ABSTRACT

Praise, Politics, and Language: South Indian Murals, 1500-1800

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This study of mural painting in southern India aims to change the received narrative of painting in South Asia not only by bringing to light a body of work previously understudied and in many cases undocumented, but by showing how that corpus contributes vitally to the study of South Indian art and history. At the broadest level, this dissertation reworks our understanding of a critical moment in South Asian history that has until recently been seen as a period of decadence, setting the stage for the rise of colonial power in South Asia. Militating against the notion of decline, I demonstrate the artistic, social, and political dynamism of this period by documenting and analyzing the visual and inscriptional content of temple and palace murals donated by merchants, monastics, and political elites.

The dissertation consists of two parts: documentation and formal analysis, and semantic and historical analysis. Documentation and formal analysis of these murals, which decorate the walls and ceilings of temples and palaces, are foundational for further art historical study. I establish a rubric for style and date based on figural typology, narrative structure, and the way in which text is incorporated into the murals. I clarify the kinds of narrative structures employed by the artists, and trace how these change over time. Finally, I identify the three most prevalent genres of painting: narrative, figural (as portraits and icons), and topographic. One of the outstanding features of these murals, which no previous scholarship has seriously considered, is that script is a major compositional and semantic element of the murals. By the eighteenth century, narrative inscriptions in the Tamil and Telugu languages, whose scripts are visually
distinct, consistently framed narrative paintings. For all of the major sites considered in this dissertation, I have transcribed and translated these inscriptions. Establishing a rubric for analysis of the pictorial imagery alongside translations of the text integrated into the murals facilitates my analysis of the function and iconicity of script, and application of the content of the inscriptions to interpretation of the paintings. My approach to text, which considers inscriptions to be both semantically and visually meaningful, is woven into a framework of analysis that includes ritual context, patronage, and viewing practices. In this way, the dissertation builds an historical account of an understudied period, brings to light a new archive for the study of art in South Asia, and develops a new methodology for understanding Nāyaka-period painting.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five each elaborate on one of the major genres identified in Chapter Two: narrative, figural, and topographic painting. My study of narrative focuses on the most popular genre of text produced at this time, *talapurāṇam* (Skt. *sthalapurāṇa*), as well as hagiographies of teachers and saints (*guruparamparā*). Turning to figural depiction, I take up the subject of portraiture. My study provides new evidence of the active patronage by merchants, religious and political elites through documentation and analysis of previously unrecorded donor inscriptions and donor portraits. Under the rubric of topographic painting I analyze the representation of sacred sites joined together to create entire sacred landscapes mapped onto the walls and ceilings of the temples. Such images are closely connected to devotional (*bhakti*) literature that describes and praises these places and spaces. The final chapter of the dissertation proposes new ways of understanding how the images were perceived and activated by their contemporary audiences. I argue that the kinesthetic experience of the paintings is central to their concept, design, and function.
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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

I have used the *ALA-LC Romanization Tables: Transliteration Schemes for Non-Roman Scripts* in my transliterations of the Tamil and Telugu-language inscriptions included in this dissertation. I have also, for the most part, used these Schemes to transliterate the names of people and places. At times, I have chosen the Transliteration Scheme over a more commonly accepted spelling (such as Maturai instead of Madurai). However, there are words that have so thoroughly entered common (or, at least, academic) usage, that I have not transliterated them (for example, Vijayanagara, Lepakshi). I have also chosen to leave off the leading “I” before words transliterated from Tamil, such as Ramanatapuram instead of Iramanatapuram. In some hybrid transliterations, I have followed the spelling printed in the temple’s talapurāṇam, such as in the case of Tēṇupurīsvara at Paṭṭiccaram. I have mostly used svāmi instead of the Tamil transliteration, cuvāmi. My aim has been to make it easier for others to locate the places, texts, or people discussed in this text.

The translations included herein are my own, unless otherwise noted, and are in most cases liberal approximations of the original inscriptions. They are not intended to serve as a basis for textual analysis. Although I have made complete translations and transliterations of the inscriptions at the major sites considered in this dissertation, I have included only the relevant passages in transliteration; these are included in footnotes to the text. I am especially grateful to Samuel Sudhananda, M. Kannan, Y. Subbarayalu, and G. Vijayavenugopal for their help with the more difficult inscriptions I encountered. Indira Peterson helped me greatly with questions of transliteration. All errors remain my own.
MAJOR SITES: NAMES, DATES AND STYLE GROUPS

The spelling of names of places and deities varies widely in scholarship, text, and common usage. The following is an attempt to alleviate this challenge by providing some of the alternate names and spellings for the sites that are most closely studied in the dissertation. Where possible, I also provide the dates that previous studies assigned to the paintings at these sites.

Additionally, I identify the “Style Group” to which I assign each of the sites studied. It will be seen that previous scholars’ assessments of date and style vary wildly; establishing Style Groups allows me to proceed with a tentative dating system, and establishes a rubric by which to determine the paintings’ relative chronology. The Style Groups are more fully elaborated in Chapter One of the dissertation.

**Style Group One**
The style is strongly associated with temple paintings attributed to Vijayanagara patronage in Karnataka (Anegundi and Somappalle) and Andhra Pradesh (Tadpatri and Lepakshi); all the paintings date to the 16th century and are virtually devoid of any inscription. The style is characterized by sharp angularity of the figures, strictly profile depictions of non-iconic figures with a protruding far eye, sharp facial features, elongated hands, fingers, and feet, and legs unnaturally bowed back at the knee. Great care is taken in the depiction of different costumes and textiles. Figures are usually painted against a monochrome background with decorative borders above and below; representations of fabric hangings or architecture decorate the upper part of the registers. The paintings generally include some iconic depictions of deities and rulers, but for the most part are narrative depictions of popular stories. The Tamil-area temples studied here are the TēṆupurīsvāra Temple at Paṭṭicaram and the Nāṟumṉūṭāsvāmi Temple at Tiruppuṭaimaruttūr. Distinct from their northern counterparts, these sites bear lengthy inscriptions in Tamil, most of which identify characters or scenes in the narrative depicted. While at Tiruppuṭaimaruttūr the inscriptions are found in the border bands between registers, at Paṭṭicaram they are found both within the narrative field and in the borders.

**Style Group Two**
The two temples that belong to this style group are the Cennarāya Perumāḷ Temple at Atiyamāṅkōṭtai and the Vēṅkōpāḷa Pārṭasārāti Temple at Ceṅkam. These date to the 17th century. The style is characterized by very round limbs, circles for the knee and elbow caps, extremely exaggerated eye size, and emphasis on linework to show volume in the body. The paintings are mainly narrative, and include inscriptions in both Tamil and Telugu languages that are mostly integrated into the pictorial space, but may be found in the borders between pictorial registers. The temples are situated in the northwestern area of the Tamil region, a linguistic and political border zone; the closest comparisons to the style are found in manuscript paintings of southern Karnataka (Mysore) and Andhra Pradesh.

**Style Group Three**
This group includes 17th and 18th-century murals from the Tamil region, which are found in greatest concentration in the region of Madurai, in the lower middle and western part of Tamil Nadu. The figures are stout, with rounded fleshy limbs reminiscent of Style Group Two, but generally avoid the circles that emphasize the knees and elbows of the Andhra figures. The
figures are outlined in black with lines of equal width. The eyes are elongated, like those of Style Group One, but typically do not protrude when shown in profile. The pictorial ground is usually red, white or green, with representations of fabric hangings, architecture, or free-floating flowers to decorate space unfilled by figures. Series of iconic images, in addition to narrative paintings, are common. Inscriptions are sometimes found in the narrative space, but are usually restricted to the borders separating the narrative registers.

**Paṭṭīccaram Tēnupurīsvara Temple**
Alternate names and spelling:
- City: Pattiswaram, Patteeswaram, Paṭṭīccaram
- Goddess: Gnanambikai, Nānampikai
- God: Tēnupūrīsvara, Dhenupūrāśvara
Dates:
- Thomas 1979: 1550-1560
- Varadarajan 1982: ca. 1620
Style Group One

**Tiruppūțaimarutūr Nārumṇāṭasvāmi Temple**
Alternate names and spelling:
- City: Tiruppudaimarudur, Tiruppudaimaruthur, Thirupudaimaruthur
- Goddess: Kōmatiyampāl, Gomathi Ambal
- God: Putarjunesvara, Narumbunathaswamy
Dates:
- Dallapiccola 1996: late 16th c.
- Deloche 2011: late 16th c.
- Guy 2009: 17th c.
- Hariharan 1979: 16th c.
- Howes 2003: 18th c.
- Michell 1995: 18th c.
- Nagaswamy 1979-80: 15th c. / late 16th c.
Style Group One

**Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai Cennarāya Perumāl Temple**
Alternate names and spelling:
- City: Adiyamankottai, Adamankottai, Dharmapuri
- God: Chennaraya Perumal, Perumal Chennamaraya
Dates:
- Dallapiccola 1996: mid-17th c. – 18th c.
- Lakshminarayanan 1984: 17th c.
- Nagaswamy 1979-80: early 17th c.
- Nagpall 1988: 16th c.
- Ranjan 2008: fourth quarter of 18th c.
- Seth 2006: early 19th c.
Style Group Two
**Ceṅkam Vēṅkōpāla Pārtasārati Temple**
Alternate names and spelling:
- City: Chengam
- God: Venugopala Parthasarathi, Arjunasarathi, Gopal Krishnaswamy

Dates:
- Dallapiccola 1996: 17th c.
- Nagaswamy 1979-80: 17th c.
- Nagpall 1988: 17th c.
- Chaitanya 1976: 17th c.
- Varadarajan 1982: late 16th c.

Style Group Two

**Putukkōṭṭai Śrī Pirkatāmpāl Temple**
Alternate names and spelling:
- City: Tiru Gokarnam, Tiru Kokarnam, Pudukkottai
- Goddess: Brahadambal, Brihadambal, Bṛhadamba
- God: Gokarnesvara, Kokarneswarar

Dates:
- Dallapiccola 1996: 18th c.

Style Group Three

**Āvūṭaiyārkōvil Āṭmanātasvāmi Temple**
Alternate names and spelling:
- City: Avudaiyarkoil, Tirupperuntuṟai, Tirupperundurai
- Goddess: Yogambikai
- God: Atmanatha
- Saint: Māṇikkavācakar, Manikkavasagar

Dates:
- No known scholarship on the murals studied in this dissertation

Style Group Three

**Nattam Kailasanatha Temple**
Alternate names and spellings:
- City: Nattam-Kōvilpaṭṭi
- Goddess: Senbagavalli
- God: Kailasanathar

Dates:
- Nagaswamy 1983: 17th c.

Style Group Three
Maṭavār Vaṭākam Vaṭṭiyanāṭar Temple
Alternate names and spellings:
   City: Maṭavārvalākam, Madavar Vilagam, Madavār Valagam, Putuvai, Puduvai
   Goddess: Sivakami, Civakāmi
   God: Vaidyānathar
Dates:
   No known scholarship on the murals studied in this dissertation
Style Group Three

Ālvār Tirunakari Āṭināṭar Temple
Alternate names and spellings:
   City: Azhwar Tirunagari, Tirukurukur, Tirukurukoor
   Goddess:
   God: Adinathan, Adipiran
Dates:
   No known scholarship on the murals studied in this dissertation
Style Group Three
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has called me to places, situations, and relationships I never imagined likely, nor even possible. I am grateful to the people and institutions that have made this study possible, and that have so enriched my life.

I have been fortunate to study with scholars whom I admire deeply and who have consistently pushed me to do more. Vidya Dehejia has been an unstinting source of support and guidance, especially during times that were both professionally and personally great challenges. She has mentored me in countless ways, and it has been a true pleasure and privilege to study with her. Bob Harrist and Jack Hawley have also been great mentors to me in and outside the classroom; their critical feedback has made me a better scholar, and their generosity has shown me how to be a better colleague. Phil Wagoner set me on this path when I was young and impressionable; for that, and for his persistent encouragement, criticism, and friendship, I am very grateful. The faculty at Columbia University in the departments Art History, Religion, and MESAAS have nurtured and shaped this project.

My fellow graduate-student colleagues have greatly enriched my study and work. Katherine Kasdorf has read countless drafts of papers, chapters, and letters. My travels with her in South India were a synergistic experience and taught me a lot. Risha Lee has also contributed much to my research with her insight and comments on my work. Jessamyn Conrad has been a critical reader and interlocutor, and has helped me immensely to clarify and communicate my ideas better. Dipti Khera spent many hours improving my work and thinking. Dana Byrd, Jennifer Stager, and Di Yin Lu encouraged and shaped my work in countless hours of shame-free collaborative editing.
Language study has been one of the great joys of doing this project. My interest in the history and art of South Asia was first inspired by the University of Wisconsin Year in India Program. My study of Tamil with Sam Sudhananda began at the American College in Madurai, and continues to the present at Columbia University in New York. I am grateful to Sekar Jesudasan, who taught me how to follow and trust my interests. I would have been lost without the generosity and excellent tutelage of Dr. Bharathy and the teachers at the American Institute of Indian Studies Tamil Program. Lavanya Collooru of the AIIS Telugu Program, while not able to dislodge Tamil as the Indic language closest to my heart, did succeed in showing me the beauty and pleasure of Telugu, and for that I am grateful. I have also benefited from conversations about language, literature, and epigraphy with M. Kannan and Y. Subbarayalu of the French Institute of Pondicherry, and G. Vijayavenugopal of the École française d'Extrême-Orient in Pondicherry. SriNithi Jayagopal has never failed to help me through vexing problems. All of those mentioned here have helped me with the translations included in this text, and with understanding the contexts in which they were written.

In addition to the individuals who have made my work possible, I am indebted to numerous institutions. The Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts supported my research and writing for two intense and exciting years that broadened my vision and helped me to better understand the place of my work in the field of art history. The people I met and worked with there remain a source of inspiration to me. I was fortunate to be affiliated with the French Institute of Pondicherry, which generously provided facilities for research and study, contacts, and mentorship with its faculty. The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department in Chennai was extremely helpful in facilitating and encouraging my research.
Visiting the temples and palaces where the murals are located was one of the outstanding delights of my research. The catalyst for my first visit to see murals was the gift a book from Jagdish Mittal, who continues to be a source of encouragement for my study of South Indian painting. I could not have formulated this project without Hids Samsudeen, who gave months of his life to driving me around southern India, aiding me in my search for murals. His inimitable skills as driver are evident in the breadth of work surveyed here, and as architect are evident in the plans included herein. His role as coach, therapist, and cultural broker are perhaps more difficult to discern, but were equally vital. I am grateful to Justice Ratnavel Pandian, his sons Ravi and Sam, and their families, who shared their home with unstinting generosity as I studied the truly amazing murals at Tiruppuṭaimarutūr. The priests, officials, and residents of that village taught me everything from local history to how to roll beedis, and made me feel welcome in their beautiful village. I am, finally, overwhelmingly grateful to the administrators, priests, and devotees at all of the temples I visited. If not for their welcome and kindness this work would not have been possible.
For my mother

who always lights the path, wherever I choose to tread
CHAPTER 1 – HISTORIOGRAPHY, STYLE, AND PLAN OF THE DISSERTATION

This study of mural paintings in southeastern India, which focuses on temple murals in the contemporary state of Tamil Nadu, redresses lacunae in the scholarship on Indian painting traditions, as well as the mischaracterization of the time period 1500-1800 as an era of decadence and decline. Of the nearly one hundred south Indian mural sites I have visited and photographed—most of them undocumented, and all of them under-studied—I have chosen a representative sample of still-extant murals to demonstrate the broad relevance of the paintings not only to art historical study, but to our understanding of the political, economic, and religious dynamism of this period. While recent research has contributed substantially to our understanding of the vitality of courtly culture in this period, the emphasis on courtly activity and royal patronage tends to skew studies of art and literature away from individuals and groups otherwise known to have been politically and economically vital in this period. My study of the visual and textual content of murals, conversely, substantiates the patronage of temples, texts, and paintings by merchants and monastic individuals. Throughout, this study insists on a paradigm of beholding informed by contemporary narrative performance traditions and the kinesthetic experience of the temple of which the paintings are a part. The paintings are not merely decoration, passively perceived by the devotee-viewer; rather, the paintings motivate

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2 It happens that most of the surviving murals are located in southern South India, and even here, greater numbers survive in the southern region. Accordingly, most of the sites studied in the dissertation are located in the far south.
movement through the sacred and ritual space of the temple. Through this action, the paintings, with the participation of the viewer, contribute to the transformation of architectural space into enlivened, iconic space.

**Historiography of Nāyaka Painting**

The standard historiographic account of Tamil area painting states that while the earliest extant paintings date only to the 7th century, literature testifies to a wealth of mural paintings in ancient times. According to this narrative, the style of Tamil area paintings was essentially unchanged from the 7th through the 13th centuries, under the successive rule of the Pallava, Pandya, and Chola dynasties. This continuity was disrupted in the 13th century by Muslim conquest. Following a century of political and social turmoil, the formation and expansion southwards of the (Hindu) Vijayanagara empire brought with it a new style of painting. Hereafter, the narrative of what happened to painting traditions in South India after the fall of Vijayanagara, ca. 1565, finds variation. Some scholars assert that the style of Vijayanagara persisted until the 17th century, when “increased pressure from the Muslim rulers of the north”

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3 Seth, for instance, writes, “Tamil Nadu painting produced earlier in the first millennium and at the beginning of the second millennium has a great deal of stylistic similarity whether it was patronized by the Pallavas, the Pandyas or the Cholas. This stylistic cuts across religious boundaries between different shrines.” Mira Seth, *Indian Painting: The Great Mural Tradition* (New York: Abrams, 2006), 88-89. A similar account is found in R. Champakalakshmi, "South Indian Paintings: A Survey," in *South Indian Studies*, ed. H. M. Nayaka and B. R. Gopal (Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1990). Nagaswamy’s account differs in that he explicitly identifies Chola-period paintings as the stylistic apogee of Tamil-area painting. He also does not mention political and artistic disruption by Islamic forces; rather, he asserts the distinctiveness of Vijayanagara painting, as well as the unique style of individual Nāyaka courts. R Nagaswamy, "Tamil Paintings," Marg 33, no. 2 (1979-80).

4 The trope of Hindu Vijayanagara as restoring South India after its loss to Islamic sultanates is rife through the literature on the history of South India; recent scholarship has drawn attention to this bias and produced a revised history. Alas, this has had little impact on the study of Tamil-area painting. Wagoner has studied this problem from numerous perspectives, including literature and art history. Phillip B. Wagoner, "“Sultan among Hindu Kings”: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (1996); "Fortuitous Convergences and Essential Ambiguities: Transcultural Political Elites in the Medieval Deccan," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3, no. 3 (1999); “Hariraha, Bukka, and the Sultan: The Delhi Sultanate in the Political Imagination of Vijayanagara,” in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).
“spelt doom” for the south Indian kings and patrons of painting.\(^5\) Others assert that distinctive styles of painting developed at the regional courts that succeeded the empire of Vijayanagara.\(^6\) These regional courts developed under nāyakas, Telugu-speaking warrior-administrators whose fealty to their Vijayanagara suzerains became increasingly nominal in the late 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) centuries as they became powerful rulers in their own right. These narratives of painting’s development, no matter which ending they take, are inadequate to the complexity of art produced across multiple centuries and socio-politically distinct regions. The one-size-fits-all interpretation of pre-Vijayanagara painting survives because there exist precious few examples of paintings from this period. There is ample evidence, however, to bring more nuance to the study of Vijayanagara and later painting.

The lack of critical or prolonged art historical engagement with south Indian painting during the Vijayanagara and Nāyaka periods, especially compared to the intense interest in painting during the same period in northern India, is perhaps due to the paucity of surviving material (though certainly some decades ago much more survived than does today), and the difficulty of gaining access to the paintings, which are found primarily on the walls and ceilings of temples, a few palaces, and in painted manuscripts. Scholarship tends either to be a general overview of the sites and stylistic trends, typically devoting not more than a single paragraph to

\(5\) To quote Thomas in full, “A study of the history of Tamil Nadu indicates that towards the middle of the seventeenth century there was increased pressure from the Muslim rulers of the north, who were desirous of taking over the southern regions. This spelt doom for these numerous chieftains and nobles. Their options were limited—either face a fight for survival or acquiesce and slip into insignificance. In any case these patrons, who invariably stood by the side of their favorite gods in the paintings, disappeared from the political scene of Tamil Nadu towards the middle of the seventeenth century.” Isaac Job Thomas, "Painting in Tamil Nadu, A.D. 1350-1650" (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1979), 364.

\(6\) Appasamy argues the “prototype” of the Nāyaka style at Tañcavūr is Tirupati, itself a stylistic “descendant of Vijayanagar painting.” Jaya Appasamy, Tanjavur Painting of the Maratha Period (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1980), 27. Nagaswamy asserts the distinctiveness of styles developed at the major Nāyaka courts of Maturai and Cēṇći. He argues that Tañcavūr’s style is closest to Vijayanagara. Nagaswamy, "Tamil Paintings," 92.
any one site; or, a narrowly focused study of a particular painting or motif. Both do little justice to the material, particularly as they rely on a meager understanding of the genre as a whole. The major problems the field faces are that a reliable chronology has yet to be established, styles have not been sufficiently studied and differentiated, and historical factors, such as patronage, politics, and function, have not been integrated into the study of the art.

Scholarship on Tamil area mural painting consists mainly of broad overviews of sites and stylistic trends, as well as a few close studies of individual sites. No uniform conceptual approach to organizing or dating paintings prevails, nor do designations of style agree, resulting in a somewhat disjointed body of literature in which assignments of dates and styles are inconsistent. Sivaramamurti’s early studies classify paintings dynastically, mostly describing the major narratives of the paintings and some key stylistic features. The single published dissertation on Tamil murals is likewise mainly descriptive, with limited discussion of the possible origin of the Vijayanagara style. Michell’s more recent work categorizes mural paintings according first to linguistic region and second by geographic region, while Dallapiccolla organizes the material by dynasty and relative chronology; for both, discussion of

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7 There are, of course, exceptions to this characterization. Calambur Sivaramamurti has written two books on the subject, South Indian Paintings and Vijayanagara Painting. Both of these works, though seminal, are surveys that do not delve deeply into the broader contexts of the paintings and their production. Later scholarly works also do not universally accept the assignments of dates and styles made in these volumes. C. Sivaramamurti, South Indian Paintings (New Delhi: National Museum, 1968); Vijayanagara Paintings (Publications Division, Ministry of Indformation and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1985). There are also innumerable studies on the paintings at Lepakshi, as well as very occasional studies on other temple paintings, such as those at ŚrīRaṅgam and Citamparam. R Chitra Viji, "The Bhagavata Purana Paintings at Srirangam," in South Indian Studies, ed. R Nagaswamy (Madras: Society for Archaeological, 1978); "Vaiyali Paintings at Srirangam," in South Indian Studies, ed. R Nagaswamy (Madras: Society for Archaeological, 1979); David Smith, "Paintings in the Shivakamasundari Shrine at Chidambaram," in Chidambaram: Home of Nataraja, ed. Vivek Nand and George Michell (Bombay: Marg, 2001).

8 Thomas, "Painting in Tamil Nadu, A.D. 1350-1650." K.T. Gandhirajan has also written an unpublished dissertation at Madurai Kamraj University on the subject of Nāyaka-period murals in the Tamil region. I thank him for sharing his work with me.
style is limited to description of major features, with an emphasis on figural depiction. Nagpall and Seth add further variation in the assignments of dates and styles of the paintings. Studies of individual sites tend to better describe the stylistic particularities of the site and historical contexts, though do not challenge the wider (and often questionable) stylistic and chronological frameworks into which they are slotted. Nagaswamy's thorough studies of individual sites describe the subjects of the paintings and consider at length their patronage and historical contexts. He also, unusually, translates a few inscriptions; similar studies usually only note the existence of inscriptions, and inscriptions are almost never themselves objects of analysis.

In recent years, a robust vocabulary for understanding stylistic variation and transference has developed in studies of architecture and northern Indian painting that have argued for the agency of the artist over that of the patron and for local context over trans-regional religious or


13 Very rarely, however, paleography is used to date paintings. S. Hariharan, "Tiruppudaimarudur Paintings," in *South Indian Studies* 2, ed. R. Nagaswamy (Madras: Society for Archaeological, Historical, And Epigraphical Research, 1979).

political affiliation as an engine of stylistic choice, change, and meaning. These concerns also inform the most effective studies of mural painting sites outside the Tamil region. Where dedicatory inscriptions are nonexistent, scholars of murals have created a comparative methodology for assigning dates by comparing them to other genres of painting. Importantly, these scholars have highlighted the fact that murals decorate performative spaces used by their patrons; content and meaning in murals thus take on immediacy that manuscript paintings may not.

**Proposal of Style Groups**

This review of the historiography of “Nāyaka painting” shows that the term itself nebulously describes over three hundred years of artistic output, from diverse patrons, in a number of settings and styles. Little progress has been made in refining the concept of “Nāyaka painting” in terms of date or style, with the result that all paintings over three centuries are termed simply “Nāyaka.” The poverty of this approach is perhaps best illustrated by an example: the paintings of the Cennarāya Perumāḷ temple at Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai, which probably date to the late 17th century, have been assigned to wildly different styles and time periods. Although


17 As mentioned in the previous chapter and section on historiography, scholars have made some attempt to narrow stylistic terms. Mural paintings might be grouped according to geographic area: northern, central, and southern Tamil zones (Michell). Murals have also been grouped stylistically according to ruling seat, such as Maturai Nāyaka or Čeĉi (Senji) Nāyaka (Nagaswamy). Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States*; Nagaswamy, "Tamil Paintings."
scholars associate the paintings broadly with the *Nāyaka style*, the contours of this style remain rather indistinct. Nagaswamy attributes the style to the *Nāyaka* rulers based at Ceñci and to the early 17th century, while Seth, dating the paintings to the 19th century, sees “the influence of folk art in conception and design,” while still retaining “the lyricism and movement of the late Vijayanagara period.” On the other hand, Nagpall and Dallapiccola both identify the style simply as “*Nāyaka*,” though their dating is conservatively about 150 years apart (16th century and mid-17th to 18th centuries, respectively).18 In sum, the extant scholarship agrees on date only within a margin of three hundred years, and understands the style as anything from courtly to folk. A rubric that establishes standards for both style and date will improve the accuracy with which it is possible date and interpret the paintings within particular historical contexts.

Studies of *Nāyaka* painting have been attentive to the body as an obvious distinguishing feature of style, but remains divided over how to date or identify different styles even when attentive to figural differences. I propose criteria for three different typologies of the body, which I identify with “*style groups*,” and to which I connect the other developments in mural painting described in the following chapter. I here present a figural typology because within the historiography, it is primarily figures that are the descriptors and determinants of “*style*” and are hence invoked in matters of dating, which, though of secondary interest to me, is a necessary prelude to further study. These style groups are internally diverse; I hope and expect that future work will bring more nuance to these categories.

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18 Nagpall, *Mural Paintings in India*; Nagaswamy, ”Tamil Paintings,” 92; Dallapiccola, “South Indian Painting Styles, 14th-18th Centuries,” 646; Seth, *Indian Painting : The Great Mural Tradition*, 127.
**Style Group One**

*Style Group One* is characteristic of the 16th century and is the style closely associated with the Vijayanagara court, found at the premier site for “Vijayanagara Painting”, the Vīrabhadra temple at Lepakshi. The style is, however, found throughout the area at least nominally under Vijayanagara’s control in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. The style is characterized by elongated figures, tending to be quite sharp, with pointed fingers, toes, and noses. The legs tend to bend back at the knee, giving a general sense of concavity. The figures are presented in profile or three-quarter profile. Throughout, the far eye extends past the contour of the face. A line extends from the outside corner of the closer eye towards the hairline of the figure, creating an elongated eye. Deities are usually shown fully frontally, but may be shown in three-quarter profile. Framing is minimal, with changes in moments or narrative scenes more often indicated by the direction the figures face and move or by natural elements of the setting such as trees or architecture. The pictorial ground is decorated with flowers or festooned at the upper frame, denying illusionistic space. Sites discussed in this

19 I am thinking particularly of Michell’s articulation of Imperial style under Vijayanagara. Although his formulation arises from his study of architecture, I believe that this argument can be expanded to painting. He writes, “If certain architectural designs and motifs reach definition under those particular historical circumstances which lead to the successful transformation of a local polity into an empire then, it may be argued, such designs and motifs may constitute elements in an imperial style. This characterization is adopted not merely to highlight the historical coincidence of architectural evolution and imperial state formation, but also to suggest that architecture in itself is a communicator of imperial ideals.” George Michell, *The Vijayanagara Courtly Style: Incorporation and Synthesis in the Royal Architecture of Southern India, 15th-17th Centuries* (New Delhi: Manohar with American Institute of Indian Studies, 1992), 65.

20 Three-quarter profile appears to become fuller over time, as at the Sātyavākāsvara temple in Kaḷakkātu.

21 Thomas suggests that this may be evidence of Vijayanagara-style painting’s genealogical relationship to the style of Western Indian Jain painting. Thomas, "Painting in Tamil Nadu, A.D. 1350-1650," 3.
dissertation that belong to this style group are the Cennakeśava temple at Somapalle, the Tēṇupūrīsvara temple at Paṭṭīccaram, and the Nārumpūnātāsvāmi temple at Tiruppuṭaimarutūr.22

A typical figure group at Lepakshi demonstrates these features (Figure 1). The figures stand on a single ground line, which is the frame of the pictorial register. They are shown mainly in profile, with the far eye and part of the forehead extending into view. The eyes of the figures are more or less composed of a straight line for the bottom and an arched line for the top of the lid, though some figures have a more almond- or fish-shaped eye. The figures have fleshy round stomachs that hang over the waist. The arms are long, extending to the knee, with long pointed fingers. The legs are long and lean, the knee articulated slightly with a circle, and the feet wedge-shaped from the ankle to the toe. One notes that on the left side of this image two figures face opposite directions; this alone indicates a change of scene and narrative moment. The pictorial space is decorated with fabric festoons and pendant tassels; the decoration of the field is divorced from the setting of the painting’s narrative. A hilly mound and trees indicate the outdoor setting.

Close in style and geographic proximity to those at Lepakshi are the murals at Somappalle (Figure 2). The figures in this example are similar to those at Lepakshi in the shape of the body, including sloping shoulders, pointed fingers, soft bellies, and bowed-back legs with tapering feet. The textiles are rendered with great attention to detail, but are less stiff than those at Lepakshi, allowing them to fall more naturally. The female figures at both sites tie their saris in similar ways, with the end of the sari passed over the shoulder, exposing the top half of the
breasts (Figure 3, Figure 4). The chignon hairstyles are also distinctive of the women in this style group.\textsuperscript{23}

At Tiruppuṭaimarutūr, a composition similar to that examined first at Lepakshi shows figures who, though undeniably stylistically distinct, share formal and compositional attributes that locate them firmly within this style group (Figure 5). Here, the eyes are again, and more distinctively, flat on the bottom and arched at the top. The far eye and forehead protrude into space. The articulations of the body are angular, but the shoulders are softly rounded. The bellies of the figures are soft, again hanging over the waist. The arms are disproportionately long, and the fingers pointed at the ends. The legs taper to the ankle in a concave sweep, and the feet taper to the toes.

Looking to scenes of courtly figures at the same sites, we again find stylistic variation, but enough correspondence to group these together provisionally. The figures from Lepakshi, again show the protruding far eye, a single long thin eyebrow, loose bellies, soft shoulders but angular articulation of the hands and elbows (Figure 6). The legs are again tapered and unmodulated, with the whole body seeming to sway backward. There is great attention to the clothing details, especially the patterns of the fabric. The ends of the fabrics worn by the figures are extended so that the viewer can see the pattern and breadth of the material. In both images, figures wear a long-sleeved upper garment characteristic of Vijayanagara courtly dress.\textsuperscript{24} Similar dress and disposition of the figures is seen at Paṭṭicaram (Figure 7). The figures’ softly rounded shoulders, very long arms, pointed fingers, protruding far eye and forehead, line at the corner of

\textsuperscript{23} This hairstyle is seen in later painting, but not with the near-ubiquity of with which it occurs in Style Group 1.

\textsuperscript{24} For Vijayanagara courtly costume, see Wagoner, ""Sultan among Hindu Kings" : Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara."
the eye, and carefully-depicted patterned textiles all show an affinity with the figures at Lepakshi and Tiruppuṭaimarutūr. The hairstyles and costumes of the women are closely related to those found at Lepakshi (Figure 8). Differences in the shape of the eyes, the depiction of the clothing with prominent ties for the crisscrossed upper body garment, jewelry around the ankles, and less tapered feet are some of the features that differentiate these paintings from the others in the group.

Although there are certain stylistic differences between the murals that belong to Style Group One, the similarities in the depictions of the body provide a basis to identify commonality over a vast geographic area. Identifying this as an imperial style that penetrates the far corners of the empire’s reach will allow further research to identify the ways in which local traditions were integrated with imperial ideals, and to query the meanings that such stylistic adaptations held for the patrons and viewers of the paintings. Interestingly, although the visual style is translocal, the language of inscription at the Tamil-area sites remains only Tamil. Only in later painting does Telugu, the courtly and translocal language, become inscribed into murals. Such a range of material raises important questions about the circulation of images, transfer of style, and mobility of artists. These questions reach beyond the scope of the present work; it is hoped that they may be taken up in the future.

**Style Group Two**

There are only two sites that belong to Style Group Two, both in the region nearest the seat of the Nāyakas ruling from Ceñci. These have accordingly been identified in scholarship as belonging to the “Ceñci Nāyaka” style; both sites date to the late 17th or early 18th centuries.

The Vēnuköpāḷa Pārtasārati Temple at Ceñkam in North Arcot District lies roughly seventy kilometers from Ceñci, the fortified capital of one of the major Nāyaka ruling dynasties.
All sources agree that these paintings belong to the 17th century, and are associated with the Ceñci Nāyaka who built the temple’s raṅgamaṇṭapa ca. 1600. All scholars agree that the Yuddhakanda of the Rāmāyana that is shown in these paintings deviates from both Vālmīki’s Sanskrit Rāmāyana and Kamban’s Tamil Rāmāyana. Nagaswamy, Chaitanya, Dallapiccola, and Michell connect these depictions to the Telugu version of the Rāmāyana composed by Ranganatha in the 14th century. The paintings were reportedly “rediscovered” in the 1970s.

The paintings in the Cennarāya Perumāḷ temple at Atiyamāṅkurāṭṭai were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, as an introduction to the wide discrepancy in assessments of the date and style of the paintings. Atiyamāṅkurāṭṭai’s murals are located on the ceiling of the temple’s single maṇṭapa, which is divided lengthwise into five bays separated by four rows of pillars. Each bay is divided cross-wise into separate narrative registers so that the paintings are read in successive horizontal narrative bands as one walks through the temple. The central bay runs from the entrance of the maṇṭapa straight back to the door to the inner sanctum of the temple, and depicts the cosmic body of Viṣṇu, his Viṣvarūpa (discussed in detail in Chapter 5). The two bays on the northern side of the maṇṭapa depict the story of the Rāmāyana, while the two bays on the southern side depict scenes from the Mahābhārata.

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26 While the Cenkam temple appears to have attracted a comparatively large body of scholarship, when combined, text devoted to the site totals perhaps only a couple pages of text. Michell, Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States, 232; Dallapiccola, "South Indian Painting Styles, 14th-18th Centuries," 646; Nagpall, Mural Paintings in India, 183; Krishna Chaitanya, A History of Indian Painting: The Mural Tradition (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1976), 80-81; Nagaswamy, "Tamil Paintings," 92; "17th Century Ramayana Paintings in Chengam Temple," The Hindu, August 27 1975.

27 "17th Century Ramayana Paintings in Chengam Temple."

28 Nagpall dates them to the 16th century; Nagaswamy to the early 17th century; Dallapiccola to the mid-17th to 18th centuries; and Seth to the 19th century. Nagpall, Mural Paintings in India, 180-81; Nagaswamy, "Tamil Paintings," 92; Dallapiccola, "South Indian Painting Styles, 14th-18th Centuries," 646; Seth, Indian Painting : The Great Mural Tradition, 127.
The figures at both Ceṅkam (Figure 9) and Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai (Figure 10) possess very rounded limbs, circles for the knee and elbow caps, and extremely exaggerated eye size. Michell regards the composition of the paintings to be “characterized by precise linework and lively postures.” Dallapiccola likewise finds that the “crisp line work, compositions and lively figural poses suggest a connection with contemporary manuscript illuminations in Andhra Pradesh.” Chaitanya, appreciative but echoing a common charge that Nāyaka painting fails to equal its Vijayanagara predecessor, writes, “These Nayak paintings of the seventeenth century may lack the finesse of the Lepakshi murals, but they manage swift and spirited episodic narration.” The vivacity of the figures’ poses and expressions distinguishes these paintings from both Vijayanagara paintings, as well as later Nāyaka paintings; it also points to significant influence from southern Andhra or Karnataka, where the figures of manuscript illustrations are indeed shown with more dynamic poses and almost caricatured expressions, in a style highly reminiscent of the murals.

The figures in the murals are almost exclusively shown in strict profile, except for those of lower status, such as rakshasas, or other antagonistic characters of the stories, who are shown


30 Dallapiccola, "South Indian Painting Styles, 14th-18th Centuries," 646.

31 Chaitanya, A History of Indian Painting: The Mural Tradition, 81.

32 Dallapiccola does not specify the comparison she mentions. Dallapiccola, "South Indian Painting Styles, 14th-18th Centuries," 646. The Mahabharata manuscript dated 1670 to Mysore bears important similarities to the Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai and Ceṅkam paintings. Images of this manuscript available to me for study, at least as reproductions, are at Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Harvard Art Museums, accession number 2009.202.37, and in the Victoria and Albert Museum, accession number IS.76-2001, and the San Diego Museum of Art, accession number 1990.1399. Oversized eyes, neck rolls, black outlining of the bodily forms, circles for knee caps, and deep shading to model the body are common to both the styles. The Mysore paintings are distinct in that the women in particular have much larger eyes than those of the Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai paintings. The buttocks are also more clearly delineated for both men and women, and the highlighting on the figures is much more dramatic in the Mysore figures.
in either three-quarter profile or fully frontal. Frontal depictions are also given to iconic renderings of deities and heroes. Great emphasis is given to linework to show volume in the body, and there is evident interest in shading, highlights, and crosshatching in the figures. The figures are outlined by thin black lines. The pictorial space is filled with figures in action, unrestricted to the ground plane; this is different from the figural arrangement characteristic of Style Group One. The pictorial space is rarely decorated with non-narrative elements; when it is, these are restricted to flowers. Gone are the pendant festoons and tassels of Style Group One. Narrative scenes are divided by frames or architectural elements.

**Style Group Three**

Figures of this style group belong to murals of the 17th and 18th centuries. While most of the examples belong to the region of Madurai, the style is evident as far south as Āḻvār Tirunakari. Unlike Style Group Two, shading of the figures is mostly limited to the face. The eyes are smaller, and are shaped by equally curving lines for the top and bottom lids; the pupil is usually placed in the center of the eye, touching both the top and bottom lids. The far eye never protrudes. The body is rounded and fleshy, and although the contours of the chest and arm muscles are usually defined, this does not result in a sense of volume. Though present, the circles that defined the joints and muscles of the bodies in Style Group 2 are far less conspicuous here. Figures are almost exclusively presented in strict profile or fully frontally; rarely are they shown in three-quarter view. The frontal depiction is usually reserved for iconographic renderings of deities and heroes.

33 The sites with figures that belong to this group discussed in this dissertation include the Maturai Mīnaksī temple, the Aḻakar temple at Aḻakarkōvil, the Pirakatāmpaḷ temple at Tirukkōkāṟṟam outside of Putukkōṭṭai, the palace of at Ramanatapuram, the Atmanātsvāmi temple at Āvuṭaiyāṟkōvil, the murals in the Vaittiyanāṭar temple at Śrīvilliputtūr, the murals in the goddess’s shrine at Citamparam, and the Kailāsanāṭar temple at Nattam. This list is, again, only partial.
deities, though infrequently also occurs among narrative figures. The action of the narrative paintings often occurs on a single plane, though there are examples of multiple figures populating the entire vertical space of the narrative field, as in Style Group Two. Nevertheless, overlapping remains the most common way to indicate the relationship of figures in space to one another.

The visual narratives in murals of this style group are clearly delineated through abundant use of internal framing, as well as variation of the ground color. The frames between scenes are invariably white lines outlined in black. Internal divisions within scenes are indicated by the insertion of trees and architectural features. The visual field is infrequently decorated, but may show a rolled-up curtain at the top of the frame, or on occasion, festoons. Both Tamil and Telugu-language inscriptions are found in the paintings; every mural in this style group carries inscriptions.

An example from Āḻvār Tirunakari, which is discussed at length in Chapter 3, displays all of the attributes described above (Figure 11). The faces are strictly shown in profile, and the visible eye is equally curved on the top and bottom, with the pupil positioned in the middle of the eye. The bodies are stocky, and the feet of the figures do not taper to the toe. The figures’ chests are unmodeled, soft and rounded, as are the shoulders and stomach. The seated figures are students, each holding a manuscript, and listening to their teacher seated on the right side of the image; on the left, two figures discuss the teacher’s plan to kill the first student. The narrative moments are separated by hard frames, as well as by changing background color. Tamil and Telugu text in the register above describe the action below.

Similarly, in an image from Ramanatapuram (Figure 12), the figures are unmodeled, with soft shoulders and rounded stomachs. Lines indicate pectoral and shoulder muscles, but do not
convey a sense of volume. The figures are resolutely profile, though the bodies are turned toward the viewer. Telugu script figures prominently on the manuscript that the figure on the right holds in his left hand while he speaks to the figure on the left. The eyes are the same shape top and bottom and the pupil is at the center of the eye. The eyes generally lack the line towards the hairline that is characteristic of the other style groups. This figure type is again seen at Āvuṭaiyārkōvil (Figure 13), Citamparam (Figure 14), and Aḷakar Kōvil (Figure 15).35

The figural types described by each of the style groups that I propose are offered as a starting point for thinking about stylistic progression and its geographic distribution. They answer a historiography that is exceedingly diverse in its view of the dates and styles of “Nāyaka paitning.” Although the proposals here do not establish a firm rubric for dating the murals, they address the problem that style and date vary so greatly between different analyses and point to the ways in which we may begin to discern trends within the chronological, geographic, and stylistic diversity of Nāyaka painting.

Studies concerned with south India during the late Vijayanagara and Nāyaka periods, especially in the fields of history, anthropology, and literature, has shown that artistic patronage and regional power did not simply fade away under the shadow of “Muslim rulers of the north,”

34 The inscription indicates that this is a recitation of the Rāmāyana. The Telugu reads, śrī rāmanive gati || śrīmadrāmāyaṇa pārāyaṇa

35 These, again, would benefit from further categorization, as stylistic diversity within this set is evident. The paintings at Maturai, which feature a portrait of the Nāyaka queen Maṅkammāḷ (r. 1689-1704) are considered in scholarship to be contemporary with Maṅkammāḷ’s life, and therefore would rightly belong in this style group (see Crispin Branfoot, "Mangammal of Madurai and South Indian Portraiture," East and West 51, no. 3/4 (2001)). However, close examination reveals that the figures have been repainted at least once. The result is that the stylistic markers, beyond the substantial nature of the bodies and the prevailing profile presentation of the figures, are much changed. One notices the white highlighting of the facial features, particularly around the eyebrows, nose, chin, and neck. The chins are stylized with small circles. The dress of the figures has also been repainted in places, and the colors of the skin modified. The round jewels of the crowns, and the repeating large-sized pearls that adorn them are characteristic of later painting. These features relate closely to the dispersed images of deities painted on paper in the mid-18th century in Andhra Pradesh or Tamil Nadu. See Marta Jakimowicz-Shah, Metamorphoses of Indian Gods (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1988).
but remained both generous and dynamic within a political situation that was equally so.\(^{36}\)

Scholars both within and outside the field of art history have argued that material symbols of kingship and their public transaction were essential components of this dynamic political system in which relations of hierarchy were subject to constant change.\(^{37}\) Rulers great and small, landowners, traders, and monastics were organized in a shifting constellation of power relationships. This dissertation complements studies of south Indian history, literature and religion by arguing that paintings were one way that kings, merchants, and monastics could assert their material wealth, show both tangible and intangible symbols of power, and articulate and consolidate political, linguistic, and sectarian identities. Demonstrating that mural paintings, particularly in temples, are meritorious, public, and eminently legible statements from their patrons, the dissertation also contributes specifically to field of art history, which has lavished attention on south Indian architecture and sculpture while giving comparatively little attention to the subject of painting. Moreover, the history of painting in South Asia is strongly biased toward early painting (such as the murals at Ajanta), and North Indian courtly painting of the Rajasthani and the Mughal Imperial and sub-Imperial courts. The experience of the temple, of ritual and

\(^{36}\) It is during this period that one of the most famous empires of Indian history comes to the fore: the Mughal Empire. Scholars of all stripes have focused more attention on the Mughal imperial and sub-imperial courts during the period 1500-1800 than they have on any other region of the subcontinent. This is even more true in the field of art history, as Mughal imperial art was perhaps the most appealing to audiences in the West, and Mughal paintings were collected and displayed more extensively and earlier than almost any other art from the Indian subcontinent. Thus, this preoccupation with “Muslims of the North” may be rooted as much or more in scholarship’s bias than as in historical reality.

devotional practice, and the creation of sacred space within the temple are herein reconsidered in light of the large-scale programs of paintings that have so far been virtually absent from studies of the south Indian temple. By taking south Indian murals of the Nāyaka period as a subject of sustained and interdisciplinary study, I aim not only to rewrite the narrative of Tamil-area painting, its significance, and meanings within the sacred and royal contexts in which it is found, but to alter the narrative course of the history of painting in South Asia.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The period undertaken in this dissertation, 1500 to 1800, is admittedly large, and somewhat arbitrary. It is a reflection of the relative paucity of secondary scholarship, which has seen the “Nāyaka period” as a unitary entity, the dates of which are fuzzy at best. As mentioned above, traditional historiography has disdained this period, which has only more recently become the subject of sustained study. Because paintings of this long period are not securely dated, my approximation of the period is warranted. I include paintings strongly associated with the height of Vijayanagara power, murals associated with the major Nāyaka courts, as well as murals

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38 Branfoot’s work on the ritual and movement in relationship with the architecture and sculptural programs of the Nāyaka temple represents a truly transformative intervention in the scholarship, and has been foundational for my own thinking about the place of murals within the temples. Branfoot, *Gods on the Move: Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple*.

39 For a discussion of the establishment of Nāyaka rule and vaduga (northerner) settlement in Tamil Nadu, see Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu*, 33-56.

40 “The period of the Nāyaka states, be it in Tanjavur, Senji, or elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, is a neglected one, and finds little place in both popular post-colonial depictions and in the standard historiography of the south.” *Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu*, 25. However, Subrahmanyam reports that the narrative of decay has not been so bad for South India as it has for the north, “For, as it happens, the early modern period in South Indian history (unlike the ‘medieval’ period) remains curiously inchoate in the imaginations of historians, a situation that is at one and the same time somewhat disquieting and rather exciting.” Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions : Making Polities in Early Modern South India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 10. See his Chapter 1 in the same publication for an overview of the historiography on this period.
patronized by courts of more circumscribed power. I intend this study of murals belonging to the early 16th-century, as well as late 18th-century, to build a foundation for future study.

The period 1500-1800 saw vast changes in the political configuration of south India. The Vijayanagara Empire was founded ca.1350, with its capital in what is today central Karnataka, at Hampi. At the height of its power, after 1500, the empire included most of south India, extending over parts of present-day Orissa, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu (Figure 16). Although the language of the Vijayanagara kings was Telugu, the language of each area under their control remained distinct; importantly for this study, Tamil continued to be the dominant language spoken by people living in southeastern India, in the area that now comprises the modern state of Tamil Nadu. When the Vijayanagara empire fell, ca.1565, it splintered into smaller kingdoms controlled by nāyakas, Telugu-speaking warriors from the Andhra region (north of Tamil Nadu) who had served as governors in the empire; hence, this period is known as the Nāyaka period. The customs and etiquette of the Vijayanagara court, however, continued to be important signs of legitimate and cosmopolitan kingship for centuries to come; Vijayanagara courtly dress and Telugu language remained conspicuous as a courtly and literary language through the eighteenth century.

The murals studied in this dissertation contain inscriptions in both the Telugu and Tamil languages. These languages employ different scripts, and thus are iconographically distinctive.

41 The extent of the empire is contested in scholarship, and is closely bound to theories of state formation. For a discussion of these issues, particularly with regard to the Tamil region, see Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu, 28.

42 The date of 1565 is more rightly described as the point at which the Empire went into decline; its rulers survived, moving their capital further to the south. However, the fealty of the Nāyakas to their Vijayangara overlords became, after this time, increasingly more nominal than it was functional.
for their viewers, even if those viewers are unable to read the content of the writing.\textsuperscript{43} The significance of language choice in South Asia in the pre-colonial period is a much-debated issue outside the field of art history, while its consequence in artistic contexts has yet to be explored. Mitchell and Kaviraj, for example, contend that social or ethnic identification on the basis of language is a product only of colonial knowledge systems, not an indigenous category of self-representation.\textsuperscript{44} Others, such as Talbot, Pollock, and Narayana Rao, argue that language was indeed one way in which people identified themselves and their communities.\textsuperscript{45} Pollock’s work, in particular, focuses on how vernacular languages (such as Tamil and Telugu) come to define individual, social and political identities in the early second millennium.\textsuperscript{46} While language choice is briefly discussed in this dissertation, entry into the contested field of scholarship on what choice of language means (for which evidence is slim) has to a large extent been deferred for later study. What is suggested by the material I have surveyed, however, is that strongly bilingual sites are in many cases associated with courtly patronage.

\textsuperscript{43} Schapiro’s study the complex relationships between text and image in Western art from the medieval period to the present has been formative for my own apprehension of these issues in the study of South Indian murals. Meyer Schapiro, \textit{Words, Script, and Pictures : Semiotics of Visual Language}, 1st ed. (New York: G. Braziller, 1996), esp. “Script in Pictures: Semiotics of Visual Language, pp. 117-98.


\textsuperscript{46} “In the early centuries of the second millennium, wide areas of Eurasia, and most dramatically India and Europe, witnessed a transformation in cultural practice, social-identity formation, and political order with far-reaching and enduring consequences. I call this transformation vernacularization, a process of change by which the universalistic orders, formations, and practices of the preceding millennium were supplemented and gradually replaced by localized forms.” Sheldon Pollock, "India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000-1500," \textit{Daedalus} 127, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 41.
The three most powerful Nāyaka kingdoms were associated with the cities of Madurai (and Tiruccirāppalī), Tañcavūr, and Ceñci. Peripheral to, and within, these kingdoms, local centers of power (often characterized as “little kings”) operated with relative autonomy. The kingdoms of Ramanatapuram and Putukkōṭṭai, in particular, have been the subjects of revisionist histories that show the cultural efflorescence of the period even at these smaller courts, against the notion of cultural decline in a period without a strong central state. The throne at Tañcavūr passed from the Nāyakas to Marathi-speaking Maratha kings ca. 1675. Paintings from Tañcavūr of the Maratha period are not considered in this dissertation, although mural paintings, painting in other media, music, dance, and literature are well known to have been patronized by these rulers.

47 Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam’s studies of the history of this period assert themselves as correctives to the lack of scholarship noted above. It is from their work that I have developed my own orientation to this material, and situate its importance. They write that “Nāyaka south India has been largely ignored, its cultural universe devalued and disdained, until very recent times. One of the major reasons for this is surely that the immense wealth of sources from this period remains to a very large extent unexplored.” Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu*, x. Their second book also draws on previously unexplored literary sources for Nāyaka history, demonstrating the richness of an approach that considers a broad range of historical material. Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India*.


49 Appasamy, *Tanjavur Painting of the Maratha Period*; Nanditha Krishna, V. K. Rajamani, and Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library, *Painted Manuscripts of the Sarasvati Mahal Library* (Thanjavur: Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1994); Indira Viswanathan Peterson, "From Sthalapurana to Dance Drama: Temples and New Strategies of Localization in Dramas Form the 18th Century Tanjavur Maratha Court,"
This same period saw equally striking changes in the religious and philosophical landscape of the Tamil region. The establishment and growth of Brahmin and non-Brahmin monastic institutions (Ta. maṭam, Skt., maṭha) attached to particular temples is an extremely important but understudied development of this period, particularly in the Tamil region.\textsuperscript{50} Maṭams were not only important religious and economic institutions, but were an important site of patronage and production for texts. Karashima \textit{et al.}'s studies of epigraphic references to maṭams, which tracks the incidence of their mention over a period of roughly eight hundred years (900-1750 A.D.), identifies the diversity of sectarian affiliations that develops over the period 1300-1750. The authors further note that with regard to text, where recitation of canonical texts (they note especially the Śaiva Ṭēvāram) is recorded in the early period they study (900-1300), one of the primary activities of maṭams in the post-1300 era is the composition of \textit{purāṇams} (epic stories), and especially \textit{talapurāṇams} (epic stories related to a specific place; Skt. \textit{sthalapurāṇam}), which begin to be composed in the fourteenth century. The authors surmise that one of the determining factors for the growth and popularity of this new literary form is the growth and promotion of new sectarian formations.\textsuperscript{51} Fisher has also shown that the seventeenth century witnessed the intensification of sectarian debate and rivalry, resulting in the production


\textsuperscript{51} “We may suggest that the popularisation of Śaivasiddhānta tenets in Tamil by Meykaṇḍar acted as a catalyst for the rise of several Tamil \textit{sthala-purāṇas}, a new hagiographical genre, from the time of Vijayanagar rule.” "Maṭhas and Medieval Religious Movements in Tamil Nadu: An Epigraphical Study (Part 2)," 200.
of widely distributed texts intended to aid their readers in inter-sectarian religious debate. Literary texts display a new preoccupation with devotion to the writer’s sectarian lineage and teacher (guru). Koppedrayer studies the role of maṭams in the consolidations of social, political and economic power, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These institutional, religious, and literary developments are significant because Nāyaka-period murals overwhelmingly depict the talapurāṇam of a sacred site, narrate the hagiographies of saints and teachers, and show the writing and transmission of texts. My translations of the donor inscriptions and portraits show the active involvement of maṭam members in temples’ mural paintings.

The religious, political, and social dynamism of the period 1500-1800 calls for an equally multifaceted and nuanced frame of analysis for the paintings it produced. In order to redress shortcomings in the historiography of Vijayanagara and Nāyaka period artistic production, I establish criteria to identify the style and relative chronology of the murals. I contend that an understanding of the paintings is not achieved merely by decoding their narrative content, but by understanding the style of the paintings and the language of their inscriptions as equally endowed with meaning for their viewers: style and theme, inscriptive content and language, and historical context provide the lenses through which to comprehend each object across the distance of intervening centuries and cultures. The innovation in the sixteenth century of writing


53 Kippedrayer writes that “the non-Brahmin maṭhas were in a position to wield considerable power, especially in the context of south India in the 17th and 18th centuries when the central authority of the last major empire, the Vijayanagara empire, had long dissipated. Whether these centres were created expressly for such purposes cannot be considered here; what is salient is that the centres were in a position to use such power.” K.I. Koppedrayer, “Are Śūdras Entitled to Ride in the Palanquin?,” Contributions to Indian Sociology New Series 25, no. 2 (1991): 204-5. See also K. I. Koppedrayer, “The Sacred Presence of the Guru: The Velala Lineages of Tiruvavatuturai, Dharmapuram, and Tiruppanantal” (McMaster University, 1990).
inscriptions on mural paintings makes written language an important visual component of the paintings; language choice is significant because different scripts are symbolically meaningful even if semantically illegible to their audiences. My dissertation contributes to art historical scholarship on south India by creating a framework of analysis that may be applied generally to south Indian paintings of this period. More broadly, understanding painting as the visual expression of social affinities, and political and religious allegiances brings art historical investigation into conversation with other disciplines concerned with the history of southern India.

**PATRONAGE AND THE NĀYAKA TEMPLE**

Although Vijayanagara rulers are credited with re-establishing norms of Hindu kingship, such as the construction and patronage of temples in the Tamil area after a period of Muslim suzerainty, Branfoot shows that the greatest period of temple construction in Tamil Nadu after the famed Chola temples of the 11th-13th centuries is the Nāyaka period from ca. 1550-1700. As Branfoot argues, “The contrast between the relative dearth of temple construction in the 15th century, the height of Vijayanagara imperial power with the great expansion under that empire’s successors, the Nāyakas, is partly explained by the patronage of temples as a means of supporting the Nāyakas’ legitimacy in a politically unstable, but culturally vibrant era.” Nāyaka rulers expended vast resources on expanding and decorating Hindu temples, as well as founding new ones. One of the reasons that rulers great and small were such avid patrons of temples is

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54 Branfoot shows that the much of what is considered to be a product of Vijayanagara patronage is, in fact, more rightly understood as Nāyaka. Branfoot, *Gods on the Move: Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple*, Chapters 1 and 2.

that they offered prodigious returns—both tangible and intangible—on their investment. In both cases those returns yielded political and economic advantage.

The temple as a center for redistribution of material and intangible goods has been the focus of numerous influential studies. Appadurai and Breckenridge argue that temples functioned as redistributive centers, as do and Hardy and Dirks. Appadurai and Breckenridge present this aspect—the distribution of honor and redistribution of goods—as the most important function of the temple, and that which pre-colonial kings were responsible for protecting. Honor is a fundamental element of temple worship, which is more accurately described as an exchange that occurs between deity and devotee. The deity, conceived as a ruler, asserts sovereignty “not so much of a domain, as of a process, a redistributive process.” What is redistributed through exchange with the deity is mariyātai, honor. That which is first publicly and ritually donated to the deity is transformed through its association with the deity: “These redistributed leavings [given as offerings to the god] are known as ‘honours’ (mariyatai), and they are subject to variation and fluidity both in their content as well as in their recipients.” Building on the work

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56 I am mindful of Subrahmanyam’s directive that histories of this period are set with the task of explaining change, interpreting the actions of historical actors as both breaking with the past and drawing on it in meaningful and authentic ways. He writes, “Here the idea of polities that always fall back on ‘cultural forms which had deep roots in the south and on the sub-continent generally’ continues after all to dominate the historiography, even when the problem is precisely one of explaining change.” Subrahmanyam, Penumbral Visions: Making Polities in Early Modern South India, 12, see also his discussion of temple patronage by the Raja of Travancore, pg.13.

57 Arjun Appadurai and Carol Appadurai Breckenridge, "The South Indian Temple: Authority, Honour and Redistribution," Contributions to Indian Sociology 10, no. 187 (1976); Friedhelm Hardy, "Ideology and Cultural Contexts of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Temple," The Indian Economic and Social History Review 14, no. 1 (1977); Dirks, The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom. The arguments of these authors emerge from the extensive discourse that developed around the theories of state formation and function in medieval and early modern southern India, particularly with regard to Tamil Nadu and the Chola empire. These have been well rehearsed throughout the historiography of pre-modern Tamil Nadu, and it is not necessary to repeat them here. For an overview, see Daud Ali, "The Historiography of the Medieval in South Asia," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Series 3, 22, no. 1 (2012).


of Appadurai and Breckenridge, Dirks also argues that the reception of honor is a fundamental constitutive element of political relationships. However, Dirks differs from them in that he believes they “have put too much stress on the autonomy of temples and temple honors.”

Drawing on the work of Louis Dumont, who “notes that hierarchy itself has no word in Tamil, but that the closest word would be mutalmai, for precedence,” Dirks highlights the fact that honor derives from mutalmai, primacy, which is itself “a key component of [religious] worship.” Honor, gotten from temple ritual, establishes social and political primacy (hierarchy):

> Endowment is the principal means by which honors are secured. Endowments to temples, whether by kings or far lesser individuals, “permit the entry and incorporation of corporate units into the temple” (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976, 201). Thus the gifting activity which has created and sustained so many temples in southern India has at its root the goal of entering the temple community, and then increasing one’s rank within it and ones relative proximity to the deity. Like the offering of service which initiates a political relationship, the endowment to a temple has a structural logic which unfolds in the redistributational cycle suggested above.⁶¹

Although Dumont’s formulation of hierarchy has been seriously challenged by subsequent scholarship⁶², the redistribution of honor through the temple as an expression of social hierarchy has continued to be an important lens through which the function of the temple in south Indian society is understood.

Breaking from the close focus on the temple as an institution through which honor and material goods were redistributed, Karashima maintains the ways in which nāyakas materially gained from their association with temples must be considered. He argues that in return for gifts

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to the temple, nāyakas could receive kāṇiyāṭchi, hereditary rights at the temple, appointment to administrative posts, and access to resources. As a result, “nāyakas’ close association with temples in this form must have brought in more than the income to which they were entitled.”

