



Writing Tamil Catholicism: Literature, Persuasion and Devotion in the Eighteenth Century

Margherita Trento

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Writing Tamil Catholicism

*Literature, Persuasion and Devotion
in the Eighteenth Century*

By

Margherita Trento



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Paris, 29 October 2021

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Abbreviations

ACDF	Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede
AHSI	<i>Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu</i>
AHSS	<i>Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales</i>
APF	Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide
ARSI	Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu
AAV	Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (formerly known as Archivio Segreto Vaticano)
APUG	Archivio della Pontificia Università Gregoriana
BEFEO	<i>Bullettin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient</i>
BCR	Biblioteca Casanatense di Roma
BL	British Library
B.MAR.	Biblioteca Marciana
BNCR	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale "Vittorio Emanuele II"
BnF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
DBI	Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani
EHES	École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales
EFEO	École Française d'Extrême-Orient
GOML	Government Oriental Manuscript Library, Chennai
ICHR	<i>Indian Church History Review</i>
IFP	Institut Français de Pondichéry
IHSI	<i>Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu</i>
IESHR	<i>Indian Economic and Social History Review</i>
JAMP	Jesuit Archives of the Madurai Province
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
LEC	<i>Lettres Édifiantes et Curieuses</i>
LII	<i>Luttēriṇattīyalpu</i>
MEP	Missions Étrangères de Paris
MW	Miron Winslow's <i>A Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary of High and Low Tamil</i>
NAF	Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises
NM	<i>Ñāṇamuyarci</i>
RL	<i>Revue de linguistique et de philologie comparée</i>
STM	Sen Tamil College
TL	<i>Tamil Lexicon</i> , University of Madras
TTS	Tamilnadu Theological Seminary
TV	<i>Tonnūlvilakkam</i>
U.Vē.Cā.	U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar aka U.V. Swaminatha Iyer (1855–1942)

VO	<i>Vētiyarolukkam</i>
VV	<i>Vētaviḷakkam</i>

Notes on Transliteration and Translation

All translations from Tamil, Latin, Italian, Portuguese, French, and German are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

I adopt the Madras Tamil Lexicon system for transliterating Tamil, but I use the common anglicized forms for nouns originally belonging to other Indian languages (Marathas, siddhas, sutra, and so forth). When transliterating Tamil place names, I use the anglicized version whenever it is available and well-known (as in Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli or Ramnad) but I include the literal spelling when the city occurs for the first time. In all other cases, especially when discussing little-known villages, I transliterate the original name, since this might help to locate those places on a map. In the case of toponyms found in Jesuit letters and following a Latin, Portuguese, Italian, or French transliteration, I maintain the original spelling and add the current Tamil transliteration whenever I was able to identify the place with a certain degree of certainty.

With names of people, I follow a different strategy. I adopt the version of the name given in the sources where it appears, generally preferring the Tamil spelling—for instance, even if Muttucāmi Piḷḷai also published in English as Muttusami Pillei, I retain the Tamil instead of the anglicized version of his name. In the case of Tamil proper names appearing in Portuguese, French, Latin, or Italian sources, I use the same strategy as with toponyms. I maintain the original spelling, and I offer my hypothetical reconstruction of the standard spelling between brackets the first time I mention that person.

I adopt several strategies for citing primary sources, depending on the way I analyze them in the book. Whenever I discuss the contents of a passage originally written in a language other than English, I include a translation in the main text, and the original passage in a footnote. When my analysis touches more closely upon linguistic aspects, I include both the original text and the translation in the main body of the book. In order for the reader to follow my translation with ease, I cite Tamil metrical texts by giving the divisions corresponding to word boundaries, and not prosody units. I add a minimal amount of punctuation, and mark the hyper-short u that is deleted through sandhi by a single inverted comma. However, in the few occurrences where my remarks concern more closely matters of prosody as well as style and content, I first transcribe a verse according to its metrical units, then offer a version of the same verse that includes word-breaks, and finally my translation.

Finally, in the transliterations of Tamil works in the footnotes and in the Bibliography, I capitalize only the letters that need to be capitalized according to citation standards. The Tamil alphabet does not mark capital letters, and so I keep the long titles of Tamil works entirely in lowercase letters.

Catholic Literary Practices in Eighteenth-Century South India

In the early decades of the eighteenth century, the Jesuit missionary Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (1680–1747) and his local catechists would often travel the muddy roads of the Kaveri delta to preach and convert in the overwhelmingly Śaiva towns and villages of South India. They spent a good part of the 1730s on such missionary tours, *tēcacañcāram* or “circumambulations of the land” in Tamil. Once, for instance, they set off from their residence at Ēlākkuricci, walked without interruption for two days, and reached Vaittīsvaraṅkōyil, a small but important Śaiva village not far away from the more famous Chidambaram. Exhausted by the long walk, they decided to rest there for the night. While the sun was quickly setting on the horizon, and shadows and candlelight were finally offering some respite from the day’s heat, they began to explore the alleys of the village. Almost immediately, Beschi noticed the great number of people flocking to the local temple with sumptuous offerings. Intrigued by their fervor, he approached a group of yogis who were standing separate from the crowd, and asked them about the temple. The yogis explained that it was dedicated to Viṇaitīrttāṇ, a form of Śiva as the remover of afflictions. Anyone plagued by disease, they added, like hunchbacks, the blind, and lame people, could come and pray there, and their ailment would vanish like darkness in front of the sun. Upon hearing their explanation, the missionary smirked, and replied right away with the following verse:

vātakālān tamakku maittuṇaṅku nīṟivām
pōtapperuvayirām puttiraṅku—mātaraiyil
vantaviṇai tīrkka marunt’ ariyāṇ vēḷūrāṇ
entaviṇai tīrttāṇ ivāṇ?¹

1 I follow the version of this verse recorded in the Tamil biography of Beschi by A. Mutucāmi Piḷḷai, *Viṇamāmuṇivar carittiram*, in Appāvuppiḷḷai (ed.) *Viṇamāmuṇivar aruḷicceyta tirukkāvalūrkalampakamum aṇṇaiyaḷuṅkalantātiyūm tēmpāvaṇṇir cilapāṭalum vaṇṇamum vāmaṇ carittiramum puttakappeyaraṭṭavaṇaṇṇiyūm ceṇṇaikkalvicanṇakattu māṇēcar ākiya a. muttuccāmi piḷḷai yavarkaḷāl ceyyappaṭṭa viṇamāmuṇivarcarittiramum* (Tañcainakaram: Pūṇkoṭi ciṇṇappiḷḷai kumārar rā-rā mariyap piḷḷaiy avarkaḷ tampi appāvuppiḷḷai enpavarālum, ṇāṇātikkappiḷḷai enpavarālum [...] accipatippikkappaṭṭaṇa, 1843), 1–22, here 16. This is my

He himself has elephantiasis in his leg, his brother-in-law has diabetes, his son has a giant pot-belly—in short, Śiva doesn't know the remedy for his own family's diseases.² What illness can be cured by someone like that?

With sharp wit, this verse ridicules Śiva's inability to cure the ailments of his own divine family, including Viṣṇu, the brother of his wife Mīnākṣi, and his own son Gaṇeśa. In order for these gods to be immediately recognizable, the negative attributes in the first two lines all have alternative yet simultaneous explanations.³ The first, *vātaḥkāḷam*, refers to Śiva's elephantiasis, but also describes one “whose leg (*kāl*) is under dispute ((*vi*)*vātam*),” thus bringing to mind the dance competition between Śiva and Kālī. On that occasion, the goddess lost because, out of modesty, she could not raise her leg as much as Śiva did. The second epithet refers to Viṣṇu and, besides indicating the diabetes resulting from his excessive love for sweets when in his Kṛṣṇa avatar, it also evokes the myth of the river Ganga (*nīr*) that originally flowed from his feet during his incarnation as Vāmana. The third attribute refers to Śiva's son Gaṇeśa, and while making fun of his pot (*pōtam*) belly, could also be saying that his belly is naturally (*pōtu*) big since his body is partially that of an elephant.⁴ The yogis who witnessed Beschi's literary exploit were so impressed by the verse, which displayed knowledge of their mythology as well as mastery over the most refined literary techniques of Tamil (such as, in this case, *sleśa* or *cilētai*), that they converted en masse to the new religion he was preaching—or so the story goes.⁵

source for the whole episode. The English version of the same biography, translated and published by Muttucāmi himself, has a different reading of the verse. It has *taṇakku* instead of *tamakku* (line 1); *puttirarḥku* instead of *piḷḷaiyarku*, *otakkēl* instead of *mātaraiyil* (line 2); and *vaḷi* instead of *maruntu* (line 3; note that because of sandhi, the number of *acai* in the line doesn't change): A. Muttucāmi Piḷḷai [Muttusami Pillei], *Brief Sketch of the Life and Writings of Father C.J. Beschi or Vira-mamuni, translated from the original Tamil* (Madras: J.B. Pharaoh, 1840), 22. For a discussion of Beschi's nineteenth- and twentieth-century biographies as sources, see p. 39 below.

- 2 Vaitṭisvarāṅkōyil's main temple is dedicated to Śiva as Viṇaitīrttan, the “Remover of afflictions,” and Vaitṭiyanātar, the “Lord of physicians.” It is also connected with various myths. Here, Śiva cured Cevvāy (Mars) of leprosy, and gave to his son Murugan the spear (*vēl*) that became the latter's favorite weapon—hence, Śiva is also known locally as Vēḷūrān, the epithet used in this verse.
- 3 The technique of *sleśa* has been translated as “simultaneous narration” in Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
- 4 Some of these explanations are included in a footnote in Muttucāmi, *Brief Sketch*, 22; and Muttucāmi, *Vīramāmuṇivar carittiram*, 16.
- 5 Muttucāmi, *Vīramāmuṇivar carittiram*, 17.

The events of that evening in Vaitṭisvaraṅkōyil encapsulate most of what this book will disentangle and articulate. We encounter there for the first time the actors that will animate the next chapters: Jesuit missionaries and Tamil catechists, Śaiva yogis and lay devotees. The episode alludes to their many entanglements, from the teacher-disciple relationship between Beschi and his collaborators, to the competition between the missionary and the yogis. It further implies a tension between estrangement and familiarity, especially in the role of the catechists vis-à-vis the yogis and lay devotees of Vaitṭisvaraṅkōyil. After all, these men shared memories, languages, and sacred geographies long before the arrival of the missionaries. Yet this episode goes beyond the obvious movement of the mission to India, and shifts the focus to clashes and conversations between people, poems, and beliefs that happened on the roads and in the villages of South India. Observing our actors at such small-scale resolution, we find among their main concerns the salvation of bodies and souls, and the movements of spiritual as much as social life. Strikingly, these relationships and preoccupations are articulated in the story through the public performance of a refined Tamil verse.

The questions animating this book are precisely how and why Tamil poetry became at the turn the eighteenth century a language of choice for Catholicism in South India. There was no real Catholic poetry in Tamil before then. It appeared along with a community of readers, the catechists, and immediately afforded Catholics entry into debates, such as the one with the yogis, with all the authority that a good verse could afford. Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (Figure 1) was a central player in this process. With him, Tamil Catholics acquired their first poet-scholar (*pulavar*) and their first poems, and “Tamil Catholic literary activity got integrated to Tamil literary legacy.”⁶ Everything about the verse he recited in Vaitṭisvaraṅkōyil, from the rigid *venpā* meter to the impromptu recitation, from the polemical tones to the use of complex double

6 Karthigesu Sivathamby, *Literary History in Tamil: A Historiographical Analysis* (Thanjavur: Tamil University, 1986), 27. On Beschi as a missionary and *pulavar*, see my article with Sascha Ebeling, “From Jesuit Missionary to Tamil *Pulavar*: Costanzo Gioseffo Beschi (1680–1747), the ‘Great Heroic Sage,’” in *L’Inde et l’Italie. Rencontres intellectuelles, politiques et artistiques*, eds Tiziana Leucci and Marie Fourcade (Paris: Éditions de l’EHESS, 2018), 53–90. Outside the Tamil region, Christian literature in Marathi had begun already in the early seventeenth century with Thomas Stephens (1549–1619). Stephens’s main work, the *Krista purāṇa*, has been edited several times and has been the subject of many studies, including most recently Nelson Falcao, *Kristapurana: A Christian-Hindu Encounter: A Study of Inculturation in the Kristapurana of Thomas Stephens, SJ (1549–1619)* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2003).



FIGURE 1 Costanzo Beschi as portrayed in Appāvu Pillai's 1843 miscellanea
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entendres, speaks of his being at home in the world of Tamil poetry.⁷ Yet, Beschi and other missionaries in South India were rarely alone. Even when they did

⁷ On the genre and culture of *tanippāṭal*, see Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998).

not have any Jesuit companion, they were surrounded by catechists, disciples, servants, and sometimes even slaves.⁸

This book brings into focus the role of these other men, who were crucial for the life of the mission as much as for the preservation of its memory. We know about Beschi's performance that evening only because he was traveling with his disciples, and they kept the memory of his verse. They passed it on to their own sons and disciples until Muttucāmi Pillai (d. 1840), a Tamil *pulavar*, a Catholic, and Beschi's first biographer, visited the villages of the Kaveri delta in 1822 and recorded it in writing.⁹ By then, Beschi had become for Christians in the region a saint and a hero, their own poet, and the champion of Tamil Catholic identity. He was especially important for lay Catholic élites, who from the late eighteenth century onwards often articulated their historical memory and local authority in relationship to his biography and his literary œuvre. Sources on these men, who were close to the missionaries and responsible for much of the social and cultural life of the mission from its inception, are scarce. Yet the contours of their role become clearer precisely in the early eighteenth century, with the emergence of a Catholic literary sphere, and with the controlled transfer of authority from the missionaries to their catechists both in the spiritual and in the literary realm. These are the two specific and related processes I map throughout the chapters of this book.

1 Genealogies of Tamil Catholicism

The Vaittīśvaran̄kōyil episode is also a window into larger concerns regarding the time, place, and modes through which Catholicism became a local religion in South India. When and how did the religious and literary exchanges we just observed, articulated via the language of Tamil poetry and mythology, first become conceivable? This study will show that, starting from the early eighteenth century, Christians wrote and read Tamil Catholic poetry in order to participate and claim a certain degree of authority in local social, political,

8 The importance of laymen in the Catholic missions has recently been the subject of a set of studies edited by Aliocha Maldauskis, *Les laïcs dans la mission: Europe et Amériques, xvii^e–xviii^e siècles* (Tours: Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2018). The classical work with regard to Protestant missions to India is Heike Liebau, *Cultural Encounters in India: The Local Co-workers of the Tranquebar Mission, 18th to 19th Centuries* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2013).

9 These local stories are only hinted at in Muttucāmi's *Brief Sketch*, but they are full-fledged episodes in the Tamil version (Muttucāmi, *Vīramāmuṇivar carittiram*, 16–17).

and cultural life. In doing so, they brought about the *inventio*—both the discovery, and the invention—of Catholicism as local and vernacular, in other words, of Tamil Catholicism.¹⁰ This process unfolded in the context of the old Madurai mission (Figure 2), the Jesuit mission to the Tamil hinterland or Tamilakam. The mission was founded by Roberto Nobili (1577–1657) in 1606, and gradually suppressed in the mid-eighteenth century in concomitance with the suppression of the Society of Jesus, first in the domains of the Portuguese empire, and then globally in 1773.¹¹ While there had been Christians in the region before this time, from the ancient Syrian Christian communities of Mylapore to the Paravar fishermen converted by Saint Francis Xavier (1506–1552) and other Jesuits on the southern Coromandel coast in the sixteenth century, the Madurai mission was the beginning of a sustained Catholic presence in the Tamil hinterland. It was also one of the great fields of Jesuit accommodation, insofar as missionaries in Madurai strived to adapt Christianity to Tamil social and cultural norms. But was it the beginning of Tamil Catholicism, and if so, how?¹²

10 “Tamil Christianity” is an expression used by English-speaking as well as Tamil-speaking anthropologists; for instance, the expression *tamiḷ kīrttavam* appears programmatically in the title of Ā. Civacuppiramaṇiyaṇ, *Tamiḷk kīrttavam* (Nākarkōvil: Kālaccuvaṭu patip-pakam, 2014).

11 The literature on Roberto Nobili is well summarized in a long footnote in Paolo Aranha, “Sacramenti o *saṃskārāḥ*? L’illusione dell’*accommodatio* nella controversia dei riti malabarici,” *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 31 (2010): 621–646, here 621–623. There are no doubts on the beginning of the Madurai mission with Nobili in 1606, while the end is more difficult to map due to the long period of limbo after the 1759 suppression of the Society within the Portuguese domains, but not elsewhere, during which Jesuits tried to find support for the mission from other sources. This emerges, for instance, in a report preserved in the archives of Propaganda Fide (henceforth APF) and titled *Notizie, che possono servire, quando al Pietosissimo Cuore di Gesù Uomo Iddio piaccia di mandar missionarii agl’Infedeli*. This report mentions some letters, written by Jesuit missionaries in Madurai to plead with Propaganda for money and missionaries, which reached Rome in 1765 (APF, SC, Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 29, ff. 610–615, here f. 610^r). On the little-studied topic of the suppression of the Madurai mission, some information can be found in Sabina Pavone, “The Province of Madurai Between the Old and New Society of Jesus,” in *Jesuit Survival ad Restoration. A Global History 1773–1900*, eds Robert Aleksander Maryks and Jonathan Wright (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 333–352; Ead., “Ricostruire la Compagnia partendo da Oriente? La comunità gesuita franco-cinese dopo la soppressione,” in *Missioni, saperi e adattamento tra Europa e imperi non cristiani*, eds Vincenzo Lavenia and Sabina Pavone (Macerata: EUM, 2015), 129–164.

12 An analogous question stands at the foundation of Eugenio Menegon’s account of Chinese Catholicism in eighteenth-century Fuan, *Ancestors, Virgins and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009).



FIGURE 2 Map of the villages and residence of the Madurai mission (note the density along the Kaveri river) from *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. 15 (Paris, 1722), 1
BOOK IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Ethnographers and anthropologists have been the first to notice and discuss vernacular Catholicism in Tamil Nadu. Mapping some of its centers, beliefs, and practices, they have brought to light the experiential and ritual worlds shared by Catholics and Hindus across the region.¹³ They have also exam-

13 Brigitte Sébastia, *Les rondes de saint Antoine. Culte, affliction et possession en Inde du Sud* (Paris: Aux lieux d'être, 2004); J. Selva Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey, *Popular Christianity in India: Riting between the Lines* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002); J. Selva Raj, *Vernacular Catholicism, Vernacular Saints: Selva J. Raj on "Being Catholic the Tamil Way,"* ed. Reid B. Locklin (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017); Kristin Bloomer, *Possessed by the Virgin: Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, and Marian Possession in South India* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Ā. Civacuppiramaṇiyaṇ, *Kirittavamum cāṭiyum* (Nākarkōvil: Kālaccu-

ined the role of caste among Tamil Catholics, and the strategies that a universal religion like Christianity has used to cope with, integrate, and finally also subvert this paradigm of difference.¹⁴ Indeed, ritual and caste were *vexatæ quæstiones* from the inception of Catholic presence in the subcontinent, and hotly debated in the context of the Madurai mission. So, anthropologists have often pointed to the mission as a foundational moment for Tamil Catholicism, yet they have rarely engaged with the genealogical trajectories leading from the mission to the present.¹⁵ The pioneering work by Susan Bayly has been among the rare attempts to offer an ethno-historical account of Catholicism in South India considering processes of integration and transformation of this religion over the *longue durée*.¹⁶ However, Bayly's focus has been solely on syncretism, according to which Jesuit missionaries went native, thus allowing converts to freely read and integrate the new religion into preexisting systems of popular beliefs and practices.¹⁷ While local processes of assimilation did happen, the syncretic paradigm does not consider the concerns for orthodoxy and orthopraxis that were so central to the life of Christians and Hindus alike in the eighteenth century, and the many negotiations they required.

Historians studying the early modern Catholic Church and Catholic empires have tried to articulate some of those concerns. They have done so by focusing on accommodation, the strategy of radical social and cultural adaptation that many Jesuit missionaries working in China and India adopted from the sixteenth century onwards.¹⁸ Classical studies on the subject have insisted on

vaṭu patippakam, 2001); Id., *Kīrttavamum tamiḷc cāḷalum* (Nākarkōvil: Kālaccuvaṭu patippakam, 2010); Id., *Tamiḷk kīrttavam*.

14 David Mosse, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012).

15 Mosse does however offer a historical overview of how the Jesuit and Protestant mission adopted and adapted local rites in connection to caste (*The Saint in the Banyan Tree*, 30–59), although mostly relying on secondary literature.

16 Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

17 Bayly describes for instance Nobili's translation efforts as an attempt to reach "accommodation between the Hindu and Christian scriptural traditions," and the "scriptural or literary context for the interweaving of Hindu and Christian traditions which was already underway in society at large" (Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 390 and 391).

18 As a general introduction to Jesuit accommodation, see Stefania Tutino, "Jesuit Accommodation, Dissimulation, Mental Reservation," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, ed. Ines G. Županov (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 216–240. I always use the English word accommodation instead of the Latin *accommodatio*, even though the latter is widespread among historians. However, the Latin noun seems a late missiological

the importance of accommodation as an epistemological tool for discerning religious from civil practices within Indian society. This opened up the missionary discourse to a polyphony of voices and cultures, allowing for continuities as opposed to changes.¹⁹ More recent articles by Paolo Aranha have reassessed the radical nature of Jesuit accommodation, reminding us that it always remained a strategy aimed at spiritual warfare and conquest.²⁰ Aranha further stressed how the adoption of local customs created confusion and tensions within the Church, resulting in controversies over the degree of accommodation to Tamil social norms that missionaries and their converts could afford without lapsing into paganism. The heart of the matter were caste-based habits, rules, and discrimination. The Church in the eighteenth century, much like anthropologists today, had a hard time deciding whether caste was a religious or civil institution.²¹ Still, notwithstanding their different stress on continuity, or change

coinage: I never found it as such in eighteenth-century sources, which employ nevertheless the verb *accommodare*.

- 19 Ines G. Županov used the concept of *adiaphora* to explain the nature of indifferent things in "Le repli du religieux. Les missionnaires jésuites du 17^e siècle entre la théologie chrétienne et une éthique païenne," *AHSS* 51 (1996): 1201–1223. She reflected upon the ethnographic gaze necessary to make this distinction in "Aristocratic Analogies and Demotic Descriptions in the 17th Century Madurai Mission," *Representations* 41 (1993): 123–148; and she connected Kerala's Syrian Christian integration with the elaboration of a strategy of accommodation in "'One Civility, but Multiple Religion': Jesuit Mission among St. Thomas Christians in India (16th–17th Centuries)," *Journal of Early Modern History* 9 (2005): 284–325. Her first book on Roberto Nobili also offered a sensitive reading of the many dimensions of a Jesuit missionary career, and attempted to envision the worlds of social and political relationships that surrounded him: Ines G. Županov, *Disputed Mission. Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 20 See Paolo Aranha, "«Glocal» Conflicts: Missionary controversies on the Coromandel Coast between the XVII and the XVIII centuries," in *Evangelizzazione e Globalizzazione. Le missioni gesuitiche nell'età moderna tra storia e storiografia*, eds Michela Catto, Guido Mongini and Silvia Mostaccio, special issue, *Nuova Rivista Storica* 42 (2010): 79–104; Id., "The Social and Physical Space of the Malabar Rites Controversy," in *Space and Conversion in Global Perspective*, eds Wietse de Boer et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 214–232, esp. 219–220. The phrase "spiritual conquest" was already introduced by the seventeenth-century historian of the Franciscan mission, Paulo da Trindade (1570–1651), in his *Conquista Espiritual do Oriente* (printed only in 1962).
- 21 On accommodation and caste, see Paolo Aranha, "Discrimination and Integration of the Dalits in Early Modern South Indian Missions: The Historical Origins of a Major Challenge for Today's Christians," *The Journal of World Christianity* 6, 1 (2016): 168–204; see also Sabina Pavone, "Tra Roma e il Malabar. Il dibattito intorno ai sacramenti ai paria nelle carte dell'Inquisizione romana (secc. XVII–XVIII)," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 31, 2 (2010): 647–680.

and conflict, these historians have analyzed accommodation as a European discourse, created for a European public, albeit assembled using different pieces of local knowledge.

But how did Tamil people, both local converts and their Hindu friends and neighbors, read and understand Christianity and the mission? What were the languages of Catholicism in *South India* at this time? These questions remain largely unaddressed. A possible answer lies, I think, in the history of literature produced in the Madurai mission, of its writers and readers, and of the places, times, and institutions where they operated. Catholic texts in Tamil have been studied so far mostly by Indian Christian scholars, eager to utilize them in debates on interreligious dialogue and inculturation, and ultimately to find ways to articulate their own local belonging.²² These engagements, often in the form of English translations, almost unanimously recognize Beschi as the first Tamil Catholic poet, on par with his Hindu contemporaries.²³ Conversely,

22 And thus they share, perhaps unwillingly, some of the premises of Bayly's syncretic approach sketched above. I should add that inculturation and interreligious dialogue are different approaches, and bring with them different sets of questions. The role of early modern missionaries in these contemporary theological fields is summarized in Paolo Aranha, "Roberto Nobili e il dialogo interreligioso," in *Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656): Missionario gesuita poliziano. Atti del convegno di Montepulciano, 20 ottobre 2007*, eds Carlo Prezzolini and Matteo Sanfilippo, (Perugia: Guerra Edizioni, 2008), 31–44; arguments against equating accommodation and inculturation are found in Paolo Aranha, "Sacramenti o *saṃskārāḥ*?" Notwithstanding the anachronism of this approach, it has produced important studies, especially the many works on Nobili by S. Rajamanickam, for which I direct the reader to the Bibliography.

23 We are witnessing, as I write this introduction, a resurgence of interest in Nobili and Beschi as examples of Christian cultural integration in South India. Recent editions and translations of their works in this vein include Mărkareț Păștiu, *Viramamunivar iyarriya tēmpāvaṇi mūlamum uraiyum* (Tirucci[rappalli]: Uyir eḷuttu patippakam, 2014); Anand Amaladass, *Gift of the Virgin Conch-Shell. Tirukkāvalūr Kalampakam by Constantine Joseph Beschi S.J.* (Tiruchirappalli: Golden Net Computers, 2018); Id., *Mother Mary's Song of Affliction by Constantine Joseph Beschi S.J. Edited and Translated in English with an Introduction by Anand Amaladass S.J. and Antony S.V.* (Chennai and Tiruchirappalli: Tamil Literature Society, 2018); Id., *Refutation of Rebirth. Punarjanma ākṣepam by Robert de Nobili S.J. Edited and Translated into English with an Introduction by Anand Amaladass S.J.* (Tiruchirappalli: Tamil Literature Society, 2019); M. Dominic Raj, trans., *Thembavani: A Garland of Unfading Honey-sweet Verses; an Epic in Pure Tamil* (Amazon Kindle E-book edition). In general, Beschi's works have steadily attracted the interest of Tamil Christian scholars precisely insofar as they attained literary status. See, for instance, Vi. Mi. Nānappirakācar [aka V.M. Gnanapragasam], "Contribution of Fr. Beschi to Tamil," (PhD diss., University of Madras, 1965); Pā. Vaḷaṇ Aracu, *Viramamunivar oru viḷakkam* (Maturai: Nōpili veliyiṭṭakam, 1982); and S. Rajamanickam (aka Cavarimuttu Iracamāṇikkam), *Viramā munivar* (Ceṇṇai: Tē nopili āraycci nilaiyam, 1998). Nobili, on the other hand, had been almost

scholars of Tamil literature have seen Christian texts as external ‘contributions’ to Tamil rather than an integral part of its literary world, as suggested in the title of K. Meenakshisundaram’s classical study.²⁴ To this day, Christian literature in Tamil receives little attention, to the point of being almost excluded from the curriculum. Still, histories of Tamil literature cannot ignore Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi. They invariably mention him and his poem *Tēmpāvaṇi* at least in passing, as a turning point for Christian literature. So, Christian and non-Christian scholars alike agree that Beschi and the early eighteenth-century moment when he was active mark a crucial moment for the connection of Catholicism and Tamil literary culture.

Relying on this intuition, the book addresses the question posed by the present—what exactly is Tamil about Tamil Catholicism?—by taking as its main object of analysis the corpus of eighteenth-century missionary literature in Tamil, mostly by Beschi, and its attendant literary practices such as reading, writing, and grammatical reflection, and also copying, circulating, and preaching. As I will argue more in detail later in the Introduction, this historical moment was the beginning of a Catholic presence in the world of Tamil literature, and in the socio-political reality it articulated. One advantage of focusing on this process is that it avoids reproducing the viewpoint ingrained in accommodation. By making Jesuit accommodation the object of analysis, even when

forgotten until S. Rajamanickam single-handedly brought out in print for the first time most of his texts, and claimed he was “the father of Tamil prose” in his pioneering monograph, *The First Oriental Scholar* (Tirunelveli: De Nobili Research Institute, 1972). Among the books offering an overview of Tamil Christian literature are D. Rajarigam, *The History of Tamil Christian Literature* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1958); Ignatius Hirudayam, *Christianity and Tamil Culture* (Madras: The Dr. Sr. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras, 1977), and the many works by Inṇāci, listed in the Bibliography, which connect early missionary texts with later texts by local Catholic poets and intellectuals.

- 24 K. Meenakshisundaram, *The Contribution of European Scholars to Tamil* (Madras: University of Madras, 1974). A critique of the term “contribution” is found in the groundbreaking reflection on the discipline of literary history in Tamil by K. Sivathamby, *Literary History in Tamil*, 96. Still, Meenakshisundaram’s work was crucial in acknowledging the role of Nobili, Beschi, and other Christian authors. Their works remain otherwise marginal within classical histories of Tamil literature; for example, see Mu. Varatarācan, *Tamiḻ ilakkiya varalaru* (Putu tilli: Cākittiya akātemi, 1972), 227–229. Some scholars even thought that Beschi could not have possibly composed his poems himself because they were written too well, like Mu. Arunachalam, *An Introduction to the History of Tamil Literature* (Thiruchitrambalam: Gandhi Vidyālayam, 1974), 276–279. Among the very few books on Tamil Christian literature authored by non-Christians, M.C. Vēṅkaṭaçāmi’s *Kīṟittuvamum tamiḻum* (Tirunelveli: Teṇṇintiya caivacittānta nūṟpatippu kaḷakam, 1936) includes an interesting discussion on the development of Tamil prose.

addressing it as a strategy to connect the global and the local, one is always leaning towards the missionary or imperial vision. South India is never the starting point, and always the destination. The focus on the history of Tamil Catholic literature and literary practices redresses the balance in two ways.

First, it posits Tamil, its speakers and readers, writers and listeners, as the cornerstone of reflection. Tamil literature, with its formal rules and the social world it implies and articulates, becomes the immediate context for understanding the activities of missionaries and catechists involved in the process of creating, reading, copying, and circulating Catholic literature in Tamil. From such grounded perspective, this study explores literary texts as contact zones affording a glimpse into relational practices articulated at different levels.²⁵ Up front, texts create a space of encounter for the different cultural elements that composed the Madurai mission, the Latin and Italian education of the missionaries/writers, and the aesthetic and moral worlds of their Tamil collaborators. Catholic literary texts, as points of contact and deposits of social relationships, further reveal to a discerning eye the world of social contracts within which they were negotiated.²⁶ The agents involved were the missionaries, their catechists, and their different publics, but also the institutions and individuals who sustained the cultural activities of the mission, and the larger community of *pulavars* and learned men whose recognition Catholic texts sought to gain. In other words, the texts themselves offer the entry point into a *histoire du littéraire*, a social history of Catholic literature as integral part of Tamil literary culture in the eighteenth century.²⁷

The focus on the history of Tamil Catholic literature further allows for the mapping of social practices of reading connected with this corpus, in the footsteps of Anne Monius' investigation of Buddhist textual communities in Tamil South India.²⁸ The focus on readership is dictated by the texts themselves.

25 The term was introduced by Marie-Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

26 I take both ideas—the idea of literary works (or works of art) as repositories of social relationships, and of the “period eye,” that is the eye trained to see from an eighteenth-century perspective—from Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

27 The relationship between literary and social history, well sketched out by Sivathamby in *Literary History in Tamil*, esp. 8–9, is fraught in Tamil, especially with regard to early *caṅkam* poetry and its social context. Beyond these debates, a good example of a historical approach to Tamil literature is Sascha Ebeling's recent exploration of the world of the poet-scholars known in Tamil as *pulavars* in the colonial period: *Colonizing the Realm of Words: The Transformation of Tamil Literature in Nineteenth-Century South India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

28 Anne Monius, *Imaging a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community*

Tamil works written in the context of the Madurai mission are often dialogic in nature, and evoke and invoke their readers and listeners. Moreover, the archives of the mission offer clues as to how social and professional communities in the eighteenth-century, like the catechists, might have used these texts. In some cases, we can even trace individual acts of reading, pointing to the fact that Catholic literature accompanied all the stages of a catechist's life in the eighteenth-century. In addition, acts of reading and trajectories of circulation are sometimes recorded in the paratexts accompanying the manuscripts and printed editions of these texts, as I show at some length in Chapter Six. In reconstructing and giving space to such practices, and including them in the historical narrative, my aim has been to balance the viewpoint of accommodation with the 'tactics and games' of reading, as a creative strategy implying a differential engagement with, and accommodation of, Catholicism to eighteenth-century Tamilakam.²⁹ So, the hermeneutic process mapped in this book is twofold. On the one hand, missionaries interpreted India in order to write Tamil poetry convincing enough to convert its people. On the other hand, Tamilians read Christian literature to understand, reject, or accept Catholicism, make it their own, and imagine how to live a Christian life in their multireligious world.

2 *Microstoria* and the Global in the Local

Within the larger framework of the Madurai mission, this study privileges small-scale analysis. It focuses on people and events in a few villages of the Kaveri delta region over three decades, and studies a polemical pamphlet, three spiritual manuals, a grammar, and two poems, in order to map the social and cultural life of the missionaries who wrote these texts and the catechists who read and circulated them. More specifically, the main setting comprises the villages of Ēlākkuricci and Āvūr from 1718, when missionaries first organized spiritual retreats for their catechists in those locations, until the early 1740s, when the demise of the local ally of the mission, the Mughal warlord Chanda

in *Tamil-Speaking South India* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). My thinking on the history of reading, a field of enquiry encompassing many disciplines (including some I am rather unfamiliar with) has been clarified by a recent article by Roger Chartier, "From Texts to Readers: Literary Criticism, Sociology of Practice and Cultural History," *Estudos Históricos Rio de Janeiro* 30, 62 (2017): 741–756.

29 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, transl. Steven Randall (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), 175.

Sahib, the removal of Beschi from the Madurai mission, and the publication of the papal bull *Omnium Sollicitudinum* condemning the Malabar Rites all shifted the priorities of the Society of Jesus away from the spiritual and literary training of the catechists. In this short yet critical period of time, Catholic literature entered the Tamil literary sphere, and catechists were its main intended readers. The role of these catechists was institutionalized at this very time as that of spiritual and cultural élites who shared most of the missionaries' tasks, from evangelizing to exorcism, and mediated between the mission and Catholic communities on the ground, which they managed.

This shift happened in peripheral spaces, with little-known actors that should be investigated on their own terms. Before turning to those, though, I should briefly clarify how these topics and concerns relate to emerging fields of inquiry that share a certain inclination towards a global, or rather connected, vision of early modernity. Relying upon the exceptional archives the Society of Jesus collected over the centuries and the efforts of many of its members to write the history of their order, scholars have turned in the last few decades to Jesuit missionaries as important agents in the making of an early modern world.³⁰ The role of India in these processes and historiography has been recently articulated by Ines Županov.³¹

Within this field, the works we already encountered by Paolo Aranha analyze Jesuit accommodation in connection with the controversy over the heterogeneous set of local rites that missionaries authorized their converts to retain in South India, known as Malabar Rites.³² Aranha has shown how these included

30 Programmatic in this respect is Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Bernard Vincent, *Missions religieuses modernes. 'Notre lieu est le monde'* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2007); see also Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *A Companion to the Early Modern Catholic Global Missions* (Leiden: Brill, 2018). For an overview of the relationship between the Society of Jesus and historiography, see Paul Shore, "The Historiography of the Society of Jesus," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, ed. Ines G. Županov (New York: Oxford University, 2019), 759–782. Towering in the historiography of the Madurai mission in the twentieth century have been, in Europe, the figures of Joseph Wicki SJ and Georg Schurhammer SJ; in India, Savarimuthu Rajamanickam SJ and Léon Besse SJ (the latter's work is particularly relevant for this book, and a complete list of his publications can be found in the Bibliography).

31 Ines G. Županov, "The Historiography of the Jesuit Missions in India (1500–1800)," in *Jesuit Historiography Online* (2016), (consulted on 04 February 2021). Of course, Županov herself plays a central role in this historiography.

32 This controversy was coeval with that over the Chinese Rites; for an overview of both, see Claudia von Collani, "The Jesuit Rites Controversy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, edited by Ines G. Županov (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 891–917. On the Malabar Rites, crucial are the articles and forthcoming dissertation by Paolo Aranha (see below, n. 33, 34, 35). Aranha distinguishes a "Madurai Mission controversy," concerning

rituals of caste reproduction such as the *upanayana*, but also adaptations of the Catholic liturgy, like the avoidance of saliva during baptism, to comply with norms of purity and caste separation.³³ After the apostolic legate Carlo Tomaso Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710) issued a first decree of condemnation of such rites in 1704, for over forty years Jesuits appealed repeatedly to Rome to have this decree revoked, or at least mitigated, fighting against their detractors within and outside the Catholic Church.³⁴ However, the decree was eventually confirmed by the Papal bull *Omnium Sollicitudinum* that prohibited most Malabar Rites in 1744.³⁵ One cannot underplay the complex dynamics and the impact of this Roman controversy on the Indian mission as much as on the global Church, then forced to reckon with issues of social and religious inclusion and exclusion. Most Jesuit missionaries in Madurai, including Beschi, followed the strategy of accommodation. They dressed and behaved like local teachers, practiced the Malabar Rites, and were involved in the Malabar Rites

Roberto Nobili's innovations, and the "Malabar Rites controversy" properly said, exploded just before Tournon issued his decree in 1704. Additional information on the topic can be found in Sabina Pavone, "Tra Roma e il Malabar"; Ead., "Propaganda, diffamazione e opinione pubblica: i gesuiti e la querelle sui riti malabarici," in *L'Europa divisa e i nuovi mondi: Per Adriano Prosperi*, vol. 2, eds Massimo Donattini, Giuseppe Marcocci and Stefania Pastore (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2011), 203–216; Ead., "Jesuits and Oriental Rites in the Documents of the Roman Inquisition," in *The Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World*, eds Ines G. Županov and Pierre-Antoine Fabre (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 165–188. On controversy as a form of early modern intellectual engagement, see Antoine Lilti, "Querelles et controverses. Les formes du désaccord intellectuel à l'époque moderne," *Mil neuf cent* 1, 25 (2007): 13–28.

33 See Paolo Aranha, "Sacramenti o *saṃskārāḥ*?"

34 On the Capuchins as sworn enemies of the Jesuits in the controversy see, for instance, Paolo Aranha, "Les meilleures causes embarrassent les juges, si elles manquent de bonnes preuves: Père Norbert's Militant Historiography on the Malabar Rites Controversy," in *Europäische Geschichtskulturen um 1700 zwischen Gelehrsamkeit, Politik und Konfession*, ed. Thomas Waldig et al. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 239–270.

35 This bull, promulgated by Pope Benedict XIV (born Prospero Lorenzo Lambertini, 1675–1758), includes the full text of Tournon's decree (*Inter Graviores*) and of the subsequent documents promulgated by the Holy See on the matter of the Malabar Rites controversy, chiefly the 1734 brief *Compertum Exploratumque* by Clement XII (born Lorenzo Corsini, 1652–1740). The *Omnium Sollicitudinum* thus retraces the institutional history of the controversy, and reflects the nuanced understanding of Benedict XIV, who before his election to the Papacy had been following the controversy from Rome in his roles as Consultor of the Congregation of the Inquisition, Promoter of the Faith, and member of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. For our purposes, it suffices to say that the bull prohibited most of the so-called Malabar Rites, and was received as a blow against Jesuit accommodation. A pro-accommodationist analysis of the *Omnium Sollicitudinum* can be found in François Bertrand, *Histoire de la Mission du Carnate* (Typescript in the JAMP, 1935), 341 ff.

controversy in some capacity. They wrote letters to their superiors in Rome, kept in contact with intellectuals in Europe, and signed petitions in favor of their missionary strategy. In short, they took active part in the life of the global Church in the eighteenth century.

Besides, missionaries were one among many mobile groups traveling on the coasts of East Africa, South and Southeast Asia in this period, their presence in the subcontinent being almost coextensive with that of Portuguese officers and settlers on whose ships they reached Asia. The Madurai mission, albeit positioned outside colonial territories and jurisdiction, was still under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Portuguese Royal Patronage (*padroado*).³⁶ Hence, the connection between Catholicism and the colonial project of the Portuguese crown is important for understanding the mission. Ananya Chakravarti has recently argued that precisely Jesuit accommodation and Catholic literature in local languages contributed to the creation of a Portuguese imperial *imaginaire* encompassing India as well as Brazil. It is through “*accommodatio*,” she writes, that Jesuits came to place the “myriad locales of their acquaintance into the much broader conceptual geographies of the Portuguese empire and the universal church.”³⁷ In a similar vein, recent explorations of British colonialism in India have focused on the role of literature, and of agents such as converts, catechists, and village accountants, in negotiating the global empire at the local level, and the many types of violence involved in this process.³⁸

36 The literature on the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* is truly enormous; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (Chichester UK and Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) remains a good introduction. Ines Županov has contributed to this field by focusing on Portuguese Goa and, in her work with Ângela Barreto-Xavier, on the role of Catholic networks in the constitution of Portuguese oriental knowledge. See *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India (17th–18th Centuries)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Ângela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Županov, *Catholic Orientalism, Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th–18th Centuries)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

37 Ananaya Chakravarti, *The Empire of Apostles: Religion, Accommodatio and The Imagination of Empire in Modern Brazil and India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 10.

38 Thomas R. Trautmann, *Languages and Nations. The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2006); Id., *The Madras School of Orientalism: Producing Knowledge in Colonial South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009); Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). On the role of intermediaries in the French colonial context, see Danna Agmon, *A Colonial Affair: Commerce, Conversion and Scandal in French India* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017); and the review of the latter in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Hybrid Affairs: Cultural Histories of the East India Companies,” *IESHR* 55, 3 (2018): 419–438. This review relies in part on David Shulman, “Cowherd or King? The Sanskrit Bibliography of Ananda Ranga Pillai,” in *Telling Lives in India: Biogra-*

The history of eighteenth-century Catholic literature in Tamil could similarly be used to reflect on the local metamorphoses of the rhetorical and literary practices that Jesuit missionaries spread on a global scale.³⁹ The works I just mentioned adopt variations of this approach, switching programmatically between different scales of analysis, the *jeux d'échelles* theorized by Jacques Revel.⁴⁰ While aware of this approach, in this book I have consciously chosen to adopt a different, perhaps more classically microhistorical, point of view.⁴¹ Rather than moving from specific Tamil locales to the larger political, religious, and intellectual worlds they intersected, and back in a looping movement, this study is firmly placed in provincial South India. The space where my actors—texts and men—move is limited, and I consider global processes and trajectories only insofar as they are present in that space.

In fact, though, larger horizons are often in sight, and regional centers like Thanjavur or Hyderabad, colonial cities like Pondicherry or Madras, and Rome as the center of the universal Church, all enter my narrative. This is because most of the actors in the following pages—missionaries, catechists, soldiers, or impostors—are exceptional. They often came to South India from elsewhere,

phy, Autobiography and Life History, eds David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 175–202.

39 An approach recently adopted in Stuart McManus, “Jesuit Humanism and Indigenous-Language Philology in the Americas and Asia,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, ed. Ines G. Zupanov (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 737–758.

40 Jacques Revel, “Microanalisi e costruzione del sociale,” *Quaderni storici* 86 (1994): 549–575. This approach has been discussed with regard to the history of the mission by Antonella Romano, *Impressions de Chine: l'Europe et l'englobement du monde (xvie–xviiie siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 2016), 17–19. This focus on the local/global dialectic is also common to the study of early modern India, especially after Sanjay Subrahmanyam pioneered the integration of microhistorical methodologies within his framework of connected histories; for some early methodological reflections, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, 3 (1997): 735–762. The relationship between global history and microhistory is at the center of ongoing discussions, crystallized in recent special issues of the reviews *AHSS* and *Past and Present*; the connection of microhistory as practiced by Italian historians with global history is better outlined in Francesca Trivellato, “Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?” *California Italian Studies* 2, 1 (2011).

41 With the expression “classically microhistorical” I refer to the methodology adopted by Italian historians (hence the Italian *microstoria* in the title of this section) in opposition with microhistory as it developed in the English-speaking world. In Italy, the focus on the small-scale always remained central, while American historians have privileged biography and the construction of a narrative, two approaches that I find prevalent in recent historical works that combine global concerns with microhistorical methodologies. On the specificity of the Italian approach, see Carlo Ginzburg, “Microstoria, due o tre cose che so di lei,” *Quaderni Storici* 86 (1994): 511–539.

dreamt about elsewhere, and sometimes reached elsewhere by an interplay of interest, chance, and aspirations. And yet, because of the unevenness of the archive, the biographical approach usually preferred by practitioners of microhistory does not throw equal amounts of light on all of them. Unsurprisingly, we know a lot more about missionaries and their lives than about their collaborators.⁴² Hence, while still following the individual trajectories of Jesuits like Beschi or his less famous colleague Carlo Michele Bertoldi (1662–1740), I turn to a microhistory of texts as collaborative projects, and of their locations, to show how the literary corpus and the practices at the core of my book are brimming with the tensions and movements of their time and place.

Conversely, perhaps in reaction to what I read as a contemporary anxiety to show how there was no early modern locality not already imbricated in the global, the consistency of the small scale in the book makes space for provincial concerns, and for a closer horizon than one would perhaps like to imagine for oneself today. I have consistently tried to preserve such autonomy of the local as an independent sphere of action and intelligibility. In order to zoom out, and gain new perspectives on the events I narrate, I have preferred to engage with a longer chronology rather than with a wider geography. Doing so has led me to tracing the continuities, ruptures, and more generally the consequences of the historical nodes I identify in the early eighteenth century as they unfolded in the following decades. I have followed these threads, albeit not systematically, up until the early nineteenth century. By looking at how early eighteenth-century people, texts, and practices have been reflected, remembered, and reenacted at later times I have come to conceive of the early eighteenth-century Madurai mission as a moment of literary, and thus social beginning. The pages to follow are an attempt to offer a history of that specific place and time, of the new things that happened there and then, and of the worlds they contributed to create.

3 The Beginnings of Catholic Literature in Tamil

The main argument of this book is that the beginning of Tamil Catholic literature dates to the first decades of the eighteenth century. Of course, Jesuit missionaries to South India wrote several texts in Tamil before that time, but the systematic accommodation of Christianity to the specific cultural sphere of

42 The local, small-scale analysis that characterizes microhistory is often based on following the steps of exceptional characters, and hence closely connected with biography, as specified in Ginzburg, “Microstoria.”

the literary only began with Beschi.⁴³ Hence, it is only from this moment that we can map practices of writing, reading, and circulation of Catholic texts *as literature*, and study their role for the emergence of a catechist élite in that perspective. Being part of the world of Tamil literature further provided Catholics, both missionaries and their catechists, with an entry point into the social and political world of eighteenth century Tamilakam, a world they inhabited then fully for the first time. The book will explore such processes in detail, but in order to substantiate these claims, the next sections offer a concise history of literary practices in the Madurai mission—their development differing, in many ways, from that of accommodation practices.

Was Jesuit accommodation a literary strategy? Did it invariably imply literature? The answer largely depends on our definition of literature. A tendency towards communication was constitutive of accommodation, and bringing the message of salvation to the world entailed the translation of Christianity, its theology and vocabulary, into local social and cultural idioms. So Jesuit missionaries who practiced accommodation studied languages, wrote grammars of those languages, and used them to compose catechisms, theological treatises, sermons—in short, all the Catholic didactic and rhetorical genres of the period.⁴⁴ In doing so, they enveloped the early modern globe in a dense fabric of analogies that made the translation of Catholic doctrines possible in languages as distant as Guaraní, Ethiopian, Tamil, and Chinese.⁴⁵ Whether such

43 To the best of my knowledge, only three Catholic texts written before Beschi's time were considered refined literary pieces: the *Tiruceḻvarāyappurāṇam*, the *Aticaya kāṇṭam*, and the *Kiristi ulā*. The last two texts are included in the list of Catholic titles that were available to Lutheran missionary Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, as printed in Wilhelm Germann, "Ziegenbalgs Bibliotheca Malabarica," *Missionsnachrichten der Ostindischen Missionsanstalt zu Halle 22* (1880): 61–94, here 1–20. Unfortunately, the three texts are lost. They likely date to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, and I would group them with Beschi's works as part of a literary turn in the mission around that time.

44 The remarkable grammatical efforts of the Jesuits and other missionaries around the globe are the object of study of missionary linguistics; for the case of Tamil, see Jean-Luc Chevillard, "Beschi, grammariens du tamoul, et l'origine de la notion de verbe appellatif," *BEFEO* 79, 1 (1992): 77–88; Id., "The Challenge of Bi-directional Translation as Experienced by the First European Missionary Grammarians and Lexicographers of Tamil," in *La Traduction dans l'histoire des idées linguistiques. Représentations et pratiques*, ed. Émile Aussant (Paris: Geuthner, 2015), 111–130; and Cristina Muru, *Missionari portoghesi in India nei secoli XVI e XVII: l'Arte della lingua tamil. Studio comparato di alcuni manoscritti* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2010).

45 While Jesuit linguistic and cultural translations have attracted much scholarship, their relationship with lesser-known coeval experiments within South Indian Islam—such as Ronit Ricci's *Islam Translated. Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) or Torsten Tschacher's "Can

texts could claim the status of literature in this early global, comparative realm largely governed by the rules of Latin literacy is a fascinating issue that brings into play ideas of rhetoric and eloquence as well as literature in this period. Yet the problem at the heart of this study is different; namely, could these texts be considered literature in the specific and wildly different literary spheres connected to the various languages they employed? Were Catholic catechisms in Tamil, Guaraní, or Chinese considered literary texts by the men learned in those languages? There are, of course, as many answers to these questions as there are languages.

As for Tamil, this leads us to descriptions and conceptualizations of the literary register of the language in the eighteenth century, its orthography, morphology, contents, prosody, genres, and so on. While contemporary Tamil literary histories might adopt a more inclusive definition, my interest lies in delineating the elite sphere of literature (*ilakkiyam*) that was recognized in the eighteenth century as the art practiced by learned men according to, or at least in dialogue with, the rules of grammar (*ilakkaṇam*).⁴⁶ These were conservative rules upheld by a society of learned poets, the *pulavars*, and by a canon of normative texts that I discuss in Chapter Three. These rules describe a literary world that can be subsumed, with few exceptions, under the umbrella of poetry.⁴⁷ Other types of texts, like grammatical sutras (*nūrpā*) or commentaries (*urai*), were part of the world of refined language (*centamiḷ*), but ancillary to the writing and reading of poetry.⁴⁸ Sascha Ebeling's study of nineteenth-century *pulavars* affords important insights into the literary practices and supporting institu-

'Om' be an Islamic Term? Translations, Encounters, and Islamic Discourse in Vernacular South Asia," *South Asian History and Culture* 5, 2 (2014): 195–211—is an unexplored yet fascinating avenue of inquiry.

46 Sivathamby, *Literary History in Tamil*, 93 relies on the Tamil Lexicon's definition of literature as "*ilakkaṇamuṭaiyatu*, 'that which is written/composed according to certain norms' and *caṇṇōr nūl*, 'the work of great men.'" This first definition is complementary to *Naṇṇūl* 141, *ilakkiyam kaṇṭataṟku ilakkaṇam*, according to which "grammar derives from seeing, i.e., understanding poetry." This sutra of *Naṇṇūl* shows the intrinsic relations between grammar and poetry in the early modern period, and the two disciplines were often practiced by the same *pulavars*.

47 That prose existed from early on in Tamil is not doubted; the still unresolved issue is when and how it entered the sphere of literature.

48 For an insightful analysis of the relationship between poetry and grammar in Tamil, see David D. Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2016), esp. 195–248 for the early modern period. I refer the reader to all of Shulman's single-authored works in the Bibliography as well, while his works with Velcheru Narayana Rao focus on Telugu rather than Tamil.

tions of this poetic world, which also apply to previous centuries.⁴⁹ This learned sphere of *ilakkiyam* was moreover contiguous, and interacted with popular literature that only rarely found its way and recognition into grammar books, and was grounded in orality and performance.⁵⁰ Catholic textual activities moved between these two levels, the learned and the popular. Still, my focus is on practices of “high” literacy and literature in the eighteenth century, because in this type of practices, and in this body of texts, are enclosed some of the social and cultural interactions I see as foundational in the process of transformation of Catholicism into a Tamil religion.⁵¹

When exactly, then, did Jesuits start to write “proper” Tamil literature?

3.1 *Writing before Accommodation*

The first Jesuit missionary to write, and print, in Tamil was Henrique Henriques (1520–1600), a Catholic of Jewish origin who worked among the newly converted Paravar fishermen of the Coromandel coast in the second half of the sixteenth century.⁵² The conversion *en masse* of the Paravars was a strategic caste decision to create strong bonds with the Portuguese power, against competing trade groups on the Coromandel coast.⁵³ Henriques wrote in such a “pretercolonial” context, where accommodation was not really necessary.⁵⁴ So,

49 Sascha Ebeling, “Tamil or ‘Incomprehensible Scribble’? The Tamil Philological Commentary (*urai*) in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Between Preservation and Recreation. Tamil Traditions of Commentary*, ed. Eva Wilden (Pondicherry: IFP/EFEO, 2009), 281–312; Id., “The College of Fort St. George and the Transformation of Tamil Philology During the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Madras School of Orientalism. Producing Knowledge in Colonial South India*, ed. Thomas R. Trautmann (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 233–260; Id., *Colonizing the Realm of Words*.

50 See, for the nineteenth century, Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003); A.R. Venkatachalapathy, “Songsters of the Cross-roads: Popular Literature and Print in Colonial Tamil Nadu,” *South Indian Folklorist* 3, 1 (1999): 49–79.

51 On religion and the interplay of levels of culture see the introduction and essays in Carlo Ginzburg, “Religioni delle classi popolari,” *Quaderni Storici* 41, II (1979): 393–397.

52 On Henriques see Ines G. Županov, *Missionary Tropics*, 232–258; Ead., “‘I Am a Great Sinner’: Jesuit Missionary Dialogues in Southern India (Sixteenth Century),” *JESHO* 55, 2–3 (2012): 415–446. On *conversos* or *cristão-novos*, namely Jews who had converted to Catholicism in Portuguese India, see Ângela Barreto Xavier, “*Conversos* and *Novamente Convertidos*: Law, Religion, and Identity in the Portuguese Kingdom and Empire,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 15, 3 (2011): 255–287.

53 The economic, political and social conditions for the striking early conversion of the Paravars have been the object of several studies; see especially Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 321–378; and Patrick Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1984).

54 I derive the category of “pretercolonial” from Aranha (“«Glocal» Conflicts,” 301–302), who

he wrote Tamil texts following European genres, including a confession manual (*Confessionairo*) printed in Cochin in 1580, where we read the following passage:

(12v) itu tavira mutalān kappittuliṇ mukivilē elutiṇatu naṇṛāy niṇaikka vēṇum atāvatu naṭapaṭiyiṇālē ceytatoḷcaṇkaḷ kompecārikkiratanṇiyē vacaṇaṇkaḷiṇālēyūm niṇaivukaḷiṇālēyūm iccaikaḷiṇālēyūṇ ceytatoḷcaṇkaḷ | kompecārikkavum | vēṇumpaṭiyē yātoru cāvāṇa toḷcam yātoru-taraik koṇṭu ceyavittatenṇkiluṇ, ceyyattakkatākapputti coṇṇatenṇkiluṇ, ceytatuppirku ceytavaṇaik koṇṭāṭiṇatenṇkiluṇ, ceyyumunṇē tavirakkattakkatāka viṭamuṇṭāyirukkacceytē tavirātēyiruntatenṇkilum, avaiyellān | kompecārikka | vum vēṇum.⁵⁵

Apart from this, one should think carefully about what was written at the end of the first chapter, namely that one does not only need to confess the sins committed through actions, but that one should also confess the sins committed through speech, thought, and desire. Accordingly, making someone commit any mortal sin, expressing a thought favorable to committing it, mocking a sinner after they committed the sin, failing to avoid sin when there was a way of avoiding it before someone committed it, all these instances need to be confessed.

Here begins a long list of questions on the potential sins to be confessed that includes this one:

defines it as “a realm that is beyond a colonial domination, but that is also fundamentally defined by a colonial contact.”

- 55 *Kompeciyoṇāyru*, f. 12^v. The only extant copy of the text, held by the Bodleian Library in Oxford (Vet. Or. f. Tam. 1.), was first discovered and described by Graham W. Shaw, “A ‘Lost’ Work of Henrique Henriques: The Tamil Confessionary of 1580,” *The Bodleian Library Record* 11 (1982): 26–34. Henriques printed three other texts in Tamil during his lifetime, namely a short catechism (*Tampirāṇ vaṇakkam*), a longer catechism (*Kiricittiyāṇi vaṇakkam*, of which one copy is bound together with the *Confessionairo*), and a collection of lives of the saints titled *Flos Sanctorum* by S. Rajamanickam when he edited the work; see Bibliography for details about the editions. Copies of such early prints are extremely rare; on their archival location, see Graham W. Shaw, “Scaliger’s Copy of an Early Tamil Catechism,” *The Library* 6, 3 (1981): 239–243; Id., “The Copenhagen Copy of Henriques’s *Flos Sanctorum*,” *Fund og Forskning* 32 (1993); on the role of these books in the history of printing in India, B.S. Kesavan, *History of Printing and Publishing in India: A Story of Cultural Re-awakening*, vol. 1, *South Indian Origins of Printing and its Efflorescence in Bengal* (Delhi: National Book Trust, 1985), 34.

pēyaiyeṅkilum poḷutaiyeṅkilum nilavaiyeṅkilum pakavatikaḷaiyeṅkilum
vērē yātoru paṭaippaiyeṅkilum tampirāṇaippōlē vaṇaṅkiṇatāy ācarittarāy
uṇṭō.⁵⁶

Has one worshipped and celebrated the demons, the sun, the moon, the goddesses or any other created thing as if they were God?

As apparent at a first glance for a reader acquainted with the Tamil language, Henriques's prose employs a colloquial morphology and syntax. To mention just a few pointed examples, we see in the passages cited above the verbal form *vēṇum* instead of the standard *vēṇṭum*, the ubiquitous use of emphatic *-ē*, and the form *koṇṭu* used as a postposition with the accusative, rather than as an adverbial participle (*viṇaiyeccam*). The text also incorporates lexical borrowings from Portuguese, like the verb *confessar* in the neologism *kompecārittal*. Županov has suggested that Henriques' language might be a transcription of the Tamil dialect spoken by the fishermen at that time.⁵⁷ Yet, considering how the *Confessionairo* shows traces of a written culture among the Paravars, and how elsewhere Henriques talked about their sponsoring the printing of his books, I think this was probably some sort of written register.⁵⁸ Not a literary register, clearly, but perhaps the language used by local accountants (*kaṇakku piḷḷai*) to record in writing the facts relevant to the life of their village.⁵⁹ This speculation aside, the language and style of this passage show how this was a collection of injunctions far removed from, and not attempting to enter in conversation with, the domain of Tamil literature.

3.2 Social Accommodation in Madurai

Moving forward, Roberto Nobili, the founder of the Madurai mission, was the one to introduce the strategy of accommodation in seventeenth-century South

⁵⁶ *Kompeciyonāyru*, 13r.

⁵⁷ Županov, "I Am a Great Sinner," 429.

⁵⁸ Among the sins listed in the *Confessionairo*, and included in Županov's article ("I Am a Great Sinner," 433), is the selling of palm leaf books that "contain the religion (*mārkam*) of those who have not embraced the Christian religion." Moreover, in the introduction of his *Kiricittiyāṇi vaṇakkam*, Henriques addressed the Paravars as "you who became famous and glorious before the world, because you procured a press spending much money over it" (*Kiricittiyāṇi vaṇakkam*, vii, translation in Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar*, 182).

⁵⁹ This group is described in Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600–1800* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), esp. 19–21.

India.⁶⁰ Nobili worked in the city of Madurai, where he himself adopted, and encouraged among his converts, social, and ritual practices that attempted to reconcile Christianity with Brahmanical culture.⁶¹ In this context, Nobili criticized the use of previous translations and transliterations from Portuguese to render Christian ideas and keywords in Tamil, and suggested a new terminology largely derived from Sanskrit.⁶² In doing so he went against the view of his

- 60 A recent study, building upon Županov's intuition on the connection between Syrian Christian integration and Catholic accommodation ("One Civility, But Multiple Religions"), argues that the pioneer of Jesuit accommodation in South India was Francisco Ros (1559–1624). See Anthony Mecherry, *Testing Ground for Jesuit Accommodation in Early Modern India: Francisco Ros SJ in Malabar (16th–17th Centuries)* (Rome: IHSI, 2019). An assessment of this contribution is offered by Ananya Chakravarti, "Review of *Testing Ground for Jesuit Accommodation in Early Modern India: Francisco Ros SJ in Malabar (16th–17th Centuries)*, by Antony Mecherry SJ," *Journal of Early Modern History* 25, 4 (2021): 352–355.
- 61 On Nobili, see note 11; he was a foundational figure for the eighteenth-century Malabar Rites controversy, insofar as some of the so-called Malabar Rites were extensions of the customs first adopted by him, and first questioned by the Inquisition during his time. On the relation between Nobili and his Brahman teacher Śivadharmā, and on how it shaped Nobili's accommodation, see Margherita Trento, "Śivadharmā or Bonifacio? Behind the Scenes of the Madurai Mission Controversy (1606–1618)," in *The Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World*, eds Ines G. Županov and Pierre-Antoine Fabre (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 91–121.
- 62 In Nobili's words, "Certainly, not all the people of Malabar use the same prayers that the Paravars use. [...] The difference of registers forces us to change the vocabulary, and because the language spoken here [in Madurai] is extremely refined, and interspersed with Sanskrit words, it is very different from what they speak on the coast. Having gained a good knowledge of Tamil, and sufficient knowledge of Sanskrit, I eliminated all the rustic words and I composed new prayers, using a more refined language." *Malabares omnes orationibus quibus christiani Paravæ utuntur non uti, certum est [...] Pro varietate ergo linguarum variandæ sunt voces, et quia lingua qua hic utimur admodum polita est, et Ghirandanis vocibus permixta, multum discrepat a lingua qua utuntur christiani in Maritimis oris. Merito ergo postquam exacte Thamulicam linguam, et mediocriter ghirandanam callui, impolita verba abiciens ad hanc politam linguam orationes novas redegi.* Roberto Nobili, *Première Apologie*, 1610: *texte inédit latin*, ed. Pierre Dahmen (Paris: Édition Spes, 1931), 78–79. Nobili gave two main justifications for rejecting Henriques's translation of some Christian terms. The first was that some translations were simply wrong; for example, "he [i.e., Henriques] said *cuttamāṇa ispiritto* for Holy Spirit, and the word *cuttamāṇa* means only clean [i.e., not pure or holy]" ([...] *ut est pro Spiritu Santo dicere chutumana spiritto, quæ vox chutumana mundum tantum significat* (Ibidem, 149)). The second reason was that, when considered from the point of view of the listeners, certain translations could provoke heretical opinions. An example was the translation of Heaven as *svarga*, which was the name of one of the heavenly spheres in Hindu mythology and thus unsuitable, according to Nobili, to translate the idea of Christian Heaven (Nobili, *Première Apologie*, 50).

confrère Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso (1541–1621), and indirectly against Henriques, whom Fernandes admired and whose lexical choices he followed.⁶³ But what about Nobili's Tamil texts, besides their Sanskritized vocabulary? Were they really that different from Henriques' works? The following passage from the *Tūṣaṇa tikkāram* ("Refutation of calumnies") offers an example of a prose text that the Jesuit wrote in the later period of his life. It is a sort of *summa contra gentiles*, a systematic treatise fighting the wrong ideas about Christianity circulating at his time:

avvaṇṇamē, cīṣantāṇē poyyāṇa tēvarkaḷaip pacācukaḷ enru aṛintu meyyāṇa carvēcuraṇai inṇatenru telintu paṇṇattakka pūcai vaḷipāṭukaḷai muluppattiyuḷḷa maṇatōṭu avaṇukkup paṇṇuvāṇ enkiratiṇāl, carkuruvāṇavar cīṣaṇukkup paṇṇiṇa ṇāṇōpatēcam capalamāy āccutenru collappaṭum. enrāl, carvēcuraṇ pērilē vicuvācamuḷḷavaṇai irācāvāṇavaṇ pārttup poyyāṇa tēvarkaḷai vaṇaṇkenru conṇāl attaruṇvāyilē puṇṇiyavāṇāy irukkiraṇavaṇ poyyāṇa tēvarkaḷ pacācukaḷāyirukkiraṇkaḷ enrum atukaḷai vaṇaṇkukiraṇālē narakaḷ pirāpti palikkum enrum itu mutalāṇa tūṣaṇaṇkaḷaip poyyāṇa tēvarkaḷpērilē collak kaṭavāṇ. kaṭaiciyāy carvēcuraṇuṭaiya tostiram uṇṭākiratukkāṇālum, yātoru āttumāvāṇatu karaiyērukiratukkenkilum poyyāṇa tēvarkaḷait tūṣaṇikkiratukku atē taruṇvāyēṇru collak kaṭavōmoliya marrappaṭiyalla. avvaṇṇamē kurōtam mutalāṇa parpala pāvaṇkaḷukku māttiram kāraṇamāy irukkira viyartta tūṣaṇaṇkaḷaic carkuruvāṇavar mutalāṇa puṇṇiyavāṇkaḷāy irukkira pērkaḷ varcikkak kaṭavārkaḷ. [...] atētenrāl, kuruvāṇavar pāvikaḷuṭaiya poyyāṇa tēvaṇai akkiramamāy tūṣaṇikkiraṇāl pāviyāṇavaṇ kōpittukkoṇṭu meyyāṇa carvēcuraṇait tūṣaṇippāṇ. ippaṭippaṭṭa pācattukkup poyyāṇa tēvaṇ pērilē kuru conṇa akkiramamāṇatu kāraṇamāyirukkum enkiratukkuc cantēkappaṭat tēvaiyillai.⁶⁴

Thus, the disciple himself will know that the false gods are really demons, will understand the nature of the true God, and with a mind filled with devotion will perform for him the appropriate worship and prayers, and because of this the instruction of the true teacher will be considered successful. Afterwards, if the king will order one who believes in God to worship the false gods, at this particular juncture the person should proclaim

63 The dispute between Nobili and Fernandes is at the center of Županov, *Disputed Mission*; their respective relationship with the same informants is analyzed in Trento, "Śivādharma or Bonifacio?"

64 *Tūṣaṇa tikkāram*, 479–480.

that the false gods are demons, that by adoring them one goes to Hell, and other similar abuses on the false gods, and he will obtain merit for that. For in the end, we can say that this and only this is the moment to abuse the false gods, either that God may be praised or that a soul may be saved.

Thus, the true teacher and the people who are virtuous must avoid those meaningless abuses that are the cause of anger and of many other sins. [...] If you ask why, in case the teacher abuses inappropriately the false gods of the pagans, a pagan might get angry and abuse the true God. There is no doubt that the cause of such evil would be the inappropriate remarks of the teacher about the false gods.

Nobili's prose in this passage is a mix of colloquial forms, like *āccutu* instead of *āyirru*, and standard forms. Besides Sanskrit lexical items that were normally part of the Tamil language at that time, it includes examples of the Sanskrit-derived philosophical vocabulary introduced by Nobili, like the phrase *viyartta tūṣaṇam*, "meaningless abuses." Moreover, Nobili's prose is structured through repetitive expressions that likely belong to a spoken philosophical jargon, like *mārrapaṭiyalla*, "not otherwise." In the introduction to his edition of the *Tūṣaṇa tikkāram*, Savarimuthu Rajamanickam offered an extensive analysis of these usages, and I think he was mostly right in arguing that Nobili employed in his texts the spoken language of his interlocutors, who were learned Śaiva Brahmins.⁶⁵ Yet it is possible that, like Henriques, Nobili also used a language that was already written down by those interlocutors for didactic purposes. His texts might record a style of philosophical and theological teaching, a mix of Sanskrit and Tamil that circulated both orally and on palm leaves at his time.⁶⁶ But

65 *Tūṣaṇa tikkāram*, xiv–xv. The recent works by Elaine Fisher explore the different forms of Śaivism in early modern South India, especially her book *Hindu Pluralism. Religion and the Public Sphere in Early Modern South India* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); and Ead., "Remaking South Indian Śaivism: Greater Śaiva Advaita and the Legacy of the Śaktiviśiṣṭādvaita Viraśaiva Tradition," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 21 (2017): 319–344. See also Margherita Trento, "Translating the Dharma of Śiva in Sixteenth-Century Chidambaram: Maṛaiñāṇa Campantar's *Civatarumōttaram*, with a Preliminary List of the Surviving Manuscripts," forthcoming; Eric Steinschneider, "Beyond the Warring Sects: Universalism, Dissent, and Canon in Tamil Śaivism, ca. 1675–1994" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2016); Id. "Subversion, Authenticity, and Religious Creativity in Late-Medieval South India: Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal's *Oḻiviloṭukkam*," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, 2 (2017): 241–271. The relationship between Śaivism and Catholicism will emerge as a central theme in this book, as we will see especially in Chapter Six.

66 Theological prose in Tamil might have been written down starting from the sixteenth or seventeenth century among Śaivas, Christians, and Muslims alike, but this is a history yet

again, this is just a conjecture, and beside the point. Even if one could argue that Nobili's prose has something in common with commentarial prose, this is not the proper language, nor subject matter, of Tamil literature.

3.3 *The Literary Turn*

After Nobili, several missionaries wrote little-known texts in Tamil that employed the same European genres, the same register, and the same vocabulary, with few variations.⁶⁷ The literary activity of Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi represents at the same time the culmination, and a moment of rupture with respect to this tradition. For the first time in the history of Catholic textuality in Tamil, Beschi came to conceive of translation as a literary rather than just linguistic practice. In other words, Beschi was the first missionary to reflect on the indigenous categories of Tamil literature, including genre, meter, and register, and to

to be told. Vaiṣṇava theological prose in *maṇipravāḷam*, a mix of Sanskrit and Tamil, has received much attention by scholars like Suganya Anandakichenin and Erin McCann; see for instance their collaborative article "Towards Understanding the Śrīvaiṣṇava Commentary on the *Nālāyira Tṭviya Pirapantam*: The Blending of Two Worlds and Two Languages," in *The Commentary Idioms of the Tamil Learned Traditions*, eds Suganya Anandakichenin and Victor D'Avella (Pondicherry: IFP/EFEO, 2020), 385–441.

- 67 Some Jesuit missionaries wrote in Tamil throughout the seventeenth century, but the activity intensified at the turn of the eighteenth century, when works by local, often anonymous poets also began to emerge. Among the early Jesuit writers is Manuel Martins (d. 1656), one of Nobili's collaborators who worked as a Brahman *saṃnyāsi*. Only one of his works, the *Īṇāmuttumālai*, has been printed, while most are preserved only as manuscripts in JAMP; for instance, *Īṇāppūcceṇṭu*, 222/147. Yet the most famous missionary to write after Nobili adopting the same theological prose style is Jean-Venance Bouchet (1655–1732), who was active in the very early eighteenth century. His works under the Tamil name of *Ṇānacañcivinaṭar* have been edited by S. Rajamanickam, and studied in Francis X. Clooney, *Fr. Bouchet's India: A 18th Century Jesuit's Encounter with Hinduism* (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2005). Even though the texts by Martins and Bouchet are nowadays mostly forgotten, they were important in the eighteenth century, especially since they were read during weekly paraliturgical celebrations officiated by the catechists whenever missionaries could not say mass. Martin's *Īṇāmuttumālai* and *Īṇāppūcceṇṭu* are mentioned as being used in this context in Gotthilf August Francke, ed., *Der Koenigl. Daenischen Missionarien aus Ost-Indien eingesandter Ausfuehrlichen Berichten Dritter Theil, Von der xxv bis zur xxxvisten Continuation; Darin die Fortsetzung des Missions-Wercks bis aufs Jahr 1732. umstaendlich beschrieben wird; mit einer Vorrede Von dem mercklichen Wachsthum der Missions-Anstalten in den letzten sechs Jahren herausgegeben von Gotthilf August Francken, S. Theol. Prof. Inspect. im Saal-Creyse und Pred. zur L. Fr. Nebst einem vollstaendigen Register* (Halle: in Verlegung des Waysenhauses, 1735), 424. The writing of spiritual works in a similar Tamil prose intensified in the eighteenth century, with the work of missionaries like Giovanni Battista Buttari (1707–1759) and especially Giacomo Tommaso de' Rossi (1721–1774) wrote.

ask whether these could express Catholic truths. His final answer was in the affirmative, as his own literary corpus shows. The book will explore this corpus in connection with Beschi's personal trajectory, and with the social and political context in which he lived and worked in the Kaveri delta region. For the moment, let us plunge directly into some verses from his poem *Tēmpāvaṇi* (translatable as “The Unfading Ornament” [*tēmpā aṇi*] or “The Bouquet of Sweet Song” [*tēm pā aṇi*]):

mālka lantavā vaḷaraveṇ paṇiyiṇār kaviṇār
nūlka lantavāy nuṇittatē neṇattakuṇ kāmañ
cālka lantapāc cārṇravuṇ kēṭpavuṇ ceyvāy
pālka lantakār parukiya naṇcumīṭ paritē.

māl kalantu avā vaḷara eṇ paṇiyiṇāl kaviṇār
nūl kalanta vāy nuṇitta tēṇ eṇa takum kāmam
cāl kalanta pā cārṇravum kēṭpavum ceyvāy
pāl kalanta kāl parukiya naṇcu mīṭpu aritē.⁶⁸

So that lust mixed with confusion grows, through my workings you will make men compose and listen to verses filled with an abundance of lechery, like honey inside the mouth when it recites the books of the poets.⁶⁹ It is difficult to reject the poison one has drunk, when it is mixed with milk.

68 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIII, 92. Unless otherwise indicated, I always cite verses of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* from the *editio princeps* of 1851–1853, which is accompanied by the oldest available commentary, sometimes attributed to Beschi himself; see Chapter Six for an analysis of this commentary and some information on this edition. I list the canto (*paṭalam*) in Roman numbers, followed by the verse in Arabic numbers. Usually, I reproduce the Tamil verse with word splits rather than metrical splits, although maintaining most sandhi. In this instance, though, I transliterate the original Tamil verse twice: the first transcription follows the metrical pattern, and shows the metremes (*cīr*) and rhyme. The second transliteration shows word breaks, thus helping the informed reader to follow my English translation.

69 The second line of this verse contains two words which pose difficulties: *kalanta*, the *peyareccam* loosely connecting *vāy* and *nūl*, as typical of these participles used in the rhyming position; and *nuṇitta*, another adjectival participle from *nuṇittal*, “to sharpen” (*nuṇi*, “edge, point”). The old commentary glosses this line as [...] *kalvi vallōr ariya nūr paṭi vāy matup polintatu pōlav inītāy pāṭik kāmam* [...] The gloss ignores *nuṇitta*, substituting it with the easier, generic *polinta* (meaning “oozing” or “flowing”). The adjectival

oruva ruñceyi ruraippavuñ kēṭpavuñ ceytā
 liruva ruñceyi riṇṇiyu nāṇamē velvāy
 maruva rumpukar paḷakavē vaḷaṅkiya muraiyān
 teruva rumpuli cīṇṇuñ cīruvarum veruvār.

oruvarum ceyir uraippavum kēṭpavum ceytāl
 iruvarum ceyir iṇṇiyum nāṇamē velvāy
 maruvu arum pukar paḷakavē. vaḷaṅkiya murai ām
 teru varum puli cīṇṇum cīruvarum veruvār.⁷⁰

If you make one person speak about sin, and you make another one listen, not only will they both sin, but you will also destroy their shame, and crimes difficult to accept may become familiar. In the same way, children don't fear a tiger even when raging, if its walking in the streets has made them used to it.

These verses are part of a speech delivered by the king of demons (*pēyḱku aracan*) to his minions, to inspire them to spread sin and crime on earth after the birth of Jesus has hindered for a moment their power and grip over human beings. It is immediately clear that this is nothing like what we have read so far.

participle *kalanta* is glossed with *paṭi*, which could be a noun (and thus implying a second comparison, which I don't think make sense in this context) or the root of verb *paṭi-ttal* "to read, recite" (admittedly, if this is the meaning implied, it is strange that the commentator did not put *nūl* in the accusative). Anyway, I consider this second option to be quite elegant, insofar as "reading" expresses well the relationship between a mouth (*vāy*) mixing with (or even making love to!) a book (*nūl*), which is the literal meaning of *kalanta*. A newer commentary by Vittuvāṇ N.M. Mariya Aruṭporakācam glosses the same sentence as [...] *kaviṇar tam nūlkaḷil kalantu vaittav iṭattu, nāviṇ nuṇṇiyil vaitta tēṇ eṇa pōṛrap paṭum kāmam* [...] See *Vīramāmuṇivar iyaṛṛiya tēmpāvaṇi. puṇṇita vaḷaṇāraip parṛi, tirukkuṭumpa vāḷvu parṛi paṭam piṭittu kāṭṭum cīṇanta tamil ilakkiyam* (Maturai: Nopili puttaka nilaiyam māvikā accakam, 1982) vol. 2, 580. Here, *vāy* is taken as a locative marker (*iṭattu* in the gloss, so the meaning would be something like "in the place where [lust] is mixed in the books of the poets ..."), a solution that I find unlikely. The word *nuṇṇitta*, on the other hand, is explained by referring to the expression *nuṇi-nā*, which Miron Winslow's dictionary defines as "tip of the tongue," from an attestation in *Naṇṇūl* (MW 278). This solution, albeit referring to an image that might be implied in the verse, does not respect the grammatical form attested (*nuṇṇitta* is a verb). Hence, I adopt a different solution, and take *nuṇṇittal* to loosely mean "examine carefully" (as in TL, 2320), a meaning attested in Kampan, who is an author that Beschi knew well. So, lust is like honey which inspects carefully, i.e., wanders inside the mouth.

70 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIII, 93.

For one, Beschi has written his poem in verse, using the sub-type (*pāvinam*) called *viruttam*, popular in his time. His stanzas employ a literary register of the language, and draw on images that are part of the common Tamil (and Indic) repertoire, like the mixing of less noble substances with milk—here it is poison, but usually it is water.⁷¹ Moreover, the rhyme of the first stanza, which relies on the repetition of the participle *kalanta* preceded by a long syllable (notice the sequence *māl-nūl-cāl-pāl*), uses what was likely a standard set of variations playing with the idea of milk mixed with water. Similar sets were part of the *pulavar*'s toolbox, and were especially useful when composing verses in the moment, as in the case of the standalone verse (*tanippātal*) that opened this chapter.⁷² In short, these two stanzas show how Tamil poetry and its formal aspects already initiated a conversation, putting Christianity in relationship with a social world, that of the *pulavars*, the education it entailed, and an existing literary corpus.

I chose these verses also because they contain a meta-poetic statement on the social and political nature of poetry. They hint to why Beschi thought that writing good Tamil poetry was important, and how he envisioned poetry as a means for acting in the social and political world surrounding him. In the Madurai mission, Jesuits and Christians more generally could not rely on, let alone aspire to, local political power. In fact, they were more or less violently excluded from it.⁷³ In such a context, poetry became at the same time a social and political field. Indeed, from roughly the beginning of the second millennium, Tamil poetry had been the language of politics in the region, its mastery enabling kings to exercise their rule, and poets to sing kings into being.⁷⁴ Analogously, Christian poetry allowed Jesuits, starting with Beschi, and later local Christian poets, to gain social recognition and enter courtly networks of power, a topic that will be the focus of Chapter Three.

71 The classical trope is that of the goose's ability to separate water from milk.

72 On *pulavar* education, see Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, 37–45.

73 This political marginality is different from the colonial situation studied in Guillermo Wilde and Fabián R. Vega, "De la indiferencia entre lo temporal y lo eterno. Élités indígenas, cultura textual y memoria en las fronteras de América del Sur," *Varia Historia, Belo Horizonte* 35, 68 (2019): 461–506; otherwise describing similar literary processes in the eighteenth-century Guaraní mission.

74 On the role of vernacular poetry in creating political discourse, in the age following the first millennium-long "Sanskrit cosmopolis," see Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 380–436; on the relationship between kings and poets in the Chola period, David Shulman, *The Wisdom of Poets* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 63–102.

Still, like any other good missionary, Beschi saw “pagan” poetry as spreading false stories filled with horrible examples of moral depravity. This is the poison he refers to in the first stanza. He also understood that the same poetry was beautiful and refined, though, hence the comparisons with honey and milk. His spent his life working, as the proverbial goose, to separate milk and honey from poison, and to offer his Tamil converts and interlocutors beautiful poetry filled with good moral content. Poignantly, the second verse opens with a reflection on the social embeddedness of poetry and language. People recite poems, while other people listen to them. This performative setting captures well how poems were enjoyed in pre-colonial South India, and how poetry created communication, familiarity, and a universe of shared images, myths, and habits. That preexisting, familiar universe, tied together by non-Christian stories and rites, was something that missionaries like Beschi wished to tear apart—conversion entailed a fair amount of cultural and social disruption.⁷⁵ But was conversion also forcibly a loss, and specifically a loss of poetry? Maybe not. Catholic poetry in Tamil could mend that fabric, Beschi seems to tell us with these verses, by offering a new, beautiful message in the old, beautiful vessel of Tamil classical poetry. When speakers and listeners would share this poetry, they would also create new social bonds.⁷⁶

3.4 *Beyond Accommodation*

This brief survey would be incomplete without at least one passage from an indigenous text of Catholic devotion. I have decided to include a passage from the *Marikarutammāl ammānai*, an anonymous ballad on Saint Margaret that was most likely written down in its present form in the early eighteenth century. There are many Christian ballads on the lives of saints, but this one on

75 The scholarship on continuity and rupture in processes of conversion is too vast for me to summarize it in a footnote. It will suffice to mention the sociological study by Rowena Robinson, *Conversion, Continuity and Change: Lived Christianity in Southern Goa* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sagar Publications, 1998), and Ângela Barreto-Xavier's *A invenção de Goa* (Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2008), both discussing such issues in Goa.

76 As I will discuss again in the following chapters, notwithstanding the similar persuasive aims, this approach to Tamil textuality relied on completely different premises than the Protestant approach analyzed by Bernard Bate: “Textuality itself, then, including the social relations of textual animation, was a major site of ethical evaluation for the missionaries, and they waged a campaign against what they judged to be wicked textual ethics that would deny the masses access to the word of God.” Bernard Bate, “The Ethics of Textuality: The Protestant Sermon and the Tamil Public Sphere,” in *Ethical Life in South Asia*, eds Anand Pandian and Daud Ali (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 101–115, here 102.

Saint Margaret, often associated with practices of exorcism, has been passed down in several manuscript and printed editions that show its popularity over the centuries.⁷⁷ Moreover, even though the author and place of composition of the ballad are unknown, some believe that the composer was a Muslim man who converted to Christianity, so this poem also points to a shared literary and social world between Muslims and Christians.⁷⁸ While we have almost no information on such interactions outside of folklore and oral histories, both communities made extensive use of the popular genre of the *ammānai* or ballad, meant for oral performance.⁷⁹ The following verses, in which Margaret addresses her pagan father after she converted to Christianity, were likely recited in front of a Christian audience, but using a genre, style and rhythm they shared with both their Muslim and Hindu neighbors:

appārē ummuṭaiya ampuviyil tēvarkaḷtān
 vaippāka peṇkaḷ vaittu makāmōkam ceytārkaḷ
 ilaiyi(l) stīrikaḷōṭu niṣṭūramākavētān
 cīlai taṇai urintu tītumika ceytārkaḷ
 ceytārkaḷ peṇkaḷai cumantu tīrintārkaḷ
 aiyo pala cātikaḷōṭu alintārkaḷ ampuviyil
 ampuviyil ummuṭaiya ākattiya tēvarkaḷai
 nampināl mōṭcam uṇṭō nāṇamillā tēvarkaḷai
 tēvaṇpilli vaṇcaṇaikkum cittuvittai mōkiṇikkum
 avanitaṇil pollātavāka aṭiya tēvar allō.⁸⁰

77 I list all the editions available to me in the Bibliography. Catholic hagiographical literature in Tamil is very extensive, and in different genres, including Henriques' *Flos Sanctorum* in the sixteenth century, the sermons on the lives of the saints by Giacomo Tommaso de' Rossi, Beschi's poem *Tēmpāvaṇi* on the life of Saint Joseph, and many other missionary texts. Even more numerous are popular hagiographical texts on the saints, often employing the genre of *ammānai* or other popular ballads (like the *kummi*); an old *ammānai* on Saint Anthony of Padua is analyzed in Civacuppiramaṇiyaṇ, *Tamiḷ kirittavam*, 38–52.

78 See the introduction to *The Defender of the Faith. Arc. Marikarutammāl ammānai*, eds K. Jayakumar, R. Jayalakshmi and R. Rajarathinam (Chennai: Institute of Asian studies, 1996), li.

79 Muslim *ammānai* and Christian *ammānai* were the topic of two papers presented respectively by Torsten Tschacher and myself in the panel "Genres and the Cultural Ecology of Early Modern South India (16–18th Century)" at the European Conference of South Asian Studies (ECSAS) in Paris on July 26, 2018. There are different types of *ammānai*, and some of them belong to the realm of popular "folk" poetry, while others (usually, later ones) can be refined literary pieces. On this literary genre, see M. Arunachalam, *Ballad Poetry* (Tiruchitrambalam: Gandhi Vidyalayam, 1976).

80 *Arcc. marikarutammāl ammānai*, 28–30. Since I take this text from the edition, the sandhi has been resolved.

O father! In your beautiful world, the gods themselves kept girls as concubines, and acted with lustful desire, they were cruel in their love-making with women, they stripped their sarees, they harassed them in many ways, and after doing that, they dragged them around! Alas! People of many castes have been corrupted in the beautiful world! In the beautiful world, by placing faith in these obstinate gods of yours, can there be salvation? These shameless gods, aren't they maliciously the sources on earth of the lies of sorcery, and the witches with their magic tricks?

The language of this text is poetical, but different from Beschi's learned poetry. The stanza form is the typical *ammānai* couplet (*kanni*), and the text is filled with colloquialisms, repetitions and other marks of oral literature, like the use of *taṇ*—here, *avaṇitaṇil*—to attach cases to words. The relationship between texts such as this *ammānai* and learned Catholic literature, first composed by missionaries and from the late eighteenth century by local Catholic *pulavars* too, is yet to be explored. Both literary corpora—Beschi's pioneering poems, and popular poems such as this one—developed around the same time, and Beschi authored an *ammānai* too.⁸¹ He must have realized that this was an important genre for many of his converts. The two worlds were in communication, and while missionary literature represents a step in the direction of Tamil Catholicism, this *ammānai* is without doubt a mature literary expression of that *tamiḷ kirittavam*. This popular domain is always in the background even when this book examines the negotiations implicit in learned missionary literature, and the boundaries between the two are often blurred.

Before heading towards the concluding sections of this Introduction, I would like to pause for a moment on the content and tone of the various passages we have read thus far. The *Confessionairo* is a normative text by definition, so pagan practices like worshipping *pēys* and goddesses appear there in a list of things “not to do.” Perhaps more surprisingly, throughout the text Henriques rarely becomes openly polemical. His aim is to forbid certain practices, but he does not engage with them directly. We find a similar non-aggressive mode in Nobili's text, where polemical attitudes towards Hindu gods are deemed counterproductive. Nobili's approach is pragmatic, since in the context of the powerful Hindu sects of Madurai, there was no motivation for missionaries and their converts to insult other people's gods, and thereby lose all opportunities to convince them by rational means. Nobili's passage might also imply that con-

81 The *Kittēriyammāl ammānai* on the life of the Portuguese St. Quiteria (see editions in the Bibliography).

verts on the ground, especially catechists and other enthusiastic preachers, did insult local gods—and that the mission was not gaining much from it apart from occasional retaliations. This leads us back to the last two texts, Beschi's *Tēmpāvaṇi* verses and the passage from the *Marikarutammāl ammāṇai*. We find there more aggressive attitudes, combined with completely different textual fabrics. Beschi claims that local, i.e., Hindu texts are filled with the poison of lust, thus leading people to sin. Elsewhere in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* he lists those sins quite explicitly, as we will see, and they include sex, violence, and all kinds of immoral acts. Finally, the *ammāṇai* is by far the most polemical among the texts we read. Throughout the first half of the poem, the list of the evil actions performed by Margaret's father includes rape and sorcery, and in the passage above, Margaret is holding her father's Hindu gods responsible for such evil deeds. In short, after a little more than a century, we have come full circle: from Nobili's advice not to abuse local gods without reason, to an indigenous poetical text filled with aggressive passages targeting precisely local gods and spirits.

The reason for this shift is, I think, that the mastery over proper Tamil literature afforded Catholics a degree of cultural belonging, and thus allowed the mise-en-scène of local conflicts between Christianity and Hinduism. In other words, the polemical aspects of Catholic texts in Tamil increased with literary accommodation, and the new Catholic literature could be aggressive precisely because it operated within a space of interactions regulated by the discipline itself.⁸² By abiding by the rules of poetry, Beschi could afford to say much more than any of his predecessors. These aspects are even more accentuated in the *ammāṇai*, an indigenous work that probably served to establish local Catholicism in the performative, ritual, and social arenas, in opposition to competing religious practices. Both texts, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* and the *ammāṇai*, are aggressive because they were drawing the boundaries of the Catholic community at the time, albeit on two distinct cultural levels, the learned and the popular. Unlike previous texts such as Nobili's catechisms and treatises, mostly addressed to a public of non-Christians whom Nobili was trying to persuade of the rational superiority of the Catholic faith, Beschi and the anonymous author of the *ammāṇai* were addressing existing Catholic communities, and only secondarily other groups—even though impressing local Hindus and Muslims with his erudition and poetical genius was clearly among Beschi's goals.⁸³

82 Incidentally, Tamil poetry was not new to religious conflict, as shown by the frequent references to the killing of Jains in Śaiva bhakti texts.

83 The book attempts to map the readership of Beschi's texts, so this topic will be discussed

To recapitulate, using a restrictive definition of literature based on historical Tamil understandings allows us to identify the moment when Christian texts first entered the world of Tamil literature in the eighteenth century. Until then, whatever was written in Tamil remained in the sphere of what Sheldon Pollock has called the documentary. Henriques, Nobili and their fellow missionaries wrote texts which served a purpose, explaining and converting, without any pretension to literariness. Tamil Catholic literature began with Beschi, as Tamil Christian scholars and histories of Tamil literature unanimously recognize. From that point onwards, the formal literary aspects of Catholic texts became crucial for understanding their social and political effects, their circulation and readership, an insight that will be crucial to the development of my argument throughout the book.

4 The Making of an Archive

This study is based on archival research in several countries, including India, Italy, France, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. While unfolding, this research has at the same time produced the archive of Tamil Catholicism, connecting fragmented records scattered among locations as diverse as the libraries of Church institutions in Rome, and the dusty cupboards of parish priests in remote villages of Tamil Nadu. Indeed, the existence of such an archive is a premise as well as an argument of the book, which can be seen as an exercise in reading its documents as a connected corpus, albeit in wildly different genres and languages, including Tamil, Italian, German, French, Latin, Portuguese, and English.

At the center of this archival constellation are two eighteenth-century texts of Catholic *ilakkiyam*, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* and *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, along with a grammar of poetry written by Beschi and a number of prose manuals for the catechists of the Madurai mission. Most of these texts were printed in the

again in the coming chapters. As for Nobili, while certainly his texts also offered instructions to people already willing to embrace Catholicism, they were first and foremost presentations of the main tenets of the religion to his local Hindu interlocutors. This is clear, for instance, in the beginning of the *Ñāṇōpatēca kuṟippiṭam*, “Summary of the catechism,” which mentions how people approached Nobili for instruction with different motivations (*karuttu*): the desire to remove diseases (*viyāti*) and poverty (*tarittiram*), to attain good health, wealth, and offspring; various concerns related to marriage; the desire for good health and to send away evils spirits (*picācu*) and bad omens (*tantiram*); the desire to attain true liberation. See *Ñāṇōpatēca kuṟippiṭam*, 1. According to Nobili, only the last motivation led to real conversion.

nineteenth century, often by the Mission Press (in Tamil, *Mātākkōvil Accukkū-tam*) run by the Missions Étrangères in Pondicherry. These early editions, listed under each title in the Bibliography, often implied heavy interventions on the texts as they were circulating until then in manuscript form.⁸⁴ The Mission Press had the project of mobilizing eighteenth-century Jesuit literature for the nineteenth-century mission, which sometimes motivated the editors to adapt the texts to their times.⁸⁵ This has required going back to the manuscripts in order to access versions of the texts closer to what would have been available to an eighteenth-century reader. Once I was able to get a satisfying version of the texts, I have read them with all the tools at my disposal, including linguistic and literary analysis, but always with an eye to their historical significance. I discuss some of these strategies in greater detail in Chapter Five.

A second type of sources are Jesuit documents. Most important among them are the letters, both the annual letters missionaries sent to Rome with reports on the status of the mission, and the individual letters they sent to their Gen-

84 The subsequent adaptations of the Tamil sermons by Giacomo Tommaso de' Rossi, as they have been printed by the Mission Press from the nineteenth century until today, have been noted and mapped in C. Cānimuttu, *Ċiṇṇa cavēriyār: Rev. Fr. James Thomas de Rossi, S.J. (1701–1774) ākkiya tamīl uraiṇaṭai nūlkaḷ paṇṇiya tiraiṇāyvu* (Tiruccirāpaḷli: Kīlārā patippakam, 2010). Léon Besse noticed the same process in his catalog of the palm-leaf manuscripts in JAMP; a catalog that is nowadays useless, unfortunately, since manuscripts are no longer numbered; and obsolete, since losses and acquisitions completely changed the composition of the archive. Still, most entries describing De Rossi's manuscripts include the sentence: "The olei is not printed as it is. It is corrected and augmented by Dupuis" (JAMP, uncataloged typescript).

85 On the beginning of the Mission Press and its first editor, Louis Savinien Dupuis MEP (1806–1874) see Jayaseela S. Stephen, *The First Catholic Bible in Tamil and Louis Savinien Dupuis at Pondicherry: A History of Translation and Printing, 1850–1857* (Pondicherry: Louis Savinien Dupuis Research Center, Immaculate Generale, 2017); Id., *Louis Savinien Dupuis, 1806–1874: A Biography of the MEP Missionary in Pondicherry* (Pondicherry: Louis Savinien Dupuis Research Center, Immaculate Generale, 2017). Two caveats are necessary. First, these works are part of the current efforts of canonizing Dupuis, like the website recently dedicated to him: https://www.dupuisfilm.com/dupuis_life_history.html (consulted 25/08/2021). Secondly, Stephen has been found guilty of plagiarism at least in relation to a book of his; see Jean Deloche, "Compte rendu: S. Jeyaseela Stephen, *Letters of the Portuguese Jesuits from Tamil countryside (1666–1688), translated from Original Portuguese* (Pondicherry: Institute for Indo-European Studies, 2001)," *BEFEO* 88 (2001): 382–383. These reservations aside, the books I cite contain interesting information and are to the best of my knowledge the only monographs dedicated to Dupuis and the Mission Press. An overview of the work of the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) during this time can be found in Adrien Charles Launay, *Histoire des missions de l'Inde: Pondichéry, Maïssour, Coïmbatour* (Paris: Ancienne Maison Charles Douniol, P. Téqui successeur, 1898), vol. 1 and 2.

eral, their colleagues, and more rarely to their friends and family in Europe. There is a rather large corpus of methodological literature on how to read and counter-read these letters, which are often carefully crafted rhetorical pieces.⁸⁶ The same applies to the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, which were written and edited for publication beginning in 1701.⁸⁷ Other types of Jesuit sources are the *indipetæ*, letters containing the requests of the young Jesuits to be sent as missionaries to the Indies; the *Epistolæ generalium*, letters of the Generals to members of the Society; and annual and triennial catalogs (*Catalogi breves* and *triennales*) including details about each Jesuit's career, and short evaluations of their character.⁸⁸

In certain sections of the book, I also use inquisitorial records and minutes of inquiries of the Congregations for the Causes of the Saints nowadays kept, respectively, in the archives of the Holy Office and in the Vatican Apostolic

86 On Jesuit letters, see Pierre-Antoine Fabre, "Correspondance as an Instrument of Government: Continuities and Evolutions of the Epistolary Habitus in the Society of Jesus," in *The Acquaviva Project: Claudio Acquaviva's Generalate (1581–1615) and the Emergence of Modern Catholicism*, eds Flavio Rurale and Pierre-Antoine Fabre (Boston College: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2018), 11–28; Markus Friedrich, "On Reading Missionary Correspondence. Jesuit Theologians on the Spiritual Benefits of a New Genre," in *Cultures of Communication: Theologies of Media in Early Modern Europe and Beyond*, eds Ulrike Strasser, Helmut Puff and Christopher Wild (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 186–208. On letters and Indian history, although a bit dated, see John Correia-Alphonso, *Jesuit Letters and Indian History 1542–1773* (Bombay, London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

87 The LEC are a collection of thirty-four volumes of letters from Jesuit missionaries around the world, first published in French in the eighteenth century; but later translations and re-prints abound. Pioneering in reading the LEC was Sylvia Murr, who defined the letters in the following way: "Les *Lettres* sont un instrument de propagande et même de combat sur le plan des idées religieuses. Un instrument de propagande à l'égard des dévots, à qui l'on montre que Dieu est parmi nous et intervient constamment pour assister tous ceux qui le servent avec zèle [...] elles sont aussi un instrument de combat contre les libertins, les athées, les sceptiques et surtout la marée montante des philosophes que ne retient plus—ou de plus en plus mal—la censure et la police royales depuis 1715." Sylvia Murr, "Le conditions d'émergence du discours sur l'Inde au siècle des Lumières," in *Inde et littératures*, ed. Marie-Claude Porcher (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1983), 233–284, here 239.

