designs. This part presents Wu’s main analysis of what he terms the “pictorial program” of the shrine. In it, he considers the iconographical, ideological, and ritual aspects of the shrine illustrations. It is here that he attempts to draw some general conclusions concerning thought and society, although his exposition is anchored in a mass of details concerning the shrine itself and relevant materials from other sources, both textual and artifactual. Wu sees the shrine as essentially a representation of the universe in which the deceased’s soul would abide once it was detached from his body.

This grand conception prompts Wu to declare unequivocally that the shrine “is a masterpiece..., an epic representation of human thought, comparable to the Sistine Chapel and the Chartres Cathedral in Western art.” (p. 70) As stated, this is merely an assertion that remains to be demonstrated. The shrine, when standing, would have measured only five feet (sides) by seven feet (back—the front was left open), and many of the scenes are so miniature and schematic that they would have been hard to differentiate clearly even before the damage that has been done to them by the ages. I am also dubious of the claim made on p. 165 (following K.C. Chang) that a certain Master Wind Pot of most doubtful authenticity should be ranked with Lucretius (96?-55 B.C.E.) as “one of the first archaeologists in the world” to propose a classification of civilization based on material culture. Furthermore, I would suggest that Wu look into what Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus, and Hegel have to say about the dual nature of history (facts and interpretation) before intimating that Geoffrey Barraclough was the first theoretician in the West to comprehend (in 1955) what Sima Qian, China’s first great historian, had arrived at in the first century B.C.E.

Wu is at his best when he sticks to Chinese art history, and there he can be very good indeed. His identification of the central figure in the homage scene of the shrine is persuasive and his demonstration of the impact of Buddhism on the development of the figure of the Queen Mother of the West is scintillating. He makes a few minor mistakes, such as calling Berthold Laufer (b. Cologne, October 11, 1874-d. Chicago, September 13, 1934) a “British art historian,” transcribing inaccurately a couple of Sanskrit words, and mistranslating some of the cartouche inscriptions. In general, however, this is a thorough study of high quality. It is so comprehensive that I expect no further major advances on the subject will be made until Sinology becomes an integral part of world philology. Then we will begin to understand what all those shadowy forms and figures (Fuxi, Nüwa, the unicorn, the divine mushroom, the Fusang tree, and so forth) that populate the inside walls of the Wu Liang Shrine really symbolize.

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The field of Śrīvaiṣṇava sectarian literature presents formidable challenges to the scholar. Students of Śrīvaiṣṇavism must master not only the Sanskrit and Tamil literature and the dual cultural heritage of the sect, but also the numerous works of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Acāryas in the hybrid language called manipravāla (gem and coral), which is a unique mixture of Tamil and Sanskrit. In The Tamil Veda John Carman and

Vasudha Narayanan have pooled their expertise in complementary areas of Śrīvaiṣṇava scholarship to give us the first in-depth study of the 12th century śrivaippatī of Tirukkurukai Piran Pillān, the first manipravāla commentary on Nammāḻvār’s Tamil Tiruvimozhi, foremost among the tamil sacred texts of the Śrīvaiṣṇava sect.

Carman and Narayanan’s discussion of Pillān’s commentary turns on a controversial, and crucially important, point: the continuity of thought between the bhakti of the saint-hymnists called the Āḻvār and the devotion of the Ācārya, the latter theologians of the tradition. Specifically, the authors take issue with the position taken by Friedhelm Hardy in his work on the bhakti of the Āḻvār (Viraha-bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India, Delhi, 1983). According to Hardy, Rāmānuja, Pillān’s guru and the sect’s founder-teacher, endorsed through his Sanskrit writings the bhakti-yoga of the Bhagavad Gītā, very different in spirit from the ‘‘emotional” bhakti of the Āḻvār. Nor did the devotional ideal of the later Ācāras truly resemble the spirit of Āḻvār bhakti, epitomized by the hymns in which Nammāḻvār and the other poets express the passion and anguish of a woman who is lovesick for Krishna. The Ācārās who commented on the Āḻvār poems had to explain away their sensuous tenor, to make them conform to their own “intellectual” view of devotion. It was for a formal and external purpose, that of creating an uninterrupted lineage (paramparā) of sectarian mentors, that the Ācārās considered their ideology to be in a direct line from the bhakti of the Āḻvār. Nor did the devotional ideal of the later Ācārās truly resemble the spirit of Āḻvār bhakti, epitomized by the hymns in which Nammāḻvār and the other poets express the passion and anguish of a woman who is lovesick for Krishna. The Ācārās who commented on the Āḻvār poems had to explain away their sensuous tenor, to make them conform to their own “intellectual” view of devotion. It was for a formal and external purpose, that of creating an uninterrupted lineage (paramparā) of sectarian mentors, that the Ācārās considered their ideology to be in a direct line from the bhakti of the Āḻvār (Viraha-Bhakti, p. 243).

Contra Hardy, the authors of The Tamil Veda maintain that Pillān’s commentary eloquently testifies to a genuinely felt, and logically argued, continuity of thought between the Āḻvār and Ācārās, and that this spirit is carried on in the best of the later commentaries as well. According to Carman and Narayanan, the profound agreement in the theology of the Āḻvār and Ācārās overrides the genuine and obvious differences in their conceptions and expression of bhakti. Both the Āḻvār and the Ācārās emphasize the concept of God’s embodiment in different manifestations, especially that of the image in the temple (arcā), as an act of divine grace. At the same time, according to Rāmānuja’s formulation of the Viṣṇudvaita theology, God is the Supreme Self and Master, who ensouls and owns all finite souls, who thus stand to Him in the relationship of bodies and servants. Service and devotion, for Ācārā as well as Āḻvār, are a celebration and enjoyment of God’s auspicious qualities and His supreme beauty. Guiding us through Pillān’s commentary on particular verses of Nammāḻvār, Carman and Narayanan demonstrate the affinities Pillān feels for the Āḻvār’s vision. In Nammāḻvār’s celebration of particular image-avatāras at particular temples, in the Āḻvār’s exclamation of ecstasy at the Lord’s grace in entering his body and mingling with his soul, Pillān sees instances of the direct revelation of the Lord’s essential nature: simultaneous transcendence (paratva) and accessibility (Saumlabhya), and the role of Supreme Self with respect to finite souls. Finally, although Pillān’s sensibility is far removed from the erotic aspects of Nammāḻvār’s bhakti, the commentator responds deeply to the erotic poems as moving expressions of the Āḻvār’s enjoyment of the supreme beauty of the Lord.

Carman and Narayanan have done justice to the complexity of the relationship between the Āḻvār and the Ācārās, and of the dual literary and cultural heritage of the Ācārās. Interweaving their voices and ideas in the manner of the best manipravāla writers, the authors skilfully guide us through the subtleties of Rāmānuja’s theology, Nammāḻvār’s superb poetry and its Tamil classical background, and Pillān’s close yet by no means imitative relationship with the language and imagery of both the Āḻvār and Rāmānuja. Their interpretive skill shines particularly in their careful analysis of