Nāyakas also leased temple land, which increased both their own holdings and their strength in a particular locality. Karashima shows that the increase in private landholding, the cultivation of artisans, and the enforced production of goods and crops for trade signal an economy possessed of skilled laborers, farmers, and merchants. In the 16th century, artisan and merchant communities proliferate in inscriptions; Karashima reflects that trade was encouraged by ruling Nāyakas because it increased their own revenue through the rights to the temple they possessed, as well as the taxes they levied on goods and their sale.

Mukund’s study of merchant capitalism, in contrast, shows how merchants associated themselves with the temple in the period 1400-1600 in order to establish social identity. She moves the focus of the temple’s function away from benefits accrued by the ruler-patron of the temple, and to merchants, whose “association with a local temple was also the medium for

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64 “This explains to a great extent the enthusiasm of the nāyakas in the sixteenth century in making charitable donations to temples, though we should not ignore the element of genuine religious motivation. In addition, donations to temples gave the nāyakas the opportunity of expressing their loyalty to their superior, a relationship from which they must have derived benefits.” *A Concordance of Nayakas: The Vijayanagar Inscriptions in South India* (Delhi Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 50.
achieving a social identity.”

Mukund cites examples throughout the Tamil region of merchants imposing taxes on themselves in order to raise money to donate to a temple.

Rudner’s study of the expansion of the Nakarattar community of salt merchants in southern India in the 17th century enhances studies of the political benefits of temple patronage by showing how merchants expanded their business and ingrained themselves in new markets by patronizing local temples. This Nakarattar community, in constitution and function, is different from the medieval merchant associations well documented in literature on the subject of merchant guilds and the organization of trade.

Religious gifts performed not only religious and political functions but also distinctive economic functions, including the acquisition and reinvestment of funds in mercantile enterprises. Just as there was no separation of religion and politics—indeed, in many ways, worship was politics—so too, there was no separation of religion and economics. The Nakarattar caste and other castes of

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65 Kanakalatha Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel* (Chennai: Orient Longman, 1999), 45. It should be noted, however, that Mukund draws on the work of Karashima to substantiate her argument, citing his studies of inscriptions that show that nāyakas granted tax remissions and social privileges to artisans and merchants, especially for goods traded in local markets and brought for use in temples. *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel* (Chennai: Orient Longman, 1999), 44.


67 Daud Ali demonstrates the very close alliance of merchants to royal power at the Hoysala court in the 12th and 13th centuries. Daud Ali, “Between Market and Court: The Careers of Two Courtier-Merchants in the Twelfth-Century Deccan,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1/2 (2010). Heitzman demonstrates a similar arrangement in the Cōḷa court. James Heitzman, “Temple Urbanism in Medieval South India,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 4 (1987). The distance from these examples, as Rudner explains, is great by the 17th century: “Sometime between the thirteenth and the sixteenth century, inscriptive occurrences of the term nakarattar underwent a semantic transformation Reference to medieval merchant assemblies and guilds died out and was replaced after the sixteenth century by reference to mercantile castes similar to those we know today. It seems reasonable to assume that these historical changes in the meaning of nakarattar reflect an evolution in the institutional re-organization of South Indian trade and other commercial activities. In particular, from 1300 to 1700, regional kings and religious sectarian leaders intruded upon the prerogatives of local merchants, and the power of localized merchant assemblies became diffused (Appadurai 1981; Hall 1980). At the same time, however, regional networks of merchants developed affinal and other caste-related alliances across localities and continued tradition of powerful mercantile influence over the commercial assets of Indian temples.” David West Rudner, "Religious Gifting and Inland Commerce in Seventeenth-Century South India," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 2 (1987): 362. For an overview of the historiography of merchant activity in South India, and particularly Tamil Nadu and the Coromandel coast, see Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel*, Chapter 1, “Merchant Capitalism: Theory and Context”.

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itinerant traders engaged in worship as a way of trade, and they engaged in trade by worshiping the deities of their customers. The system as a whole constituted a profit-generating “circuit of capital” in which the circulating capital comprised a culturally defined world of religious-cum-economic goods. Nakarattars “invested” profits from their salt trade in religious gifts. Religious gifts were transformed and redistributed as honors. Honors were the currency of trust. 

Rudner argues that where new technologies of warfare made possible more effective armies with fewer members, credit, sustained through trust, allowed and sustained the political dynamism of the era. The generation of capital through the integration of merchant groups into new communities via the temple also gave rise to new opportunities for temple patronage and the generation of new rituals. Rudner specifically cites the individual worship by merchants of the deities at Palani, as well as establishment of religious festivals there, created under the advisement of the head of a monastery, who was also an advisor of the king of Maturai, Tirumalai Nāyakar.

Scholarship has shown that the reasons for Nāyaka-era patronage of Tamil area temples relate not only to the religious beliefs and practices of the donors, but also to the political and economic conditions of the regions and times in which they were living. While this research has focused on the activities of royal, land-holding nāyakas, we can more broadly construe its arguments to the institutional framework of the temple and the expectations of donors. I will show that it is not only nāyakas and kings who donated to temples; rather, the donative

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68 Rudner, "Religious Gifting and Inland Commerce in Seventeenth-Century South India," 376-77. Rudner’s study is especially important because it offers indigenous account of the expansion of trade in the 17th century, whereas Mukund states that “The available sources of data comprise almost exclusively the records of the European companies. In addition, there are a few contemporary travel accounts. These sources provide a one-sided view of the local merchants--essentially refracted through the prism of European priorities, prejudices and interests--and thus have obvious limitations.” Mukund, The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant : Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel, 53-54.


inscriptions I have discovered point to active patronage by members of maṭams, as well as by members of the merchant community. In this regard, the evidence of the murals expands substantially on what we know of donative practice in this period.

**THE NĀYAKA TEMPLE: SPACE, PLACE, AND PRACTICE**

Built structures that accommodate worship through ritual circumambulation, or pradakṣīṇa, are as ancient as the first remaining sacred structures in South Asia. In Nāyaka-period south India, rituals of circumambulation combine with new architectural forms to produce an innovative temple structure that both accommodates and directs movement through the temple. The so-called “expanded temple” is constructed in a striking set of concentric passages and walls that converge on the focal points of worship – the shrines—facilitating a mode of worship in which circumambulation of the shrines is fundamental. Around this structure, the cities in which the temples are located were likewise constructed in concentric rings. Branfoot shows that the layout of cities in concentric rings is a feature of the Nāyaka period, and that the concentric construction of the city coincides with the ritual development of circumambulation within and outside of the temple by the deity.

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71 The oldest structures that survive are not Hindu temples, but Buddhist stūpas. The date of the oldest structure is disputed. The Buddhist stūpa at Sanchi, sponsored in the third century BC by the king Aśoka, is one of the earliest extant sites.

72 Branfoot states that in the Chola period, for which there are myriad inscriptions, there are few that describe deities leaving the temple, and no evidence of their circumambulation of the exterior of the temple; there is, he states, a concomitant emphasis on “linear, rather than radial,” architectural form. Branfoot, Gods on the Move: Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple, 128. Orr’s study of Chola inscriptions shows that when deities do leave the temple, they do not circumscribe their domain through circumambulation of the temple, but emerge from the temple in order to see their devotees. “Gods on the move,” so characteristic even today of temple ritual, is a product, Orr describes, of the mobility and competing nodes of power that distinguish the Nāyaka period. Leslie Orr, “Processions in the Medieval South Indian Temple: Sociology, Sovereignty and Soteriology,” in South-Indian Horizons : Felicitation Volume for François Gros on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday, ed. François Gros, et al. (Pondicherry: Institut Français De Pondichery and École Française D'Extreme-Orient, 2004), see esp. 464-66.
Attendant to the development of processional festivals and worship within the temple is a sculptural program that responds to the presence of the deities and devotees in these new spaces. Branfoot argues that new kinds of portrait sculpture of elite and royal donors were in fact intended not only to represent the person indexed by the portrait, but to allow the person-made-present in the portrait sculpture to interact with both deity and devotee as they processed through the temple. This constitutes a significant break with previous portrait sculptures in the temple, which were executed in low relief, with little to no physiognomic specificity, and directed exclusively toward the sacred image of devotion. In pre-Nāyaka temples, donation was acknowledged and recorded through inscription. Branfoot suggests, however, that since there are fewer inscriptions on stone and on copper plates in the Nāyaka period, portrait sculpture replaced inscriptions, standing in for both the public proclamation of the donors’ gift, as well as maintaining the eternal presence of the donor.

Branfoot shows that many of these portrait sculptures, life-sized and attached to columns that face processional routes, are placed higher than eye level, on a par with the height of the deity as it is paraded through the temple on the shoulders of men. These features suggest that they are meant to interact with both the god and devotee-viewers when they are engaged in ritual processions through the temple. The portrait images do not face the permanent shrine or center of the temple.

However, by appreciating the importance of movement in temple complexes, in the festival procession of deities, their location is comprehensible, for royal portrait sculptures are located primarily in corridors, in the gateways of gopuras and in festival mandapas, all processional routes or places where deities are normally absent, but, at certain times, crucially present. The portrait images of

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kings in anjali-mudra are placed to greet deities, when they are moving or temporarily enthroned during festivals.74

Branfoot continues by explaining that the relationship between portrait image and festival is not exclusive to the donor and deity. Rather, it is meant to be seen by a viewing public:

This is a three-cornered relationship, however, for not only do the god and king greet each other, but the devotees or worshippers see both the king and the deity, and the relationship between the two when they are assembled for the festival. The king, an often-inaccessible figure in the palace, is given permanent presence in the temple in a life-size representation, and in locations there that are widely accessible and visible. During festival periods, worshippers see the king's relationship with the temple's deities—a relationship crucial to the welfare of the kingdom. The image of the king, projected by the life-size sculpture and seen by others at all times, and especially during a festival with the deity present, is that of the devoted servant, protector, or regent on earth for the deity. In the locations of these portrait images, they thus resemble the most important devotees of Shiva and Vishnu, the bull Nandi and the hawk-man Garuda, who similarly face towards their Lord in the temple, in eternal devotion. These sculptures are to be seen, not as a sculptural reminder of the king, but as embodying the presence of the king himself. The scale of these figures, around life-size, their three-dimensionality, the attention to anatomical detail, and occasional use of paint to enliven the stone, all suggest such an interpretation.75

In the spectacle of festival procession, there is a clear link between god and patron, as well as the expectation that a processing, viewing, and worshipping public will see it.76 In other instances, moreover, such donor portraits are not placed along the deities’ processional route; in these cases, Branfoot suggests, they are placed to “greet” devotees in their circumambulation.77

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76 Although Branfoot uses “king” almost interchangeably with “donor” in his texts, he notes that this may not always reflect the intent of the portrait. That is, not all portrait figures represent kings, but in the absence of inscription, it is nearly impossible to attribute identity to the portrait’s historical figures. He writes, “The problematic issue of the specific identity of royal portrait images has been largely omitted here, not for its lack of interest, but because it merits more detailed treatment...But it is worth briefly noting that the vast majority of donor images across southern India, whether small reliefs or life-size sculptures, do not have identifying inscriptions alongside.” "Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple," 259.

77 "Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple," 254.
portraits, in this context, are enlivened, making the person indexed by the figural sculpture present in the temple.

Branfoot’s interpretation of the sculpture that decorates the circumambulatory architectural spaces of the temple may be fruitfully applied to murals. Like sculpture, murals decorate the sacred space through which the deity processes in festivals. The narrative, iconic, and topographic content of the paintings is activated by the presence of the deity, to whom the paintings refer. At the same time, the paintings are directed toward the devotee, who encounters them while worshipping the deity who resides, unmoving, in the central shrine of the temple, around which the devotee circumambulates.\textsuperscript{78}

The “expanded temple” focuses worship into the center where the main sanctum is found; at the same time, the aedicular forms of the temple replicate and expand so that the temple seems to expand out from the center in a pattern that could continue \textit{ad infinitum}.\textsuperscript{79} This architectural form is reflective of Indic conceptions of the cosmos, which is composed of rings of land, mountain, and sea that emanate from a center, the \textit{axis mundi}, usually visualized as a mountain on top of which resides the supreme deity.\textsuperscript{80} The temple sanctum, over which a tower is built, is

\textsuperscript{78} The temple accommodates both movable and immoveable images. Even while the deities of the temple process, others remain in their shrines.


\textsuperscript{80} An alternate conception of the temple and its symbolism is proposed by Granoff, who suggests, rather, that the temple and the concentrically-built city in which it is situated represents heaven on earth. Branfoot, who has produced the most influential scholarship on the Nāyaka temple, concurs with Granoff’s view. Phyllis Granoff, "Heaven on Earth: Temple and Temple Cities in Medieval India," in \textit{India and Beyond: Aspects of Literature, Meaning, Ritual and Thought}, ed. Dick van der Meij (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997); Branfoot, \textit{Gods on the Move: Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple}, 46.
likewise conceived as the *axis mundi* of this tangible cosmic structure, which emanates out from
the square sanctum to the succeeding layers of temple and city. In fact, the sanctum of the temple
in Tamil may be called the *mūlastānam*, meaning origin place, or source. The physical
manifestation of the deity in that place is the *mūlavar*, again meaning source or origin. There is a
kind of symmetry at work here, where the cosmic grows out from the center (the sanctum of the
temple), and at the same time the limitlessness of the cosmos moves back toward the defined
space of the temple and its sanctum – a human scale place, wherein human activity and ritual are
of signal importance in this cosmic scheme.

Movement is central to ritual practice and worship within the temple; it defines the
worshipper’s experience of the site. The form of the temple and the city are guided by the *vāstu
puruṣa maṇḍala*, which is a symbolic representation of the cosmos, over which the temple and
city are built.¹ The *vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala* is a building (*vāstu*) diagram (*maṇḍala*) overlaid on
man’s image (*puruṣa*). The maṇḍala is further governed by solar and lunar constellations, with
Brahman (the universal divine principle) at the center, where the image of the main deity of the
temple will be installed. The overlaying of the grid on the body of man with the deities, planets,
and constellations that are always necessarily in motion, produces a structure that is homocentric
and inherently dynamic. Beck substantiates this, noting that “…body and cosmos are viewed as
related topological spaces that exhibit similarities at the level of visible structure….it is thought
that the two may be united by their successful containment within the same magical space….the
ideal shape of this magical space, in Hindu tradition, is a square or cubic form.”² The human

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body itself is considered to be an ideal square, when measured from head to foot and outstretched fingertip to fingertip. The Nāyaka construction of temple and city is an expression of cosmic form that requires and accommodates ritual performance of movement within the sacred space. Circumambulation, always performed in a clockwise direction, mimics the proper movement of form in accordance with the clockwise direction of the rising and setting of the sun, and thus the movement of the planets, as reflected in the vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala. The experience of space—particularly sacred space—is dynamic and physically demanding.

Central to my consideration of space and place is the human viewer who experiences it. The context of viewing the paintings is not one that encourages silent meditation of the image. Rather, those who beheld paintings within the ritual space of the temple experienced them while in motion. The form of the temple itself requires and facilitates this experience of sacred space, and connects notions of form to conceptions of space. Inscriptions and depictions of individuals in portrait sculpture, according to Branfoot, invoke their real presence in the temple. Following Branfoot, I argue that the kinetic experience of the paintings is central to their concept, design, and function. Ultimately, paintings manifest sacred presence through the beholder’s noetic and kinetic experience of the narratives and iconic representations.

**Plan of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is comprised of two parts, documentation and analysis. Documentation is essential since virtually none exists for Nāyaka murals. Chapter Two focuses almost exclusively on the documentary, but this continues necessarily to be woven through the

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dissertation. The major research interests that guide the analytical part of my dissertation are style, content, text, and reception. Murals at six temples have been selected for close study because they remain in good condition, are relatively complete, and may be considered representative of the broader artistic, social, religious, and intellectual trends. These sites recur through the analytic chapters, as very different facets of the paintings are discussed in each of the individual chapters.

There is currently little agreement on the parameters by which paintings can be assigned to specific stylistic categories, dates, and regions. In Chapter Two I establish these parameters under the rubric of “style groups.” I distinguish three preliminary style groups based on figural style, framing, narrative mode, inscription, content, and physical context. I substantiate these groups using examples of murals from across the Tamil region and in southern Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, in part to establish that style groups are not based on geography, but on the stylistic criteria that cut across regional and linguistic bounds.

The first element I consider in Chapter Two is depiction of the body, which varies significantly throughout the Nāyaka period, and which has been the primary indicator of style in scholarship up to this point. The second stylistic factor is framing. Formally, frames determine visual narrative structure; semantically, they condition interpretive possibilities available to the viewer. While paintings of the sixteenth century are amenable to fluid interpretation because of their open narrative structure, eighteenth-century mural paintings narrow interpretive possibilities through a combination of formal construction techniques, including narrative mode

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84 The term style group, as opposed to style, encompasses not only the quality of line, colors, or approaches to figural depiction (understood here as constitutive of style), but includes broader considerations such as the structure of pictorial narrative and the inclusion of text. A single style group may include examples that vary in figural style, for instance, but are collected into a single group based on considerations of narrative structure, subject, and the inclusion of text, as well as broadly commensurate figural styles. It is hoped that in the future this approach may be refined.
and the inclusion of text that comes to frame each of the narrative registers. I have identified three genres of painting that are most common in the murals, narrative, figural (iconic/portrait), and topographic; these are taken up in case studies in the following three chapters. Narrative is by far the most common type of mural painting. The stories depicted typically concern the activities of deities, saints, or historical people connected to the temple and highlight what is special or notable about a place. When collected in a single written text dedicated to the temple, the stories constitute the *talapurāṇam*, or “lore of the place.” Meanwhile, iconic and portrait images make visible for the devotee the forms of the deities or important mythological or historical figures, but do not function as objects of worship in themselves. By iconic, I mean images that are presented frontally and with an established iconography that results in the ability of the image to function as an index of its subject. Likewise, portraits, limited to figural subjects, are indexical of their human referents. Topographic images are of two kinds, iconic and schematic. In both, *topographic* refers to the fact that the image represents a physical site that is understood to be real (even if it is an imagined site, such as the heavens or subterranean realms of traditional Indic cosmographies). For *iconic topographic* sites, I propose an iconography of place, which draws on and reinforces that which is unique to the physical site, including natural features, the tree or water tank sacred to the place, and the forms and actions of its saints and deities. *Schematic topographic* images show the plan of a real temple, the relationships between shrines within the temple, or a whole sacred complex. The paintings may show other nearby temples, thereby visually linking one place to another at the same time that they compel the viewer to associate the sites; such paintings create a network of connected places.

One of the major contributions of this dissertation is its attentiveness to the text on mural paintings, which is a distinctive feature of this corpus. No previous study has seriously engaged
text in Nāyaka-period murals. I identify the content and subject of the paintings and transcribe and translate the inscriptions that accompany the images. The visual and textual record I have created is unparalleled and is important particularly because the paintings are quickly disappearing due to age, damage, and renovation. Text manifests in three primary ways in the murals: as pictorial representations of books, reading, and writing; as labels and narrative inscriptions in the pictorial registers or accompanying textual registers; and as visual renditions of narratives also found in written texts.

Chapter Three is devoted to narrative murals of *talapurāṇams* (histories of sacred places) and hagiographies at three temples: Tiruppuṭaimarutūr, Maṭavār Valākam, and Āḻvār Tirunakari. Representations of talapurāṇam and hagiography have been chosen for analysis because they are the most popular kinds of narratives chosen for visual representation. Using anthropological studies of oral and pictorial narrative performance in south India, I propose that the emphasis on textuality in mural paintings accompanies a paradigm of beholding in which pictorial narratives are experienced and interpreted by a single devotee as she moves through the sacred space.

Chapter Four, which takes portraiture as its theme, contributes new evidence of the active patronage by merchants, religious and political elites through documentation and analysis of previously unrecorded donor inscriptions and donor portraits in mural paintings at Maṭavār Valākam, Āvuṭaiyārkōvil, and Nattam. My findings elaborate in new ways what is distinctive about the Nāyaka period: This period is most often characterized as a highly diverse and competitive environment in which new social and political actors vied for resources and status within a multilingual milieu—an environment that resulted in increased literary and artistic patronage. In this dynamic world, portrait images and inscriptions played a significant role as a
means of self-representation and promotion for both individual donors and the groups to which they belonged.

Chapter Five focuses on topographic images, and examines the representation of place in Nāyaka painting and literature, particularly drawing attention to the evidence of bhakti (devotional) literature’s influence on the content and composition of mural paintings of this era. The ideas developed in bhakti literature—that god and place are coextensive, that physical and mental pilgrimage to these sites, which together constitute a sacred geography, are equally meritorious—are applied to interpretation of topographic paintings at three temples—Āḻvār Tirunakari, Āvuṭaiyārkōvil, and Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai. The sacred geographies imagined in the bhakti hymns are quite literally mapped onto the walls and ceilings of the temples. All three of the sites considered in this chapter are the setting for murals that represent series of sacred places and locate them within a larger conception of sacred space. The murals are situated in the temples so that they engage the devotee as she moves through the temple in a way that corresponds to devotional and ritual convention, allowing the beholder to perform pilgrimage to multiple sacred sites through contemplation and physical experience of the paintings. All of the images insist on the presence, knowledge, and participation of their viewers.

Central to my consideration of space and place is the human viewer who experiences it. I conclude the dissertation by arguing that the context of viewing the paintings is not one that encourages silent meditation of the image. Rather, those paintings that decorate the walls and ceilings of the circumambulatory passage and shrine walls were perceived by the devotee while engaged in ritual circumambulation or circulation through the temple. The form of the temple itself requires and facilitates this experience of sacred space. I argue that the kinetic experience of the paintings is central to their concept, design, and function. Paintings manifest sacred
presence through the beholder’s participation in space and time with the icons and narratives of mural paintings.
Chapter 2 – Style, Typology, and the Role of Text in Nāyaka-period Murals

The aim of the current chapter is to lay the ground for the subsequent chapters of the dissertation by introducing the terms I use as criteria for describing the paintings, as well as for determining their approximate date and style. These were discussed briefly in the previous chapter in the section on style groups. The style groups, and the criteria and terms I use to establish and describe them, are based on assessments that have been formulated through study of the corpus of Nāyaka-period mural paintings in situ and in photography. They are presented in this chapter through close analysis of select examples. The determinations remain preliminary, as this is a huge corpus to tackle, and the findings are intended as a foundation on which to build and refine further study. Throughout, I shall introduce the paintings of different sites thematically, rather than geographically, in a self-conscious rejection of geographically-centered narratives of painting because this approach obscures the deep relationships between sites of different regions (Figure 17). My presentation of the sites instantiates the stylistic rubric that I have devised for the entire Nāyaka period and region, resisting the geographic determination and ad hoc individual analysis of single sites that has prevailed in favor of a stylistic and genre-specific study of the material.

My rubric for style groups is based on four broad criteria: figural type, framing and narrative mode, image type, and text. These are not arranged hierarchically, as each is equally important to the determination of style group. Depiction of the body varies significantly throughout the Nāyaka period, and in the historiography serves as the primary determinant of style. This was discussed at length in the previous chapter under the rubric of “Style Groups.”
Framing not only describes the boundaries around and between horizontal registers of paintings, but also how individual scenes and even unique figures within the scenes are framed; attendant to framing is the issue of decoration of the pictorial field. Framing is one of the primary determinants of visual narrative structure, or mode. The changes in narrative structure are a relatively reliable indicator of date at the extremes of the period considered. Type of image refers to the three genres that I find most prevalent in the murals: narrative, figural (portrait and iconic), and topographic. These form the conceptual basis of each of the following chapters of the dissertation (Chapters 3, 4, and 5). Finally, the inclusion of text within the mural painting also forms a crucial category of analysis. Observations of how this feature changes over time are included in the present chapter but explored more fully in the following chapters, which deal with the iconicity of text within the paintings, issues of legibility and viewership, and the relationship between the texts’ and paintings’ content. So too, discussion of framing of both images and of text are integrated into the subsections of this chapter.

**Painting Typologies of the Nāyaka Period**

Painting over the course of the period 1500-1800 generally tends toward clarity of expression that in effect narrows interpretive possibilities for the paintings’ viewers. While throughout the Nāyaka period visual narrative form is sequential (which limits interpretive horizons more than non-sequential forms), over the three hundred years surveyed here, there is a marked shift toward the use of framing to make explicit the pace and content of the narrative. Similarly, iconic images become increasingly standard and legible, often appearing in series of like subjects. Inscriptions that describe the narrative or name the iconic subject of the paintings are irregularly deployed in the 16th century (as in Style Group One), but become a standard component of mural painting by the 18th century (in Style Group Three). The denomination of
the subject through inscription produces a single “correct” identification for the image. In
general, the scope of interpretive variation is narrowed over time as the subjects and narratives
become increasingly delineated through pictorial composition, style, and the inclusion of text.
The result is an increasingly didactic art. The present chapter focuses on establishing the
typology of images and criteria that I have used to make these determinations and which will be
used throughout the rest of the dissertation to describe the paintings.

I find it meaningful to analyze Nāyaka paintings under the three distinct genres of
narrative, figural (iconic and figural), and topographic, even though these typologies often
overlap and intersect within a single mural cycle. Although not unique to the Nāyaka context,
these genres, especially the figural and topographic, will be discussed in nuanced ways that
enhance our understanding of the role played by the murals in the context of both temple and
palace ritual. The types of paintings I have identified are found throughout different areas of the
temples of which they are a part, apparently without restriction as to what kind of image might
decorate the space in which it is found.¹ I describe these outside the rubric of the style groups,
even though these constitute criteria for them, because the differences in figural style are more
distinctive than changes in narrative structure, and narrative and pictorial content. The broad
changes that I observe over time remain true regardless of figural style.

¹ My use of the word “decoration” throughout the dissertation is an approximation to the concept of alaṅkāra, and
does not connote something superfluous to that which it decorates. ‘Decoration’ or ‘adornment’ is an essential
component of architecture, an attribute of the divine, and a requisite feature and signifier of rulers, courtiers, and
aspirants. Daud Ali, Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India, Cambridge Studies in Indian
History and Society (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162-70, see especially pp. 69-70 for comments
on architecture; Vidya Dehejia, The Body Adorned: Dissolving Boundaries between Sacred and Profane in India’s
Art (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Howes, The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India: Material
Culture and Kingship, Chapter 1.
**NARRATIVE**

Narrative paintings are by far the most common type of mural painting. The narratives are typically painted in horizontal bands than run the length and width of a section of the ceiling or wall. The bands, or registers, are typically outlined and framed, making each a distinct visual unit. The narrative always reads right to left or left to right, with all action usually occurring in a single plane within the visual space of the painting. This organization of the picture plane makes possible only a restricted set of visual narrative structures. Narratives structured as networks, or even synoptically, find little place in a compositions confined within horizontal registers. Most of the narrative paintings in both temples and palaces are limited to three closely related types: conflated, continuous and linear.

*Conflated narrative*

*Conflated narrative* is typically understood as the representation of multiple events that occur at different times in a single narrative for which the protagonist is represented only once,

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2 I have relied on Dehejia’s taxonomy of visual narrative, which identifies six modes of narration: monoscenic, synoptic, conflated, continuous, linear, and narrative networks. Dehejia’s definition of synoptic narrative is as follows: “In the synoptic mode of narration, multiple episodes from a story are depicted within a single frame, but their temporal sequence is not communicated, and there is no consistent or formal order of representation with regard to either causality or temporality” (382). Describing a mural at the site of Ajanta and it’s network structure, Dehejia writes, “Though the protagonist, the merchant Simhala, is repeated in several scenes, there is none of the coherence that accompanies continuous narrative, with its clear depiction of temporal succession and spatial movement. Instead, the action moves across the forty-five feet of wall in an unpredictable manner, commencing at the lower level of the right end and moving upward, then working its way across the upper segment of wall to the left where it meanders downward, finally culminating in the central section of the available space. Within each of these three segments - right, left, and center - the action moves in crisscross fashion, and no specific pattern emerges from a close study of the painted wall. In fact, one is confronted with a complete network of movement in space and time” (388). Vidya Dehejia, "On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art," *The Art Bulletin* 72, no. 3 (1990). See also "Narrative Modes in Ajanta Cave 17: A Preliminary Study," *South Asian Studies* 7, no. 1 (1991); "The Treatment of Narrative in Jagat Singh's "Ramayana": A Preliminary Study," *Artibus Asiae* 56, no. 3/4 (1996); *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art: Visual Narratives of India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997).
but who nevertheless participates in the different chronological moments of the narrative.  

However, I take conflated narrative to have two related but different articulations in Nāyaka painting: conflation occurs not only as multiple narrative events referring back to a single figure (the standard understanding of conflation described above), but as the conflation in a single image of a single figure in multiple poses, showing instantaneous movement of the figure in opposition to other static figures. This conflation of time and action in a single figure enables the artist to show narrative within a highly compressed space, as well as heighten the sense of drama associated with an individual among a group of figures. This mode of representation is only rarely found in the sixteenth century, but by the eighteenth century is well within the painters’ repertoire. The following examples, one from a 16th-century temple and the other from an 18th-century palace, will show how the structure is used within the larger narrative, as well as how artists made the form more sophisticated over time.

The sixteenth-century paintings at the Cennakeśava temple in Somapalle, Andhra Pradesh, contain an extensive sequence of Rāmāyaṇa paintings on the maṇṭapa ceiling. These paintings, though significantly damaged by age, are one of the few remaining examples of the late Vijayanagara/early Nāyaka style classified here as Style Group One. The scene with which we are concerned shows a young Rāma encountering and killing the demoness Tāṭakai (Figure 18). Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Viśvāmitra approach from the left. The figure of Lakṣmaṇa is no longer clear. Rāma draws an arrow back in his bow, taking aim at Tāṭakai. Tāṭakai approaches from the right. She is fanged and bug-eyed; her breasts are uncovered and hang down to her

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3 Dehejia defines conflated narrative as that in which “multiple episodes of a story or multiple scenes of an episode are presented, [and] the figure of the protagonist is conflated instead of being repeated from one scene to the next; this characteristic overlapping manner of presentation undermines temporal succession even further.” "On Modes of VisualNarration in Early Buddhist Art," 385.
waist. Her two arms are raised, the right holding a long curved dagger. Below the ankle-length hem of her sari, her feet are visible. Here, the artist has shown not two, but six feet: the action of Tāṭakai running towards Rāma has been condensed into the conflated image of her feet three times (Figure 19). This conflation is unnecessary: anyone familiar with the story would know that Tāṭakai charges Rāma (and Rāma emerges victorious). The replication of the feet heightens the viewers’ awareness of the figure’s movement, increasing the sense of drama within the narrative of the painting. Each iteration of Tāṭakai’s running feet, however, imply Rāma, as each step of Tāṭakai’s feet is *towards Rāma*. In this, we discern both the established understanding of *conflated narrative* as a single figure participating in multiple narrative moments (Rāma, who is the subject of Tāṭakai’s every step), as well as the conflation of the body in action in different moments (Tāṭakai’s six feet). In this early example, conflation as a narrative strategy seems to be in its infancy—only a few small steps are taken, after all. In later examples, however, the same approach is employed by the artist to communicate a greater breadth of narrative action.

The same scene—Rāma’s battle with Tāṭakai—recurs in the *Rāmāyaṇa* cycle in the palace of the kings of Ramanatapuram in central Tamil Nadu, which date to ca. 1725.4 In this painting, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Viśvāmitra again approach from the left (Figure 20). Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa both have raised their bows and issued a host of arrows that rain down on the demoness. Tāṭakai approaches from the right, and is shown three times within a single unit of space. This is particularly marked because, as mentioned above, all action usually occurs on a single horizontal plane. However, in this depiction of Tāṭakai, she is shown once walking on the ground line, once walking on an invisible ground line at the midpoint of the register, and again,

4 These, like the paintings at Maturai, have in many places been repainted.
falling backward, her body conflated below the hips with the second walking figure (Figure 21). Although one might expect that the figures chronologically appear in the order I have described, in fact the narrative is not so simplistically rendered. Rather, the chronologically first appearance of Tāṭakai is that in which she is on the second, invisible, ground line, walking towards the figure group led by Rāma. The second iteration of the figure is that walking on the proper groundline, where Tāṭakai has lost both her arms, and her weapon, a trident, is falling to the ground before her. The final iteration of the figure is that which is compositionally conflated with the first. The figure arcs backward, the stumps of her arms oozing blood, as her head falls beyond the frame of the scene and into the space cell of the following scene where Viśvāmitra teaches Rāma and Lakṣmana about the great weapon they earned by killing Tāṭakai. The dying body of Tāṭakai thus serves both as the narrative link between one scene and the next, as well as a compositional joint between the distinct scenes, leading the viewer onward in the narrative.

As an instance of conflated narrative, we see in this composition the two kinds of conflation described above. The physical conflation of representations of Tāṭakai increases the density of narrative action within a single visual unit. At the same time, the multiple representations of Tāṭakai refers in each iteration back to Rāma: he is shooting the arrows that dismember the body and cause it to fall. The conflation heightens the drama at the same time that it refers the viewer back to the protagonist, Rāma.

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Continuous and Linear Narratives

Linear and continuous narrative structures are closely related, and in Nāyaka-period murals, are always found in combination. However, a clear preference for continuous in the sixteenth century shifts to preference for linear narrative structure by the eighteenth century. While paintings of the sixteenth century are amenable to fluid interpretation because of their open narrative structure, eighteenth-century mural paintings narrow interpretive possibilities through a combination of formal construction techniques and the inclusion of text that comes to literally frame each of the narrative registers.

The primary difference between continuous and linear narrative structures is the framing of the scenes. Linear narrative composition is perhaps most familiar to present day viewers: like a comic strip, the scenes and distinct narrative moments are clearly differentiated by non-pictorial vertical lines that frame each discrete scene; I refer to these as “hard” frames. Meanwhile, continuous narrative refers to a narrative structure that is linear in format, but fairly open to interpretation because the movement from one narrative moment to the next is unmarked or only subtly marked by natural or architectural features in the composition of the painting; I refer to these as “soft” framing devices. Continuous narrative, more popular in the sixteenth century, allows the viewer greater freedom in determining the pace and meaning of the narrative.

Dehejia defines continuous narrative as depicting “successive episodes of a story, or successive events of an episode, within a single frame, repeating the figure of the protagonist in the course of the narrative. Consecutive time frames are presented within a single visual field, without any dividers to distinguish one time frame from the next; however, temporal succession and spatial movement are generally clearly indicated.” Defining linear narrative, Dehejia writes, “Linear narrative, like continuous narrative, contains the repeated appearance of the protagonist at different times and places; the distinction between these modes is compositional in nature, and revolves around enframedment. In continuous narrative, temporal development is to be understood by means of intrinsic criteria, and requires, on the part of the viewer, an integrating effort of mind and eye. In linear narrative, on the other hand, extrinsic criteria are used to demarcate temporal divisions. Scenes are separated from one another by a variety of compositional means, and generally each episode is contained within a separate frame.”

depicted. Linear narrative, most popular by the eighteenth century, limits interpretive possibilities by unambiguously setting the pace of the narrative and defining each of the scenes, resulting in greater semantic clarity.

**Continuous Narrative**

Artists of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries primarily constructed narratives in continuous mode, making little attempt to frame the narrative between successive scenes. In instances where linear narrative is preferred, features of the setting provide the framing devices. A tree, rock, river, or even the final pillar of a building in which some narrative action occurs can indicate a break in the narrative. The background color of all the scenes tends to be the same, save for instances when a different color is used to highlight a figure or action. Thus, viewers who are not sensitive to subtle clues may not recognize the divisions within the narratives’ progress. Inscriptions, rarely present in early Nāyaka painting, are integrated into the visual field in highly idiosyncratic ways, or are inscribed into the borders between horizontal registers of paintings. These formal characteristics allow viewers considerable freedom in determining the pace of the narrative, while at the same time requiring that they possess substantial prior knowledge of the story in order to discern all of the characters and various situations within the images. The two sixteenth-century Tamil Nadu sites I examine in this dissertation display these features.

The murals of the Nārumpūnātasvāmi temple in Tiruppuṭaimarutūr (hereafter Tiruppuṭaimarutūr) in the far south of Tamil Nadu are composed almost exclusively of narrative in continuous form. The well-known story of the Tamil saint Māṇikkavācakar is told in five
registers, each fourteen inches tall (Figure 22). The narrative is structured only by “soft” frames, as well as the direction in which the figures face and interact with one another. This kind of framing results in a fairly elastic sense of narrative time. This elasticity is pushed even further by figures who overlap other figures who properly belong to a separate geographic or chronological moment in the narrative. This visual presentation of the story of the saint at once advances a chorological narrative that is structurally linear, and at the same time pushes back against the linearity through composition that conflates figures belonging to different chronological and spatial settings within a single unit of space. I will examine here the first, second, and fifth registers to show how continuous form conveys and inflects the meanings of the visual narrative here.

The first of the five register reads left to right and depicts three times the king receiving his minister, Māṇikkavācakar, and presenting him with jewels, each time in the company of soldiers and attendants. On the left, the king is seated in a maṇṭapa on a low throne, holding a sword as he speaks to Māṇikkavācakar, who stands before him on the right. Māṇikkavācakar is followed by three other figures; the last of these three figures overlaps a figure to the right, who is turned towards the right, participating in the following scene (Figure 23). There is no division

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7 This narrative is discussed in detail in Chapter Three. Hariharan, though not explicit about its placement, mentions a depiction of the Māṇikkavācakar story. No other major narrative wall could be identified as the story of Māṇikkavācakar, so it is presumed that Hariharan refers to these paintings. Michell also mentions the Māṇikkavācakar story, though does not state where it is located. Murugaiah Pandyan, the local authority on the paintings, identifies this scene as Māṇikkavācakar’s story. Hariharan, “Tiruppudaimarudur Paintings,” 178-79; Michell, Architecture and Art of Southern India : Vijayanagara and the Successor States, 244.

8 Māṇikkavācakar is a saint of the 9th century. He was a minister to the Pandya king, and was converted to Saivism by an encounter with Śiva at Tirupperuntuṟai. He spent the rest of his life converting the Pandya king and others, traveling to temples, and composing hymns in praise of Śiva at those places. He is said to have merged with the murti of Naṭarāja at Citamparam. He wrote two works, the Tiruvācakam, a collection of fifty-one poems, and the Tirukkōvaiyāṟ, a collection of four hundred verses. See Norman Cutler, Songs of Experience : The Poetics of Tamil Devotion, Religion in Asia and Africa Series (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 148-49.
between the two moments or scenes, and in fact the overlapping of the figures denies the separation in time that the two scenes demand. In the second scene, the minister again stands before the seated king, his right hand raised in a gesture of speech, while his left hand covers his mouth in a gesture of humility. The figure behind him also covers his mouth. Although this figure doesn’t overlap the following figure, who belongs to the third and final scene of the register, he shares the physical space cell outlined in red against the white background of the scene (Figure 24). Here again, the king is shown seated and giving a jeweled necklace to Māṇikkavācakar.

The second register again reads left to right. The scene begins with a scribe holding a stylus and a palm leaf prepared for writing (Figure 25). An attendant stands before him, gesturing to Māṇikkavācakar. The minister looks to the right, anticipating the palanquin carried towards him. The rightmost palanquin-bearer overlaps the figure of the next scene, who carries a box above his head (Figure 26). The overlapping is more extreme than in the previous register. Here, the legs of the figure cross so that their legs appear entwined. Their hips seem to touch, their garments covering each other’s bodies. The head of the left figure crosses over the arm of the box-bearer, sending the latter deeper into space, a move that the flatness of the figures resists. The composition, while showing narrative movement, at the same time denies the passage of time. Complicating the image further, the box-bearer participates in the scene in which the palanquin-bearer is shown again, ahead in the procession in which the box-bearer is the final figure (Figure 27). So while the box-bearer shares the physical space with the palanquin bearer of the first scene, his body and clothing entwined with that figure, the narrative space he inhabits is one in which the palanquin bearer is physically ahead of him. This complication between the visual representation of figures and the narrative movement creates substantial cognitive and
interpretive interest. It also requires that the viewer pay close attention in order to make sense of the narrative. This kind of representational and interpretative flexibility is a feature only of early Nāyaka painting.

Although there are short label and narrative phrase inscriptions on some of the paintings at Tiruppuṭaimarutūr, the Māṇikkavācakar paintings are devoid of inscription of any kind. The possibility that the narrative moves either right to left or left to right makes identification difficult. Moreover, the continuous narrative structure makes the viewer work much harder to interpret the separation of narrative events, especially where the artist has denied temporal and physical progression by representing figures belonging to discrete temporal moments as physically overlapping.

**Linear Narrative**

Murals of the late seventeenth century and eighteenth century are typically broken into individual cells of action defined by linear borders and emphasized by alternating background colors between the cells. Text boxes describing the visual narrative usually fill the borders between the registers, often in both Tamil and Telugu languages. Inscriptions identifying individual characters or objects are sometimes inserted into the visual field. The increased use of text, identifying labels, and the separation of every action into neatly defined cells guides the viewer through the narrative in a way that is much more restricted in its possibilities than paintings of an earlier period.

The murals at the Śrī Pirakatāmpāḷ temple in Putukkōṭṭai are typical of the 18th-century style that is especially prominent in the central region of Tamil Nadu, in and around the Nāyaka kingdom of Madurai (Style Group Three). Here, the Rāmāyaṇa narrative (Balakaṇḍa and
Aranyakanda up to Valmiki’s 30th sarga) is painted on the ceiling of the long mantapa that serves as entrance to the temple (Figure 28). The mantapa is south-facing. In the central aisle there are fifty-four registers of narrative paintings that alternate with more narrow black registers of white-painted Telugu and Tamil narrative text; vertical lines through the text registers frame and separate the discrete narrative moments the text describes.

The system of framing found in the paintings at Putukkottai is a combination of hard and soft frames in the visual register integrated with frames in the text register that determine how the visual structure of the narrative should be interpreted. In the visual register, discrete temporal and narrative events are set apart by gold-colored borders. Different scenes belonging to a continuous sequence of events, however, will be separated visually by “soft” frames such as changes of background color, architecture, or trees. Divisions within the text register appear much more frequently than the hard frames of the pictorial register, and are much more likely to correspond to changes within a visually continuous sequence. Thus, although the gold-colored borders in the pictorial register typically correspond to frames in the text register, frames in the text registers do not, conversely, necessarily indicate the presence of borders within the pictorial register. Likewise, the “soft” frames will often correspond to frames within the text register; the text will explain or describe the shift in the narrative. Thus, even when the text register’s frame does not extend physically into pictorial space, it signals that the viewer should conceptualize the scene as set off in some way from its predecessor: the frame still frames, even when restricted to

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9 Panels perpendicular to these, located between each pier of the mantapa, are excluded from this enumeration and description. Additionally, there were paintings on the ceilings in the side aisles of the mantapa. I was informed that those in the western aisle were obliterated by sandblasting during the last kumpapihekam, in 2005. Those on the east side remain; although these are also labeled in Telugu and Tamil, the style of the figures, as well as their roughness of execution, suggest a later date for these paintings.
the text register. The authority of the text’s frames further underscores the artist’s intention that the authority of text-based interpretation supersedes that of visual interpretation. In so doing, it expresses the authority of an agent other than the individual who encounters the painting to determine the story.

An illustration of these hierarchies of framing is the sequence of the conception, birth, and presentation of Rāma and his brothers in registers eight through ten, each of which is composed of three scenes. Daśaratha, the king of Ayodhya, lacking heirs, has invited the powerful sage, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, to perform a sacrificial ceremony to help Daśaratha beget sons. Consuming pāyasam, a porridge produced from the ceremonial fire, Daśaratha’s wives, Kausalyā (mother of Rāma), Kaikeyī (mother of Bharata), and Sumitrā (mother of Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughṇa), bear four sons.

We begin in register 8 (reading left to right) with the sacrificial fire led by Ṛṣyaśṛṅga in which Daśaratha participates (Figure 29). Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and Daśaratha are seated on either side of the sacrificial fire. Rishis are also in attendance—three on the left behind Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and one on the right behind Daśaratha—and all hold spoons to pour offerings into the fire. The background is green, and decorative tassels hang from the upper frame. This scene is framed by a “soft” frame on the right, where next to the rightmost rishi a thick white diagonal line is bounded by

10 The narrative found at Putukkoṭṭai roughly follows the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. However, there are some major deviations, of which this sequence is one. The elaboration of the childhood games and education of Daśaratha’s children is found here and in many of the Rāmāyaṇas depicted in this period. Dr. Vijayavenugopal of the École Française d’Extrême-Orient, Pondicherry, has suggested to me that this is the influence of the Tamil literary genre, Piḷḷai Tamil, which is concerned with the activities of children. I hope to investigate this connection further in my next project.
thin gold lines. The first figure of this second scene is indistinct because of damage, but may be identified as Ṛṣyaśṛṅga.\textsuperscript{11}

Like the figures at Tiruppuṭaimarutūr that overlapped, the first figure of the second scene, identified tentatively as Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, is shown standing in front of this dividing line. The artist thus creates a tension between the separation indicated by the framing element and the figure who overlaps the frame. This visual tension signals the narrative continuity of the two scenes. Because the line slants from the upper left to lower right, it brings the figure who stands before it into the foreground, pushing the narrative forward in its rightward thrust. Although extensive damage to the text registers has resulted in their illegibility, a frame dividing the text between the first and second scene is legible directly above the proper right side of the figure; the figure is made to overlap both scenes even as frames indicate their separateness.

The visual narrative of the second scene is continuous rather than linear, unlike the rest of the register. It is slightly interrupted by a large lotus carved into the ceiling (Figure 30). This scene shows a figure within the sacrificial fire holding a large golden bowl the viewer knows to be filled with pāyasam, the sweet porridge that will cause Daśaratha’s wives to conceive when they eat it. On the right side of the fire, Daśaratha takes the bowl. He is immediately shown again, facing the opposite way from his last self, and offers the pāyasam to his three wives. There is no frame between the two representations of the king. A new text box begins above the image of the three women accepting the food. This text box extends across the next space cell, in which the women are seated in an interior with the bowl of pāyasam from which they are eating.

\textsuperscript{11} The skin color of the figure is exactly the same as the other depictions of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. Also, in this image, a figure emerges from the sacrificial fire, while Daśaratha stands on the right. It makes sense according to the precedent of the previous image, as well as in the logic of the narrative, to show Ṛṣyaśṛṅga on the other side of the sacrificial fire from Daśaratha.
Although this third space cell is in fact the fourth scene, it is connected to the last by the text box above, the narrative content of which applies equally to both scenes. The text states in both Tamil and Telugu that Daśaratha is feeding his three wives pāyasam.\textsuperscript{12}

The final scene shows the result of the eating of the pāyasam: the women are pregnant. This scene is separated from the former by a golden frame in the visual register, a change of background color from white to green, and a frame in the text box above; this frame is undermined, however, by the curtain and plinth on which the women are seated, which are both continuous across the last two scenes. As we have seen, the artist delights in the tension between continuity and separation.

The first scene in the following (ninth) register is unusual, and the text register above it is damaged beyond any reading: it shows a woman seated, arms held out from her sides, with attendants on either side (Figure 31). She is bare-breasted with very large nipples. It is probable that this indicates the period of late pregnancy or labor. A golden line on the left separates this from the following two scenes, as does the change in background color from red to green; it is not possible to know whether there is a frame in the text register that corresponds to the golden line that separates this first scene from those that follow. The plaster has completely fallen away in the text register, making any conjecture about the text impossible. This figure may serve as a synecdoche for the pregnancy of all three women.

The second scene shows each of the three wives supported by two other women and standing behind a textile screen, suggesting their labor and delivery.\textsuperscript{13} Although the background

\footnotetext{12}{The inscription is damaged, but reads in Telugu, daśaradhū aṅga bhāryalakā pāyasam yaccuta. In Tamil, …mupaiya sriyaḷakku pakantu.}

\footnotetext{13}{This is based on the interpretation of the image and the text.}
color behind each of the three identical women is the same, there is a golden frame between the third and second from the right. This golden frame corresponds to a frame in the text register above that identifies the women in order of their seniority: Kausalyā, Kaikeyī and Sumitrā. The frame, then, serves to highlight and mark off this leftmost figure from the others. The continuity of the iconography and background color, however, link her to the others who are within the same visual and textual frames. If we read the scene with the inscription, i.e. left to right, this figure highlighted through framing is Kausalyā, the first wife of Daśaratha and mother of Rāma. In the absence of iconographic differentiation, the frames distinguish this most important female character from the others.

The following scene shows the presentation of the children to Daśaratha (Figure 32). Two of the children are green in color (Rāma and Bharata) and the last two presented are golden (Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna). Four women, each carrying a child, approach Daśaratha, who stands on the left side of the scene. Daśaratha is shown twice again in immediate succession. The first repetition of the figure is turned to the left, immediately at the back of the first (rightmost) Daśaratha figure. The two figures of Daśaratha overlap one another. In the absence of any frame or even space between the figures, and text above that extends over the entire left half of the register, the quick succession of the figures seems to indicate the quick succession of time. Immediately upon seeing his sons, Daśaratha turns to go: the third iteration of Daśaratha shows him bathing in the Sarayū river, which completely contains the figure. Daśaratha wears no upper garment or crown, and holds his right hand to his nose in a mudra associated with ritual.

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13 This composition is exactly the same as those in the Rāmāyaṇa cycles at Ramanatapuram and Alakarkōvil, which I consider to be roughly contemporaneous with these paintings.
bathing.\textsuperscript{15} The river is shown only as a white, slightly diagonal and curved form (similar to the separation between the first and second scenes in the previous register). There is no indication of water or movement. On the other side of the river, Daśaratha is shown once more, seated inside a maṇṭapa on a low throne. The maṇṭapa, like the river, serves as a soft frame around the final scene of the register. The background color inside the maṇṭapa is white, setting it off from the red background of the rest of the scenes. A figure stands before the king; a small mound is shown between them. Extensive damage obscures the torso and head of the figure, as well as any detail of the contents of the mound. The text register, which is continuous across the entire left half of the register, however, directs interpretation of the image.

The text register above, in its entirety, is composed of two or three discrete cells. The first, rightmost cell, is completely effaced. The second is very damaged, though, as noted above, the names of Kausalyā, Kaikeyī, and Sumitrā are legible. The third text box, with which we are here concerned, extends from the left side of the register beyond the midpoint, and over the figure of Kausalyā giving birth to Rāma. The inscription states, “This is the event in which Daśaratha saw the women and was happy and [bathed in the] Sarayū river [and] gave gifts of … cows…gold … and [other things].”\textsuperscript{16} The inscription describes the events below, but because the events are represented in image right to left but described in text from left to right, the words in this case do not correspond with the images. While the artist has in other places made significant

\textsuperscript{15} This mudra is always associated with ritual bathing. Its use is continuous through the period, and examples can be seen at Pattīśvaram, Maṭavār Valākam, and Āḻvār Tirunakari.

\textsuperscript{16} The Telugu is illegible. The Tamil is only partially legible, and only partly intelligible: \textit{tecaṭaraṭ \textasciitilde{\textcopyright} uvavamanakul\textit{\textasciitilde{\textcopyright} taiyalal [pār]\textit{\textasciitilde{\textcopyright} stocici saraiyo natiyi[\textit{\textasciitilde{\textcopyright} vetai tāṇam ko tāṇam…taanam coranna tāṇam κु\textit{\textasciitilde{\textcopyright} uttattu.}}}}
effort to coordinate text and image, here the viewer has to read the two narratives in opposite directions.

Returning to the visual narrative, the final figure of the register, who stands before the king, is probably a Brahmin representing those who received gifts from Daśaratha after the births of his children.\textsuperscript{17} The mound between the two figures no doubt represents the gifts mentioned in the inscription. The form of Daśaratha immediately to the right, within the swath of white, represents Daśaratha bathing in the Sarayū river. The inscriptions secure a specific meaning for the images that might otherwise be open to variable interpretation.

The change of preference from continuous narrative structure in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century to linear narrative structure by the 18\textsuperscript{th}, while not immutable, is significant because it results in a shift in the possibilities of reception and interpretation. This shift is accompanied by a marked increase in the use of narrative and label inscriptions that dictate the meaning of the images. The standardization of visual types discussed in the following sections is also symptomatic of these trends.

\textbf{FIGURES: ICONIC AND PORTRAIT}

The strong emphasis on narrative in Nāyaka-period murals implies, and indeed necessitates, extensive figural painting. Among figural images within mural paintings, I focus on iconic and portrait images as significant and distinct figural types, both of which become

\textsuperscript{17} One is mindful, also, of the particular importance of gifting to Brahmins in the Nāyaka period. Under Nāyaka and Maratha rule, donation of land or villages to Brahmins was replaced by distribution of food (Ta. \textit{ṣṭvatāṭayam}) as the primary form of patronage. Naryana Rao \textit{et al} cite contemporary stories from these courts, as well as European accounts, that discuss the gifting of food to Brahmins and the poor of the same: “In text after text, it is annadana that constitutes the major boast, the essential claim to fame, of the political centre.” Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, \textit{Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu}, 70.
increasingly popular over the course of the Nāyaka period. As described in Chapter One, both iconic and portrait figures must be iconographically consistent in order to be readily legible as images that point to a unique person or deity. Iconic and portrait-type images are related in that both use a distinct vocabulary of style and iconography to mark the figures as different from figures who merely populate the narrative or topographic images. Iconic images are presented frontally, with the figure uninvolved in narrative action. Portrait figures, however, are often presented in profile, and may engage in action with the figures or deities included in the image. This argument will be expanded in Chapter 4 with a detailed study of portrait images; the present chapter will focus on iconic images as a prominent genre of Nāyaka painting, and as a basis for developing a conception of portrait images that does not rely on physical likeness alone.

Over the course of the Nāyaka period, iconic form becomes increasingly standard, the poses of iconic figures become increasingly static, and the popularity of iconic form as subject increases in popularity. The subjects of iconic figural painting are usually deities, though images of saints, patrons or rulers are also frequently painted. We have seen that narrative figures are shown almost exclusively in profile and in three-quarter profile; iconic figures, on the other hand, are shown fully frontally. Iconic figures are usually presented in static, rather than active, poses. Although iconic figures are found in 16th century painting, by the 18th century, series of iconic images become a standard element of mural cycles. Together, all of these developments result in an easier legibility of the forms. As we saw in the case of narrative above, the trend towards legibility and clarity of meaning is characteristic of the development of Nāyaka painting as a whole.

There are two ways in which iconic imagery is portrayed in mural paintings: individually or as part of a narrative. While in the early Nāyaka paintings iconic figures are integrated with
narrative images, by the eighteenth century, it is very common to find iconic images as stand-
alone figures, either grouped together in a series or placed in a discrete architectural setting.
Iconic images that are integrated with narrative very often serve as the object of worship for the
figures active in the narrative. Iconic images may also serve an apotropaic function, and can be
seen at junctures or thresholds, particularly on ceilings, within the architecture of the temple. As
a potentially powerful image placed in such liminal spaces, the image becomes closer to an icon
in the traditional sense of a deity manifest in an image, insofar as the image possesses some
power of the deity it represents. Although the paintings of deities and saints associated with the
temple do not function as objects of worship in themselves, taken together, they make visible the
forms of the deities or important mythological or historical figures throughout the
devotee/viewer’s journey through the temple. In so doing, they construct an iconic, enlivened
space. This argument will be developed throughout the rest of this dissertation.

It is salutary to note here that divine manifestation is not limited to images. Medieval
devotional literature promoted the idea that text, like images, is not just a representation of the
divine, but is itself a manifestation of the divine. That both text and figural iconic image come

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18 Davis writes that “the worship of icons infused with the divine presence of deities such as Śiva, in public temples and private home shrines, has been a pervasive form of religiosity” at least from the 7-8th centuries to the present. Richard H. Davis, "Presence and Translucence: Appar’s Guide to Devotional Receptivity," in Presence : The Inherence of the Prototype within Images and Other Objects, ed. Rupert Shepherd and Robert Maniura, Histories of Vision (Aldershot, England Ashgate, 2006), 87-88.

19 Davis, though his focus is on the presence of god for devotees in the icon, also directs attention to the total context for worship. He writes, “Śaiva worshippers and devotees, then, should see and celebrate the presence of Śiva in the icon, either stationary inside the temple sanctum or in motion during a festival. They should engage Śiva through the material offerings of worship, and through the emotional singing and dancing suitable to Śiva’s festival parade.” "Presence and Translucence: Appar’s Guide to Devotional Receptivity," in Presence : The Inherence of the Prototype within Images and Other Objects, ed. Rupert Shepherd and Robert Maniura, Histories of Vision (Aldershot, England Ashgate, 2006), 91.

20 “The visible, verbal image, in the form of the book, is none other than an incarnation of God, parallel to the idea that an iconic image of God is also an incarnation (arcāvatāra) of the divine.” C. Mackenzie Brown, “Purāṇa as
to be considered incarnations of the divine may be one reason that text, and the representation of
texts, becomes so prominent in paintings of this period.

**Sixteenth-century Iconic figures**

Iconic figures of the sixteenth century, as evidenced by the paintings of Lepakshi, Pattīśvaram, and Tiruppuṭaimarutūr, are relatively rare compared to narrative paintings, which are by far the preferred mode of painting. Iconic paintings are usually integrated with the narrative registers compositionally, and very often—though not without exception—also participate in some way in the narrative action of the figures around them. While the integration of iconic with narrative images remains a feature of Nāyaka painting, by the eighteenth century, the forms of the icons become increasingly distinct and set off from the narrative through internal framing devices.

At Pattīśvaram, iconic figures are found at the beginning of the narrative sequence in the prākāra of the Tēṇupurīśvara shrine. The first painting is an iconic portrait of the goddess Gajalakṣmī (Figure 33). She is shown frontally, seated on a throne, with four hands, lustrated by elephants on either side. Over the right elephant’s back is a festoon, which is the only element that separates this from the next figurative scene. The following scene shows Śiva as Bhairava (Figure 34). He stands frontally, on a golden pedestal, feet outturned and shown in profile, his

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21 There are a number of iconic images of Śiva at Lepakshi, all of whom are shown receiving worship from narrative figures. An exception to the iconic figure linked to narrative is the cycle of Daśāvatāra images before the Viṣṇu shrine in the temple. Each avatar is depicted in its own architecturally-defined space in the maṇṭapa ceiling. Another would be the huge image of Virabhadra on the ceiling of the maṇṭapa before the Virabhadra shrine. Both of these examples are nonetheless accompanied by figures who worship the deity. Many of the paintings show an iconographically-identifiable figure of Śiva interacting with the people around him.
four arms partially obscured by damage, and a halo of flames around his head. He is naked save for his adornments. His vāhana, a dog, stands behind him. He is set off against a bluish-black mandorla with a red border that highlights his ashen-white body. The transition between the iconic image of Bhairava and the following narrative scene is marked by an architectural element and change of background color. There are a number of such frames throughout this single band of paintings that runs along the prākāra wall. Thick gold lines outlined in black indicate breaks in the narrative subject, while thinner lines indicate breaks within a continuous narrative. Whereas Gajalakṣmī and Bhairava appear to be non-narrative iconic figures without identifying or narrative inscriptions, the next series of narrative paintings bear short narrative inscriptions. The iconic figures are frontally-presented, highly legible, and partake of a standard iconography. But they are modest: they are not larger than the narrative figures, they are not individually framed, and they do not appear visually discontinuous with the narrative register of which they are a part.  

This integration of iconic and narrative forms is seen again in the large iconic image of the goddess praised at this temple, Ēnanampikai, in the center of the maṇṭapa ceiling before the shrine dedicated to her (Figure 35). The paintings on the maṇṭapa’s ceiling, composed of five aisles, narrate the talapurāṇam of the temple. The central act that brings Śiva as Tēṅpurīsvara to this site is the performance of austerities (tapas) by the goddess. In the central image of the central aisle in the maṇṭapa, the goddess is shown, three times as large as the narrative figures around her, performing austerities. It is an iconic image – the goddess is highly legible and

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22 The narrative includes one more iconic image of Śiva. This is much larger in scale than the devotees (nobles, soldiers, rishis, and celestials) who surround the figure. However, overpainting obscures the image of Śiva from the neck down. The scale of the figure, if we presume a whole body was originally depicted, indicates that much more of the wall was decorated with registers of painting – perhaps a span of three or four additional registers of painting.
shown frontally with the iconography established for her image at this temple: standing on one foot, beneath a flowering tree, beside a water tank, with a white cow on her left. This image is replicated in the narrative that accompanies the larger iconic image. More emphatically than the iconic images from the Tēṇupurīśvara prākāra we saw, this figure is integrated with the narrative. She is not set off by any frame; the attendant figures relate directly to her; indeed, the iconic image is the subject of the narrative, and the focus of the action of the figures around her.