88 A lot has been written, and is still being written on the *indipetæ*; a review of the historiography is in Aliocha Maldavsky, "Pedir las Indias. Las cartas 'indipetæ' de lo jesuitas europeos, siglos XVI–XVII, ensayo historiográfico," *Relaciones* XXXIII, 132 (2012): 171–172; for the *longue durée* history of this genre, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, see Emanuele Colombo and Marina Massimi, *In viaggio. Gesuiti italiani candidati alle missioni tra Antica e Nuova Compagnia* (Milano: Il Sole 24 ORE, 2014); and for the interface between *indipetæ* and *epistolæ generalium*, Elisa Frei, "The Many Faces of Ignazio Maria Romeo, SJ (1676–1724?), Petitioner for the Indies: A Jesuit Seen through his *Litteræ Indipetæ* and the *Epistolæ Generalium*," *AHSI* 85, 170/11 (2016): 365–404.

Archives (formerly the Vatican Secret Archives). Inquisitorial and, more in general, trial records were crucial to the development of the Italian *microstoria*, and have generated a wealth of studies concerned with methods of reading them in order to recover the subaltern voices they enclose—the most famous example of this strategy being Carlo Ginzburg's work on the miller Menocchio.⁸⁹ I also sporadically complement these archives with Protestant sources in comparison with Catholic ones. Even though my command of the relevant languages is still rudimentary, this comparison opens important avenues of inquiry, which are beginning to receive from scholars the attention they deserve.⁹⁰

Yet another set of sources, which I analyze in Chapter Six to map the readership and circulation of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, are the letters, genealogies and family histories written by Tamil catechists, mostly in Tamil. These sources are rare, and besides a handful of eighteenth-century letters by Rayanaykken, a Catholic catechist turned Lutheran, which were incorporated into Benjamin Schultze's (1689–1760) diaries, they have mostly been written down at the turn of the twentieth century.⁹¹ Yet they record the history of catechists and their fam-

89 Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del Cinquecento* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976); see also Id., "The Inquisitor as Anthropologist," in *Clues, Myth and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 141–148. Our understanding of the Roman inquisition has been greatly promoted by the opening to scholarly research of the Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1998, decreed by John Paul II and supervised by the then Prefect of the Congregation, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. For a balance of what we have learned, see Alejandro Cifres (ed.), *L'inquisizione romana e i suoi archivi. A vent'anni dall'apertura dell'ACDF* (Roma: Gangemi Editore, 2019). José Pedro Paiva, "The Inquisition Tribunal in Goa: Why and for What Purpose?" *Journal of Early Modern History* 21, 6 (2017): 565–593 offers a recent introduction to the Goan inquisition, which played a crucial role in the history of the Madurai mission, as shown in Giuseppe Marzocchi, "Rites and Inquisition: Ethnographies of Error in Portuguese India (1560–1625)," in *The Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World*, eds Ines G. Županov and Pierre-Antoine Fabre (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 145–164. Still, the controversy over the Malabar Rites was mostly discussed in Rome, by the Roman Inquisition, as shown in Sabina Pavone, "Jesuits and Oriental Rites in the Documents of the Roman Inquisition," in *The Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World*, 165–188.

90 A good starting point to explore the new research on interconfessional mission will be the edited volume by Markus Friedrich and Holger Zaunstöck, *Protestants and Catholics in Overseas Missions* (Halle: Francke'sche Stiftungen, forthcoming in 2022).

91 Rayanaykken or Rajanayakkan (Rāyanāyakkāṇ, 1700–1771) was a Catholic and a *paraiyar*, before converting to Lutheranism and being employed by the Tranquebar mission in the Thanjavur region from 1727 onwards; see Liebau, *Cultural Encounters*, 135–136. Interestingly for us, he was also the author of an *ammāṇai* on the life of Jesus, which is now lost. As Heike Liebau points out (p. 28, n. 52), his letters are among the few to be marked as such in missionary reports. The ones I consulted are included in the diaries by Ben-

ilies starting precisely from the early eighteenth century, thus corroborating my claim of a new (specifically literary) beginning of the mission at that time. They also allow for an important change of perspective, and they are invaluable to understand the role, motivations, and trajectories of Catholic catechists and cultural élites over the *longue durée*. I used in a similar way the two extant biographies of Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi, one written in the early nineteenth century by Muttucāmi Pillai, a *pulavar* and Tamil Catholic, and the other in the early twentieth century by Jesuit Léon Besse (1853–1919).⁹² As I show in Chapter Three, these biographies investigate the life of Beschi as much as they speak about his role, and the role of his memory, within the communities to which the two biographers belonged.

Finally, a trickier type of documents, for a textual scholar such as myself, have been the ethnographic materials and visual resources I collected over eighteen months of research and fieldwork in India between 2016 and 2018. These sources have been formative to the way I have come to conceive of this project. I spent much time reflecting upon what these monuments, often in ruins, tell us about the mission in the eighteenth century, and I hope some of the insights they have afforded me will shine through in the book. I have also made use of oral and local histories whenever they were helpful in corroborating or questioning other archives, and fleshing out my descriptions. The reader will notice that most of these materials appear in the footnotes, which tell a story that is parallel but integral to the main body of the book. Inspired by Nicholas Dirks, whose ethno-historical paradigm I still find productive, as well as by recent interdisciplinary studies by Guillermo Wilde and Daves Soneji, this book begins a reflection on the relationship between history and ethnography that keeps shaping my historical practice.⁹³

jamin Schultze (1689–1760) (I did not consult the manuscript copies in Halle, but those in the Cambridge University Library (CUL), MS SPCK, E2/1). Liebau (*Cultural Encounters*, 28) also notices that diaries and other Tamil documents by Lutheran catechists are now held in Copenhagen, and still await proper examination. In light of the trajectory of conversion from Catholicism to Lutheranism at the turn of the nineteenth century that emerges from the sources I analyze in Chapter Six, these diaries might contain important information on Catholic catechists too.

92 For the nineteenth-century Tamil and English biographies by Muttucāmi Pillai, see n. 1; the other important biography is Léon Besse, *Father Beschi of the Society of Jesus: His Times & His Writings* (Trichinopoly: St. Joseph's Industrial School Press, 1918).

93 See Guillermo Wilde "Toward a Political Anthropology of Mission Sound: Paraguay in the 17th and 18th Centuries," *Music & Politics* 1, 1 (2007): 1–29 on the history of music in the mission; for the question of history and memory, Id., "Jesuit Missions' Past and the Idea of Return: Between History and Memory," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, ed. Ines G.

5 Chapter Outline and Threads across the Chapters

This Introduction has spelled out the main assumptions, questions, and methodologies of the book. The rest of the work is divided into three parts, each of them comprised of two chapters. Part One, “Spiritual Institutions,” explores the context of the emergence of Tamil Catholic literature, and focuses on the institutionalization of spiritual retreats for the catechists in the village of Āvūr. Within it, Chapter One offers an overview of the role of the catechists in the mission at the turn of the century, and then analyzes the function of the retreats in their recognition as a spiritual élite, as well as in shaping their relationship with the missionaries. This analysis is partially organized around the biography of Carlo Michele Bertoldi, who was the main promoter of the retreats. Bertoldi also wrote the first adaptation of Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* into Tamil, known as *Ñānamuyarci*. Chapter Two centers around this text, and a small related corpus of spiritual manuals written to shape and discipline the catechists’ Catholic selves in the context of the retreats. Through a close reading of these manuals, the chapter analyzes, on the one hand, the role missionaries envisioned for the catechists in the mission, and on the other hand, the concerns and tensions apparent in the relationship of the texts with their intended readers.

In Part Two, “Rhetorical Education,” I investigate the parallel enterprise of the school of literary Tamil for catechists instituted by Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi in the village of Ēlākkuricci in 1730. Chapter Four is devoted to the analysis of the location of Beschi within the political context of the Kaveri delta region in the 1720s and 30s, and it reflects on the importance of his self-fashioning as *pulavar* and school-master in order to act in that arena. Chapter Five centers around the reading of the textbook Beschi produced for his school, the grammar *Tonṇūlvilakkam*. My analysis focuses on the treatment of the subject matter of poetry (*poruḷ*), in order to understand what Beschi thought good Catholic poetry in Tamil should be about, and illuminates the synthesis between Tamil literary culture and Latin and Italian humanism that was constitutive of the culture of the mission. Both Chapter Four and Five show how catechists at this time were configured as a cultural élite, and reflect on the role of literature in the positioning of the mission vis-à-vis political powers in the region, and competing missionary enterprises such as the Lutheran one.

Županov (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1004–1035; Devesh Soneji, *Unfinished gestures. Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Part Three of the book, “Catholic poetry in a Tamil world,” focuses on Beschi’s epic poem *Tēmpāvaṇi*, the masterpiece of eighteenth-century Tamil Christian literature. In Chapter Five, I analyze this poem in terms of its genre and style, and of the strategies through which it spoke to its eighteenth-century audience, against the background of the social and political contexts detailed in the previous chapters. Chapter Six is devoted to the history of the reception of the poem, which I recover through different sources, from the paratext accompanying manuscripts of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* to local caste histories mentioning its circulation in the late eighteenth century. In a sense, the whole book can be read as a microhistory of the birth and early life of this text, of the relationships in which it was embedded, and the ones it helped to create. Because texts, unlike human beings, sometimes live on for very long periods, the last chapter leads us up to the turn of the nineteenth century, when the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, along with the whole cultural and social capital that Catholic catechist élites had accrued in the eighteenth century, was about to be reconfigured to fit within the colonial order. This complex process cannot be covered in the present work, so in my conclusions I look back to eighteenth-century literary experiments from the perspective of their end, and evaluate them, before pointing to some future avenues of inquiry.

PART 1

Spiritual Institutions



Spiritual Exercises for Tamil Saints

In 1693, the little king of the Maravar region Rakunāta Tēvar (r. 1671–1710) ordered the imprisonment, and then the execution of Jesuit missionary João de Brito (1647–1693) in the village of Ōriyūr. Brito was beheaded on February 4, his blood spilling to redden the sand on the banks of the Pambar river that cuts across the village.¹ Less than two years later, on 2 January 1695, the Archbishop of Mylapore Gaspar Alfonso Álvares (1626–1708) sent to the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome the Portuguese translation of an inquiry into Brito's extraordinary life, captivity, and death. This was the first of many inquiries that Jesuits conducted early in the eighteenth century to advance the cause of Brito's canonization.² At this initial stage, their goal was to prove that their confrère was killed out of hatred of the Catholic faith, *in odium fidei*, and was therefore a martyr. To this end, the documents sent by the bishop included minutes of the interrogations of forty witnesses, who were gathered in Mylapore and questioned both about Brito's life in Portugal and his mis-

1 João de Brito was born in 1647 into a noble family in Lisbon. After joining the Society of Jesus in 1662, he became a missionary in Madurai where he adopted the method of accommodation and the Malabar Rites. He was killed on 4 February 1693, and immediately the Society invested huge efforts in the process of his canonization, also as a way to find recognition for their methods in South India. He was beatified in 1853 and canonized in 1947. The bibliography on Brito's life and work spans more than three centuries and is extensive, especially when considering the many devotional pamphlets that are still being written in South India today. For a chronology of the canonization process and a list of books on Brito written by Jesuit authors, see Augustin de Backer SJ and Alois de Backer SJ, *Bibliothèque des écrivains de la Compagnie de Jésus*, vol. 5 (Liège: Imprimerie de L. Grandmont-Donders, 1859), 100–103. The most comprehensive biography published to date is Augustine Saulière's *Red Sand: A life of St. John de Britto, S.J., Martyr of the Madura Mission* (Madurai: De Nobili Press, 1946), notwithstanding the hagiographical undertones. On the intersection between Brito's life and death and local Tamil dynamics of kingship and honor, see Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 398–405.

2 The files of this inquiry are preserved in the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (henceforth AAV), Congr. Rit. Proc. 1699. This volume contains an authenticated Portuguese copy of the interrogation of forty witnesses that took place originally mostly in Tamil in Mylapore in 1695 under the supervision of João Pereira SJ (d. 1717), rector of the Jesuit college of S. Thomé; and an Italian translation of the same document. The pages of the Portuguese documents are not numbered; therefore, I cannot refer to the specific page when citing from this source. The 1695 documents are part of a larger series of volumes containing the records the inquiries on Brito's martyrdom that occurred between 1695 and 1726 (AAV, Congr. Rit. Proc. 1694–1699).

sionary work in the Maravar region, at that time part of the Madurai mission. The focus, though, was on the events connected to his persecution, captivity, and death.³ As it turns out, the witnesses were all Indian converts who knew nothing about Brito's life in Europe, but they remembered well his time among them.⁴ They evoked Brito's saintly demeanor, the persecutions of the Brahmins who eventually convinced Rakunāta Tēvar to imprison him and sentence him to death, and the tortures he had to endure before his execution.

And yet the story of Brito as it emerges from this inquiry is not a simple one-hero narrative of sanctification. The first witness to be interrogated, Casturi Paniquen (Kastūri Panikkaṇ), a layman who had known Brito for almost ten years, evoked a dense network of catechists and lay helpers, including himself, who had shared the sufferings of captivity with the missionary. After Brito's death, some of these men even risked their lives to recover his remains and bring them to the Superior of the mission, Francisco Laines (1656–1715).⁵ Cas-

3 In this respect, the crucial questions in 1695—and the questions that received the most articulated answers by the witnesses—were those from seven to twelve in the list, which can be summarized as follows: 7. Where, when, how, by whom and why was Brito killed? More specifically, was he killed because of the Maravar king's hatred of the Catholic faith? 8. How did Brito die? Did he withstand death with a strong spirit? 9. Where are Brito's body and mortal remains? Was he killed for any reason other than hatred of the Church? 10. What is the opinion of the people on Brito? 11. Did Brito perform miracles during his life, or after his death? 12. Are Brito's fame, and the awareness he had died for the Catholic faith, widely and uniformly spread among the people of South India? (From AAV, Congr. Rit. Proc. 1699).

4 On the role of Brito among the Maravars, see again Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 398–405. The Maravar people are known in Jesuit and colonial sources of the period as “robbers,” because of their name (*kaḷḷar*) and traditional caste occupation; on Dutch sources regarding this people, see Lennart Bes, “The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits in Eighteenth-Century Ramnad (South India),” *JESHO* 44, 4 (2001): 540–574. The Maravar region was ruled in the early eighteenth century by the Setupatis, formally subordinate to the Nāyakas of Madura but practically autonomous by this time. Recent scholarly contributions focusing on the Setupatis as patrons of the arts in the eighteenth and nineteenth century are Pamela Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jennifer Howes, *The courts of Pre-Colonial South India. Material Culture and Kingship* (Routledge Curzon: London and New York, 2003); and Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, esp. 122–128 and 253–255.

5 Casturi Paniquen is described as: *natural de Madurey cazado e morador em Quellicottey aldeia do Maravâ, soldado nas ditas terras do Maravâ de idade q.e disse, ser de sessenta e sinco annos pouco mais, ou menos*. The inquiry does not record whether “soldier” (*soldado*) was his family/caste profession, but he was not described as a catechist, even though he followed Brito while the missionary was still alive. Paniquen is clearly the transcription of the caste name *panikkaṇ*, and according to *Castes and Tribes of South India* this was the title of a caste of barbers in Tamil Nadu; however, the same title was also used to describe a group of soldiers

turi Paniquen emphasized how “he was with the aforementioned Father [Brito] from his first day in prison and until the hour of his martyrdom, and was one among those who stole his remains.” He also claimed that whatever he saw and reported was common knowledge among his peers, and could be confirmed by “the Brahman Arlapâ, now married and living in Madurai [...]; three catechists who served the Father, namely Mutû, Arlandren, and Mariadasso, who followed Brito after being caught in Canddamaniquam [...]; and Xilvenaiquem and Arlapâ, who stole Brito’s relics together with the witness; and Cheganadâ, Chinapen, Anddi, and Arlapa Cottegarâ, who all live in the Maravar country and followed the father in disguise from a distance until they saw him brought to the place of his martyrdom, and could not disguise themselves anymore, so they let themselves be caught together with him; one of them lost his nose and ears, while the other only the ears.”⁶

The following witnesses all endorsed this narrative. None of them forgot to cite Brito’s catechists and their sufferings—the fame, powers, and saintly aura of these local men were as much elements of the reality constructed by this inquiry as Brito’s sainthood. The dynamics at play in these sources show, perhaps for the first time so transparently, the complex relationship between missionaries, their catechists, and the constitution of Catholic religious authority at the turn of the eighteenth century. Lay helpers were integral to the Madurai mission from its inception—it is well known that the founder Roberto Nobili worked closely with a small group of Brahman converts⁷—and yet through-

practicing the martial art of kalaripayattu in sixteenth-century Portuguese accounts on the region; see Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras: Government Press, 1909), vol. 6, 54–55. The witness of Casturi Paniquen is again in AAV Congr. Rit. Proc. 1699; interestingly, Casturi Paniquen also took part in the 1726 inquiry, thirty-one years after the first one. On that occasion, he worked as scribe (*scriptor deputatus*, see AAV, Congr. Rit. Proc. 1697, f. 224^v), a detail that shows how his own role and identity over the years remained tied to Brito’s sainthood.

6 [...] [Casturi Paniquen] *acompanhou ao dito P. do primeiro dia da sua prisão, athe a ultima hora do seu martyrio, e foy hum dos que furtarão suas reliquias, e o viram tambem com seus olhos o Bramene Arlapâ cazado e morador em Madurey, q. a ocasião de sua prisão se achava com o dito P.e; e fou cõ elle prezo; o cathequista Mutû, Arlandren, e Mariadasso todos tres servidores do dito Padre, q. selhe ajuntarão vindo presos de Canddamaniquam aldeia do dito Maravâ, onde assistião em huã igreja, que tinha a aly o dito Padre, Xilvenaiquem, e Arlapâ, q.e furtarão cõ elle testemunha suas reliquias; Cheganadâ, Chinapen, Anddi, Arlapa Cottegarâ todos moradores nas terras do Maravâ, que incubertos seguiã de longe ao dito Padre, e os sois ultimos vendo ai Padre ja posto deço elhos no lugar do martyrio por não poder incubrirse mais, se forão abraçar come elle, e a hum lhe cortarão o nariz, e as orelhas, e a outro as orelhas só.* AAV, Congr. Rit. Proc. 1699.

7 On the role of Nobili’s first Brahman teacher, Śivadharma, in the initial phases of the Madurai

out the seventeenth century their work became essential in new ways that underpin this inquiry. As the number of converts increased and tending to their spiritual needs became impossible for the missionaries alone, who were rarely more than nine or ten at a time, the Society began to employ a greater number of catechists to preach, teach, and manage local Catholic communities.⁸ On the one hand, these men shared more and more in the religious authority and spiritual charisma of the missionaries; on the other hand, being a catechist, an *upatēciyar* in Tamil, became with time a veritable occupation.⁹ As recorded in the annual catalogs, paying the catechists used up most of the mission's funds, even though their compensation was still not competitive according to one missionary, who in 1731 lamented that "the salary established for catechists in former days, is now not enough to give them even a miserable livelihood."¹⁰

As the importance of the catechists increased, the Society put new efforts into developing but also controlling their role.¹¹ This chapter focuses precisely on one such effort, and maps how in the course of roughly a decade, between 1718 and 1731, Jesuits introduced for the first time in the Madurai mission retreats based on Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* as a tool for training their catechists. After a brief excursus on the social identity and tasks of the catechists, the chapter outlines the history of the institutionalization of their training, considering the immediate geographical and political contexts in which it was introduced. Following the fortunes of the *Exercises* in the mission, as a text and a practice, offers a useful perspective from which to examine the social and spiritual life of these men vis-à-vis the missionaries. The grow-

mission, see Trento, "Śivadharmā or Bonifacio?"; on the other converts working closely with Nobili in the first decades of the seventeenth century, see Županov, *Disputed Mission*, 211–236.

- 8 The annual catalogs of the Malabar Province tell us that the catechists paid by the mission were more than thirty in 1697 (*Catalogus Tertius Provinciae Malabaricae Pro anno 1697*, ARSI, Goa 29, ff. 155–156, here 156^r); their number had increased to around a hundred in 1731 (*Catalogus Provinciae Malabaricae an. 1731*, ARSI, Goa 29, f. 202^v) and this number remained more or less constant throughout the eighteenth century.
- 9 The catalog of 1705 reports that "the missionaries sustain themselves by means of the *congrua portio* (i.e., minimal tithe or allowance) sent from Goa, of which the biggest part is spent in supporting the catechists" (*Aluntur missionarii ex congrua portione missa à Goa, cujus maior pars in alendis Cathequistis expenditure*, in ARSI, Goa 29, f. 168^v).
- 10 The complaints regarding the pay of the catechists are included at the end of the annual letter of 1731, penned by Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi to the General of the Society (Madurai mission, 4 September 1732), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 597–602, here 602^v.
- 11 While the role of lay people in the Catholic mission to South India is virtually unexplored, similar processes in the context of the Lutheran mission in Tranquebar have been analyzed in Liebau, *Cultural Encounters*.

ing awareness among Jesuits of the key role played by their lay helpers, whose responsibilities were so similar to their own, influenced the decision to train them to feel, think, and behave like good Christians. This was also the premise for catechists to become good readers of Catholic as well as Hindu literature in Tamil—they needed eyes trained to understand and love the former, and to engage with the latter in order to reject it. Besides, this training was also prompted by, and in turn promoted, the development of an awareness among the catechists, who were given their role as much as they took it for themselves.

1 Being a Catechist: Preaching and Literature

The special status of the catechists of the Madurai mission is already visible in a short account of the churches and houses of the Malabar Province compiled in 1667.¹² There we read that while the other colleges of the province employed dubashes (*lengoas*, “linguists”) paid for their services as translators and interpreters, missionaries in Madurai were expected to know local languages.¹³ Therefore, each father worked instead with “three or four catechists who were always traveling to teach the catechism, and each of them would check the other’s competence in catechizing, and making new Christians.”¹⁴ The role of these catechists was also described by André Freyre (d. 1691) in the annual letter of the same year: “What eases our task is the help of efficient catechists, men who have been for a long time trained by us for this work. They go into towns and suburbs, into villages and marketplaces, into the country-

12 The Society of Jesus divided the world in *Assistentiæ* (Assistancy), to which belonged the different *Provinciae*, to which in turn belonged the missions. In the Old Society of Jesus (before the suppression in 1733), the Malabar Province (founded in 1610) belonged to the *Assistentia Lusitaniae*, and was distinct from the Goan Province. It included the Madurai mission, whereas the Mysore mission was included in the Goan Province, and the Carnatic mission was assigned to the *Assistentia Galliae*. These three missions, although belonging to different jurisdictions within the Society of Jesus, all adopted the strategy of accommodation. For a sketch of the geographical divisions of the Society, see Atlas SJ, 5–7; on the history of the Malabar Province, Léon Besse, *Histoire de la Province de Malabar* (Unpublished typescript in JAMP, Madras, 1941); Maria Sales, “Do Malabar às Molucas: os Jesuítas e a Província do Malabar (1601–1693)” (PhD diss., Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2015).

13 *Elenchus Ecclesiarum et Domorum Prov[inciæ] Mal[abariae]*, ARSI, Goa 29, ff. 107–109, here 107^v.

14 [...] *tres e quattros catequistas que andão sempre por diverças partes catequizando, e cada hum se esmera a competencia do outro a catequizar mellor e a fazer mais xpãos p.a Deos. Ibidem.*

side and the forests, using their time according to our instructions, like hunters skilled not only in making fresh prey, but also in domesticating the wildest beasts of the forest.”¹⁵ Rhetorical flair aside, this passage highlights two important aspects of the work of the catechists: they were trained by the missionaries, but they preached and evangelized on their own.¹⁶

In the course of the seventeenth century their role diversified, and by the end of the century we find some catechists attached to a missionary, as in the case of Brito’s men mentioned in the inquiry, while others were hired as “resident catechists” (*vācal upatēciyar*). The latter were in charge of managing local Christian communities and took part in the administration of villages, an important role they retained well into the nineteenth century.¹⁷ They also fulfilled paraliturgical functions, and lead Sunday celebrations with their communities even when missionaries were not available to say mass.¹⁸ The two types of catechists and some of their tasks are described in a private letter written in 1740 by a newly arrived missionary to his brother:

Each missionary in his residence chooses eight or more catechists, belonging to the various populations where there are Christians. [...] Two

15 *Quello che ci agiusta assai è il servizio delli catechisti pratici, et ammaestrati longo tempo da noi per questo effetto; questi hora nelle città, e suoi contorni, hora nelle ville, e fiere, hora ne campi, e boschi passano il tempo ripartiti da noi, attendendo, come cacciatori pratici non solo all'acquisto della nova preda, ma ancora in domesticar le più infierite bestie delle selve [...]* André Freire to Giovanni Paolo Oliva (Candalur [Kāntālūr], 14 July 1667), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 335–358, here 336^v.

16 The process of domestication, or bringing the wilderness and its inhabitants into civilization, as a figure of evangelization is common among Jesuit missionaries; see for instance Carole Blackburn, *Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Missions and Colonialism in North America, 1632–1650* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 42 ff.

17 For information regarding the trajectory and social role of resident catechists, see the story of catechist Gnanapragasi later in this chapter. The resident catechist (*vācal upatēciyar*) is listed among the local administrative roles in a manuscript on the history of the village of Carukaṇi compiled by one Jesuit Parish priest in the late nineteenth century; see *Crāmam de Sarougany* (ca 1882), JAMP 217/278.

18 While the paraliturgical role of the catechists is mostly implied in many Catholic documents of the period, it is (pejoratively) described in Lutheran reports: *Dans certains lieux du Royaume de Madure où il n'y a point de Missionnaires, les Catéchistes en font les fonctions, qui consistent à lire quelques lambeaux de livres de dévotion, à réciter les prières de la Messe & à chanter une Litanie*. Jean Lucas Niekamp, *Histoire de la Mission Danoise dans les Indes Orientales, Qui renferme en Abrégé les Relations que les Missionnaires Evangeliques en ont données, depuis l'an 1705. jusqu'à la fin de l'année 1736*, vol. 1 (Genève: Henri-Albert Gosse & Comp., Libraires & Imprimeurs, 1745), 234.

among them must always follow the missionary, as he moves every few months from one church to another, for the advantage of the Christians. This being so, when the Christians come to take confession, they make the sign, and are gathered in the church. There, either the missionary or the catechists of that residence examine each of them (no one excluded) about whether they know the Christian doctrine, and the prayers. During important days, all the catechists of a certain residence gather, each of them bringing the Christians of the population subject to them, and then all together they examine the penitents about the doctrine, and so on. [...] Having thus prepared [the Christians], [the catechists] give them a piece of palm leaf with a written evaluation, which they have to give to the missionary when they go for confession, as a proof that they know the Christian doctrine, the acts of the Theological virtues, and that they are prepared for confession.¹⁹

Two elements stand out in this passage. First, missionaries chose catechists who belonged to the various local “populations” where there were Christians, and gave them spiritual jurisdiction over those populations. In Italian, the term *popolazioni* could stand in for caste, or be the Italianization of the Portuguese *povoações*, “villages.” So, lay leadership and the work of resident catechists was envisioned territorially and possibly also along caste lines. Second, the process of instruction and confession described in this letter involved writing on little pieces of palm leaf. The catechists sanctioned whether the Christian devotees they managed were ready for confession by writing it down, and the missionary would read that evaluation on the palm-leaf fragment. This humble writing practice points to a world of popular literacy, and to the cultural role of the catechists as small-scale literati among their communities, to which we will keep

19 *Ciascun missionario nella sua Residenza elegge otto, ò più Catechisti divisi in varie Popolazioni, dove sono i Cristiani. [...] Or due di questi debbono sempre stare dove in quel tempo risiede il missionario, mentre p[e]r alcuni mesi stà in una Chiesa, e poi si porta in un'altra, per comodo de' Cristiani. Ciò presuppuesto, quando vengono li Cristiani per confessarsi, dato il segno, e radunati tutti in Chiesa, ciascuno (nemine excepto) viene esaminato, o dal missionario, o dalli Catechisti di quella residenza, se sà la Dottrina Cristiana, e l'orazioni: e ne' giorni di grande concorso si radunano tutti i Catechisti di quella residenza, e ciascuno viene con li Cristiani delle Popolazioni a lui soggette, e tutti esaminano li penitenti sopra la Dottrina &c. [...] Così preparatisi si da loro un pezzetto di foglia di palma scritto quale essi in andare a confessarsi devono dare al missionario in contrasegno che sanno la dottrina Cristiana, gli atti delle virtù Teologali, e che si sono preparati per la Confessione.* Gianbattista Buttarì to his brother (Madurai mission, 4 September 1740), APUG, Miscellanea 292, pp. 655–667, here 663–664.

returning. The use of pieces of palm-leaf containing written evaluations on the readiness of Christians for confession is also attested in Lutheran reports.²⁰ In fact, Protestant missionaries in their own letters to Europe accused Catholic catechists of selling such written tickets for a price, creating a *de facto* spiritual racket. This accusation, be it true or false, further brings into focus the interplay of literacy, lay leadership, and economic benefits that were at the heart of the catechist profession.

Because they were able to speak and write well, catechists worked as preachers and often acted as intermediaries between Jesuits and local political powers. In the early days of the mission, Roberto Nobili had his Brahmin convert and collaborator Śivadharma speak in his name in front of an assembly of Brahmins in Madurai.²¹ Exactly one century later, the eulogy of catechist Xaverius Muttu (Cavēri Muttu), who had been Brito's collaborator and a witness in the 1695 inquiry, offers a summary of the cultural and political role that this man had stably acquired in the mission by then. Xaverius Muttu had died the previous year, and the missionary Noël De Bourzes (1673–1735) remembers him in the annual letter of the year 1712 with the following words:

Xaverius Muttu, to whom had been entrusted the negotiations at the Thanjavur court, had passed away. There was no other catechist in the mission who could stand on a par with him, not even by far, for accomplishing a job so fraught with dangers. Indeed, he was endowed with such sagacity, and his eloquence was such, that when he spoke everyone would sigh. He was equally well versed in the Christian doctrine, and in the stories of the Hindus, so that with his mix of gravitas and modesty, he would easily win over local people; and so that all those who knew him would not dare enter into an argument against him. And no wonder, for he excelled in poetry, a science held in greatest esteem in this country. We owe to him almost all the sacred hymns that are played in our churches. Notwithstanding his many remarkable talents, he was not arrogant, and would listen to instructions, and he was shining with a wonderful meekness of soul, and a tender devotion towards God. Finally, such

20 *Les Prêtres sont peu scrupuleux & exacts dans la célébration du saint Sacrement de l'Eucharistie, & le communiant n'a besoin d'aucune autre préparation que celle d'apporter un témoignage de son Catéchiste, pour se présenter au Confessionnal & être reçu à communier. Rien n'est plus facile, au reste, que d'obtenir ces fortes de billets; les Catéchistes intéressés & avarés les distribuent volontiers, même aux plus scélérats, moyennant un fano.* Niekamp, *Histoire de la Mission Danoise*, vol. 1, 233–234.

21 Trento, "Śivadharma or Bonifacio?", 99–100.

was Xaverius Muttu that, if he would glory that venerable João de Brito was his master, that venerable martyr could equally have gloried that he had such a disciple.²²

As it emerges from this passage, Xaverius Muttu was a respected politician, a preacher, and a poet. These three aspects were intimately connected in the life of catechists in the Madurai mission, and classical Tamil poetry was a crucial tool for them to preach effectively, when used to support Christian arguments thanks to the rhetorical strategies that we will explore in Chapter Three. Xaverius Muttu's role in Thanjavur further brings into focus one among the most important and difficult fields of evangelization in the Madurai mission. The kings of the Bhonsle dynasty in Thanjavur were hostile to European missionaries, and catechists were crucial to maintaining Catholic presence in that region. Elsewhere too, they often worked as intermediaries between Jesuits and the courts of the small kings of the Tamil country in the eighteenth century. Finally, De Bourzes characterizes Xaverius Muttu as an eloquent and well-respected man, who still remained meek and humble. Without doubt, at least in the mind of De Bourzes and his readers in Rome, this was the result of an intense spiritual exercise that helped him to attain these precious Christian virtues. The combination of eloquence, charisma and meekness is a Jesuit ideal at the core of the educational project that the missionaries in Madurai envisioned for their catechists at this time.

22 [...] *P. Emmanuelem Machado, qui priusquam adveniret, maximo dolore audivit fato funestum esse insignem catechistam Xaverium Muttû, cui demandata erant partes negotiorum in aula Tanjaorensi tractandorum. Ad tam periculosae plenum opus aleæ nullus inter missionis catechistas huic, ne longo quidem intervallo, par; quippe qui et prudentiâ polleret, et eloquentiâ tantâ, ut loquentem illum omnes suspirarent. In doctrinâ Christianâ pariter, Gentiliumque fabulis probè versatus, mixtâ gravitate modestiâ, Ethnicos facillimè revincebat; ut, qui eum nosset, nullus jam cum eo auderet argumentando manus conserere. Nec mirum! Cum poesi excelleret, quâ scientiâ nulla in his terris maiori in pretio. Huic debentur sacra cantica, quaecumque ferè nostris in templis personant. Tot egregiis datibus nihilo superbior, dicto audiens erat, egregiâque animi demissione, tenerâque in Deum pietatè præfulgebat. Denique iis erat Xaverius Muttû, qui si Venerabili P. Joanne de Britto Magistro gloriabatur, posset et ipse Venerabilis Martyr tali discipulo jure gloriari.* Louis Noël de Bourzes to Michelangelo Tamburini, *Litteræ Annuæ Missonis Madurensis anni 1712* (Madurai mission, 20 August 1713), in ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 506^r–515^v, here f. 507^v.

2 Being a Catechist: Caste and Profession

Prior to the early eighteenth century, we mostly know about catechists and their different roles from missionary letters and reports such as the ones seen above, and from catalogs that list their stipends among the expenses of the mission. At the turn of the century, though, the sources become richer. The many documents produced for the cause of Brito's canonization and the documents produced in the context of the Malabar Rites controversy, two coeval and crucial moments in the life of the mission and its practice of accommodation, record for the first time the catechists' own voices.²³ These sources remain building blocks for the Jesuits' representation of their activities in South India vis-à-vis their interlocutors and their enemies in Rome, and they mobilize local voices in support of the missionaries' positions. Nevertheless, as soon as the catechists begin to speak in their own voice, their stakes in the mission become clearer, as does their self-positioning within Catholic lay networks centered around family and caste.

If we turn once again to the records of the 1695 inquiry, for instance, we find that Brito's old catechists—Arlapa (Arulappan, b. 1659), Vadapa (Vēṭappan, b. 1665), Xiluei Naiquen (Ciluvai Nāyakkan, b. 1649), and many others—all testified as witnesses.²⁴ Like Casturi Paniquen, they emphasized their closeness to Brito, and among them, Xiluei Naiquen capitalized on this relationship with the greatest skill. Xiluei Naiquen was among those who had worked with Brito in the Maravar for the longest time. He was with him during an earlier imprisonment in 1686, after which Brito was forced to leave the region for some years. He joined him again when Brito came back to the Maravar, following from a distance and sending his son to attend to the missionary, and he quickly reclaimed center stage when it was time to rescue Brito's mortal remains after the execution. Among the witnesses in the 1695 inquiry, for almost twenty years Xiluei Naiquen's name kept resurfacing in the sources, while the names of his companions slowly faded into oblivion. Witnesses in later inquiries rarely failed to mention the story of his eye, for instance, which was miraculously healed by Brito during the first imprisonment. Most witnesses also remarked that he was the leader of the rescuing party who recovered the missionary's body

23 See the overview of the Malabar Rites controversy in the Introduction. For the political connection between Brito's canonization and the Malabar Rites controversy, see the forthcoming dissertation by Paolo Aranha.

24 I derived the birth dates from their ages in 1695, recorded in their witnesses in AAV, Congr. Rit. Proc. 1699.

and belongings.²⁵ They also noticed that Xiluei Naiquen himself recounted the story of his healing in front of wide audiences, thus suggesting that he was actively fabricating his own fame and authority in front of local Tamil Catholics.

Coincidentally, one of the first and most important post-mortem miracles attributed to Brito is the healing of Mariadagen (Mariyatācan) (b. 1676), a catechist in the Maravar region and a crucial witness in the later 1726 inquiry, the last to take place in the eighteenth century.²⁶ Mariadagen was none other than Xiluei Naiquen's son. He was with Brito during his second and final imprisonment, and became heir to a catechist dynasty in the making. The social dynamism of the family is proven by the fact that, in the documents of the 1726 inquiry, Mariadagen could sign in Tamil, and speak in Portuguese, the language of his testimony in the sources. This hints to his having been educated by Portuguese-speaking missionaries on the coast.²⁷ Moreover, in his statement Mariadagen retold and appropriated his father's story, using it as a way to prefigure his own captivity side to side with Brito, and the miracle that the saint operated upon him afterwards. In other words, Mariadagen's case shows the role played by kinship in the institutionalization of the catechist profession, like with most other professions in India. Xiluei Naiquen clearly passed down to his son the ability to connect with Brito's powers, and thus become the recipient of miracles.²⁸

25 These narratives emerge in the records of the 1726 inquiry, kept in AAV, Cong. Rit. Proc. 1697.

26 The miracle of Mariadagen, healed from a skin tumor, is recounted already in Carlo Colano to João da Costa (14 September 1696), in AAV, Cong. Rit. Proc. 1698, ff. 104–109, esp. 108^r. The same miracle made it into one of the articles of the interrogation in the 1726 inquiry (where Mariadagen was a witness), as follows: 43. *Qualiter veritas fuit, et est, quod ex simili pustularu[m] morbo penè deploratus, et morti proximus erat Puer alter nomine Maria Dagen in civitate Vaipuræ oræ Malabaricæ quippe præ tumore ita erat deformis ut corporis humani figuram non haberet, prout testes informati deponent fuit et est publicum &c.* 44. *Qualiter veritas fuit, et est, quod Parentes prædicti Maria Dagen omni alio auxilio humano destituti subsidii[m] Beate [sic] Mariæ Virginis, ac intercessionem Ven. Patris Joannis de Britto cujus catechista fuerat d. Pueri Pater, implorarunt, recitatis cum ad stantibus litanis quando Æger, qui multo jam tempore loquelam amiserat statim Patrem hilari vultu compellans enarravit sanctissima[m] Virgine[m] Cætu Angeloru[m] stipatam una cu[m] Ven. Martyre Joanni de Britto a dextris sibi apparuisse, et salutem a Deo impetrasse, et post unius horæ intervalum tumore omni evanescente, a quoque humore effluente puer liber omnino remansit prout Testis informati deponent, fuit et est publicu' &c.* AAV, Cong. Rit., Proc. 1697, ff. 20^v–21^r.

27 Among the 38 lay witnesses of the 1726 inquiry, only five could sign with their names in Tamil (the others used a cross or a symbol); among these, four out of the five were catechists. See AAV, Cong. Rit., Proc. 1697, f. 52^r. Catechists in this inquiry gave their testimony in Portuguese, while the schoolmaster Ātippan (whom we will encounter again in the next chapter) signed and testified in Tamil.

28 The relationship between Mariadagen and Xiluei Naiquen is discussed in 1699 in the tes-

A sentence in the statement Mariadagen gave in 1726 while testifying on Brito's martyrdom and miracles further stresses the engagement of this family, who actively sought to be associated with Brito. As soon as they knew that the missionary had come back to South India after his mission at the Portuguese royal court in 1687–1690, Mariadagen says, “my father and I went to Tala on the Fishery Coast, met with him [Brito], we went (back) with him to the Maravar, and we assisted him until his imprisonment, and martyrdom.”²⁹ What this sentence does not say explicitly, but implies, is that the starting point of their journey was the Maravar. And there is no mention in Mariadagen's statement that this was an official task given to them by the mission. In other words, the two men went to search for Brito of their own accord, and took him back to what will become the field of his martyrdom. In doing so, they played no small role in making the martyrdom happen, and Mariadagen's testimony is a subtle claim to the central role he himself, and his father before him, played in those extraordinary events.

Some of Brito's catechists also appear as signatories in one of the appendices to Francisco Laines's treatise *Defensio Indicarum Missionum*, “In Defense of the Indian Missions.” Their role was to testify to the accuracy of Laines's portrayal of the Madurai mission, thus supporting an appeal against Tournon's decree forbidding the Malabar Rites.³⁰ Their statements were collected in 1704 together with those of some other catechists and neophytes in the mission, and were organized according to location and caste, thus revealing a great deal

timony of Fr. João da Costa, a Jesuit friend who had studied with Brito in Lisbon (see n. 24 above). For an example of catechist family ties at play in Pondicherry, see Agmon, *A colonial Affair*, 63–69.

29 I take this citation from the Italian version of Mariadagen's witness in ARSI, APG-SJ 726, fols. 664^r–694^v, here 671^v–672^r: *Avuta la notizia della sua venuta, io e mio Padre ce ne andassimo fino a Tala* [probably Talai, a generic village name] *nella Costa di Pescaria, dove l'incontrammo, accompagnandolo fino al Marava, et assistendolo poi fino alla sua carcerazione, e Martirio.*

30 The statements were collected in 1704, and appeared in print in Francisco Laines, *Defensio Indicarum missionum: Madurensis, nempe Maysurensis, & Carnatensis, edita, Occasione Decreti ab Ill.mo D. Patriarcha Antiocheno D. Carolo Maillard de Tournon visitatore apostolico in Indiis Orientalibus lati; & suscepta a Francisco Laineze Societate Jesu electo Episcopo Meliaporensi [...]* *Superiorum permissu* (Romæ: Ex Typographia Reverendæ Cameræ Apostolicæ, 1707), 605 ff. Laines' book—nowadays rare, but extremely important in the context of the Malabar Rites controversy—was the first systematic Jesuit response to the decree of condemnation of the Malabar Rites, the *Inter Graviores*, issued by Tournon in 1704. Paolo Aranha argues that this book was not printed in Rome but in Lisbon; see “Discrimination and Integration,” notes 70–71.

about social identities within the catechist group.³¹ In Anddapandy—probably the village of Āṇṭippaṭṭi near Madurai—we find again Arlapen (Arlapa) and Vedapen (Vadapa), two of Brito's former catechists who had already left the Maravar in 1695 at the time of the first inquiry. Despite his relatively young age, Xiluei Naiquen's son Mariadagen is also listed as a catechist in the Maravar region. In this list, caste is spelled out explicitly when the catechists are Brahmans or Vellalas (*vēlāḷar*), and these catechists are listed first. In other cases, caste can be inferred from the names and position within the list. Catechists with the title Nayquen (Nāyakkaṇ), for instance, were often Telugu people, called Vadugar, i.e., Vaṭakar or "Northern People," in Jesuit sources.³² Strikingly, the testimonies of Dalit catechists—identified in the documents of this period as *Parreàs*, from the Tamil *paraiyar*—were collected separately, and constitute a separate section in the printed book. This was coherent with one of Laines' main arguments in the *Defensio*, namely that converting India would have been impossible without the Malabar Rites, which in turn implied caste separation and the segregation of the *Parreàs*.³³

That Laines asked Dalit catechists to testify for the necessity of caste segregation is a powerful reminder of the dark sides of Jesuit accommodation. Attempts to incorporate caste divisions into the life of the mission, central to the Malabar Rites controversy, challenged the analogy between European and Indian society, and the construction of a universal idea of humanity that was the basis of earlier missionary experiences.³⁴ Accommodation in Madurai

31 A manuscript copy of the testimonies contained in Laines's *Defensio Indicarvm missionvm* is preserved in the Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (henceforth ACDF) St. St. QQ 1-i (the volume is unpaginated). Like the appendix of the *Defensio*, the manuscript contains the Portuguese translation of the witnesses, originally in Tamil. It was presented to the Sacred Congregation of the Inquisition by Jesuit Procurator Fr. Antonio Broglia Brandolini, who wanted to use it for writing his own apology of the mission, on 13 December 1723. This document is important because, unlike in the printed version in Laines's *Defensio*, the testimonies are here geographically divided according to their village, so we know the places where the different catechists were working in 1704 (and how many of them resided in a specific place, etc.) I use this information in the chapter.

32 Mariadagen himself declares his belonging to this group (*casta Baddaga*) in his second witness of 1726, in AAV Congr. Riti, Proc. 1697, fol 172^r. On the relationship between Jesuits and the Vadugars, spelled "Baddaga" in Italian or Portuguese sources, see Luis Bazou, "The Jesuits Meet the Vadugars—Part 1," *Caritas* 53, 1 (1969): 37–43; U. Paul Satyanarayana, "The Jesuits Meet the Vadugars—Part 2," *Caritas* 53, 2 (1969): 105–112.

33 For the debates regarding the *Parreàs* in context of the Malabar Rites controversy, see Aranha, "Discrimination and Integration," and Pavone, "Tra Roma e il Malabar."

34 Alphonse Dupront, *De l'acculturation* (Vienna: F. Berger & Söhne, 1966). The reactions to this obstacle at the time of the controversy were varied—Laines pushed for the Church to

included, for instance, high walls separating the spaces intended for different castes in the churches of the mission.³⁵ Besides, while Dalit converts were managed by catechists belonging to the same caste, there were no missionaries living among them until 1744 when the papal decree *Omnium Sollicitudinum* forbade the sacramental segregation of the *Parreās*. A new group of missionaries was then created to work among the Dalits, but this caused enormous discontent among converts of higher *śūdra* caste. As written in the annual letter of 1746–1749, “while we were living in peace with the Hindus, the Christian Śūdras waged such a war on the new missionaries, that the Church of these regions was almost entirely afflicted.”³⁶ Indeed, it seems that converts and catechists of high caste refused to interact with the new missionaries, which goes to show that besides the missionaries’ own understanding of caste in India, the catechists themselves were a corporation with strong internal fractures running along caste lines.

Among the groups who adopted and better navigated the new profession were the Vellalas, a Tamil *śūdra* land-owning group, also thanks to the Jesuit preference for high caste community leaders.³⁷ The family records of the catechists of the southern village of Vaṭakkaṅkuḷam offer a good example of one lineage of Vellalas constituting their identity in relationship with their occupation.³⁸ These Vellalas recognized as their ancestor Gnanapragasam (Ñṇappirakācam), the catechist who instructed the Nayar chieftain, Catholic convert,

accept the fundamental differences of Indian society, other missionaries wanted reform—and yet whether humanity (in more recent times often termed human rights) is to be defined in absolute or relative terms remains an issue.

35 On this issue see Paolo Aranha, “The Social and Physical Space of the Malabar Rites Controversy,” in *Space and Conversion in Global Perspective*, eds Wietse de Boer et al. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014), 214–232.

36 *Dum enim cum Gentilibus pacifice vivebatur, xutres christiani novis missionariis bellum intulerunt, quo tota fere harum Regionum Ecclesia adeo afflicta fuit [...]*. Giulio Cesare Potenza to Franz Retz, annual letter of the year 1749 (Madurai Mission, 21 September 1750). ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 657–661, here 656v.

37 Vellalas (*vēlālar*) are a prestigious, land-owning Tamil caste belonging to the *śūdra varṇam*. See Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, vol. 7, 361–389; on the role of Vellalas in the making of Tamil geography, see Burton Stein, “Circulation and the Historical Geography of Tamil Country,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 37, 1 (1977): 7–26.

38 The genealogies of this Vellala dynasty have been recorded in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century by Fr. Arpudam SJ, *A genealogical study of the Catholic Velalla families at Vadakankulam* (1915) (JAMP 217/463). The introduction to this work collects oral histories on the family, and on p. 37 we find the record of the original nuclear family of Gnanapragasam (also known, before conversion, as Chidambaram Pillai) and his wife Anandavalli. This document will be the subject of more detailed study in Chapter Six.

and recently canonized Tēvacakāyam Piḷḷai (1712–1752).³⁹ As in Xiluei Nayaquen's case, the authority of Gnanapragasam originated from his close relationship with a saintly figure. In fact, the histories of the two men, and their self-fashioning strategies, are remarkably similar.⁴⁰ Like Xiluei Nayaquen did for Brito, Gnanapragasam dared to defy the wrath of the king, in his case Marthanda Varma (1705–1758) of Travancore, in order to recover the mortal remains of Tēvacakāyam—his turban and his sword—and take them back to Vaṭakkankūlam, where they have been preserved until today.⁴¹ In this way, Gnanapragasam and his descendants became leaders of the village, until their authority was questioned and finally overthrown by another group, Christian Nadars, in the late nineteenth century.⁴² Still, their story shows how in the eighteenth century becoming a catechist could be a powerful way to mobilize the symbolic and material resources of the Church, acquire local authority, and rise to leadership over a community. It also shows how religious identity as Catholic catechists, and social identity as Vellalas were constituted simultaneously at this time. This hints at the role that Catholicism played in the Tamil country as a resource for Vellalas to establish their leading role within local communities throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Susan Bayly has argued.⁴³ With this

39 On Tēvacakāyam, see Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 416–452; on the hagiographic side, Rosario J. Narchison, *Martyr Devasahayam: A Documented History* (Nagercoil: Canonization Committee, 2009). The similarity between Xiluei Nayaquen and Gnanapragasam's stories points to modes of expressing, and capitalizing upon, Catholic holiness in these centuries; this is the subject of my current research project.

40 I use the term “self-fashioning” in the sense introduced by Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

41 Although for Gnanapragasam, who lived half a century later than Xiluei Nayaquen in the southern part of the mission, and therefore further away from the control of colonial centers like Madras and Pondicherry, the saint in question was not a missionary but a fellow layman. This, combined with the relative isolation of Vaṭakkankūlam, might be among the reasons why the relics of Tēvacakāyam survived the suppression of the Society, British colonialism, and independence, and are still in their original location within an eighteenth-century chapel.

42 These later events have been recorded by Adrien Caussanel's manuscript account *Historical Notes on the Tinnevely District*, in two volumes (JAMP 217/397–398). The history and extant monuments of the Vaṭakkankūlam Christianity are the focus of Ā. Civacuppīramāṇiyan, *Kīṟittavamum cāṭiyum*.

43 On the constitution of Vellala identity in the eighteenth century through conversion, see Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 379–419 (esp. 413–414); on Vellalas and Protestant Christianity, Dennis Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India. Tamil Evangelical Christians, 1706–1835* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000). More generally, on Vellalas's claims in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, see Eugene

quick sketch of the social identity of the catechists in mind, it is time to turn to the early eighteenth century and the missionaries' growing awareness and positioning in relation to this group, a process that followed from, but also fostered, self-awareness among the catechists themselves.

3 Bringing the Spiritual Exercises to the Mission

During the Christmas season of 1718, the Jesuit missionary Carlo Michele Bertoldi gave Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* to his catechists for the first time at Āvūr, a small village within the domain of the Toṇṭaimāṇ of Pudukottai (Putukkōṭṭai).⁴⁴ This is also the first time the sources record the practice of the exercises in the mission, even though missionaries must have done them in the seventeenth century too. The following year, Bertoldi reported to the General of the Society Michelangelo Tamburini (1648–1730) the impact of that retreat on his catechists and on his own morale:

Towards the end of last year [1718], during the festivities for the Nativity of Our Lord, I gave (*tradidi*) the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius in the church at Āvūr to the catechists of this residence and their families, and to the catechists of the Maravar region. It was clearly a success: that pious work generated [in them] great devotion, contrition, and the intention of reforming their lives. For many years I had been hesitant and uncertain whether the *Exercises* should be given to neophytes of this kind. The

Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), esp. 93–94; on twentieth-century processes of Vellala identity-making, Srilata Raman, "Who Are the Velalas? Twentieth-Century Constructions and Contestations of Tamil Identity in Maraimalai Adigal (1876–1950)," in *Idioms, Sacred Symbols, and the Articulation of Identities in South Asia*, eds Kelly Pemberton and Michael Nijhawan (New York: Routledge, 2009), 78–95.

- 44 There is no information on the practice of the *Spiritual Exercises* in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century internal missions of South India, even though Jesuit fathers of the Madurai mission must have performed them. Some observations can be found in Ignacio Iparraguirre, *Historia de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio*, vol. 2, *Desde la muerte de San Ignacio hasta la Promulgación del Directorio Oficial (1556–1599)* (Roma: IHSI, 1955), 202–204. The only available study on the history of the exercises in Madurai is an article by Léon Besse, *La Pratique des Exercices de Saint Ignace dans l'ancienne Mission du Maduré* (Enghien: Bibliothèque des Exercices; Paris: P. Lethielleux; Reims: Action Populaire, 1910). This relies on the two letters written by Bertoldi in 1719 and 1720 that I also use, and when translating those letters from Latin, I have consulted the French translations included there.

favorable result drove away my fear, and stirred up in me the desire to promote this salvific work, since nothing is more useful, and more effective, to extirpate vices and generate piety.⁴⁵

Finally convinced of the necessity to introduce the practice of the *Exercises* more widely in the mission, Bertoldi organized another retreat in 1719 in the church of Ēlākkuricci, for the catechists of different residences. Other missionaries soon joined in his efforts. In the same year, Ignacio Cardoso (1682–1734) imparted the *Exercises* to 160 Christians at Ēlākkuricci, and Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi organized a retreat for 55 neophytes in his church at Vaṭukarpēṭṭai.⁴⁶

Even though Bertoldi simply mentions giving Ignatius' *Exercises*, the available sources all suggest that the retreats he organized in 1718–1719 followed the model of group retreats for lay people that had become common in Europe by the end of the seventeenth century, and were practiced in other missions too.⁴⁷ During these retreats, the priest led meditations inspired by Ignatius' *Exercises*, but adapted to the needs of a secular audience.⁴⁸ Yet in South India, the spiritual transmission implicit in the exercises, and suggested by the Latin verb *tradere*, always associated with this practice and used by Bertoldi too, was

45 *Sub fine anni transacti intra dies festus Natalis D[omi]ni in hac Aurensi Ecclesia tradidi Exercitia Spiritualia S[ancti] P[atris] N[ostri] Ignatii Cateq[ui]tis et famulis hujus Resid[enti]æ, et cateq[ui]tis Resid[enti]æ Maravarensis. Res è voto successit; magna enim devotione, contritione, et mutandæ vitæ propositio piu[m] opus transegere. Ad multos annos fluctuans, et hæsitans animo fui, num traderentur hujusmodi Neophytis Exercitia Spiritualia. Felix eventus timorem abigens omnem exsuscitavit in me studiū[m] promovendi tam salutare ministeria, quo nihili utilius, nihil fortius extirpandis vitiis, pietatis insinuandæ. Carlo Michele Bertoldi to Michelangelo Tamburini (Aur [Āvūr], 16 August 1719), ARSI, Goa 20, ff. 135–136, here 135^r.*

46 Ibidem.

47 See Anna Rita Capoccia, "La casa di esercizi spirituali di Foligno (1729–1773)," *AHSI* 67, 133 (1998): 161–206; and Nicolas Standaert, "The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola in the China Mission of the 17th and 18th Centuries," *AHSI* 81, 1 (2012): 104–105.

48 On the different ways of giving and receiving the *Exercises*, see Iparraguirre, *Historia de los Ejercicios*, vol. 2, 42–45. Jesuits developed in the seventeenth century a "light version" of the exercises (*ejercicios leves*), mostly targeting laypeople and focusing on the meditation topics of the first week, as recommended by Ignatius in the annotation 18; an "open version" (*ejercicios abiertos*) performed by individuals over a longer period of time, without interrupting their daily business; and finally, the exercises made completely and *de modo perfecto*, in four weeks and according to Ignatius's book. The choice of the type of exercises to give in each situation depended upon context; in Iparraguirre's words (and citing Ignatius): "Un principio regulaba toda la actuación: el principio de la adaptación. «Según que tienen edad, letras, o ingenio, se han de aplicar los ejercicios» (Ej. 18)." Ibidem, 43.

meant only marginally for regular lay converts. It was mostly directed to the catechists, to whom the missionaries also entrusted many of the spiritual and social responsibilities concerning the life of the mission. Many aspects of the diffusion of the retreats, including the spiritual literature they generated, can only be understood by keeping their catechist audience in mind. So, in the rest of the chapter we will use the biography of Bertoldi, and his trajectory in the Madurai mission, to map the institutional context and the Tamil locations of the transfer of spiritual and cultural authority from the missionaries to their catechists, against the backdrop of political and social life in the Tamil country at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Going back to 1719, Bertoldi describes how during the first retreat the catechists meditated three times a day. Between these meditations, they were often overwhelmed by tears and contrition, and they would thus offer detailed confessions of their sins. According to Bertoldi, such strong emotional reactions were proof that God favored the practice of the exercises in Madurai, a favor confirmed by the fact that, after a long drought, rain finally came during the first retreat in 1718.⁴⁹ The tone and contents of his narrative reveal an attempt on the part of Bertoldi to show how the Madurai mission in the early eighteenth century was still the community of saints envisioned by its founder Roberto Nobili more than a century before. This is what miracles such as the sudden appearance of rain were signaling—incidentally, this also alludes to the symbolic power of rain in Tamil cultural poetics.

This spiritual community was finally becoming visible and articulating itself socially through the retreats, with the catechists at its center. This happened precisely (and conveniently) at the time when the Jesuits were under severe attack from Rome because of the Malabar Rites controversy, and needed to show proof of their apostolic efforts in South India.⁵⁰ Still, there is no reason

49 [...] *nam ter per diem meditabatur cum illis ex contritione, et lachrymis, ex distinctâ, et minutâ culparum[m] confessione, ex firmis renovandâ in melius vitæ, et usque[ue] ad mortem perseverandi in Dei obsequio, et timore propositis, compertum[m] est uberam extitisse fructum[m] in Exercitiis; licet multi essent mirum[m] est quam reverente silentium[m] servaverint, et modestè processerint, ardentemque[ue] desideraverint in virtutibus proficere. [...] Tam pium opus sibi gratum esse speciali favore comprobavit Deus. Cum enim exercitantes propter summam siccitatem atque[ue] ariditatem caritatem fame, et siti durius laborarent, magnam vim pluvie concessit, quæ in fossis arte concavatis ad plures menses restagnaret.* Carlo Michele Bertoldi to Michelangelo Tamburini (Aur [Āvūr], 16 August 1719), ARSI, Goa 20, ff. 135–136, here 135^{r/v}.

50 Županov (*Disputed Mission*, 196) describes “utopian fragments produced by the missionaries” in the Madurai mission, which “configured the position of a very Jesuit public selfhood, grounded in social know-how and well equipped to assume leadership within the indigenous communities of new converts.”

to doubt that the experience of the retreats was transformative for the catechists, and that a great number of them attended the gatherings of 1718–1719 in Vaṭukarpēṭṭai, Āvūr, and Ēlākkuricci out of enthusiasm. In a second letter written in 1720, Bertoldi describes how even larger crowds gathered in Tuticorin (Tūttukkuṭi), an important commercial town and a Catholic center on the Fishery coast, where he traveled in early 1720 to administer another month-long retreat.⁵¹

Unfortunately, we have no first-hand report regarding the exercises after this date. The letters written by Bertoldi and the other missionaries involved are not preserved in the Jesuit archives, and only the responses written by General Tamburini survive.⁵² Still, thanks to four messages penned by Tamburini on September 1727 we understand that the practice of giving the exercises to large groups of catechists was soon met with opposition within the mission. Three of these messages were sent to Bertoldi, Beschi, and Antonio Riccardi (1672–1735), another Italian Jesuit who was Superior of the Madurai mission at the time. In the letter to Bertoldi, Tamburini expresses his concern for the burgeoning hostility against the exercises, mentioning specifically the troubles Beschi had to face in the course of the previous year because of the retreat he had organized at Ēlākkuricci.⁵³ In the second letter to Beschi, Tamburini voices the same preoccupations, and reiterates his support of the missionary and of the whole enterprise.⁵⁴ In the third message for Riccardi, the General mentions the hostility towards the exercises in the context of the following, bitter evaluation of the state of affairs in the Madurai mission:

But, much as I dread the rage of the heathen [king] and his innate hatred towards Christ,⁵⁵ I fear even more internal disorders and conflicts, and the opposition that has arisen against the *Spiritual Exercises*, thanks to

51 Carlo Michele Bertoldi to Michelangelo Tamburini (Aur [Āvūr], 31 August 1720), ARSI, Goa 20, ff. 141–142; a copy in Goa 20, ff. 143–144.

52 The loss of the letters written after 1720 is noted also in Besse, *La Pratique des Exercices*. Besse, however, did not know of the extracts from Tamburini's letters, transcribed and organized in chronological order in the volume of the *Epistolæ generalis* regarding the Malabar Province in ARSI, Goa 1.

53 Michelangelo Tamburini to Carlo Michele Bertoldi, ARSI, Goa 1, f. 54^{r/v}. The General acknowledges receipt of three letters by the missionary in 1720, 1725 and 1726, of which the last two are lost to us.

54 Michelangelo Tamburini to Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi, ARSI, Goa 1, f. 53^v.

55 This is likely a reference to the hostility of the Maratha rulers of Thanjavur towards the missionaries; see below, notes 79 and 80.

which so many fruits have been collected, and the neophytes have developed a firmer stance against adversities, so that their triumph against the tyrant should prove more glorious. Yet in the midst of this, when their spiritual nourishment has been suspended and their ill-advised pastors have drawn in various endeavors, how can they not fear the ultimate destruction? Until now, I was truly happy about this mission: a zeal for the salvation of souls evidently burnt with it, and no means had been neglected in order to obtain it. Peace, and the harmony of souls prospered, perhaps to the point of generating envy in others; [...] However, the situation has completely changed. The souls of our members are drifting apart, and the 'national' spirit begins to sneak in; how many evils have grown out of just one head!⁵⁶

In this letter, Tamburini identifies among the evils behind the opposition to the retreats the emergence of disagreements among missionaries from different countries. Indeed, the three men to whom he wrote these friendly letters were Italians, while main opponent of the practice of retreats, the Provincial of Malabar Antonio Dias (1666–1726), was Portuguese. National differences had always been present within the Society. Historians have argued that throughout the seventeenth century, for instance, Italian missionaries had the tendency to adopt the strategy accommodation, while Portuguese Jesuits were often more directly involved with the Portuguese colonial enterprise.⁵⁷ In eighteenth-century South India, this picture was further complicated by

56 [...] *at, quanvis ad Ethnici furorem, innatumq[u]e in Christum odium exhorruerim, magis timui a domesticis disturbis, ac dissidiis, atq[u]e contrarietate comota in Exercitia Spiritualia, unde tot fructus colligebantur, firmioremq[ue] in adversitatibus constantiam concipiebant Neophiti, ut gloriosorem de tyranno reportarent triumphum: per id enim subtraheretur spirituali subsidio, et male consultis pastoribus in diversa studia tractis, quid ni ultima strages pertimescatur? Ego equidem in ista Missione bene mihi hucusq[ue] complacebam: in illa quippe flagrabat salutis animarum studium, nullo pretermisso medio ad eam obtinendam; vigeat ad aliorum fortasse invidiam pax, et animorum consensus; [...] Mutata vero modo scena, in diversas partes scinduntur sociorum animi, serpereg[ue] incipit nationalis spiritus: quanta ab uno capite pullulabunt mala!* Michelangelo Tamburini to Antonio Riccardi, ARSI, Goa 1, f. 54^v–55^r.

57 This distinction simplifies the complex relationship between members of the Society and their countries of origin, analyzed in Luke Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On the role of Portuguese Jesuits in the construction of the Portuguese imperial *imaginaire*, see Chakravarti, *Empire of Apostles*; on the different approaches of an Italian (Roberto Nobili) and a Portuguese missionary (Gonçalo Trancoso Fernandes) to South India as a mission field, see Ines G. Županov, "Aristocratic Analogies and Demotic Descriptions."

the fierce competition regarding jurisdiction over local Christians between the *padroado* missions of the Jesuits, such as the Madurai mission, the *Propaganda Fide* missions responding directly to Rome, such as the Capuchin missions in Pondicherry and Madras, and the Jesuit mission to the Carnatic, directly dependent on the French crown. The problem of jurisdiction was closely related to the question of whether accommodation was a viable strategy in South India—*Propaganda* missionaries in the Tamil region generally thought it was not, unlike most Jesuits, and they were quite vocal about their opinion.⁵⁸ The envy to which Tamburini refers in this letter might indicate the hostility the Society was facing at that time, and the virulent attacks that member of other religious orders in India, especially the Capuchins, directed against the Society and its style of evangelization.⁵⁹ All of this, he claimed, had sprung out of one “head,” or maybe “fundamental principle,” whose identity is not clear—but this might be a reference to the Malabar Rites controversy, as the root of all evils befalling the mission.

Returning to the retreats, the nature of the opposition they faced is further clarified by the fourth letter that Tamburini wrote on the same day, addressed to Antonio Dias.⁶⁰ Tamburini begins this letter by praising the abundant fruits of the exercises in Rome as well as in the Madurai mission.⁶¹ He then mentions his concern after learning that Dias had released three decrees to limit their practice in the mission. These decrees, recapitulated in the letter, forbade missionaries from giving the exercises outside of their residence, giving them to groups of more than thirty people, and giving them to those people who had already taken them once.⁶² Tamburini orders the Provincial to suspend

58 Even though the article by Paolo Aranha (“«Glocal» Conflicts”) complicates this picture by showing how Capuchins in Madras also adopted accommodationist strategies towards the local British residents.

59 See especially Aranha, “Les meilleures causes embarrassent les juges.”

60 Antonio Dias (1666–1726) was twice Superior of the Madurai mission, in 1705 and 1716. He was also Visitor of the mission, and in this role, he spent many months at Āvūr in 1717. Léon Besse, *Catalogus Missionariorum qui in veteri Madurensi Missione laboraverunt* (Trichinopoly: St. Joseph Industrial School Press, 1908), viii–ix.

61 Tamburini’s support of the practice of the exercises is coherent with his “forte zelo per la propagazione degli *Esercizi spirituali*” that emerges from other sources; see Capoccia, “La casa di esercizi,” 163.

62 1.a *Nullus Missionariis extra propriam Resid.am tradat exercitia spiritualia*: 2.^a *qui exercetur, non excedant numerum 20 aut ad sūmum 30*: 3.^a *Tempore exercitiorum denuo adventantes, et ad aliquot dies meditationes audiendo exercitari volentes non admittantur*. Michelangelo Tamburini to the Fr. Provincial of Malabar [Antonio Dias], ARSI, Goa 1, ff. 55^r–56^r, here 55^v.

them immediately.⁶³ He writes that missionaries are few, and among them, even fewer have the strength and linguistic abilities to give the exercises; they should therefore be allowed to travel. Finally, he orders Dias to support the exercises in all possible ways.⁶⁴ The issue of conflicting nationalities is never explicitly mentioned, but Tamburini ends his message with an appeal for harmony within the mission. Tamburini was clearly displeased with Dias, as he would also prove to be with his successor Emanuel de Silva. The sources show that in 1729 he even attempted to have Bertoldi elected as the new Provincial of Malabar, but the attempt failed—by then, having an Italian in charge of a Jesuit Province under Portuguese patronage had become unviable.⁶⁵

Still, Tamburini's injunctions were effective with regard to the practice of retreats. In a letter written the following year, on 21 February 1728, he mentions learning that Dias had already retracted his decrees.⁶⁶ In the same letter, he shares his satisfaction with the fact that Beschi's good name had been restored, and the missionary was finally able to go back to "the place from which he had been called out," that is the Madurai mission and more specifically the Ēlākkuricci residence.⁶⁷ Tamburini expresses similar feelings in another letter, written on the same day to the missionary Louis Noël De Bourzes. He is relieved that Beschi, after having spent the previous years in the Maravar region to collect evidence for yet another inquiry related to Brito's process of canonization, had finally been reinstated and put in charge of the Ēlākkuricci church.⁶⁸ Besides his interest in the practice of the exercises, Tamburini's concern for Beschi, for his fame and well-being, is remarkable—in Chapter Three we will explore some of its possible causes.

For the time being, the situation was once again favorable, and the retreats resumed. In the annual letter of 1730 João Vieira (b. 1695) writes that Beschi organized a retreat for all the catechists of the Madurai mission, and describes the daily activities during that retreat as follows:

63 [...] *æquum duco suspendi, imo interim supersedere (nisi aliud præter dicenda gravius obstet) ejusmodi ordinationibus*. Ibidem.

64 [...] *injungo, ut omni ope, omniq[ue] studio ubiq[ue] promoveat tam sanctum opus*. Ibidem.

65 Information about the process of electing a new Provincial of Malabar after the death of Emanuel de Silva (including the failed attempt to elect Bertoldi) can be found in ARSI, Goa 1, ff. 61–63. The relationship between imperial *padroado* and Jesuit missions to South India (and especially the Madurai mission) is the focus of Chakravarti's *Empire of Apostles*.

66 Michelangelo Tamburini to Manuel Machado (21 February 1728), ARSI, Goa 1, f. 58^r.

67 *loco, a quo evocato fuerat*. Ibidem.

68 I go back to the documents of the 1726 inquiry in the next chapter, when investigating their connection with the composition of the *Vētaviḷakkam*.

Half of the catechists of the whole Mission, by order of the superiors, met at Ēlākkuricci for the *Exercises* of our holy Father St. Ignatius. This was not without great labor for the Father, who had composed for this purpose a skillful, elegant, and powerful book in Tamil—a language he knows very well—that explains in an orderly and methodic way the duties and obligations of the catechists, so that it was used as a spiritual reading for eight days. Besides, [the Father] was always and tirelessly present for the meditations at all hours, either joining in with a loud voice, or explaining something in the lecture at hand. And to such a great labor corresponded a proportionate result. One man, on the fifth day of the exercises, his voice broken by sobbing, threw himself at the feet of the Father asking for permission to leave, because, as he himself said, he was unable to bear the weight of the truths that he had discovered in the meditations. In the end, everyone purified their soul with a general confession, to the great consolation of the missionary.⁶⁹

First, this passage emphasizes once again the strong emotional responses of the catechists, which will go as far as triggering, as reported in a later section of this letter, the self-sacrifice of one of those who attended the retreat, a certain Rayen, who died while enthusiastically curing the sick.⁷⁰ As we already noted, by the early eighteenth century, catechists were often described as sharing with the missionaries the desire of sanctification through self-sacrifice. These descriptions were part of the Jesuit rhetorical move to fashion their converts into saints, but clues scattered throughout the sources also point to acts of self-fashioning by the catechists themselves, as in the case of Xiluei Nayquen.⁷¹ Secondly, when describing the manual used to give the exercises, Vieira is likely

69 *Dimidia totius Missionis Catechistarum pars, superiorum iussu in eadem Elacurrichiensi ecclesia S[ancti] P[atris] N[ostri] Ignatii exercitia obivit, non sine magno Missionarii labore, qui, præterquam quod ad hoc ipsum ea, quam callet, Tamulicæ linguae peritia, elegantia, ac efficacia librum composuerat, catechistarum munera, ac obligationes ita partite, ac disposite exponentem, ut per integros octo dies semper lectioni spirituali inserviret, horis omnibus tum meditationis, cum elata voce contexendo, tum lectionis, aliqua subinde explicando, semper adfuit indefessus. At laboris tanto par utiq[ue] fructus. Aliquis 5^o exercitiorum die, singultibus vocem prohibentibus, ad P[atris] pedes provolutus abeundi facultatem postulabat, eo quod, ut ipse aiebat, agnitarum meditationibus veritatum ponderi ferendo jam esset impar. Omnes denique cum maxima Missionarii consolatione generali confessione animam expiarunt.* João Vieira to Franz Retz (Calpaleam [Kalpālaiyam], 18 June 1731), ARS1, Goa 54, ff. 589–596, here 592^v.

70 Ibidem.

71 On the relationship between Jesuits and their converts' saintly self-fashioning, see Županov, *Disputed Mission*, 195–236.

referring to the *Vētiyarolukkam*, a book written by Beschi that we will explore in the next chapter. For our purposes here, simply note how meditations happened through reading aloud. The catechists who attended these retreats were expected to have a certain familiarity with literary Tamil, which would allow them to read—mostly in group lessons, such as the one described here, but likely in private too—the complex and abundant Catholic literature written by this time for their edification.

The importance of nurturing literacy and even a certain amount of literary refinement among the catechists emerges clearly in the annual letter of 1731, compiled by Beschi. In this letter, the Jesuit laments that few catechists in the mission could master the intricacies of literary Tamil. In order to remedy this situation, in the 1730 he opened at Ēlākkuricci a school of classical Tamil, in which the practice of the *Spiritual Exercises* was paired with rhetorical training.⁷² That Tamil literature and erudition could help the spread of Christianity, as Beschi states almost nonchalantly in this letter, is not a straightforward point. Chapters Three and Four will be devoted to exploring the exegetical strategies that allowed this conception to emerge. For now, we should note that this is the first and last time Beschi mentions his school of classical Tamil, and also the last time Jesuit letters openly discuss the practice of the *Spiritual Exercises* in the Madurai mission. The great political and social unrest of the 1730s and early 40s in the Tiruchirappalli and Thanjavur areas, paired with the acute phases of the Malabar Rites controversy, changed the focus of the missionaries' correspondence. It is not unlikely that the classical Tamil school continued until 1742, when Beschi left Ēlākkuricci for Tiruchirappalli, but Jesuit sources do not mention whether any of these practices and institutions—the *Exercises*, the retreats, or the school—continued and spread independently from missionaries and their efforts. Mapping the circulation of the texts written in this context might be our only way of addressing this question, a strategy we will explore in Chapter Six. In the meantime, the next paragraphs will be devoted to teasing out the articulation of this training project in the 1720s, and its locations.

72 *Cum verò hujus in disciplinæ studio ipse pluribus consumptis annis, non litteratus quidem, sed litterator videar, me tamulico gymnasio præficiunt [...] sub finem, pijis Sancti Ignatij exercitationibus exsecuti, divinis humanisque disciplinis veluti duplici armaturâ fortium muniti, dimissi sunt.* Costanzo Beschi to the General of the Society (Madurai Mission, 4 September 1732), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 597–602, here 600v. We will reflect further on the school, and on this passage by Beschi, in Chapter Three.

4 Spiritual Retreats between Italy and India

Many Jesuits contributed to the success of the retreats in the 1720s and early 30s, but the soul of the project was Carlo Michele Bertoldi. This missionary has received little attention so far, probably because the sources about his life are sparse. Yet they suggest a trajectory that would lead him to become the promoter of new forms of catechist training in Madurai. Born in Valperga, a small town outside Torino, Bertoldi spent his formative years in the Jesuit Province of Milan in northern Italy (*Provincia Mediolanensis*). He joined the Society of Jesus in 1682 at the age of twenty, and in 1684 we find him in Genova working as a catechist in the galleys, probably among convicted criminals sentenced to work at the oar. Two years later he was still in Genova, but in charge of the catechesis in the Church of St. Sixtus. Even after moving to Nice to continue his studies, he was tasked to teach the catechism to the young disciples of the Jesuit College. Thus, from the beginning of his career within the Society, Bertoldi's role—maybe even his vocation—was to teach the catechism rather than to work as a professor of Latin or rhetoric, as many of his companions did.⁷³

In 1691, Bertoldi was still studying in Nice, but the following year he moved to the Brera College in Milan, where he stayed until his departure for India. It is not clear what his occupation was in Milan—oddly, even though he is listed among the Jesuits residing there, his profile is nowhere to be found in the *Catalogi breves* nor in the *triennales* for those years.⁷⁴ In 1693, he expressed for the first time to General Tirso Gonzales (1624–1705) the desire to become a missionary with a letter that contains many tropes of the *indipetæ* genre. Bertoldi had probably had the occasion to hear stories about the Indies while in Genova, since it was from that city that many missionaries embarked from Italy towards Lisbon, and from there to Asia. In 1693 he confessed that he had been nurturing his missionary vocation for many years, and could not restrain anymore from expressing his wish that, paraphrasing Ignatius's *Exercises*, “when the time of my death will arrive, I will be able to look back and count many years spent for the love of God, the salvation of the souls and the glory of the Society in the missions of the Indies, where my thoughts fly, and lives my desire.”⁷⁵ For

73 Information from ARSI, Med., 3 and 4, *Cat. Brev. Provinciae Mediolanensis*.

74 This is remarkable, because these catalogs included even the most unremarkable young Jesuits, and suggests (to me at least) that his status within the Society might have been unclear during those years.

75 *Dio voglia ch'io possa in punto di morte contare molti anni di vita spesi per amore di Dio, e per salute dell'Anime, e per gloria della Comp[agni]a nelle missioni dell'Indie dove volo col pensiero, vivo col desiderio.* ARSI, F.G. *Indipetæ*, n. 521. This passage is a rephrasing of the

some time, Gonzales avoided giving a clear answer—missionaries were carefully selected among the many Jesuits wishing for the Indies—but eventually gave his approval. The two men had a final exchange of letters in September 1696, while Bertoldi was waiting to leave from Genova for the mission, and Gonzales granted him permission to recite the offices of the Blessed Sacrament and Immaculate conception outside Advent and Lent times once in India.⁷⁶

Bertoldi reached Goa in 1697 at the relatively old age of 37. After spending two years on the Fishery Coast working among staunch Catholic Parava fishermen, a common practice to acquaint newcomers with the Tamil context, he entered the Madurai mission in 1699. The surviving annual letters have little to say about his first years in the mission. He is mentioned for the first time in the catalog of 1705, where he is listed among the missionaries ready to take up administrative roles.⁷⁷ A few years later, in the annual letter of 1708, Antonio Dias describes him as already in charge of the Āvūr residence, where he would spend most of his life, and Superior of the mission.⁷⁸ Yet Bertoldi's initial years were marked by two extraordinary events, both of them the result of deep errors of judgment that would affect the relationship between the Jesuit mission and the Church for years to come. The name of Bertoldi surfaces in the documents relating to both these circumstances.

The first was the death of a Jesuit missionary, João Carvalho, in the prisons of Thanjavur. In 1701, less than two years after joining the Madurai mission, Bertoldi was one among three Jesuits captured in Thanjavur and held prisoners by the Maratha king Śahājī (r. 1684–1712).⁷⁹ The reasons for this imprisonment

fourth rule for the distribution of the alms in the *Spiritual Exercises*: “[341] The Fourth: Imagining how I will find myself on judgment day, I will think well how at that time I will wish that I had carried out this office and duty of my ministry [...]” Ignatius de Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991), 208. I thank Pierre-Antoine Fabre, who alerted me to this reference.

76 Tirso Gonzales to Carlo Michele Bertoldi (10 September 1696), in ARSI, Med. 38, f. 127^v.

77 The catalogs of the Malabar Province (from *the catalogus primus* to the *quintus*) for the year 1705 are in ARSI Goa 29, ff. 161–169.

78 Antonio Dias to Michelangelo Tamburini (Madurai, 20 July 1709), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 484^r–494^v.

79 The hostility of the Maratha kings toward the mission became a topos of missionary letters from the early eighteenth century onwards, and was mirrored by the criticism and complaints of the missionaries against the Thanjavur rulers. King Ekoji I [Ekoji] (b. 1629), the first Maratha ruler, was depicted a tyrant (*he tyranno, que nê com D[e]os nem com os homes tem lealdade*) only concerned with accumulating money. See André Freire to F.G. Giovanni Paolo Oliva, *Annuia da missam de Madurey dos annos 1679 680 e 682* (Cattur [Kāṭṭūr], 25 February 1682), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 401–414, here f. 401^v. His successor Shahaji [Śahājī] (r. 1684–1712) was equally despised, but missionaries also noticed, although scornfully, his

are not clear. According to the missionaries, it was simply the response to an aggressive anti-Hindu play performed by local Christians in Thanjavur, which irritated the king.⁸⁰ According to other sources, including the diaries of the Venetian self-made doctor and Pondicherry resident Nicolò Manucci (1638–1717), the persecution had both deep origins and proximate causes. Among the deep origins, Manucci lists several offenses that French Jesuits had perpetrated against their Brahmin neighbors in Pondicherry. Offended, those Brahmans retaliated by asking to their relatives and acquaintances in Thanjavur to ill-dispose the Maratha king towards the missionaries working there.⁸¹ Among the three contingent causes identified by Manucci, the most striking is “an imprudent act of one of the reverend Jesuit fathers’ native catechists. [...] The catechist made so bold as to say several times in addressing the Hindu crowd, that the father whom they saw and heard speaking their language was the brother of, and of the same Society as, the Brahman priests of the Christians who dwelt at Tanjor, and consequently those referred to were this one’s brothers, members of one and the same body or company. Thus they (the Tanjor fathers) must be Pariahs, for he (the Pondicherry Jesuit), of whom he spoke was reputed such in the minds of these peoples.”⁸²

The Jesuit explanation and Manucci’s analysis point to two different dimensions of the mission. In the first case, the emphasis is on the enthusiasm of local converts, and on the strength of popular forms of Catholicism. Manucci, on the other hand, highlights the difficulty for the missionaries to control their closer collaborators, their catechists. The independence and power of these men appear as one of the pitfalls of Jesuit accommodation. In this case, they made it impossible for the missionaries to manage their multiple identities,

passion for the arts: *Shahaji gasta o tempo, não sô dedia mas grande parte da noite em ver danças, e ouvir des cantes de molheres* [...] Francisco Laynes to F.G. Tirso González, *Carta annua da missão de Maduré do anno de 1701*, AJPF, Fond Brotier, vol. 79, ff. 80–88, here 82f.

80 Speak about this imprisonment letters and reports by Francisco Laines (ARSI, Goa 53, ff. 18–19), Simão Carvalho (ARSI, Goa 49, ff. 260–264) and Antonio de Barros. See also John Zacharias Anthonysamy, “The Foundation of Christianity in the Nayak and Maratha Kingdom of Thanjavur and the Formation of the Diocese of Thanjavur” (PhD diss., Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, 2013), 170–171.

81 One (partial) account of the causes of the 1701 persecution is Nicolò Manucci, *Storia do Mogor, or Mogul India 1653–1708*, vol. 3, transl. William Irvine (London: John Murray, 1919), 309–333. According to Manucci the Thanjavur persecution was connected with the ongoing hostilities between Brahmans and Jesuits in Pondicherry. The responsibility lay mostly with the Jesuits and their methods of evangelization, which Manucci wittily but harshly criticized; he was, after all, a good friend of the Capuchins in Pondicherry.

82 Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, 319–320.

and their political and social ties with colonial as well as local powers in South India. In other words, Manucci interpreted the persecution as the result of a glitch in the carefully woven fabric of Jesuit missionary identities, which included their conflicting roles as staunchly anti-Brahman in the French colony of Pondicherry, and as Indian holy men in the Tamil inland.⁸³ Unsurprisingly, the Jesuits chose to mention the first reason when writing to their superior in Rome. Whatever might be the causes of the arrest, Bertoldi was soon released. His fellow missionary José Carvalho, on the other hand, died in prison in 1701. From that moment onward, it was difficult for the missionaries to enter and evangelize in the kingdom, and especially in the city of Thanjavur.

The second event was the publication of the decree of condemnation of the Malabar Rites. In 1703, not long after being released from the Thanjavur prisons, Bertoldi was chosen by Laines, the Superior of the mission, to travel to Pondicherry in order to welcome the Apostolic Legate and Patriarch of Antioch Carlo Tomaso Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710), entrusted by the Holy See to inspect the Asian missions and contribute to the solution of the Chinese Rites. Bertoldi was selected because he already knew Tournon, probably from his time at the Jesuit College in Nice.⁸⁴ In June 1704, before leaving for China, Tournon issued the decree *Inter Graviore*s, forbidding many of the accommodated practices adopted by the Jesuits in Madurai, including the use of ashes, ritual baths, and the sacramental segregation of the Dalits. Shockingly, Bertoldi figured as one of Tournon's main informants.⁸⁵ In other words, a missionary who practiced accommodation, like most of the Jesuits in Madurai, became an authoritative, although unintentional, source of condemnation of the Jesuit accommodationist mission. This was clearly a scandal, and Jesuit documents written in response to the *Inter Graviore*s always tried to downplay the importance of Bertoldi's conversations with Tournon, and to stress his ignorance of the country. Still, the list of the sources used by Tournon for the elaboration

83 On the role of the Jesuits in Pondicherry, see Agmon, *A Colonial Affair*.

84 Giorgio dell'Oro, "«Oh quanti mostri si trovano in questo nuovo Mondo venuti d'Europa!»: Vita e vicissitudini di un ecclesiastico piemontese tra Roma e Cina: Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710)," *Annali di storia moderna e contemporanea* IV, 4 (1998): 305–335.

85 The text of the *Inter Graviore*s was included in the papal bull of condemnation of the Malabar Rites, *Omnium Sollicitudinum*, first issued in 1744; and reprinted several times, including in the *Bullarium* of Pope Benedict XIV, Benedicti XIV Pont[ifex] Opt[imus] Max[imus] olim Prosperi Cardinalis De Lambertinis, *Bullarium. Tom. I, in quo continentur Constitutiones, Epistolae etc. editae ad initio pontificatus usque ad annum MDCCXVI* (Prati: in Typographia Aldina, 1845), 422–425, here 422.

of his decree clearly includes a ten-page statement signed by Bertoldi. The contents of the statements are unknown, since the dossier on which Tournon prepared the *Inter Graviore*s has not been found (we only have the index of the volume as it existed in the eighteenth century).⁸⁶ Yet there is no doubt that Bertoldi, albeit unwillingly, contributed to shaping Tournon's vision of the Madurai mission.⁸⁷

By condemning the practice of accommodation, the publication of the *Inter Graviore*s shook the foundations of the mission. Jesuits tried for decades to have it revoked, before it was eventually confirmed by Pope Benedict XIV with the bull *Omnium Sollicitudinum* in 1744. Among the immediate and most vocal opponents of Tournon's decree was Francisco Laines, the Superior of the mission. Laines wrote his lengthy treatise, the *Defensio Indicarum Missionum*, precisely in response to the *Inter Graviore*s. In the book, Laines lamented that Tournon relied on untrustworthy sources, among them Bertoldi, who had spent only three years in the mission and could not possibly understand India very well after such a short time!⁸⁸ In support of this view, in August 1704—only two months after the publication of the *Inter Graviore*s—Bertoldi was asked to testify along with other missionaries in Madurai against Tournon, and in favor of Laines' analysis of the strategies necessary for the mission. These witnesses were annexed to the *Defensio*, together with the sworn statements of the catechists. But can a ten-page report be canceled by a short statement,

86 The inventory of the documents used by Tournon to write the *Inter Graviore*s, including the statement by Bertoldi, can be found in APF, SC, Indie Orientali e Cina, Miscellanea 67. I thank Paolo Aranha for this reference.

87 A new piece of evidence on the interaction between Bertoldi and Tournon was recently brought to my attention. It is a petition presented by Bertoldi to Tournon, concerning precisely some of the adapted rites missionaries were compelled to introduce in South India. Among Bertoldi's requests in this petition, the most striking one is perhaps that of burning the bodies of dead Christians (*cremandi defunctorum cadavera*), thus following the Hindu tradition; Biblioteca Casanatense di Roma (henceforth BCR), Ms. 1634, f. 1r. It is not clear how this request related to the concession obtained by Roberto Nobili half a century earlier to burn the bodies of his Brahman followers (on this issue see Aranha, "Les meilleures causes," 264 ff.). Still, the text of this petition points to the fact that when Bertoldi met Tournon in 1704, he did so as the representative of the accommodationist mission.

88 *E duobus Missionariis a sua Excellentia appellatis, unus nempe P. Carolus Michael Bertoldus nondum tribus annis in Missione versatus erat; & licet eo tempore non exiguum illarum terrarum notitiam pro sua sagacitate adeptus esset, dubium nullum est, quin adhuc maiorem deinde comparaturus fit; Missus Puducherium fuerat, non ad res Missionum exponendas, sed ad salutandum nomine Provinciae Malabaricae Illustriss[imum] Patriarcham, cui ignotus non erat. Laines, *Defensio Indicarum missionum*, 273.*

and dismissed as a misunderstanding? Until the dossier of the *Inter Graviore*s reemerges, questions such as what Bertoldi said to Tournon, or how that contributed to the elaboration of the *Inter Graviore*s, have no real answer. Yet it seems significant that among all the witnesses in the *Defensio*, Bertoldi's statement is the only one that includes a strong conditional clause: "The rites and customs under examination," he swore, "are indeed necessary, *considering the current state of things*."⁸⁹

So, we have a man, used to laboring as a catechist among convicts and young noblemen alike, who immediately upon joining the mission was thrown first into prison, and then into the hands of a Curial prelate like Tournon. It is not difficult to imagine that he might have been at a loss, and unable to manage either situation. Still, after the complaints that he probably shared with Tournon, he kept worrying about his faux pas, and never raised his voice again. He spent the rest of his life in remote residences of the Madurai mission, where he found the sufferings his young exalted self yearned for, if we can trust a letter he wrote to Tamburini in 1719 that describes the horrible living conditions of missionaries and their converts after a famine in the Thanjavur region.⁹⁰ Notwithstanding his initial faux pas, Bertoldi cultivated a good relationship with Tamburini, who entrusted him with administrative roles over the years—he was Visitor and Superior of the mission at least twice, in 1708 and 1718. He dedicated most of his efforts in the late 1710s and in the 1720s to the educational project of the retreats, in continuity with his activities in Italy.⁹¹ He was in charge of the Āvūr residence for more than twenty years, and became known as Ñāṇappirakāca Cuvāmi, the name by which converts and catechists always referred to him in the 1726 inquiry for Brito's canonization.⁹²

With age came respect and fame of holiness, and the annual letter of 1728 reports that he often performed miraculous healing by the imposition of his hands, thus winning the veneration of local Christians. During the last years of his life, Bertoldi became weak and almost blind, and from the 1730s onwards

89 [...] *affirmo, & iuro in verbo Sacerdotis, prædictos mores, & ritus, considerato statu rerum præsentium, esse valde necessarios, cum ad conservandam rem Christianam, tum ad conversionem Gentilium* [...] Testimony of Bertoldi in Laines, *Defensio Indicarvm missionvm*, 601.

90 Carlo Michele Bertoldi to Michelangelo Tamburini (Aur [Āvūr], 16 Agosto 1719), ARSI Goa 20, ff. 135–136.

91 He is described in the catalogs as having a talent for teaching the catechists: *ad Neophytos Madurensis excolandos non vulgari talento pollet*, in the *Catalogus 2.us Sociorum Provinciae Malabaricæ anno Domini 1718*, ARSI Goa 29, ff. 189–190, here 189^r.

92 See AAV, Cong. Rit. Proc. 1697.

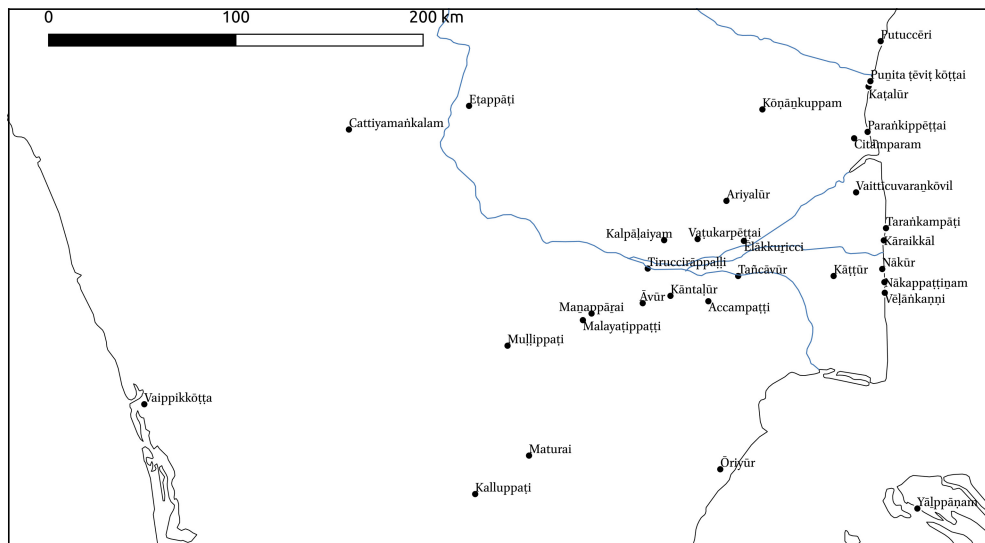


FIGURE 3 Map of the towns and villages of the Madurai mission along the Kaveri (18th century)

he needed the assistance of another missionary to manage his residence. Giovanni Battista Buttari (1707–1757) helped him during his final years, and took charge of Āvūr after Bertoldi died on 10 March 1740.⁹³

5 Missionary Strategies and Tamil Locations

Even though Bertoldi traveled widely in the mission to impart the exercises, the main center for the retreats was his residence at Āvūr. It was at Āvūr and in the nearby villages in the Kaveri region, Ēlāḱkuricci and Vātukarpēttai, that missionaries developed this spiritual practice into a method for training their catechists (Figure 3). What exactly made these locations, all of them old missionary stations, appear to be ideal centers for the development of this training? Dwelling on this question offers the opportunity to consider the role of the mission, its institutions and members, in the natural, social and political landscape of the Tamil country in the eighteenth century and beyond. Any attempt to study a process of localization cannot be separated from understanding, if possible, imagining, the historical locations that were the scene of this process. So, why and how did a remote hamlet such as Āvūr—located twenty kilometers

93 Bertoldi's death notice is in ARSI, Goa 29, f. 242^v.

south of Tirucchirappalli towards Pudukkottai, in the arid territories mostly inhabited by *kaḷḷars*—become a center of Tamil Catholicism at the turn of the eighteenth century?

Some sources claim that it all began in the seventeenth century, when the area was under the jurisdiction of the *pāḷayakkārars* of Pēraṁbūr-Kattalūr, in turn dependent on the Nāyakas of Madurai.⁹⁴ These rulers first granted Roberto Nobili the possibility of evangelizing in the village.⁹⁵ Yet during the second half of the century Āvūr was abandoned, if we are to believe the report of Manuel Rodrigues, then in charge of the residence of Kāntalūr. He wrote in the annual letter of 1682 that, when passing briefly through Āvūr, he had to leave almost immediately due to the hostility of local *kaḷḷars*, strongly averse to missionaries and to Christians in general.⁹⁶ The situation began to change in the 1690s, and definitely improved when the Nāyaka ruler Vijayaṛaṅka Cokkanāta (r. 1706–1732) ascended to power after the death of Queen Maṅkammāl (r. 1689–1705). He donated vast territories under his jurisdiction to the Toṇṭaimaṇ of Pudukkottai, who was then expanding and solidifying his power, and among these territories was Āvūr, which remained under the mostly benevolent jurisdiction of the Toṇṭaimaṇ well into the eighteenth century.⁹⁷

The French Jean-Venance Bouchet (1655–1732) was one of the first missionaries to be based at Āvūr, from 1696 until he was transferred to the Carnatic mission in 1702. He brought to the village the statue of Mary that is still venerated today, and built for her one of the few stone churches of the mission, thus sanctioning the role of this otherwise remote hamlet as one of the main centers of Catholicism in the area.⁹⁸ He also composed several devotional books in

94 The *pāḷayakkārars*, also known in English as *poligars*, are the little kings who shared the rule over the Tamil country after the dissolution of the Vijayanagara empire in the seventeenth century, until the British conquest of 1800. This political régime is the subject of Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993); for an historical overview, see esp. 19–107.

95 K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar, *A Manual of the Pudukkottai State. Volume 11, Part 11* (Pudukkottai: Sri Brihadamba State Press, 1944), 1020.

96 *Annuaire da missao de Madurey do anni de 1682 pera o nosso R.P. Geral*, André Freyre to the General of the Society (Varugapatti [Vaṭukarpēṭṭai], 14 May 1683), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 415^r–432^v.

97 On Vijayaranga Cokkanāta, see R. Sathianathayer, *Tamilaham in the 17th Century* (Madras: University of Madras, 1956). The donation of the territories to the Toṇṭaimaṇ is mentioned in the annual letter of 1708 (ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 484^r–494^v). Toṇṭaimaṇ was the name of the dynasty which ruled over the small kingdom of Pudukkottai from the seventeenth to the twentieth century; they are the focus of Nicholas Dirks's *The Hollow Crown*.

