, however, interesting to note that Mayilainātar is a Jain scholar, whose main purpose is to comment on the *Naṇṇūl*, a grammar composed by another Jain scholar, and that he does not tell us anything about the author of the *Tolkāppiyam*, which he also quotes, being the disciple of Agastya. This sharply contrasts with Naccinārkkīṇiyar, whose position was already mentioned earlier here, and who ranks very low in terms of quotations of *Akattiyam*, because there is only a single very short quotation⁵³ from *Akattiyam* in the whole of his commentary on the first two books of *Tolkāppiyam* (on *Eḷuttu* "Letters" and *Col* "Words"), which covers the same range of topics as Mayilainātar's commentary to *Naṇṇūl*, where the 18 *Akattiyam* fragments appear.⁵⁴ We thus seem to be confronted with two attitudes regarding Agastya.

- Either one believes in the myth of the divine origin of grammar through the mediation of Agastya, but in that case any real text (like *Akattiyam*) comes as an embarrassment, as being too evidently imperfect.

- Or, one has no religious stakes involved and one is a scholar with a good library. In that case, one will not be embarrassed by quoting an existing text.

This brings us back to the sorrowful state of our knowledge concerning the genesis of Tamil grammatical literature. One of the obstacles for that knowledge could be said to be an overstrong desire for perfection. On the one hand, there is an impressive corpus of grammatical texts, with the *Tolkāppiyam* as its most massive piece and a number of impressive editorial efforts. However, more efforts have been devoted to showing what an intellectual achievement *Tolkāppiyam* is—which it certainly is—rather than to determining how it was made—which certainly did take place in several stages. On the other hand, we have a number of fragments of texts, preserved as quotations, but not many attempts have been made to study those fragments for themselves. The 12 disciples motif and the ambiguous interest in Agastya the grammarian thus appear as a tentative to give an answer to an interesting question: what were the beginnings of the Tamil grammatical tradition. But the answer given is more satisfactory from a religious perspective than from a history-of-science perspective. If the list of 12 disciples is a 19th century forgery by Ārumuka Nāvalar, in the context of the Christian-Hindu controversies (and drawing on the mystic power of the number 12), where did its unidentified elements come from? Who were Turāliṅkaṇ, Vaiyāpikaṇ, Kaḷārampaṇ and Vāmaṇaṇ? *Akattiyaṇ* being a multifaceted character, it is possible that some or all of

53. It should, however, be noted that the words *akattiyam* and *akattiyaṇār* appear several times inside his examples.

54. It is probably also significant that the text by another exponent of the Agastya myth, the commentary attributed to Nakkīrar, does not contain even a single quotation from *Akattiyam*. Ideology and philology do not belong together.

these names belong to the medical literature or to Siddhar literature.⁵⁵ Further research in these directions will hopefully tell us.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AES = Asian Education Services
 MTL = Madras Tamil Lexicon
 UVS = U. Vē. Cāmināta Aiyar
 PPVM = *Puṛaṇa Poruḷ Veṇṇā Mālai*
 MCV = Vēṇkaṭaṭāmi, Mayilai Cīṇi
 T = *Tolkāppiyam*
 TC = *Tolkāppiyam, Collatikāram*
 TE = *Tolkāppiyam, Eluttatikāram*
 TP = *Tolkāppiyam, Poruḷatikāram*
 YK = Vēṇkaṭaṭāmi Nāṭṭār, MU.
 VMS = Subramanya Ayyar, V. M.
 YV = *Yāpparuṅkala Virutti*

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55. Another possibility is that some of these names are connected with the tradition of Tamil drama *Nāṭakam* (or *Kūttu*) “drama (including dance)”, one of the branches of *Muttamiḷ* “threefold Tamil”. If that were the case, the twelve disciples might be associated with all the three branches of *Muttamiḷ*, since the identified disciples belong to the other two branches.

56. This 6th edition seems to reproduce in fact the 3rd edition (1927).

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Paripāṭal: see Gros, below.

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23

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Gérard COLAS et Gerdi GERSCHHEIMER



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