There is only one iconic image of a divine figure that is completely set off from any narrative action, and placed within an architecture that emphasizes the iconicity of the image. This is the single figure that adorns the ceiling of the gopura in the innermost prākāra that surrounds the Ėnanampikai shrine. The figure sits at the center of a lotus, against a plain whitish ground. Ankles crossed in front of her, she sits with a yoga bandha around her drawn knees. She holds attributes in two of her four hands, though these are now illegible.23

The murals in the temple at Tiruppuţaimarutūr, like the paintings at Lepakshi those at Pattīśvaram, display iconic images that are active in pose and relate closely to narrative. Such single paintings of deities are found in the panels on the walls of the dormers of the gopura, as well as the two panels at the southern end of every level of the gopura. Figures such as the Dakṣiṇamūrti (Figure 36) and Trivikrama in the western dormer of the first level are larger in size than the figures around them and are iconographically distinct, but are yet engaged in the narrative action of the figures around them. They are shown in three-quarter profile, and their gaze is fixed not on the viewer, but to the other figures in the scene or into the distance. The only figure that appears free from narrative setting is the figure of Anantaśāyana at the southern end

23 This figure, apparently engaged in meditation or austerities, may be an alternate representation of the goddess Ėnanambikai.
of the first level of the gopura, accompanied by the *daśāvatāra* of Viṣṇu, an image that yet retains considerable narrative elements (Figure 37).

Labeled images of deities are also found on the six wall panels of the fifth level of the gopura (Figure 38). These images are presented frontally to the viewer, but are dynamic, sometimes interacting with the figures around them, and sometimes only the object of other figures’ actions. Each figure is shown seated or standing on a pīṭam, carrying the attributes appropriate to their iconography, accompanied by their *vāhana*, and labeled in inscription. The figures’ bodies are lithe and fluid, with none of the rigidity often associated with “iconic” images. The figures are subtly separated from one another with decorative curving lines, trees, and attendant figures. Some of the attendant figures, well-known poets and saints such as Kamban, Patañjali and Vyāghrapāda, are also labeled.

Iconic figures found in the murals of the Tēṇupurīśvara Temple at Pattīśvaram and the Nārumpūnātāsvāmī Temple at Tiruppuṭaimarutūr are composed within narrative pictorial space, and interact with and are accompanied by narrative figures. Framing is minimally utilized if present at all. As a result, these iconic figures retain a greater connection to narrative images than do those of later periods.

**Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century iconic figures**

In the seventeenth century and later, iconic figures become increasingly formally consistent and separated from narrative. By the eighteenth century, iconic images are very seldom included in narrative; instead, iconic images are set apart in frames, often occurring in series.
The late 17th-century murals at the Ātinātar temple at Ālvār Tirunakari express a range of semiotic potential through iconic imagery that consists of both individual iconic figures, as well as iconic figures embedded in narrative. The paintings are found in the circumambulatory passage around the saint Nammālvār’s shrine. Throughout the narrative paintings, Nammālvār is shown only in iconic form (Figure 39). He is seated, right hand held in vitarka mudra and left hand resting in his lap, palm up. He wears necklaces, bracelets, anklets, flower garlands, and a Nāyaka-style headdress with a golden pearl-tasseled bun on the left side. He sits against a blue background under a makara torana, also hung with a flower garland. A large tamarind tree rises behind, with owls seated in the branches on both the left and right sides. This image remains unchanged whether the written narrative indicates that Nammālvār is interacting with someone, or whether he is simply the object of another’s actions. This emphatic rendering of Nammālvār as icon, rather than active human saint, visually emphasizes his divinity. Although there are other iconic images of Viṣṇu in his many forms, these images indicate the shrines in which the form of Viṣṇu is found, not the activity of the god. This is made clear by other images of Viṣṇu in the narrative cycle that show the god engaging other figures, and involved in action (Figure

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24 A priest at the temple report to me that this area of the temple is not opened save for once a year, when there is a festival for Nammālvār and the festival mūrti is cleaned. At this time, only the head priests are allowed to see the mūrti. The pradakṣīna patha is opened to women who put kolams on the ground. Then the priests keep the devotional image there, then take the saint in procession out to the waiting worshippers. The doors to the patha are otherwise locked. Paintings are also found in a small maṇṭapa near the eastern prākāra wall on the north side, in the outermost enclosure of the temple. Animals and a cart are now kept here. The painting shows Viṣṇu reclining of Adiśeṣa. Interestingly, underdrawing is visible in many parts of the painting. The drawings do not accord with the paintings now present. There are also paintings in the first gopura ceiling over the entrance to the temple, though these appear to be more recent.

25 In Vaiṣṇava tradition, the saints are not just exemplary humans, but are secondary incarnations of Viṣṇu himself; Nammālvār is understood to be an incarnation of Viśvaksēṇa, Viṣṇu’s guardian. Vidya Dehejia, Slaves of the Lord : The Path of the Tamil Saints (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988).
40). The static nature of Nammāḻvār’s depiction, against the dynamism of the god’s depictions, further emphasizes the importance placed on representing the divinity of the saint.

In addition to these small iconic figures interspersed throughout the narrative, there is also a major iconic image of Nammāḻvār in the middle of the north wall, directly on axis with the Nammāḻvār mūrti in the shrine (Figure 41, in the space labeled “9”). The painting is large, measuring roughly four feet across and six feet in height (though the bottom has faded into oblivion). Nammāḻvār is shown in the form described above, with slight variation. In his right hand he holds a ceṅkōl (scepter) on which a parrot is perched. This is a typical attribute of royalty and divinity in the Nāyaka period.26 The torana is draped with cloth and flower garlands; the tamarind tree is full of cavorting squirrels, monkeys, and birds. There are two figures on either side of Nammāḻvār, whom I identify as Madura Kavi Āḻvār and Nāṭhamuni.

To the left and right of the iconic Nammāḻvār image in the center of the north wall are iconic depictions of Viṣṇu in his various forms at temples around the Tamil region (Figure 42).28 Each is separately framed, showing the deity, his consorts, and form particular to the temple named in the inscription. As I will argue in Chapter Six, these images depict the places praised in the Nāḷāyira Divya Prabhandam, and as such, represent divine manifestation as much as sacred place. As part of a series of iconic images, these are typical of later Nāyaka mural cycles. Iconic images are typically individually framed, and very often labeled. Examples of these are further seen in the Nandikēśa shrine maṇṭapa at Āvuṭaiyārkōvil (described in detail in Chapter Five), the

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26 This attribute is seen associated with kings, queens, and deities in the paintings at Aḻakar Kōvil, Śrīvilliputtūr, Ramanatapuram, Putukkōṭṭai, and others. It is seen throughout Nāyaka sculpture, as well.

28 These would have completely covered the walls; they now remain only on the north and east walls.
maṇṭapa of the Kailāsanātar temple at Nattam (also discussed in Chapter Five), and the first room of the Rāmalingavilāsam at Ramanatapuram.  

The iconographic clarity of the images, their even spacing and framing, and their identifying labels make the images exceedingly legible. The semantic clarity of the image can be understood positively in terms of communicating an idea via the medium of painting. It might also be understood as a closing down of interpretive possibility. And yet, as we will see in the following section, the stability of the iconic form makes subtle manipulation of the meaning of the form possible through the addition of figures or symbolic elements to the standard iconography.

Rāma Enthroned: A stable iconography

One of the most striking examples of an unchanging iconography across style, time and region is the image of Rāma enthroned. This image occurs with remarkable stability at the Cennarāya Perumāḷ temple at Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai, the Vēnukōpāla Pārtasārati temple at Ceṅkam, the Rāmalingavilāsam at the Ramanatapuram palace, and even in the 20th-century paintings in the gopura of the Tāṇumālaiyaṉ temple at Suchindram at the southern tip of India. Of these four sites, the last three are almost certainly royal donations, and the first is of unknown patronage.

29 For a description of the paintings at Ramanatapuram, see Howes, The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India: Material Culture and Kingship.

30 Scholarship attributes the paintings to the Nāyaka at Ceṅci whose inscription at the temple states that he built it ca. 1600; scholars also identify his portrait in the paintings. I have not noticed the portrait, and the scholarship does not mention the name of the Nāyaka. Nagpall, Mural Paintings in India, 183; Chaitanya, A History of Indian Painting: The Mural Tradition, 80-81; Nagaswamy, "Tamil Paintings," 92. The paintings in the Ramanatapuram palace are ascribed to royal patronage. The royal portraits in the paintings at Suchindram suggest that these, too, are royally sponsored.
Although the image of Rama had long been used throughout India as a symbol of divinized and legitimate kingship,\textsuperscript{31} Rao has shown that the figure of Rāma became, during the Vijayanagara period and through Vijayanagara promotion, intimately connected to the person and office of the king.\textsuperscript{32} Rao demonstrates that this change is due to the political and religious ascendance of Śrī Vaiṣṇava leaders at Vijayanagara. He writes,

Śrīvaishṇavas were the first religious order to assimilate the Rama story into temples, first in generic temples and later in specific temples dedicated to Rama.…

Śrīvaishṇavas also played a crucial role in the establishment of a royal Rama cult in the Vijayanagara empire, established in 1336. Although there is some evidence for the existence of earlier Rama temples from the tenth century in the Tamil region and the mid-twelfth century elsewhere, Rama worship became culturally significant only during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries at Vijayanagara.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} Goldman dates Vālmīki’s Sankrit Rāmāyana to roughly the 7th century BC to the mid-6th century BC. Pollock states that although visual representation of Rāmāyana stories are attested in temple sculpture from as early as the 5th century in southern India, the first temples devoted to Rāma in the Tamil region were founded only during the Cōla dynasty. This is contradicted by Nagaswamy, who contends that there were shrines dedicated to Rāma in Tamil Nadu as early as the 8th century (414-415). Rao, however, thinks that the image described by Nagaswamy was probably a “generic Vaiṣṇava image” identified with Rāma (42, nt. 31) However, Nagaswamy’s account concurs with Rao’s later assessment that it is only in the Vijayanagara period that temples are dedicated to Rāma: “So far as Rāmāyana was concerned this was the period when separate temples came to be built for Rama as the main deity. In many of the Vaiṣṇavite temples the entire story of Rama came to be painted on the ceilings with labels below each.” Goldman, The Rāmāyana of Vālmiki : An Epic of Ancient India, 1: Bālakanda, 22-23. Sheldon Pollock, “Ramayana and Political Imagination in India,” The Journal of Asian studies 52, no. 2 (1993): 265. R. Nagaswamy, “Śrī Rāmāyaṇa in Tamilnādu in Art, Thought and Literature” (paper presented at the The Ramayana tradition in Asia : papers presented at the International Seminar on the Ramayana Tradition in Asia, New Delhi, December 1975, New Delhi, 1980 1975), 420. Ajay K. Rao, "The Theologization of the Rāmāyaṇa in South India, 1250-1600" (University of Chicago, 2006).

\textsuperscript{32} Miller similarly writes that Rama is “considered an incarnation of the cosmic deity Vishnu, [and] is the embodiment of dharma….through the centuries [rulers] have constructed their moral authority with reference to Rama….In Vijayanagara…the visual representation of Rama’s mythology in architecture, sculpture, and urban design, served to reinforce the legitimacy of the king.” Barbara Stoler Miller, "The Universe of Rama: Valmiki's Epic Poem," in The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions, ed. Vidy Dehejia (Bombay: Marg, 1994), 22.

\textsuperscript{33} Rao, "The Theologization of the Rāmāyaṇa in South India, 1250-1600," 17. The influence of Śrī Vaiṣṇava thought on painting will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Since little work has been done on this subject, Rao’s work is seminally important because it demonstrates how the “theologization of the Rāmāyaṇa” directly influenced artistic practice.
The development of Rāma as a figure of devotion, who is at the same time identified with both the supreme god Viṣṇu and the Vijayanagara rulers and their successors, is the background against which the popularity of iconic paintings of Rāma grows. Paintings of Rāma and the story of the Rāmāyaṇa are a distinct feature of Vijayanagara-period and later art in southern India; so, too, is the strong association of south Indian kingship with the figure of Rāma and the conception of his divine kingship.34 In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the nature of the relationship between Rāma and kingship drastically changed. At this time, the dharmic character of the god-king was deemphasized, and the identification of the earthly ruler more explicitly overlaid on the identity of the deity, and the erotic and sensual pursuits of the ideal figure given unique prominence.35

The iconography of the image considered here dictates that Rāma sits frontally on the lion throne, a symbol of royalty. The right hand is raised in vitarka mudra, a symbol of reason, knowledge, and explanation; the left hand rests in his lap. His left leg is drawn up, and his right hangs down, in the posture of lalitāsana, the posture of royal ease. On his left side is Sītā, who is turned towards him. An attendant holding an umbrella, another symbol of divinity and royalty, stands to the back and right of Sītā. At Rāma’s right foot kneels Hanuman, his left leg slightly extended while he rests on his right knee. The easy legibility of the image because of its stable iconography results in stability of meaning. Where form and meaning are so clearly established,


interventions in the standard form of the image, such as the inclusion of royal human patron, are semantically powerful and fundamentally political. This image, I argue, is an image that is only fully realized in its political contexts.

The two earliest examples of this iconography in Nāyaka painting occur at the temples devoted to incarnations of Viṣṇu at Ceñkam (Figure 43) and Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai (Figure 44). Neither of these temples is dedicated to Rāma, although the iconic images of Rāma decorate the final pictorial space before the entrance to the gods’ shrines. Both paintings date to the 17th century and are executed in a mural style associated Nāyaka kingdom of Ceñci (Style Group Two). Besides the iconographic features described above, both images also show Lakṣmana, Rāma’s brother, to the upper left of Rāma. He is identified iconographically as golden in color, hands raised in añjali mudra, and a longbow and quiver over his shoulder. This central image is the height of two registers of figures that praise the divine royal couple on the left and right sides of the image. What is most striking about these images is how very similar they are, appearing almost as copied. This indicates a firmly established iconography for this image type.

The next example of this image is the ca. 1725 image in the Ramalingavilasam, the royal audience hall at the palace in Ramanatapuram. Here, the same iconic form is attended by figures that are markedly different from those found in the temple settings of the previous two. The image is divided into three major compartments by a tripartite arch typical of 18th-century representations of palace architecture (Figure 45). The large central section is occupied by the iconic image of Rāma Enthroned. The umbrella-bearer stands to the right, over Sītā’s shoulder. As in the other images we have seen, figures are arranged in two rows to the right and left of the central figures. The field on the right side of the image is not divided into separate registers, but shows three distinct rows of figures. The uppermost row is composed of three men, two golden
and one dark green.\textsuperscript{36} Below, women, monkeys and men stand in two rows. On the left side, the field is divided into two main registers. The upper register depicts a group of rishis. The lower register shows four figures dressed in 18\textsuperscript{th}-century clothing appropriate to the court. The first wears Islamicate dress, while the other three wear traditional South Indian clothing, including a \textit{veshti}, \textit{angavastram}, and turban. These figures are preceded by another figure that represents an 18\textsuperscript{th}-century royal figure.\textsuperscript{37} Just the head and hands of this figure are visible, as a doorway has been installed where the paintings once were. This figure overlaps the frame that separates the central image of Rāma from the outer portions of the image. He serves as a link between the divine king and the Setupati court. This connection is made more explicit by the large-scale figure on the right, which is positioned within the central panel, just to the left of Rāma.

The figure immediately to the left of Rāma, who stands within the central panel of the image, is a Setupati ruler\textsuperscript{38} who stands with hands open and extended towards Rāma. Rāma’s right hand is extended to the Setupati, apparently exchanging something that is no longer legible.\textsuperscript{39} Exchange between the ideal divine ruler, Rāma, and the earthly ruler, the Setupati, was

\textsuperscript{36} I conjecture that the parasol-bearer and the two figures to the right of him are Rāma’s three brothers. All wear tall crowns, and the two in the right compartment have longbows over their shoulders; they are also golden in color, which is the iconographic indication of Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna. If so, then the parasol-bearer is Bharata, who ruled in Rāma’s stead while Rāma was exiled. The subordination of Rāma’s royal brothers within the image perhaps speaks to tensions within the Setupati court. The final figure, green in color, with small fangs, and a large nāmam on his forehead, I take to be Garuda, Viṣṇu’s vāhana.

\textsuperscript{37} These judgments are based on my close analysis of paintings in the rest of the Ramalingavilasam.

\textsuperscript{38} Setupati is the name of the rulers whose palace is in Ramanatapuram.

\textsuperscript{39} The gesture does not appear to be one of blessing, as this would almost certainly be shown iconographically through the use of mudras. Here, the hand is softly open, palm down, almost touching the receiving hands of the Setupati.
As Pamela Price has noted, “In south India ruling authority did not belong exclusively to the highest-ranking among domain heads. It was shared among gods and men in rank order. The highest ranking human ruler had the right to transact with highest honours with the highest-ranking gods….Through his exchange of honours with divinities, a ruler came to acquire a partly divine nature himself. In ritual performances organized in palaces and temple, therefore, a ruler was approached as a human with a somewhat divine nature.”

The subtle change in the position of Rāma’s hand, and the subsequent action it depicts, radically changes the image from one that projects the divine power of the ideal king, Rāma, to the transfer of divine rule to the earthly king. Just to the right of the Setupati king stands a small figure, not even the height of the throne. Dressed in an Islamicate mode appropriate to courts in this period, this figure probably represents a Setupati prince. Positioned under the hands that exchange honor between earthly and divine ruler, this small figure may represent the next in line to the Setupati throne.

The differences in this image from the two in the temples discussed first point to their position in a highly charged political setting (a palace audience hall), rather than a sacred setting (the temple). While at the first two temples, the image is found on axis with the Viṣṇu shrine in the temple as the culmination of the cycle of paintings, the image in the Ramalingavilasam is found on the central axis of the audience hall, on the center back wall, presumably behind where

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40 Price writes, “The incorporation of the Rāma story into the mythic history and symbolism of Maravar kingship in Ramnad had occurred at least by the fifteenth century, when major building, funded by Maravar kings, began on Rameswaram temple.” Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 151.

41 *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 15.
the royal patron of the paintings would have sat to receive visitors.\textsuperscript{42} The close visual link between Rāma and the Setupati ruler, who actually receives something from Rāma in the image, visually articulates the divine right to rule that the Setupatis believed they had in fact received from Rāma.\textsuperscript{43} This painted exchange, which confirms the position of the king within an earthly and divine hierarchy, decorates the space where subordinate rulers would be confirmed within the hierarchy of the state by the Setupati through the exchange of gifts and honors. The iconic image of Rāma Enthroned draws on the established iconography of divine ideal ruler. The variation in the iconography layers the meaning, so that the ideal divine rule is transferred to the earthly ruler. It remains the overriding stability of the image that makes these subtle changes meaningful.

An addendum to these examples is the reproduction of the subject in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} or early 20\textsuperscript{th}-century murals that adorn the interior of the rājagōpura in the Tāṇumālayaṇ temple at Suchindram. These are chronologically and stylistically beyond the scope of this dissertation, but are mentioned here as they indicate the longevity and stability of this iconography, as well as the political work to which it was put. The paintings are strongly influenced by the painting styles of Kerala, and the costumes and settings are clearly those of Kerala. The paintings may well have been a royal endowment from the rulers of Travancore.

\textsuperscript{42} Price reports that this room also may have held a shrine to Rāma. Indeed, today, on a raised dais in the center of the room, are three-dimensional figures of Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣman; these are not, however, worshipped in this space, nor do I know of evidence that they ever were. \textit{Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India}, 151.

\textsuperscript{43} Two manuscripts collected by Colin Mackenzie in the early nineteenth century state that Rama coronated the first Setupati king. These manuscripts state that theSetupatis were the “true rulers of southern India during the Pandya period, and tell how they were dispossessed of their territories by the Cholas.” These manuscripts seem to have convinced a number of nineteenth century British scholars of the antiquity of the Setupati lineage. Howes, \textit{The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India : Material Culture and Kingship}, 72.
The image of Rāma Enthroned is painted on the first level of the rajagopura over the eastern doorway in the center of the room (Figure 46), which grants view into the temple, on axis with the main deity’s shrine. Rāma is again seated in lalitāsana on the lion throne; Sītā sits on his left, while Hanuman, on one bent knee, kneels at his right foot. Different from the images we have examined, both hands are folded in Rāma’s lap, across which he balances his longbow. Lakṣmana stands to the left behind the throne, as at Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai and Ceṅkam. Śatrughṇa and Bharata stand on the right side of the throne. The throne is situated under an architectural canopy that serves as a frame for the royal couple, but does not separate the space they occupy from the other figures in the image. Rishis, women, monkeys, and bears are crowded around the divine couple. On the right, closest to Sītā, is a portrait-type figure in dress presumably contemporary to the painting. Other figures who are probably contemporary to the painting stand on the left, just to the left of the pillar that supports the canopy over Rāma. Four figures with bejeweled turbans and formal dress stand with hands clasped or folded across their waists (Figure 47). The turban ornament with a long spray of white feathers worn on the proper left side of the head seems to be an attribute of Travancore rulers, and is seen in the portraits and photographs of Travancore rulers throughout the nineteenth century. Behind them are two Brahmins wearing only vēṣṭis, and with prominent Śaiva sectarian marks across their foreheads, chests, and arms. Three other figures of equal size follow, two in tailored upper garments over vēṣṭis, and a final figure of an older man in white vēṣṭi and angavastram. All of these nine figures, and the single figure to the right of Sītā, are highly individualized and appear to be portraits of real people. This image, then, attends to both the devotional and political needs of its

Interestingly, none of these figures, save for the second Brahmin, holds their hands in anjali. The monkey kings also do not hold their hands in anjali. Does this signal a different attitude towards the god?
patrons and viewers. Drawing on a well-established iconography, the image communicates the immutable authority of the divine presence. That authority, coupled with portrait images of rulers, links divine presence to royal authority.\(^{45}\)

The image of Rāma Enthroned is a particularly potent image because both Rāma-as-King and Rāma-as-God are communicated together through this stable iconography. The importance of Rāma as a model of right kingship in the Vijayanagara and Nāyaka periods, and the association of king with Rāma, contributes to the political meaning of the image, which is again heightened by the inclusion of overtly political figures.

**TOPOGRAPHIC**

Topographic paintings are closely related to iconic paintings in that they represent a particular real place. As stated in Chapter One, I understand iconic images to be those that are presented frontally and with an established iconography that results in the ability of the image to function as an index of its subject. Although I distinguish between two types of topographic images, iconic and schematic, both are iconic insofar as they use a visual iconography to refer to a real sacred site (imagined sites, such as heavens, are understood as no less real). Unlike the iconographies of deities, however, the iconography of sacred sites is not highly regularized. The artist communicates the identity of the site through some combination of its unique features: the

forms of the gods particular to the site, the tree or water tank sacred to the place, natural features, and elements of the stories connected to the sacred site, known as the *talapurāṇam*.\(^{46}\)

For topographic images, it is both the place and the deity associated with the place that are the meanings of the image. The iconic and schematic are different in that the iconic uses attributes of the site to indicate the site and the god who dwells there; schematic images do this, but will show the physical and structural composition of the site and temple, and usually how the different shrines and buildings related to one another. These distinctions only become clear, however, in the depiction of sacred sites in paintings of the 17th century and later. Earlier paintings blend narrative, iconic, and schematic features.

*Tiruppuṭaimarūr*

In the cycles of paintings from the sixteenth century, there are few representations of sacred sites; as noted above, most painting of this period is narrative. However, the temple at Tiruppuṭaimarūr contains a set of topographic images. What is particularly interesting about these images is that they elude the categorization possible at later sites, as either iconic or schematic images. A few examples will show how although the subject of the paintings is the representations of particular temples and their resident deities, and that the images show the structure of the temples, the water or tree associated with the site, they defy easy categorization. Description here will concentrate on typology; the paintings will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three in relationship to textual traditions.

On the first level of the gopuram, on the opposite side from the narrative paintings of the life of the saint Māṇikkavācakar examined earlier, are iconic images of mainly Śiva temples (positions 10 and 15 in Figure 48). There are no inscriptions to identify the temples; they rely on iconographic specificity to indicate their subject. And while the deities, architecture, trees, and composition of each painting indicates a specific subject, the iconography of the sites assumes extraordinary familiarity on the part of the paintings’ anticipated viewers. As with the iconic figural images examined in the previous section, these images also include narrative figures, such as dancers, musicians, priests, and devotees.

The southwest wall (position 10) of the first level of the gopura is bisected by a decoratively carved pillar. The three registers on each side of the pillar create six discrete compositional spaces for a single temple; the area to the left of the pillar is slightly smaller than the right (Figure 49). The temples on the left contain a single shrine with a maṇṭapa, inside of which there is always a single priest, two male worshippers, one or two female worshippers, and musicians. There are also two or three males in Vijayanagara courtly attire on the far (back) side of the temple in the first and third registers.

The first register of the left side shows a fruiting tree beside a Śiva temple with a tripartite maṇṭapa and an elephant offering worship to the linga inside the main shrine (Figure 50). On the left side of the composition a tree producing small round fruit is shown. The most famous shrine in Tamil Nadu in which an elephant did puja for a Śiva linga is that of the Śrī...
Jambukēśvara Akhilandēśvari temple in Tiruvānaikkā. The sacred tree of this temple is the rose apple (jambu) tree, which produces a small fruit.\textsuperscript{48}

The first register of the right side of the southwest wall depicts a very large temple with prominently displayed thin pillars before the Śiva shrine. Behind the goddess’s shrine, on the right side of the image, is a large stand of bamboo trees (Figure 51). This image may be identified as the Nellaiyappar temple in Tirunelveli. Bamboo is the sacred tree of the temple, and the temple is known for its slim “musical pillars.” The second register of the right side shows the Kurṛāḷaṅṭar Śiva temple at Kurṛālam, which is iconographically identified through the waterfall depicted on the far right, as well as the inclusion of jack trees; the jack tree is the sacred tree of this temple, and the site is famous for its waterfalls (Figure 52). The iconography of the third register’s Madurai Mīnākṣī-Cantarēśvarar temple is based on the sacred tree of the temple, the kadamba tree, which has small round “hairy” flowers seen in the painting, as well as the story associated with the its talapurāṇam, which explains why white elephants support the roof of the god’s shrine (Figure 53). The goddess shrine is given more importance in this depiction, with a large maṇṭapa and musicians and worshippers on either side of the shrine.\textsuperscript{49}

In each of the images, the identity of the site is established through the iconography of the resident deities, the tree sacred to the temple, sometimes the water source, and mythology associated with the temple. These three objects—a devotional image (usually stone), a tree, and a

\textsuperscript{48} An argument against this identification is that the story of the temple includes both an elephant and a spider worshipping Śiva here. A spider or spider web over the Śivalinga would securely identify the site as Tiruvānaikkā. These identifications will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{49} Today the temple is popularly known as the Mīnākṣī temple, and the goddess in many ways has precedence here.
water source—constitute the three basic components of a sacred site. The importance of these elements is reflected in the talapurāṇam, which invariably names these features and gives their histories. As Granoff points out, it is the sites, not the deities or people, that are most important in talapurāṇic texts. She writes, “The Purāṇic māhāmyas, texts that deal with holy places in Hinduism, most often talk about the geographical features of the sites and less often about the images there.” In the 16th-century images at Tiruppuṭaimarutūr an interest in the physical attributes of the site—temple, image, tree, and water—is combined with images of devotees in worship, and also refer to talapuranic stories. This combination of narrative and iconographic elements is not seen in later topographic series.

Topographic images do not evince the same iconographic stability as do images of deities, and the choice of what to include (i.e., architecture, water, landscape) varies from painting to painting. The variation seems to contradict the central element of iconography that I have thus far promoted: that a stable iconography is essential to its legibility. Topographic images always contain images of the temple’s mūrti, the manifestation of the god particular to the site. They will also include the elements of the temple that are unique—the water source, the temple tree, and other deities or saints associated with the site. The sacred site is constituted by

50 Each of these has cosmic resonances, constituting a microcosm within the sacred ground of the temple. Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition, 40-47.


53 Branfoot’s recent article argues that it is not the architecture of a site that is sacred, but the site itself. The architecture, and even (though to a lesser degree) the image of the deity there, may be replaced. He writes, “The expectation of those responsible for building and using the temple would appear to be that it is not a fixed and finished structure, but one that will need to be added to, modified and constantly re-made…What is clear from an examination of the material evidence is that some architectural historians and archaeologists have underestimated
these elements. Their visual representation constitutes an iconography of the site. Looking at a few of the images will clarify this.

**Iconic Topographic Images**

Iconic topographic images, like the figural iconic images discussed in the previous section, use the iconography of sacred place—deity, tree, water, and narrative—to indicate their subject. Chapter Six will further argue that iconic images of place may actually be considered topographic icons—manifestations of those places and their associated deities. The present discussion, however, will be limited to the formal properties of the images, and the changes that occur over the course of the period in the representation of this type of imagery.

**Kailāsanāta Temple, Nattam Kövilpatṭi**

Paintings in the Kailāsanātatar Temple at Nattam Kövilpatṭi (henceforth Nattam) are found in the maṇṭapas before both the god and goddess shrines. The iconic topographic images are found in the Kailāsanātatar maṇṭapa, while narrative images decorate the ceiling of the maṇṭapa of the goddess’s temple. The paintings that decorate the Kailāsanātatar maṇṭapa consist of three parts. The central panel consists of three registers of iconic and portrait images, all oriented so that the viewer faces east to see the paintings right side up (Figure 54).

The images to the left and right of this central panel, all of which are topographic images, show various temples in the Tamil region. The southern panel consists of three registers of paintings, oriented so the heads of the figures are nearer the central panel. The North panel

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the degree to which many Tamil temple sites have been completely remodeled by their own worshipping communities.” Crispin Branfoot, “Remaking the Past: Tamil Sacred Landscape and Temple Renovations,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 76, no. 1 (2013): 44.
contains four registers of images, also oriented so that the heads of the figures are nearest the central panel. All of the sites represented then, converge towards the center. Of the twenty-six temples depicted, seventeen are dedicated to Śiva, five to Viṣṇu, three to Murugan, and one is no longer legible. Each image shows the shrine of the god and goddess, and very often shows subsidiary shrines in the temple. The form of the deity particular to the temple is depicted within each of the shrines. Very often, the water tank at the temple, the tree, or some other distinguishing feature of the temple is shown. Landscape elements are integrated in to the image, so that those temples that are located on mountains (Aḷakar Kōvil, Tirupati, Paḷani, Tirupparaṅkunṟam, and others) are shown on a hilly landscape. Likewise, water fills the bottom of the image of Rāmēśvaram (which is located on the Indian Ocean beach). While in some cases the iconography gives sufficient information to identify the temple, in others the bilingual Telugu and Tamil inscriptions are necessary to identify the image.

The southernmost register contains four, approximately equally-sized panels of temples. Beginning on the east side, the first is the Viṣṇu temple at Aḷakar Kōvil (Figure 55). The Telugu inscription reads, “Solemale Aḷaghari Svāmi,” while the Tamil simply reads, “Aḷakar.” There are three shrines in the image. The central and largest shrine shows Viṣṇu as Aḷakar, standing between two consorts. The two goddesses resident at the temple, each with separate shrines, are Kalyana Sundaravalli and Andal; the image here, however, lacks any identifying iconography for either goddess. On the right side of the image is a small shrine with the figure of Yoga Narasimha within; there is likewise a shrine dedicated to Yoga Narasimha at the Aḷakar Kōvil temple. On the left side of the image is a smaller shrine, in which stands a blue-skinned figure.

55 The inscriptions here combine both Tamil and Grantha letters. In this inscription, the Tamil “Ka” is replaced with the Grantha letter.
with a mace; this is Karuppa Swamy, a guardian deity who stands just at the gateway of the Aḻakar Temple. In reality, the temple is located at the base of a hill, Cōlai Malai (as is indicated in the Telugu inscription here). In the painting, hills rise up in the background of this image. On the right, water emerges from a spring in the mountain, and empties into a tank. At Cōlai Malai, there is a natural spring, known as the Nūpura Ganga. The uppermost peak of the hills on the right side of the painting is in the shape of a bull’s head. This relates to a story about the superiority of Śiva, related in the twenty-ninth chapter of Paraṅcōti’s sixteenth-century talapurāṇam of the Madurai Mīnaksi temple, the Tiruviḻaiyāṭal. This story tells of a ferocious cow sent by a Jain monk to destroy the city of Madurai, which upon seeing Śiva’s mount, Nandi, died of love and turned to mountain of stone. This mountain is identified with two sites in the vicinity of Madurai: one mountain to the southwest of the city, and another at Solamalai. Nandi, it is said, also left his material form there to commemorate the event, and this is known as Bull hill. It is this form that is depicted in the painting here.\footnote{Writing of this event, and others similar to it, Harman notes, “The landscape in and around Madurai is thus a sacred geography: prominent mountains, rivers and bathing tanks are attributed to the gracious acts of Śiva.” William P. Harman, \textit{The Sacred Marriage of a Hindu Goddess}, Religion in Asia and Africa Series (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 35.} In this image of a Viṣṇu temple, painted on the ceiling of a Śiva temple, the grace and power of Śiva is communicated in the image of landscape.

Although the iconography of the painting is subtle, any worshipper familiar with the temple at Aḻakar Kōvil would no doubt recognize the temple through the conjunction of deities – Viṣṇu, two consorts, Karuppa Swamy, and Yoga Narasiṁha – in a mountain setting where a spring emerges from the mountain in the shape of a bull.\footnote{Aḻakar Kōvil is also very close to this Nattam, lying at a distance of about twenty kilometers as the crow flies.} Although this is undeniably a
depiction of the deities resident at the site, the image is equally concerned with the sacred site within a sacred landscape. To quote Harman again, “Topographical features become the vehicle by which a sacred history is communicated to devotees. These features are reminders of and testimonies to Śiva’s involvement in their past and, perhaps more important, in their present experience of the world.”\textsuperscript{58} The landscape itself is sacred, and its features, remembered through story in \textit{talapurāṇam}, call to mind not only the history of a sacred site, but of the continuous divine presence that inheres there.

On the northern side of the ceiling, in the register closest to the central panel, there is an image of the Śiva as Jambukēśvara at Tiruvānaikkā on the far right side of the register—the same temple we saw in the first topographic image at Tiruppuṭaimarutūr (Figure 56). There are only two shrines pictured in this image, that of the goddess on the left, and the Śivalinga shrine on the right. Both are elaborate golden structures; interestingly, the goddess’s shrine is the taller of the two. The inscriptions, again, are different between the Telugu and the Tamil. The Telugu reads, “Jambbugeśvaram,” while the Tamil reads, “Tiruvānaikkāval.”\textsuperscript{59} Between the god and goddess shrine a jambu tree grows. Its broad green leaves and round white flowers spread over Śiva’s shrine, and a single branch is also visible within the shrine, directly over the Śivalinga. On the right, now barely visible, a spider’s web stretches from the wall of the shrine to the tree branch. Directly below the spider’s web an elephant holds a conch in its trunk just before the pedestal of the Śivalinga. The \textit{talapurāṇam} of this temple relates the story of two Śiva devotees being born

\textsuperscript{58} Harman, \textit{The Sacred Marriage of a Hindu Goddess}, 35.

\textsuperscript{59} The persistent differences, which are found throughout the paintings, may indicate a different hand for the two languages; however, if a single scribe wrote different content for the two languages, the differences in content are more interesting. Could they reflect common usage in the respective languages? Although I have referred to this site throughout the dissertation as “Tiruvānaikkā,” “Tiruvānaikkāval” is also a widely-used name for the site even today.
as a spider and an elephant. The spider worshipped Śiva by protecting the linga from falling leaves by building a web over it. The elephant worshipped Śiva by bathing the god with water from its trunk. At the base of the jambu tree, a small mendicant figure is seated, a yoga bandha around his knees, and hands in aṅjali mudra. His body is enveloped by the trunk of the tree. The talapurāṇam relates that the temple tree grew from the body of the mendicant who worshipped Śiva here. Here, as with the Aḻakar Kōvil image, the devotee familiar with major shrines devoted to Śiva would recognize the iconography of the temple. The temple tree and the story related through the talapurāṇam, for which the temple is famous, are clearly visible in enough detail to communicate the subject of the image.

A final example, which possesses a less legible iconography, is the image of the temple at Tiruviṭaimarutūr. This image is located in the southern part of the maṇṭapa, on the extreme east side of the third register from the center (Figure 57). This image shows two large shrines, about equal in size, with a linga in the left shrine, and a standing goddess in the right. Between the two shrines a maruta tree rises (from which this temple gets its name), spreading its branches equally between the two shrines. In front of the linga shrine is a very small Nandi. None of these features is distinctive enough to indicate the temple that is depicted. In this case, the Telugu (“Tiruvaṇamarudūru”) and Tamil (“Tiruviṭamarutūr”) inscriptions below are necessary in order to identify the temple. In this iconic rendering of the temple, the iconography remains insufficient to communicate the subject of the image. The inadequacy of the iconography, however, does not render the image un-iconic. The iconic image of the temple still points to the temple itself, showing the tree sacred to the temple, as well as the deities present. It is typologically iconic even if the iconography is not sufficient to identify the subject. This
iconicity of the image, which yet fails to point to a referent, is seen with even more intensity at
the Śiva temple in Āvūṭaiyārkōvil.

Āvūṭaiyārkōvil

Paintings are found throughout the Ātmanātasvāmi temple at Āvūṭaiyārkōvil
(Tirupperuntuṟai); those we are interested in here are found on the ceiling of the maṇṭapa before
the Nandikēśa Māṇikkāvācakār shrine. On the ceiling of the two aisles south of the center of
the maṇṭapa, in the aisle in the center perpendicular to these, and in the first and second aisles
north of the center are grids filled with iconic topographic images of the temples praised in the
Śaiva devotional text, the Tēvāram. Each topographic icon of a temple is composed—at
minimum—of the god and goddess shrine, a water tank, and sometimes the tree sacred to the
temple. These elements are not, however, distinctive enough to indicate exactly which temple is
depicted. The inscription that accompanies each topographic icon is necessary to make clear to
the viewer which temple is indicated.

All of the images of temples here appear at first to be exactly the same: a grid of images
that consist of two shrines within a square, one dedicated to Śiva and one to the goddess (Figure
58). Each has a label in Tamil at the bottom. Closer inspection, however, reveals myriad
differences between the images. The vimānas of the images are individualized, as are each of the
images of the gods. Features such as flower garlands, musical instruments, Nandi, the tree or

60 There are two shrines dedicated to Māṇikkāvācakār in this temple. This, the Nandikēśa (or Nandīśvara)
Māṇikkāvācakār shrine, is located in the mahāmaṇṭapa; I will discuss the maṇṭapa’s construction in Chapter Four.
The second Māṇikkāvācakār shrine is the Śivananda Māṇikkāvācakār shrine, located in the third prākāra. The
former is considered the “old” shrine, while the latter is recognized as the “new” shrine (putukkōvil); this was built
by the 15th and 16th heads of the Tiruvāvaṭutuṟai āṭiṇam (herein refered to as a maṭam; see Chapter Four), who are
commemorated in portrait sculptures that face the Māṇikkāvācakār shrine. Cīrvalarēṟ Civappirakāca Tēcika
water tank sacred to the temple all are different between the images, and serve to show the individuality of each site. On the other hand, the formal sameness of the images, placed within the strict grid, defies the individuality of each site in favor of seriality. Here, it is membership within the set of sites enumerated and praised in the Tēvāram that is communicated by the form.

The stability of the iconography here is part of the meaning of the image: each individual site is equally the home of Śiva, and each is a constitutive member of the Śaiva sacred landscape. As Eck argues, Hindu sacred landscape is characterized by repetition and duplication, a “‘systematic geography’ in which geographical features are noteworthy not for their uniqueness but for their repetition in the ordered, systematic whole.” 61 Each site is meaningful only insofar as it is one of a limitless number of such sacred sites. As Eck articulates, “It is the linking, the network, the duplication, the substitution of…[sacred sites] that cumulatively constitute a landscape.” 62 The iconic depictions of the sacred sites at Āvutaiyärkōvil, in concert with inscriptions that identify for the viewer exactly which site is depicted, enact this conception of the landscape as composed of independent, individual sites that nonetheless rely on the network of sites to express their full meaning. The sameness of the iconography of these sites acts in a way consonant with the iconography of Rāma Enthroned examined the previous section: the iconographic sameness between depictions makes the images legible as belonging to an established category of image with a standard meaning; meanwhile, the subtleties of difference between the images inflect the meaning of each iteration of the image.


The iconographies of iconic topographic images are drawn from the form of the god and goddess resident at the shrine, the tree, water source, and the talapurāṇam of the temple. The visual representation of the elements unique to the site constitutes an iconography of the site. Like iconic images of figures, the sites are represented “frontally” – that is, with shrines open to the viewer who sees straight through to the deity. Such representations give visual prominence to the deities associated with the site. Since the deity and site are mutually defined, such visual emphasis on the deity-of-the-site does not diminish the primacy of place for the meaning of the image. Although I will argue in Chapter Six that these images constitute icons in the sense that they function as more than representation, I am interested here only in their iconicity; that is, only that the type of image is iconic, whether or not the image actually manifests the divine.

**Schematic Topographic Images**

Schematic topographic images, in contrast to those I classify as iconic, emphasize the architectural form of a sacred site. Schematic images show the layout of the temples, the circumambulatory passageways and points of access, as well as the arrangements of deities and points of interest; schematic images are descriptive rather than indexical. This type of painting is not seen at sites of the 16th century, and only begins to be painted in the 17th century. The genre reaches its full articulation in the 18th century, when schematic images are found in other media, such as painted kalamkari cloths.  

Schematic images are different from iconic images in that they will be populated with figures active in the image. Inscriptions on the images very often label the component elements of the image, not just the name of the site, as is common in iconic

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63 See, for example, accession IM.29-1911 in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which is a labeled topographic image of the Subrahmanyam temple at Tirupparaṅkungam, the hill on which it is situated, and the other shrines found thereon.
images. The images very often bear labels in the visual field that identify the different shrines, buildings, deities, or activity seen in the image. Like the other categories of image so far enumerated, this category, too, encompasses significant variation.

Maṭavār Valākam

In the murals in the mahāmanṭapa of the Vaittiyanātar temple at Maṭavārvalākam, we find on the west side of the maṇṭapa, adjacent to the center panel, a schematic topographic temple image (Figure 59). This may be identified as an image of the Maṭavārvalākam temple itself. Even though the image is not a true schema of the temple plan, as the deities and saints it depicts are not quite as they are found within the temple precinct. The center shrine in the image shows a linga, which I believe to be Vaittiyanātar, the main deity of the Maṭavārvalākam temple. His two consorts, Manōmaṇi Ammaṇ and Śivakāmi Ampāḷ, are shown in the center of the image with the anthropomorphic image of Śiva – perhaps meant to represent the festival images of the temple. On the right is a separate shrine for Śivakāmi Ampāḷ. However, a peculiar feature of the Maṭavārvalākam temple is that the goddess’ shrine is located to the south of the god’s shrine, and this is not shown here.64 The surrounding shrines include Naṭarāja, Murugan and his consorts Valli and Tēyvāni, Ganapathi, and the Nāyanmār Nālvar. These all are listed among the temple’s

64 I take the front-facing god to be facing east, as he does at the temple. Most goddess shrines are located to the north, which would place the shrine on the right side of the god’s image. The talapurāṇaṃ I bought at the temple also states that although the Silpa Sastra states that the goddess shrine should be to the north of the god’s shrine (on the god’s left side), in some Tamil temples, as at this one, it is located to the south (at the god’s right side): “ciṟpa cāṭirappṭi iṟavam sannatikku ṟatuṟṭamam ṣamanna sannti amaivatu vaḷḷakam. Āṉāl tamiṭṭakattī sīḷ aḷavṟavkalmaṭṭung valatupuṟam uḷḷatu. Civaṟkāmi amṭṭān smnaṇi iṟavuṟkuvaḷatupuṟam uḷḷatu.” K.P.S. Čelvaḵumār and C. Koṭṭalvaṇṇān, Srīvi Vaittiyanātar, 3 ed. (Srīvilliputṭūr: Intu Kālācāra Virivākka Maiyam, 2009 [2006]), 36.
parivara devatas. The schematic topographic image is not a map that corresponds to a physical reality, though it suggests a real site through its organization and combination of physical elements.

Nattam Kövilpaṭṭi

The cycle of murals in the Kailāsanāta Temple at Nattam, though discussed in the previous section as iconic topographic images, also contain a very interesting schematic image of the Maturai Mīnākṣī-Cuntaratēvara temple. This is the largest of the topographic images in this mural cycle. Contrary to the image at Maṭavārvalākam, in which the layout is different from the actual temple that it depicts, the Nattam image indicates fairly faithfully the relative position of the deities to one another within the architecture of the Maturai temple.

In this plan of the Maturai Mīnākṣī temple, we see two major shrines (Figure 60). That on the left (south), as at Maṭavārvalākam, is dedicated to the goddess, Mīnākṣī. Before her shrine is a large temple tank and the shrines of Ganapathi and Murugan, the goddess’s sons. The shrine compound is bounded by a circumambulatory path, shown here with the white-colored pillars in profile, creating a grid-like frame. The architecture of the real shrine consists of a very large water tank in front of the goddess’s shrine, around which is a pillared arcade; the image at Nattam is evocative of the devotee’s experience of the temple. In the passage that links the goddess Mīnākṣī’s shrine to Śiva’s shrine compound is a very large image of Ganapathi, son of Pārvatī (Mīnākṣī) and Śiva (Cundarēśvara / Cokkanātar); this is shown in the Nattam painting, and is in fact the most prominent feature of the image. The shrine dedicated to Śiva is on the

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65 These deities, however, are found in many temples, and do not necessarily indicate any one temple. The temple’s talapurāṇam lists thirty-one shrines in the temple. For a list of deities, see Srīvī Vaittiyanātī, 3 ed. (Srīvilliputtēr: Intu Kalāccēra Virivēkka Maiyam, 2009 [2006]), 36-38, 47.
north (right) side of the complex. The shrine itself is supported by white elephants, a feature explained in the text of the temple’s talapurāṇam.\textsuperscript{66} To the right of the shrine a white-skinned figure sits under a tree, holding a sugarcane towards the elephant that supports the roof of the shrine, and which reaches with its trunk to take the sugarcane. This image also refers to a story from the temple’s talapurāṇam, which narrates how Śiva, in the guise of a siddha, was asked by the king of Maturai to demonstrate his miracle-working power by making a stone elephant eat sugarcane; this event is shown in the image here.\textsuperscript{67} Below, on the east side of the temple, is an image of Naṭarāja. The Thousand-pillared Hall in which the Naṭarāja is installed was built in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, and is suggested here only by the iconic figure of the god. Although this image is not an exact record of the way the temple is laid out, it shows the physical position of the major deities installed in the temple and the architectural particularity of the site. The site is further represented iconographically by the iconography of those deities, the water tank, and stories associated with the temple.

\textit{Citamparam}

The paintings at the Naṭarāja temple at Citamparam are found in the mahāmaṇṭapa in the goddess Śivakāmasundari’s temple compound. Paintings in the northmost aisle seem to narrate Śiva’s manifestation at Citamparam, and the building of the temple at the site; the inscriptions are so damaged as to preclude legibility. The first register shows a festive celebration as a king mounted on an elephant approaches revelers who light fireworks. The second register depicts construction of a gopura and maṇṭapa at the temple. The third register presents a fascinating

\textsuperscript{66} Chapter 2 of Paraṅcōti’s \textit{Tiruviḻiyāṭal Purāṇam}.

\textsuperscript{67} Chapter 21 of Paraṅcōti’s \textit{Tiruviḻiyāṭal Purāṇam}.
topographic image of the Citamparam temple. The register is large and roughly square in shape, making it about 1.5 by 1.5 meters (Figure 61). This image, rather than showing how the physical parts of the temple relate to one another, plots the parts of the temple around a central image of a linga, suggesting that the icon is generative of the component parts of the temple. The rest of the paintings in the aisle are oriented perpendicularly to these, and presented in a continuous scene of a festival wherein the gods process outside the temple. Royal and ascetic portrait figures are included in the festival image.\(^{68}\)

At the center of the topographic image of the temple compound is the shrine of Mūlanātar and his consort, Umā (Figure 62). The linga in this shrine is considered by some to be the original linga praised by the saints Vyāghrapāda and Patañjali. Because of their worship of this linga, Śiva appeared to them at Citamparam in his form as Naṭarāja. However, Younger states that the temple for Mūlanātar was established only in the 13\(^{th}\) century in order to bring the temple more in line with orthodox expectations of temple construction and worship.\(^{69}\) Nevertheless, legend maintains that this is the linga that was self-manifest at this site, and which was worshipped by two saints in order to bring Śiva as Naṭarāja to this site.\(^{70}\) Arranged around this

\(^{68}\) My determination of the figures’ portrait status is based both on the physiognomic specificity of the image, as well as their depiction against a green background that indicates that the image is a portrait. This is discussed at greater length in Chapter Four.

\(^{69}\) There is, however, no conclusive evidence that Mūlanātar does not predate the shrine built around his icon, and the history of the order of the gods’ manifestations at the site are contested. The evidence that Younger provides does not show that linga worship does not predate the shrine (or even conclusively determine when the shrine was constructed). Paul Younger, "The Citamparam Temple Complex and Its Evolution," *East and West* 36, no. 1/3 (1986): 201.

\(^{70}\) This story is the basis for the site’s talapurāṇam. For a succinct English-language description of the talapurāṇam and the architecture of the site, see [http://www.chidambaram.rajadeekshithar.com/temple_history.htm](http://www.chidambaram.rajadeekshithar.com/temple_history.htm). Nanda, who notes the primacy of the linga in Citamparam’s stories but who follows Younger’s suggestion that the linga shrine is a medieval addition, writes, “The Mulasthana shrine, located in the northern flank of the second prākāra, according to the Citamparam liturgy is believed to be the original svayambhu linga found by Byaghrapada and Patanjali on the banks of the Shivaganga tank. The temple faces east, and was probably originally built by Kopperunjinga, the
shrine, in the cardinal directions, are the gopuras (gateway towers) to the temple. Each of these is labeled. In each of the remaining quadrants different important parts of the temple are shown. The upper left of the image shows the goddess in her shrine. The shrine is shown as a stone temple, and the maṇṭapa before it is suggested by the roof and pillars that extend from the shrine. A golden barrel roof with three kalaśas crowns the shrine. On the upper right are the Chit Sabha, housing Naṭarāja and Śivakamsundari; the Kanaka Sabha, where rituals are performed; the Nitya Sabha, where the temple flagpost is visible on the right; and the shrine for Ganeśa. The lower right quadrant depicts two shrines with Śiva and Umā inside; this may represent the Deva Sabha. The final quadrant, in the lower left of the image, shows the water tank, and is labeled as the Śiva Ganga Tirtha. Although East and West are the mirror image of what one would expect, all of the buildings represented in the painting relate to each other spatially as they do at the temple itself. The adjustment of the constituent elements in this image, however, may point to greater levels of meaning than we have heretofore recognized in the images.

Pallava king, who attempted to align it with the east gopuram. Several scholars believe that the Mulasthana shrine was in fact a 13th-century renovation intended to bring the temple more into line with orthodox sanskritic canons, with regard both to facing east and to making the central object of worship a linga rather than an anthropomorphic image.” Vivek Nanda, "Chidambaram: A Ritual Topography," in Chidambaram: Home of Nataraja, ed. Vivek Nanda and George Michell (Mumbai: Marg Publications on behalf of the the National Centre for the Performing Arts, 2004), 15.

71 The gopuras are not labeled in a way that corresponds with the order of the cardinal directions as we usually label them. On the left is the “north gopura,” directly across from it on the right is the “south gopura,” but the east gopura is labeled to the left of north, when it should be to the right of north; the west is to the right of north. It is unclear why the artist has reversed west and east, and whether this is an intentional adjustment of space on the part of the artist.


73 There is a label here, but water damage has made the writing illegible. Only “capai” (sabha) is visible at the end of the inscription.
The gopuras, axially aligned in the cardinal directions, seem to fold out from the center, the linga of Mūlanātar, a name that literally means The God (nātar) who is the origin (mūlam). The god is also known by the name of Mūlattanīśvara, meaning the God (īśvara) who is the origin (mūlam) of the place (tānam). This representation of the icon of the god who is the origin of the site is located exactly at the center of the square image. The square, as the basic unit of measurement and form on which the temple is built is fundamental to the sacred space of the temple. The form of the god original to the site, whose name itself communicates its originary nature, is placed at the center of the image of the scheme of the temple, a square, the fundamental building block of sacred space. The interpretation of this image is muddied by the uncertain history of the site. If this linga shrine is an orthodox addition, here cast as the origin of the site, perhaps the image promotes a kind of orthodoxy in the Nāyaka period unattested in historical studies of the site. Naṭārāja, the god that is today so strongly associated with the site, is here one among a number of gods present. Interestingly, the Vaiṣṇava association with the site, and the presence of a Viṣṇu icon in the temple, is completely elided from this representation. This topographic image, while showing the directional relationship between architectural components of the temple compound, promotes an understanding of the site that is resolutely Śaiva. The image instantiates the talapurāṇam of the site, which understands worship of this linga as bringing about the appearance of Śiva as Naṭārāja, for which the site is most famous, and around which the site developed.

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74 Kramrisch and Burnier, *The Hindu Temple*. 
Ramanatapuram

In the eighth panel of the south wall of the first great room in the audience hall of the Ramanatapuram palace, the Rāmalingavilāsam, in the third register, is a schematic topographic image of the Tāyumānar Temple at Tiruccirāppalī, the hill on which it is located, and its neighboring temples and structures (Figure 63).\(^{75}\) This is the second in a set of topographic images that decorate part of the south wall and the entire north wall of the south side of the room. This image shows the temple in the so-called Rock Fort at the center of Tiruccirāppalī, a rocky hill that hosts many different shrines and temples.\(^{76}\) Like those schematic topographic images already described, this one also shows the features of the site and their physical relationships within the image. However, more than the others, this image present an entire landscape traversable by the viewer. The doors in the structures open on to paths and other buildings, and figures who traverse the landscape are painted into the image. This image records the entire sacred site, whereas the other images we have examined present only the circumscribed space of the temple.

\(^{75}\) The register above this image is now in very poor condition. However, it is possible to just make out an image of an elephant performing puja for a Śīvalinga. The inscription below, though now visible only in parts, identifies this as another iconic topographic image of Jambukēśvara Akhilandēśvari temple at Tiruvānaikkā. The inscription below the panel refers to the following register, wherein Śiva appears as a beggar in the forest and entrances the rishi’s wives.

\(^{76}\) A connection between Ramnad and this image that I cannot substantiate, but is intriguing, is an early 18\(^{th}\) century poet-rishi is associated with both Ramnad and the Tāyumānar temple. Tāyumānar, who became the head of a non-Brahmin monastery (the importance of which was previously discussed in Chapter 1, and is discussed again in Chapter 4) lived in Tiruccirāppalī. After renouncing householder life and moving to Ramnad, he devoted himself to austerities and the writing of devotional poetry. He was a devotee of Śiva as Tāyumānar. Is it possible he is pictured in the image, or that his presence in Ramnad might have influenced the inclusion of this image in the mural cycle? Cuttāṇanta Pāṭrāyā, Voice of Tāyumānar: the Life of the Saint and His Song-Offering (Madras: Shuddhananda Library, 1963), 16-25; Kamil Zvelebil, Tamil Literature, A History of Indian Literature V 10 : Dravidian Literatures (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974), 221; D. Dennis Hudson, Protestant Origins in India: Tamil Evangelical Christians, 1706-1835, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publiciations, 2000), 79-80.
At the base of the mountain is the Mānikka Vināyakar temple. This is shown just off-center at the base of the images. Stairs rise to the left side, giving access into the mountain shrine. The second level of the mountain shows three maṇṭapas and a gopura. The left maṇṭapa has an open doorway in the center, which presumably leads to the goddess shrine that is positioned directly above it. The gopura, to the right of the goddess’s maṇṭapa, points toward another two-tiered maṇṭapa, inside of which are shown deities at the temple: Naṭarāja, Bhikṣātana, two Uma-Mahesvara-type images, a Śiva linga, and a goddess. Above the maṇṭapa containing these figures is the large linga of Tāyumānavar. To the right of the gopura that leads to the Śiva shrine, there is a pavilion, inside of which is the inscription “Kumāracuvāmi,” indicating that the shrine above houses the image of Murugan. The iconic image of the god is shown above a maṇṭapa, which also houses the koṭimaram (flag post). On the far right of the image is another long horizontal maṇṭapa, above which is another pavilion, beside which is a Piḷḷaiyār shrine. A rishi sits upon a tiger skin within the pavilion; his right hand is raised in a figure of speech, while in his left he holds a long brownish object, perhaps a manuscript. There is a faint inscription below the rishi in the maṇṭapa.

The viewer is led through the rest of the image along a white path that begins near the koṭimaram, to the left of Kumāra’s shrine, next to the small image of Bhikṣatana, and then up the mountain, represented by rocky forms with vegetation, as well as cavorting monkeys. The path turns at the right side of the image, through a maṇṭapa, and left towards the peak of the mountain. Under the maṇṭapa where the path turns is another inscription, which reads, “Tāyamāna cuvāmi malai uccip piḷḷaiyār,” naming the Piḷḷaiyār shrine at the apex of the mountain of the god Tāyumāna. Two human figures are shown ascending up the mountain to the shrine, the first of whom raises a stick to beat off a monkey. The shrine of Ucci Piḷḷaiyār, along
with the svayambhu (self-manifesting) linga at this site, is shown within the pavilion at the apex of the mountain.

This painting, like the others we have seen, does not render the mountain temple as an image that one might readily read as a topographically correct depiction of the site. However, like the other schematic topographic images we have examined, the image does depict the main deities of the site and places them in relationship to each other as one would find them within the temple. Characteristic of paintings of the 18th century, the image is also extensively labeled (as was also the case at the late 17th-century site of Citamparam). The pilaster that frames the image on the right shows an extraordinarily richly bejeweled male royal figure, hands together in anjali, looking on the topographic image (Figure 64). That this figure is shown in a worshipful attitude addressed to this topographic image indicates that even the topographic image can function iconically. That is, the depiction of a sacred place, and not only a deity, is worthy of veneration.

TEXT

Mention of the content and role of text has been included in the descriptions and analyses of murals discussed throughout this chapter. Here, I wish to briefly restate the broad changes seen over the Nāyaka period with regard to the presence, language, and content of text. While studies of the murals mention the presence of text, text has never before been understood as an integral element of the mural paintings. It is my contention that a more complete understanding of the murals requires consideration of the presence and content of text.

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78 The inscription below identifies the figure as “periya ayya.” This honorific inscription gives no information about the actual identity of the figure.
Narrative and label inscriptions are found only in some murals of the sixteenth century, but at both of the Tamil-area sites discussed here, Paṭṭīccaram and Tiruppuṭaimarutūr.\textsuperscript{79} In these, the narrative and label inscriptions are written only in Tamil, though freely incorporate grantha script; grantha continues to be seen in murals into the 17\textsuperscript{th} and early 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries.\textsuperscript{80} Inscriptions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century may be written in Tamil, Telugu, or both languages together. By the eighteenth century, narrative inscriptions in the Tamil and Telugu languages consistently frame pictorial registers.

Inscriptions range from short labels or phrases inserted into the visual field (though these are somewhat rare), to longer descriptions of the events of the image they accompany. Narrative inscriptions are found in dedicated borders, always written in white paint against a black ground, bordered by a single white line above and below. Internally, inscriptions are divided from each other by two or three vertical white lines through the inscriptive register. Label inscriptions, as well as records of donation, may occur in the visual field, and may be written in either Tamil or Telugu languages.

The choice of language changes over time, and seems to conform to patterns of patronage. At all bilingual sites, many of which are associated with courtly patronage, Telugu and Tamil languages are systematically deployed; the pattern of deployment, however, varies between sites. At Āḻvār Tirunakari, Nattam, and Putukkōṭṭai, Tamil and Telugu narrative inscriptions in dedicated registers convey the same information, while labels in the pictorial register employ only one language (either Tamil or Telugu). The incidence of Tamil being the

\textsuperscript{79} Inscriptions at Somappalle appear to have been added later. There is a single instance of writing on an image of a manuscript at Lepakshi. The letters, however, appear to be gibberish.

\textsuperscript{80} Most conspicuous are the inscriptions at Nattam for their inclusion of grantha.
language that labels the pictorial field is rare compared to that of Telugu. At Ramnad, Tamil is the only language of narrative inscription, while Telugu is reserved for occasional inscriptions, to reiterate Tamil labels, or to indicate important persons, donors, books, or sacred sites. At Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai, narrative inscriptions in registers, as well as labels in the pictorial field are written in Telugu, though there are a few label inscriptions in Tamil. The reverse, it seems, is true at Ceṅkam. Thus, although there is variation in the ways that language is deployed between these sites, to a large extent, language choice is systematic. It would seem that where inscriptions are bilingual, there is higher probability of courtly patronage. There is also a tendency to use Telugu as the language of inscription within the pictorial register. This may indicate the use of Telugu as a marker of status, particularly as Telugu was the language of courtly culture in the Tamil region in this period.