98 On Bouchet, see Francis Xavier Clooney, *Fr. Bouchet's India*, and Ines G. Županov, "La science et la démonologie. Les missions des Jésuites français en Inde (XVIII^e siècle)," in

Tamil, which might have inspired Bertoldi to follow in his footsteps.⁹⁹ The latter arrived in the village immediately after Bouchet, and from that time onwards resided at Āvūr for almost forty years, notwithstanding his frequent travels. In Āvūr, he survived droughts and famines, and the frequent passages of the soldiers mobilized by the campaigns of the Nāyakas and Maratha rulers in those decades. He cultivated a good relationship with the Toṇṭaimaṇ, so much so that in 1713 Irakunāta Rāya Toṇṭaimaṇ (1686–1730) gave him permission to move freely around his territories.¹⁰⁰ A few years later, after a passing army destroyed the old church, the center of the village was moved from old to new Āvūr, roughly a kilometer south of the original location, where Bertoldi's successor would build the stone church that survives there until today. By the late 1720s, Christians from all over the mission would travel to Āvūr to receive the sacrament of Penance, and thanks to Bertoldi's presence the village went from an isolated hamlet to being one of the spiritual and administrative centers of the mission in the early eighteenth century.¹⁰¹ Besides, Āvūr was only two and a

Missions d'évangélisation et circulation des savoirs (XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle), ed. Charlotte de Castelnaud-L'Estoile et al. (Madrid: Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 2011), 401–421. On the church Bouchet built at Āvūr, see Niekamp, *Histoire de la Mission Danoise*, vol. 1, 216–217: *La plus considérable, qui est bâtie à Aūr, est de figure octogone; elle a une porte à chaque face; elle est décorée d'un magnifique Autel, situé à peu près au milieu de la nef. Au-dessus de l'Autel est placée une statue d'environ trois piés de haut, qui représente l'image de la Vierge Marie: & plus bas, d'un côté est l'image de St. Ignace de Loyola; de l'autre côté est l'image de St. Xavier: Vis-à-vis la statue de la Vierge il y a une lampe qui brûle jour & nuit. Ceux qui viennent de loin pour faire leur dévotion prennent de cette huile & en emportent dans leurs maisons, dans la pensée que cette huile a une vertu miraculeuse & surnaturelle [...]*

99 Some devotional works in Tamil attributed to Bouchet—*Tarma naṭakkai*, *Nalla māraṇam*, *Nāṇa cañcivi*, etc.—have been published by S. Rajamanickam, on the base of paper manuscripts in the JAMP (see the Bibliography). However, they have never been translated nor critically analyzed.

100 The Pudukottai State Manual tells that the Toṇṭaimaṇ “granted a charter to the Father at Āvūr promising Christian debtors that sought refuge in the Church there freedom from arrest.” K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar, *A Manual of the Pudukottai State Volume 11, Part 1* (Pudukottai: Sri Brihadamba State Press, 1940), 765–766. The patent is mentioned in Louis Noël de Bourzes to Michelangelo Tamburini, *Litteræ Annue Missionis Madurensis anni 1713* (Madurai mission, 25 July 1714), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 516^r–541^r. An anecdote on the conversion of Maturanāyakam Piḷḷai, the ancestor of famous novelist Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai (1826–1889), throws partial light on Āvūr's fame in the eighteenth century. After suffering from rheumatic pains for several days, the god Ayyanār appeared to Maturanāyakam in a dream, and advised him to go to Āvūr. He did so, prayed in the village church, and talked with the missionary there (either Bertoldi or one of his successors) who helped him to relieve his pain. Positively impressed by the efficacy of Catholicism, Maturanāyakam converted (Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, 171–172).

101 As emerges from the documents of the 1726 inquiry on Brito, preserved in AAV, many cat-

half days by foot from the Jesuit residences in the Maravar region. So, during the decades immediately after the martyrdom of João de Brito, when the socio-political situation in the Maravar was hostile to the missionaries, it served as an administrative center for that region too.¹⁰²

The importance of this village within the mission, combined with its isolation, contributed to preserve local Catholic architecture and monuments during the times of turmoil and war in the eighteenth century and beyond. The location of old Āvūr, where Bouchet had erected his church and where Bertoldi initially resided, is still marked by a graveyard with the tombs of five Jesuits, nowadays surrounded by paddy fields. Locals claim that the very first Jesuit priest of Āvūr, Fr. Luís de Mello, is buried there. At the center of new Āvūr is the church built in the mid-eighteenth century by Fr. Tommasini and Fr. Homem, Bertoldi's successors, and inside this building is the much-venerated statue of Periyānāyaki mātā, installed at Āvūr by Bouchet and, according to local folklore, named Periyānāyaki by Costanzo Beschi himself.¹⁰³ In front of the church, safely stored within a tall stone building, is probably the most ancient, and certainly the most beautiful Christian ritual chariot (*tēr*) of Tamil Nadu (Figure 4). This was built in the mid-eighteenth century, and later enriched with intricate wooden decorations representing the fight of angels and demons when, after the suppression of the Society of Jesus, the Parish of Āvūr was administered by a so-called "Goan priest" Periya Rāyappā (in charge from 1798 to 1818).¹⁰⁴ Finally, not too far away from the church is the cemetery called Nantavaṇam, where nine priests are buried, including Bertoldi and his successors Homen

echists as well as regular Christians traveled to Āvūr annually to receive the sacrament of penance from Bertoldi, aka Nāṇappirakāca Cuvāmi.

102 The close distance and ease of travel between Āvūr and the Maravar region emerge in various private letters of Fr. Giovanni Battista Buttari to his brothers and sisters, preserved in ARSI, Op. NN. 128 I–II.

103 Local stories and a description of the monuments still standing at Āvūr are collected in two publications by Antōṇi Ṭivōṭṭa, one in English and one in Tamil, printed and available in loco: *Āvūr kōvil carittiram*, and *The History of Avoor Parish, The Ancient Mission Station*. The veneration of Mary as Periyānāyaki is particularly connected to Beschi, at least in popular culture; the church of Kōṇāṇkuppam is dedicated to Periyānāyaki and people claim that the statue now inside the church was brought to the village by Beschi himself (more on this legend in the next chapter, in connection with Ēlākkuricci).

104 This information, contained in the two pamphlets cited in the previous footnote, is derived from the palm-leaf historical records of this church, which I could not access but must still be in the possession of the Parish priest and the parishioners at Āvūr. These manuscript sources are cited in Léon Besse, *La Mission du Maduré. Historique de ses Pangous* (Trichinopoly: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1914), 95–117. The *tēr*, and the chariot procession at Āvūr have been studied in Joanne Punzo Waghorne, "Chariots of the



FIGURE 4 Detail of the decorations on the chariot (*tēr*) at Āvūr
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

and Buttari. Their tombs are in fact mandapa structures, and represent one of the few still-standing examples of the Dravidian style of architecture applied to Catholic religious buildings (Figure 5). They are simple, but together with a small number of other buildings in the same style, let us infer that Catholic architecture in the eighteenth century was at least partially adapted to the local context of the mission. The catechists would walk along these dusty streets, dotted with humble monuments in the shade of tall trees, during the breaks from the spiritual exercises that would prepare them to go and preach in the other villages of the Tamil country, to make them into many other Āvūrs.

Less central to the administrative life of the mission, the villages of Ēlākuricci and Vaṭukarpēṭṭai, where Bertoldi's collaborators, especially Beschi, organized retreats starting from 1719, were equally important Catholic centers. In the period under consideration these three locations—Āvūr, Ēlākuricci, and Vaṭukarpēṭṭai—shared some features that made them ideal for hosting the retreats for the catechists. First, they were safe spaces where missionaries enjoyed a certain amount of protection from local rulers, the *Toṇṭaimaṇ* of

God/s: Riding the Line between Hindu and Christian,” in *Popular Christianity in India: Riding between the Lines*, eds Selva J. Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 11–38.



FIGURE 5 The tomb where Bertoldi is allegedly buried in the Nantavaṇam cemetery at Āvūr
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

Pudukottai and the *pāḷayakkārar* of Ariyalūr, directly ruling over Ēlākkuricci.¹⁰⁵ This was partially the result of a larger policy of mild support to the missionaries that characterized the Nāyakas of Madurai, by then residing at Tiruchirappalli, under whose jurisdiction these two local kings were ultimately placed.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, in Madurai Nāyaka territories, churches were able in the course of the seventeenth century to enter local networks of patronage, and we know from the annual catalogs that by the end of the century many local missions and residences survived financially largely on the basis of donations from local Christians and non-Christians alike.¹⁰⁷ In other words, Christians were

105 The *pāḷayakkārar* of Ariyalur certainly patronized poets in the nineteenth century (see Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, 131–132); but the role of this small court in the eighteenth century is not well known. Some information on this small kingdom can be found in the account of the Uṭaiyārpālayam ruler in A. Vadivelu, *The Aristocracy of South-eastern India*, vol. 2 (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1984), 195–243.

106 It might be appropriate to recall here that it was the Madurai Nāyaka Kṛṣṇappa II who in 1595 first invited the Jesuits to establish a mission at his court, then still in Madurai. From that moment onwards, and notwithstanding occasional conflicts, these rulers were generally more favorable to Jesuits than other local dynasties, especially the Bhonsle of Thanjavur, who were extremely hostile to Christianity and its colonial implications in the eighteenth century.

107 There are three locations where these donations were recorded, following Tamil usages, on stones or copper plates: Ēlākkuricci, Kāmanāyakkappaṭṭi and Carukaṇi. Augustine Saulière, in *Red Sand*, 485, mentions that the church at Ōriyūr was also given to the missionaries as a *carvamāṇiyam*. I analyze the Ēlākkuricci donation in the next chap-

established social players in those regions, and the catechists were relatively safe to meet and work there.

These villages were further located close to the border of the Thanjavur kingdom, which after 1715 was completely inaccessible to missionaries due to the hostility of the Maratha kings.¹⁰⁸ As a result, the city and the surrounding region were evangelized solely by catechists. Supporting and controlling the Christians of that region thus became critical, even more so after the establishment in 1706 of the first Lutheran mission in the coastal town of Taraṅkampāṭi, better known as Tranquebar, in the early eighteenth century. Soon after Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719) and his fellow missionary Heinrich Plütschau (1676–1752) reached the town, they began to preach and convert precisely in the territories of the Thanjavur kingdom, with the help of a large number of catechists and collaborators they recruited over the years. Ziegenbalg had already opened a school for his catechists in Tranquebar in 1716, and even though we do not know the curriculum and organization of this school, it seems hardly a coincidence that Jesuits began organizing their retreats less than two years afterwards.¹⁰⁹ The competition between Jesuits and Lutherans was aggravated by the fact that the main conversion target of Lutheran missionaries and catechists was, at least in the beginning, Tamil Catholics. Even the catechists recruited by the Lutherans were often Catholic catechists who decided to embrace Lutheranism, as in the case of Rajanayakkan, one of the crucial figures to promote Protestantism in Thanjavur in those years.¹¹⁰

ter; the Carukaṇi copper plate is lost (it still existed in 1881, when it was mentioned in the account on the *The Cramam of Sarugani* now in JAMP 217/278, 7–8) but a copy of the grant is now preserved in JAMP 220/66. A partial transcription of this grant is in Mosse, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree*, 41–42. A transcription of the Kāmanāyakkappaṭṭi inscription is included in Robert Caldwell, *A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely, in the Presidency of Madras, from the Earliest Period to its Cession to the English Government in A.D. 1801* (Madras: E. Keys, and the Government Press, 1881), 236–237.

108 The Maratha kings' hostility led to the persecutions of Christians, and to the imprisonment and death of José Carvalho in 1701 (see notes 79 and 80 above). After a period of relative calm, the conflict resurfaced again in 1715 when Christianity was finally banned from the kingdom.

109 See Liebau, *Cultural Encounters*, 111–112.

110 On Rajanayakkan, see A.R. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes and Scribblers in Colonial Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2012), 213–214; and Liebau, *Cultural Encounters*, 304–310. Several letters written by Rajanayakkan in 1728 for the Lutheran missionary Benjamin Schultze (1689–1760) are copied in Schultze's diary for that year in CUL, MS SPCK/E2/1/1b.

Neither Catholic nor Protestant missionaries could enter Thanjavur, but their catechists could, and they did. They engaged in fierce spiritual battles that often became rather tangible too. The reports of Lutherans and Jesuits alike talk about threats, fires, and bitter conflicts, sometimes involving members of the same family, in case some individuals decided to turn Protestant without bringing their entire family with them. Jesuits were immensely preoccupied by the situation, which was as much a local as a global clash of two faiths and the worldviews they brought with them. Indeed, Protestants brought to South India forms of modernity—such as diary-writing, the printing press, public schools, the predilection for vernacular rather than classical languages—that were not part of Jesuit and Catholic culture in India.¹¹¹ The distance between Jesuits and Lutherans at this moment is well exemplified by their contrasting attitudes towards the printing press, and the copious literature they wrote against each other, which circulated in completely different ways. Despite their early attempts to introduce printing in Tamil, by the early eighteenth century the Jesuits exclusively relied on Tamil traditional modes of textual transmission, and they wrote and circulated their Tamil texts on palm leaves, though they had occasional access to paper.¹¹² Protestants, on the other hand, began printing and distributing extensively from the early 1700s onwards. I will explore some implications of these choices in Chapter Four. Certainly, a crucial strategy for opposing the Lutherans was to train good catechists, who would be firm in their faith, spiritually aware of the risks of the Protestant “heresy,” and endowed with the theological and literary knowledge necessary to oppose Lutheran catechists. The retreats partially fulfilled this need, and their locations at Āvūr, Ēlākkuricci, and Vaṭukarpēṭṭai made it so that the missionary had an army of saintly warriors on the sidelines, ready to be thrown against the Lutherans in the battlefield of Thanjavur.¹¹³

111 The literature on Protestant modernity in India is extensive; particularly interesting with regard to textual practices is Hephzibah Israel, *Religious Transactions in Colonial South India. Language, Translation, and the Making of Protestant Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

112 On the Jesuit press, see Bellary Shamanna Kesavan, *History of Printing and Publishing in India*, vol. 1; and S. Rajamanickam SJ, “Padre Henriques, the Father of the Tamil Press,” in *Proceedings of the Second International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies*, vol. II, ed. Ron Asher (Madras: International Association of Tamil research, 1917), 520–527.

113 The ferocious debates and the competition between Roman Catholic and Lutheran catechists in the territories of Thanjavur are well portrayed in the letters sent by the catechist Rajanayakkan to Schultze in 1728 (these are in CUL, MS SPCK/E2/1/1b; the dossier is unpaginated). In his first letter, Rajanayakkan describes his theological arguments with a Catholic catechist who convinced Rajanayakkan to offer him a copy of the Tamil Bible, only to burn it as a heretical book after the Lutheran catechist left. In the second letter that

Finally, these locations were in the northern part of the mission, relatively close to and easily in contact with Pondicherry. Even though the Madurai mission always remained under Portuguese *padroado*, by the early eighteenth century Portuguese imperial control over their South Indian territories was seriously undermined. The Dutch East India company controlled most of the coastal cities once belonging to the Portuguese crown, and their favor towards the Jesuits was fluctuating.¹¹⁴ The Catholic power on which missionaries relied was the French crown, which was based in the colonial town of Pondicherry and, at least until the Carnatic wars in the mid-eighteenth century, had great hopes to increase its influence in the region. The French king also directly sponsored one Jesuit mission to the Telugu-speaking territories of the Carnatic, which was in many respects an offspring of the Madurai mission.¹¹⁵ Missionaries in Madurai often traveled to Pondicherry, and the importance of this town further increased when Tournon published his decree there.¹¹⁶ The ensuing controversy on the Malabar Rites developed mostly in Pondicherry, where Jesuits had to articulate a compromise between their different roles as accommodated local savants, priests of the colony, and counselors to the

reached Schultze on 27 of January 1728, Rajanayakkan wrote: *Accordingly the [Catholic] Catechists, being come to Tanshaur, call'd the People together, and led them away to Elakuridshi. Where the Priest acquainted them that Rajanajakken was turn'd heretic; and ask'd them, if they thought that Right? They reply'd, what would you have us to do in it? The Priest made Answer: if Rajanajakken would come to me, I would give him a Fitting Reception; but since he abstains from so Doing, I leave him to Your Discretion. One of them saying, I will knock this Rajanajakkan down. The Priest reply'd, But if you shou'd Chance to kill him, it will raise up an Evil Report against us. (Non Credendo Credite. Believe it if you can)* [Ed. This is a note of Schultze, who translated the letter]. *After this Intercourse, the People return'd to Tanshaur; and at the Instigation of the Catechist N., Several of the Inhabitants out of those Eighteen Villages assembled, and went in a Body to Sinneien-paleam, the Village where I live, and offer'd many Insults to my Parents, as also to demolish my House. But Some of Every Rank amongst the Inhabitants of Sinneien-paleam prevented their carrying their Outrage to such an Height. The Priest mentioned in this remarkable passage is clearly Beschi.*

114 See for instance Achilles Meersman, "The Catholic Church in Tranquebar and Tanjore During the Formative Years of the Lutheran Mission," *ICHR* 1, 2 (1967): 93–112 for some observations on the situation in Tranquebar.

115 To date, there is no comprehensive monograph on the Carnatic mission apart from the introductory work by S. Joe Sebastian, *The Jesuit Carnatic Mission: A Foundation of Andhra Church* (Jesuit Province Society, 2004). Articles that focus on different aspects of this missionary enterprise are Murr, "Le conditions d'émurgence" (on the relationship between Jesuit missionaries and French orientalism); Županov, "La science et la démonologie."

116 And vice versa, French missionaries who would go on to work in Pondicherry or in the French Jesuit mission to the Carnatic would often get trained at Āvūr (see Besse, *La Mission du Maduré*, 95–97).

French crown. In this context, their enemies accused the missionaries of allowing pagan practices among their converts, and of double standards, as not-so-subtly implied by Nicolò Manucci in his analysis of the Thanjavur persecutions mentioned before. The vicinity of Pondicherry and the movement of people, things, and information between this city and the missionary outposts in the Kaveri region created a situation in which such opponents could easily gather (and manipulate) information. Thus, missionaries had to lead their local communities while also avoiding the spread of dangerous information, be it real or fictitious, regarding the mission. In this context, training the catechists was a crucial way of creating agents who could control the local, independent circulation of Catholicism. As we shall see in the next chapter, catechists made sure that local Christians would not relapse from Christianity into paganism or, even worse, create their own synthesis between the two.



In conclusion, we can now imagine the historical process of constitution and organization of the catechists as a spiritual and social élite as centered around a man and his collaborators, around a place, and a practice. Carlo Michele Bertoldi began to give the *Spiritual Exercises* to his catechists at Āvūr in the early eighteenth century, because his own training led him to do so. He introduced the exercises as a way to shape and control his catechist's thoughts and actions, at a moment when their identity and role was becoming more important and surfacing in multiple ways, including the early phases of Brito's canonization process. The exercises also helped the catechists to solidify their Catholic identity in opposition to Lutheran pressures at the time. This experiment took place at Āvūr, which became at this very time a center of Catholicism in the region.

These spiritual practices were the first steps in the direction of training the eyes and hearts of the catechists to read old Hindu poetry without faltering, and new Christian poetry with devotion. Little by little, these men were fashioned but also self-fashioned into an audience for Tamil Catholic literature written by the missionaries, and into an army of potential Tamil Catholic poets. At the turn of the eighteenth century, their voices remain almost invisible, hard to recover, just whispers in the archive. By the end of the century, we find many Catholic intellectuals reading, writing, and discussing Catholicism and its literature all over the Tamil region. Chapter Six will explore that later phase, which is however unthinkable without the first steps taken a century earlier in the context of the retreats. But what did the catechists do, exactly, during these retreats? What types of exercises were undertaken? What were the words, mental images, and sounds that surrounded them during this experience? The next

chapter will address these questions, and read closely the texts written for the spiritual retreats of this time. In a way, this philological strategy will mirror the eighteenth-century practices of the exercises, because we will see that, over the decades in the context of the Madurai mission, the dialogic nature of the *Exercises* was transformed into a logic of reading.

Tamil Manuals for Catholic Selves

In articulating the relationships between missionaries and catechists that we explored in the previous chapter, didactic and devotional literature was key. This chapter is devoted precisely to the exploration of three Tamil manuals written by the missionaries for the retreats and the spiritual education of the catechists in the decade when these were first introduced, between the 1720s and 1730s. They are the *Ñānamuyarci*, “Spiritual Exercises,” *Vēṭiyarolukkam*, “Discipline for the catechists,” and *Vēṭaviḷakkam* “Illustration of the scriptures.” These texts are in prose, but they go well beyond the writing attempts of the previous century.¹ Adopting a more refined literary style, they accommodate for the first time a wide range of topics beyond the theological and the catechetical, including historical narratives, sociological reflections and analysis of emotions. Indeed, at least Beschi conceived of his prose as belonging to the realm of literature, as we will see in Chapter Four when analyzing his grammatical works.² More central for our discussion here, the new topics are mobilized in most of these works to record in writing the spiritual instructions that were part of the conversation between the director and the catechists during the retreats. In other words, the texts are inherently dialogical, addressing directly their readers, and engaging them in textualized conversations.³

Such conversations really took place during the retreat at Āvūr that started in 1718, traveling from the page or the palm leaf into the mouths and hearts of the catechists, through the loud reading of the three texts listed above among

1 On earlier missionary prose in Tamil, see the Introduction. The role of missionary literature in the birth of prose in Tamil has been sometimes overly stressed, especially by Catholic scholars, as in Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar*; a more balanced discussion is Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, vol. 10.1, *A History of Indian Literature*, ed. Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974), 231–239. More recently, Sascha Ebeling has mapped the birth of literary prose, especially the genre of the novel, in *Colonizing the Realm of Words*; and David Shulman has analyzed the emergence of Tamil prose in connection with previous narrative literature, and issues of literary realism, in *Tamil: A Biography*, 255–269.

2 See Chapter Four, especially pages 189–190.

3 On the historical processes of transformation of the exercises into a textual practice, see Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Patrick Goujon, “The Spiritual Exercises in the Development of the Society of Jesus,” *The Acquaviva Project: Claudio Acquaviva's Generalate (1581–1615) and the Emergence of Modern Catholicism*, eds Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Flavio Rurale (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources.), 29–42; Patrick Goujon, *Les politiques de l'âme. Direction spirituelle et Jésuites français à l'époque moderne* (Paris: Classique Garnier, 2019).

groups of retreatants led by a Jesuit. Because they were embodied in such a way, these texts go far beyond the ventriloquism often attributed to Jesuit texts of this time.⁴ These manuals did not speak in name of the catechists, but gave them the very words through which they then could speak. In this regard, the early eighteenth-century textual production is rather unique. There is only one other spiritual manual, written in the seventeenth century and usually attributed to Nobili, which is known under the title of *Ñānōpatēcam: irupatteṭṭu piracāṅkaṅkal*, “Catechism in twenty-eight sermons.” This text was apparently composed for the education of the catechists, and was quoted in the literature we are about to explore.⁵ Yet this type of literature expanded exponentially with the organization of the retreats, which offered a new site and new modes of reading. Linking the social, spiritual, and literary aspects of this enterprise, the chapter shows that training catechists and elite Tamil converts to become Catholic individuals relied heavily on transforming them into readers of this new type of spiritual and dialogic literature.

This chapter also shows how, through reading and interiorizing the spiritual conversations in these manuals, and through living the experience of the retreats, catechists entered into a closer relationship with the mission and the Church. This allowed for a transfer of spiritual charisma and social authority from the missionaries to their catechists, which is either instantiated or described in the texts we will read. Jesuits were few at this time, as I mentioned. So, catechists had the task of preaching, catechizing, and managing the ritual, spiritual, and social life of Catholic communities throughout the Tamil country. They also healed and performed miracles, thanks to the powers they derived from their special affiliation with the mission and the Church. Yet the fact that these laymen were the face, hands, and voice of Catholicism locally created a certain amount of preoccupation among the Jesuits, who tried to control and discipline them while at the same time imparting them with the authority coming with their occupation. These tensions and negotiations are at the heart of the texts to which we now turn.

1 Creating a Catholic Self: The *Ñānamuyarci*

Even though the Jesuit letters do not mention the Tamil text used to give the *Spiritual Exercises* at Āvūr, only one text containing Ignatian meditations from

4 On the alleged ventriloquism of Jesuit sources, see Ginzburg, “Alien Voices.”

5 This catechism by Nobili was cited by Beschi in his *Vēṭiyarolukkam*, as we will explore in a moment; it was edited by S. Rajamanickam in 1965 (see Bibliography).

the 1730s has survived. This is the *Ñāṇamuyarci* (henceforth NM), whose title means precisely “spiritual exercises,” and which is furthermore attributed to Bertoldi by various sources.⁶ The NM was first printed in 1843 in Pondicherry, and the title page of this edition identifies the author as priest Ñāṇappirakācar Cuvāmiyār from Āvūr, which was Bertoldi’s Tamil name.⁷ A palm-leaf manuscript copied in 1825 by a certain Cañcīvi, grandson of the catechist of Karaīyānpaṭṭi, also attributes the text to him.⁸ Finally, as early as 1730 an old manuscript copy of the NM was sent to Paris, where it is still preserved, and shows that the book existed and was in use precisely in the period of Bertoldi’s initial experiments with the *Spiritual Exercises*.⁹ While the structure, sections, and topics of the NM are the same across the available copies, there are also important variations. For now, and in short, I think that the work of the first editors of the NM in the nineteenth century is mostly reliable with regard to contents. How-

6 There is at least another book of meditations based on the *Spiritual Exercises* and written in the eighteenth century, the *Ñāṇattiyāṇaṅkaḷ*. I agree with Besse (“La Pratique des Exercices”) that this is likely the work of missionary Giacomo Tommaso de’ Rossi, an important yet forgotten Jesuit who was a prolific Tamil author.

7 *Ñāṇamuyarci*, 5. While the title page gives the author as Ñāṇappirakācar Cuvāmiyār, the introduction refers to him as Ñāṇappirakācar Nātar. Ñāṇappirakācar Cuvāmiyār was Bertoldi’s Tamil name, as proven by the minutes of the interrogation of the 1726 inquiry regarding Brito’s canonization (recorded in the original Tamil) where Christian witnesses called him that (AAV, Cong. Rit. Proc. 1697). See also Besse, “La Pratique des Exercices”. In principle, I accept the attribution of the NM to him, even though I think the text was probably a collective enterprise. For instance, both the language and the images in the book remind at times of those used by Beschi in some of his prose work and in his poetry, sometimes strikingly so (as I show later in this section). Yet there are also clues that Bertoldi conceived of its general structure, and indeed the places where he worked in Italy—Genova, Nice, Milan—were important centers for the organization of exercises for lay people. Considering how the NM was likely used by different missionaries to give the exercises during the retreats of 1718–1719, including Beschi, one might envision a scenario in which the text was enlarged and polished over time by all of them, even though Bertoldi had the original idea of the work.

8 The colophon further specifies that Cañcīvi, grandson of the catechist of Karaīyānpaṭṭi Cavarimuttā Piḷḷai, copied the book for Lācaru, son of Ñāṇappirakācam Piḷḷai, and finished doing so on the nineteenth day of the month of *mārkaḷi* in 1825. JAMP, uncataloged palm-leaf manuscript, f. 164^v.

9 The text is still in the archives of the BnF as Indien 463. The old catalog of the library refers to this manuscript as belonging to the *Fonds ancien* (n. XXIV) and gives it the date of 1750. The date is unjustified, and probably wrong, because the *Ñāṇamuyarci* (spelled *Gnana moarchi*, “livre pour donner la retraite spirituelle”) is listed among the books sent by the Jesuits to the abbé Bignon, librarian of the Royal Library in Paris, in 1730. *Memoire des Livres Malabares et Talanga envoyés en France par les Pères Jésuites de Pondichéry pour être mis à la Bibliothèque du Roy*, BnF, NAF 5442, ff. 5–6.

ever, the MEP fathers who ran the Mission Press updated the language and style of the text, as they did with much of the eighteenth-century devotional Tamil literature they published in that period.¹⁰ Therefore in this section, I read the 1843 printed version to illustrate the structure and overall themes of the NM, and give a general idea of the contents of the work. Yet I use a critically edited passage to propose a closer reading that also considers language and style, and add some remarks on the editorial process in the footnotes for those who might be interested.

At a first glance, it appears immediately that the NM is not a translation, literal or otherwise, of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. It is rather a book of meditations inspired by the *Exercises* but meant to be read by the retreatants, unlike Ignatius' text, meant for the priest giving the exercises.¹¹ Moreover, the NM is not a simple set of instructions for mental activities, but develops such activities on the page for the reader, and mimics the imaginative work that originally happened through real conversation by means of a language rich in questions and similes. In both respects, the NM is part of a global body of retreat manuals written in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when members of Society of Jesus began to give the exercises to lay people, first in Europe, then in Asia and South America.¹² These manuals were meant to be read during retreats of varying lengths, and the topics of meditation were usually those suggested by Ignatius for practitioners of the first week. The NM follows a similar model, and includes Ignatian meditation on the nature of Hell and sin, together with other topics more catechetical in aim, like particular and final judgment. It is organized in seventy-six short sermons or meditations (*uṇarttutal*), which are in turn divided into twenty-four exercises (*muyarci*). The retreatants meditated three times a day, as Bertoldi described in one of his letters, so the catechists must have worked their way through three exercises a day, each of them comprising three different topics of reflection.¹³ We know from the annual

10 See the Introduction for a discussion of such issues connected to sources and archives.

11 The same subversion of the model—with the reader being the retreatant instead of the priest—can be traced to some French manuals for the exercises, and was adopted in in China too. For an overview of both contexts, see Standaert, "The Spiritual Exercises," 91–93.

12 For the beginning of this movement in Europe, see Ignacio Iparraguirre, *Historia de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio*, vol. 3, *Evolucion en Europa durante el siglo XVII* (Roma: IHSI, 1973). Standaert, "The Spiritual Exercises," is a useful starting point to reflect on the situation outside of Europe; it contains an account of the practice of *Spiritual Exercises* in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century mission to China, and of the accompanying literature in Chinese.

13 Since each of the 24 exercises (*muyarci*) is divided into three meditations, I initially

letter of 1730 that these were read aloud by a group of catechists, and the missionary joined in every now and then with some explanations; so the retreats were still not based on individual reading, a practice whose beginnings are difficult to map in South India.¹⁴

Bertoldi was certainly familiar with the existing body of retreat literature, especially with the manuals produced in Italy in the decade just before his departure. Among the texts that circulated in Italy in the late seventeenth century, the NM shows analogies especially with the structure and the arguments laid out in Carlo Ambrogio Cattaneo's *Esercizi Spirituali di Sant'Ignazio*. Cattaneo (1645–1705) was a Jesuit preacher and professor of rhetoric who wrote a set of meditations based on the first week of the *Exercises* to be used during the retreats for lay people he organized in Milan.¹⁵ These retreats were extremely popular in the late seventeenth century, so much so that Cattaneo's meditations were collected and published posthumously by his students.¹⁶ Even though the publication happened after Bertoldi's departure for India, both Jesuits lived in the College of Brera during the years 1693–1696. At that time Cattaneo had already begun to organize his retreats, and Bertoldi must have had the chance to get acquainted with his argumentation and style.¹⁷ The first few exercises of the NM closely mirror the organization of subject matter in Cattaneo's *Esercizi*, and there are even precise parallels between the two texts. Take, for instance, the second point of the first meditation, which in both books is a

thought that the retreats would also last 24 days. I later realized from the letters that the one-month retreats were based on more than one text. So, considering that the letter talks about three exercises per day (and not three meditations), and that catechists were after all lay people, it is most likely that the NM was used for eight-day exercises. The introduction to the other book of Ignatian exercises written in this century mentions explicitly that Christians should go through the full book once a year over eight days (*Ñāṇattīyāṇikaḷ*, 3–4).

- 14 The history of reading in premodern India—silent or otherwise—is yet to be written, and the role of Catholic practices almost completely unexplored. Still, the works by R. Venkathachalapathy on the colonial period, such as “Reading Practices and Modes of Reading in Colonial Tamil Nadu,” *Studies in History* 10, 2 (1994): 273–290, offer valuable insights into Tamil reading practices in the earlier period too.
- 15 For an outline of Cattaneo's life and works, see Gino Benzoni, “Carlo Ambrogio Cattaneo,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 22 (Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1979).
- 16 The work was first printed on the basis of his notes in Venice in 1726, after Cattaneo's death. In the chapter, I use a later edition: Carlo Ambrogio Cattaneo, *Esercizi Spirituali di S. Ignazio* (Venezia: Tipografia Emiliana, 1892).
- 17 The catalogs of the Society show that Bertoldi was in Brera (*Coll. Braydensis*) in those years. Cfr. ARSI Med. 60, *Cat.trien.* 1693–1696, ff. 35^v and 81^r.

reflection on God as final cause. Cattaneo begins the sections by asking: “God did not create you for your own sake, but for his sake. By creating you, he wanted to have a son who would love and obey him; he wanted a servant who would serve him. Do you understand? *Ad hunc finem, ut Dominum Deum suum laudet ac revereatur*. Don’t you owe this filial service to him, for many reasons?”¹⁸ In exactly the same position within his text, Bertoldi mentions how man was created to pray, obey, and worship God “like a slave obeys the orders of his lord, like a son respects his father, like the subjects behave according to the ordinances of their king.”¹⁹

Similar to Cattaneo’s *Esercizi*, and unlike other theological texts composed by missionaries in Tamil, the NM is not weighed down by citations from the gospels or the Church fathers. While such references do occur occasionally, they mostly include examples, and the text seeks to elicit the understanding, imagination, and emotional response of the readers by speaking to them as directly as possible. Each meditation opens and closes with questions, for instance, often in the first person—“is this liberation, or is this Hell?”, “Shall I risk suffering in the fire of Hell for all eternity?”, and so on. This is typical of the genre of the retreat manual. The other main rhetorical strategy in the text is the frequent use of comparisons and similes, and it is precisely on this terrain that the context of production of the text—the Madurai mission—begins to emerge. For instance, to describe the crowded nature of Hell, Bertoldi writes that people gathered there are “like a collection of sesame seeds in the oil press, squeezed and crushed by the spinning of the plank; like coconut fibers, intertwined without interval; like creepers closely entangled, like straws of paddy tied very firmly together, like thorns pressed and tied to other thorns.”²⁰ These similes clearly draw upon aspects of daily life in Tamil Nadu that were famil-

18 Cattaneo, *Esercizi Spirituali*, 12: *Dio non ti ha creato per te, ma per sè. Creandoti ha voluto farsi un figlio, perchè lo ubbidisca e lo ami: un servitore perchè lo serva. Intendi? Ad hunc finem, ut Dominum Deum suum laudet ac revereatur. E questa figlial servitù non la devi a lui per tanti titoli?*

19 *Īṇāṁamuyarci* 1, 2: *taṇṇāṇṭavaṇukku aṭimaiy ēval ceykīrāp pōlēyum, takappaṇārai perrapīl-lai caṅkikkīrāp pōlēyum, irācāvukkup payantu avaṇ karṇippatāṭip piracaikaḷ naṭakkīrāp pōlēyum*. For ease of identification of these citations across editions (see Bibliography), I give the exercise (*muyarci*) in Roman numbers, and the meditation (*uṇarttutal*) in Arabic numbers. For these shorter citations, I rely on the 1843 edition with some insights from Indien 463. The long passages from *Īṇāṁamuyarci* xx, 3 that I analyze below, is critically edited on the basis of the 1843 edition, Indien 463, and the uncataloged manuscript in JAMP.

20 *Īṇāṁamuyarci* xi, 3: *cekkiliṭṭa eḷḷu nerukkup palakai curriyāṭukaiyil nacuṇiki aṭarumāp pōlē-yuṇ, katampai tirikkappaṭā nīrkaiyīr curuṇkumāp pōlēyuṇ, koṭiyāṇatu marukkaiyīr cīruku-*

iar to Bertoldi's readers; later in the text, before arguing for the importance of meditating upon death in order to gain a middle ground for right discernment, Bertoldi brings into play local examples of misperception: "If one tries to understand what an elephant, a temple tower, or a mountain is by looking from afar, the elephant will look like an ant, the temple tower like a straw, and the mountain like an ant-hill."

These analogies, while faithful to the spirit of Ignatius, contribute to the new association of Catholic truths with the landscape of South India in the early eighteenth century. The association works in two directions: on the one hand, in the pages of the NM the Tamil landscape seems to speak the language of Catholicism, and the nature surrounding the catechists is taken as revealing universal Catholic truths. On the other hand, the NM itself trains and "Christianizes" the eyes of the catechists to look at the Tamil landscape as a code to be deciphered according to Catholic truths. Yet, the text not only brings into being for the catechists a Christianized natural environment, it also contributes to the creation of a new textual environment. This is achieved through frequent intertextual references to Tamil proverbs, passages from the *Tirukkural*, and sometimes to other Catholic texts in Tamil, written in different genres. For example, in the eighth meditation of the NM we read: "If you want to go from Tiruchirappalli to Kanchipuram, but you do not go north and instead start walking towards the south, you will never approach and reach Kanchipuram by taking just one step back, will you not? Similarly, if you abandon the path of liberation and proceed on the road that leads to Hell, will you ever be saved?"²¹ In this passage, the path to salvation is compared to the roads of the Tamil country on which catechists often had to travel in order to reach their communities. At the same time, a very similar image is used by Saint Joseph to argue with an opponent in the twenty-ninth chapter of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, Beschi's epic poem on the life of Joseph, and a crucial text for the education of the catechists that we will explore at length in Chapter Five:

"When someone who intends [to reach] a country lying in the west but has taken the wrong way, and gone towards the north for many days,

māp pōlēyum, vaikkōlāna tīrukavīruka vicikkaīyilē neruṇkumāp pōlēyum, muḷḷukaḷ piṇitta muḷḷukaḷōṭu oṭuṇkumāp pōlēyum [...]

- 21 *Ṇānamuyarci* VIII, 3: *nī tiruccirāppaḷḷiyiliruntu kāñcipurattukkup pōkavēṇṭumāṇāl vaṭaticai viṭṭut teṇṭicai nōkki naṭantāl orukkālun kāñcipurattai aṇṭavum piṇvāṇki orē tāvutalār cellavumāṭṭāyallō? appaṭṭiyirukka mōṣattīrkup pōkum vaḷiyai viṭṭu narakattīr celuttu mārkkattiloḷuṭiṇār karaīyēruvāyō?*

hears: ‘This is not the way,’ yet he is not ready to abandon the initial road, and doesn’t follow the eastern path shown to him—can we say he is a wise person?” asked Joseph.²²

When a catechist read and meditated upon the question in the NM, his thoughts probably connected Tamil roads with ideas of liberation, and also with this verse, that he could easily memorize and re-use during Sunday sermons or while instructing the Christians entrusted to his care. In other words, insofar as the NM was part of a wider Catholic literary corpus, it mirrors these other texts, as well as the local geographical and social environment, in multiple ways and directions.²³

Still another context is subtly implied by the selection of the topics in the text. The initial two thirds of the NM include a series of meditations on sins, death, and on the nature (*iyalpu*), darkness (*iruḷ*), thronging (*nerukkam*), stench (*pūti*), (bad) company (*tunai*), hunger (*paci*), thirst (*tākam*), pestilence (*nōy*), and fire (*neruppu*) that characterize Hell.²⁴ These topics were suggested by Ignatius for the first week of the *Exercises*, and they are present in most retreat manuals, but the emphasis given to them in the NM creates a remarkable symmetry between the beginning of the book, dedicated to meditating upon Hell, sin, and death, and its last meditations focusing on the body after resurrection and the powers that Christians will obtain in Heaven. The intended symmetry between the two sections is shown by the fact that they both end with a special meditation, meditating, respectively, on Hell and Heaven. The theological underpinning of the second part is Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, as expected from Jesuit theology of this period, and the emphasis on the body is also not new in the missionary context in India and elsewhere. And yet the placement of this topic as the culmination of a course of Ignatian meditations, together with the emphasis of the NM on immortality in connection with a powerful resurrected body, points to the cultural and religious context

22 *Tēmpāvāṇi* XXIX, 5: *kuṭakku nēr vaikuṇ tēyaṇ kuṇittāṇar ceppa māri | vaṭakkunēr neṭunāl cella vaḷi at’ aṇṇ’ eṇṇu kēṭkiṇ | ruṭakkunēr taṭaṇ cellātār ruyar alār kāṭṭikiṇra | kiṭakkunēr neri cellārō keḷvīyar eṇṇāṇ cūcai.*

23 I take reflexivity in a slightly technical sense here, as proposed by A.K. Ramanujan, “When Mirrors are Windows: Towards an Anthology of Reflections,” *The Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan*, ed. Vinay Dharwadker (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004) 6–33, and as an indication that the NM was part of an inter-connected Catholic literary corpus.

24 This is a rather long elaboration of the fifth exercise described by Ignatius, which is a meditation on the nature of Hell (Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 141–142).

in which the text was written. More specifically, it points to the competition between Christianity and coeval yogic concerns over the body and its sanctification, as they were expressed in Tamil by the saint-poets known as *siddhas* (*cittar*), whose poems were often cited by Nobili in the early seventeenth century.²⁵ Aside for these famous poets, in the village of early modern Tamil Nadu the men called *siddhas* were mostly performers, healers, and magicians. As specialists of daily and almost mundane aspects of the sacred connected with the body, these local *siddhas* were also important competitors for the missionaries, to whom Tamils attributed exceptional powers to heal and exorcise.²⁶

And so, the description of the body in the NM repeatedly mobilizes a vocabulary that resonates with that of both *siddha* poets and *siddha* healers, especially with regard to the powers (*citti*) of the resurrected body, for instance in the sentence: “Among the boons enjoyed by the bodies of the virtuous people, the main ones are impassibility (*aṭcayam*), subtleness (*cūṭcam*), agility (*ilaku*) and light (*oṇmai*).”²⁷ This list of four powers is translated literally from Aquinas’ *Summa*, but it also echoes *siddha* ideas regarding the subtle body (*nūṇṇuṭal*) and the divine light (*olī*) traversing it.²⁸ The choice of verb in the sentence—*cittikkum*, from the same root that creates the words *citti*, “power,” and *cittar*—is a signal of this analogy, indeed a “trigger” or keyword.²⁹ The competition with *siddhas*

25 See Margherita Trento, “The Theater of Accommodation: Strategies for Legitimizing the Christian Message in Madurai (c. 1610),” in *The Acquaviva Project: Claudio Acquaviva’s Generalate (1581–1615) and the Emergence of Modern Catholicism*, eds Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Flavio Rurale (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, Boston College, 2017), 109–127; and Anand Amaladass, “The Writing Catechism and Translation Strategies of Three Jesuits in South India: Henrique Henriques, Roberto de Nobili and Joseph Beschi,” in *Translating Catechisms, Translating Cultures: The Expansion of Catholicism in the Early Modern World*, eds Antje Flüchter and Rouven Wirbser (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 170–194.

26 On Catholics, healing, and exorcism in Tamil Nadu see Sébastia, *Les rondes de saint Antoine*, for an anthropological approach; and Ines Županov, “Conversion, Illness and Possession: Catholic Missionary Healing in Early Modern South Asia,” in *Divins remèdes. Médecine et religion en Asie du Sud*, eds Ines G. Županov and Caterina Guenzi (Paris: Édition de l’EHESS, 2008), 263–300, for the historical role of Jesuit missionaries.

27 *Ṇāṇamūyār* xx, 1: *nallār uṭam pīrkeytuvaṭāya varaṇkaḷuḷ vicēṣamāy oṇmai cūṭcam ilaku aṭcayam ivai nāṇkuṇ cittikkum*.

28 The second part of the *Ṇāṇamūyār* summarizes *Summa Theologiae*, III, Suppl. III, 82–85. Even the Tamil vocabulary used by Bertoldi is a direct translation of Thomas’ Latin in these four *questiones*: *aṭcayam* is *impassibilitas*, *cūṭcam* is *subtilitas*, *ilaku* is *agilitas*, and *oṇmai* is *claritas*.

29 For a general introduction to the philosophy and literature of Tamil *siddhas*, see Kamil Zevelebil, *The Poets of the Powers* (London: Rider and Company, 1973).

and with yogic approaches to the body also constitutes the background of the meditation on immortality (*cākāmai*), where the NM describes in ironic terms failed attempts at increasing the life of this mortal body through mutually contradicting techniques. Consider to the following passage from this meditation:³⁰

The gift of immortality consists in the life principle never abandoning the body at any time. Because this boon alone is the undying source of enjoyment of all fortunes connected with good virtues, this is called everlasting life, that is, liberation (*mōkṣam*), according to the authority of the Bible (*vētam*). People on earth, however, believe that there is nothing beyond their own interests, desires, and pleasures—which are greater than the earth they inhabit—and do not subordinate all their works to good morals

30 *Ṇāṇamuyarci* xx, 3: *cākāmai* *eṇkīra* *varamāvat* 'uyir orukkālum uṭampin nīrkāmai ākumē. ivaram *onrē* *naṇmai* *ellāvarrai*yun *taḷuviya* *celvam* *āṇaittum* *iṇpaṇkalukku* *varrāt* 'tūrum *ākaiyāl* *vētapīramāṇattilē* *mōkṣamāṇatu* *cattaciviyam* *eṇru* *kūrappaṭṭatu*. *pārmicaiy-ōrkaḷ* *tām* *vāluṇ* *cukattiṇum* *mikka* *kaṇittalum* *vilāittalum* *iṇittalum* *onrum* *illai* *yeṇpavarrai* *parri* *yellāttolilkaḷaiyūm* *olukkattukkup* *piṇvāṇkuvārum* *illai*. *uyirai* *keṭuppatāy* *paci* *ṇōy* *kuḷir* *veppam* *īram* *ulartal* *eṇru* *collappaṭṭa* *viparītamikutiyai* *nūkkum* *poruṭṭāṇa* *māḷikaḷ* *eṇrum*, *vastira* *pōcaṇam* *ēṇam* *aviḷtam* *eṇrum*, *ārōkkiyattaiy* *ōmpum* *uraipatiy* *eṇrum*, *veku* *cañcalatt* 'uṭaṇē *tēṭuvār* *makkaḷ*. *āṇār* *rāṇ* *cākāvaṇṇam* *ettāṇai* *varuntinālum* *vāṇāṭkaḷaic* *curukki* *varuttuvār* *allāmal* *avaṇrai* *nūṭṭavumāṭṭār*. *at* 'ēṇ *enrāl* *uyirai* *pēṇutalai* *nōkkiyav* *upāyaṇkaḷ* *tāṇē* *yērrakkuraittalākak* *koṇṭu* *vuṭampinaik* *keṭuttu* *viṇai* *ai* *payakkum*. *paṭṭap* *piṇaiyācam* *ivvākkai* *kākatātināl* *īlaippārutal* *naṇr* 'eṇpar. *viṇai* *paṭāmai* *iṇ* *pāramum* *iṣṭulamu* *mikāvaṇṇan* *tolilkaḷaic* *ceyvar*. *maṇṇuyir* *acaiyāmai* *iṇ* *alīyāta* *paṭikk* 'iṇ *yaṇkutaḷ* *ulāvā* *nīrpar*. *iyaṇkutaḷ* *īlaippu* *varal* *ōṇṇāt'eṇr* 'acaiyār. *uṇṭi* *mikutiyāl* *aciraṇam* *piṇakkum* *eṇru* *payant* 'ilaṇkaṇattai *kāppar*. *ilaṇkaṇattār* *palavūṇam* *ākaiyā* *nīrai* *yap* *po-cippar*. *tuyil* *ākum* *eṇr* 'eṇṇiy *uraṇkuvar*. *tuyilāṇ* *maṭiy* *eytutalār* *cākaraṇamāy* *viḷippar*. *avviccai* *yāṇkāram* *avā* *vilāivu* *verupp* 'eṇṇappaṭṭa *pañcakkilēccattānu* *maḷiḷci* *tukka* *mac-can* *tunivu* *naṇmai* *tiṇmai* *eṇpavarraṇṇum* *īrutayam* *virintuṇ* *curuṇkiyū* *maṇam* *elumpiyum* *aṭintum* *ivvākkai* *pelattu* *melintum* *uyirai* *yōmpuvāṇ* *roḷil* *anrō*? *vaḷivir* *kaṭumait* *taṇam* *ācic* *cāvir* 'okkum. *it* 'anrīyē *īrakkuṇ* *kālam* *eppaṭiyāṇalum* *varumēy* *eṇr* 'arintatiṇāl *māyarkup* *payamē* *viḷivukku* *mikka* *tiṇmai* *eṇpatām*. *muttip* *pēru* *perārkaṇ* *ikkirīya* *turitaṇkaḷum* *viparītaṇkaḷum* *orvāk* *kiṇṭṭiyaṇkaḷum* *illātatiṇā* *nīrai* *uyir* *uḷḷa* *celvattaiy* *eytuvar*. *ātalāl* *vētapīramāṇattil* *eḷutiyaṇvārē* *aṇal* *cītam* *vātaṇ* *caḷi* *pūṇal* *āyācam* *viṭa* *maruntu* *paci* *tākam* *narai* *tirai* *piṇi* *kēta* *mītūrutal* *payam* *vekuḷi* *paṭaiy* *eṇrum* *ivai* *mutaliya* *tīṇkukaḷ* *viṭṭiṇkaṇ* *ṇilaṇātālāṇ* *mōkṣattār* *vacciravākkaiyar* *ākiyūm* *aliv* 'iṇrī *orē* *taṇmai* *yāka* *ennayattaiyūi* *kāntu* *vāḷvārāmē*. *it* 'ippaṭi *yirukkaḷi* *maṇṇulakil* *aḷav* 'iranta *cañcalattaiy* *uṭaiyav* *uyir* *meyyonrūtalaip* *pēṇuvār* *makkaḷ*. *celvam* *ellāvarrai* *niṇainta* *civiyattai* *kaṇamāka* *matittut* *tēṭa* *vēṇṭāmō*? I use a critically edited version of this passage, based on BnF Indien 481, pp. 136–137, as well as the 1843 edition and the uncatalogued manuscript in JAMP. The edition being still a work in progress, which I hope to publish separately, I use the edited text here without the apparatus.

(*olukkam*). Thinking that a house might help them to keep away the many afflictions that spoil life, such as excess of hunger, sickness, cold, heat, wetness or dryness; and wishing for clothes, food, utensils, medicines, as well as for a way to preserve their well-being, people pursue all these with great anxiety. But, independently from how much they strive in order to avoid death, (in doing so) they suffer and decrease the days of their life, rather than increasing them. The reason is that the means of nurturing life themselves wear away and spoil the body, and result in death. Because extreme efforts are not good for the body, it is well-known that resting from them is good. Yet some people, in order to prevent the body from becoming heavy and fat by not doing any work, will engage in activities. For [their] spirit not to be destroyed by lack of movement, they will keep moving and walking around. But then, because they cannot get any rest as they are [always] moving, they will stop moving altogether! Fearing that because of the excess of food they might get indigestion, they will observe fasting. But then, because they get weak due to fasting, they will eat a lot! Thinking that sleep is good, they will sleep. But then, because they sleep (too much), they become sluggish and keep awake! The task of those who seek to increase life is to control as the heart contracts and expands, the mind falls and rises, the body weakens and strengthens respectively as a result of the five afflictions known as desire, egotism, lust, avarice, and hatred, and of happiness, grief, fear, courage, goodness, softness, and love—isn't it so? But this task has the nature of being enslaved to death and therefore is the same as death. Besides, the fear of death that comes from the knowledge that death is inevitable is overpowering, more so than death itself. Among those who have reached Heaven, the sufferings, troubles, and inconsistent behaviors I just mentioned are not present, and therefore they will obtain the wealth of a full life. Moreover, as it is written in the Bible, because in Heaven there are no evils (*tīṅku*)—such as heat, cold, wind, chillness, fatigue, flood, poisons, hunger and thirst, old age (grey hair and wrinkles), attachments and afflictions, obsessions, fear, rage, hate—liberated people, as they live in Heaven (*vītu*) and have a body of diamond (*vacciravākkai*), never perish, and enjoy all goodness without variation in their nature. Things are this way, and yet people care so much about their bodily life that brings about endless sorrows! Shouldn't they reckon a life filled with all fortunes more important, and seek it?

Note how this text is far removed from the verbose theological prose that characterized Nobili's works, as we have seen in the introduction. The NM always strives for brevity, and uses long lists as a rhetorical device to make a point—

when it mentions all the ways in which men can suffer in this life, for instance, this would have reminded the retreatants of the pains of Hell they had meditated upon in the previous days. Indeed, the central section of this passage, which makes fun of people who attempt different methods to improve their bodily life, such as moving, immobility, and fasting, is almost elliptical. Certain formal features of the text suggest the possibility that the missionary or catechist in charge would have recited it by accompanying it with gestures. The short sentences of the NM, combined with the colloquial and dialogic style, make more sense when one imagines the text read out loud, with pauses and emphasis. By contrast, Beschi's own prose texts, to which we will soon turn our attention, have a much more "literary" flow.

This passage is relevant to our discussion because it stages the competition between two models of sanctity and immortality—the Catholic embracing versus the yogic rejection of death. It criticizes first of all the belief that mortal bodies can be perfected and made immortal, by describing clumsy and failing human attempts at making life in this finite body longer, more stable and pleasant. This is a flawed logic that brings about death, claims Bertoldi, with no exceptions. On the one hand, nurturing the body forces one to delve in material life, and on the other hand, if material comfort is rejected and the body neglected, body and soul suffer, and death nevertheless arrives. Eternal life, the text tells us between the lines, is qualitatively different from mortal life and therefore cannot be achieved by means that are dependent on our mortal body. Immortality can only exist in Heaven, and never on earth. The passage is therefore a critique of generic yogic and siddha ideas of the body and immortality, in favor of an orthodox Catholic view. Yet, the vocabulary referring to the condition of the immortal body after resurrection weaves into the text a parallel, more nuanced approach. By describing a body without defects (*tīṅkukaḷ vīṭṭiṅkaṇ nilaṇātal*), and diamond-natured (*vacciravākkai*), the text once again gestures towards siddha descriptions of bodies that have attained powers.

In conclusion, then, this as well as the other passages we analyzed that focus on the sanctified, immortal body, show how the practice of retreats was used both to instill and to discipline the desire of self-sanctification in the catechists. It is not by chance that most of the letters we mentioned in the beginning include stories of catechists who, after taking the *Exercises*, began performing miracles, often underwent persecution, and gave up their life for the faith. In 1730, for example, immediately after the end of the retreat, the catechist Rayen (Rāyaṇ) lost his life while enthusiastically curing those who had been infected by a pestilential disease at Ēlākkuricci, while being sick himself. Eventually he healed, but then a fever killed him. While Beschi mourned him, he also admired his willingness to self-sacrifice, a trait that was also characteris-

tic of the missionary vocation.³¹ From Beschi's point of view, Rayen's sacrifice was a wondrous sign of the all-pervading holiness of the Madurai mission. One wonders, however, what Rayen's fellow catechists thought—were they able to rejoice, like Beschi? Did they feel urged towards the *imitatio* of Rayen, and ultimately of Christ? Or did the loss of a companion instill in them feelings of doom, and sorrow? In many respects, while at this time the figure of the catechist begins to be superimposed on the figure of the missionary, especially with regard to self-sanctification, the NM shows the deep tensions underlying this process. For one, it shows one fundamental difference between missionaries and their catechists. These had to be reminded that the model of sanctity to which they needed to aspire was different from those available locally, and that they should rejoice in death—because unlike the siddhas, their reward did not include a powerful body in this life, but a perfect one in the afterlife.

2 Disciplining the Catholic Self: The *Vēṭiyarolukkam*

The *Ñānamuyarci* allowed us a glimpse into the way retreats equipped the catechists with tools to understand both their bodies and their souls in Christian terms. It was not, however, the only text used in that context. In the annual letter he wrote after the *Exercises* resumed in 1730, Vieira mentions another manual for the catechists that explained in detail their occupation, the duties and privileges connected to it. This text is titled *Vēṭiyarolukkam*, “Instruction for the catechists” (henceforth VO). It was written by Beschi, and has been immensely popular since the nineteenth century among Catholics and Protestants alike, if we consider the number of reprints in the last three hundred years.³² The VO is written in the sophisticated register that is Beschi's signature

31 *Accensi porro exercitiis fervoris signa deinceps extitere non pauca. Catechista quidam Rāyen nomine, consuetam pro officio moribundis opem allaturus, pestilentiali, ac contagioso morbo minime territus obstantibus necququam cognatis, ac amicis, vitæ prodigus in apertum se dedit discrimen: dumq[ue] per aliquot dies, totus in adjuvandis incumbit egrotis, eādem correctus, febris lætus occubuit nobilis victima charitatis [...]* João Vieira to Franz Retz (Calpaleam [Kalpālaiyam], 18 June 1731), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 589–596, here 592^v.

32 A list of the editions of this text is to be found in the Bibliography. Probably because of the great number of printed editions available, not many manuscripts have been preserved. I was able to consult a manuscript in GOML, which is a paper copy of an older palm-leaf manuscript made by Gopalakrishnan in 1953, but was far too brittle to be used extensively. To the best of my knowledge, all the palm-leaf copies in GOML have been lost or misplaced. The only palm-leaf manuscript of this text I consulted is in the Weston Library (WL) at Oxford, Ms. Tam. b. 62, but I did not use it systematically. In this section, I use and refer to the page number of the Mission Press edition of 1934.

prose, and its twenty chapters contain frequent citations from the gospels, the Church fathers, and the lives of the saints. Unlike the *Ñānamuyarci*, it addresses the psychological and social dynamics involved in the catechist occupation rather than the contents of the Christian faith. In other words, this manual does not teach how to feel and think like a good Christian, but how to behave like one. It has often been printed together with a short list of eight instructions on how a catechist should behave towards God, his own self, his family, the missionaries, the Church, non-believers, and people in extreme need, as well as in times of difficulty. The short introductory paragraph to these instructions claims that they summarize the contents of the whole vo, and should be repeated daily—in a way, they too are spiritual exercises, to be performed in the midst of everyday life.³³ Finally, the set of literary tools connected to the vo also includes a set of prayers and proverbs, called *Ñānacūttiraṅkaḷ*, that were never printed but offer a good entry point into the specific vocabulary and the narrative construed by Beschi in this set of works:

4. A catechist (*upatēci*) without compassion—a cloud without water.
5. A catechist (*upatēci*) without learning—a businessman without capital.
6. A catechist (*upatēci*) without virtues—a dancer without legs.
7. Learning and virtue are the catechist's (*vētiyar*) two hands.³⁴

These aphorisms insist on some of the qualities foundational to catechist identity and describe them by association with classical Tamil images; for example, the cloud is the standard metaphor for generosity. The seventh verse, with its pairing of virtue (*aṛam*) and learning (*kalvi*), mirrors what Beschi wished for the school of classical Tamil he opened in 1730 to achieve, namely to equip the catechist with the knowledge of humanities as well as theology (*divinis humanisque disciplinis*). The Tamil words chosen by Beschi to translate those ideas—*aṛam* and *kalvi*—are very important ethical concepts explored at length in the *Tirukkuraḷ*, a Tamil classical text Beschi knew well and cited often. Even the word *oḷukkam* in the title of the vo refers to a concept, sometimes translated as “decorum”, explored at length in the *Tirukkuraḷ*.³⁵ The insistence on learning

33 *Vētiyaroḷukkam*, 173.

34 4. *tayaīy illāv upatēci—taṇṇir illā mēkam* 5. *kalvi yillāv upatēci—mutalillā vāṇikaṇ* [sic] 6. *puṇṇiya millāv upatēci—kālilāk kūttan* 7. *kalvium aṛamum vētiyarkk' irukai. Ñānacūttiraṅkaḷ*, GOML R 4425, f. 1^r. In the manuscript, the set of prayers constitutes a second appendix to the vo after the *Vētiyar oḷukkac cōtaṇai*.

35 The thirteenth decade of *Tirukkuraḷ* is on *oḷukkam uṭaimai*, the possession of decorum. See George Uglow Pope, *Tiruvalluvarāṇār aruḷicceya tirukkuraḷ. The Sacred Kurral of Tiru-*

here opens up a perspective on the catechists that will be the theme of the next chapter. More importantly right now, these aphorisms refer to catechists with the two different words in use at that time: *upatēci*, by far the most common, and *vētiyar*. The word *vētiyar* to indicate the catechists was first introduced by Beschi precisely in the vo, and is the keystone on which the whole book hinges, as well as the social and literary project it articulates. The essence of this project appears already in the incipit of the vo:

Because teaching the scriptures (*vētam*) is one among the six occupations prescribed for men of high birth, i.e., Brahmins, they are called *vētiyar*. However, as this name is derived from the occupation, it would be correct to call *vētiyar* anyone who performs that occupation, irrespective of the class into which they were born. Therefore, both the gurus (i.e., missionaries) who teach the Veda, and the catechists who are sent to preach the insights of the guru's Veda, should be called *vētiyar*.³⁶

Beschi continues by saying that he has nothing to teach to the missionaries, who already know so much, so the book will be for those *vētiyar* who are catechists. These first few sentences are extremely dense and illuminate many aspects of the process of rethinking and institutionalizing the occupation of the catechists involved in the choice of renaming them *vētiyar*. First of all, this noun refers to one among the six occupations traditionally attributed to Brahmins already by the first commentators of the *Tolkāppiyam*, the oldest grammar of Tamil, and included in most later grammars including Beschi's own *Tonṇūlvilakkam*. The context of this list as it appears in the grammars is the classification of the elements (*karu*) that belong to the different landscapes (*tiṇai*) of Tamil poetry.³⁷ Therefore, the reference to this background immediately positions the vo and the catechists it addresses, and for whom it was written, within a Tamil scholarly classification of the world. Already in the classical grammars, this was a classification that cut across the boundaries

valluva Nayanar, with introduction, grammar, translation, notes, lexicon and concordance (in which are reprinted Fr. Beschi's and F.W. Ellis versions) (New Delhi and Chennai: Asian Educational Service, 2003), 20–21.

36 *Vētiyarolukkam*, 1: *mērkula maṇitarakkuriya āru tolilkaḷil vētattaip potittal oṇṛākaiyil mērkulattōrai vētiyar eṇṇar. āyinuṁ ippeyar tolir peyarāṇapaṭiyāl, antat tolilaic ceypavar yāvarum ekkulattir pīrantārāyinuṁ vētiyareṇṇappattuvatu niyāmāmē. ākaiyāl vētattaip pōtikkuṇi kurukkaḷum, ivarkaḷiṭamāka vēta uṇarccikaḷaic colla aṇuppappaṭṭa upatēcikaḷum vētiyar eṇṇappaṭuvārkaḷ.*

37 Beschi, for instance, talks about these occupations in sutra 183 of his grammar *Tonṇūlvilakkam*; both the grammar and this sutra more specifically will be analyzed in detail in Chapter Four.

between the subject matter of poetry and the structuring of society, an ambiguity that Beschi understood and mastered, as will become clearer when reading his grammar *Tonnūlvilakkam* in the next chapter.

The incipit of the VO also shows right away that Beschi has the intention to reform this vision of the world, beginning with a completely different understanding of *tolil*, occupation. For him, at least theoretically, being a catechist was a matter of choice and had little to do with social status at birth. In fact, becoming a catechist and a *vēṭiyar* could enhance the social standing of the people chosen for this task. The possibility of this reform hinged, at least partially, on the re-signification of the word *vētam* that had taken place in the context of Tamil Catholicism. In the early seventeenth century the founder of the Madurai mission, Roberto Nobili, had borrowed the word *vētam* to refer to the complex networks of meanings, including the Christian holy book, i.e., the Bible, the Christian revelation, and the doctrine of the Church.³⁸ This resignification had been made possible in turn by the opening up of this word in the context of Tamil devotion already in the first millennium, when the literary works of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava poets and devotees such as Nammāḷvar began to be identified as Tamil Vedas.³⁹ In this passage, Beschi fully exploited the polysemy of the word *vētam* and its social consequences.

Finally, and most importantly, the use of the noun *vēṭiyar* indicates that the work of the catechists was chiefly that of teaching the *vētam* (albeit in its new Christian meaning) and that implied an assimilation to the highest spheres of Indian social hierarchy. Traditionally, spiritual teaching was considered an occupation reserved for Brahmans and the title of *vēṭiyar* was used only for

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- 38 The issue of translation and re-signification of words in the Christian missionary context has received much attention; the classic study of the Tamil case is Bror Tiliander, *Christian and Hindu Terminology: A Study in Their Mutual Relations with Special Reference to the Tamil Area* (Uppsala: Antikvariat Thomas Andersson, 1974). On the word Veda in the Christian-Tamil context, see also M. Thomas Thangaraj, "The Bible as Veda. Biblical Hermeneutics in Tamil Christianity," in *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, Bible and Postcolonialism series, vol. 2, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 133–143.
- 39 On the development of Tamil devotional paths towards salvation, with a special emphasis on the idea of a Tamil Veda, see John Carman and Vasudha Narayan, *The Tamil Veda: Pillān's Interpretation of the Tiruvaymoli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); and Vasudha Narayan, *The Vernacular Veda: Revelation, Recitation and Ritual* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994). Similar issues of translation and resignification of Tamil words in a Muslim context are analyzed in Torsten Tschacher, "Commenting Translation: Concepts and Practices of Translation in Islamic Tamil Literature," in *Translation in Asia: Theories, Practices, Histories*, eds Ronit Ricci and Jan van der Putten (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2011) 27–44; and Torsten Tschacher, "Can 'Om' be an Islamic Term? Translations, Encounters, and Islamic Discourse in Vernacular South Asia," *South Asian History and Culture* 5, 2 (2014): 195–211.

them. In the eighteenth century, many social and spiritual realities challenged this privilege, and precisely in this century the Kaveri delta region saw the birth and flourishing of Śaiva non-Brahmanical monastic institutions that became important centers of learning. Beschi's definition of the role of the catechist must be read against this background as part of a more general tendency of certain castes, especially Vellalas, to become protagonists of spiritual and cultural life in these centuries.⁴⁰ As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Catholic catechists did use the spiritual and material capital that came with their job to establish their leading role, and the role of their families, within the community.

Yet in this incipit, precisely because of their role as teachers, catechists are not only assimilated to Brahmins but also to missionaries, as attested by fact that the name *vētiyar* could apply to all these figures. So, the definition needs to be further understood in relation to the evolving missionary understanding of Indian hierarchies. Jesuits in the seventeenth century, starting with Nobili, saw Brahmins as scholars and teachers. Throughout the century they fashioned themselves as Brahmins, and this was an important part of the construction of their identity as spiritual teachers. Yet by the late seventeenth century, missionaries had abandoned their claims to Brahmanical status, and actually saw Brahmins as their most bitter enemies. They fashioned themselves as non-Brahman religious leaders instead, and called themselves *paṇṭāraccāmi*, from *paṇṭāram*, a word indicating a religious mendicant as well as, in the early modern period, the leader of non-Brahmanical monastic institution.⁴¹ In this new guise, their claims to purity and true revelation (*vētam*) were analogous to the claims of non-Brahman, mostly Śaiva Vellala teachers of this period.⁴² Catechists who

40 Among the very few English works on the non-Brahmanical Śaiva institutions that developed in the Kaveri delta region from the sixteenth century onwards are Kathleen Iva Koppedrayar, "The Sacred Presence of the Guru: The Velala Lineages of Tiruvavatuturai, Dharmapuram, and Tiruppanantal" (PhD diss., McMaster University, 1990); Ead., "The 'Varṇāśramacandrikā' and the 'Śūdra's' Right to Preceptorhood: The Social Background of a Philosophical Debate in Late Medieval South India," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 19, 3 (1991): 297–314.

41 On the role of *imitatio* in the missionary context, and on the first Jesuit *paṇṭāraccāmi*, see Ananya Chakravarti, "The Many faces of Baltasar da Costa: *Imitatio* and *Accommodatio* in the Seventeenth Century Madurai Mission," *Etnográfica* 18, 1 (2014): 135–158.

42 Śaiva Vellala's self-fashioning strategies in the twentieth century are the focus of Sri-lata Raman, "Who Are the Vellalas?" For the eighteenth century, besides Bayly's *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, see the Protestant-Vellala interaction portrayed in Dennis Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India. Tamil Evangelical Christians*; Will Sweetman with R. Ilakkuvan, *Bibliotheca Malabarica: Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library* (Paris and Pondicherry: EFEO/IFP, 2012).

were trained to become Catholic teachers and community leaders participated in this multi-layered process of identity-making. In spreading to them, however, the strategy of social accommodation entered into new relationship and fusion with trends in social mobility in the Kaveri delta and elsewhere. These Indian men, the catechists, were not simply imitating the claims of contemporary Śaiva Vellala teachers, who were their brothers, friends, and neighbors.⁴³ Those claims were very much their own. The blending of the missionary strategy of accommodation with such local social and spiritual movements, in the persons of the catechists, is the most important social transformation to emerge from Tamil Catholic literature.

Of course, the incipit of the vo still speaks with Beschi's voice, and expresses his expectations as much as it portrays the reality of the mission. What about the agency of the catechists, then, and their own motivations and expectations? A strategy to understand their perspective is to multiply sources, and read the incipit of the vo together with the portrayal of catechists we find elsewhere. We know from reports of the Lutheran missionaries, for instance, that "Catechists, very much like Pagan priests, would apply ashes from cow dung to their foreheads [...] and the justification of this behavior is the example given by missionaries who, similarly to Brahman priests, color their foreheads with a yellow paste."⁴⁴ Adding to this description of catechists accommodation, the annual letter of 1683 contains a long obituary for the catechist Gnanapragasi (Ñānapirakāci), which begins as follows:

To facilitate the work of conversion this catechist disguised himself in all possible ways. He left his country, changed his name—he took the name of Gnanapragasi, which means Louis—and concealed (*se disfarçou*) his caste; he ate neither meat nor fish, but only rice with some greens and vegetables; he would bathe every day at dawn in the rivers or tanks, a thing which in this country is considered a sign of great virtue and high nobility.⁴⁵

43 For instance, the family history of catechist Cavarirāya Piḷḷai (a source to which we will come back in Chapter Six), who later converted to Lutheranism in the nineteenth century, tells that his ancestor Cuvāmiyaṭiyāḷ was the only girl and the only Catholic in her family; her many brothers were all Śaivas. See Yōvāṇ Tēvacakāyaṇ Cavarirāyaṇ, *Upatēciyar cavarirāyapillai* (1801–1874), ed. Ā. Civacuppiramaṇiyaṇ (Nāḱarkōyil: Kālaccuvaṭu paṭippakam, 2006), 75–76.

44 *Les Catechistes, qui, à l'exemple des Prêtres Payens, se poudrent le front avec des cendres de fiente de vache, [...] & ensuite ils s'autorisent de l'exemple même des Missionnaires, qui à l'imitation des Prêtres Bramins se teignent le front d'une terre jaune.* Niekamp, *Histoire de la Mission Danoise*, vol. 1, 223–224.

45 *P[ar]a facilitar a converção se disfarçou em tudo este catequista, deixou a patria, mudou o*

The letter continues by listing the adversities Gnanapragasi faced in his career, and his successes. Remarkably, he won the favor of a Maravar overlord who offered him the administration of a village, and so he was for a long time in charge of this village, where he collected taxes, solved disputes, healed the sick, and freed people from the possession of evil spirits (*pēy*). And yet the beginning of his career as a catechist and the subsequent successes was Gnanapragasi's initial disguise, which is also the most striking element in this letter. He concealed his caste (*se disfarçou na casta*) and adopted a Brahmanical, or rather pure, lifestyle—avoided fish and meat, bathed in the morning, and so on—in a way that mimics similar and better-known processes of self-fashioning that missionaries underwent in South India. Exactly like a missionary in the process of accommodating, Gnanapragasi changed his name, his habits, and took up a new identity. In his case, however, it was a Tamil person to re-position within the complex social world of late seventeenth-century Tamil Nadu. Most likely, the description of Gnanapragasi's self-fashioning was part of a Jesuit rhetorical strategy, and tailored to give the impression that accommodation was one ineludible step in the path towards sanctity in South India. At the same time this letter offers insights into the possibilities that opened up for converts once they became catechists—they could create a new identity for themselves.

This new identity was predicated upon the spiritual powers God and the missionaries bestowed upon the catechists, which conferred in turn social powers crucial for the local spread of Catholicism. However, this transaction was inherently problematic from the point of view of the missionaries, and raised multiple questions for them. How could they control their catechists? How could they instill in them obedience to the Church and humility vis-à-vis their role? What could prevent the independent and non-orthodox circulation of Christian ideas, which missionaries encountered multiple times and reported in alarmed terms? Episodes of fake Christian gurus fill Jesuit letters of this period, and the independent circulation of Christian ideas was indeed a reality. So, these questions must have been particularly pressing in the early eighteenth century, when the Malabar Rites controversy called into question the Jesuit

nome, chamandosse Nhanaprâgagi [sic], que val o mesmo che Luiz, e se disfarçou na casta; não comia couza alguma de carne, nem peixe, mas somente arros come algumas ervas, ou legumes; lavavasse todos os dias de madrugada nos rios, ou nos Tanques, accão que nesta terras se avalia por grande virtude, e singular grandeza. This passage is taken from a letter of Rodrigo de Abreu, in charge of the residence of Mulipary (Mullippaṭi) and included in João de Brito to Charles de Noyelle, *Carta Anua da Missão do Madurey do anno de 1683* (Madurai mission, 9 May 1684), ARSI Goa 54 ff. 433–456, here 449^v.

ways of evangelizing and the strategies for the local spreading of Catholicism they had been supporting for more than a century.

Proof of the missionary awareness of the dangers implied in the increasing importance of the role of the catechists is Beschi's repeated admonition in the vo that, even though catechists could heal and perform miracles thanks to the charisma given to them by God, this was not the goal of their job, but simply a means to an end. Obviously, the spiritual powers of the catechists, above all the ability to perform miraculous healing, crucially showed their belonging to a community of saints that was slowly taking the form of a social community in the Tamil countryside. Yet according to Beschi catechists should strive to remain humble, and (most importantly!) respect the authority of the missionaries.⁴⁶ The vo includes a lively sketch of what could happen if catechists lost sight of the origins of their power, and became arrogant:

Moreover, some men, as soon as they become catechists, think it's now their duty to show the greatness of their profession. So, they begin to wear expensive clothes and jewelry, and when they go around the village bringing a servant with them, in case someone doesn't go to greet them, they become angry and punish that person. In other words, they begin to search for greatness in fear, and for fame in suffering. If asked why they behave in that way, they would reply: "Our efforts are important, are they not? If we do not do all this, who will respect the greatness of this occupation?"⁴⁷

In a world with competing models of authority, the figure of the catechist had a liminal status. Catechists were no missionaries, whose chiefly spiritual role was clear; they often had administrative roles at the village level, and could also serve as healers, counselors, etc. Their authority derived from the spiritual investiture they received from the missionaries, and therefore should be used differently from mundane authority.⁴⁸ Yet once the charisma was transmitted—and the practice of the spiritual exercises during retreats was

46 *Vētiyarolukkam cōṭaṇai* (toward the gurus).

47 *Vētiyarolukkam*, 20: *mīlavum cilar upatēcikaḷāṇavuṇaṇē taṅkaḷ uttiyōka mēṇmaiyaik kāt-ṭavēṇṭum eṇru, vilaiyērapperrā āṭaiyāparaṇaṅkaḷait tarittuk koṇṭu, āṭaiappaikkāraṇ oruvaṇai kūṭṭik koṇṭu kirāmaṅkaḷai cuṇṇip pōkaiyil, taṅkaḷai kāṇa oruvaṇ varāt'iruntāl, avaṇaik kōpittut taṇṭikkac caṅkaiyir perumaṇṇum, viruntir ciṇṇappun tētat toṭaṅkuvārkaḷ. appaṭi naṭappatu eṇṇav eṇru avarkaḷai kēṭṭāl, eṅkaḷ uttiyōkam perit'allō? aṅkaḷaipparri it'eḷlāṇ ceyyāmal ittolilīṇ māṭciyai matippatār?*

48 This liminal space inhabited by the catechists allowed them to mediate between mun-

precisely one crucial moment of such transmission—it belonged to the catechists, and was theirs to use. The annual letter of 1713, for instance, reports a bitter dispute between Hindus and Christians of the same Reddy (*reṭṭi*) caste. This was managed and eventually solved by the catechists alone, chief among them one Pappu Reddy (Pāppu reṭṭi), who skillfully led his community towards mutual understanding.⁴⁹ Beschi could only admonish such powerful men by saying that: “Not only should people fear you for the modesty of your catechist behavior, and for the truths you say; it is not appropriate for you to be feared on account of your rage and your beatings. Being dreaded in this way is something good only for men who seek honor in this world!”⁵⁰

In order to understand their role, and remain humble both in front of God and the missionaries who entrusted them with their jobs, Beschi suggests the catechists read his book often.⁵¹ This suggestion, to be found in the last chapter of the VO, provides crucial evidence that catechists were a literate élite within the Madurai mission, and the literature composed by missionaries at this time was meant chiefly for them. This argument will resurface in the next chapters on Tamil rhetoric and Catholic poetry written in these years, but as for the set of meditations contained in the NM and in the VO, they were certainly meant to be read—either in the context of the retreats, or as aids for individual meditation—by catechists who knew both Catholic doctrine and the Sanskrit and philosophical vocabulary in which it had been coated since the time of Roberto Nobili. Actually, in the seventh chapter of the VO Beschi mentions one of Nobili’s catechisms, the *Irupattēṭṭu piracaṇkaṇkaḷ*, as an important reading for the catechists.⁵² Clearly, by the early eighteenth century catechists had at their disposal a whole devotional and theological corpus, beginning with the works by Roberto Nobili and including the poetical works by Beschi we will encounter in the next chapters. This corpus had a pivotal role in tying cate-

dane and sacred matters in ways that remind of the holy men described by Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), and the lively scholarship that engaged with that intervention.

49 Louis Noël De Bourzes to Michelangelo Tamburini, *Litterae Annuae Missionis Madurensis anni 1713* (Madurai mission: 25 July 1714), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 516–541, here 517^v–518.

50 *Vēṭiyarolukkam*, 186: *upatēci naṭakkum mēraikkuṇ collum niyāyaṇkaḷukkuṇ caṇkaṇkaḷ aṇ-cavēṇṭum allātē uṇ kōpattukkum uṇ aṭikkum payappaṭuvatu uṇakku yōkkiyamalla. ulaka maṇiyakkārarakku ippaṭi aṇcukīratu cariyē.*

51 *Vēṭiyarolukkam*, 163–164. See especially this passage about reading: *ini nām eḷutiṇatai nāṇkaḷ aṭikkaṭi vācittu uṇkaḷ mēl nīrkuṇ kaṭaṇait tīrkkavum, ellōraiyum aṇṭavar tiruppātatiṭ cērkkavum ācāvaittu, uṇkaḷal itarkuk kurai varātaṭaṭikkum naṭakkavum, acca naṭukkat-tōṭu pirayācappaṭak kaṭavīrkaḷ.*

52 *Vēṭiyarolukkam*, 64.

chists together into a spiritual and social group. It was mostly thanks to spiritual works such as the NM and the VO that missionaries could hope to create and shape the spiritual and social selves of their catechists, and make them into visible models to display in front of large and diverse audiences, including Tamil villagers and urban settlers in Thanjavur and Pudukottai regions, of how a Tamil Catholic person should be and behave.

3 The Dangers of a Self in Transition

The normative anxiety of texts such as the NM and the VO shows how missionaries wanted to control their catechists, who were after all recently converted laymen. But what were the dangers of letting catechists work on their own? What did missionaries fear? This appears with remarkable clarity in the report Antonio Broglia Brandolini (d. 1747) wrote in 1720 in Lisbon, on his way from South India to Rome to become the main advocate for the Malabar Rites in front of the Papal Curia. Thinking that the annual letters of the previous decade might be lost, Brandolini summarized the salient episodes in the recent life of the mission, especially those where he played an active role, for his superiors. Much of the document thus concerns the persecution of Christians that took place in the southern residences of Kāmanāyakkāṇpaṭṭi, Kayattāru, Kurukkalpaṭṭi, where Brandolini had worked, and Tenkasi (Tenkāci) around 1714–1715.⁵³ This persecution was mostly the doing of Yogananden (Yōkāṇantan), a Vellala from the Tamil heartland who had been raised among Christian Paravas on the coast, and as an unforeseen result developed a hatred towards Christianity and the missionaries. Once he was back inland to work as an advisor for local small kings, he tried very hard to oppose the spread of Christianity, and the work of Brandolini and Beschi. Once, Yoganandan found an unexpected ally in an itinerant, low-caste preacher that Brandolini describes as follows:

53 This report is summarized in Joseph Bertrand, *La mission du Maduré d'après des documents inédits*, vol. 4 (Paris: Librairie de Poussielgue-Rusand, 1851), 344–347. The origin of the persecutions is also described in the annual letters of 1714 and 1715, which did eventually reach Rome, contrary to Brandolini's fears (and can be found respectively in ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 542^r–549^r; and ff. 550^r–563^v). The first letter mentions Beschi's catechists without naming any names; the second one mentions the figure of this meddling *Parrea*/Pariah, but again includes no names. This is why I chose to translate here Brandolini's account.

On the Coromandel coast, they had baptized a lowly Pariah who, after spending some time there, was even able to prattle a bit in Portuguese. Due to the many complaints we sent to Rome, Your Reverence knows well that missionaries in Madurai are deeply troubled whenever people from the inland are baptized on the coast, because we have learned from long experience that those conversions are mostly false, and done with mundane, malicious aims. These are usually riotous people, or poor people, or people of very low social status who pretend to belong to a higher caste, and thus deceive those missionaries, who do not know them. These people extort good alms from them, and once enriched and fattened up, they go back to Madurai, abandon the faith, and become, so to say, domestic enemies, launching against us the worst possible persecutions. Indeed, so did this infamous Pariah. After receiving baptism, and substantial alms, he went back to the inland, took the appearance of a fakir, a Muslim penitent, and made a monstrous mix of Paganism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism. He pretended to be Pagan among Pagans, Christian among Christians, and Muslim among Muslims, and fooled everyone. By means of these deceits, he provided for himself, and indeed, lived quite comfortably. I do not know why, but this infamous Pariah, who pretended at that time to belong to the *vēḷāḷa* caste, came to the Vaṭakkankuḷam residence, where I was staying at that time, and with cunning, wretched words, proclaimed that he was a sinner, and that after twelve years spent living in the wrong, he now wanted to reconcile with God. He was so good at acting that he deceived the catechist of the noble caste of the Rajas who was then in my service, and convinced him that he had truly repented. Thus, the Raja, giving thanks to Heaven, with great relief ran to me to convey the good news, and let me know about the sheep that had been lost for so long, and now wanted to go back to its heavenly Shepherd. He added that the man wanted to see me, and testify with his tears to the greatness of his suffering, and that I should not deny to such a sincere contrition the solace of my presence. I agreed to his requests unwillingly, because due to some circumstances, and questions that I posed to the Raja, I was suspicious of deception, and fraud. In spite of this, because I didn't want to offend the neophytes, I brought the fake penitent in front of me; and I am telling the truth when I say that I had no blood left in my veins, once I saw him pronounce the sign of the Cross in Portuguese in front of our Christians, and mix that language with Tamil. I bluffed, and pretended I did not understand. I told him in Tamil to speak a language I could understand, and that as a first proof of his true repentance, he should take off the fakir dress he was wearing, and wear the clothes of the

caste to which he claimed to belong. After doing that, he should prepare to listen to the catechism again for fifteen days, and apply himself to other works of piety and devotion, so as to gain the appropriate disposition for a sacramental confession, and to appease the divine Justice, which he had irritated through many excesses, as he himself admitted. That false penitent seemed to agree to everything, so giving him some spiritual advice, I pleasantly discharged him. Yet once he saw that by the evening I was sending him neither alms, nor rice to cook, without saying a word to anyone, he left Vaṭaṅkaṅkuḷam that same night—so we believe—and started walking towards the residence of Father Beschi, which was next to mine at the time. Stopping in a place inhabited by many Christians, he changed his appearance from that of a penitent to that of a catechist, and teacher, and began to preach, and to show around a bag of books that he was carrying with him, to make people believe that he was some sort of learned man. Those Christians immediately sent word of the newly arrived “scholar” to Father Beschi’s catechist, who was assigned to that region, and asked him to come soon to examine the opinions of the man, because they thought them to be suspicious. The catechist went immediately, and from his initial conversations with the Pariah, he recognized him immediately for the scoundrel he was. After seeing the horrific mix of Christianity, Paganism and Islam that he was teaching, and filled his books, the catechist scolded him harshly. Not satisfied with just that, he abandoned himself to an inappropriate and imprudent zeal, confident in his nobility and the power that Christians held locally, and ordered that the man be tied to a tree and whipped, a bit excessively. After he untied him, he commanded him to leave immediately. The Pariah obeyed, because he had no other option at the moment, and left that Province where he had encountered so many misfortunes. Muttering and grumbling, he went straight towards Kurukkalpaṭṭi, where Fr. Beschi was staying. After reaching there, with harsh words and threats, he began to complain with the Father about the beating that the catechist had unjustly inflicted upon him. Showing his fresh bruises, he insisted that he wanted to be avenged, and especially that he wanted back the books that the catechist had taken from him. For some time, Fr. Beschi was uncertain about these unexpected accusations, but after posing him many questions, he somehow became afraid of what might have happened. With sweet words he began to console the Pariah, and promised him that he would grant him justice, in case he would find the catechist—who should be arriving any time—guilty. The Christians of Kurukkalpaṭṭi also intervened. Fearing that from all this some persecution might arise, they tried to pacify the Pariah with many words and offers,

even more so, since he was already pretending by then to be a Muslim, and a fakir by profession. The Pariah appeared to be almost completely appeased. Yet as soon as he heard that the royal army was camped nearby, he suddenly left, and secretly and with great hurry ran to the camp where the high officials of the army—who were almost all Muslims—were staying.⁵⁴ There he began to cry and shout in despair. Then, showing to them the bruises from the beating, he began the ill-fated narration of the story, which he told from his own perspective, filling it with lies and calumnies. He reproached the Muslims for the little zeal they had for their religion and for the honor of their fakirs, then he went back to crying, praying, imploring, and finally threatening that Muhammad would be outraged, if they did not set about avenging him right away.⁵⁵

54 Brandolini seems to refer to a military campaign undertaken by Sa 'adatullah Khan, Nawab of Arcot, possibly after conquering the kingdom of Senji in 1714. On the latter see Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanya, *Textures of Time*, 140–183.

55 *Era si battezzato nella costa del Choromandel un vile Parrea, il quale trattenutosi colà alcun tempo, aveva perfino imparato a cinguettare la lingua Portoghese. Per molti lamenti mandati a Roma, sà V[ostro] P[aternali]à molto bene, che li Missionari del Madurey sentono sino all'anima, allorchè nelle spiagge marittime si battezzino Gentili de Paesi interiori; poiche la lunga sperienza ci ha insegnato, che perlopiù quelle conversioni sono finte, ò fatte per fini umani, e maliziosi, e di gente ò facinorosa, ò povera, ò dell'infima quisquiglia del Popolo, che ingingendosi di tribù nobile, ingannano que' missionari inesperti, che non li conoscono, gli truffano buone limosine, e di poi impinguati, ed incrasati ritornano al Madurey, lascian la fede, e come nemici, dirò così, domestici, ci muovono contro le più orribili persecuzioni, che immaginare si possa. E così fece di fatto questo infame Parrea, il quale dopo il battesimo, e dopo buone limosine, voltando al Madurei, e vestitosi dell'abito proprio de' Fachirj, che sono li penitenti de Turchi, fece un misto mostruoso di Gentilesimo, di Cristianesimo, e di Mahometanismo, e spacciandosi co' Gentili Gentile, co' Cristiani Cristiano, e co' Turchi Turco, andava ingannado tutti, e con queste frodi sostentavasi e viveva molto agiatamente, e con abbondanza. Venne non sò come quest'infame Parrea, che allora spacciavasi della tribù de Velala, alla Residenza di Varacanculam, dove allora io stava, e con dolorose astute parole, dicendo d'essere un Peccatore, che dopo dodici anni di vita mal menata si voleva riconciliare con Dio, seppe così bene ingingersi, che ingannò il Catechista della nobilissima tribù de Raggi, che mi assisteva, e si fece credere vero Penitente. Quindi il Raggio, dando infinite grazie al Cielo, con indicibile consolazione, corse a darmi la fausta nuova, e ad avvisarmi della pecorella, per tanti anni smarrita, che voleva già ritornare al suo celeste Pastore. Aggiunse di più, ch'ella desiderava vedermi, e con le sue lagrime testimoniarmi la grandezza del suo dolore: che però [= perciò] non volessi negare ad un pentimento così sincero il sollievo della mia presenza. Mal m'indussi a condescendere alla richiesta, e per causa d'alcune circostanze, e interrogazioni, che feci al Raggio, venni in gran sospetto d'inganni, e di frode. Con tutto ciò perchè li Neofiti non si scandalizzassero, feci venire il finto Penitente alla mia presenza; e dico il vero, che non mi restò sangue nelle vene, quanto il vidi in presenza de Cristiani farsi il segno della Croce in lingua Portoghese, e mescolar quell'idioma col Tamulico. Dissimulai, e come*

This wonderfully vivid passage by Brandolini illustrates many of the trends we have identified thus far. Notice first how the whole narrative is set against the backdrop of the opposition between the Tamil hinterland and the coast. On the coast, missionaries under Portuguese or French protection did not need to adopt the strategy of accommodation. Yet this left them in a double bind.

chi non l'intendeva, gli dissi nella lingua tamulica che parlasse in linguaggio da me intelligibile, e che per prima prova del suo vero dolore, si spogliasse tosto di quell'abito di Fachire, che portava indosso, e si vestisse nella foggia della sua tribù, di cui ei si faceva. Fatto poi questo, si preparasse ad udire per quindici giorni il catechismo un'altra volta, e ad esercitare in altre opere di divozione e pietà, per così disporsi ad una generale sacramental confessione, e a soddisfare alla divina Giustizia irritata da lui con tanti eccessi, com'egli medesimo confessava. A tutto mostrò di consentire il Penitente bugiardo perciò dandogli altri spirituali ricordi, il licenziai piacevolmente da me. Ma quando poscia vidde che sull'imbrunire del giorno non gli mandua [sic! = mandava] limosina di sorte alcuna, ne riso per cucinare, senza dir niente ad alcuno in quella notte medesima come si crede, se ne parti da Varancacolam, e fù camminando verso la Residenza del P. Beschi, allora confinante con la mia. Ivi fermatosi in un luogo abitato da un numero considerabile di Cristiani, mutato già il sembiante di Penitente in quello di Catechista, e Mastro, cominciò a far le sue prediche, e ad ostentare un sacchetto di libri che seco portava, per farsi credere un Arcifanfalo [= arcifànfano: a braggart, a boaster] in scienza. Què Cristiani mandarono subito l'avviso della venuta del nuovo Dottore al Catechista del P. Beschi assegnato à quella Provincia, ed il pregarono a venir tosto ad esaminare i di lui dogmi, che ad essi già si rendevan sospetti. Si parti il catechista, e sin da primi congressi, ch'èbbe col Parrea, riconosciutolo per quel Furfante ch'egl'era, e veduto l'orrendo misto di Cristianesimo, di Gentilesimo, di Maometanismo, che insegnava, e leggevasi ne di lui libri, non contento di averlo ripreso con acerbe parole, si lasciò trasportare da un zelo indiscreto, e molto imprudente; e fidato nella propria nobiltà, e nel potere, che colà avevano li Cristiani, il mandò a legare ad un albero, e il fece sferzare anche con qualche eccesso. Indi fattolo sciogliere, e minacciandogli ancor più grave risentimento, se continuasse a disseminare dogmi sì mostruosi, gl'intimò che si partisse tosto di colà. Ubbidì il Parrea, perchè colà non poteva fare in altra maniera, e lasciando quella Provincia così infausta per lui, brontolando, e fremendo, si portò a dirittura a Gurucalpàty, dove allora stava il P. Beschi. Ivi giunto, con acerbe parole, e minacce, cominciò a lagnarsi col P[ad]re, delle sferzate, che ingiustamente gli aveva mandato a dare un suo Catechista; e mostrando le lividure ancor fresche, instò, perchè gli facesse giustizia, e particolarmente, perchè gli facesse restituire i suoi libri, che di soprapù il catechista gl'aveva presi. A queste inaspettate querele restò non poco sospeso il P[adre] Beschi; ma dopo varie interrogazioni, venuto in qualche timore di quello, che per ventura poteva essere succeduto, si diede con dolci parole a consolare il Parrea, e gli promise di fargli ogni giustizia, quando ei ritrovasse colpevole il catechista, il quale probabilmente non potrebbe molto tardare ad apparire colà. Vi s'interposero ancora li Cristiani, che dimoravano in Gurucalpàty, i quali temendo, che da ciò non nascesse qualche persecuzione, con molte espressioni ed offerte procurarono di pacificare il Parrea; e tanto più, quanto che egli si'ingueva già Turco di setta, e di professione Fachire; si mostrò il Parrea quasi mitigato del tutto. Ma però all'udire, che l'esercito reale era calato in que' contorni, un giorno se ne parti, e segretamente con tutta pressa correndo al campo acanti de' supremi uffiziali delle truppe, che quasi tutti erano Turchi, cominciò a piangere, e a schiamazzare da disperato. Indi

On the one hand, their fellow Europeans thought the practices they adopted inland were dangerously close to Hindu practice; and on the other hand, their Tamil converts in the Madurai mission did not want to be mixed with the impure *parangis* (Europeans) of the coast.⁵⁶ The difficulty for the missionaries in juggling this situation, and the method they used, is clear when Brandolini admits, using a technical term, that he lied: *Dissimulai* (which I have rendered with an actualizing expression, “I bluffed”).⁵⁷ For the sake of the highest good, i.e., keeping his converts happy, he avoided revealing to them that he was the same as those foreigners on the coast. Yet he could not prevent people like the Pariah (spelled *Parrea* in the report, from *paraiyan*) of this story from moving across these spaces, and using the fissure between the two to their advantage.

Even stronger than the fear of the risks represented by the *Parrea* are the disgust and horror Brandolini expressed at of the mix of religions that the man had fabricated, which is repeatedly described as monstrous (*mostruoso*). The Pariah became Christian among Christians, Muslim and among Muslims, and Hindu (*Gentile*) among Hindus—which, by the way, goes to show how these three religions coexisted closely in this space and time. This sentence in Brandolini’s letter is a parody of St. Paul’s famous *I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some* (1 Cor. 9:22), which had become almost a motto among Jesuit missionaries. Indeed, the Pariah’s methods were so dan-

mostrando le lividure delle percosse, diede principio alla funesta narrazione del fatto, che a suo modo dipinse con mille bugie, e calunnie, rimproverò a Maometani il poco zelo che avevano della lor Religione, e dell’onore de lor Fachiri, tornò a piangere, a pregare, a scongiurare, e finalmente a mianciare l’indignazione di Maometto, se non si accingevano ad una presta vendetta. Antonio Broglia Brandolini to Michelangelo Tamburini, Lettera annua della Missione del Madurey dell’anno 1714 e 1715 (Lisbon, 20 March 1720), ARSI, Goa 54a, ff. 447–482, here ff. 463^r–464^v.

56 *Parangi* (also spelled *prangui*, *frangui*, etc.) was a pejorative term used to refer to foreigners; in South India, it almost always referred to the Portuguese. See the entry “firanghee” in Henri Yule, *Hobson-Jobson: A glossary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases, and of kindred terms, etymological, historical, geographical and discursive* (London: J. Murray, 1903), 352–353.

57 On Jesuit dissimulation, see Stefania Tutino, “Jesuit Accommodation, Dissimulation, Mental Reservation.” The issue of ideological dissimulation (*nicodemismo*) is important for early modern Europe; Delio Cantimori, *Prospettive di storia ereticale italiana del Cinquecento* (Bari: Laterza, 1960) was the first to study the topic. A recent attempt to relate nicodemism and accommodation is Paolo Aranha, “Nicodemism and Cultural Adaptation: The Disguised Conversion of the Raja of Tanor, a Precedent for Roberto Nobili’s Missionary Method,” in *Interculturation of Religion. Critical Perspectives on Robert de Nobili’s Mission in India*, ed. C. Joe Arun (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2007), 105–144.

gerous because, from a certain perspective, they were also familiar. This is the confusion that the careful training of the catechists wanted to prevent. Appropriately, the one most keen on punishing the Pariah in the story is Beschi's catechist, because his role was specular yet diametrically opposite to that of the deceiving fakir-turned-catechist. In order for the real catechist to be the only true representative of Christianity locally, he had to unmask the impostor. Moreover, we note that when the Pariah met with Beschi, what he wanted back were the books he used to carry around in a bag. This shows once more how catechist preachers were identified with learning and 'books' (most likely, palm leaves). It also shows that literacy existed at the popular level, and that catechists and their competitors, such as this Pariah, inhabited a non-élite literary sphere. The books of the *Parrea*, however, were as filled with confusion as his words. Thus, controlling the content of books was as important as controlling the work of the catechists, as the next chapter will explore.

Taking a step back from Brandolini's own interpretation of these events, what seems most evident is the Pariah's ability to self-fashion. Here was a low-caste man (and indeed Brandolini, betraying his favorable attitude towards caste hierarchies, never calls him anything other than *Parrea*) who could pass for a Vellala, not unlike the catechist Gnanapragasi who, as we saw before, could pretend to be a Brahman, or Brandolini's ability to appear *not* to be European. In other words, mimicry at this time extended well beyond the missionaries, and their catechists, if men like this Pariah could comfortably make a living out of multiple, imagined identities. This was in contradiction with the specific Jesuit understanding of dissimulation and accommodation, of course, which was tied to specific theological premises. What was jarring for Brandolini was accommodation applied to matters of faith, and that none of the religious belongings of the Pariah—Christian, Muslim, Hindu—was more real than any other. The nemesis of Jesuits like him was this Pariah, a figure that was the distorted reflection of their own missionary selves, a man navigating between the culture on the coast and the one in the interior, mobile, defying the idea that caste is immutable, with a certain amount of cultural capital, entrepreneurial, and ready to get involved with local political powers. They wanted their catechists to be dangerously like him, and yet not like him.

