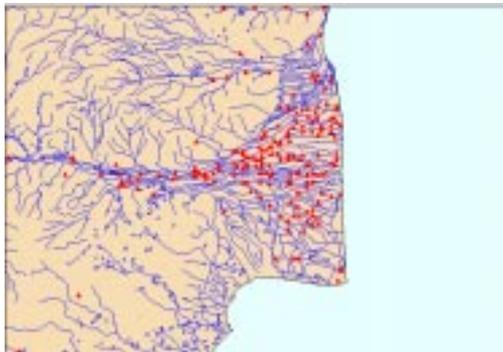


DIGITAL TĒVĀRAM PROGRAM (feb. 2001 write-up)

The multi-media ‘‘Digital TĒvāram’’ program, was initiated in July 1997, with the purpose of being a continuation to a long-pending translation project of TĒvāram (a collection of ca. 800 Tamil saiva hymns, by 3 authors, possibly dating back to the 7th and 8th centuries), that had been started in Pondicherry in the seventies and that had resulted in an unpublished ca. 3500 pages manuscript, authored by the late V.M. Subrahmanya Ayyar and kept in the IFP library (Pondicherry) as well as in the EFEO library (Paris). References to the program can be found in the IFP ‘‘Activity Report’’ (1998-1999, pp.38-39), in the EFEO reports, as well as in the 1999-2000 activity report of the UMR7597 (HTL, CNRS [French National Center for Scientific Research] and University Paris7). There was also an announcement in the first issue of the Newsletter Pattrika, in 1999.



Technically speaking, distributing the TĒvāram text and its translation on a CD-ROM is a way of overcoming the difficult choice that printed editions have to make between proposing the hymns ordered ‘‘according to musical modes’’ (as in the paṇmuṛai editions) or ordered ‘‘according to the sites’’ (as in the talamuṛai editions). To be more specific, the reference edition published in 1984-1985 (T.V.Gopal Iyer & F. Gros) by the IFP follows the paṇmuṛai, whereas the physical manuscript, in 15 volumes, of the unpublished translation of TĒvāram by V.M.S. follows the talamuṛai. However, on the ‘‘Digital TĒvāram’’ CD-ROM, both texts are linked smoothly, verse by verse. In that way, it is easy for a student of Tamil easily to compare T.V. Gopal Iyer’s editorial choices with V.M.S. Ayyar’s, as well, of course, as finding the latter’s interpretation of any given verse.



Besides overcoming the dual nature of the text, the multi-media capacities of a CD-ROM, and the linking facilities offered by modern programming languages (such as HTML, the World Wide Web language, which is used throughout the project) have allowed the project to grow beyond being a mere electronic typescript. On the one hand, on the geographical talamuṛai side, more than one hundred digital maps, showing the location of all the pāṭal peṛra stalam ‘‘places sung [[in the TĒvāram]]’’, have been created by the IFP Geomatics Lab, and these have been electronically linked with the appropriate hymns by clickable hyperlinks. On the other hand, on the musical paṇmuṛai side, more than one hundred audio recordings (totalling more than 7 hours, in MP3 format) by several interpreters, in different styles, and illustrating the more than 20 different paṇ-s

(or musical modes) are also available on the CD-ROM, and hyper-linked to the relevant hymns. Thus, this multi-media document is a testimony to the living nature of the TĒvāram, and could have been called ‘‘Twentieth-Century TĒvāram’’.

Beyond serving as a testimony to the status of the TĒvāram in the twentieth century, the CD-ROM can also be used as a linguistic tool for studying the language of TĒvāram because it also contains a full concordance (totalling 200,000 lines) for the 45,000 different strings that are to be met with in the text of the TĒvāram. This concordance is fully hyper-linked with V.M. Subrahmanya Ayyar’s translation. It is thus easy to check how any given lexical item has been understood by that reputed scholar.

To conclude, it is to be emphasized that this work, which is still being subjected to proof-correction (it has gone through successive stages, released as Beta-versions, and is now in its preliminary version 0.9c) and its multidisciplinary richness would not have been possible without the beneficial collaboration over several years of three institutions (The IFP, CNRS & EFEO) and the dedicated involvement of their scientific, technical and administrative staff. Let all of them be thanked. Our special thanks is also due to the several artists who performed the TĒvāram songs, to Mrs Nagalakshmi, daughter of V.M.S. Ayyar, and to Mr P.B. Seshadri, for providing biographical information about him.

[The Editors: Jean-Luc Chevillard & S.A.S. Sarma]