CONCLUSIONS

Paintings produced in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries may be assigned to three typologies: narrative, iconic/figural, and topographic. Within each of these types there is considerable variation. However, generalizations about changing preferences over the course of the period for certain types or modes are clearly demonstrable. While continuous narrative mode is most popular in the 16th century, linear narrative dominates visual narrative structure by the

81 Scholarship asserts that there are Telugu-language inscriptions here, but I have failed to find them. Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States*; Dallapiccola, "South Indian Painting Styles, 14th-18th Centuries," 646; Chaitanya, *A History of Indian Painting: The Mural Tradition*, 80-81; Nagaswamy, "Tamil Paintings," 92.

82 The Taṅjavūr Maratha court also patronized Marathi as a courtly language. Telugu remained, however, an important courtly language, and a language of composition for both literature and music.
18th century. Similarly, iconic and topographic images become more popular in the later 17th century and into the 18th century. In the earlier part of the Nāyaka period, iconic paintings retain prominent narrative elements. Later iconic paintings, except for schematic topographic paintings, usually exclude narrative figures. Later Nāyaka painting often includes series of iconic figures. Membership within a series emphasize the images’ iconic function at the same time that the seriality underscores the notion that the images’ referents are one among numberless equals in the series—whether as incarnations of God or the sacred sites inhabited by God.

Topographic images, which might be understood as a sub-category of iconic painting, develop a (more) regular iconography over the course of the period. The iconography of a sacred site is based on four elements, all of which may or may not be present in any one image, but of which at least two are always present: The visible aspects of the sacred site, the mūrti (or representation of another form of the god who dwells in the temple), vṛkṣa (tree), and tīrtha (water source), form the basis of this iconography of place. The mythology of the site also becomes part of its iconography, so that visual representations of figures drawn from poetry and the talapurāṇams form a standard component of topographic images.

The formal changes in the paintings—typology, narrative mode, stable iconography, greater use of inscription—have broad implications for viewers’ reception of the images. Over the course of the period, formal structure and the proliferation of label and narrative inscriptions limit the interpretive possibilities available to the viewers of the paintings. Continuous narrative structure, most popular in the 16th century, affords the viewer considerable freedom in determining the pace of the narrative. Linear narrative, in which each scene is separated from the next by a hard frame, determines the pace of the narrative for the viewer. This becomes more popular throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Likewise, inscriptions that proliferate in the 17th
and 18th centuries render the identities of the figures and their actions unambiguous. The increased popularity of semantically-clear iconic figures, especially when arranged as series of iconic figures, also points to clarity of meaning being a priority for later art production and reception.
CHAPTER 3 - VISUAL NARRATIVES AND NĀYAKA MURALS: TALAPURĀNIC, BHAKTI, AND HAGIOGRAPHIC TEXTS

The previous chapter outlined the content of Nāyaka-period murals as comprised mainly of narrative, iconic, and topographic images. The present chapter will focus more closely on narrative paintings and the relationship of the paintings’ content to texts. The concept of “text” manifests in three primary ways in the murals: as pictorial representations of written textual narratives, as labels and narrative inscriptions in the pictorial registers or accompanying textual registers, and as pictorial representations of books, reading, and writing. It is on the first of these, the relationship between written and painted narratives, that this chapter will concentrate. The content of the narrative paintings of the Nāyaka period frequently relate to known texts such as local mythologies, transregional epics, devotional poetry, and histories of sacred sites, saints, and rulers. Because there are countless representations of texts in mural paintings, for this chapter I have chosen to document and analyze closely three sites that reflect artists’ and patrons’ interest in histories of sacred sites (talapurāṇams), devotional (bhakti) poetry, and hagiographies of teachers and saints (guruparamparās).¹ I argue that texts play a central role in the visual and notional content of the paintings, and demonstrate that the devotional traditions and sectarian identities expressed in the murals both express to their viewers, and expect of their viewers, knowledge of the literary traditions that inform them.

¹ All of these are complex literary genres, poorly expressed by the glosses given here. On the wide, but inadequate, use of the term hagiography to describe these texts, see Snell’s introduction in Winand M. Callewaert and Rupert Snell, eds., According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India, Khoj (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994).
During the period 1500-1800, talapurāṇams were the most popular subject of narrative representation in mural paintings. The talapurāṇam is a polysynthetic work that includes the history of the site, the activities of deities, saints, and important people at the site, and the names of the sacred tree, water source, and deities particular to the place. Literally, the word can be translated as “sacred ancient legend [or history]” (purāṇam) “of place” (talam); the talapurāṇam describes why the site is important and what is sacred therein. It is an incorporative genre that combines different genres of narrative, such as mythology, hagiography, and history. As a result, the precise definition of what constitutes talapurāṇam (Skt. sthalapurāṇa) is a subject of contention in scholarship on the subject.

Although a pan-Indian genre, scholars agree that the literary form of talapurāṇam is different in the Tamil region, whether written in Tamil, Sanskrit, or Telugu. The work of Jan Gonda is foundational in this regard and is quoted by almost all later scholars. Gonda argues that

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2 The Rāmāyana epic replaces talapurāṇam as the narrative most often depicted in later murals. The ubiquity of this narrative in later murals – particularly those associated with political power—is a subject that merits an independent study. I plan to take up this subject in the future.

3 The foregoing discussion draws on Tamil-language scholarship that seeks to define the genre. Many Tamil-language studies of literary history are, however, unconcerned with definitions. Arunachalam focuses on the authors of various purāṇas, not limiting his discussion to talapurāṇas, but including them among the broad genre of purāṇa. Kaṇṭappa Mutaliyār, meanwhile, lists purāṇas by title, and provides discussion of the content and date of the works, as well as the identity of the authors. Although he includes purāṇas written on the subject of place, the author does not distinguish these as fundamentally different from purāṇas written in praise of deities. Pālacuppiramaṇiyam, in his discussion of Nāyaka-period literature simply states that talapurāṇas are texts that describe temples, that praise a deity, and tell what is special about a place (“ik kālattīl vāñta pulavarkal tala purāṇāṅkaEl elutat talaippattān.Par kōyilkaip pāriyum ãravān eluntaruliyirukkum avvirūn sirappinaip pāriyum nūlkal talapurrāṇamāka mukīṭṭaṇā”). M Arunachalam, History of Tamil Literature through the Centuries: XV Century (Thiruchitrambala, Mayurm, Tanjore District: Gandhi Vidyalayam, 1969), 124–49; Pālil Kaṇṭappa Mutaliyār, Tamil Nūl Varaḷāru: A General History of Tamil Literature (Chennai: Āciriyar Nāṟṟapippuk Kaḷakam, 1962), 296–311; Ci Pālacuppiramaṇiyam, Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru, 2nd ed. (Chennai: Pāri Nilaiyam, 1967), 185.

the Tamil talapurāṇams are “a unique Tamil expression of Hinduism.”

David Shulman, similarly, writes that “these texts, whether composed in Sanskrit, Tamil, or in rare cases Telugu, embody a rich tradition of mythology unique to the Tamil area.” The nature of that uniqueness, for Shulman, lies in the importance of the local in Tamil texts—a point that will become important in my analysis of the paintings.

Hardy also understands the Tamil talapurāṇam to be a distinctive reflection of “cultural difference between the Tamil South and normative Hinduism, between two different approaches to life: one poetic-emotional, the other mythical.”

Kamil Zvelebil, too, states that Tamil talapurāṇam represents a distinct literary form from the Sanskrit genre of the same name.

While the fact of difference between the Tamil and Sanskrit expressions of this literary form are replicated throughout the scholarship on talapurāṇams, getting to the core of this distinction remains elusive, and is a fundamental problem. Moreover, the definition of what ‘counts’ as talapurāṇam is sharply divided between Tamil-language and English-language


7 Shulman writes, “The feature that most conspicuously distinguishes the Tamil myths from the classical corpus of Sanskrit myths is the persistent localization of the mythic action,” Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition, 40.

8 Hardy, "Ideology and Cultural Contexts of the Śrīvaishnava Temple," 150.

9 Zvelebil is further discussed below. Zvelebil highlights the fact that literary compositions on the fame of a place are not unique to Tamil, nor even to South Asia, but are associated even with European Christian sites such as Lourdes or Fatima. Zvelebil, "Tamil Sthalapuranas," 128. Also see Zvelebil’s other entries on Tamil talapurna in the following: Tamil Literature (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974), 170-92; Lexicon of Tamil Literature, Handbuch Der Orientalistik. Zweite Abteilung, Indien, 9 Bd. (Leiden [Netherlands] ; New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 638.

10 Harman argues that Sanskrit sthalapurana are distinct from Tamil talapurna because they are more like localized mahatmya, a literary work that praises a single site. He writes, “the mahatmya may be regarded as a more widely known and accepted sthalapurana. Frequently, a Sanskrit purana will contain collections of mahatmyas, although the distinctions between puranas and mahatmyas are not hard and fast either.” William Harman, “Two Versions of a Tamil Text and the Contexts in Which They Were Written,” Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies 5, no. 1 (1987): 2, ftnt.1.
scholarship. Those writing in Tamil conceptualize talapurāṇam as a relatively general term that describes different kinds of literature and even just sections of other kinds of texts, while it appears that for English-language scholars, talapurāṇam describes a narrow category of literature that is most concerned with the legends and mythology of a specific place.

V. Kirusnacami lists thirty-six different words for the literary genre, most of which are dismissed by Zvelebil as describing other types of literature. Of these, Kirusnacami states that purāṇam (ancient tale or legend; old, traditional history) is the most commonly used term; following this, varalāru (history) is the second most common; third, mānmiyam (treatise on the greatness of a sacred place); fourth, māhaṭmiyam (greatness; given in the Tamil Lexicon as a synonym of mānmiyam); and vācanam (reading, reciting, knowledge). Of these, varalāru and vācanam are always prose. Like Kirusnacami, Mātavan writes that there are many different kinds of talapurāṇam, with distinct forms and qualities, and which include different kinds of narratives. Mātavan particularly highlights the development of Tamil talapurāṇams, saying that although the stories first began as oral literature, they were then written in Tamil in verse (ceyyul naṭai). Beginning in the 11th century, talapurāṇams were translated in prose (urai naṭai) directly from Sanskrit, and then, for Śrī Vaiṣṇava audiences, were also written in manipravāla (a blend of Sanskrit and Tamil) beginning in the 13th century.

11 Kirusnacami, Tamilil Talapurana Ilakkiyam, 123; Zvelebil, "Tamil Sthalapuranas," 130.

12 All of the glosses are taken from the Tamil Lexicon.

13 Kirusnacami, Tamilil Talapurana Ilakkiyam, 123.

Zvelebil gives an enumeration similar to that of Kirusnacami in his article, *Tamil Sthalapuranas*, of the kinds of texts that fall within the realm of talapurāṇam.¹⁵ He states that all or most of these components should be present, though the ratio of each to the others differs between texts: 1. Historical legends; 2. Legends; 3. Myths; 4. Local tales; 5. Historical tales, and 6. Extraneous stories. Zvelebil states that the terms Kirusnacami offers for the different kinds of talapurāṇam are not synonymous with talapurāṇam. He writes,

…these terms may not cover the same thing; there seems to be differences which should be spelled out with exactitude by further research: thus, e.g., as far as we can now say, a full-fledge talapuraṇa would probably contain all narrative elements mentioned above with greater emphasis on myths, legends and local tales, whereas a varalaru is rather a sort of guidebook for the pilgrim, and the emphasis would be on historical legends, local historical accounts and extraneous matter; again, a makatmiyam [mahatmya] would rather be centered around a deity, albeit it would be around the local manifestation of the respective god or goddess.¹⁶

The definition of the genre is, then, at the very least an ill-defined problem. While all scholars identify the Tamil talapurāṇam as something different from both the Sanskrit sthalapurāṇa and māhātmya, none very clearly articulate the way in which this is so. Moreover, while all agree on this point, it would appear that scholars writing in Tamil are more likely to include a number of types of literature under the designation of talapurāṇam than are scholars who write in English. More importantly, Tamil-language scholarship suggest that the boundaries between genres are quite flexible, and that different kinds of works all belong to a single conceptual category, even if at the same time literary convention designates distinct – but overlapping – genres.

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¹⁵ Zvelebil relies heavily on Kirusnacami’s book. His article serves as a kind of critique and guide to the book, but also presents information from the book without citing Kirusnacami as the source. For instance, Zvelebil lists six “narrative components” of talapuraṇa, which also appear in Kirusnacami’s book, in the same order, with the same sublist of varieties of myths, and many of the other elaborations Zvelebil gives. Compare Zvelebil’s list on page 129 to Kirusnacami’s on pages 39-49.

¹⁶ Zvelebil, “Tamil Sthalapuranas.”130.
One of the genres that Tamil-language scholarship directly connects to talapurāṇic literature, but which English-language studies are more reticent to compare directly, is bhakti, or devotional, literature. This literary genre is usually understood to describe poetic works composed by devotees (bhaktas) of Śiva and Viṣṇu roughly belonging to the 6th to 9th centuries who would travel to the shrines of the gods and sing the praises of the god in each unique place.\(^{17}\) Studies of bhakti literature in both Tamil and English emphasize the strong association of its content with specific geographic places. Bhakti poems are noted for their role in developing regional consciousness, laying the ground for patterns of pilgrimage and the construction of large temples, as well as for the strong sense of devotion they convey. All these aspects of bhakti hymns that are highlighted by modern scholars are also characteristic, I argue, of talapurāṇams.

Like later talapurāṇam texts, bhakti poems address the physical specificity of the shrine and the deity who resides there. The geographic specificity of the poems reflects the fact that the love of place springs from the love of the god who dwells in that place, and is unique to that place.\(^{18}\) Peterson shows that in each of the songs in praise of Śiva, the saint “identifies Siva as belonging to a particular place—even to a specific temple in a place—and exuberantly sings of the virtues of the god in his unique persona at that shrine. Love of Tamil places pervades these

\(^{17}\) An overview of the genre, which includes not only the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints associated with its early development, but also later authors, including Muslims and Christians may be found in Tamil Literature, 88-116.

\(^{18}\) As Indira Peterson has noted, the songs represent the location of the shrines with “remarkable attention to geographical, topographical detail and accuracy.” Indira Viswanathan Peterson, “Lives of the Wandering Singers: Pilgrimage and Poetry in Tamil Saivite Hagiography,” History of Religions 22, no. 4 (1983). 344.
songs as much as love of Siva.” Devotion and veneration of the place is equal to that of the deity—this is a key point to which I shall return in the case studies below.

The bhakti hymns facilitated the formation of a “sacred geography” that is evident in later devotional practice, temple construction, and concepts of landscape, geography, and community. The fame that sacred sites garnered from their mention in the saints’ songs—“the devotional zeal of the saints and the “’publicity” value of their hymns”—significantly influenced later religious practices, particularly the construction of major temples that became loci of pilgrimage, as well as centers of cultural and economic activity. Spencer, in his article, *The Sacred Geography of the Tamil Saivite Hymns*, explicitly identifies the songs of the saints as a kind of advertisement for the temple. The saints’ songs praise the deity of the place, the physical shrine or temple, the geography in which it is situated, and are said to have been composed at the place of which it speaks. The geographic specificity of the songs allows Spencer to reconstruct


20 “[T]he nature of the love of Siva as an intensely emotional experience rooted in a particular place, and, as a necessary corollary to this experience, its expression in intensely emotional poetry, in song,” is characteristic of Tamil Saivite devotion. Peterson, "Lives of the Wandering Singers: Pilgrimage and Poetry in Tamil Saivite Hagiography," 356.

21 Dutta has an extremely engaging study of the importance of pilgrimage and the role of talapuruṇam in building community that shares a “spatial identity.” She writes that sthalapuranas “presented an integrative picture of the narrative and textual tradition of the community, viz., the hymnal tradition, the Sampradaya, the commentarial, hagiographical and liturgical traditions and contributed towards the reinforcement of the collective consciousness and identity of the community.” Ranjeeta Dutta, "Pilgrimage as a Religious Process: Some Reflections on the Identities of the Srivaisnavas of South India," *Indian Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (2010): 32.

22 “In the medieval period, the imperial temple became a center of culture, it legitimized and actualized the dynamics of kingship, it represented the evolution of Hinduism, and it served as an economic nucleus for imperial donation, leases, and trade.” Karen Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 77.

the movement of the saints and the perimeters of the geographic and devotional landscape they inhabited.

The extraordinary importance of place in poems conventionally understood as emotionally stirring expressions of devotion to God have great implications for the development of talapurāṇic literature. Talapurāṇams, which recount the deeds of the deity and devotees in a specific location, are distinct in tone from bhakti poems because they do not employ the language of emotion; they are factual and narrative. The first-person immediacy of bhakti poems is transformed to third person history in the talapurāṇam. Talapurāṇams draw on the discourse of sacred place developed by bhakti literature, which itself connotes the devotion and emotion that attends the sacred place for poet and devotee. Yet Talapurāṇams are most concerned with the temporal actions of the poet-saints at the site and their experience of the divine in that place. The verses do not simply reiterate the myths associated with the temple, but recount the actions of the saint who sang, dwelt, and worshipped there, or perhaps even interceded on a devotee’s behalf.24 These stories of the saint’s deeds become part of the story of the site itself. As the images of the saints are installed and worshipped at every temple, they also become a part of the visual program and ritual that represents and enacts the stories and history of the temple, as do rituals that are connected to the main deity and are specific to each temple.

The fame of a place spread through the songs and hagiographies of the saints who visited the site, which in turn promoted the shrine as a pilgrimage destination. The production of guides that described the exact geographical location of the shrines, which begin to be written in the 12th century, but like hagiographic and talapurāṇic literature, reach their apogee in the 16th and 17th century.

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centuries, are one indication that pilgrimage was increasingly popular.\textsuperscript{25} It is at this very same time that many of the temples in the Tamil region were renovated and expanded. Connecting the political context to temple construction and the production of talapurāṇic texts, Branfoot writes,

> The Nayaka period was marked by political instability and substantial temple construction, both in numbers and size. An element of this expansion was the composition of site-related mythological literature, the sthalapurāṇas…. The sacred site is dehistoricized in this literature and set in mythological time; rarely is there any mention of architecture. Though undoubtedly preceded by oral literature and now lost texts, the bulk of the sthalapurāṇas known today were written down exactly when so many temples were being expanded or founded, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\textsuperscript{26}

It is in this context—of political turmoil, temple construction, and increased literary activity related to sacred sites, hagiographies, and pilgrimage—that we must understand the popularity of the Tamil talapurāṇam in the Nāyaka period.

The two main religious movements in the Tamil region during this period have been mentioned obliquely up to this point, though the developments of both have major implications for the development of literature and visual art. Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, the history and development of which will be considered more fully below in conjunction with the paintings at Āḻvār Tirunakari, began to take shape textually, geographically, and ritually during the 11\textsuperscript{th} to 13\textsuperscript{th} centuries, though it grew out of the theological and devotional matrix provided in the poetry of the Āḻvārs (6-9\textsuperscript{th} centuries). The “territorial theology” evident in the Āḻvār’s poems puts significant emphasis on the particularity of place and the god in the place.\textsuperscript{27} In the fourteenth century,

\textsuperscript{25} Although it is very difficult to track the dates of these developments, the shape of development is discerned in reading broadly across studies of these different literatures. See Hardy 1977, Dutta 2010, Mātava 1995, Shulman 1983, Peterson 1994, Peterson 2005, Zvelebil 1992.

\textsuperscript{26} Branfoot, “Remaking the Past: Tamil Sacred Landscape and Temple Renovations,” 47.

\textsuperscript{27} “The bhakti of the Āḻvār is grounded in the local terrain: it is a territorial theology. The temple is extremely important in the bhakti, but Viṣṇu, the Lord in the temple, is also recognized as the one who is in the human heart and who, in the past, incarnated as Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, et al. It is to the Lord enshrined in the temple that they frequently express their words of surrender.” Vasudha Narayanan, The Way and the Goal : Expressions of Devotion in the
differences of interpretation, particularly with regard to the authority of texts and the nature of man’s relationship to god, resulted in a schism that produced two different sects within Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, Vaṭakalai and Teṅkalai. As Dutta shows, the competition between these two groups for adherents and donating pilgrims became increasingly important from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, motivating the production of talapurāṇams, guruparamparās, and hagiographies. Texts that praise sacred sites, as well as those that trace the histories and life stories of teachers and saints came to be especially meaningful for the promotion of particular sites and distinct communities.

The other main religious force at this time was the expansion and expression of Śaiva Siddhānta. Chief among the activities of Śaiva Siddhānta proponents during this period was the production of new texts as well as commentaries. In her work on bhakti in the Tamil region, Prentiss argues that the transformation of pan-Indian Sanskrit texts and Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy into one expressly local to the Tamil region was performed through the collection and re-presentation of Tamil bhakti texts and the production of new texts, resulting in the creation of a canon of uniquely Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta texts. Although her focus is not the production of talapurāṇic texts, Prentiss’ discussion of the influence of Śaiva Siddhānta on the writings of Umāpati Civarācārya, an extremely influential proponent and teacher (ācārya) of this


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28 Vaṭakalai Śrī Vaiṣṇavas acknowledge the authority of Vedanta Desika’s theology, and consider Sanskrit texts more authoritative than Tamil-languages texts, though acknowledge these as also important. Teṅkalai Śrī Vaiṣṇavas follow the theological interpretation of Pillai Lokācārya and his disciple, Maṇavāla Māmunikaḷ, and understand Tamil-language texts to have the same divine authority as Sanskrit texts. Teṅkalai Śrī Vaiṣṇavas believe that surrender to god and devotion is all that is required for salvation, while Vaṭakalai Śrī Vaiṣṇavas believe that it is through man’s own effort that he wins the grace of god.


30 Prentiss, _The Embodiment of Bhakti_. 
philosophy in the 13-14\textsuperscript{th} century, shows how Śaiva Siddhānta incorporated bhakti texts in order to enhance its own appeal. Umāpati Civarācārya, who left the priestly community of the Citamparam temple, nevertheless authored a talapurāṇam for Citamparam.\textsuperscript{31} Prentiss argues that the talapurāṇam written by Umāpati differs from its Sanskrit predecessor in that it downplays the authority of the temple and its priests, who disagreed with Umāpati on matters of theological and social philosophy and practice. Umāpati’s talapurāṇam, though laudatory of the temple, served as a platform from which to articulate a specific theological approach to the place of which it speaks whilst promoting a set of religious and social positions.

This same Umāpati was also the author of a Tamil-language text that describes the writing and canonization of the most important hagiographic text in the Tamil Śaiva tradition, the Periya Purāṇam, written by Cēkkilār in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century. In it, Umāpati constructs a history for the origin and reception of the text that emphasizes its divine inspiration as well as its firm location in Tamil literary, religious, and social cultures. Describing its presentation to the Chola king at the Śiva temple in Citamparam, Peterson writes,

For a whole year Cēkkilār expounded his completed hagiography to the king and to thousands of devotees gathered at the Siva temple in Chidambaram. Anapāya [the Chola king] was deeply moved, both by the saints' lives and by magnificent poem, in which the literary beauties of the classical epic genre (kāppiyam, Sanskrit kāvyā) blended with the edifying content and style of a purāṇam, a religio-historical narrative of great compass. He worshipped the author and the work, taking them in procession on an elephant around the streets of the shrine-centre. The PP [Periya Purāṇam] was hailed as the fifth Veda, pronounced the twelfth book of the Tamil Śaiva canon, engraved on copper plates, and placed before Siva in the Golden Hall of Chidambaram temple.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} Umāpati Civarācāriyar is an extremely important figure in the history of Tamil Śaivism. He authored eight of the fourteen śāstras revered in the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. He wrote hagiographies of Cēkkilār (and the writing and canonization of the Periya Purāṇam) and of Nampi Anṭār Nampi, an 11\textsuperscript{th}-century scholar who also wrote a hagiography of all the Śaiva saints.

Cēkkiḻar’s *Periya Purānam* blends different narrative modes, and combines hagiography of the saints with their *bhakti* poems and descriptions of the sites themselves. This work anticipates many of the developments in literature over the Nāyaka period, namely in works that praise saints and teachers (hagiographies or *gurupāramparās*), as well as place, through the redeployment of classical modes of literary composition.33

**Sites and Saints at Tirupputaimarutūr**

The paintings in the Tiruppuṭaimarutūr temple are found in the five levels of the single gopura of the temple, located on the eastern side of the temple complex in the second prākāra wall.34 A staircase ascends through the southern end of the tower, leading to each of the five stories. The interior of each level is a large, roughly rectangular room, with widow bays in the center of the east and west sides, creating eight additional wall surfaces in the overall cruciform plan of the space. Each of the six walls of the rectangle (excluding the window bays) is bisected by a pilaster, which is either carved and painted, or plastered over so as to create a large uninterrupted wall surface. Every wall surface of every room is painted, and I have identified seventeen positions in which the paintings to which I will refer are situated (Figure 65). Positions two, seven, ten, and fifteen are what I will term “major narrative walls.” These are the largest uninterrupted surfaces and usually contain continuous narratives that span the width of the wall in three to five horizontal registers; smaller walls are typically monoscenic, suggesting the narrative through the representation of a single well-known scene. Others represent single-scene vignettes, iconic renderings of deities, or decorative designs.

33 Indeed, analysis of inscriptions reveals a decrease in the recitation of bhakti texts; instead, patronage directed toward purānic composition is seen to rise. Karashima, Subbarayalu, and Shanmugan, "Maṭhas and Medieval Religious Movements in Tamil Nadu: An Epigraphical Study (Part 2)," 200.

34 The gopura of the outermost prākāra belongs to a later period and remains unfinished.
The woodwork in the tower is an integral part of the architectural composition and experience of the space. Beautifully carved pillars serve not only a structural function, but punctuate the space and frame the paintings. Every level contains richly carved pillars on either side of the two windows, as well as pillars supporting the central crossbeams. The carved and painted ceilings create a sense of solidity through the repetition of designs within a grid pattern, and a sense of rhythm and play through the variation of forms within the grid and in the brackets.

In this discussion I will concentrate only on the paintings in the first level of the gopura, some of which were included in Chapter Two as examples of topographic images. Of the four major narrative walls, two depict episodes from the lives of the Śaiva saints, Māṇikkavācakar and Campantar (positions 2 and 7), while the opposite major narrative walls (positions 10 and 15) illustrate important temples of the Tamil region. The smaller panels in the dormers depict Śiva, Viṣṇu, and sages. The paintings, which I believe belong to the early 16th century, reflect the preeminence of major texts remembered in the Śaiva Siddhanta tradition, foremost among which are the *Periya Purāṇam* and *Tiruvilaiyāṭal*, hagiographic and talapurāṇic texts, respectively. Māṇikkavācakar’s life and works are described in the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal*, a

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35 I propose a date earlier than almost all other scholars. I feel that the narrative content of the paintings makes the strongest argument for their dating, though this is an extended argument unwarranted here. The style is somewhat idiosyncratic, though close examples are found at Kaḻakkāṭu, as well as in the remnants at Iṟaikkal. The style relates most closely to Vijayanagara style, and therefore also accords with an earlier date. Nagaswamy 1979-80 dates the paintings variously (within a single article) to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Hariharan 1979, Dallapiccola 1996, and Deloche 2011 date the paintings to the 16th century. Guy 2009 dates them to the 17th century, while Michell 1995 dates them to the 18th century.

36 “The *PP [Periya Purāṇam]...* is a complete and systematic hagiography, a masterpiece of narrative art, and a literary classic of 'epic' proportions. Cekkilar's lives are fully developed, carefully structured poetic narratives, his saints, precisely situated in terms of social milieux and character traits. The *PP* remains the standard Tamil source for the lives of the Nāyaṅgārs.” Peterson, "Tamil Śaiva Hagiography," 196. Zvelebil claims that not only this is the earliest Tamil-language *purāṇa*, but that it is “in many respect [sic], the greatest” Tamil *purāṇa*. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 170.

37 The *Tiruvilaiyāṭal* was recorded by Perumparpuliyūr Nampi in the 12th century, and re-written by Paraṇcoti in the late 15th or early 16th century. Elaine Fisher has made an extremely thorough study of the history of this text, and
talapurāṇam of Maturai, as well as the Tiruvāṭavūrpurāṇam, a talapurāṇam written by Kaṭavunmakāmuṇivvar in the 14-15th century.\(^{38}\) Campantar’s life is described in Cēkkilār’s hagiography of the sixty-three nāyanmārs (Tamil Śaiva saints), the Periya Purāṇam, as well as in the Tiruvilaiyāṭal, where the stories concerning Māṇikkavācakar and Campantar constitute the final six of the sixty-four “sports” of Śiva. The section of the Periya Purāṇam that deals with the life of Campantar is by far the largest section, three times as long as the next longest section.\(^{39}\) These texts attest to the great importance placed on transmission of the stories of the Śaiva saints’ lives, as recorded in the Periya Purāṇam, and the sacred places on which the saints wrote the poems that comprise the sacred text of the Tēvāram. What is striking in the paintings of the first level of the gopura is the connection between these hagiographic and talapuranic texts, the texts authored by the saints described in the texts, and the subjects of the paintings, which not only depict the saints, but the sites about which the saints wrote. All of the topographic images I have identified are praised in the songs of Campantar, and many are also praised by Māṇikkavācakar.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{38}\) A brief overview of these texts and their content is made in Zvelebil, Tamil Literature, 176-83.

\(^{39}\) Zvelebil reports that the whole work is between 4253 and 4289 quatrains long, depending on the edition. Of these, the longest, 1256 quatrains, is addressed to the life of Campantar. The next longest concerns the life of Appar, and is only 429 stanzas in length. Tamil Literature, 174.

\(^{40}\) The first level of the gopura is unique in that it possesses wood-carved narrative panels adjacent to the ceiling. The narrative panels of the ceiling of the central area—the largest space—contains carved panels that scene for scene almost exactly match the painted version of the narrative in position 2, the story of the saint, Māṇikkavācakar, while the panels on the south side ceiling replicate the narrative of Kirāturjuna that is painted in position 15, in the north side of the room.
POSITION 2

The southwestern wall (position 2) contains four registers, each roughly fourteen inches in height (Figure 22). This panel depicts the story of the Śaiva saint Māṇikkavācakar. 41 A minister to the king in Maturai, Māṇikkavācakar is dispatched with the king’s money to buy horses. However, he spends the money to build a temple after Śiva appears to him as a guru and converts him to Śaivism. The angry king sends for Māṇikkavācakar and punishes him for misspending his money. Śiva demonstrates his superiority by intervening in the ensuing punishments of the minister-turned-devotee, until the King also recognizes the superiority of the god.

The first register depicts a king receiving a minister and presenting him with jewels. In the second register, the minister sets off, carried in a palanquin. Māṇikkavācakar is then shown prostrating himself before a Śiva temple. In the third register he gifts jewels to a Śaiva temple priest. In the next scene of the same register, Māṇikkavācakar meets a sage and his four disciples, all of whom hold palm-leaf manuscripts in their right hands (Figure 66); note that the figure of Māṇikkavācakar is shown twice on the left side of the scene). The sage is the lord Śiva, who takes Māṇikkavācakar as his disciple. In the fourth register, the narrative order seems to shift, reading right to left, rather than left to right. 42

In the first image of the fourth register, a figure wearing only a loincloth, his hair matted and worn piled up on head, is seen praying at a Śiva temple. The vimānam of this temple extends up in to the third register, pointing towards the guru to whom the minister is listening. The

41 See note 26 in Chapter One for discussion of the mention of this narrative in scholarship.

42 I have based this assessment of the flow of the narrative based on the direction in which the figures are shown walking and gesturing.
legend of Māṇikkavācakar identifies this guru as Śiva himself, who appeared to Māṇikkavācakar at Āvuṭaiyār Kōvil as a sage sitting under a Kuruntha tree, at which time Māṇikkavācakar sang the first hymn of the Tiruvācakam. Śiva then instructed the minister to use the king’s money to build a temple to Śiva. The temple in the fourth register, which points toward Śiva-as-guru above in the third register, may be understood as the temple Śiva instructed Māṇikkavācakar to build (Figure 67). The representation of this temple, however, is odd in that its vimānam is circular, rather than the Dravidian pyramidal style that is ubiquitous in the Tamil region. With its triple-tiered circular vimānam, devoid of decoration, and steeply pitched roof with individual tiles and a single kalaśa on top, this temple is clearly intended to be understood as different from the typical drāvida vimānam composed of tiers of alternating kūṭas and śālas, and topped by a domical or barrel-roofed structure, which is shown in all of the other paintings of temples here. If this is the story of Māṇikkavācakar, why is the temple clearly depicted as outside the Tamil temple tradition, and unlike the physical temple? In the fourth register, we see an ascetic—presumably Māṇikkavācakar—worshipping at the temple. An armed member of the king’s army approaches from the left, speaks to the ascetic, then forcibly takes him to the king, leading him by the arm. The ascetic speaks to the king, and then again is led away by two soldiers who grab hold of each arm. The last scene depicts the king speaking with the ascetic.

43 See Dehejia, Slaves of the Lord: The Path of the Tamil Saints.

44 The question of why the temple is depicted in a style not shown elsewhere in the paintings, and which represents a style of temple not commonly found in the region associated with the narrative is an interesting one. The temple founded by Manikkavacakar is located in the town of Tirupperuntugai is well within the Tamil region, and is a typical drāvida-style temple. The Nārumpūnātavāmi temple, in which these paintings are located, is itself also a typical example of drāvida architecture. The location of the temple, however, is a region contested by rulers of both Kerala and Tamil regions, and is culturally a mix of Keralan and Tamil traditions. The painter may well have been influenced by local, albeit more westerly, architectural forms. Circular vimānas are seen more commonly in Kerala. However, they are found in Tamil Nadu, as at the contemporary shrine of Ajakar in Ajakarkōvil near Maturai. See Michell for an overview of these forms and styles. Michell, Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States.
There are some inconsistencies that make a positive identification of these paintings as the story of Māṇikkavācakar difficult. The point of high drama in the story, when horses turn into jackals that eat the other horses in the king’s stable, or when Māṇikkavācakar is punished, are usually included in paintings of this story; later paintings of this story at Citamparam and Āvuṭaiyār Kōvil, for instance, both devote large panels to the violence the king experiences when he distrusts and punishes Māṇikkavācakar. There is, however, support for the identification of this panel as Māṇikkavācakar when viewed alongside the content of the narrative and iconic images of the rest of the room: The second narrative wall of this level is given totally to the depiction of saint Campantar’s miraculous works in Maturai, which is also recounted in detail in Cēkkilār’s *Periya Purāṇam* and in the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam*. The other two narrative walls, on the east side, mainly depict important Śaiva temples, and thus share a single subject matter, as well as emphasize the importance of the temple as an endowed site belonging to a network of other temples, and connected to the saints. The temples on the facing walls are without exception praised by Campantar, and some are also praised by Māṇikkavācakar. Assuming a correspondence between the subjects of the two narrative walls of the western side and their relationship to the major narrative walls of the east side, it is likely that the first wall depicts a saint, or at least a revered figure in the history of Śaivism. Since this panel is the first one sees when emerging from the staircase, and thus serves as an introduction to the space, it follows that the narrative would have been considered important to the temple donors or devotees. Certainly, Māṇikkavācakar is one of the major figures of the Śaiva tradition, but perhaps the emphasis on

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45 Māṇikkavācakar is, however, excluded from the set of sixty-three Nāyanmārs. The reasons for Māṇikkavācakar’s exclusion are discussed in Peterson, "Tamil Śaiva Hagiography," 196.
the importance and merit of donation to Śiva temples was also seen as an apt introduction to what was certainly a significant act of patronage.

**Position 7**

The second major narrative panel depicts the life of Campantar. Campantar is one of the *Mūvar*, literally *The Three*. This term designates the three saints who became most important in the Tamil Śaiva Siddhanta tradition; the other two saints are Appar and Cuntarar. The three figures receive the majority of Cēkkiḻār’s consideration in the *Periya Purāṇam*, within which the section devoted to the life of Campantar is the longest by far. The mural’s narrative proceeds through three registers in six parts, as the painted space is bisected by a pilaster that protrudes five inches from the surface of the painting. (Figure 68) This physically divides the narrative scenes, though the story continues across the pilaster in each of the three registers. The figures are large, eighteen to nineteen inches in height, and drawn without much background, decoration, or crowding. Unlike the previous narrative wall, this depiction of Campantar compares favorably to later depictions of the same, including the tests the king sets between the Jains and Campantar, and the gory impaling of the Jains when they fail to impress. However, unlike textual narrations of the story, the visual narrative ends not with king Kulasekara’s conversion from Jainism to Śaivism, but with the bloody impaling of the Jains; the painter has left the resolution of the story to the viewer’s imagination.

Compared to all the other narrative

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46 Although Maṇikkavācakar is not included as a saint alongside the other nāyanmars (Śaiva saints), together the four figures are revered as the *Nālvar, The Four*.

47 Although there is not space to discuss it in this paper, an interesting question for further research is why the patron or artist chose to exclude important components of the narrative from both Maṇikkavācakar and Cambandar’s story. It is not just a detail that is missing, but a whole component of the narrative; in the former, the rising action to the climax of the story, and in the latter, all reference to the conclusion has been omitted. Both of the stories eschew depiction of the moment when the king unequivocally recognizes Śiva as supreme. This, I am tempted to suggest, is a function of the patronage of the paintings, an issue I hope to address more fully in a future project.
panels, the composition is simple and unembellished. The interest of the artist is concentrated fully on expressing the story rather than creating a complex composition. The didacticism implied by heavy emphasis on the narrative raises the question of the function of the paintings, a point I hope to take up more fully in a future project.

**POSITION 10**

The third major narrative wall (Position 10) is also bisected by a decoratively carved pillar, with three registers on each side of the pillar, which creates six discrete compositional spaces (Figure 69); these were introduced in Chapter Two. As I demonstrated there, the iconography of each temple depicted is very specific, suggesting that a particular temple is the subject of each topographic image. All the topographic images that I have identified as particular Śiva temples are praised in the Nālvar’s hymns collected in the Ēvāram, which comprises the first section of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta canon, the Tirumugai. The Tirumugai includes all the hymns of the saints as well as Čekkilār’s hagiography of the saints, the Periya Purāṇam. All of the sites depicted in these paintings are praised in the hymns of Campantar, the first of the Nālvar.

The first register of the left side shows the Śrī Jambukēśvara Akhilandesvari temple in Tiruvānaikkā (Figure 50). This temple is praised in the hymns of all four of the Nālvar: Campantar, Appar, Cuntarar, and Māṇikkavācakar. One further support for the identification of this temple as the Jambukēśvara temple is that the temple is located on the island of Śrī Raṅkam; the famous Viṣṇu temple of Śrī Raṅkanātāsvāmi is also located on this island, and is, I believe, depicted in the second register of this panel.

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48 It also includes other hymns and hagiographies. A brief description of the text may be found in Zvelebil, Tamil Literature, 91.
The Śrī Raṅkanātāsvāmi temple at Śrī Raṅkam, depicted in the second register, is the only temple represented here that contains a Viṣṇu image. It is shown with its entrance on the right side of the painting, whereas all the Śiva temples have their entrances on the left side; perhaps this refers to the fact that the temple is oriented to the south, rather than the east, which is more typical. Viṣṇu as Raṅkanāta reclines on Ādiśeṣa, with a lotus emerging from his navel on which Brahma is seated (Figure 70). A single priest performs aarthi, while two men and a woman stand behind in worshipful attention. Beyond, three musicians play their instruments. Left of the shrine stand three men, palms together in worship, as in all the other paintings. Although the Śeṣāśayī form of Viṣṇu is not limited to the Śrī Raṅkam temple, the association of this image with that temple is justified not only because it is depicted next to the Jambukēśvara temple, to which in reality it is closely situated, but because it is the most famous and most important of the temples that house this form of the deity.49 This set of paintings depicts famous temples, so it is unlikely this painting would refer to a more obscure temple.50

The three temples depicted on the right side of the central pillar of this wall are more elaborate than those on the left, and are replete with bāli pīṭam (sacrificial altar), stambha (flag post), and goddess shrine. There are no female devotees depicted in these temples, though there are female dancers in the temples of the second and third registers.

The first register of the right side depicts a large temple decorated with delicate pillars, a Śivalinga inside, and a separate goddess shrine, to the right of which is a large stand of bamboo,  

49 The image here does not show the gilded vimana that would secure a positive identification of this temple as Śrī Raṅkam. There are countless other temples across Tamil Nadu in which this form of Viṣṇu presides. However, for the reasons stated above, this seems to me the most likely identification.

50 I believe that the patron of these paintings was closely involved with the Śrī Raṅkam temple. I hope to publish a separate work on the paintings and patronage of this temple that will demonstrate my findings in this regard.
probably represents the Nellaiyappar temple in Tirunelveli (Figure 51). This temple is praised in the *Tirumuṟai* only in the hymns of Campantar.\(^5\)\(^1\)

The second register of the right side shows the Kurrālanātar Śiva temple at Kurrālam, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, is iconographically identified through the waterfall depicted on the far right and the distinctive jack trees (Figure 52). This temple is praised only in the hymns of Campantar and Māṇikkavācakar.\(^5\)\(^2\)

The third register shows the Maturai Mīnākṣī Amman temple (Figure 53). The iconography of this temple includes white elephants supporting the roof of the Cokkanāṭan (Cuntarēśvara, Śiva) shrine, which is explained in story of Indra’s Moksha in the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam* (a talapurāṇam of Maturai), a story that is repeated in a narrative sequence in the third level of the gopura. (*The Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam* also narrates the stories of Māṇikkavācakar and Campantar that are depicted on the opposite walls.) This temple, identified in the *Tēvāram* as Ālavāy, is praised in the *Tirumuṟai* by Campantar, Appar, and Māṇikkavācakar.

**POSITION 15**

The fourth narrative panel, like the third, is also divided into two halves, though broken not by a pilaster but by the changing background color of the paintings, or with a framing element such as a tree (Figure 71). The right half of the narrative wall relates the *Kirāṭārjunīyam*.\(^5\)\(^3\) The left half of the wall, on which I will focus, again contains a single Śiva

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\(^5\)\(^1\) Throughout, I have consulted the work of the Digital *Tēvāram* sponsored by the Institut Français de Pondichéry and the École française d’Extême-Orient at http://www.ifpindia.org/ecrire/upload/digital_database/Site/Digital_Tevaram/INDEX.HTM.

\(^5\)\(^2\) The sites associated with Māṇikkavācakar are listed and described at http://www.templenet.com/Saints/maanikka.html.

\(^5\)\(^3\) The *Kirāṭārjunīyam* is an epic poem written by Bhāravi in the 6th century and based on an episode in the *Mahābhārata* in which Ārjuna fights Śiva in the guise of a kirāṭa, a forest-dweller. Although relevant to the topic
temple in each of the three registers. The temple in the first register has a large gopura but no goddess shrine. There are four visually-prominent fruit-laden palm trees depicted around the temple (Figure 72). One possible identification for this temple is the Sri Vedapurśvara Temple at Tiruvottūr, Ceyyāru, near Kanchipuram. The tree that is sacred here is a group of four palm trees that represent the four Vedas, which Śiva taught at this place. Campantar is the only saint among the Nālvar whose poems praise this place. It is said that when Campantar sang here, the palm trees turned from barren male trees to fruit-bearing female trees. In the painted image here, the temple is not only suggested by the its sacred trees, but by the fruiting of the trees, which point to the poet-saint who praises the site, causing the trees to flower.

The importance of place, as seen in the hymns of the saints such as Māṇikkavācakar and Campantar, who promoted specific sites as particularly holy and helped to develop a “sacred geography” of the Tamil country, is very much in evidence here. Both talapurāṇams and accounts of the saints’ lives were produced and circulated preceding and during the era of the paintings execution; these also appear in the paintings. The topographic images opposite the visual narratives of the saints’ lives and works depict temples praised by these saints, and of the temples I have identified, every one is praised in the hymns of Campantar. The depiction of specific places associated with the saints and the worship of Śiva was clearly important to the people who commissioned and viewed these paintings.

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considered in this chapter, I have eschewed discussion of the text and its depiction here because, well, one has to draw the line somewhere. This story is also famously depicted in the murals at Lepakshi. See Indira Viswanathan Peterson, Design and Rhetoric in a Sanskrit Court Epic: The Kirātārjuniya of Bhāravi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); T.N. Ramachandran, "The Kiratarjuniyam, or Arjuna's Penance in Indian Art," Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art 18(1950-51).
TEXTS AND TEMPLES IN THE NĀYAKA PERIOD

The hymns of the saints experienced a renaissance in the Nāyaka period partly due to the encouragement of pilgrimage and sectarian promotion by maṭams, confraternal and largely monastic institutions, which were responsible for the patronage of texts that praised the sacred sites, as well as the saints and teachers associated with them. Scholarship’s explanations for the apparent popularity of talapurānic literature, produced in Tamil from the first decade of the twelfth century, but truly popular only beginning in the sixteenth, generally point to the texts’ ability to articulate and consolidate communal identity, particularly in the face of a changing political and religious landscape in the Tamil region in the at this time. Chief among such stimuli for change is the influence of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy and associated maṭams, which began to be established in the twelfth century, and by the sixteenth century, had become preeminent sources of patronage and sites of literary production. David Shulman emphasizes the role of maṭams in the production of texts during this period and explicitly links the rise of Śaiva maṭams to the increased production of purānic literature. He writes,

The golden age of purānic composition in Tamil begins in the sixteenth century. There are earlier purāṇas extant, such as the Koyiṟpurāṇam of Umāpaticivācāriyar (early fourteenth century), a close adaptation of the Čidambaramāhātmya, and the “old” Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam (on the Maturai shrine) by Pēṟumparappuliyūṟūnampi….But it was only in the sixteenth century that purāṇas began to be composed on a wide scale—a process that has continued right up to the present day….The sixteenth century also witnessed the establishment of two of the most prominent surviving Śaiva mutts (Tamil maṭam, Sanskrit maṭha) in Tamiḻnātu, at Tarumapuram and Tiruvāvaṭuturai; this fact is closely related to the

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54 Cu. Venkatraman, as reported by Harman, also links the production of talapurāṇams to early Christian efforts to convert Hindus. He notes that in the areas near Tirunelveli, Cuddalore, Maturai and Nagapattinam, where there were concerted efforts towards conversion, in a fifty-year period at least twenty-one new talapurāṇams were composed, “many focusing on the wrath of Śiva visited upon those who forsake him.” Harman, "Two Versions of a Tamil Text and the Contexts in Which They Were Written."
vogue in purāṇas noticeable from this period, for a majority of these works were composed by scholars associated with these institutions of religious learning. Members of maṭams were the primary patrons and authors of talapurāṇams and guruparamparās, chronicles describing a lineage of teachers and students, both of which powerfully emerge in this period as texts that promote particular sects, maṭams, and temples.

Maṭams, charged with the administration of major temples, were naturally interested in promoting the fame and maintaining the importance of the sites under their control to pilgrims, devotees, and potential donors. Koppedrayer’s study of the Dharmapuram maṭam is suggestive of the operation of similar institutions during this period:

By the early 18th century, the Dharmapuram Adhinam was one of several non-Brahmin centres that were being given administrative control over land or income endowments (kaṭṭalais) made to temples for the upkeep of specific daily rituals. In the grants that marked this distribution of authority, the head of the lineage was named in the capacity of adhikārī, an office which oversaw the administration of the endowment and ensured the rituals took place. These kaṭṭalais effectively controlled the resources needed to maintain the temple rituals and thus figured importantly in the existence of the temple as an economic institution in pre-colonial south India. Rights to oversee these endowments were often allotted by members of the dominant group in a locality and thus guaranteed the groups controlling and administering the endowments significant economic and political power.

As Kopperday suggests, the production of talapurāṇams may have been stimulated by the economic gain derived from the popularity of a site. Koppedrayer particularly highlights the fact

55 Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths : Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition, 32.

56 In early modern South India, maṭhas and royal courts were the two most powerful institutions, and both major patrons of art and literature. Maṭhas not only supported the composition of Tamil and Sanskrit literature, but provided the forum in which scholars, writers and poets from all over South India could meet, no matter their religious affiliations. Sascha Ebeling, Colonizing the Realm of Words : The Transformation of Tamil Literature in Nineteenth-Century South India, Suny Series in Hindu Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 59-60. Also see Pālacuppiramaniyam for a description of the importance of Śaiva maṭams for the promotion of Tamil literature during the Nāyaka period. He gives a description of the major figures associated with each maṭam and reports the major works credited to that maṭam. Pālacuppiramaniyam, Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru, 197-205.


that single *matams* sponsored numerous texts on the same sites, and that these sites were often those administrated by the those very institutions that sponsored their texts, even if they were not geographically proximate. The talapurāṇic texts sing the praises of a specific place, enhance its status, create a flow of pilgrims, and may also have been used to promote and legitimate structures of social, economic, and political power.

**Talapurāṇam and Matam Patronage at Maṭavār Valākam**

The paintings of the Vaittiyanātar temple at Maṭavār Valākam depict the narrative talapurāṇam of the temple, as well as a topographic schematic image of the temple, and an image of a festival and procession of the deities at this temple. I will argue that the axial arrangement of the three thematic sections of the painting — the iconic images god Śiva in his divine abode, his manifestation and worship at Maṭavār Valākam in narratives of the *talapurāṇam*, and finally the image of the temple itself and its deities’ procession — make the argument visually that the god atop Mt. Kailas at the center of the cosmos is the same as the god in the inner sanctum of the temple. The paintings of the talapurāṇam function both narratively and formally to communicate the essence of the Tamil talapurāṇam: to locate the cosmic in the immediate.

I have been able to locate two tellings of stories connected to the temple’s talapurāṇam. The first is the current pilgrim’s guide I purchased at the temple in January 2011. This slim text includes descriptions of the twenty-one “sports” (*tiruviḷaiyāṭal*) of Śiva at this site; description of the temple, its environs, and history; a schedule of daily worship and annual festivals; descriptions of the hymns sung by the *Nāḷvar* about this site; and the benefits to be won by

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60 Celvakumār and Koṇṭalvaṇṇaṇ, *Srīvi Vaittiyanātar*. 
worshipping Śiva here. This text, though it contains elements of the temple’s talapurāṇam, does not claim to be such a text. Moreover, the order and content of the stories it contains are at odds with those in the paintings, as well as those in earlier known talapurāṇic texts associated with the temple. Koṅguṭiyāṇṭi’s 1969 telling of the Maṭavār Valākam talapurāṇam states that it is based on Vaiṭtiyaliṅka Piḷḷai’s Putuvaittalapurāṇam, written in 1902, which may have been based on a work written “about 300 years before” by Tiruccirrampalam Tēcikar.61 Koṅguṭiyāṇṭi makes it clear in his introduction that his publication attempts only to relate the legends (purāṇakkataikaḷ) connected to the place, not the historical information found in other works.62 This book, he writes, intends to convey the greatness (makimai) of the god in the place (mūrti), the water source (tīrttam), and the site itself (talam).63 These, we will see, were also the main concerns of those who created the visual rendition of the talapurāṇam on the ceiling of the temple’s mahamaṭṭapā, which stylistically belongs to the late 17th century.64 We may bear in mind that maṭams were principal patrons and authors of textual talapurāṇams; in this case, the named members of the maṭam are at the very least the patrons of the temple’s visual talapurāṇam.65


62 Interestingly, though based on a talapurāṇam (the Putuvai Talapurāṇam) and consisting of purāṇic stories (purāṇa kataikaḷ), Koṅguṭiyāṇṭi titles his book a history of place (tala varalāru). The point is germane to the discussion that opened this chapter; namely, the diversity of opinion over what constitutes a talapurāṇam, and how different works ought to be named. In the interest of someday finishing this dissertation, I will, however, leave further discussion of this example for another day.


64 This would make the visual talapurāṇam roughly contemporaneous with the textual talapurāṇam that Koṅguṭiyāṇṭi mentions. Because the paintings and their inscriptions so obviously rely on a text, the paintings must postdate the production of the text, written “about 300 years” before the second text Koṅguṭiyāṇṭi mentions, published in 1902.

65 Shulman also draws attention to the link between talapurāṇam and maṭas. He writes, “But it was only in the sixteenth century that purāṇas began to be composed on a wide scale—a process that has continued right up to the present day. The sixteenth century also witnessed the establishment of two of the most prominent surviving Śaiva mutts…this fact is closely related to the vogue in puranas noticeable from this period, for a majority of these works
The paintings are found on the ceiling of the mahāmaṇṭapa in the central aisle that connects the eastern gateway entrance to the second enclosure of the temple, on axis with the shrine of Śiva at the center of the temple (Figure 73). There are donative inscriptions in each of the first five registries. These inscriptions tell us that the first image was donated by the head of a non-Brahmin head of a Śaiva maṭam, while those in the succeeding registers each document donation by a man whose title indicates that he was probably also a member of the maṭam. The inscriptions and images clearly connect the maṭam associated with the temple to the visual narrative of the talapurāṇam in the murals.

The ceiling is divided into three main parts: western, center, and eastern. The central and eastern paintings are in poorer condition and much less legible than those in the west. The images arranged around the sculptural panel in the center of the maṇṭapa ceiling show the temple deities in procession; the accompanying inscriptive registers are now illegible. The eastern side of the maṇṭapa, like the western side, is composed of horizontal narrative registers separated by bands of inscription. However, the plaster in the east end has completely fallen away, and those portions near the center are extremely fragmentary. While the identification of some narratives is possible, those further to the east are lost.

The cycle commences with an image of Mount Kailas, home of Śiva in the Himalayas. In this large panel, Śiva is seated with two consorts and his two children, Murugan and Vinayakar (Figure 74). This mountain, although a geographic site that one can visit and inhabit, is at the same time an imagined site: the center of the cosmos, the axis mundi. In this image, Śiva is seated atop the snowy mountain, where ascetics and fantastic creatures dwell. To the right and

were composed by scholars associated with these institutions of religious learning. Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition, 32.
left are the sun and moon, the other gods in flying vehicles, saints and devotees on the right, dancers, musicians, and heavenly beings on the right and left. Supporting the mountain are Śiva’s attendant gaṇas, snakes, and white elephants, which are believed to support the world. This iconic image, at the head of the cycle of narrative paintings, is an invocation of the supreme Lord who resides in his mountain home at the center of the cosmos. The following paintings and text of the temple’s talapurāṇam articulate in visual terms the theological paradox that the deity in the temple is the very same as the supreme deity – in this case Śiva – who resides in the center of the cosmos, and that this temple is thus also the cosmic center.

Immediately following the Kailas panel, three narratives are presented in two registers each. The stories tell of the god Sūrya, the saint Durvāsa, and the sages Pantañjali and Vyāghrapāda worshipping Śiva at Maṭavārvalākam. The next two registers show Śiva as Vaittiyanātar at the Maṭavārvalākam temple and the great annual festival that occurs there. The registers are separated by thick black fields, most of which are filled with white Tamil-language inscriptions. These describe the action in the images directly below them. The language of the inscriptions relates closely in form to talapurāṇam chapter headings, where the number heading is followed by a short description of events to follow in the poetic verses below. Each of the narratives in the murals likewise begins with an inscription giving a number heading followed by a short description of events to come. Thus in the mural’s talapurāṇam the conventions of textual talapurāṇam are retained. However, the short phrases inscribed alongside the paintings merely

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66 The idea of an image such as this serving as an invocation stems from my study of allied forms of painting, such as scrolls and kalamkari, that consistently begin with an image of Ganapati, and if text is present, and invocation to Ganapati at the start of the image cycle. Formally and conceptually, it follows an established pattern of image-making in south India to begin with an invocatory image.

67 A careful discussion of this topic, with special reference, however, to its development in Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology after the 12th century, may be found in Hardy, “Ideology and Cultural Contexts of the Śrīvaiśṇava Temple.” This theme is again taken up in Chapter 5, particularly with regard to the (Śaiva) paintings at Avuṭṭayār Kovil.
summarize the action of the paintings, and are almost certainly not quoted from a text.

Nevertheless, according to this temple’s talapurāṇam, twenty-one sacred sports of Śiva (tiruviḻaiyāṭal) occurred here at Maṭavār Vaḷākam. It is these that are illustrated in the paintings.68

The first two registers narrate the story of the sun god, Śūrya, worshipping Śiva (Figure 75). Both of the registers read from right to left. The fragmented text of the rightmost textbox reads, First: The Sacred Sport of granting salvation to Śūrya; Presiding on Mt. Kailas; giving grace at Putuvai on earth.69 Putuvai is an old name for the town in which this temple is situated. As noted above, this kind of heading is found in poetic Tamil talapurāṇams, which give a numbered heading, followed by a short description of the following narrative. In Celvakumār’s and Koṇraiyāṇṭi’s texts, Sūrya goes to Kailasa, and tells Śiva that he has become thin, following Śiva’s command that he circle the earth for eternity.70 Sūrya says that he needs to see Śiva to receive his grace and salvation. Śiva immediately comes to Maṭavār Vaḷākam and takes form as a linga, here described to be like the mountain Kailasa. He tells Sūrya, “Come and worship me, and you will get salvation.” Celvakumār’s text adds that in the eclipse of the sun, Śiva creates the Vaṇṇi tree, the tree sacred to the temple.71 This is shown in the paintings in the second register.

68 There are discrepancies between the paintings’ stories and those printed in the contemporary pilgrims’ guide, including both the number assigned to the story, as well as the content of the stories. However, the order of the stories matches that of Koṇraiyāṇṭi’s text. Although the stories are not exactly the same between Koṇraiyāṇṭi’s text and the paintings, the gist of the story remains the same.

69 The inscription is damaged and therefore incomplete. The text that remains reads, Mutilāvatu cūriyāṇukku mutti koṭutta…[tiruvilaiyāṭal kayilaiyaippileṭuntaruliyiru…pūlokattil putuvai…

70 According to Celvakumār’s guide, this is the 9th of Śiva’s sacred games at the site, not the first. The discrepancies between the paintings’ stories and those in the temple’s recent talapurāṇam are vast, including not only the number assigned to the story, but the content of the stories as well. This is, however, the first of the tiruvilaiyāṭals related in Koṇraiyāṇṭi’s text.

71 This is at variance with Koṇraiyāṇṭi’s text, which states that when Śūrya achieves moksha, he sheds tears of joy and falls to worship Śiva. Upon rising, he sees a forest of vaṇṇi trees spread in all the eight directions. Śiva says that
These details – the linga like the cosmic mountain Kailasa, and the tree’s creation resulting from the Sun’s worship of the linga/axis mundi/Kailasa—are all examples of the way in which the cosmic or translocal are localized in the mythology of the place.

The second scene of the first register shows an anthropomorphic image of Śiva seated with his consort (Figure 76). The inscription above reads, As the God and goddess are residing in Putuvai, the goddess asks the god to provide water so that everyone may live. Hearing this, Śiva created the Ganga.72 The Ganga refers to the sacred Ganges River in northern India, but at this temple one of the two water tanks at the temple is known as the Śiva Ganga. Lehman writes that in the Indic conception of the cosmos, it is water, and specifically the Ganga, that is a direct physical connection between the cosmic center (Kailas) and earth. Wherever the sacred Ganga flows, there is a direct connection to Kailas. This renders the temple complex into which it flows a “ritually adequate microcosm.”73 The Ganga is at times personified as a woman and regarded as a consort to Śiva. Ganga is generally understood to flow from the heavens to earth, but as the force would be too strong for the earth to bear, Śiva breaks Ganga’s fall in his hair, from which she continues her descent to earth. In the painting, Ganga’s head emerges from the left side of Śiva’s topknot; water pours from her, over Śiva’s hair, and into the temple tank beside them. In this prelude to the narrative, the artist has given a river of pan-Indian fame a local home and origin – a translocation of sacred tīrthas, literally crossings, characteristic of talapurāṇic

he will abide in this this place of divine wisdom (nānattalam) under the shade of the vaṇṇi trees. Koṇṇaiyāṇṭi, Śrivilliputtūr Maṭavār Valākam Ennūm Pūtuvaittala Varalāṟu, 11.

72 cuvāmiyum ammaṭum putuvaiyile[lantaruli]navuṭane ammaṭ cāmiyaip pāṭṭu cakalarum piḷaiikkum poruṭṭāka yaru tīrṭa muniṭāka vēnumēnṟu keṭṭavujage cāmi keṇ[kai]matt ci va keṇkaiyākkigatu

literature. The story has thus far established the reason that Śiva became manifest at the site (in order to receive the worship of Sūrya), and the reason for the water tank at the site (to give life to those who dwell there). The story also provides the reason for the presence of the tree sacred to the site, which we see in the first scene of the second register.

In this first scene, we see Surya worshipping the Śivalinga as a ray of light turns to a shower of gold over the god’s image (Figure 77). The inscription above states, *Śūrya Bhagavan bathed [abhiṣeka] the god Putuvai Nāyakar with light.* In the following scene, the Śivalinga stands alone among five trees: one rises directly over the god, while two others stand on either side. Here we read, *The seed of light that bathed the god spread in all the four directions and became vāṇṇi trees* [in the image, we actually have five directions: North, South, East, West, and Up].