4 The Catholic Self and Its Other: The *Vētaviḷakkam*

Jesuits in Madurai had another nemesis: the competing Lutheran mission of Tranquebar. So in 1727, during the time when the retreats were suspended, Beschi was asked by Superior Domingos Madeira to compose books to show the

errors of the Lutherans.⁵⁸ Some years later, in 1730, another missionary mentioned that during Easter Beschi condemned in a public sermon at Ēlākkuricci those Christians who had lapsed into Lutheranism. In doing so, he made use of a book he had recently written refuting the errors of Lutheran heretics, both theologically and linguistically (*en habile théologien et en mattre de la langue*).⁵⁹ The book composed in this short window of time was the *Vētaviḷakkam*, literally “The explanation of revelation” (henceforth vv), which Beschi finished writing at Ēlākkuricci in the spring of 1728.⁶⁰ This text, of which the missionary was so proud he offered it as an example of his writing to one visitor at Ēlākkuricci in 1730, is a systematic treatment of the theological points which Catholics and Lutherans were debating at the time.⁶¹ It is part of a small corpus of texts Beschi composed in these years, which includes the *ad hominem* attack against Luther in the epistle “On the nature of the Lutheran flock” (*Luttērinattiyalpu*), as well the *Pētaka maruttal*, a response to the anti-Catholic tract *Akkiyānam* (*Aññānam*) written by Ziegenbalg in 1713.⁶² Beschi also wrote two letters (*niru-*

58 Prospero Giuliani to Michelangelo Tamburini, *Ann. Malabarica* 1728 (Guruccalpattini [Kurukkalpaṭṭi], 17 August 1728). ARSI Goa 56, ff. 653–656, here f. 656r.

59 “Lettre du P. Calmette a M. De Coetlogon, Vice-Amiral De France. A Ballabaram, le 28 Septembre 1730,” in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses concernant l’Asie, l’Afrique et l’Amérique*, ed. Louis Aimé-Martin (Paris: Paul Daffis, 1877), 598–610.

60 The manuscript of the *Vētaviḷakkam* preserved in BnF (Indien 481) was sent to Paris already in 1730; see Henri Omont, “xxix Liste de manuscrits envoyés de l’Inde par les Jésuites (1729–1735),” in *Missions archéologiques françaises en Orient aux xvii^e et xviii^e siècles. Seconde partie* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1902), 1179–1192. The final colophon in the manuscript tells that Tayiriyānātarācarīṣi kurucuvāmiyavarkaḷ aka Beschi finished writing the book at Elakuricchi on the 25th of the Tamil month of *vaikāci* (mid-May to mid-June) in the year 1728. Many clues contained in the paratexts of Indien 481 make me suspect that this is an autograph by Beschi, but a comparative analysis of Beschi’s handwriting in Tamil is still a desideratum; so much so that there is an interesting—albeit incomplete and mostly unreliable—Tamil Wikipedia page dedicated to this topic: <https://ta.wikipedia.org/s/pbg> (consulted on 13/09/2021). Coincidentally, the first Mission Press edition of the vv and all the subsequent reprints include the same colophon, so one wonders whether the publication of this text was based on the French manuscript; and whether Dupuis and the Mission Press editors made the effort to use, in the case of Beschi, what they considered to be autograph copies. In this section, for ease of consultation I cite paragraph numbers (already in the manuscripts, and consistent in all editions) instead of page numbers, but the text I cite is from the 1936 edition (see Bibliography).

61 The annual letter of 1731, written by Beschi, includes the story of a certain Mudali (Mutaliyār) who, after persecuting the Christians, finally became curious about their doctrines and so asked Beschi about it; on the circulation of the vv and the episode of the Mudali, see Chapter Four.

62 On this tract by Ziegenbalg see Will Sweetman, “Heathenism, Idolatry and Rational Monotheism among the Hindus: Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg’s *Akkiyanam* (1713) and Other Works

pam) on the subject of Lutheran ‘heretics’ (*patitar*), and a literary epistle on the same subject that I will examine in the next chapter.⁶³ Like all these works, the vv makes use of deep learning and ferocious satire, and it often ridicules the (little) knowledge of Tamil language and literature displayed by Protestant authors, a trope that we will encounter in the next chapter too.

In this context of fierce competition between Catholics and Protestants in the region of Thanjavur, the vv was again aimed at the catechists. The text purports to explain to them how to differentiate between the false revelation of the Lutherans, and the true Christian (i.e., Catholic) revelation. True Christianity was, explained Beschi, one and undivided. It had a long history in India that had begun with St. Thomas and went all the way to St. Francis Xavier, and continued into the present.⁶⁴ Beschi was well aware that Christianity had been in India before the arrival of Catholic missionaries, and claimed for the Roman Catholic Church the heritage of St. Thomas and the Syrian Christians of Kerala, thus claiming at the same time the Indianness of Christianity, and the Catholic-ness of India. That the Tamil audience of Beschi was composed more specifically of catechists is suggested first of all by the amount of information regarding theology and Church history contained in the book, which regular converts were most likely not expected to know. Moreover, Beschi tries to tie this information to what were the shared religious experiences, and even the sacred geography familiar to Catholic catechists in the early eighteenth century. The most striking example of this is the section where Beschi, after discussing miracles as signs of the true (i.e., Roman Catholic) Church, describes the martyrdom of João de Brito—whom we encountered at the beginning of the previous chapter—within the global economy of sainthood and salvation. The passage begins by explaining the logic of his martyrdom:

A myriad of people all over the world have sacrificed their lives in order to show that our Veda is the true Veda, and became martyrs (*cāṭci*). But you don’t need to go to another country to look for such witnesses, because right in this country the Lord chose Aruḷāṇanta Cuvāmi to give you evidence of that. Aruḷāṇanta Cuvāmi wandered these kingdoms as

Addressed to Tamil Hindus,” in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, eds Andreas Gross, Vincent Kumaradoss and Heike Liebau (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 2006), 1249–1275.

63 These letters were printed only recently by Vi. Mi. Nāṇappirakācar [aka V.M. Gnanapragasam] on the basis of a single surviving manuscript in JAMP; see the Bibliography under *Nirupaṇkaḷ*.

64 *Vētaṇṇakkam, pāyiram*.

a missionary (*kāraṇakkuru*)⁶⁵ for many years [...] and after teaching the true Veda of the Roman Holy Church, he made himself into a living proof that true revelation exists in it alone and there is no salvation outside of it, and wrote this for you with his flowing blood as letters that never fade away. On the fourth day of the month of *māci* of the year 1693, in the city of Ōriyūr in the Maravar country, he made up his mind and with happy resolution, great compassion, and blissful desire, courageously resolved to donate his life. He stretched out his fearless head and offered it to his enemies, and became a martyr for our faith—didn't he?⁶⁶

This passage uses a legal vocabulary that superimposes the semantic range of martyrdom to that of witness, and testimony (*cāṭci*, literally eye-witness). Obviously, this mimics the historical development of the Greek noun 'martyr', literally meaning witness and used by early Christians to indicate martyrdom.⁶⁷

65 The term is often used in the VO to distinguish the missionaries (*vēṭiyar* but also *kāraṇa kurukkaḷ*) from the catechists (*vēṭiyar* insofar as *upatēciyar*). The brief discussion in Vi. Mi. Nānappirakācar [aka V.M. Gnanapragasam], "Contribution of Fr. Beschi to Tamil" (PhD diss., University of Madras, 1965), 181 does not refer to any specific model, but the expression is in use among Śaivas today. I ignore its source, but a simple search on Google will show that the distinction between *kāraṇa* and *kāriya kuru* is often invoked as a Śaiva teaching.

66 *Vētaṇṭakkam*, 127: *nammuṭaiya cattiya vētattai eṇṭikka ulakameṇkum atarkāka valiyap pirāṇaṇait tantu, kōṭākōṭi pērkaḷ cāṭci colliyirukka, nīnkaḷ antac cāṭcikalait tēti puṛa nāṭṭirkup pōkāmāl inṅētāṇē atarkuc cāṭciyaic colli uṇkalukku eṇṭikkum poruṭṭāka āṇṭavar aruḷānanta [sic] cuvāmiyāit terintukoṇṭār. inta aruḷānanta cuvāmi neṭuṇṭālāka invirācciyaiṅkaḷ eṇkum kāraṇak kuruvāyt tirintu [...]. urōmāṇ tiruccapaip parama cattiya vētattaip pōtitta piṇṇpu, atuvē meyyāṇa vētameṇṇum, atuvēyaṇri iṭṭēramillaiy eṇṇuntāṇē cāṭciyāka nīṇru, cintiṇa irattattiṇāl uṇkaḷukku māṛāta eḷuttāy eḷuti vaikka 1693-m āṇṭil māci mācam 4-n tēti putāṅkilamai maṛavaṇ cīmaiyluḷḷā oriyūrile [sic] maṇam porunti makilṇta maṇatōṭu, uyarnṭa tuṇivōṭu, āṇanta ācāiyōṭu uyirai valiyat tarac cammatittu, koṭiyavarkaḷikku aṇcāta talaiyai nīṭṭi tanti vētacāṭciyaṇārallō?*

67 The word derives from the Indo-European root **smar*, which has the meaning of "observe, remember" and is at the base of the Latin word *memoria* as well as the Sanskrit *smṛti*. Beschi used the Tamil word *cāṭci* for the witness of martyrdom, again derived from the Sanskrit, but referring instead to eye-witness (*sākṣin*). On the semantic values of this term, and ideas of martyrdom among Tamils in Sri Lanka, see Peter Schalk, "Images of Martyrdom among Tamils," *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2016). *Sākṣin* is also a key philosophical term in *advaita vedānta*, used already by Śaṅkara. It doesn't seem Beschi had that meaning in mind, and it is clear from his work that he did not know Sanskrit. He could, however, have read Tamil Śaiva texts of *advaita vedānta* that use the word; see Eric Stein-schneider, "Beyond the Warring Sects: Universalism, Dissent, and Canon in Tamil Śaivism," 55–59.

And yet the new language makes the etymology present and once again relevant. The two meanings—that of witness and that of martyr—are both present in this sentence, which almost acquires a double meaning and claims very strongly that the way to give testimony of the Catholic faith in Tamil is indeed martyrdom, an ideal to which all readers, that is, all catechists, could aspire in the footsteps of Brito.

Besides, martyrdom was the *only* way towards sainthood open to the catechists. At this time, Indian men were not ordained into the Society of Jesus, and the Indian native clergy was viewed with suspicion, with the exception of the Goan Oratorians, much appreciated for their clandestine apostolate in Ceylon.⁶⁸ In other words, at least in the internal regions of South India, there was no form of priestly holy life open to the catechists, and becoming martyrs was their only possibility for self-sanctification. Hence the importance of the miracles they performed, which were tangible signs of their being martyrs and saints in the making. In this perspective, the importance of Brito in keeping together the catechist community becomes clearer. He offered them a model of sainthood to which they could aspire, and even more, a model of martyrdom accommodated to Indian culture. So, while they were prepared by the exercises to not seek death but simply to accept it as a way of being witnesses to their faith, catechists still sought martyrdom. The vv shows this was also the only path to heroic sainthood that Jesuit priests such as Beschi could offer to their catechists. The necessity for the missionary to control the catechists becomes even more urgent in this perspective, and yet the task was daunting: how were they to control the inordinate appearance of charisma, and an army of saints in-the-making?

The Catholic Church had a long history of absorbing and disciplining such excesses. So, the vv appropriately continues by explaining how the miracles performed thanks to Brito's intercession are clear proof of the fact that the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church:

[...] from the day Aruḷāṇanta Cuvāmi wrote with his blood that the law of the Roman Catholic Church, and that alone, is the true universal law (*vētam*), so that you all may know it, and until this very day, the Lord himself, for everyone to recognize without any doubts that what he wrote is true, chose him as if impressing his unfading divine seal, and [through

68 On the Goan Oratorians, and their missionary role in Sri Lanka, see Ines Županov, "Goan Brahmins in the Land of Promise: Missionaries, Spies and Gentiles in the 17th–18th Century Sri Lanka," in *Portugal—Sri Lanka: 500 Years*, ed. Jorge Flores (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2006), 171–210.

him] has been operating innumerable miracles, without pause. Therefore, there is not even the need to speak—if anyone still doubts that the Roman Catholic Church is the Church founded by Lord Jesus, the universal Church, and a necessary means for salvation, that person should just go to the Maravar country, and inquire. It will be difficult to find a town where miracles by the intercession of Aruḷānanta Cuvāmi have not happened! If one's reasoning is not faulty, having seen all this for himself, and having understood the necessity of joining and belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, which shows through so many miracles the path towards salvation, that person will certainly join in.⁶⁹

In this passage, Beschi continues to use a legal-theological language to explain how God—the only one with the power to suspend natural law—performs miracles in the name of Brito as if putting a seal (*muttirai*) of authenticity on his witness of the true faith. This is also, by the way, the way catechists ought to understand their own ability to perform miracles and healings as deriving directly from God. The next few pages of the vv substantiate the claim that miracles happen everywhere in the Maravar region by listing a series of extraordinary events, about which Beschi had learned while hearing the witnesses of the 1726 inquiry for Brito's canonization. This job was partially an excuse to send him away from Ēlākkuricci and the organization of the retreats, as we saw in the previous chapter, and yet it offered him the opportunity to gather crucial information to understand and connect with the local community.

Among the miracles listed we find the healing of the daughter of Ātippan, a teacher in the school attached to the Jesuit residence in the village of Carukaṇi. This is how Beschi describes the episode in the vv:

[...] carukaṇi eṇṇum ūrilē, kulattil iṭaiyaṇ, tolilil upāttiyenṇum ātippan-
ukkum avaṇ stirī ānantāyikkum piṛanta pūvāyi 1722-m āṇṭil patiṇaintu

69 *Vētaṇṭakkam*, 127: *aruḷānanta cuvāmiyūm urōmāṇ tiruccapai vētamāttiram potuvāy nīr-
kum meyyāṇa vētameṇṇu nīṇkaḷ aṇiyat taṇ irattatiṇāl eluṭi vaitta nāl tuvakki, annāḷmaṭṭum
ivar eluṭiṇatu meyyeṇṇu cantekamaṇa evarum nīccayikkumpatiṭṭu, āṇṭavar tāṁē māṇṇap-
paṭāta tēva muttiraiyittār pōl avarai kuṛittu maṭṭillāta putumaikaḷai viṭāmaḷ ceytu koṇṭu
varukirār. ākaiyāl coṇṇayāvum pōtāmaḷ, iṇṇamum urōmāṇ tiruccapai cēcunātar uṇṭākkiṇa
tiruccapai eṇṇum, evarukkuṇ karai ēra vēṇṭiyatākip potuvāy nīrkuntiruccapai eṇṇuṇ can-
tekappatuvār uṇṭāṇāl, maravaṇ cīmaikkup pōy vicārikum pōtu, aruḷānanta cuvāmi vēṇṭu-
taliṇāl ākiya putumaikaḷaik kāṇāta ūraik kāṇpat'aritēy ākic calaṇcāṭiyātavaṇāl tāṇē telintu
moṭṭac karai ēra attāṇai putumaikaḷāl eṇpikkap paṭṭa urōmāṇ tiruccapaiyil utpaṭṭu naṭak-
kavēṇṭiyat' eṇṇu nīccayam paṇṇit tāṇum naṭakkakaṭavāṇ.*

vayatullāval, iruntārpōlē⁷⁰ mayaṅki viḷuntu cettār pōlē kiṭantapiṇṇu, eḷuntiruntu iruvīḷi purappaṭa, irukaṇ vīṅki, pārvaḷiyuṇ keṭṭu akaṇra poruḷ oṇraiḷuṇ kāṇāmal, aṭutta poruḷaip pukai paṭarntārpōlat telivarak kaṇṭu, iraviḷ cuṭar viḷakku erittālum oṇraiḷuṇ kāṇāmal, pakaliṇum arukē āḷ muṇ-pōṇāl oliya vaḷiyaik kaṇṭu cevvē pōka māṭṭāmaliruntāl. vanta mayakkamum, kuruṭuṇ tāṇē karaintu nīṅkumōv eṇṇu iraṇṭu mātamum pārttuk koṇṭirunta iṭattil atu nālukku nāl atikam atikamāki, maruntu oṇṇun tēṭāmal mikunta nampikkaiyōṭē aruḷānanta cuvāmi pāṭupaṭṭa stalattaic cēvikkap pōṇāl.⁷¹

In the village of Carukaṇi, Ātippan, a teacher of the *iṭaiyar* caste, and his wife Ānantāy had a daughter, Pūvāy. In 1722, when she was fifteen years of age, while standing, she fainted and fell, and lay there as if she was dead. After she stood up and opened her eyes, her pupils were dilated, and her vision spoilt. She could not even see big things, and even during the day, she could not follow the road and walk straight unless a person would walk closely in front of her. Two months went by thinking that the confusion and blindness that had befallen her would dissipate and disappear by themselves, but instead of seeing, everything got much worse day by day, and no medicine seemed to work. So, with great hope, she went to pray on the place of the martyrdom of Aruḷānanta Cuvāmi.

Of course, once she reached Ōriyūr, Pūvāy was healed by the intercession of the saint, an event that generated much wonder in the village. As it happens, we can compare Beschi's text with a second version of the same story told by Ātippan himself, since his testimony was recorded (in Tamil) in the 1726 inquiry. He was also, together with three catechists, among the four witnesses who could write, and thus sign, in Tamil. Here is what he said:

eṇ viṭṭilē campuvitta [*sic*, campavitta] putumaikaḷaiccolluvēṇ. 1722 āṇṭilē eṇ makaḷ pūvāy kōvililēy iruntāppōlē mayaṅkic ceṇṇavaḷaippōḷ viḷuntāl. carṇu piraku eḷuntiruntu kaṇmiḷi mikavum purappaṭṭu naṇṇāyōṇṇuṇ kāṇātiruntāl. tūram oṇṇun teriyāteṇpāl. kiṭṭa māci paṭarntāppōlē teriyum eṇpāl. pakalilē muṇ pōravāṇaik kiṭṭap piṇceṇṇāl oliya vaḷiyaṇiyāl. rātti

70 The expression *iruntār pōlē* is odd in this otherwise very polished and well written text, but read together with the witness of Ātippan immediately below, it is clear that Beschi uses *pōlē* as the colloquial variant of *appolūtu* also found there. The sentence has *iruntār pōlē* in all the editions I have consulted.

71 *Vētaṇṭilakkam*, 132.

viḷakku veḷiccattilēyum oṇṇun teriyāmar̥ kaikoṭukka veṇṭiyiruntatu. ippaṭiyiraṇṭu mācam pōy nāḷaikku nāl̥ pārvai yatikamāyk kuraintu cat-tiyaṇāta vupatēci yennaik kōpittu maruntu vicārikkac conṇān̄. atukku nān̄ māṭṭēn̄ eṇṇu cakala viyāti tīrkkū maruḷāṇanta cuvāmi pāṭupaṭṭa stalattukkanuppuvatē kuṇamenṇu nān̄ paḷikkūṭam avaicciruntu pōkka kūṭāmal ippō cērru pōṇamaravaṇ uṭaiyappa cērvaikāraṇum cāṇāttiyaṇ-pāyum paḷlicavariyāyūn̄ kūṭṭi yaṅkē makaḷai yaṇuppiṇēn̄.⁷²

I will tell you some miracles that happened in my household. In 1722, when my daughter Pūvāy was at the church, she fainted and fell, as if she was dead. After a bit, she stood up, but the pupils of her eyes were very dilated and she could not see anything well. From far away, she would say, she couldn't distinguish a thing. Closer by, a fog seemed to envelop everything. She could not make out the road, unless she was following closely someone walking in front of her. Two months went by like this, and her sight was getting much worse day by day, and catechist Cattiyaṇāta scolded me, telling me I should take care of her with medicines. I did not think so, and decided that it would be good to send her to the place of the martyrdom of Aruḷāṇanta Cuvāmi who can cure every disease. But I was busy with the school and could not accompany her, so I sent my daughter there with Maravaṇ Uṭaiyappa, a soldier (who is now dead), with Cāṇātti Āṇpāy, and with Paḷli Cavariyāy.

In this version too, Pūvāy is eventually healed by God at Ōriyūr. Notice first of all how the two versions are very similar, and Beschi often uses the exact same words as Ātippan̄. He also strives for a colloquial tone, even though he substitutes here and there colloquial vocabulary (*mīḷi*, *māci*) with more standard forms (*viḷi*, *pukai*). Catechists and other Tamil Christians who would read (or hear) the vv would find in it a polished version of the words of one of their own. However, two differences stand out. First, in his testimony Ātippan̄ stresses his own agency and faith, by telling how it was his idea to send Pūvāy to Ōriyūr. In Beschi's version, she simply decides that she will pray there. More poignantly for us, Ātippan̄'s version of the story includes a catechist, Cattiyaṇāta, who fulfills his role of community leader by scolding (*kōpittu*) him, and prompting him to cure the girl with medicines. Cattiyaṇāta behaves in the way we have come to expect from a catechist—including the unmistakably brusque manners Ātip-

72 The witness of Āṭippayaṇ (Andreas in Latin) is in AAV, Cong. Rit., Proc. 1697, ff. 85^v–90^v, here 88^v.

pan attributed to him. In Beschi's story, though, this reference is completely absent. This might have been for the sake of brevity, but certainly, it would have been inappropriate for a text whose readers were going to be mostly catechists to say that one of them had failed to suggest the right remedy.

In conclusion, the miracles that Beschi collected and listed in vv were part of the Catholic geography of the Maravar region, and mark a space that converts, especially catechists, at the same contributed to create and inhabited. Interestingly, the vv takes for granted that these events were indeed miracles—Beschi stresses the fact that he saw and spoke in person with the people who were healed through those miracles, *putumai*—even though at this time the Jesuits were still in the process of getting the Roman authorities to recognize Brito's martyrdom, and the miracles performed through his intercession (Figure 6).⁷³ While the canonization of Brito was connected with long-term Church politics, and the Jesuits invested time and effort in having one of their missionaries who practiced the Malabar Rites recognized as a martyr and eventually a saint by the Church, the local role of Brito was different, and immediately effective. He became part of the world of local Catholicism, sacralized the spaces inhabited by the catechists, and was a powerful tool to create and mobilize catechist identity (Figure 7). The miracles he performed when alive, and after his death, were also proof of the truth of Catholicism in opposition to Protestant Christianity, its church, its missionaries, and its catechists. This text mostly offered tools—from histories of miracles to theological explanations—to fight Protestant catechists locally, on the ground of the Maravar and Kaveri delta regions. It aimed to mobilize the catechists for the purpose of controversy against their most direct opponents, Protestant catechists, and Beschi cleverly weaved this antagonism into the narrative of catechist identity in the text.

5 Conclusions: Catholic Selves, Dangers and Discipline

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the practice of the spiritual retreats crystallized for the first time in the history of the mission the social, spiritual, and cultural identity of Catholic catechists. The multiple roles of these men clearly emerge in the sources of the period, which also record for the first time the catechists' own voices as witnesses. As we saw in Chapter One, the different

73 The word *putumai* originally means something novel, fresh, and also uncommon or strange (MW, 324). By the eighteenth century *putumai* meant, in the Catholic context, a miracle, as is well attested in the literature.



FIGURE 7 Contemporary statue of Arulāṇanta Cuvāmi or Saint João de Brito in the new church of Ōriyūr
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

inquiries for Brito's canonization and documents connected with the Malabar Rites controversy include interrogatories and sworn statements of these laymen. Through these sources, we could glimpse at how catechists positioned themselves vis-à-vis the missionaries, and imitated them, while also abiding by local systems of caste solidarity and patterns of social mobility. Starting from 1718, thanks to the initiative of Carlo Michele Bertoldi, the training and the role of the catechists in the mission was further shaped by the spiritual retreats organized at Āvūr and other villages of the Kaveri basin. Since the Society of Jesus accepted into its ranks as a priest only one Indian before the suppression, becoming a catechist was the only form of spiritual investiture available to Tamil converts at the time.⁷⁴ The modes and implications of this investiture included the transmission of many different types of charisma, from healing powers to social authority. This transfer generated anxiety among the missionaries, and the desire to control their catechists, which was strongly connected to the establishment of training methods such as the retreats. At the same time, everything we learn from missionary sources of the time points to a considerable amount of self-fashioning on the part of the catechists. In the case of Brito's canonization inquiries, for instance, the catechists carefully navigated the local context as well as the official Church procedure in a way that would improve their social and spiritual standing. The first goal of Chapter One and Chapter Two was to identify missionaries and their catechists as interlocutors, and partners in such complex negotiations and conversations.

So, these chapters have explored the immediate contexts of these interactions, at the crossroads of local and global processes. On the one hand, catechists in India were the local expression of one crucial force in the global spread of early modern Catholicism, that is lay people, who were organized differently from place to place and yet always a resource that missionaries all over the globe were able to mobilize *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.⁷⁵ On the other hand, the missionaries who organized the retreats did so against the background of local competing Śaiva and siddha specialist groups, as well as powerful Śaiva *maṭas*

74 The only Indian Jesuit ordained before the suppression of the Society was Luís Bramane, a collaborator of Henrique Henriques in the sixteenth century (Županov, *Missionary Tropics*, 259–267). The situation was different in Goa, where converted Brahmans had their own (Oratorian) order, and the local priest Mateus de Castro (1594–1677) became a Bishop. For the latter's adventurous story, see Giuseppe Sorge, *Matteo De Castro (1594–1677). Profilo di una Figura Emblemativa del Conflitto Giurisdizionale tra Goa e Roma nel Secolo XVII* (Bologna: Edizioni Clueb, 1986).

75 On lay people in the mission see Maldavsky, *Les laïcs dans la mission*; on the Japanese case, Hélène Vu-Thanh, *Devenir Japonais. La mission jésuite au Japon (1549–1614)* (Paris: Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2016), 147–174.

or *ātinam* in the Kaveri region, which were specifically non-Brahmanical and managed by Vellalas. These (mostly Śaiva) religious men and institutions articulated local connections between language, location, spirituality, and social mobility in the context of a fragmented political order, that offered an important model to the catechists, and the missionaries. We will return to this in the next chapters.

The tensions, dialogues and negotiation between catechists and missionaries emerge in the corpus of texts composed for the retreats. A remarkable stylistic aspect of these texts is the fact that they were written in (relatively good) prose. Of course, by the early eighteenth century, prose-writing was hardly a novelty. Besides the many specialized forms of prose traditionally available in Tamil, Jesuit missionaries had been experimenting with forms of devotional, theological, and scholastic prose since the late sixteenth century. Yet the texts we just read introduce new important elements. First, they show a certain familiarity with a number of Tamil registers, from the philosophical to the colloquial, and their syntax and vocabulary are varied. As it appears from his grammatical text, Costanzo Beschi at least thought of his prose works as belonging to the realm of high or literary Tamil. Moreover, these texts are dialogic, and transpose into writing either the inner dialogue between catechists and their own Christian selves in-the-making, as in the case of the *Ñānamuyarci*; or the conversation between missionaries and their converts, which Beschi almost literally includes in the *Vētaṇṇakkam*. This dialogic nature is, on the one hand, closely tied to the core of the Ignatian project in the *Spiritual Exercises*, which were after all conversations between a retreatant and his guide. At the same time, these textualized dialogues record for the first time the spiritual, social and cultural mediations that were shaping Tamil Catholicism in those years, and in this respect, they offer crucial insights into the different levels at which the practice of the retreats contributed to shape the catechist identity.

Finally, all the texts we have seen—the *Ñānamuyarci*, the *Vētiyarōḷukkam*, and the *Vētaṇṇakkam*—contain spiritual and practical instructions that were meant to fight the dangers of the liminal situation of the catechists. These were non-ordained men who held great social and spiritual powers among Tamil Catholic communities that missionaries could hardly reach, let alone evangelize and discipline. The best solution was therefore to discipline the catechists themselves, who in turn could work as agents to avoid the independent circulation of Christianity (as in the case of the Pariah) and the lapse of Catholics into Lutheranism. Among the many aims of this training there was the solidification of the catechists' Catholic self around orthodox ideas and practices, in order to allow them to resist local competing religious discourses and models of the self, like those of the siddhas, the Śaivas, or the Lutherans. This chapter

has considered such intersecting processes of social and spiritual mobility, as well as disciplining, and has begun to explore the role of texts and textuality in this context. The next chapter will take us to the world of Tamil grammar and poetry. This was never too far away even in the preceding pages, insofar as Tamil was the medium of communication and the world order implied by most of the historical events I mapped. Throughout the chapters that follow, the way Catholics wrote, read, and lived in Tamil will constitute the entry point to understanding the complex relationship between missionaries, catechists, and their locations.

PART 2

Rhetorical Education



Catholic Poetics and Politics of Space

The sixteenth and last point of the *Inter Graviores*, the decree issued in 1704 by Carlo Tomaso Maillard de Tournon against the practices of accommodation in the Madurai mission, concerned literary practices. The decree prohibited Indian converts reading non-Christian literature under pain of excommunication, unless they had special dispensation from the missionaries.¹ This point received little attention during the ensuing Malabar Rites controversy, because neither Laines nor Antonio Broglia Brandolini, the procurator for the mission's cause at the Roman Curia in the 1720s, ever asked for it to be revoked or softened. They claimed that on that point, Jesuit missionaries agreed with the decree, and behaved accordingly.² The issue was certainly minor when compared with other pressing concerns, especially those regarding caste among Catholics. That was a pervasive aspect of life in South India, and missionaries in those years fought fiercely to be allowed to respect caste differences among their converts.³ By contrast, most newly converted Christians were illiterate or had only partial access to written texts, even when they enjoyed public

- 1 This interdiction is articulated in the sixteenth point of the decree. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I cite Tournon's *Inter Graviores* as included in Benedict XIV, *Bullarium*, 422–425.
- 2 The two books written by Antonio Broglia Brandolini to defend the Society from the accusations and injunctions of Tournon's decree—*Giustificazione del praticato sin'ora da' religiosi della Compagnia di Gesù, nelle missioni del Madurey, Mayssur, e Carnate; presentata alla Santa Sede Apostolica. In occasione del Decreto, loro intimato in Puducierj dalla chiara memoria del Sig. Card. di Tournon a'di 8. di Luglio, dell'anno 1704* (Roma: Stamperia della Rev. Camera Apostolica, 1724), and *Risposta alle accuse date al praticato sin'ora da' Religiosi della Compagnia di Gesù, nelle Missioni del Madurey, Mayssur, e Carnate, in due libri diversi dal reverendissimo Padre Fra Luigi Maria Lucino del Venerabil' Ordine de' Predicatori, Maestro di Sacra Teologia, e Commissario Generale del Santo Ufizio in Roma*, 3 vols (Cologne, 1729)—do not even address the sixteenth point of the decree. Indeed, multiple documents in ACDF show how Brandolini considered this point outside of the scope of his legal action, including a note sent by Brandolini to the Holy Office on March 31, 1733, which lists the points of Tournon's decree that the Society accepted without further specifications (*Capi del decreto dell'Em.o Sig.r Cardinal di Tournon, intorno a'quali non si supplica la S[an]ta Sede*), in ACDF, S.S., QQ 1 m.
- 3 On the crucial role of caste in the Malabar Rites controversy, and the discussions regarding the status of the low-caste *paraiyar* converts in the mission, Aranha argues that at stake in the controversy was “the definition of the limits to which the Indian church could incorporate mechanisms of caste reproduction and caste division” (“Discrimination and Integration,” 189). See also Pavone, “Tra Roma e il Malabar.”

readings, oral narratives, and performances. And yet, was the relationship with non-Christian literature in the Madurai mission really unproblematic?

Taking this question as its starting point, this chapter explores how missionaries read Tamil literature, how they explained it to their catechists, and how they explained themselves and the Catholic faith in relationship with that literature. It also shows how in this process they mobilized Latin and Tamil models of education, from rhetorical manuals to *maṭam* or monastic institutions, as modes of social and political engagement. A good basis for understanding these developments is to read the entire sixteenth point of *Inter Graviore*s, which includes Tournon's prescriptions regarding non-Christian, meaning primarily Hindu, Tamil literature:

Finally, because of reading books that talk about the false religion, and obscene and superstitious things, a poison creeps into the hearts of the faithful, which not only offends the purity of their faith, but also corrupts their morals, we greatly commend the zeal and hard work of those missionaries who either translated books containing the sacred doctrine of the Catholic Church, and records (*monumenta*) of sacred things into the Malabar language, that is Tamil, for the education of the Indian converts; or composed new books, for their convenience and instruction. And to those converts we explicitly prohibit the books of fables of the Gentiles, and we forbid them from reading them, and keeping them, under pain of excommunication *latæ sententiæ*, unless they obtain beforehand the permission of their Parish priest, or of the missionary in charge of the cure of their souls. To the discretion of these men, we entrust the faculty of dispensation with regard to this matter, as well as to select for the use of Christians some books free from obnoxious superstitions (if indeed there are any) and not treating anything that goes against good morals, and to allow their reading.⁴

4 Benedicti XIV, *Bullarium*, 424: *Et demum, quia ex librorum de falsa religione, et de rebus obscaenis, superstitiosisque tractantium lectura, venenum ut plurimum serpere solet ad cor Fidelium, quo non minus Fidei puritas offenditur, quam mores corrumpuntur, magnopere commendantes zelum, ac studium Missionariorum, qui libros sacram Ecclesiæ Catholicæ doctrinam, rerumque Sacrarum monumenta continentes, pro Indorum Christifidelium eruditione, in linguam Malabaricam, seu Tamulicam transtulere, vel novos pro illorum commodo, et institutione composuerunt; iisdem Christifidelibus expresse interdiximus fabulosos Gentilium libros, eosque legere, et retinere prohibemus, sub pœna excommunicationis latæ sententiæ, nisi prius habita licentia Parochi, seu Missionarii curam animarum exercentis, quorum prudentiæ committimus facultatem super hoc dispensandi, et libros (si qui forte sunt) noxia superstitione vacuos: et nihil contra bonos mores tractantes, pro Christianorum usu seligendi, eorumque lecturam permitendi.*

Conspicuously, Tournon was worried about the connection between literature and pagan superstition. He thought Tamil books to be persuasive, and therefore insidious for Christian converts, and took it upon himself to remind Madurai missionaries of the danger such books represented. The long commentary to Tournon's decree written by Vigilio Saverio Mancini (1666–1743), an eccentric Jesuit who, after twenty years as a missionary on the Coromandel coast, took a hard stance against the method of accommodation, agrees with Tournon, and offers some further clues that the situation regarding Tamil literature on the ground was more complex than the depiction given by Laines and Brandolini.⁵ The following passage, written around 1722, shows Mancini's take on the sixteenth point of the *Inter Graviores*:

This is a very good measure for Christians all over the world, and especially for those who, living in close proximity with heathens, are in greater danger of transgressing. Missionaries usually prohibit the reading of such books, but they need to allow it for the catechists, so that they know and understand the fables of the gentiles enough to be able to confute them, and change the heathens' minds. At times, from this need arise scandals, because the catechists—who are the greatest competitors of the missionaries (*sono gl'emoli maggiori delli missionarj*)—abuse their power (*prevaricano*), and cause others to overstep boundaries (*fanno prevaricare*).⁶ But this is no fault of the missionaries, nor of the license given to the catechists. Besides, it is rare for Christians to read these books out of curiosity. Still, the new prohibition contained in the Decree might be useful to give the missionaries better judgement, and make the catechists more cautious.⁷

5 On Vigilio Mancini and his role in the condemnation of the Malabar Rites, see again Aranha, "Discrimination and Integration".

6 While the verb "emulare" (from which the adjective "emulo" derives) means in modern Italian "to imitate", in the early modern time it meant primarily *concorrere*, *gareggiare*, i.e., "to compete". See *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, 3rd edition (Firenze: Stamperia dell'Accademia della Crusca, 1691), 598.

7 *É ottimo q[ue]sto rimedio per tutti li Cristiani del mondo, e maggiorm[en]te per quelli, che convivono con gl'Infedeli, e sono in maggior pericolo di prevaricare. Li missionarj proibiscono la lettura di tali libri, e solo sono necessitati a concederla alli catechisti, perchè abbiano tutta la cognizione, e notizia delle favole della Gentilità, per poter rispondere, e convincere gl'Infedeli. Da q[ue]ste necessità alle volte nasce qualche scandalo, perchè gli catechisti med[esimi], che perloppù sono gl'emoli maggiori delli missionarj, prevaricano, et fanno prevaricare altri, ma è senza colpa delli missionarj e della licenza, che gli vien data; Per altro rari sono de cristiani, che per curiosità si mettono à leggere q[ue]ti libri: nondimeno q[ue]sta nuova proibizione del Decreto può molto giovare, e à rendere li missionarj più oculati, e li catechisti più cauti, e li cristiani tutti*

The subtle yet suggestive irony of the passage is typical of Mancini's style. Worthy of note here is the use of the Italian verb *prevaricare* in its intransitive sense, implying both abuse of power and wrong moral conduct. The late Latin verb *prævaricare* also had the meaning of secretly coming to an agreement with a defendant during a trial, so as not to witness against him. This nuance might be present in Mancini's passage, insofar as the catechists influenced by "pagan" literature could be considered accusers in a religious controversy who surreptitiously allied with an enemy deserving indictment.⁸ Crucially, in the sentence where he describes the *prevaricare* of the catechists, Mancini inserts an appositional clause to say that as a rule the catechists competed with the missionaries. Hence, the catechists happened to *prevaricare*—to abuse their power, transgress the laws of Christianity, and adopt a wrong moral conduct—precisely because they wanted to impose their authority over that of the missionaries. To do so, they were possibly spreading the influence of Hindu literature among the Catholic faithful, rather than using it to oppose religious adversaries.

This reading of Mancini's passage reveals a fissure behind the smooth surface of Jesuit apologetical narrative, and clearly poses the question of the relationship between missionaries, catechists, and Tamil literature, which will be the focus of this and the next chapter. What was the role of "pagan" literature in the mission? Who read it, in what context, and how? In what way was it persuasive, and how could Catholic texts be equally or more persuasive? By raising these questions, the *Inter Graviore*s and Mancini's commentary invite us to reconsider Catholic literary practices in Tamil, and to examine how Christian texts positioned in relationship to Tamil literature and literary theories in the eighteenth century. We will see how at that moment, missionary practices of literary and cultural translation went beyond lexical semantics (the word-to-word analogies explored by authors like Henriques or Nobili) to become a matter of literary

più scrupolosi. BCR, Ms 192, f. 61^r. Another copy of this treatise, accompanied by letters regarding Mancini's stay in Rome in 1723 (which solidified the positions against the Jesuits, and the final condemnation of the Malabar Rites) can be found in ACDF, St.St., QQ 1-I.

8 The deponent verb *prævaricari* acquired a technical meaning in Roman law: *Prævaricatorem eum esse ostendimus, qui colludit cum reo, et translatit muneris accusandi defungitur, eo quod proprias quidem probationes dissimularet, falsas vero accusationes admitteret* ("we show that a *prævaricator* is the one who colludes with a defendant and in a negligent way acquits oneself of the duty of accusing, inasmuch he dissimulates his own evidence, and admits false accusations as truth"). See *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis conditum a Carolo Dufresne Domino du Cange auctum a Monachis Ordinis S. Benedicti cum supplementis integris D.P. Carpenterii, Adelungii, aliorum, suisque digessit G.A.L. Henschel ...*, vol. 6 (Niort: L. Favre, 1886), 475.

genre, register, meter—in short, a matter of poetics or *poruḷ*. This transition is embodied in the life and works of Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi, whom we encountered in the previous chapter among the organizers of the retreats. Yet in the 1730s and early 1740s he fulfilled many other roles, including educator, court poet and counselor to local political players.

1 Jesuit Humanism and Devotion

The main events of Beschi's life are well known, especially thanks to the biography and articles written by the Jesuit missionary and scholar Léon Besse in the early twentieth century.⁹ These works are invaluable sources of information, albeit aimed at emphasizing Beschi's missionary agenda in reaction to what Besse saw as an excessive indigenization of his life story by local scholars, especially Beschi's nineteenth-century biographer Muttucāmi Piḷḷai.¹⁰ Following Besse's œuvre, the life of Beschi can be roughly divided into three periods. The first one is the Italian period, from Costanzo Gioseffo Eusebio Beschi's birth in Castiglione delle Stiviere in 1680 until his departure for India in 1711.¹¹ The years from 1700 to 1710 are particularly important in this context, because Beschi spent them in the culturally stimulating environment of the Jesuit college of Santa Lucia in Bologna. He left Bologna in 1710, reached Goa in 1711, and thereupon joined the Madurai mission. After a couple of years spent in the southern villages of the mission, in the region of Tirunelveli, in 1716 he

9 For a review of the historiography on Beschi, see the Introduction. Besides his biography, *Father Beschi*, Léon Besse wrote the important essay *Chanda Sahib and Beschi* (Trichinopoly: St. Joseph Industrial School Press, 1909).

10 Appāvu Muttucāmi Piḷḷai aka A. Muttusami Pillei was a Catholic Vellala from Pondicherry who worked at the College of Fort St. George until his death. Besides the biographical sketch of Beschi's life, first published in English (1840) and then in Tamil (1843), Muttucāmi authored many other Christian works. A short biography of this figure is found in Simon Casie Chetty, *The Tamil Plutarch, containing a Summary Account of the Lives of the Poets and Poetesses of Southern India and Ceylon* (Jaffna: Ripley & Strong printers, 1859), 55–56. Muttucāmi collaborated with Vittuvān Cāmināta Piḷḷai, another Catholic Vellala from Pondicherry who taught Francis Whyte Ellis (1777–1819) (Chetty, *Tamil Plutarch*, 114–115). I discuss both figures in Chapter Six.

11 Besse was unclear about Beschi's baptismal name, and the names of his parents. These doubts were clarified after I was able to access Beschi's baptismal record, still in the Parish archives of Castiglione, *Battesimi*, vol. 7 (ab anno 1667 ad 1683). See Ebeling and Trento, "From missionary to *pulavar*," n. 2. Even though these documents show that Beschi was baptized with the unusual northern variant Gioseffo, in this book I use the standardized form Giuseppe that he also used to sign when writing to his Jesuit companions and superiors.

was given responsibility for the Christians of the Thanjavur kingdom, among whom he spent most of his missionary career. Until 1742, Beschi worked in different villages—Vaṭukarpēṭṭai, Kōṇāṅkuppam—but mostly at Ēlākkuricci, nearby the city of Thanjavur, where his literary, devotional, and social project took shape. From the early 1730s onwards, he cultivated a close relationship with general Chanda Sahib, and moved to Tiruchirappalli in 1742 to join Chanda Sahib's court, just before the latter's defeat at the hands of the Marathas. We have almost no information on the third period of Beschi's life, from when he was forced to leave Tiruchirappalli in 1742 until his death at Ambalakkadu in 1747.¹²

Keeping this chronological sketch in mind, some specific moments of Beschi's biography are crucial to clarify the contradictions that emerge from the competing biographical accounts, and to understand Beschi's multiple local identities—the learned Tamil *pulavar*, the initiator of most Marian cults in the Kaveri region, and much more—in the context of his overall trajectory. Particularly important for this endeavor are some hitherto little-studied sources like the *Epistulae Generalium*, registers of the letters sent by the General of the Society in Rome to its members worldwide, and the surviving catalogs of the Malabar Province.¹³ When reading closely the *Epistulae Generalium*, for instance, it is impossible to miss that Beschi's name appears with extraordinary frequency among the recipients of those letters, especially after the election of Michelangelo Tamburini to the Generalate in 1706. This is remarkable, because Beschi was not a nobleman. He came from a solid but middle-class family that did not play any role in the life of the Society, unlike the families of many of his confrères.¹⁴ The relationship between Beschi and Tamburini must therefore have developed independently, before Tamburini became General. It likely happened when Tamburini—originally from Modena, a town not too far from Beschi's native Castiglione—was head of the Venetian Province, and Beschi

12 On the date of Beschi's death, see n. 44 in this chapter.

13 The use of *Epistulae Generalium* (abbreviated as Epp. GG.) to reconstruct the relationship between the central administration of the Society and its individual members has been pioneered by Elisa Frei. The Epp. GG. are not cataloged together, but divided by Province; usually, the letters sent by the general to members of a certain Province are collected in the initial volumes of the series devoted to that Province in ARSI. While living in Italy Beschi belonged to the Venetian Province, and that is the series that I use for this section; in the next section, I use letters written to missionaries in Madurai (part of the Malabar Province) contained in the first volume of the Goa series.

14 Elisa Frei, "The Many Faces of Ignazio Maria Romeo, SJ (1676–1724?)" analyzes a case in which the General's letters reflect the important role a specific Jesuit and his family played in the life of the Society.

one of its members working first in Ravenna, then in Bologna. Their correspondence continued after Beschi left Italy for India, and even though Beschi had few administrative roles in the mission, Tamburini wrote to him more than to any other simple missionary in Madurai.

The early letters by Tamburini concern Beschi's studies at the College of Santa Lucia in Bologna. In those years, Beschi focused on grammar and rhetoric, as required by the *Ratio Studiorum*—a training that would, in hindsight, help him to tackle Tamil grammar and poetry once in India, and ultimately open his school.¹⁵ Another aspect that emerges from these letters, and seems equally important to understanding his subsequent work as a missionary, is Beschi's deep involvement in the world of Baroque Catholic devotion. This comes as no surprise to historians of Catholicism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, yet historians of the Madurai mission have almost uniquely stressed the theological approach of its founder Roberto Nobili, and Beschi's philological enterprise. The study of the global and local articulation of devotional practices has been overlooked, or confined to the domain of anthropology and folklore studies.¹⁶ Yet from the *Epistolæ Generalium* we know, for instance, that as early as 1701 Beschi asked to be allowed to go on a pilgrimage to the Santa Casa in Loreto, probably the most important Marian sanctuary in Europe at this time.¹⁷ This was a rite of passage for many young Jesuits of his generation. The answer of the then General Tirso Gonzales was positive, but delegated the final decision to the Venetian Provincial—Tamburini himself, who would become general only five years later.¹⁸ We have no proof that Beschi's request was eventually granted, but it is likely that he went to Loreto and the place made a strong impression on him, since more or less explicit representations of the Santa Casa appear in many of the Tamil works he com-

15 It is possible to follow his studies in the catalogs of the Venetian Province (the *Catalogi breves* of 1705–1711 are in ARSI, Ven. 50 and the *Catalogi Triennale* in Ven. 77–78–79), where his roles as student and sometimes teacher were duly noted down. A summary of the information contained in these catalogs can be found in Gualberto Giachi, *L'India divenne la sua terra* (Milano: Editrice Missioni, 1981), 22–25.

16 The groundbreaking (if not always accurate) study of Muslim and Christian devotion in South India by Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, is an exception.

17 On the importance of Loreto for the Jesuits, see Vincenzo Lavenia, "Miracoli e memoria. I gesuiti a Loreto nelle storie della Compagnia (secc. XVI–XVII)," in *Figure della memoria culturale. Tipologie, identità, personaggi, testi e segni*, ed. Massimo Bonafin, special issue, *L'Immagine Riflessa. Testi, Società, Culture* 22, 1–2 (2013): 331–348; on the role of this sanctuary in the missionary *imaginaire*, see Chapter Five.

18 This information is in the reply of General Tirso Gonzales to Fr. Costanzo Beschi in Ravenna (3 May 1701), ARSI, Ven. 21, vol. 1, f. 58^v.

posed years later. In a similar vein, we read that in 1710, just before Beschi left for India, Tamburini gave him permission to print a small devotional booklet on the guardian angel, pending approbation of the revisers. Beschi had written it together with his patron, Marquis Locatelli, whose sons he was educating in Bologna.¹⁹

This devotional and emotional climate centered around pilgrimages and devotion to saints and angels informed the missionary choices that Jesuits like Beschi would take in South India. It also explains some of the changes in the literary life of the mission in the eighteenth century, in comparison with previous centuries. Francis Xavier famously brought along on his missionary travels only a breviary and a copy of *De institutione bene vivendi* by Marko Marulić, while Roberto Nobili was mostly influenced by medieval scholastic literature such as the works of Thomas Aquinas and Peter Lombard.²⁰ While these influences never faded—in the previous chapter we saw, for instance, the importance of Aquinas for understanding the *Īnānamayārci*—in the eighteenth century missionaries in South India read and wrote different texts. They liked devotional works, and were particularly fond of edifying stories and examples, which they found useful while preaching in South India. So, the list of books that Giovanni Battista Buttari, then stationed in the southernmost residence of the Madurai mission, requested in 1749 from his sister, a nun in the small Italian town of Osimo, included copies of *L'utile col dolce*, a collection of edifying stories by the fellow Jesuit Carlo Casalicchio; *Il divoto di S. Giuseppe fornito d'esempj, e di pratiche fruttuose per venerarlo*, a work of devotion towards St. Joseph by the Jesuit poet and playwright Giuseppe Antonio Patrignani; and the *Mystica ciudad de Dios*, the life of Mary by the Spanish nun and mystic María de Jesús de Ágreda.²¹

19 *Non hò difficoltà che V.R.a dia alla stampa anche col suo nome l'operetta che mi accenna sopra il S[ant]o Angelo Custode e per propagare il culto di esso, e sodisfare alla divotione e sua e del Sig[no]re Marchese Locatelli che ve l'ha richiesta. Scrivo pertanto al P[ad]re Pro[vincia]le che le assegni i revisori, e quando questi l'approvino le mandarò subito la facoltà & la stampa.* Michelangelo Tamburini to Giuseppe Costanzo Beschi in Bologna (21 October 1709), Ven. 21, vol. 1, f. 415^v. It seems that in the end the book was not published, or at least there are no traces of it anywhere in the archives.

20 See for instance Giulia Nardini, "Roberto Nobili's *Vivāha Dharma*. A Case of Cultural Translation," in *Translating Catechisms, Translating Cultures: The Expansion of Catholicism in the Early Modern World*, eds Antje Flüchter and Rouven Wirbser (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 223–251.

21 *Per me: Prediche del Fabri, Mystica Citta di Dio, Casalicchio l'utile col dolce, Varii fogli di Storie, Il divoto di S. Giuseppe del P[adre] Patrignani, o altro libro che tratti di S[an]t Giuseppe.* Fr. Giovanni Battista Buttari to his sister S. Maria Maddalena Buttari (Nemao [Nēmam], 29 October 1749), ARSI, Opp. NN. 128 I, ff. 82–83, here 83^r.

Ágreda's work was especially popular among missionaries in Madurai, and appears in all the surviving lists of books they requested. Buttari asked for it, as did João da Costa before him, and we will see that Beschi's literary masterpiece, the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, was conceived as an elaboration upon Ágreda's work.²² As these literary interests show, by the early eighteenth century missionaries were not simply relying on their charisma, or arguing from a philosophical and theological standpoint that Christianity was the most rational religion, as Xavier and Nobili had done before. They talked about angels and demons, miracles and wonders, and used examples from the lives of saints and other emotionally charged stories in order to inspire devotion, and to inscribe Catholicism in the eyes, ears, and hearts of their listeners.

Devotion towards old and new saints, including Ignatius and Xavier themselves, also nourished the desire for self-sanctification that was such an important element in the missionary vocation. Beschi began to feel the sting of this desire, and wrote his first (lost) *indipeta* while in Ravenna in 1701. General Tirso Gonzales answered this letter in the usual cautious way, inviting Beschi to wait, and work hard in the meantime.²³ After moving in 1702 to the Collegio Santa Lucia in Bologna, a much bigger Jesuit institution, Beschi's desire for the Indies must have been further stirred by hearing stories of the mission, and witnessing the departure of other Jesuits. One of his colleagues in the Collegio from 1703 to 1705, Alessandro Calini—originally from Brescia, and likely a relative of the famous Jesuit writer Cesare Calini—became a missionary in South India just a few years before him.²⁴ Beschi wrote his second *indipeta* in 1706, precisely around the time when Calini left. One sentence stands out in this other letter, addressed to the newly elected General Tamburini: "Six years have already

22 *Pedi hum Breviario da impressão mais nova que V.R. podesse achar, e com todas a vezes dos sanctos novos. Hum jogo dos libros que compos Soror Maria Jesu de Agreda sa via da virgem purissima. Isto peno agora se for possivel acharse, e não estiverem prohibidos os taes libros. Posso a V.R. muito particularmente se vir na sella Angelica, aonde tene principio e redemção, que esta em Loreto se lembre de myn, e me recommenda a Sacratissima Raynha Mary, o mesmo pesso a V.R. faça em Roma en todos os sanctuarios [...]* Letter of Carlo Colano to João da Costa (Vaypem [Vypeenakotta, Vaippinkōṭṭa] 14 September 1696), AAV, Cong. Rit., Proc. 1698, ff. 104–109, here f. 109^r.

23 Tirso Gonzales to Costanzo Beschi in Ravenna (4 April 1701), ARSI, Ven. 21, vol. 1, f. 54^r.

24 'Alexander Calinus' is listed, together with Beschi, among the Jesuits of the Collegio Santa Lucia in Bologna in the following catalogs: ARSI, Ven 50. Cat. Trien. 1705–1711, *Catalogi Provinciae Venetæ anni 1705*, ff. 1–136; and ARSI Ven. 78 Cat. Brev. 1703–1706, *Catalogus Brevis Provinciae Venetæ* Kal. Januarii 1703, ff. 1–48^v. Even though the paucity of sources makes it difficult to follow Calini's career closely, we have the official records of the fourth vow and the five simple vows that Calini took in 1713 in the church of Manappad (Maṇappāṭu) on the Fishery coast in ARSI, Lusitania 13, ff. 235–236. The annual catalog of the year 1722 says

passed since I swore myself to the Mission among the unfaithful, with the letter you know. I wrote to Your Reverence multiple times about this; and it is not without great consolation, that I keep re-reading the loving replies, and the great hopes, that you deigned to give me.”²⁵ The previous General, Tirso Gonzales, did not write to Beschi after responding to Beschi’s first *indipeta* of 1701. Here, Beschi is clearly addressing Tamburini as a long-term interlocutor, not in his role as General. The passage must refer to an exchange of letters regarding Beschi’s desire to become a missionary that happened when Tamburini was still Provincial. This highlights how becoming a missionary was the result of long-term networking efforts. Beschi was lucky to have his previous Provincial, and clearly one of his supporters, become General during his lifetime. We find in this letter also a reference to Beschi’s self-proclaimed skills as an orator—he declares that if given the opportunity to argue for himself in person, he would certainly win the cause, and convince Tamburini to allow him to leave for the Indies.²⁶

As a newly elected general, Tamburini could only reply to Beschi’s letter in a vague, albeit positive, manner.²⁷ One year later, however, he wrote again to reassure him that sooner or later he would leave. From this second letter, we also understand that Beschi was already explicitly requesting for the Malabar mission (*Malavare*).²⁸ It was extremely rare that missionaries would ask for a specific mission, and even rarer that they would be assigned to it. Perhaps Beschi was influenced by his colleague in Bologna, Alessandro Calini, who

that Alexander Josephus Calinus died at Tindicallu, nowadays Dindigul, on 29 July 1721; see Besse, *Excerpta e Catalogis Provinci Malabarensis (1610–1752)* (Trichinopoly: St. Joseph Industrial School Press, 1910), 38, which offers a transcription of the section in ARSI, Goa 29 concerning the Madurai mission.

25 *Già sono sei anni, dacché m'obbligai alla Missione tra gli' Infedeli con noto espresso. Più volte ne ho scritto a V.P.; e non senza somma mia consolazione, ne vado tuttora rileggendo le amorevoli risposte, e le grandi speranze, che si è degnata di darmi.* Costanzo Beschi to General Michelangelo Tamburini (Bologna, 3 December 1706), ARSI, Ven. 99, f. 199.

26 *Ma deh se io potessi venire in persona a piedi di V[ostre] P[aternalità] e a viva voce esporle la mia dimanda, mi da Dio fiducia, che vincerei la causa.* Ibidem.

27 Still, Tamburini wrote to him twice in the year he was elected, with very similar messages. The first time, he wrote in reply to another *indipeta*, now lost (Michelangelo Tamburini to Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (15 March 1706) Ven. 21, vol. 2, f. 341). The second time was in reply to the *indipeta* we know: Michelangelo Tamburini to Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (16 December 1706) ARSI, Ven. 21, vol. 2, f. 425^r.

28 *Quanti sono i vostri santi desiderii che tengo nelle replicate domande che mi fate della Missione dell'Indie, et in particolare del Malavare, altre tanti motivi hò ancora di consolarmi. State x.cio di buon animo, poichè alla prima congiuntura che ci sarà e non potrà tardare molto, si adempiranno certamente le vostre brame.* Michelangelo Tamburini to Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi in Bologna (5 December 1707), ARSI, Ven. 21, vol. 2, f. 576^r.

was by then a missionary on the Fishery coast; or perhaps his familiarity with Tamburini made him daring with his requests. In any case, when in 1709 Tamburini granted Beschi's desire, he assigned him to the Madurai mission, with the strange additional reassurance that superiors in Goa would not stop him from reaching his final destination. This remark suggests that Beschi had wished to work in Madurai, and also expressed the fear to be held back in Goa instead.²⁹

Coincidentally, Beschi's attraction towards the Malabar mission developed during the years when Francisco Laines had come back from South India, and was in Rome to defend the Indian mission against Tournon's accusations. Only a few months after granting the Madurai mission to Beschi, Tamburini accepted another missionary, Antonio Broglia Brandolini, and entrusted his training to Laines.³⁰ This training was probably a well-engineered transfer of responsibilities in the context of the burgeoning Malabar Rites controversy, considering that after a short time in South India Brandolini would become the procurator of the Madurai mission in Rome. In other words, the General most likely had precise expectations from each Jesuit he selected for the mission at that delicate time. So why Beschi, among the many Jesuit novices who dreamt of the Indies? Was he chosen because he was a good scholar who had already proven himself by authoring a book, but was not so exceptional as to be needed in Europe? Did Laines specifically request someone who could devote himself to the cause of local literature, since the mission had not had anyone operating in this field since the time of its founder Roberto Nobili?

When Beschi reached India, he entered the Madurai mission right away, wearing the clothes of a *paṇṭāram*, a non-Brahman preacher, as all missionaries did by this time.³¹ He was first assigned to villages in the south, and his

29 *Desiderando che l'Apostolico zelo di V[ostra] R[everenz]a che con tanto fervore lo chiama alle laboriose Missioni dell'Indie abbia tutto quel maggior merito che può avere in una risoluzione sì generosa e di tanta gloria del Sig[no]re e profitto delle anime, espressamente le comando in virtù di S[anta] Obedienza che vada alla Missione del Madurè; Ne dubiti punto che i superiori di Goa siano per porre alcuna remora à quanto con precetto le ordino, e à queste gentili sue brame.* Michelangelo Tamburini to Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (September 1709), ARSI, Ven. 22, vol. 2, f. 407^v.

30 *Circa la partenza potrete intendervi col P[adre] Laines Proc[urato]r di quelle Missioni, alla cui volontà mi rimetto.* Michelangelo Tamburini to Broglia Antonio Brandolini in Parma (13 April 1707), ARSI, Ven. 21, f. 458^v.

31 By the early eighteenth century, Nobili's experiment of Brahmanical *saṃnyāsi* missionary had failed, and Jesuits took up the role of non-Brahmanical *paṇṭāram* missionaries. The history of this title in the pre-modern period is unclear, likely referring to non-Brahmanical groups in charge of devotional practices in temples, but from the early modern period onwards *paṇṭāram* has come to indicate the member of an *aṭṭam*, a non-Brahmanical monastic institution. In that context, we even see the development of

residence at Kāmanāyakkappaṭṭi was not too far away from Brandolini's own residence. It was Brandolini who witnessed his fourth and fifth vows in 1714.³² Beschi began studying Tamil poetry almost immediately upon entering the mission, as remarked in the annual letter of 1715:

Father Beschi gave himself entirely to the study of Tamil poetry; for nothing in the country is esteemed more than this study. In the space of a few months he made more progress in it than any other missionary since the foundation of the Mission. The result is that he writes Tamil verses most elegantly and he has made no despicable progress in reading the ancient poets, which is the most difficult. From this study he will one day be able to make a choice of beautiful maxims for the formation of a good manners, and of excellent quotations as arguments in support of the faith with these people, who trust only their poets.³³

Beschi would go on to perfect his literary abilities to the point of being recognized as a poet both by his fellow missionaries and by competing Lutheran preachers. Whether his Hindu and Muslim interlocutors thought the same is harder to assess, but his success in securing Chanda Sahib's support—our focus in the next section of this chapter—is a strong indication that his scholarly persona commanded general respect. Most official roles Beschi was ever given in the course of his career were connected to his literary abilities. In 1726, at the time of the controversy on the *Spiritual Exercises* that we analyzed in the pre-

a literature by such members called *paṇṭāra cāttiraṅkaḷ*; see Rafael Klöber, "What is Saiva Siddhanta? Tracing Modern Genealogies and Historicising a Classical Canon," *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 10 (2017): 217, fn. 10. Probably connected to this use is the adoption of the title by Jesuit missionaries, in an attempt to go beyond the Brahmanical model of mission inaugurated by Nobili (see Chakravarti, *Empire of Apostles*, especially 256–257).

32 The official records of the vows taken by Beschi in Kurukkalpaṭṭi in front of Brandolini on 28/10/1714 (the fourth vow of obedience to the Pope with regard to missions, and the five simple vows) are in ARSI, Lus. 13, ff. 293–294.

33 *P[ater] Constantius Jos[ephus] Beschi totum se studiis tamulicæ pœseos addixit quibus nullum in his terris majori in pretio est, tantumque in iis paucorum mensium spatio profecit, quantum nullus missionarium a missione conditâ, ita ut versus tamulicos p[er]eleganter scribat, quodque difficilior est, in lectione veterum Poetarum haud spernendos progressus fecerit: ex quo deinceps tum ad mores instituendos egregia effata, tum ad fidem confirmandam optima relatâ ad istam gentem quæ suis Poetis unicè credit, argumenta desumi possunt [...].* Louis-Noël de Bourzes to Michelangelo Tamburini, *Litteræ Annuæ Missionis Madurensis anni 1715* (Varugapatti [Vaṭukarpēṭṭai], 23 July 1716), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 550^r–563^v, here 551^r. An alternative translation can be found in Besse, *Father Beschi*, 66–67.

vious chapter, his Superior sent Beschi away from his residence, and assigned him to work as an interpreter for an inquiry on the post-mortem miracles connected to João de Brito, in view of Brito's canonization. The proceedings of this inquiry, coordinated by the Bishop of Mylapore João Pinheiro, contain a letter by Beschi that outlines the interrogation procedure. There, Beschi also stressed his own exceptional mastery of Tamil by noticing that no one knew the language in Rome, and therefore the missionaries decided to attach a Latin translation of the inquiry to the Tamil originals. He also reported that the witnesses were simple people, and yet he was sure they had been honest in their declarations, because he could read their respect for the sacred oaths, and their fear of excommunication in their faces, tones, and voices.³⁴ The following year, the new Superior of the mission Domingos Madeira asked Beschi to write some anti-Lutheran works in Tamil against the missionaries at Tranquebar. This led to the composition of the *Vētavilakkam* and the other treatises at the center of the previous chapter, which partially rely on information Beschi gathered from catechists during this inquiry.

The inquiry on Brito's death was connected with the Malabar Rites controversy, as it implied the canonization of a missionary who practiced accommodation. It involved some of the most radical practitioners of accommodation, first of all Beschi who worked to collect the witnesses, and Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733), who was at the time living in Pondicherry after the failure of the Jesuit Tibetan mission. It was Desideri who brought the documents of the inquiry from Pondicherry to Rome in 1727, and handed them to Brandolini, by then the main advocate of the Madurai mission at the Papal See.³⁵ Yet apart from the participation in this crucial process, Beschi's name is virtually absent from the documents relating to the Malabar Rites controversy. He was among the most successful practitioners of adaptation on the ground, but he did not participate in the intra-institutional controversy over the adapted rites. Was his local function too important to be compromised by institutional quarrels? I doubt it. More probably, his intellectual successes were combined with an unruly personality that made him unfit for such roles. Unlike previous catalogs of the Venetian and the Malabar Provinces that describe him as talented in grammar and rhetoric, later catalogs contain many pointed and crit-

34 ARSI, APG-SJ 726—Meliapor 1720, ff. 9–12. This version of the record of the inquiry, kept in ARSI, is a copy of AAV, Cong. Rit., Proc. 1697.

35 The bibliography on Desideri is extensive, but mostly focuses on his Tibetan mission. On his role in Pondicherry, some remarks can be found in Enzo Gualtierio Bargiacchi, *Un ponte fra due culture, Ippolito Desideri S.J. (1684–1733): Breve biografia* (Firenze: Istituto Geografico Militare, 2008), 30–31.

ical remarks. In 1718, he is described as a man with “prompt intelligence, but his maturity of judgment is a little bit shaky, but not in matters of great importance; the same applies to prudence—there is however hope for more prudence in the future.”³⁶ In the extensive *Catalogus ad gubernandum* of 1734, missionaries evaluated their colleague’s readiness for administrative roles, and Beschi is described as unwilling and unfit to take up any role in the administration of the mission.³⁷ Among the many good attributes ascribed to him in this catalog, including an exceptional (*supra mediocritatem*) intellect, are some troubling traits. His fellow Jesuits described Beschi as lacking restraint over his passions, missing an adequate love for poverty, and wanting in humility. Among the reasons given for his unfitness for governance was also the excessive importance he gave to his own affairs, his liberality with expenses and buildings, and the frequent visits to powerful people.³⁸ These descriptions strongly suggest that Beschi’s colleagues were at least ambivalent with regard to the political role he was beginning to play in those years thanks to his close relationship with Mughal general Chanda Sahib, to which we now turn.

2 Kaveri Delta Politics

Shams al-Daulah Husain Dost Khān, better known as Chanda Sahib, was the son-in-law of the Nawab of the Carnatic (based in Arcot), Dost Ali Khān (r. 1732–1740), and an important player in the political and military scene of the Kaveri delta region from the 1730s until his death in 1752.³⁹ In the competition between colonial powers in the region that would lead to the Carnatic wars, Chanda Sahib was an ally of the French, and on friendly terms with the French Jesuits working in the Carnatic mission, whose headquarters were in Pondicherry.⁴⁰ Beschi met him for the first time in 1733, when Chanda Sahib was leading a raid

36 *Promptu ingenii est; maturitas vero iudicii claudicat aliquantulum, sed non in rebus magni momenti; idem intelligatur prudentia: spes tamen effulgit prudentiorem futurum [...]. Catalogus Secundus Sociorum Provinciae Malabaricae Anno Domini 1718*, ARSI, Goa 29, ff. 189–190, here 190^r.

37 *Catalogus Patrum De Quibus in Provincia Malabarica acceptae sunt informationes ad gubernandum anno 1734*, ARSI, Goa 29, ff. 216–226, here 224^v–225^v.

38 *Minus aptus videtur ad gubernandum, praecipue propter nimiam rerum suarum existimationem, faustum in expensis, et aedificis, et in visitandis magnatibus frequentiam*. Ibidem.

39 One portrayal of Chanda Sahib as a local warlord is in Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 156 ff.

40 This detail is contained in the annual letter of 1733, which I could only access in the translation included in Besse, *Chanda Sahib and Beschi*, 8.

against the Tonṭaimāṇ troops nearby the Jesuit residence of Āvūr. The warlord was immediately charmed by the missionary, and their relationship became stronger over the years. While fighting in the Kaveri delta region in order to get into Tiruchirappalli, Chanda Sahib tried to protect Catholic churches from plundering by his soldiers. After he conquered the city in 1736, deposed Queen Mīṇāṭci, and put on the throne the young Nāyaka heir held captive by his ally Baker-Ali-Khan, the Nawab of Vellore, he sent Beschi to visit and entertain the Nāyaka prince in Vellore.⁴¹ In a message written to Beschi in 1739, General Franz Retz (1673–1750)—Tamburini's successor in that role—discussed sending an official letter and gifts for “the Turkish lord who ruled the armies of the Great Mughal” (*Sig. Turco, che comanda l'arme del Gran Mogor*).⁴² Besse interpreted the gifts as being meant for Dost Ali Khān, but Retz's letter does not indicate the intended recipient. It might have been Chanda Sahib, considering that according to Jesuit catalogs Beschi was in Tiruchirappalli in 1739–1740.

In any case, in 1740 Dost Ali Khān was killed by the Maratha armies that invaded the region at the request of the king of Thanjavur and the young Nāyaka heir, Paṅkāru Tirumalai. Chanda Sahib lost Tiruchirappalli and was captured by the Marathas. While he was imprisoned at Satara, his wife and son were in custody in Pondicherry, until the French were able to have him released in 1746, and he could go back playing a role in the political life of the region.⁴³ At that moment, however, Beschi was already far away from the Kaveri delta, working and teaching in the college of Ambalakkadu where he would die in 1747.⁴⁴

41 The episode is recounted in the annual letters of the years 1736–1737 (Toppi [near Cape Comorin], 1 May 1739), in ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 621–627. Translated excerpts are found in Besse, *Chanda Sahib and Beschi*, 5–16.

42 Franz Retz to Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (20 October 1739), ARSI, Goa 1, f. 87^v.

43 On the captivity of Chanda Sahib, his release, and in role in the Anglo-French wars, see Sarojini Regani, *Nizam-British Relations, 1724–1857* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1988), esp. 24–59; this period is also covered in Edward James Rapson, *The Struggle Between England and France for Supremacy in India* (London: Trübner & Co., 1887), 59–74. On Chanda Sahib's relationship with the French, see Catherine Manning, *Fortunes à Faire: The French in Asian Trade, 1719–1748* (Aldershot: Variorum Publishing Ltd, 1996), esp. 203–218; and on the role of the war against the Marathas in the politics of the Nizam of Hyderabad, Munis D. Faruqi, “At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-Century India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 1 (2009): 5–43.

44 We have no account on the specific circumstances of Beschi's death, but Jesuit obituary records show that he died at Ambalakkadu on February 4, 1747. See ARSI, H.S. 53 (*Defuncti* 1741–1750), p. 64. At first sight this would seem in contradiction with the fact that we have an extant letter of General Retz written to Beschi on February 10, 1748 (ARSI, Goa 1, f. 114) in response to a letter written by Beschi in 1744. However, it is clear the news of the death of Beschi had not yet reached Rome at that moment.

Between the fall of Tiruchirappalli and his death in Kerala a decade later, Beschi had tried to ask for more money and help for Chanda Sahib, but Retz had refused because he was well aware that the general was at that time in the hands of the Marathas.

These are the main facts about Beschi's involvement with Chanda Sahib and the Arcot Nawab's campaigns in the Kaveri region in the 1730s and early 1740s. While Beschi's alignment with Chanda Sahib was likely part of the general political strategy of the Jesuits in South India, in line with French positions, it is striking that even after the initial defeat of Chanda Sahib in 1740, and after being sent away from the Kaveri region, to the Fishery coast and then Ambalakkadu, Beschi still sought help from the Father General to support Chanda Sahib. The close relationship between the missionary and the military leader is also at the center of the colorful early biographical sketch of Beschi by the Tamil Catholic pundit Muttucāmi Pillai, published in 1840. In this biography, Muttucāmi claims that Chanda Sahib made Beschi his *diwan*, offered him a gift of four villages and their revenues, and as a consequence Beschi began moving around on a palanqueen surrounded by a pompous retinue.⁴⁵ Besse did not agree with Muttucāmi's account, and strongly denied that Beschi might have accepted living in luxury at the court of Chanda Sahib. In his seminal article of 1909, he labeled Muttucāmi's work as "evidently exaggerated, and due chiefly to the vivid imagination of the Indian." He further argued that while Chanda Sahib might have offered land to Beschi, and the title of *diwan*, no proof of this existed, and both honors would have been at odds with Beschi's vow of poverty. Probably as a result of Besse's judgment, Muttucāmi's work has often been dismissed as a folk account, faithful to local Indian perceptions of Beschi rather than to historical reality. But is the idea that Beschi accepted Chanda Sahib's financial support, and became a member of his retinue, really so far-fetched? I believe it is not, and that reconsidering the social and political patterns of the mission in South India, as well Beschi's role at Ēlākkuricci, proves Muttucāmi's account to be quite coherent.

Beschi certainly considered Chanda Sahib the future ruler of the region, and saw in him a good opportunity to adopt the typical top-down conversion strategy of the Jesuits. His attitude was in keeping with a long-term Jesuit project to access local networks of patronage, a project that missionaries had been pursuing from the beginning of the mission. Although his identity is not clear, we know that Roberto Nobili received financial and political help from "Hemachatti," a Telugu notable with a certain amount of influence at the court

45 Muttucāmi, *Brief Sketch*, 8.

of Tirumalai Nāyaka.⁴⁶ The Madurai mission continued to rely on the patronage of local rulers after Nobili, also because the only fixed income of the mission came from few plantations the Society owned in Goa. Therefore, besides the occasional gift from Europe or South America, local donations made up a substantial portion of the mission's funds. Patterns of patronage also ran deeper, and imply the participation of the missionaries and their catechists in the political and cultural networks of certain regions. This is particularly evident in the village of Kāmanāyakkanpaṭṭi, where the land of the local church was donated to the missionaries in 1690 by the local ruler, the *pālaiyakkārar* of Eṭṭayapuram, known with the title of Eṭṭappan. The donation is testified by an inscription still visible on the façade of the church, and there is a rich oral tradition regarding the patronage the Eṭṭappan offered to different religious groups.⁴⁷ In the eighteenth century, this little king ruled over a religiously diverse territory, and sponsored Muslim, Hindu, and Christian towns and holy places. The cultural life of the court was also multireligious, and some claim it was here that Umaru Pulavar composed in the 1680s the *Cirāppurāṇam*, a life of Muhammad in verse that might have been among Beschi's models for the *Tēmpāvaṇi*.⁴⁸ A similar case is the village of Carukaṇi, where the land to build the church and the income from the surrounding fields were donated to the Catholic Church in the late eighteenth century, during the time when Jesuit Giacomo Tommaso de' Rossi (1701–1774) was in charge of the village. This donation was later confirmed by the zamindar of Sivagangai, who ruled over Carukaṇi, and recorded on a copper plate in 1800.⁴⁹

These are only the most striking examples of what was part of the everyday reality of the mission. Funds were often lacking, and one of the few ways

46 Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar*, 28; Županov, *Disputed Mission*, 174–183.

47 The text of this inscription is transcribed in Caldwell, *A Political and General History*, 236–237; on Kāmanāyakkanpaṭṭi and the stories surrounding this village, see A. Cūcai Celvarāj, *Putumai puṇita paralōka matā tiruttala varalāru* (Kāmanāyakkanpaṭṭi: Puṇita paralōka matā tiruttalam, 2017); on Eṭṭayapuram, see G. Manonmani, “Ettayapuram—A Historic Study” (PhD diss., Madurai Kamaraj University, 1999).

48 On Umaru Pulavar, see Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated*, 57–58; Vasudha Narayan, “Religious Vocabulary and Regional Identity: A Study of the Tamil *Cirāppuranam*,” in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, eds David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 74–97, and Tscharcher, “Can ‘Om’ be an Islamic Term?”

49 The first donation is attributed to the independent chieftains of Sivagangai, the Marutu Pāṇṭiyār brothers, who fought against the British; this was confirmed by the first British-installed zamindar, as shown in the copper plate inscription partially transcribed in Mosse, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree*, 38–49. On the history of Carukaṇi from its foundation up to the early twentieth century, see Besse, *La Mission du Maduré*, 322–329.

for the missionaries to access resources was to rely on the support of local lords seeking to expand their authority by funding different types of educational and spiritual institutions. The alleged gift of four villages that Chanda Sahib gave to Beschi follows this logic, as does the land donation that Beschi received from the *pālaiyakkārar* ruling over Ēlākkuricci. In 1734—three years after Beschi opened a Tamil school of rhetoric in Ēlākkuricci, as we will see shortly, and one year after he met Chanda Sahib—the poligar of Ariyalūr, Raṅkappa Maḷavarāyar, donated the land where the Ēlākkuricci church stood to the Catholic community *in aeternum*, as recorded in a stone inscription still in the Church premises (Figure 8).⁵⁰ Ariyalūr was then a small court that fell under the jurisdiction of the Nāyakas of Madurai, so the fact that in 1734 Chanda Sahib was already the most powerful man in the region, about to seize Nāyaka power in 1736, might have had an influence on the donation. The inscription of this donation is worth reading in full:

svasta śrī cālivākana cakāptam, 1657 rākṣata varuṣam āṭi mātām 26 tēti [śrīmān] rācamāṇiyarācu śrī ariyalūr aracu nilaiyiṭṭa raṅkappa maḷavarāyar ēlākkuricci ttiрукkāvalūril vīraṇṇa tēvaṇ [pōkum] vaḷikkuk kiḷakku, kōvilūr vaḷikkumērkkuk kuṭṭaikkut teṛku, periya ērikku vaṭakkuppaṭṭayāvuṇ caruvēcuraṇ kōvilukkuc cilācāṭaṇamākat tantōm, cantirātittavarai kalluṇ kāviriyum pullum uḷḷavaraiyum cukamēy irukkavum, intat taru-mattukku yātāmoruttaṇ vikāṭaṇ ceytāl kaṅkaikkaraṇiyilē kārām pacuvaik koṇra tōṣattilē pōkakaṭavāṇ.⁵¹

Happiness and prosperity! In the *rākṣata* year, which is the year 1657 of *cālivākana* era [corresponding to 1734 CE], on the 26th day of the

⁵⁰ The *pālaiyakkārar* of Ariyalūr certainly patronized poets in the nineteenth century, including U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar's father (see Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, 131–132); but the role of this small court in the eighteenth century is not well known. Certainly, the rulers of Ariyalūr were connected via marriage with the small king (later *zamin-dar*) of Uṭayār pālaiyam, see Vadivelu, *The Aristocracy of Southern India*, vol. 2, 195–243.

⁵¹ Inscription recorded in January 2017. In consultation with G. Vijayavenugopal (EFEO Pondicherry), I made some changes to the version included in Muttucāmi, *Brief Sketch*, 9. According to folk tradition, the king of Ariyalūr donated the land because he was healed by the powers of the statue of Our Lady of Refuge (*āṭaikkala mātā*) installed at Ēlākkuricci by Beschi. This story is recorded in *Aruḷmiku āṭaikkala aṇṇai tiruttala varalāru* (see § 6.4). The name of the king refers to his belonging to the *maḷavar* caste, which was ruling in the region; see Rā. Pi. Cēṭuppiḷḷai, *Tamiḷakam ūrum pērum* (Ceṇṇai: Paḷaniyappā piratars, 1968), 89–90.



FIGURE 8 Stone inscription at Ēlākkuricci recording the donation of the land of the church to the mission
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

month of *āṭi*, the excellent lord Rācamāṇiyarācu Śrī Raṅkappa Maḷavarāyar, who steadily rules over Ariyalūr, has donated to the church of Caruvēcuran̄ with this stone inscription [the land] in Ēlākuricci's Tirukkāvalūr falling within Viraṇṇa *tēvaṇ* road to the east, Kōvilūr road to the west, the tank to the south, and the big lake to the north.⁵² This should be enjoyed as long as the sun and the moon endure, and the stone, the river Kāviri, grass and earth exist; and if anyone acts contrary to this charity, may he incur the sin of killing a black cow on the banks of the Ganges.

The inscription records the donation of land to the ‘temple of Caruvecuran̄’ (*carvēcuran̄ kōyil*), the local name of the Catholic Church after Roberto Nobili's choice to call the Christian God Caruvecuran̄, Lord of all (Skt. *sarva-īśvara*).⁵³ The boundaries identified by the inscriptions are still roughly the boundaries of the church compound at Ēlākuricci today, between the pond and the local water tank. This is the area that Beschi renamed Tirukkāvalūr, literally the “place of holy protection,” in honor of the statue of Mary as Our Lady of Refuge (*aḍaikkala mātā*), which he installed in the church altar.⁵⁴ The noun *aṭaikkala* means refuge, and is likely inspired by one of Mary's titles in the

52 Rāyar is the title used by these local rulers since Chola times (opposite to *rāja*, *irā-jarāja*, and other imperial titles), and the Maḷavarāyar is an old family of such chieftains ruling over the Uṭayarpālayam region, in the city of Ariyalūr. I heard this information from Y. Subbarayalu during a talk he gave at the NETamil workshop “Glosses-Lexicography-Semantics” in Pondicherry on 09/12/2017, titled “Dictionary of Epigraphic Terms, Prospects and Problems.”

53 This, like many other lexical choices made by Nobili, was likely inspired by the literary work of Thomas Stephens in Marathi. On Stephens, see Falcao, *Kristapurana*; Pär Eliasson, “Mukti in *Kristapurāṇa*. How Thomas Stephens S.J. (1549–1619) Conveys a Christian Message of Salvation in Words with Hindu Connotations” (MA thesis, University of Gothenburg, 2015); Chakravarti, *Empire of Apostles*, 178–227.

54 The statue of Aṭaikkala aṇṇai or mātā is at the center of a set of folk tales that connect most of the churches instituted by Beschi in the Kaveri delta region. The founding myth of Kōṇāṅkuppam talks about Beschi traveling in the forest with two identical images of the Virgin, of which he lost one for some time, only to find it again in the place where the church of Kōṇāṅkuppam was eventually built. This story allows for a second original statue to exist, and both the churches of Vaṭukarpēṭṭai and Ēlākuricci claim to host that second statue—indeed, these villages both served as Beschi's residence at different times in the 1720s and 30s. Interestingly, other churches in the region like those at Virākkuricci and Eṭappāṭi claim to have the second statue of that original pair, thus effectively creating a network of churches of a specific form of Mary as Our Lady of Refuge, with a process that mimics local processes of diffusion of Hindu devotion. I learned about these stories during fieldwork in these villages in 2017 and 2018.

Litaniæ Lauretanæ. In the famous sixteenth-century litany, she is *refugium peccatorum* (“refuge of sinners”), and we know that Beschi had a special devotion for Loreto.

The text of this inscription employs standard epigraphic formulas, and the only remarkable element is probably the mention of a *Vīraṇṇa tēvaṇ* road. This is a relatively common Sanskrit-derived Tamil name, and *tēvaṇ* can also be a title used by people belonging to the Maravar and Kallar castes.⁵⁵ Yet Muttucāmi in his reading of this inscription transliterated the toponym as *Vīrān dēwān*, interpreting *tēvaṇ* as a non-standard spelling of the Persian title *dēwān*, usually transcribed in Tamil alphabet as *tivāṇ*.⁵⁶ Muttucāmi must have thought that *Vīraṇ/Vīraṇṇa* was referring to Beschi—who, soon after composing the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, took the name of *Vīra-mā-muṇivār*, “the great heroic ascetic”—and that the street surrounding the church at Ēlākkuricci must refer to him. This is likely one of the reasons why Muttucāmi claimed that Beschi became Chanda Sahib’s diwan.

Whether the inscription does refer to this title is difficult to assess, but the role of Beschi at Chanda Sahib’s court was likely close to what Muttucāmi envisioned, and certainly more important than what Besse was ready to acknowledge. First of all, we saw that Jesuit catalogs mention that in 1740 Beschi moved to Tiruchirappalli to join Chanda Sahib’s court. Soon after Chanda Sahib was taken captive by the Marathas, Beschi was removed from his residence in the Kaveri region, and from the Madurai mission altogether. This points to the close relationship between Beschi and Chanda Sahib: it is hard to avoid the impression that the fate of the two men was closely intertwined. Moreover, the details contained in a letter that the German missionary Johannes Walter wrote from Anjengo in 1740—a letter published as early as 1755, but ignored by Besse—confirms many aspects of Muttucāmi’s account. When reporting on the situation of the Madurai mission and the support it received from a certain “Mahometan king,” Walter claims that the king’s main aim in approaching Beschi was to use his literary fame to his advantage, in order to win the favor of the Madurai Nāyaka heir. This claim aligns with other Jesuit reports mentioning that Chanda Sahib sent Beschi to visit the young prince, and the missionary entertained him by offering a representation of the Nāyaka genealogy.⁵⁷ The let-

55 These castes are nowadays collectively referred to as *tēvar*.

56 Muttucāmi, *Brief Sketch*, 9.

57 Beschi had drawn the genealogical tree himself, on paper, and the boy was very happy to see his nobility so portrayed. See again the annual letter of the years 1736–1737 (Toppi [near Cape Comorin], 1 May 1739), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 621–627; translated excerpts in Besse, *Chanda Sahib and Beschi*, 15–16.

ter continues by listing some of the standard information about Chanda Sahib. He was favorable to the missionaries, and ordered his soldiers to spare the villages where they resided. He sought to ally himself to the French, and helped them to access the Fishery Coast that was otherwise controlled by the Dutch in Nagapattinam. The few sentences at the end of the passage confirm that Chanda Sahib was, for a time, the patron of the mission, and indeed considered Beschi part of his retinue:

I can praise this Muslim king, who is very well inclined towards our Christianity, even further. He has promised to our missionaries a fixed yearly revenue to support their livelihood, which will benefit this needy province, where poverty is indescribable. He always wants to have his Father Beschi at his side, and the humble man, notwithstanding all his objections, when traveling must avail himself, like other courtiers, of a palanqueen, that is a litter, on which he is carried from place to place by four people paid from the Royal Treasury, to accompany the king.⁵⁸

The promise of a yearly revenue for the mission must have been a strong incentive for Beschi to cultivate this relationship, and Jesuits must have dreamt of finally having a stable income and solid local patronage. This dream seemed within reach when Chanda Sahib made a substantial gift to the mission in 1740, just before his downfall.⁵⁹ More importantly, this letter confirms that Beschi

58 *Ich konte da von diesem Mahometanischen, unserem Christenthum sehr geneigten König noch viel Lobwürdiges beysetzen. Er hat unseren Missionariis zu ihrer Erhaltung gewisse jährliche Einkünfften zugesaget, welches dieser bedürfftigen Provinz, dero Armut unbeschreiblich ist, wol zu statten kommen wird. Seinen P[ater] Beski will er immer an der Seite haben, und muß sich der demütige Mann, wider alles sein Einwenden, auf denen Reisen, gleich anderen Grossen des Hofes, eines Balankin oder Trag-Beths bedienen, in welchem er von vier aus Königlicher Rent-Cammer besoldeten Trögern von Ort zu Ort, den König zu begleiten getragen wird.* Johannes Walter to his parents (Anjengo, 25 February 1740), in Franciscus Keller et al., eds, *Des neuen Welt-Botts [...] Allerhand So Lehr als Geistreiche Brief, Schrifften und Reise Beschreibungen: welche von denen Missionariis der Gesellschaft Jesu aus Beyden Indien, und andern über Meer gelegenen Ländern, meistens Heils Von A. 1730 biß 1740 in Europa angelangt seynd* (Wien: Leopold Johann Kaliwoda, 1755), 109–110. I thank Paolo Aranha for pointing out this reference to me.

59 The gift is recorded in the *Catalogus Quartus* of 1740 as providential, due to the dire condition of the mission's finances at that time, wrecked by the Maratha attack to the Portuguese territories on the Indian West Coast: *omnium Congruis consuluimus tūm nonnullis pecunijs fænoris acceptis, tūm largissimis eleemosinis, quas per manus piorum virorum Divina Providentia benignissime elargiri dignata est, inter quas illa in primis numeranda, quam usq[ue]. ad 350 S. Thomæ Madurensi Missioni dedit Mogolensis exercitus Imperator Santa Saibuj, qui Madurensi Regno potitus Missionarios nostros summo fovet amore.* "We

was among the grandees at Chanda Sahib's court (*Grossen des Hofes*), and that he did actually travel on a palanqueen, accompanied by four servants. In other words, it confirms some of the allegedly most folkloric passages of Muttucāmi's account, and suggests that the oral memories he collected are not unreliable; on the contrary, they might prove helpful to rethink and refocus traditional biographies. The figure of Beschi begins to emerge, beyond the idealized figures of the missionary or the orientalist, as that of a local *pulavar* turned politician. His difficult character and the tensions with his fellow missionaries as they are evident in the catalogs, combined with his strong investment in Chanda Sahib suggest that he orchestrated a daring—albeit ultimately failed—attempt to gain influence for himself, his catechists and the mission within the shifting political and religious landscape of the Kaveri delta in the early eighteenth century.

3 A Mirror for a Tamil Christian King

How exactly Beschi envisioned the connection between devotion, poetry, and politics in South India is articulated in a clear, if unexpected, way in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, the epic poem he wrote in honor of Saint Joseph. Without anticipating much about the contents and formal aspects of the poem, which is the topic of Chapter Five, we will explore here the thirty-sixth and last canto of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. Here, Beschi introduces for the first time in his poem a character from his recent history, Leopold I of Austria (1640–1705). The main events of his reign are retold so to show that Leopold consecrated Austria to Joseph, and received

took care for the allowances of everyone, both through some money borrowed at interest, and through most plentiful alms, which the Divine Providence condescended to bestow by the hands of pious men. Among these alms, it has to be mentioned in the first place the one that Santa Saibuj [= Chanda Sahib], commander of the Mughal army, gave to the mission of Madurai, up to a value of 350 *São Thomes* [i.e., Indo-portuguese golden coins with the effigies of the Apostle Thomas, aka *pardãos de ouro*]. After having taken possession of the Kingdom of Madurai, he favours our missionaries with greatest love." Luís de Vasconcellos, *Catalogi Provinciae Malabaricae anni 1740* (Manapar [Maṇappāṭu], 31 August 1740), ARSI Goa 29, ff. 240–243, here 243^v. On the Madurai mission's finances, with a mention of this donation, see Léon Besse, "Ancient Mission Finances," *The Examiner*, September 2 (1911). The economic history of the Madurai Mission, and of the Malabar Province to which it belonged, is still to be written. A preliminary attempt was made by Julia Lederle, *Mission und Ökonomie der Jesuiten in Indien: Intermediäres Handeln am Beispiel der Malabar-Provinz im 18. Jahrhundert*, Studien zur Außereuropäischen Christentums-geschichte (Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika) 14 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009).

in exchange a son and success in battle. So, Leopold provides Beschi's readers with the model of a successful Christian king devoted to Saint Joseph. In the new Tamil setting created by the language and style of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, Joseph, Leopold, and their relationship further point to how Christian kingship could and should function in the Tamil country.

The canto opens with Jesus visiting Limbo to take Joseph and the patriarchs with him to Heaven. The ascension of the son and the assumption of his mortal father to the house of the heavenly father is narrated with an abundance of details. It takes place at dawn, as we learn from a nice morning verse that uses the rhetorical device of imputing human feelings to natural and inanimate objects, a figure called *taṅkurippērravaṇi* in Tamil, which we will encounter again. So, they ascend.⁶⁰

Desiring to see the rising of that light, the sun appeared right at that time—and, as if saying “I have lost in this competition,” it blushed with shame while rising slowly. The two great ones ascended emanating a splendor rising beyond words.⁶¹

After they both reach Heaven, Jesus asks God the Father to give Joseph seven spiritual gifts to mirror the virtues he displayed during his lifetime.⁶² These gifts take the material form of a crown with seven gems, and will allow him to protect those who will appeal to him. Exactly what kind of help Joseph can provide to his devotees is made explicit in a set of verses that connect nicely with the concerns for the body, and its health, that we explored in Chapter Two. Take this one, for example:

60 In this case, the old commentary to *Tēmpāvaṇi* xxxvi, 15 mentions the time of the day (*Tēmpāvaṇi* vol. 3, 371).

61 *Tēmpāvaṇi* xxxvi, 15: *vill eḷuntatu kāṇa virumbiy aṇṇi* | *ell eḷunt' inai tōrtt' eṇa nāṇalin* | *mell eḷuntu cīvantatu mikkavar* | *coll eḷunta cuṭark koṭuv ēriṇār*.

62 Beschi portrays the assumption of Joseph as happening with the body. The first line of *Tēmpāvaṇi* xxx, 26 leaves no doubts in this regard: Jesus tells about Joseph that “Being a man of such morality (*takavu*), with his body, he came up here with me” (*iṇṇāṇ iṇṇa takavu uḷaṇāy eṇṇōṭu uṭal koṇṭu iṇku aṭaintāṇ*). The belief in the assumption of Joseph body and soul is a common feature of devotion to this saint, but less known than the assumption of the Virgin Mary because it was never declared a dogma of the Catholic church. However, important theologians such as Francisco Suárez SJ (1548–1617) supported this view. A summary of the scriptural and theological arguments on the subject developed in the early modern period can be found Edward Healy Thompson, *The Life and Glories of St. Joseph: Husband of Mary, Foster-father of Jesus, and Patron of the Universal Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 1891), 411–425.

tāyēy okkav arun tayaiy okkum arā
 nōyēy okka maruntinaiy okku nuḷai
 pēyēy okkav araṇ piṇaiv' okkum uyir
 miyēy okka viṭāt tuṇaiy okkum ivan.⁶³

Because of his compassion, he is like a mother; he is like a medicine for incurable diseases, like a safe fortress against the infiltration of *pēys*, like an unending companion to reach the heavens.

Joseph is compared here to a remedy (*maruntu*) against disease (*nōy*), which refers to both the healing of the body as well as of the soul, two dimensions never too far removed in the context of the mission. Even more importantly, he is compared to a safe fortress (*araṇ piṇaivu*) protecting his devotees against the infiltrations (*nuḷai*) of the *pēys*. This is an explicit reference to the processes of opening, and subsequent hardening of the self that catechists learned via the *Spiritual Exercises*. After opening up to Christianity, allowing it to enter and restructure their lives, new converts should use the help of angels and saints, especially Joseph, to protect their new Catholic selves from the attacks of ghosts and demons. This protection was particularly necessary to discern the action of evil spirits inside men, since misjudgment could lead to madness, marginalization, and even damnation, as any Jesuit would know all too well, after the spiritual crises the Society faced throughout the seventeenth century.⁶⁴ Indeed, the verse immediately following this one refers to Joseph as conferring the power to chase away the demons, one among the powers commonly associated with the missionary as well as the catechist profession, as we saw especially in the *Vēṭiyarolukkam*.

After explaining the gifts received by Joseph, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* turns abruptly to showing how this protection functioned in history. The remainder of the canto is thus devoted to the story of Holy Roman emperor (*irōmaināṭiṇitāl*) Leopold (*Leyuppōlt*). In the first verse where he appears (xxxvi, 50), Leopold

63 *Tēmpāvaṇi* xxxvi, 45.

64 The problem of the discernment of the spirits was central to the spiritual experience of Ignatius, who had to distance himself from the mildly heterodox experiences of the Spanish *alumbrados* in the sixteenth century; see Susan Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. 271ff. A crisis concerning mysticism and spiritual life among French Jesuits is analyzed in the seminal work by Michel de Certeau, "Crise sociale et réformisme spirituel au début du xvii^e siècle," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 41 (1965): 339–386.

is described as the conqueror of the armies of the enemies (*vempaṭaivel*), a standard turn of phrase in Tamil that here certainly refers to his victory in the battle of Vienna, which stopped the advance of the Ottoman Empire into central Europe in 1683.⁶⁵ The following verses describe him as an ideal king, a great devotee of Joseph, an ascetic, and an invincible warrior. The canto continues by narrating the development of a secret conspiracy organized against Leopold by his enemies, until Saint Joseph appears to the king to warn him, and so he is finally able to identify and vanquish those enemies. This might or might not refer to the Zrinyi rebellion against Austrian rule in Hungary and Croatia, which ended with the execution of the main agitators in 1671. What is crucial for the development of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* is that Leopold, forever grateful to Joseph, decides to relinquish to him the rule over his kingdom. Although, after his advisors and ministers beg him to stay in some capacity, he keeps for himself at least the role of mediator between the divine and the worldly realm. The passage of authority from Leopold to Joseph is celebrated with pomp in the end of the canto. The king calls all of his vassals to the capital, and organizes a ten-day celebration that includes the coronation of a statue of Joseph, a festive procession (*viḷā*), and the enthronement of Joseph.

The connection between Leopold and Saint Joseph would have appeared obvious to most European readers in the eighteenth century, and the celebration in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* of Joseph as king in lieu of Leopold mirrors historical events. Leopold put his hereditary lands, and then in 1675 the whole empire, under the protection of Saint Joseph, an event later celebrated with the erection of a short-lived column in Vienna in 1702, and commemorated in an anonymous painting made around 1690 and today in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Sources of the period also connect this consecration of the empire to Joseph with the long-awaited birth of Leopold's heir, who was named after the saint.⁶⁶ Moreover, the emperor had been educated by the Jesuits, and Jesuit institutions were important centers of production of literature and art in his praise, a corpus that Beschi must have known.⁶⁷ Finally, via his step-mother Eleonora Gonzaga, Leopold was directly connected with the Dukes of Man-

65 On the main events of Leopold's life, I follow John P. Spielman, *Leopold I of Austria, With 44 Illustrations* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1977). Leopold's victory over the Ottoman empire is one among the most important tropes in the praise literature on Leopold I, as shown in Maria Goloubeva, *The Glorification of Emperor Leopold I in Image, Spectacle and Text* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2000).

66 Goloubeva, *The Glorification of Emperor Leopold*, 206.

67 Ibidem, 52 ff.

tua who ruled Beschi's hometown of Castiglione delle Stiviere. Indeed, from 1708 onwards, a few years before Beschi left for India, Castiglione passed under direct imperial rule. The choice of Leopold as the subject of praise is therefore reasonable, almost logical, from the point of view of a Jesuit intellectual from Castiglione such as Beschi. But still, this does not explain why he would praise Leopold in Tamil, in the late 1720s.

Perhaps, this delayed enthusiasm was influenced by the presence on South Indian shores of vessels belonging to the newly founded Ostend company, a chartered trading company based in the Austrian Netherlands and active from 1722 until 1731, precisely the time in which Beschi was composing his poem.⁶⁸ Between 1724 and 1725, vessels of the Ostend company certainly docked at different ports of the Coromandel coast, including São Thomé.⁶⁹ Was Beschi hoping that the Holy Roman Empire, which he knew and admired, would take up a political role in South India? There are no traces of this in the text, but the temporal overlap seems uncanny.

