ABODES OF ŚIVA: MONUMENTS AND MEMORY IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN SOUTH INDIAN PURĀṆĀS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2020
Abstract

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In this dissertation, I investigate a popular type of narrative literature called in Tamil talapurāṇam (literally “place-lore”), which describes the legends associated with Hindu shrines as well as the manner in which rituals at the temple must be conducted. Though such texts were popular throughout South Asia as written in Sanskrit, it was in the hands of early modern poets writing in Tamil that they became a genre of elite literature. These poets transformed prosaic Sanskrit texts into elaborate works of court poetry. Through an analysis of the poetics of these texts, the stories that they narrate, and the historical circumstances surrounding their popularity, I argue that the Tamil talapurāṇams mark a conscious and sustained effort to unite a community of devotees around a set of shrines that existed in South India by appealing to and simultaneously producing the collective memory of a distant past. Drawing upon the work of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, among others, I further argue that such a notion of collective memory is essential to our understanding of the manner in which sacred space is experienced more broadly.
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Acknowledgments

This dissertation was the result of a collective effort to which many individuals contributed at different times and in different places. First and foremost, I must thank my advisors, John Stratton Hawley and Rachel McDermott, without whose wisdom and kindness none of what follows would have been possible. Indira Viswanathan Peterson has been an inspiration of mine throughout my time in graduate school, and it was an honor to have her feedback on the content of the dissertation and her assistance with the difficult business of Tamil translation. Vidya Dehejia and Michael Como also provided invaluable feedback over the years and it was a pleasure to have both serve on my committee. I am grateful to Sheldon Pollock for providing me with a great deal of assistance in the early stages of this project, especially as I was narrowing down my area of interest, and am delighted to have studied Sanskrit with him. Additionally, I must thank D. Samuel Sudhananda for inspiring my love of Tamil literature and for his constant advice and assistance.

My dissertation would have been impossible without the help and support of my fellow graduate students. In particular, I must thank Anand Venkatkrishnan, Hamsa Stainton, Drew Thomases, Simran Jeet Singh, Joel Bordeaux, Yogi Trivedi, Mark Balmforth, Joseph Fisher, Zachary Ugolnik, Elizabeth Tinsley, Laura McTighe, Elizabeth Dolfi, Krista Dalton, Manpreet Kaur, Andrew Jungclaus, Daniel Del Nido, Quinn Clark, Alexandra Kaloyanides, Marko Geslani, Mark Holum, Andrew More, and Ellen Gough for their advice and friendship over the years. I thank Elaine Fisher and Anna Seastrand for kindly sharing their own marvelous research with me.
at various stages. Most of all, I am grateful to my dear friend Shiv Subramaniam for his conversation and camaraderie.

A great many individuals also came to my aid during my year of field research in India. First, I must thank everyone at the American Institute of Indian Studies for making my research possible, as well as the staff of the Adyar Library and Research Centre for sponsoring my visa and for their help procuring invaluable research material. Additionally, I am grateful to Dr. Padma Subramaniam, Babaji Raja Bhonsle, and T.N. Ramachandran for greatly assisting my research in Thanjavur and in Kumbakonam. I must also thank the staff of the Dharmapuram Adheenam, the S.K.S.S. Arts College, and the Tiruvaravaduthurai Adheenam Library for their help with finding much of the material that I examine in what follows. I must also thank T. Ganesan of the French Institute of Pondicherry for his help and advice with my research.

I am tremendously grateful to my extended family in India, who always came to my aid whenever I needed anything during my stay. In particular, I must thank my uncle, K.T. Ravindran, who always offered scholarly advice and a kind ear, as well as K.T. Raghunath, K.T. Ratnakaran, Shantha Raghunath, Judy Ratnakaran, Amba Sanyal, Ammu Sanyal, Prasanth Kalliat Rajagopal, Sulu Gopal, Divya Rajagopal, Narendranath C.M., Vineeth Radhakrishnan, Priscilla Vineeth, Shilpa Ratnakaran, Ranjith Vishwanathan, Vishu Nair, Nina Nair, Siddharth Vishwanathan, Swati Gupta, Surendran K.P., Anuradha Surendran, Shreevidya Surendran, Shrejith Surendran, Vandana Menon, Shashidhar Kollipara, Kumari Menon, Harish Vellat, Namrita Nair, Subhadra Menon, Rema Menon, Karun Menon, Avinash Menon, Manasi Menon, Medha Menon, and Rekha Menon for making sure that I felt loved no matter where I was in the world. Most of all, I must thank V.K. Gopalakrishnan, Gowry Gopalakrishnan, V. Rajesh Menon
and Madhav Menon for giving a me a home to come to in Chennai. Furthermore, this work would surely have been impossible without the love and aid of three individuals whom we recently lost – my great-uncle V. Sivakumar Menon, my uncle Prakash Menon, and especially my grandmother Shantha Menon, from whom I gained a lifelong love of storytelling that led to this dissertation.

I must also thank my dear friends Surjyakiran Das, George Pradhan, and Sarah Beckham for their support and counsel over the years.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to my immediate family – my father K.T. Ramesh, my mother Achala Menon Ramesh, my brother Sid Arjun Ramesh, and my sister-in-law Shruti Mathur – for making all things possible. This work is dedicated to them.
For Achan, Amma, Arjun and Shruti
Introduction

“The unholy town where no temple stands,
the town where men do not wear the holy ash,
the town which does not resound with sacred song,
the town which is not resplendent with many shrines,
the town where the white conch is not reverently blown,
the town where festive canopies and white flags are not seen,
the town where devotees do not gather flowers for the worship rite,
that town is no town, it is a mere wilderness. - Appar (trans. Indira Peterson)\(^1\)

This verse, attributed to the early medieval poet Appar (more popularly known as Tirunāvukkaracar - “the king of the tongue”), reflects one of the most persistent themes in South India Śaiva literature – the centrality of sacred space, which forms one of the major organizing themes of early devotional (i.e., bhakti) poetry in that tradition. In describing the town and its sacred center, characterized by the vibrancy of its spiritual activity, Appar's verse begs a further question – how, in the Tamil imagination, was sacred space distinguished from “mere wilderness”? This question guides my inquiry into a particular set of texts from Tamil Nadu, composed throughout the medieval and early modern periods.

Broadly speaking, this dissertation examines a group of texts known as sthalapurāṇas (Tamil: talapurāṇam) that were composed throughout South Asia in Sanskrit and in virtually all of the vernacular languages. These texts were primarily concerned with the stories surrounding individual shrines as well as the rituals and theological traditions associated with them. More specifically, I examine sthalapurāṇas of Śaiva shrines from the Tamil speaking region of what is now Southeast India, with a particular emphasis on texts written about shrines in the vicinity of the city of Thanjavur, the erstwhile capital of several political

\(^1\) Indira Peterson, Poems to Śiva (Delhi: Princeton University Press, 1989), 149
formations throughout the second millennium of the Common Era. Sthalapurāṇas, written in both Sanskrit and Tamil, were highly popular throughout the Tamil speaking South, with hundreds of examples of this type of literature produced from the 13th to the 19th centuries. In what follows, I argue that sthalapurāṇas can productively be read as a mode of collective memory, expressed in a Tamil-Sanskrit hybrid literary culture that was explicitly anchored to a Śaiva sacred topography. It is the presence of such a memory that in large part afforded a place its sacrality, distinguishing it from the “mere wilderness” mentioned in Appar's verse.

Sthalapurāṇas are by no means exclusively found in South India; texts describing the greatness of individual sites of worship as well as different routes of pilgrimage exist for virtually every part of South Asia. Such is the ubiquity of this literature that, as Diana Eck recently remarked, “In Hindu India, sacred space is so vastly multiplied that there is little left untouched by the presence of the sacred, reminding us that ultimately what is at stake is not the capacity of the gods to be present in the world, but rather the human capacity to apprehend that presence.” Sanskrit texts devoted to different sacred sites (usually referred to as “tīrthas” - a term that literally means “fords,” but which broadly signifies sites of ritual bathing or worship) often appear as sections of the 18 mahapurāṇas, with each declaring the special benefits of the place that it glorifies. Even as these Sanskrit texts describe sites from vastly different parts of South Asia, they are typically similar in style and content; as I explain further in what follows, they collectively represent a unique mode of engaging with sacred space, casting local legends in the trans-regional idiom of purāṇic Sanskrit. The purāṇic

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2 One survey of printed texts and manuscripts conducted in the 1970s counted 581 Tamil talapurāṇams – many of which were likely based on Sanskrit predecessors. The actual number of such texts is likely significantly larger. See François Gros, “Tradition Tamoule et Mythologie Hindoue (Notes Critques),” Revue de le Histoire des Religions 199.1 (1982): 67-83.

3 Diana Eck, India: A Sacred Geography (New York: Harmony Books, 2012), 76
tradition as expressed in the Tamil language differs in this regard; the Tamil talapurāṇams composed there were not timeless and authorless works of Sanskrit purānic tradition, but were poems that were firmly rooted in an already flourishing Tamil tradition of glorifying space. It is this persistent interest in space, I argue, that accounts for the special popularity of purāṇas in Tamil Nadu. Throughout this dissertation, I use these terms - sthalapurāṇa and talapurāṇam – to signify the Sanskrit and Tamil texts, respectively.

The glorification and memorialization of spaces were a central part of the Tamil Śaiva tradition from its inception. The majority of the sites that I describe in this dissertation were originally eulogized by some of the nayanmār, the collective term for the 63 canonical saints of Tamil Śaivism. From the 7th to the 9th centuries, three of these poets in particular – Appar, Cuntarar, and Campantar – traveled to shrines, towns and villages in South India (the majority of which were located in the Kāvēri river delta in what is now central Tamil Nadu) and sang of the deity said to dwell there. The works of these poets, along with those of other early medieval Śaivas, came to be collected and canonized by the 14th century, by which time Tamil Śaivism came to constitute a heterogeneous community that would produce a diverse body of literature for centuries to come. All of the Tamil talapurāṇams that I discuss here pay homage to the three aforementioned poets, who initiated the tradition that they participated in. At the same time, the authors of talapurāṇams very often claimed to be translating their works directly from Sanskrit sources, which seldom referenced any familiarity with Tamil literature.4 Far from being literal renderings of their sources, however, the Tamil “translations” were elaborate works of poetry that, as I will explain below, differed significantly from their sources

4 The resistance of Sanskrit authors – including the unseen compilers of Sanskrit purāṇas - to vernacular literature would soften a bit by the 17th century, as I will discuss in my third chapter.
One of the principal goals of my dissertation is to account for the popularity of these “translations” (and, by extension, their Sanskrit sources), which to my mind has no parallel in any other regional literary tradition in South Asia. Given the importance that sacred space is afforded from the inception of the Tamil Śaiva tradition, I necessarily adopt a broad chronological scope. In this dissertation, I trace the emergence and maintenance of this important strand of Tamil Śaivism – the production of sacred space through the invocation of a collective memory of a distant past - at four different historical moments. I begin by exploring the importance of narratives connected to spaces in early Śaiva bhakti literature – particularly as found in the poems of the aforementioned three nayanmār (6th to 9th centuries) and in the very first Tamil text to be called a “purāṇa” - the Periyapurāṇam, Cēkkiḻār's 12th century hagiography of the nayanmār. I then proceed to discuss two late medieval purāṇas (one Sanskrit and one Tamil), composed at a time (i.e., the 14th and 15th centuries) when Tamil Śaivism came to exhibit the influence of Śaiva Siddhānta and Vedānta and in which a sense of Śaiva sacred space – conceived locally (in the case of the Tamil text) and trans-regionally (in the case of Sanskrit) – was articulated in new ways. The third moment that I explore is what David Shulman has called “the golden age of purāṇic composition in Tamil” - the period from the 16th to the 18th centuries, when Tamil translations of Sanskrit purāṇas were composed in great numbers with the support of figures from newly founded monasteries and royal courts,

5 George L. Hart describes the difference between the Sanskrit and Tamil texts thus: “The Sanskrit purāṇas are for the most part unpolished works consisting of verses in the śloka meter that have all the hallmarks of oral verse – many formulae, themes, lack of enjambement. The Tamil mythological poems, on the other hand, are complex and highly sophisticated.” See George Luzerne Hart, The Relationship Between Tamil and Classical Sanskrit Literature (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976): 343.
against the backdrop of an emergent literary culture. I conclude by considering some early modern examples of non-purāṇic texts, such as dramas and pamphlets, that reflect the continued centrality of purāṇic themes in the way that sacred space is experienced in South India. By taking such a broad chronological view, I will show that the collective memory of Śaiva sacred space is as layered and multifaceted as Tamil Śaivism itself; the texts refer to the actions of deities, sages, devotees and kings, enjoin a variety of ritual practices, and reflect the heterogeneity of this tradition at different stages in its history.