The story of Sūrya culminates on the left side of the second narrative register. On the right side of the scene, Śiva and his consort are shown as icons facing the viewer—Śiva in the form of a linga, and the goddess in anthropomorphic form. On the left, the temple tank balances the composition (Figure 78). There is no representation of Sūrya, nor is there any action in the image. The text above states that due to worshipping Śiva, Sūrya was absorbed into the linga: it is precisely the physical absence of Sūrya that the image is meant to portray. Yet even in the

74 *Putuvai nāyakarai sūriyapakavān kirānāvināle apiṭekam panninatu.* See the note above for how this differs from both of the texts I have consulted that relate this narrative.

75 This reflects a broader genre of mythology concerning cosmogony, with the temple or sacred site at its center. As Meister writes, “Legends of cosmogonic origination in India often spoke of the created universe as spreading from a point in the four cardinal directions, thus forming a square.” Michael Meister, “Symbology and Architectural Practice in India,” in *Sacred Architecture in the Traditions of India, China, Judaism and Islam,* ed. Emily B. Lyle, *Cosmos* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 6.

76 The Tamil reads, *cūriyapakavān civārcanai makattu vattināle civalinkattile ayakkamānatu.*
absence of the devotee, the god remains physically present in his form particular to the site, under the vaṇṇi tree, and beside the Śiva Ganga water tank.

In this first story in the cycle of talapurāṇam paintings on the ceiling of the great hall of the temple, the artist introduces all three components required of a sacred site. First, the reason and form of Śiva’s manifestation at this site; second, the origin and name of the water source at the site; and third, the origin and name of the tree sacred to the site. It is these three components that, according to Shulman, are necessary component parts of the sacred site of the temple: a water source, a tree, and a rock (the mūrti).\footnote{For the symbolism of these three elements, see especially Shulman, \textit{Tamil Temple Myths : Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition}, 40-47.} The mūrti is in this case the Śivalinga, which is itself, like the tree, a representation of the \textit{axis mundi}, that which marks \textit{this place} as the center of the ordered cosmos, and the element that binds the heaven to the earth and to the underworlds.\footnote{Summing up the symbolism of these elements, Shulman writes, “Thus the tree, like the stone image of the deity, or its analogue, the mountain found in some shrines, represent the vital link between the shrine and the transcendent worlds above and below; but the symbolism of the tree is more complex because of the tree’s implicit association with primeval chaos and the notion of a violent birth and growth. In this association there is a close ties between the tree and the sacred waters, which reach the shrine from the dark world of Pātāla and which, like the tree, are confined and thus controlled by the ordered universe of the shrine. Together, all these elements constitute a regulated microcosm, or an “ideal landscape” of water, rock and tree.” \textit{Tamil Temple Myths : Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition}, 47.} In his study of Tamil Śaiva talapurāṇams, Shulman shows that the myths “illustrate the prime importance of \textit{place}. Each shrine sees itself as the only center of the universe, the one spot that is directly linked to heaven and the nether world; the deity of the shrine can hardly be moved from a spot endowed with this characteristic.”\footnote{\textit{Tamil Temple Myths : Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition}, 55.} In the three registers we have considered, we see the descent of the god from the cosmic center (Mt. Kailas) to his manifestation at the site as the Śivalinga, and his creation of the water source and tree sacred to the temple. The divine presence is made meaningful through story.
The following narrative registers likewise relate stories connected to the worship of Śiva at this place, and the grace or salvation that is won by the devotee who worships him here. The next two narrative registers relate a story of the saint Durvāsa, a character who appears in many stories throughout India (Figure 79). Durvāsa is a powerful but fearsome yogi, for he is known to anger quickly. At Maṭavārvalākam, Śiva bestows his grace on Durvāsa by granting him the quality of peacefulness (sānta kuṇam).

The viewer is introduced to the new story in the first inscription on the right (south) side of the third narrative register, which reads, Second: The Tiruvilaiyāṭal of Durvāsa’s Puja: God and Goddess preside over Kailasa; Durvāsa requests the boon of peace; Śiva tells him to go to earth and worship him.80 The accompanying image shows Śiva and the goddess, Śivakāmi, in anthropomorphic form (Figure 80). They sit on a low platform below lobed arches; Śivakāmi is shown against a plain white background with dark green skin. Śiva is the inverse, with bright white skin against a dark green background, here decorated with stylized white flowers. On the left side of the composition Durvāsa bows and covers his mouth with his right hand in a show of respect for the deities. He wears a tiger skin as his lower garment, no upper garment, and dreadlocks piled up on his head.

The following three scenes show the yogi alone in space cells each defined by a single tree (Figure 81). The artist has distinguished the bright white branches of the first tree against a background of dark green foliage. The second tree is full of individually painted dark green leaves on brown branches that recede from the foreground. The final tree has yellowed leaves, and again the artist has brought out the white branches of the tree. These changes, though subtle,

80 The inscription is illegible in some parts. It reads, u āvatu turuvācār pūcāi pāṇna ṛṭiṟuviḷaiyāṭal kavilācattil cāmīyum ammaqumeluntiruviṟuntu turuvācār cānta kuṇaṇkaḷṭiḷaiyīta vēnumēṟu keṭṭuḷ pāḷokalṭiḷ vāṉattil vantu nammai puciyēṟu tiruvuḷam pa[trīṇalu]
show the passage of time as the tree matures from fresh dark green growth to mature individual leaves, and finally to dying yellow leaves, marking the days Durvāsa performs penance in the forest to win the grace of Śiva. This is reinforced in the inscriptions above, which describe Durvāsa’s despair at the time that has passed without seeing Śiva. The inscription over the first space cell says that According to what god said, Durvāsa came to the vaññi forest and searched for god. The second conveys Durvāsa’s desperation at the time passed with not sign from Śiva: Not seeing god in the vaññi forest, Durvāsa fell on the ground, rolling and crying. Nevertheless, Durvāsa continues with his penance: Without seeing god, Durvāsa did penance. Visual expression of emotion is rather limited in Nāyaka painting; what might otherwise be a rather enigmatic solitary figure in a landscape becomes, through the combination of text and image, a comprehensible and perhaps even sympathetic series of events.

The following two registers read right to left. The inscriptions for both registers were never finished, though a heading is given in the first inscriptional register on the right side; it reads, “Fourth Ampalavāṇṇa Cēṭṭi.” The designation as “fourth” is somewhat surprising, as the two previous narratives were labels as “first” and “second.” This narrative, which features the saints Vyāghrapāda and Patañjali, is the third narrative, after those of Sūrya and Durvāsa, given in Koṇṭaiyāṇṭi’s text. The narrative links this temple to the Citamparam temple, at which these two sages famously worshipped; this narrative asserts the superiority of the temple of Maṭavār Vaḻākam over the other shrine. The story, as told by Koṇṭaiyāṇṭi, relates how Śiva spoke to the two sages at Citamparam, instructing them that if they wished to see his dance as Naṭārāja they

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81 The three units of text are as follows. 1. cuvāmi tiruṟuḷap paįkku turuvāċar vaṉṉivaṉattil vantu cāmiyait teṭinatu; 2. vaṉṉivāṇattil cāmiyai kāṇāmal kile viḷuntu piṟandaiḷuṭu; 3. cāmiyai kāṇom enru turuvāċar tavaču paṇṇinatu.

82 Given that the inscriptions were never added to the painting, perhaps this was a direction to the painter, rather than the final designation?
should go to Maṭavār Valākam and worship him there. The first register shows two figures, presumably the saints, within a schematic topographic representation of the Citamparam temple, as well as Vyāghrapāda and Patañjali worshipping Vaiṭtiyanātar at Maṭavār Valākam. The second register is interrupted by the temple’s flagpost, which rises through the center of the second register; on the left of this flagpost the saints worship the linga at Maṭavār Valākam; on the right Śiva asNaṭarāja appears to Vyāghrapāda and Patañjali, and Karaikkal Ammaiyyār, and four other ascetics.

The final register on the west side of the maṇṭapa is a scheme of the Maṭavār Valākam temple, wherein all of the major shrines within the temple are shown (Figure 59) This was described in Chapter 2. At the center of the image is a tripartite shrine. Śiva and two consorts are seated in the center; in the left cell is a Śivalinga, and in the right cell, a standing image of the goddess. The temple is shown as a rectangle, with four large shrines in each of the corners, and subsidiary shrines throughout. The decrepitude of the paintings makes these subsidiary shrines difficult to identify. The shrine in the lower left corner is an image of Śiva Naṭarāja. The upper left shrine is an image of Murugan with his two wives. Directly across, in the upper right corner is Vināyakar, while the lower left shrine is devoted to the Nālvar, the four foremost saints in the Śaiva bhakti tradition.

The second enclosure of the temple shows the ritual of the temple’s human participants. At the top and right side men and a few women process in clockwise (pradakṣiṇa) direction. The bottom of this image, in the center under the central shrines of the inner enclosure of the temple, show a group of figures against a white ground. On the left, three Brahmins raise a festival flag on which an image of a sitting bull is just legible (Figure 82). To the right, three male musicians—a horn player and two drummers—followed by two female dancers perform.
Although this appears to be primarily a topographic image of the temple—showing the major shrines within the temple precinct, though not exactly recording the way the temple is laid out—it also participates in narrative. This narrative is the preparation for a festival, when the deities come out of the temple and process through the adjoining streets of the city, circumscribing the sacred space in which they reside. Temple festivals throughout Tamil Nadu are marked first with the raising of a flag before the temple. The narrative of the temple festival is made clear in the following panel, which marks the center crossing of the maṇṭapa.

The relationship between this primarily topographic image and the narrative that precede it is clarified in Koṇṭaiyāṇṭi’s text, which articulates the link between the temple’s largest annual nine-day festival and the appearance of Śiva as Naṭarāja to the sages Vyāghrapāda and Patañjali. Koṇṭaiyāṇṭi describes that the festival is initiated by the raising of a festival flag on the first day, and concludes with a large chariot festival on the ninth and last day. This is illustrated in the painting adjacent to the scene in which the festival flag is raised.

The central panel of the maṇṭapa marks the crossing of the north-south axis of the maṇṭapa with its east-west axis. Paintings of the festival procession are arranged around the freize panel. The rectangular shape of the panel is slightly longer on the east-west sides. The center of this rectangle is a smaller sculptural freize panel, square in shape, and astrological in content. At the center is a seated male figure, flanked on the left by the sun, and on the right by

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83 For a description of a similar festival at the paradigmatic Maturai Mīnākṣi-Cuntarēcuvarar Temple, see D. Dennis Hudson, “Two Citrā Festivals in Madurai,” in Religious Festivals in South India and Sri Lanka, ed. Guy R. Welbon and Glenn E. Yocum, Studies on Religion in South India and Sri Lanka (New Delhi: Manohar, 1982).

84 Koṇṭaiyāṇṭi, Śrivilliputtur Maṭavār Valākam Eggum Putuvaittala Varaḷāru, 16-19.
the moon (Figure 83). Forty-three smaller squares arranged symmetrically around the figure contain single images.\(^{85}\)

The largest contiguous scene of the festival procession appears on the western side, in the center, on the central axis of the maṇṭapa. The procession consists of moveable festival images of the deities, seated atop their vāhanas, and carried by scores of men. Three of the sides show the deities processing on palanquins, while the north side consists of four festival chariots, or tēr, decorated with flower garlands, banana leaves and flowers, and flags on each tier of their superstructures. Men stand on the left side of each of the chariots, holding on to thick ropes that are visible looping around the right side the chariots. Although almost all of the men face to the right, towards the tēr they are pulling, the procession must move to the left (the direction the ropes must be pulled). The procession moves first to the south, and then to the east, and finally north, so that the viewer who follows the movement of the procession follows it in a counterclockwise movement. The three sides that show the procession in palanquins are subdivided into different scenes, separated by hard frames and changes of background color. In sum, this central panel has nine separate scenes, possibly corresponding to the number of days the festival is celebrated. The procession continues into the first narrative register of the east side of the maṇṭapa, adjacent to this center crossing. The narrative reads left to right (south to north), and terminates on the north side of the register, where courtly and religious persons are shown praising the deities. These are highly individualized figural images (comparatively speaking) that may have honored living persons at the time of the paintings’ execution.

\(^{85}\) In forty-three small cells are various animals and objects. These may represent, but closer examination of these will be necessary in order to identify the cells in order to make a secure argument for their identification.
The following narrative registers on the east side of the maṇṭapa continue with stories of the talapurāṇam, though those nearest the east side appear never to have been fully finished. The first register (the second in the eastern ceiling, after the processional image, narrates a story concerned with Brahma worshipping Śiva at Maṭavār Vaḷākam. This narrative occupies one and one-third registers. This is also the narrative that follows in Koṇṭaiyāṇṭi’s text. The remaining portion of the second register is decorative, showing large painted fish and water creatures, which add color to the fish sculpted into the ceiling panels themselves. The following six registers do not have any associated text. In fact, the preparation of the ground for text is found only above the first register that follows the conclusion of the Brahma narrative; no text appears ever to have been written here. The plaster in the text registers of the subsequent registers have been left completely untreated, although narrative paintings remain in fragments. This makes clear that the paintings were finished before the ground was even prepared for the addition of narrative text.

Taken as a whole, this ceiling asserts the central importance of this place by showing its cosmic, terrestrial, and mythic links to Śiva, both the omnipresent supreme god, and the god unique to this site. As Shulman writes,

“…the myths of the Tamil purāṇas are imbued with the belief that a sacred presence is revealed in individual, localized manifestations. The history and nature of these manifestations form the subject matter of the Tamil myths. While conscious of the theological issues implicit in this belief, the myths insist upon the overriding importance of the shrine….Although the deity has absorbed the universalism implicit in the Upaniṣadic goal of brahman, the myths are concerned with the specific rather than the universal, with the present rather than the apocalypse…., and with life on earth as opposed to release or to life in heaven.”

The center of the ceiling anchors the narratives of the talapurāṇam to the site. The festival procession of the deities enacts the gods’ suzerainty over the space circumscribed by their procession. That the iconography of the sculptural panel around which they process is of cosmological significance further links the local to the cosmic. The image, text, and form of the paintings do more than simply render myths visible: the axial arrangement of these constituent parts describe visually the axis mundi, an axis that connects the heavens through the earth in the microcosmic space of the temple, marking the cosmic center that moves from Mt. Kailas to the icon in the shrine.

**Talapurāṇam and Hagiography at Āḻvār Tirunakari**

The paintings in the Āṭināṭar Āḻvār Temple in Āḻvār Tirunakari are found in the pradakṣina patha around the Nammāḻvār shrine. The Nammāḻvār shrine faces south toward the

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87 For the homology of the ritual activities of the god, the festival calendar, and the cyclic passage of time to the cosmos, see Clothey’s discussion of the “tempocosm.” See the discussion above on the possible depiction of time within the festival image over the crossing of the manṭapa. On the relationship of the division and marking of time to perceptions of the cosmos Clothey writes, “Time and its measure are important dimensions of ritual observance throughout Hinduism. Chronometry does not only dramatize the relationship of religious man and his world to bodies that are extraterrestrial. The dividing of the cosmic rhythm into measurable units also serves to focus in manageable segments the character of that rhythm itself. Each segment of time thereby becomes a microcosm of the cosmic rhythm, and appropriate junctures within that segment become ‘tempocosms’ or points of access to the larger dimensions of existence….The measure of time and the ritual observances which occur at important tempocosms thus reflect a basic cosmology or vision of the world, at least for those for whom the pattern is intelligible.” Fred W. Clothey, "Chronometry, Cosmology and the Festival Calendar in the Murukaṇ Cult," in Religious Festivals in South India and Sri Lanka, ed. Guy R. Welbon and Glenn E. Yocum, Studies on Religion in South India and Sri Lanka (New Delhi: Manohar, 1982), 157.

88 See Shulman on the perfect microcosmic order of the space defined by the temple. Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition, 26.

89 Narrative images adorn the ceiling, while iconic images decorate the entire wall surface. The paintings are badly damaged, though those on the east side are much better preserved than those on the west (which now remain only as fragments). The paintings date to the late 17th or early 18th century. The iconic paintings that adorn the walls are generally more refined than the narrative paintings that adorn the ceilings. The workmanship is more careful, the details are finer. The iconic images are much larger in scale than those on the ceiling. This raises the question of whether such differences in execution and placement indicates the relative importance of the types or places of images. Are iconic images more important than narrative ones? Does subject or placement influence these choices?
main temple shrine of Ātinātar (Viṣṇu). Paintings are found on the west, north, and east walls and ceilings as one circumambulates the shrine. The viewer’s reception of the images in this shrine is dictated by the clockwise direction of circumambulatory worship. Entering through a doorway in the south wall, the worshipper enters the processional space around the shrine of Nammāḻvār without ever gaining sight of the devotional image of the Āḻvār within the shrine (Figure 84). Yet, as I will show, the paintings create for the worshipper the historic and devotional world of Nammāḻvār, allowing him or her to participate in the history, service, and devotion to the Lord that Nammāḻvār represents. More broadly, the talapurānic and hagiographic narrative murals at Āḻvār Tirunakari create for, and with, those who behold them the history of the site and its devotional community, as well as the lineage of teachers and saints revered in its ritual and textual traditions.

This area of the temple is not opened save for once a year, when there is a festival for Nammāḻvār and the devotional image (mūrti) is cleaned. At this time, only the head priests are allowed to see the mūrti. The pradaksina patha is opened to women who put kolams on the ground. Then the priests keep the mūrti there, then take it in procession out to the waiting worshippers. The doors to the patha are otherwise locked. This was reported to me by a priest at the temple. Paintings are also found in a small maṇṭapa near the eastern prākāra wall on the north side, in the outermost enclosure of the temple. Animals and a cart are now kept here. The painting shows Viṣṇu reclining of Ādiśeṣa. Interestingly, underdrawing is visible in many parts of the painting. It looks like the drawings do not accord with the paintings now present. There are also paintings in the first gopura ceiling over the entrance to the temple, though these may be of later date.

90 I take this notion of participation from Vasudha Narayanan, who advocates a phenomenological approach to text. In her 2007 article, she argues that the singing of devotional (bhakti) hymns in temples “signals the moment when, according to the tradition, revelation become explicit: bhakti becomes embodied in words and dance and moves from an amorphous, “forgotten” state in to domestic and temple spaces.” In her earlier work, Narayanan uses the notion of participation to argue that it is through recitation of bhakti texts that the devotee accesses revered teachers’ and saints’ emotions, and participated in their experience of devotion. She writes, “The Śrī Vaiṣṇava liturgy, at home and in the temple, is based on participation of the devotee in the myth of the Āḻvār.” This is taken up in Chapter Six. Vasudha Narayanan, ""With the Earth as a Lamp and the Sun as the Flame" : Lighting Devotion in South India," International journal of Hindu Studies 11, no. 3 (2007): 227; The Way and the Goal : Expressions of Devotion in the Early Śrī Vaiṣṇava Tradition, 150.

91 The name of the place itself, Āḻvār Tirunakari, itself points to a certain self-consciousness about its importance in the tradition. It is, literally, the sacred (īru) city (nakari) of the Āḻvārs. I thank Vidya Dehejia for pointing this out to me.
The West ceiling is the only ceiling devoted to the activities of the god of the temple, Ātinātar. The rest of the ceilings’ murals, on the north and east sides, expand on the hagiographies of saints and ācāryas (teachers) important to this site and important to the formation and transmission of Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology and praxis. The paintings’ narratives and individual figures represent the development and transmission of Śrī Vaiṣṇava texts, community, history, at the same time that the actually transmit this history to the devotee. Those responsible for the paintings at this temple were evidently interested in the community, history, and transmission of Śrī Vaiṣṇava texts such as Nammāḷvār’s Tiruvāymoḻi (Sacred Utterances) and the Nālāyira Divya Prabhandam (Four Thousand Sacred Verses) as well as the hagiographies of the sect’s saints and teachers. Four figures are especially singled out in the narratives here: Rāmānuja, Nāthamuni, Madura Kavi Āḻvār, and, of course, Nammāḷvār, the saint to whom this shrine is dedicated. The stories concerning the life and works of Nammāḷvār are found on the north ceiling, and the propagation of Vaiṣṇava teaching by Madura Kavi Āḻvār, Nāthamuni, and Rāmānuja are narrated on the east ceiling. The east ceiling concludes with what appears to be contemporary (late 17th or early 18th-century) worship of Nammāḷvār. The north and east ceiling together constitute a single narrative of transmission from God to Nammāḷvār and to his disciples, who are in turn teachers, through whom the teachings of service and devotion are enacted (back) toward Nammāḷvār and to God.

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92 The sectarian marks on the figures further indicate that the patrons were specifically Teṅkalai in orientation. This might also account for their interest in transmission of the Tamil texts, which understands them to be scripture of the same status as Sanskrit scriptures.

93 The fact that Nammāḷvār is included in the narratives of the west ceiling, which I argue represent the talapurāṇa, before the narrative that explains his birth, further supports the idea that the paintings of the west ceiling constitute a discrete narrative cycle concerning the history of the site, not the history of the theology and transmission of texts.
sacred texts illustrates the *guruparamparā*, that is, the lineage of teachers (paramparā, Sanskrit, is “an uninterrupted row or series, order, succession, continuation, mediation, tradition”).

The *guruparamparā* took shape during the period of the ācāryas, teachers, from the time of Nāthamuni (9-10th centuries) to Rāmānuja (11-12th century). The organization of the paintings, which shows the temporal and sequential order of transmission, furthermore, follows the recitation of the *guruparamparā*, which is supposed to be spoken by each Śrī Vaiṣṇava practitioner before commencing study or recitation of the sacred texts handed down through these teachers. The recitation of the teachers’ names begins with Viṣṇu himself, then his consort, Lakshmi, his protector, Viśvakṣena, then Nammāḻvār, Nāthamuni, Yāmuna, Rāmānuja, and other gurus down to the worshipper’s own teacher. The doctrinal history, models of devotion, service, and surrender to god, and the *guruparamparā* revered in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism are painted on the ceilings of the circumambulatory passage.

In Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, the saints are not just exemplary humans, but are secondary incarnations of Viṣṇu himself; Nammāḻvār is understood to be an incarnation of Viśvakṣena, Viṣṇu’s guardian. Nammāḻvār’s importance and divinity further stem from his writing. He authored one thousand hymns praising Viṣṇu and the sites sacred to him, known as the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, or *Sacred Utterances*. These hymns constitute the last section of the Tamil text considered scripture in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community, the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*, or *Four

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94 Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, “परम्परा”.


Thousand Sacred Hymns, which praises the deities of the sites sacred to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, known as the Divya Desams, literally, the sacred places.  

Madura Kavi is another of the twelve Vaiṣṇava saints and Nammālvār’s disciple, and is considered an incarnation of Viṣṇu’s mount, known by the name of Vainatēya or Garuda. The hagiography of Madura Kavi says that following a bright star in the southern sky, he came upon the meditating Nammālvār, and immediately identified the saint as a person of great knowledge. Madura Kavi remained a student and servant of the saint and is remembered for his discipleship through a single hymn he composed in praise of Nammālvār, which is included in Nālāyira Divya Prabhandam.

Nāthamuni is not one of the twelve aḷvārs, but is revered as the ācārya who collected and codified the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham in the first half of the 10th century (Nammālvār and Madura Kavi lived in the 9th century). Tradition holds that most of Nammālvār’s Tiruvāymoḷi was lost. Nāthamuni, hearing three verses that remained known, was either compelled through pious interest, or was instructed by the Viṣṇu in his hometown of Vīranārāyaṇapuram, to recover the text. Nāthamuni went to Āḻvār Tirunakari and meditated on Nammālvār by repeating twelve thousand times the poem written by Madura Kavi Āḻvār. Nammālvār revealed himself, his verses, and the three thousand more verses that constitute the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham. Nāthamuni is thus sometimes considered the founder of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition because the the scripture held sacred in the tradition was revealed to him. He taught the Divya Prabhandham

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97 See Chapter 5 for greater detail on this subject.
98 Dehejia, Slaves of the Lord: The Path of the Tamil Saints, 187. Vainatēya is also described in the Mahābhārata as a descendent of Garuda, Viṣṇu’s vāhana. Udhyog Parva, Chapter 101.
99 For a description of these events and further bibliography, see Vasudha Narayanan, The Vernacular Veda: Revelation, Recitation, and Ritual (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).
through song, and innovated its performance in temple shrines through song and dance.\textsuperscript{100} He is identified iconographically with cymbals in his hands.

Rāmānuja, the last of the figures represented in the paintings, is considered the most important of the ācāryas.\textsuperscript{101} Legend asserts that, like Nāthamuni, he traveled to Āḻvār Tirunakari to meditate on the saint Nammālvār in order to gain access to the divinely-given words.\textsuperscript{102} His philosophical and commentarial works became pillars of Śrī Viṣṇava theology, and his devotional poems remain popular even today. Śrī Viṣṇava philosophy is known within the tradition as \textit{emperumāṉar darśanam}, meaning the \textit{vision of Rāmānuja}.

Collectively, these figures represent the transmission of Śrī Viṣṇava theology and practice. Nammālvār is considered to be the most important of all the āḻvārs, and his text, the \textit{Tiruṉāmulṉī}, is considered the most important Tamil-language text in the tradition.\textsuperscript{103} Madura Kavi was the disciple of the saint, who set his poems to music, and who also wrote poems about Nammālvār. Nāthamuni, meanwhile, is responsible for bringing together the hymns of the Vaiṣṇava saints and transmitting them to Śrī Viṣṇava communities. He is revered as the first

\textsuperscript{100} Bharati Srirama, \textit{Araiyar Sevai : Theatre Expression in Śrī-Vaishnava Worship}, Subsidised Indian ed., Bhavan's Book University (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidyā Bhavan, 1999).

\textsuperscript{101} “He was not the first ācārya of the Śrī Viṣṇava tradition, but it is his name that the tradition bears. The Śrī Viṣṇava philosophy was traditionally known as \textit{emperumāṉar darśanam}, the vision [or the philosophy] of Rāmānuja,” and Rāmānuja is considered to be the savior of the community.” Narayanan, \textit{The Way and the Goal : Expressions of Devotion in the Early Śrī Viṣṇava Tradition}, 151.

\textsuperscript{102} This is, however, contested by the historical record, and its scholarship. For a related discussion, see John Braisted Carman and Vasudha Narayanan, \textit{The Tamil Veda : Pillan's Interpretation of the Tiruṉāmulṉī} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), Chapter 11.

\textsuperscript{103} Narayanan writes, “While all the works of The Sacred Four Thousand are considered sacred and the term Veda is applied to them collectively, the \textit{Tirupāvai} of Aṇṭāl and the \textit{Tiruṉāmulṉī} of Nammālvār are of particular importance. The \textit{Tiruṉāmulṉī} is referred to as \textit{The Veda} or \textit{The Upaniṣad} more often than any other work.” And again, “Later ācāryas call the Tiruṉāmulṉī the Draviḍa, or Tamil Veda, and considered its author, Nammālvār, to be the most important of all the Alvars. The ācāryas formally take refuge in Nammālvār before they commence their works…” Narayanan, \textit{The Way and the Goal : Expressions of Devotion in the Early Śrī Viṣṇava Tradition}, 9-10, 10.
ācārya, teacher, in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava lineage, though none of his own works survive. The distinctive tilakas on both Madura Kavi and Nāthamuni mark them as specifically Teṅkalai in sectarian affiliation, a tradition that puts particular emphasis on the importance of Tamil-language sacred texts. Rāmānuja, finally, is perhaps the most influential thinker, writer, and teacher of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition.

**The West Ceiling**

The west ceiling is extremely damaged; but it is possible to identify major deities and celestial beings in the paintings iconographically, as well as the Nammālvār and Ātināta images associated specifically with this temple. The inscriptions, though badly damaged, support these identifications. Although the ruined state of the paintings make identification uncertain, there is correspondence between what remains of the narrative paintings and the talapurāṇam handed down today. An extensive narrative sequence shows many different deities coming to worship the form of Ātināta at this temple. Another shows Brahma worshipping at the temple; one of the main stories that concerns the naming of the site as Kurukūr (the town, ār, of the guru, kuru) concerns the devotion of Brahma to Ātināta, and the latter’s appearance here as Brahma’s teacher (guru).

**The North Ceiling**

The north ceiling tells the story of the birth of Nammālvār and his residence under the tamarind tree at the temple of Ātināta at Áylvār Tirunakari. In the version of the story here, which is quite extensive, Nammālvār is born to a king, Kārimā Rāja. Although badly damaged, the

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104 The inscriptions, though fragmentary, specifically mention the names of the god here (Ātināta, Paramapatanāta), discuss worship (puja) and circumambulation (pradakṣīna) around the god here, and specifies the sacredness of the place (talattattaiya puṇṇiyam).
story appears to roughly follow the versions that remain popular today, although even in these there is significant variation. All stories agree that the father and mother of Nammāḻvār were childless and went to Tirukkurungudi to pray for a child. Viṣṇu sent Viṣvaksena to be incarnated as their child. The child was born enlightened, and did not respond to those around him, nor did he eat or drink. His parents took him to the temple at Āḻvār Tirunakari (known as Kurukūr), where he lived out the rest of his life seated under a tamarind tree. All of this appears in the paintings on the west aisle. Interestingly, the birth of Nammāḻvār occurs in the registers directly behind the shrine and in front of the iconic image of Nammāḻvār on the north wall. The narrative moment of the saint’s earthly incarnation is axially aligned with his living presence in the icon in the shrine, echoed by the painted icon of the saint directly behind the shrine on the wall in the circumambulatory path. The remaining registers of the west ceiling are extremely fragmentary. The second-to-last register shows the figure of Madura Kavi blessing a king, and the final register depicts women praising Nammāḻvār under the tamarind tree.

In versions of the story that survive today, Nammāḻvār is said to be born to a king or into an agricultural caste, often identified as Vellala. His father is usually identified as Kari or Kariyar. It has not been possible for me to read a full talapurāṇa of this temple, either in Tamil or in English. I have subsequently relied on the short summaries told to me orally, or published on websites dedicated to the history of the temple, of Śrī Vaisnavism, or the divya desams. I have also read the published accounts of the saints and āḻvār’s lives available in countless scholarly publications. I have not individually cited them here, as it is the accumulation of story that characterizes this knowledge; pointing to any single source is inconsistent with the transmission of the tradition as it lives today, as well as the constitution of my own knowledge of it.

The tree itself is considered to be an incarnation of Śeṣa, the serpent on which Viṣṇu reclines, or Lakṣmana, the boon companion of Rāma, an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

Missing from the narrative as it now remains is the arrival of Madura Kavi and his becoming a disciple of Nammāḻvār. Since the figure of Madura Kavi is present at the end of the narrative, one may assume that this event was depicted, but has been lost due to the extensive damage to the paintings.
The East Ceiling

The beginning of the narrative paintings on the ceiling of the east wall, where they adjoin those of the north wall, have completely fallen away from the ceiling. Roughly one-third of the paintings that would have adorned the ceiling are now missing. The twelfth of the remaining registers of painting seems to show Viṣṇu teaching the Nālāyira Divya Prapandham to Nammāḻvār and Madura Kavi (Figure 40). In the image, Viṣṇu, accompanied by Lakṣmī and Garuda, stands behind Madura Kavi, who faces Nammāḻvār. The following register, read from right to left, shows Madura Kavi standing to the left of Nammāḻvār. In the following scene, Madura Kavi is seated and holding a manuscript, the title of which was written on it, but is no longer legible. Three figures are seated before him, hands in añjali mudra; they appear to be students. The following scenes show the apotheosis of Madura Kavi. In the first scene he is borne aloft in a shrine-like structure carried by two figures. The next scene shows him engaged in a ritual bath in a river. The inscription is damaged beyond legibility on the right side, but over the bathing scene, the Tamil inscription informs us that after ritually bathing in the river that borders Viṣṇu’s heaven, Madura Kavi went to Paramapadanatha, the cosmic form of Viṣṇu who resides in the heaven Vaikuntha. The figure who emerges from the river seems to be transformed into a four-armed figure who carries the same attributes as Viṣṇu. This figure is first embraced by a seated Paramapadanatha. He is then greeted by a woman who holds a flame held...
in a decorative lamp, welcoming him (Figure 85). The figure is immediately shown again, in two overlapping figures of himself, bowing before an enthroned Paramapadanatha seated with his two consorts within a triple-lobed arch. The transformed figure is again shown on the lap of this image of Paramapathanatha. The inscription states that the god Paramapadanathan instructed Madura Kavi Āḻvār. This narrative would seem to show Madura Kavi’s attainment of heaven, Vaikuntha, and reception by the Lord. I can find, however, no reference to this narrative in any text, though have yet been unable to obtain the temple’s talapurāṇam.

The following register, the 14th, marks the beginning of a narrative describing the transmission of Nammāḻvār’s texts through Nāṭhamuni, who lived in the late 9th or early 10th century. The inscriptions are mostly missing due to damage; though the name Vīranārāyaṇa is legible over the third figure group, which shows a Viṣṇu dressed and armed as if ready for battle, accompanied by two consorts. As stated above, Nāṭhamuni was born in a village called Vīranārāyanapuram, where the presiding deity of the Viṣṇu temple is Vīranārāyaṇa (“heroic Nārāyaṇa”). This site is important not only for the revival of Nammāḻvār’s hymns, but for the development of Śrī Viṣṇava theology and temple ritual. I quote Vasudha Narayanan:

According to the priests, the four thousand hymns of the Āḻvārs that were revealed to Nāṭhamuni, the first Śrī Viṣṇava ācārya, were first recited here. Since this place saw the birth of the first two important ācāryas [Nāṭhamuni and his son, Yāmuna or Āḷavantār] and the first recitation of The Sacred Four Thousand, the priests hold it to be the stage where the Śrī Viṣṇava tradition made its debut. At Vīranārāyanapuram we are told of the reforms that Nāṭhamuni and

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111 The word for instruct, upadēcam, indicates that it is instruction of a traditional, doctrinal, or spiritual kind, usually denoting instruction from a guru to disciple. The inscription reads in Tamil, cuvāmi [para]mapatanā[ta]y maturakviyāvārrukku upptecam panninatu. The Telugu inscriptions are legible, but difficult to parse. Interestingly, although one could express the same ideas in Telugu in much of the same words as in Tamil, the vocabulary of the inscriptions are dramatically different. The Telugu inscription reads, ārtemettindī amānavunṇḷuṇcēsvīcēnciṇdi.

112 Madura Kavi is in all stories I have encountered stated to have outlived Nammāḻvār. I also know of no other instance of the transformation of the person into a—albeit smaller—physical form of the deity. Madura Kavi’s transformation here into a crowned, blue-skinned, four-armed divinity is unusual.
Yāmuna made in the ritual life of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community. Because of their efforts, the tradition became the inheritor of the Ubhaya-vedanta, or the twin scripture: the Sanskrit canon and the Tamil Veda of the Āḻvārs.\textsuperscript{113}

Directly to the right of the image of Viṣṇu, armed as the heroic Vīranārāyana, is an image of Brahmin men holding a small child, perhaps presenting the child to another seated image of Viṣṇu on the right side of the register. The following register, which reads right to left, shows Nāṭhamuni, who is consistently named Nāṭhamuni Āḻvār in both the Tamil and Telugu inscriptions, first at the shrine of Raṅkanātha at Śrī Raṅkam (Figure 86), and then at the shrine of Vīranārāyana, here identified as Maṇṇār, identifying him as the god of Maṇṇār Kövil, Nāṭhamuni’s hometown (Vīranārāyanapuram is also known as Kāṭṭu Maṇṇār Kövil). It is believed that the god in this place told Nāṭhamuni to recover Nammāḻvār’s sacred text, the Nālāyira Divya Prabhandam, of which only a few poems at that time survived. The inscriptions identify Nāṭhamuni and those whom he instructs as Śrī Vaiṣṇava, though this designation only came into use during the time of Rāmānuja, some three or four generations later.\textsuperscript{114} As stated previously, Nāṭhamuni is credited with setting Nammāḻvār’s recovered poems to music; he is iconographically identified throughout the narrative with cymbals in his hands.

The following register again shows Nāṭhamuni at the Maṇṇār temple, and then shows him going to Āḻvār Tirunakari, where Nammāḻvār appears to him and reveals the entire text of the Nālāyira Divya Prabhandam. Unfortunately, much of the plaster has fallen away on the right side of this register. The following register, which again reads right to left, first shows

\textsuperscript{113} Narayanan, The Way and the Goal : Expressions of Devotion in the Early Śrī Vaiṣṇava Tradition, 60.

\textsuperscript{114} I have read the inscriptions right to left, as I believe this is the direction of the narrative. The top line is Telugu, and the second is Tamil. The Telugu reads, nāṭhamunulu śri ranggāniki rāṅgā śri vaiṣṇavam...vincukoni || nāṭhamuniyāḻvāru namberumāḷli sevincindi || śri ranggāna peddalanu amppancukoni vaccindī || nāṭhamunulu maṇṇārū svāmīni sevincindi. The Tamil, from right to left, is, nataṃuniyāḻvārai sri vai[ṇ]aḷ māḷ yeturakondupu...sevittu... | sri rankattile ceviccugaṭantattu namperumāḷai cevittatu | nāṭhamuniyāḻvār maṇṇār koville vantu ceviccatu.
Nammāḷvār teaching the Nālāyira to Nāṭhamuni, who in the next scene returns to Maṇṭār Kōvil, and with cymbals keeping time, appears to sing the sacred words to Maṇṭār. The final scene shows Nāṭhamuni seated before four disciples and a single ascetic (Figure 87). Inscriptions in Telugu and Tamil name all of the figures: Nāṭhamuni, Piḷḷai Lōkācārya, Uyyakōṇḍār, Manakala Nambi, and Kurukai Kāvalappan. All of these are prominent ācāryas, teachers, in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition. The image indicates a lineage, rather than an actual meeting: Nāṭhamuni lived in the tenth century and Uyyakōṇḍār was his pupil; Maṇṭakkāl Nambi was the disciple of Uyyakōṇḍār; and Piḷḷai Lōkācārya lived in the late 13th century (after Rāmānuja) and was the first proponent of Teṅkalai Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, which is practiced at this temple. The artist renders to the viewer an account of the transmission and development of Nammāḷvār’s Tiruvāymoḻi through a lineage of revered teachers.

The following registers describe the education and teachings of the most revered ācārya and pillar of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja is understood to be an incarnation of Śeṣa, and of Lakṣmana (just as the tamarind tree under which Nammāḷvār sits is identified as a form of Śeṣa and Lakṣmana). Although known in scholarship primarily by the name of Rāmānuja, the historical figure is known by many names. Those used in the inscriptions here are Elāḷvār, Emperumāṉār, and Bhāsyakāra. Because of this inconsistency, I have chosen to use the name most well known in scholarship, Rāmānuja, even though this is not one of the names ascribed to the figure here.

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116 English-language sources identify the birth-name of Rāmānuja as Iḷāya Perumāḷ. The narrative of Rāmānuja begins in the 18th register by my count.
Rāmānuja was born at the town of Perumputūr to Brahmin parents. The narrative here begins with Viṣṇu instructing Śeṣa to incarnate as Rāmānuja.117 The second scene shows the god at Perumputūr and a small child carried by two people. The rest of the register is damaged. The following register shows Rāmānuja’s education as a disciple of Yādavaprakāśa. In the center, Rāmānuja stands crying, his hands on Yādavaprakāśa’s head. The teacher sits on a golden seat, before the crying Rāmānuja and four other seated students, all of whom hold manuscripts. Legend tells that Rāmānuja’s philosophical break became definitive when his tears at hearing Yādavaprakāśa’s misinterpretation of a text fell on the teacher as he massaged him.118 In the next scene, figures are shown walking into a forest; this refers to Yādavaprakāśa’s plot to kill Rāmānuja in the Goṇḍa forest while on the pretext of a class trip to bathe in the Ganges river.119 Forewarned, Rāmānuja escapes into the forest. The following register narrates a story in which Viṣṇu and Devi, in the guise of forest-dwellers, appear to Rāmānuja, saving him from his distress. He follows the divine couple and meets Tirukācci Nambi, a śūdra who serves the god Varatarājaperumāl in Kanchipuram (Figure 88).120 Rāmānuja, though a Brahmin, considered Tirukācci Nambi (also known as Kanchipurna) to be his guru. The following register describes Rāmānuja’s education with each of five ācāryas associated with the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition at ŚrīRaṅkam through their guru Yāmuna with whom he studied after Kanchipurna. The narrative

117 The Telugu inscription is not legible. The Tamil reads, cuvāmi [parama]patanātan sesanai elāyvāry pira...coṇṇatu.

118 The Telugu inscription states that Rāmānuja was applying oil to his teacher’s head: yelāyāvāru yādavaprakāśulaki nūne amṭṭandi

119 Both of the inscriptions are quite clear on this point. The Telugu reads, yelāyāvārunnu yambārunnu yādavaprakāśunnu sisyalunnu ganggāstānam podāmani goṇḍaṟṟanṇyaniki poyeri. The Tamil reads, e[lāl]vār empārayatavapirakāsaram ...māl kekā [s]tāṇam paṇṇa koṇṭāraṇṇa...

120 Tirukachi Nambi (known also as Kanchipurna) is here identified iconographically with a fan, renn and round in shape. Tirukachi Nambi’s job was to fan the god, Varadaraja Perumal. This ritual is known as alavaṭṭam kaiṅkariyam.
first shows Rāmānuja speaking with Kanchipurna, and then seated with each of the five ācāryas, each holding a different manuscript (Figure 89). The inscriptions in both Telugu and Tamil identify the figures as Periya Nambi, Tirukkostiyūr Nambi, Tiruvaranga Perumāl, Tirumalai Āndār, and Periya Tirumalai Nambi. The names are given in a different order and with variation between the Tamil and Telugu; this would seem to indicate that the scribes of the two languages were not the same person. It additionally shows that they were not working together or with the painter, as the names attached to the figures are inconsistent. Also, the Telugu inscription states that these five ācāryas told the prabhanda to Rāmānuja (named as Yemberumānār). The Tamil, meanwhile, states only that Emperumanar (Rāmānuja) studied with the five people named in the inscription. Regardless, the images, with the inscriptions, create an intellectual history for Rāmānuja’s work, specifically acknowledging his own teachers, his own guruparamparā.

The next register (register 22) narrates the problems Rāmānuja encounters with his wife – how she picks a fight with Periya Nambi’s wife, and how she ritually purifies her home after Rāmānuja instructs her to feed Tirukācci Nambi. Both of these stories show how Ramanajua

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121 Each manuscript is inscribed with a title, but I have not been able to match the words with a text – the words are probably short forms, or just the first letters, of the titles. For instance, in another scene, the Tiruvāyumoli is identified as Ti Vā Mu.

122 Periya Nambi is also known as Mahapurna; Tirukkostiyyūr Nambi is also known as Ghishtipurna; Periya Tirumalai Nambi as Shailapurna; Tirumālai Āndār as Maladhara; and Tiruvaranga Perumal as Varanga.

123 A fascinating feature of the inscriptions is that they appear at one time to have been reversed, so that where there is now Telugu there was once Tamil, and vice-versa. This is true throughout the entirety of the ceiling paintings. The irregularities of the text as well as the equal aging of the inscriptions to the paintings indicates that this reversal was accomplished at roughly the same time that the paintings were complete.

paid little heed to the hierarchy of caste, but that his wife was less inclined to subvert convention. This friction led Rāmānuja to send his wife away, whereupon he renounced his married life and devoted himself to study. The following register (23) narrates how Rāmānuja took the kāṣāyam, red cloth of a renunciant (sanyāsin), and set out to visit the holy places. At Śrī Raṅkam he accepted the cadakōpam (crown symbolizing Viṣṇu’s feet) and ceṅkōl (staff symbolizing that he is a Vaiṣṇava ascetic). Registers twenty-five and twenty-six narrate the story of Yādavaprapkāśa, Rāmānuja’s former guru and would-be assassin, becoming Rāmānuja’s disciple at the behest of his mother. The paintings here additionally show Yādavaprapkāśa learning the Tiruvāymoḷi from Rāmānuja, visually represented as the presentation of the manuscript (with the title inscribed) from Rāmānuja to Yādavaprapkāśa (Figure 90). Following the blinding of the disciple Kūrattāḷvār, who impersonates Rāmānuja to protect him from a malevolent Śiva-worshipping Chola king, Krimikanda, which is narrated in three scenes, a single scene shows the image of Viṣṇu possessed by the daughter of a Muslim ruler in northern India. Rāmānuja retrieves the image and installs it in a temple in Melkote, though this is not shown in the paintings.125 The narrative is suggested only by the scene in which the Muslim ruler and his daughter sit within a maṇṭapa and the daughter holds the god’s image. The Muslim identity of the ruler is suggested by his turban, long jāma, and prominent sword. The rest of the twenty-sixth register depicts a story associated with Jain persecution, though the inscription here identifies Buddhists, rather than Jains. Here, Rāmānuja is shown causing Buddhists to be ground in an oil mill.126


126 Rāmānuja sits before a large instrument used as an oil mill. However, the mill is full of human heads, which spill over onto the ground. A naked male figure stands atop the piled-up heads in the mill. The Telugu states, śṛi bhashyakārulu bavuddulanu bhānu gānugalō _śi ādincindi_. The Tamil states, emperumāṅgar pāṉṆṟṭarai yellām kal kālam āṭṭi viccaṭu. This story is associated with the conversion of the Hoysala ruler, Viṣṇuvardhana (Bhiṣṭideva, before conversion) to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism from Jainism, and it is usually Jains, not Buddhists, who are ground in the oil
The final part of the twenty-seventh register shows Rāmānuja praying before Nammālvār. In the next register, Nammālvār gives a text to person identified as a “northern Śrī Vaiṣṇava.” The text is identified as “śrī mukam,” an epistle from an important person. It is rolled up, and looks like a white circle – this same indication of a text is also found in other registers (Figure 91). The Śrī Vaiṣṇava places the rolled-up manuscript before an academy of writers, known as a caṇkam. The inscription states that he places the manuscript on the caṅkapalakai, a miraculous seat belonging to the famed caṇkam of Maturai poets. The seat judges the quality of a work and its scholar. The work here passes the test by pushing all of the poets off the seat, and in the next scene, the members of the caṇkam worship Nammālvār. The final four registers of the ceiling are in extremely poor condition. It is evident, however, that the scenes are repetitive, showing the worship of Nammālvār through numerous different rituals and with different substances. He is worshipped in his shrine, as well as in procession as a festival image (utsava mūrti). Each of the modes of worship is described as cevai (cēvai), service. The performance of araiyar cēvai is suggested by the costume of some of the worshipping figures. In addition to priests who serve Nammālvār in every scene, there is always a single figure dressed in a green tunic who wears a green conical hat, topped with a finial, and decorated on the front with the namam, conch, and discuss of Viṣṇu. Some of the hats have strips of fabric that hang down in front of the ears. This mill. A discussion of this theme is found in Sakkottai Krishnaswami Aiyangar, Ancient India : Collected Essays on the Literary and Political History of Southern India (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2004), 257-62. Carman states that this story is found in the Rāmanujārya Divya Caritai, a Tamil work written by Piḷḷai Lōkam Jyiar. Carman and Narayanan, The Tamil Veda : Pillan’s Interpretation of the Tiruvāyur, 282, nt.39.

\[\text{The inscriptions states [cuva]ni nammālvār vaṭakkittu śrī vayiṣṇaman kaiyile śrīmukam yelitikoṭuttatu caṅkappalakaιyile vaccaṭu avā...itāli viṭṭu. I read vayiṣṇaman as a misspelling of vayiṣṇavan.}\]

\[\text{Strangely, all the members of the caṇkam have the heads of boars. I know of no story that explains why this might be the case. This is similar to a story about the Tolkāppiyam, a classical Tamil grammar, pushing the Madurai caṇkam off of the caṅkapalakkai. On the legends of the caṇkam, see Kamil Zvelebil, The Smile of Murugan on Tamil Literature of South India (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 45-49.}\]
same costume is seen on the figures of Madura Kavi Āḻvār and Nāthamuni in the large iconic image of Nammāḻvār on the north wall (Figure 92).  

The narrative paintings of the east wall show the transmission of Tamil-language scripture from the mouth of God to Nammāḻvār and his disciple, Madura Kavi. These words, once lost, are recovered by Nāthamuni, who at Āḻvār Tirunakari repeats the single surviving verse composed by Madura Kavi in praise of Nammāḻvār until Nammāḻvār appears to Nāthamuni and restores to mankind the Nālāyira Divya Prabhandam. Nāthamuni sets the verses to music and introduces a special mode of worship, which is continued by his own disciples, who are depicted in the paintings. Rāmānuja wrote commentary on Nammāḻvār’s Nālāyira Divya Prabhandam, and became the most important teacher in the lineage of Śrī Vaiṣṇava ācāryas. He is specifically shown studying with ācāryas trained at ŚrīRaṅkam, where Tamil-language text as scripture is emphasized, and araiyar cevai is performed. In the images here, Nammāḻvār hands him a text, which is judged and deemed worthy by the caṅkam. Nammāḻvār is subsequently worshipped in numerous ways. In this, the narrative comes full-circle: the word of god is lost, found, taught, commented upon, and returned to god through its enactment in worship. Throughout, the authority of Tamil-language text and so-called “southern” traditions are emphasized.

Circumambulating the shrine of Nammāḻvār in worship, the beholder of the paintings participates in the history of the site and the history of its theological and devotional traditions as passed down through the ācāryas revered by Teṅkalai Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. Talapurāṇams create and promote a history for a locale. In doing so, the talapurāṇams not only promote the fame of the deity and the site in which he resides, but are a means through which individual people and

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129 This style of hat remains in use among those who perform araiyar cevai.
corporate entities may articulate their claim to a site.\textsuperscript{130} As Dutta argues for Śrī Vaiṣṇava talapurāṇams, they integrate the “narrative and textual tradition of the community…the Sampradāya, the commentarial, hagiographical and liturgical traditions and contributed towards the reinforcement of the collective consciousness and identity of the community.”\textsuperscript{131} Texts that give the histories of sacred places, such as talapurāṇams and guruparamparās, and the sacred places themselves, including temples and maṭams, are sites for both the production and articulation of individual and group identities.\textsuperscript{132}

\section*{Conclusion}

Text manifests in the murals of Nāyaka-period Tamil Nadu in a number of ways—as image of books, reading, or writing; as legible writing in inscriptions; and as pictorial representations of known texts. The murals discussed in this chapter represent the geographic and chronological breadth of Tamil Nāyaka painting. At the same time, they also represent the two most influential religious systems of the time, Tamil Śaiva Siddanta and Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, as well as the three genres of texts—deeply connected to the temple and its institutions—that were

\textsuperscript{130} Koppedrayer points to the potential of these texts to reveal their patrons and writers, who inscribe their identities into the texts: “Moreover, the lineages can be traced from references to receptors and lineages (and thus institutional affiliations) that appear in the introductory passages to the many talapurāṇam texts produced during this period, although to date little attention has been paid to this information.” Koppedrayer, "Are Śūdras Entitled to Ride in the Palanquin?,” 199, ftnt. 9.


\textsuperscript{132} This is, Dutta argues, particularly true of Śrī Vaiṣṇava literature, which from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries "served as an integrative force, unifying disparate social groups within a single community framework. The institutional network including the temples and the mathas accommodated the non-brahmana groups and gave them ritual space in temple activities." "Pilgrimage as a Religious Process: Some Reflections on the Identities of the Srivaisnavas of South India," 25.
influential at this time: talapurāṇams, bhakti literature, and hagiographies or guruparamparās. As we have seen, these three genres are thoroughly interwoven.

Talapurāṇams, drawing on geographic systems and iconographic content developed in bhakti literature, promote the fame of unique temple sites, and the unique god associated with each site. The paintings at Tiruppuṭaimarutūr, the earliest murals closely considered in this dissertation, pair hagiographic stories of two major bhakti saints with topographic images of the temples they praise in their poems. Even in this early example, the connection between bhakti poetry, the saints’ hagiographies, and the uniqueness of the places they praise is strongly articulated in the content and organization of the murals.

Scholarship that deals with the history of literature and patronage has noted that monastic institutions, maṭams, were the primary patrons of talapurāṇams, and that both of these experienced their greatest growth during the Nāyaka period. My reading of the donative inscriptions in the murals of the talapurāṇam at Maṭavār Vaḷākam documents for the first time the patronage of visual talapurāṇam by members of a maṭam. The text of the talapurāṇam available today accords with the order of the stories of the painted talapurāṇam, as well as much (but not all) of its content. Variations between the sources are natural, given that the transmission of the stories was and remains primarily an oral tradition, and the painters are unlikely to have painted from a text. Moreover, the unfinished inscriptional register that accompanies more-finished (but, ultimately, unfinished) paintings, indicates that although the painter left room for the accompanying inscriptions, these were added ex post facto. Thus, although today one looks to texts to identify and corroborate the visual narratives, this is evidently not the process through which the paintings were created or perceived.
The final set of paintings considered in this chapter, that at Āḻvār Tirunakari, requires familiarity with the hymns in praise of Śrī Vaiṣṇava sacred sites (this is examined more thoroughly in Chapter 5), the talapurāṇam, as well as with the history of transmission of texts sacred to the tradition, and the teachers who taught them. Talapurāṇams not only promote the fame of the deity and the site in which he resides, but are a means through which individual people and corporate entities may articulate their claim to a site. Scholarship has shown that texts such as talapurāṇams were especially used in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava context to establish the rights of one sect or community to a site. At Āḻvār Tirunakari, the paintings which document the transmission of texts from Viṣṇu to Nammāḻvār and to the ācāryas establishes a lineage for Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, and for this temple in particular, that is resolutely Teṅkalai in sectarian affiliation.

In all cases considered here, texts play a central role in the visual and notional content of the paintings. Texts appear as manuscripts throughout the paintings, and text is itself inscribed into the murals. Without knowledge of the history of texts—the bhakti poets, the development of theological and philosophical writing by figures such as Rāmānuja, and the generation of talapurāṇams by later writers—the full meaning of the paintings is lost, as are the networks of meanings between literature, site, temple, painting and the historical and divine figures associated with them. I do not argue that we read from text to image; rather, I advocate a reading of these paintings that takes into account their total context. In this chapter I highlight the self-consciousness of the textual tradition that informs the devotional traditions and sectarian identities expressed in the murals. The following chapter will examine wider social conditions of the Nāyaka period and document the diverse patrons of temple murals.
CHAPTER 4 - PATRONS AND PORTRAITS

The patrons of the wall and ceiling paintings that decorate so many temples of the Tamil region are for the most part unknown. The reason for this lies partly in the paucity of donor inscriptions generally, as well as the sharp drop in inscriptive activity during the Nāyaka period. In consequence, lithic and copperplate inscriptions that record the construction or renovation of the structure in which paintings are found are often used to assign credit for the paintings found within the buildings. Similarly, portrait statues, with or without identifying labels, are commonly assumed to be donor portraits. Studies of portraiture in South India thus are wont to conflate portrait image, donor, and donation. These studies largely focus on royal patronage, in part because images of political elites survive in greater number, as do texts that describe them.

This chapter contributes new evidence of active patronage by merchants, religious and political elites through documentation and analysis of previously unrecorded donor inscriptions and donor portraits in temple mural paintings. My findings elaborate in new ways what scholarship has come to recognize as distinctive about the Nāyaka period: This period is most often characterized as a highly diverse and competitive environment in which new social and

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1 Examples of the assumed correlation between patron and portrait are found in Hari Rao (1967), who assumes that the portrait sculptures in the Sīrāngam temple depict those who donated the maṇṭapa in which they are situated. Similarly, Thomas (1979) identifies the patron of the paintings at the Tēṇṇpurīvara temple in Pattīśvaram as the noble whose portrait sculpture is installed before the sanctum. Kaimal (2000) directly addresses, and refutes, this assumed association: “Even the presence of a king’s portrait on a Kaveri temple does not signify, moreover, that Cola kings were as yet directly responsible for the temple construction.” Dehejia (1998) gives Cola-period examples of the complicated relationships between portraiture and patronage.

2 “Royal patronage” is used loosely in the scholarship. As Branfoot notes, “given the wider social nature of patronage of temples in the Nāyaka period, ‘kings’ must include any major political dignitary, noble or ‘little king.’” Branfoot, "Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple," 14.
political actors vied for resources and status within a multilingual milieu—an environment that resulted in increased literary and artistic patronage. In this dynamic world, portrait images and inscriptions played a significant role as a means of self-representation and promotion for both individual donors and the groups to which they belonged.

DEFINING SOUTH INDIAN PORTRAITURE: TEXT AND IMAGE

Two modes of visual representation of real persons have long been recognized in the historiography of South Asian art: physical likenesses, or portraits, and textual denomination, the inscription of a name or title. Studies that approach the issue of representation of an individual through the inscription of his name address the problem in an early Buddhist context, where denominative inscriptions make possible the continuous presence of the donor before the living presence of the Buddha at the site of worship. Although not well developed for inscriptions in other contexts, the logic of this argument equally applies to studies of portrait sculpture, where scholarly interpretation assumes and affirms the living presence of the person represented in portrait sculpture.

The art historical narrative of portraiture in South Asia over the past one hundred years charts a trajectory from the wholesale rejection of the possibility that South Asia produced its own tradition of portraiture, to the argument that portraiture in India developed completely free

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4 Branfoot qualifies “presence”—indeed a thorny issue and one I will take up in Chapter 5—writing, “This is not, however, to imply that the presence of the king is ritually embodied in these images in the manner in which divine images are consecrated for worship, but temple ritual does acknowledge the king’s presence in the sculptural form.” Branfoot, "Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple," 29.
of outside influence.\footnote{Most colonial studies of South Asian art, such as Vogel (1925) and Smith (1930), argue against the existence—and even the possibility—of portraiture. Heras (1925), conversely, argues that true portraits, which are not idealized, emerge only under the Nayaks of Maturai. Nationalistic revision of the colonialist view is voiced by Coomaraswamy (1939), who redefines the concept of “portrait,” arguing that in an Indian context, portraiture reflects the “Spiritual-essence” rather than appearance of a living person; thus Coomaraswamy, in his preface to Aravamuthan (1931), prefers the term \textit{effigy} to \textit{portrait}. Aravamuthan (1930, 1931) argues in both of his books, however, that portraits are an ancient and enduring feature of Indian art, and especially of South Indian art; he reacts specifically against colonialist scholarship that promoted a “Hindu disinclination to realism” (1931: 1). The issue was picked up again by Rowland (1954), who argues that Indian art does not possess a tradition of portraiture because Indian images are too idealized to be considered portraits. Goswamy (1986) argues that portraiture in Indian (Rajput, as opposed to Mughal) painting is not concerned with “observed reality” but with the “inner reality” of its subjects. Dehejia (1998) contends that it is the \textit{use} of an object, rather than its appearance, that makes an image a portrait. Kaimal (1995, 1999, 2000) argues that portraiture is indigenous to South Asia, but argues that the term must be understood in a specifically South Asian context, where representation of the real appearance of an individual is neither the goal nor the practice of those who made portrait images. Kaimal draws on the terminology of semiotics to argue that a portrait must intend to be an index of the person it represents, and the viewer must recognize this intention. On this point, her argument is akin to Dehejia’s insofar as it argues for use and reception as measures of the image’s status as portrait. Branfoot (2000, 2001, 2007) likewise argues that portrait images, particularly those of the Nayaka period, represent a physical likeness of the individual they purport to represent, although the figures may yet be stylized or idealized. Portrait images are those whose “artistic intention” is to represent a specific person. Kaimal and Branfoot’s work is characterized by a desire to assert an indigenous origin for south Indian portraiture, as well as to expand the definition of portrait to include idealized figures within the category of “portrait.”}

This chapter will not reiterate these arguments; rather, I will build on the theoretical and evidentiary material of the most recent studies of portraiture in South India.\footnote{Kaimal (1999) is especially comprehensive in her survey of the literature, though Branfoot and Aravamuthan also base their argument for the indigenous origins of portraiture in a survey of the early historiography that argues the opposite.}

These studies almost exclusively focus on sculpture, and within sculpture, on royal portraits. This focus skews what we know to have been the reality of patronage in the Nāyaka period—one where the field of donors includes not only political elites, but merchants, and, importantly, non-brahmin religious actors, including members and heads of temples and monasteries.

\footnote{I have made a conscious decision to limit my discussion of the historiography on portraiture to that which pertains specifically to portraiture in South India. Kaimal (1999) is a model of an approach that fully engages the art history of portraiture in the West in her study of South Indian portraiture. Although such a comprehensive review of the subject can only be termed a strength, such an approach here belabor what is already well integrated into current scholarship, which I have in turn cited here. Moreover, it expands the subject beyond what I can adequately address in this project.}
Padma Kaimal’s studies, which focus on the 10th-century figural relief sculptures on temples near the Kaveri river area, argue that the defining feature of a portrait is that it is an index of a real person, rather than a close physical likeness. Crispin Branfoot, working on the problem of portraiture in the Nāyaka period, some 600 years later than the portraits on which Kaimal works, defines portraits as images that intend to represent a specific person, that are legible as such to their contemporary audience to it, and whose subject was alive at the time of its creation. Continuity between representations of an individual or among groups of figures is established by jewelry, dress, and disposition of the body rather than physiognomic stability or singularity.