Another striking aspect of this last canto is that it represents Leopold as a Tamil king, carrying all the traditional insignia. He has the scepter and the parasol, is honored by an ocean of smaller kings, organizes a splendid *vilā*, a "fest" or "festival," builds a splendid statue of Joseph, and so forth. In other words, Beschi portrays Leopold in a way that his readers could recognize, and thus offers a model of local Catholic kingship. Why should small kings in Tamil Nadu—like the *pālayakkārar* of Ariyalūr, for instance, or Chanda Sahib—not follow this same, successful model? After all, entrusting his kingdom to Joseph gave Leopold success on the battlefield and protection against internal enemies, two equally important elements in the fragmented political landscape of eighteenth-century South India. Finally, the donation of the empire by Leopold to Joseph seems a (wishful) prefiguration of the political future of South India. Beschi and his colleague clearly hoped that a local king would finally convert, and allow the missionaries to manage the spiritual life of his kingdom. This perspective plunges us into the political surroundings of the mission, and to the concerns with local power and protection that were recurrent during Beschi's lifetime.

The *Tēmpāvaṇi*, and his other literary works, were key elements of his missionary strategy, aiming to find a balance between competing colonial power and local rulers via his *pulavar* identity. We mentioned in the Introduction

68 Jelten Baguet, "Politics and Commerce: a Close Marriage? The Case of the Ostend Company (1722–1731)," *TSEG/ Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 12, 3 (2015).

69 See for instance the travels of the ship *Charles II* mapped in Georges-Henri Dumont, *L'épopée de la Compagnie d'Ostende, 1723–1727* (Bruxelles: Le Cri éditions, 2000).

how the connection between Tamil poetry and politics run deep, and poetic discourse was the favorite form take by royal discourse in India across the centuries. This chapter in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* was per se a political act in the context of early modern South India, where poetry was an especially important site of experimentation for new modes of praising the king. Praising Leopold I of Austria might have been a way to introduce his figure to the Tamil audience, hoping that the Habsburgs would one day rule of the Tamil region. Or perhaps it was the opportunity to offer to that same audience the image of a perfect Catholic and Jesuit king, a man who had already died, and whose life was ready to become a model. But, at the most basic level, the mere possibility of praising a Christian king via the language of Tamil poetry that began with Beschi made the existence of such a king imaginable, and thus possible.

4 The Ēlākkuricci School of Rhetoric

Beschi's attempt to gain political influence did not only entail his own self-fashioning as a scholar-poet, a *pulavar* worthy of being the counselor of a king. He also founded a school, thus appropriating the authority reserved for teachers in the Tamil country. Indeed, the catalog of the Jesuit missionaries working in the Malabar Province in 1734 describes Beschi's main activity in the previous year with two words: *docuit Rhetoricam*, "he taught rhetoric."⁷⁰ This laconic statement refers to his role as headmaster of the school for the literary training of the catechists that the missionaries instituted at Ēlākkuricci in 1731, as we learn from the annual letter of that year. The school offered a formalized environment where the catechists could approach traditional Tamil erudition with the prospect of using it as a tool for preaching, persuasion, and conversion. In line with Tournon's requests, it allowed for the study of Tamil literary texts to happen in a safe environment controlled by the missionaries, who could select the best passages—"free from obnoxious superstitions"⁷¹—from those texts. Notwithstanding its brevity, the statement *docuit rhetoricam* also provides insights on the purpose and curriculum of the school, at least in the perspective of the missionaries.

First of all, it was a school of Tamil rhetoric, not literature. As Marc Fumaroli first pointed out, the category of literature has often been superimposed by

⁷⁰ *Catalogus 1.us Personarum Provinciae Malabaricae Confectu mense Augusti anni 1734*, ARSI, Goa 19, ff. 207–209, here 208^r.

⁷¹ See the passage of the *Inter Graviore*s cited just above.

modern critics onto a range of literary activities that most scholars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially Jesuit scholars, would have defined as rhetoric.⁷² The sermons and treatises many Jesuits wrote, in Europe like in Asia, were first of all aimed at persuading their audiences, and were thus rhetorical rather than literary pieces.⁷³ In our case too, Jesuit missionaries intended to train their catechists so that they would acquire the technical set of skills—rhetorical skills—necessary to please, convince and convert in Tamil. The study of Tamil literary texts was just one part of this overarching project. The passage referring to the school in the annual letter of 1731, written by Beschi in 1732 and mentioned in the previous chapter, should be read in this perspective:

Tandem hoc ipso annò in pago Elacurrici Tamulensium litterarum ludus catechystis apertus est; siquidem cum nemo jam à catechistis esset, qui sublimioris tamulici idiomatis aliquid vel nimium sciret: animadvertentes Missionaris hanc litteraturam divinæ legis non parum decoris, et ad ejusdem propagationem non vulgare catechistis subsidium fore: communi voto statuunt eligendos undequaque plures e catechistis, qui per aliquod tempus huic studio operam præsent. Cum verò hujus in disciplinæ studio ipse pluribus consumptis annis, non litteratus quidem, sed litterator videar, me tamulico gymnasio præficiunt. Eâ autem animi alacritate, eâque diligentia omnes sese huic studio dedere, ut et ipsi brevi non vulgari progressu hujus disciplinae artem adiscerent et me omni prorsus levarent laboris tædio. Sub finem, pijis Sancti Ignatij exercitationibus exculsi, divinis humanisque disciplinis veluti duplice armatura fortium muniti, dimissi sunt.⁷⁴

Finally, in the same year [1731] we opened a school for the exercise (*ludus*) of Tamil erudition for the catechists in the village of Ēlākkuricci, since there was no longer anyone among them who had the least knowledge of literary Tamil. The missionaries, aware that such eloquence (*litteraturam*) could contribute in no small degree to the charm (*decor*) of the divine law, and help the catechists to propagate it, decided by common

72 The classic study of this period is Marc Fumaroli, *L'âge de l'éloquence: rhétorique et «res literaria» de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1980).

73 Of course, this was not a clear-cut distinction, and teaching and persuasion were among the aims of at least certain kinds of poetry; see the discussion below, p. 161.

74 Costanzo Beschi to the General of the Society (Madurai mission, 4 September 1732), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 597–602, here 600v.

accord to choose some among the catechists of all residences who for some time would apply themselves to that work. As I have spent many years studying this subject, and I am regarded not only as a learned man but also as a teacher, I was appointed master of this Tamil academy. All gave themselves to that study with such eagerness and diligence, that they acquired mastery of that discipline in a remarkably short time, and completely relieved the tedium of my work. Towards the end, perfected by the pious exercises of Saint Ignatius, armed with divine and human sciences as if with the double armor of the strong, they were sent away.

At a close reading, this passage contains a dense network of references to the world of Jesuit humanism and rhetoric. We are introduced into this world by the use of the word *ludus* (“play, sport, training”) to define Beschi’s school, a word often used for grammar schools attended by young men in early modern Europe.⁷⁵ Moreover, the subject taught at Ēlākkuricci was Tamil *litteratura*, another keyword that in the early eighteenth century had not yet taken on its contemporary meaning of “literature.” Rather, in this context, it meant eloquence.⁷⁶ And indeed, in the very same sentence the letter mentions the principal aims of Christian rhetoric in this period, namely to add beauty to the expression of the divine law (in other words, *delectare*), in order to teach, and convert, more easily (*docere* and *movere*). In this context the word *decor*, literally beauty and charm, is crucial to understand Beschi’s own literary strategy, which we will explore in the next chapter. The text continues to play on the two complementary poles of *delectatio* and *doctrina* when mentioning the *litterae humaniores* together with the *exercitia spiritualis* as the two ways of fortifying of the catechists—a double armor—before sending them to evangelize in the Tamil countryside. This passage closely mirrors the Ignatian vision at the foundation the Society of Jesus, namely the capability of its members to mobilize humanistic as well as theological and spiritual knowledge for the greater glory

75 See for example the title of John Brinsley’s work, *Ludus literarius: or, the grammar schoole shewing how to proceede from the first entrance into learning, to the highest perfection required in the grammar schooles ...* (London: Printed [by Humphrey Lownes] for Thomas Man, 1612). On this important term, and on Jesuit schools of rhetoric as *ludi*, places of exercise or practice, see Yasmin Haskell, *Loyola’s Bees: Ideology and Industry in Jesuit Latin Didactic Poetry* (Oxford: British Academy and Oxford University Press, 2003), 321–327; see also François de Dainville, “L’éducation par le jeu,” in *L’Education des jésuites* (xvie–xviii siècles), ed. Marie-Madeleine Compère (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1978), 473–533.

76 Fumaroli, *L’âge de l’éloquence*, esp. 21–22.

of God. And yet in this conventional description, Tamil substitutes Latin. How was this switch possible, and even desirable, in the missionary context of South India? And what were its consequences?

The network of Jesuit humanistic ideas and key-terms must have made the enterprise look familiar, even reassuring, to the readers of this letter in Rome. These details inscribe the Tamil school within a global humanistic project they could recognize, and in which the study of local languages was subsumed within a larger Western rhetorical framework that nevertheless had the capability to interact with local learned tradition, and create a variety of hybrid realities. As recently argued by Stuart McManus, in this period “Jesuit humanism became something akin to a ‘world philology’ [...], not in its universality, but in its ability to interact with learned traditions from Asia, Africa, and the Americas. This included multiple hybrid textual cultures, which we might call ‘Indo-humanisms’ (borrowing the Iberian meta-geographical idea of the ‘Indies’), that became naturalized in the Christian societies that grew up in the wake of Iberian expansion and Jesuit missions.”⁷⁷ Within this framework, the Ēlākkuricci school represents a case-limit, insofar as the Tamil language provided the grammatical and literary framework of the project. In most other cases, Latin supplied the metalanguage that missionaries used to understand the languages they encountered and described throughout the world.⁷⁸ Indeed, Beschi’s Latin grammars of Tamil, written for the use of his fellow missionaries, show how he negotiated local grammatical knowledge in order to represent Tamil in this global framework. By contrast, the Tamil textbook he composed for the Ēlākkuricci school, the *Tonnūlvilakkam*, subverts this balance. Beschi incorporated in this grammar those elements of the Latin tradition that he reckoned necessary for creating Christian poetry in Tamil. Yet, the overall purpose of the *Tonnūlvilakkam* is to make Christianity, its poetry and poetics, part of the Tamil literary and grammatical tradition.

The urgency for Beschi, his fellow missionaries, and their catechists to become proficient in literary Tamil, and to take active part in the Tamil cultural

77 Stuart McManus, “Jesuit Humanism and Indigenous-Language Philology,” 738.

78 The global, Latin-centered practices of eloquence supported by the Jesuits and studied by McManus are related to (but not co-extensive with) what Sylvain Auroux has called the diffusion of a *grammaire latine étendue*; see Sylvain Auroux, *La révolution technologique de la grammatisation* (Liège: Mardaga, 1994), esp. 86–88, where he talks about missionary grammars of already-grammaticalized languages. Other languages—chiefly Portuguese and Spanish—also served as acrolects, i.e., linguistic varieties with a connotation of social prestige, in different missionary contexts; for the relationship of Portuguese and Tamil, see Cristina Muru, *Missionari portoghesi in India nei secoli XVI e XVII: l’Arte della lingua tamil. Studio comparato di alcuni manoscritti* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2010).

world, is at the same time obvious and novel. The role of language acquisition in Jesuit missionary enterprises has been stressed multiple times. Like many of his colleagues, Beschi argued for the importance of local authors as a source of topics and ideas to promote Christianity locally, and suggested that they could function as *auctoritates* upon which Catholics could rely to structure their arguments, in a way analogous to the role Greek and Latin classics played in the development Christian rhetoric in the West.⁷⁹ In this perspective, it was crucial for the catechists to learn Tamil grammar and literature in order to preach effectively. As we will see more clearly in the next chapter, Beschi also aimed to connect the Tamil realm of the literary with that of oratory and persuasion. How the written and the oral dimension played into his plan to Christianize

79 Particularly revealing in this respect are two passages in Beschi's Latin grammars that draw this comparison explicitly: *Ex iis [= i.e., hoc idioma et carmina] certius eorum fabularum notiones extrahere, ex iis, quas negare Indi nunquam praesument, rationes adducere, ex iis certis per ipsos textibus veritatem probare unice poterimus.* "Only from this language and poems we will be able to extract more certainly the notions of their fables; to put forward those reasons that the Indians would never presume to deny; to demonstrate the truth [= i.e., the Christian doctrine] through proved texts, by themselves." Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi, *Clavis Humaniorum Litterarum Sublimions Tamulici Idiomatis, auctore R.P. Constantio Josepho Beschio societatis Jesu, in madurensi regno missionario* (Tranquebar: printed for A. Burnell, by the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Press, 1876), 160; *Hieronymus manifeste ostendit et apostolum Paulum passim in suis epistolis poetarum carmina adduxisse, et praestantissimos Ecclesiae Patres, non modo secularium litterarum passim ponere exempla, sed et propriis carminibus non polluisse quidem sed ornasae Ecclesiam. Quod sane in his regionibus potissimum valet ubi, cum Indigenae non tam rationi quam auctoritati assentiantur, quid ex ipsorum auctoribus ad veritatem confirmandam adducam praeter poetarum carmina? Si quidem omnia carmine scripta sunt.* "Jerome clearly shows that even the apostle Paul occasionally quoted verses of poets in his letters, and that the most excellent Fathers of the Church, not only interspersed examples from secular literature, but that also with their own poetical compositions did not contaminate the Church, but rather decorate it. Certainly this applies in these regions with greatest force, where the natives are persuaded not so much by reason, as by authority: what will I quote from those same authors to confirm the truth, but verses of poets? It is so, because all those works are written in verse." Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi, *Grammatica Latino-Tamulica, ubi de elegantiori linguae tamulicae dialecto செந்தமிழ் dicto cui adduntur tamulicae poeseos rudimenta ad usum missionariorum Societatis Jesu. Prima editio. Accedit ejusdem operis anglica translatio a Benjamin Guidone Babington anno 1822, Madraspatani primum edita. Nova Editio* (Trichinopoly: St. Joseph Industrial School Press, 1917), xi. I always cite Beschi's Latin grammars of Tamil on the base of their first edition, and indicate the page number. On the constitution of grammatical and rhetorical knowledge in relationship with translations of the classics, see Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Tamil is hard to assess. Certainly, homiletic was a concern for missionaries.⁸⁰ As early as the seventeenth century, Roberto Nobili wrote a catechism organized in sermons (*piracāṅkam*).⁸¹ Some of the prose works we analyzed in the previous chapter were conceived to be read out loud, and we know that the *Vētaṭṭaṭṭam* was used by the catechists as inspiration for preaching.⁸² Yet Beschi's main concern remained within the realm of textuality, and the accommodation of Catholicism to Tamil *ilakkīyam*, even when the circulation of his works partially relied on orality and performance.

In general, unlike later Protestant missionaries who thought Tamil poetry to be inherently pagan, Catholics never found the formal aspects of Tamil literature to be especially faulty, nor did they try to systematically introduce new (prose) textual genres more appropriate to their message. The contents of Tamil literature—the “Hindu fables” mentioned by Tournon—were vehemently criticized, but poetry, meter and genres, sound and figures were all considered neutral ground.⁸³ Even when missionaries had preferences—and they did, as shown by the attention Nobili devoted to siddha poetry, and Beschi to the *Tirukkuraḷ*—they did not adhere to a rigid ethic of textuality, and never deemed any expression of Indian textuality to be inherently bad.⁸⁴ Their turning towards Tamil literature was informed by the principle of accommodation, and by the belief in the possibility of both cultural as well as literary analogies

80 Sermons are an important Tamil Catholic genre at this time, as demonstrated by the wealth of manuscripts, many of them produced in the eighteenth century, containing the sermons by Giacomo Tommaso de' Rossi. We encountered him in the previous chapter as the probable author of a manual of Ignatian exercises, yet almost nothing had been written on the figure of this important Jesuit missionary writer. For a list of existing references, see Carlos Sommervogel et al., eds, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Bruxelles: Oscar Shepens and Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1890–1900), vol. 7, 170–171.

81 Nobili's work is the *Īṇāṇpatēcam: irupattēṭṭu piracāṅkaṅkaḷ*, which Beschi considered an appropriate reading for his catechists, as we saw in the previous chapter.

82 Nāṇappirakācar, “Contribution of Fr. Beschi to Tamil” (PhD diss., University of Madras, 1965), 49–50.

83 On the concept of *adiaphora*, as applied to the realm of bodily practices instead of literature, see Županov, “Le repli du religieux.”

84 The approach of Catholic missionaries was starkly different from the Protestant attitude described by Bernard Bate in his pioneering article, “The Ethics of Textuality,” and in his posthumous book, *Protestant Textuality and the Tamil Modern Political Oratory and the Social Imaginary in South Asia*, eds E. Annamalai et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021). Taking inspiration from Bate's contribution, but departing significantly from it, this chapter shows how Catholic missionaries created a version of Tamil rhetoric and persuasive speech that did not imply rupture with the Tamil literary tradition.

and translation.⁸⁵ Beschi did not shy away from equating *kāppiyam* with the epic poem, and *ulā* with elegy.⁸⁶

Looking at this literary turn from a local perspective, the role of poetry in the localization of devotion in the Tamil land, as well as the strong connection between poetry and spiritual and political authority, must have offered enough reasons for Beschi and his catechists to fashion themselves as Tamil savants or *pulavar*. Tamil bhakti poets were the first to use devotional literature as a technique to *invent* space, and create the geography of the Tamil country, its temples and pilgrimage routes, by locating God in its fields, hills, and seashores.⁸⁷ From the Chola period onwards, Tamil poetry also had the uncanny power to sing kings into being, as David Shulman has shown.⁸⁸ The role of poetry and imagination in the constitution of political power became all the more central during the Nāyaka period, and even after the advent of colonialism patronage of poets remained one of the main activities of local courts.⁸⁹ The social and political articulation of Tamil literature in the time between Nāyaka and British rule awaits further exploration, but the political and social fragmentation that characterized the eighteenth century saw the proliferation of small courts, monasteries and sectarian institutions as literary centers, and the intensification of the available connections between literature, social mobility, and political power.⁹⁰ This was also the moment when

85 On cultural translation in early modern Europe, see Peter Burke and Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, eds, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

86 See respectively Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi, *Clavis*, 109 (பெருங்காப்பியம் *est apud Tamulenses praecipuum carmen, ut apud nos Heroicum*); and Beschi, *Grammatica Latino-Tamulica, ubi de elegantiori ...*, 99 (*Speciem elegiae habent quam vocant உலா seu மாலை*).

87 Literature on this topic is extensive; the classics are Norman Cutler, *Songs of Experience: The Poetics of Tamil Devotion*, Religion in Asia and Africa Series (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Vidya Dehejia, *Slaves of the Lord: The Path of the Tamil Saints* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988). On Tamil cultural geographies, see Martha Ann Selby and Indira Viswanathan Peterson, eds, *Tamil Geographies. Cultural Constructions of Space and Place in South India* (New York: SUNY Press, 2008).

88 David Shulman, *The Wisdom of Poets*, 63–102.

89 On the Nāyaka period see Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in the Nāyaka Period Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 169–219. On the court and the temple as different locations of patronage of poets, see Velcheru Narayana Rao, “Multiple Literary Cultures in Telugu: Court, Temple, Public,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 323–382; for the modern period, Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, esp. 57–61 (temple patronage) and 103–164 (court patronage).

90 Recent scholarship has emphasized the role of sectarian religious affiliations to under-

a new alliance between Tamil poetry and the Śaiva religion was forged, as testified by the number of ritual, theological, and mythological texts translated into Tamil from Sanskrit as well as other South Indian languages.⁹¹ As will appear more clearly while we proceed, these models and modes of authority-making connected with Tamil, its grammar and literature, are a necessary background to understand Beschi's project, and his choice to fashion himself as a spiritual guru, a scholar, and a poet, and his catechists as his followers.

And yet, even though—or maybe because—it brought together such diverse cultural elements, Beschi's Tamil school was a little-known and short-lived experiment that never received a particular support from Rome. In 1734, Beschi wrote to the new general of the Society Franz Retz a letter that contains what is probably an indirect reference to the school. The letter is a heartfelt appeal regarding the catechists and their education:

Besides their servants, of whom three at least are necessary, missionaries used to maintain, according to their scanty means, one or two youths, who would be instructed and exercised so as to fulfill later on the office of ministers of the gospel. Yet Father João Antunes, the Moderator of the Province [i.e., the Provincial of Malabar], who, on the plea of poverty, hardly allows even necessary expenses, lately prohibited this. If only this mission could imitate at least the Carnatic and the Mysore missions; which, for many years, have had a seminary where several well-chosen young men are prepared for the post of catechists! All the missionaries desire it ardently.⁹²

stand Sanskrit literature, philosophy and theology produced in Tamil-speaking South India during this period (Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*); and the importance of *maṭas*, monastic and sectarian religion institutions, always in relationship with Sanskrit learning (Valerie Stoker, *Polemics and Patronage in the City of Victory: Vyāsātīrtha, Hindu Sectarianism, and the Sixteenth-Century Vijayanagara Court* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016)).

91 One striking element is the proliferation, from the sixteenth century onwards, of Śaiva *talappurāṇas* in Tamil; see David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Śaiva Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). See also Ofer Peres, "The Tamil Life of Purūravas: A Vernacular Adaptation of a Sanskrit Myth," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 138, 2 (2018): 291–312; and Margherita Trento, "Translating the Dharma of Śiva."

92 *Solebant missionarii, præter sibi inservientes famulos, qui tres necessariò sunt, pro modulo suo alere unum ulteriùs aut alterum juvenem, qui obeundis, olim evangelicis ministerijs instructi proluderent. Sed P. Joannes Antunes Prov.æ Moder.or qui titulo paupertatis ad sumptus vel necessarios, satis difficilis est; nuper hoc ipsum prohibuit. Utinam saltem hæc Missio n[ost]ra, Carnatensem ac Maissurensensem imitaretur; quæ jam à multis anni Seminarium instituerunt, ubi plures scelecti [sic! = selecti] juvenes ad Cat[echist]æ munus instru-*

This passage remains vague on the means of educating the catechists that already existed in the Madurai mission, mentioning only the one-on-one education that missionaries used to give to their catechists. This shows how the institutions of training we have encountered so far, the spiritual retreats and the Tamil school, were not officially recognized, nor were they financially supported by the Society. The missionaries had to manage them with their meager funds. So, this plea for money in order to finance a seminary for the catechists was probably a funding request for the school that already existed, albeit unrecognized. It also introduces us to a recurrent theme in Beschi's career, that is his conflicting attitude towards excessive upholding of the vow of poverty. From this moment onwards, the sources are silent about the school and the training of the catechists more in general. This leaves many questions unanswered. How did the school work locally, and how long did it last? What was its curriculum? How did the global rhetorical model mingle and mix with the local models in practice? And who were the catechists in attendance? In the following section we will address some of these questions both directly and indirectly, by looking closely at how Beschi's background shaped the curriculum of his school, which intersected at the same time with local concerns and models of literary and religious education.

5 *Ēlākkuricci* as a Christian *Maṭam*

The project of a school of literary Tamil at *Ēlākkuricci* tied together many elements, especially Beschi's humanistic and devotional education, and the way he acquired and negotiated local authority. While the school was part of the global Indo-humanistic project sketched earlier, and drew upon Jesuit educational resources, it also allowed Beschi to mobilize the relationship between poetry and power that was at the heart of Tamil literary culture. Beschi envisioned an institution that, from the little information we have, shared many features with contemporary educational models available locally. Among these, the most influential reference was certainly the Śaiva *maṭam* or monastery. As shown by Kathleen Kopperdayer, the term *maṭam* indicated the place of residence of a religious lineage, usually attached to a temple, and organized into a cluster of institutions including a shelter, school, and library. In the

untur. Missionarii omnes hoc maxime desiderant. Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi to Franz Retz (Elacurrici [*Ēlākkuricci*], 8 September 1734), ARSI, Goa 20, f. 195. An alternative translation of most of this letter can be found in Besse, *Father Beschi*, 140.

Tamil context, and precisely in the Kaveri delta region from the sixteenth century onwards, these were often Vellala lineages. The Śaiva *maṭam*, and the way it developed in the Tamil country, therefore offered a model of a non-Brahmanical religious and cultural institution, in which Tamil learning was paired with devotion to Śiva.⁹³

Starting from this moment, and throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *maṭam* schools became the site par excellence for the study of the Tamil grammatical and literary tradition—men like Miṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai (1815–1876) and U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar (1855–1942) were educated and worked at such institutions.⁹⁴ Beschi's Tamil school borrowed from Śaiva *maṭas* the curriculum, as we shall see in a moment, but maybe more fundamentally the pairing of religion and Tamil learning, and inflected both in a Christian way. This was perhaps the deepest and most structuring in the long series of influences that Tamil Śaivism exercised over the mission, which is a topic yet to be explored. In view of these analogies, it does not seem a coincidence that the first extant reaction to Catholicism in the Tamil country, in the form of a versified treatise written in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, comes precisely from a Śaiva teacher at Chidambaram.⁹⁵

Going back to Ēlākkuricci in the early eighteenth century, it is by keeping this context in mind that the creation of the holy site of Tirukkāvalūr at the outskirts of the village—and within that space, the Tamil school—appears as a coherent project. Beschi conceived of it as a *maṭam*, of which he was the master, and his catechists were the disciples. Indeed, *maṭam* is the technical word used by Beschi in the colophon of the *Vētavilakkam*, which he composed “in the year 1728, on the 25th day of the month of *vaikāci*, in the *maṭam* of Ēlākkuricci.”⁹⁶ Moreover, Ēlākkuricci had, like most *maṭam* insti-

93 Koppedrayer, “The Sacred Presence of the Guru,” esp. 225ff. The Tamil *maṭam* innovated while building upon the earlier, analogous institution of the *maṭha* described in Sanskrit literature.

94 See Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, 57–63.

95 This is the *Pāppuvētavikarṇam*, refuted in A. Muttucāmi Piḷḷai, *Vētavikarpatikkāram* (Ceṇṇai, 1820). The treatise is still extant as a manuscript, of which I am currently preparing and edition and translation. Earlier responses, chiefly Tuṛaimaṅkalam Civappirākācar Cuvāmi's *Ēcumata nīrākaraṇam*, are nowadays lost. I discuss the few surviving verses of this work in Chapter Six.

96 1728 *āṇṭilē varuṣam vaikāci mātam 25 tēṭiyil elākkuriccimaṭattil* [...] *eḷuti mutintatu*. BnF, Indien 481, f. 152^v. This colophon, together with two introductory *veṇṇā* verses, are also included in the first two printed editions of the *Vētavilakkam* (in 1842 and 1855, see Bibliography). Confusingly, the very same colophon is attached to the 1936 edition of the *Pētakamaruttal*, printed as an appendix to the *Vētavilakkam*. It is possible, I think, that the editor of the first edition had access to Indien 481, but the following editions (all of

tutions, a temple with a powerful goddess, endowed land, several yearly processions, and support from the local ruler.⁹⁷ Like other *maṭam* in the region, it received the patronage of a small king, the *pālaiyakkārār* of Ariyalūr, who donated land to the temple of Caruvecuraṇ. While hosting a temple to the Christian God and to Mary, Ēlākkuricci was also home to many other powerful sacred beings, like Saint Quiteria, who were located in different places within the sacred enclosure, and offered to Catholics a place for devotion, as well as spiritual and literary instruction.⁹⁸ This is well summarized in a stanza of the *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam* describing *camūka ullācam*, “joy in common celebration,” a theme newly introduced in the *kalampakam* genre by Beschi. The verse gives a description of the festival procession in honor of Aṭaikkala mātā at Tirukkāvalūr:

All of you who wish for happiness, and search for a place of learning, ongoing praise, wealth, and divine grace! All of you—the lame, the handicapped, the childless—who are in great affliction, and suffer incomparable pains! You should gather here, and praise and worship every day the flower-feet of the compassionate Lady who grants salvation, the one who is your refuge, and whose grace is boundless.⁹⁹

So, from the point of view of its aims, the Ēlākkuricci school—a place “of learning, ongoing praise, wealth, and divine grace”—was not very different from contemporary Śaiva enterprises. What about the cultural project of the school? What was the curriculum adopted by Beschi, and how did it relate to contem-

them in fact reprints, the main difference among them being the splitting of the sandhi) did not know about it and simply moved the colophon around, from the *Vētaṇṭalakkam* to the *Pētaṇṭal maṇṭal*.

97 The annual letter of 1731 mentions for instance a procession in honor of Saint Quiteria, whose statue was also at Ēlākkuricci. Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi to the General of the Society (Madurai mission, 4 September 1732), ARSI Goa 54, 599^v–600^r.

98 I am currently preparing an article Saint Quiteria at Ēlākkuricci in relationship with the *Kittēriyammāl ammāṇai*. A first draft of this was Margherita Trento, “Christian Epic and Tamil Genres in the Eighteenth Century,” paper presented at the *Conference of the European Association of South Asian Studies* (ECSAS), Paris, 08/26/2018. On Beschi’s poem, see also Ā. Jōcap, *Tēmpāvaṇi—kittēriyammāl ammāṇai. ōr āyvyu* (Tiruccirāppalli: Tamilāyvtuturai tēciyak kallūri, 1999).

99 *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, 38: *kaḷi uli aruḷ poruḷ nikaḷ pukaḷ kalai nilai | nāṭuvir yārum turainta tuyarāy | kaḷal il karam ila makar il nikar ila | nōkuvir yārum tiraṇṭu maruvir | karuṇaiyaḷ katīyinaḷ kaṇivinaḷ kaṭaiyilaḷ | pūvaṭi nāḷum paṇintu toḷuvir*. Here I cite the number of the poem, and not the page number; the reference edition is in the Bibliography. I read *uli* as *uḷli*, following the 1872 commentator.

porary curricula in Śaiva schools? We have little direct information regarding school curricula in South India in this period, and to the best of my knowledge there are no administrative records surviving. Most of the information available is based on the canon of literary and grammatical authorities we can infer from contemporary literature, and on later accounts of how education changed in the nineteenth century as a result of the “rediscovery” of the ancient *caṅkam* texts. Famously, U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar in his biography offered an overview of the *maṭam* education he received in his youth, and of the books he studied in that context, in order to stress the revolutionary changes the rediscovery of *caṅkam* caused to his perception of what the Tamil literary canon was.¹⁰⁰ The renewed focus on *caṅkam* would indeed provoke, in the long term, a rupture in the history of Tamil education.¹⁰¹ Yet in the nineteenth century many schools were still organized according to the early modern method.¹⁰² Their grammatical curriculum relied on *Naṇṇūl*, the thirteenth-century grammar of *eḷuttu*, at the same time phonology and orthography, and *col*, morphology, and on the *pāṭṭiyal* grammars focusing on prosody and genres. The literary curriculum included *purāṇam* and *cirrilakkiyam* literature, along with classical Chola works like the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*. The study of multi-text manuscripts that contain anthologies of works probably used in educational settings of the type I just described, while still in its infancy, confirms this curriculum. It also shows that some earlier texts were also well-known and studied, including Tamil epics like the *Cilappatikāram* that have long been claimed as “rediscoveries” of the Tamil renaissance.¹⁰³

100 On the literary canon, see A.R. Venkatachalapathy, “‘Enna Prayocanam?’ Constructing the Canon in Colonial Tamil Nadu,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 42, 4 (2005): 535–553; and Norman Cutler, “Three Moments in the Genealogy of Tamil Literary Culture,” in *Literary Cultures in History*, 271–322.

101 One that implied a great deal of cultural loss, as David Shulman has recently argued: Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography*, 298–307. In the interest of brevity, I use the word “rediscovery,” but the history of the circulation of *caṅkam* poetry and other ancient Tamil texts before they were edited in the nineteenth century by men like U. Vē. Cāminātaiyār (1855–1942) and Tamōtarai Pillai (1832–1901) is yet to be fully explored. The manuscript transmission of the *caṅkam* corpus, one of the most important sources to trace this history, is studied in Eva Wilden, *Manuscript, Print and Memory. Relics of the Caṅkam in Tamilnadu* (Berlin, München, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014).

102 Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, esp. 37–54.

103 Jonas Buchholz and Giovanni Ciotti, “What a Multiple-text Manuscript Can Tell Us about the Tamil Scholarly Tradition: The Case of UVSL 589,” *Manuscript Cultures* 10 (2017): 129–144. On the *Cilappatikāram* never having disappeared but simply being a sectarian text, see Christoph Emmrich, “The Ins and the Outs of the Jains in Tamil Literary Histories,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 39 (2011): 599–646.

The Jesuit letters and reports do not offer specific information about the schedule and curriculum of the Ēlākkuricci school. We can safely guess that the term *litteratura* we encountered earlier covered both Tamil grammar and literature, but what exactly were the texts authorized to become part of Catholic education needs to be inferred from a number of scattered citations. In the *Vētaṇṇakkam*, for instance, Beschi accuses the Lutherans of lying when claiming to have mastered the whole of Tamil learning. The implication is obviously that he had, and the titles he listed in this passage are indeed the standard literary and grammatical texts of his time:

This is what they [i.e., the Lutherans] write: “We came to this country, we studied Tamil, we read all the books and the manuscripts written by the people of this land, we examined them, and we saw that they are of very many kinds”. As if these Tranquebar folks, who use such a low Tamil, could have seen, read and studied themselves *Akattiyam*, *Tolkāppiyam*, *Nanṇūl*, the two *poruḷ* [i.e., *Nampiyakapporuḷ* and *Purapporuḷ*], *Kārikai*, [*Taṇṭiy*] *alaṅkāram* and all other grammars; the six orthodox [Śaiva] religious systems (*uṭcamayam*), and the six unorthodox systems [*puraccamayam*, again according to Śaivas]; the eighteenth *purāṇas* and the *stālapurāṇas*, the sixty-four arts and sciences, the ninety-six properties, the *Īraṭippayan* [i.e., *Tirukkuraḷ*] and the *Nālaṭippayan* [i.e., *Nālaṭiyār*], the *Cintāmaṇi*, the *Cilappatikāram*, the *Pāratam*, the *Irāmāyaṇam* and all other poems, without leaving anything out!¹⁰⁴

With regard to grammar, we can integrate this list—including the mythical grammar of Agastya, *Tolkāppiyam*, *Nanṇūl*, and *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*—with the references Beschi gives in the introduction to his grammar of high Tamil, where he discusses the sources for composing the work. There Beschi writes that Agastya’s work is lost, and *Tolkāppiyam* extremely difficult to understand. So, even though recognizing the importance of the latter, he admits that, like almost everyone else, he got his education on the five branches of grammar from other books: “These rules, which I laid out, are scattered in seven books, and the Tamilians teach them copiously and in a confused way: 1. *Nanṇūl*, 2. *Akapporuḷ*, 3. *Purapporuḷ*, 4. *Kārikai*, 5. *Yāpparuṅkalam*, 6. *Pāṭṭiyal*, 7. *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*.”¹⁰⁵

104 *Vētaṇṇakkam*, 120.

105 Beschi, *Clavis*, 159: *Has, quas tradidi regulas, Septem libris dispersas fuse et confuse tradidere Tamulenses*: 1. நன்னூல், 2. அகப்பொருள், 3. புறப்பொருள், 4. காரிகை, 5. யாப்பருங்கலம், 6. பாட்டியல், 7. தண்டியலங்காரம். This *fuse et confuse* is likely a citation from Vossius,

This list is also coherent with the grammatical models Beschi used to compose the *Tonṇūlvīlakkam*, the main textbook for the Ēlākkuricci school. The *Tonṇūlvīlakkam* is a fivefold grammar (*aintilakkaṇam*), a grammar book aiming to encompass all five branches of Tamil learning—phonology and orthography (*eḷuttu*), morphology (*col*), poetics (*poruḷ*), prosody (*yāppu*) and figuration (*aṇi*).¹⁰⁶ The main authorities on which Beschi relied to compose these different sections, often quoting them at length, are those he cited in the *Vētavīlakkam* and the grammar of high Tamil. There is one interesting exception, a text that Beschi appears to have known on the basis of the *Tonṇūlvīlakkam*, but never discusses openly. This is Vaittiyanāta Tēcikar's *Ilakkaṇa vīlakkam*, another treatise composed in the first half of the seventeenth century and aiming to cover the entirety of grammatical learning in three books.¹⁰⁷ This grammar must have been a competitor of Beschi's book, considering that it aimed to summarize existing knowledge, and was written to facilitate the education of students, but within a Śaivasiddhānta milieu.¹⁰⁸ Albeit technical in aim, the *Ilakkanavīlakkam* was at the same time a sectarian work, insofar as it was a product of the educational context sketched above.

The study of grammar implied the study of poetry, because traditional Tamil grammar is the grammar of poetic language. A literary curriculum already emerges from the *Vetavīlakkam*'s passage we cited, and Beschi gave a condensed version of the same in another Latin grammar, the *Clavis Humaniorum Litterarum Sublimioris Tamulici Idiomatis* ("The Key to the Classics in the High Tamil Idiom," henceforth *Clavis*). In both cases, he selected texts meant for a Catholic readership. These are his reading suggestions for the missionaries in the introduction to the *Clavis*: "Hence they shall read the old authors, they shall

De Arte Grammatica, "many handed over many things, both copiously and in a confused way" (*multa multi tradiderunt, et fuse, et confuse*); a sentence also cited in Gianbattista Vico's *Scienza Nuova*; see *Autobiografia—Poesie—Scienza Nuova* (Milano: Garzanti, 2000), 253.

106 The development of the *aintilakkaṇam* canon is studied in Giovanni Ciotti, "Tamil *Ilakkaṇam* and the Interplay between Syllabi, Corpora, and Multiple-Text Manuscripts," in *Education Materialized: Reconstructing Teaching and Learning Contexts through Manuscripts*, eds Stefanie Brinkmann et al. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 315–352.

107 See Kamil Zvelebil, *Lexicon of Tamil Literature*, Handbuch der Orientalistik 9 (Leiden-New York-Cologne: Brill, 1995), 731; Indra Manuel, *Literary Theories in Tamil (with Special Reference to Tolkappiyam)* (Pondicherry: Pondicherry Institute of Linguistics and Culture, 1997), 89.

108 According to Zvelebil (*Lexicon*, 731), Vaittiyanāta Tēcikar wrote the *Ilakkaṇa vīlakkam* for the education of the son of his (Śaiva) patron, Miṭait Tiruvēnkaṭanātar, and of his disciples.

read the masters of this poetry, namely the *Cintāmaṇi*, the *Cilappatikāram*, the *Rāmāyaṇam*, the *Pāratam*, and the *Nakiṭam* [aka *Naiṭatam*]. Among the Christian manuscript texts, they shall read *Aticayakāṇṭam*, *Tirucelvarāyappurāṇam*, *Tēmpāvaṇi*, and *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*.¹⁰⁹ Likely, this was the same set of texts Beschi taught at Ēlākkuricci, considering that they are the main sources of examples in the commentary of *Toṇṇūlvilakkam*. Often Beschi privileged a specific section of a literary text. The Jain epic *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, for instance, is organized around explicitly sexual allegories and yet Beschi never allegorized *akam* themes, so he preferred to cite gnomic stanzas, often from the eighth moralizing chapter on liberation (*mutti ilambakam*). Moreover, the literary works Beschi found excellent, including *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, can all be classified as *perunkāppiyam* or epic poems. He must have thought this to be the most important among local genres, a judgment in line with Sanskritic and Sanskritizing literary theory in Tamil that also resonates well with Jesuit predilection for epic and didactic poetry in these centuries (more on this in Chapter Five).

Among the Christian works Beschi endorsed, apart from his own texts, we find two poems nowadays lost. The *Tirucelvarāyappurāṇam* was a retelling of the story of Saints Barlaam and Josaphat, most probably written in Sri Lanka in the seventeenth century.¹¹⁰ The *Aticayakāṇṭam* was known also to the Lutheran Ziegenbalg, but it has not been recovered yet.¹¹¹ Incidentally, the connection

109 Beschi, *Clavis*, 161: *Quare legant antiquos, legant hujus poëseos magistros, v.g.* சிந்தாமணி—சிலப்பதிகாரம்—ராமாயணம்—பாரதம்—நெகிள்தம். *Legant ex Christianis codicibus* அதிசயகாண்டம்—திருசெல்வராயப்புராணம்—தேம்பாவணி—திருக்காவலூர் கலம்பகம்.

110 Tirucelvarāy is the name usually attributed to prince Josaphat in Tamil, and this work cited by Beschi was a retelling of the well-known story of Josaphat and Berleem. The *Tirucelvarāyappurāṇam* is probably lost, but there is a later poem on the same topic, the *Tirucelvar kāvīyam*, composed by the Śri Lankan poet Pūlākaciṅka Aruḷappanāvalar and printed in 1896 (see Bibliography), which mentions its predecessor *Tirucelvarāyappurāṇam* in the introduction.

111 The *Aticaya kāṇṭam* was among the Catholic texts in the library of Ziegenbalg, who described it as “a book of theology so highly respected among Catholics, not only because of its subject matter, but also because of the grace of its verses, which is indeed the thing to admire about it” (6. *Adischeakandam ein theologisches Buch, so von den Katholiken in großem Weth gehalten wird, nicht nur allein wegen der Materie, sondern auch wegen der Zierlichkeit der Verse welches auch das meiste ist, das man darinnen zu admiriren hat*. Wilhelm Germann, “Ziegenbalgs Bibliotheca Malabarica,” *Missionsnachrichten der Ostindischen Missionsanstalt zu Halle* 22 (1880): 1–20, 61–94, here 16). The book is also mentioned in Daniel Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg: The Father of the Modern Protestant Mission. An Indian Assessment* (New Delhi—Chennai: The Indian Society for Promoting Christian

with Sri Lanka shows how the two sides of the Gulf of Mannar were part of one Tamil-speaking world, and Catholic texts written on either side circulated widely. Indeed, the oldest existing Tamil Catholic poem was written in Sri Lanka, and the connection between these two Catholic corpora still awaits proper study.¹¹² Finally, among non-Christian texts, the collection of ethical verses *Tirukkuraḷ* held a special place. Not unlike George Uglow Pope (1820–1908) a century later, Beschi felt that that this work contained some Christian truth and prepared the ground for revelation.¹¹³ We will see in the next chapters how Beschi continuously went back to the *Tirukkuraḷ* for inspiration and examples. He made this text his favorite terrain to experiment with the new strategies of reading and interpreting the Tamil classics in the light of, and in agreement with the Christian message he and his catechists aim to spread in the Tamil country.



In conclusion, Beschi was aware that Christians were not supposed to read and use ‘pagan’ books, and he was trying to construe Tamil poetry and scholarship as a neutral discipline—a discipline ready to be filled with new, Christian significations. Carefully selecting his sources, throughout the *Tonnūvilakkam* Beschi followed the grammatical trends of his time, allowing for instance great relevance to prosody and ornamentation that were central to the *pāṭṭiyal* tradition, and even accepted the rules related to the auspiciousness of certain sounds. Yet at each step, he also integrated and negotiated in this grammar his previous knowledge, based on his study of Latin grammar and rhetoric in early eighteenth-century Italy.¹¹⁴ Each of these negotiations deserves to be treated

Knowledge and The Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 2006), 138. To the best of my knowledge, no other information about this text is available. An enticing piece of information I gathered recently in conversation with Torsten Tschacher is that *Aticaya purāṇam* was one of the titles of the earliest extant Tamil Muslim texts, the *Āyiramacāla* or “One Thousand Questions,” studied in Ricci, *Islam Translated*.

112 The oldest Catholic poem from a local poet, and using a traditional Tamil genre, is the recently reprinted *Nāṇappaḷḷu* (see Bibliography).

113 In the introduction to his translation of *Tirukkuraḷ*, George U. Pope imagines the author of this work—who lived in Mylapore (Mayilāpūr), the ancient village where the Apostle Thomas died and is likely buried, nowadays a suburb of Madras—as “pacing along the sea-shore with the Christian teachers, and imbibing Christian ideas, tinged with the peculiarities of the Alexandrian school, and day by day working them into his own wonderful *Kurraḷ*” (Pope, *The Sacred Kurraḷ*, iii).

114 Coincidentally, this tradition also attributed great importance to prosody and ornamen-

on its own terms, and in the next chapter we will address directly the question of the subject matter of poetry (*poruḷ*) and its organization.

This negotiation between the Tamil and the Christian traditions also shows how the curriculum as Beschi devised it was a huge step towards reading Tamil poetry in new ways. We will soon move our attention to some of Beschi's strategies for reading classical Tamil texts, as they emerge in the new rules for poetical composition that he offered in the *Tonnūlvilakkam*. The protocol of reading he envisioned further emerges in the way he used those rules in his own literary works. Before turning to these experiments, one last question regarding the Ēlākkuricci school of rhetoric remains to be addressed—was it successful? How can we assess whether it had any impact? There is no definitive answer to these questions, but we have some clues as to the impact of Beschi's work. Certainly, the poems he wrote in this period, especially the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, circulated among the catechists. Moreover, Lutheran sources mention that Catholic catechists would use Beschi's work, especially the *Vētaviḷakkam*, to prepare for theological disputes. In short, as we will discover in the course of the next chapters, there was a direct correlation between Vellala catechists, their intellectual aspirations, and Beschi's role as a grammarian, poet, and educator. These links begin to emerge more clearly in the history of the composition and early circulation of the *Tonnūlvilakkam*, the grammar textbook Beschi composed for the Ēlākkuricci school, to which we will turn next.

tation. The *aṇṇiyatikāram* in the TV, for instance, builds upon the theory and classification of figuration in the *Taṇṭiyalaṇṅkāram*, but introduce new figures of meaning (*poruḷaṇi*), probably taken from the Latin tradition. I thank Indra Manuel for discussing with me this interesting topic, which I plan to explore further in the future.

A Tamil Grammar of Persuasion

During the long decades he spent as a missionary in the Tamil country, Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi fashioned himself as a Tamil poet, a *pulavar*, and composed many literary works in conversation with the local literary milieu. The depth of his learning and the sheer quantity of his writings have often puzzled scholars of Tamil, who wondered whether he really wrote the poems.¹ Yet, identifying his possible readership is an even greater challenge than establishing his authorship. Who in the eighteenth century could both possess the literary skills required to read such works, and an interest in Christianity? The previous chapter has hinted that Beschi's readers were the catechists whom he trained in the context of the retreats and of the Ēlākkuricci school of rhetoric. Already spiritually trained through the spiritual exercises they performed in the context of the retreats, as we saw in the first two chapters, these men had the education and the permission to access Hindu texts, as mentioned by Vigilio Saverio Mancini in his commentary to the *Inter Gravidiores*. What they needed were Catholic texts that could also claim to belong in the realm of literature, in fact, to challenge those other texts in private and public debates.

The school of rhetoric and classical Tamil that Beschi founded at Ēlākkuricci in 1731 was particularly important in tying together spiritual, literary, and social training for these catechists. The school taught them Tamil poetry and grammar, including poetics, and offered them a Catholic version of both. It did so by providing them at the same time with the grammatical tools to articulate Christianity in the language of Tamil poetry, and the exegetical strategies for reading Tamil literature and culture in a way that was coherent with their new faith. These experiments in reading, and in speaking persuasively, are at the core of Beschi's traditional grammar of Tamil and the daring novelties this text introduced in a largely conservative field. So, through a reading of the grammar *Tonnūlvilakkam* or "The illumination of the classics," the textbook Beschi wrote for the Ēlākkuricci school, this chapter maps the birth and development of Tamil Catholic poetics as a local yet intercultural project that took place in

1 The question of Beschi's authorship has been particularly debated among Indian scholars. For a favorable opinion, see Meenakshisundaram, *The Contribution*, 324–335. The opposite view, namely that Beschi's works were not his, but were actually written by a local poet (often identified with Cupratīpakkavirāyar) is most emphatically put forward in Arunachalam, *An Introduction*, 276–279.

parallel with the institutionalization of the catechists as a spiritual and literary élite, and reflects on the implications of this process for the social and political positioning of the Jesuit mission in the early eighteenth century.

1 A Textbook of (Christian) Tamil: The *Tonnūlvīlakkam*

There are no references in the letters written by Beschi and his Jesuit companions in Madurai to the exact date of composition of the *Tonnūlvīlakkam* (henceforth TV), nor explicit mentions of the role of this text in relation to the Tamil school. Yet the TV was certainly written after the *Tirukkāvalūr kalam-pakam* and the *Tempāvaṇi*, two texts Beschi composed in the mid to late 1720s, as verses from these poems are used as examples in the auto-commentary of the TV. In addition, Léon Besse in 1918 was able to access a manuscript of the TV dating back to 1730, which makes the most probable date of composition of this grammar the years 1729–1730, after Beschi wrote his poems, and just before he opened the school of literary Tamil at Ēlākkuricci.² After roughly a century of circulation in manuscript form, the TV was the first book by Beschi to be printed, in 1838 in Pondicherry. This early edition testifies to the importance of this work in the field of Tamil grammar. Indeed, the TV is one among the few early modern *aintilakkaṇam* grammars, and it appears in all standard lists of Tamil grammatical texts. The initiative to sponsor the publication of this work was taken by a certain Aruḷānantappiḷlai Kumārar Nellittōppu Upatēciyār Mariyēcavēriyāppiḷlai who was, according to the title-page of the 1838 edition, an eminent personality among Vellalas (*vēlālakulōttuṇkar*).

We have no information about this man apart from his name, which nevertheless contains important clues pointing to the network of catechists we delineated in the previous chapter. His father's name, Aruḷānanta, was the same as João de Brito's Tamil name and indicates devotion towards that saint, an important figure for the constitution of catechist self-awareness, as we say in Chapter One. Our editor's main name, Mariyēcavēriyār, implies devotion towards Mary and the Jesuit Saint Xavier, whose name was Tamilized as Cavēriyār. The title

2 Besse, *Father Beschi*, 219. I have not yet been able to locate this manuscript, but it originally belonged to Paulinus a Sancto Bartolomaeo OCD (1748–1806), whose library is at present scattered between different archives and libraries in Rome. It is therefore likely that the grammar is still in the city. Incidentally, 1730 is the date of composition of this text according to the Tamil version of Muttucāmi Piḷlai's biography (*Vīramāmuṇivarcarittiram*, 11). Unlike the English version, the Tamil text records the dates of all of Beschi's works, and they are generally rather accurate.

piḷḷai is a honorific referring in this case to the man's Vellala caste.³ Most importantly for us, Mariyēcavēriyāppiḷḷai identified himself as the catechist (*upatē-ciyār*) of Nellittōppu, a suburb of Pondicherry that was donated to the Jesuits in the mid-eighteenth century by Jeanne Albert (1706–1756), the wife of the famous Governor of the French colonial town, Joseph-François Dupleix (1697–1763).⁴ The title page adds that Mariyēcavēriyāppiḷḷai decided to approach the son of Cuvānimutaliyār, Vētakirimutaliyār, a *pulavar* learned in literary Tamil (*centamiḷ*) and attached to the group of learned men (a school?) of the Church in Pondicherry in order to edit the book.

This Vētakirimutaliyār, the early nineteenth century editor, intervened heavily on the text as it circulated as a manuscript, which included verses, sutras (*cūttiram* in Tamil), accompanied by Beschi's own commentary. Muttucāmi Piḷḷai was critical of this edition, and wrote in 1840 that the TV "was lately printed at Pondicherry by one of the native Tamil Christians, but, I am extremely sorry to say, it is quite incorrectly done, because the proof sheets of the work were examined by an illiterate Hindoo, who, without understanding the plan of Father Beschi, made several omissions and useless additions to the work."⁵ Value-judgments aside, the editor certainly added topics that were not initially treated in the TV, gave new examples from literary works, and made citations from other grammatical works explicit. Although these interventions are declared in the preface of the work, all subsequent editions are derived from this version. The original commentary only exists in the manuscript transmission of the text, which continued in parallel with the printed circulation. In order to bypass this nineteenth-century editorial intervention, which is interesting in its own right but beyond the scope of this book, and to recover the pre-1838 version of the text, in this chapter I rely on manuscript rather than printed editions of the TV. Among all the manuscripts available, however, only a few are complete. Certain chapters of the TV, especially those on letters (*eluttu*) and

3 On catechist families in Pondicherry, see Agmon, *A Colonial Affair*, esp. 62ff. On the caste of the catechists involved in the Naniyappa affair at the center of Agmon's book, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Hybrid Affairs: Cultural Histories of the East India Companies," 419–438. Relying on David Shulman, "Cowerd or King?", the latter points out that, notwithstanding the title of *piḷḷai*, these catechists were either *iṭaiyar* or *akamuṭaiyar* (one of the three caste belonging to the *tēvar* group, with *kaḷḷars* and *maṟavar*). The title page of the TV, however, clearly states that the catechist was a Vellala, and indeed we know of a group of Catholic Vellalas from Pondicherry who adopted the title of *piḷḷai* (like Muttucāmi).

4 Nellittōppu is still an important center for Catholic activities in Pondicherry; the history of the local community and its mid-nineteenth century church is sketched in the website of the parish: <http://nellithopeparish.org> (consulted 24/10/2021).

5 Muttucāmi, *Brief Sketch*, 21.

words (*col*), had much wider circulation, while the section on poetics (*poruḷ*) appears to have been copied less often. Partially because of this, I was not able to collect enough evidence for a critical edition, and will be relying on a single well-preserved manuscript instead.⁶ There are many possible reasons for the uneven transmission, but I believe the main one is that Beschi in the section on poetics departs more drastically from traditional theories.

As abundantly shown by Mi. Vi Nāṇappirakācar [aka V.M. Gnanapragasam SJ], the five chapters of the TV rely heavily on previous grammatical work, but they also imply a certain amount of negotiation between Tamil theories and Beschi's own ideas, derived from Latin grammar and rhetoric. The interventions in the other chapters, however, are minimal when compared with the novelties introduced in the chapter on poetics (*poruḷatikāram*).⁷ Already Muttucāmi referred to this chapter to explain how Beschi "not only intended to define the rules of grammar more concisely and accurately than the ancient ones, but also by means of it to establish the Christian doctrine."⁸ In other words, when treating the subject matter of poetry, Beschi was compelled to turn to the Latin rhetorical theories that played such a crucial role in the Jesuit educational and missionary enterprise worldwide. This allowed him to marginalize traditional Tamil understanding concerning the centrality of *akam*, the love theme, which he found irreconcilable with a Christian vision of poetry and poetics, as we shall when reading more closely the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in the next chapter. In turn, this allowed him to tie the study of Tamil with ideas of persuasion,

6 The manuscript I am going to use is BnF, Indien 204, which is a complete *aintilakkaṇam* manuscript and contains four out of the five chapters of the TV. Interestingly, the copyist (or the assembler) of the manuscript thought that the *Kārikai*—the text upon which Beschi relied to compose his chapter on meters (*yāppatikāram*)—was more appropriate to the study of prosody, and so substituted it for the relevant chapter of the TV. This manuscript belonged to the French colonial officer and orientalist Édouard Simon Ariel (1818–1854), who collected a remarkable library of Tamil manuscripts in Pondicherry; see Léon de Rosny, "La bibliothèque Tamoule de M. Ariel de Pondichéry," *Variétés orientales historiques, géographiques, scientifiques, biographiques et littéraires* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1866), 177–224. In partial disagreement with the description in the proofs of Vinson and Feer's catalogs (BnF, Indien 577, f. 49)—the most accurate, albeit incomplete, description of the Tamil manuscripts in BnF—my exploration has shown that the manuscript contains almost the entirety of the TV, not only the table of contents and the chapter on rhetorical figures (*aṇiyatikāram*). It seems therefore a quite coherent textbook that simply inserts the *Kārikai* instead of one of Beschi's chapter. I chose this manuscript because it is relatively old and in good condition, but I envision working further on the textual transmission of the TV.

7 Chapter Seven of Nāṇappirakācar's dissertation ("Contribution of Fr. Beschi," 215–267) is dedicated to an in-depth analysis of the TV and its relationship with previous Tamil works, and includes very useful comparison tables.

8 Muttucāmi, *Brief Sketch*, 21.

and practices of preaching and conversion. Beschi showed awareness of his innovative choices in his own translation of the TV into Latin, the *Clavis*, written in 1742. This is supposedly the last work he wrote before his death, and it is useful in understanding the specific project of the TV, insofar as it shows Beschi translating and adapting it for a Latin readership. In the *Clavis*, Beschi declares that he will not translate the initial section of the TV's chapter on poetics (*poru-ḷatikāram*), because it mostly relied on Latin rhetorical theories well-known to his audience.⁹ The *Clavis* focuses on the second part of that chapter, where Beschi summarizes traditional Tamil landscape (*tiṇai*) theories.

The chapter on poetics is therefore central for understanding the way Beschi refashioned Tamil grammar for his Indian audience—the catechists he trained as preachers and spiritual leaders at Ēlākkuricci—and will be the focus of my analysis. Before turning to that chapter, though, let us read the “common introduction” to the whole TV, the *potuppāyiram*. This is the only paratext to appear in all manuscript and printed versions of the grammar I have consulted, and it gives important hints into the general plan of this work according to Beschi:¹⁰

nīr mali kaṭa ṛavaḷ¹¹ nila mutan marṛ' aruñ
 cīr maliy ulak' elāñ ceyt' aḷitt' aḷippa
 vallavan āy mutan matṭ' īr' opp' etir
 illavan āy uyar īraiyoṇ oruvaṇaip
 paṇmaiy oliyap paṇintēy irāv iruṭ
 ṭaṇmaiy oliyat taraṇiyil tōṇriya

9 Beschi, *Clavis*, 51: *Quare in libro, de quo supra, தொன்னூல் விளக்கம் dicto, nostras rhetorum leges sequendo plura de amplificatione scripsi: quae tamen hic, cum illius facultatis magistros alloquar, repetere ineptum esset.* “Hence, in the aforementioned book called *Tōṇṇūḷṭakkam*, I wrote many things on amplification, following our laws of the rhetors; however, since I am addressing masters of that discipline, it would be useless to repeat them.”

10 On the *cīrappuppāyiram* and the nineteenth century economy of praise, see Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, 62–73. On paratexts in Tamil manuscripts, see Eva Wilden, “Making Order in the Vaults of Memory: Tamil Satellite Stanzas on the Transmission of Texts,” *Kervan—International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies* 21 (2017): 317–337; Ead., “Tamil Satellite Stanzas: Genres and Distribution,” in *Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages: Material, Textual, and Historical Investigations*, Studies in Manuscript Cultures 14, eds Vincenzo Vergiani, Daniele Cuneo and Camillo Formigatti (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 163–192; Giovanni Ciotti and Marco Franceschini, “Certain Times in Uncertain Places: A Study on Scribal Colophons of Manuscripts Written in Tamil and Tamilian Grantha Scripts,” in *Tracing Manuscripts in Time and Space through Paratexts*, eds Giovanni Ciotti and Hang Lin (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 59–130.

11 I correct *taviḷ* in Indien 204, f. 1r with the form *tavaḷ* found in all printed editions.

ātava n̄ikar iruḷakatt' arav aṇṇān
 ōtiya maṇai nūl ōtiṇaṇ āki
 yammeypporuḷ onr' anaivarum uṇarac
 cemmeypporuḷ at tirumaṇai vaḷaṅkav
 amaittu uḷatt' eḷuntav ācaiy uṭ tūṇṭic
 camaitt' uḷa yāvarun tāṅkat taruk' eṇav¹²
 ēviyatākav ippaṇiy ērri nūn
 mēviyav aimporuḷ viḷakkal uṇarntu
 virivilāt tonṇūl viḷakkam eṇum peyartt'
 ariyav āciriyaṇ arun taṁiḷc collip
 piraṇūṇ muṭintatu peyartt' uṭaṇ paṭuttium
 puṇaṇūṇ muṭintatu poruttiiyun tāṇ oru
 vaḷi nūṇ muṭintaṇaṇ, vāyppu arum meymmaṇai
 moḷinūlattar āy, mutircirapp' iṇaiyil
 virōmai nāṭṭiṇiṇr' eytiya muṇiy aruḷ
 virōtamoli tayai mēv'aka
 nēra mātavattiṇ vīramāmuniyē.¹³

God has the power to create, protect and destroy the entire great world, beginning with the land that ends into the ocean filled with water. He has no beginning, measure, or end, nothing that can oppose and nothing that is comparable to him. This one high God lowered himself into one person to vanquish sin, like the sun that appears on earth to vanquish the darkness of the night, and that man [Jesus] with the power to destroy darkness is spoken about in the revealed scriptures. Speaking about those scriptures, in order for everyone to understand their one true meaning (*poruḷ*), in order to spread the holy book carrying that beautiful truth, [Beschi] accomplished this work according to the com-

12 The sandhi between *taruka* and *eṇa* as *tarukeṇa* is not attested in grammar books but common in poetry. It is used in the *Cilappatikāram*, for instance, and found in contemporary colloquial Tamil. I thank E. Annamalai for pointing this out to me.

13 BnF, Indien 204, f. 1r. After some initial unnumbered folia, containing prefatory stanzas, the text begins with the *potuppāyiram*. However, the numeration of the folia in the beginning is inconsistent. After this first one, certain initial folia are missing, and other ones with unrelated numeration have been inserted (one can notice the different hand). The numeration becomes rather regular and reliable in later sections, including the *poruḷatikāram* from which I quote at length later. The manuscript is in the *scriptio continua*; I restore word breaks, and mark the end of lines (*aṭi*) mostly following the printed editions. All the subsequent passages will be edited in this way, including punctuation, word and verse line breaks, for ease of reading.

mand: “Kindle inside a desire that takes root and grows in the heart, and support anyone whose heart is thus on fire.” He understood how to explain the five topics pertaining to [grammar] books, and calling this faultless work an illumination of the classics (*tonṇūl viḷakkam*), speaking with the beautiful Tamil of the great teachers he took the conclusions of previous books, and used them, making [them] to agree with the conclusions of outsiders’ books,¹⁴ and accomplished this summary (*vaḷi nūl*). He is the father of exegesis, a graceful sage rising from the country of Rome in a group of first greatness, one who did great penance to gain a loving compassion for an opposing language, the great heroic ascetic.

The *potuppāyiram* begins with a praise to God that portrays him with an image adapted from the local pantheon—like the Hindu *trimūrti*, he creates, preserves, and destroys. A few lines into the stanza this God becomes more markedly Christian, as he lowers himself (*paṇi*) and becomes a person in order to destroy sin.¹⁵ In this form—as a man—he is spoken about in those scriptures that the author of the *TV* has the task of spreading in the world. Indeed, Jesus, this incarnated God, is the beautiful truth (*cemmeypporuḷ*) revealed by those scriptures. At this point there is a change of grammatical subject in the text. Jesus (*annān*) is the object of *ōṭiya*, and therefore the object spoken about in the scriptures. Beschi, on the other hand—the subject of the rest of the sentence, and the author of the work—is the one tasked with reciting those scriptures (*ōṭinan*). This complex sentence, presenting us Jesus as God incarnated as well as the *meypporuḷ* of the scriptures, and Beschi as the one spreading those scriptures, points to the key role of *poruḷ* in Beschi’s conceptualization of Tamil grammar. The compound *meypporuḷ*, literally “true thing” or “true meaning,” is a term inspired by Śaiva theology that Christians adopted early on. Roberto Nobili already described the true scriptures and their preachers as *meyvetam* and *meykkuru*.¹⁶ Considering that the *potuppāyiram* introduces a

14 The phrase *puṇṇūl* seems to be in this context another adaptation from Śaiva vocabulary, in line with *puṇaccamayam* above (I thank Whitney Cox for bringing this to my attention). The repeated use of these categories suggests that Beschi needed a vocabulary of religious and cultural difference, but he only possessed the hierarchical model of his Śaiva opponents. So, he adopted the language of inclusion and exclusion that was typical of Śaiva sectarianism at his time (see Steinschneider, “Beyond the Warring Sects”).

15 The analogies between the incarnation and the *avātaram* logic had already been noticed and exploited, first of all by adopting the word *avātaram* for incarnation, by Roberto Nobili. See for instance *Ñāṇōpatēca kuṛippaṭam*, 78–84.

16 See Nobili’s discussion of the signs of the true Veda (*mey* or *meyyāṇa vētam*), among which is the connection with a true guru (*meykuru*), in *Ñāṇōpatēca kuṛippaṭam*, 66–74.

book on grammar, this seems to be a play on the multiple meaning of *poruḷ* as a key grammatical term, referring to the subject matter of poetry, and a reference to Jesus as both the truth revealed in the scriptures and the true subject matter of the scriptures. Beschi's treatment of *poruḷ* is built upon this polysemy, as we shall see, to allow for his catechists to use Tamil to talk about this specifically Christian *poruḷ*, and spread it (*vaḷaṅka*) among people in the Tamil country. The following lines in the verse refer to the injunction Beschi was given to spread this message. The phrasing of the injunction, especially the reference to a fire that takes the heart, is likely to be an elaboration upon the famous Ignatian phrase *ite, inflammate, omnia*, often translated as "go, set the world on fire," that Ignatius used as a close to his letter to the first Jesuits.

The second half of the stanza addresses the composition of the TV directly, and gives important insights on the role of this grammar, and of Tamil language more in general, for Beschi's missionary project. First of all, it stresses how Beschi relied on the old (Tamil) teachers, namely traditional grammarians. The works cited in the TV are those we touched upon in the previous section, and many verses of the TV are simply citations from these texts, with a clear preponderance of *Naṇṇūl*. In most cases, these citations and references have been made explicit in the nineteenth-century enlarged version of the commentary, and Nāṇappirakācar organized them in a useful table.¹⁷ Remarkably, the nineteenth century commentator did not list the *Ilakkaṇa viḷakkam* among the influences of the TV, thus replicating Beschi's silence regarding this text. Yet Nāṇappirakācar duly noted some parallels between the TV and the *Ilakkaṇa viḷakkam*, which are especially important in the *poruḷ* section. In a Catholic perspective, the two grammars were likely in competition from early on, and certainly so in the nineteenth century, when the controversies between Christian and Śaiva practitioners (mostly Vellalas, like the editors of this work) and their respective educational models were at their height.¹⁸ As just mentioned, the ultimate purpose of the TV and of the study of Tamil as expressed in the *potuppāyiram* is to help everyone understand the true, i.e., Christian mean-

17 Nāṇappirakācar, "Contribution of Fr. Beschi," 222–223.

18 The figure of mission-educated Śaiva reformer and Tamil author Ārumuka Nāvalar was key in these processes; see for instance Richard Fox Young and S. Jebanesan, *The Bible Trembled: The Hindu-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Vienna: Sammlung De Nobili, 1995); Bernard Bate, "Arumuga Navalar, Saivite Sermons, and the Delimitation of Religion, c. 1850," *IESHR* 42, 4 (2005): 469–484; Rick Weiss, "Religion and the Emergence of Print in Colonial India: Arumuga Navalar's Publishing Project," *IESHR* 53, 4 (2016): 473–500.

ing of the scriptures. The author, “the great heroic ascetic” Vīramāmuṇivar aka Beschi, is described as a man learned in exegesis, or philology (*moḷi nūḷ*) applied to revelation (*mey marai*), a turn of phrase that describes well the humanistic project of the Jesuits in South India as elsewhere. Beschi’s heart is filled with compassion towards a language, Tamil, that is traditionally contrary to the scriptures, and so aims to Christianize it.¹⁹ He does so, argues this stanza, by reconciling and bringing into agreement the teachings of old Tamil grammatical books with foreign (Latin) books, thus creating a new and approachable synthesis. The stanza thus makes explicit that in the TV Beschi is Christianizing the discipline of Tamil grammar by blending two traditions.

The *potuppāyiram* is a programmatic statement that does not apply to grammar alone. Both in the Tamil land and in the Latinate world rhetoric and literature, *ilakkaṇam* (grammar) and *ilakkiyam* (literature) were closely interconnected, and Beschi’s grammatical project is intertwined with the literary project of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. Reading the chapter on *poruḷ* is therefore particularly useful to understand the connection between these multiple dimensions. It also shows how, with Beschi, the field of Christianization shifted drastically in comparison with earlier missionary attempts. By the eighteenth century, missionaries in South India had been learning Tamil for more than a century. They had studied the language, they had written grammars about it, and composed dictionaries. They had authored theological and devotional texts in Tamil, entertained heated debates on the semantics of certain words, and they had discussed the pros and cons of translating versus transliterating sacred Christian vocabulary into Tamil.²⁰ Beschi was in many ways the inheritor of this tradition, but he was the first missionary to go beyond the question of language, and open up the question of textuality. As mentioned in the Introduction, he was the first to ask: what is Tamil literature? Can Tamil literature be Christian? Before him, missionaries took for granted that they could write texts in Tamil, and never really reflected on the status of these texts, and on their belonging (or not) to the realm of literature. Beschi devoted his life to this question, and answered it by exploring the boundaries of literary and scientific genres both in Latin and in Tamil—by writing Latin grammars of Tamil, and poetical and prose texts in Tamil.

19 Alternatively, *moḷi* in this expression (*virōtamoḷi*) could also stand for opinion, thus pointing to Beschi’s argumentation skills.

20 The controversy between Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso and Roberto Nobili in Madurai revolved around, among other things, the appropriate vocabulary for Catholic prayers. For an overview of the linguistic points involved in the dispute, see Rajamanaickam, *The First Oriental Scholar*, 86–92.

2 *Amplificatio* as *Poruḷ*

Beschi explicitly engaged with the question of literature in the third chapter (*atikāram*) of the TV on poetics or *poruḷ*. After an invocation to God, the chapter begins by examining traditional definitions of *poruḷ* as the subject matter of poetry. Beschi declares himself unsatisfied with the works he consulted—chiefly Nambi's *Akapporuḷ*—and their exclusive focus on carnal love and warfare, as he perceived *akam* and *puṛam*. He therefore tries to subsume this literature and its rules within a larger framework, as we see in verse 144 and its commentary:

144—cū—

poruṇū lenṇatu pukalporu ṇutaliya
vurippayan paṭuttumā ruṇarttu nūlē.

—el—ivvatikāram poruṇūlilakkaṇattaiy uṇarttuvatākaiyil iccūttirattin kaṇṇē poruṇūlāvat' eṇak kāṭṭutum. akaiyil innṇaṇa poruḷ eṇap paṭuvatu tāṇ piriṭ' turaippāṇ eṭutta poruḷaip payaṇpaṭak kūṛum paṭiyaik kāṭṭu nūlē yeṇak kaṇṭ' uṇarka. ātalār pulavarāl uraikkat takum poruḷāvaṇa aṛam poruḷ inṇam vīṭ' eṇa nāṇku āyiṇum, ivarṇuṭ poruṇūr ṛanta centamiḷ uṇarntōr marṛayāvum oliyav akapporuḷ eṇac cirrinṇam oṇṛaiyum puṛapporuḷ eṇap paṭaiccēvakam oṇṛaiyum viritt' uraikkiṇṛār. aṇṇaṇam, potuppaṭāt'-uraitta nūl ciṛu pāṇmai yākaiyiṇ inkaṇ aṛamutaṇāṇkirk'ēṛpap potunūlā-kav ivvatikāra mukiyum eṇavē koḷka.²¹

144. A treatise on *poruḷ* is a book that explains in a useful way the essence of the subject matter (*poruḷ*) chosen to be expanded upon.

Because this chapter explains the grammar found in the treatises on *poruḷ*, in this sutra we explain what a “treatise on *poruḷ*!” really is. What we call *poruḷ* here should therefore be understood as a treatise that explains how to make good use of the subject matter selected to be elaborated upon. In this regard, there are four types of matter appropriate for exploration by the poets—law (*aṛam*), profit (*poruḷ*), passion (*inṇam*), and liberation (*vīṭu*). In spite of this, the connoisseurs of literary Tamil who have written books on *poruḷ* have focused their explanations only on the subjects of *akam*, which is carnal love (*cirrinṇam*), and *puṛam*, which

21 BnF, Indien 204, f. 74^{r-v}.

is warfare, ignoring anything else. Because these treatises do not cover the whole subject matter, since these two [i.e., *akam* and *puṛam*] are something of marginal importance, this comprehensive treatise should be understood as covering all four subject matters beginning with law.

In the commentary, Beschi uses a well-known Sanskrit definition of the subject matter of poetry as consisting of the four “goals of human endeavor” (Skr. *puruṣārtha*)—law (Skr. *dharma*, Tamil *arām*), profit (Skr. *artha*, Tamil *poruḷ*), passion (Skr. *kāma*, Tamil *inṇam*), and liberation (Skr. *mokṣa*, Tamil *vītu*). He places the Tamil traditional poetological classification, based on love and war—*akam* and *puṛam*—, as a sub-category within this larger framework.²² By his time, this move was not unique, nor unprecedented. Tamil grammarians had long been reflecting on the relationship between traditional ideas on the subject matter of poetry as constituted by *akam* and *puṛam* and Sanskrit influences based on the *puruṣārtha* division that appear (albeit in a marginal position) already in the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam*.²³ Among the early texts Beschi certainly knew, the *Tirukkuraḷ* is divided into three books corresponding to first three *puruṣārthas*. The *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*—the twelfth-century Tamil version of Daṇḍin’s Sanskrit treatise on poetics often cited in the TV—introduced the treatment of the four *puruṣārthas* as one of the characteristics of the epic poem or *peruṅkāppiam*.²⁴ Around the same time, the commentators of *Tolkāppiyam*’s section on the subject matter of poetry (*poruḷiyal*), beginning with Ilampurāṇar, proposed a substantial harmonization of Sanskrit and Tamil theories regarding this topic. As Jennifer Clare has shown, this attempt was likely prompted by the flourishing of post-classical literature in the Chola period, which could hardly be described according to traditional *akap-poruḷ* theories, and was strongly influenced by Sanskrit.²⁵ So, Ilampurāṇar in his introduction to the *poruḷiyal* defined *akam* and *puṛam* as a subset of the

22 The following discussion on the role of the *puruṣārtha* theory in Tamil poetics has been shaped by several conversations with professor E. Annamalai at the University of Chicago in March 2019. I am grateful to him for his time and patience in exploring these issues with me—any mistakes or imprecisions are obviously due to my inability to understand his insights.

23 *Tolkāppiyam poruḷatikāram*, sutra 411 (*ceyyuḷiyal* sutra 12): *annilai maruviṇṇa ramuta lākiya | mum mutar poruḷku muriya veṇpa*.

24 *Taṇṭiyācīriyar iyaṛriya taṇṭiyalaṅkāram mūlamum paḷaiyavuraḷiyum* (Ceṇṇai: Vai. Mu. Kōpālākuruṣṇam ācāriyar kampaṇ, 1962), sutra 7. The *puruṣārtha* division also appear in *Yāpparuṅkalam viritturai*, sutra 211, another text Beschi knew and used as a model for his *yāppatikāram*.

25 The tensions and integration between the Sanskrit and Tamil grammatical tradition in the late medieval and early modern period are the topic of Jennifer Clare, “Canons, Conven-

larger *puruṣārtha* classification, although for him these four categories do not have the status of *tiṇai* or categories of *poruḷ*. Yet it was only in the seventeenth century, in the aforementioned *Ilakkaṇa viḷakkam*, that an original grammar proposed the integration of *akam* and *puram* within the *puruṣārtha* theory as the framing of all Tamil poetry.²⁶ In sutra 374, the *Ilakkaṇa viḷakkam* gives two alternative yet parallel classifications of the subject matter of poetry—a three-fold classification in *aram*, *poruḷ* and *inṇam* (without *viṭu*, as its considerations are outside of the human domain), and the twofold classification in *akam* and *puram*.²⁷ In the following sutra, the *Ilakkaṇa viḷakkam* identifies *akam* as being about worldly love (*inṇam*) in the same way as Beschi in the commentary we just read—albeit Beschi classifies it pejoratively as *cirrinṇam*, “carnal love.”²⁸ As it emerges from these intertextual resonances, Beschi’s enterprise was in many ways parallel to, if not even partially inspired by the *Ilakkaṇa viḷakkam*.

The *puruṣārtha* theory was therefore current at the time Beschi wrote the TV. But why did he adopt it, besides the obvious fact that he disliked *akam*’s focus on worldly love? The key to his interpretation is the adverbial clause *payaṇ- paṭuttumāru* in the verse above, literally “in a way that is useful/brings about results.” In Beschi’s view—which is strongly reminiscent of Torquato Tasso’s definition of the goal of literature as “to be useful while giving pleasure,” *giovare diletando*—the study of poetics should lead to composing literature that is also useful.²⁹ The Sanskrit theory of *kāvya* in its Tamil incarnation must have appealed to him precisely because of its didactic aspects, insofar as *kāvya* has among its aims, besides the aesthetic, *upadeśa* or instruction (*jñāna-upadeśa* is, incidentally, the word used by Catholics to translate “catechism”).³⁰ How-

tions and Creativity. Defining Literary Tradition in Pre-modern Tamil South India” (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2011).

26 As noted in Manuel, *Literary Theories in Tamil*, 189.

27 *Ilakkaṇa viḷakkam*, sutra 374: *pōkkaṟu marapiṇ poruḷeṇaṇ paṭuvatu | nōkkaṟum viṭu nuvaṛ- cicel lāmaiṇ | āraṇporuḷ inṇam ākum atuṇē | akaṇum puṇaṇumenṇu āyiru pāṇṇāy | vakai- paṭa vanta aṇinalam taḷi ic | ceyyul iṭavayin pulliya nerittē*. The *Ilakkaṇa viḷakkam* follows *Tolkāppiyam* in positing the fourth *puruṣārtha*, liberation, *mokṣa* or *viṭu*, beyond human understanding, and therefore not a valid subject of poetry.

28 *Ilakkaṇa viḷakkam*, sutra 375: *akameṇaṇ paṭuvatu vakaiy oru mūṇṇaṇuḷ | inṇam eṇṇum iyaḷpiṇṇu āki | akattunikaḷ olukkam ātal vēṇṭum*.

29 Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi del Poema Eroico di Torquato Tasso e Lettere Poetiche dello stesso e d'altri, particolarmente intorno alla Gerusalemme*, Opere di Torquato Tasso, vol. 3 (Milano: Società Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 1824), 21. This parallel is relevant because Beschi was inspired by Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* while writing his *Tēmpāvaṇi*, as I explore in Chapter Five.

30 A discussion on the didactic purposes of *kāvya* can be found in Shonaleeka Kaul, *The Making of Early Kashmir: Landscape and Identity in the Rajatarangini* (New Delhi: Oxford

ever, Beschi's preoccupation with explaining literature's power to teach and to persuade pushed him to go beyond Sanskrit models, and to introduce a new poetological framework taken from classical theories of Latin rhetoric as they had been reworked in Baroque Europe. In doing so, he saw Latin rhetoric and Tamil poetics as parallel disciplines, especially in their treatment of subject matter, figuration, and meter. This analogical view probably developed due to the remarkable similarities between Western rhetoric in the Baroque period, and Tamil (and, more generally, South Asian) grammar and poetics as they developed in the post-classical period. Both emphasized the role of sound, for instance, of complex meters, and figuration.³¹ More importantly, at Beschi's time the view prevailed among humanists "that poetry's prime task was to praise the virtues of the protagonists and to castigate their vices, in order to ensure that, in the spirit of Horace, the poem provided both instruction and delight."³² In other words, in the Baroque Latinate world, the goals of Christian rhetoric—instruction and persuasion—applied to poetry too. Hence, the rules of rhetorical speech must have seemed appropriate to Beschi to help his catechists understand the grammar of Tamil poetry with the prospect of using it for preaching, instructing and persuading their audiences. Besides, rhetorical theories offered the additional advantage of describing the contents of texts independently from their metrical aspects, thus offering a version of *poruḷ* that could include not only post-classical Tamil genres, but Catholic prose genres too.

The next few paragraphs explore the specific theories introduced by Beschi, especially amplification as a technique for reading local literature in a Christianized way, and composing new Christian literature. The TV incorporates three main ideas from Latin rhetoric: 1.) The theory of the *genera causarum* as the three main types of oratory, which he then implicitly identifies with

University Press, 2018), 41–46; and Anne Monius, "‘And We Shall Compose a Poem to Establish These Truths’: The Power of Narrative Art in South Asian Literary Cultures," in *Narrative, Philosophy and Life*, ed. Allen Speight (Boston: Springer, 2015), 151–165.

31 On the importance of sound in the grammatical thinking of this period in South India, see David Shulman, "Notes on *Camatkāra*," in *Language, Ritual and Poetics in Ancient India and Iran: Studies in Honor of Shaul Migron*, ed. David Shulman (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2010), 249–277; on the role of rhetorical figures or *alaṅkāras*, see Anne Monius, "The Many Lives of Daṇḍin: The 'Kāvyaḍarśa' in Sanskrit and Tamil," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 4, 1 (2000): 1–37; Jennifer Clare, "Embracing Traditions: The Figure of Condensed Speech in Tamil," *Rivista di Studi Orientali* xc, 1–4 (2018): 107–126.

32 Craig Kallendorf, "Rhetoric," in *New Pauly Supplements II*, vol. 8, *The Reception of Antiquity in Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Chad M. Schroeder (New York and Leiden: Brill, 2017).

poruḷ, i.e., the subject of all poetry 2.) The theory of the parts of speech, and especially argumentation. 3.) Only after these two, he explores the theory of amplification (*amplificatio*), as a strategy to elaborate upon the subject matter at hand by means of figuration, and other techniques. Interestingly, these ideas do not really help in interpreting local poetry as such, and seem to have been inserted in the perspective of using poetry within Christian sermons, and of composing new poetry. One wonders whether one of Beschi's plans was to make his catechists into an army of Christian poets, as certainly the connection between grammar and poetical composition—parallel to that between rhetoric and preaching—was not lost on him. Following the order of the TV, the theory of the three *genera causarum* is expressed in two sutras that clarify the ways in which the subject matter can be useful, and used within a text. The first one introduces a threefold division of *poruḷ*:

145—cū—
 vaḷakkut tērran tōrra meṇavim
 mūvakaip paṭumā moliyum poruḷē

—el—poruḷ kūrupāṭ' uṇarttutū. ākaiyir karrōr pirar payanpaṭa viritt' uraikkat takum poruḷ ellām vaḷakkun tērramun tōrramum eṇav immūru vakaiyuḷ aṭaṅkum.³³

145. Law-suit (*vaḷakku*), discernment (*tērram*) and praise (*tōrram*)—these are three categories in which we can subdivide *poruḷ*.

We shall now explain the way to talk about the subject matter (*poruḷ*). We can group all *poruḷ* that is worth being explained by educated people in order for others to obtain results into three types—*vaḷakku*, *tērram*, and *tōrram*.

While my translation is influenced by my knowledge of the three *genera causarum*—judicial, deliberative, and apodeictic speech—the three Tamil words chosen by Beschi are important, polysemic words that point to different ways in which poetry can make an intervention in social life, by offering ethical norms (*vaḷakku*), by helping to form opinions (*tērram*), and by showing (good or bad) examples (*tōrram*).³⁴ The following sutra in the TV lists the effects

33 BnF, Indien 204, f. 74^v.

34 In the attempt to make sense of this threefold classification without knowing the Latin theory, the nineteenth century commentator added the following sentence at the end

ness through reproach, by saying that even if he saw his own mother hungry, he would give nothing. Therefore, one should understand that [the three types of *poru!*] respectively have the purpose of arguing for the implementation of justice in accordance with tradition, the purpose of clearly determining something without any doubt, and to show clearly good and bad things [...] These three types of *poru!* belong without distinction to prose (*iyal tamil*) and poetry (*icai tamil*).

The division of oratory into forensic, deliberative, and epideictic is a commonplace, already present in the classical works of Cicero and Quintilian, and always adopted after them in the Renaissance.³⁶ It was explained at the very beginning of Cipriano Suárez's famous textbook of Latin rhetoric, *De Arte Rhetorica*, in use in Jesuit schools from the sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century. Beschi's schematic and systematic presentation, however, is probably derived from the textbook that had supplanted Suárez and was in vogue in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the *Candidatus Rhetoricæ* by the French Jesuit François-Antoine Pomey (1618–1673).³⁷ This work presents the information through questions and answers—for instance, “What are the *genera causarum*, to which the orator can turn? They are three, and namely the judicial, the deliberative, and the demonstrative, called in Greek epideictic.”³⁸ Even when Beschi's commentary elaborates with abundant examples, the overall structure follows Pomey's presentation, as does the sequence of the topics introduced, from the *genera causarum* to the parts of

36 On the typology of speeches in the Renaissance and early modern period, see Francis Goyet, “Le problème de la typologie des discours,” *Exercices de rhétorique* 1 (2013).

37 The evolution of the curriculum and textbooks of rhetoric in the Jesuit schools of central Italy has been carefully mapped in Andrea Battistini, “I manuali di retorica dei gesuiti,” in *La «Ratio Studiorum». Modelli culturali e pratiche educative dei Gesuiti in Italia tra Cinque e Seicento*, ed. Gian Paoli Brizzi (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1981), 77–120.

38 The whole passage on the *genera causarum* in Pomey reads:—*Quot sunt Causarum Genera, in quibus versari Orator potest? R. Tria haec. Iudiciale, Deliberativum, & Exornativum, seu Demonstrativum, Graece Epideicticum.*—*In quas partes dividitur Iudiciale Genus? R. In duas; Accusationem scilicet, & Defensionem.*—*Quas habet partes, Deliberativum? R. Duas; Suasionem, & Dissuasionem.*—*Quas sunt partes Demonstrativi Generis? R. Duae; Laus, and Vituperatio.* “—What are the species of rhetorics (lit. kinds of causes) which an orator can be engaged in?—These three: judicial, deliberative, and embellishing or demonstrative, which is said epideictic in Greek. —In which parts is the judicial kind divided? R. In two parts, namely accusation and defense.—Which parts does the deliberative kind have? R. Two, persuasion and dissuasion.—What are the parts of the demonstrative kind? R. Two, praise and reproach.” François Pomey, *Candidatus Rhetoricæ seu, Aphthonii Progyrnasmata. In meliorem formam vsumque redacta Auctore P. Franciso Pomey è Societate Iesv* (Antverpiæ: Iuxta Exemplar Lugduni Editum, 1666), 6.

speech. The focus on these categories ultimately delivers the idea that the purpose of any Christian literary composition in Tamil is that of convincing and converting the audience. I chose to translate the extract in the commentary exemplifying epideictic speech, that includes praise and blame, and their effects, because of its importance in light of Beschi's own literary project in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. As Hardison and Wicker have shown, the epideictic mode of speech became in the Renaissance the guiding principle of epic literature, whose purpose was to praise the good and condemn the bad.³⁹ This is relevant because Beschi conceived the *peruṅkāppiyam*—the genre of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*—as the Tamil equivalent of the epic poem.⁴⁰ The ability to praise virtue and condemn vice must have also been the guiding principle behind Beschi's reading of Tamil authors, considering that all the poems in his literary curriculum belong to the *pēruṅkāppiyam* genre, as we saw.⁴¹ Coincidentally, praise was also one of the most important modes of post-classical Tamil literature.⁴²

After discussing the *genera causarum*, Beschi introduces the parts of the oration (sutra 147), and explains in some detail the introduction (*patikam*), probably because it was an important section in Tamil theory too, also mentioned in classical Tamil grammars. It is difficult to draw direct equivalences from this list, but it seems likely that the following terms are on par: *patikam* and the introduction (*exordium*); *tokai* and the outline of the argument (*partitio*); *tuṇi* and the final invocation (*peroratio*). Then, Beschi spends some sutras (150–161) elaborating upon *kāraṇam*, which is the development of the argument (*argumentatio*), and includes here the theory of rhetorical *loci*. Aptly, Muttucāmi describes this section as dealing with “logic.” In order to introduce this new content, Beschi borrows from traditional vocabulary, and defines intrinsic and extrinsic cause as *akattiṇai* and *purattiṇai*. This is not a misunderstanding on

39 This is explicitly theorized in Tasso's *Del Poema Eroico*. On praise and blame in the context of sacred oratory in the Renaissance, see John O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court*, c. 1450–1521 (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1979).

40 As appears clearly in his discussion of Tamil genres in Latin. Chapter Five is devoted to the *Tēmpāvaṇi* and discusses the issue of literary genre at length, especially the analogies between the *peruṅkāppiyam* as conceived by Beschi and Christian epic.

41 This “moralizing” strategy was a common way of reading classical authors in the Renaissance. For one example of reading the classics—and specifically Virgil—in the sixteenth century, see Craig Kallendorf, *Virgil and the Myth of Venice: Books and Readers in the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

42 On praise and *cirrilakkiyam* grammars, see once again Clare, “Canons, Conventions and Creativity”; on the nineteenth century “economy of praise” Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*.

his part, and we will see that he employs the terms in the traditional way later on. This move seems instead to point to the old missionary strategy of lexical resignification, often used with theological terms—recall the new meanings of the word *vētam* we encountered in the previous chapter. In this case, Christianity forces new meaning into old terms belonging to the technical realm of literary composition, without however discarding the old meaning.

Throughout these sutras Beschi operates a similar resignification of the terms *iyarramil* and *icattamil*. The two terms are usually part of a triad (*mut-tamil*), and indicate *belles-lettres* and musical composition, together with *nāṭa-kattamil* or drama. Beschi was well aware of this tripartite division, and used it often. However, the commentary to the TV makes often use of the doublet *icai-iyal*, and this seems to imply a sharper distinction between poetry and prose. This is particularly evident in the commentary to sutra 149, which includes the example of a *patikam* Beschi composed to introduce a verse of the *Tirukkural* (34). Here, Beschi mentions that the *patikam* he just composed is in prose (*iyarramil*), and for a parallel example in poetry (*icai*) the reader is directed to the three initial verses of the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*.⁴³ This slight semantic shift, while marginal in the overall scheme of the grammar, is certainly the first missionary reflection on the role of prose within the ecology of Tamil literature, and demonstrates how it was perceived (at least by Beschi) as another mode of expression.

It is only at the end of this complex rhetorical section that Beschi introduces one sutra (162) and a long commentary on amplification proper, even though in the *Clavis* he would define this whole initial section of the *poruḷatikāram* as dealing with *amplificatio*. Amplification became hugely important in the Baroque period, and from Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) onwards it was systematized in many different ways.⁴⁴ It was a typical aspect of both Latin and

43 *icattamilppatikatt'utāraṇamākak kampaṇ uraitta pati[ka]muppāp pāyirattaik kāṅka. av-arṟuṇ mutarpāt teyvavaṇakkamun piṇṇirupāvuṇ ceyporuḷ uraittalam, piṇṇār pāvinōḷ' avaiyaṭakkamu, marṟavai taṇ katai māṭciyūm arumaṭiyūm payaṇum vantat' aṟika.* BnF, Indien 204, f. 78^r.

44 Gérard Genette, “D’un récit baroque,” in *Figures II* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), 195–222, which is the classical article on amplification in the Baroque explores this technique at the narrative level, is perhaps more relevant to the discussion on the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in Chapter Five. On amplification, see also Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380–1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and the special issue of the journal *Exercice de rhétorique* devoted to *amplificatio* in early modern France, especially Cendrine Pagani-Naudet, “L’amplification dans le discours des grammairiens (xvi^e–xvii^e siècles),” *Exercices de rhétorique* 4 (2014); and Stéphane Macé, “L’amplification, ou l’âme de la rhétorique. Présentation générale,” *Exercices de rhétorique* 4 (2014).

vernacular Baroque poetry, to the point of almost overgrowing *inventio*, and Jesuits were particularly engaged in exploring and enlarging its boundaries. Indeed, both Suárez and Pomey have large section on *amplificatio*, but the latter offers a much larger array of techniques and examples, including a list of semantically related words useful for the purpose of amplification. In the case of the TV too, the keyword of the section on rhetoric is *virivu* (in all its nominal and verbal forms), because the whole section is really about explanation and expansion, that is, the whole range of *virivu*.⁴⁵ Indeed, *virivu* is the technical term Beschi chose to translate the Latin *amplificatio*, and his definition of this term is a strong indication that his rhetorical presentation is derived from Pomey rather than Suárez. As Battistini noted, Pomey did not adopt the sophisticated definition of *amplificatio* by Cicero that implied intensification of emotional reaction, but the simpler—almost banal—definition by Isocrates.⁴⁶ For Pomey as well as for Beschi, amplification is a technique to expand upon the subject matter, and *enumeratio* (another Latin term which could translate *virivu*) is the most important aspect of this rhetorical strategy.⁴⁷

162—cū—

viriveṇa vaṇivali viritta taṇporu
ṭeriyavaik kaṭcelac cepputa leṇpa

—el—niṛutta muṛaiyāṇē virivāmār' uṇarttutum. viriv' eṇiṇum parav' eṇiṇum okkum ākaiyiṇ mērkūriya tiṇai mūvaintum ellāpporuṭk'ellām vēṇṭiyavallavākiy oru poruṭk'uriya cilavuṇ cila mar'oru poruṭk'uriyavā-kaiyir rāṇ viritturaippav eṭutta poruṭk' ērpavarrait terintu—pōrmukatt' aṇikaḷaip palavakaiyūkamāka vakuttatu pōlak, kuṛitta payaṇaiy aṭaitark'-ēṛrav oḷuṇkun teḷivumām paṭit terinta ṇāyāyāṇkaḷaip pakutta piṇṇar ēṛriya cuvar mēṛ cittiram eḷutuvār pōlavum eḷuti ccuruṭṭiṇa paṭattai viripār pōlavu', muṛaiyir kiṭanta neṭum vāl uruvi vīcuvār pōlavun—tāṇum avarrait taṇittāṇi virittukkāṭṭal vēṇṭum ituvē viriv' eṇappaṭum. itark'aintām atikārattir collappaṭum alaṇkāraṇkaḷē valiṇyām. utāraṇaṇ kāṭṭa vitiyē viḷaṇkum. [...]⁴⁸

45 According to a preliminary examination, verbal and nominal forms connected with *virital* appear 46 times throughout the chapter (which has a total of 57 sutras); among these occurrences, 36 are concentrated the initial section on rhetoric (of only 19 sutras). This doesn't consider variations such as *pirital*, and other synonyms.

46 Battistini, "I manuali di retorica dei gesuiti," 98.

47 Pomey, *Candidatus Rhetoricæ*, 131–133.

48 BnF, Indien 2014, f. 183^r.

162. We call amplification the extended enunciation of the things we know about the subject matter which is amplified by way of ornamentation.

This [verse] explains amplification (*virivu*) according to the order we established. Amplification is the same as spreading (*paravu*), but it is unnecessary to apply all the aforementioned fifteen categories (*tiṇai*) to all subject matters (*poru!*), since some of them are applicable to one subject matter, while others are applicable to other topics. Therefore, after recognizing the elements that are suitable to the subject matter selected to be expanded upon, one should show and explain them one by one: similar to subdividing the divisions of an army on the battle-front according to the different types of possible arrangements; similar to those who draw paintings on the walls they selected, after thinking about the methods they know [from experience] to achieve the order and clarity necessary to reach the objective that one has in mind; similar to those who spread out a piece of cloth after it has been painted and rolled; or similar to those who unsheathe and wave a long sword that was lying in its cover. This is what we call amplification. The way to do so is through figuration (or ornaments, *aṇi*), about which I talk in chapter five. When one shows an example, the rule becomes clear.

In the commentary, Beschi says that one important way of achieving *virivu* is by means of figuration, or *aṇi*, which he will explain in the fifth chapter of the *TV* (*aṇiyatikāram*). Yet he still gives an example of this technique as based on the materials he has expounded thus far. So, immediately after this passage, most of the commentary on *sūtra* 162 is taken up by an essay on the same verse of *Tirukkura!* (34) that Beschi also used to build an example of *patikam*. The essay is rather long, and strings together a series of examples from classical literature connected with the initial *kura!*. These have the purpose of showing how classical Tamil authors could be used within a prose passage explaining some universal ethical arguments taken from *Tirukkura!*. Considering that Beschi deemed *Tirukkura!* to be the closest Tamil literature had gotten to expressing Christian ethics before the arrival of Christianity, this essay in a way also shows how to Christianize classical Tamil poetry. It offers one practical answer to the question with which we began this chapter, concerning the relationship between new Catholic literature and canonical Tamil texts, by showing how the first could build upon the latter. This is particularly evident in the following self-contained section of the essay that links verses from the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* to yet another *kura!* (272):

anṛiyum, miṇṭup piṛitiṇ vēroru cāṭci vēṇṭumō taṇakku meytāṇ uraiṇṇi
 purattaraccāyal pukalāp piṛar meyt tiratt' uḷan tammait tīy eṇac cuṭaccu-
 ṭac cerivāy maruḷ arat telintu meymmai kaṇṭarivār arappayan ācaiy uṭpaṭ-
 tāṇ itaṇalanrō, vāṇuyar tōṛramevaṇ ceyyun taṇneṇcan | tāṇarikuṛrap-
 paṭiy || eṇṛār anṛiyu, nīṭṭiyacaṭaiyumāki nīrmūlki nilattircērntu | vāṭṭiya
 vuṭampin yāṇkaḷ varakati vīlaikku menṇir | kāṭṭiṭaik karaṭi pōkik kaya-
 mūlṭik kāṭṭu nīṇrum | vīṭṭinai vīlaikku vēṇṭum velīrrurai viṭumi nēṇrāṇ
 ||⁴⁹ nuṇṭukil vēka laṇci neruppakam porunti | nōkki kkoṇṭupōy maraiya
 vaittār kotalal cuṭātu | māmō kaṇṭatti nāviyārtaṇ kaṭimaṇait tuṇantu
 kāṭṭuṭ | paṇṭavā vuḷanīṇkā terpāvamō pariya menṇrāṇ ||⁵⁰ inṇaṇē purattav
 vēṭam anṛi yuḷḷat tūymai yillāmuṇivarkkuc cintāmaṇiyiṇ cīvakaṇ coṇṇāṇ,
 vāṇōrpukaḷntu vaṇaṇkiyaturavun tāṇōrpayaṇilai tāṇatakattalu kkāṇuḷa-
 tēleyeṇi lakattulaṇṭattin pēṇuḷaṇṇpatu pīlaiyōvenpār ||⁵¹ eṇpat' ivaiyum
 ittoṭakkattana palavuṇ karippurattiṇaiyām invvār' ēṇait tiṇai vēṇṭuḷi virit-
 tuk kūruka.⁵²

Besides, do you need any further evidence other than this? If one tells one-
 self the truth, while others praise the exterior appearance of virtue, his
 truthful mind will understand deeply, burning them like fire, and without
 confusion—those who desire to obtain the fruit of virtue, they are people
 who will find such truth. For this reason, has not he [Tiruvalluvar] said:

49 This is a citation from *Cīvakaṇṭintāmaṇi* 1431, but there are some minor differences com-
 pared to U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar's edition, that runs thus [bold is mine to underline these
 differences]: *nīṭṭiyacaṭaiyumāki nīrmūlki nilattircērntu | vāṭṭiya vuṭampin yāṇkaḷ varakati
 vīlaṭtu menṇir | kāṭṭiṭaik karaṭi pōkik kayamūlṭik kāṭṭi nīṇrum | vīṭṭinai vīlaikka vēṇṭum
 velīrrurai viṭumi nēṇrāṇ*. Tiruttakkatēvar, *Cīvakaṇṭintāmaṇi mūlamum maturaiyācīriyar—
 pārattuvāci naccinārkkīṇiyar uraiyūm*, ed. U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar (Ceṇṇai: Kapir accukkū-
 ṭam, 1956), 728.