Chiefly, I argue that sthalapurāṇas and talapurāṇams played an important role in the very production of sacred space by anchoring a collective memory as Jan Assmann understands the term – which in this context consists of legends describing the activities of deities, kings, saints, and devotees – to the sites that they glorified. In what follows, I summarize three prominent themes that foreground my analysis of these texts. First, I discuss what exactly I mean by “space” and its production with respect to these texts. Second, I further explain why “memory” offers a useful interpretive model for the study of purāṇas. Third, I further explicate the difference between the Sanskrit and Tamil examples of these texts, and explain my claim that they were produced within a “hybrid literary culture.”

Producing “Sthala”

The verse from the poet Appar, quoted above, alludes to the importance of religious activity in the production of space, and my intention in this dissertation is to show how purāṇas of space produce the very spaces that they describe. Here, I conceive of “space” on three levels, corresponding to what I see as the three senses in which “sthala” (or the Tamil

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“talam”) are used in the purāṇas that I explore. At the broadest possible level, space refers to region; sthalapurāṇas devoted to sites in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere typically situate the places to which they are devoted in larger networks of shrines and sacred cities. In her study of literary and pilgrimage traditions of Maharashtra, Anne Feldhaus offers a useful definition of region: “a region is a set of places that are connected to one another and that taken together contrast with some other set of places (another region)” and is “thought of as such by its residents and perhaps also by some others, an area with a distinct identity and significance for people who live in it and for others who think and care about it.” The early medieval Tamil Śaiva poets established such a set of connected places in their poetry, as each poem in their canonized body of work is devoted to a particular place; today, these places are often called pāṭal peruṟṟa talaṅkaḻ, “places that occasioned a song.” The poems mention 274 such places, the majority of which lie in the vicinity of the Kaveri river delta in what is now central Tamil Nadu. Later purāṇic texts, particularly those written in Sanskrit, invoke different “regions;” they often seek to situate the site that they glorify in the context of a pan-Indian Śaiva sacred geography. Throughout this dissertation, we will see how such works often situate sacred places in multiple, overlapping sacred regions. Furthermore, the memory of political formations also serves as an important theme in the literary production of a Tamil Śaiva region. More specifically, the memory of the Cōḻa emperors, who ruled over much of Tamil Nadu from the 9th to the 13th centuries CE and who funded the construction and maintenance of many Śaiva temples in the region, is invoked by several authors of Tamil

7 Anne Feldhaus, Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage and Geographical Imagination in India (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003): 4

talapurāṇams described below.

On a second level, “space” can refer to cities. Many of the sthalapurāṇas that I examine are devoted to entire cities, and generally describe many of the shrines contained therein. The third and fourth chapters of this dissertation are devoted to the literature surrounding one particular city – Kumbakonam, located roughly 40 kilometers east of Thanjavur. Generally speaking, these texts offer an origin myth for the city’s shrines, often outlining a pilgrimage route through them. A city, as described in the purānic mode, might thus be considered a small “region” in and of itself, especially when considering the fact that many of the cities glorified in these text contained whole networks of sacred spaces, as I will describe in Chapters 3 and 4.

Finally, space refers to the shrine itself. Sthalapurāṇas – even those which describe a network of shrines or a sacred city or region – usually hold one to be more important than all others, often (as we will see in the third chapter) placing it at the end of a pilgrimage. Their narrative, didactic (in the case of Sanskrit texts) and literary (in the case of Tamil) elements are primarily devoted to explicating the experience of visiting a particular temple. By “shrines,” here I refer primarily to the Śaiva temples themselves, though this term could also include smaller sites of worship such as specially demarcated areas for ritual bathing.

Both sthalapurāṇas and talapurāṇams engage with the concept of space on all three of these levels, but they do so to different degrees. The Sanskrit texts exhibit a much greater interest in region, as they generally begin by situating the city or shrine that is being glorified within one or more regions, frequently listing sites located all over South Asia. The Tamil texts, in contrast, adopt a much more localized geographical scope; while they might
occasionally mention other spaces (usually located in Tamil Nadu, with Cidambaram and its Natarāja temple), their contents are more focused on an individual city or shrine rather than a larger pilgrimage network, let alone a pan-South Asian sacred landscape.

It should be noted here that sacred space was not only an important concept for Śaivas. The Vaisnava devotional tradition in South India, which developed contemporaneously with Śaiva bhakti, also placed a great deal of importance on sacred spaces. Just as the nayanmar glorified the places where Śiva was said to dwell (which collectively came to known as patal perra talankal, “places that occasioned a song”), early medieval Vaisnava poets describe 108 divyadesams – the “sacred places” where devotion to Vishnu finds its fulfillment, and later poets would also glorify these places.9 While this Vaisnava material merits further inquiry, the Śaiva texts seemingly never mention them; for all intents and purposes, the Śaiva and Vaisnava texts devoted to sacred space represent distinct but parallel literary traditions, and as I will show throughout this dissertation the Śaiva material was often concerned with articulating the boundaries of the tradition to which it belonged.

In what follows, I argue that sthalapurāṇas and talapurāṇams play an important role in the production of these three kinds of spaces. In describing sacred space as being “produced,” I have been influenced by Henri Lefebvre, who argues that social spaces as they are experienced by those who inhabit them are subject to a complex and ongoing process of production. Critically, for Lefebvre, this production can be understood on three levels; first, “spatial practice,” which refers to the everyday activities carried out in a space (such as day-

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to-day life in a city); second, “representations of space,” by which Lefebvre means “conceptualized space,” such as that of an urban planner or engineer; third, “representational spaces,” which “the imagination seeks to change and appropriate,” as in works of art.\(^{10}\) The latter two elements of Lefebvre’s conceptual scheme provide a useful framework for thinking about the role of purāṇas in the production of sacred space. Purāṇas – particularly those written in Sanskrit – offer us an example of “representations of space,” in that they offer definitive plans for the usage of sacred spaces by outlining connected routes of pilgrimage, enjoining specific rituals, and demonstrating the importance of specific shrines. Those written in Tamil offer us examples of “representational spaces,” as they describe, through ornate verse, the beauty of places of worship and the devotional experience of inhabiting them. Thus one of the goals of this project is, in short, to describe how purānic literature mediates the production of Tamil Śaiva regions, cities, and shrines.

The three levels of conceptualizing space, as outlined by Lefebvre, are not mutually exclusive; for instance, both “representations of space” and “representational spaces” would have a profound impact on the day-to-day lives and experiences of individuals inhabiting a space (i.e., on their “spatial practice”). Similarly, both sthalapurāṇas and talapurāṇams engage in prescriptive and literary functions, although – and this is a key part of my argument – they do so to different degrees. I utilize Lefebvre here to highlight what I see as a fundamental difference in the intentions of sthalapurāṇas and talapurāṇams; the former are primarily didactic or prescriptive, seeking to enjoin a pilgrimage or set of rituals and declaring the benefits of doing so, while the latter follow the example of earlier Tamil bhakti

poetry in describing the emotional experience of devotee visiting a space. In other words, though both sets of texts engage in the production of space through the invocation of a collective memory, they express and utilize this memory differently.

**Purāṇa as Memory**

Despite the fact that purāṇas are one of the most popular types of religious literature in South Asia, they have often presented philological and historiographical problems to both premodern and modern observers. Collectively, Sanskrit purāṇas constitute a vast corpus that defies easy categorization with respect to their content. Though the most famous Sanskrit lexicon, the *Amarakośa*, defines “purāṇa” simply as that which has “five characteristics” (*purāṇam pancalakṣaṇam*) the texts bearing this title seldom have all of them, and even when they do, they only account for a very small amount of their total content. Furthermore, despite their putative authority as having originated from a divine teaching and their lack of any identified human author, these texts were redacted constantly over the course of centuries. The footprints of interpolation that are evident in these texts posed a problem to their interpreters at least as early as the 17th century, when Śaiva theologians in South India began to argue in favor of the authority of purāṇas despite their internal inconsistencies. Authors of Sanskrit aesthetic theory (*alāṅkāraśāstra*) also sought to define

11 These are sarga (creation), pratisarga (either “secondary creation” or “dissolution”), vamśa (royal lineages), manvantara (cosmic ages), and vamśānucarita (accounts of royal lineages). What is precisely meant by each of these terms is not specified in the *Amarakośa* or its commentaries, yet this seems to have been an influential definition. For instance, the 14th century commentator on the *Aitareya Brahmana* Sāyaṇa defines purāṇa more simply as “stories of the origin and creation of the world.” See Maitreyee Deshpande, “Concept of History in Vedic Ritual,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 90 (2009): 171-176.


the generic boundaries of purāṇa, often considered alongside the related classification of itihāsa (often translated as “history,” but usually used in reference to epics such as the Mahābhārata) or more broadly under the category of smṛti (“remembered” texts). For example, Bhoja, in his 11th century work on aesthetics entitled Śṛṅgāraprakāśa (“The Light of Erotic Sentiment”), classifies purāṇa alongside smṛti as narratives of the past “relating to seers” (ārṣa, as opposed to “śrauta” or “laukika,” meaning “revelation” and “worldly,” respectively); in doing so, Bhoja sought to distinguish purāṇa from the literary works of human poets that were the primary object of his interest. As I explain in greater detail below, the translation of Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas into Tamil significantly complicates this generic characterization; the relationship of such translations to questions of aesthetics will be explored in detail in the third chapter of this dissertation.

What all of these interpreters of purāṇas agreed upon, however, was the simple fact that they were principally concerned with relating the events of a past; it is this concern with the past that was especially confounding to Western Indologists of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the legendary pasts related by purāṇas, early Indologists saw evidence of the prevalent belief that, as A.A. MacDonell put it in 1900, “early India wrote no history because it never made any.” The first scholar to attempt to utilize purāṇas in the construction of a positivist history was Frederick Eden Pargiter, who argued that the numerous, lengthy purāṇas as they exist today all likely originated from an ur-text, which would have adhered closely to


15 He adds that “The ancient Indians never went through a struggle for life, like the Greeks in the Persian and the Romans in the Punic wars, such as would have welded their tribes into a nation and developed political greatness.” Arthur A. MacDonell, A History of Sanskrit Literature (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1900), 11.
the “five characteristics” mentioned above and which described an actual historical situation
dating to the time of the Vedas. Pargiter was especially interested in the royal genealogies that
appeared in many popular purāṇas, claiming that unlike the narratives of saints and deities
that constitute the vast majority of the texts, these genealogies could be subjected to historical
scrutiny.\textsuperscript{16} The search for positivist history within the purāṇas, as well as the frustration at
their lack of suitability for this purpose expressed by Indologists of the colonial period, would
influence generations of scholars to come. Thus the editors of one of the texts that I discuss
below, the Bhṛhatiśvaramāhātmyam (a Sanskrit sthalapurāṇa devoted to Thanjavur; the term
“māhātmya,” which means “greatness,” is often used in the titles of purāṇic texts), decried the
historical validity of their text, declaring simply “our pain to trace the historical value in this
work, resulted only in [futility].”\textsuperscript{17}

Thus colonial-period and some modern scholars working on purāṇas generally and on
sthalapurāṇas specifically were at times perplexed by their apparent lack of historicity; I
highlight this not to explicitly argue against such a view (for this view of purāṇas by no means
represents a contemporary scholarly consensus) but instead to ask a more basic question –
how do sthalapurāṇas and talapurāṇams represent the past, if not as history? As I will argue in
what follows, South Indian Śaiva purāṇas offer us an example of an altogether different
engagement with the past; they do not represent it for the sake of simply for the sake of
chronicling, as one might expect of certain modes of positivist historical writing, but instead
utilize the past in order to influence the lives of devotees in the present day. As I clarify

\textsuperscript{16} Frederick Eden Pargiter, \textit{Ancient Indian Historical Tradition} (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), 39.