Following Kaimal, I have adopted a definition of portrait in which its indexicality is central. Portraits represent real people who lived during or near to the execution of the work. Following Branfoot’s study of portrait sculpture, I also find that over the course of the Nāyaka period physiognomic specificity becomes increasingly pronounced. I will further argue that inscriptions of the names of real people act in a way consonant with this definition of portraiture. Names are indexical, and though they are not visually indicative of a person, their placement, I will show, is meant to suggest presence in a way commensurate with portrait images.

8 Kaimal proposes an understanding the genre rooted in indigenous understandings of the self, arguing that although the aim of portraiture is different in different cultures, all endeavor to capture something of the self. What all portraits do, no matter how they do it, is to represent a real, living or once-living person. Drawing on the vocabulary of semiotics, Kaimal argues that a portrait is both an object and an index, insofar that as an index, the portrait points to a living person. Although semiotics is not an “indigenously Indic way of knowing” Kaimal argues that this method better apprehends objects produced in a context temporally and geographically beyond direct experience. Kaimal, "The Problem of Portraiture in South India, Circa 870-970 A.D.; "Passionate Bodies: Constructions of the Self in South India," Archives of Asian Art 48(1995).

9 Branfoot, "Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple.*

10 Ibid; "Mangammal of Madurai and South Indian Portraiture; Jean-François Hurpré, "The Royal Jewels of Tirumala Nayaka of Madurai (1623-1659)," in The Jewels of India, ed. Susan Stronge (Bombay: Marg, 1995).
Although paintings are found throughout the Atmanathaswamy temple at Āvutaiyärkōvil, the subject of this study are those found on the ceiling of the maṇṭapa before the shrine of Nandikēsa Māṇikkavācakar. The paintings, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 5, are composed of grids spanning the width and length of four aisles of the maṇṭapa. Each cell within the grids is an iconic temple image, composed at minimum of the god and goddess shrine, a water tank, and sometimes the tree sacred to the temple; each site is accompanied by an identifying label (Figure 58). The images represent temples belonging to the 275 pāṭal perra tālams, sites revered in the Tamil Śaiva tradition that are praised in poems written by the sixty-three Nāyanmārkaḷ (Tamil Śaiva bhakti saints, fl. 5th-10th centuries AD), and compiled in the 11th-century text of the Tēvāram. The poetic hymns of the Tēvāram are customarily organized in text according one of two systems: paṇmūrai (according to musical mode) and tālamura (according to place and region). The order of those arranged according to place is governed by the order in which the pilgrim would visit; that is, roughly, east to west (or vice versa) and south to north (Figure 93). The geographic orientation and pilgrimage order of temple sites in the Tēvāram is manifest in the arrangement of the paintings on the ceiling of the maṇṭapa.

Included among these iconic temple images are four larger panels that incorporate narrative and figural scenes. These are the Naṭarāja Temple at Citamparam, the Mīnākṣī-
Sundaresvara Temple at Maturai, the Kamakoti Kamaksi Temple at Kanchipuram, and the Himalayan home of Śiva on Mt. Kailas. I believe that panels of Citamparam and Maturai are not contemporary with the rest of the ceiling, and will not include them in the foregoing discussion, which will focus on the Kailas and Kanchipuram panels.

In the figural scenes that adjoin the iconic images of Kailsa and the Kanchi Kamaksi temple are seven labeled portrait images. All of the labeled portrait images are stylistically and physiognomically differentiated from each other and from other, non-portrait, figures. Distinctions afforded these portrait images include differentiation of skin tone, hairstyles, jewelry and dress. Although other portrait-type figures are present, these are not named in accompanying inscriptions, and therefore function as portrait types because they are stylistically marked as individual people, but cannot be identified as named individuals. Four of the figures

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12 I am not sure of this identification, as my images are inadequate. But its visible features, as well as the labeled Vaikai river that runs alongside it, make this a defensible identification.

13 The Maturai and Citamparam panels appear to be contemporary with the narrative paintings on the walls of the pradakṣina patha around the Nandikesa Māṇikkavacakar shrine. I have not made a close study of these, but the costume of the figures is characteristic of Maratha clothing and turbans. Moreover, there are figures in the wall paintings that are directly copied from those of the ceiling. The dancers in the second register in the middle of the south wall are closely modeled on the dancers from the Kailas panel in the first north aisle of the maṇṭapa ceiling. In fact, the artist of the wall paintings has taken the three registers of adoring figures attendant to the Kailas image from the maṇṭapa ceiling panel and transposed them to a single register of figures attending the marriage of Śiva and Mīnākṣī at Maturai. The wall figures are less detailed, stiffly posed, and executed in a coarser manner than the ceiling figures; their proportions are also not as graceful as those of the ceiling figures. Because of the costuming, transposition and simplification of figures and their composition from ceiling to wall painting, I postulate that the wall paintings postdate those of the ceiling.

14 In answer to the vexed problem of portrait identification, Branfoot argues that “A more productive approach to portrait sculpture is to examine its general location, function and aesthetic characteristics in a temple setting, and seek to explain its appearance in the Nayaka period. What is significant is not what the image is, so much as what it does.” I am inclined to agree with proposal. As Branfoot suggests, it is possible to discuss the location, function and appearance of images that refer to an unknown individual, but not the person to whom the image once referred. Portrait images that may have been understood in their original context as true portraits, in the present function only as portrait types. Branfoot, Gods on the Move: Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple, 225.
are identified in the inscriptions as rulers belonging to the Arantangi Toṇṭaimān lineage, while another three are identified as office-holders or members of a *mātha*, a sectarian confraternity.\(^{15}\)

Relatively little is known about the chronology and activities of the Arantāṇki Toṇṭaimāns, especially compared to the wealth of literature on the neighboring Nāyaka, Maratha, Setupati, and Putukkōṭṭai Toṇṭaimān rulers of the same period.\(^{16}\) Most of what is known comes from lithic and copper-plate inscriptions.\(^{17}\) These record the donation of villages, land, food (*annatānam*), and the provision of worship to temples, maṭhas, and *agrahāras* (Brahmin settlements). The inscriptive record also attests that the Arantāṇki Toṇṭaimāns were major patrons of Āvuṭaiyārkōvil, which is less than fifteen kilometers from Arantaṇgi.\(^{18}\)

Labels identify two of the portrait images as Aruṇācala Vaṇaṅkāmuṭi Toṇṭaimān, once at the Kāmakōṭi Kāmakṣī temple at Kanchipuram, and again at the divine abode of Śiva at Mt. Kailas. Aruṇācala was the first of four kings to use the title “Vaṇaṅkāmuṭi,” meaning *he who bows to no one*.\(^{19}\) Irācu reports four donations made by Aruṇācala using this title in the years

\(^{15}\) *Mātha* (Ta. *majam*) is usually glossed as a monastery (as it is in this dissertation). However, the institution admitted both ascetic and lay (householder) members. Treating these institutions as strictly religious obscures their important social and political functions. Koppedrayer (1991) argues for this more inclusive definition; Oddie (1984), however, understands *mātha* more narrowly, as referring only to the residence of monks or ascetics. See Koppedrayer, "Are Śūdras Entitled to Ride in the Palanquin?"; G.A. Oddie, "The Character, Role and Significance of Non-Brahman Saivite Maths in Tanjore District, in the Nineteenth Century," in *Changing South Asia: Religion and Society*, ed. Kenneth Ballhatchet and David D. Taylor (Hong Kong: Published for the Centre of South Asian Studies in the School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London, by Asian Research Service, 1984).

\(^{16}\) While there is a significant body of literature in both Tamil and English on the histories of these dynasties, I have found few resources for the study of the (admittedly minor) Arantāṇki Toṇṭaimāns. The main sources I have consulted for the history of these rulers are two Tamil-language texts. Ce Irācu, *Toṇṭaimān Ceppēṭukaḷ*: Putukkōṭṭai, Arantāṇki Aracu (Taṇcāvūr: Tamil Palkalaik Kalakam, 2004), and Ce Irācu, Arantāṇkit Toṇṭaimāṅkal (Cennai: Ulakat Tamiḻrāycci Nīruvanam, 2008).

\(^{17}\) Inscriptions from the 17th and 18th centuries, when lithic inscriptions declined across all of Tamil Nadu, are recorded only on copper plates. Ce Irācu, *Arantāṇkit Toṇṭaimāṅkal* (Cennai: Ulakat Tamiḻrāycci Nīruvanam, 2008), 54.

\(^{18}\) *Arantāṅkit Toṇṭaimāṅkal* (Cennai: Ulakat Tamiḻrāycci Nīruvanam, 2008), 57.

\(^{19}\) *Arantāṅkit Toṇṭaimāṅkal*, 54.
1716, 1726, 1728, and 1731. The inscriptive record indicates that this title was in use from 1716 to 1759. Because Aruṇācala Vaṇaṅkāmuṭi is depicted twice, and his forebears but not successors are included in the portraits, and because the style of the paintings is appropriate to the early 18th century, I propose that Aruṇācala Vaṇaṅkāmuṭi Toṇtaimān is a likely patron of this cycle of paintings.

**Kanchipuram Kāmakōṭi Kāmākṣi Amman Temple**

The Kanchi Kāmākṣi temple is not a site praised the Tēvāram, though it is associated with the Ėkamparanātar temple, the first pāṭal pēṛṛa talam in Toṇtai Nāṭu, the region in which the Arantāṅki rulers exerted political power, and within which Kanchi is traditionally considered the center. Another unusual feature of this image is that it is the goddess temple, not the god’s temple, that is given pride of place—all other pāṭal pēṛṛa talams are temples dedicated to a male god. Further, this image represents the only disruption of the pictorial order of the temples following the talamuṇai system of the Tēvāram. The ruler-patrons’ disruption of the talamuṇai order of the Tēvāram temples emphasizes the presence, authority, and agency of these rulers as patrons, particularly of those sites within the territory in which they exercised political power.

The prominent insertion of the Kanchi Kāmākṣi temple into the landscape of Toṇtai Nāṭu asserts pictorially the influence exercised by the Arantāṅki Toṇtaimāns in this region, whether real or desired.

The panel, including two small narrative registers, occupies the space of about four registers and stretches across the width of the aisle (Figure 94). The center of the image shows

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20 In reality, the political power of these rulers was curtailed by more powerful neighbors, especially the Setupatis of Ramanatapuram, the Toṇtaimāns of Putukkōṭṭai, and the Marathas of Taṅcavūr.
the goddess seated within a temple.\textsuperscript{21} Adjacent and below the image of the goddess is a \textit{sri yantra}, which is as large in size as the goddess herself. Around this image is a frame, perhaps indicating a \textit{prākāra} wall. Palm trees fill the space between this and the second \textit{prākāra} wall, within which portrait figures at the bottom left and right corners stand in reverence facing toward the goddess. On the left and right sides of the temple are scenes that narrate a story from its talapurāṇam. This story tells of Parvati’s penance to win the hand of Śiva in marriage. This story connects the goddess to the Ėkāmparanāṭtar temple, which is first temple of Toṇṭai Nāṭu according to the \textit{talamurai} order of the \textit{Tēvāram}; hence, this story, the talapurāṇa of the site, connects the Kāmākṣi temple to the group of images in which it is embedded. The register below includes three more portrait images, as well as narrative scenes of Parvati and her attendant women gathering flowers.\textsuperscript{22} Piles of food, identified with labels, are also included in a small register; there are jugs of milk and yogurt, sugar cane, limes, jackfruit, and bananas. The final scene is labeled as the village of Kanchipuram, though it shows only a gopuram, a pīṭam, two water tanks, and three trees.\textsuperscript{23}

Of the four figures depicted within the prākāra walls of the Kanchi Kamakshi temple, only those on the left are labeled. The two on the right are portrait types, however, and are represented through costume as Śaiva ascetics (Figure 95). The first figure is larger than the second. His skin is golden. He wears rudrākṣa beads around his neck, an ochre \textit{antarīya} (a patterned hip-cloth) over a short white vēṣṭi and diaphanous ankle-length vēṣṭi. He holds his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} The goddess has four hands; dirt has made the objects difficult to identify. It appears that she may hold a \textit{pāśa} in her upper left hand.
\item \textsuperscript{22} The women are identified in the inscription as \textit{ceṭiyapeṇkaḷ}; the place is identified as \textit{nantavanam}.
\item \textsuperscript{23} The label is located in the pictorial register, rather than the inscriptional register. It reads, \textit{u yivaṭam kāṇchipurapattaṇam}. Most of the inscriptions in the inscriptional register are damaged beyond reading. However, the inscription under the pīṭam identifies it: \textit{u taṇi pīṭam}.
\end{itemize}
hands in aṇjali mūdra. The second figure is smaller. His skin is dark brown and marked by vībhūti over his torso. He wears a reddish turban, a plain short white vēṣṭi, and holds a staff between his arms, upraised in aṇjali mūdra. The two figures on the left side of the image also face toward the center, hands together in aṇjali (Figure 96). The leftmost figure, furthest from the goddess, is labeled Rāja Aruṇācala Vaṇāṅkāmuṭī Toṇṭamān.  

24 He wears a short vēṣṭi beneath a transparent ankle-length vēṣṭi, over which he wears a patterned antartiya and shawl looped over his arm in a style more typical of portrait figures of the 16th and 17th centuries. He wears a white turban, multiple necklaces and armbands, and a large katar dagger on his right hip. The figure who stands before him is slightly larger and is darker in skin color. He wears the same lower garments as Aruṇācala (though his antartiya is unpatterned) and the same jewelry, but his head-covering is different: it is a transparent fabric that covers the hair and has long ties at the back that hang down past the shoulder.  

25 The label below the figure is damaged, but I read it as Rāja Āṇṭavarāya Vaṇāṅkāmuṭī Toṇṭamān, the father of Aruṇācala.  

26 That the figure of Āṇṭavarāya appears before Aruṇācala and is larger in size accords with this identification, as hieratic scaling is a common convention.

27 In sum, this second prākāra of the Kamakshi temple hosts two Śaiva ascetics, opposite from and only slightly smaller in stature to the two Toṇṭaiman rājas on the left.

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24 There is another word that concludes the inscription, but it is no longer legible.

25 This same headgear can be seen on statues at the temple, such as on the portrait images now identified as Setupati donors, which are located just beyond the rajagopura.

26 There is a problem with titles here. The figure of Āṇṭavarāya is also given the title of Vaṇāṅkāmuṭī. However, the inscripotional evidence seems to indicate that Vaṇāṅkāmuṭī was used first with his son, Aruṇācala. If Aruṇācala, however, is the patron of these paintings (a likely conjecture since he is twice shown), it would not be unreasonable to think he might project such a title back into the reign of his father.

27 Greater research on fashion of this period is urgently needed. Hurpré’s work is a step forward, but not systematic, nor easily mapped chronologically or dynastically. Jean-François Hurpré, "Le Costume Nāyaka Dans L’ Inde Du Sud" (Memoire de Maitrise, Universite de Paris, 1986); "The Royal Jewels of Tirumala Nayaka of Madurai (1623-1659)."
The denominative inscriptions, as another form of individual representation, elevate the royal portrait figures’ status.

The three portrait images in the following register are likewise turned towards the goddess, hands pressed together in añjali (Figure 97). Labels identify the three figures: Maṇiyum Tāndavamūrttiyar Pillai, Cannamaṇiyum Muttu Virappa Pillai Avarkal, and Māppillai Muttu Pillai. The first figure, who is the largest, also wears the most jewelry (two large gold earrings and gold rings on his fingers), a fine transparent hair-covering similar to that of Āṇṭavarāya, as well as fine cloth for his vēṣṭi. The word that prefaces his name, “maṇiyum,” I take to be an alternate spelling of “maṇiyam,” a title that identifies someone holding official power, such as a revenue official, manager, or superintendent of a village, land, or temple. The second figure is smaller in size and wears only two golden hoop earrings. He wears a white cloth turban, but his vēṣṭi and hip-cloths (antarīya) are almost identical to those of the first figure. The title that prefaces his name indicates that he is a junior official: I interpret “canna” in its meaning of small to indicate “junior;” as “canna maṇiyam” this figure may be an official who occupies the position of maṇiyam junior to the figure that precedes him. The addition of “avarkal” at the end of his name is a mark of respect. The final figure is the smallest of the three, but is dressed identically to the second figure. He does not have a title that distinguishes his office. However, he, like the others, is identified with the title “pillai.” Pillai is a title that may refer to members of the Vēḷāḷa caste group, but in this period, “pillai” was also used to designate members of Śaiva maṭhas.28 The image associates these officials with kings and ascetics at a temple, while the titles

28 According to Dr. Y. Subbarayalu, pillai was at this time used as an honorific for members of a Śaiva maṭha, rather than as a caste title (personal communication). The chronology of these usages has as yet eluded me. On the confusion of caste names and titles see Jacob Pandian, Caste, Nationalism, and Ethnicity: An Interpretation of Tamil Cultural History and Social Order (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1987), Chapter 8.
indicate both community affiliation as well as occupation. Together, these factors suggest that the figures’ association with, and honor at, the temple may be as members of a maṭha affiliated in some way with the Kamakshi temple, or as agents in the temple.29

The Śaiva maṭhas that emerged in this period, and specifically in Toṇṭaināṭu (where Kanchipuram is located), though also elsewhere, were populated and run by members of the Vēḷāḷa community, some of whom use the name Piḷḷai.30 This community was primarily an agrarian community and its members were landholders, making them powerful players in the land-based economy of pre-colonial South India.31 As discussed in the previous chapter, this group was able to consolidate power through the administration of land grants (kaṭṭalais) given for the provision of temple functions or rituals. The donation of kaṭṭalais, administrated by maṭhas for the benefit of the temples to which they were given, gave greater control of important resources to the maṭhas and to the communities that controlled them. A significant feature of the

29 There is very little critical literature on the history of maṭhas in this region, and especially during the Nāyaka period. The most comprehensive is Koppedrayer’s dissertation (1990) and article (1991). Oddie (1984) and Nambi Aroon (1984) focus on nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively. Raghavan (1989) gives a brief overview of maṭhas that follow Saiva Siddhanta. Recently, Karashima et al. (2011) have documented inscriptions pertaining to maṭhas; as inscriptive activity in the Nāyaka period is meager, the authors themselves state that other means would be necessary to document maṭhas of this period.

30 Maṭhas in Toṇṭai Nāṭu are the best studied, for what reason I do not know. There are four maṭhas in the Toṇṭaināṭu region that were established in the sixteenth century, and count as their members, and are headed by, members of the Vēḷāḷa community. The first of these is the Tiruvāvatūrāi Āṭṭam, which controls Āvuṭāyärkōvil, and which was patronized by the Arantangi Tondaimans. The others are located at Dharmapuram, Tirupanantal, and Suriyankoil. Koppedrayer, "The Sacred Presence of the Guru: The Velala Lineages of Tiruvavatuturai, Dharmapurum, and Tiruppanantal," 5; T S Raghavan, "Saiva Siddhanta Maths," in Monasteries in South India, ed. Swami Swahānanda (Hollywood, Ca.: Vedanta Society of Southern California, 1989). Although there is an important maṭha in Kanchipuram that today is associated with the Kamakshi Amman temple, the Kanchi Kamakoti Śankaracharya Math, the maṭha’s control of the temple was established only in 1863. This association, postdates the execution of the paintings, which may be stylistically assigned to the second quarter of the 18th century – a time that corresponds to the reign of Aruṇācala. Mattison Mines and Vijayalakshmi Gourishankar, "Leadership and Individuality in South Asia: The Case of the South Indian Big-Man," The Journal of Asian studies 49, no. 4 (1990): 775.

31 “The Vēḷāḷa caste network represented in the members of the non-Brahmin centres was well-established throughout south India by the 17th century. As a landlord caste grouping it exercised a great deal of control over agrarian production, and hence over the local economy, which was land based.” Koppedrayer, "Are Śūdras Entitled to Ride in the Palanquin?," 205.
*kaṭṭalais* donated during this period is that their donors are not limited to the immediate vicinity of the *maṭha* or temple. Koppedrayer’s study of these institutions has been discussed in Chapter Three.²² Koppedrayer documents that many came from emergent rulers, such as the Putukkŏṭṭai Toṇṭaimāns and the Setupatis of Ramanatapuram (and, I would add, the Arantāṇki Toṇṭaimāns³³), who nurtured alliance with the Vēḷāḷa community in order to “garner influence in the control of production, which was vital to any consolidation of political power in south India at that time.”³⁴ The inclusion of the two Śaiva ascetics and three *Piḷḷais* in the image of the Kāmākṣi temple is significant in this context. The unnamed ascetics are shown opposite the rajas and equally proximate to the goddess, but they lack labels and are slightly smaller in stature than the rājas. The Piḷḷais are visually subordinate to the rajas, but larger in size and elevated through portraiture and label inscriptions. These figures associated with Śaiva religious institutions are honored in the paintings, albeit within a hierarchy that maintains the primacy of the Arantāṇki Toṇṭaimān rajas, who are the likely patrons of the paintings. The distribution of honor to both royal benefactors and maṭha members is a crucial function of the paintings.

The importance of the receipt of honor in the south Indian temple has been amply demonstrated in secondary literature.³⁵ In their seminal article, Appadurai and Breckenridge refer

³² "Are Śūdras Entitled to Ride in the Palanquin?,” 204.

³³ Irēc records numerous donations made by Arantāṇki Toṇṭaimān rulers to these institutions.

³⁴ Koppedrayer, "Are Śūdras Entitled to Ride in the Palanquin?,” 206.

to a nebulously-defined “set of moral and economic transaction[s]” in which one receives a share, pañku, of honor. Shares of food, flower garlands and clothing worn by the deity, and water used to bath the deity are the material goods that both constitute and signify honor. These are apportioned first to the donor, then temple servants, and finally worshippers. Honors also include rights, including the right to offer service through endowment or ritual, to move resources or instruct actors in a ritual event, the right to play a part in ritual, or simply the right to be present for a ritual. Appadurai and Breckenridge write that “the sum total of one’s rights, over time, would constitute a share…in the temple. This share is given public expression and authoritative constitution by some combination of the finite set of substances transvalued by association with the deity, which are referred to as ‘honours.’” The exchange and display of honors at the temple, especially between political and religious elites, became extremely important in the shifting constellations of power that characterize the Nāyaka period. In this context, the role of sectarian leaders, such as the heads of maṭhas, was primary.

36 These redistributed leavings of the deity are known as ‘honours’ (mariyātai), and they are subject to variation and fluidity both in their content as well as in their recipients. Recognized sectarian leaders and political figures are often given some prominent combination of these ‘honours.’” Appadurai and Breckenridge, "The South Indian Temple: Authority, Honour and Redistribution," 197.

37 "The South Indian Temple: Authority, Honour and Redistribution," 198. I have extensively quoted Appadurai and Breckenridge as they give the most complete definition of “honors.” On the lack of a clear system for analyzing this “complex conceptual system,” see Rudner, "Religious Gifting and Inland Commerce in Seventeenth-Century South India," 373, nt. 16.

38 Appadurai demonstrates that “in the socio-political context of the period from 1350-1700, sectarian leaders were crucial intermediaries for the introduction, extension and institutionalization of warrior-control over constituencies and regions…. These warrior-kings bartered the control of agrarian resources gained by military prowess, for access to the redistributive processes of temple, which were controlled by sectarian leaders.” Appadurai, "Kings, Sects and Temples in South India, 1350-1700 A.D.,” 55.
Building on the work of Appadurai and Breckenridge, scholarship has focused on the way in which the temple honors received by an individual achieve both material and non-material gains for the community the individual represents, or to which he belongs. Mines and Gourishankar, conversely, argue for the primacy of the individual who secures temple honors not firstly for his community, but for himself. Temple donation and receipt of a share in temple honors yet remain moored in social relationships and are, therefore, fundamentally political. Mines and Gourishankar write,

…[temple honors] equate with political relations, in effect being symbolic markers investing persons with the authority to represent and command…they distinguish individuals, acknowledging them as society's agents. It is this aspect of honors-their symbolic role connecting individual identity with agency…organizing society into institutions and constituencies-that we wish to stress. This connection has not been incorporated into theories of the Indian person, perhaps because it has been assumed that the individual is significant only in opposition to groups and that Indians act and therefore are honored, not as individuals, but as representatives of groups. This thinking, however, involves a false dichotomy: that individuals exist only in opposition to groups. Individuals always exist in relation to groups, and the individuality of eminence that honors help define necessarily defines individuality in relationship to others. Further, honors are achievements that individuals seek for themselves. Contrary to interpretations that deny or downplay individuality in Indian society, our theory finds individuality vigorously acknowledged and valued in the practice of ritual honor…

The importance of receiving temple honors is paramount for the individual, who always exists and is defined in relationship to other individuals and social formations or groups. While portraits and inscriptions do not constitute what are typically regarded as “temple honors,” they are, I argue, a form of honor that, in the words of Mines and Gourishankar, vigorously acknowledges individuality.

Similarly, Branfoot argues in his study of royal temple portrait sculpture that it is the exchange of honor and recognition between god and king that is the basic function of the sculpture. But this is not a private exchange: royal portrait sculptures are the real presence of the king who “see[s] the deity and the deity sees them: this is *darshana*, sacred sight in Hindu practice. But this is a three-cornered relationship, for not only do the god and king greet each other, but devotees or worshippers see both the king and the deity and the relationship between the two when they are assembled for the festival.” The exchange between god and king that confers honor is fundamentally a public act, one embodied and enacted through portrait sculpture. I extend this argument to mural painting: The representation of specific individuals through inscription and portraiture is a way in which honor is conferred on the individual and, by extension, the social formation with which he is identified. Portraits and nominative inscriptions in mural paintings at once communicate and consolidate rank and identity. Such expressions are fundamentally “vigorously individual,” socially constitutive, and meant to be seen.

**KAILASA**

The culmination of the pilgrim’s progress through all the regions and sites depicted on the ceiling of the Mānikavācakar maṇṭapa delivers her finally to the home of Śiva at Mount Kailasa. The scene of Kailas is festive, filled with dancers and divine beings who shower flowers upon the god (Figure 98). To the right, in a panel that adjoins the Kailasa image on the north side of the shrine porch, three horizontal registers depict rishis, dēvas, and dancers worshipping Śiva; all are identified with labels. The first register shows three rows of rishis tightly packed into the

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40 Branfoot contends that portrait sculptures, mostly installed in the circumambulatory passages of temple, are activated during festival processions, when the god would “meet” the royal portrait, which is typically raised to a level equal to that of a processional palanquin. Branfoot, "Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple," 29.
pictorial space, the first two of whom offer handfuls of flowers to the image of Śiva in the adjacent panel. The label below reads, *Forty-eight thousand rishis came to Kailasa and worshipped Śiva.* The second register shows Nandīkēśvara, the human form of Śiva’s mount, facing away from Kailas, toward a multitude of dēvas (celestial beings), all wearing crowns, and arranged roughly in three rows. The inscription under the crowned figures of the devas reads, *All three hundred thirty million dēvas came and worshipped Śiva, the giver of grace residing on Kailasa.* The final register shows four richly dressed and bejeweled dancers accompanied by a dance master and musicians. The dancers are identified in inscriptions as the heavenly apsaras, Rambha, Urvaśi, Tilottama, and Menaka (Figure 99).

Within this august heavenly assembly, nestled among the crowned devas at the right side of the second register, is an inset cell in which three figures stand, hands in aṅjali. Below the figures is a register of text, divided into three cells corresponding to the three figures. The first figure is identified as Rekunāṭa Pūpāla Vaṇāṅkāmuṭi Toṇṭamān Āvarkal (Figure 100). There is no inscription beneath the second figure. The third figure is identified as Aruṇācala Vaṇāṅkāmuṭi Toṇṭamān Āvarkal, the same individual represented in the Kāmākṣi temple portraits.

We have seen that Aruṇācala Vaṇāṅkāmuṭi Toṇṭaimān issued inscriptions between 1716 and 1731, and was the first of the kings to use the title Vaṇāṅkāmuṭi. I have so far been unable to

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41 Forty-eight thousand is a standard enumeration of rishis who attend the gods. The Tamil inscriptions reads, *u kayilāsatite vanṭu nātpatteṇṇayiram riḷikaḷum cuvāmi iericatam paṇṇukīṭatu u.*

42 Three-hundred thirty million is also a standard number of devas. The Tamil reads, *u kayilācavācarrāka eluṭantarulikṛita cuvāmiyai mupputumukkoṭi tevarkaḷum vanṭu terisanam paṇṇukīṭatu u.* There is also a label identifying Nandikēśvara.

43 My thanks to Davesh Soneji for pointing out the dance-master, holding cymbals and bent down, making eye contact with the final dancer. I have since found that this posture is almost invariably used to indicate the figure of the dance-master in painting.

44 I thank Kesavan Veluthat and Indira Peterson for helping me read arammai as Rambha.
identify Rekunāṭa Pūpāla with any of the kings named in other stone or copper plate inscriptions. However, this maṇṭapa, according to the temple’s current talapurāṇam, is known by multiple names: The Periya (Big) Maṇṭapa, the Thousand-Pillared Maṇṭapa and Rekunāṭa Pūpāla Maṇṭapa. There is an intriguing inscription that records information about the construction of the maṇṭapa. The inscription, issued by the second successor of Aruṇācala, Mutṭu Vaṇāṅkāmuṭi Toṇṭaimān, states that construction of the maṇṭapa was begun by one Accutappa Toṇṭaimān, and for that reason the maṇṭapa is known as the “Accuta Pūpāla Maṇṭapa.” It is unclear whether Accuta and Raghunatha (Rekunāṭa) are the same person. Since two modern accounts name the patron as Raghunatha Pūpāla, and there is an inscribed portrait of one

45 Koppedrayer mentions an unpublished copperplate inscription dated to 1603 from Tiruvāvatūruturai that describes an endowment made by one “Rekunāṭa Vaṇāṅkāmuṭittonṭaimān” and administered by a paṇṭāram. This is curious, however, because Irācu states that Aruṇācala Vaṇāṅkāmuṭi Toṇṭaimān, whose reign occurred more than one-hundred years later, was the first to use the title Vaṇāṅkāmuṭi in inscriptions. Koppedrayer, "Are Śūdras Entitled to Ride in the Palanquin?,” 205, nt. 17; Irācu, Arantāṅkī Toṇṭaimāṅkal, 54.

46 Pa. Makāliṅkam, Tirupperuntuṟai Tala Varalāṭu, 2nd ed. (Tiruvāvatūruturai: Tiruvāvatuttoṟai Āṭtnam, 2009), 16. The maṇṭapa is also named as both the “Periya Maṇṭapa” and the “Rakunāṭa Būppāla Maṇṭapa” in the comprehensive account given at Shaivam.org (http://www.shaivam.org/siddhanta/sp/spt_t_tirupperunturai.htm, accessed 7/10/12). The website misidentifies the shrine in the maṇṭapa as the Sivāṅkāvācakar shrine, which is located in the third enclosure of the temple. That the author intends the Nandisvara Māṅikkavācakar shrine is clear from the physical description of the disposition of the shrine and the description of the painting of a bird (here named as a “Anṭaranṭa” bird, and elsewhere called a gandabherunda (see Majlis 2011)) found on the ceiling adjacent to the shrine. Brigitte Khan Majlis, "Gandabherunda Images of Textiles and Monuments of South India,” in South India under Vijayanagara : Art and Archaeology, ed. Anila Verghese and Anna L. Dallapiccola (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

47 Accutappa, for reason unknown, did not finish the maṇṭapa; therefore, Mutṭu took up the project to finish it. Mutṭu’s minister, Taṇāmuṭtvirappillai finished it on the king’s behalf in 1737. The inscription also gives the names of the project’s managers, accountants, artisans, and masters. It is of note, in connection with the portrait images of the three Pillais in the Kamakshi panel, that the project managers are designated with the term “maṇiyam” and both are identified as “Pillai.” Irācu, Arantāṅkī Toṇṭaimāṅkal, 58. That the maṇṭapa was not finished until 1737 does not indicate that the paintings could not predate this dedication. The Nandisvara Māṅikkavācakar shrine is actually located within, and a part of, a larger maṇṭapa. The larger maṇṭapa is cruciform in shape, with aisles in the north, south, and east sides; the west is occupied by the east-facing Nandisvara Māṅikkavācakar shrine. The shrine and its maṇṭapa stand on a plinth raised above the level of the rest of maṇṭapa accessed by a set of six stairs; though situated within the large maṇṭapa, it is a space that is set apart. The Nandisvara ashrine and maṇṭapa are only about one-third of the total structure. It is possible, then, that any part of this structure could have been finished by Mutṭu. In fact, the temple’s talapurāṇam states that although it is within the maṇṭapa, the shrine itself is old. Makāliṅkam, Tirupperuntuṟai Tala Varalāṭu, 19.
Raghunatha Pūpāla in the paintings in the maṇṭapa, the variation of the name in the inscription as Accuta Pūpāla is curious. Nevertheless, the popular name of the maṇṭapa, corroborated by the portrait, indicates that Rekunāta Pūpāla was an historical figure and an important patron of the temple, remembered even today in the maṇṭapa that bears his name and his portrait.

The placement of the royal figures and use of the title “Vaṇāṅkāmuṭi” in these portraits is provocative – and seems to be intentionally so. Irācu points out that during the period in which the Arantāṅki Toṇṭaimāṅs used this title, 1716-1759, much more powerful rulers, non-Tamil in origin, held sway over much of the Tamil region.\(^{48}\) Irācu specifically mentions the empire of Vijayanagara and the Maturai Nāyakas; added to this list could be the Maratha rulers in Tanjavur, and the Tamil-origin Setupatis of Rammad and Putukkōṭai Toṇṭaimans, all of whose interests directly conflicted with those of the Arantangi Toṇτaimans.\(^{49}\) It is in this context that the self-representation of Aruṇācala and his predecessors through patronage, portraiture and inscription becomes defiantly political. Assuming Aruṇācala to be the patron of the paintings in the maṇṭapa built by his predecessors, the choice to represent the entire Tamil Śaiva sacred landscape – rather than a narrative of the temple *talapurāṇa* or other popular subject—suggests a certain amount of self-promotion and pictorial contraversion of political reality.\(^{50}\)

\(^{48}\) Irācu, *Arantāṅkit Toṇṭaimāṅkal*, 54.

\(^{49}\) Arantangi was located between the kingdoms of the Tanjavur Marathas and the Setupatis of Ramanatapuram, both powerful and contesting each other’s territorial claims. Arantangi was a major bone of contention in the “Marava War of Succession” from 1720-29, during the reign of Aruṇācala. See R. Sathianathaier, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, The Madras University Historical Series (London: H. Milford Oxford University Press, 1924), 225-29. I am indebted to Indira Peterson for pointing out to me the great disparity between the image and the political realities of Toṇṭaināṭu in this period.

\(^{50}\) And yet, Irācu reports that the inscriptions from the Arantangi Toṇτaiman honor the Setupati rulers of Ramanatapuram and the Maratha rulers at Tanjavur, major rulers at the north and south of the Arantangi Toṇτaiman’s regions, both of which enjoyed greater power than the Toṇτaimans. Irācu, *Arantāṅkit Toṇτaimāṅkal*, 57-58.
The pilgrim who follows the sacred landscape, arranged in pilgrimage order, will end her tour in the northern aisle, where inserted into the Tondainadu landscape is the very large representation of the Kanchi Kamakshi temple with which we commenced this section, the only temple that does not belong to the series of pāṭal pera talams. In the painting of Aruṇācala and his father, Anṭavarāya, two ascetics, and three pillais are singled out for honor at the Kanchipuram temple through inclusion of their names, titles, and portrait images. The subsequent depiction of Aruṇācala, along with the probable patron of the maṇṭapa itself, Raghunatha, inserted among the gods who worship Śiva at Mount Kailas, promotes an image of the rulers as ones who enjoy divine favor as well as the support of religious institutions that were central to accessing economic and political power, as well as traditional forms of political legitimacy established through temple patronage. The title of Vaṇaṅkānuṭi, He Who Bows to No One, leaves little room for misinterpretation of the message the ruler-patrons wish to convey. Position, rank, and honor—desired and real—are asserted in labels and portraits that represent specific real individuals.

Maṭavār Valākam—Maṭam Patronage

The paintings in the Vaittiyanātar temple at Maṭavār Valākam, like those at Āvuṭaiyärkōvil, honor individuals; the representation of individuals is achieved here, however, only through donor inscription, and not through pictorial portrait. The epithets given in the inscriptions distinguish this as a corporate donation—one I will argue is a monastic donation—at once honoring the individual and the social formation, or institution, to which he belongs. The donors’ names are the only text that occurs within the pictorial registers of the murals; all other text is limited to the inscriptive registers. The intrusion of the names into the pictorial field
incorporates the person named into the beholder’s apprehension of the paintings. The position of the names within the image may indicate that such inscriptions occupy an ontological position between text and image insofar as they represent an actual person. At both Āvuṭaiyārkōvil and Maṭavār Vaḷākam, whether in image or in text, the individual is honored and perpetually commemorated for his gift through representation that renders him in constant proximity to the deity.

The roughly sixty-five linear feet of painting in the maṇṭapa that serves as the entrance to the temple have already been described: they depict the sacred home of Śiva on Mt. Kaḷas, narrates stories from the temple’s talapurāṇam, and includes topographic temple images (Figure 73). The pictorial registers are separated by thick black fields outlined in golden borders, most of which are filled with white Tamil-language inscriptions that describe the action that occurs in the images directly below them. The images and text are eminently readable: the paintings are roughly twenty feet from the ground, and a typical text box with two or three lines of text is seven to eight inches tall. The text is white set against black, the best choice to reflect light in the dimness of the temple. Standing below the paintings, the registers of which are on average three feet tall, one can easily read both the visual and textual narratives.

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51 I draw on Dehejia’s concept of intrusion with regard to the donative inscriptions on narrative images at Barhut. Dehejia, “On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art.”

52 Mention has already been made in the introduction of this chapter of scholarship that understands inscriptions of names to stand in for the real presence of the person.

53 I draw on Ebeling’s articulation of a sign system of royal self-representation, but expand this to consider how non-royal actors participated and manipulated the system for their own self-representation. Ebeling writes that royal patronage relied on a “sign system of courtly representational practices which included not only courtly poetry and general patronage of the arts, but also royal processions, the systematic and calculated giving of gifts….Such acts of display…would seek to establish a contact between the ruler and the ruled through a common representational idiom, a common repertory of signs with which both parties needed to be familiar.” Ebeling applies the idea of a sign system of courtly representational practices to the emergent zamindar class of the 19th century. Ebeling, Colonizing the Realm of Words: The Transformation of Tamil Literature in Nineteenth-Century South India, 109.
The donor inscriptions are located in the visual fields of each of the first five registers. All of these inscriptions, which are roughly aligned on the right side of each register, carry formulaic denominations composed of an individual name and title followed by the word *upaiyam*, indicating they are a gift to the temple from the named person. These inscriptions are uniformly written in white text on a black field painted over the mural after its completion. These text fields sometimes conform to the branches of a tree, a hanging curtain, or simply occupy the space between figures. The inscriptions are given pride of place, situated near the beginning of each figurative register, large enough to be read by anyone standing below, and set off from the rest of the text so that they intrude upon the viewer’s reading of the visual narrative. The names inscribed upon the images that relate the history and sacredness of the temple, like donations today that still proudly bear the label *upayam*, were meant to be seen.

The first pictorial register is larger than all the others, a kind of iconic capstone to the entire cycle of paintings that otherwise narrate the *tiruviḻaiyāṭal* (sacred amusing and instructive games) of Śiva at Maṭavār Valākam. The panel depicts Śiva residing on Mt. Kailas, surrounded by adoring divine and semidivine beings, saints, rishis, and servants (Figure 74). The donor inscription is placed just to the right of Mt. Kailas, before the first worshipping rishi on the right side (Figure 101). The inscription and black field on which it is written are relatively large, equal in size to the body of Śiva. The inscription reads *Siri [Śrī] Paṇṭāṟam Vitṛappa Pillai upaiyam.*

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54 The rest of the ceiling seems to be, to varying degrees, incomplete. It is clear from the paintings themselves that although the narratives and paintings were begun on the entire ceiling, the finishing (including the addition of narrative and donor inscriptions) was accomplished from west to east. The

55 This is an alternate to the more common *upayam*, meaning a gift or donation to a temple or monastery (*Tamil Lexicon*), or a gift for religious purposes (*Fabricius*).

56 Since the inscriptions were added *ex post facto*, and since each register has a different patron, it seems likely that the named donors were not responsible for planning or executing the paintings.
The prefix of Siri (Srī) Paṇṭāram indicates that this person is the head of a non-brahmin Śaiva *maṭha* or is a non-brahmin temple priest.\(^\text{57}\) This first register, the iconic image of Śiva, which is both the beginning and culmination of the cycle of narrative paintings\(^\text{58}\), bears a donor inscription that designates the person of the highest rank.

Subsequent donor inscriptions name individuals who are exclusively male and whose name ends with the honorific *Pillai*. Since the title is used consistently for all of the people named, and since they are organized under the name of the *paṇṭāram*, a person unambiguously affiliated with a Śaiva religious institution, I am inclined to identify them as members of a maṭha headed by Siri [Srī] Paṇṭāram Virappa Pillai. All of the inscriptions are prominently placed, usually between the first and second scenes from the right side of the register, proximate to Śiva or the protagonist of the story, the god Surya or the saint Durvāsa.\(^\text{59}\) The narratives with which the inscription are integrated relate to the worship of Śiva at this temple and site; it is therefore appropriate that donors to this temple would associate themselves with the worship of Śiva’s manifestation here.\(^\text{60}\)

The first of these donor inscriptions is painted over one of the festoons that decorate the top of the first narrative register (register 2). The name is positioned between the invocation of Śiva in the first scene and the beginning of the narrative in the second, where the god and

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\(^{57}\) I am indebted to Dr. Y. Subbarayalu and M. Kannan of the French Institute of Pondicherry for their help teasing out meaning from some of the more difficult inscriptions. I am particularly indebted for their identification of *paṇṭāram* and *pillai* as titles indicating that the person named is associated with a Saiva *maṭha*.

\(^{58}\) The narrative of the paintings moves east, making this the first panel of the cycle. However, this is the west-most panel, adjacent to the doorway that leads into the temple and towards the sanctum within. It is thus the last image the viewer encounters walking into the temple. As an iconic, and therefore atemporal image, it may be read as first, last, and always.

\(^{59}\) The narrative content of the registers is discussed at length in Chapter 5.

\(^{60}\) Maṭhas was the most prolific patrons of *talapurāṇams*, the texts that narrative these site-specific stories.
goddess are shown seated in conversation (Figure 102). The inscription identifies one 
Poṭṭampalam Pillai. The donor inscription in the second narrative register (register 3) is again 
positioned between the first and second scenes. Here it is inscribed into the branches of a tree, 
leaning in close to the Śivalinga bathed in rays of light by the Sun god, Surya (Figure 103). The 
name records Poṭṭam Perumāḷ Pillai. The donor inscription of the following register is 
positioned directly over the body of the sage Durvāsa (Figure 104). The narrative text above 
describes that Durvāsa worships and implores Śiva to bestow his grace upon him; this text seems 
to apply equally, however, to both Durvāsa and Periya Cāmiyar Pillai, named in the inscription, 
as the two are compositionally joined in the pictorial register. The final donor inscription is again 
located directly above the figure of Durvāsa as he worships the Śivalinga (Figure 105). The 
inscriptional field naming Pāṇṭiya Pillai is adjacent to the jatāmukuta of Durvāsa, visually 
associating the donor with Durvāsa and with the action of worshipping Śiva.61 Shading the 
Śivalinga within the branches of a tree, festooning the divine manifestation, or accompanying the 
Saint Durvasa in his worship of Śiva, the names themselves, in a way analogous to pictorial 
portraiture, participate in the narratives into which they are incorporated.

The inscriptions, activated compositionally within the visual narrative, argue for the real 
presence of the person named in the inscription. Although they do not pictorially approach the 
status of portrait, the donor inscriptions participate in the visual narrative, identify an individual, 
and in the temple context, confer honor on that individual.62 That there are separate inscripational

61 The beginning of the donor’s name is missing due to deterioration of the painting.

62 Mack, in her study of Vijayanagara and Nāyaka-period lithic inscriptions on temples, argues that donor 
inscriptions were analogous to portrait sculpture insofar as they visually represent the public identity of the donors. 
She writes, “South Indian political power was tied to dharma….Thus, rulers were the quintessential benefactors of 
religious institutions, confirming their right to rule by supporting temples. The patronage of kings and members of 
the elite was visually apparent in sculptural representations of the donors and stone inscriptions recording gifts on
registers that relate the narrative through written description, further indicates that these
denominative inscriptions are categorically different from the narrative inscriptions. The
inscriptions attribute a gift to the temple, and do so in a way that suggests that it was important
for the gift to be publicly acknowledged. The representation of individuals whose names
associate them with a maṭha, the first of whom is indicated as paṇṭāram, the head of a maṭha,
projects an institutional identity onto the whole of the donation, and in turn the honor and
promotion of that corporate body.63 That this is achieved in the pictorial register signals that the
representation of the real person, even in inscription, is of an order different than the narrative
text segregated from the images it describes.

NATTAM – MERCHANT PATRONAGE

17th-century paintings in the Kailasanathar Temple at Nattam Kōvilpaṭṭi are found on the
ceiling of the maṇṭapa before the entrance to the second enclosure of the temple. The maṇṭapa
contains six engaged column figures stylistically and sartorially typical of the late sixteenth and
early seventeenth centuries.64 The paintings that adorn the ceiling probably date to the second

63 Karashima et al. have demonstrated that the leaders of maṭhas played a prominent role in associated temples. They
states, “wherever a maṭha existed close to a temple, the head of the maṭha seems to have been quite influential in the
activities of the temple management.” Karashima, Subbarayalu, and Shanmugan, "Maṭhas and Medieval Religious
Movements in Tamil Nadu: An Epigraphical Study (Part 2)," 203.

64 The engaged column figures are all individualized, and so could have functioned as portraits, but as there is now
little clue to their identities, they cease to function as portraits, though they continue to function as clearly
differentiated portrait-types. Three of the figures are identically and plainly dressed. They wear simple turbans with
a knot on top and narrow pieces of fabric that hangs down to the jaw in front of the ear. Hurpré identifies the turban
form as similar in construction to the kullāyi of Vijayanagara costume and notes that this kind of turban is depicted
paintings of Lepakshi and Tiruppuṭaimaruttūr, both of which may be dated to the 16th century. The turban also
features in the mid to late 16th-century paintings and portrait sculptures at Pattīsvaram. The other figures include a
half of the 17th century; they were discussed at length in Chapter Two as exemplars of
topographic painting. This chapter documents and examines the donor inscriptions found in each
register of the paintings, as well as the multiple portrait images adjacent to the iconic temple and
figural images. Although different individuals belonging to diverse social formations—namely,
royal, priestly, and merchant—are represented in the murals, the donor inscriptions that remain
legible name, with one exception, individuals identified with the title _ceṭṭi_, indicating members
of merchant community. In its diversity, the representation of individuals at this site is
exemplary of the kinds of individuals in whose hands power was concentrated in the later
Nāyaka period. In its attribution of donation primarily to members of the merchant community,
these paintings are unique among those I have surveyed.

courty figure and a warrior-type figure with a dagger at his waist. The first courtly figure wears a Phrygian-type
cap, while the other wears a type of bonnet typical of courtly dignitaries. Both of these figures wear a fine chain
wrapped five times around their left forearm. Hupré (1995) suggests that this was a fashion of the first quarter of the
17th century, but went out of fashion during the reign of Tirumalai Nāyaka (r. 1623-59). Both courtly figures wear an
earring composed of four large beads within a hoop; this type of earring is found in the paintings at Chidambaram
worn by gods, kings, and nobles; in the earlier paintings at Tirupputaṭamaruttūr, this type of earring is worn only by
figures associated with the court of Vijayanagara, and is thus extremely restricted in its depiction. The earrings
appear to have been restricted in wear to associates of the Vijayanagara court, and have come into greater fashion by
the 17th century, when the murals at Citamparam were painted. In sum, the costume of the figures would support a
date for the construction of the maṇṭapa between 1550-1625. Hurpré, "Le Costume Nāyaka Dans L' Inde Du Sud,"
103-08, 27-30; "The Royal Jewels of Tirumala Nayaka of Madurai (1623-1659)."

65 Like other names and titles discussed in this chapter, the history of usage for this term is also ambiguous. Chetti is
used as a generic term to refer to merchants, and by the sixteenth century, to refer specifically to a caste of traders.
Citing an inscription of 1521, Mukund writes, “Another interesting development is that the term _chetti_ or _chettiyar_ is
from now on used as an appellation along with traders’ names with the connotation of a specific endogamous
trading caste, and not as a generic term for a merchant.” Mukund, _The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant :
Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel_, 47. However, Rudner asserts that Chetti does not necessarily
refer to people engaged in trade, and that many have adopted the title only in the recent past. He writes, “…it is
more accurate to view the term simply as an occupational title often adopted by castes only recently specializing in
trade or money lending.” Rudner, "Religious Gifting and Inland Commerce in Seventeenth-Century South India,”
ftnt.1. Although I here generally refer to merchants belonging to the “ceṭṭi” community, there are in fact numerous
different communities identified by this title. Rudner’s focus in both his article and book is on the Natukkottai
Ceṭṭiyārs, who call themselves Nakkarattars. I use the term generally because the paintings and inscriptions do not
provide evidence to make a more specific determination of the communities to which they refer. As an occupational
title, or as a caste title, the term generally refers to merchants.
DONOR INSCRIPTIONS

The murals on the ceiling may be divided into three sections: south, center, and north (Figure 106). There are four registers on the south side of the maṇṭapa (Register 1-4), a single inscriptional register between the south side and the central panel, another inscriptional register between the central panel and north side, and three registers on the north side (Register 6-8). The figures and buildings of the two side panels are oriented so that the tops of the images on both sides are nearest the central panel, so that viewers are always facing or moving toward the center.

The central panel is subdivided into three registers perpendicular to those of the north and south panels. The panel is right side up when the viewer faces west, as if exiting from the temple.

The first register, and by far the largest, of the central panel is an iconic image of Śiva seated with his consort within a golden jeweled maṇṭapa atop Mt. Kailas. Divine and semidivine figures stand to the left and right. Some seem to be lifted up on clouds, accompanied by winged, angel-like figures. The saint, Bhringi, and other rishis are visible at the bottom of the register.

The middle register of the central panel shows a temple; although extremely damaged, it seems likely that the shrine on the left showed the goddess, and the shrine on the right shows Śiva.66 Two people, who may be identified as contemporaries of the painting, and probable patrons, stand on the left. The final register is divided into three panels. The right and left are portraits, while the center is an iconic image of Murugan seated atop his vehicle, the peacock.

I have identified seven inscriptions as donor inscriptions; these invariably give one or two names followed by the term upaiyam, indicating that the object on which the text is inscribed is a

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66 There are Telugu and Tamil inscriptions below the images. These are for the most part illegible. The first inscription, below what is probably a contemporary figure, reads “Kāśiya…” There are Telugu inscriptions visible in both of the shrines. The second line of the first reads “Aṃmma…”, which could be the beginning of “Ammavāru,” indicating a goddess. The triple “m” is the result of the sumna plus a doubled “m”, and is commonly found in the inscriptions.
gift of the person named in the inscription. There is an additional inscription adjacent to the central panel on the north side that describes the pantāram performing worship at this temple. A complementary inscription on the south side adjacent to the central panel is a record of donation. It is evident that the donor inscriptions were added after the images’ completion and after the addition of the labels because the donor inscriptions fit rather uncomfortably into both the pictorial and inscriptional spaces that remain. The text is written in a slightly yellowish paint and in a sloppier hand than the label inscriptions; however, the paleography, including a substantial amount of grantha script (which also appears in the label inscriptions), perhaps indicates that these inscriptions do not substantially postdate the execution of the paintings and their identifying labels.67

The poor condition of the paintings results in the partial illegibility of most of the inscriptions. However, what remains legible is enough to show that the majority of the donor inscriptions belong to merchants. Of the nine people named in donor inscriptions (one inscription names two people), four belong to a merchant (ceṭṭi) community and three are unidentifiable because of the poor condition of the inscriptions. The remaining donor inscription, adjacent to, and perhaps associated with, the central panel designates a political elite. In short, all of the legible donor inscriptions independent of the central iconic panel identify merchants.

The inscriptions of Registers 1, 4, and 8 are mostly illegible except for the word upaiyam. The inscription of Register 2 is damaged in the first part, but concludes with the words “ceṭṭi

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67 The damaged condition of the paintings makes the inscriptions partially illegible— as do some extremely irregular letters, which conform neither to Tamil nor to grantha scripts. The inscription naming the paṇṭāram is particularly idiosyncratic.
viyapari [upai]yam,” identifying the donor as a “merchant trader.”\(^{68}\) The inscription of the third register identifies the donor as “kaṇṇaku piḷḷai.” Although kaṇakappiḷḷai may specifically refer to a caste title, it more generally refers to an accountant or bookkeeper.\(^{69}\) The title likely indicates that the individual was involved in business; he may or may not directly belong to the merchant community. The inscription of Register 7 gives two names in which some of the letters are illegible; however, the title cetti is legible in both. In sum, the inscriptions located in the pictorial field of the topographic images, or alongside the label inscriptions of the topographic images, mostly attribute themselves to donation by persons associated with trade, either as merchants (cetti) or as an accountant (kaṇakappiḷḷai).

Two other inscriptions are located in the borders of the north and south sides of the central panel. The inscription on the north side, which is badly damaged, may refer to Register 6, as this is the only register that does not otherwise have a donor inscription.\(^{70}\) However, as it borders the central panel, it may, like its complement on the north side, refer to the paintings in the central panel. The inscription begins with an adjectival form of a word for slave or servant, “ūliyakkāra,” indicating that the person named in the noun that follows is a servant or slave. The noun that follows seems to be rāsa, an alternate spelling of rāja, meaning king, but this cannot be stated with absolute confidence as much of the plaster from the middle of the inscription has fallen away. If the second word is rāsa, it is possible that the inscription relates to the two portrait images of the Nāyaka in the central panel. In so doing, it would complement the

\(^{68}\) The word viyapari I take to be a misspelling of viyāpāri; it is very common that long vowels are represented as short vowels in the inscriptions.

\(^{69}\) kaṇakappiḷḷai is an alternate spelling of the standard kaṇakkappiḷḷai Tamil Lexicon, (Madras: University of Madras, 1924-1936), http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/tamil-lex/. 701, 02.

\(^{70}\) It is possible that one of the two names recorded in register 5 applies to this register, as it is unusual to find two donors named together.
inscription on the north side, which refers to a panṭāram; the portrait in the central panel on the left side shows a Nāyaka-type figure interacting with a Śaiva panṭāram (Figure 107).

The inscription on the south side of the central panel names one Chiṅṇaya Paṇṭāram. The inscription is by far the lengthiest at the site, as well as the most difficult to read. The orthography and paleography are extremely idiosyncratic and include a substantial amount of grantha script. The inscription identifies Chiṅṇaya Paṇṭāram as the manager (maniyyam) of the Kailasanathar temple—in all likelihood this Kailasanathar temple.71 Thus, although the condition of the inscriptions makes it impossible to state with certainty, those inscriptions adjacent to the central panel may describe the people depicted in the portraits therein.

**PORTRAITS**

The central panel is divided into three registers (Figure 108). The top register is an iconic image of Śiva and Parvati seated on Mount Kailas and surround by a host of divine, semi-divine, and saintly figures. The second register is badly damaged; I propose that the images in this register represented the Kailasanathar and Senbagavalli shrines at this temple.72 Devotees are legible in fragments beside the shrines, as are denominative inscriptions below the figures.73 The

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71 The inscription, as far as I have been able to parse it, reads [ti]rukatirokacuvarar śṛṭmaṛkal…cuṇṇaya paṇṭāram maniyattil kayilacunṭṭar cuvami saṅgatiyil alākā paṭattil yākatta ummaka cittiram eluti…cantiran cū[ri]yaṭ irukkira varai _ _ eṇu patināṭu vayacu iruku tavu cuṇṇaya paṇṭāram yeṇṭu nittama catā ceruṭavā[r].

72 The inscription within the shrine on the left starts with the letters “ṣe” on the first line, and “aṃmma” on the second; these likely originally spelled “ṣenbagavalli ammavāru,” meaning Goddess Senbagavalli. Additionally, the right arm of the figure remains, which indicates a goddess and not an image of Śiva, which was likely a linga. The inscription still legible in the shrine on the right reads, “…kailās,” and probably once indicated Kailasanathar. The shorter space of the shrine (because of its higher ground line) is typical of Śivalinga representations (compare the other temple images at this site).

73 The Telugu letters kasıya… are visible below the figure on the left. The very difficult inscription on the right side in Tamil reads, mutukumara….
third register is divided into three cells. The right and the left are portrait images of Telugu elites\textsuperscript{74}, while the center is an iconic image of the god Murugan, son of Śiva, astride his vehicle, the peacock, with his two consorts at his sides.\textsuperscript{75}

The cell on the right side of Murugan, below the shrine of Kailasanathar, shows a portly figure typical of Nāyaka portraiture (Figure 109). He wears a plain white turban, diaphanous angavastram, and vēṣṭi. He wears a large pendant pearl in his upper ear, two gold hoops through the earlobe, and multiple rings on his fingers. He holds a rudrākṣa and silver rosary over his right wrist as he stands with hands in añjali facing left towards Murugan. The label inscription below the figure names him as Chokkalinga Naidu Sada[...]. Although it is not possible to positively identify this historical figure, the name, bodily disposition, and costume mark this figure as a political elite.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{74} I identify them as “Telugu” because the name of the figure on the right side, “Naidu,” is a name used by Telugu-speaking people. The figure on the right is dressed in courtly costume associated with Nāyakas. Naidu and Nāyaka are closely associated. Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, \textit{Castes and Tribes of Southern India}, 7 vols., vol. 1 (New Delhi: Asian Educacional Services, 1987), 138-40.

\textsuperscript{75} Aside from the close association of the merchant community with Murugan temples, as noted above, one is tempted to make a deeper reading of the image of Murugan between the portraits on his left and right that depict political elites in an attitude of reverence toward the god: Another of Murugan’s names is “Ceṭṭi,” the same word that designates the merchant donors of the paintings. Choosing this would render an image of the Nāyaka worshipping Ceṭṭi. Whether a kind of double-entendre was intended is impossible to say, but this kind of play with visual and semantic meanings within a single image would not be without precedent in south Indian art. Padma Kaimal, “Playful Ambiguity and Political Authority in the Large Relief at Māmallapuram,” \textit{Ars Orientalis} 24, no. 1-27 (1994); Michael Dan Rabe, \textit{The Great Penance at Māmallapuram: Deciphering a Visual Text}, 1st ed. (Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2001); Susan L. Huntington, "Kings as Gods, Gods as Kings: Temporality and Eternity in the Art of India," \textit{Ars Orientalis} 24(1994).

\textsuperscript{76} The inscription is missing the last few letters. It is possible that the inscription originally named the figure as Chokkalinga Naidu Sadasiva. Naidu may be an alternate to Nāyaka, as noted above. I have not been able to identify an historical person of this name. There are two Chokkanatha Nāyakas who ruled Maturai; they are variously called Chokkanatha and Chokkalinga. The second, Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha (or Chokkalinga) Nāyaka, ruled 1704-1731, a period that accords with the style of the paintings and the dress of the figures. If the inscription on the north side of the center panel refers to this figure, the title rāja would indicate a royal—perhaps Maturai Nāyaka--identity. However, this is by no means a solid identification. Vijayavenugopal of the École Français d’Extrême-Orient suggested to me in 2011 that the image and inscription refer to one Lingama Nāyaka, a figure of the 17th century who rebelled against Tirumalai Nāyaka of Maturai (r.1623-1659). In either case, without further documentation it is impossible to identify the subject of the portrait beyond what is evident visually: the figure is an elite political figure belonging to the late 17th or early 18th century.
On the left side of the Murugan is a portrait image with two figures, mentioned above (Figure 107). The face of the left is obscured by damage; however, the protruding belly, long diaphanous jama, golden patka, and katar dagger indicate that this is a courtly figure. He holds his hands before him, probably in aṅjali, though the hands are now missing. He faces towards the paṇṭāram, whose right hand is raised in a gesture of speech while the left holds an object that looks like a piece of paper. This figure wears rudrākṣa beads in two bands around the crown of his head and two strings around his neck. He wears a white knee-length vēṣṭi and prominent Śaiva sectarian marks over his body. It is tempting to identify him as the Chiṅṇāya Paṇṭāram mentioned in the inscription that adjoins the central panel, but there is no further evidence for this identification.

In addition to the pictorial portraits in the center panel and the personal names inscribed into the north and south panels, there is a solitary portrait figure that appears, like the donor inscriptions, to have been added after the completion of the paintings. The figure is painted over a thin white ground in the lower right corner of the image of the Murugan temple at Paḷāṇi in the seventh register (Figure 110). The whitish ground is rounded at the top like the arches that define the shrines of the subsidiary deities at the site, and scaled to the same size. The figure stands with hands in anjalimudrā, gazing up at the much larger figure of Murugan in the form of Taṇṭāyutapāṇi. The figure’s name is inscribed in the text register below, and identifies him as Ramachandra Sadasiva. The social identity of the figure is unclear from his dress and name.