50 This is a citation from *Cīvakaṇṭintāmaṇi* 1434. The differences between this verse and the
 one in the U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar's edition are much deeper, and include the entire fourth
 line of the verse. This is once again the standard edition, with the differences in bold:
*nuṇṭukil vēta laṇci neruppakam potintu | nōkki kkoṇṭupōy maraiya vaittār kotalal cuṭātu |
 māmē kaṇṭatti nāviyārtaṇ kaṭimaṇait tuṇantu kāṭṭuṭ | paṇṭaicey toḷilīr pāvam paraikkur-
 rār paraikkalāmē*. The first printed edition of the TV includes the non-standard version of
 this verse as it appears in BnF, Indien 204 (with some minor differences, mostly *potintu* for
porunti in line 1, like U.Vē. Cā's version). Indeed, the editors of the first TV edition in 1838
 could not yet compare their verse with Cāminātaiyar's first edition, which only appeared
 in 1887.

51 Apparently, these two lines are also from the *Cīvakaṇṭintāmaṇi* but I wasn't able to locate
 them in U.Vē. Cā's edition yet.

52 BnF, Indien 204, f. 86 r/v. I inserted here vertical slashes to mark cited verses to help the
 reader to recognize them, and follow my translations.

“What is the point of an appearance which reaches beyond the heavens, if there is fault in one’s heart, and one knows about it?” (*Tirukkuraḷ* 272)

And again: “Wearing long and matted hair, bathing in water, lying on the ground, emaciating the body—if you say that we obtain salvation from such things, then the bears that wander around the forest and bathe in the rivers must also obtain liberation! Quit,” said he, “such foolish talk!” (*Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 1431) “If fearing the burning of a fine cloth, one places it within the very fire, won’t the fire burn the things that one has taken to hide, when placed in it? If one has renounced a protected house, and women with musk-perfume on their necks, and yet retains in the wilderness the ancient desires, will his sins,’ said he, ‘be eradicated?” (*Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 1434)

Thus, in the *Cintāmaṇi*, Cīvakaṇ addresses an ascetic who, apart from the garb of outward devotion, is devoid of inward purity. “If the heart is impure, even renunciation—which is praised and worshipped by the celestials—will be utterly useless. But if there is greatness of virtue within, can there be any fault?” These passages and many others like these prove what has been stated by direct examples. If any further illustrations be required, they may be given at large.⁵³

This passage is first of all a small sample of the ornate prose typical of Beschi, the type of prose that he included in the domain of the literary. The first sentence contains, for instance, phonetic and semantic word play hinging on the similarity of the two words *aram*, virtue, and *aru* (inf. *ara*) “to end, cut.” Moreover, this passage expands on the *kuraḷ* by using the *Cintāmaṇi*—a connection that was clearly intended by the author of the *Cintāmaṇi* himself, who used words and ideas from the verses of the decade on imposture (*kūṭāvoḷukkam*) to which *kuraḷ* 272 also belongs. This technique—citing *ad hoc* verses from classical literature to prove a point—was also in all probability among the most immediate uses of Tamil poetry among Beschi’s catechists. Indeed, the overall theme of the necessity of inner virtue is a Christian theme too, and Beschi will use the same ideas (and the same words) he pointed out here, and expressed in both *Tirukkuraḷ* and *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, to compose one verse of his epic poem *Tempāvaṇi*:

53 This passage was already noticed and translated in Francis Whyte Ellis, *Translation of Tirukurral of Tiruvalluvar* (Madras: College of Fort St. George, ca. 1819), 88–90. I consulted this translation, which is not however literal. Ellis also noticed the connection between the decade of the *Tirukkuraḷ* to which the verse 272 cited here belongs (*kūṭāvoḷukkam*, on

caṭai vaḷar uruk koṭu tavirki nīr kuḷitt'
 aṭai vaḷar vaṇattiṭaiy akanṇ' ilāt tirint'
 iṭai vaḷar kaṇikaḷōṭ' ilāṇ kiḷaṅk'uṇu
 muṭai vaḷar karaṭikaḷ muṇivarōv eṇpār.⁵⁴

With body growing long hair, they incessantly bathe in water, they wander boundless in the forest dense with leaves, and they eat the tender roots and the fruits produced there—because of this, should we call stinking bears “devotees”?

This passage, taken from a canto where the protagonist, Saint Joseph, encounters and converts a group of ascetics in the forest, shows how the grammar of poetry Beschi outlines in the TV could guide the composition of new poetry. It also shows Beschi's favored technique of controversy. It is not difficult to see in the verse of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* we just read a critique of the same Śaiva and śiddha practices that were the polemical goal of the *Ñāṇamūyarcī* in the previous chapter. In his poem, though, Beschi construed the critique of these forms of Hindu devotion, as they were embodied in generic yogic behaviors, out of Tamil classical texts.

3 The Grammar of Society

After this excursus on rhetoric and amplification, which is rather complex but not exceedingly long, the TV goes back to the treatment of traditional Tamil poetological categories, introducing an independent enumeration of divisions of time in seasons and their characteristics (*kālavurimai*). Beschi then continues by describing the classical divisions of land (*tiṇai*) and their distinctive elements or *karupporuḷ*. However, he does not connect them with *uris*, the emotional phases of the *akam* sequence, thus effectively severing the most important connection within Tamil *akam* poetics. According to these, the elements of the natural world are connected with, and thus express, inner emotions. Always in *caṅkam* poetry, but often in later compositions too, it is enough for the poet to mention a certain animal, flower, or season, for the informed reader to understand the inner feelings of the hero or heroine of the poem. For instance, the hills with their forest are the setting for desire, and love affairs

impotence), and themes expressed both in the *Cintāmaṇi* and in Beschi's *Tēmpāvaṇi*. See Ellis, *Translation of Tirukurral*, 55ff.

54 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XX, 124.

before marriage—but the system of correspondences runs much deeper, and is more sophisticated than such direct connections.⁵⁵ Beschi undoes this deep structure of Tamil poetry. As we will see in more detail in the next chapter, for him nature does not speak the language of human emotions, but rather that of devotion towards the Christian God.

Still, Beschi maintains the internal coherence of landscapes and their characteristics (*karu*), and seems quite comfortable with the idea that a certain place and time of day imply specific flora and fauna, characters, language registers, and occupations.⁵⁶ In a way, this section is also coherent with the framework of *amplificatio*, insofar as it offers lists of elements to be expected, and used, in specific contexts, and could even be read in the spirit of Pomey's list of related words to be used as an aid for amplification. Moreover, the system of landscapes offers him a way to engage with representations of Tamil society. So, while talking about the occupations appropriate to the different social groups, hence discussing caste, Beschi introduces an element of social critique in line with the reform of the role of the *vēṭṭiyar* we explored in the previous chapter.⁵⁷ This might well be a nod towards his Vellala readership. Here is the sutra related to the critique, which also offers a good example of how Beschi summarized traditional theories in this section:

183—cū—

vaṇṇiyar⁵⁸ maṇṇar vaṇikar cūttirar
eṇṇivar nālarkk' iyalvaṇav uraikkil

55 The field of classical Tamil (including *caṅkam* poetry in connection with its poetics, as expressed in the *Tolkāppiyam* as well as in the later grammars of *akam*) is too extensive for a footnote. A classical overview of the principles of *caṅkam* poetics is A.K. Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967); a renewed attention to *caṅkam* poetry from a philological perspective was inaugurated by the pioneering study of Eva Wilden, *Literary Techniques in Old Tamil Caṅkam Poetry: The Kuṟuntokai*, Beiträge zur Kenntnis südasiatischer Sprachen und Literaturen 15 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

56 One wonders whether he saw analogies between the organization of the *tiṇai* in Tamil poetics and Latin ideas of *decorum* or appropriateness; being culturally contingent, *decorum* additionally offered a rhetorical frame for accommodation.

57 This passage was first noticed, and analyzed with respect to social innovations, in Ki. Nāccimuttu, "Vīramāmuṇivar (1680–1747) tonṇūl akapporuḷilakkaṇam kāṭṭum camattuvakkalvik kolkai putumaiyum puraṭciyum," *Maṇarkēṇi* 9 (2011): 33–41; and Id., "Vīramāmuṇivar (1680–1747) tonṇūl akapporuḷilakkaṇam kāṭṭum camattuvakkalvik kolkai putumaiyum puraṭciyum iraṇṭām pakuti," *Maṇarkēṇi* 10 (2012): 35–39.

58 Nāccimuttu notices how *vaṇṇiyar* as a noun to indicate Brahmans is a novelty introduced by Beschi.

ōṭar roḷil uritt' uyarntōr mūvarkku
mallāta kalviy ellārkkū murittē.⁵⁹

If one has to articulate what is suitable for the four kinds of people known as Brahmans (*vaṇṇiyar*), kings (*maṇṇar*), merchants (*vaṇikar*) and *śūdras*, the occupation of reciting the Vedas is proper to the three higher groups, but wisdom is everyone's right.

In the commentary to this verse, Beschi adds that “according to the tradition of this country [i.e., the Tamil country], certain occupations belong to certain castes. Therefore, the recitation and study of the Vedas is entrusted to the first three castes among these four, and not appropriate to *śūdras*.” He goes on highlighting that *śūdras* can nevertheless be scholars and spiritual teachers, even with this interdiction of practicing Vedic recitation. He further notes that it would be wrong to deny the true revelation (*meymmaṛai*) to someone, and that anyone can attain it by following the tradition appropriate to their social group. We find here once again the reference to Śaiva vocabulary—*meymmaṛai*—as well an explicit attempt at grounding the role of *śūdras* as spiritual leaders and teachers.⁶⁰ This is particularly relevant because Vellalas were, like most Tamil castes, *śūdras*, and Tamil Śaivism has a long tradition of Vellala spiritual lineages. Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, during Beschi's lifetime Catholic catechists reconfigured as a spiritual and intellectual élite whose ranks were filled mostly by Vellalas.

Beschi devotes the very end of the chapter to other traditional discussions, including that on the different types of language registers. In this section, he devotes just a single sutra (199) to traditional Tamil understanding of the subject matter of poetry as divided by *akam* and *puṛam*, and mentions briefly the

59 BnF, Indien 204, f. 96^r. The second two lines in the verse are a citation from Nampi's *Akap-poruḷ viḷakkam*, 1 (*akattiṇaiyiyal*), sutras 69–70.

60 The commentary to the verse runs thus: *nīrutta muṛaiyāṇē cātīyurimaiyāmār' uṇarttutum. ākaiyil antaṇar aracar vaṇikar cūttirar eṇav innāṭṭil vaḷaṅkum uyarcātīyir peṇanta [sic, pīṇanta] nālvar āki marṇavar ilintōr eṇap paṭuvar eṇr' uṇarka—innāṭṭuvalakkam parri yavavavaccātikk' urīya toḷilai viḷakkutūm—ākaiyi nāviṇār kaḷkun [sic, kaṛkun] toḷilul vētattaīy ōtiy uṇartal antaṇar aracar vaṇikar eṇa mūvarkkum urittēy oḷīya cūttirarkkut takāt'eṇavum vētanūl oḷitt' oḷinta kalvi yāvaiyum uṇarta nālvarkkum uritt' eṇavuṇ kūṇvār eṇak koḷka—āyīṇum vāyāl uṇappaṭu muṭarṇkuṇā yārkkum potumaiyav ākaiyir kātāl uṇappaṭum uyirkk' uṇavākiya meymmaṛaiy ōtal cilarṇkū vilakal koṭumaīy aṇṇrō—mīḷavu maraiyē parakati vaḷi-yaiḱ kāṭṭuvāt' ākaiyil aṇaivarum potuppaṭav akkatik kuriyarākap peṇanta piṇṇar avvaḷi-y uṇartal potumaitt' aṇr' eṇa vitippatu nīraiyo. BnF, Indien 204, ff. 96^{r-v}. This commentary*

connection between landscape, its *karu*, and *uri*—that is the different phases of the love story. The opening line of the commentary to this sutra shows how Beschi thought of the relationship between his grammar and these Tamil theories: “Since by way of the explanation of *poruḷ* offered here an exception (*puranaṭai*) arises, this [sutra] explains the gist of the theory of *poruḷ* as it was given by traditional authors.”⁶¹ In other words, for Beschi *akam* and *puram* are exceptions, marginal themes that wrongly became central in traditional Tamil theories. At the same time, he recognized their cultural importance—catechists could not ignore them if they wanted to appear truly literate in Tamil—and by positioning them at the very end of the chapter, and referring to them as *puranaṭai*, a well-known grammatical term, he offered his students a key to make sense of them in the new framework. Indeed, this chapter offered them the possibility of understanding (and composing!) good Tamil poetry without references to *akam* and *puram*. Yet it also shows that Beschi knew those theories were important, and that his students needed to know about their existence. On the opposite side of the spectrum, in the *Clavis*, while talking to a Western missionary audience, Beschi introduced *akam* and *puram* theories at the very beginning of the chapter on *poruḷ*, in lieu of the treatment of *amplificatio* in the *TV*. Their treatment remains rather brief, but for this different public, these theories represented the Tamil way of explaining poetry they had to learn, and reckon with.⁶²

Beschi’s attitude towards the *akam* theme has been widely debated among Tamil scholars, and Christian poetry in Tamil has often been regarded as lacking precisely because it refuses to include *akam* elements. We will return to the question of *akam* in the next chapter, and analyze how Beschi used and negotiated Tamil theories in practice within his poems. The chapters of the *TV* devoted to meter and figures are particularly important in this regard, since in those domains Beschi did follow traditional authorities very closely. Yet for now, the *poruḷatikāram* has shown us that, after accepting most of the grammatical rules of *eḷuttu* and *col*, and the technical aspects of subject-matter development (the *karu*), Beschi boldly introduced the new idea that literature should persuade and be useful. He shifted the focus of traditional understanding of *poruḷ*,

is followed in the manuscript by the two examples (also included in the printed edition) attributed to a certain Meymmaṇaiy ācīriyār. The identity of this poet is unknown (see Nācimuttu, “Vīramāmuṇivar (1680–1747) *tonṇūl akapporuḷilakkaṇam*,” 10) but the name is strongly reminiscent of Tamil Śaiva vocabulary.

61 *īṇṭukkūriya poruṇūlvalip puranaṭaiyākaiyil iṇṇaṇa muṇṇōr tanta poruṇūr rokai yuṇartututūm*. BnF, Indien 204, f. 104 r/v.

62 Beschi, *Clavis*, 50–51.

while still aiming to be in conversation with the Tamil grammatical tradition, and ultimately claiming a place within that tradition.

4 Ignorant Enemies

This literary identity and self-positioning of Beschi, and of his catechist students, on the side of Tamil traditional learning, albeit with all the negotiations we have just seen, clearly emerges in the controversy between Catholic and Lutheran missionaries that developed in the 1730s. In the previous chapter, I argued that the *Vētaṇṇakkam* (vv), a text in which Beschi laid out Catholic central beliefs in opposition to Protestant ones, also created a narrative of sainthood that would appeal to and mobilize his catechist audience. In the same text, Beschi describes Protestantism as an erroneous, lowly version of Christianity, because of the inability of Lutheran missionaries to comply with basic standards of literacy in the Tamil context. In other words, Beschi argues in front of his catechist audience that the Lutherans' bad Tamil is a reflection of their wrong theological stance. This makes his—as well as their—knowledge of the classical tradition, albeit reinterpreted in a Christian sense, a guarantee of being on the right side of the controversy. As a result, variations on the theme of Lutheran ignorance of Tamil displayed in the following passage are rather common in the vv, and in the other anti-Lutheran works by Beschi:

On top of that, the Tranquebar people, who cannot even write the name of their town properly in Tamil, decided to translate the holy book into Tamil! Just as if hiding a shining gem in the mud, mixing poison to sweet ambrosia, or dropping black ink to stain a beautiful painting, they cover the truth of the Veda, spoil its essence, and introduce flaws that kill its beauty. How can such people who do not know Tamil call Veda the books they have written, in a language so rough that it disgusts our ears? We know that up to this day, insofar as this is the Tamil country, the southern language of Tamil is in use here, with the exception of a few things which are in Sanskrit. And we have seen how the books of the Tranquebar people are in such low Tamil that as soon as they read them, everyone begins to laugh and mock them very hard.⁶³

63 *Vētaṇṇakkam*, 119: *mīlavun tarāṇkampāṭiyār tamatu ūriṇ peyarait taṇṇil cevvaṇṇaiy el-*

Throughout the vv, Beschi also tries to discredit the Lutherans' knowledge of Tamil—which they claim to possess in the introduction to their books—by offering to his readers juicy vignettes, which bring in the catechists as crucial players in this competition. For instance, how can Beschi be sure that the Lutherans do not know Tamil? “I know,” he writes, “that when the letter that I have written to my catechist arrived in their hands, because it was written in literary Tamil (*centamil*) they got together with their shastris and tried hard for three days, but they could not read it! In the end, they had to give up!”⁶⁴

This line of argument is not unique to the vv. It underlines all the texts Beschi wrote against the Lutherans in the 1730s, a corpus that includes four works in prose that were composed in reaction to the books and pamphlets printed in Tranquebar during those years. The vv is certainly the most important among these works, and the one to address the question of Protestantism in the most systematic way. Each of the chapters tackles one of the main theological points of contention between the two Christian denominations, both in the abstract, and with examples drawn from the local Indian context. The vv was likely written in 1728, as testified by the earlier extant manuscript of the text, and used by Catholic catechists as an inspiration for preaching and debating against Protestant catechists.⁶⁵ We have an idea of other ways in which this text circulated thanks to the annual letter of 1731, where Beschi reports a conversation he had with a certain Mudali, one of the ministers of the Madurai kingdom who used to be an enemy of the Christians but, after losing his employment, changed his mind and became curious about the missionaries:

utamāṭṭātavarāki tēva pustakattait tamīluraiyākat tiruppiṇōmenru, oḻiṭu maṇiyaic cērril putaittārpōlavum, iṇiya amutilē nañciṇaik kalantār pōlavum, vaṭivuḷla cittirattiṇmēl cariyauk kilṭitty mācu paṭuttinār pōlavum, vēta uṇmai maraiyavum, ataṇ uyiraiḱ keṭukkavum, vaṭivaṇru mācu koḷḷavun tamīlai ariyātavarkaḷ namatu maṇam nōkak koṭiya mōlikaḷāl eḷutit tanta pustakaṇkaḷ vētameṇṇappaṭuvato? innāl ivaraikkum innāṭṭut tamīḷaka vaṭamoli cilavaikaḷaṇṇit teṇmōḷit tamīḷē vaḷaṇṇiṇatenru ariyōm. ippōtu taraṇkampāṭiyar tanta pustakaṇkaḷai vācitta aḷavil kīḷmōḷit tamīḷum mūṇṇām vakaiyāka evarum nakai tikaḷumpaṭikku muḷaittatu kaṇṭōm. As in the previous chapter, I cite the section and not the page number.

64 *Vētaṇṇilakkam*, 120: *atēṇil nāmē taraṇkampāṭiyār kāriyamāka nammuṭaiya upatēcikkū aṇuppiṇa pattiram avarkaḷ kaiyir cenru, centamiḷc collāl eḷutappaṭṭatai tāṇkaḷun tāṇkaḷ cāstirikaḷum oruṇikuṭaṇ kūṭi, mūṇṇunāl varunti ataṇai vācikkamāṭṭāmaḷ kaivittārkaḷenru ārivōmē.*

65 This manuscript (BnF, Indien 481) was sent to Paris in 1729, as attested by the ancient catalogs of the Royal Library, and might contain Beschi's autograph; see above, p. 114 n. 60.

Being quite versed in the sciences of that country, during our conversation that lasted several hours, [Mudali] asked questions, out of curiosity, on the nature of things, on the rule of literary Tamil, on their poetry, on astrology, etc. [...] He inquired eagerly, and examined for a long time a book that I offered to him. This was titled *Explanation of the Law* [i.e., *Vētaṇṇakkam*], in which three years ago I had endeavored, after exposing the shameful origin of Lutheranism, to explain, as best as I could, the principal truths of our faith, which are being called into question by the heretics. [...] As the volume I presented to him was written on paper, he exclaimed at once that he had in his possession books of that kind which had been sent to him from Tranquebar. ‘Read,’ said I smiling ‘and you will easily learn the difference between ourselves and the Tranquebar people.’⁶⁶

It is easy to infer that Beschi’s smile was the expression of his self-confidence. He was certain that the beauty of his articulated, literary prose, paired with the strength and relatability of his arguments, would convince a learned man like the Mudali of the superiority of the Catholic faith over Protestantism. This passage also shows a competition between the difficult manuscript circulation of Catholic works (Figure 9), which relied on personal connections and one-on-one conversations, and the printed books that Lutherans freely distributed at that time (Figure 10).

66 *Et hujus regionis scientiarum non ignarus, protracto in plures horas sermone, non nulla de naturā rerum, de sublimioris tamulicæ linguæ præceptis, de eorum poësi de Astrologia aliis que curiosè percunctatus, [...] avidissime perquirebat [...] ac oblatum a me librum diu ipse perlegit. Erat autem liber cui nomen legis explicatio in quo tribus ab hinc annis turpi Lutheranae Sectæ origine paucis exposita, præcipua fidei n[ost]ræ dogmata quæ per id tempus ab hæreticis in controversiam vocantur, quâ potui diligentia explicare conatus fueram. [...] quare cum et à me oblatum volumen papyro exaratum esset, exclamavit illicô se hujus modi libros ab arce Tramgambariæ missos habere: ad hæc subridens ego, legas, dixi, et quanto à Trangambariensibus distrahamur intervallo, faciliè noveris.* Costanzo Beschi to the General of the Society (4 September 1732), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 597–602, here 597^{r/v}. An alternative translation is in Besse, *Father Beschi*, 109–120. While Beschi used “Mudali” as a first name, in 1730 the French Jesuit Jean Calmette reported some bad news regarding the persecutions against the missionaries in Tiruchirappalli perpetrated by an “homme du palais, modely de caste et substitut du dalavai et général des troupes,” Jean Calmette to the Marquis de Coetlogon (Ballabaram [Cikkaballāpura], 28 Septembre 1730), in Aimé-Martin, *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses concernant l’Asie, l’Afrique et l’Amérique*, 603. The episodes reported by Calmette and Beschi certainly refer to the same person, whose name we do not know. What we do know is that he was a court official, and adopted the caste title of *mutaliyār*, which Beschi used as the man’s personal name.



FIGURE 9 Title page and first folio of a manuscript copy of the *Luttērīnattiyalpu*, BnF, Indien 489
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR, COURTESY OF THE BNF

Indeed, all the texts Beschi wrote against the Lutherans circulated in the eighteenth century only as manuscripts. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, besides the vv, these include the “Refutation of the schism” (*Pētaka-maruttal*), a pointed response to a work by Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg printed in 1722 entitled “The schism of the Church” (*Tiruccapai pētakam*), and three works in the epistolary genre that focus their critique more specifically on the Lutheran mission in Tranquebar. These are the *Luttērīnattiyalpu*, a fictitious letter about “The nature of the sect of Luther” addressed to a local—probably Hindu—friend, and two epistles written for the Catholic community of Tirukkaṭaiyūr, a temple town located less than nine kilometers north of Tranquebar, on the matter of Lutheran “heretics” (*patitar*).⁶⁷ All these texts show how the competition between Beschi and the Lutherans was riddled with odd silences. Apart from Ziegenbalg’s *Tiruccapai pētakam*, which addresses explicitly the rivalry between Protestantism and Catholicism, there is no trace that missionaries in Tranquebar responded directly to any of Beschi’s tracts. They focused instead on producing and printing their translation of the Bible and other works on Protestant beliefs, while ignoring contemporary Catholic efforts.⁶⁸ This attitude went hand in hand with the claim that, while Catholic

67 Once again, *patitar* is a term used by Tamil Śaivasiddhāntins to indicate outsiders who do not follow the true (Śaiva) path.

68 This strategy of silence has been analyzed in Ines Županov, “Against Rites: Jesuit *Accommodatio* as Pietist *Preparatio Evangelica* in Eighteenth-Century South India,” in *The Rites controversies in the Early Modern World*, eds Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Ines Županov (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2018), 364–395; competing modes of approaching science in Will Sweetman and Ines Županov, “Rival Mission, Rival Science? Jesuits and Pietists in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century South India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, 3 (2019): 624–653. See also Sweetman and Ilakkuvan, *Bibliotheca Malabarica*, 10.

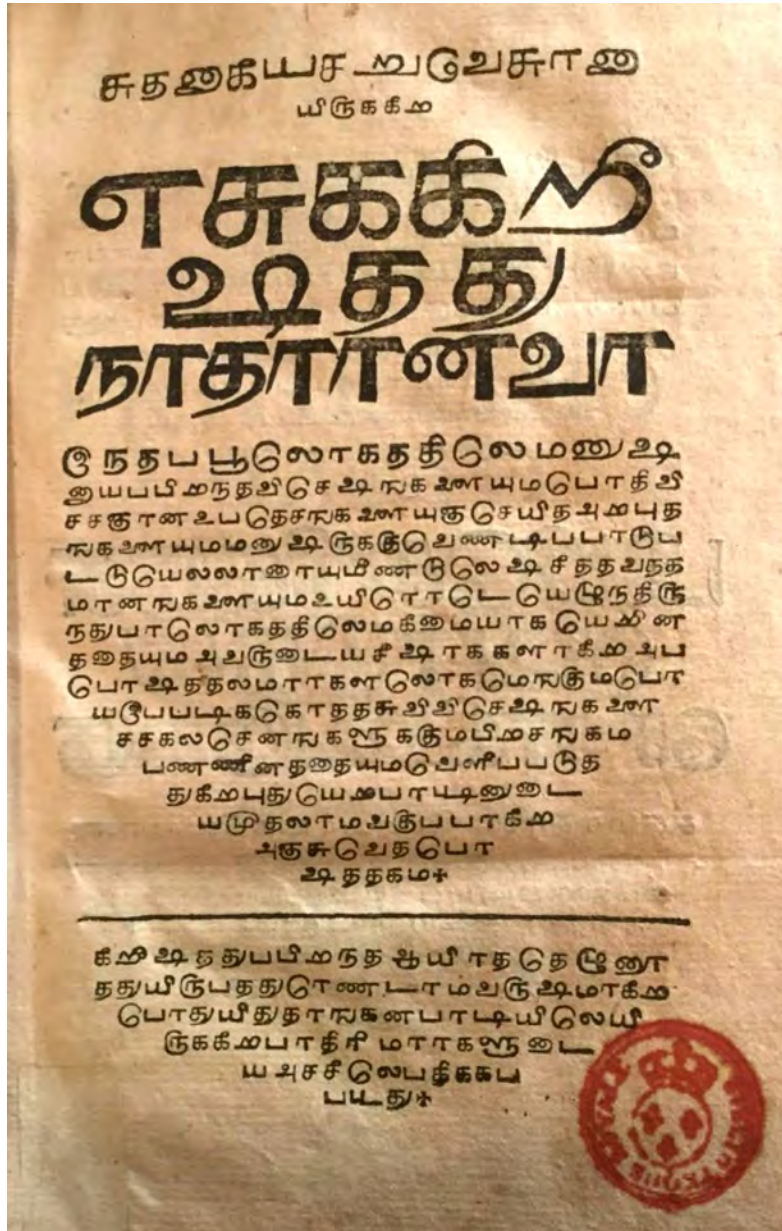


FIGURE 10 Tamil title page of the translation of the New Testament by Ziegenbalg, published in Tranquebar in 1722
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR, COURTESY OF THE BNF

missionaries in the previous century had worked hard and well—it is well known Ziegenbalg produced his translation of the gospels into Tamil relying heavily on Nobili's and other Catholic works—contemporary Jesuits were ignorant and corrupted.⁶⁹ And yet Schultze admitted in one letter that Beschi's mastery of Tamil was exceptional, and printed one of his grammars in Tranquebar, albeit with corrections.⁷⁰

For Protestants too, then, mastery of language and the choice of language register were a crucial battleground for the enmity between the two Christian sects. This linguistic rivalry, and Beschi's approach to it, are particularly clear in the short fictional epistle *Luttērinattiyalpu* (henceforth LII), which aims to both argue for and demonstrate Jesuit superiority in matters of language, literature, and theology. In the prologue, the LII claims to be the response to an inquiry made by Beschi's friend Cātṭaṇ, curious to know who the Lutherans living in Tranquebar were. Cātṭaṇ is probably a fictional character, if we consider that Cātṭaṇ is the name of the narrator of the *Maṇimēkalai* and other classic Tamil texts. Beschi's response to Cātṭaṇ is articulated in the form of a translation into Tamil, and careful exegesis of the passage in *The Apocalypse of John* (9, 1–2) concerning the fifth trumpet, and the coming of the Antichrist. According to Beschi, the passage referred to Luther and to the evil deeds of his followers in Tranquebar. This is not an exegetical novelty. While the identification of the Antichrist with the Pope was a topos of Protestant controversial literature starting with Luther, various Catholic authors had opposed this interpretation of *The Apocalypse* by identifying the Antichrist with Luther himself. Particularly important and extremely popular in this context was the exegetical work of the Flemish Jesuit Cornelis Cornelissen van den Steen, better known with his Latin name of Cornelius Cornelii a Lapide (1567–1637). In his commentary on *The Apocalypse*, Cornelius a Lapide summarizes various readings of this passage, including those that identified the Antichrist with Luther, and lays out some of the arguments upon which Beschi will elaborate at length in the LII.⁷¹

69 See Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 137–143; on Ziegenbalg's assessment and use of earlier Catholic translations, see Israel, *Religious Transactions*, especially Chapter Two.

70 Nāṇappirakācar, "Contribution of Fr. Beschi," 48. The passage he refers to is the following: "He [a Catholic bishop] had a Pater with him who understands Malabar thoroughly, and is so versed in it that he may be called 'a Poet.' He called on me on December 30, when I showed him our printed books, and especially the Malabar Bible. As might have been expected, he made light of them, and thought it was not well to cast the Word of God to the Heathens, as a pearl before swine. These were his own words." Benjamin Schultze et al., *Notices of Madras and Cuddalore, in the Last Century, from the Journals and Letters of the Earlier Missionaries of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (London: Longman and Co., 1858), 27.

71 Cornelius Cornelii a Lapide, *Commentaria in Acta Apostolorum, Epistolas Canonicas, et*

The two genres that Beschi mobilized in the LII—the epistle and the commentary—were important humanistic genres. They were also particularly appropriate for the Indian reception Beschi had in mind. By being part of an ongoing conversation with a local savant, in the form of letters exchange, the LII shows how Beschi was socialized within Tamil cultural and intellectual life, and how his mastery of Tamil allowed him to be in conversation with local scholars. Moreover, as we shall see, the format of the commentary allowed Beschi to translate the short passage of the *Apocalypse* in verse, in opposition with the colloquial language used by the Protestants, and to elaborate upon it in prose. This format was completely in line with standard exegetical and poetological practices in Tamil, where poems of various natures were often accompanied by long prose commentaries. This was different from the logic of texts such as the Tamil Bible and the other tracts printed by the Lutherans, written in a mix of colloquial, archaic and simply weird Tamil, in a genre difficult to pin down. Very much like the theological treatises written by Nobili in the previous century, and even though the language they used was probably familiar to the segments of the missionary informants' population, these were completely alien textual objects, a potpourri of histories, theological/philosophical commentaries, and intercultural references that ultimately could not find a home in South India. Beschi's works, on the other hand, were completely different. They followed a local logic of textuality, and it is interesting to see how the two aspects—the social and the exegetical—function in further detail.

In the opening of the LII, Beschi describes the context for his letter exchange with Cātṭaṇ:

The foreign poet (*puṛanilaikkāppiyaṇār*⁷²) wishes for the abundance of good things to befall Cātṭaṇ, the speaker of cool Tamil. He [Cātṭaṇ] sent me a palm-leaf through the hand of Kēcariyaṇ. I immediately removed the seal, but before I could begin reading, Kēcariyaṇ told me about the distressing events that my friend had just suffered. As I listened and questioned again and again the news that [Kecariyaṇ] reported, I laughed frantically, three times more than his previous suffering. If you ask what

Apocalypsin (Antverpiae: Apud Iacobum Meursium, 1672), 170–172. Cornelius a Lapide builds on previous controversial Catholic and especially Jesuit literature on the issue of the Antichrist, including works by Saint Roberto Bellarmino. Beschi does not cite Lapide, and I am pointing out the connection just to show how his exegesis of *Apocalypse* 9 was nothing new.

72 The expression *puṛanilaikkāppiyaṇār* looks like it could be Beschi's nickname, and considering the polysemy of the word *puṛam*, it could be translated alternatively as “a poet from a foreign (*puṛa*) land (*nilai*)”; or a “poet of unorthodox books (*puṛanilai*).”

the messenger Kēcariyaṇ said—he said that five days before, Cāttaṇ had gathered many poets, who were standing in the shade of the grove of *cam-paka* trees with fragrant flowers. While they were discussing the merits of what the ancestors had written with a method that took many days, a lowly person came from the eastern sector and offered [them] a book, saying it was the Tamil means (*payan*) for salvation.⁷³

The word ‘book’ (*pustakam*) is important here, as it clearly refers to a printed text appearing in the midst of that gathering of traditional Tamil scholars, and creates a stark contrast with the palm-leaf (*ōlai*) letter that Beschi received in the beginning, and with the palm leaves on which the LII would circulate until the mid-nineteenth century, when it was finally printed.⁷⁴ Beschi’s friend is immediately fascinated by the exceptional regularity of letters and columns in the book, and by the title page engraved with shining gold.⁷⁵ Curious about the text delivered in such a beautiful form, he calls his fellow scholars and begins to read it to them; but he cannot go beyond the first line. The language of the text is so bad, ungrammatical and coarse, that he first develops burning pain in his eyes, tongue, and ears. Then he is struck with the realization that the foreigner in front of him has deemed such a low idiom worthy of being called Tamil. The thought makes him extremely angry, and so he throws the book at the man and chases him away. We begin to understand now why Beschi can-

73 *Luttēriṇattiyalpu*, 1: *puṛanilaikkāppīyaṇār kuḷun tamīl cāttaṇukku ellā naṇmaiyl cīrappu uṇṭākavum. kēcariyaṇ kaiyil tāṇ varaviṭṭa ōlai vantu, mēliṭṭa poriyai nikki, nāṇ atai vāciyā muṇṇē kēcariyaṇ collattāṇ muṇṇaṭṭa caṇcalak kavalai aṛintēṇ. avan coṇṇa ceytiyaṇ mīṇṭu mīṇṭu viṇavik kēṭka, nāṇum niṇṇa yāvarum tāṇ muṇ varuṇṭinatarṭu mummaṭaṇkāka ma-kīṇtu nakaittōm. tāṇ varaviṭṭa kēcariyaṇ coṇṇatēṇil, aintunāl muṇ tāṇ pulavar palarum cūṇtu, naṇrupūṇ caṇṇakac cōlainṭilalil niṇṇu mūttōr uraitta payaṇkaḷai neṭunāl piṭṭa muṇaiyōṭu āṛyṇtirukkak kiṭṭicaiyiṇṇu oru kiṭṭamaṇ vantu merkatī tarum tamīlppayaṇ iteṇṇu oru puttakattait tantāṇām.* I cite from the 1936 edition of this work (which I have compared with BnF, Indien 489) mentioning the section number instead of the page number, since the text is divided into sections in all printed editions (see Bibliography).

74 The relation between Beschi and the Lutheran mission in Tranquebar with regard to printing was a complex one; the Catholic mission did not have a printing press in the eighteenth century, and the Protestants printed Beschi’s grammar of *koṭuntamiḷ* in 1738, with his initial approval. A love/hate relationship with printing surfaces again and again in the LII, and is mirrored in the letters of the period (see note 75 below).

75 The Jesuits were struck by the beauty of the texts printed by the Lutherans in a way very similar to the LII. Prospero Giuliani, editor of the annual letter of 1728, candidly admitted: “we wish we could oppose books to books, but means fail us” (*nobis libros libris opponere cupientibus modus deest*), showing awareness of the advantages given by printing. Prospero Giuliani to Michelangelo Tamburini, *Ann. Malabarica* 1728 (Kurukkalpaṭṭi, 16 July 1728) ARSI, Goa 56, ff. 653–656, here 656r.

not stop laughing ... After regaining his breath, he goes back to the *ōlai*, where he reads the same story, plus one last sentence: his friend tells him he discovered those wretched people who insulted Tamil so badly are called Lutherans, and they live in Taraṅkampāṭi (also known as Tranquebar).⁷⁶ “Who are they?” he asks Beschi. This is the innuendo that Beschi needs to begin his response, which will be a ferocious letter filled with gossip, biblical exegesis, and sarcastic remarks.

This introductory frame nicely illustrates the social and intellectual environment in which Beschi imagined himself. Notice first of all how the gathering of poets takes place in a rural landscape, that somewhat idealizes the locale from which Beschi himself was writing. There are once again no explicit references to fellow poets and patrons, as in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*—even Beschi’s friend is mentioned only by first name. And yet this position doesn’t entail intellectual insularity. The epistolary exchange that constitutes the LII (be it fictitious or real) shows how Beschi imagined himself in conversation with the world of Tamil learning even while writing outside the immediate social network of the *pulavars*. In other words, through his work and his day-to-day intellectual exchanges Beschi still claimed membership in the Tamil division of the Republic of Letters.⁷⁷ Certainly, in the LII both his Catholic message and his anti-Lutheran critique were articulated from within that space. This appears all the more clearly in the way Beschi decides to write his explanation, in the genre and style he selected. Claiming that if he was simply stating his opinion, people might think that he was speaking out of hatred, he decides to rely on a biblical passage that talks about Luther—*The Apocalypse*’s passage mentioned before. He first translates the passage, and then comments upon it, section by section. Let us look at the first two verses of this passage, first of all in the Latin vulgate version that would have been the source of Beschi, and then in the King James English version:

(1) Et quintus angelus tuba cecinit: et vidi stellam de caelo cecidisse in terram, et data est ei clavis putei abyssi. (2) Et aperuit puteum abyssi: et

76 “Tranquebar” is how Lutherans spelled (in European languages) the name of the little coastal town of Taraṅkampāṭi, where their mission was located. In the *Vētaṇṭakkam*, Beschi asks humorously whether people who cannot properly spell the name of their town can be trusted on other, more important, matters.

77 We can read in this perspective his encounter with the Mudali. The scholarship on the Republic of Letters is large, and in recent years, has tended to enlarge its geographical and chronological scope; on Jesuits in this context, see Mordechai Feingold, *Jesuit Science and the Republic of Letters* (Cambridge MA and London UK: The MIT Press, 2003).

ascendit fumus putei, sicut fumus fornacis magnae: et obscuratus est sol, et aer de fumo putei: [...] (*Apocalypse* 9, 1–2)

And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from Heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

A few years before Beschi decided to translate this passage into Tamil in the LII, the passage had already been translated by Ziegenbalg and included in his Tamil version of the New Testament printed at Tranquebar in 1722:

añcām cammaṇacāṇavar tārai yūtiṇapotu orunaṣcettiram vāṇattilē ni-
nru pūmiyilē viḷukirattaikkāṇṭēṇ atukkup pātālattiṇuṭaiya tūkukku tirā-
vukolak kuṭukkappattiruntutu + 1 + avar pātālattiṇuṭaiyaturakaittirantār
appo turakilē ninru makā aṭuppiṇuṭaiya pukaikkāṭu polē pukai yeḷumpit-
tutu antat turakiṇ pukaiyiṇālē cūriyaṇum ākācamum antakāramāyppoc-
cutu.⁷⁸

When the fifth angel played the trumpet, I saw a star falling from the sky to the earth. To it was given the lock to open the pit of Hell. It opened the pit of Hell. Then, the smoke arose from that pit, similar to the thick smoke of a great furnace. The sun and the sky were darkened because of the smoke from that pit.

This translation by Ziegenbalg displays, like the rest of his Bible, a colloquial register of Tamil, which is evident from the choice of words and their spelling, up to the syntax. For instance, we find that both the particle of comparison *pol* and the instrumental case *-āl* (in *pukaiyiṇālē*, for instance) appear regularly with the emphatic suffix *-ē*, even when no emphasis is intended. This is a common feature of contemporary spoken Tamil, but in written Tamil they should appear in their original form. Moreover, we see in this sentence the colloquial form *poccutu*, instead of the formal *pōyirratu*, used to indicate a change of state.

⁷⁸ Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, *Novum Jesu Christi Testamentum ex originali textu in linguam damulicam versum opera & studio Bartholomæe Ziegenbalgii & Joh. Ernesti Gründleri, Serenissimi Daniæ regis Friderici IV. ad Indos Orientales Missionariorum. Editio Secunda Corectior & accessione Summariorum cujusvis Capitis auctior* (Tranquebariæ: In littore Coromandelino Typis Damulicis Missionis Danicæ, 1722), 1000–1001.

Finally, the syntax is strongly paratactical, almost broken. Instead of using the temporal or causal subordinate clauses typical of good—written and oral—Tamil, the text uses finite verbs connecting them with particles such as *appo*, “at that moment.” In comparison with this text in colloquial, extremely simple Tamil, the poetical translation of the very same passage offered by Beschi in the LII is all the more striking:

mītticai ninru kīlvīnta voḷimīn
 rītticaivāyīr rīrakkuñ kōlvāñki
 yatticait tīrantuḷi yātavaṇ mukamutal
 etticai veliyelām iruṭpaṭap pukaiyeḷi i [...] ⁷⁹

A bright star that fell down from the sky took the keys to open the doors of Hell, and when it opened that door, the rising smoke obscured the sun and the whole sky in all directions [...]

This verse is appropriately in the *akaval* rhythm, that is in the *aciriyappā* meter that characterizes continuous narration in Tamil. Since this is a passage from the Bible, by all accounts an urtext or *mūlam* in need of exegesis, and not itself a commentary (*urai*), Beschi appropriately translates it into literary Tamil (*centamil*). The verse achieves remarkable brevity, while displaying the nice alliterations and the initial rhyme pattern (*etukai*) typical of Tamil poetry. Moreover, the translation is rather accurate, but more concerned with being appropriate than being literal—for example, unlike Ziegenbalg, Beschi does not translate the Latin *puteus* into Tamil as a hole or a pit, but refers to it as a direction (*ticai*) and a door (*vāyil*). The rest of the ninth book of *The Apocalypse* is translated in the same way, and the short poem has a total of twenty-three lines.

The whole of the LII is a prose commentary to this *aciriyappā* poem, that is the translation of *Apocalypse* 9. Beschi explains first of all that the fallen star was precisely Luther, who decided to abandon his role as a monk and to reject the Catholic Church. He then continues to interpret the rest of the passage in light of the global situation within the Church, citing well-known topoi of controversy in Europe—such as the fact that Luther got married, etc.—as well as local events that happened in Tranquebar. Throughout the book, Beschi insists with great emphasis on the evilness of the Tamil books printed by the Lutherans, which are beautiful on the outside, but filled with both lies and bad Tamil

79 *Luttēriṇattiyalpu*, 5.

sentences on the inside. Yet the best example that Beschi offers in this book of how to recognize real Christianity remains his alternative translation of this passage from *The Apocalypse*, coated in his lively satirical commentary. Upon reading the two alternative translations, who could have any doubt on what the true text of the Bible really was, and what its vulgarization? This is also probably the best expression of Beschi's overall project—tying together with a univocal relationship orthodox Christian beliefs and practices with good literary Tamil.

5 Conclusions: Tamil Poetry and the Grammar of Persuasion

Using the figure of Beschi as a node, this and the previous chapter have untangled the multiple threads that contributed to the development of Catholic poetics, and a Catholic literary culture in Tamil in the early eighteenth century. The focus on this cultural process has offered some clues on the social and political positioning of the Jesuit mission in South India in this period. First among them is, once again, the importance of a non-Brahmanical, Vellala sphere for the spiritual, social, and literary life of Catholicism in the Kaveri delta region. We saw how especially the pattern of circulation of Beschi's texts in manuscript and print, and the few references to a possible readership contained in the *Tonṇūlvilakkam*, the textbook he composed for the Ēlākkuricci school of Tamil, point to a catechist Vellala elite that was taking shape precisely at this moment. This connects with our observations in the previous chapters regarding the catechists who attended the spiritual retreats at Āvūr. The occupation of these catechists emerges, step by step, as involving spiritual as well as literary training, and a transfer of authority from the missionaries to their local helpers in both domains. This picture is further complicated by the connections between the mission and local political powers—both indigenous rulers and colonial powers, especially the French crown—and the economic and political advantages, and sometimes disadvantages, that these alliances gave to both the missionaries and their collaborators. We will continue pursuing this lead in the next chapter when considering the readership and circulation of Beschi's masterpiece, the poem *Tēmpāvaṇi*.

The Ēlākkuricci school and the texts that Beschi composed in that context, the *Tonṇūlvilakkam* and the anti-Lutheran works *Vētavilakkam* and *Luttēri-nattiyalpu*, also show how Catholic cultural identity became entwined at this time with Tamil ideas and practices of grammatical and literary learning. Well beyond the Indo-humanism theorized by McManus, these texts reconfigured Catholic literary practices under the umbrella of Tamil textuality and learning,

a sphere that we could define in Tamil as *pulamai*. This association is particularly striking when reading Beschi's anti-Lutheran texts, insofar as it allowed him to articulate his critique of Protestantism from two authoritative—and in his understanding commensurable—points of view: his belonging to the Catholic Church, and his belonging to the learned circle of Tamil *pulavars*. The liminal case-study of the Ēlākkuricci school equally stretches the boundaries of Jesuit Indo-humanism, and shows how Beschi's grammatical and literary choices, while connected to the global development of Latin eloquence as articulated by the mission, were meant to make Catholic discourse relevant in the Tamil sphere. The cosmos they aimed to inhabit—granted, by modifying and converting some its assumptions—was coextensive with the cultivation of Tamil language and literature in the early eighteenth century, and spread over contemporary Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. Beschi accepted the grammar of Tamil as the organizing discursive principle in this cultural sphere, but modified one crucial aspect of its poetics—he marginalized traditional understandings of the subject matter of poetry as divided in *akam* and *puram*, and introduced the idea that literature should be useful and convince the audience. Again, we will pick up this theme in the next chapter.

The idea of the persuasive power of Tamil literature pervades the sources of this period, and is a central theme in this chapter. Tournon clearly thought that Hindu texts in Tamil had the power to make converts vacillate in their new faith, and prohibited them. Beschi also recognized that Tamil poetry was powerful, but thought its power of persuasion could offer to the missionaries and their catechists important avenues for communicating the Christian message effectively. By selecting passages from Tamil literature, and inserting them in the new framework of “useful” literary themes, he showed how the Tamil literary tradition could work in favor of the mission. In doing so, he made explicit for the first time the connection between literary language and persuasion, via some imported rhetorical techniques. Bernard Bate has argued that this connection, which informs much of contemporary Tamil political oratory, was first drawn by nineteenth-century Protestants in their sermons and tracts. The *Tonnūvilakkam* demonstrates that Catholics in the eighteenth century, and especially Beschi, already made the connection. However, they did so without the Protestant moralizing attitude towards textuality. They thought Tamil poetry could perform the job of persuading its public to embrace Catholicism, and they did not envision any literary rupture. Related to this power of persuasion of Tamil literature is the concern with expressing praise and blame, in connection with the necessity of presenting good Catholic models in Tamil. Incidentally, the power of praise had already emerged as a crucial mode of early modern literature in Tamil, and this is relevant when analyzing Beschi's literary

works. Indeed, the complex negotiations sketched in this chapter take on a new life when reading the epic poem Beschi wrote in this period, the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, to which we turn in the next chapter.

PART 3

Catholic Poetry in a Tamil World



Writing for Eighteenth-Century Catechists

On 12 January 1721, the French Jesuit Noël de Bourzes wrote to Étienne Souciet (1671–1744) in Paris that his fellow missionary Memmius Renée Gargam (1686–1754) was studying Tamil “with Father Beschi, that is, with the father of flowers.”¹ The enigmatic epithet, *le père aux fleurs*, becomes clearer when reading another letter that de Bourzes wrote to Souciet a few days earlier, where he thanked him for the care with which he had bought and sent to India some flower seeds. De Bourzes added that “the Father on whose behalf I asked for those [seeds] found them very expensive, and what is annoying is that the majority of the seeds you sent lost their vitality during the journey. This is as much as I can say on the matter for now, since after those flowers arrived I have yet to meet with the Father for whom they were meant. I am keeping your letter to show it to him. I have no doubts he will understand, since he is a very understanding man.”²

These lines offer another glimpse into the strong personality and concern with money that were typical of Beschi, as we learned in Chapter Three. As for the flower seeds, some Jesuit residences in India had decorative and medicinal gardens, since missionaries often doubled as spiritual healers and physicians (Figure 11).³ But what use could Beschi have for imported flowers in the village of Ēlākkuricci? This detail is all the more intriguing if we pair it with the following verses in praise of Mary in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, the poem on Saint Joseph that Beschi wrote in 1726:

- 1 Noël de Bourzes to Étienne Souciet (Culupatti [Kalluppaṭṭi], 12 January 1721), AJPF, Fond Brotier 86, f. 47.
- 2 *Le P. pour qui je les ay fait venir les a trouvées bien chères, et le facheux est que la plupart de vos semences ont perdu toute leur force en chemin. C'est tous ce que je peux vous écrire maintenant sur l'article, car depuis qu'elles sont venues ces fleurs, je n'ay pu me rencontrer avec le P[ère] pour qui elles sont venues. Je garde votre lettre pour la luy montrer. Je ne doute pas qu'il n'entende raison, car il est fort raisonnable.* Noël de Bourzes to Étienne Souciet (Madurai mission, 10 January 1721), AJPF, Fond Brotier 86, ff. 45–46, here 45^v. This passage was also transcribed (albeit with some corrections to De Bourzes' original eighteenth-century spelling) in Julien Vinson, “Notice sur quelques missionnaires jésuites qui ont écrit en tamoul et sur le tamoul au dernier siècle,” *Revue de linguistique et de philologie comparée* 32, 2 (1899): 101–146.
- 3 A rare painting of the Jesuit house at Chandernagor, for instance, shows the garden attached to the Jesuit house and the Church compound, while it was being attacked by clouds of grasshoppers (BnF, Estampes, OD 59, no. 24).



FIGURE 11 Jesuit house in Chandernagore (Bengal) with its decorative garden, threatened by a cloud of grasshoppers

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR, COURTESY OF THE BNF

[Mary], whose beautiful feet spread a light surpassing the bright moon, is like an unwithering flower beyond comparison. In order to show the goodness of that virgin who defeated lust, is luminous, and has a mind purer than the sun, a hundred [angels] left at her feet garlands of white lilies (*ilili*) in bloom, similar to her own banner that gives protection, spreading scent, and overflowing with dripping honey mixed with the fresh pollen of their blossoms.⁴

Her power is a gift from Heaven, defeating the beauty of words. A hundred angels, wishing for their love to surpass their usual condition, in order to show her goodness, and her love towards the only Lord who created all beauty, carried blossoms of cool, sweet and thick roses (*irōcai*), spreading petals redder than the color of blood, and presented them as an offer in front to her, venerating her small feet brighter than the sun.⁵

That good woman, whose beauty shows the goodness of Heaven, offers support to those whose hearts are spoiled by sin, for everyone in this wide world to live happily. To show her ever-growing good mercy, a hundred [angels] worship her bright feet, offering garlands of scented open lotuses (*kamalam*) that bloom in the pond that gives refuge (*āṭaikkalam*) to all kinds of waters, running there after flowing for long from their springs.⁶

These verses are part of a vision through which Joseph finally dispels his doubts about Mary's immaculate conception. Convinced of her holiness, he sees groups of angels honoring her feet with flowers, which is a traditional way of expressing devotion in South India.⁷ Yet the flowers that the angels offer to

4 *Tēmpāvaṇi* VIII, 50: *nīmam* [sic, *tīmam*] *uṭait tiṅka tuṭaitt' oḷiyaip pāynta nēr aṭiyāl nēr arap pū viḷḷā vaṇṇaṇ* | *kāmam uṭaitt' oḷiy uṭuttuc cuṭarir rūya karuttil amai kaṇṇi nalaṇ kāṭṭutarkē* | *tāmam uṭait taṇ tātu maṭuv uṭaittuc cāyṭta matu veḷḷamoṭu vācam vīciy* | *ēmam uṭait taṇi virut' eṇṇ' alar cūvētav ililiy eṇu mālai patatt' oru nūr' uytṭār*.

5 *Tēmpāvaṇi* VIII, 51: *irutiy eḷir paṭuttīya vāṇ varattu vallāl ivar vāṇōr nilai kaṭantav aṇpu viṇṇac* | *karutiy eḷir paṭuttīya vāṇ āya entai kaṇṇiy amai nēya nalaṇ kāṭṭutarkē* | *kurutiy eḷir paṭuttīya centāṭulāvun koḷun taṇ tēṇ irōcaiy eṇuṇ kōtai koṇṭu* | *parutiy eḷir paṭuttīya cīr' aṭiyaip pōṛrip paṇiy āka mur paṭaittār oru nūr' aṇṇō*.

6 *Tēmpāvaṇi* VIII, 512: *vīṭ' avīḷṭta nalaṇ kāṭṭum vaṇappi nallāl viri puvī maṇṇ uyirkaḷ elām inṇ'urṇ' uyyak* | *kēṭ' avīḷṭta neṇiṇnarkkum uruti ceyyūṇ kiḷarntaṇa taṇ rayāpa nalaṇ kāṭṭutarkē* | *nīṭ' avīḷṭta vāy iṭattup pirint' oṭum paṇ nīrk' ellām āṭaikkalaṇ cey vāvi pūṭṭa* | *tōṭ' avīḷṭta viraik kamala mālai māṇṇic cūṭiya tā ṭoḷukiṇṇār oru nūr' aṇṇō*.

7 On flowers and garlands in India, see Jack Goody, *La culture des fleurs*, trad. Pierre-Antoine Fabre (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 372–405.

Mary—white lilies, roses, and lotuses—are not conventional in Tamil poetry. Strikingly, the first stanza mentions the white lily (*lilium candidum*), a flower unknown in eighteenth-century South India, but commonly associated with Mary's purity and chastity in the Catholic tradition.⁸ Beschi had to coin a new word to refer to it, even though he generally avoided transliterating Latin or Portuguese terms, and favored translation instead.⁹ In this case, though, the symbolic significance of the white lily and its association with Mary and Joseph could not be translated, but only transplanted. The second flower, the rose, was also uncommon in Tamil poetry, but well known in the region by Beschi's time in association with Islamic culture.¹⁰ By contrast, the third flower, the lotus, was and is among the most common in Tamil literature. It is also the flower blossoming at the feet of Mary as worshipped at Ēlākkuricci with the name of Aṭaikkala mātā, Mother of Refuge. The third verse is really about this local form of Mary, as also indicated by the reference to her name with the noun *aṭaikkalam* ("refuge"), and to the pond with which she was associated, which still exists in Ēlākkuricci today.

We do not know exactly which seeds Souciet sent to India, but it is tempting to imagine that Beschi wanted to include white lilies and red roses in his

8 Other varieties of the *lilium* family, as well as flowers belonging to other families but commonly referred to as lilies (like fire lilies or water lilies) were common in India, but rather different in habitat, color, and overall aesthetic.

9 The question whether to transliterate technical terms was debated in the early seventeenth century, when Roberto Nobili rejected the transliteration of Portuguese terms into Tamil introduced by his predecessor, Henrique Henriques, and substituted them with Sanskrit-derived technical terms. Some observations on this topic can be found in the Introduction. Nobili's main justification of this choice was published and discussed by Pierre Dahmen in Roberto Nobili, *Première Apologie*; it should be read in the context of missionary linguistic strategies analyzed in Županov, *Missionary Tropics*, 232–258; Ead., "'I Am a Great Sinner': Jesuit Missionary Dialogues in Southern India (Sixteenth Century)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55, 2–3 (2012): 415–446.

10 In the verse cited Beschi describes red roses, which symbolize martyrdom and resurrection in the Catholic tradition; see Mia Touw, "Roses in the Middle Ages," *Economic Botany* 36, 1 (1982): 71–83. However, it is unclear whether red roses were widely available in South India in the eighteenth century. As explained to me by Nicolas Roth (whom I thank for his time and expertise) in an email conversation on 06/16/2019, "roses in 17th and 18th century India would have therefore been mostly pink, semi-double damasks—the kind of rose used for rose water and often depicted in Persian and Mughal art—or the white musk roses native to the Himalayas, *Rosa moschata* and *Rosa brunonii*, known as *sevatī* or *seotī* in North Indian vernaculars. The one other kind available at least by the mid-18th century would have been some form of the China roses (*Rosa chinensis*), which have the important characteristic of being able to flower year-round, which they would later impart to the *deśī gulāb* or 'country roses' mentioned above."

flower garden to show them to his catechists.¹¹ Regardless of whether this really happened, reading the episode of the flower seeds together with the *Tēmpāvaṇi* suggests that the religious changes that Beschi and the other missionaries introduced in South India cut across both the mundane—in this case, the natural—and the literary spheres. Beschi's import of new flowers was at the same time the import of new botanical species, and new standards of comparison. In this chapter, I read Beschi's masterpiece, the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, in this vein. I explore the way this meticulously crafted poem connected European and Tamil literary worlds, but also the mission and the natural, social and cultural worlds surrounding it. I focus especially on literary conventions and innovations in the poem as clues as to the perspective of the eyes meant to read the text.¹² These were, I argue, the eyes of the catechists we already encountered. To understand their possible modes and habits of reading, this chapter stays close to the poem, its logic and subject matter. The next chapter will explore the circulation and reception of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in the eighteenth-century, and the role of this poem in creating a literary and social identity for the catechists.

One caveat before plunging into the poem. The *Tēmpāvaṇi* is a pastiche of Tamil, Latin, Italian, and generic Christian influences. As Julien Vinson (1843–1926) once wrote, *il y de tout dans le Tēmpāvaṇi*, and it is difficult to avoid the temptation of hunting for citations and references.¹³ Previous scholars have done so, but this is not the aim of this chapter.¹⁴ The following pages attempt to grasp the coherence of the poem, and to make sense of the historical world of the eighteenth-century mission as it was articulated within it.¹⁵

11 That Ēlākkuricci had a flower garden is clear from the mention of a servant in charge of it (*famulus qui florum hortis curam habebat*) in the annual letter of 1731, written by Beschi (Madurai mission, 4 September 1732), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 597–602, here 600^r. Whether it contained imported species, and how were they imported, is mostly unknown besides the reference to the seeds I discuss here. It should also be noticed that roses in this period were propagated mostly by cutting, and not through seeds.

12 Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, esp. 29 ff. and 151–153.

13 Vinson, “Le Tasse dans la poésie tamoule,” 53.

14 Apart from the pioneering article by Julien Vinson, “Le Tasse dans la poésie tamoule,” the most systematic attempt to recover the influence of the Church fathers and Western epics in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* is the doctoral dissertation by Jesuit Father A. Lūrtucāmi, “Tēmpāvaṇiyil mēṇāṭṭu ilakkiyat tākkam” (PhD diss., Ceṇṇai palkalaik kaḷakam, 1998).

15 Even though I have read and translated many cantos (*paṭalam*) of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, I was not able to read the entire work in the original, which is very long (3,615 *viruttam* stanzas). In order to orient myself in the text and its overall narrative, I could nevertheless consult a number of aids, including the detailed table of contents at the end of vol. 3, 409–428;

1 Christian Epic and Tamil *Peruṅkāppiyam*

Let us begin with some basic questions. What type of text is the *Tēmpāvaṇi*? What genre does it belong to? At a first glance, Beschi's masterpiece is a *peruṅkāppiyam* ("long poem"), a long narrative poem following the life of a hero, in this case Saint Joseph, from birth to death. This genre was defined relatively late in Tamil, in relationship to the Sanskrit genre of *mahākāvya*. With time it also came to refer to earlier poems, like the *Cilappatikāram*, that deviate substantially from the list of the genre's defining elements as they appear in the twelfth-century *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*.¹⁶ Beschi knew this list, which includes the four *puruṣārthas* as the main subject matter of *peruṅkāppiyam*. He incorporated it in the *Tonṇūlvilakkam*, he summarized it in Latin both in the *Clavis* and in the *Grammar of High Tamil*, and he followed it closely when writing his poem.¹⁷ But why did he decide to compose a *peruṅkāppiyam*? Considering the difficulty of this long and complex genre, with the *Tēmpāvaṇi* he was likely trying to acquire the status of a poet-scholar or *pulavar*. Indeed, the oral tradition reports that Beschi received his Tamil title of *Vīramāmuṇivar* ("the great heroic sage") only after composing his *peruṅkāppiyam* in 1726, and its commentary in 1729.¹⁸

Beschi must have also found it appealing that the subject-matter of *peruṅkāppiyam* is defined as one or more, but never all of the four *puruṣārthas*. This

S. Rajamanickam sj, *The Poem Tempavani by Joseph Beschi, S.J. A Tamil Epic on St. Joseph* (Montréal: Centre de Recherche et Documentation, 1994); the summary by Ārōkkiyācāmi Piḷḷai, *Tēmpāvaṇik karupporuḷ allatu arc. cūcaiyappar māṇmīyam* (Tiruccināppalli: Arc. cūcaiyappar toḷiḷcālai accāpīsil patippikka paṭṭatu, 1912); and the detailed table of contents in JAMP 220/14. As I was revising this book, an English translation of the whole poem by Dominic Raj appeared in print (see Bibliography). While I have occasionally consulted it, all translations from the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in this as well as the other chapters are my own.

- 16 These are: 1. praise to God (*vālttu*), invocation (*vaṇakkam*) and/or main topic (*varuporuḷ*); 2. the four *puruṣārthas* (*nārporuḷ*); 3. a great hero (*talaivaṇ*); 4. certain descriptive units that should come in the beginning, like mountains (*malai*), sea (*kaṭal*), country (*nāṭu*), city (*nakaram*), seasons (*paruvam*), and the two lights (*irucuṭar*), i.e., the sun and the moon; 5. certain life-situations, like good marriage (*naṇmaṇam*); 6. messengers (*tūtu*), ministers, etc. 7. division in sections called *carukkam*, *ilambakam*, etc. 8. finally, a *peruṅkāppiyam* must be the work of savants (*karṇrōr*). This list relies on the discussion of Tamil epic poetry in Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 128–131; and *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, sutra 7.
- 17 *Tonṇūlvilakkam*, sutra 256; Beschi, *Clavis*, 109; Beschi, *Grammatica Latino-Tamulica, ubi de elegantiori ...*, 98–99.
- 18 Muttucāmi, *Brief sketch*, 10; this is narrated more extensively in the Tamil version, Id., *Vīramāmuṇivarcarittiram*, 8.

is the subject matter he envisioned as appropriate to all poetry in the *Tonnūlvilakkam*, as we learned in the previous chapter, and indeed, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* can be seen as dealing with all *puruṣārthas* excluding only *īnpam*.¹⁹ Besides, most of the Tamil literature Beschi admired and recommended to his students belongs to this genre. The heroes of these poems offered to Tamil readers ideal models that fulfilled some of the didactic purposes Beschi considered foundational to poetry, since ethical instruction (*upatēcam*) was inherent to the *kāppiyam* genre both in Tamil and Sanskrit.²⁰

The *Tēmpāvaṇi* is also an epic poem, at least within the inclusive boundaries that were elaborated in the seventeenth and eighteenth century through heated debates on Aristotelian genre theory vis-à-vis the new epic poems in European vernaculars, often connected to chivalric romance.²¹ Beschi himself created a parallel between these Tamil and Western genres in the *Clavis*, where he wrote that “the *peruṅkāppiyam* is the main type of poem among the Tamilians, like the epic poem (*carmen heroicum*) among us.”²² He also noticed differences between the two genres—the plot of the *peruṅkāppiyam*, for instance, follows the hero’s life from birth to death, the “natural order” (*ordo naturalis*), instead of beginning *in medias res*.²³ Yet, with the obvious adaptations with regard to meter and figures, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* agrees with Torquato Tasso’s famous definition of epic poetry as “the imitation of an illustrious action, elevated and perfect, and told with noble verses, with the purpose of edifying while giving pleasure (*edificar diletando*),” whose specific mode of operation is to generate wonder (*maraviglia*).²⁴ Crucially, Tasso’s definition shares with the *peruṅkāp-*

19 Obviously, the marriage of Joseph and Mary has a chaste character (see canto VI on their married life), so effectively the *Tēmpāvaṇi* does not include any sustained representation of marital love.

20 Beschi himself explains the didactic aim of the *peruṅkāppiyam*, in *Clavis*, 109: *haec autem omnia ea arte et stylo disponi ac distribui debent, ut, qui legunt, ad amorem virtutis ac boni honesti, utilis, delectabili et aeterni excitentur*. “All these things must be set and arranged with such an art and style that those who read them be incited to love virtue, and what is good, honourable, useful, delightful and eternal.”

21 For an overview on the reception of Aristotelian genre theory in Italy, in the context of the development of Italian epic poetry from Ariosto to Tasso, see Daniel Javitch, “The Assimilation of Aristotle’s Poetics in Sixteenth-Century Italy” and “Italian Epic Theory,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 3, *The Renaissance* ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 53–65 and 205–215.

22 Beschi, *Clavis*, 109: பெருங்காப்பியம் *est apud Tamulenses praecipuum carmen, ut apud nos Heroicum*. Beschi seems here to have caught on an analogy, particularly interesting in the context of the parallel processes of vernacularization in Europe and India highlighted by Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods*, 469–470.

23 Beschi, *Grammatica Latino-Tamulica, ubi de elegantiori ...*, 98.

24 Tasso, *Discorsi del Poema Eroico*, 20–21.

piyam the didactic purpose that was so central to Beschi's own understanding of poetry. We will return to this dense formulation later in this chapter, especially to the question of the relationship between epic poetry, reality, and wonder.

For now, it is also worth mentioning the Aristotelian categories of plot (*mythos*), character (*ethos*), thought (*diánoia*), and diction (*lexis*), at the core of the theory of the epic genre in early modern Europe. Particularly important among them, and crucial in the economy of Beschi's poem, is *diánoia*. Once again according to Tasso, a poet and critic that Beschi knew well, epic *diánoia* aims "to demonstrate, explain, move affects (such as mercy, wrath, dread), praise and belittle, and make known the greatness and the insignificance of things. Therefore, this component of poetry includes almost everything rhetoric usually deals with: to such an extent, poetry or poetics is larger than rhetoric."²⁵ After having explored the interplay of literary and rhetoric theories in the *Tonnūlvilakkam*, it is impossible to miss how Beschi must have been especially interested in this aspect of epic poetry, which included and coincided with rhetoric.²⁶

Thus, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* is at the same time a *peruṅkāppiyam* and an epic poem, and the simultaneity of this double generic belonging is key for understanding the work. Yet in his masterpiece Beschi also transcended the *peruṅkāppiyam*, in a way analogous to what Christian authors did for the classical epic when they transformed it into a Christian genre. The category of the Christian epic, discussed but not unanimously theorized by early modern critics and poets, has recently been explored in a series of articles by Marco Faini on the basis of the existing corpus in Latin and European vernaculars.²⁷ Faini has defined

25 Tasso, *Discorsi del Poema Eroico*, 146: [...] *dimostrare, il risolvere, il mover gli affetti (come sono la misericordia, l'ira, il timore), l'aggrandire e il diminuire, o il farci conoscer la grandezza e la picciolezza delle cose. Laonde in questa sola parte della poesia si contengono quasi tutte le cose di cui si tratta nella rettorica: tanto la poesia o l'arte poetica è più ampia della rettorica.*

26 On the contributions of rhetoric to literary criticism and poetics, see George Kennedy, "The Contributions of Rhetoric to Literary Criticism," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 4, *The Eighteenth Century*, eds Hugh B. Nisbet, George A. Kennedy, Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 349–364.

27 See Marco Faini, "Heroic Martyrdom Unsung: The Tradition of Christian Epic in Renaissance Italy and the European context," *Wolfenbütteler Renaissance Mitteilungen* 32 (2008–2010): 135–152; Id., "La tradizione del poema sacro nel Cinquecento," in *La Bibbia nella letteratura italiana*, vol. 5, *Dal Medioevo al Rinascimento*, eds Grazia Melli and Marialuigia Sipione (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2013), 591–608; Id., "La poetica dell'epica sacra tra Cinque e Seicento in Italia," *The Italianist* 35 (2015): 27–60.

Christian epic as having a strictly biblical topic, while also displaying most, or all the structural elements characterizing the epic genre.²⁸ Beschi's *Tēmpāvaṇi* falls squarely within this definition. Moreover, argues Faini, "in the self-consciousness of writers, Christian epic was thought to be a means to excel Antiquity by introducing true religion in its highest literary genre."²⁹ This statement could easily apply to Beschi's plan in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. In his case, though, European classical antiquity was two steps removed—albeit present, as shown by the numerous allusions to Virgil.³⁰ The ancient authors Beschi aimed to extol were first of all classical Tamil authors like Kampan, with whom he appears to feel in competition in his grammar of literary Tamil.³¹ In substituting Western classics with Tamil classics, Beschi used a strategy already available in Latin literature to make a Tamil literary genre into a favorite mode of expression for Christianity in Tamil Nadu.³² The Vaittiṣvaran̄kōyil episode we encountered at the very beginning of the Introduction points to links such as this one, which Beschi forged.

2 Worldly Publics, Divine Patrons

The *Tēmpāvaṇi* begins as every *peruṅkāppiyam* ought to begin, that is with an introduction, *pāyiram* in Tamil, fulfilling multiple functions. It opens with an invocation to God (*kaṭavuḷ vālttu*), whose first syllable is the auspicious *cīr*, and goes on to introduce the hero of the poem, Saint Joseph, whose name is translated alternatively as Cūcai or Vaḷaṇ ("the prosperous one").³³ The choice of Saint Joseph is in line with the growing devotion towards his figure in this period, especially among the Jesuits, but is at the same time original.³⁴ The

28 Faini, "La poetica dell'epica sacra," 27.

29 Faini, "Heroic Martyrdom Unsung," 137 (quote originally in English).

30 Lūrtucāmi, "Tēmpāvaṇiyil mēṇāṭṭu ilakkiyat tākkam," 220–267.

31 Particularly striking is Beschi's remark that he was able to include in his poem more *can-tam*, i.e., *vaṇṇam* variations than Kampan (see footnote 101 in this chapter).

32 At the same time allowing the Christian epic to exceed the Western epic, transforming it into a global literary genre in conversation with extra-European languages, genres, and literary cultures; a transformation which is not at center of this study, but would deserve further reflection.

33 The auspiciousness of certain syllables in certain positions is part of the larger concern with appropriateness, *poruttam*, at the center of *pāṭṭiyaḷ* grammars. Beschi includes this aspect under *yāppu* (see *Toṇṇūlvilakkam*, sutra 284–294; and Beschi, *Clavis*, 120 ff.).

34 Devotion to Saint Joseph developed in the seventeenth century among the Jesuits: see Non Faesen, "The Great Silence of Saint Joseph: Devotion to Saint Joseph and the 17th Century Crisis of Mysticism in the Jesuit Order," in *Instruments of Devotion: The Practices and*

Tēmpāvāṇi is the first—and to the best of my knowledge the only—epic poem entirely dedicated to this saint in any language.³⁵

Reading along the introduction, in stanza 5 Beschi begins to plead for the compassion of fellow *pulavars* when reading his faulty work. This show of humility signals that the introduction has transitioned into the section on appeasing the assembly (*avaṭṭaṭakkam*), which played a central role in the economy of praise of the early modern and modern Tamil literary world.³⁶ As was common, Beschi uses the occasion to show off with humble verses that are also proof of his mastery over Tamil language and conventions:

muraiyaṭuṭ tarunū lōruṇ mūlkiya vuvappi laṇṇa
 turaiyaṭuṭ taḷḷi yuṇṇun tuṇi vilā nēṇṇai nōkkir
 kuraiyeṭuṭ tanaṭiyēṇ rāṇṇār koṭuñciṇat turukka ṇaṇrō
 paraiyeṭuṭ tulakaṇ kēṭpap paḷit teṇai nakaikka ṇaṇrō.³⁷

murai aṭuttu aru nūlōr uṇ mūlkiya uvappil aṇṇa
 turai aṭuttu aḷḷi uṇṇum tuṇivilāṇ eṇṇai nōkkin
 kurai eṭuttaṇai eṇru aṇṇār koṭum ciṇattu uṇukka ṇaṇrō?
 parai eṭuttu ulakam kēṭpa paḷittu eṇai nakaikka ṇaṇrō?

Those who compose difficult books in accordance with tradition are happily immersed [in the ocean of *amṛta*]. If, when they see me, a man with no presumption, as I reach their harbor and eat a handful, they say “you took too little,” and with cruel anger chastise me, is this a good thing? If they ridicule me with drums, so that the world hears them and laughs, is this a good thing?

This self-deprecating yet sophisticated stanza contains a reference, likely intended, to the following verse in the analogous section of Kampan’s *Irāmāvatāram*:

Objects of Religious Piety from the Late Middle Ages to the 20th Century, eds Laura Katrine Skinnebach and Henning Laugerud (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press), 137–150, which is a response to de Certeau, “Crise sociale et réformisme spirituel.” Devotion to Joseph also spread in mission territories, and Saint Joseph was declared, for instance, Saint patron of China in 1668; see Liam Brockey, *Journey to the East. The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 133.

35 Joseph played, of course, a large role in many poems dedicated to Mary in this period.

36 On the *avaṭṭaṭakkam*, see Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, 74–76.

37 *Tēmpāvāṇi*, *pāyiram*, 5.

turaiya ṭutta viruttat tokaikkavik
 kuṛaiya ṭutta cevikaḷuk kōtilyāl
 naṛaiya ṭutta vacuṇanan māccevip
 paṛaiya ṭutta tupōlumen pāvarō.³⁸

turaiy aṭutta virutta tokaik kavikku
 uṛai aṭutta cevikaḷukku' ōtil, yāl
 naṛai aṭutta acuṇa nan mā cevi
 paṛai aṭuttatu pōlum eṇ pā arō?

When sung into the ears, which are the receptacles of poetry in its various types, *turai* and *viruttam*, my stanzas are like the beating of the drums in the ears of good *acuṇam* birds who drink the honey of the *yāl*—are they not?

It is immediately evident from the length of their lines that the two verses use different meters, Beschi's the longer six-metreme *ācīriyaviruttam*, and Kampan's a four-metreme *kaliviruttam*. Still, notice how Beschi uses the same *etukai* rhyme as Kampan, repeating the second syllable *-rai* at the beginning of each line. He follows Kampan also when repeating the sound *-tut-* after the rhyme, even though in Kampan we have the more elegant repetition of a whole word (*aṭutta*) as the second metreme (*cīr*) in each line, while Beschi only repeats the final sounds of his first metreme, construing another type of rhyme called *īyaipu*. Besides these formal assonances, both verses also mention the *paṛai* drums. Kampan compares his own poetry to the music of the *paṛai*, while Beschi describes the same drums as the instrument of his detractors. In a way, this antagonistic reference sets the tone of the poem, and shows how Beschi was in competition with traditional Tamil poets and wanted to outdo them, especially Kampan.

The Introduction then switches to explaining the origins of the work (*nūlvanta valī*), and mentions the most important source of inspiration for Beschi's work:

In the city called Ágreða (*ākirta*), excelling in beauty because of its gardens, a virgin, exalted by praiseworthy boons that have no comparison

38 Kampar, *Srīmatkamparāmāyaṇam. teyvikam poruntiyā kaviccakravarttiy ākiya kampanāṭ-ṭālvār aruḷicceytatu. mutalāvatu pālakāṇaṭam* (Ceṇṇai: Niraṇṇavilāca acciyantiracālai-yir patippikkappaṭṭatu, 1913), *pāyiram*, 8.

on earth, walked, rose through difficult penance, embraced the feet of the mother of God, and worshipping them with great love, she reached wisdom—did she not?³⁹

The words she said through a vision exceeding the five senses, and surpassing in greatness [anything] on earth, were sweet, and flowed from her graceful open mouth! Her conduct was strait and virtuous, as happens among people with perfect words, her moral conduct was excellent, and showed the truth of the scriptures.⁴⁰

Like the moon among the stars bestowing coolness, she shone among the women with rare excellence, and not only this—free from any imperfection generating sin, she obtained the vision of the Heaven of our Father with the assembly of the celestials, and she became like a light for the teachers of the scriptures (*vēṭiyar*).⁴¹

These verses refer to María de Jesus de Ágreda (1602–1665), Ākirta in Tamil, the Spanish mystic and author of the *Mystica ciudad de Dios*, a book on the life of Mary on which the plot of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* is closely modeled. Beschi often relied on Ágreda's version of the story of the holy family, which advocates for Mary's immaculate conception and is rich in details, miracles, and divine interventions, rather than on the simpler narration of the gospels.⁴² In its amplification of the life of the Blessed Virgin, the *Mystica ciudad* also offered a rich narrative on the otherwise evanescent figure of Joseph.⁴³ Beschi further believed Ágreda's book to be the result of a divinely inspired vision, as

39 *Tēmpāvaṇi*, *pāyiram*, 7: *aṭaviyāl vaṇappil vāyntav ākirtav eṇum nakarkkuṭ | puṭaviyāl uva-mai nitta pukaḷ varatt' uyarnta kaṇṇi | naṭaviy ār tavattil ōṇki nāṭaiaiy iṇṛā ṭāḷait | taṭaviy ārv' uyarap pōṇṇit takavu aṭaintu iruntāl aṇṛō*.

40 *Tēmpāvaṇi*, *pāyiram*, 8: *poraiy uli ciṇappil vāynta pulan ravir kāṭci taṇṇāl | arai moliy inimai kāṇṇav aruḷ avil vāyinaḷē | nīrai molī māntar pūṭta nīrmaiyoṭ' oḷukal ceytu | marai molī vāymai kāṭṭu mānp'ūṭaiy aṭattiṇāḷē*.

41 *Tēmpāvaṇi*, *pāyiram*, 9: *cit' aruḷ uṭukkaḷ ūṭu tiṅkaḷaip pōlak kaṇṇi | mātaruḷ ariya mānpāl vāyaṅkiṇāl aṇṇit taṇṇiṇ | kōt' aruḷ kuṇaiy aṇṇ' umpar kuḷuvuṇukk' entaiy aṇṭam | mīt' aruḷ kāṭci pūṭtu vēṭiyarkk' olivē pōṇṇāl*.

42 Beschi follows Ágreda even with regard to the exact moment of the immaculate conception, as noted in Rajamanickam, *The Poem Tempavani*, 72–73.

43 An anthology and rearrangement of the material on Joseph in the *Mystica ciudad* is provided by Augusto Alpanseque Frías, *San José en la «Mística Ciudad de Dios» de Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda: Ordenamiento biográfico* (Madrid: Hermanos Augusto y María del Carmen Alpanseque Frías, 1978).

clear from the verses, and as the nun herself always claimed even when her person and books became the object of inquisitorial investigations.⁴⁴ Notice how he describes Ágreda as possessing good moral conduct and words, a pairing which is also key to his project of expressing Christianity in good literary Tamil.

In general, Jesuit missionaries in the eighteenth century were fond of Ágreda's work, her book offering them a retelling of the gospels steeped in the world of Baroque Catholic devotion. Moreover, the figure of Ágreda was relevant to missions on account of her most famous miracle, namely her appearing in front of missionaries and their indigenous converts on the Mexican frontier without ever leaving her convent in Spain.⁴⁵ The possibility of bilocation and relocation of devotion represented by this miracle is a founding feature of the missionary project, and of the literary recasting of the history of salvation in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. In connection with this possibility, the choice of words at the end of stanza 9 is particularly telling. Here, Beschi compares Ágreda to a lamp for the *vēṭiyar*, a key-word we analyzed in Chapter Two. In Beschi's view, all the teachers of the divine revelation were *vēṭiyar*, including missionaries and their catechists, but in the *Vēṭiyarolukkam* he particularly associated the word with the job of the catechist. The mention of *vēṭiyar* in this introduction thus plunges us into the context of the Madurai mission, and the catechists who read these verses certainly understood *vēṭiyar* as a reference to their own daily work.

44 On the figure of María de Ágreda, her political role during the kingdom of Felipe IV, and her literary works, see the work of Ana Morte Acín, who also sketches the history of the wide circulation of the *Mystica ciudad* in Europe and America: *Misticismo y conspiración. Sor María de Ágreda en el reinado de Felipe IV* (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2010), 422–423. On the inquisitorial investigation on Ágreda's work, see Joaquín Pérez Villanueva, 'Algo más sobre la Inquisición y Sor María de Ágreda: la prodigiosa evangelización americana', *Hispania sacra* 37, 76 (1985): 585–618; Clark Colahan, 'María de Jesús Ágreda: la novia del Santo Oficio', in *Mujeres en la Inquisición: la persecución del Santo Oficio y el Nuevo Mundo*, ed. Mary E. Giles (Barcelona: Ediciones Martínez Roca, 2000): 191–209. However, there is substantial documentation on Ágreda and her *Mystica ciudad* in the Archives of the Roman Inquisition, still waiting to be studied in detail. See for instance ACDF, S.O., St. St., O 3-b, 3-c and 3-d. On female mystics in seventeenth-century Spain, and their writings, see Isabelle Poutrin, *Le voile et la plume. Autobiographie et sainteté féminine dans l'Espagne moderne* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1995).

45 Further information on Ágreda and the "new world" via the analysis of a geographical treatise she wrote is found in Clark Colahan, *The Visions of Sor María de Ágreda: Writing Knowledge and Power* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994).

We will return to the strategies by which Beschi relocated the story of the holy family in the new Tamil context. For now, reading along the introduction, Beschi describes the love of the Virgin Mary for her homonymous daughter María de Ágreda:

To show the greatness of that tender vine, she gave her her own sweet name, to show how much she loved her, she bestowed upon her numberless boons. She wears the shining sun on her body, her foot tramples on the white moon, and her head is surrounded by [a crown of] stars—she is the divine mother!⁴⁶

Here we find, right at the beginning of the poem, an image of Mary as *Aṭaikkala mātā* or Mother of Refuge. She wears a sundress, a crown of twelve stars, and is standing on the crescent moon. The same elements are recurrent in the songs of the *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, “The mixed-bag of *Tirukkāvalūr*,” a poem Beschi dedicated entirely to *Aṭaikkala mātā* at *Ēlākkuricci*.⁴⁷ Listen for instance to the following stanza:

You are a vine where flowers blossom, you are adorned with bright sun rays as golden leaves (*taḷaiyā*), you are a peacock wearing as feathers (*taḷaiyā*) the shining stars on your head, and you have sprouts (*taḷaiyā*) as lotus-feet oozing honey on the cool moon—you queen, and mother! *Tirukkāvalūr* is great because of the splendor of your three shining ornaments.⁴⁸

46 *Tēmpāvaṇi, pāyiram*, 10: *ilaṅkoṭi māṭci kāṭṭav iṇiya taṇ ṇāman tantu | vaḷaṇ koṭu naṭpu kāṭṭa varaivila varaṅkaḷ iṇtāl | viḷaṅk'olīy uṭutta mēṇi veṇṇmati mititta pātam | uḷaṅkuṭu cūṭṭuñ ceṇṇiy uṭaiyavaḷ paramatāyē.*

47 Among the shorter poems, two are, like the *kalampakam*, in honor of *Aṭaikkala mātā*: *Aṭaikkala mālai*, and the *Aṭaikkalanāyaki mēl veṇkalippāvum karuṇāmparap patikam*. For information on the editions of these texts, see the Bibliography. Especially the connection between the *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam* and the place is so strong that the poem is today painted on the walls of the church compound at *Ēlākkuricci*. A third, short poem in honor of Mary as *mater dolorosa* is the *Aṇṇai aḷuṅkal antāti*, recently published as *Mother Mary's Song of Affliction* by Constantine Joseph Beschi S.J. Edited and translated in English with an Introduction by Anand Amaladass S.J. and Antony S.V. (Chennai and Tiruchirappalli: Tamil Literature Society, 2018).

48 *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, 31: *pōt'aviḷ pūṇkoṭiyāy ceṇkatir pūṇṭāl por raḷaiyā | mūt'aviḷ mūṇ raḷaiyāk koṇṭāṇ maṇṇaiyāy veṇṇmatiyait | tāt'aviḷ tāmarait tāṭ ṭaḷaiyāv urrā ṭāy aracāḷ | cītaviḷ muttalai nīḷalir kāvalūr cīrttatuvē.*

This *taḷai* verse, typical of the *kalampakam* genre, relies on the conventional background story of the hero gifting a leaf-dress (*taḷai*) to the heroine via her friend.⁴⁹ Here Beschi builds a verse that relies upon the polysemy of the word *taḷai*, but also reinterprets this convention usually based on *akam* themes—more on this type of move later. In the first line, *taḷai* means “leaf,” in the second “peacock feather,” and in the third line “sprout.” Each line is also built around a different metaphor. First, the young virgin Mary is compared to a tender vine, and her sundress to the golden foliage on that vine. Second, she is compared to a peacock with a crown of feathers, in turn compared to the crown of stars surrounding her head. Finally, Beschi describes her lotus-feet that rest upon the moon in comparison with a tender sprout. Notice that the coexistence of the moon and an open lotus at her feet is miraculous, since in Tamil poetry (and in reality, too!) lotuses close up at night, and so the appearance of the moon is antithetic to lotuses in bloom.⁵⁰

This iconography of Aṭaikkala mātā is inspired by the *Mystica ciudad*, where Ágreda portrays Mary as the divine woman in the *Apocalypse* of Saint John.⁵¹

49 Beschi in TV, sutra 258 lists the following elements as part of *kalampakam*: 1. a song on the hero's prowess, *puyam*; 2. the girl's game-song, *ammānai*; 3. a swing song, *ūcal*; 4. a hunter song, *maṛam*; 5. a siddha song, *cittu*; 6. a song on time, *kālam*; 7. a song on a singing/dancing girl, *mataṅka* (see Beschi, *Clavis*, 111); 8. a song on a bee-messenger, *vaṇṭu*; 9. a messenger song, *tūtu*; 10. a song on magic and illusion, *campiratan*; 11. a song on one-sided love, *kaikkīlai*; 12. a song on penance, *tavam*; 13. a song with word-play, *maṭakku*; 14. a song about the wind, *kāṇṇu*; 15. a bard's song, *pāṇaṇ*; 16. a song of the fortune-teller, *kuṛam*; 17. a song on the leaf-dress, *taḷai*; 18. a song on waiting, *iraikkal*; 19. a song on the cold, *kuḷir*. Compare the slightly different list in David Shulman, “Notes on *Tillaikalampakam*,” in *South-Indian Horizons. Felicitation Volume for François Gros on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, eds Jean-Luc Chevillard and Eva Wilden (Pondicherry: IFP/EFEO, 2014), 160.

50 Beschi himself stresses this point in the first stanza of the playful *ammānai* that follows the verse just read. See *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, 32: *cīrtta tiru kavaṇalūrt tēvaṇaṅku tāṭ kamala | nīrtta tirut tiṅkaṇ mē nīṇṇaṇa kāṇ ammānai | nīrtta tirut tiṅkaṇ mē nīṇṇaṇav eṇṇ' ām ākil | ārtta tiru vaṇṭ' uvappav āṅk'alarāv ammānai | pōrtta tiruc cōṭiy iṇp'apṇōt'alarum ammānai* || “The lotus feet of the divine woman of famed Tirukkāvalūr,—they stay on the moon beautiful with good qualities, look, *ammānai*!—If you say they stay on the moon beautiful with good qualities,—then they don't blossom for the bright and beautiful bees to rejoice, *ammānai*?!—Because of the sun she has covered herself with, the sweet buds blossom, *ammānai*!”

51 See chapters 8–10 of the *Mystica ciudad*, in María de Jesús Ágreda, *Mystica ciudad de Dios, milagro de su omnipotencia, y abismo de la Gracia, historia divina y vida de la Virgen Madre de Dios, Reyna y Señora Nuestra Maria Santissima, restauradora de la culpa de Eva, y medianera de la Gracia, manifestada en estos ultimos siglos por la misma Señora à su esclava Sor Maria de Jesus* (Amberes: Cornelio y la viuda de Henrico Verdussen, 1722), 31–53.

The twelfth chapter of the *Apocalypse* (12, 1) begins with the description of a woman “clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” It continues by narrating how this woman gave birth to a child, and fought with a dragon with the help of angels. Art historian Patrizia Granziera has argued that Beschi used this apocalyptic image of Mary in his poetry, but sponsored instead the worship of a clean, immaculate virgin at Ēlākkuricci.⁵² I agree with Granziera on this point, but the oldest statue of Mary at Ēlākkuricci has nevertheless a lot in common with the woman of the *Apocalypse*. She is wearing the sun and a crown of stars, and standing on the crescent moon (Figure 12). True, she does not seem to be trampling on a dragon or a serpent, and instead she is peacefully resting on a pedestal decorated with lotus flowers. Yet under the thick layers of pastel color that characterize contemporary Church aesthetics in Tamil Nadu, we can still see serpents (*nāgas*) in the niches of the eighteenth-century altar where the statue is located (Figure 13).⁵³ In other words, devotees could and can recognize this statue as representing the goddess sung in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* and the *kalam-pakam*.⁵⁴

After introducing Aṭaikkala mātā, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* turns to her special relationship with María de Ágreda, who wrote down in her book whatever was dictated to her directly by the Virgin. Beschi then explains how his own work

52 See Patrizia Granziera, “Christianity and Tamil Culture: Father Joseph Beschi and the Image of the Virgin Mary,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 27, 2 (2011): 249–266, esp. 253 ff.

53 On a systematic appropriation of *nāgas* in the rich iconography of Goan churches, see, Ines Županov, “The Pulpit Trap: Possession and Personhood in Colonial Go,” *RES: Anthropology and Esthetics* 65–66 (2015): 298–315.

54 The *kalam-pakam* includes a verse that mentions explicitly her crushing a snake. See *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, 8: *puyaṅkav uruvāl viṇai nañc’ umiṇtu puḷuṅkiya pēy | uyaṅka mitittut tavattāl venṛāy eṇav oṇmatīya | mayāṅk’ār pakaiyiṇukk’ aṇci vant’ uṇ tava vākaīyir rāṇ | muyāṅkav aṭaikkalan koṇṭat’ ōr kāvalūr mūt’ uyirē ||* “In the form of a snake, the devil was boiling with anger, and spitting the poison of karma—you crushed him, so that he would suffer, and conquered him through your penance. The bright moon, afraid of those enemies endowed with the power to bewilder, came to the place where your penance won, and took refuge there while embracing you, O unique ancient life in Tirukkāvalūr!” This verse refers to two stories at once. On the one hand, Mary killing the devil in the form of a snake is a Catholic topos inspired by various biblical passages, especially the chapter of the *Apocalypse* we just read. On the other hand, the enmity between moon and snakes originated, according to Hindu mythology, with the episode of the serpent-demon Rahu drinking the gods’ ambrosia. So, in his literary production Beschi imagined Aṭaikkala mātā, the goddess of Ēlākkuricci, also as the woman of the *Apocalypse*. This goes against Granziera’s claim (“Christianity and Tamil Culture,” 253) that in this text Beschi portrays the peaceful version of Mary, in contrast with the militant version in *Tēmpāvaṇi* VIII, 7–21.



FIGURE 12 Statue of Aṭaikkala mātā in the church at Ēlākkuricci
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR



FIGURE 13 Detail of a niche with a *nāga* motif in the same altar
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

is positioned vis-à-vis that relationship: “Eager to make the effort, I too will write down the things she wrote.”⁵⁵ In other words, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* is conceived as a retelling, or rather, the amplification in Tamil of Ágreda’s work, in turn inspired by divine revelation.⁵⁶ Finally, after having thanked God, excused himself in front of the assembly of fellow poets, and introduced the two Marys who guided his literary enterprise, Beschi returns to his hero:

He is exalted in the heart, filled with rare greatness due to abundant penance according to the great sacred books; he protects the [Lord who is the] protector of the earth; he is the one with a fragrant beautiful vine—in order to tell his story, I strung together the fresh blossoms of that vine in unfading clusters [or: a bouquet of sweet songs] in Āriya-nūr.⁵⁷

We see here the main iconography of Joseph throughout the poem, as a man carrying a flowering stick, which according to the *Legenda Aurea* blossomed with white lilies when he was chosen as Mary’s husband. Beschi also offers in this verse the only reference to a possible place of composition or performance of his poem, a city called Āriya-nūr. This name has been associated from the early nineteenth century with Kōṇāṅkuppam, and modern commentators have been influenced by the strong local tradition connecting this village with the *Tēmpāvaṇi*.⁵⁸ However, no proof exists in support of this claim. I am

55 *Tēmpāvaṇi*, pāyiram, 12: *varuntiya naciāyā nānum varaintavai varaintu kātṭa* [...].

56 Conveniently, Ágreda’s book told the story of Jesus and the holy family in a version that was translatable without challenging the ecclesiastical prohibition of translating the Bible. On the prohibition of Bible translation into vernacular language in the Counter-Reformation, see Gigliola Fragnito, *La Bibbia al rogo. La censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della scrittura* (1471–1605) (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

57 *Tēmpāvaṇi*, pāyiram, 13: *cīriya maṛai nūr pūṇṭa ceḷun tavatt’ ariya māṭci | nēriyav uḷattil ōṅki nēmi kāttavaṇaik kāttu | vēriy aṇ koṭiyōṇ kātai viḷampav akkoṭi viḷ paim pū | āriyaṇūrir rēmpāv aṇiy eṇap piṇittal ceyvām*. This verse plays, like a few others in the poem, on the double entendre implicit in the title of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, which can be read both as an unfading bouquet (*tēmpā aṇi*) or a cluster of sweet songs (*tēm pā aṇi*).

58 The oldest attestation of this tradition is again Muttucāmi, *Vīramāmuṇivarcarittiram*, 6: *kōṇāṅkuppam eṇṇa āriyaṇūr*. Yet Muttucāmi also claims that the donation recorded in the Elākkuricci inscription was from Raṅkappa maḷavarāyar who ruled over Āriyaṇūr (*Vīramāmuṇivarcarittiram*, 7). This is a misreading, though, as I show in Chapter Three, and the inscription has Ariyalūr instead (which is coherent with the title of the ruler, *maḷavar*). Besides, at the time of Beschi Kōṇāṅkuppam was under the jurisdiction of the *pāḷayakkār* of Perūr, Muttuccāmikaccirāya, who himself was subordinate to the king of Ariyalūr (under whose direct rule was Elākkuricci). The latter in turn paid tribute

inclined to interpret Āriyaṇūr either as a generic noun for a city of noble men, *āriyaṇ*, or as an alternative spelling of Ariyalūr, where resided the small king who donated the land of Tirukkāvalūr to the mission some years after Beschi completed his poem.⁵⁹

3 Angelic Time and the Relocation of Devotion

Not unlike Italian Renaissance paintings portraying biblical scenes in the more familiar hills of Latium, the first cantos of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* describe the country of Palestine and the city of Jerusalem as yet another region and city of literary Tamilakam. This is the result of Beschi's following the Tamil rules of poetics and genre. The descriptions of natural and urban landscapes operate in Tamil within a rigid set of possibilities, and *peruṅkāppiyam* must begin with descriptions of land and city. So, in the beginning of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, the clouds pour rainwater that, flowing through the country of Palestine, traverses all the traditional Tamil landscapes: mountains (*kuriñci*), forests (*mullai*), the country (*marutam*), and finally the seashore (*neytal*). Elsewhere, Beschi also portrays the wilderness of *pālai*, especially in connection with the journey of the holy family through the Sinai desert to reach Egypt. Even though the landscape in this first canto is stereotypically Tamil, and invariably benevolent—in the country of Palestine, people live in peace and harmony with animals and plants, and have no enemies—Beschi also describes local nature with an eye for detail and species, as we would expect from a lexicographer who was keen to import flower seeds from Europe:⁶⁰

to the *pālayakkārar* of Uṭaiyārpālayam (*Vīramāmuṇivarcarittiram*, 6). My hunch is that Kōṇāṅkuppam was an important devotional center for Pondicherry Catholics (the village is very close to the French colony) in the nineteenth century, and this reflects in Mutucāmi's account; yet it is undeniable that Beschi spent time there, and had a connection with the place.

59 The main problem with the Āriyaṇūr-Ariyalūr identification is that the *Tēmpāvaṇi* spelling begins with long *ā*, but Beschi might have purposively elongated the *ā* to fulfill the metrical demands.

60 Beschi wrote Latin and Portuguese dictionaries of Tamil, and a Tamil-Tamil one, the *Caturakarāṭi*; see Gregory James, *Colporuḷ. A History of Tamil Dictionaries* (Chennai: Cre-A, 2000), 105–114. For editions of the *Caturakarāṭi*, see the Bibliography; a book-length study of this work is Cū. Iṇṇāci, *Caturakarāṭi āṟāycci* (Maturai: Patippuṭ turai, maturai kāmārācar kalaik kaḷakam, 1976).