\textsuperscript{17} Damodaran, T.R., S Rajalakshmi, and N. Srinivasan, ed., \textit{Bhṛhatiśvaramāhātmyam} (Thanjavur: Tanjore
Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1985), vi.
further below, it is for this reason that I believe purāṇas can be more productively read as a mode of collective memory.

There are several possible challenges to be mounted against the idea that ancient India lacked a historical consciousness, and attempts to differentiate purāṇic narratives from historical ones are further complicated by the inherently fraught nature of the latter category itself. As Sheldon Pollock has pointed out, Sanskrit authors of theological literature were likely influenced by a mīmāṃsika (the “orthodox” school of Vedic hermeneutics) interpretation of Vedas, according to which those texts were authoritative precisely because they were eternal; other forms of didactic literature thus asserted their own authority by making such a claim to transcending historicity.\(^{18}\) As I will argue further in what follows, purāṇas in both Sanskrit and Tamil had their own ways of staking such a claim; their very intent was to articulate a notion of the past that transcended historical time. Moreover, as Hayden White has argued, history as a genre of writing contains within itself narrative dimensions akin to fictional writing.\(^{19}\) This tension between historical writing and what is frequently referred to as “myth” (of which the purāṇas would offer an example) was often noted by earlier scholars of the texts I interrogate here. For example, in his study of Tamil literature, Kamil Zvelebil claims that purāṇas:

> were not written as historical writing. They are not history, since history is a strictly temporal process divorced carefully from mythology. But the purāṇas are historical in the sense that they were concerned with a 'historical' explanation of certain phenomena: the explanation is phantastic, unscientific, and

\(^{18}\) Sheldon Pollock, “Mimamsa and the Problem of History in Traditional India,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109.4 (1989): 603-610. A key argument of adherents of the mimamsa school was that the Vedas were both eternal and were not created by any agent, human or divine.

unconvincing, but not unhistorical. The authors were more concerned with the patterns of events occurring in the world than with the events themselves.20

Although Zvelebil’s treatment of history as a “strictly temporal process” is perhaps too narrow, he is right to indicate a fundamental difference in the manner in which purāṇas represent the past as compared to modern forms of historical writing. In pointing out that purāṇas are more concerned with “the patterns of events occurring in the world,” Zvelebil underscores what I take to be a characteristic feature of the purāṇic recollection of the past – they engage in this recollection in order to establish a continuity between this past, the deities that they glorify, and the practices that they enjoin. As I will explain further below, it is this emphasis on the past as immanent in contemporary religious life that leads me to argue that purāṇas can best be understood as a form of collective memory.

More recently, several scholars have attempted to make sense of the usage of the past as presented in purāṇic texts. Romila Thapar identifies itihāsa-purāṇa as an “early historical form,” and argues that Hindu rulers after the 1st millennium CE utilized royal genealogies (such as those studied by Pargiter) to legitimize their status by allowing them to show that they were “participating in a common kṣatriya past.”21 Perhaps the most significant recent challenge to the idea that pre-modern or early-modern South Asian thinkers lacked a sense of history has come from Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, who, in Textures of Time, argue that such a sense of the historical – characterized by an emphasis on fact and detail - is evident in a variety of texts composed in early modern South India. They seek to differentiate these


21 Romila Thapar, Interpreting Early India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 154.
texts from “the traditional reworking of the past in a non-historical mode - most conveniently seen in large portions of the itihāsa-purāṇa, but actually existing in a considerable range of media and forms.” Furthermore, they argue that though “factually oriented history” and such a non-historical mode interact in rich ways, Indian audiences would have readily been able to distinguish between them.  

While I do not wish to interrogate the question of whether or not history truly existed in early-modern South Indian writing, Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam's observations highlight the need to explore these distinctly “non-historical” modes of understanding the past, and it is such an investigation that I seek to engage in here.

Given the stylistic differences between Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas and their Tamil counterparts, and given the inadequacy of normative Sanskritic models for classifying these texts, it makes little sense to describe “purāṇa” as a genre with all but the most basic unifying characteristics. Furthermore, if purāṇa can instead be represented as a mode of understanding of the past that is explicitly different from “history,” how should we describe this understanding? Proceeding from these observations, I understand purāṇas as a mode of expressing what Jan Assmann calls “cultural memory.” Assmann uses the term “cultural memory” to describe the manner in which a group “disseminates and reproduces a consciousness of unity, particularity and a sense of belonging” through a recollection of a distant past.  

In discussing the role that texts play in the construction of cultural memory,

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Assmann describes two different types of text that perform distinct functions. The first are “normative texts,” which include proverbs and laws and which answer the question “what shall we do?”; the second are “formative texts,” which include legends and genealogies and which answer the question “Who are we?” All of the texts described here, I argue, fulfill both of these functions, as they utilize a Śaiva past in order to enjoin specific activities and beliefs while also marking off the boundaries of the community (as in the case of the Śaiva Siddhanta polemic described further below). Additionally, I would add a third type of text to this scheme that is particular to talapurāṇams; I believe that they can be described as “affective texts,” creating a sense of Śaiva identity by describing a particular emotional experience.

Yet, as this dissertation will show, “Śaiva identity” is itself rather unstable; each of the texts that I will consider presents a slightly different picture of what exactly this means. Rather than conceiving of Tamil Śaivism as embodied solely in a set of canonical texts or institutional structures, I attempt to show here some of the ways in which the tradition gradually developed along different trajectories. The earliest layer of the Tamil Śaiva tradition is undoubtedly represented by the aformentioned bhakti poetry of the nayanmār, who were active between the 7th to the 9th centuries CE, and their poetry was compiled into a canonical body of texts a few centuries later. The production of Tamil talapurāṇams commenced at roughly the same time as this canonization; thereafter, the invocation of a Śaiva collective memory became one of the key ways in which later authors signified their belonging to this tradition, even if the exact nature of that tradition was constantly being reformulated.

Recently, Christian Novetzke has argued that the traditions of narrative and performance surrounding the 14th century Marathi poet Namdev can be described as a form
of “public memory.” Novetzke summarizes the difference between memory and history as found in his texts thus: “Memory presupposes at least a latent social knowledge, whereas history assumes a rational reader. Memory involves sensual and physical interaction, as well as intellectual understanding; history relies only on the latter.”24 This observation – which holds memory to be both distinct from history and operative in a social context – informs my readings of the Tamil Śaiva purāṇas that follow. That said, there is a key difference between the kinds of materials with which Novetzke engages (he largely deals with the performance of Namdev’s poetry in public settings, and highlights the manner in which individual performers incorporate improvisation into their repertoires) and the texts with which I am concerned. The purāṇas I examine here are written texts, and in the case of talapurāṇams, are deliberately literary. It is important to point out here that texts are not the only mode in which purāṇic legends are expressed; as David Shulman has pointed out in his study of Tamil Śaiva purāṇas, “the literary sources of Tamil mythology have always existed alongside, and indeed been nourished by, an unbroken oral tradition.”25 Texts nonetheless tell us much about how cultural memory functioned in pre-modern Tamil Nadu in a variety of different contexts, and it is for this reason that much of my analysis focuses on the unique literary culture of South India.

A Hybrid Literary Culture

Thus far, I have mentioned that the Sanskrit sthalapurāṇa and the Tamil talapurāṇam exhibit several differences with respect to style and content, and effectively constitute

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25 David Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths, 15.
different genres. One of the central arguments of this dissertation is that Tamil and Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas participated in a hybrid literary culture. Not only were the Tamil texts often based on (and in some cases – as we will see in the third chapter – said to be translations of) Sanskrit sources, but Sanskrit Śaiva texts produced in the south reflected the influence of Tamil sources. Before proceeding, then, it is necessary to describe what we mean by a “hybrid literary culture.”

Such a hybrid literary culture has its origins in the early part of the second millennium CE. As Sheldon Pollock has argued, it was at this time that vernacular languages began to be used in the composition of court poetry and royal inscriptions – a role that had been solely occupied by Sanskrit for nearly a millennium prior.²⁶ While an extensive body of poetry written in Tamil did exist prior to the vernacular turn, the production of literature in medieval Tamil Nadu underwent a similar transformation, as Sanskritic literary models came to influence Tamil literature to a much greater degree than before. It was also at this time that Tamil translations or adaptations of Sanskrit works began to be composed. Perhaps the earliest of such works is the Pāratavenpā, an adaptation of the Mahābhārata that can be dated to the late 9th century;²⁷ the most famous of these works is unquestionably Kampan’s Irāmavataram, a Tamil retelling of the Valmiki Rāmāyana that has been dated variously between the late 10th and early 12th centuries.²⁸ It was also during the early medieval period that Tamil authors began to take a greater interest in the world of Sanskrit aesthetic theory. In


²⁷ Kamil Zwelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 143.

²⁸ Ibid., 147.
the 12th century, two influential works on poetics, the Viracõḻîyam of Puttamittiran and the Tanțiyalaṅkāram were composed. Both of these works drew heavily from Daṇḍin's 7th century work on Sanskrit poetics, the Kāvyādarśa (as the title suggests, the Tanțiyalaṅkāram is ostensibly a translation of this work).29

These early examples of “Tamil vernacularization,” seem to have been the models for the production of talapurāṇams for centuries to come, as many of the works that I explore in this dissertation follow some of their structural elements (such as the “nāṭṭupaṭalam” - the description of the country – or the “nakarapaṭalam” - the description of the city – which the Irāmavataram and many talapurāṇams commence). In the third chapter of this dissertation, I consider the issue of translation by examining a talapurāṇam alongside its Sanskrit original; in doing so, I show how this translation involved a reinvention of the nature of the text itself, as these works are essentially Tamil kăppiīyams (Sanskrit kāvyā) and thus privilege aesthetics over injunction. Thus, I use the term “hybrid literary culture” to indicate the influence that Sanskrit poetry and poetics had on the composition of Tamil literary through the early modern period.

Conversely, from perhaps the 16th century onward, Sanskrit purāṇas exhibited the influence of Tamil bhakti texts. One example of such a text is the Śivabhaktavilāsa, which I discuss extensively in Chapter 3 and is an undated Sanskrit purāṇa that is essentially a retelling of Čēkkilār's 12th century Periya Purāṇam, a hagiography of the 63 nayanmār and one of the most influential Tamil Śaiva works. In some ways, the Śivabhaktavilāsa is an example of the process of the translation of Tamil talapurāṇams in reverse; it adopts the didactic tone of a

Sanskrit purāṇa, and introduces a new narrative frame that is characteristic of Sanskrit texts of its type. Another early modern purāṇa, the Śivarahasya, makes occasional references to the nayanmār in several narrative episodes. I discuss both of these texts in the second and third chapters of this dissertation.

While it is clear from these two examples that the world of the Sanskrit purāṇa came to reflect the influence of Tamil Śaiva literature by the early modern period, there is evidence that at least some Sanskrit authors were ambivalent about the value of Tamil literature. In her study of early modern Tamil Śaivism, Elaine Fisher describes a 17th century kāvya, the Śivalilārṇava of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, that reflects this ambivalence. Although the Śivalilārṇava is based on the Tamil Tiruviḻaiyāṭal Purāṇam, an immensely popular talapurāṇam of Madurai, its author distances himself from “the passion of hicks for vernacular texts” (as Nīlakaṇṭha himself puts it) in the introduction of the work, and reworks episodes from the text to remove references to Tamil literary culture.30 Despite Nīlakaṇṭha’s stated disdain for vernacular literature, the influence that it has had on his own work is clear from his choice of source material. If Tamil talapurāṇams were products of a hybrid Sanskrit-Tamil literary culture, so too were Sanskrit purāṇas, as they drew from the wellspring of Tamil Śaiva legends and vernacular texts.

Some Examples

To recapitulate, the central argument that I make in this dissertation is that South Indian Śaiva sthalapurāṇas and talapurāṇams engage in the production of sacred space through the invocation of a Śaiva collective memory. Furthermore, these texts are not the product of a single tradition, but instead reflect the ever shifting boundaries of Tamil Śaivism.

In what follows, I consider three examples from works of these two types that illustrate the different ways in which the texts accomplish this.

