Jeanne Hein and V. S. Rajam, *The Earliest Missionary Grammar of Tamil: Fr. Henriques' Arte da Lingua Malabar: Translation, History and Analysis*

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THE VOLUME UNDER review represents the fruit of more than three decades of engagement with a little-known document of great importance for the history of European linguistic thought and the history of the Tamil language, Fr. Henrique Henriques' *Arte da Lingua Malabar*. The *Arte* was the first grammar of a South Asian language written by a European and one of the earliest examples of the grammar of non-European languages composed by missionaries as part of the extension of the Spanish and Portuguese empires from the sixteenth century onwards. The main part of the publication consists of a translation of the Portuguese parts of the grammar from the only known manuscript of the work kept in the Biblioteca Naçional in Lisbon, augmented by a general introduction regarding the historical context in which the grammar was composed, a brief analysis of the grammar, and a series of very useful appendices dealing with various parts of the grammar. The translation is the outcome of the collaboration between a scholar of Portuguese India and one of Tamil linguistics, the late Jeanne Hein and V. S. Rajam, respectively.

Henriques, a Jesuit who had come to India in 1546, worked as a missionary on the Fishery Coast in the extreme south of India for the whole of the second half of the sixteenth century. He had begun working on the *Arte* in 1548 and continued to improve it until at least 1566 (11–2), but the grammar was never printed. The

manuscript kept in Lisbon from which the translation has been made represents, in the estimation of the translators, an earlier stage in the production of the *Arte*, possibly the very manuscript that Henriques sent to Ignatius of Loyola in 1549 (33) and which he himself apparently considered "unsuitable for publication as it stood" (12). As such, Henriques' *Arte* is one of the earliest surviving attempts at producing a grammatical sketch of a non-European vernacular that resulted from the expansion of the Iberian Empires and Catholic Christianity in the sixteenth century. Apart from its obvious importance as a document of the history of linguistic thought in Europe, the *Arte* is also of fundamental importance for scholars interested in the history of the Tamil language. As Henriques wrote the *Arte* in order to facilitate the acquisition of Tamil by European missionaries for the sake of ministry, the language recorded in the *Arte* is, by and large, not the learned idiom of written Tamil, but the spoken language of the Fishery Coast. While, as I shall discuss below, I consider the translators' claim that Henriques was "totally ignorant" (14) of literary Tamil to be problematic, there is no doubt that the *Arte* offers valuable glimpses into a spoken Tamil dialect of the sixteenth century.

The publication consists of five parts. The first introduces the historical context in which the *Arte* was composed, including a sketch of Henriques' activities and a discussion of the manuscript. Part two, which makes up the majority of the book, is comprised of Hein's and Rajam's translation of the *Arte*. The third part is a discussion of the *Arte*'s structure and organization, while the fourth part highlights certain aspects of the text that the translators consider to be of particular importance. Part five, finally, contains a number of appendices concerning the orthography employed by Henriques in the Arte, the noun and verb forms he posits, an index of the Tamil words employed in the Arte, and a brief note on both the extant and non-extant works of Henriques. A bibliography and a general index conclude the work.

Hein's and Rajam's translation of the *Arte* is of great value for a number of reasons. As already mentioned, the *Arte* by and large presents a form of Tamil that is close to the spoken language of the Fishery Coast, the southernmost part of the Indian east coast between Kanyakumari and Rameswaram. While Tamil inscriptions, manuscripts, and even literary works occasionally permit us insights into pronunciation and morphology of spoken varieties of Tamil, Henriques' is the first systematic discussion of such an idiom. As such, it provides historians of the Tamil language with a wealth of information, which, thanks to the translation under review, is now available for those who are not familiar with sixteenth-century Portuguese, undoubtedly the majority among them. For example, Henriques presentation of many analytic verb forms and especially his brief discussion of compound verb constructions (91–92) are of great interest, as the translators duly note (277). Hein and Rajam need to be commended for attempting to present the spelling of the *Arte* both in the Tamil and the Portuguese script as exact as possible, though admittedly, one at times wishes for a facsimile edition of the manuscript. Of particular value are the appendices, which include indexes of the varying ways in which Henriques transcribed Tamil words in Latin script and the contexts in which the variant spellings occur (appendices A and B) as well as an index of Tamil words used in the *Arte* (appendix F). Future linguistic analyses of the language presented

by Henriques will be greatly aided by these appendices. What the translation is unfortunately missing is a greater consideration of Henriques' place in the general history of the production of grammars and primers of non-European languages in the Portuguese and Spanish empires. While his indebtedness to Latin grammar and de Barros' Portuguese grammar is mentioned in passing (15), the impact this had on the way Henriques conceptualized Tamil grammar is hardly considered at all in the analytical parts of the book, nor is the by now quite voluminous literature on Iberian missionary grammars referred to in the translation. This would have been of great help to those whose field of specialization lies in Tamil linguistics and South Indian history rather than in the history of European linguistic thought or the Portuguese Empire.