Palmyra trees, tall areca-palm trees with their long leaves, iron-wood, mango, *makil*, jackfruit, and *culli* trees, jujube, sandalwood and saffron plants—should not we mention that they grow [there] in many gardens?⁶¹

This verse lists different botanical species, from palm trees to precious scented plants, usually associated with different landscapes and emotional conditions in Tamil. Beschi mixes them here to indicate the material and spiritual wealth of Palestine, but more generally, in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* natural descriptions eschew Tamil traditional systems of correspondences between nature and other orders of meaning, codified in the theories of *akam* and *puṇam*. Mountains and forests are not associated with love encounters, nor countryside with marriage, and so on. Nature is entirely reoriented towards devotion to the Christian God, it expresses the love of the created world towards its creator, and moves according to God's will.

Especially in the first two cantos of the poem, the *nāṭṭuppaṭalam* ("canto on the country") and the *nakarappaṭalam* ("canto on the city"), Beschi achieves this vision of nature as participating in God's providential plan with the help of two literary techniques. First, the many metaphors in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* are often construed with more or less recognizable Christian tropes as standards of comparison. This is a well-known strategy in Tamil, already popularized by Śaiva poets when they recast traditional *akam* genres such as the *kōvai* in a devotional mode.⁶² In some cases, these metaphors refer directly to Catholic images, like the *Virgo lactans* compared to the earth in verse 9, but more often they introduce generic virtuous models in line with Christian ethics, often resonating with the *Tirukkural*. Another recurrent technique is the use of a figure (*aṇi* or *alaṅkāram*) known as *taṅkurippēṇṇavaṇi*, literally "the ascription of the function of an object [unto another]," corresponding to the Sanskrit *utprekṣā* or "flight of fancy."⁶³ In Tamil, the name is also the definition of this figure that usually revolves around avoiding the natural explanation of a certain phenomenon, like dawn, by attributing it to the intention of otherwise inanimate elements, such as the moon or the stars.⁶⁴ The following

61 *Tēmpāvaṇi* I, 37: *ōlaikaḷ kiṭanta nīṇ kamukoṭum paṇai | pālaikaḷ mā makil palavu cuḷlikaḷ | kōlaikaḷ cantāṇaṅ kuṅkumam pala | cōlaikaḷ kiṭantaṇa tokuppa vaṇṇamō*.

62 See Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, esp. 86–91.

63 Compare the discussion of the mental operation implied by Sanskrit *utprekṣā* in David Shulman, *More than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 53–62.

64 Beschi in the *Toṇṇūlvilakkam* (sutra 346) uses the word *ūkāñcitam* instead of *taṅ kurippu eṇṇa aṇi*, even though his inspiration remains *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, sutra 12.

verse is a nice example of *tar̥kuripperravaṇi*, taken from the description of Jerusalem in the *nakarappaṭalam*:

“Such a beautiful, golden, elevated city does not belong to this world, but rather to the divine world abounding in wealth! It will clearly take up residence there!” As if thinking so, and placing silver fetters to detain it in this world lapped by the ocean, the water lilies grow in the long ditch surrounding the walls that reach up to the sky.⁶⁵

The first two lines of the stanza imagine the thoughts of the water-lilies (*kuvaḷai*) growing in the moat surrounding the walls of Jerusalem. The flowers, afraid that the city might leave this world for Heaven, where it belongs, surround it like silver chains in order to keep it from disappearing. This is a *tar̥kurippērram*-explanation for the abundance of white flowers that, together with the shining water of the moat, look like silver fetters surrounding the city in a circle. The verse might be a reference to the Augustinian idea of a heavenly Jerusalem, but certainly shows nature as involved in glorifying its creator.

Both techniques I just mentioned, Christian-based metaphors and the *tar̥kuripperravaṇi*, are also used in the following verse describing, once again, the walls of Jerusalem:

kōt' akanṛ' aḷikkuvār aruttik koḷkai pōr
rīt' akanṛ' arun tiru nukarac ceṇmiṇ enṛ'
ēṭ' akanṛ' aṇikkulatt' ilāṅku māṭaṅkaḷ
mīt' akanṛ' acai koṭi viḷippa māṇumē.⁶⁶

Similar to the type of attachment of those who give without interruption, as if saying “Proceed, and experience the great riches hiding no evil!” on top of the mansions that shine with gems without any impurities, the large waving banners seem to invite [people] in.

65 *Tēmpāvaṇi* 11, 8: *pūvulak' iyalp' anṛ' am por poli maṇi nakaram poṇṇ ār | tēvulak' urit' enṛ' aṅkaṭ ṭelintu pukkiṭum enṛ' āḷi | tāv' ulak' irutta veḷḷit tā ṭaḷaiy iṭṭatē pōr | kōv ulav' iṇci cūḷṇta kuvaḷai nīḷ akaḷit tōrram*.

66 *Tēmpāvaṇi* 11, 19. As it emerged in conversation with N. Govindarajan (whom I thank for his insights), the verb *ceṇmiṇ* is problematic, because *cel* means “to go” (and not “to come”) so technically the banners are not calling people inside the city. They are probably gesturing people to go somewhere, maybe telling them to follow the direction of their movement.

The first line of this verse compares the banners on top of the wall to people who are without attachments, since they are generous to the point of giving all the time. Besides referring to the Christian quality of charity, this line points to a number of verses in the *Tirukkūṟaḷ* that emphasize the importance of giving.⁶⁷ What is striking here, though, is the second half of the verse, which contains again a *taṟkuṟippērravaṇi*. The banners waving on the walls seem to invite visitors to proceed and enjoy the happiness and wealth of the city, which hides no evil. This image is particularly powerful because it builds upon a very famous passage in the *Cilappatikāram*, where the banners waving on the walls of Madurai seem to warn Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṇ about the sorrows and tragedy that will befall them if they enter the city, as if trying to stop them from entering.⁶⁸ Our verse inverts the image, thus adding a third layer of complexity to Beschi's literary strategy. It shows how the creation—including indirect, human creation, like cities and houses—participates in the plan of the creator, and is benevolent towards Christians, through the use of figures such as similitude and *taṟkuṟippērravaṇi*. It simultaneously shows how this reconfigured nature is connected with a new type of Tamil poetry, which builds upon but also transcends the works of classical Tamil authors.

These passages show that Beschi knew and understood Tamil poetical codes, the language of *tiṇai* as well as that of *alaṅkāram*, and used both to blend Christianity into the local natural landscape as it was represented in literature. In a way, while the *Ñāṇamūyarcī* we analyzed in Chapter Two attempted to reconfigure the eyes of the catechists so that they would see the working of the Christian God in the nature surrounding them, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* presents in front of those same eyes a Christianized nature in action. But how to understand the connection between the mission, that is the physical movement of Christianity into the Tamil land, and the literary reconfiguration of nature in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*? How to think of imported flower seeds and Tamil verses as part of a coherent project? Embedded within Beschi's poetical corpus, the history of the miracle of the journey of the Santa Casa to Loreto offers a powerful model for this physical and cultural *translatio*.⁶⁹

67 See especially decades XXII and XXIII, which Beschi also translated into Tamil (Pope, *The Sacred Kurral*, 230–231).

68 See Iḷaṅkōvaṭikaḷ, *Ācīriyar iḷaṅkōvaṭikaḷ iyaṟriyaruḷiya cilappatikāram* (Ceṇṇai: Tirunelvēlit teṇṇintiya caivacittānta nūṟpatippuk kaḷakam, 1969), *maturaik kāṇṭam, puṇaṇṇēri iṟutta kātai*, 189–190: *pōr uḷaṇ' eṭutta āṟ eyil neṭuṇ koṭi | vāral eṇṇaṇa pōl maṟittuk kai kāṭṭa*. “The tall banners on the beautiful walls that ward off war flapped as if raising a hand to stop them, as if saying ‘Don't come.’”

69 On the relationship between theories of translation and *translatio studii et imperii* in the middle ages, see Natalia Petrovskaja, “*Translatio* and Translation: The Duality of the

The Santa Casa in Loreto is allegedly the Nazareth house where Mary was born, grew up, and lived with Joseph and Jesus. According to Catholic tradition, the angels saved the house from destruction during Muslim rule in Palestine by carrying it first to the Rijeka, in today's Croatia, and then to its final destination on the hilltop town of Loreto in Italy's Marche region. Indeed, from the sixteenth century onwards a small brick house possibly from Palestine was enshrined in a monumental Baroque church in Loreto, and the town became an important center for pilgrimage. The place was so dear to Beschi that the *translatio* of the Santa Casa is among the events Jesus reveals to Joseph in the *Tēmpāvāṇi*, while prophesying about the future glory of the country of Italy:

I wield the only one *cakra*, and the whole world is the temple where I am enthroned. How will I show the nature of that country, whose riches exceed those of the incomparable ocean surrounding the earth? Crossing the waters, I will make our home go there, and make it a refuge in this world—there, in the country of Italy, I will make this house shine brighter than the disc of the sun!⁷⁰

“After those who raise flags with the crescent moon became rulers here, everyone suffers greatly. They oppose the path of the Veda, and will surely destroy this house!” Thinking so, the angels will take it, and traveling with the speed of their wings, they will cross the cool ocean. Then, in the good country of Italy, they will place it on top of a mountain to shine as a lamp given by God, like the sun.⁷¹

Concept from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period,” *Doshisha Studies in English* 99 (2018): 115–136; for the early modern relationship between England and America as shaped by these categories, Kristina Bross, *Future History: Global Fantasies in Seventeenth-Century American and British Writings* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2017), esp. 28–32. The case I study is related but different; I try to show how *translatio* in the case of Loreto and the mission did not imply unidirectional movement, but rather the simultaneous coexistence of the Church in many particular locations.

70 *Tēmpāvāṇi* XXXII, 25: *ōr āliṃ uruṭṭiya nāṇ vīrīrukkūṇi kōyil eṇakk’ ulakil ākip | pār āliṃ oṇr’ iṇaiyāp paṭar celva nāṭṭ’ iyal yāṇ pakarvat’ eṇṇa | nīr āli kaṭant’ aṇkaṇṇ im maṇai ceṇr’ aṭaikkalamē nilattir ceyt’ āṇk’ | ōr āliṃ iraviyīṇ iṇv ill ilaṇkac ceyum ittāliya nāt’ aṇrō.*

71 *Tēmpāvāṇi* XXXII, 26: *pīrai tanta koṭṭy uyarttōr piṇp’ iṇkaṇṇ āṇṭ’ evarum perit’ aluṇka | marai tanta nerī nūtt’ im maṇaiṇk’ aliv’ ām eṇr’ itaṇai vāṇōr ēntic | cīrai tanta vicaiyoṭu pōy teṇ kaṭalaik kaṭant’ ittāliya nāṇ nāṭṭil | irai tanta viṭakkāka malai neṇṇir iraviyaip pōl ilaṇkav uyppār.*

These verses describe the risks the Santa Casa will face in Palestine under Muslim rule, its journey to Italy, and how after reaching Loreto it would become a refuge for everyone in this world.⁷² The word employed for refuge is *aṭaikkalam*, which by now we have learnt to identify as a key-term in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. Indeed, Beschi conceived of Tirukkāvalūr, and of Mary as present there, as the foremost place of *aṭaikkalam* in the Tamil country. This shared function is the first clue as to the analogy between Beschi's small church on the banks of the Kaveri and the holy house in Loreto, a connection reaffirmed in the *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*. Listen to the following verse, which elaborates upon the *maṣam* theme and reports the speech of a hunter who is offended by the inappropriate marriage request to a woman of his tribe:

nāṇi pūṭṭiya cāpam ēntiya vīra veṅkara vēṭaṇār
nāṇav uḷ cuṭu tīya col ko(ṇ)ṭu nammaiy eḷḷiṇār āraṭā
cēṇi pūṭṭiya kompar ēntiya tēral ūṭṭiya kāvalūrc
cīriṇāl oru tēva māṇ oru cīyamē karuvuṟrakār
pāṇi pūṭṭiyav eṅka ṭārmalai parriy eṅ kuṭil eytiṇāl
pātam ūṇriyav āy iṟāmarai pūṭta kāt' eṇav āy aṭā
tūṇi pūṭṭiyav ampu pōl avaḷ pukka ciṟṟil alarnta pūt
tūya tēṇ ukav iṇṇum vāṭilai cūḷntu vāḷttiṭa vaṇṭarō.⁷³

Who are those who ridicule us with wicked words that burn, and shame our hearts—*us*, hunters with heroic fiery hands, carrying bows with fastened bow-strings? The beautiful one in Tirukkāvalūr, where honey trickles from branches reaching up to the sky, that unique divine deer, when the only lion [Jesus] was in her womb, took shelter on our hill in bloom and filled with honey, and reached our hut. Then, you know, the house where she set her feet became like a grove blossoming with lotuses! Even now, the flowers that blossomed in the little house she entered, like an arrow in its quiver, drip honey, and do not wither, and the angels surround the place singing her praise.

72 This is one among the few scattered mentions of Islam in the Catholic texts of this period; yet these two religious communities were contiguous in the Tamil land at this time, and missionaries even observed how Tamil people would not convert easily to Islam, in order to understand what strategy to deploy (see especially Louis Noël de Bourzes to Michelangelo Tamburini, *Litteræ Annuæ Missionis Madurensis anni 1713* (Madurai mission, 25 July 1714), ARSI, Goa 54, ff. 516^r–541^v).

73 *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, 15.

This little poem is quite complex, and refers at the same time to the nativity and to the Santa Casa now in Loreto. First, the poem talks about Mary taking refuge in a grotto (*kuṭil*) on the hunters' hill while pregnant, and this is certainly a reference to the birth of Jesus in a hut. The second part of the poem mentions first a house (*il*), and then a small house (*cīrril*) that the commentators identify with the house of the holy family in Nazareth. The description of angels surrounding the place is a strong clue in favor of this interpretation, since the common iconography of the Madonna of Loreto portrays her standing on the top of her house, surrounded by angels. What is new and unexpected about this verse is the location of the Santa Casa on the Tamil hills populated by *maravar* hunters. This brings to mind the recent study by Karin Vélez, which shows how after the first relocation from Palestine to Italy via Croatia, the Santa Casa continued its journey. Thanks to Jesuit missionaries, replicas of the Loreto sanctuary were erected in the territories of their north, central, and south American missions.⁷⁴

In the case of South India, we have an example of literary relocation that might have corresponded to a material one, if, as it seems, Beschi conceived of the church at Tirukkāvalūr as another Loreto. The Santa Casa thus offers a model for thinking about our initial question regarding the connection between the physical movement of the mission into the Tamil land, and the literary reconfiguration of nature in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. First, the Santa Casa is present in multiple places at once—in Palestine, where the fourth wall of Mary's house is still standing; in Italy; and in the "new world." Yet while traveling from one place to the other, the house is also translated into new architectural codes, from a middle-eastern brick house to a white marble Baroque church, from an American wooden chapel to a humble hut on a Tamil hill. More poignantly, the physical journey of the Santa Casa shows how the house of Mary went from being a fragment of the gospel narrative, which prefigures and yet is different from the history of the mission, to becoming an actual actor in that history. In other words, the Loreto story relies upon but also explodes the Christian hermeneutical mechanism of figuration—which is crucial in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*—by eliminating the spatial and temporal distance between the two elements of that mechanism. The house of Mary in Nazareth is not just a prefiguration of the place of protection that churches dedicated to her will be in the future. It is really present in Loreto, as well as in the many Loreto replicas

74 See the useful maps in Karin Vélez, *The Miraculous Flying House of Loreto: Spreading Catholicism in the Early Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 4–6.

around the world.⁷⁵ Analogously, descriptions of landscape in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* are not simply a form of accommodation to local norms of literary representation (granted, they are *also* that) but rather the description of a Christian natural and spiritual world really present in the mountains, rivers, and fields of the Tamil country.

This simultaneous presence of the Santa Casa in multiple places is possible because its journey occurs in the infinite, instantaneous time of the angels. The angelic transportation allows a plurality of Loretos to exist at the same time, because the angels are not within time. This logic, which at first glance may appear alien to us, is an integral part of Beschi's world. In the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, the reoriented Tamil nature we have explored is populated by Christian forces that defy the logic of human time and human space. When moving from the descriptive to the narrative level, we encounter characters previously almost unknown in Tamil, like angels and saints, often engaged in a cosmic fight against demons.⁷⁶ The fight is already won by God, as the story of his human incarnation in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* itself repeatedly demonstrates, but nevertheless real. Instrumental to this victory at the same time within and outside the time of history are the angels, ubiquitous figures in the poem, who guide Joseph's every step from his childhood until his death. In the fourth canto, for instance, the young Joseph is heading towards a mountain covered with forest, wishing to renounce the world and to live there as an ascetic. On his way, he encounters an angel disguised as an old hermit, who convinces him with wise words that remaining virtuous while living in the world has more merits than renouncing the world altogether:

"The jasmine, which blossoms when the clouds are dark, is exceptionally fragrant. When a ship fears the blowing of strong winds, will it accumulate any wealth? Will the desired victory be achieved by retreating and not engaging in battle? Aren't you a young man looking for beautiful wisdom?" asked the elderly man.⁷⁷

75 Throughout this passage I use the category of "presence" in a strong way, to indicate a God that is really present in the Tamil land, inspired by the recent, groundbreaking work by Robert Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016).

76 Some of these supernatural beings—especially angels—had of course already become part of the Tamil literary landscape thanks to Muslim authors. The words used by Catholic poets to identify angels, such as *vāṇōr*, *vāṇavar*, *cammaṇacukaḷ*, would offer a good entry point to study the connection between Christian and earlier translation strategies by Muslim authors.

77 *Tēmpāvaṇi* IV, 30: *kār mukatt' alaru mullai kaṭi mukatt' imaikkum vaṇkāl | ūr mukatt' aṇcu*

After a long conversation along these lines, the old man disappears. Joseph understands that he was an angel sent by God to guide him, turns back, and continues his life that will lead him to marry the young Mary. This is just one example of the multiple ways in which angels take an active part in the history of salvation retold in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. Elsewhere in the poem, Gabriel delivers God's messages, while other angels worship, help, advice, or simply accompany the holy family throughout their journey. Innumerable verses in the poem are hymns of praise sung by the angels in honor of Joseph, Mary, or Jesus, like the three verses that opened this chapter. Another, perhaps more peculiar role that angels fulfill in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* is that of storytellers. It is thanks to angels, and their explanations during the travels and ordeals faced by the holy family, that we learn about old-testament stories, and other episodes unrelated to the main plot. In this role as well, they create a short-circuit between biblical time, the story of the gospels, and the Madurai mission. In short, it is impossible to overemphasize the importance of angels in the poem, and in the articulation of a Catholic cosmology in the Tamil country.⁷⁸

4 Tamil Demons and Christian Wonder

Angels have yet another function in the poem, that of protecting men and women from the attacks of the demons (*pēy*). This ability of the angels plays an important role within popular Catholic devotion in South India, which is mirrored in literature. The Italian Jesuit Giacomo Tommaso de' Rossi, for instance, devoted a whole book of Tamil sermons to Tuesday devotions to the angels, and sometime in the nineteenth century the façade of the church he erected in the village of Carukaṇi was covered with a bas-relief depicting archangel Michael and his army of angels defeating the demons.⁷⁹ Around the same period, the ritual chariot (*tēr*) of Āvūr was covered in carvings represented the same fight between angels and demons, as we observed in Chapter One. Similarly, popular Catholic performances from the eighteenth century onwards, most famously

nāvāy uṭait tiruk koṇaruṇ kollō | pōr mukatt' etirā nūṅkiṇ puṇarumō vīlainta verri | ēr mukatt' uṇarvīr rērtav ilavalōy eṇṇāṇ mūttōṇ.

78 Angels are important in Catholic devotion more generally (remember how Beschi wrote a poem on the custodian angel). Baroque treatises on the angels have been collected in Carlo Ossola, ed., *Gli angeli custodi. Storia e figure dell' «amico vero»* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2008).

79 A good (and the only available) analysis of Giacomo Tommaso de' Rossi's works is Cāmi-muttu, *Ciṇṇa cavēriyār*.

Easter plays (*paskā nāṭakam*) and plays of the sepulcher (*kallarai nāṭakam*), almost invariably begin with long dialogues and skirmishes between angels and demons.⁸⁰

In these staged confrontations, demons are often the most intriguing characters, probably because, unlike the universal and benign forces of the angels, they are intimately connected with the imperfect human world they contributed to creating. In the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, this is mostly the Hindu world of eighteenth-century South India. How does the text establish this connection? First of all, and maybe somewhat banally, demons in the poem are always called either *pēy*, *picācu*, or sometimes more esoterically *kuṇṇiku*. These are the names of the ghosts that populate Kāli's retinue, most famously portrayed in the *Kaliṅkattupparaṇi*. More poignantly for us, these are also the names used to identify the supernatural forces responsible for possession in Tamil villages, as studied by anthropologist Isabelle Nabokov.⁸¹ Indeed, demons retain in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* the tendency to possess vulnerable women, as we will see shortly. Yet this is only one among the many tricks at the disposal of Beschi's *pēys*, a word referring to Tamil ghosts as well as to the fallen angels of the Catholic tradition. In this second role, they are actually the cause for the spread of all those wrong beliefs that Beschi and his confrères would have identified as "Indian paganism," including popular village beliefs and practices, and more elite expression of Hinduism. In other words, demons are not identified with the Hindu gods, but they create the illusion of the existence of those gods, and can act as ones if need be.

We read about demons especially in the cantos describing the flight of the holy family into Egypt, and the time they spent there in the city of Heliopolis. This episode takes up very little space in the gospels and in Ágrede's *Mystica ciudad*, but grows disproportionately in Beschi's version of the story.⁸² Joseph

80 On the tradition of Catholic *nāṭakam*, see the PhD dissertation by Em. Es. Kānti Mēri, "*Tamiḷakattiḷ, kiṛistava nāṭaka araṅkukaḷil pāskā nāṭakaṅkaḷ*—Christian theatres in Tamilnadu with special reference to Passion plays" (PhD diss., Putuvai palkalaik kaḷakam, 1992); on the *kallarai nāṭakam* performed at Kāmanāyakkappaṭṭi, see Ā. Civacuppīramaṇiyan, *Kallarai vacakappā (kūttunāṭakam)* (Pālaiyaṅkōṭṭai: Nāṭṭar valakkāṛriyal āyvu maiyam, tūya cavēriyār (taṇṇāṭcīk) kallūri, 2007). While visiting the village of Eṭappāṭi in August 2017, a ten-years old boy proudly showed me his "*pēy* dance," which he had performed during the previous year's Easter drama, in the open-air stage adjacent the eighteenth-century village church; on Eṭappāṭi and its theater, see A. Jekkap, "Puṇita celvanāyaki aṇṇai ālayam paṅku varalāru," *Mariyīṇ aṇṇu mariyīṇ makattuvaṅkaḷ* 2, 3 (2014): 9–12.

81 Isabelle Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self: An Ethnography of Tamil Rituals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); see the discussion later in the chapter.

82 The text of the *Mystica ciudad* (without counting the notes to the text) takes up just above one thousand pages in the 1722 edition I have consulted, of which only about 30 are dedi-

sets out for Egypt with his family in the fourteenth canto, and returns only in the thirtieth canto. This means that seventeen out of the thirty-six cantos of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* are set either on the way to Egypt, or in Egypt. This literary device offers Beschi the occasion to introduce a number of biblical and non-biblical digressions. It is among these cantos, for instance, that we find the retelling of Tasso's episode of Roland in enchanted forest, first identified by Vinson.⁸³ Above all, the flight into Egypt allows Beschi to stage the consequences of the arrival of Jesus and the holy family in a non-Christian land. The barebones narrative structure follows Ágreða's version of the story, including the long journey, the ruin of local pagan temples when Jesus steps into Egypt, the council of the demons who want to understand why they have been dethroned, and the subsequent battle between the armies of Hell and the holy family.⁸⁴

Yet Beschi adds a number of details, such as descriptions of the meeting between the demons and their king (*pēykkaracaṇ*), partially inspired by the council of the demons in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*.⁸⁵ Beschi's demon king is as fearsome as Tasso's Pluton, his mouth spewing forth flesh and fire, his eyes shot through with blood, although this shared image is complemented in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* by a number of local elements. Beschi's king of demons has Śiva's dreadlocks and Ganapati's elephant trunk, his fangs are like crescent moons, his beard is as messy and intricate as coconut fibers, and he brandishes a trident with the power to shake the eight directions (XXIII, 6–8). This pastiche of a king presides over an assembly of frightened, nasty and competitive *pēys* who are quick to lose their tempers, and fight among themselves with grotesque results.

Beschi's work is unique in imagining such skirmishes and lengthy arguments. His *pēys* fight fiercely to decide who among them was the most successful in deceiving people in the past, and they shout and jump at each other until their king asks each of them to enumerate their evil deeds. The winner of this demonic context is predictably Cattanaṇacu (likely the transliteration of Ital-

cated to the flight into Egypt. The same episode takes up ten verses in the second chapter of Matthew's gospel (Matthew 2:13–23). The importance of this episode in the various historical reconfiguration of Christian sacred geography, especially during the middle ages, has been shown by Lucette Valensi, *La fuite en Egypte. Histoires d'Orient et d'Occident* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

83 Vinson, "Le Tasse dans la poésie tamoule."

84 Ágreða, *Mystica ciudad*, vol. 2, 204–236.

85 Torquato Tasso, *La Gerusalemme Liberata di Torqvato Tasso. Con le Figure di Bernardo CASTELLO; e le Annotationi di Scipio GENTILI, e di Giulio GVASTAVINI* (In Genova, 1590), 35–37.

ian *satanasso*), the demon responsible for the creation of the corrupted gods of India. By describing Cattaṇācu's deeds, Beschi embeds in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* a virulent attack against Hindu gods and myths, in verses that are hard to read—they offend something that many people held dear and true in the eighteenth century, as much as they do today—but are important to understanding the polemical aims and the readership Beschi envisioned for his work.⁸⁶ This is Cattaṇācu speaking:

I gave you a country streaked by rivers filled with gold, and surrounded by mountains where parade dark clouds filled with the water from the ocean holding precious stones. There, through deceits that create sin, I spread a darkness that killed wisdom, I made it a country full of vices, and brought worship to you.⁸⁷

Those who try counting the gods that arose there, they are bewildered! Those who behave like the gods they worship, they become sinners! Those who tell the story of those debauched gods, they are ashamed! Those who behave like the gods of such stories, they get themselves killed!⁸⁸

Crying in dismay because of the death of one's wife, adorned with the lovely moon; getting beaten, and running away from the wife; carrying one's wife on the head; smearing on one's forehead, like an ornament, the blood from her vagina—this is one game, I told them, showing the nature of the god who wears such ornaments.⁸⁹

86 Too often editors and translators of early modern Jesuit texts have removed this type of passages. See an explicit instance in Anand Amaladass and Richard Fox Young, *The Indian Christiad: A Concise Anthology of Didactic and Devotional Literature in Early Church Sanskrit* (Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1995), 105: "While translating this work, some sections [...] are omitted. The reason is simply that these sections are of a polemical nature, befitting the time in which they were written with their underlying conquering attitude to other religions. They do not interest us at the moment."

87 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIII, 56: *kāc' ulān kaṭali nīruṇ kār ulām varaiyuṇ cūḷntu | tēc' ulān cintu kīrun tēyamē enakkut tantāy | āc' ulān kuṭilatt' aṇkaṇṇ ariv' arav iruḷaiy uyttu | māc' ulān tēyam ākki vaṇakkamēy uṇakkuk koṭṭēṇ.*

88 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIII, 57: *ērriya tēvar eṇṇill eṇṇuvar kalaṅku vārum | pōrriya tēvar oppap purikuvar pukar koḷvārum | ārriya tēvar kātai araikuvar veḷku vāruṇ | cārriya tēvar pūṇṭa takav' uḷōr tamaik koḷvārum.*

89 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIII, 58: *puṇainilān aṇiy illāḷaip pōkkaḷāl ararri mālkal | maṇaiviyāl aṭi paṭṭ' oṭal maṇaiviyait talaiyir rāṅkal | aṇaiyaḷ kālpinirruccennūr aṇiy eṇa nutaḷir pūcal | inaṇiy elām pūcit tēvarkk' iyalum ōr vūḷaiyāṭṭ' eṇrēṇ.*

Coveting women who are common possession; lusting for the wives of others, and entering [their] flowers, naturally dripping with sweet honey, thus appeasing the heat from Kama's arrows; giving the back, shamefully hiding, in fear of his bow arched like a crescent moon—these are the sports of the gods, I told them, establishing them as lawful scripture.⁹⁰

The description of Cattānacū's evil deeds continues, insisting on the grotesquely sexual nature of Hindu gods, and on the bad model they offer to people, who nevertheless worship them, carrying them around in jubilant, noisy processions (*vilā*) (xxxiii, 63). The other way in which the stories concerning these false gods spread, tells Cattānacū, is by being painted on the high walls of local temples:

When women with long eyes hiding the tips of swords look at the stories of the gods on the temples that hide the face of the sky, after hiding their faces because of shame, shame removed, due to the confusion generated by their adorned faces, I made them fully worship the protagonists of those stories.⁹¹

Beyond the aggressive nature, this set of verses is important for a number of reasons. First, and most strikingly, it shows the obsession with sexuality and sexualized bodies that permeated such a large part of the early modern Catholic mission.⁹² Among the most common tropes in the letters and treatises by missionaries who had to negotiate their place in tropical India were the constant worries about the lust and concupiscence which they saw embodied in Hindu myths, art, and literature, and which were quick to captivate the minds and souls of their converts. These were paired with concerns for the body and its fluids, which are also evident in the textual production surrounding the Malabar Rites controversy and the local customs that convert Christians could

90 *Tēmpāvaṇi* xxiii, 59: *potu muraḥ mākāḥ nāḥaḥ pūḥa māḥaḥ vīḥaital taḥṇa | matumuraḥ malaruḥ pukka matucakaḥ kaḥai vepp' āḥṇal | vitumuraḥ kuḥi viḥk'aḥci veḥṇarav oḥittu nāḥal | itu muraḥ māḥaiyi nāḥṇṇi iraiyavarkk' ililai eḥṇēn.*

91 *Tēmpāvaṇi* xxiii, 64: *cēḥ mukam putaitta kōyir ṇṇṇiḥa tēvar kātai | vāḥmukam putaitta nṇṇ kaḥ maḥantaiyar kaḥṇa kālai | nāḥ mukam putaitta piḥṇai nāḥam āḥṇ' ataḥ ceytōrai | pūḥ mukam putaitta māḥayḥ polivoḥu vaḥṇaikac ceytēn.*

92 A broad overview on the history of the early modern Church and sexuality is Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2000), esp. 178–212.

keep.⁹³ Missionaries never tired of examining the different substances used to draw *tilakam* on the forehead, for example. Their efforts were mostly geared towards justifying the purity of dried cow-dung, a substance they allowed their own converts to use, but some texts produced in this context went as far as describing red *tilakam* with reference to menstrual blood.⁹⁴ This is uncannily reminiscent of Beschi's description of the god with a lover standing on his head in verse 58, a distorted version of Śiva's iconography.⁹⁵ In Hindu lore, this lover is none other than the sacred river Ganga, but in this verse, she becomes a woman whose menstrual blood (*kāl pinīrri cennūr*, literally "the red water from the womb") runs down his forehead.

This set of verses also offers a representation of Śiva that, notwithstanding the many distortions, reflects the early modern developments in Śaiva sectarian affiliation as they have been recently mapped by Elaine Fisher and others. Besides Śiva being recognizable as the god in stanza 58, who wept for the death of his wife Sati and holds a lover on his head, the poem refers to his *tiruvīlaiyāṭal* or sports, a key-term connected with the narrative of the sixty-four sports of Śiva that had become canonical by the seventeenth century thanks to Parañcoti's *Tiruvīlaiyāṭal purāṇam*. Fisher discusses the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭal purāṇam* as representing the crystallization of a widespread narrative that exceeded the boundaries of the textual domain, and unrolled from languages into paintings and performances, to become one of the first recognizable examples of public religion in South India. Beschi's work testifies to the public dimension of this narrative cycle, especially in the final two stanzas of Cattānacū's speech. In stanza 63, Cattānacū mentions how false gods are brought around in jubilant procession, a reference to public festivals like the

93 Indeed, for Jesuits in Southern India "the connection between blood, fertility, and sanctity was quite threatening, precisely because the equation was correct from their point of view, except that fertility, ideally, led to abundance in the celestial, not in the terrestrial, world" (Županov, *Missionary Tropics*, 180). The relationship between holiness and bodily fluids, especially blood and semen, in South India was first thematized in Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths*.

94 See for instance the first treatise published by Brandolini after his arrival in Rome to take up the cause of the Malabar Rites (*Giustificazione del praticato*, 165 ff.) that discusses the substance of the ashes.

95 In fact, the topos was associated by Catholic missionaries to different Hindu deities. Paolo Aranha told me in a personal communication (09/15/2021) that some Franciscans, opponents of the Jesuits in the Malabar Rites controversy and with a limited experience of India, testified to the Roman Inquisition, at the same time in which Beschi was active in India, that the red tilakas worn by Vaiṣṇava devotees referred to the menstrual blood that allegedly flew on Viṣṇu's forehead, as he was carrying his wife on his shoulders.

famous *cittirai* festival in Madurai. In stanza 64, translated above, he boasts that such stories (*katai*) are painted on temple walls, thus persuading even shy women to adore the false gods. Indeed, by the late seventeenth century representations of the games of Śiva had appeared in various temples in the Tamil country, including Chidambaram.⁹⁶ It is interesting that the target of mural paintings was, according to Beschi, women. This might be a reversal of the Catholic idea that images were books for the simple-minded and the ignorant, useful for explaining them the history of salvation. It might also reflect a sociological reality, and women might have been the ones to enjoy the paintings outside the temples, probably because they could not enter as often as men.⁹⁷

Finally, but most importantly for our discussion, the fact that Beschi decided to represent the tricks of *pēys* and *picācu* as being at the origin of more or less identifiable Śaiva myths and practices tells us quite a bit about his intended public. First of all, these verses imply that the readers of the poems would have a certain knowledge of Śaivism. After all, for a verse about menstrual blood flowing down from Śiva's head to be effective—to generate repulsion, as well as a sarcastic smile at the idiocy of those who might believe such a *monstrum* to be a god—the reader had to compare Beschi's version with the original image. This is another clue in the direction that the missionaries' main competitors on the ground were mostly non-Brahmanical Śaiva teachers. As we will see in Chapter Six, the few eighteenth-century *vēlāḷa* converts and catechists about whom we have some information converted from Śaivism. On the one hand, the fact that the verses are so bitterly hostile implies that readers would share the same opinion as Beschi, and would agree in condemning Śaiva beliefs and stories. As we saw in the introduction, unlike the work of Nobili, who one century ear-

96 Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*, 248 (n. 105).

97 Paintings are important for Beschi, who spends quite some time writing about them. Compare the verse we just read on the bad effects of paintings with this other one on the paintings in Jerusalem: *Tēmpāvaṇi* 11, 44: *tunṇarum eḷil ceyy inṇ'uṇṇum vīlikkuṇ curuti nūl inṇitṇiṇ kāṭṭap | poṇṇ arum ilāiyā nīrainirai cuvarir puṭaitt' elap palavuru kiḷampav | uṇṇ' arum vaṇappir kiḷar oḷi vāyṇtav uyir pēra cittiran tiṭṭi | piṇṇ aruṇ kavṇi kaṇṭ' ayaṇv' uṇṇi uraiyūm imaippum illāyṇnam ātō*. "To show the sweetness of Vedic books to the eyes, that feed on the love creating beauty hard to approximate, many sculptures, carved with craftsmanship out of gold, appear hanging on the walls in rows. While paintings are drawn, as if they were alive with intense brilliance, because of their beauty that appeals to the thought. Seeing such a sweet beauty, caught by bewilderment, one cannot talk, nor blink." See also the canto on a mansion of paintings (*Tēmpāvaṇi* xx) and compare the importance of painting in configuring early modern South Indian imagination (Shulman, *More than Real*, esp. 24–50).

lier was speaking to a community-to-be with the meager support of a handful of individual converts, and thus averted open polemics, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* was meant to be the social glue of an existing social and religious community. At the same time, virulent polemics were a feature of South India's multireligious life in the early modern period and well into the colonial period.⁹⁸ Intellectuals and poets from different religious communities read and responded to the carefully crafted attacks of their competitors, and it is likely not by chance that Beschi's work was at the center of one such controversy between Catholics and Śaivas at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Leaving these polemical stanzas aside for now, let us follow the *pēys* after they stop fighting among themselves, and decide to emerge from Hell to wage war against the holy family. This will be a pointless effort, since devils cannot harm Jesus and his holy parents. However, before ending the canto on their defeat, Beschi devotes dozens of verses to describing the fire, smoke, and noises of the demonic armies erupting from Hell, and the way the demons show off by attacking each other in bloody duels. The following two stanzas are but a small sample from this long virtuoso section:

puḷuvāyvaḷi kaṇvaḷi kaivaliyum puṇalotta verittira lūrṟuraṇiṇ
maḷuvāyvaḷi vēḷvaḷi vilvaḷiyum maliyakkipu kaippama tattavuvāk
keḷuvāyvaḷi pāypari vāyvaḷiyuṇ kilipaṭṭaka ṇattiṭi yotteriṭi
vuḷuvāyvaḷi maṇvaḷi vāṇvaḷiyum veruvuṟṟaḷa laccamar kāṭṭiṇavē.

puḷu vāy vaḷi, kaṇ vaḷi, kai vaḷiyum puṇal otta erittiraḷ ūṟru uṟa; nīṇ
maḷu vāy vaḷi, vēḷ vaḷi, vilvaḷiyum mali akki pukaippa; matatta uvā
keḷu vāy vaḷi, pāy pari vāy vaḷiyum kilipaṭṭa kaṇattu iṭiyottu eriti,
viḷu vāy vaḷi, maṇ vaḷi vāṇ vaḷiyum veru uṟru aḷala; camar kāṭṭiṇavē.⁹⁹

From their worm-filled mouth, their eyes, and their hands flames of fire flow, like a river. The heavy fire from their bows, spears, and the tips of their long axes creates smoke, and the mouths of rutting elephants and leaping horses glow like lightening breaking through that thick cloud. As they fall down, they burn and scare both the earth and the sky, and wage war.

98 A classical study on the subject is Kenneth W. Jones (ed.) *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

99 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIV, 25.

mēkaṅkaḷ melintara vēkumeṇā mēkanturu kiṇṇiṭi vēkumeṇā
 mākaṅkaḷa ṭaṅkilum vēkumeṇā vāṇiṇṇiri veṇcuṭar vēkumeṇā
 nākaṅkaḷo ṭumpunaḷ vēkumeṇā nālvampalo ṭuṅkaṭal vēkumeṇā
 vēkaṅkaḷu ṇarntuḷam vēkumeṇā vēkaṅkoṭu venticai yōrporuvār.

mēkaṅkaḷ melintu ara vēkum eṇā, mēkam turukiṇṇu iṭi vēkum eṇā,
 mākaṅkaḷ aṭaṅkilum vēkum eṇā, vāṇiṇ tiri veṇcuṭar vēkum eṇā,
 nākaṅkaḷoṭum punaḷ vēkum eṇā, nāl vampaloṭum kaṭal vēkum eṇā,
 vēkaṅkaḷ uṇarntu uḷam vēkum eṇā, vēkam koṭu venticaiyōr poruvār.¹⁰⁰

As the clouds burn to fade and disappear, as the thundering that resonates in the clouds burns, as the entire sky burns, as the sun that crosses the sky itself burns, as the streams and the hills burn, as the ocean that expands in the four directions burns, as the mind also burns by conceiving of that heat, the people of the burning direction fight furiously.

In this couplet depicting the armies of *pēys* appearing at the horizon, the long lines of the *ācīriyaviruttam* offer Beschi the opportunity to play with sound and rhythm, employing different types of ornaments known as *vaṇṇam*.¹⁰¹ In stanza 25, for instance, besides the initial rhyme, we see the two letters *vaḷi* repeated at the end of the first and second foot in line 1, 2, and 4, as well as in the middle of the third foot, an effect called *iyaiṇu*. In verse 26, the final repetition of the same metre *vēkumeṇā* in third and sixth position, with the sole exception of the final line, creates both assonance and a very specific cadence. Many verses in this passage display similar *vaṇṇam* ornamentations that help create the soundscape of the battlefield, and contribute to representing the armies of the devils as a wondrous, if monstrous, appearance.

This takes us back to the issue of the *meraviglioso*, and to Tasso's definition of the epic poem as creating wonder. The definition of the Christian realm of wonder was hotly debated in late-Renaissance and Baroque Europe. Could it include the gods of Greek and Roman mythology? What about devils, ghosts, fairies, and other supernatural beings? Tasso was adamant in saying that epic

100 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIV, 26.

101 The importance of mastering *vaṇṇam* for Beschi is clear from his boasting, in the grammar of literary Tamil, that he used more *cantam* variations (rhythms depending on *vaṇṇam*) than Kampaṇ (Beschi, *Grammatica Latino-Tamulica, ubi de elegantiori ...*, 84; Idem, *A Grammar of the High Dialect*, 94–95); moreover, the final paratext (an *ācīriyam* verse) of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* lists the number of *vaṇṇam* in the poem (90) together with the number of verses (*pā*) and cantos (*paṭalam*), thus showing how this was considered an defining feature of the poem by its early readers.

should offer a plausible (*verosimile*) representation of the world, which meant for him a representation of the world as animated by Christian forces. Beschi adheres to this vision, and in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* avoids any Latin or Indian mythology. He uses instead all the elements of the Christian *meraviglioso* at his disposal, including angels and saints, the wondrous results of asceticism and faith, miracles, but also devils and their tricks, visions and false dreams, and the illusions of the human mind. Whenever the text takes up this enhanced formal and imaginative mode, it is usually paired with an intensified use of figures of sound and meaning, and effectively triggers attraction or repulsion, praise or blame, thus generating via emotional responses the didactic effect that Beschi set out to achieve with his poem.

5 Staged Conversions

Turning our attention back to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, the relationship between their history and the history of the mission is at the core of the cantos devoted to the flight of the family into Egypt. As already mentioned, this episode is short in Ágreda's account, but takes up several cantos in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, and offers Beschi the occasion to describe the holy family living in a pagan country. After settling in the city of Heliopolis, young Jesus asks his father Joseph to evangelize the people of Egypt in order to save them from the tricks of those devils who attacked them when they entered the country (xxvii, 9–18). This leads to the three long cantos to which we now turn (xxvii–xix), which stage the conversations between Joseph and the people of Egypt, and address in the meantime some of the most pressing issues facing missionaries and their catechists in South India. However, these dialogues are not merely instrumental acts of ventriloquism of Beschi's present in South India.¹⁰² We should take seriously the fact that the *Tēmpāvaṇi* is a retelling of a sacred history, the history *par excellence* for every Christian, and that Beschi thought his poem to spring from a divinely inspired vision of that history that Mary gave to María de Ágreda and, indirectly, to him. The best way to explain the relationship between Beschi's present and that history, without banalizing any of the two dimensions, is through the exegetical strategy of figuration.¹⁰³

102 On Jesuit ethnographic modes of writing and ventriloquism, see Ginzburg, "Alien Voices."

103 I use the concept as it has been explained in Erich Auerbach, *Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014),

According to Erich Auerbach, “*figura* is something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical.”¹⁰⁴ In this perspective, the Egyptian conversations and the experience of the mission in the Tamil country are equally real, and most importantly for us, they talk about one another. Since the Madurai mission was prefigured by the missionary activity of Joseph in Egypt, discussing issues central to Tamil Catholicism offers Beschi a way to understand, and talk about, the experience of Joseph. In turn, figuration allows for the conversations between Joseph and the people of Egypt as Beschi imagined them to become realistic representations of possible modes of Christian interior life in the Tamil country, and of the moral predicament faced by new converts in the Madurai mission. Significantly, Joseph’s interlocutors—a mendicant, *Civācivaṇ*; a soldier, *Vāmaṇ*; and an old woman, *Curami*—are all from lower-class backgrounds, if we can at all apply this category to the early modern Tamil region. Certainly, they are far removed from Nobili’s Brahman interlocutors, and yet they are confronted with the existential dilemma implied in the choice of embracing or rejecting Christianity. With a move that Auerbach has identified as typical of Christian realism, these chapters explore the depth of the choice that Christianity forced these humble characters to make, and they dwell in the possible tragic nature of the outcome. In a way, they are a recasting of Tamil interior life, *akam*, in a Christian mode.¹⁰⁵ Most conspicuously, the inner life of the self in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* is not anymore a life of love and feelings, but rather of faith and choice. By offering a vivid image of such an alternative interior landscape, these cantos acquire a meta-poetical tone that will be particularly evident in the second conversation between Joseph and *Vāmaṇ*; but let us proceed in order.

5.1 *The Temptations of Rebirth*

In the first conversation with the people of Egypt, narrated in canto xxvii, Joseph begins by explaining the importance of charity through the story of Tobias, but after a point his main interlocutor becomes an ascetic whose name and appearance remind us of the Tamil Śaiva practitioners of the early modern period.¹⁰⁶

65–113 (a recent edition of his famous 1938 essay *Figura*); and Id., *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 73–76.

104 Auerbach, *Time, History, and Literature*, 79.

105 Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 50–76; and 521–524.

106 *Tēmpāvaṇi* xxvii, 80: *kōlam iṭṭav aṅkak kuṭam ottu avaṇ | cūlam akk’ aṇi kokk’ aṇi tokk’ aṇi | cāla mikka tavatt’ urut tāṅki naṇ | cīlam aṇṇa civācivaṇ ceppināṇ*.

Then, similar to a pot with designs to make it beautiful, wearing a trident, bead necklaces, crane feathers, and swinging earrings, thus assuming the appearance of a great ascetic, but without the good behavior, Civācivaṇ spoke.¹⁰⁷

Immediately after making his appearance, Civācivaṇ raises two difficult questions, which allow Beschi to confront two theological issues central to the Malabar Rites controversy, and to the ethical and social life of the Madurai mission. First, Civācivaṇ asks St. Joseph, do souls reincarnate? If they do not, how is it possible to explain social hierarchy, and the fact that certain people are poor and suffer, while others are wealthy and live a happy life? Joseph replies to the question of rebirth with the arsenal of theoretical weapons the mission had been developing in India and elsewhere for more than a century.¹⁰⁸ He states that souls are tied to a body only once, and afterwards undergo individual and final judgment. So eternal Heaven and Hell are the punishment and reward of the souls, not rebirth. The second question by Civācivaṇ is trickier. How can one justify injustice and social differences without rebirth? Here, the poem aligns with the Jesuit answer to this question at the time. Social hierarchy was considered part of God's creation plan, not dissimilar from the natural order, and did not imply any value judgment on the creatures:

Have all moving beings one nature, all the trees the same fruit? On earth, does the soil give everywhere the same crop? Do we all have the same face? [Human] conditions are many, but faultless, glorious virtue is common to all castes. It is just one, without gradation, and should be performed everywhere. The wise men know that exterior differences are really nothing.¹⁰⁹

107 This is another reference to the *Tirukkuraḷ*-*Civācintāmaṇi* trope we analyzed in Chapter Four.

108 On the issue of rebirth for Jesuit missionaries throughout Asia, see Francis X. Clooney, "Jesuit Intellectual Practice in Early Modernity: The Pan-Asian Argument against Rebirth," in *The Jesuits and Globalization: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Challenges*, eds Thomas Banchoff and José Casanova (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 49–68.

109 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXVII, 99: *calatt' ellām ōr nilaiyō tarukk' ellām ōr kaṇiyō taraṇiy enikum | nilatt' ellām ōr vīḷaivō namakk' ellām ōr mukamō nilaiyum pall āyk | kulatt' ellām potu niṇṇru kuṇ-rāc cīr aram onrē kurai onr' inri | pulatt' ellām ākum eniṇ pūra vikirtam onr' enṇār pulamai mikkōr.*

Most of these issues had already been discussed by Beschi's predecessors in the Madurai mission, especially Nobili, whose arguments and influence are visible throughout this canto. For instance, Nobili often used an argument analogous to the one in the stanza we just read—that people might be socially different, but everyone is nevertheless equal in front of God. He usually backed it up with the proverb “when it comes to Heaven, a servant and the *Toṇṭaimaṇ* king are equally good.”¹¹⁰ More generally, Nobili thought and wrote multiple times about rebirth. Jesuit letters from the seventeenth century record his lively discussions on this matter with Brahmans in Madurai, and he composed an entire treatise in Tamil (and possibly Sanskrit too), the *Puṇarjanma ākṣepam*, in order to refute the theoretical tenets of rebirth.¹¹¹ The influence of Nobili's texts on Beschi are clear in the following stanza, which offers a description of the attributes of the true God:

He exists by his own power, he is without beginning, and without a form pertaining to the senses, he is endowed of all enduring good qualities, he pervades everywhere, he is the cause for the creation of everything at once, without any external power; this is the nature of the true God worshipped in all the worlds, beginning with the heavens shining in gold!¹¹²

Beschi offers here a Tamil poetical recasting of the characteristics of the true God first identified by Nobili, whose preferred theological vocabulary was however Sanskrit. Compare this with the list in Nobili's *Kaṭavuḷ nirṇayam*, a short text devoted to the systematic explanation of God's attributes: self-existent (*svayambhu*); without beginning (*anāti*); without body (*aśārīri*); naturally possessed of all good qualities (*samastaśubha-svarūpiyaḥ*); all-pervasive

110 *Ñāṇōpatēca kuṛippiṭam*, 73: *corkkavācalukkut tōṭṭiyum toṇṭaimāṇuñ cari enṇru collukirārkalē. appaṭiyē mōkṣattukkup paḷḷaṇuñ cari irācāvum cari. evaṇ taṇṇai uṇṭākkina karttanai aṇintu, avar vētattin paṭiyē naṭantāṇō avaṇukkē karaiyēṇṇam oḷiya maṇṇpaṭiy alla.*

111 On this text, see Gérard Colas and U. Colas-Chauhan, “Une pensée en morceaux. Two Works from the Carnatic Mission: A Refutation of Metempsychosis in Sanskrit and a Collection of Sermons in Telugu,” in *Intercultural Encounter and the Jesuit Mission in South Asia (16th–18th Century)*, eds Ines G. Županov and Anand Amaladass (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2014), 62–87; *Id.* “An 18th Century ‘Refutation of Metempsychosis’ in Sanskrit,” *Religions* 8, 9 (2017); and the translation and analysis in Anand Amaladass, *Refutation of Rebirth. Punarjanma ākṣepam by Robert de Nobili S.J.*

112 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXVII, 157: *taṇ vayatt' ātaṇ mutal ilaṇ ātal takum poriy uruv ilaṇ ātal | maṇ vayatt' ellā nalam uḷaṇ ātal vayiṇ roṇum viyāpakaṇ ātal | piṇ vayatt' inṇiy oruṇk'utaṇ aṇaitum piṇappitta kāraṇaṇ ātal | poṇ vayatt' oḷir vāṇ mutal elāv ulakum pōṇru meyyiraimaiyi nilaiyē.*

(*sarvavyāpi*); Lord of all (*sarveśa*).¹¹³ Beschi is clearly drawing upon the same list, and throughout the chapter summarizes many of the theological and ethical concerns at the center of Nobili's œuvre in Tamil. However, Beschi translates them from the technical and Sanskrit-inspired idiom preferred by his predecessors into Tamil, and this choice is another indication of his intended readership.¹¹⁴ Nobili aimed to be in conversation with Brahmans whose spoken language was Tamil, but whose philosophical language was Sanskrit. Beschi, on the other hand, wrote for people who had an extensive and articulated Tamil vocabulary to discuss theological, philosophical, and poetological matters.

Beschi knew Nobili's œuvre well, then, and engaged with it in multiple ways. He praised his predecessor in the introduction to the *Vētavilakkam*, and suggested his catechists read Nobili's *Ñāṇōpatēcam: irupattēṭṭu piracaṅkaṅkaḷ*. He also included in his grammars and dictionaries explanations of the peculiar, Sanskrit-inspired language used by Nobili, sometimes criticizing its lack of elegance, but always recognizing its importance as an idiom of Christian theology in Tamil.¹¹⁵ The specter of Nobili that hunts this canto is coherent with the most important message conveyed by the conversation of Civācivaṇ and Joseph, which regards the role of (Christian) selves in the social hierarchy in the Tamil land. Like Nobili, and like most missionaries who practiced accommodation in the early eighteenth century, Beschi believed India's caste hierarchy (referred to in verse 99 with the world *kulam*) to be a good example of the order of creation as willed by God.¹¹⁶ The next canto turns to another aspect of social life (and hierarchy) in the Tamil land that Catholic converts struggled to negotiate, namely the relationship between the sexes.

113 *Kaṭavuḷ nirṇayam*, 5. A translation is Anand Amaladass and Francis X. Clooney, *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise: Three Treatises by Roberto de Nobili SJ, Missionary and Scholar in 17th Century India* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000), 306–307.

114 The recasting of texts in prose into more properly literary/poetical Tamil was also a common process among Muslim intellectuals in the region, as shown by Torsten Tschacher, "Rendering the Word of God," paper presented at the Chicago Tamil Forum (University of Chicago, 25 May 2019).

115 Compare the references collected in Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar*, 255–259.

116 The non-contradiction between caste and religious belonging, and the irrelevance of caste for the salvation of a true devotee, is a Christian theme, as we saw in the previous chapters; but it also had a long elaboration in Tamil. One important locus of reflection on such issues in the Tamil Śaiva tradition is the story of Saint Nantaṇār, analyzed in detail in Sascha Ebeling, "Another Tomorrow for Nantaṇār: The Continuation and Re-Invention of a Medieval South-Indian Untouchable Saint," in *Geschichte und Geschichten. Historiographie und Hagiographie in der asiatischen Religionsgeschichte*, Acta Universitatis Upsalien-sis, Historia religionum 30, ed. Peter Schalk et al. (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2010), 433–516.

5.2 *The Devil Is a Woman*

The second canto (xviii) in the Egyptian trilogy focuses on the conversation between Joseph and the soldier Vāmaṇ, and is probably the single most popular passage in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. In the early nineteenth century, it circulated independently in a prose-dialogue version, the *Vāmaṇ carittiram*, which was printed alongside a short biography of Beschi ten years before the third book of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* including the original canto first appeared in print.¹¹⁷ What made this conversation so appealing to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences? The pretext for Joseph's teachings in the canto is Vāmaṇ's initial complaint that he finds it almost impossible to resist the charms of women. To this, Joseph replies with an invitation to discipline and control the senses. The canto further retells the story of the birth of angels and demons, their nature and rationale in the overall plan of God's creation. It also makes explicit the fact that Hindu gods are illusions created by the demons, and should be treated as such.¹¹⁸ This cosmological picture is complemented by a vivid representation of original sin, and of pains that await sinners in Hell, including the eternal fire and heat that will consume them. These stanzas are strongly reminiscent of the meditations on Hell included in Bertoldi's manual for spiritual exercises, the *Ṇāṇamuyarci*, which we analyzed in Chapter Two. The poem reiterates and confirms the truth of those meditations. All these cosmological elements—the origin and nature of angels and *pēys*, and the nature of Hell—are crucial building blocks of Tamil Catholic identity in this period, as we saw in the previous sections, and must have contributed to the popularity of this chapter.

Equally captivating must have been the opening of the canto, addressing the relationship between Christianity and sexuality—and indirectly, between literature and sexuality. As clear in his condemnation of *akam* poetry as dealing just with carnal love in the *Toṇṇūlvilakkam*, or in his description of Hindu gods as sexually degenerated in canto xxiii, Beschi was invested in offering an ethical and poetical model that would marginalize the theme of human sexuality. The missionary preoccupation with sexuality was part of a larger trend within the Church, and sometimes tied with issues of tropical climate and its moral

117 The *Vāmaṇcarittiram* was included, alongside the Tamil biography by Muttucāmi Piḷḷai's, in the pamphlet on Beschi edited in 1843 by Appāvuppiḷḷai, *Vīramāmunivar aruḷicceyta*, 23–28. The third book of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, which includes the Vāmaṇ canto, was published by the Mission Press only ten years later, in 1853.

118 Beschi uses some unusual words in the stanza (xviii, 75) where he claims that Hindu gods are demons—namely, *tāṇavar* (a word for asura) and *veri* (a dictionary-word for demon). These should be added to the long list of words for demons in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, and raise the question of whether all these words were absolute synonyms for Beschi, and could all equally translate the Latin *diabolus*.

associations. The attempts to control sexuality in this period is evident in the role that rites connected with sexual maturity and marriage held in the Malabar Rites controversy, and in the long lists of questions regarding marriages between Christians and Hindus, or between Christians of different denominations, which missionaries sent to their superiors in Rome throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is also worth remembering that João de Brito's death was precipitated by the accusations of a princess who had been abandoned by her husband because, after converting, he could retain only one among his many wives. The gendered body and the relationship between the sexes impinged upon family structures, and were crucial fields of contention within the larger battlefield that was the body of the converts in the Madurai mission.

This constellation of problems and preoccupations often crystallized in fear and open hatred of women, at least of those women who did not adhere to the virginal standards of Catholic sainthood. Nowhere in the *Tēmpāvaṇi* are these feelings better expressed than in the opening stanzas of this canto, in Vāmaṇ's speech about the charms and temptation represented by women:

The hair of women, shining by nature and lusciously dark like rain clouds, is sung as a place for rest at night, on flower pillows perfumed with incense wood. But it is a forest where the enemies that shout in battle hide, take and confuse the spirit, it is a black poison, it is the evil Lord of Death who drinks lives!¹¹⁹

If they cast arrows from their eyes, through their bow-like eyebrows, to wound the inner spirit, for many days one's clear reasoning will be lost, and the heart, afraid, will be utterly confused. Without coming out to show the wounds inflicted by those eyes, who wouldn't be intoxicated by such a battle?¹²⁰

Vāmaṇ continues by listing other characteristics that make women attractive according to Tamil literary traditions, and are especially associated with courtesans in this period, like their sweet voices and musical skills:

119 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXVIII, 27: *iru mañc' aṇṇav iruṇṭ' oḷiṟum iyalp' uṟṟ' avir kūntal | maru viñc' akīṟ pūn tavic' iruḷē vakai tuñc' iṭam eṇṇār | ceru viñcu oṇṇār karantu uyiraic cekukkuṇ kāṭ' atuvē | karu nañc' atuvē uyir uṇṇuṇ kaṭuṇ kūṟṟ' atuṭāṇē.*

120 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXVIII, 28: *puruva villār kaṭkaṇaikaḷ puṇṇpaṭṭ' uḷḷ uyīru | muruva viṭṭār pala nāḷum uṟṟav uṇarv' aḷintu | veruva neñcam uṭ kalaṅki viḷaitta puṇ kāṭṭi | veruvat' allāl icca-mariṇ maruḷāt'ēvar uṇṭō.*

With hands like flower blossoms, they tune the *yāl*, and the sound of it kills, doesn't it? They bring about ruin, and they do so purposely! But it's difficult for other people to understand it. Aren't their songs, [sweet] like a flow of milk, a tongue of fire? Aren't they spears? An ocean of lust? As women pour them into our two ears, they kill our spirit.¹²¹

Reading these verses, one understands why some thought that poet Cuppiratīpa Kāvīrāyar, when already old and blind, wrote most of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* for Beschi.¹²² In the beginning of Cuppiratīpa's most famous work, "A message delivered by a dancer" (*Viṛaliviṭutūtu*), the Brahman protagonist addresses the *virālī*, the woman-musician he tasks with delivering his message, with words similar to those of Vamaṇ. She is the "queen of music that devastates the mental concentration," a living doll whose batting eyelashes as she sings "plunder the hearts and minds of yogis."¹²³ Cuppiratīpa's work portrays the highly eroticized world of the courtesans, with their exceptional mastery of music, dance, and other arts.¹²⁴ Vāmaṇ is complaining that he cannot resist the charms of such women, and this is not the first time this central figure of early modern Tamil literature takes the scene in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. Earlier in the poem, Beschi describes a courtesan attempting to seduce Joseph while he and Mary are on their way from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for the imperial census.¹²⁵

121 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXVIII, 32: *pōt'aṇ kaiyār uḷariya paṇ puḷaṅkic cey kolaīyō | vētaṇ koṇṭār eṇṇuvar maṟṟ' eṇṇum pāṅk'aritē | kūtam pālāy curant' eṇa tik kiḷaiyō vēlō nacc' | ōtaṇ kollō iru cevīy ūt' ūṭṭiy uyir kolvār.*

122 Cuppiratīpakkavīrāyar, a poet at the court of the ruler of Nilakkottai (Nilakkōṭṭai) in today's Dindigul district, Nākama Kūḷappa Nāyakkaṇ, is remembered for two poems he composed in honor of his patron: *Kūḷappa nāyakkaṇ kātal* and the *Kūḷappa nāyakkaṇ viṛaliviṭutūtu*. The story goes that when Cuppiratīpa became old and blind, his patron chased him away from the court, and he thus ended up working for Beschi. This version of Beschi's works actually having been written by Cuppiratīpakkavīrāyar is most emphatically put forward in Mu. Aruṇācalam, *An Introduction*, 276–279.

123 Translation from Indira V. Peterson, "The Courtesan's Arts in the Tamil *Viṛaliviṭutūtu* Poetic Genre: Translations from *Kūḷappanāyakkaṇ Viṛaliviṭutūtu*," in *Tamiḷ tanta paricu. The Collection of Articles in Honor of Alexander M. Dubyanskiy*, Papers of the Institute of Oriental and Classical Studies 63, eds O. Vecherina, N. Gordiyuchuk and T. Dubyanskaya (Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities, 2016), 7–8.

124 For an account of *bhoga* culture, and the role of courtesans in parodying asceticism during the Nāyaka period, see Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, esp. 57–82; on the importance of courtesans as social figures in the early modern period, and in later centuries too, see Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures*.

125 The episode of the prostitute tempting Joseph is not in the gospels. Likely, Beschi elaborated upon a passage in Ágreda (*Mystica ciudad*, vol. 2, 151) where Mary understood the

Running on her face that carries poison, bright like stars adorned with great beauty, swords that deliver cruel Death—her dark eyes seize, crash, and drink lives aplenty.¹²⁶

All these passages connect with the preoccupation regarding women and sexuality that I sketched above, and the courtesan is the exemplary figure of this preoccupation in Jesuit letters too.¹²⁷ Before Victorian moralists took up similar battles, courtesans already represented for missionaries everything that was seductive, and everything that needed to be reformed about local cultural and social norms.¹²⁸ It is clearer now why the canto ends with an elaborate description of original sin, and divine punishment. Original sin was the reason for the weakness of human nature, and of the human body, constantly tempted by lust. The description of the sufferings of Hell opposes to the sweet charms of the courtesan an equally strong, albeit fearsome image.

But how does this passage tie with Beschi's overall idea that carnal love should not be the subject matter of poetry? First of all, conventional erotic descriptions are mobilized here for blaming women and the men who succumb to them, thus fulfilling one of the rhetorical functions typical of epics, as we saw in the previous chapter. Beschi relies upon Tamil topoi regarding women's attractiveness—in both the passages we just read, echoes of the third book of *Tirukkural* are particularly strong¹²⁹—only to subvert them, and turn them into

souls of the people they encountered during the journey, their sins and weaknesses, and helped them to improve and convert to God. In the *Tēmpāvaṇi* too, the courtesan converts; the fact that, among all the sinners the holy family might have encountered, Beschi focused on a prostitute is another sign of how pressing the issue of sexuality (and the control thereof) was for the missionaries.

126 *Tēmpāvaṇi* x, 29: *ālam ēntiyav āṇaṇatt' ōṭi naṟ | kōlam ēntiya kōḷ ena vēyntu kol | kālaṇ ēntiya vāḷ kavarnṭ' īrnt' uyir | nīlam ēnti nīraint' uṇuṇ kaṇṇiṇṇāḷ*.

127 The most famous episode is the accusations brought forth by one early convert, Aleixo, that Nobili had sex with prostitutes/courtesans (see Županov, *Disputed Mission*, 232–233).

128 These different sources of judgment—Catholic concerns, Tamil and Victorian morality—were all at play in the verses on *devadāsī* in Vētanāyaka Piḷḷai (1826–1889)'s *Nītinūḷ*; see Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, 184–192.

129 The verses we just read refer specifically to two verses of the *Tirukkural*: v. 1083, where Yama (*kurraṇ*) is said to be in the eyes of women; and v. 1084, where the eyes of women are said to drink life (*uyir uṇṇum*) with an expression identical to the one we find in *Tēmpāvaṇi* xxviii. These similarities were first noted in Lūrtucāmi, “*Tēmpāvaṇiyil mēṇāṭṭu ilakkiyat tākkam*,” 340–341, where the comparison of eyes with stars in *Tēmpāvaṇi* x, 29 is attributed to an influence from v. 29 in the fourth canto of the *Gerusalemme liberata* (Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata*, 38). I think the parallel with Tasso is not accurate in this

something dangerous and disgusting. Parallel to the strategy of vilifying human love is that of dissolving the movements of inner emotional life, that is the subject of *akam*, into forms of chaste Christian love. This is visible in the early cantos of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, in the stanzas where Beschi praises the chaste marriage of Joseph and the virgin Mary. In its more technical aspects, this second strategy is most evident in the *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, especially in those stanzas that fulfill *akam*-theme requirements. Take for example the following poem in the *kaṭṭalai kalitturai* meter, on the theme of *kaikkilai* or one-sided love:

Moon! When you have a single digit, she always wears you on her cool flower-foot. When you are full, you are just like the face of the holy mother. You live in Tirukkāvalūr, which possesses the shade of that tree which cools the entire world. From now on, you won't burn anymore, at any time: the distress of one-sided love does not abide here.¹³⁰

This short composition relies on the poetic convention that the rays of the moon, while usually having cooling qualities, feel as if they were burning when the heroine is suffering from one-sided love. But here, Beschi mentions *kaikkilai* only to discard it, with a theological as well as poetological argument. In the presence of Aṭaikkala mātā at Ēlakkuricci, he claims, the moon is tamed, the love of all those people who venerate her is reciprocated, and thus *kaikkilai* poetry becomes useless. In a somewhat similar vein, let us read the following *nēricai veṇṇā* on the *vaṇṭu* theme, that is the theme of the bee:

kāntaḷkai, kaṇcattāḷ, kāvikkaṇ, āmpalvāy—
vēyntu alarnta kāvaṇalūr meṇkoṭiyē īnta matu
uṇ aḷikāḷ, coṇmiṇ nīr, ottuḷatō pūvulakil
paṇ naḷi pūn tīntēṇ paṇittu?

case, but indeed the use of *mīṇ* in the sense of stars instead of fishes is uncommon in Tamil. As for the *Tirukkuraḷ* references, they show how Beschi did read the third book on love (*kāmattuppāl*), even if he did not translate it into Latin (see the notes in Pope, *The Sacred Kurral*), and did not comment upon it in Tamil apart from the first two verses (*Tirukkuraḷ vīramāmuṇivar urai*, 110–111).

130 *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, 21: *oruvā tīnkāḷ kuḷirm pūn tāḷ aṇintāḷ orukalaiyāyt | tiruvāy mukamottāy āntakalaiyāyc cekaṇkuḷirrkum | taruvāy niḷarkāvalūr vatintāy iṇittāṇ cuṭavō | maruvātekkālamum iṇkullaik kaikkilai mālaiyatē.*

Kantal flower hands, lotus feet, *kuvaḷai* eyes, *āmpal* mouth—the tender vine of Kāvalūr blossoms with all these flowers! Bee, you drank the honey that oozes from them, so after wandering about, tell me: does it resemble the sweet honey from the cooling flowers of this world?¹³¹

The first two lines of this stanza describe a single vine blossoming with many different flowers, which is the standard opening of *kōvai* poems, and an allusion to the poetic landscapes connected to these flowers.¹³² Moreover, the short poem collapses two themes that are among the most famous of Tamil *akam* poetry. On the one hand, starting with the classical poem *Kuṟuntokai* 2, the bee is often interrogated as being the one who can get closest to the heroine. On the other hand, whether the heroine is a goddess or a woman is a question that the hero raises again and again, maybe most famously in *Tirukkōvaiyār* 3. This doubt is usually solved when the hero realizes that after all, she is a woman, and he can have her. In this poem, Beschi asks to the same old bee the same old question, and yet the answer implied is completely different. She is no woman, so any further development of the *akam* theme is impossible. Even allegory, the strategy more often utilized by Jain or Śaiva poets to recast *akam* in spiritual terms, is no viable solution for him. Yet, while refusing the guiding principle of *akam* poetics, these verses rely upon the typically Tamil entanglement of poetry, emotional, and ethical life, all the while offering an example of how to read and interpret that poetry. As foregrounded in the Introduction, Tamil poetry posed a problem precisely because it was mix of good and bad in all these domains, and Beschi took upon himself the task of painstakingly separating *nel* and *vai*, rice and hay, truth and lies within it.¹³³

5.3 *The Discernment of the Pēys*

After reflecting on the temptations of sex, and the punishments of Hell, Vāmaṇ converts, and the surrounding crowd is almost unanimously convinced by Joseph's arguments. The sole exception is Curami, an old lady who cannot let

131 *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, 23: *kāntaṭkai kañcattāl kāvikkaṇ āmpalvāy | vēynt' alarnta kāvaṇalūr meṇkoṭiyēy īnta matuv | uṇṇ aḷikāl coṇmi nīr ottuḷatō pūvulakīr | paṇi naḷi pūn tīntēṇ paṇittu*.

132 On *kōvai*, see Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, 80–102, and esp. 93 for an analysis of *kōvai*'s conventional opening lines.

133 This image is common in his corpus; see for instance *Kittēriyammāl ammānai* 1 (*pirappu kātai*), 13–14 and *Tēmpāvaṇi* 1, 15, two parallel verses that develop the same trope of rice and hay (*nel* and *vai*) connected to truth and lies (*mey* and *poy*).

go of her old beliefs, and argues against Joseph throughout the next canto, XXIX. Her character offers Beschi the opportunity to make some of his most insightful observations regarding the role of Christianity as a new religion in the Tamil land, and affords him a *mise-en-scène* of yet another aspect of everyday negotiations between missionaries, catechists, and the men and women they wanted to convince and convert. This is the world of intimate attachment to old practices, rituals, performances, and well-known and beloved places. On the meta-poetical level, while the previous canto articulated the demise of *akam* as a proper subject for poetry, this one affords a thoughtful yet merciless view on the necessary detachment between the Tamil landscape and its old systems of emotional and religious signification. Catholicism was meant to sever that link, and replace it with the vision of a nature reoriented towards God, as we saw. The canto shows no hesitation in this regard, but Beschi's literary skills afford him such an intensified level of ventriloquism, that the reader is left to wonder whether the missionary at least understood how radically painful was the rupture he wanted to introduce.

The interaction between Curami and Joseph at the beginning of the canto is beautiful, and worth reading in full before plunging into the analysis of some of its main themes:

Curami supported her hunched body with a stick, her trembling head shaking, and appeared like a row of ants covered with excessive skin, without any flesh. Her eyes had lost their fish-shape, and her thin face was covered with ulcers. When she spoke, she railed against the wise words of that holy man, Joseph.¹³⁴

"After loving the tender flower in bloom, filled with new honey," she asked, "why should we discard its sweet fruits? Is it really wise to reject as useless and low all the fruits we sought after for so long through pure penance, to abandon the gods we worshipped before, and to behave according to the new authoritative books?"¹³⁵

134 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 3: *kūṇ uruk kōliṇ ūṇrik kuluṇkiya ceṇṇiy āṭṭiy | ūṇ uruk kaḷinta nūṇ ṭōl uṭutta venp'olūṇkīr rōṇṇi | mīṇ uruk kaḷinta kaṭpuṇ melimukac curami eṇṇāḷ | vāṇ urut tavattōṇ coṇṇa maraimolī paḷittuc coṇṇāḷ.*

135 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 4: *viḷḷiya putit tēṇ paim pū virumpi naṇ kaṇi nūtt' aṇṇa | teḷḷiya tavattir paṇ nā tēṭiya payaṇkaḷ yāvum | eḷḷiyav avatti nūṇkav iraiṇciya tēvar nīkki | uḷḷiya nava nūḷ eṇṇiy olukalōv urutiy eṇṇāḷ.*

Joseph replied: “Imagine a person who wanted [to reach] a country in the west, but took the wrong way and went north for many days. When he hears ‘This is not the way,’ but he is not ready to abandon the initial road, nor does he follow the path towards the east shown to him—can we say that he is a wise person then?”¹³⁶

She said: “For us to really know that your religion leads to Heaven, how can it be enough if you say, ‘My way has no faults?’” He answered: “If you hear somebody who simply says, ‘This is the good way,’ you shouldn’t follow. But if that path is explained with wise words, your mind should understand and be clear.”¹³⁷

She added: “Your words appear sweet, coated in music (*paṇ maraittu*), but if we don’t oppose them, the powers of darkness will obfuscate our eyes like a spell!” He said: “If one appeases a wound that has hidden inside, is that an illusion? The seed of goodness which has been hidden inside will give fruit.”¹³⁸

The old woman said: “Today in my dream I have seen the water lilies that grow on the mountain, and the other honey-filled flowers wither away, and the pond with blossoms become dry. Listening to your deviant words, that show new things and instigate [bad] actions—this is a gift that in reality spoils our country where palmyra trees grow!”¹³⁹

Everyone around commented: “When looking at the shining sun, her spoiled eyes don’t [see any light]. The nature of this old woman is to stare at the dark night!” The woman, enraged because of [her own] confusion,

136 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 5: *kuṭakku nēr vaikun tēyaṇ kuṇittanar ceppa māri | vaṭakkunēr neṭu nāl cella vaḷiy at’ anr’ enru kēṭkīr | ruṭakku nēr taṭaṇ cellātār ruṇar alār kāṭṭukinra | kiṭakku nēr neri cellārō kēḷiyar enrāṇ cūcai*. This verse probably includes a proverb; the same image is found in *Nāṇamūyarcī*, 82.

137 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 6: *niṇṇeri katiyaic cēru neriy eṇav ariya nāṅkaḷ | eṇ neri vaḷāmai cellum eṇṇi nī cālpōv enrāl | naṇ neriy uraiyir kēṭki naṇukalir uraitta nāṇatt’ | anneriy uriyat’ enrāl arint’ uḷan teḷikav enrāṇ*.

138 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 7: *paṇ maraitt’ inīti nīyē paṇitta coṇ marukkal ārrāk | kaṇ maraitt’ iruṭṭu māyaik kaṭṭ’ enat tōṇrum enrāl | puṇ marait tiṭṭa pālār puṇṇ ara māyaḷy enrōv | uṇ maraitt’ olitta naṇriy urum payaṇ kāṭṭum enrāṇ*.

139 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 8: *cūṇaivaḷar kuṇaḷaiy āti cori matu malarkaḷ vāṭi | naṇai vaḷar poykai vaṇra nāṇ inru kaṇavir kaṇṭēṇ | viṇaivaḷar navaṅkaḷ kāṭṭi viritta niṇcollaik kēṭṭup | paṇai-vaḷar nāṭu nainta paric’ itēy enrāṇ mūttāl*.

said: “Is my beautiful dream a lie? If this is not its meaning, then what is it? You tell me!”¹⁴⁰

Responding to her, Joseph began to explain the nature of her dream: “When the mind is confused, and lacks clarity, it should not boil over into rage. The vision you had in your dream is like the gold one obtains in a dream: if you imagine it in your mind, its perfection is useless—or does it have any consequence?”¹⁴¹

Anything that we experience through the five senses and the eyes in daylight appears in our mind as images, like drawings in a painting. After seeing at once an elephant with tusks and covered in musth, and a crow, at night in our deceitful dreams, that elephant appears as flying upon our head.¹⁴²

A mirror with a clear surface shows the things that are next to it; and dreams, confusing by nature, show the things that pass through the mind. So a loving mother will see her son, who has long left; and a foolish, scared lady will see an army waging war against her.¹⁴³

Like the gathering of smoke produces darkness, when bile increases excessively and spreads, it creates confusion that leads to decrease of knowledge and mistakes, and shows dreams that lack any worth, but look like knowledge that gives clarity. People may act in a state of delirium, and out of fear—but aren't they fools?”¹⁴⁴

140 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 8: *teruṭavaḷ pakali ṇōkkac citainta kaṇ kilaviy illāt' | iruṭavaḷ iravi nōkkal iyalp' eṇav evaru nakkār | maruṭavaḷ ciṇaṇ koṇṭ' aṇṇāl vaṭiv' uruṇ kaṇavum poyyō | poruṭavaḷkilatēr rōṇṇap poruṭṭ' eṇō coṇṇiṇ eṇṇāl.*

141 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 10: *ciṇav' itai maruṭav uḷḷan teliv' arap poṇkal veṇṭā | kaṇav' itai uṇarnta kāṭci kaṇav' itaiy aṭainta poṇpōṇ | maṇav itaiy eṇṇir koṇṇē vaṭuv alār payaṇ onr' uṇṭōv | eṇa viṭai uraitta cūcaiy iyal paṭa virittuc coṇṇāṇ.*

142 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 11: *paṭam puṇaint' eḷutiṇār pōr pakal itaiy iru kaṇṇōḷ' aint' | itam puṇaint' uṇarnta yāvum eḷutiya niṇaivil rōṇṇrik | kaṭam puṇaint' atir kaim māvuṇ kākamūṇ kaṇṭat' onṇric | caṭam puṇai kaṇavil yāṇai talaik' mēr parakkak kāṇpār.*

143 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 12: *teruḷ puṇaṇ koṇṭav attaiṇ cērnt' aṭutta vaṇṇaik kāṭṭu | maruḷ puṇaṇ koḷ kaṇavu maṇaṇ kaṭuttavaṇṇaik kāṭṭiy | aruḷ puṇaṇ koṇṭa tāyēy akanṇa taṇ makavaik kāṇpāl | veruḷ puṇaṇ kaṇṭa pētai viṇaip paṭaiy etirppak kāṇpāṇ.*

144 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 14: *iruṭ paṭap pukai moytt' eṇṇav eṇciyav aṇivu kuṇṇru | maruṭ paṭap pukaintu maṇṭi malinta pitt' ēruṇ kālai | teruṭ paṭat telintatē pōl cīr ila kaṇavu kāṭṭi | veruṭ paṭa pataitt' uḷḷ aṇci viṇai koḷvār pittar aṇṇō.*

Joseph concluded: “By the action of bile, when it is excessive, delirious people have crooked thoughts. Without inquiring, their words which are lowly chatter and their dreams similar to reality when they sleep, become one. If they believe them with their perturbed minds, is that wisdom?”¹⁴⁵

Like when shutting the eyes which are in pain and unable to look at the sun, unable to accept in her mind the knowledge given by Joseph with motherly love, Curami foamed with fire-like rage, and collapsed. Focusing on this rage that had overtaken her, her heart darkened.¹⁴⁶

There is no straightening with hands the bending of a tree as hard as rock, and an old wound won't heal. People who have had them for very long time, won't change their wrong habits; and on top of these just mentioned, those with lies like the deep ocean, and without wisdom, will never understand anything.¹⁴⁷

Like a jewel in the earth surrounded by the ocean that bestows the shining pearls inside the conches on its shores, where spreads the scent from the blossoming of the fragrant *talai* trees, Curami decided to conceal the flood of light that were the words [of Joseph] bringing wisdom into the country of Egypt.¹⁴⁸

She said: “Alas, my mind boiled and suffered, as I saw the temples of fresh gold fall at once with one blow into a hole. Now, will I stand and witness the flood-like destruction brought about by those who believe in a religion that is clearly a treachery bringing about blasphemy?”¹⁴⁹

- 145 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 15: *viñciya kālāip pittu viñaiyīnār pittar cemmaiy | eñciya niñaiṇ' urr' āyāt'iliv' urap pitarruñ collun | tuñciya kālai mey pōr rōñriya kaṇavum onr' āy | añciyav uḷatt' iḥt'eṇṇil ariv' itōv eṇṇrāṇ cūcai.*
- 146 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 16: *nōy uṭaiy iru kaṇ veyyō nōkk' ilā mūṭṭir' eṇṇa | tāy uṭaiy aṇṇir cūcai tanta nūl uḷattir kollāt | tēy uṭai vekulī poṇkac cīriya curami cāyntu | pōy uṭai vañcam uḷlip pukainta neñc' ārrāḷ aṇṇō.*
- 147 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 17: *kāl vaḷar taruvin kōṭṭaṇ kaikkoṭu nimirkkal ārrā | vūḷ vaḷar puṇṇum ārāv ūḷ uḷik kiḷavar koṇṭa | tāḷ vaḷar kaccatu mārrār cārriyav avariṇ ūṇkum | āḷ vaḷar kaṭaliṇ vañcatt' ariv' ilār eṇṇun tērār.*
- 148 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 18: *virai vāyp pūn tāḷai mukaikaḷ viṇṭa verī vimmuṇ | karai vāyc caṇkaṇkaḷ katir mutt' ūṇra kaṭal cūḷun | tarai vāy pūṇ okkav ecittu nāṭṭir rakav' uykkum | urai vāy katir vellam oḷippac curamiy uṇarntālē.*
- 149 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 19: *uḷḷaṇ kāyṇt' uḷaiyap pacum por kōyil oruñk'antō | paḷḷaṇ kāṇ aṭiyē vīlak kaṇṭeṇ paḷipp' uykkuṇ | kaḷḷaṇ kāṭṭiyav ōr maraiyum yāruṇ kaṇint' uḷḷi | vellāṇ kāṭṭ' aḷivum iṇik kāṇpēṇō melint' eṇṇāḷ.*

She said: “Without knowing anything about our country, our family, and our tradition, this one, begging around, preached something. If even Vāmaṇ, who had no match before, believed and followed [what he said] as revelation, and has now embraced it, who will not follow it in the future? But accepting it is a mistake.”¹⁵⁰

At this point, the conversation ends for the day. Curami, deeply upset but determined to bring about Joseph’s ruin in some way, goes to bed. The action continues in her dreams:

The demon who had lost the rule [over Egypt], which he had enjoyed previously, with the purpose of putting into practice the hatred he had felt towards that ascetic [Joseph] for very long, thinking that the day had come for that hatred to develop without scorn (*palippu*), appeared to that woman in her dream, in order to foment the rage she felt.¹⁵¹

In a luxuriant large garden, where colorful peacocks are dancing, and honey is dripping from opening buds, changing his appearance into a sorrowful, thin and suffering face, he went to meet her as the god she worshipped. She saw him in her dark dream, and upon seeing him, worshipped him with her hands.¹⁵²

“You protect the whole word, so why does [my] understanding generate affliction? You have rare power beyond measure, how can an enemy oppose you? If things are difficult, is it appropriate to withdraw and hide?” Saying this, she fell down and worshipped him. Standing in front of her like a flash of light, what follows is what he said sighing.¹⁵³

150 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 21: *eṇṇāṭ’ ekkulam emmuṛaiy eṇṇu aṛiyātu irant’ oruvaṇ | coṇ nāṭiṇaṇ aḥtē curutiṭyākat toṭamt’ eṇṇi | muṇ nā ṭuṇaiy illā vāmaṇ rāṇu muyaṇkukinṇa | piṇ nā toṭarār āṛ porukkun taṇmai piḷai eṇpāl.*

151 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 23: *muṇ nāl uṛṭav arac’ ilanta pēy am muṇitaṇ mēr | paṇ nāl uṛṭa pakai celuttun taṇmai palipp’ inṇiy | inṇāl uṛṭa pakaiy ākum eṇṇak kaṇavir tāṇ | aṇṇāl uṛṭa ciṇan tūṇṭav aṇkaṇ ṭōṇṇirṇē.*

152 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 24: *varinta mayil akavi malarnta mukai vāy matuv ūḷttuc | corinta neṭum poḷirkaṇ melintu vāṭun tuyar mukamāyt | tirinta vaṇṇan tāṇ īraiṇcun teyvaṇ ceṇṇ’ eṭirppak | karinta kaṇav’ itaiyir kaṇṭāl kaṇṭu kai toḷutāl.*

153 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 25: *ulakirṭ’alī ceytōy tuyaram pūttav uṇarvu eṇṇōv | alak’ irṇ’ arun tiṛalōy pakai niṛk’eṇṇō arit’ eṇṇāl | vilakit tavar taṇmaiṭ eṇṇōv eṇṇa viḷuntu īraiṇci | ilakit takum miṇ pō nōkkiy uyirppōṭ’ iyampirṇē.*

The canto continues by describing how the *pēy* in Curami's dream instructs her to undermine Joseph in all possible ways, and thus save the crumbling temples and rituals of her old religion. Upon waking up, Curami is extremely unsettled, and tries for the rest of the canto to convince the captain of the local guards to arrest Joseph. She ultimately fails, the captain converts, and she sinks deeper and deeper into degradation and madness, until she finally dies and goes to Hell.¹⁵⁴

Within this frame, the canto weaves in various biblical narratives regarding the persecutions suffered by the Jewish people at the hands of different Assyrian kings. These stories introduce a further layer of complexity to the mechanism of figuration. They show how, on the one hand, the persecution of the Jews at the times of the Old Testament prefigured the persecutions of the holy family in the gospels, and in Ágreða's book. In turn, the persecution of the family prefigured the misunderstandings and persecutions that missionaries and their catechists would have to face while preaching the gospel in South India. In this way, this canto places the history of the mission within the history of salvation through a mise-en-abyme of the entire plan of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. The tragic story of Curami ought to be read in this perspective, as representing both the typology of the person resisting the truth, as well as a very local instance of the same.

Let us go back to the last stanzas in the passage we read, which show how one of the *pēys* we encountered earlier has now taken the form of the god Curami worshipped throughout her life, and entered her dark dream (*karinta kaṇavu*). Yet he appears in a beautiful garden, and stands in front of her like a flash of shining light (*ilaki tarum miṇ*). The grammar of light and darkness is important throughout this passage, especially the reference to Curami's heart becoming dark with anger (*pukainta*, v. 16), and to her blackened dream. This interior darkness is what makes her unable to distinguish the true light of Joseph, who is like the sun (v. 16), and makes her believe instead the demon who appears to her in the form of light, but who is in reality black and corrupted. This is a quite literal recasting of the central theme of the discernment of the spirits, which had always been present in Christian teaching but played a central role in the life of the Catholic Church during the spiritual renewal

154 *Tēmpāvaṇi* XXIX, 129 describes Curami's death: *tēv ilukk' urav ivar cenru yāvarum | pūv ilukk' urav uḷam poruppatōv eṇā | nāv'ḷutt' irant' eri narakir rāṇ toḷum | ōv' ilukk' iṭuṇ kuṇuik' uvappa mūlkināḷ*. "She said: 'My heart cannot tolerate anyone going to him [Joseph], forgetting our gods, disgracing this world!' Then, she bit off her tongue, died, and sank into the burning Hell, as the devil she worshipped—who gave her but grief and madness—rejoiced."

of the sixteenth century and the Counter-Reformation.¹⁵⁵ Ignatian spirituality, born in that context, is centered around the concern of distinguishing between true visions given by God, and the temptations of the devil who can appear disguised as an angel of light. Here Beschi shows how Curami, who believes herself guided in her actions by God, is actually deceived by the devil who appears to her as a figure of light. What is more striking in her case, though, is that the deceit is successful partially because of her attachment to natural and cultural landscapes, in her eyes inextricably bounded with her traditional religion.

While the reference to practices of discernment of the spirits would have been obvious to any reader literate in Baroque Catholic spirituality, this passage also explains the tragic error of Curami according to alternative logics, some of which belong to the level of Tamil popular culture. First of all, Curami is old, her age symbolizing both her attachment to habits and beliefs she cultivated throughout her long life, and her inability to let go of the past to embrace change. The fact that Curami is a woman is also important, if we consider that according to most views of Tamil anthropology women are constitutionally weak, and prone to *pēy* possession.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, our *pēy* is very similar in this passage to the homonymous ghosts who play such a large role in Tamil village life. His appearance in Curami's dreams is coherent with this role, considering that "Tamil supernaturals often assume responsibility for initiating their own worship, accosting people and demanding steadfast devotion through dreams."¹⁵⁷ The representation of this type of ongoing demonic possession, in which Curami is completely deceived by a *pēy* to the point of losing her mind, also reflects the important role that practices of possession, and consequently of exorcism, played in the building of Catholic religious authority in South India. Catholic priests and their catechists were considered specialists in driving away the *pēys*, and had devised a series of preventive as well as *ad hoc* strategies for that purpose, including spiritual exercises, exorcism, and confession.¹⁵⁸ This canto is therefore a warning against a

155 See Susan Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era*, esp. 261–322.

156 See the discussion in Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 70–72. Nabokov identifies the favorite target for possession as young brides, but other anthropologists have enlarged the category to women more in general. Interestingly, this remains true in the cases of positive, Marian possession analyzed in Bloomer, *Possessed by The Virgin*.

157 Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 117.

158 On exorcism and confession, the two most common performative *ad hoc* rituals against the *pēys*, see Mosse, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree*, 65–71; and Županov, "Conversion, Illness and Possession."

hardening of the self that would keep Christianity, and more practically missionaries, catechists, and their healing powers, permanently out. Conversion implied first of all an opening, to allow for the light to come in and reshape the self into a new, luminous form, at that point hard to penetrate for external evil forces.

Connected with the issue of possession and exorcism is the issue of medicine, and of theories and techniques of the body available to the missionaries in the early modern period. Before turning to the verses, I should mention here that Vīramāmuṇivar, aka Beschi, has an afterlife in Tamil Nadu as a practitioner of siddha medicine, and in this avatar he is still venerated as a siddha (*cittar*) within the precinct of the Acalāttammaṇ shrine nearby the Nuṅkampākkam post office in Chennai (Figure 14).¹⁵⁹ Several books of alchemical recipes attributed to him were published in the early decades of the twentieth century, and some recent articles have tried to connect this corpus more systematically with Beschi's historical figure, by analyzing the medical vocabulary that appears in his more famous works.¹⁶⁰ The passage we just read hints to this connection, as does the presence of the flower garden in Ēlākkuricci we mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, even though it is unlikely that Beschi really composed those siddha recipe books. Here, Joseph first explains the visions Curami experienced in her dreams as based on unfulfilled desires. He then explains the proclivity towards such dreams as the result of an excess of bile, *pittam*, that causes according to Tamil medicine bodily agitation and madness. In other words, Beschi thematizes here the importance of the connection between the body and the mind, displays a certain knowledge of traditional systems of humoral medicine, and shows the risk of an undisciplined body prone to excess of bile and ultimately to self-destruction. As we saw in the second chapter with regard to spiritual exercises, conceptions and techniques of the

159 See the introduction to Mārkareṭ Pāṣṭiṇ's recent edition of the *Tēmpāvāṇi* (2015, 22). When I visited the shrine in 2017, the local priest confirmed the identity of Vīramāmuṇi siddha, whose place of samadhi he tends to, and Beschi the missionary, at least in the mind of contemporary worshippers at the temple.

160 On medical terminology in Beschi's works, see Ā. Nirmalā, "Vīramāmuṇivariṇ akarātikaḷil maruttuvam," *Neytal āyvu* 2, 1 (2017): 98–105. Indeed, there is a tradition in Tamil Nadu that sees Beschi as a *cittar*, and three books of medical-alchemical recipes are attributed to him: *Nāca kāṇṭam*, *Aṇupōka vaṭṭiya cikāmaṇi*, *Vākaṭatiraṭṭu*. For editions of these texts, see Bibliography; they are briefly analyzed in R. Thiagarajan and K. Palanichamy, "The Life Sketch of Virama Muniver (Rev. Beschi) and his Sidha Works," *Bulletin of the Indian Institute of the History of Medicine* 4, 3–4 (1974): 171–174; and Jayaseela Stephen, *A Meeting of the Minds: European and Tamil Encounters in Modern Sciences, 1507–1857* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2016), 534–535.



FIGURE 14 Statue of Beschi as a *cittar* in the Acalāttamman temple in Chennai

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

body were important fields of contention and competition between missionaries and contemporary systems, including siddha medicine, ascetic and yogic practices.



In conclusion, the three cantos we just analyzed portray with a certain level of realism the beliefs and the dilemmas that confronted the missionaries, their catechists, and their Tamil audiences in the first decades of the eighteenth century. While the *Tēmpāvaṇi* offers an unequivocal truth, it does not underplay the difficulty and the disruptive nature of the choice for Christianity, as the story of Curami shows. To sweeten the bitter (but necessary) medicine, this choice is presented as “coated in music” (*paṇ maraittu* XIX, 7), the beauty and sweetness of the verses being themselves an argument in favor of conversion. Indeed, from the very first cantos of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* the relocation of the Christian message in the Tamil landscape happens through rhymes, alliteration, tropes, and figuration—in short, through the language of Tamil poetry and its techniques. Among the primary functions of Tamil Catholic literature was to present the missionary message in ways that would be attractive for the local readers; and beautifully crafted language was proof of good, well-articulated thought.

At the same time, throughout the *Tēmpāvaṇi* Beschi indulges in systematic expositions of Catholic history and doctrines, thus fulfilling the didactic function of epic. Still, if we take seriously Tasso’s definition that an epic is the imitation of things that really happened, and Beschi’s belief that his poem was divinely inspired via the mediation of María de Ágreda, the meaning of these didactics goes beyond the insertion of useful bits of teaching. Because of the bi-directional link allowed by figuration, Beschi used his experience in Tamil Nadu to imagine, and thus to understand, the life of Joseph, and especially the experience of the holy family in Egypt. He could do so because the Madurai mission was, in his view, the fulfillment of the history of salvation narrated by the gospels, and therefore it gave him and his readers a model for thinking about that history in new ways, while also inscribing their present into it.

The *Tēmpāvaṇi* is in itself an exercise in the simultaneous reading of the history of Christianity and the Tamil classics, requiring from its readers to do the same exercise—to understand the world of Tamil poetry as yet another language to express the beauty of the Christian world. So, the poem presupposes readers who knew Tamil literature well, and who were familiar with the logic of local devotional practices, while at the same time endowed with the type of discernment that would allow them to read both in a Christian way. This brings

us back to Tamil literature and Ignatian spirituality as two key elements in the educational experiments that missionaries implemented to train the eyes of their catechists between 1718 and 1730. In the next chapter, we will abandon the letter of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* to follow these catechists, and explore their modes and strategies of reading the poem over time.

Reading as an Eighteenth-Century Catechist

In his annotated translation of the *Tirukkuraḷ* or “Sacred Kural” (*kurāl* being the kind of verse used in the text) into English, the colonial officer and Tamil scholar Francis Whyte Ellis (1777–1819) often referred to Beschi’s Latin translation of this classical Tamil text.¹ He also cited several passages from the *Tēmpāvaṇi* where Beschi elaborated upon ideas and images originally found in the *Tirukkuraḷ*. For instance, when discussing *kurāl* 9 on the eight attributes of God, Ellis refers to stanza XXVII, 157 of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. We analyzed this stanza in the previous chapter, and saw how it contains a list of six attributes of the Christian God enumerated by Joseph for Civācivaṇ. Ellis starts off by commenting upon the language of this verse. He writes that the terms employed by Beschi “are not in common use in the service of the Catholic church, though they are known to all Christian natives conversant with the writings of Vira-māmuni [...]” He then goes on to note how the vocabulary used by Beschi is partially borrowed from Hindu vocabulary, but had already been Christianized by Roberto Nobili: “the explanation of them is taken from the Mantra-mālei, containing the principal part of the liturgy of the Catholic church composed by Tatwabodhaca-swāmi, the R. Robertus Nobili. This writer has also given an elaborate disquisition on the attributes in his work entitled Jnyéana-upadésam.” Ellis further comments on the style of Nobili’s works, which despite being a clever attempt at translating Christian theology into Tamil, “does not entitle it to rank among compositions in the superior dialect of the Tamil.”²

So, Ellis read the *Tēmpāvaṇi* as well as other Catholic texts by Nobili, and recognized the literary quality of Beschi’s poem. In a way, his commentary is an exercise in reading the *Tirukkuraḷ* through the lens of Tamil Catholic poetry, and in reading the *Tēmpāvaṇi* against the background of Tamil classical literature. By the early nineteenth century, similar exercises were likely standard practice among elite Catholic converts, who had inherited and appropriated

1 Ellis’s translation is often reckoned to be the first translation English of the *Tirukkuraḷ* into English. N. Govindarajan has brought our attention on an older English version by N.E. Kindersley (1763–1821), who relied on a different version of the text. See Na. Kōvintarājan, *Atikāramum tamīḻ pulamaṇṇum tamīḻiliruntu mutal āṅkila mōḷipeyarpukaḷ* (Cennai: Kriyā, 2016).

2 Francis Whyte Ellis, *Translation of Tirukurral of Tiruvalluvar* (Madras: College of Fort St. George, ca. 1819), 25.

the reading strategies Beschi had devised for his catechists at Elākkuricci. Ellis's Tamil teacher Vittuvāṇ Cāmināta Piḷḷai, to whom we will return later in this chapter, was one such man: a high caste Catholic intellectual and poet from Pondicherry, who read and imitated Beschi in his own works. It is thanks to Cāmināta Piḷḷai, often evoked by Ellis, that the Englishman learned the strategies of reading we see at work in his commentary on *Tirukkuraḷ*. Ellis's reading of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* thus leads us to times and spaces well beyond and outside those imagined by the text itself, in this case colonial Madras. But how exactly did Beschi's poem travel all the way there? How was it circulated, read and interpreted earlier in the eighteenth century? While clues as to the intended readership of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* are scattered within the poem, as we saw, we have little solid information on its circulation and readership after its composition. It must have contributed to Beschi's newly established *pulavar* fame in the 1730s, but who exactly read the poem after him, when, and how?