The first example is a brief summary of an episode from a Sanskrit text entitled Unnapurīmāhātmyam (“The Greatness of Unnatapuri”), devoted to a shrine in the town of Melattur located about 15 km east of Thanajavur, which illustrates the relationship between purāṇic narrative and theological disputation. The episode begins with a description of how, at the end of the previous cosmic age, Śiva created the world and the other Gods, including Brahma, who then spoke the four Vedas as a result of his “knowledge of Śiva.” The people on earth began reciting the Vedas, and as a result obtained whatever they desired. The Vedas thus thought to themselves, “Humans achieve liberation by worshiping with us, and by performing the rituals we state and by [reciting] our mantras. They experience our benefits by making offerings in the sacrificial fire. Therefore, we are the 'Great Lords’ in all the worlds.” The Vedas thus grew arrogant and ceased paying homage to Śiva, who, being aware of this, withdrew the power of his divine knowledge from them. As a result, the world suffered greatly; brahmans abandoned the Vedas since they no longer possessed knowledge of their meaning, and began to engage in forbidden practices such as the mixing of castes. The Gods, distressed by no longer receiving sacrificial offerings, sought the advice of Viṣṇu, who suggested that the Vedas must take on a human form and worship Śiva at Unnatapurī to atone for their arrogance. The Vedas did so, adorning themselves with sacred ash and with threads

31 The term used here is “Maheśvara,” a very common epithet of Śiva; the implication is that the Vedas are asserting their superiority over Śiva specifically.
of rudrākṣa beads (common marks of Śaiva devotees) and sang a verse of praise to Śiva at the shrine in question.32

At the most basic level, this narrative is one of many in the text that situates a legendary narrative at the Śiva temple at Melattur, enhancing its prestige; yet several details from this story suggest the perspective from which it was composed. The story proclaims Śiva's supremacy over the Vedas, which are rendered impotent in the absence of the “power of [his] divine knowledge” (citśakti), a theological concept of significant importance to members of the Śaiva Siddhānta school; this sect enjoyed a great deal of popularity in South India and especially in the vicinity of Thanjavur beginning from at least the 14th century, and its members were active in the production of purāṇas in Sanskrit and in Tamil. This narrative was very likely intended as a polemic against members of the Mīmāṃsā school, who held that the Vedas were eternally existent texts without any human or divine author, and who denied the importance of any form of devotional activity to individual deities.

Much to the frustration of readers seeking any kind of historicity in these texts, narratives such as the one just summarized - which constitute the vast majority of the content of sthalapurāṇas – are situated entirely outside of historical time. Rather, the vast majority of the stories found in sthalapurāṇas are intended to invoke a sense of the past with the specific purpose of enjoining a certain viewpoint, ritual, or festival; to read them as “historical” in any sense is to obscure their actual intent.

The narrative summarized above is rendered in simple Sanskrit verse with virtually no aesthetic elaboration; as Bhoja commented in his Śṛṅgāraprakāśa, Sanskrit purāṇas were not

intended to be read for their literary merits, in contrast to “worldly” works of poetry. As previously stated, Tamil examples of this literature fundamentally differ from their Sanskrit counterparts in this regard, as the following brief example illustrates. The verse I cite below is taken from one of the earliest Tamil talapurāṇams, the 14th century Kōyipurāṇam of Umāpati Civācaryār, which was devoted to the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram. It describes the journey of a young brahman to the site of the shrine at time before the construction of a temple there, and specifically mentions how the brahman came to a pond adjacent to the future shrine:

Passing through the forest path,
which resounded continuously like the ocean,
like the sound of the four ancient vedas, never diminishing,
And passing through a marshy brackwater,
buzzing with young bees drinking the nectar from tall, fragrant water-lilies,
The young brahman came to a pond
with blooming golden lotuses,
which dispels one's blemishes [malam],
and praised it,
with eyes flowing with tears and a heart brimming with joy.\(^{33}\)

Much like the Sanskrit texts, this verse also enjoins a practice specific to the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition (specifically, that one should bathe in the pond to “dispel one's blemishes”), but the manner of the text's presentation is entirely different. Here, the experience of sacred space is deeply emotional, rather than simply hinging on the fulfillment of a ritual obligation. The manner in which the journey is described will likely be familiar to any reader of South Asian poetry, and Tamil poetry in particular; throughout, the physical beauty of surrounding landscapes in described in vivid (if somewhat generic) detail. Furthermore, what is obscured

\(^{33}\) Umāpati Civācaryār, Kōyipurāṇam, ed. G. Cuppiramaniyam (Chennai: Vittiyānupālanayantiracālai, 1952), 27.
in the translation is the degree of phonoaesthetic elaboration (Tamil collaṇi, Sanskrit śabdālaṅkāra) evident in the original Tamil verse; authors of Tamil talapurāṇams employed a great deal of alliteration and complex metrical structures in their texts. I further discuss this text (and this particular verse) in Chapter 2.

As a final example of the manner in which sthalapurāṇas narrate the past, I consider here the premise of the Brhādiśvaramāhātmyam, a Sanskrit text which relates the patronage that the medieval Cōḷas bestowed upon the Śaiva shrine at Thanjavur. Unlike the two texts mentioned above, the Brhādiśvaramāhātmyam describes the lives of an identifiable dynasty, the remnants of whose reign were visible throughout the Kaveri delta in the shrines that they constructed and in the inscriptions that adorned them. Yet the Brhādiśvaramāhātmyam is not concerned with relating the dry facts of temple patronage, as are frequently recorded in the aforementioned inscriptions, but instead utilizes the memory of the medieval Cōḷas in order to lionize them as exemplars of devotion and to glorify the landscape that they forged into being.

This is evident from the very beginning of the text, which is framed as a conversation between Śiva and Pārvati; the latter asks Śiva how the world is restored when it is continually destroyed at the end of each cosmic age. Śiva answers that, in various times and places, the kings of the solar and lunar dynasties have restored Śaiva shrines, and Cera, Cōḷa and Pāṇḍya rulers of Southern India are given special veneration. This early dialogue culminates in a lengthy (if rather general and non-specific) description of the patronage of temples conducted by the Cōḷa kings, which constitutes the entirety of the text's fourth chapter. It begins as follows:
The attendants of Śiva were born on earth as kings, O Īśānā, and were devoted to Lotus-feet of Śiva.

Those kings, whose wealth was fame, who conquered their enemies in battle,

who were adorned with sacred ash garlands of rudrākṣa beads, took pleasure in venerating the devotees of Śiva.

They worshiped the śivaliṅga respectfully, together with all of their sons and subjects,

Venerated brahmans, and were always intent on [ritual] bathing and giving.

Those kings built the abodes of Śiva in the Cōḷa country,

And restored the places of the naturally-formed [śivaliṅgas], their hands joined [in worship].

The chapter then goes on to list the kinds of structures that the Cōḷas built, the types of donations that they gave to brahmans and to their subjects, and the some of the types of daily rituals they engaged in. Once again, this passage is in no way a history, even though it is ostensibly about a historical dynasty who did indeed construct and patronize many temples in the region, including the shrine to which this text is devoted. Rather, the Cōḷas are cast as the incarnate attendants of Śiva, born with the explicit purpose of restoring Śaiva worship. In other words, the Cōḷas as represented in this text serve an important role in the cultural memory of region in Central Tamil Nadu.

In each of the above examples, narratives of the past are used to convey something about the nature of Śaiva practice in the present, even as each text utilizes different strategies in order to do this. In the Unnatapurīmāhātmyam, a story about Śiva's triumph over the

34 *Bṛhadīśvaramāhātmyam*, 9.
personified Vedas is used to comment on a theological dispute; the Kōyirpurāṇam alludes to Śaiva Siddhanta theology while highlighting the emotional experience one has in encountering a sacred site (which in this case is a pond), and the Brhadīśvaramāhātmyam elevates a historical dynasty credited with the construction of one of the most famous temples in South India to a semi-divine status. All of these examples represent ways in which the past is not narrated for its own sake, but is instead made immanent in the present, and each story seeks to influence the reader's (or listener's) experiences of the sites that they glorify. In this way, memory not only describes sacred space, but produces it.

**Literature Review**

This project has been influenced by a variety of studies of the production of sthalapurāṇas in other parts of South India, as well as by recent studies of literary culture in South India. Furthermore, I see this project as being in dialogue with other studies of the relationship between collective memory, space, and religion as studied outside of South Asia. In what follows, I briefly mention several of the works that have influenced my thesis.

A variety of recent works have examined the manner in which sthalapurāṇas tell us much about both pan-Indian and regionally focused conceptions of sacred space. In a general study of the role that pilgrimage plays in the Hindu religious landscape, Knut Jacobsen has recently highlighted the important normative role that sthalapurāṇas as well as other Sanskrit texts pertaining to pilgrimage (such as the more legalistic dharmanibandhas) have played in declaring the “salvific” power of sacred spaces in South Asia; indeed, he argues that such a view of the sacred site is “a defining feature of Hinduism.” In his study of two different Sanskrit texts devoted to Varanasi, Travis Smith has articulated how each text presents its

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view of that sacred city in accordance with historically contingent notions of brahmanical orthopraxy, sacred geography, and Śaivism itself; his study offers a valuable example of how much Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas can tell us about the specifics of local histories. Along similar lines, Kunal Chakrabarti’s study of sthalapurāṇas from medieval Bengal argues that these texts represent the brahmanical absorption of local cults of worship, synthesizing these disparate practices under the hegemonic ideology of Sanskrit, brahmanically oriented Hinduism. Each of these three studies has informed my own reading of the Sanskrit material that I discuss in several places; indeed, these Sanskrit texts frequently invoke notions of caste (if not brahmanism, specifically) in ways that resonate with the material discussed by Jacobsen, Smith, and Chakrabarti.

My work also directly engages with a wealth of available scholarship on the role of sacred space in the Tamil Śaiva bhakti tradition. The work of Indira Viswanathan Peterson on the early canonical bhakti poetry has, in large part, informed my interpretation of that material; Peterson has highlighted the extent to which spaces, and the narratives associated with them, serve as one of the principle themes of much of this literature. Karen Pechilis’s work on Tamil Śaivism also highlights the significance of space in the literature of that tradition; additionally, her discussion of the historical circumstances surrounding the canonization of the aforementioned bhakti poems, as well her treatment of the career of Umāpati Civācaryār, informs my study of the early stage of the composition of talapurāṇams

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38 See Indira Viswanathan Peterson, Poems to Śiva, and “Lives of Wandering Saints,” both cited above.
(i.e., the 14th century, which I discuss in Chapter 2).39 In a recent edited volume, Peterson and Martha Ann Selby have brought attention to the myriad of ways in which Tamil literature engages with “cosmology, space, landscape, environment, region, village, temple, the home and the stage, in short, the entire range of geographical constructions in Tamil India.”40 I see my own work, which focuses more narrowly on the construction of “sthala/talam” (by which I have referred to as “sacred space” or more simply as “space”), as complimentary to the studies contained in this volume, several of which I make reference to in what follows.

While existing scholarship on talapurāṇams is more limited, two recent works merit special mention. The only monograph-length work to date that deals with talapurāṇams has been written by David Shulman,41 who was perhaps the first Western scholar writing in English to identify the special importance of this class of literature in Tamil Nadu. My own work on purāṇas is thus deeply indebted to his study; however, his focus was primarily on the content of the narratives themselves, rather than on the literary forms and historical contexts in which they were expressed. Elaine Fisher’s recent work on literary culture in early modern Tamil Śaivism42 has also informed my own study of similar materials; in particular, her reading of Tamil and Sanskrit literary renderings of the purāṇic legend of Madurai reveals much of the dynamics of the literary culture of early modern South India, which I discuss in greater detail in the Chapter 3.

In choosing to read the South Indian Śaiva purāṇic tradition as an expression of


41 David Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths, cited above.

42 Elaine Fisher, Hindu Pluralism, cited above.
“collective memory,” I have been influenced by several works outside of South Asian Studies. The first scholar to articulate the notion of collective memory as an analytical concept was Maurice Halbwachs, who, in his reading of the Gospels of the New Testament, articulated in simple terms the manner in which collective memory produces sacred space: “from the day when a place becomes a rallying point for a complete group of believers [who believe that sacred events, such as moments in the life of Jesus, occurred there], it becomes a holy place.”