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77 While it is very common to show documents in Nāyaka paintings, the documents are always written on palm-leaves; it would be highly unusual to show a figure holding paper.

78 The Telugu reads, rāma[ca]ndru sadaśeva. In fact, the only reason the figure qualifies as a “portrait” is its associated label inscription. To judge on purely visual terms, it is a stock figure accompanied by an inscription that names a real person.
All of the portrait figures, including the single figure included in the topographic paintings, are shown worshipping Murugan. This is odd, given that the temple itself is dedicated to Śiva as Kailasanathar. However, the strong merchant presence in the donor inscriptions perhaps goes some way toward explaining the preference for Murugan in the paintings, as Murugan is considered to be a patron deity of that community.\footnote{Given the substantial patronage from merchants at this site, it is tempting to identify the portrait figure as a member of the ceṭṭi community. Rudner’s documentation of merchant activity in the Murugan temple at Palani from 1608-1805 shows that their involvement was both substantial and transformative. Nattam, the location of the temple here discussed, lies on the road that connects the merchants’ homeland (Ceṭṭināṭu) to Palaṇi. Moreover, as this community of traders settled across South East Asia, they built temples dedicated to Murugan, often as Taṇṭāyutapāṇi, the form of Murugan at Palaṇi.}

**A ROYAL GODDESS AND HER DEVOTEES**

Adjacent to the ceiling murals on the lateral surface of the ceiling beam on the north side of the east wall there is a single figural scene that shows priests, donors, and devotees on the left and right sides of a goddess. The left and right figure groups are differentiated through skin color, dress, action, and reception. Those on the right are portrait-type figures, but there are no label inscriptions. It is an enigmatic scene that announces the participant figures’ asymmetric relationships to the goddess.

On the left side of the goddess shrine are three figures, the first mediating the access of the other two to the goddess (Figure 111). This figure carries a bowl or basket on his head and a short vēṣṭi. A *kuṭumi* (long lock of hair) is visible at the back of his head. The only other figure in the paintings who wears a *kuṭumi* is the priest on the right side of the goddess. It is likely that both figures represent official servitors of the goddess. The left hand of the figure supports the

\footnote{There are also paintings on the ceiling of the maṇṭapa in the goddess Senbagavalli’s shrine in this same temple. The paintings relate the story of the birth of Murugan. The paintings are unfinished, and do not have donor inscriptions. K. Ramanathan states that Murugan is the patron deity of the Cheṭṭiars who settled in Malaysia. K. Ramanathan, “The Hindu Diaspora in Malaysia,” in *Hindu Diaspora : Global Perspectives*, ed. T. S. Rukmani (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2001).}
load he carries, while his right is upheld, palm forward, with index and middle finger extended. The gesture is ambiguous: it is not quite an image of benediction or acceptance, and could easily be read as a refusal. The figure whom he faces appears to be an ascetic, though the gifts he offers are sumptuous: two gold necklaces set with pearls and jewels, and a golden crown. The would-be donor’s only adornment is two strands of rudrākṣa beads worn as a crown over his closely cut hair—a style typical of ascetic figures. He wears no other jewelry, and his vēṣṭi is short and lacking any decoration. The second figure, like the first, wears no adornment; his skin color is darker brown than the two priestly figures, who are all darker in color than the four figures on the right side of the image. He wears a white cap over his hair that ties at the bottom, and a short plain white vēṣṭi. His hands are held in aṅjali. The extraordinary plainness of both figures is at odds with the richness of the gifts they offer.

Opposite this curious scene, four figures stand with hands in aṅjali, facing toward a priest who stands before the goddess shrine, whose right hand held in a gesture of speech and his left touching his right elbow in a sign of respect. The priest wears a kutumi at the back of his head, a large golden hoop earring, and a choker of black and red beads. The four figures to whom he speaks are unmistakable portrait images (Figure 112). The four figures are hierarchically ordered, though basically similarly dressed: All of the figures have very light-colored skin compared to the other figures, wear a white undecorated turban, at least one golden hoop earring, and dark skin.

81 As a vertical palm shown to the figure who proffers gifts, the gesture repels rather than receives. One could argue that the gesture is a somewhat lackadaisical expression of certain mudrās, such as katarī or ardhapatāka. The former can communicate opposition or disagreement, while the latter can be used to say “both.” Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy and Gopala Krishnayya Duggirala, The Mirror of Gesture, Being the Abhinaya Darpaṇa of Nandikēśvara (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), 28.

82 Differences in skin color in 18th-century paintings are dramatic and systematic. Difference in skin color does not indicate a difference in status. The portrait images of the Setupati kings of Ramanatapuram in their palace audience hall, the Ramalingavilasam, consistently show the kings with darker skin than other rulers, courtiers, foot soldiers, or musicians. These figures are depicted in a variety of possible skin tones.
and white vēṣṭis. The second and third figures both wear rudrākṣa necklaces and rudrākṣa mālās on their right arms just above their elbow. Their vēṣṭis are white with a red border. The first figure is larger in scale, though not taller, than the other figures. He has a slight paunch in his belly like images of Nāyaka political elites. He wears two large earrings, a gold choker, and a long multi-strand gold necklace. He, like the others, wears rudrākṣa beads just above his right elbow. On his wrists are two very large golden bracelets.\textsuperscript{83} This figure’s golden-bordered vēṣṭi is longer than the others’, with a diaphanous piece that fans in front of the knees. While the other figures have Śaiva vībhūti marks on the arms and chest, the first figure appears to be smeared with a yellow paste, perhaps representing sandal paste, a costly aromatic. The first figure clearly has the most status and wealth, the second two appear as equals, and the third is the least of the four, with no adornment save his earring, and no colored border on his vēṣṭi. As is typical of paintings that feature devotees or donors at worship in a temple, on the far right side of the scene, behind the last of the four figures, are dancers, musicians, and more women.

These four figures, though hierarchically ordered, are united through similarity of form and dress, and all are painted on a unitary green background. The green background itself signifies the status of the image as portrait: both of the portrait images already discussed in the central panel are painted against the same green background, but the color is not used elsewhere. This use of green to signify portrait has precedence in the paintings at the Ramalingavilasam (ca.1725), the durbar hall at Ramanatapuram of the Setupati rajas, to which the paintings at Nattam compare closely. The Ramalingavilasam’s paintings make extensive use of green background to distinguish royal portrait images. The color appears in the midst of other

\textsuperscript{83} The bracelets are very large, and perhaps represent the chain-link bracelets fashionable at the time. They are, however, more reminiscent of the flower garland bracelets worn on certain ritual and auspicious occasions, and seen in many of the paintings at Ramanatapuram.
background colors in order to highlight the king, and sometimes his queen or close retinue. Sometimes the entire image background is green, and sometimes only the frame around the king – which may be architectural, a pillow, or simply freeform (Figure 113). The use of pale green to denote portrait images was a well-established pictorial convention popularized in Mughal painting around the turn of the 17th century. It became standard during the reign of Jahangir (r.1605-1627) to depict portrait figures against a green background, and continued to be used even during the reign of his successor, Shah Jahan (r. 1627-1657), though with less regularity. The convention is found also in Deccani painting. The paintings at the Ramalingavilasam show a great interest in the exotic – including styles and designs of the Deccani and Mughal courts, as well as those of Europe. At present, there is no established south Indian tradition that distinguishes portrait images against green background, this convention seems to be a stylistic adaptation drawn from north Indian and Deccani painting. Its popularity appears brief, though it is seen in the paintings not only at Nattam and Ramanatapuram, but also in the portraits at Ávutaityärkōvil and Citamparam. The use of green pigment is in all cases indicative of the


85 However, one could argue that this convention is found in the earliest paintings of the Tamil region: all of the figural paintings found in the Kailasanatha Temple at Kanchipuram, which date roughly to the 7th century, are executed against a green background. P. S. Sriraman, Chōja Murals: Documentation and Study of the Chōja Murals of Brihadisvara Temple, Thanjavur (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2011), esp. 30-37. While a careful study is needed, it is apparent even from a casual review of the paintings that majority of royal and divine portrait images in the early 11th-century murals at Tanjovur’s Brihadisvara temple are overwhelmingly painted against a green background.

86 The three portrait figures that attend Kailasanathar in the Ávutaityärkōvil murals are painted against a light green background, while the rest of the register is red. The green background at Citamparam is reserved for portraits of royal, ascetic or religious figures, which are also labeled. At Ramanatapuram the green background designates royal portraits. This convention, is limited in its use in Tamil-area murals, suggests that these paintings, which are stylistically similar to each other, may be chronologically closely related, dating roughly to the second quarter of the 18th century.
elevated status of the figure(s) depicted. At Nattam, it is the political elites in the central panel who worship Murugan and these four enigmatic figures who worship the goddess whose portraits are thus announced.

The goddess in the Nattam mural is green in color and bedecked in jewels and flowers (Figure 114). Her hair is worked into a bun on her left side, covered in flowers, and finished with a pearl tassel.\(^{87}\) She holds a scepter, ceṅkōḷ, in her right hand while her left rests on her knee. This iconography—a green-skinned goddess who holds the ceṅkōḷ—is associated with many goddesses, but in the region of Maturai, is deeply associated with royalty. There is a painted image of the goddess of the Maturai Mīnākṣī temple handing the ceṅkōḷ, an emblem of royalty, to Queen Mangammal of Madurai, who rule as regent 1689-1704 (Figure 115).\(^{88}\) Closer comparisons to the image at Nattam, however, are those of both Vaisnava and Śaiva goddesses in the Ramalingavilasam, the durbār hall of the Setupati rajas at Ramanatapuram. Of these, the image of Rajarajesvari, located in the center panel on the west wall in the single room on the second floor of the hall, is extraordinarily similar to the example at Nattam (Figure 116). Both are seated frontally in rājalīlāsana, the seated posture of royal repose. Both hold the ceṅkōḷ in their right hand, while the left rests on the knee. Their jewelry and hairstyle are the same, though that of Ramanatapuram’s Rajarajeswari is more elaborate.

\(^{87}\) This hairstyle and its covering are typical of Nāyaka costume for both men and women. Hurpré, "Le Costume Nāyaka Dans L’ Inde Du Sud," 110-16.

\(^{88}\) Branfoot dates the painting 1690-1700. He writes, “The royal sceptre (ceṅkōḷ) that was an element of Madurai Nayaka royal insignia, and received from the goddess Minakshi at coronations, is held by kings in some ivories or in paintings and suggests a Madurai provenance for these, but no life-size stone example holds it.” Branfoot does not discuss the feudal courts of Maturai adopting the ceṅkōḷ; however, this is amply attested in the case of the Setupati court at Ramanatapuram. The ceṅkōḷ is associated with images of both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava goddesses, and is an attribute of Mīnākṣī, Rajarajesvari, Andal, and others. I have so far been unable to identify the object’s origin. Branfoot, "Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple," 13-14, 19.
Rajarajeswari, “Goddess of the King of Kings, a form of Durga”\textsuperscript{89} is the tutelary goddess of the kings of Ramanatapuram. She is particularly worshipped on the final day of the festival of Navaratri, when, in Vijayanagara and its successor states, the king would receive the ceṅkōl from the goddess.\textsuperscript{90} The celebration of Navaratri was a symbol of royalty itself, and one regulated first by the rulers of Vijayanagara, and then by the Nāyakas of Madurai.\textsuperscript{91} In addition to the worship of the Goddess, the ritual also provided the setting in which the king was honored as a semi-divine figure. One of the major rituals associated with the Navaratri festival was the durbar of the king. In this setting, the worship and honor of the goddess was conflated with that of the king:

During the Navaratri celebration, rituals which focused upon the king (or queen) were embedded among rituals which sought to honour and propitiate the Goddess. In Ramnad, there was an exchange between the king and the Goddess. She received the royal sword and scepter, which were returned to the king….While the king was honoured and, in a sense, worshipped in the evening durbar, priests simultaneously worshipped Rajarajeswari. Rituals which sought to create or renew royal substance, the abhishekam, were performed amid a series of rituals which sought to empower the tutelary deity of the lineage and to make her the great Goddess of all the samastanam [kingdom]. At the climax of the festival, king and Goddess shared a single identity, as, together, they preserved dharma and created conditions for prosperity in the kingdom.\textsuperscript{92}

The rituals of Navaratri conflate the identities of ruler and goddess; this conflation is expressed iconographically in the seated pose of the goddess (rājalīlasana, the seated posture of royal ease), her rich adornment, and the royal scepter (ceṅkōl). This form of the goddess is also one

\textsuperscript{89} Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 137.

\textsuperscript{90} *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 146.

\textsuperscript{91} The ruler of Ramnad, Raghunatha Deva (r.1647-1672), won the right to celebrate Navaratri by assisting Tirumalai Nāyaka in battle against the ruler of Mysore. Ramaswamy reports that “Thirumala Nayakka presented Ragunatha with a Durga Peedam (and altar of the Goddess Durga) and permitted him to celebrate the Navarathiri festival in his own kingdom with the same pomp and magnificence.” Tamil Nadu (India) and A. Ramacami, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers*, Gazetteer of India (Madras: Printed by the Director of Stationery and Printing, 1972), 83.

\textsuperscript{92} Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 146.
that is iconographically stable in the region of Madurai, though with two variations: As noted above, the image of Rajarajesvari at Ramanatapuram is extremely similar to the image at Nattam. Another image of Rajarajesvari at Ramanatapuram, on ceiling in the third room of the Ramalingavilasam, depicts Rajarajesvari seated in a European-style chair, handing a scepter to the Setupati king (Figure 117); this image is extremely similar formally to the portrait of the Setupati in the previous examples, and to the depiction of Mīnākṣī handing the ceṅkōl to Mangammal in the Madurai Mīnākṣī temple, a uniquely royal act.

The iconic image of the goddess at the Nattam Kailasanathar temple, almost exactly the same as the image at Ramand, shows mediated exchange with the goddess, much like the image at Madurai. But here, the goddess does not share her royal persona with her devotees. The modest figures on the left offer a crown, but their gift is not readily accepted. Those on the right offer no more than an attitude of devotion, but are distinguished and honored through portraiture and respectfully received by the priest whose stance overlaps the goddess’ shrine and therefore stands as a direct conduit to the goddess. These figures appear neither to be royal nor religious figures. Political elites typically carry weapons, which these figures do not. As the figures wear jewelry and turbans, it is equally evident that they are not monks or ascetics. Since they are in the position of donors, and indicated to be portraits both by the style in which they are rendered, their individuation, and the green background, it is tempting to identify these figures as patrons of the Kailasanatha temple, especially those represented in the donor inscriptions.

93 It appears that the image of the goddess at Ramanatapuram has received a recent touch-up. However, the basic form and style are preserved, and this is what is similar between the images.

94 The dress of the figures is inconclusive of their social affinities or identities. I have compared the clothing to late 18th century Tañcavūr company paintings. The style of turban worn by the first figure is not atypical of merchant and artisan figures, as well as Brahmans and political elites. See the albums in the Victoria and Albert’s collection, accession numbers AL9128 and IS39-1987. Some of these paintings are reproduced in Mildred Archer, Company Paintings : Indian Paintings of the British Period, Indian Art Series (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1992).
Reconsidering the figures on left in this context, it is possible that these ascetic figures act as agents of a royal donor—a not-uncommon practice when endowments were administrated by maṭha officials. The ascetics offer a golden crown and jewels, but are coolly received. The others, possibly merchants, venerate royal power embodied in the image of the goddess, but do not give or receive anything material. Yet, they are met with respect by the goddess’ priest, and honored through artistic conventions of portraiture. Such a reading bolsters support for the possibility of merchant patronage and representation in this image.\(^95\)

The incentive for, and practice of, merchants’ self-representation and promotion through temple patronage is well documented. Mukund has argued that during the Vijayanagara and Nayaka periods, representation through temple patronage was a means of establishing social identity, particularly for immigrant or transient merchants.\(^96\) Similarly, in his study of merchants’ efforts to establish themselves at the pilgrimage town of Paḷaṇi, Rudner uses records dating from 1600 to 1805 to show that traders established themselves in new markets by patronizing temples.\(^97\) The evidence he offers from Paḷaṇi shows that they did so in a highly visible way.\(^98\)

\(^95\) Other readings could be made of this image; to date, I find this most convincing.

\(^96\) Mukund writes, “For merchants who might not have been regarded as belonging to the local community—because of their ethnic origins and because of the fact that they were transients—association with a local temple was also the medium for achieving a social identity.” Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel*, 45. Karashima et al. have also documented the close connection of ceṭṭis to temples and maṭhas in this period. They further state that these communities seem to have established their own maṭhas. Karashima, Subbarayalu, and Shanmugan, "Maṭhas and Medieval Religious Movements in Tamil Nadu: An Epigraphical Study (Part 2)," 204-05.


\(^98\) The evidence from Paḷaṇi does not include visual evidence of the traders’ activities at the temple. Rather, their activities are documented in texts, which relate the types of donations to the temple. These included money, sponsoring rituals, distributing food (*prasād*), as well as introducing and managing a popular pilgrimage. All of these would have been highly visible to contemporaries.
According to Rudner, religious gifting identifies community leaders who control collective resources, while at the same time integrating diverse social groups, including “extralocal sovereigns, leaders of local corporate groups, and religious sectarian leaders,” into a “unified political system.” The situation that Rudner describes is exactly what is expressed in the murals at Nattam, where political and religious elites are represented with merchants whose donation to the temple is recorded in text and image. These figures are integrated to an extent—separated in text and in image—but represented together in a collective act of patronage and self-representation in the paintings that adorn the temple ceiling.

CONCLUSION

Studies that address the issue of portraiture in South Asia have to a large extent focused on the degree to which South Asian artists represented “observed reality.” Recent scholarship, particularly that addressed to the art of the Tamil region, asserts that the definition of portraiture must be one that accommodates idealized representation, but that requires that the subject be a recognizable living person. I have taken a definition of portrait to be an image that represents a person living at or near the time of its execution, and that viewers would recognize as indexical of that person. The image may be idealized or draw on conventions common to figural depiction, but must include enough specificity to be legible as a portrait.

The late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century images on which this chapter has focused differentiate portrait images from figural images stylistically, and reflect the physiognomic distinctiveness of real persons. Portrait figures at Āvuṭaiyārkōvil and Nattam demonstrate these features; studies of the portrait images found in the Ramalingavilasam at Ramanatapuram and

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the portraits of royal and religious figures in the paintings at Citamparam would also show the divergent styles developed for portrait and non-portrait figures.

Few studies have addressed the issue of representation in denominative inscriptions. Like portraits, denominative inscriptions are indexical. Also like portraits, denominative inscriptions point to their subject at the same time that they manifest the personal presence of the subject. Thus names, like portraits, have the ability to participate in their environments: representation allows the subject to be ever-present before the god, ever seen by beholders of the image as benefactor and honored devotee of the god. The nature of denominative inscription, as distinct from narrative inscription and resembling in essence and function figural imagery, is articulated in visual terms in the paintings at Maṭavār Vaḷākam. The placement of the names within the pictorial, rather than textual, registers asserts that such inscriptions occupy an ontological position between text and image, representing an actual person and capable of maintaining the presence of that person through representation. Although they do not pictorially approach the status of *portrait*, donor inscriptions participate in the visual narrative, identify an individual, and in the temple context, confer honor on that individual.

My interpretation of the developments in portraiture during this period is contextualized in the changing structures of economy and religious and political authority in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. Foremost among these with regard to temple patronage is the establishment and growth of non-brahmin maṭhas. These were largely controlled by members of the landholding community, who, through the system of land grants (*kaṭṭalais*), consolidated control of agrarian production and distribution over areas not limited to those in which the maṭha was located. These institutions were economically powerful because of their control over land, and culturally powerful because of their control of temples. Political elites, both emergent and
established, gained access to wealth and symbols of status through the temple and its associated institutions. The concurrent establishment of new market centers by merchants in this period is well established. One of the hallmarks of this process was merchants’ endowment to temples in the new places they sought to establish themselves. For all of these groups, donation was a means to obtain rights to temple honors.

The receipt and public display of temple honor, as has been amply demonstrated in secondary literature, was of paramount importance to secure and maintain economic, ritual, and social status. The evidence of patronage and portraits in temple mural paintings, understood in this context of shifting economic, religious, and political relationships, points to the importance of what both individuals and groups stood to gain through representation at the temple, not least of which was honor. Challenges to established political boundaries, both material and ritual, were made on the battlefield as well as in the patronage of temples and mathas in the form of endowments. For merchants, endowments and honor served as a way to generate income and integrate into the community in which they wished to conduct business. Unique representation in temple murals allowed the subject to be eternally proximate to the deity in the temple, and to perpetually assert his honor, status, and domain to the murals’ beholders. The representation of donors and elites in text and image was a way in which honor was conferred first on the individual, and then on the social formation to which he belonged.

The three sites considered in this chapter, all roughly belonging to the first half of the eighteenth century, demonstrate great interest in individual representation in both text and image. My close reading of image and text together shows, in contrast to previous scholarship that has often conflated portrait image, donor, and donation, that these three facets of representation and donation are related in ways much more complicated than has been recognized. My analysis of
previously unrecorded donor inscriptions, donor portraits, and non-donor portraits provides new evidence of the active patronage of merchants, religious and political elites. The variety of ways in which members of these groups are represented together is an intriguing window onto the social, cultural, and political dynamics of the era.
This chapter focuses on topographic images, the third major type of painting in murals of the Nāyaka period. What is truly fascinating about this type of imagery is that it occurs in sequences intended to convey or represent an entire sacred geography. Many of the texts produced in this period attest to the importance of place. Foremost among these is the genre of talapurāṇam, which describes and narrates the uniqueness of a particular place within broader networks and conceptions of space; these networks of sites that create space are commonly referred to in scholarship as “sacred geographies” or “sacred landscapes.”

As early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—just as talapurāṇam texts were starting to be written—guides intended for pilgrims that described the geographic location of Tamil shrines also began to appear. During this time, pilgrimage to major temples seems to have become more popular as the shrines became increasingly renowned through dispersion of bhakti (devotional) songs and hagiographic stories. As we have seen, competition and consolidation of social and sectarian identities also provided catalysts for these developments. The importance of pilgrimage to the shrines was in part the result of the fame of the poets and their songs describing the shrines of the Kāvērī river delta. Pilgrimage, as both a concept and a practice, served to unify

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2 “As early as the 12th and 13th centuries books and pamphlets were written on the geographical distribution of the shrines according to the medieval division of Tamil country into areas called naute, “land,” and according to their exact location in relation to the northern and southern banks of the river Kaveri.” Peterson, “Singing of a Place: Pilgrimage as Metaphor and Motif in the Tevaram Songs of the Tamil Saivite Saints,” 72.
the land politically and ideologically. Mythology associated with the shrines was enacted through the rituals at the temple, as well as the rituals of pilgrimage. In this way, the creation of a sacred landscape, of "connected places," occurred through the dissemination of narratives describing the events, histories, geographic specificities of sacred places through story, song, and text.

The importance of place, and conventionalized and aestheticized conceptions of space, inform Tamil literature from a very early date. In classical cañkam literature, ca. 300 BCE – 300 CE, poems were divided into subgenres, each of which was defined by a landscape (mountain, forest, plain, coastal, and desert) that conferred a specific set of meanings and was associated with particular kinds of activities and emotions. In its association of individual shrines with unique deities and mythology, cañkam poetry laid the ground for the later development bhakti, or

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3 “The travels of the nayanmar as expressed in the songs bring together in one framework the isolated shrines and local mythologies of the region, and thus serve to integrate the politically (Pallavas vs. indigenous rulers, especially the Colas and Pandyas) and religiously (Buddhism and Jainism vs. “indigenous” religion) fragmented landscape of Tamil country into a unified sacred geography where everything had meaning with reference to something else.” Peterson, "Lives of the Wandering Singers: Pilgrimage and Poetry in Tamil Saivite Hagiography."

4 Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition, 17.

5 I am especially thinking of the work of Anne Feldhaus, who shows how geographies are constructed through the stories and beliefs of those who inhabit them. These geographies may be many, overlapping, and even opposed to one another, but are nevertheless coextensive for those who inhabit them. Feldhaus, Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India.

6 This is an objectionably brief description of the literature, and one that does not quite tell the whole story. See A. K. Ramanujan, Poems of Love and War: From the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems of Classical Tamil, Translations from the Oriental Classics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); George L. Hart, The Poems of Ancient Tamil, Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Zvelebil, Tamil Literature. For an overview of changing conceptions landscape divisions from the cañkam through bhakti periods, see Rao Bahadur C.M. Ramachandra Chettiar, "Geographical Distribution of Religious Places in Tamil Nad," The Indian Geographical Journal 16 (1941).
devotional, poetry.\textsuperscript{7} The intersections of landscape, site, and narrative action that inform cāṅkam literature were highly influential on this subsequent genre.\textsuperscript{8}

Bhakti literature is associated with the hymns of itinerant Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva Tamil saints of the sixth to tenth centuries CE, whose poems extolled sacred sites of the Tamil region.\textsuperscript{9} Bhakti poetry draws on the mythological and physical singularities of sites already recognized as sacred, describes sites with a high degree of geographic specificity, and explicitly promotes pilgrimage to the sites and deities it praises. In their hymns of praise for sacred site and deity, the Tamil bhakti poets constructed a “sacred geography” within a specific conception of region defined by devotion to a particular deity (Śiva or Viṣṇu), and articulated in a particular language (Tamil). The poets thereby laid the ground for patterns of pilgrimage and the consequent construction of large temples to attract and accommodate pilgrims. Yet, at the same time, the poems advocate their own ability to serve as a vehicle for pilgrimage through contemplation.

Bhakti poetry develops the idea that sacred place and the deity who inheres there are mutually defined. This conflation of space and deity was further reinforced in post-bhakti literature (compilations of bhakti texts, talapurāṇams), visual arts (especially in the decoration of the temple), and ritual (in the interaction of the devotee with the architectural plan of temple). These developments, so characteristic of temple worship in the Nāyaka period, are distinctly

\textsuperscript{7} As Yocum writes, The focus on sacred places in early Tamil religion is amply confirmed in Cankam literature. There is some evidence that certain places originally derived their sacredness from a tree or stone which was considered to embody sacred power….it is clear that by Cankam times, i.e., by the beginning of the Christian era, shrines associated with particular deities were flourishing in South India. Glenn E. Yocum, "Shrines, Shamanism, and Love Poetry: Elements in the Emergence of Popular Tamil Bhakti," \textit{Journal of the American Academy of Religion} 41, no. 1 (1973): 8.

\textsuperscript{8} Carman and Narayanan, \textit{The Tamil Veda : Pillan's Interpretation of the Tiruvāymoḷi}, esp. 26.

\textsuperscript{9} The saints also included some sites beyond the Tamil region, including some in wider South India, a few in Northern India, and a very few celestial sites. See Dehejia, \textit{Slaves of the Lord : The Path of the Tamil Saints}. 
post-bhakti, though they draw on conceptions of sacred place developed in that literature. As Orr has demonstrated,

[It] is only the post-Chola period [i.e., after 1300] that rigid demarcations of sacred space, the insistence on specific iconic identities, and the mapping of divine power through processional movement became prominent features of temple ritual. The temple milieu represented by the inscriptions—and to a large extent in the sectarian literature of the same period—is one in which the sacred site in its entirety is seen as imbued with the transcendent divine.  

The “mapping of divine power” within a space “[entirely] imbued with the transcendent divine” that Orr describes is the point of departure for the present chapter. This concept will be expanded and explored in two ways: firstly, this chapter examines the representation of place in Nāyaka painting and literature, particularly drawing attention to the evidence of bhakti literature’s influence on the content and composition of mural paintings of this era. The ideas developed in bhakti literature—god and place as coextensive, and the centrality of physical and mental pilgrimage to these sites that together constitute a sacred geography—will be applied to interpretation of mural paintings at three sites. The sacred geographies imagined in the bhakti hymns are quite literally mapped onto the walls and ceilings of the temples. The second idea, that ritual demarcates sacred space, and indeed maps divine power onto the place, is intrinsic to my interpretation of the paintings.

BHAKTI AT ĀLVĀR TIRUNAKARI: DIVYA DESAMS AND DIVYA PRABHANDAM

On the walls of the pradakṣiṇa patha around the Saint Nammālvār’s shrine are a series of topographic images that together depict the Śrī Vaiṣṇava sacred landscape. In the center of these, in the middle of the north wall and directly behind the mūrti in the shrine, is the major iconic image of Nammālvār with the saints Madura Kavi Ālvār and Nāthamuni (Figure 41). The

transmission of the texts and practices of these central figures in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition have already been discussed Chapter Three. Here I wish to show what the paintings already tell us: that the centrality and authority of Tamil-language scripture is expressed not only in the narrative paintings treated in Chapter Three, but equally in paintings whose subjects are the iconic representations of Viṣṇu in his various forms at temples in and around the Tamil region. These paintings would have originally completely covered all of the walls in two registers; they are now very fragmentary and remain legible only on the north and east walls (Figure 84).

The inscriptions at the top of each painting name the place or form of Viṣṇu manifest at each place in both Tamil and Telugu. I believe that these iconic images of Viṣṇu actually represent the one hundred-eight sites especially sacred to Viṣṇu in the Tamil Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, the divya desams. It is these places that are praised in the hymns of the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham.

Nāthamuni’s 10th century collation of the texts of the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham belongs to the genre of bhakti literature described in the introduction to this chapter. Its poems were composed by the canon of twelve Vaiṣṇava Saints active in the seventh to ninth centuries CE. As an example of the centrality of place in these poems, let us take a poem from Nammāḻvār’s Tiruvāymoḷī (which is the last section of the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham) that praises both Viṣṇu and the sacred site of Tirumāliruṅcōlai, another name of Aḻakar Kōvil—a temple and site we have seen already in Chapter Two:

Before the growing glow of youth begins to fade, and your limbs become feeble,  
If you reach the temple, where the dark Lord, whose splendor ever grows, dwells with love  
Māliruṅcōlai, hill surrounded by luxuriant young groves  
Rare fortune is yours.  
Heed not the charms of lovely young women!  
Praise the temple of the handsome Lord whose conch roars with might.  
Praise Māliruṅcōlai whose peak is awash with moonlight
and arise
That is your reward.
My heart! There is nothing to gain by performing wasteful deeds.
Reach yonder hill: near Māliruṅcōlai surrounded by thick enchanted forests.
This is the temple where he who has the hue of stormy cloud, delights to dwell.
This is the right thing to do.
So that our strong bonds of attachment caused by previous deeds may be cut;
So we may serve him and live, the powerful [one], who held aloft the great mountain, abides in this temple, Māliruṅcōlai, drenched in rain.
Reach that sacred hill: that is the righteous way.
Do not add to your sins with your gathered strength: Reach the slopes of the outer hill. Māliruṅcōlai, surrounded by sparkling clear mountain springs.
This is the temple of the Lord who uses his discus in righteous wars.
That is the way.
Think of the way; Avoid what is base. This is the temple of him who ate the butter from the hanging jars. Māliruṅcōlai Hill where the doe is close to her fawn.
This is the way: Thinking of it is good.
Think good thoughts; do not sink in hell. He who bored through and raised Earth long ago, has long dwelt in this temple.
Māliruṅcōlai Here the moon cuts through impurities
Approach it in the right manner, reach it, and you shall be secure.
Be strong, don’t waste your strength day by day. This is the temple of the marvelous cowherd, who makes you strong. Māliruṅcōlai where the celestials come to circle him in adoration. Circle, come near him everyday; it is the right way.
Think of the right way; don’t drown in powerful sins. This is the great temple where the Lord who killed demon woman lives. This is Māliruṅcōlai here herds of young elephants gather together.
Be firm in your desire to adore him: success will be yours.
Deeming it as success don’t drink and gamble, This is the temple desired by the one who, long ago, expounded the Vedas.
This is Māliruṅcōlai where lovely peacocks dwell in
Enter the hills covered with buds just ready to blossom: this indeed is wealth.
These ten verses from a thousand spoken without delusion by truthful Caṭākōpañ from the fertile town of Kurukūr
To illumine the glory of him who created this world as his wealth
Will at last unite you with the feet of the gracious Lord.11

This poem at once extols the beauty and deeds of Viṣṇu in his many forms, the beauty of the place where he dwells (Māliruṅcōlai), and the benefits to the pilgrim who visits there.

Nammālvār (here, Catakōpaṇ) over and over again enjoins the devotee to praise, approach, reach, and circle the sacred hill. The place, the temple, and the deity are conflated, equally reached and equally praised by going to that place—the place is, after all, Māliruṇcōlai, the grove (cōlai) where Viṣṇu (Māl) dwells (iru). Yet, even without physically going to the site, Nammālvār confirms in the last verse that “These ten verses…will at last unite you with the feet of the gracious Lord.” Thinking on the place and the deity through the poem is equal in effect to actually going to the site.

Māliruṇcōlai is among the paintings of the divya desams still extant at Āḻvār Tirunakari (Figure 118). The painting is composed of four parts. The lowest level is damaged and difficult to read; however, it shows a group of four figures dressed in white on the left side. Two of the figures are seated, their hair standing out from their heads. On the right are two trees, water tanks, and a maṇṭapa or shrine on the right. What is in this part of the image is not a temple scene, nor a scene of worship, as is characteristic of other marginal figures in paintings at this site: What is shown is the forest environment in which people and structures are located. The second, and by far the largest, portion of the image is that which shows the iconic image of Viṣṇu with his two consorts, Sundaravalli on the left and Bhu Devi on the right. Half-size images of these figures are placed in front of them, perhaps representing the physical mūrtis of the deities at the temple. The smaller image of Viṣṇu is additionally attended by two women shown in profile. The third part of the image, in the upper third of the composition, depicts the hills of Māliruṇcōlai. A path, beginning on the left side, emerges from the halo around the iconic figures and winds through the forest. The path first takes the pilgrim to a water tank, then crosses to a

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12 This site was also discussed in Chapter Two in the context of topographic images at the Kailasanathar temple at Nattam.
shrine of Viṣṇu in front of which Hanuman and Garuda emerge from fountains and praise Viṣṇu. Crossing two other empty maṇṭapas, the path finally terminates where three devotees are shown in a maṇṭapa; two of the men seem to bathe under a fountain, perhaps the spring on the mountain known as the Nūpura Gaṅgai. The fountain emerges from the basement wall of a maṇṭapa in which sits a crowned figure who has no sacred attributes and holds his hands in anjali mudra. The inscription at the top of the image is damaged and illegible on the right. The left part, framed and separated from the following inscription, first names the place and then the name of Viṣṇu at the site. It reads in Tamil, Tirumalaruṅcolai malai Alakar (Aḷakar of the sacred hill of Māliruṅcōlai). In this image, reinforced through the inscription, place and deity are mutually definitive. The natural setting, so important in Nammāḷvār’s poem, is likewise integrated in the visual and inscriptive conception of the deity of that place. The paintings that adorn the pradakṣīṇa patha allows the devotee who circumambulates the shrine of Nammāḷvār to simultaneously travel to each of the sites; deity and place are objects of both physical and poetic pilgrimage.

That icon, site, inscription, and literary reference are brought together in each of these panels is even more unambiguous in the image of the god at Arimēya Viṇṇakaram (Figure 119). This image has a simple inscription in Tamil and in Telugu above the figurative iconic image of Viṣṇu in his form as Narasimha, half-man half-lion, seated between Bhu Devi on his left, and Sri Devi on his right. The inscriptions both translate, roughly, as The Beautiful Lion [God] of Arimēya Viṇṇakaram. But perhaps a better gloss would be to say Arimēya Viṇṇakaram’s Beautiful Lion god; here, as in all the inscriptions, it is the place name that is given first.

13 There are, in fact, a number of maṇṭapas in these hills to give shelter to travelers.

14 Ta. arimeviya viṇṇakaram aḷakayasiṅkar; Te. harimeyavinṇagaram aḷagiśinggari
The mūrti at the Arimēya Viṇṇakaram temple is not, however, a form of Narasimha, nor is the festival processional mūrti a Narasimha image. The temple mūrti is an anthropomorphic seated figure of Krishna, who goes by the name of Kuṭamātu Kūtaṇ. The festival devotional icon is Gopāla, another name of Krishna. Neither of these images is shown in the painting. A poem written by Tirumānkai Ālvār on Arimēya Viṇṇakaram in the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham, however, states that this is the place where Viṣṇu took the form of Narasimha to protect his devotee, Prahlāda. The poem particularly highlights the fragrant flowers—lotus, jasmine, champak, and others—that grow around the temple. Although not an uncommon decorative device in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the artist here has hung the arch in which the god is seated with three varieties of white flower chains, at the end of which hang red and white lotuses, as well as a long yellow flower. The variety of flowers depicted in the painting resonates with the olfactory emphasis of the poem itself. The icon in the painting, then, is not based on what the devotee might actually see at the temple, but a form of the god represented in the verses of the Divya Prabandham.

The connection to a textual source goes beyond iconography, to the function of the text and image. The subject of the text is the name of the place and deity, while the primary subject of the image is a figural icon Viṣṇu. The form of Viṣṇu shown in the painting is not necessarily the same as that found in the shrine of the temple referenced in the inscription. When this is the case.

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15 It is the 4th of Tirumangai’s poems the Periya Tiruvāymolji, pasuram #1241. The Tamil text reads, “otta ariya uruvamattu koṇṭu anṭu / rulappil miku peruvattai iranyanaip pārī / vāṭa valluṅkil pālātu avar tan makanukku / arul ceytān vāḷum iṭam mallikai senkalunjē / ceteṭu malar cerunti seluṅkamukam pāḷai / senpāṅkal maṇam nāṟum vāṇpōrīn uṭē / uṭē vayaḷalāp pukai kamaḷum nāṅkūr / arimēya viṇṇakaram vaṇṇku maṭa neṅcē.” My free and rough translation, which I am grateful to Sam Sudhandha for checking: This is the place where on that day he took the steadfast [qānqā?] form of Narasimha and bestowed grace on the son of Hiranyakasipu, who possessed great boons, by tearing apart Hiranyakasipu with his undiminishing sharp nails. Arimeya Vinnakaram is where Narasimha lives, in the middle of a fragrant garden of jasmine, red water lilies, with beautiful golden champak, sweet-smelling with white champaka flowers, and the fragrance of boiling sugarcane. Dear heart, worship there.
case, the form is one that occurs in the *talapurāṇa*’s stories or *bhakti* poetry connected to the place.

The primacy of place in these paintings is further reinforced by the organization of the paintings, which predominantly seem to be organized according to region. There is a group of images to the south of Nammālvar on the north wall that belong to Malai Nadu (present-day Kerala). Almost all of the remaining images on the east end of the north wall, as well as the first two-thirds of east wall, belong to Chola Nadu. Within Chola Nadu, the temples are again organized regionally: Temples belonging to the region of Kumbakonam begin near the east end of the wall, and continue onto the north side of the east wall; temples in the region of Sirkali occupy the center of the wall. The temples at the south end of the east wall all belong to Pandya Nadu, and all are in the region of Madurai. Grouping the temples by region makes possible two related operations for the viewer. On one hand, it makes identification of the temples easier in the absence of the ability to read the inscriptions, especially if the viewer is already given a clue as to what to expect or associate. Grouping the temples by region also makes plausible a pilgrimage to the sites, even if only in the mind of the beholder.

The poems of the *Prabandham*, explicitly and implicitly through emphasis on place, suggest that a mental pilgrimage to the homes of the lord is equal to physical pilgrimage to the

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16 The evidence is limited by the poor condition of the paintings, many of which no longer exist. However, the pattern is strong enough in the remaining paintings, I believe, to warrant this interpretation.

17 This is, of course, also useful to the researcher, who can make an executed guess about the subject of the paintings when only fragments remain. For instance, the representation of the temple at Tiruvattaru in present Kerala is today nothing more than a very damaged inscription and a small strip of painting illustrating a river that appears to have circumscribed the icon of the deity. The inscription, in this case, gives only the name of the deity, and not the site name (it is, however, quite damaged, and may have at one time carried the site name). Today, the legible portion of the inscription says in Tamil, "ādikesivapperumāl," and in Telugu, "adike[sa]va peru[ma]." Situated between two other paintings of temples in Malai Nadu, this painting, by the logic of organization at this site, would also depict a temple in Malai Nadu. Adikesava is the name of the god at Tiruvattaru. Furthermore, the temple is famed for being located on an island where two rivers are joined. It is consequently with confidence that this fragment can be identified as a topographic icon of the temple at Tirvattaru.
shrines. Topographic icons, grouped according to region, reiterate the established canon of sites sacred to Viṣṇu, and allow the devotee the benefit of pilgrimage to all the sites praised in the *Prabandham* as he circumambulates the single shrine of Nammāḻvār. The painted icon of Nammāḻvār is situated exactly in the middle of the painted *divya desams* (Figure 84). The *murti* of Nammāḻvār within the shrine is likewise situated in the middle of these paintings that create the Tamil Sri Vaiṣṇava world. Nammāḻvār, a figure understood as central to Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, is first among its *acaryas*, or teachers. Juxtaposed against the ceiling paintings concerned with the teaching and transmission of Sri Vaiṣṇavism, it is fitting that Nammāḻvār’s iconic image is at the center of the topographic icons of all the places sacred within the tradition.

The sacred landscape defined by the set of temples lauded by bhakti poets is, we have seen, a landscape traversable both physically and mentally. At Āḻvār Tirunakari the one-hundred eight *divya desams* are depicted iconically, drawing on iconography that relies on both the physical distinctiveness of the site and the narratives associated with the site and the deities there, and arranged according to localities even within regions. This regional grouping of the sites makes tangible the imagined sacred landscape at the same time that such a composition makes the landscape traversable through pradakṣiṇa, conceptually and physically linking the act to physical pilgrimage to all the sites.

**NETWORKS AND PATRONAGE: PĀṬAL PERRA TALAMS AND TĒVĀRAM AT AVUTAIYARKÖVIL**

The close connection between the representation of the sites and the actual sacred landscape defined through topography is made still more explicit in the paintings in the maṇṭapa

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before the Nandikēsa Māṇikkavācakar shrine at Avuṭaiyarkōvil. The paintings on the ceiling of the maṇṭapa form a set of topographic icons of the two hundred seventy-five sacred sites praised in Śaiva bhakti hymns of the Tēvāram, a collection of about eight hundred poems written by itinerant Śaiva saints between the 6-8th centuries. Like the hymns of the Divya Prabandham examined in the previous section, the Tēvāram poems bring together the landscapes of caṅkam poetry with narratives derived from multiple sources. The songs of the Śaiva Tamil bhakti poets, Peterson argues, blend “local and pan-Indian myths of Śiva in the arena and context of particular Tamil landscapes identified with the real and ideal landscapes of classical Tamil poetry…. The Tēvāram poems unite particular places in order to produce a sacred landscape unique to the Tamil Śaiva tradition.

Like the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham, place and the importance of pilgrimage to the sacred places, even if only mentally, is stressed within the text itself. Peterson, in her extensive work on the Śaiva bhakti poems, has amply proven this point:

Siva is the place, and, therefore, to sing of the place is to sing of Siva. Throughout the Tēvāram, if there is any one activity that is praised over all others, it is this: "singing of Siva/the place." By singing these songs the devotee makes a mental pilgrimage to the spot and reaps the same benefits as one who has actually made the pilgrimage; and the benefit is the experience of singing as pilgrimage. The last verse in Ĉampañtar's songs, the Tirukkaṭaikkāppu ("Sacred Closure") verse, tells of the phala ("fruit") not of visiting the shrine but of reciting the songs dedicated to the shrine:

\[
\text{Ṇānacampañtan tunefully sang this garland of ten Tamil verses}
\text{at the holy shrine of Kaḷukkuṇṟu}
\text{which the three-eyed Lord loves;}
\text{those who know these ten will}
\]

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19 Like the Nālāyira Divya Prabandham, the Tēvāram became a singular work of collected poems only after the saints’ lifetimes. The Tēvāram became a recognized corpus in the 11th century. Those places praised in the hymns are known as pāṭal perga talams, literally, sites having songs. Peterson, "Lives of the Wandering Singers: Pilgrimage and Poetry in Tamil Saivite Hagiography," fn. 3.

reach Heaven as holy ones. (Cam; 1.103.11)

The above verse makes it clear that singing the song with love for Śiva surpassed all other acts of Śiva-love in importance, for in repeating the song, the devotee recreates the mental attitude of the saints who journeyed to Śiva's places and worshipped Him there. The songs of the "First Three" thus urge the Tamil Saivite to sing them, and, in so doing, symbolically to undertake the pilgrimages which they encapsulate.21

Even while the idea of pilgrimage pervades this literature, and it is certain that the saints themselves visited the sites,22 scholars have argued that it was only in the Vijayanagara and Nāyaka periods that physical pilgrimage to these sacred sites by ordinary devotees received its greatest encouragement.23 At the same time that talapurāṇams were starting to be written, guides describing the geographical location of Tamil shrines also began to appear.24 Thus, in addition to the devotional value of bhakti poetry—thinking of a site and praising the god there—the physical location of the site became increasingly important.

In the ceiling paintings in the Māṇikkavācakar shrine at Avuṭaiyarkōvil, it is the representation of the sacred physical landscape that clearly precedes in importance the representation of individual shrines or the deities there.25 The iconic representation of each sacred site in the murals at Avuṭaiyarkōvil is consequently radically different from those at Āḻvār

21 "Singing of a Place: Pilgrimage as Metaphor and Motif in the Tevaram Songs of the Tamil Saivite Saints," 81.

22 Peterson shows two features of the hymns’ composition that are particularly salient for study of the importance of pilgrimage in the Tamil Śaiva tradition: 1. The hymns are always addressed to the god “who dwells in that particular place,” and 2. The songs are composed by the saint, spontaneously, “when he was in that place.” "Singing of a Place: Pilgrimage as Metaphor and Motif in the Tevaram Songs of the Tamil Saivite Saints," 71.

23 For the later development of talapurana and guruparampara as stimulus for actual pilgrimage to temples, see Dutta, "Pilgrimage as a Religious Process: Some Reflections on the Identities of the Srivaisnavas of South India."

24 Peterson, "Singing of a Place: Pilgrimage as Metaphor and Motif in the Tevaram Songs of the Tamil Saivite Saints." 72.

25 The forgoing discussion concerns the paintings in three of the four east-west aisles of the maṇṭapa that have ceiling paintings. The second aisle on the north side of the maṇṭapa are similar to those that will be discussed in that they depict a set of temples established in literature and tradition, the six homes of Śiva’s son, Murugan, as well as associated narratives. But as the paintings make no attempt to map the physical location of the shrines, they will not here be included in this discussion.
Tirunakari, where the unique deities of each site are visually emphasized. At Auvātaiyarkōvil, each temple image is unique, but the iconographic specificity is not enough to identify most of the sites. Each site is indicated with a god and goddess shrine, a water tank, and sometimes the tree sacred to the temple (Figure 58). This limited information, even though visually differentiated for each of the images, makes the inscription that accompanies each image necessary to identify the site. Reading the label inscriptions, it becomes apparent that all of the temples depicted are pādal perra talams, sites praised in the Tēvāram. Placed within a regular grid formation the visual similarity of each temple image gives way to seriality—rather than individuality—of the sites (Figure 120).

The specificity of divine manifestation at a particular place, praised for its uniqueness in devotional and talapurānic literature, is one among an infinity of sites where god resides. While talapurāṇams and bhakti poems are concerned with the specificity of place, they also articulate the deities’ and temples’ relationships to a greater tradition, as well as participation in a wider geography of sacred sites. In fact, the specific place has meaning only within the context of other places. Put another way, “Hindu sacred places….do not stand alone, in isolation….but [are] part of a complex fabric of reference and signification that constitutes a cumulative

26 See Chapter 2 for my proposal of an iconography of place.

27 This is a subjective understanding, and not true for every single image: some of the images are easily identified by their distinctive iconography. Others, however, are iconographically undifferentiated. The strong similarity of many of the images makes creates an impression of sameness and makes the inscriptive labels a necessity.

28 For an interesting discussion of seriality framed by a contemporary art historical understanding of Minimalism, see John E. Cort, Framing the Jina: Narratives of Icons and Idols in Jain History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 54-60.

29 As Eck has noted, “The...sthala purānas of Hindu India’s thousands of...[sacred places] do indeed extol and praise ‘this very place’... However, these are always set in the context of a wider peripheral vision in which...[sacred places] and their...[associated stories] are not unique, but ultimately numberless, limited not by the capacity of the divine to be present, but by the capacity of human beings to discover and to apprehend the divine presence.” Eck, "The Imagined Landscape: Patterns in the Construction of Hindu Sacred Geography," 168.
The sacred landscape of the Tamil country as a cumulative landscape is most powerfully conceived in the minds of those who connect and construct the landscape through story, ritual, and pilgrimage. This imagined sacred landscape is characterized by repetition and duplication. This is linked to a conception of the cosmos that is itself iterative, a “‘systematic geography’ in which geographical features are noteworthy not for their uniqueness but for their repetition in the ordered, systematic whole.”

The sacred landscape, praised in devotional hymns and talapurāṇic literature, is likewise iterative. One place becomes the sacred center, a reflection of cosmic ordering, so long as the pilgrim is focused on the site. But this site is meaningful only insofar as it is one of a limitless number of such sacred sites. As Eck articulates, “It is the linking, the network, the duplication, the substitution of…[sacred sites] that cumulatively constitute a landscape.”

This landscape system, constructed through rituals of circumambulation and pilgrimage, imagined through collected stories of talapurāṇic literature, praised through devotional hymns, is produced on the ceiling of the Avuṭaiyarkōvil Temple in the icons of the places praised in the Tēvāram hymns.

We have pointed out earlier that the poetic hymns of the Tēvāram are customarily organized in text according to one of two systems: paṇḍuṟai (according to musical mode and then author) and talampurai (organized according to place). Those arranged according to place are further organized by division into ten regions. The order of the temples within each region is governed by the order in which the pilgrim would visit, so that the sites are listed, roughly, east

30 Ibid.
to west (or vice versa) and south to north.\textsuperscript{33} This geographic and pilgrimage ordering of the sites is maintained within the ordering of sites at Avuṭaiyarkōvil. The artist has made an effort to define the regions within the architectural bounds of the ceilings, so that regions appear largely confined to a single aisle within the hall. Furthermore, the artist has ordered the temples so that the movement of the devotee within the temple while following the order of the images approximates the direction of travel between the pilgrimage sites.

The first two aisles, on the south side of the maṅṭapa, depict the temples of Coḷa Nāṭu in the order in which they occur according to the \textit{panmugai} system (Figure 120).\textsuperscript{34} In the first (southmost) aisle, the series begins in the west end of the aisle, and proceeds eastward through all of the temples of Coḷa Nāṭu south of the Kāvēri (indicated in my scheme with blue color). Each of the registers alternates the direction in which it should be read, so that if one were to follow the order, one could, without interruption or backtracking, pass under all the temples in \textit{panmugai} order. Moving from west to east, the beholder of the paintings also moves in the direction that the pilgrim to the physical sites would travel to visit the sites in the prescribed order.

The temples of Coḷa Nāṭu north of the Kāvēri (indicated in burgundy), on the other hand, are ordered so that the pilgrim to the physical sites would move from east to west. This direction of movement is largely followed in the paintings at Āvuṭaiyārkōvil. However, Citamparam, the

\textsuperscript{33} “It must be added that the sites enumerated in the talamuṟai do not come in a random order: a pilgrim (or a virtual pilgrim) …will first move from East to West, across 14 different taluks, along the Kāvēri vaṭa karai (i.e. Northern half of the Kāvēri delta and Kāvēri Northern bank) …He will then start a West-East journey [for the Southern bank of the Kaveri]…followed by a "zig-zag walk" [for the last part of the South bank of the Kaveri] and a "grand tour" (through the Southern parts and the Northern parts of Tamil Nadu) before heading towards the Himalaya.” French Institute of Pondicherry, “The Talamuṟai Arrangement of Tēvāram”.

\textsuperscript{34} The numbers in the diagram correspond to the \textit{panmugai}-ordered numbering of the sites in the Tēvāram. I have only labeled those which I could positively identify. A return to the site would yield further identifications.
first of the temples of Coḷa Nāṭu north of the Kāvēri, is given pride of place to the left of the
shrine of Māṇikkavācakar, and is much larger in size than the temples that are in the grid of
temples. The rest of the series of temples begins directly across from Citamparam, at the center
of the east aisle near the entrance to the maṇṭapa. The first twelve temples are arranged here so
that the viewer proceeds southward until she meets the second south aisle. The east aisle, like the
paṇmūṟai order of the sites, leads the devotee from east to west, terminating with the sixty-third
temple in the series, Tiruvēṅkōymalai, at the western end of the aisle. Above the last register of
temples, in the border between the temples of Coḷa Nāṭu north and the only temple that
represents Pandya Nādu (indicated in yellow), the Maturai Mēṅkāși Temple, is an inscription that
makes explicit the geography. It reads, “This side is the north bank of the Kāvēri [river] To its
south side is the south bank of the Kāvēri [river].”

The visual accuracy of the physical
landscape, augmented by the inscription, is made explicit with the inclusion of the Kāvēri river,
which flows east from the inscription and along the south side of the second south aisle,
literalizing the inscription above by separating the northern and southern regions of Coḷa Nāṭu.
The viewer of the paintings is thus instructed in the physical region of the temples, given their
names in inscription, and made to follow their course in the geographic ordering or the paintings.

The next region that the pilgrim encounters on her northward journey is that of Naṭu
Nāṭu (orange in the diagram). The paintings here are badly damaged, and it is impossible in
many cases to read the inscriptions. However, those that are legible belong to Naṭu Nāṭu and the
twenty-two cells of this of this portion would accommodate the twenty-two temple sites that

35 The singling out of this temple is probably due to its importance and popularity.

36 Tā. u intap patti kāverikku vaṭa karai u yītaŋ terkap pattiyil kāverikku teg karai u

37 East is the actual direction in which the Kāvēri River flows, emptying into the Bay of Bengal. The direction of
flow is indicated visually by the direction in which all of the fish are swimming.
compose Naṭu Nāṭu. As the pilgrim to the physical sites would, so the pilgrim who moves through the sites in the temple travels from south to north, into the first east-west aisle of the north side of the maṇṭapa.

Proceeding west from Naṭu Nāṭu in the first north aisle of the maṇṭapa, the pilgrim enters Toṇṭai Nāṭu (designated with green), where thirty-one of thirty-two temples belonging to this region are represented. There is a very large interpolation of the Kanchipuram Kāmākṣi Amman temple, which was discussed with reference to patronage in Chapter Four.\(^\text{38}\)

Proceeding northward, the pilgrim next encounters the single pāṭal perra tālam in Tuluva Nadu (present-day Karnataka), Gōkarṇa. Northward from here, with a single interpolation of another representation of Avuṭaiyarkōvil, are the sacred sites of Vaṭa Nadu, which are those of northern India, including Śiva’s divine abode on Mount Kailaś. Kailaś, unlike the other temples represented, is both a physical and imagined site. This difference, and the importance of Kailaś as Śiva’s divine home, is indicated visually by its separation from the grid of earthly temples. There is an inscription in the first border that adjoins the grid, which reads, ‘‘The mountain belonging to Śiva the Destroyer: Kailaś.’’\(^\text{39}\)

The Kailaś image consists of two large panels in the first northern aisle, as well as the panel that adjoins the Māṇikkavācakar shrine porch on the north side. The pilgrim who approaches the image, having traveled down the aisle from east to west, first encounters Kailaś mountain, which is composed of registers of figures within individual cells (Figure 121). The first, lowest, register depicts gaṇas dancing and making music. The second shows animals,

\(^\text{38}\) The Kāmākṣi temple may be associated with the Ėkāmbaranātar temple, which is a pāṭal perra tālam. However, the visual depiction here is clearly that of the goddess temple, and the scenes that surround the image relate the story of the goddess at that site, constituting the talapurāṇam of the Kāmākṣi temple.

\(^\text{39}\) Ta. nōṭittāŋmalaiyāvatu : kayilāsam. Nōṭittāŋmalai, which I have translated here by parsing the constituent parts of the word, is commonly understood as a single word, which is synonymous with Kailaś in a Śaiva context.
including lion, leopard, boar, and elephant. The third shows rishis studying from palm-leaf manuscripts, or reading and debating over manuscripts with other rishis. The next register shows ascetics performing various difficult penances (tapas). The fifth register shows various birds—rooster, peacock, goose, etc. The sixth shows ascetics again, engaged in less severe tapas than the ascetics below. The next register shows rishis each worshipping a Śivalinga through puja, offering light, flowers, and liquids to the murti set on a small pīṭam. The eighth register shows rishis in meditational poses, while the ninth shows them with hands in añjali. The tenth register shows all the vahanas of the deities – a peacock (Murugan), goose (Brahma), Nandi (Śiva’s own mount), Garuda (Viṣṇu), and a white elephant (Indra). The tenth, and last, register shows ten rishis standing with hands in añjali. On either side of the mountain are depicted kinnarīs on the right and other gods on the left, though these are very damaged and difficult to identify.

The culmination of the pilgrim’s journey through the sacred Śaiva landscape is an image of Śiva resplendent within a tripartite temple structure (Figure 122). Śiva, seated in the center of the temple below a festoon and pendant white lotuses, is beautiful and richly adorned. In the right side of the temple sits Parvati. The left side of the structure is divided into three parts. The lowest shows the children of Śiva and Parvati, Murugan and Vinayakar. Above, Tumburu and Narada play vīnas, while other gandharvas shower flowers from baskets in the uppermost part of the scene. Outside of the temple, filling the rest of the space, are female attendants and kinnarīs on the right, while on the left are arrayed the gods. Gandharvas, showering flowers upon the scene below, stand in cloud-like vehicles at the top of the panel. Inscriptions in the three registers of the panel adjacent to the shrine porch identify forty-thousand rishis, three-hundred million
devas, two Arantangi Tonṭaimān kings, and four celestial dancers, apsaras, praising and celebrating Śiva.40

Considered as a whole, the paintings on the ceiling of this pillared hall represent the Tamil Śaiva sacred landscape.41 The sites are arranged according to the paymūrai ordering of the text of the Tēvāram, and according to the direction the pilgrim would actually experience them, mapping the directionality and movement of the pilgrim who physically goes to each of the shrines onto the orientation and walking movement of the viewers of the paintings. Thus, the devotee moves from west to east to follow the temples in Coḷa Nāṭu south of the river Kāvēri. Then, to move among the temples of Coḷa Nāṭu north of the Kāvēri, the devotee moves primarily east to west. On the north side of the maṇṭapa, the devotee moves first south to north, following the order of sites in Naṭu Nādu, and then continues up the aisle from east to west, as the architecture of the temple demands, forward through the temples of Tonṭai Nāṭu, which are here adjacent, and geographically also abut and blend into those of Nadu Nādu. The aisle culminates with the temples of Vaṭa Nādu, ending with a large image of Śiva atop Mount Kailaś. Beginning in the south, the worshipper travels through all the major Śaiva sites in the order demanded by

40 These were described in the previous chapter.

41 There is one additional aisle of paintings which will not be explicated here, though they certainly accord with the theme of place this chapter considers. The northmost aisle is devoted exclusively to temples associated with the son of Śiva, Murukan. Murukaṇ is, in his own right, an extremely popular deity in the Tamil region, and has, since the late medieval period, been explicitly identified with Tamil language and culture. The east end of the aisle is damaged and the paintings that would have concluded the aisle are now totally gone. My conjecture is that the aisle was divided into eight parts. Beginning on the east side, the first six registers depict the ārupatai viṭukal, typically known in English as the Six Abodes of Murugan (in the paintings, the first of these is missing). Tiruparankuram, Tiruchendur, and Swamimalai can be confidently identified. I believe that the westmost image represents Tiruttani. The image of Murugan, and the giant mountain on which he sits, is similar in format, though smaller, than that of Śiva, adjacent to it in the next aisle. This would seem to posit a correspondence between the two, as well as a hierarchy, as Muruga’s depiction is less grand (smaller, excluding dancers, rishis, and patron figures) than Śiva’s. This series of paintings is another sacred landscape – that of Murugan – adjacent, and subordinate, to the sacred landscape of Śiva. For the sacred landscape of Murugan, see Fred W. Clothey, “Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan,” American Academy of Religion 40, no. 1 (1972): esp. 88.
tradition and geography. Since the devotional hymns consider thinking of a place as equal to
going to the site, the devotee’s ambulatory engagement with the paintings here is itself a
pilgrimage to the sacred sites. Understood in their sacred and ritual contexts, the paintings
facilitate the devotee’s worship of Śiva in all his homes.