In order to answer such questions, this chapter focuses on the many different practices, strategies and chronologies that contributed to making the *Tēmpāvaṇi* the quintessential Tamil Catholic poem. This implies a multiplication of the actors involved, beyond Beschi as its author, and the catechists as its intended readers.³ So, in the following pages we will explore a world of copyists, editors, scholars, singers, and composers who all interacted with, and contributed to the life of the poem in the eighteenth century and beyond. In order for all these processes and voices to emerge, and to cross the divide between the *Tēmpāvaṇi* as a text and as an object, the chapter adopts an eclectic methodology, drawing from manuscript studies, the history of the book, and the history of reading. Our attention will linger especially on three aspects. First, we will explore the history of the paratexts of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, of its manuscripts and printed editions. Then, relying on some rare diaries and family history, the chapter will move to the social history of some of the people who copied and read the poem in the eighteenth century, and show how their practices of copying, reading, and engaging with the text continued well into the nineteenth century, even in some unexpected, non-Catholic milieux. Finally, we will peek at the Śaiva religious and cultural world that surrounded Catholic communities and cultural practices at the time of the poem's composition, and the responses and controversies that the *Tēmpāvaṇi* engendered—and those it did not. In tracing the history of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in the Tamil country on the eve of moder-

3 Roger Chartier, *Inscrivere e cancellare. Cultura scritta e letterature* (Milano: Laterza, 2006), viii.

nity, this chapter reconstructs the tactics and strategies connected to reading that the catechists could deploy to incorporate Catholicism into their lives.

1 Paper and Palm-Leaf Trails

This manuscript tradition of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* has received little attention, likely because the text was printed early and because the first edition, which is also the *editio princeps*, was based on an extremely authoritative manuscript. Besides, the edition was brought out by the Mission Press in Pondicherry and supported by the Church establishment of the nineteenth century. And yet, an initial survey in the archives, in Tamil Nadu as well as in France and in the United Kingdom, shows that the *Tēmpāvaṇi* circulated extensively as a manuscript at least until the first half of the nineteenth century, and perhaps even later.⁴ The origins and current distribution of existing manuscripts point to Thanjavur, Pondicherry, and Chennai as the cultural and political centers for Catholics in the region from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Noteworthy for us, such a manuscript tradition shows considerable variations. The copy of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, for instance, contains a text rather different from the one standardized in the printed edition, a fact that points to the existence of several independent chains of transmission. So, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* circulated extensively after its composition, especially between the end of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century when there were no Jesuits in South India. How were these manuscripts read and used? What can they tell us about the readership of the poem?

Such questions are particularly important to understand the history of the most famous, and most authoritative manuscript copy of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, written down in 1729 while Beschi was still alive. This is a thick paper volume today preserved at the British Library, and the main source for the *editio princeps* published by the Mission Press in Pondicherry in 1851–1853 (Figure 15).⁵ The edi-

4 The manuscripts of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* I consulted are: 1. One incomplete palm-leaf manuscript at WL, Ms. Tam. b. 61(R); 2. Two incomplete palm-leaf manuscripts in the uvs library, ms. 38 and 486; 3. One incomplete paper manuscript in the archives of Madurai's TTS, Vētanāyakam Cāstriyār collection, Box 2, VST-2; 4. An incomplete copy in two palm-leaf volumes at the BnF, mss Indien 474–475 (once part of Édouard Ariel's collection). This is by no means an exhaustive list; for instance, the old catalog of the palm-leaf manuscripts in JAMP lists a copy of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, but the collection is currently in disarray, and I could not locate it.

5 BL, Mss. Tam. B. 3. This manuscript is composite. It includes, after the cover and the cover-page, some letters to, and from Walter Eliot, the last private owner of the manuscript (ff. a-c); the title page, and fragments of the *pāvurai pātikam* and of the *pāyiram* belonging originally

tor, Father Louis Savinien Dupuis MEP (1806–1874), reckoned this manuscript to be the autograph copy of the poem, as he explains in the French introduction to his edition.⁶ This conviction was shared by many scholars in the mid-nineteenth century, and largely based on the account of the origins of this manuscript contained in Muttucāmi Piḷḷai's biography of Beschi.⁷ Muttucāmi claimed that, while traveling south to collect information about the Jesuit on the request of Francis Whyte Ellis, he met at Āvūr a man called Luz Naig (Pirakāca Nāyakkar), the son of Beschi's disciple Bungaroo Naig (Pāṅkāṭu Nāyakkar).⁸ Luz Naig claimed to have in his possession a copy of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in Beschi's own handwriting, and Muttucāmi was able to convince him to sell that copy to Ellis for 300 rupees—a rather large amount in the early nineteenth century. This is the manuscript that, after passing through the hands of a few colonial administrators, entered into the Library of the British Museum (now the British Library). It includes the poem and its first commentary. Muttucāmi's biography of Beschi was also the origin, or perhaps an early record of the belief that Beschi wrote the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in 1726, and added a self-commentary in 1729 because his fellow poets found the poem too difficult to understand.

Some of the traits of the London manuscript, especially the liberal use of thick paper, suggest a missionary connection. Besides, it was obviously important for the catechists who sold it to Muttucāmi, and for Muttucāmi too, who ended up keeping it after Ellis's death.⁹ The civil servant and naturalist Sir Walter Elliot (1803–1887), the subsequent owner, obtained it from Muttucāmi. In

to the manuscript, but recovered and added at a later date (see below § 4.9) (ff. d–i); a copy of the *pāvurai pātikam*, the beginning of the *pāyiram* and its commentary in a different, clearly nineteenth-century hand (ff. j–m). At this point begins the manuscript originally found by Muttucāmi, which is numbered (ff. 2–470); the last folios are again missing, and the same hand as in ff. j–m has copied ff. 469–471 retaining the old numeration.

6 Louis Savinien Dupuis, *Notice sur la poésie tamoule, le rév. P. Beschi et le Tembavani, par un membre de la congrégation des Missions-Étrangères* (Pondichéry: Imprimerie des missionnaires apostoliques, 1851); coherently, the title-page of the *editio princeps* declares its text to be identical with that of Beschi's autograph copy (*avaratu kaiyeḷutta piratikḱ oppa*). For further information on the Mission Press, see the Introduction.

7 Robert Caldwell, for instance, was certain that the manuscript was Beschi's original: "A Valuable Manuscript," *Athæneum* 2458, 5 (1874): 750–752.

8 The Tamil versions of their names is just a hypothesis. In the first case, Luz means "light" in Portuguese, and the name commonly used among Catholics, referring to divine light, is Pirakācam.

9 The manuscript today in the British Library (BL Mss. Tam. B. 3) is bound together with some of Walter Elliot's letters concerning the way Elliot acquired the manuscript. These letters are the sources for the discussion to follow.

७:५५

அநாதிநம்.

தேம்பாவணி
முதற்காண்டம்.

வீரமாமுனிவர்

அருளிச்செய்த

இக்காப்பியம்

அவரது கையெழுத்துப் பிரதிக்கொப்பப்

புதுவையிலே, பூந்தாளியிருக்கும்

மகர்களுக்கெதிராகத் தீவிர ஆண்டவரும்

அப்போஸ்தொலிக் குவிக் காரியு மாகிய

கிளைமேன்சு பொன்னு

துரிசிப்பார்வொன் னும்

நாமதேயங்கொண்டிருக்கிற

மேற்றிராணியார்வர்கள் நுமதியில்

உரோமாபுரியின் துவந்த

உத்தாரத்தின்படியே



தொண்டுகம். (வது)

புதுவைப் பிற் சண்மலராகக் கிணியாதாரகோபிஸ்சேர்த்த
அச்சுக்கூடத்திற் பதிப்பிக்கப்பட்டது.

FIGURE 15 Title-page of the 1851 *editio princeps* of the *Tēmpāvāṇi* by the Mission Press

BOOK IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

the handwritten note he attached at the beginning of the volume, Elliot further tells that when he first received the manuscript, the initial pages were missing, and the text had been supplied by Muttucāmi (perhaps from memory). This addition is still visible today. In the end, though, Elliot managed to retrieve those missing pages, thanks to a certain Thambisami, a *śūdra* from Tanjavur whom he assisted in finding a job in the lower ranks of the British administration.¹⁰ In a letter from Caveripatam (Kāvērippaṭṭaṇam), dated 21 August 1844, Thambisami said he had found those pages among the papers left by Muttucāmi Piḷḷai, who had obtained them towards the end of his life from Vētanāyakam Cāstiriyār (1774–1864), the court poet of the Maratha king Serfoji II, and a Protestant. We will return to this trajectory of circulation of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. For now, the fact that Muttucāmi had searched for the missing pages, and that Vētanāyakam Cāstiriyār had them among his personal possessions, further shows the importance of this manuscript of the text for local Christians.

However, this is likely not Beschi's autograph. Between the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, both Julien Vinson and Léon Besse rejected the assumption that Beschi was the copyist of the manuscript, as well as the author of the commentary it contains.¹¹ Their revisionism was based on the recognition that, according to the paratexts, the scribe of the manuscript speaks in the voice of the author of the commentary, and so the 1729 manuscript is a coherent scribal project. Yet, this is not Beschi's voice. The paratexts indicate that it was a student of Beschi who wrote the commentary (*urai*).¹² In the introduction to said commentary (*pāvurai patikam*), Vīramāmuṇi is mentioned in the third person, and the authorial voice mentions having first understood the poem, and only then composed his commentary (*arumpayaṇ uṇarnt' urai aṛaikutu nāṇē*).¹³ The verse at the end of the commen-

10 In the words of Elliot, "a Chrutran from Tanjore." It is probable that Thambisami was a *vēḷālar*, a prestigious land-owning community of Tamil Nadu but still considered to belong to the *śūdra* caste.

11 Vinson did not believe the manuscript to be copied by Beschi's because he did not think Beschi was the author of the commentary. He also denied the possibility that the manuscript was in Beschi's handwriting (which he thought he could recognize): Julien Vinson, "Le Père Beschi et le manuscrit original du *Tēmpāvaṇi*," *Revue de linguistique et de philologie comparée* 41, 4 (1908): 225–237. Besse mostly agreed with him, and discusses the issue at length in *Father Beschi*, 182–186.

12 As recognized in a recent edition by Vittuvāṇ N.M. Mariya Aruṭpirakācam, who clearly attributes the paratexts in the *editio princeps* of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* to a student of Beschi: *Vīramāmuṇivar iyaṛriya Tēmpāvaṇi* (Maturai: Nopili Puttaka nilaiyam māvikā accakam, 1982), vol. 1, 1.

13 BL, Mss. Tam. B. 3, f. g/v; copied in f. l/r.

tary contains a similar expression, in which the authorial voice claims that he set out to explain the poem after understanding it (*karṛ' uṇarnt' uṇartta nāṇ*).¹⁴ This commentator speaks in the same voice as the author of the colophon of the London manuscript, where he mentions that he finished writing in 1729, on the day of the Nativity of Mary (i.e., on 8 September).¹⁵ Unfortunately, we have no additional information about this commentator, and the manuscript does not mention his name, nor the place where he was writing. Still, by considering that in 1729 Beschi was still alive and on the verge of founding the Ēlākkuricci school of rhetoric, we can imagine the scribe and commentator as one of Beschi's disciples, likely a catechist. He likely composed the commentary, perhaps in collaboration with Beschi, to make the poem accessible to the prospective students of the Ēlākkuricci school.

This impression is corroborated by the discussion of the purposes of the commentary in the initial passage of its introduction:

tēmpā vaṇiy eṇa ceyirara avatari
 kāmpāv aruḷuḷa kaṭavulai vaḷartta
 vuyar kaittātaiy eṇru uṭaivaḷatt' urivaḷaṇ
 peyar peruṇ cūcai perum payaṇ caritai
 ceyyuḷum uraitta ceyyuḷōṭ' icaippaṭac
 ceyyūṇirai piraḷāt teḷiv' urai vaḷaṅka
 oru peyarār paṇporuḷum oruporuḷār paṇpayaṇuṇ
 karutik kaviṇar taṇ kaviy iyalp' eṇiṇum
 iṇṭu viriyum ituv eṇav aṇci
 vēṇṭ' oru poruḷāl viḷamputum uraiyē
 marṛavai makilv' urak
 karṛavar uṇarka

14 This second paratext is more clearly in a distinguished voice, and even uses a slightly different language register, at the same time more formulaic and more modern (I thank E. Annamalai for sharing this insight on language register). This might be why even in the first Mission Press edition, the final *ācīriyam* is said to be the work of a student, while the initial *pāvurai patikam* is implicitly attributed to Beschi.

15 The colophon is found in BL, Mss. Tam. B. 3, ff. 470^v–471^r; it has also been reproduced at the end of the 1851–1853 edition: *anāti nāmattup periyānāyaki tuṇaiyāl avataritta nāṇai vaḷartta kaittātai vaḷaṇ eṇṇuṇ cūcai taṇ caritaiy ākiya tēmpāvaṇi naṇṛāka muṭintatu. taṇ-maṇattuṇaiyāy niṇṛa cūcai māmuṇi caritai muṇṇuraitta vaḷāy pīṇṇ uraitan tīṅk'uraippitta vaḷāy ekkalaṇ aṇaittum viḷaivitt' uṇarttuṇ kilattiy ākiya mariyāy eṇpāl vāṇulak' uvappap pūlak' uyirppat tūyulakuṇ cittiraṇṇa tēṅkav avataritta nāṇaṇaik kaṇṇi mārāt' iṇṇṛa 1729m āṇṭil avataṇ oḷi nīrai pīrai eṇa vippūlak' iruḷ oḷiyap pīranta tiruṇāl mukirttat tavaṇ rīru malar ppātatt' aṇiy eṇat tēmpāvaṇi yurai muṭintatu. ākaiyār puṇavurai kātṭutum.*

mīṇṭu kallārum viḷaipayan̄ urav urai
iṇṭuvelip poruḷāy iyampuva karuttu.¹⁶

As for the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, this is a poem on the greatly edifying life-story of Joseph, who deserves the name of Vaḷan because he had the role to attend as a foster father to the cherished life of the Lord, who is filled with protecting grace, and incarnated without any defect. In order to match this poem with a text of explanation (*uraitta ceyyul*) and to give a clear summary (*teḷivurai*) not deviating from the line of the poem, and yet afraid that it will become too long—considering that, if you ask learned men about their poems, they will tell you how one word has many meanings, and one meaning can be expressed in many words—this explanation (*urai*) will only mention the one meaning that is necessary. While learned men (*karravar*) understand and enjoy such things fully, for simple people (*kallār*) to also experience a fully formed result, my intention is to explain it in an accessible way (*veliporuḷāy*) here in the commentary.

This passage states that the main concerns of the commentator are to remain faithful to the original text, not to write an exceedingly long text, and to make the poem clear and accessible to simple, even if still literate, people. In other words, this is not an explanation for fellow poets, and the word *teḷivurai* acquires a quasi-technical meaning in this context. It excludes other types of commentary, like the word-by-word *patavurai* or the elaborate *virivurai*, in favor of a short summary of the verses. Indeed, while the commentary of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* included in this manuscript is by no means in an easy register, it does offer short and straightforward prose retellings of the original verses. Words are glossed only when necessary, and often the multiple meanings of a stanza are not explored. The purpose of such a commentary does not seem to present professional scholars with a learned discussion on each stanza, but to give its literate yet common readers the gist of the stanza. These imagined readers could well be the catechists who received a generic Tamil education in the Ēlākkuricci school, and had a certain amount of literary and cultural capital, but were not professional poets or intellectuals. Their purpose would be to understand the stanzas, and use them for teaching the poem in public.

16 BL, Mss. Tam. B. 3, f. g (the older copy); ff. k-l (the newer copy). I adopt line breaks as in the newer copy, which also correspond to line breaks in the 1851 edition.

There are no sources on how this was done in the eighteenth century, but some clues can be gathered from nineteenth-century practices. In the 1860s, Catholic poet and Pondicherry resident Cavarāyalu Nāyakar toured various cities and villages in Tamil Nadu to recite and explain the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in front of relatively large audiences. In 1861, the Christian population of Pondicherry offered him a gold medal precisely because “of the rare talent and the skillfulness he displayed in explaining and paraphrasing viva voce the wonderful Tamil poem by Fr. Beschi, the *Tēmpāvaṇi*.” An article on the journal *Moniteur Officiel* of Pondicherry on 14 June 1861 further describes Cavarāyalu Nāyakar’s performance on the day of the ceremony during which he received the medal: “He recited some stanzas of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, then commented upon them with an elegant and approachable style, and then changed the subject to show how Father Beschi came to these faraway lands [...].”¹⁷ The 1729 commentary is coherent with this practice of public explanation in an approachable style that would bring the *Tēmpāvaṇi* to normal Catholics, rather than to a public of expert *pulavars* with the means of accessing the poem on their own—precisely as stated by the commentator himself in the *patikam*. Moreover, the marked variations in the text of the poem and the commentary, found in the manuscript copies of the text mentioned at the beginning of this section, point to its use in public performances as well as teaching. Catechists and school masters probably adapted the *Tēmpāvaṇi* to the needs of their audiences and their students, especially by twisting or updating its commentary, a process that little by little came to an end after the text was crystallized in the authoritative printed edition of 1851–1853. Yet these earlier practices show how accessing Beschi’s poem, and Tamil Catholic literature more generally, often implied the mediation of a catechist-like figure. Similar to Cavarāyalu Nāyakar, and other forgotten performers, preachers, and teachers, the commentator of the 1729 manuscript self-positioned as such a mediator between the poem and a devoted popular audience, and as the link between the institutional mission, represented by Beschi and his literary practices, and the people.

17 [...] en récompense du rare talent et de l’habileté qu’il a déployés à expliquer et à paraphraser de vive-voix le magnifique poème tamoul du R.P. Beschi, intitulé Tembavani [...]; Lorsqu’il eut pris place au fauteil, Savarayalounaïker récita quelques strophes du Tembavani; il les commenta dans un style élégant et facile, puis quittant ce sujet, il montra le père Beschi arrivant dans ces contrées lointanes ... Ce. Cavarāyalu Nāyakar [= Z. Savarayalounaïker], *Recueil de chants tamouls* (Pondichéry: A. Saligny, Imprimeur du Gouvernement, 1869), 1 and 3.

2 Catechist Dynasties

Some of the early practices of copying, performing, and teaching the poem, implicit in its manuscript history, emerge forcefully in two exceptional documents recording the history of a family of catechists of the village of Kurivīṇattam, a tiny hamlet just one kilometer away from the old Jesuit residence of Kāmanāyakkanpaṭṭi, where Beschi began his career in South India. The first document is the genealogical record of the members of the Vellala family of the village of Vaṭakkankuḷam, who called themselves by the title of *piḷḷaimār*, and who provided catechists to the local Catholic community for more than a century. This document was compiled in 1915 from local palm-leaf records and oral histories by Father Marianus Arpudam SJ (= Arputam, 1867–1923), who himself belonged to this group, and titled *A Genealogical Study of the Catholic Vellala Families at Vadakkankulam*.¹⁸ It was produced in the context of violent litigations between different castes competing for control over Catholic places and rites in the village, and has the agenda of proving the ancient history and deep ties of the community with the location of Vaṭakkankuḷam, as well as with a translocal network of Vellala catechists throughout the Tamil country.¹⁹ In other words, this document shows how a well-established Vellala community reflected on its past, and produced a document whose hybrid mode, between dynastic history (*vaṁśāvali*) and family genealogy, is similar to that of contemporary caste *purāṇas*, which mixed the old puranic forms with new communal and historical preoccupations.²⁰ Notwithstanding, or maybe because of this later agenda, the document contains a wealth of exceptional information on the eighteenth century.

18 Marianus Arpudam SJ, *A Genealogical Study of the Catholic Vellala Families at Vadakkankulam*, JAMP 217/463. In the context of nineteenth century caste litigations at Vaṭakkankuḷam, the story of the place was also mobilized by two other Jesuits, in Edouard Perroquin's 1908 account, *The History of Vadakkankulam Christianity*, JAMP 217/459, and in Adrien Caussanel's *Historical Notes on the Tinnevely District*, JAMP 217/297. These last two accounts are not as focused on Vellala families, but agree in large part with the origin myths found in Arpudam's work.

19 On these nineteenth century disputes among Catholics of different castes, often revolving around certain honors (*marīyātai*) attributed during processions and other rites, see Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*; Civacuppiramaṇiyan, *Kīrittavamum cāṭiyum*; and Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Caste, Class and Catholicism in India 1789–1914* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998).

20 One example of Christian caste *purāṇam* in Tamil is the *Paravar purāṇam* by Aruḷappa-mutaliyār; on this type of writing, see Veena Das, "A Sociological Approach to the Caste Puranas: A Case Study," *Sociological Bulletin* 17, 2 (1968): 141–164; and more recently Badri Narayan, *Women Heroes and Dalit assertion in North India. Culture, Identity and Politics* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks and London: Sage publications, 2006), esp. 41–42.

In the beginning of *A Genealogical Study*, we learn how the founder of this dynasty, Gnanaprakasam (Ñāṇappirakācam), came to Vaṭakkankuḷam, converted to Catholicism, and became a catechist. He later was the teacher of Tēvacakāyam Piḷḷai, the first Indian convert of the Madurai mission to be martyred in 1752. Tēvacakāyam's martyrdom and saintly fame greatly contributed to increasing the prestige of Ñāṇappirakācam's family, and the connection between Ñāṇappirakācam and Tēvacakāyam was also recorded in Jesuit sources of the period. In addition to such origin stories, the manuscript by Arpudam also offers an unprecedented amount of data on the names, family affiliations, and professions of each member of the Vaṭakkankuḷam family lineage, *kuṭumpam* in Tamil, and their affiliated lineages. Sometimes, the text also includes short but precious biographical sketches. Among these affiliated lineages, one that emerges in the document as being both ancient and important is precisely the catechist family of Kuriviṇattam.

Additional sources on this family are the journal (*Cavarirāyappiḷḷai carit-tiram*) and the family history (*Cavarirāyappiḷḷai vama varalāru*) written by nineteenth-century Lutheran catechist Upatēciyār Cavarirāya Piḷḷai (1801–1874). These literary genres, especially the journal, were typical instruments of self-knowledge and education among Protestant catechists, who from early on were encouraged to write about their work among local communities, and their families. Most of these documents have been lost, or survive only as manuscripts, but fortunately for us Cavarirāya Piḷḷai's texts were published in 1900 by his son, Yōvāṇ Tēvacakāyam Cavarirāyaṇ, who recognized their importance. Note immediately the middle name of the son: Tēvacakāyam, the name of the martyr of Vaṭakkankuḷam, and one of the most common Catholic names in the south of the Tamil country. Indeed, Cavarirāya Piḷḷai baptized his son following an old family tradition, since we discover from his works that he originally belonged to the Catholic Vellalla family of Kuriviṇattam also mentioned in the manuscript by Arpudam, and was connected with the Vaṭakkankuḷam lineage by marriage. He only converted to Lutheranism in his early twenties. So, when Cavarirāya Piḷḷai wrote about his ancestors in the history of his family, the people he mentioned were mostly the Catholic élites of Kuriviṇattam also listed in *A Genealogical Study*. Thanks to this peculiar history, we have two parallel and exceptional sources on the very same family of catechists.²¹

21 To the best of my knowledge, the connection between the Arpudam manuscript and Cavarirāya Piḷḷai's family history has not been noticed before. On this exceptional document, which is part of a set of works edited by Cavarirāya Piḷḷai's son, including a diary and a biography, see Robert Eric Frykenberg and John J. Paul, "A Research Note on the Discovery of Writings by Savariraya Pillai, A Tamil Diarist of Mid-Nineteenth-Century

Let us turn to the description of this family. Narasinghamurthia Pillai (Nara-
ciṅka Piḷḷai in Tamil) was the first Catholic convert and founder of the Catholic
Vellala lineage in Kuruviṇatām.²² The only son of Naraciṅkam Piḷḷai, Nalla-
tampiyā Piḷḷai, died very young, but he still managed to produce a son with his
wife Cuvāmiyaṭiyāl. The boy, Cavarimuttu Piḷḷai, survived to become an impor-
tant, if somewhat restless figure in the history of the family. We learn from
Cavarirāya Piḷḷai that Cavarimuttu's mother Cuvāmiyaṭiyāl took good care of
him, and was invested in his education, even after the death of her husband Nal-
latampiyā and her second marriage to a certain Viyākappiḷḷai. Cuvāmiyaṭiyāl
sent Cavarimuttu to school from early on, and hired learned *pulavars* to deepen
his education. These men would read and explain to Cavarimuttu the *Tēmpā-
vaṇi*, along with other difficult poems.²³ This detail reveals how Beschi's poem
had become important for the education of young Catholic boys almost imme-
diately after its composition, considering that the life of Cavarimuttu unfolded
in the middle of the eighteenth century. Thanks to this education, Cavarimuttu
went on to become a disciple of the priest at Vaṭakkunḷam, while his younger
brother became record-keeper, *kaṇakkuppillai*, in another village. Even after
running away from Vaṭakkunḷam to the Maravar country, for reasons that
remain unknown, he ended up working as a catechist and a teacher, often fol-
lowing some missionary, until his early death at Kāmanāyakanpatti.²⁴

The main events of Cavarimuttu's life, recounted at length in the family his-
tory by Cavarirāya Piḷḷai, are well summarized in one of the short but precious
biographical notes of the Arpudam manuscript:

Saverimuthu P. was a disciple of the priest at Vadakankulam. Enraged
as her [*sic*] young widowed mother remarried to Yagappa P of Visaya-
narayanam, went in exile to the Maravan country, and after pitiable wan-
derings came and settled at Kamanayakanpatti as Vasal ubedesi ["resi-
dent catechist"]. Here he refused the hand of **Kanakan's** daughter for she

Tinnevely," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 44, 3 (1985): 521–528. I use the 2006 reprint of
the 1900 edition of the two works, *Cavarirāyappiḷḷai vamca varalāru* and *Cavarirāyappiḷḷai
carittiram*, by Ā. Civaippiramaṇiyaṇ. This includes an introduction with useful informa-
tion about the life and duties of Lutheran catechists in the early nineteenth century. The
1900 edition was by Cavarirāyappiḷḷai's son, Yōvāṇ Tēvacakāyam Piḷḷai, who appears as the
"author" in the 2006 edition (and thus I cite him).

22 The genealogy of the "Guruvinatham kudumbam" is in Arpudam, *A Genealogical Study*,
124–133.

23 *tēmpāvaṇi mutalia aruntamiḷḷkaḷaiyum vācikkavum arttam paṇṇavum tīramaiyūṭaiyavar-
kaḷāy iruntārkaḷ*. Yōvāṇ Tēvacakāyaṇ, *Upatēciyar cavarirāyapiḷḷai*, 77.

24 The life of Cavarimuttu is in Yōvāṇ Tēvacakāyaṇ, *Upatēciyar cavarirāyapiḷḷai*, 76–85.

was immodest as வேட்டுக்கிடாய் [*vēṭṭukkīṭāy*], but married the daughter of Thamma Chettiar of Sekkarakudi at Vadak. He was afterwards **ubedesi** of Srivaikuntam where he planted the three of the present **puliantopu** [“tamarind grove”]. He resigned and became a teacher (near Esalapuram) of Tharmathupuram. Finally he came to Vadakankulam where he became the accountant of Mr. Bilderbeck. Caught by fever at Puliangudi (Vasudevanallur) he was brought to his father-in-law’s house at Kamanyakanpatti where he died in 1767 at the age of 35. Saverimuthu P. was a learned man, tall in stature, fair in appearance, of great faith—writer & author of “Thembavani”, “Sathuragarathi”, “Kitteriammal ammanei” & others. His wife Madavadiyal, the third of the children of Thammu Chettiar, died at Thuttampatti.²⁵

This account shows that the geographical contours of Cavarimuttu’s life overlapped in many ways with Beschi’s missionary trajectory. He traveled to the Maravar country soon after Beschi was there to collect witnesses for Brito’s inquiry, and he worked as resident catechist (*vācal upatēci*) at Kāmanāyakkānpatti, where Beschi began his missionary career. Finally, towards the end of his life, Cavarimuttu worked as secretary of a certain Mr. Bilderbeck. While the chronology given by Arpudam is coherent with that found in Caverirāya Piḷḷai’s family history, it does not map exactly onto the admittedly little information available on Mr. Bilderbeck. This merchant, Christopher Bilderbeck (d. 1817), father of the better-known Anglican missionary John Bilderbeck (1809–1880), likely settled in Vaṭṭakkaṅkūḷam only late in the eighteenth century, considering that he was born around 1758.²⁶ Exact dating aside, though, it is not surprising that in this context Cavarimuttu would come into contact with Beschi’s literary works. But what does the last sentence of the passage mean? How could Cavarimuttu be “writer & author” of most of Beschi’s poems?

The answer becomes obvious when reading another short note in the Arpudam manuscript, clearly referring to the relationship between a manuscript and its owner, rather than a text and its author:

25 Arpudam, *A Genealogical Study*, 124.

26 Yōvāṇ Tēvacakāyaṇ, *Upatēciyar cavarirāyapiḷḷai*, 77 contains a short notice on Mr. Bilderbeck saying that he had no children from his wife, only from his Indian mistress, but still raised them like Europeans. On his approximate date of birth, see the webpage: <http://www.vincemattthews.plus.com/family/bild01.htm> (consulted on 16/09/2021). His first son John Bilderbeck (1809–1880) became an Anglican pastor, and his obituary can be found in K. et al., *Church missionary intelligencer record. A monthly journal of missionary information*, vol. 5 (London: Church missionary house, 1880), 512–513.

Thembavani of Saverimuthu P. though stolen by the robbers (தளவாய்-பிள்ளை கொள்ளை) was purchased by his son Mariasinga Chettiyar, from whom it passed to Nadukadai Michael. P. & from him to his son Ignacimuthu P., from whom it passed to Devasagaiam Savaraya P in whose custody is also the Thembavani of his grandfather.²⁷

This short passage refers the chain of transmission of a material object, which could be and was at a point stolen—that is, it refers to a manuscript of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* originally copied by Cavarimuttu. The passage, and the chain of manuscript transmission it quickly records, is clarified and explained in detail by Cavarirāya Piḷḷai's family history. Indeed, Cavarirāya Piḷḷai tells us, Cavarimuttu owned a copy of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, which he himself had copied onto palm-leaves. A thief, called Taḷavāy Piḷḷai, stole that copy around the time of Cavarimuttu's death, and soon after he sold the manuscript to a merchant. The new owner was a clever man. He immediately realized that the object must have been a prized family possession, and guessed the family to which he must have belonged. So, he brought the palm-leaf manuscript to Cavarimuttu's son Mariyaciṅkam Piḷḷai, and offered to return it to him, of course upon payment of its market price. Mariyaciṅkam, "seeing that the palm leaf (*ēṭu*) was in the handwriting (*kaiyeḷuttu*) of his father, was astonished, and bought it for the price asked."²⁸ The *Tēmpāvaṇi* thus came back to the family.

As stated by Arpudam too, Mariyaciṅkam later gave the manuscript to his second wife's son, who passed it down to his son Inṇācimuttu. The latter in turn gave it to Upatēciyār Cavarirāya Piḷḷai's son, Yōvāṇ Tēvacakāyaṇ Cavarirāyaṇ, the editor of his father's diary and family history. His name is found in the passage by Arpudam above in its anglicized form, Devasagaiam Savaraya, without any mention that this member of the family had become in the meantime a Lutheran. Still, we know that in his journey from hand to hand, the manuscript finally went from Catholic to Protestant hands, while staying within the same family. Yōvāṇ Tēvacakāyaṇ Cavarirāyaṇ had it in his custody for a while, before deciding to give it back to his ancestral church in Kuruviṇatām with a pompous ceremony. This exceptional story shows the circulation of a single manuscript of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in the same family over five generations, spanning more than a century, and crossing confessional divides. It also shows how Beschi's *Tēmpāvaṇi* accompanied Cavarimuttu's life from his early childhood education to his afterlife, shaping his and his family's cultural identity both as a text and as an object throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

²⁷ Arpudam, *A Genealogical Study*, 124.

²⁸ Yōvāṇ Tēvacakāyaṇ, *Upatēciyar cavarirāyapiḷḷai*, 81.

The lives of the other members of the same family, especially Nanasanjivi Pillai (Ñāṇacañcīvi Piḷḷai) and Cavarimuttu's son Mariyaciṅkam Piḷḷai, highlight other important aspects of the Catholic cultural world in the second half of the eighteenth century.²⁹ Ñāṇacañcīvi Piḷḷai lived most of his life in the small village of Vaṭakkaṅkuḷam, and yet he knew Latin, thanks to the schooling efforts of the missionaries. Moreover, his Catholic zeal led him to once beat a Protestant minister, an event that resonates well with the bitter rivalry that characterized Beschi's missionary career, and throws further light on the difficult choice of Upatēciyār Cavarirāya Piḷḷai and his son to convert, as well as on their attachment to their Catholic roots. By contrast, Mariyaciṅkam was not a particularly learned man, but fortunately the text tells us what he did not know—that is, what his more cultured relatives likely knew. As it turns out, writing on palm leaf and a certain knowledge of arithmetic were considered basic skills for the men of this family, and for the small-town Catholic intelligentsia of their time.

It will be clear by now that the analogies between the cultural milieu mapped by these local histories and what Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have defined as "*karaṇam* culture" run deep. These authors described the small-scale literati that made up *karaṇam* culture as polyglot authors of texts meant to be recited in public as well as read privately, often privileging prose over verse. They were "a service gentry [...] able to accommodate new members over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, groups that emerged into this sphere of discussion by processes of social mobility."³⁰ The early nineteenth-century records we just read look back at the time in the eighteenth century when Catholic, and later Lutheran, Vellalas emerged into this type of literate and literary sphere by processes of social mobility facilitated, and partially generated, by Catholicism and the mission. Catechists at this time combined the cultural tools offered to them by family and caste, that is the *karaṇam* toolbox, with the spiritual, cultural, and institutional investiture given to them by the mission. The *Tēmpāvaṇi*, a poem which was their own, the highest poetic expression of Catholic Tamil literature of their time, further gave them an entry point into the world of poetry and learning, and the social and political networks that made that world. It is not surprise, then, that the *Tēmpāvaṇi* was a crucial part of their education, a text that they copied and whose manuscripts were passed down within their families in the villages of the Tamil country.

29 These biographical sketches are in Arpudam, *A Genealogical Study*, 124 and 126.

30 Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, 19–20.

3 Śaiva Neighbors and Rivals

The sources we just analyzed, besides offering us glimpses into the role of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in the life of a Catholic catechist family, also offer an image of the catechist community in the larger religious and cultural context of the eighteenth century. Most strikingly, this is the moment when Lutheran and Anglican forms of Christianity became very important, especially in the southernmost region of the Tamil country. Cavarirāya Piḷḷai's conversion to Lutheranism points to this process, and to its complex nature, since he continued to have a keen interest in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, and the traditions of his Catholic ancestors. The same documents also show how most of the families that at the turn of the eighteenth century converted to become Catholic catechists were originally Śaiva, and continued to have relatives who professed that faith. We have almost no information on the reactions of those who remained Śaiva to the conversion and new allegiances of their friends and family members. Yet, if we look closely enough at Jesuit sources of the time, and compare them with oral histories and legends that still circulate in Tamil Nadu regarding the foundations of churches and villages, the contours of the catechists' local activities emerge as integrated into a social, literary, and religious fabric that unfolded on the local scale, where the boundaries between Catholic and Śaiva were not so firm.

This emerges with particular force in the oral sources and village accounts from the deep south of the Tamil country, probably because this region still has strong Catholic communities and folk traditions. Besides, even though Beschi's life and work are tightly connected with the Kaveri delta region, he began his missionary career in Southern Tamil Nadu, in the village of Kāmanāyakkappaṭṭi, and spent his last years at Maṇappāṭu on the Fishery coast, before dying in Kerala. So, the oral traditions of both these areas, the Fishery coast and the Tenkasi region where Kāmanāyakkappaṭṭi is located, remember Beschi in a number of colorful stories. For example, he appears in the foundation myth of the church of Cērntamaram, often spelled Sendamaram in English, an account filled with details that might help us understand the social and cultural milieu in which the catechists operated:

Apart from them, in the beginning of the eighteenth century (in the year 1714) Giuseppe Beschi aka Vīramāmuṇivar, who was working at Kāmanāyakkappaṭṭi, came to preach in the Tirunelveli (Nellai) district. At that time, a man of the *kaṇṇiyāṇ* caste listened to his teachings, converted, and became his catechist (*upatēciyar*), and came to teach with the name of Ūṇāṇtiraṇ. Due to his efforts, two brothers who lived in the village of Veḷlāṅkuḷi nearby Kallīṭaikkuricci in this district—called Irūḷappa Mūppa-

ṇar and Caṅkaraliṅka Mūppaṇar, belonging to the *cēṇaiyar* or *ilaivaṇikar* caste—were converted by his teachings and zeal. Virāmamuṇivar baptized both of them with his own holy hands in 1715, and Irulaṇṇa Mūppaṇar took the name of Ṇāṇēntiraṇ, while Caṅkaraliṅka Mūppaṇar took the name of Cavarimuttu. After this, both of them were mistreated by their relations, so Ṇāṇēntiraṇ Mūppaṇar moved to Citamparāpuram next to Caṅkaraṅkōyil, and Caṅkaraliṅka Mūppaṇar moved to a place called Vairavaṇ kuṭiyiruppu (i.e., Tavaṇai) next to Ceṅkōṭṭai. Caṅkaraliṅka Mūppaṇar who had gone to Tavaṇai, because of his ability in Tamil due to being born in the group of the *cēṇaiyar*, began to work in that village (*ūr*) in the house of a man called Muttuvīrappa Pulavar. Seeing his rectitude, Muttuvīrappa Pulavar gave to him his own daughter, Vīracaṅkili Māṭatti, in marriage, and they all lived in the same house. At that time, because of his learning (*pulamai*) Muttuvīrappa Pulavar was appointed by the Zamindar of Vaṭakarai, called Tiru Ciṇṇa Ānanta Paṇṭiyaṇ, as one of the ritual singers (*ōtutar*) in the temple of Pirakalāticuvarar in Cērtamaram, and so he came to live in Cērtamaram.³¹

I stop here, but the story continues. Caṅkaraliṅka Mūppaṇar, together with his wife, sets out to join his father-in-law, but on their way to Cērtamaram the couple walks in front of a chapel dedicated to the archangel Michael. Caṅkaraliṅka, who has not yet confessed his conversion to his wife, cannot however repress the irresistible urge to worship in the chapel. He has to tell her the whole story, and so he does. Then he prays, and finally—to make the proverbially long story short—she converts too. When husband and wife, now both openly Catholic, arrive in Cērtamaram, they begin preaching, converting, and tending after the local community, practically working as catechists.

One reason why I decided to recount this particular origin narrative is its surprising connection with events narrated in Jesuit reports of the period, where we find multiple references to a certain Gnaniendira (Ṇāṇēntiraṇ), who worked as Beschi's catechist in Kurukkalpaṭṭi in 1714–1715. He was one of the two catechists who accompanied Beschi when the Pariah we encountered in Chapter Two set in motion the events leading to the persecution of the Christians

31 I translated this passage into English from *Cērtamaram tūya irāyappar ciṇṇappar ālaya nuṇṇaṇṭu viḷā—ūr varalāru* (Cērtamaram, 1987), 4–5. The same episode is narrated more at length in another pamphlet, *Cērtamaram puṇita irayappar, ciṇṇappar tiru stala māṇmiyam* (Cērtamaram, 1953), which also deals with the issue that made the small village of Cērtamaram briefly famous in the early twentieth century, namely the discovery that the old church incorporates stones from a Hindu temple (*ibidem*, 35–38).

of Kurukkalpaṭṭi, Kāmanāyakkappaṭṭi and Kayattāru in 1714.³² The Cērantamaram village history claims that it was this Nāṇēntiraṇ who converted the two *mūppaṇar* brothers. Beschi baptized them, of course, conferring the new religious identity by imposition of his holy hands (*tirukkai*), but he didn't play any active role in the evangelization of the village. And yet, notwithstanding the marginalization of the role of Beschi, Caṅkaraliṅka Mūppaṇar's story is completely different from that of the Pariah we analyzed earlier. The events of his life, conversion, and evangelizing efforts show a network of independent circulation of Catholicism that was sanctioned and approved by the missionaries.

Among the striking elements in the story is the precise caste identification of the main characters, likely a function of the moment in which the story was written in the early twentieth century rather than an exact reference to eighteenth-century realities. Still, this account shows the catechists as belonging to Southern groups—Nāṇēntiraṇ is *kaṇṇiyāṇ*, the two brothers are *ceṇaiyar*—that shared a certain amount of cultural capital, and the strive towards upward mobility.³³ Especially Caṅkaraliṅka, the brother who will end up becoming the first catechist of Cērantamaram, is portrayed as a provincial Tamil savant, married into the family of a local *pulavar* turned *ōtuvar* of the village temple. This points to the peripheral intellectual class that constituted, I argue, the cultural milieu in which most catechists were immersed before as well as after joining the mission, and the milieu in which the Catholic texts we read so far circulated. Finally, the name of the second brother, Caṅkaraliṅka, as well as his father-in-law's occupation as *ōtuvar*, a professional singer of Śaiva hymns, speaks to the original religious affiliation of the two convert brothers as some form of Tamil Śaivism. This in turn points to a general tendency that we mentioned. Converts to Catholicism in the eighteenth century, and especially those literate men who would become catechists, often belonged originally to Śaiva (mostly, self-proclaimed Vellala) families. Śaivism always remained in the

32 *Il padre Beschi, il quale con un nobile catechista detto Gnaniendira stava attualmente preparando il S.to Presepio* [...] “Father Beschi, who with the noble catechist Gnaniendira, was at that time preparing the Holy Crib ...” Throughout the episode of the persecution by the prince of Caietharu (Kayattāru), Beschi is accompanied by two catechists, Xaveriraian (Cavēriraian) and Gnaniendira (Nāṇēntiraṇ). The first is tortured, but Brandolini in his account is not sure about what happens to the second (*Non saprei dire di certo, se all'altro catechista fossero dati i tormenti. Penso più tosto, che nò; [...]*) Antonio Broglia Brandolini, *Lettera annua della Missione del Madurei dell'anno 1714 e 1715* (Lisbon, 20 March 1720), ARSI, Goa 54a, ff. 447–482, here 467^r and 468^v.

33 Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, vol. 6, 360–361.

not-so-remote past of the mission, and missionaries and their catechists were in direct competition with Śaiva ritual, spiritual and intellectual practices.

This competing milieu appears clearly in the Tamil version of Muttucāmi Piḷ-ḷai's biography of Beschi, which—unlike the English version—includes a number of colorful vignettes showing how Beschi answered various tricky questions posed to him by his Śaiva opponents. Once, for instance, he engaged with two Śaiva itinerant preachers, called *paṇṭāram*, in a debate that took place entirely through hand gestures. He won without pronouncing a single word.³⁴ Another time, nine conceited *paṇṭāram*, sure of their superior education, came to Beschi at Ēlākkuricci, and asked him to engage in a philosophical debate (*tarkkam*). After only one month of intense discussion (and this gives a sense of the length of such public debates) they all declared defeat. Six of them converted, while three of them cut their dreadlocks (*caṭai*) out of shame, and moved to another region—but the hair they cut off was tied, like straw, to the roof of the mandapa at Tirukkāvalūr.³⁵ Notice how in all these episodes, Beschi's opponents are Śaiva *paṇṭāram*, while he himself was dressed and behaved at this time as a Christian *paṇṭāram*, a strategy we encountered in the previous chapters. So, in more than one way, Beschi, his catechists, and their Śaiva counterparts were colleagues.

The history of Śaiva responses to Catholicism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, before the well-known nineteenth-century debates between Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta champions and Protestant missionaries, is little known.³⁶ In fact, there are almost no sources showing that such early responses existed, apart from fragments of an anti-Catholic treatise called *Ēcumata nirākaraṇam*, "The refutation of the religion of Jesus," attributed to the Vīraśaiva poet-saint Turaimaṅkalam Civappirakācar. If this text is really by Civappirakācar, and if the usual dating of this author to the seventeenth century is correct, then the *Ēcumata nirākaraṇam* was not a polemic against Beschi, but against one of the earlier missionaries, possibly Roberto Nobili.³⁷ Whatever the case, only three verses survived, because they were incorporated within

34 Muttucāmi, *Vīramāmuṇivarcarittiram*, 18.

35 Ibidem, 19.

36 A classical study on these later controversies is Young and Jebanesan, *The Bible Trembled*; recent works by Srilata Raman, Rick Weiss, and others further clarify the Śaiva milieu of the nineteenth century.

37 Cōmacuntara Tēcikar, *Tamiḻ pulavarkaḷ varalāru. patinēlām nūṟṇṇu* (Putukkōṭṭai: Kīṭaikkumiṭam s.s. tēcikar, 1976), 125 cites Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ saying that the *Ēcumata nirākaraṇam* was written against Beschi, but reckons that the work might be later since Christianity (allegedly) did not have a big following at Beschi's time.

Perūr Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ's commentary to Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Aṭikaḷār's *Kolai maruttal*, "Against killing." These stanzas give us a sense of those early controversies:³⁸

ari_kilai nararkkāy vēṇṭi yaḷittanaṇ miruka māti
yiraiyava nenrāyōrī yīnriṭa malamī tūruñ
cirupulu viraiyu rāten ceykuvai yataṇai nōkka
arivaru nuṇiya tēkiyaṇantanī yavai yeṇ ceyvāy.

ari_kilai. nararkkā vēṇṭi aḷittanaṇ mirukam āti
irai avan enrāy. ōr ī īnru iṭa malamītu ūrum
cīru puluvu iraiy urātu—en ceykuvaiy? ataṇai nōkka
arivarum nuṇiya tēki aṇantam nīy avai en ceyvāy.

You are ignorant. You say that the Lord has created the animals and so on for the use of men. Yet the small worms crawling in the dirty feces, born from a single fly, do not turn into food. What do you do [about them]? Similar to this, tiny creatures deprived of intelligence are limitless. What do you do about them?

vāytiran talarum vēṅkai valviṭa mumilpām pāti
nēyamar revarkūrāy nikaḷvate nūlakat tannāl
tūyavaṇātik kōtuñ conneri yaṭaṅkā teṇṇin
āyakō vāti māntark kaṭaṅkiya vitameṇ kollō.

vāy tirantu alarum vēṅkai, valviṭa mumilpāmpu āti
nēyam aru evarku ūrrāy nikaḷvatu en ulakattu annāl
tūyavaṇ ātikku ōtum col neṇi aṭaṅkātu eṇṇin
āyakōv āti māntarkku aṭaṅkiya vitam en kollō.

The tiger that roars with open mouth, the snake with strong poison, and the like, who have no love for anyone, behave harmfully—how so? If they do not obey the words said by the Purest one in the beginning, on that [first] day on earth, tell me, in what way would have the animals submitted to the first men?

38 On seventeenth-century Viraśaiva poet and theologian Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Aṭikaḷār, see Steinschneider "Beyond the Warring Sects," esp. 22 ff.

collīṇa ṇavarkkac cāti yaṭaṅkavun tuyaraṅ ceytē
 kolla marraiṇavū mīcaṇ enṇiṭṭiṇ koṭunā kāti
 nallavā vōrōr kālāt taṭaṅkalā ṇavilac cāti
 allal cey tiṭalār rīyōy aṇainta coṇ paḷutēy ākum.

collīṇaṇ avarṅku accāti aṭaṅkavun tuyaram ceytē
 kolla marraiṇavum īcaṇ enṇiṭṭiṇ, koṭu nāku āti
 nallavā vōrōr kālatt' aṭaṅkalāl, navilaccāti
 allal ceytiṭalāl tīyō? aṇainta col paḷutē ākum.³⁹

If you claim that the Lord ordered those falling into that [animal] birth to submit to them [i.e., to men], and that they are to be violently killed, then, since the treacherous animals such as the cobra sometimes are also obedient, and behave nicely, is killing them a bad thing? The word spoken by God must be false.

These complex verses survived within the commentary on a text arguing for vegetarianism, and coherently they analyze the relation between men and animals. They show a surprisingly deep knowledge of Christian stories, and challenge the commonly held belief that Christian ideas had very little circulation at this time. The three stanzas address the basic belief among Catholics that God wished men to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). The first verse claims that Catholic doctrine cannot explain the function of tiny, useless animals, such as worms and mosquitoes; the second one asks how was it possible that animals are meant to obey and serve men, if God allows dangerous beasts to continue living on this earth and harm human beings; and the third verse wonders, what about dangerous beasts that are domesticated only occasionally? Even when they stop doing any harm, still they are not used for food. Can we say that they submitted to men? As the commentary by Perūr Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ makes clear, the Christian doctrine challenged in these verses posits human beings and animals as qualitatively different, since the latter were created to serve and feed the former—and indeed animals will not resurrect,

39 Cited in Cāntaliṅka Aṭikaḷār, *Kolai maruttal* (Perūr: Tavattiru cāntaliṅka aṭikaḷār tiru-maṭam, 1971), 24–26. The last two verses are also found in Cōmacuntara Tēcikaṇ, *Tamiḷp pulavarkaḷ*, 125; he took the verses from a magazine (called *Tikkiraiyāyirru*), but it is likely that they originated in the commentary to Cāntaliṅka Aṭikaḷār's work from where I took them.

according to Christian doctrine. Śaivism, with its belief in rebirth, opposed this view, and reckoned all living beings to be part of the same cycle of karma and ultimate liberation.

It is difficult to gain a deeper understanding of the theological and social implications of these verses outside the context of the whole *Ēcumata nirāka-
raṇam*, and the text has not resurfaced yet. Still, the themes of hierarchy and of the relationship between men and nature resonate with our discussion thus far, especially with Civācivaṇ's questions, which we encountered in Chapter Five. These stanzas show how Christianity aimed at fundamentally reshaping that relationship. The new Christian doctrine of original sin, the fall, and the final judgment implied a new way of looking at the animals and the trees of the Tamil land, and explaining their relationship with men, as the Śaiva author of these verses well understood.

4 Towards the Colonial Archive

Within the contours of the social and cultural world we just sketched, a poem like the *Tēmpāvaṇi* seems at the same time appropriate and necessary. How else could catechists compete with their Śaiva neighbors and relatives? What Catholic hymns could they sing in response to the mellifluous verses of temple *ōtavar*? Of course, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* was not the only text available to them. During the eighteenth century, there was a proliferation of Catholic poems and plays in the popular genres of the period. The relationship between this body of literature, missionary literature, and the refined texts composed by local Catholic poets from the turn of the nineteenth century onwards, both in the *cīṟṟilakkiyam* genres and in the longer narrative genres, is yet to be explored. Certainly, Beschi's poems remained at the center of this literary constellation, and represent a successful attempt of the mission to harness this cultural milieu. In this context, the circulation of *Tēmpāvaṇi* manuscripts mapped by Arpudam and Cavarirāya Piḷḷai offers an example of practices common among eighteenth-century Catholic élites. Recovering this relatively widespread circulation of Beschi's poem also offers a new perspective on the colonial "discovery" of Beschi in the early nineteenth century, in the context of what has been called the Madras School of Orientalism. Great attention has been paid recently to the role of Francis Whyte Ellis, who was an admirer and a reader of Beschi. Ellis' desire to procure Beschi's manuscript for the College prompted Mutucāmi Piḷḷai to travel south, and eventually recover, among other texts, the 1729 manuscript of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* we analyzed earlier. And yet, this clichéd tale of rediscovery has obscured something that appears quite clearly in the pages,

and sometimes in the footnotes, of Muttucāmi's biography of Beschi. As soon as he stepped outside of Madras, Muttucāmi encountered a dense network of Catholic catechists and intellectuals who had preserved old manuscripts of poems by Beschi, and of texts by other missionaries too. Besides Luz Naig in Avūr, for instance, he mentions "Dayiriyam Pillei and Aairda Pillai, who were the sons of Chowrimootoo Pillei, Beschi's catechist, and who gave me much information respecting the life of Beschi as well as his valuable works, and whom I met at Cariyam Putti, a village which is about midway between Tanjore and Trichinopoly."⁴⁰

In other words, in order to "discover" Beschi's manuscript Muttucāmi simply had to ask those men who had been reading and using them throughout the eighteenth century, and were still doing so in the early colonial period.⁴¹ Indeed, one such man was a close collaborator of Ellis, and most likely the source of his interest in Beschi. As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, before launching the quest for Beschi's manuscripts, Ellis had studied the *Tēmpāvaṇi* and the *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*, as demonstrated by the many quotations from the two texts in his translation and commentary of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. He could probably access those texts because his Tamil teacher, Vittuvāṇ Cāmināta Piḷḷai, was a Catholic Vellala who had likely studied Beschi's poems while growing up in Pondicherry, as Cavarimuttu had done in Kuriviṇattam. Cāmināta Piḷḷai was furthermore the author of numerous Catholic poems, including the *Nacaraikkalampakam* and the *Ñāṇāttikkarāyar kāppiyam*. Both these texts use two Tamil literary genres, the *peruṇkāppiyam* and the *kalampakam*, first adapted to Christian poetics by Beschi.⁴² The *Nacaraikkalampakam* further follows the innovations introduced by Beschi, and includes verses on themes that were not part of the *kalampakam* genre before the *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*. So, while his poems still await proper analysis, Cāmināta Piḷḷai clearly stands at the juncture between the pre-colonial and the colonial order. It was likely him who brought to early nineteenth century Madras a set of Catholic texts and literary preoccupations that were important for him, for his family, and for his community.

⁴⁰ Muttucāmi, *Brief Sketch*, 19.

⁴¹ Emmrich, "The Ins and the Outs," analogously problematizes the rediscovery of ancient Jain literature.

⁴² See Chetty, *The Tamil Plutarch*, 114–115; Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 99–100 also mentions Cāmināta, saying that Ellis was not satisfied by his biographical sketch of Beschi, but doesn't cite the source (the detail is not in Chetty).

It is not surprising, then, that when Muttucāmi Piḷḷai set out to write a biography of Beschi, he could work with papers that had already been prepared for that purpose by Cāmināta Piḷḷai. It is not clear whether Muttucāmi himself was a relative of Cāmināta, but probably not, since the sources are silent about it. Still, it is possible that his career with Ellis in Madras was at least partially facilitated by this fellow Pondicherry Catholic. Besides, even though Muttucāmi worked at Fort St. George as a Tamil pundit and editor of Tamil classical texts, his interest in Beschi and Tamil Catholic literature was not only connected to the influence of Ellis. Muttucāmi himself came from a Catholic family, and it was likely his father who edited the first poems by Beschi to appear in print in 1843.⁴³ So, even though his biography of Beschi was written upon Ellis's request, Muttucāmi also had a personal engagement with and close knowledge of Beschi's œuvre. Indeed, in the 1820s Muttucāmi entered into a polemic against a Śaiva teacher in Chidambaram who had written a poem against Catholicism, the "Refutation of the religion of the Pope" or *Pāp-puvētavikarpam*. In the treatise he wrote to refute this poem, Muttucāmi often cited Beschi's stanzas from the *Tēmpāvaṇi* and the *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam*. In sum, the endorsement of Beschi's persona and poems among Vellala from Pondicherry such as Muttucāmi and Cāmināta, was imbricated with British Orientalism, but also connected with Catholic practices and traditions dating back to the eighteenth century.⁴⁴

One additional thread, woven into Ellis's interest in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, shows the connection with such eighteenth-century trajectories of circulation. As we already saw, when Ellis bought the 1729 manuscript from Luiz (or Luís) Naik via Muttucāmi, the first pages were missing. Some time later those pages appeared in the hands of Vētanāyakam Cāstiriyār, the Lutheran poet of Thanjavur, who eventually gave them to Muttucāmi.⁴⁵ While it seems reasonable that a Christian poet, albeit of a different denomination, could find inspiration in one of his predecessors, the fact that Vētanāyakam preserved a page

43 I infer this from A. Muttucāmi Piḷḷai's name. The A. could be the initial of his father's name, and the editor of the 1843 compendium of Beschi's works also including the Tamil version of Muttucāmi's bibliography is called Appāvu Piḷḷai.

44 On British orientalism and the role of Beschi within the development of Tamil studies in the context of the Madras school of Orientalism, see Ebeling and Trento, "From Jesuit Missionary to Tamil *pulavar*"; Thomas Trautmann, *Languages and Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2006); Id., *The Madras School of Orientalism: Producing Knowledge in Colonial South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

45 This information is in a letter by Thambisami to Walter Elliot (Caveripatam, 2 August 1844) bound together with the *Tēmpāvaṇi* manuscript in BL, Mss. Tam. B. 3.

of that specific manuscript, while also owning a newer manuscript of the first cantos of the poem, points to a devotional, symbolic significance of that material artifact. This attachment is particularly meaningful in light of the history of Vētanāyakam's family. His father Aruṇācalam Piḷḷai was a Śaiva Vellala from the Tirunelveli region who converted to Catholicism in the middle of the eighteenth century, and took the name of Tēvacakāyam. This is a common Catholic name, but the geographical location of the family in the South of the Tamil country, and the historical moment of this conversion, make for strong clues that Vētanāyakam's father took it in honor of the then recently killed Tēvacakāyam Piḷḷai, the disciple of Nāṇappirakācam Piḷḷai who founded the Vaṭakkaṇkuḷam Vellala lineage.⁴⁶ Vētanāyakam himself was raised and educated as a Catholic for the first ten years of his life, in the southern context we briefly sketched in the previous pages. Did he know, recite or maybe sing stanzas from the *Tēmpāvaṇi* as a young boy? Did his family retain an attachment to Beschi even after their conversion to Lutheranism in 1785, similarly to Upatēciyār Cavarirāyaṇ Piḷḷai and his son Yōvāṇ Tēvacakāyaṇ Cavarirāyaṇ? I believe so, but have no proof of it yet. There is still a possibility that Vētanāyakam learned about Beschi only after moving to Thanjavur, and becoming a disciple of the Lutheran Missionary Christian Friederich Schwartz (1726–1798).⁴⁷ He

46 Indeed, Aruṇācalam aka Tēvacakāyam was first introduced to Catholicism by a catechist called "Gnanenthira Kanian" who worked as a money lender while at the same time helping the poor. Notice how this catechist had the same name, and belonged to the same caste as Beschi's catechist Nāṇēntiraṇ whom we met before. Moreover, in their initial interaction, "Gnanenthira Kanian" answered to Aruṇācalam's question with a *kuṛaḷ veṇṇpā* verse, thus pointing once again to the spiritual as well as cultural leadership of the catechists. Aruṇācalam converted and was baptized at Kāmanāyakkappaṭṭi by a Jesuit missionary in 1760, became a catechist (*upatēciyār*), and married in 1770 a Catholic girl, Nāṇappū (a typical name for Catholic women of the Vaṭakkaṇkuḷam *vēḷālar* lineages). See Tā. Vi. Tēvanēcaṇ, *Taṇcai vētanāyakam cāstiriyār* (Madras: Kīristava ilakkiyac caṅkam, 1956), 1–2; Grace Parimala Appasamy, *Vedanayaga Sastriar. Biography of the Suvisedā Kavirayar of Thanjavur* (Thiruninravur: Thanjai Vedanayaga Sastriar Peravai, 1995), 1–2.

47 Vētanāyakaṇ (whose baptismal name was actually Vētapōtakam, the same as that of the Catholic missionary who baptized him) began studying grammar and arithmetic when he was five, and he had at times Hindu tutors. His father converted when he was eleven, and when he was twelve, he joined Schwartz and began his education in Thanjavur. See Tēvanēcaṇ, *Taṇcai vētanāyakam*, 2–7; Indira V. Peterson, "Bethlehem Kuṛavaṇci of Vedanayaka Sastri of Tanjore: The cultural discourses of a 19th century Tamil Christian Poem," in *Christians, Cultural Interactions, and the Religious Traditions of India*, eds Judith Brown and Robert E. Frykenberg (Grand Rapids: W. Eerdmans, 2002), 9–36; Ead., "Between Print and Performance: The Tamil Christian Poems of Vedanayaka Sastri and the Literary cultures of 19th-century South India," in *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, eds Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 25–59.

might have received that page of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* during a trip to the villages to Ēlākkuricci or Vaṭukarpēṭṭai, where Beschi spent a large part of his life and left a number of trained catechists. Still, what matters for this story is that, at the end of his life, Vētanāyakam still kept among his possessions that one page of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* manuscript.

In the nineteenth century, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* also circulated beyond Catholic and Protestant circles. When discussing possible modes of fruition of the poem and its paratexts, we encountered the figure of Cavarāyalu Nāyakar, a poet from Pondicherry who toured the Kaveri delta region reciting and explaining the *Tēmpāvaṇi* to a large public. Cavarāyalu Nāyakar himself was a Catholic, but his name shows that he belonged to a different group than Cāmināta and Mut-tucāmi Piḷḷai. Still, his education was also centered around the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. His teacher, though, had not been a Catholic intellectual himself, but rather the famous *pulavar* and Śaiva devotee Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai. Cavarāyalu Nāyakar was able to study with him thanks to the intercession of Ci. Tiyaṅkarācar (1826–1888), another student of Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai. The latter began by teaching Cavarāyalu some works of the Tamil canon, and then “took him through the *Tembavani* and other Christian religious works which he had specially come to study.”⁴⁸ This means that even the most important Tamil *pulavar* of the nineteenth century, the celebrated Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai, read and knew the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. Even more striking, he found the poem worthwhile enough to teach it to his Catholic student. When Cavarāyalu Nāyakar recited and explained the *Tēmpāvaṇi* to his audience, he was mediating the text for them in the light of Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai’s understanding of Beschi’s poem. At the same time, through his teacher Cavarāyalu became part of the wider world of Tamil literature, as shown by the many *pulavars* who sent him verses of praise for his anthology of poems published in 1869.⁴⁹

This short list of intellectuals who engaged with the *Tēmpāvaṇi* throughout the nineteenth century is partial. Each of the stories I just sketched is more complex than I made it out to be, and deserves to be the subject of a thorough investigation. My purpose in the previous pages has been simply to show that Beschi’s poem succeeded in making Catholicism part of the world of Tamil literary culture. His poem inspired later poets, was read and analyzed by later *pulavars*, and gave Catholics a classical *kāppiyam* of their own, a foundation on which to articulate their own place inside that world.

48 On Cavarāyalu Nāyakar, see Sridharam K. Guruswamy, *A Poets’ Poet: Life of Maha Vidwan Sri Meenakshisundaram Pillai, Based on the Biography in Tamil by Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. U.V. Swaminathaiyer* (Madras: Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer Library, 1976), 37–38.

49 Cavarāyalu Nāyakkar, *Recueil de chants tamouls*, 24–27.

5 Conclusions: Catholic Lay Identities in the *longue durée*

In conclusion, taking the *Tempāvaṇi* as a prism has allowed us to follow the accommodation of Catholic mobile and literate groups to the new colonial order, and to ideas of Tamil culture and literature that were developing in the early nineteenth century. In a world that was changing and rapidly modernizing, Catholics remained part of the world of traditional literary practices. Throughout this book I have argued that it was Beschi, and the invention of Tamil Catholic literature that happened at his time largely thanks to his own literary efforts, who positioned Catholicism within that world. Indeed, even the nineteenth-century rediscovery of Beschi as the “first orientalist” by Ellis and his peers in Madras was part of new colonial strategies as much as it was the continuation of eighteenth-century patterns. Yet the ruptures and continuities of the new order are not my concern here. Focusing on these processes was helpful only insofar as it offered a glimpse into the *longue durée* history of the reception and readership of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*. The importance of this beautiful, musical poem for the identity of Catholic catechists in the eighteenth century, and its continuous relevance at the turn of the nineteenth century, shines through this fragmented archive.

This chapter has shown first of all how the life of this text in the world is coherent with the clues contained within the poem itself as to its catechist readership, such as the use of the word *vētiyar* in the introduction, and the concerns expressed throughout its many cantos. As we explored in previous chapters, the *Tēmpāvaṇi* revealed itself as an attempt to represent the layered reality of the mission in a cohesive way, with its multiple local and global referents, for these men. The logic of the poem is one of figuration, in which the history of salvation and the history of the mission speak to and about each other. It is at the same time a logic of presence, insofar as the *Tēmpāvaṇi* portrays divine beings—the holy family, angels, demons—as really present in the Tamil land, as present as the flowers that Beschi planted in his garden in Ēlākkuricci. Throughout this chapter, I have tried to put the poem in conversation with different types of sources to convey that the *Tēmpāvaṇi* mattered, and that its original synthesis circulated, contributing to shaping a Tamil and Catholic social and cultural world. This world perhaps becomes more visible to us after it intersected with the colonial order, and entered the colonial archives. Yet that world is at the same time entirely present in the poem, if only we can look at it with the eyes of Beschi and his catechists in the eighteenth century.

Throughout this chapter, we also came to realize that catechists and elite laymen were not only the intended audience of the missionaries. As shown

in the history of the manuscripts and paratexts of the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, and in the diaries and family history of the catechists, these men independently cultivated the means to read and appreciate the poem. Within Catholic elite families, the poem played a crucial role in the education of young boys, and when these boys went on to become catechists and preachers, they used verses from the *Tēmpāvaṇi* to teach, preach and convert in the villages of the Tamil country. Moreover, any Tamil Catholic with literary ambition would engage with the *Tēmpāvaṇi* and the other texts written by Beschi in the early eighteenth century, thus confirming that this was perceived as the beginning of Catholic presence in the world of Tamil literature. As a result, these Christian *pulavars* brought the *Tēmpāvaṇi* all the way to the Śaiva temples and *maṭam* of the Tamil country. These institutions were at that time religious as well as literary centers, and it is in one such monastery that Miṇāṭcicuntaram Pillai explained Beschi's poem to his student Cavarāyalu Nāyakar.

In the process of reading the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in their family houses and villages, in public performance, in cities, and in private lessons in temples and monasteries, these catechists and Catholic *pulavars* performed a double mediation. On the one hand, they read and mobilized the world of Tamil poetry in order to explain the role of Catholic literature within it. They built Catholic poetry on the foundations of earlier Tamil poetry as much as on the rhetorical tools that by the eighteenth century were available to missionaries and their collaborators worldwide. They introduced new ideas concerning persuasion and the subject matter of poetry into their local literary worlds. In doing so, these men transformed the world of early modern Catholic literature in ways that are still to be explored, mostly due to the barrier of a language such as Tamil, until now marginal to the study of Christianity in this period.

On the other hand, these Catholic intellectuals mediated between the world of Catholic poetry—and perhaps, of learned poetry tout court—and the world of the more common devotees who would only be able to enjoy these poems thanks to their explanations. These people in turn produced their own poetry, in the form of ballads and theater plays often based on the same stories as the literature written by missionaries and Catholic *pulavars*. Through these types of texts, written in the genres of *ammānai*, *vācakappā*, *nāṭakam*, and almost always meant to be performed, they became readers and writers, insofar as they “read” missionary and learned poetry thanks to the mediation of the catechists. They became authors by reorganizing what they had heard into new musical and poetical forms that they could integrate in their everyday lives. In conclusion, the adaptation of Catholicism to Tamil literary culture was certainly a missionary strategy, one largely elaborated by Beschi in the early eighteenth century. Yet it also happened through impromptu tactics and strategies of reading

and performing the *Tēmpāvaṇi* by local men, catechists and Catholic *pulavars*, who adapted the poem to their world with all the tools at their disposal, from changes in intonation during a performance, to modes of contextualization.

Conclusions

In the second half of the eighteenth century, after two hundred years of worldly glories *ad maiorem dei gloriam*, the fortunes of the Society of Jesus turned abruptly. In 1759, the Portuguese crown suppressed it within its empire. France followed in 1764 and Spain in 1767, until Clement XIV suppressed the Society worldwide in 1773.¹ In the aftermath of this débacle, the ex-Jesuit Pietro Lichetta, writing from the South Indian village of Dharmapura, where he was still working in 1780, to his ex-confrère Giovanni Francesco Filippi, drew a bitter picture of the situation of Christianity in South India. His letter lists the misfortunes that had befallen the Madurai and Mysore missions in the previous decades, starting with the expulsion of Jesuits from Portugal, and mixes them with private complaints, regrets, and no little amount of despair. Throughout the letter, Lichetta comes through as a hardened man, who hated the world he now found himself in and no longer believed in the possibility of converting the Indians. He was only steps away from losing all hope.² And yet there is one redeeming passage in the letter, when Lichetta's pain rings true and his faith is pure. This is the recollection of the moment when he learned that the Society had been suppressed:

Yet all these afflictions were amusements, so to speak, in comparison with the one caused to us by the fatal blow of the extinction. I was with Father Pavone in this very residence when the ill news arrived in 1774, immediately after lunch on May 16, the day of the protector of the Society St. John Nepomucene. We were doing our spiritual readings, specifically regarding the rules of modesty. I was then taken by such anguish that, unable to

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- 1 For an overview on the suppression and later restoration of the Jesuits, see Robert Maryks and Jonathan Wright, *Jesuit Survival and Restoration. A Global History, 1773–1900* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015); Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Patrick Goujon, *Suppression et rétablissement de la Compagnie de Jésus (1773–1814)*, coll. Petite Bibliothèque Jésumite (Namur: Lessius, 2014). Clement XIV's Brief *Dominus ac Redemptor* was rejected in Québec and, most importantly, throughout the Russian Empire, then including eastern Poland. In this way, between the universal suppression of the Society in 1773, and its reconstitution in 1814, the Jesuits maintained continuity, thanks to a small remnant placed under the protection of non-Catholic sovereigns. See Marek Inglot SJ, *How the Jesuits Survived Their Suppression: The Society of Jesus in the Russian Empire (1773–1814)* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2015).
 - 2 Pavone, "Ricostruire la Compagnia partendo da Oriente," shows that the French translation of this letter published by the first Superior of the new Madurai mission, Joseph Bertrand (*La mission du Maduré*, vol. 4, 457–463), omitted most such critical passages.

stop the tears, I closed the book, and since then I have never wanted to read nor see it again, so not to renew the pain and the despair that were so intense and penetrating. I had never felt such agony in my life before, nor will I in the future, not even the agony naturally caused by death. In fact, I thought I could not survive such misery: I did not eat nor sleep, if not tired and oppressed by grief, and even the little sleep I could get was often interrupted. I would suddenly wake up, and the first thought that would occupy me, like a stab cruelly piercing through my heart, was: "The Society is extinct, and here I am, not a Jesuit anymore."³

Besides the vivid portrayal of the suppression as an intimate tragedy, this passage contains a highly symbolic moment, when Lichetta closes the book he was reading to never reopen it again. Indeed, in many ways the suppression of the Society in 1773 put an end to the eighteenth-century literary experiments I have explored in this book. The few (ex-)Jesuits who remained in South India had little time for books and literature. They had to fight for survival, negotiating with other religious orders, congregations, and empires, while the world around them was changing at an astonishing pace. If in the 1740s the Tamil region was still divided into many thriving little kingdoms, and missionaries were skillfully navigating that political diversity (some would call it fragmentation), by the end of the century the entire Tamil-speaking south fell under British rule, and became part of the Madras Presidency. This concluding chapter is not the place to explore this tectonic shift and the many changes it entailed at all levels of Tamil religious, social, and cultural life. Yet, while by the end of the eighteenth century our missionary authors had abandoned the realm of literature, what about our Tamil Catholic poems, and catechist readers?

3 *Ma tutte queste afflizioni furono, diciamo così, divertimenti in confronto di quella, che ci causò il colpo fatale dell'estinzione. Mi trovava io col P. Pavone giusto in questa Residenza, quando ne arrivò l'infautissima novella, che fu appunto il dopo pranzo dei 16. Maggio, giorno di S. Giovanni Nepomuceno Protettore della stessa Compagnia nel 1774. Stavamo facendo la lezione spirituale, e nominatim delle regole della modestia. Fui sorpreso da tale angoscia, che, lasciando il freno al pianto, chiusi il libro, e d'allora in poi, non l'ho mai più voluto leggere, né vedere, per non rinuovarmi la pena, e il dispetto, che fu per me a tal segno intensivo, e penetrante, che non ne ho avuto, né avrò simile in vita mia, entrando anche quel che naturalmente causa la stessa morte. Credeva non poter sopravvivere a tanto affanno: non mangiava, né dormiva se non stanco ed oppresso dalla straordinaria tristezza; quel poco di sonno istesso veniva interrotto, ed incontenente svegliatomi, il primo pensiero, che mi occupava ed a guisa di stilletata crudelissima mi trapassava il core, era questo: La Compagnia è estinta, ed io qui non sono più Gesuita. Pietro Lichetta to Giovanni Francesco Filippi (Daraburam, 16 April 1780), ARSI, Goa 63, ff. 1–22, here 3^v–4^r. The same passage has been translated in Pavone, "Ricostruire la Compagnia partendo da Oriente," 337 but I disagree with parts of that translation, so I am offering here my own.*

The end of the previous chapter has hinted towards an answer to this question: the catechists we came to know in the preceding pages never closed that book. Around the time when Lichetta wrote his bitter account, Cavari-muttu was making palm-leaf copies of the *Tēmpāvaṇi* in Vaṭakkankuḷam, and Cāmināta Piḷḷai was writing his Catholic *kāppiyam* and *kalampakam* in colonial Madras. Just a few years later, Cavarirāya Piḷḷai, the Vellalla catechist portrayed in the image on the cover of this book, was teaching the catechism to young men and women in the church of Karaikal while holding a palm-leaf manuscript in his hand.⁴ As also shown by Muttucāmi Piḷḷai's search for Beschi's manuscripts, eighteenth-century literature remained central to the life of Catholic communities into the nineteenth century. Not only did old poems continue to be read and circulated (both as manuscripts and, later in the century, as printed books), but local Catholic poets wrote many new texts. Indeed, after missionaries abandoned the field, the ones to take up the writing of poems and prose works were exactly those lay Catholic élites that first entered the realm of literature in the early eighteenth century through the processes this book has mapped. A simple search on Tamil Wikipedia will show that several nineteenth-century *perunkāppiyam* are Christian, for instance, and composed by lay men.⁵ This mere numerical fact suggests that Catholics took up writing *kāppiyam* after Beschi, and more importantly, they never forgot the lesson that being active in the realm of literature was the best way to take part in Tamil social life. Among the famous intellectuals of the colonial period, M. Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai (1826–1889), the social reformer and first Tamil novelist, was also a Catholic who composed several works in the *cīrilakkiyam* genres preferred by Beschi.⁶ Even the Jesuits, who eventually were restored and came back to the Madurai mission in 1834, noticed how Catholic communities had coalesced around texts. In the words of Fr. Auguste Jean SJ (admittedly trying to stress the importance of Jesuit literature in a perspective of continuity): "After the Society of Jesus was suppressed, and the missionaries disappeared, what would the Christians have become, left alone in these regions where paganism is so strongly rooted? Fortunately, the books by Fr. Rossi remained. Every Sunday, Christians would gather in their prayer places, and listen to readings from these books made by the catechist [...]"⁷

4 This image, made in 1831, is part of an album in BnF, Indien 774, f. 173.

5 See the table at the bottom of <https://ta.wikipedia.org/wiki/காப்பியம்> (consulted on 16/09/2021).

6 A systematic analysis of the life and literary œuvre of Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai's is Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*, esp. 202 for his Christian works. Vētanāyakam's grandfather converted to Catholicism in Āvūr.

7 *Lorsque la Compagnie de Jésus fut supprimée et que les missionnaires eurent disparu, que*

In other words, and *pace* nineteenth-century Jesuit claims to continuity, the old Madurai mission project as a whole ended, and was in many ways a failure. But the specific literary project that Beschi, his fellow Jesuits, and their catechists began at Āvūr and Ēlākuricci in the eighteenth century survived all ordeals. Why? How could missionary literature remain important to Catholic communities after the suppression of the Society? Why were lay Catholic élites so attached to those Tamil texts? What did they represent, and above all, what did they *do* for them?

The seed for this continuity was planted when missionaries implemented the transfer of spiritual, cultural, and material authority to their catechists. In that context, Jesuits together with their catechists placed Catholic literature firmly within the realm of Tamil literature, and from that moment onwards Tamil Catholic poems, and Tamil Catholic poets, could act from within that realm. The unfolding of this double movement, so well embodied in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, in specific times, places, and modes has been at the center of previous chapters. Now, it is time to look back at its early eighteenth-century beginning with a bird's eye view, to pinpoint some of the main axes around which it was articulated.

The move towards literature in the Madurai mission—the integration of Catholicism into the specific cultural sphere of learned Tamil literature—created the connection between lay Catholic élites, the catechists, and “high” Tamil literature. In the beginning, missionaries (mostly Beschi) were the writers, and catechists the readers of Tamil Catholic poetry, even though this division of labor is problematized by the rich body of folk literature by local poets that was coeval to the missionary texts we read (more about this in a moment). This triangulation between missionaries, catechists, and Tamil literature was made possible by two little-known institutions, namely the spiritual retreats that took place in different Kaveri delta villages starting from 1718, and the school of classical Tamil founded by Beschi at Ēlākuricci in 1730. These institutions were important on the ground, and missionaries like Bertoldi and Beschi dedicated their whole life to them, yet they had almost no international resonance. The Society did not finance them directly, and there is no trace that they were part of a concerted effort towards the involvement of converts and lay people in the administration of the missions. Still, they were created at the

seraient devenus les chrétiens laissés seuls dans ces contrées où le paganisme est toujours si fortement enraciné? Heureusement le livre du P. Rossi restait. Tous les dimanches, les chrétiens, réunis dans leur lieu de prière, en écoutaient la lecture faite par le catéchiste; [...] (Sarougani [Carukani], 15 July 1876) in Auguste Jean et al., *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, vol. 49 (Lyon: chez l'Éditeur des Annales, 1877), 111.

same time as retreats for lay practitioners of the spiritual exercises developed all over Europe, and in China as well. With uncanny coordination, Lutherans had also already begun training their catechists and local helpers in Tranquebar in 1716. The retreats and the literary training at Ēlākkuricci followed similar global logics, but they were also steeped in the Tamil tradition, and testify to the strong connection between spiritual authority, lay congregations, and Tamil literature that was developing in the region at this time, independently of Christian influences. This was most striking among Śaivas, who were, as we repeatedly saw, the most important model and competitors for Tamil Catholics.

Both these institutions were grounded on literary practices. During the retreats, the catechists read lessons and meditations from written books, and the school of classical Tamil was explicitly meant to teach them how to understand, use, and adapt Tamil literary conventions to Catholic needs. They both gathered catechists from different locations in the villages, thus effectively creating a supra-local network of spiritual leaders, and literary connoisseurs. Yet this was only one aspect of the catechists' occupation. By the eighteenth century, each missionary managed several catechists, but only some of them followed the missionary around to evangelize. Most were trained to become leaders and administrators of local communities (and called *vācal upatēciyar*), often according to their caste. Indeed, caste played an important and sometimes divisive role within and outside the catechist élite, but we also witness at this time reinvention and repositioning with regard to caste and social hierarchy. Parallel to the social authority missionaries and catechists enjoyed thanks to their literary achievements were a new political authority and new alliances. Besides the usual support from Catholic empires, first the Portuguese and then the French (even though both would eventually turn against the Jesuits), the eighteenth century saw an intensification of local networks of patronage, as is clear in the relationship between Beschi and Chanda Sahib. Some of these networks continued well after the end of the Madurai mission, as shown, for instance, by the donation of the village of Carukaṇi to the Church that was ratified by the zamindar of Sivaganga in 1801. These local relationships were built upon the prestige of Catholic spiritual and cultural networks on the ground, which in turn heavily relied on the *pulamai* and prestige of the catechist élites.

The retreats and the school of classical Tamil were at the heart of these social and political changes, and also prompted the parallel development of Tamil Catholic poetics, spirituality, and ultimately of a new Tamil Catholic self. The inner and outer dimensions were obviously connected, and this connection is most visibly articulated in the literary texts of the period. By reading the meditations in the *Ñāṇamuyarci* and *Vētiyarolukkam*, catechists learned to see the Tamil world through Christian eyes, and to read the message of Christianity

in the book of (local) nature. They also learnt how to feel a sense of togetherness, and communicate their fear of Hell and desire for Heaven, their shame at their sins and pride in their acts of self-sanctification. At the foundation of such shared experiences was the spiritual language Jesuit missionaries taught them, through spiritual manuals and poetry, which allowed them to entertain a personal communication with the Christian God. And this language was Tamil. During the retreats, Jesuits and their catechists prayed and meditated in Tamil, their conversations filled with implicit and explicit references to the magical world of the *cittar*, or the ethical world of Tiruvalluvar. When Beschi mocked the Lutherans for their coarse Tamil and grammatical errors, underlining his sarcasm was the firm belief that there existed a proper way to express the spiritual beauty of Christianity, and the love for God in South India, and that was the sweet music of Tamil poetry. The school of classical Tamil and Beschi's own poems, chiefly the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, literally and metaphorically endowed the catechists with the words to express their faith, their role in local cultural and social life, and ultimately the complexity and articulation of their new Tamil Catholic self. This transcended both the rejection of Tamil *akam* poetics, and the incorporation of spiritual and ethical models from the Tamil classics, into a new synthesis that represented and enabled the coexistence of rupture and persistent local belonging, so typical of South Indian conversions to Catholicism.

Tamil Catholics were not alone in articulating the tension between displacement—their religious center oceans away in Rome—and being firmly grounded in South India. In the early modern period, Tamil Muslims were struggling to recompose similarly centrifugal forces. Along with Jain, Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva intellectuals, Muslims and Christians then took part in the process of inventing a new religious and literary language to express universal aspirations, as well as their local belonging. This language was the language of medieval and early modern Tamil poetry, which favored the sophisticated style we encountered in the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, and narrative genres such as the *kāppiyam* or the short praise-genres called *cīṟṟilakkiyam*. It was a difficult code, often requiring the mediation of specialist figures like the catechists we encountered in the pages of this book. Mastery over Tamil offered to these groups new avenues to express and access authority, imagination, right feeling and right thinking. Yet this link between good literary form and good content was not new. It had a history of two millennia, and it was one founding principles of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, until local languages began to claim for themselves the role of literary and political codes in the what Sheldon Pollock has labeled the “vernacular age” of the second millennium. The small-scale study of the way Catholics began to write Tamil Catholic literature, of the social and political stakes of this new

beginning, and its long-term implications, throws light on the dynamics of vernacularization, bringing into focus the role of religion and religious actors as one of its driving forces.



Choosing one beginning over another creates different versions of the same story. Here, I have privileged the *literary* beginning of Tamil Catholicism instead of other possible ones. Henriques was the first to translate Catholic texts into Tamil, after all, and Roberto Nobili was the founder of the Madurai mission. Even in the field of Tamil poetry, not all Catholic efforts map back onto the processes I have explored. There were, and there are, different levels of literary culture within the same linguistic ecology, and catechists and missionaries engaged in learned Tamil poetry as much as they enjoyed and, oftentimes composed, songs and plays, ballads and folktales, based on the same stories and themes as their “learned” texts. Yet, the particular beginning I have chosen in this book is important because through the connection—*la saldatura*—between Tamil literature and Catholic spirituality, it enabled new practices of the self, and new ways of being Catholic “the Tamil way.” The social and political, spiritual and poetical articulation of this new self emerged as we focused on the small scale, and followed Jesuits and their catechists through the villages of the Kaveri delta while they read, preached, meditated, engaged in debates against Śaivas and Lutherans, walked long hours under the sun, and lived their faith in their time and place, all of this in Tamil. Even when missionaries disappeared and catechists had to walk alone, in contrast with Lichetta’s closing of the book, they continued to write and rewrite Christianity into literary and historical Tamilakam, accommodating European models, Hindu models, folk songs into refined poems and refined poems into folk songs—a process that began in the eighteenth century, and that has not yet ended.

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APUG = *Archivio della Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome*

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ARSI = *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome*

AAV = *Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Rome*

APF = *Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide, Rome*

BCR = *Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome*

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1876. *Tairiya nātacuvāmikaḷeṇṇum vīramāmuṇivar aruḷiceyta arc. kittēriyammālammānai. iḥtu irāyapuram arc. irāyapparālayattil makācaṇkaikkuriya kuru tē. mari. ṇānapirakāca nātacuvāmikaḷ utaviperru mēṇṇpaṭikōvil tamil kalviccālai upāttiyāyar pavalai vai. tē. ma. ciṇṇacāmikēṭṭiyāravarkaḷār pārvaḷiṭappaṭṭu mayilai poṇṇucāmimutaliyāravarkaḷal patippikkappaṭṭati. Ceṇṇai: Ilaksmīvilāsa accukkūṭam.*

1947. *Arc. kittēri ammāl ammānai*. Maturai: Tē nopili pires.

- * 1977. *Kittēriyammāl ammānai*. Tirunelvēli: Teṇṇintiya caivacittānta nūṇṇpatippuk kaḷakam.

Kompeciyōṇāyru by Aṇṭirikki Pātiriyār [Henrique Henriques SJ]

- * 1580. *Kompeciyōṇāyru. Confessionairo*. Kocci (Cochin): Koleciyu te māter te tevucu (Collegio da Madre de Deos).

Luttēriṇattiyalpu by Vīramāmuṇivar [Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi SJ] (1720s)

See *Vētavilakkam* (the *Luttēriṇattiyalpu* is always printed as an appendix to that text).

Ṇāṇa cañcivi by Ṇāṇacañcivinaṭaṇ [Jean Venant Bouchet SJ] (ca. 1700)

- * 1965. *Ṇāṇa cañcivi*, patippāciriyaṇ c. irācamāṇikkam. Tuttukkuti: Tamil ilakkiyak kaḷakam.

Ṇāṇamuttumālai by Jekaṇivācakar Cuvāmi [Emmanuel Martins SJ, 1597–1656]

- * 1916. *Ṇāṇamuttumālai*. Trichinopoly: St. Joseph's Industrial School Press.

Ṇāṇamuyarci by Ṇāṇappirakācacuvāmiyaṇ [Carlo Michele Bertoldi SJ] (ca. 1720)

1843. *Ṇāṇamuyarci. iḥtu karttirtiruvavatārattin patinēlānūṇṇāṇṭil āvūril eḷuntaruḷiya cirēṣṭācāriyaṇ ākiya irājariṣi ṇāṇappirakācacuvāmiyaṇ avarkaḷal aruḷicceyyappaṭṭu putuvaḷiyil eḷuntaruḷiyirukkum makākaṇamporuntiya—āṇṭavarākiya kiḷemēṇcupoṇān turicippār eṇṇum nāmatēyaṇkoṇṭirukkira meṇṇirāṇiyāravarkaḷ anumatyil urōmāpurīyiniṇṇuvanta uttārattinpaṭiyē. Putuvai: Caṇmavirākkiṇimātā kōyilaic cērnta accukkūṭattirapatikkappaṭṭatu.*

- * 1931. *Ṇāṇamuyarci. iḥtu karttar tiruvavatārattin patinēlām nūṇṇāṇṭil āvūrileḷuntaruḷiya cirēṣṭācāriyaṇ ākiya irāja riṣi ṇāṇappirakāca cuvāmiyaṇ avarkaḷal aruḷicceyyappaṭṭatu. 2-m patippu. Putuvai: Mātākkōyil accukkūṭam.*

Ñāṇa naṭcēttira mālai by Ñāṇacañcīvinātaṇ [Jean Venant Bouchet] (ca. 1700)
1966. *Ñāṇa naṭcēttira mālai*, patippācīriyār c. irācamāṇikkam. Tuttukkuṭi: Tamiḷ ilakkiyak kaḷakam.

Ñāṇappaḷḷu by Anonymous.

* 2018. *Ñāṇappaḷḷu*, patippācīriyār tirumati tiruñāṇēsvari catācivam. Kōlumpu: Catācivam parippakam.

Ñāṇōpatēcam: irupattēṭṭu pīracan̄kaṇkaḷ by Tattuva Pōtagar [Roberto Nobili SJ] (17th century)

* 1965. In *Ñāṇōpatēca kurippit̄amum, irupattēṭṭu pīracan̄kaṇkāḷum*, patippācīriyār c. irācamāṇikkam. Tuttukkuṭi: Tamiḷ ilakkiya kaḷakam.

Paravar purāṇam by Aṟuḷappamutaliyār

* 1909. *Paravar purāṇam mūlamum uraiyūm*. Madurai: Vivēkapānu acciyantiracālai.

Nīrupaṇkal by Vīramāmuṇivar [Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi SJ] (ca. 1730)

* 2008. *Vīramāmuṇivar nīrupaṇkal*. Tañcāvūr: Tamiḷp palkalaikkaḷakam.

Tampirāṇ vaṇakkam by Aṇṭīrikki Pātiriyār [Henrique Henriques SJ] (16th century)

1578. *Doctrina Christam en Lingua Malauar Tamul, or Tampirāṇ vaṇakkam*. Coulam (Quilon/Kollam): Collégio do Saluador.

* 1963. In *Vaṇakkam*, patippācīriyār c. irācamāṇikkam. Tuticorin: Tamiḷ ilakkiya kaḷakam.

Tarma naṭakkai by Ñāṇacañcīvinātaṇ [Jean Venant Bouchet SJ] (ca. 1700)

* 1965. *Tarma naṭakkai. nalla maraṇa āyattam. ñāṇa ārutal*, patippācīriyār c. irācamāṇikkam. Kurattuka: Tamiḷ ilakkiyak kaḷakam.

Tēmpāvaṇi by Vīramāmuṇivar [Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi SJ] (ca. 1726)

* 1851–1853. *Tēmpāvaṇi. vīramāmuṇivar aṟuḷicceyta ikkāppiyam avaratu kaiyeḷuttuppi-ratikoppa putuvaiyil eḷuttarūḷiyirukkum makākaṇamporuntiya aṇṭavarum appōs-tolikkuvikkāriyūmākiya kiḷemēncu poṇān turicippār eṇṇum nāmātēyaṇkoṇṭirukkīra mērrīrāṇiyāravarkaḷ anumatiyil urōmāpurīyiniṇruvanta uttārattinpaṭiyē*. 3 vols. Putuvai: Caṇmavirākkiniṁmātākōyilaiccārnta accukkūṭattir patippikkappaṭṭatu.

1982. *Vīramāmuṇivar iyaṟriya tēmpāvaṇi. puṇita vaḷaṇāraip parri, tirukkuṭumpa vāḷvu parri paṭam piṭittu kāṭṭum cīranta tamiḷ ilakkiyam*, urai, tiruviviliya mērkōḷkaḷuṭaṇ pēracīriyār vittuvāṇ n.m. mariya aṟuṭpirakācam. 3 vols. Maturai: Nopili puttaka nilaiyam māvikā accakam.

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Tiruccelvar kāvīyam by Pūlākaciṅka Aṟuḷappanāvalar

- *1997. *Tiruccelvar kāvīyam irāṇṭam patippu*, patippācīriyar aruṭṭiru kalāniti e. jē. can-tirakāntaṇ, talaivar, kiristava islāmiya nākarikatturaikaḷ, yālpṇāṇap palkalaik kaḷa-kam, tirunelveli. Yālpṇāṇam: Tirumaṇaik kalāmaṇṇam.

Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam by Vīramāmuṇivar [Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi SJ] (ca. 1726)

1843. In *Vīramāmuṇivar aruḷicceyta tirukkāvalūrkalampakamum aṇṇaiyaḷuṅkalantāti-yum tēmpāvaṇṇicilapāṭalum vaṇṇamum vāmaṇcarittiramum puttakappeyarattava-ṇaiyum ceṇṇaikkalviccaṅkattu mānēcarākiya a. muttuccāmi piḷḷaiyavarkaḷāl ceyyap-paṭṭa vīramāmuṇivar carittiramum*. Madras.

- *1872. *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam mūlamum uraiyum. innūḷ vīramāmuṇivarālum ivvu-rai vēlūrttāciltār mahaśrī taraṅkaṇpāti ci. piḷḷaimuttuppiḷḷaiyavarkaḷ vēṇṭum poru-ḷaittantivirumpikkēṭṭukkoṇṭapadi taṇcaimāṇakaram paṇṭitar muttucāmimutaliyār kumārar vitvāṇ aṟuḷappamuṭaliyārālum iyarrappaṭṭatu*. Ceṇṇapaṭṭanam: Tattuva-pōtiṇi accukkūṭattil.

1929. In *Tēmpāmālai*. Putuvai: Mātākkōyil accukkūṭam.

1977. *Tirukkāvalūr kalampakam mūlamum uraiyum*, uraiyācīriyar rampōlā māskaraṇes. Tiruccirāppaḷḷi: Tamiḷ ilakkiyak kaḷakam.

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Tirukkuṟaḷ vīramāmuṇivar urai by Vīramāmuṇivar [Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi SJ]

- *1985. *Tirukkuṟaḷ, vīramāmuṇivar urai*, patippācīriyarkaḷ c. iṇṇāci, e. cauntara pāṇ-ṭiyaṇ. iām patippu. Ceṇṇai: Ceṇṇaip palkalaik kaḷakam.

Tivviya mātirikai by Ṇāṇacaṇṇivinaṭaṇ [Jean Venant Bouchet SJ] (ca. 1700)

- *1966. *Tivviya mātirikai*, patippācīriyār c. irācamāṇikkam. Tūttukkuṭi: Tamiḷ ilakkiyak kaḷakam.

Toṇṇūḷvīḷakkam by Vīramāmuṇivar [Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi SJ] (1730)

1838. *Tirumaturaic centamiḷṭ tēcikarun tairiyaṇāta cuvāmikaḷum ākiya vīramāmuṇivar tiruvāymalarn taruḷicceyta vaintilakkaṇat toṇṇūḷvīḷakkam mūlamum uraiyum*. Putu-vai: Pirāṇcumakārācāviṇatu tarumakkalviccaṅkattut talaimaippulamainaṭattum ṣāppu ṇaiyāppillai kumārar aticeyanātapillai eṇpavarāl niraivērappaṭṭatu.

- *1891. *Centamiḷṭtēcikarum, tairiya nāta cuvāmikaḷum ākiya vīramāmuṇivar tiruvāy ma-larṇtaruḷiya aintilakkaṇat toṇṇūḷvīḷakkam mūlamum uraiyum. ivai irāyappēṭṭai uvesliyaṇ micīyōṇ kālēju tamiḷpṇaṇṭitarāna ma-rā-rā-śrī nivāca rākavācāriyāravarkaḷāl pārvaiyittappaṭṭu, kaṇam. ji. mekkenji. kāpaṇ ayyar, avarkaḷāl patippikkappaṭ-ṭatu*. 2ām patippu. Ceṇṇai, pāpamscālai: Ma-rā-rā-śrī cā. iyākappillai avarkaḷāl arc. cūcayappar accukkūṭattil acciṭappaṭṭatu.

Tūṣaṇattikkāram by Tattuva Pōtakar [Roberto Nobili SJ] (17th century)

1972. *Tūṣaṇattikkāram*. Edited by Savarimuthu Rajamanickam. Tūttukkuṭi: Tamil ilakkīyak kalakam.

Vākaṭattiraṭṭum, attributed to Vīramāmuṇivar [Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi SJ]

*1912. *Irājarīṣi vīramāmuṇivar vākarattiraṭṭum teliporuḷ vīlakkavuraiyum. iraṇtu pākāṇ. iḥtu yūnāni vaittiya tāruṭṭiyaviruttipōṭiṇi mutalia pala vaittiya cāstira kirantakarttā-vākiya hakkīm pā-muhammatu aptullā cāhipu avarkaḷāl cutēcavaittiyarkaḷiṇ upayō-kattirākā ceṇṇai muslim apimāni acciyantiracālaiyil patippikkappaṭṭatu. Ceṇ-nai.*

Vētaṇṭaṭṭam by Vīramāmuṇivar [Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi SJ] (1720s)

1842. *Vēta vīlakkam. iḥtu mikunta kīrttip peyarperrā meymmaraiṭṭōtaka vīramāmuṇivar eṇṇuṇ cecucapaik kuruvākiya irājarīṣi tairīyanāta cuvāmiyār avarkaḷāl aruḷicceyyappaṭṭu putuvaṇṭai eḷuntaruḷiyirukkum makāṇam poruntīya āṇṭavarākiya kiḷemēṇcupō-nānturicippār eṇṇum nāmatēyaṇ koṇṭirukkīra mērrirāṇiyāravarkaḷ anumattīyil urō-māpuriyīṇṇu vanta uttārattinpaṭṭiyē. Putuvai: Periyakōyilaic cērnta accukkūṭattir patikkappaṭṭatu.*

*1855. *Vēta vīlakkam. iḥtu mikunta kīrttip peyarperrā meymmaraiṭṭōtaka vīramāmuṇivar eṇṇuṇ cēcucapaik kuruvākiya irājarīṣi tairīyanāta cuvāmiyār avarkaḷāl aruḷicceyyappaṭṭu putuvaṇṭai eḷuntaruḷiyirukkum makāṇam poruntīya āṇṭavarākiya kiḷemēṇcupōnānturicippār eṇṇum nāmatēyaṇ koṇṭirukkīra mērrirāṇiyāravarkaḷ anumattīyil urōmāpuriyīṇṇu vanta uttārattinpaṭṭiyē. Putuvai: Caṇṇavirākkiṇi mātākkōyilaic cērnta accukkūṭattil 2-vatu patippikkappaṭṭatu.*

1936. *Vēta vīlakkam. iḥtu mikunta kīrttip peyarperrā meymmarai pōtaka vīramāmuṇivar eṇṇuṇ cecucapaik kuruvākiya irājarīṣi tairīyanāta cuvāmiyār avarkaḷāl aruḷicceyyappaṭṭatu. 4-m patippu. Putuvai: Mātākkōyil accukkūṭam.*

Vētiyarolukkam by Vīramāmuṇivar [Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi SJ] (1720s)

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*1934. *Vētiyarolukkam. iḥtu makā kīrttip peyar perrā meymmarai pōtakar vīramāmuṇivar eṇṇum cācucapaik kuruvākiya irājarīṣi caṇ. tairīyanātacuvāmiyār avarkaḷāl aruḷic ceyappaṭṭatu. 6m patippu. Putuvai: Mātākkōyil accukkūṭam.*

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