Halbwachs highlighted the manner in which texts (in this case, the Gospels), mediated this transformation; though my own work differs from Halbwachs in many significant respects, his treatment of the relationship between memory, place, and community has informed my own understanding of that between purāṇas and Tamil Śaivism. My own thinking about memory, especially as it exists in opposition to history, has been more closely influenced by Jan Assmann, whom I discuss earlier in this introduction, as well as by Pierre Nora; Nora, in lamenting what he sees to be the modern degradation of memory as a valuable mode of engaging with the past (as opposed to history, which he describes in far less romantic terms), describes memory as a “perpetually actually phenomenon,” preserved by the groups for whom it is particularly important, and is made manifest in “spaces, gestures, images and objects.”

In the conclusion to this dissertation, I return to the question of memory and its relationship to place in these more general terms, and seek to bring this work into dialogue with scholarship outside of South Asia. Furthermore, I will show how the differing styles of Sanskrit and Tamil literature on sacred space often employ different modes of collective memory, and thus seek to


condition different experiences of sacred space in their audiences.

Methodology and Chapter Summary

The first chapter of this dissertation outlines the manner in which Śaiva sacred spaces in central Tamil Nadu initially became an object of poetic imagination. Primarily, this chapter surveys early Śaiva bhakti poems, and also considers the first Tamil work to be called “purāṇa” - Cēkkilār’s 12th century Periya Purāṇam. The early medieval Śaiva bhakti poets were deeply invested in the idea of sacred space, and their literature influenced all of the Tamil writers that I discuss later. Furthermore, it is in these texts that we first encounter some of the origin narratives of sacred cities and shrines that are later given a fuller treatment in the late medieval and early modern sthalapurāṇas. Additionally, I also examine the manner in which physical temples were constructed at many of the places mentioned in the bhakti poems, particularly under the patronage of the Cōḷa rulers.

The second chapter focuses on the beginnings of a purāṇic literary tradition in South India by considering two sets of texts. First, this chapter focuses on the career of Umāpati Civācaryār, a 14th century Śaiva Siddhāntin poet who composed the aforementioned Kōyiṟpurāṇam, along with several other Tamil purāṇas that, taken together, reflect an increased Tamil Śaiva interest in articulating the boundaries of their tradition and the collective memory of their past. Second, I examine the construction of sacred space in a later Sanskrit Śaiva purāṇa called the Śivarahasya (perhaps from the 15th - 16th century). I will show how the Śivarahasya synthesizes many currents in late medieval Tamil Śaivism, forging together Tamil bhakti and advaita vedānta. This heterogeneity is also evident in its treatment of sacred space (one of the chief concerns of the text), as it brings together several different
concepts of sacred “region” in outlining both local and pan-South Asian sacred geographies.

The third and fourth chapters of this dissertation focus on the composition and usage of sthalapurāṇas in one sacred city by examining a set of texts devoted to Kumbakonam. As a prominent Śaiva sacred center that has been glorified by Sanskrit writers and Tamil poets since the inception of the bhakti tradition, Kumbakonam offers an ideal case study in the role that such writing place in the production of sacred space through collective memory as instantiated in purāṇic literature. In the third chapter, I consider three purāṇic texts devoted to this city. First, I examine an undated Sanskrit text called the Kumbhaghoṇamāhātmyam, which (somewhat unusually) outlines both the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sacred topographies of the city and adopts a strong didactic tone. In the second part of this chapter, I examine in detail the process of translating a sthalapurāṇa, by focusing on Cokkappa Pulavar's late 17th or early 18th Kumpakōṇapurāṇam and its Sanskrit source, a chapter of the Śivarahasya devoted (if only nominally) to this city. By reading these texts alongside one another, I argue that cultural memory is used very differently in Tamil and Sanskrit purāṇic literature.

The fourth chapter of my dissertation examines the role that sthalapurāṇas play in the early modern and contemporary religious life by looking beyond the purāṇic texts themselves. I consider the variety of media in which purāṇic narratives are disseminated by examining their usage in an early modern drama, the Kumpēcar Kuṟavaṅci Nāṭakam of Pāpanāca Mutaliyār, as well as several contemporary pilgrimage manuals that relate the origin narrative of this city. Finally, I examine the relationship between these origin narratives and the geography of the city itself, looking at the ways in which cultural memory – as expressed in sthalapurāṇas – is visually imprinted on the city's Śaiva landmarks.
In the conclusion to this dissertation, I seek to bring my argument regarding purāṇa as a mode of collective memory into dialogue with scholarship outside of South India, and outside of South Asia altogether. I explore how collective memory as connected to sacred space actually influences the way that those spaces are experienced, and consider the role that texts play in influencing bodily practices tied to temple worship.

The majority of my research consists of close readings of Tamil and Sanskrit works devoted to the Śaiva sacred spaces of South India. The chapter that follows largely serves as a review of existing scholarship on the early history of Tamil Śaivism – a period that last from roughly the 6th-12th centuries CE. In the second chapter, in which I discuss two texts written by Umapati Civacaryar, supplementing the readings of scholars such as Karen Pechilis and Indira Viswanathan Peterson with my own readings of other sections of these texts. All of the other material that I discuss, such as the Śivarahasya and all of the texts devoted to Kumbakonam mentioned above, have received little to no scholarly attention to date. Moreover, given the extraordinary popularity of talapurāṇams in early modern South India, it is my hope that this dissertation will throw more light on the importance that this extensive body of poetry has played in the history of South Indian literature, and in shaping devotees' relationships with the places that they venerated.
Chapter 1: Forging the Sacred Landscape into Being

Places and landscapes have served an important function in Tamil literature from the very beginning of the literary tradition in that language. The earliest examples of Tamil poetry – which were collected into compilations sometime before the 5th century CE and which are collectively known as “caṅkam” poetry – utilized landscapes in a symbolic fashion. Thus, poems that described moments in the romantic life of two young lovers were set in landscapes that symbolized the moods that the poet sought to express; for example, poems describing the painful separation of newlyweds were often set in a parched wasteland (pālai).45 The latter half of the first millennium CE saw profound changes to religious practice in South India, and consequently to Tamil poetry as well. Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva poets began writing new forms of poetry that were – both linguistically and thematically – altogether unlike the literature of the caṅkam period. These poets wrote in a language that was, in both style and content, more strongly influenced by Sanskrit religious literature. Moreover, the works of these poets came to reflect the manner in which sacred space emerged as a key theme in devotional literature. The physical landscape underwent changes as well, as it was under the patronage of the medieval Cōḷa rulers, whose imperial center was located in the Kaveri delta, that many of the sacred places described in the earliest stratum of Śaiva literature came to be thriving temple centers.

This chapter describes how a sacred landscape came into being. In describing this sacred landscape, I refer not only to physical spaces, but also to the manner in which places of importance to Śaivas were conceived and venerated. I discuss the creation of the sacred

landscape from three perspectives. I begin by discussing the very earliest layer of Śaiva devotional poetry in Tamil – the hymns of Appar, Cuntarar and Campantar (collectively called the mūvar, “the three,” who were active between the 6th-9th centuries CE) who eulogized the many places in the Tamil country where Śiva is said to dwell. These poems were eventually compiled into a body of texts collectively known as the Tevāram, which formed the basis of the Tamil Śaiva canon. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the roles that members of the Cōḷa court – poets, military officers, members of the royal family, and rulers themselves – played in the production of physical spaces, as well as the manner in which descriptions of sacred spaces became increasingly associated with the Cōḷa empire. Finally, I conclude by discussing the most significant of all Tamil Śaiva texts – the Periyapurāṇam of Cēkkilār, a 12th century poet whose magnum opus who eulogized the the 63 nayanmar, and the mūvar especially. All of this literary and historical material represent the manner in which a notion of sacred space came to be associated with the remembrance of those who created it; it is this notion of memory with which the rest of this dissertation is concerned.

Language, Region and Community in the Tevāram

The earliest strata of Tamil Śaiva literature appears to speak from the perspective of a community of worshipers – the poets and the devotees they addressed shared certain common conceptions of their own place in the world that bound them together. Within the notion of a Tamil Śaiva community expounded by these texts, we can underscore several different and significant bases for the construction of such a community. The Tamil Śaivas placed a great deal of importance on the common language that devotees spoke, the region that they inhabited, and the manner of expression that their devotees undertook. To state
this matter more plainly, these three bases of community formation – language, region, and religiosity – were all mediated by Tamil Śaiva literature.

The following verse, composed by the poet Appar, reflects the manner in which the rhetoric of language choice served as a general marker of communal identity:

See him who is Sanskrit of the North
and southern Tamil and the four Vedas! 46

Here, the poet beseeches to devotee to look upon Śiva, who himself is “the northern language and Southern Tamil, and the four Vedas.” Implicit in this verse is an understanding of the various boundaries that language usage entails – “the language of the North” (vaṭamoḻi) undoubtedly refers to Sanskrit, and Tamil is explicitly compared to, and placed on equal footing with, this language. How can we make sense of the different claims made about the statuses of individual languages in a multilingual literary environment? The Tamil poems of the Tēvāram and (later, and to a lesser extent) the Periyapurāṇam are careful to distinguish Tamil from Sanskrit, relegating them to different spheres of usage.

The poems of the nāyanmār contain numerous references to Tamil itself, generally in ways intended to highlight its suitability for the expression of poetic refinement and devotion. The Tēvāram hymns of Cuntarar, for instance, frequently end with some reference to Tamil; for example, one typical concluding verse reads:

Āṟūraṇ
the devotee.
King of Nāval(ūr) in the south,
crowded with fine buildings and

46 Indira Viswanathan Peterson, Poems to Śiva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 112. Such an imagination of language itself as a deity, or at least as a personified subject to be venerated, has a long history in Tamil devotional literature. For example, Sumathi Ramaswamy has examined a 16th century poem in which Tamil itself is sent as a messenger to Cokkanatar, the form of Śiva associated with the city of Madurai. See Sumathi Ramaswamy “Language of the People in the World of the Gods: Ideologies of Tamil Before the Nation,” The Journal of Asian Studies 57.1 (1998): 66-92.
long streets where chariots pass,
sang this garland of ten verses
in good Tamil
to the flawless lord of Nelvāyil Aratturai
in the pasturelands, surrounded by long, well-watered fields.⁴⁷

Here, the reference to Tamil appears to be intended to convey its aesthetic merits, which are particularly appropriate to the task of praising Śiva. References such as this do not necessarily have to be read as speaking self-consciously of a linguistic community; viewed by themselves, they do not differentiate Tamil from the use of other languages. In his exploration of this particular issue, Blake Wentworth argues that the caṅkam collections contain virtually no references to Tamil as a broader marker of cultural significance; the proper noun itself only occurs a few times, and is usually modified by the prefix tan, meaning “cool” or “pleasant.”⁴⁸ In this sense, general references to Tamil of the sort seen in the above quoted Tēvāram verses have a long history in Tamil literature. Yet, as Wentworth goes on to argue, by the later centuries of the first millennium, Tamil did in fact come to be associated with a larger culture formation. As an example, he cites a line from the epic Cilappatikāram, which reads “kings newly made, who did not know the might of elegant Tamil.” With lines such as these, “in which language stands for the people who advance it over outsiders,” Wentworth argues, “the bond between language and the political order that conserves it is tightened.”⁴⁹ But what facilitates the “tightening” of such a bond is an act of differentiation – those who speak Tamil are set off against those who do not. And in a context in which such differentiation is possible,

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⁴⁹ Ibid., 161.
the seemingly generic claims of Tamil beauty take on a different meaning. Importantly, the advancement of Tamil is also here explicitly associated with sovereignty (in the case of the Cilappatikāram, this refers to the ruler of the Cēra kingdom, one of the three legendary regions of the Tamil speaking South); as I describe later in this chapter, such an association between language, power, and region would continue to play an important role in the imagination of space in literature in subsequent centuries.