Another aspect of Henriques *Arte* that is of particular interest is that the text presents an interesting document of a European's perception of, and interaction with, sixteenth-century South Indian society. Unfortunately, it is in this area that my greatest disagreement with the analysis of the translators lies. Both the historical introduction and the discussion of Henriques' work in the fourth part of the book present us with an at times uncritically positive evaluation of the Jesuit venture in India in general and Henriques' achievements in particular. There is little doubt that Henriques' efforts are impressive given his time and location and that the *Arte* is particularly valuable to us because it allows us glimpses of an idiom that was considered unworthy of attention by Tamil grammatical tradition (260–67). Yet this should not lead us to ignore that Henriques' own efforts were no less constrained by his aims and attitudes and those of the missionary venture of which he was a part. Despite his attention to the spoken word, most of his sample sentences hardly concern everyday life, but the subjects of belief and idolatry, which we may assume were hardly the stuff of much everyday conversation on the Fishery Coast. Ironically, it would be precisely Henriques' attempts at producing a vocabulary of religious devotion such as the verb *viccuvati*, "to believe," rather than, for example, verbs for "urinating" and "defecating" (165, 266–67), that would become petrified into normative paradigms not only in later Jesuit, but also Protestant grammars (see, for example, Jeyaraj 2010). Henriques' obvious exasperation at the fact that his interlocutors hardly used the plural (62–63) translated itself into almost absurd paradigms in which even the word for "boiled rice" (*cōṟu*) was given in both singular and plural (58). To be able to understand how Henriques encountered South Indian society, greater care should be given to understand not only the novelty of his thoughts from a South Indian point of view, but also to see the constraints that his own society imposed on him. This is particularly evident when Henriques uses the word "caste." The short discussion of his lists of "castes" in part four of the book (277–80) completely ignores that "caste" is a term derived from sixteenth-century Portuguese, and not Indian, social hierarchy, that is, Henriques did not provide an unbiased account of social hierarchy and organization in India but rather applied a concept of his own society, namely "caste," to the situation he encountered on the Fishery Coast.

Perhaps the most obviously problematic assumption made by the translators, both for their analysis of the language presented by Henriques and the light the *Arte* throws on Parava society, is the claim that Henriques "was not only unlet-

tered in literary Tamil but also completely ignorant of it" (14) and that, consequently, he "wrote his grammar on the basis of what he heard spoken in the community." While there is no doubt that the *Arte* largely describes a spoken idiom of Tamil, it is obvious that written forms of the language were known to Henriques and were included in the grammar, even if Henriques may not have been able to gauge the full extent of diglossia in Tamil. Firstly, the inclusion of words and passages in Tamil script show that he had not only learned the alphabet, but also that this alphabet was usually used to encode a language closer to the written standard than that of the spoken utterances he records. Thus, Henriques' discussion of letters includes the letter ள (rendered -ł- by him and -l̲- in the most common contemporary system of transliteration). That this letter was hardly pronounced as separate in the spoken language he recorded is brought home by the fact that it seems to occur only two times in the whole *Arte* outside the discussion of the alphabet, and then in both cases in the word *poḷutu* spelled in Tamil script, while the Latin renders it simply as "poludu" (85, 94). Indeed, the comments made by the translators about the samples of Tamil script in the text, such as the difficulty in distinguishing between certain letters (45, note 120; 46, note 125) and the presence of special ligatures (52 note 139), suggest that whoever wrote these Tamil passages was a trained scribe, as these features are typical of Tamil manuscript culture. Certain forms in the *Arte* similarly suggest a familiarity with written Tamil, such as the third person plural ending for verbs, *–ārkaḷ* (written "argaL" by Henriques; see page 82) or the already mentioned form *poḷutu*, as do the not infrequent remarks that certain alternative forms that would nowadays be interpreted as "written" forms are used "by those persons who are more learned" (77, 78) or that they are "more elegant" (81). Recognizing that Henriques or at least his interlocutors had access to written Tamil, though perhaps as a more documentary rather than literary idiom, would change our understanding of how the *Arte* was produced. For example, Henriques several times gives forms in which the letters -r- and -r̲- vary, such as *–kāraṉ/–kāṟaṉ* (rendered in Latin script variously as "caren," "caræn," or "caRRæn," 44–45). Such forms, rather than representing "a challenge that Henriques experienced in decoding people's utterances or a reality that people were inconsistent in their pronunciation" (267) probably had more to do with the fact that the two letters are not only difficult to distinguish in manuscripts, but that they are also often used interchangeably because they are pronounced identical in many spoken idioms. To put it otherwise, such variations were less the result of what Henriques heard spoken but what he saw written. Apparently, the Paravas were not quite the destitute and unlettered people saved from Muslim oppression by the Portuguese and the Catholic church that Jesuit historiography has presented them as (see, for example, 4).

Yet these criticisms should in no way distract from the importance and quality of this long-overdue translation of an important document for the history of the Tamil language, Jesuit missions, and the European encounter with sixteenth-century South India. Linguists and historians unfamiliar with Portuguese or Tamil will find many leads for future research in these pages. We have to thank the translators for making Henriques' work available to a wider audience.

Reference

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