

Sanghas of the Literati in Ancient Tamil

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Nakkirar's commentary on the *Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ*, the treatise on Tamil love poetry attributed to the God Śiva, tells us a legend that in ancient Tamil there were assemblies of the poets and the grammarians supported by the Pandyan kings. It is said that they lasted for 9990 years and consisted of totally 8598 poets. The legend has given a considerable influence on Tamil studies and even on the rise of Tamil nationalism.

Along with the legend, the commentary makes mention of Śiva's authorship of the treatise and its date, and Nakkirar's authorship of the commentary. However, it is filled with fancies and hence actually useless for historical studies. In this paper, the author firstly translates parts of the commentary relevant to the legend and myths concerning the authorship. He examines their style and contents and finds that the commentary was written by two persons and attributed to Nakkirar. Then, he goes into a question concerning relative chronology between the *Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ* and the *Tolkappiyam*, the oldest Tamil grammar extant. Finally, he tries to set up a relative and absolute chronology for the said texts and the commentary on the basis of all external and internal evidence he has collected.