Yet, the aforementioned verse of Appar explicitly envisions a different relationship between Tamil and at least one other language, Sanskrit. As Indira Peterson points out, the actual form of Tamil utilized by the nāyanmār “is a blend of Sanskritic and Tamil elements,” containing words such as īcaṉ (Skt. Īśa, “lord”), mūrtti (mūrti, “form”), vētam (Veda), and kītam (gīta, “song”).\footnote{Indira Viswanathan Peterson, Poems to Śiva, 83.} At the same time, Peterson notes, though the poetry of the muvar contains many seemingly archaic Tamil usages, reflecting the influence that caṅkam literature likely had on its composition, “it is simpler in style and closer to modern literary usage, so that the general, overall sense of the hymns is directly accessible to the average Tamil reader or listener.”\footnote{Ibid., 83.} We might therefore see the language of the Tēvāram as a mixture of the style and diction of classical Tamil rendered into a more accessible form of the language, heavily influenced by the religious vocabulary of Sanskrit.

References to Sanskrit found in this literature also seem to suggest its religious importance. For example, citing a line in which Appar describes Śiva as both “an Aryan” and a Tamil (āriyan kaṇṭāy tamiḻaṇ kaṇṭāy), Blake Wentworth claims, “Śiva...is realized through Sanskrit, a tongue central to the temple worship that Appar hails, but he is also realized
through Tamil; he has become Tamil's own.” Furthermore, Karen Pechilis Prentiss notes that the five syllable mantra “namaha śivāya,” (hail Śiva) originally found in the Śatarudriya, a Yajurvedic stotra, appears frequently in the hymns. For example, in one verse of Appar reads:

   The full-bloomed lotus
   is the ornament of flowers;
   to provide for Araṇ's bathing rite
   is the ornament of the cow;
   impartial rule
   is the ornament of kings;
   the chant of “Hail Śiva!”
   is the ornament of the tongue.

But references such as these suggest that the influence of Sanskrit on the hymns of the Tēvāram was primarily restricted to its religious usages, as opposed to drawing on Sanskrit literary or poetic models. And, as Norman Cutler points out, while Tamil literature had its own long-standing discourse on aesthetics by the time of the nayanmār, this discourse differed significantly from Sanskrit aesthetics. In short, in articulating the difference between Sanskrit and Tamil, the poets seemed to be highlighting the distinction between the ritual use of the former and the poetic use of the latter. This is not to suggest that Sanskrit literature and aesthetics was altogether unfamiliar to the South, but simply that such literature does not seem to have exerted a great influence on the Tamil Śaiva bhakti poems.

This differentiation would change in early centuries of the second millennium of the common era, during which time Tamil authors increasingly began looking to Sanskrit literary

54 Indira Viswanathan Peterson, Poems to Śiva, 218.
models. As Anne Monius points out, the author of the Vīracōḷīyam, an 11th century Tamil work on grammar and aesthetics, states that his own work has been composed in accordance with what is outlined in “Northern texts” (vaṭanūl), with the 5th chapter being explicitly based on Daṇḍin’s Kāvyādarśa. Additionally, the composition of Kampan’s Tamil Rāmāyana, which Zwelebil dates somewhere between the 9th and 12th centuries, is indicative of a larger process by which Sanskrit literary models increasingly penetrated into the sphere of Tamil literature.

The increased usage of Sanskrit norms in Tamil literature during this period to some extent mirrors changes in the political discourse of South India at the same time. During the reign of the Pallava empire in what is now Northern Tamil Nadu, Sanskrit came to be increasingly used in political inscriptions from the 4th century onward; as Sheldon Pollock points out, it was in the inscriptions of the Pallava ruler Simhavarman III in the middle of the 6th century that Tamil and Sanskrit came to be deployed alongside one another. Pollock further points out that the usage of Tamil in these inscriptions was purely documentary; the verbally ornate praśasti that praised the ruler was always composed in Sanskrit, while the more matter-of-fact portions of the Pallava inscriptions were always written in Tamil. For Pollock, this differentiation of labor between the cosmopolitan language (i.e., Sanskrit) and the vernacular is found throughout South Asia at this time. Considered together, this differentiation of labor in both inscriptions and in bhakti poetry suggests that these two


57 Kamil Zwelebil, Tamil Literature, 147.

modes of communication operated among different social spheres – Sanskrit was the primary language of the court and the priesthood, whereas Tamil poetry operated on a more popular level even while exhibiting the influence of Sanskritic religious discourse. As I will explain further below, however, this would change in the centuries immediately following the decline of the Pallava empire.

Descriptions of land and region are one of the most prominent themes in the early Śaiva bhakti corpus. Consider, for example, the following verse of Cuntarar:

They belong to Śiva's world
who open their mouths to sing it,
exulting in the thought
of the many villages protected by the lovely lord
draped in the elephant's skin.\(^{59}\)

The verse cited above concludes a set of ten verses (called \textit{patikam}) entitled “Ūrttokai” (“list of towns”), wherein the poet simply lists all of the locations in South India where Śiva is said to dwell. Such rhetoric is extremely common throughout the poetry of the \textit{nāyanmār}; indeed, the vast majority of the poems within the \textit{Tēvāram} corpus are occasioned by a particular saint's visit to a particular place, with each poem being devoted to the shrine of Śiva therein. As I explain further below, such an imagination of space is equally important in the \textit{Periyapurāṇam}; however, the manner in which space is glorified in that text suggests a fundamental shift in the manner in which such space was envisioned by Tamil Śaivas.

Each of the three mūvar composed \textit{patikams} listing sacred sites; the following verse from Campantar's \textit{Tēvāram} describes the different categories of places that were venerated by devotees:

Eight places called “aṭṭāṇam”
all the abodes of the handsome Lord, called kā,
eight more called “turai,” nine “kāṭu,”
three “kūlam-,” five “kāḷam,” “four “pāṭi-,” and
three “pāḻi-” - these are the beloved abodes
of the spouse of the mountain's daughter with the gragrant hair.
Love these, and the good Lord's town of Pācūr,
for your greatest sins to be dissolved!\(^{60}\)

\(^{59}\) David Shulman, \textit{Songs of the Harsh Devotee}, 299.

\(^{60}\) Indira Peterson, \textit{Poems to Śiva}, 159f.
Here, “aṭṭāṇam” refers to the eight places where great deeds of Śiva are said to have taken place, “kā” and “kāṭu,” refer to forests, “tuṟai,” refers to harbors, “kuḷam” refers to ponds or tanks, “pāṭi” refers to “settlements,” and “pāḻi” refers to sites of either Jain temples or settlements. What is striking about this list, and reflective of the character of the Tēvāram hymns more generally, is that it does not include references to large, urban spaces or the types of large temple complexes that would (as will be explained further below) later come to characterize the Tamil Śaiva religious landscape. Instead, the hymns usually glorify smaller sites, often making reference to their natural features. For instance, in a patikam describing Aṇṇāmalai, today the site of an important Śaiva pilgrimage center, Campantar concludes each verse with some reference to the wildlife dwelling on the slopes of the hill located in that places. Indeed, the seclusion of these places is occasionally the very subject of the patikam; for instance, one verse from Cuntarar's Tēvāram states:

How wild is this place!
Here the hooting of the owls
huddling in the tree-hollows
terrifies your young Woman [i.e., the Goddess]
and violent hunters and highwaymen abound,
O handsome god upon the Cape—what a place you've chosen
for your shrine!

Poems such as this, emphasizing the wilderness surrounding certain shrines, are frequently featured in the Tēvāram. However, the fact that these hymns were organized around sacred places – for, as previously mentioned, the vast majority are occasioned by the poet's visit to a

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 168-170.
63 Koṭikuḻakar, the place to which the patikam is devoted.
64 David Shulman, Songs of the Harsh Devotee, 194.
particular sacred site – suggests that even these remote sites served as social spaces. Regarding the social character of pilgrimage in the Tamil Śaiva hymns, Karen Pechilis notes, “pilgrimage is a preeminent example of the public demonstration of one’s individual decision and commitment to participate in worship. Pilgrimage is a social act that creates social space, often through transforming peripheral and uninhabited places.”65 Thus, if we view the poems as describing the pilgrimages of the poets as Pechilis does, we can see how verses such as the one above effect such a transformation – even wild locales such as Koṭikuḷakar are brought within the larger vision of Śaiva sacred space.

However, it should be noted that beyond the fact that each patikam in the Tēvāram is about a specific place, there is little to no reference to pilgrimage itself as a formalized mode of religious practice, nor is there any descriptions of the poets’ travels to each site. This is perhaps surprising in light of the fact that, by this time, pilgrimage had already begun to be a major preoccupation of Sanskrit religious literature. Perhaps the earliest descriptions of pilgrimages in South Asia are found in the Mahābhārata, which was likely completed in the 4th century CE. According to Knut Jacobsen, the Tīrthayātraparvan (“chapter on the journey to sacred sites”) of the Mahābhārata “promotes pilgrimage by describing the benefits of visiting the sites and narrates the stories associated with places to explain their salvific power.” Furthermore, he suggests that the level of detail included in this chapter suggests that pilgrimage was likely a well-established practice by the time of its composition.66 Later texts, such as the numerous sthalapurāṇas dedicated to sacred sites throughout South Asia, were similarly concerned with the proper rituals to be performed at each site and the benefits of

65 Karen Prentiss, The Embodiment of Bhakti, 50.

undertaking pilgrimages to them. The *Tēvāram* poems contain very few references to such practices, and it is thus uncertain whether or not they are describing established pilgrimage routes or are simply cataloging sacred sites of the Tamil speaking region. This is not to suggest that the poems are not describing pilgrimages at all – it is certainly possible that this literature was, in fact, describing an organized journey, and later texts make this more explicit - but simply that they do not conform to Sanskritic models of doing so.

Indira Viswanathan Peterson has argued that the early Śaiva poems do in fact lay out a pilgrimage route, and it is through the *Tēvāram*’s “orientation to pilgrimage” that it has “played a powerful role in shaping the Tamil Śaivite community’s view of itself as a separate linguistic and regional culture.” Though the question of language has been dealt with above, what remains to be explored is how these hymns created a notion of region. In her study of contemporary pilgrimage traditions in Maharashtra, Anne Feldhaus has defined “region” as “an area with a distinct identity and significance for people who live in it and for others who think and care about it.” Viewed in this sense, the sacred landscape that the *mūvar* sought to glorify can be seen as a kind of region. The *patikams* devoted to simply listing all of these sacred places, such as those of Cuntarar and Campantar cited above, serve to articulate its boundaries, and on the basis of the shrines present in each location, afford all of the included sites a collective significance. Thus these poets spoke for a Śaiva community for whom these places were sacred and in turn reaffirmed their sacrality for the future generations of Śaivas for whom their work would be considered canon.

Furthermore, these sacred sites were actually clustered in a relatively small geographic

67 Indira Viswanathan Peterson, “Singing of a Place,” 70.

68 Anne Feldhaus, *Connected Places*, 5.
space. As Peterson has noted elsewhere, of the 274 sacred sites mentioned in these poems, 190 are located in “Cōḻanāṭu,” (“the land of the Cōḷas” - the Kaveri river delta in what is now central Tamil Nadu), and all but 5 are located in what were, at the time of the poems’ composition, Tamil speaking lands. The following verse of Cuntarar, from a patikam describing Kedārnāth, suggests the manner in which sites located outside of South India were described:

Don't think his place
is far away:
it is here,
    home to him who ties a serpent
to the ragged band
around his waist.
Chant the holy name 'Kedāra'!