**The Cosmic Body of God: A Unique Viśvarūpa at Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai**

Up to this point we have examined the relationships between the representations of
sacred sites in the Tamil country and bhakti literature. It was seen that bhakti literature is not
only intently focused on place, but advocates the importance of individual places only within a
network of other places, which together constitute a religio-poetic world – a “sacred landscape”
comprised of particular places, the gods that inhabit them, and the narratives that animate them.
At Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai, conversely, the space that is mapped is the cosmic body of Viṣṇu, his
Viṣvarūpa, which within itself contains the entire cosmos, systematically revealed in text and
image. This site, though mentioned in scholarship, has never been the subject of sustained
study. The following description attempts, therefore, a comprehensive description of this central
image, not least because it is unique among Viṣvarūpa images.

The paintings at the Chennaraya Perumal Temple at Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai, near Dharmapuri in
northwestern Tamil Nadu, are located on the ceiling of the temple’s single maṇṭapa. The

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42 The Viśvarūpam is described in 11th chapter of the *Bhāgavad-gītā* (Book 6 of the *Mahābhārata*).

43 The paintings in this temple are badly damaged and in many instances completely illegible. This is true of the
inscriptions that appear to have once provided extensive labels and narrative corroboration to the images. This
problem is compounded by the fact that access to the temple is limited, and the ASI disallows any photography. The
photographs available to view at the ASI offices in Chennai, as well as those held by the IFP in Pondicherry, are not
fine enough to read detail or inscriptions, and do not document the entire painted surface. This study is therefore
limited by these constraints. Despite these limitations, however, analysis of the paintings is included here because
they contribute important material to corpus of south Indian mural painting. While some of the conclusions are
partial, they are based on analysis of the images that I believe will stand up to further study, should access to the
paintings improve.
manṭapa is divided lengthwise into five bays, roughly eleven meters in length, separated by four rows of five pillars each. The two bays on the northern side of the manṭapa depict the story of the Rāmāyaṇa, while the two bays on the southern side depict narratives from the Mahābhārata. The central bay extends from the entrance of the manṭapa straight back to the door to the inner sanctum of the temple, and depicts the cosmic body of Viṣṇu, his Viṣvarūpa (Figure 123). The Viṣvarūpa is oriented with the feet at the western end of the manṭapa, the symbolic head of the figure being placed at the eastern end, near the entrance to the temple. The arms are painted on the lateral surface of the beams supported by the columns on both sides of the aisle. The entire body, save for the arms below the elbows and the legs below the knees (which have been left devoid of images), is filled with the representations of the cosmic structure. The figure stands on a grassy mound, beyond which is the iconic image of Rāma Enthroned, discussed at length in Chapter 2.

The Viṣvarūpa is described in the Mahābhārata, when Krishna makes his omniform (viṣvarūpa) visible to Arjuna. The description focuses on the awesome infinitude of the cosmos paradoxically contained within the body of Viṣṇu. The divine, semidivine, and mortal beings are enumerated, but the order and shape of all that exists within the cosmos is not elaborated. Typical images of the Viṣvarūpa reflect this evocative, but unsystematic, description, often through the proliferation of heads, arms, legs, and attributes of the deity.

44 Ranjan writes that the beams are “wooden rafters;” they are definitely stone. Neena Ranjan, Vishvarūpa: Paintings on the Cosmic Form of Krishna-Vāsudeva (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2008), 121.

45 The remaining space around the Viṣvarūpa, below the kneecaps of the figure, shows the boar and turtle that support the cosmos; the rest of the space around the legs of the cosmic man is left unpainted save for the white background. Nagas sculpted into the ceiling intrude upon the image, but were nevertheless painted and incorporated into the composition.

46 The Victoria and Albert Museum’s Vishvarupa is a particularly captivating – and particularly schematized – vision of the god (acc. no. 2006BJ9149). Many other images show the god as multi-limbed and multi-headed, rather
The many purāṇas of South Asia’s literary traditions, though narrative in content, generally also contain a section devoted to cosmological description. These typically describe the origin and eventual dissolution of the cosmos, as well as all of its constituent parts, including worlds, stars, planets, and continents with their physical features and inhabitants. The texts are highly systematic, giving the order of all the worlds within a hierarchy of spaces (*svarga* (celestial space), *prithvī* (terrestrial space), and *pātāla* (subterranean space)) that are each described as consisting of seven levels. The Viśvarūpa in the murals of Atiyamāṇkōṭṭai likewise portrays a carefully systematized organization of figures, astronomical and astrological symbols, the *axis mundi* of Mt. Meru, and the septpartite structure of *svarga*, *prithvī*, and *pātāla*. Interestingly, however, the ordering of the terrestrial continents does not follow any single purāṇic description. This would seem to indicate that the designer of this composition knew the purāṇic descriptions of the cosmos, but did not use any (or yet-identified) text as a prescriptive model for the painted composition.

than encompassing neatly defined worlds. However, it appears that Viśvarūpa images in South India tended towards greater schematization of the cosmos in conjunction with Viśvarūpa images. This is a point for further investigation and elaboration. For comparison images, see Ranjan, *Vishvarūpa: Paintings on the Cosmic Form of Krishna-Vāsudeva*.


The tension between representation of the abstract and documentation of the real is would be an interesting point for further consideration in these murals. Although there are many discrepancies between the paintings and the texts that prescribe the forms represented, as well as tension between representation of Viśvarūpa and cosmic structure, both were considered to be literally descriptive. As Ali notes, “The cosmic hierarchy portrayed in the Purānic texts was not symbolic or metaphorical—it was literally a physical description of the universe.” Daud Ali, “Cosmos, Realm, and Property in Early Medieval South India,” in *Tamil Geographies: Cultural Constructions of Space and Place in South India*, ed. Martha Ann Selby and Indira Viswanathan Peterson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 124.
The following description proceeds from head of the figure, at the western entrance of the maṇṭapa, towards the east, terminating at the feet that stand atop the Rāma image before the door to the shrine. I describe the ceiling in detail here as there is little published, the available images are inadequate for study, and access to the paintings is difficult. I have thus produced a schematic diagram of the image (Figure 124).

**SVARGA - CELESTIAL SPACE**

The paintings on the western end of the maṇṭapa have been completely destroyed, resulting in only illegible remnants of plaster and undressed rock surface. It is here that the head of the Viśvarūpa figure would have been depicted; unfortunately, I have found no record of the painting in photographic archives. The first visible traces of the murals are four horizontal registers that may constitute the shoulders of the figure, though this also is unclear due to the extremely damaged state of the murals. These first four registers join with the following three to constitute the seven levels of *svarga*, which covers the upper chest and shoulders of the figure. The first four registers (1–4 in the diagram) are filled with single figures enclosed within white circles. The damage to these registers is severe, making iconographic interpretation of the figures impossible. These may represent constellations, *nakshatras*, or other divine and semi-divine figures associated with the celestial worlds.

The following two registers (registers 5 and 6 in the diagram) are two and three times the width of those preceding them (Figure 125). The figures depicted in these registers are accordingly larger in scale. This group of individualized figures is distinguished through size and iconography from the mass of figures in the upper realms of *svarga*. The specific iconography of the figures, as well as the largely effaced label inscriptions, indicates that the figures were meant to be read as distinct and recognizable individuals, in contrast to those above that are smaller,
more compressed, and less iconographically distinct. The fifth register is filled primarily with
two female figures: nine on the left side, and four more on the right. Each of these has specific
attributes and some have animal mounts; these are yet to be identified. To the right of the four
figures on the right side of the central axis is a clear representation of Chandra, the Moon, pulled
on his chariot driven by a charioteer on the right.

The next register (register 6) is arranged around a figural panel in which a ten-armed,
five-headed figure is seated directly on the center axis. This iconic figure is very damaged and
the attributes are difficult to discern. To the right is seated another smaller figure within the same
frame, perhaps a consort. These figures may represent Viṣṇu and his consort seated within
Viṣṇu’s heaven, Vaikuntha, which is located above Satyaloka, Brahma’s heaven, which is the
case in the image here (see Figure 124). Alternatively, since the image is located on the central
axis directly above the pinnacle of Mount Meru, and is the center towards which the planets and
face, and around which the sun and the moon move (see below), the figure may represent the
Pole Star, Dhruva. Dhruva may be identified as an avatar of Viṣṇu, and is then known as
Dhruva-Narayana.49 The iconography of Dhruva-Narayana is a multi-limbed deity, which
accords with the iconography of the figure in this image. The image may be understood as the
center, a representation of both Viṣṇu and the Pole Star, directly over the central axis of Mount
Meru, and around which all the planets and stars revolve.50

49 “Dhruva is personified as an avatāra of Viṣṇu and called Dhruva-Narāyana. His emblems are the discus, water-
vessel, spear and rosary,” Margaret Stutley, The Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography (London ; Boston:

50 The Viṣṇu Purāṇa states, “As Dhruva revolves, it causes the moon, sun, and stars to turn round also; and the lunar
asterisms follow in its circular path; for all the celestial luminaries are in fact bound to the polar-star by aerial
cords.” H. H. Wilson, The Vishnu Purana: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition (London,: J. Murray, 1840),
Book II, Chapter XI pg. 230. See also Chapter XII.
On either side of this central panel are eight of the nine planets (the ninth is the moon, which is located in the previous register). There is a single interpolation into this series, the personification of Viṣṇu’s chakra, Śudarśana, which is set apart from the other personifications of the planets by the parasols, flags, and standards that decorate the platform on which he is shown walking in front of a saṭkōṇacakra, two interlaced triangles. Beginning on the left, the grahas (planets) are arranged as follow:

- **Sani** - identified with a crow vāhana
- **Surya** - identified with a one-wheeled chariot drawn by 8 horses
- **Rahu** - very damaged; carries a trisula in one of four hands
- **Śudarśana Chakra** - personification of Viṣṇu’s chakra
- **Ketu** - identified with serpent tail, trident, and vulture vāhana
- **Dhruva-Narāyana** – the Pole Star and avatār of Viṣṇu
- **Śukra** - inscription is fragmentarily visible on upper left of roundel
- **Bṛhaspati** - inscription visible at upper left of figure; figure is extremely similar to Śukra in posture and iconography
- **Buddha** - inscription visible at upper left; seated on lion mount
- **Angāraka** - inscription above figure seated within a rectangular, rather than elliptical, frame; ram vāhana

Figures of the seventh register are arranged on either side of the trefoil element on the top of Mount Meru.51 Arranged in a line across the mountain-like forms that span the width of the register on either side of the mountain are thirteen symbols, eleven of which are readily identifiable as rāṣis, or signs of the zodiac. All were once labeled, but most of these are now missing due to damage. The first and fourth figures from the right side present difficulty for identification. Both are labeled, but neither is clear. The symbol on the furthest right is a tree; the

51 Mabbett says that the Rāmāyaṇa refers to three shining peaks on mount Meru. The reference he gives, however, is incorrect, and I have been unable to verify the statement. I.W. Mabbett, "A Sketch of Mount Meru," in Ancient Indian History, Philosophy, and Culture : Essays in Memory of Professor Radhagovinda Basak Vidyāvācaspati, ed. Radhagovinda Basak (Calcutta, India: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1987), 60, ftnt 8.
damaged inscription may read, _ṛucṣikam_, which would correspond to _vrścika_ (Skt.) (Te. _vrścikamu_; Ta. _virucikam_), which is Scorpio. There is no precedent that I can find, however, for the representation of Scorpio as a tree rather than a scorpion. The other difficult figure is one with a human-like red-colored body and black furry head with pointed ears with a canine muzzle. The right arm of the figure ends in a long point, more like a tail than an arm; the figure’s left arm, obscured by damage, possibly holds a smaller figure, on a possible third leg. Besides these two figures, the other symbols of _rāśis_ are clear. They read from left to right as follows:

- Scale = **Tula** (Libra)
- Virgin (single female) = **Kanya** (Virgo)
- Man-lion = **Simha** (Leo)
- Crab = **Kataka** (Cancer)
- Mithuna couple = **Mithuna** (Gemini)
- White bull = **Rishaba** (Taurus)
- Ram = **Mesha** (Aries)
- Fish = **Mīna** (Pisces)
- Pot = **Kumbha** (Aquarius)
- Three-legged composite figure; inscription identifies as _śṛjma_
- Makara = **Makara** (Capricorn); inscription identifies as _makaram_
- Man holding a drawn bow and arrow = **Dhanu** (Saggitarius); inscription identifies as _danasu_
- Tree = **Vṛścika** (Scorpio); inscription identifies as [v]ṛucṣikam

The signs of the zodiac conclude the seven celestial registers depicted within the Viśvarūpa. What is striking even within the few registers that are legible is the systematic depiction of astronomical and astrological phenomena through iconic representation. The Telugu

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52 The inscription beside the figure is clear, but so far nonsensical to me; I read it as _śṛjma_, which is meaningless. Another interpretation would be to read the inscription as _śṛṅgi_, a rishi well known in puranic mythology, or _śṛṅgi_, a horned animal. It is tempting, especially in light of the apparent third leg of the figure, to read the inscription as a variation on _Bṛṅgi_, the three-legged Śaiva saint. However, the visual evidence lends little further support to such an identification, and the inscription would be impossible to read as _Bṛṅgi_.
inscriptions that seem to have accompanied each of the iconic figures suggest that legibility of the component parts was important to the creators of the image. Also striking within the highly systematized and legible depictions of the celestial worlds are the interpolations of figures that do not seem to belong to the sets of figures represented. Examples of this are the addition of Sudarśana-cakra within the nine planets, and the insertion of the “śṛjma” figure with the twelve signs of the zodiac. For both there is no readily apparent connection between the figures and the series of images within which they are associated. Both are embedded within the series, not at the end or some other natural break, and thus not a position where they might simply fill empty compositional space.

**Prithvī – Terrestrial Space**

Prithvī, the second of the three components of the cosmic structure, and that which humans inhabit, is organized around Mt. Meru, the cosmic *axis mundi*. Prithvi is composed of seven horizontal parts, and Mt. Meru is comprised of seven vertical levels (Figure 126). On either side of Mt. Meru are four supporting mountains (*vishkambha*), supposed to be located at

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53 I do believe that the tree is the representation of Vṛścika. While the tree is located at the end of the register, and therefore one could argue that the artist had space to fill, this argument does not seem tenable for a number of reasons. Firstly, a figure is necessary in that position to complete the set of twelve signs of the zodiac. Moreover, although the iconography of the image is highly unconventional (a tree, rather than a scorpion), the inscription, insofar as it is legible, corroborates the identification of the image as Vṛścika, the final zodiac sign needed to complete the set.

54 One could argue for a solar identification of Sudarśana-cakra. Banerjea argues for the identification of the chakra with the sun, writing that “the wheel as a symbol par excellence of the god is undoubtedly one of the tangible connections with the Vedic Viṣṇu, an aspect of the sun.” Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956), 145. For an opposing view that understands the Sūdarśana-cakra only as a weapon and not a solar symbol, see W. E. Begley, *Viṣṇu's Flaming Wheel: The Iconography of the Sūdarśana-Cakra*, Monographs on Archaeology and Fine Arts (New York: New York University Press for the College Art Association of America, 1973).
the four cardinal directions, each crowned by a large tree.\textsuperscript{55} Each of the mountains is populated by austerity-performing rishis.\textsuperscript{56}

Mount Meru is itself comprised of seven levels, or registers; at the center of each is an iconic depiction of a major deity around which all the other figures that populate the levels are arranged. Each of the levels, excluding the first, are filled with figures depicted within and against architectural settings, the roofs of which are consistently set against a plain black background on which white Telugu-language inscriptions are found.\textsuperscript{57} Although the base of Mount Meru rests firmly in the earthly sphere, the upper levels of the mountain reach through the celestial spheres. Imagined three-dimensionally, using the scheme I have created, levels two and three of Mt. Meru overlap with registers five through seven of Svarga; svarga and pātāla would extend vertically above and below the horizontal plane of prithvi.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} The \textit{Viṣṇu Purāṇa} describes them thus: “There are four mountains in this Varsha, formed as buttresses to Meru, each ten thousand Yojanas in elevation: that on the east is called Mandara; that on the south, Gandhamādana; that on the west, Vipula; and that on the north, Supāśwa: on each of these stands severally a Kadamba-tree, a Jambu-tree, a Pīpal, and a Vatā; each spreading over eleven hundred Yojanas, and towering aloft like banners on the mountains.” H. H. Wilson, \textit{The Vishnu Purana}, 5 vols., Oriental Religions (New York: Garland Pub., 1981), Book II, Chapter II.

\textsuperscript{56} There are inscriptions on both the left and right side of Meru near these hills, though the content of the inscription remains tentative. These labels seem to read “aṣṭakulapavanam.” The inscription on the left side of the mountain is damaged, but probably repeats what is clear on the right side. \textit{Vanam} would seem to be a misspelling of \textit{vanam}, forest. Why there are eight, “aṣṭa” is unclear, as is to what \textit{[u]lapa} might refer. A possibility is that the word should read as \textit{aṣṭa upavanam}, which would be eight (\textit{aṣṭa}) regions (\textit{upavanam}). This might refer to the four \textit{vishkambha} at the cardinal points, as well as four at the ordinal points. Similar mountain forms, though without tree atop them, are found on the upper outline of the second and sixth continents [see diagram], adding some support to the supposition that \textit{aṣṭa upavanam} may refer to eight such mountains. Alternatively, it may refer to the eight landmasses pictured here, viz. the seven continents plus Mount Meru. This would be a literal and easy reading of the \textit{eight regions}, though Meru is said in the \textit{purāṇas} to be found on Bharatavarsa. In the painting, however, there are eight distinct regions, and Bharata (continent 5 in the diagram) is distinguished from Mt. Meru.

\textsuperscript{57} Unfortunately, the images available to me do not show these well enough to read, though it appears that reading them in better conditions would be possible.

\textsuperscript{58} The remaining four levels of Meru may well correspond to the remaining four levels of svarga; however, there is not enough evidence accessible or remaining to substantiate this claim.
The first level of Mount Meru is Bhūrloka, which is filled with animals, birds, and rivers. It is smaller in both height and width than the succeeding registers. However, while the visual register that signifies the realm of Bhūrloka is small, Bhūrloka actually includes all of the earthly realms (prithvī), including the seven continents arrayed around Meru, and thus comprises much more than is first apparent. The second level is Bhuvarloka, which the Viṣṇu Purāṇa associates with the sky. Beyond, in Svarloka, are found the planets and stars. Above Svarloka are the realms that are not destroyed at the end of the kalpa; these are Maharloka, Janaloka, Tapaloka, and Satyaloka.

The Seven Dvīpas

The realm of Bhūrloka, as described above, consists not only of the small register at the base of Mount Meru, but also of the seven continents, identified in the inscriptions here as dvīpas, or islands. The purāṇas give two accounts of the disposition of the dvīpas around Mount Meru. One purānic conception of terrestrial space describes four lotus petal-shaped countries arranged around Mount Meru, which is itself described as the seed-cup of a lotus flower (pericarp), an inverted cone shape. At the same time, Meru is described as the center of a

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59 Wilson, The Vishnu Purana, 212.

60 The Vishnu Purana, 214.

61 Janaloka is legible in the accompanying inscription in the register. It is using this firm identification that I have assigned the other identifications. The extensive descriptions may also shed light on the presence of specific deities in each of the realms (see the following note).

62 Satyaloka is described in the purāṇas as being the realm of Brahma; and indeed, it is Brahma who is here depicted in the center of Satyaloka. However, I have thus far found little explanation for the placement of other deities within the other realms (as shown in the diagram). It would be interesting to know whether the remaining four registers of Svarga correspond in content to the remaining four registers of Meru.
concentric series of seven island continents separated by seven seas of different substances. The painting here combines both conceptions, showing the seven continents as the petals of a lotus surrounded by a single ocean. At the center Meru stands with its peak at the top of the image, not as an inverted cone-shaped pericarp. Interposed among the representations of the dvīpas are the aṣṭadikpālas, or guardians of the directions, including a representation of Yama with multiple hells (narakas). Each of the seven dvīpas is differentiated from the others and labeled.

Kuśadvīpa is the first, rightmost, petal of the lotus; the identifying label inscription is found just to the right of the petal in large black lettering. Atop the dvīpa are two of the vishkambhas, as well as an iconic and labeled depiction of Varuna, the lokapala (guardian deity) of the West, seated just to the left of the mountain closest to Meru. Within the petal-island of Kuśadvīpa, most of the pictorial space is given to depictions of Kubera (guardian of the North) and Vāyu (guardian of the Northwest). Arranged in registers around these iconic depictions of the lokapalas are individual cells within which men and women are seated. The male figures are dressed in short pants that end above the knee and stitched shirts that close in the front. The women wear sari-like clothing, which in almost all cases leaves the legs below the knee exposed. Some of the figures sit on low platforms, while others are shown seated on stools.

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63 For an overview, see Eck, *India : A Sacred Geography*, Chapter 3. See also the Wilson’s notes that compare other purānic accounts to that given in the Visnu Purāṇa, Wilson, *The Vishnu Purāṇa: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*, Book II, Chapter II.

64 The purāṇas list various hells whose locations, unlike the other realms of the cosmos, are not specified. They are not identified with the underworlds (pātālas), which are held to be delightful places; the narakas are places of gruesome punishment. Dimmitt and Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology : A Reader in the Sanskrit Purāṇas*, esp. 24-27; *Classical Hindu Mythology : A Reader in the Sanskrit Purāṇas*.

65 I have been unable to read all of the labels; however, I have identified five of the seven inscriptions, leaving only the last two dvīpas on the left unidentified.
Śākadvīpa, the second petal of the lotus, is labeled on the far right side of the second register. It contains no iconic images of divinities, but like the previous dvīpa, is composed of five registers, each of which is subdivided into separate cells. The upper register shows a Śivalinga and Nandi on the left, and a Tulasi vrindavan (holy basil planter associated with Viṣṇu) on a riverbank on the right. The figures that populate the rest of the cells are differentiated from the figures of the previous register primarily through their conical red hats, many of which have a crosshatching over the surface. Most of the men have prominent beards and short-sleeved shirts that close in the font. Most of the figure groups are composed of both female and male figures, save for one two figure groups that are exclusively male. A hamsa, makara, and other fantastic creatures populate the land.

Śālmalidvīpa is identified by an inscription located in the center of the first of six registers. Scenes within the registers are again framed internally using both hard and soft frames. The separate cells are sparsely populated when compared to the other dvīpas. Figures are shown in conversation, and in the fourth register, figures are shown worshiping a Śivalinga. Unfortunately, I am not able to discern more in the images available to me.

Kraunchadvīpa is represented in the fourth petal; the faint gray inscription is located in the rust-colored river that adjoins the top center of the petal. There are seven registers, though their uniformity is at times disturbed by mountains and rivers, making this composition more varied than the others. On the right and left sides of the third register, for instance, the composition spans the third and fourth registers. That on the left is turned ninety degrees, so that it is presented perpendicularly to the rest of the scenes. Some of the figures wear pointed hats with brims, others wear hats with the brims upturned, while others wear turbans. Some wear striped pants. Some have very long faces, mustaches and beards, while others are clean-shaven.
Amorous couples, seemingly drinking from wine cups, are featured in the top and bottom registers. Fantastic and composite creatures populate (and copulate in) the landscape, particularly in the lower three registers.

The inscription that identifies Bharatakhandam, the fifth petal, is in the leftmost division, near the right border and in the bottom third of the image. This is the only dvīpa that represents a real, and not imagined, place. This is denoted pictorially through difference from the other dvīpas. In the imagined dvīpas, male figures wear varieties of woven and sewn hats, sewn shirts, striped pants, and often have strongly ovoid or square faces and varieties of hairstyles that are plausibly based on foreign typologies. Compositionally, the imagined places are primarily organized by horizontal registers subdivided into individual cells where human figures engage in various activities. The lotus petal that represents Bharata (India), however, is divided vertically into three sections that primarily feature architecture, rather than figures. Rivers and paths connect different parts of the image, and within the three sections there are very few hard frames dividing the composition and figures. The tangible reality of Bharatakhanda is further augmented by labels that identify the architectural features that represent well-known sites.

Bharatakhanda is, in fact, the only petal not identified as a dvīpa. The dvīpa on which Bharata is situated is stated in the purāṇas to be Jambudvīpa, but the inscription here identifies the image explicitly only as that part (khanda) that is India (Bharata).66 The image is very dense and compositionally complicated. Most of the buildings and some of the figures are accompanied by label inscriptions; unfortunately, most of these are not legible in the images accessible to me.

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66 Jambudvīpa represents the known earth, in which three regions besides India are described. The purāṇic accounts usually represent Jambudvīpa as a lotus, where each region is one of the petals—making it formally similar to the representation of all the worlds at Atiāmāṅkōṭṭai. However, the purāṇas restrict the lotus form to a single continent, and in that the murals differ substantially.
The image is not divided into registers; rather, it is divided vertically into three sections across the width of the horizontal petal. The tripartite representation of Bharata loosely represents, I believe, Northern, Deccani, and Southern India.

Northern India is located nearest Mount Meru; the portion that actually abuts Meru shows mountain forms, perhaps referencing the Himalayas. To the left are numerous fortified buildings, perhaps palaces, one of which seems to be identified as Delhi (the inscription reads in Telugu, dili). In the lower left, turned perpendicularly so that it sits along the border frame of this section of the image, is a mosque. A single figure sits on the left side of the mosque; he is labeled as munši (teacher). Four figures are seated on the right side of the mosque, hands in aŋjali.

The central section of the image, which I tentatively identify as the Deccan, is densely populated with figures, buildings, and rivers. Although there are label inscriptions throughout the image, few of these are legible. The upper part of the section shows on the extreme right five temples with roofs that seem to conform to the phamsana type within an area bounded by a river. Phamsana is typical of Deccani temple architecture. To the left, three figures are seated within a fortified structure. The two on the right wear turbans and have beards, perhaps an indication that they are Muslim. The central and most prominent feature, however, is a Śiva temple. Visible within are a devotee, the Śivalinga, a goddess shrine, and a Nandi. Small lingas occupy the circumference of the prakara wall.

The third portion of the image is the largest and represents, I believe, southern India, with particular focus on the famous temples of the Tamil region: all the temples that can be identified

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67 I read these as fortified because either they are rectilinear with circles at the corner, as would be fortifications, or there are small structures attached to the walls of the structure. For images with fortified palaces similarly represented, see Susan Gole, *Indian Maps and Plans: From Earliest Times to the Advent of European Surveys* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989).
through label or iconography are located in the Tamil linguistic region. The southerness of the region might also be conveyed iconographically through the inclusion of palm trees, which are not found in either of the two other parts of the image. The top of the image is different from the others, set off by a frame and not traversed by rivers, but densely filled with leafy plants. Set into this are two cells that appear to show interactions with foreigners, who are dressed all in black, and shown in the lower of the two cells as wearing hats with curved brims—perhaps representing Jesuits. Below this section of the image, the more familiar representation of figures amongst buildings, hills, and most prominently, rivers, returns. Among the temples for which it is possible to read the labels, the famous temple at Citamparam (depicted with a gopura, flagpost, and worshipper beside a maṇṭapa—the Śivalinga is no longer legible) is located nearest the bottom and right-side frame of this section. Directly above, another temple complex consisting of Śiva lingas on either side of a mountain with a large flame on top is labeled as Aruṇācalam, another famous and important site for the worship of Śiva in Tamil Nadu. Above another two Śiva temples is another temple with a label inscription that seems to read tirupa…, perhaps indicating the famous temple devoted to Viṣṇu at Tirupati. To the left, across a wide river, is a Viṣṇu temple complex on an island. The image of Viṣṇu is shown reclining; this could represent the centrally important Viṣṇu temple on the island of Śrī Raṅgām. Directly to the left of the Viṣṇu temple is a Śiva temple under a tree with fruits prominently shown. This may represent the Jambukesvara temple, which is an important Śiva shrine also on the island of Sri Rangam.68

The petal of Bharatakandam, unlike those of the other dvīpas, is extended slightly on the top and the bottom, where another register of figures is added beyond the regular border of the

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68 It is interesting that in this cycle of paintings in a Viṣṇu temple, Śaiva temples are shown most prominently in the region in which this temple is located.
petal. The bottom register seems to show European figures: they wear pants, shirts, brimmed hats, and carry sticks over their shoulders. The central group of figures accompanies an ox-drawn cart that carries a single figure. On the left and right, figures are seated within built structures on low chairs conversing. Near these figures, in the ocean that surrounds the dvīpas, are two boats with figures in them. The image perhaps suggests European trade in South Asia. The extra register at the top begins on the left, within what I interpret to be a fortified structure, where a figure reclines against a bolster. Beyond, seven bare-chested figures face toward a small Śivalinga shrine. These figures all wear a small cap on their heads, and have long hair pulled back to a ponytail. Four similar figures are shown on the right, the first two of which also face to the right, towards a similarly-shadowy Śivalinga located under a red-flowering tree.

The final two petals of the terrestrial continents must represent Plaksha and Pushkara dvīpas. However, I have been unable to locate and identify inscriptions on the images. The sixth petal is very small and overlapped by both Bharatakanda below and the petal-continent above. Within, four registers are visible. Some cells show couples talking, others show an amorously-engaged couple. The seventh petal-dvīpa also has four registers, which seem to depict men and women seated or standing in front of seated unadorned male figures. Much of the pictorial space is, however, given to two inset images. The first, and smaller, inset seems to represent another lokapāla, but the label and iconography of this figure are no longer clearly legible. The second inset image shows Yama, god of death and guardian deity of the south, seated on the right side of

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69 Perhaps these represent guns, but this is not clear from the image.

70 One wonders whether these peripheral spaces represent parts of Bharatakanda, or perhaps, the other regions of Jambudvīpa.
the image; his water buffalo vahana accompanies him. Before him, on the left side of the image, humans are tortured for transgressions committed during their lifetimes on earth.  

**Pātāla – Subterranean Space**

Beyond the ocean that surrounds the seven dvīpas are the seven landmasses that constitute pātāla, the subterranean continents (Figure 127). These, like the more standard purānic representation of the seven dvīpas described above, are arranged as curved bands (suggesting rings) of land alternating with narrow bands that seem to indicate bodies of water. The realms of Pātāla are considered to be paradisiacal: full of jewels, precious metals, teeming with birds, gardens, and water; there is no disease, old age, or death. There are beautiful cities constructed by the great architect, Maya.  

Pātāla is populated by daityas and dānavas (both opposers of the

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71 Bhurloka is identified in purānic literature as the realm of works, meaning that it is the place where men can do work to achieve union with god. The realm of works is the only realm in which there is death, disease and suffering. Nevertheless, it is considered the best of all realms because action that results in change is possible. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa states that Bharata “is the land of works, in consequence of which men go to heaven, or obtain emancipation.” Wilson, *The Vishnu Purāṇa: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*, Book II, Chapter III, 174. “From this region heaven is obtained, or even, in some cases, liberation from existence; or men pass from hence into the condition of brutes, or fall into hell. Heaven, emancipation, a state in mid-air, or in the subterraneous realms, succeeds to existence here, and the world of acts is not the title of any other portion of the universe.” The Vishnu Purāṇa: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition, Book II, Chapter III, 174-75. Eck, drawing on further sources, writes, “In other lands—Ketumāla, Uttarakuru, and Bhadrāśva—people are said to have golden complexes, their skin as lustrous as seashells. They live lifetimes of one thousand or ten thousand years. They suffer no sickness or selfishness, no old age or decay. All are equal in strength and stature…The list of blessings goes on….Bhārata is different. Here people are not uniformly beautiful, golden, and lustrous, but are of many races and types. Here people are generally small in stature and live relatively short lives…they are subject to the usual rounds of sickness and misfortune, flood and catastrophe, old age and death. And yet, without exception or hesitation, Bhārata is said to be the best place to live in this wide universe…In a worldview that places ultimate value, not upon enjoyment, but upon freedom from rebirth, the land of action is the only place where one can work to attain such freedom. Here alone through action, or karma, can one shape one’s destiny toward freedom, all the while running the risk, of course, of shaping one’s destiny toward further bondage as well.” Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*, 127-28.

72 The Viṣṇu Purāṇa states that the seven levels of Pātāla “are embellished with magnificent palaces, in which dwell numerous Dānavas, Daityas, Yakshas, and great snake-gods. The Muni Narada, after his return from those regions to the skies, declared amongst the celestials that Pātāla was much more delightful than Indra's heaven…There are beautiful groves and streams and lakes where the lotus blows; and the skies are resonant with the Koil's [a bird] song. Splendid ornaments, fragrant perfumes, rich unguents, the blended music of the lute and pipe and tabor; these and many other enjoyments are the common portion of the Dānavas, Daityas, and snake-gods, who inhabit the regions of Pātāla.” Wilson, *The Vishnu Purāṇa: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*, Book II, Chapter V, 204.
gods, represented as demons, or asuras), and nāgas (semi-divine half-human and half-snake, here represented fully as snakes).  

The first level of pātāla is Atala. The asura, Bala, son of the architect Maya, reigns here. Through magical power, Bala created three types of women, “harlots, adulteresses, and lustful maidens” who ceaselessly seduce men with their supernatural charms, causing the men to live in bliss. While seduction is not explicit in the paintings, we do see, on either side of the central panel wherein a group of asuras are seated to the left and right of a crowned figure (probably Bala), pavilions consisting of three cells each. One woman is seated in each cell. This construction, highlighting sets of three women, is suggestive of the three types of women created by the king, Bala.

The second level of pātāla is Vitala. Here, it is believed that Śiva and his consort, Bhavani, are engaged in ceaseless lovemaking. The seminal juices that result from that union form the river Hataki, which after being consumed by fire, becomes gold. This gold is made into ornaments for the daityas who populate Vitala. In the image, Śiva and his consort, seated frontally to the viewer and engaged in no action, are shown on the far right side of the register. The remaining portion of the register shows daityas and their wives seated in pairs and small groups between hills.

The third level is Sutala, which is ruled by Bali, who, for his impertinence, was made to dwell here by Viṣṇu. Bali lives here, however, in great wealth. The painting shows, in the middle panel, a crowned central figure (presumably Bali) seated first among other crowned figures and

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73 References for this description and the following can be had most easily in secondary sources. See Vettammanthi, Purānic Encyclopaedia : A Comprehensive Work with Special Reference to the Epic and Purānic Literature (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2002), 580-82. See also Dimmitt and Buitenen, Classical Hindu Mythology : A Reader in the Sanskrit Purānas, 48-49, 347-50; Classical Hindu Mythology : A Reader in the Sanskrit Purānas.
before another group of men with whom he talks. The space is framed with columns, which continue to mark off space on either side, and perhaps indicate the grandeur in which Bali lives—said to be even greater than the home of Indra. In adjacent chambers are women who are resting, looking in a mirror, cooking, and talking. Adjoining scenes show men seated among trees, near hillocks, and talking to one another. Many of the figures are human men and women; there are asuras in the outer parts of the register.

The fourth level of Pātāla is Talātala, which is ruled by the architect, Maya, an asura. The center of the register is dominated group of figures, at the center of which a red asura, probably Maya, is shown frontally, looking straight out at the viewer. Fantastic composite figures sit on either side; all hold trisulas. Throughout this register, as befits the architect of Tripura, are prominent architectural elements, including impossibly odd buildings. For instance, to the immediate left of the asura’s court is a tripartite structure set on a column. In three arches three busts are visible- but there is no architectural space for bodies attached to the heads. Yet, the heads in the center and right arches appear to be engaged in conversation. Similarly, there is a structure with three kalaśas on its roof on the far left side of the image; inside this pavilion is a single head that takes up all the space of the structure.74

The fifth realm is Mahātala. Mahātala is the realm of nāgas born of Kadrū, daughter of Daksha; they are known as the Kādraveyas. The central panel shows two women seated within a pavilion. Two figures, damaged beyond legibility are shown on the right. The rest of the register shows only nāgas in wholly snake form. In the register that separates this from the next level of pātāla is a small depiction of Viṣṇu Anantaśāyana with his two consorts at his feet.

74 Although a possible identification for a disembodied head is the graha Rahu, I believe this is simply a representation of the artists’ imagination of the fantastic creatures
Rasātala is the sixth level of pātāla. Here live the dānavas known as Nivātakavacas and Kāleyas, who were great tormenters of the gods until Viṣṇu reduced their power. Now, it is said, they live in fear of an incarnate mantra (mantrarūpini), named Saramā, sent by Indra. In the painting, groups of asuras are seated in conversation, sometimes in the company of snakes.

The final realm is named Pātāla, and is ruled by Vāsuki, the head king of the nagas, and populated by other nāga lords. In the painting, the nagas are represented by eight labeled snakes – though these are only a third of the beings represented.75 Above the nagas are elephants, perhaps corresponding to the eight elephants of the eight directions who hold up the earth; like the nāgas, the names of each of these is given in a label inscription.76 Finally, there are eight ganas, who are also shown with their hands above their heads, seeming to support the worlds under which they dwell. The ganas and elephants are not attested in standard purānic descriptions of Pātāla.

Below the seven levels of Pātāla resides Ananta, the thousand-headed nāga. He bears all the worlds on just one of his heads.77 In the Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai paintings, the figure of Ananta is at the same level as the nāgas of the last level of Pātāla. However, the figures that belong within Pātāla are contained within the body of Viśvarūpa, at the level of the thighs. Ananta is located outside the body of the Viśvarūpa, between the thighs of the figure. This may reflect the

75 Not all of the inscriptions are legible. On the left side of the image, only the name of Vāsuki is legible next to a nāga. On the right, the names Dhujiang, Śandu, Śankha, and Pāla are legible; however, I have been unable to correlate the names of Dhujiang, Śandu, and Śankha with naga lords attested in Puranic accounts. The names of the elephants on the left side are Airavata, Mandara, Vamana, and Kumādēśa. On the left I have not been able to read the names. The ganas are not associated with label inscriptions.

76 The word nāga may refer to elephant as well as snake.

77 The Viṣṇu Purāṇa states, “Below the seven Pātālas is the form of Vishnu, proceeding from the quality of darkness, which is called Šesha’, the excellencies of which neither Daityas nor Daṇavas can fully enumerate. This being is called Ananta by the spirits of heaven, and is worshipped by sages and by gods” (205); and “Šesha bears the entire world, like a diadem, upon his head, and he is the foundation on which the seven Pātālas rest” (206). Wilson, The Vishnu Purāṇa: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition, Book II, Chapter V.
constraints of the composition, and may at the same time communicate the separateness of the figure, for upon his head the entire cosmic structure rests; he may also be considered an avatar of Viṣṇu. On the vertical central axis of the composition, below the image of Ananta, are images of the boar, labeled as Varaha, and the tortoise, labeled as Kurma, between the calves of the cosmic body. These are incarnations of Viṣṇu, and are also associated with the depths of the cosmic ocean and support of the world. The legs of Viśvarūpa below the knees, which are indicated as lotuses, have no further elements contained with them. The cosmic man stands on a landscape built up with small hill forms and flowering plants. Below these plants is a floral border, followed by a border filled with hamsas, and then another with winged celestial figures pouring baskets of flowers on the scene below, which shows Rāma Enthroned (discussed in Chapter 2; see Figure 44).  

The complete and extremely detailed representation of the cosmos within the cosmic body of god distinguishes this image from other representations of Viśvarūpa, making this example unique among its peers. While most images of the Viśvarūpa focus on the awesome power of the god and his encapsulation of the cosmos, the detail of this image emphasizes the

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78 The paintings that fill the middle aisle of the Chennaraya Perumal Temple at Aṭiyamāṅkōṭṭai are iconic representations of climaxes of the stories narrated on either side. The iconic image of Rāma Enthroned represents one of the climactic events of the story, after Rāma has rescued Sītā and returned to Ayodhya to rule his kingdom. The Iconic image of Viśvarūpa related to the beginning of the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas in the Mahābhārata. The hero, Arjuna, is reluctant to go to battle; Krishna convinces Arjuna that he must go to battle by revealing his omnificence. The iconic representations represent the ideal image of the god – Viṣṇu as Rāma, the ideal man and king, and Viṣṇu as Viśvarūpa, both the origin and form of all existence.

79 I have yet to find a Viśvarūpa image that gives so little visual attention to the body of Viṣṇu and so much to the highly systematic and detailed rendering of the content and structure of the cosmos. However, a cursory survey of the materials indicates that South Indian examples generally include schemata of cosmological structure. See comparative material in Ranjan, Vishvarūpa : Paintings on the Cosmic Form of Krishna-Vāsudeva; Schwartzberg, "South Asian Cartography."
structure and composition of the cosmos as the body of Viṣṇu. That is, the image at Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai makes apparent the more subtle argument that Viṣṇu is the basis of everything, that he is all form and all space. This view is substantiated in purāṇic accounts, with which the designer of this composition was evidently familiar (even if no single text can be identified as a source text). Although it does not give an account of Viṣvarūpa, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa closely identifies its meticulous description of the cosmos and its order with the body of Viṣṇu:

From the waters, which are the body of Vishnu, was produced the lotus-shaped earth, with its seas and mountains. The stars are Vishnu; the worlds are Vishnu; forests, mountains, regions, rivers, oceans are Vishnu: he is all that is, all that is not. He, the lord, is identical with knowledge, through which he is all forms, but is not a substance…In that universe which I have described, he for ever migrates who is subject to the influence of works; but he who knows Vasudeva to be eternal, immutable, and of one unchanging, universal form, may continue to perform them, as thereby he enters into the deity.

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa advances the argument that Viṣṇu is in fact the form of all things – a concept identical to that of the Viśvarūpa, literally, the omni (viśva) form (rūpa). The singularity of the Viśvarūpa at Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai lies in its literal and yet multivalent interpretation of both space and place: visually contained within the body of the god, the form of the cosmos is Viṣṇu.

CONCLUSION

The paintings at Alvar Tirunakari and Avuṭaiyarkōvil draw on the textual bhakti tradition to map onto the temples’ walls and ceilings the sacred landscapes of Tamil Sri Vaisnava and Śaiva traditions. The landscape systems posited in bhakti texts were developed into sacred landscapes through the collection and codification of the distinct bodies of work into

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80 This would be even more emphatic were one able to determine whether the head of the god is included in the image, or whether, as it would seem from the photographic record, the head is represented symbolically by Mount Meru, above which are (probably) the seven parts of svarga, though this is also impossible to say with absolute certainty because of the photographs available do not include this information.

authoritative unitary works (i.e., the Nalāyira Divya Prabandham and the Tēvāram) in the early medieval period. Promotion by temple patrons and political elites who had a stake in community formation helped to develop the importance of pilgrimage to both individual sites praised in bhakti poems, as well as to the sets of sacred places developed in the re-presentation of aggregate texts that individually were never as far-reaching in their conceptualization of such expansive “sacred landscapes.” Though the paintings at both of the sites are informed by bhakti literature, this plays out very differently in each in the representation of the sacred sites praised in the literature.

The wall paintings in the pradakṣiṇa patha at Āḻvār Tirunakari evoke the sacred landscape, emphasizing the unity of place and deity in the divya desam sites organized on the wall according to physical region, but iconographically linked to descriptions of the deity in text, rather than the deity’s form at the site. The paintings at Avuṭaiyarkōvil, on the other hand, represent each sacred site within a grid; the composition and relative sameness of the images strongly suggests the connection of the individual shrine to other sites with which it forms a sacred landscape.

The representation of space at Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai is a fascinating counterpoint to the other two temples considered in this chapter. In the same ways that the others depict a “sacred landscape” or “sacred geography,” the Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai paintings represent a “sacred cosmography,” one that is pervaded by, and constitutive of, the body of Viṣṇu as the omniform, Viśvarūpa. This unique image does not correspond to a single authoritative text, but represents the composite knowledge of the individual responsible for its making.

All three of the sites considered in this chapter are the setting for murals that represented divinized space and place. The murals are situated in the temples so that they engage the devotee
as she moves through the temple according to ritual prescription. Concurrently, the progression of the murals compels the engaged viewer to move through the space in a way that corresponds to devotional and ritual convention. All of the images insist on the presence, knowledge, and participation of their viewers. At Āḻvār Tirunakari, this means performing pradakṣiṇa around the shrine of Nammāḻvār while simultaneously performing pradakṣiṇa through all the sites sacred in the Sri Vaiṣṇava tradition, the divya desams; the narrative paintings on the ceiling above, because of their linear organization, also propel the viewer forward in pradakṣiṇa. Alternatively, the paintings of the sites sacred to the Tamil Śaiva tradition – the paṭal perra talams – at Avuṭaiyarkōvil give greater attention to geographic specificity, recreating for the engaged viewer a directionally-accurate experience of visiting the sacred sites in the order prescribed in text.

While at Atiyamāṅkōṭṭai, the viewing experience is more direct: upon entering the temple, where there is no possibility of pradakṣiṇa around the shrine, the devotee passes under the body of Viṣṇu, which is the form of all things, to the image of Rāma, and to the shrine itself. Were the devotee to follow the narratives of the Rāmāyaṇa on the ceilings of the northern two aisles, or the Mahābhārata in the southern, she would return to the center, where perfected lordship is embodied by Rāma, and the centrality of Viṣṇu as the fundamental form of all things is affirmed.
**Epilogue: Murals as Performance through Participation**

In 1627 Tirumala Nayak succeeded to the throne in the capital city of Tiruccirāpalli. In poor health, the young monarch traveled south to the city of Maturai. Along the way, the god and goddess of Maturai, Śiva and Mīnākṣī, appeared to Tirumala in dream. They advised him that were he to make his capital at Maturai, they would cure his disease. They gave him sacred ash to eat and to spread over his body. Upon waking, Tirumala began to feel better, and upon taking residence in Madurai, became cured.

The home of the god and goddess of Maturai, the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple in the city’s center, was greatly expanded during Nāyaka rule. Tirumala’s predecessor built the third enclosure wall around the temple, which encloses approximately 650,573 square feet (as a comparison, that is roughly six times the area of Chartres Cathedral, which is 117,058 feet square). Tirumala built the Putu Maṇṭapa, a springtime resting place for the gods replete with a larger-than-life portrait sculpture of Tirumala himself, as well as portraits of the Madurai Nāyaka rulers that preceded him. Tirumala also laid the foundation for a huge gateway tower beyond the Putu Maṇṭapa, and constructed a large water tank for ritual use, as well as a palace. He built Māci Street, the fourth enclosing street around the Mīnākṣī temple, which provided a path for the pulling of huge temple chariots during the annual festival of the divine marriage of Śiva and Mīnākṣī when both deities and devotees circumambulate the entire temple complex and surrounding streets. The forms of the temple and the space around it allowed for the elaboration of modes of worship in the temple and the accommodation of greater crowds to witness spectacular rituals and processions.
Tirumalai Nāyaka’s additions to the temple and surrounding city thus left a legacy to the city that is both architectural and ritual. These two projects – architecture and ritual – were mutually conducive. As Reynolds notes,

What makes his [Tirumalai Nāyaka’s] construction projects significant is not so much that they altered the form of the city, but that they allowed for or were the result of the creation of new and/or expanded rituals. And new or expanded rituals allowed for the incorporation of new, greater numbers of, and more diverse groups into a polity constituted by those who engage in ritual transactions with the presiding deities.¹ These transactions were performed by the living ruler, as well as by his portrait effigy, enacted for the benefit of the king, and for the spectatorship of all participants.

This political and ritual milieu represents the wider context for the function and meaning of the mural paintings discussed in this dissertation. As Branfoot demonstrates for Nāyaka temple sculpture, temple construction and decoration during the Nāyaka period seriously took into consideration both the devotees’ and deities’ movements through the temple. Inscriptions and depictions of individuals invoke their real presence in the temple, and were meant to engage both deities and devotees. Similarly, scholars of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava religious literature show that the devotee’s identification with the poet transforms the devotee’s experience of god and place described in the poem into one of embodied immediacy. Narayanan describes this phenomenon as participation. She writes,

The Sri Vaiṣṇava liturgy, at home and in the temple, is based on participation of the devotee in the myth of the Āḻvār. Just as the Āḻvār spoke as a “girl” a heroine of the Tamil poems, the Sri Vaiṣṇava in worship speaks as the Āḻvār….The devotee participates in the passion and surrender of Āṇṭāl, Nammāḻvār, and Kulacékara, and through their identification, he is the lovesick girl, the cowherd girl, Kauśalyā, and Yaśodā. The passion of Āṇṭāl and the surrender of Nammāḻvār are the passion and surrender of the devotee.²

I expand this notion of participation, to describe the transformative experience of the temple for the devotee-viewer who not only sees the paintings, but through an active engagement with the paintings, transforms the architectural space into enlivened, iconic space.

This transformational experience is not an argument without precedent in the art historical scholarship of narrative and iconic imagery in South Asian sacred sites. Robert Brown argues in his article “Narrative as Icon,” that the painted and sculpted stories of the Buddha’s past lives on Buddhist monuments are properly understood not as illustrations of the narrative texts, but as manifestations of the presence of the Buddha. He writes that stories “on the monuments worked as icons, units of meaning and reverence, expressions of an aspect of the Buddha’s nature and life that is (more) fully expressed by the entire monument…through the worshiper’s physical encounter with the monument….” According to Brown icon is a “unit of meaning and reverence,” accessed through physical interaction with the monument, that makes manifest the presence of the Buddha through visual narrative. This transformation of image to icon is characteristic of later Nāyaka mural paintings. As Tevet-Dayan states in a recent publication on a cycle of Nāyaka-period murals, the painted images “become real temples inside the murals. The gods depicted in pigments and water have become real mūrtis …. So when the spectator walks around the murals….his experience of the god is also real.” Through the devotee’s physical interaction with these images, the images are transformed from representation of the thing to the thing itself. The different types of painted images in Nāyaka murals act in

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4 See Maya Tevet Dayan’s article in David Dean Shulman and V. K. Rajamani, The Mucukunda Murals in the Tyāgarājasvāmi Temple, Tiruvārūr (Chennai: Prakriti Foundation, 2011).
ways consonant with Brown’s formulation of “narrative icons.”⁵ The individual units of iconic imagery do not require worship (as divine presence), but together in the context of the entire monument, make the divine presence manifest.⁶

The mural paintings that decorate the ceilings and halls of Nayaka-period temples create an enlivened space; this, I argue, is not merely achieved through viewing the paintings. Rather, central to the concept of the murals is that they engage the viewer in motion, revealing their content in space and in time. Paintings that decorate the walls and ceilings of the prākāra and shrine walls were perceived by the devotee while engaged in ritual circumambulation or circulation through the temple. The form of the temple itself requires and facilitates this experience of sacred space. Movement defines the worshipper’s experience of the site because it is central to ritual practice and worship within the temple. But it goes beyond that: the directed motion of human physical interaction with the temple and the city is akin to another incorporative practice well established in the Tamil region, pilgrimage. The topographic images discussed in this dissertation both direct the devotee-viewer through space, as well as allow that person to perform pilgrimage—in a way considered as efficacious as physically going to the sites—within the sacred space of the single temple. The interaction that is required between devotee and painting renders the painting iconic insofar as it facilitates participation with the deity, person, or place it of which it is an index. Thus, in contrast to the viewer, devotee, or

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⁵ My use of Brown’s argument applied to a South Indian Hindu context is consistent with scholarship that has applied Brown’s work to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition. See Narayanan, The Vernacular Veda : Revelation, Recitation, and Ritual, 6-7.

beholder as words that refer to the person who see and interacts with paintings in these contexts, I propose the word participant. Participant announciates the dynamic relationship between the paintings and the person who not only sees them, but who, in his seeing of the paintings, co-creates the stories, places and people suggested by their visual representation.

This proposition is inspired by the physical form of the temple, the form of the paintings, their content, and the ways in which the participant is both invited and compelled by the paintings to move through the space. In the topographic murals at Āvuṭaiyārkōvil we saw that the paintings are oriented in the temple so that the devotee who follows the paintings participates not only in pilgrimage to the sites, but does so in a way that maps onto the actual geography of pilgrimage, traveling south to north, and crossing (painted) rivers at the appropriate places. The geographic specificity is further suggested by the guardians of the eight directions (dīkpālas) that are painted in the corners of the central pavilion of the maṇṭapa. These figures, by their orientation in the maṇṭapa, indicate the directions over which they are lord. They serve as a kind of compass, orienting the participant in space, and indicating their protection over the sacred landscape that surrounds them. At Āḻvār Tirunakari we saw that as the devotee circumambulates the shrine of Nammāḻvār, she become a participant in the history of the site, the history and transmission of Śrī Viṣṇuism, and in a pilgrimage to all the one hundred-seven sites held sacred in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition.

Looking to traditions of image-viewing contemporary to the production of these murals, I offer one other way that we might conceive of movement within the temple, of participation with the paintings, and of their unfolding in space and time. According to Rossi, the artists who

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7 “The guardians play an important part in the design of temples and cities. Much Indian architecture is built on the square (indicating the Absolute), which is fixed by the cardinal points.” Stutley, The Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography, 40.
painted temple and palace murals were also responsible for painting narrative scrolls, as well as palanquins, portable shrines, and dolls used in narrative performances. Scholarship on the narrative traditions of scrolls in Andhra Pradesh, as well as shadow puppetry in Kerala, offer material evidence of these narrative traditions in southern India with which painters and participants of the period under study would likely have been familiar. What is common across all these traditions is the combination of spoken word, dramatic performance, and painted images.

While there are precious few examples of mural painting in Andhra, there is a small body of scholarship concerned with narrative scrolls from northwest Andhra’s Telangana region. Formally, the scrolls are exceedingly similar to mural paintings: They have a vertical compositional structure laid out in horizontal registers separated by narrow bands of floral motifs. Like other visual narrative arts throughout the subcontinent, Telangana scrolls were viewed only in the context of their performance by a qualified specialist who would sing, rhyme, joke, and speak the narrative, all the while pointing out in the painted scroll the action and characters he verbally described.


9 Barbara Rossi writes, “Narrative traditions disseminate India’s heritage of sacred stories through illustrations of regional legends and favorites sequences in local versions of the universal epics, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata. The illustrations, however, are not intended to be seen apart from performance of the stories; that is, the narrative pictures are displayed only in conjunction with chanting or singing of specially composed narrative verses.” Rossi, From the Ocean of Painting : India's Popular Paintings, A.D. 1589 to the Present, 23.


11 "The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India."
narrative pictures from all parts of India emphasize that the paintings are *always* understood to be part of an oral performance of the illustrated narrative. Curiously, this analysis has never been applied to studies of mural paintings.\(^\text{12}\)

Taking the analysis of performance and narrative further, Stuart Blackburn, in his study of shadow puppet performances of Kampan’s Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* in Kerala, highlights how studies of folk narratives and oral performance, even when they examine the “exchange between performers and listeners” rarely make the audience anything more than “a passive receptor.”\(^\text{13}\) Instead, scholarship has focused on textual structure and composition. Yet, Blackburn insists that audiences must be recognized “for who they are—critics, consumers, and coperformers of the event.”\(^\text{14}\) This audience may be an “internal audience,” consisting only of those who are themselves performing. But even when a part of a larger viewing group, each individual internally constructs the characters and draws connections both internal and external to the narrative as it is presented.\(^\text{15}\) An audience is a necessary constituent of performance, and each viewer is herself an active member of the performance. Drawing on these insights, I submit that the viewer-as-participant—an individual engaged in the act of seeing and understanding—is also

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\(^\text{12}\) Arguably, it is does so in reverse, and by implication: scholarship on scroll paintings and *kalamkaris* of Andhra often state that the media were influenced by temple mural paintings, though offer little evidence that the flow was unidirectional.

\(^\text{13}\) The temples where these performances take place are located along the trade routes that cross from Kerala into Tamil Nadu at Palghat, where there is a mix of spoken Malayalam and Tamil. Blackburn says that the performance of shadow puppetry seems to have been brought by Tamil merchants and weavers. He identifies the agents of transmission as Mudaliyars, Chettiyars, and Mannatiyars, historically associated, respectively, with weaving, trade, and trade and agriculture. The Tamil connection is very strong, and though there is scant scholarship about it, one can still see shadow puppet Rāmāyaṇa performances in Tamil Nadu.


an essential component of mural painting and of the event of its performance. The interaction of
an individual with the painting allows the mural to perform its narrative *ad infinitum*.

In his earlier study of the Tamil folk tradition of *vil pāṭṭu*, “bow songs,” that tell the
stories of local heroes and deities, Blackburn argues that performance itself is a ritual act. The
songs are structured by mythological narratives, which exist before, during, and after the
performance as written texts. The performance of the mythic text is a ritual act. We may thus also conclude that viewing as we have structured it—that is, participating in the narrative, iconic, and topographic images—is itself a ritual act in the context of performance. Blackburn compels us to rethink the role of narrative, performance and text. He writes,

Myth, of course, is a narrative, religious genre; however, most literature on myth has examined it outside the ritual context (as charter or exegesis) and not as ritual language. In short, little thought has been given to how narrative works in ritual, an omission that reflects the general approach to performance discussed in the Introduction: to treat performance as event and to downplay text. In the context of murals, the visual is oft-deferred in favor of the text: scholarship focuses on identifying character, stories, and the texts in which they are found. Rethinking murals as performance allows for a complete reconsideration of their function within the sacred context of temple ritual.


17 “Studies of ritual language have historically focused on the short, nonnarrative genres (prayers, mantras, and so forth), but a text-based approach shows that extended genres, like the bow songs that are sung for five or six hours, are also ritual precisely because they are narrative.” Ibid.

18 *Singing of Birth and Death: Texts in Performance*, 220.
We now return to the temple with our eyes and ears attuned to an historical context where performance that combines visual, oral and written texts is the norm. The innovation of extensive inscriptions in both Tamil and Telugu became a ubiquitous feature of later Nāyaka mural paintings. Yet it does not appear that the inscriptions’ bilingualism was meant to expand their reading public, nor does it seem their primary purpose was even in all cases to be read. While the inscriptions on walls and many ceilings are unquestionably legible, many are not: the extensive labels and inscriptions at the Śrī Bragadhambal temple at Putukkōṭṭai, some 15.5 feet from the floor and unlit, would have never been legible to someone standing below. Here, then, I would like to make one further observation on the relationship between mural and scroll paintings. It has been observed that in all cases of performance, the linguistic component is central to the event of seeing the painting. While the aural aspect of viewing is not necessarily replicated in mural paintings (one cannot, for instance, control its performance since it is permanently visible), the linguistic aspect—the words one might speak, the identification of the characters the performer or guide would offer, and even labels on such mundane items as bananas, grinding stones, or building types—is inscribed into the paintings themselves. While not precluding the denotative function of the text, we must conclude that inscriptions functioned first as visual elements of the painting. The variation in script suggests that we consider the iconicity of script itself—that inscriptions carried connotative as much as denotative meaning, and that the presence of the words functioned in ways independent of their semantic content. Encompassing both visual and linguistic meanings in this way, the text signals the performance of the murals in participation with their audiences. The murals, composed of picture and text, were created in a context that expects narrative performance and that understands visual and textual media to make possible the real experience of that which it represents.
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**Figures**

Figure 1. Virabhadra Temple, Lepakshi, Andhra Pradesh  
Style Group One

**IMAGE NOT INCLUDED**

Figure 2. Cennakeśava Temple, Somappalle, Karnataka  
Style Group One
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**IMAGE NOT INCLUDED**

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**IMAGE NOT INCLUDED**

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Figure 16. Vijayanagara Empire at its greatest extent, mid-16th century  
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vijayanagara-empire-map.svg
Figure 17. Map of sites

IMAGE NOT INCLUDED

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IMAGE NOT INCLUDED

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Nāṟṟupet-
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Figure 30. Rāmāyaṇa narrative
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Style Group Three
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IMAGE NOT INCLUDED

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Image credit: Hids Samsudeen
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Image Credit: Hids Samsudeen

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Donors’ Inscriptions
i. Sri Pānṭāram Virappa Pillaī upaiyam
ii. Ponnappalam Pillai upaiyam
iii. Ponnami Perumal Pillai upaiyam
iv. Periya Cāmiyar Pillai upaiyam
v. [unclear] Pānṭīya Pillai upaiyam
[note: upaiyam is an alternative to the standard upaiyam]
Donative inscriptions are visible in both registers on the right side.
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Figure 78. Sūrya merges with the linga, Sūrya Tiruvilaiyāṭal Vaittiyanāṭar Temple, Maṭavārvalākam, Tamil Nadu
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Donative inscriptions are visible in both registers on the right side.

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Donative inscriptions are visible in both registers on the right side.
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NOT TO SCALE
All measurements in meters
All numbered places account for two iconic images, one upper and one lower on the wall
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Figure 88. Rāmānuja and Kanchipurma
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East ceiling Ātinātar temple, Āḻvār Tirunākari, Tamil Nadu
Style Group Three
Figure 90. Rāmānuja gives the Tiruvāymoḷi to Yadapraakasha
East ceiling Ātināṭar temple, Āḻvār Tirunākari, Tamil Nadu
Style Group Three

Figure 91. Nammāḻvār gives a text to Rāmānuja
East ceiling Ātināṭar temple, Āḻvār Tirunākari, Tamil Nadu
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Figure 120: Temporal order of temple paintings
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Style Group Two
Image Credit: Private Collection

IMAGE NOT INCLUDED

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Style Group Two
Image Credit: Private Collection

IMAGE NOT INCLUDED

Figure 127. Pātāla
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Style Group Two
Image Credit: Private Collection