In his comments on this patikam, David Shulman notes that the poem is actually said to have been composed at Kāḷahasti in modern day Andhra Pradesh. Thus, the poet's claim that Śiva's place is “here” takes on a different meaning than it normally does in the Tēvāram hymns – the poet is not simply describing a place that he is seeing, but that he is envisioning, and the audience is told to chant the name of this place rather than actually visit it. This rather unique treatment of a sacred site suggests both an awareness on the part of Tamil Śaivas of a larger, pan-South Asian sacred landscape, while also further underscoring the recognition of the difference between such distant sites and those closer to home. However, complicating the notion that these poets envisioned a uniquely South Indian, Tamil-speaking sacred region is the fact that individual terms to signify such regions – such as “Cōḷanāṭu” - rarely appear in the poems of the mūvar. Region, in the more strictly defined sense of a single, bounded entity

69 Indira Viswanathan Peterson, Poems to Śiva, 12-13.

70 David Shulman, Songs of the Harsh Devotee, 501.

71 Ibid., 509.
within which the community of Śaivas resides, is at best implied by these texts and is not made explicit.

There are nonetheless other examples from the bhakti corpus that gesture towards the presence of a community of practitioners to whom the poems are directed. The following verse of Campantar offers an instructive example:

They are pious men,
who can sing the ten verses
which Ñānacampatan, prince of Pukali,
sang in praise of the sacred ash
of Ālavāy's Lord who rides on the mighty, warlike bull,
to cure the southern king of his burning disease.72

The above verse commemorates a particular moment in the hagiography of Campantar, in which that saint converts the Pāṇṭiya king of Madurai (here, Ālavāy) from Jainism to Śaivism.73 The verse reflects three means by which the Śaiva community defined its own boundaries. First, the praise of those “pious men who can sing the ten verses” composed by the very poet to whom they are attributed suggests the manner in which the Tēvāram poems frequently blurred the lines between the poet and the devotee. Such verses, extolling the virtues of those who recite the poet's own work, frequently appear at the end of the patikams of the mūvar. Second, the poem references a legend associated with the poet himself, reflecting the manner in which they appear as wholly a part of a complete canonical corpus; the poems themselves do not precede the process of canonization to which they were subjected. Finally, the actual legend that the poem references underscores the great significance that the early poems placed on anti-Jain (and anti-Buddhist) polemic. As I describe

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72 Peterson, Poems to Śiva, 277.
73 Ibid., 273.
in the chapter that follows, such polemics would continue to be important to the imagination of the Śaiva community for centuries to come.

Verses such as the one cited above appear very frequently in both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Tamil bhakti poetry. Norman Cutler refers to such verses with the Sanskrit term *phalaśruti* (lit. “the hearing of the result”); they typically describe the benefits that will be conferred upon the listener for listening to, studying, or repeating the entire *patikam*. Such a statement of benefits accords the poems a greater significance in the lives of the devotees, as they are not simply considered objects of aesthetic enjoyment. Indeed, they are often said to possess a kind of salvific efficacy. For example, several of Cuntarar's *patikams* conclude with the line “Those who can sing them will reach the world of Śiva.”

What is interesting about the example with which this section began is that it specifically frames the *phalaśruti* in terms of song. Though we know little about how and where such performances of this poetry may have been conducted, it is safe to infer that they were likely intended to be appreciated in such a context. Furthermore, *phalaśrutis* are the only places in which the poet refers to himself in the third person. In light of this, we might therefore see how the line between the performer and the poet would be blurred. Through the poems' mixing of the first and third person, they allow the performer or reciter of the verses to assume the identity of the historical saint popularized in legend. In short, the *phalaśrutis* allow for the active participation of the devotee in the devotional experiences described by the poet. It is also very significant that the *phalaśrutis* frequently include references to the legends associated with poets themselves. For this reason, Norman Cutler argues that, for

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75 David Shulman, *Songs of the Harsh Devotee*, 133.
Tamil devotees, “the saint-poet is a composite of a voice heard in poetry, a legendary figure whose life story is recorded in hagiography, and a sacred personality who is enshrined in temples. Tamil audiences have never distinguished the saint, whose identity is fashioned from poetry, legend and ritual, from a historical author.” While Cutler goes on to argue that these poems are not likely later additions to the original poems as we now have them, whether or not they are is besides the point – the legends are a large part of the poets' appeal to devotees, as the phalaśrutiś reflect. Furthermore, their presence within the poems further suggests the manner in which the canon, as we now have it, appears fully formed, as the voices of the poets themselves are invoked in order to glorify the manner in which they would be regarded by devotees.

In these three ways – through appeals to language, region, and religiosity – the poets who composed much of the poetry of the Tēvāram created the basis for the formation of Śaiva communities in Tamil Nadu. Members of these communities shared a common tongue, venerated their beloved deity at a defined set of sacred spaces, and held a common set of beliefs particularly with respect to the role of song in worship. All of the Tamil poets I discuss below followed the example set by the muvar.

_Cidambaram in the Age of the Cōlas_

The political and the religious landscape of the Tamil speaking South underwent significant changes during the 9th - 12th centuries under the aegis of the Cōla empire. It was during their reign that the Śaiva poets of the bhakti period came to be canonized, and it was under the patronage that the sacred landscape of South India was physically transformed. It was also during this period that Tamil Śaiva literature achieved a new level of prominence,

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76 Norman Cutler, _Songs of Experience_, 28.
especially as exemplified by the most celebrated of all Tamil Śaiva texts – Cēkkiḷār's *Periyapurāṇam*. The association between programs of temple building and patronage and the Cōḻa court would eventually come to be a celebrated aspect of the collective memory of the Tamil Śaivas, as it was at this time that the region eulogized by the muvar first came to be associated with a real political formation. At the center of both of these transformations was the Nataraja temple at Cidamabaram, on which much of the following discussion is centered.

In the early years of the Cōḻa empire (i.e., the period from the middle of the 9th century to the end of the 10th), temple construction on the behalf of the rulers themselves appears to have been limited. Padma Kaimal has argued that prior to the reign of Rajaraja I, Cōḻa kings seldom funded the construction of stone temples; most of the temple construction of that period was undertaken with the support of local rulers away from the Cōḻa center. This pattern would change at the beginning of the 11th century; according to Burton Stein, it was at this time that these temples began to take on some of their now familiar features, featuring “ornately carved pillared halls (*maṇḍapam*),” “long stairways to the sanctorum of shrines set on hills,” and “tall gateways (*kōpuram*);” Stein adds that it was also at about this time that “sizeable urban settlements became an adjunct of great temples.” Rajaraja I’s program of temple construction, perhaps best exemplified by the Rajarajesvara (also called the Brhadisvara) temple in Thanjavur, seems to mark the beginning of a new relationship between royal self-presentation and Śaivism. Thanjavur is not among the sites eulogized by the bhakti poets, and the Rajarajesvara does not appear to have been constructed on the site

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of an already existing temple, but as R. Champakalakshmi argues, “The Rajarajesvara in Tanjavur represents a ceremonial complex symbolizing Cōḷa territorial sovereignty through cosmic structures.” Champalakshmi makes this argument on the basis of the iconographic program that the exterior of the temple employs; in her view, the repetition of the image of Śiva as “Tripurāntaka” - the “ender” of the triple city, alluding to a popular purāṇic legend – equates the conquering Rajaraja with this warlike form of the deity. The blurring of the lines between deity and sovereign was a recurring theme in court poetry of the time, as I explain further below. For the Cōḷa monarchs, however, it was the Naṭarāja temple at Cidambaram the was accorded the greatest importance; on the basis of epigraphic evidence, Kenneth Hall notes that Cidambaram had been associated with these rulers from the beginning of their reign.

Cidambaram serves as a useful example of the myriad changes that occurred in the sacred landscape of Śaiva South India, which saw the increased association of poetry, temple patronage, and the imagination of space as both sacred and political. The Tēvāram hymns afford Cidambaram none of the special significance it later came to receive. On this point, Indira Peterson claims “there is no evidence in the songs of the 3 saints that they considered Tillai to be superior to other shrines. They laud each shrine, in turn, as the highest. Campantar sang more than 60 songs about Cirkali, his native town, and Appar sang fondly of


Tiruvatikai Virattanam, the place of [his] conversion.” In light of the second half of this claim, it seems apparent while the hymns when viewed as a whole reflect no preference for a specific site, such preferences are manifest in the works of individual poets who favored places of personal significance to them. The following poem about Cidambaram composed by Appar offers us an example of how it was described in that literature:

If there are men who want to see anything in the world other than the dance of Aran, whose feet we serve, in Cirṟampalam shrine in Tillai [i.e., Cidambaram], where the arecca tree with broad fronds grows tall, the streets are lined with with great mansions, and all the fields are watered by streams full of vāḷai fish-then they are but devil-devotees, seeing worthless things with rheumy eyes.

While the historical accuracy of such a description of Cidambaram cannot be verified, a few points about this poem are relevant to this analysis. The first is that it makes explicit reference to the “Cirṟampalam” - the “Little Hall” - thus signifying a familiarity with an actual early structure of the temple. The second facet of this poem of note is the emphasis it places on natural beauty, a theme common to much of the Tēvāram hymns. Indira Peterson notes the fact that classical Tamil poetry (i.e. poetry written in the first centuries of the first millennium C.E.), the imagery of natural beauty was often invoked in romantic poetry. For the Śaiva poets, however, this imagery was intended to establish “a general link between landscape and love,

81 Indira Viswanathan Peterson, “Singing of a Place,” 73f.
82 Indira Peterson, Poems to Śiva, 120.
and between love of Śiva and the Tamil view of the emotional life.” 83 Though the later poets reimagined the romantic, human love of the cankam poetry as that which exists between devotee and deity, the association of Cidambaram with verdant fields and bountiful streams in Appar's verse seems to have this imagery in mind. The final aspect of the poem that must be noted here is that it describes “streets lined with great mansions,” thereby suggesting that by the early medieval period, prior to the expansion of the temple by the Cōḷa emperors, Cidambaram was already an urban site. The glorification of an urban locale – and sacred space as built space - in these early-medieval poems is relatively rare; as Vidya Dehejia notes, “The Śiva shrines extolled in the hymns of Sambandar and Appar were consecrated lingas standing under trees, in forests and in open spaces.” 84 Regardless of the actual structure of the site, the bhakti poems seldom if ever afford Cidambaram (or any other Śaiva shrine) any kind of political importance.

This would change dramatically in the Śaiva poetry of the Cōḷa court following the 11th century. Consider, for instance, the following verse from the Kulottuṅka Cōḷan Ulā, a 12th century poem written by the poet Oṭṭakkūttar:

The great and holy central hall where the god with the trident dances and the tall, spacious balcony with its gateway and terraces,
Together seem like great Mount Meru with its golden peak circled by the sturdy ring of mountains,
The massive seven-story towers crowd close to one another like the seven mountains,
The towers capped with sea

83 Indira Peterson, “Singing of a Place,” 78.
monsters gleam like the roofs of
heavenly chariots in the sky,
The lovely holy porch glitters, extending out
like a peerless wide hill that is glowing with gold.85

This excerpt, taken from a 12th century poem glorifying the Cōḷa emperor Kulottuṅka II, describes the Cidambaram temple in far grander terms than we have seen thus far. The king is offering his worship to the deity at the “Little Hall,” here referred to as “the great and holy central hall,” prior to leaving the temple and leading a procession into the city. This excerpt therefore reflects the importance of the temple in the eyes of the Cōḷa rulers, the expansion of the physical space of the temple that occurred during their reign, and the manner in which poets lauded the relationship that these rulers had with Śiva at Cidambaram. All of these issues will be discussed in further detail below; first, a delineation of the changes that were made to the temple grounds at this time is necessary.

Additions to the shrine at Cidambaram began with the ascendancy of the Cōḷas in the mid-9th century. At this time, the Cōḷa ruler Vicayālaya and his son Ātitya I, who had previously been minor chieftains in the Kaveri River valley, declared their independence from the dominant polity at the time and thus initiated a long period of dynastic sovereignty. Three important changes were made to the temple grounds during the first century of Cōḷa rule. The first was the addition of the “Pērampalam” (“Big Hall,” also known as the Deva Sabha - Sanskrit for “Hall of the Gods”) to the northeast of the “Little Hall” and a site in which kings may have resided on their visits to the temple; the second was the addition of gold shingles to the roof of the “Little Hall,” and the third was the construction of a “Hundred Pillared Hall” to the

northwest of the “Little Hall.”\textsuperscript{86} The gilding of the roof of the central shrine reflects the significance that the early Cōḷa rulers afforded to the shrine. Younger speculates that the “Hundred Pillared Hall,” an open structure with a large platform and one end and lined with pillars, was likely used for public performances and festivals.\textsuperscript{87} It thus seems that it is at this time that the temple began to emerge as a public space where activities other than devotional ones were carried out.

More extensive renovations would be carried out nearly a century later. Though the emperor Kulottuṇika I (r. 1070 – 1118) does not seem to have played an active role in the construction projects there, one of his generals, Naralōkaviraṇ, supported many of its most transformative additions. These include the addition of what are perhaps its most recognizable features today – the large gateways constructed at the temple's exterior wall, called kopurams. The kopurams are tall, ornately carved stone structures consisting of seven successive tiers. Younger speculates that these structures served a social function; the eastern kopuram was likely utilized by temple specialists (i.e., those individuals who carried out the rituals at the temple), while the western one was utilized by the public during special occasions.\textsuperscript{88} Additionally, Naralōkaviraṇ supported the construction of a small goddess shrine for Śiva's consort Śivakāmacuntari, and that of the set of interior and exterior walls, bounding the “Little Hall” and the entire temple complex respectively.\textsuperscript{89} Under the reign of Kulottunga II (r. 1133-1150), a “Thousand Pillared Hall” or “Raja Sabha” (Sanskrit for “Hall of Kings”) was

\textsuperscript{86} Paul Younger, \textit{Home of Dancing Śivan}, 92-94.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 96.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 100.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 101-102.
constructed adjacent to the tank at the temple complex’s northeast corner to serve as a royal audience and official performance hall.\textsuperscript{90}

The period from the mid-9\textsuperscript{th} century to the mid-12\textsuperscript{th} century, during which the Cōḷa empire flourished, thus saw the emergence of the temple complex from a relatively small and simple shrine to one in which a wide variety of religious, political, and artistic activities took place. More than one shrine now existed there, the entire temple complex was bounded by walls with imposing gateways facing each direction, and the temple complex housed several structures, such as the “Hundred Pillared Hall” and the “Thousand Pillared Hall,” which had non-religious social and political importance that the Cōḷas accorded to Cidambaram by the 12\textsuperscript{th} century is further attested by the fact that, in many of his inscriptions, Vikrama Cōḷa (r. 1118–1133) claimed to have them issued “from his residence in Citamparam.”\textsuperscript{91} Additionally, it was at this time that Cidambaram emerged as a major commercial center. Kenneth R. Hall notes that “In such sacred centres is was not uncommon for religious and economic activities to be confined to the temple compound and its immediate vicinity. The temple and its market-place core were in turn surrounded by smaller villages and rural settlements that were administrative dependencies of the temple.”\textsuperscript{92} What this observation suggests is that the emergence of the temple complex coincided with a process of commercial and urban development in which the temple was the center.

It is also important to recognize that the process of transformation of the temple was

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 103.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{92} Kenneth R. Hall, “ Merchants, Rulers and Priests,” 105.
documented by way of inscriptions carved on the temple wall itself. Note, for instance, the following excerpt from an inscription describing the activities of Vikrama Cōḷa (r. 1118-1135):

In the tenth year [of the reign] the gold brought by the conquered kings was made into an emblem studded with gems and engraved with the words: MAY THE KING LIVE LONG AND PROTECT THE EARTH.

At the same time the walls, towers, and other buildings around the golden central shrine, where the family deity of the Cōḷas does the tandava dance, were covered with gold. The gold on the altar for offerings shone until it seemed to reflect the sun. The temple chariot was also covered with gold and strings of pearls, so that the people were delighted as they pulled the chariot on festival days. The kings also had a street of priestly houses covered with jewels constructed, and that street was named after him.93

What is significant about this inscription is that it references the “gold brought by the conquered kings,” attesting to the military power of the ruler. Its appearance on the exterior of the temple would have suggests that donations and construction projects of this kind were very much public acts that explicitly accounted from the role of the member of court or ruler who served as the donor. In this sense, the inscriptions on the walls of the temple resonate with many of the themes present in court poetry.

The physical transformation of the temple did not go unnoticed by the poets of the era, who utilized the emergent sacred center in constructing imagery that lauded the Cōḷa ruler and his patron deity. Two poets in particular, Oṭṭakkūttar and Cēkkilār, both of whom were active in the 12th century and principally eulogized Kulottunga II, articulated a vision of the divine and the royal that blurred the line between the two. Moreover, their poetry creates a sense of space which centralizes the significance of Cidambaram in the larger context of the

93 Paul Younger, Home of Dancing Śivan, 140.
empire. The following verse from Oṭṭakkūttar's *Kulottunkan Pillaittamil*\(^\text{94}\) encapsulates the manner in which the poet praised his patron ruler:

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Behold, all the eight directions
are temples for his eight
elephants streaming with rut.
Behold, the eight caves serve as his huge
prisonhouses where he throws kings who
refuse him tribute.
Behold, the seven overflowing oceans are ponds with
fragrant unguents where he sports with his consorts,
Sridevi and Bhudevi.
Behold, the seven fertile groves and the seven worlds are
flower gardens where he enjoys going in procession.
Behold, the seven mountains, where pearls are
always found, serve as stalls for his elephants.
Great Mount Meru is the
martial throne where he
has carved his tiger
emblem.
His royal parasol is the top of
the universe. Therefore, Moon,
come to play.\(^\text{95}\)
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This verse is not set in a real-world space; instead, it presents the king as a divine, universal sovereign. It frequently alludes to his martial prowess, as he imprisons other kings who refuse to pay him tribute. He reign does not simply extend over the actual lands the Cōḷas occupy, but the entire world. Perhaps most significantly, it declares that “Sridevī” and “Bhūdevī” - the goddesses of wealth and of earth, respectively – are his consorts, echoing a

\(^\text{94}\) A “Pillaitamil” is a popular type of poem which takes the form of a lullaby sung to the patron, who is imagined as a small child, and is addressed to the moon.

well established trope in literature on Indic kingship which accords the ruler a semi-divine status by way of mentioning his relationship to these goddesses. Through the utilization of a different poetic genre, Oṭṭakkūttar utilized this notion of semi-divine kingship to glorify the king, his physical realm, and Cidambaram. The genre he used to achieve this end was the ula, or “procession,” wherein the king set forth from the temple to the adoration of women gathered outside, who were overcome by sexual passion upon the sight of him. It is significant that the first poem written in this genre was not dedicated to a ruler at all, but was devoted to Śiva himself. Though its date and author are uncertain, according to Blake Wentworth, this work, the Tirukkailāya Nānā Ulā, “is taken by the Tamil literary tradition not only as the earliest instance of the prolific genre of ula poetry, but by Tamil Śaivas as a poem with a divine audience.” This is made clear by two early lines in the poem, which read “As he abides in the lovely palace in Śiva's city/within the imperishable excellence of Śiva's world/The keen-eyed immortals crowd in his inner courtyard/begging him, 'Favor us by showing yourself before us.'” Here, it is significant that the poet portrays Śiva as the ruler of his own world, residing in his palace there; given the regal sense with which Śiva is described, it is fitting that this genre of poetry would later be applied to the Cōḷas. It is also important to note that the sense of space evoked by these poetic procession narratives was likely inspired by a widespread temple practice; as Wentworth notes “The ula genre takes as its creative inspiration perhaps the most dramatically significant of these [temple] practices: the procession of the murti [i.e.,

96 Ibid., 36.
97 Wentworth, “Yearning for a Dreamed Real,” 17.
98 Ibid., 343.
the image of the deity] out of the temple and into the surrounding streets, where the god and
the crowds are brought into direct contact with one another.”

Oṭṭakkūttar composed three ulas for the three rulers under which he served – Vikrama, Kulottunga II, and Rajaraja II. These poems, all of which share essentially the same structure and set of themes, typically begin with a description of the ruler's predecessors, wherein each one is lauded in a single line describing his exploits. For example, one of the first lines of the Vikkiraṁa Čōḷan Ula (“The Procession of Vikkiraṁa Čōḷa”) reads “Then the king who out of his passion covered the roof with gold/on the sacred hall where the lord dances, pure honey for the eyes.” Based on the order in which it appears in the genealogy and the activity it describes, the line is likely referencing Atitya I, who originally gilded the roof of the “Little Hall,” and therefore reinforces the importance with which acts of patronage to Čidambaram were regarded by the Čōḷas of the 12th century. The vast majority of the verses in the genealogy are devoted to the military conquests undertaken by the Čōḷas, thereby attesting to the earthly power of the dynasty and of the current ruler. Additionally, subsequent verses describe how, as the king is about to set out on his procession, all of the lords and kings whom he himself had subdued accompany him. This has profound implications for the vision of space that Oṭṭakkūttar establishes – the Čōḷa ruler marches out of his seat of power at Čidambaram accompanied by all the rulers who he had conquered, symbolizing the extent of his empire.

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99 Ibid., 28-9.
100 Ibid., 360.
101 Ibid., 364-366.
The following lines, describing the procession of Rajaraja II, from the *Irācarāca Cōḷan Ulā* encapsulate this attitude perfectly:

> Surrounded by the Southerner with his army of warriors, the Cērā king, the Sinhala king, the Koṅkani king, the king of Mālwa, the king of Magadha, the king of Gāndhāra, the king of Kaliṅga, and the king of Kosala, the lord of men advanced among them, wearing a garland of flowers, He was splendid, worthy of the holy name Vēntar Poruvata Pūpāla Kōpāḷaṇ, “The Herder of Lords, Eclipsing Other Kings”

A pilgrim entering Cidambaram in the 12th century would have been struck by an abundance of both royal and religious imagery. She would have seen the Deva Sabha, the original royal audience hall of the temple complex, located adjacent to the central temple shrine. The “Thousand Pillared Hall,” which would later come to replace the Deva Sabha as the royal audience hall, was perhaps the largest single structure in the complex. Thus she would have been very much aware of the fact that she was entering the presence of both Śiva and the king. Though it is clear that the Cōḷas placed a great emphasis on their association with Nataraja, it is still somewhat unclear as to why this association was necessary. Moreover, how did court poetry bring the spaces of Cidambaram empire to order?

Henri Lefebvre’s discussion of “monumentality” in *The Production of Space* provides a useful framework for understanding Cidambaram in the age of the Cōḷas. According to Lefebvre:

> Monumental space offered each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage. It thus constituted a collective mirror more faithful

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102 Ibid., 403.
than any personal one. Of this social space...everyone partook, and partook fully – albeit, naturally, under the conditions of a generally accepted Power and a generally accepted Wisdom...The element of repression in it and the element of exaltation could scarcely be disentangled; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the repressive element was metamorphosed into exaltation.  

Thus the monument, for Lefebvre, is a site that creates a transcendent social order; this order is itself the product of a power structure, though the act of domination is not perceived by those who traverse within the monument. Although the extent to which the public internalized the discourse of power of which Cidambaram was at the center is unclear, what we can say is that the construction projects and poetic literature undertaken on behalf of the Cōḷas at Cidambaram reflect an attempt to create such an overarching social order. Poetry and power have long been intertwined in South Asia; in her work on the early 19th century poet Padmakar, Allison Busch states the relationship between kings and poets simply: “Kings needed their court poets, an aspiring young court poet would also have needed a king,” and the role of poets in the Cola court reflects a similar symbiosis.  

Oṭṭakkūṭtar's ulās are, above all else, narratives of domination – the kings he has conquered show deference to him at Cidambaram, and the women gathered outside are overcome with sexual passion upon seeing him. With respect to the latter and its relationship to the discourse of royal power in historical South Asia, Blake Wentworth claims “the ancient pairing of sexual attraction with political control was a foundational value of noble life across the subcontinent,” and points to an example from the court of the northeast Indian king Lakṣmanasena, in which the poet claims

103 Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 43.

“Yes, lord of kings, when the bards sing your praises/the hearts of your foes, as well as your women/tremble through and through, and move to worship at your feet.”\(^{105}\) The locus of this discourse, in the context of the Cōḷas, was Cidambaram. If there is, as Lefebvre puts it, “a generally accepted Wisdom” in addition to the “generally accepted Power” marked by Cōḷa and religious policy operating in Cidambaram, that wisdom is undoubtedly represented by Śaiva devotionalism. Through the consolidation of the canon and the hagiographic literary output of Cēkkilār, the articulation of a normative wisdom at Cidambaram was accomplished on behalf of the empire. To put it simply, through both literature and architecture, religious space was fashioned into political space.

As previously mentioned, the poetry of the court, in contrast to that of the early medieval saints, represents an elite discourse originating from the center of power itself. This raises a problem for our analysis – how were such discourses received and utilized, and what manner of “spatial practice,” to use a term from Lefebvre, did they produce? Such details are difficult to discern, as there is little to tell us of the popular discourse on religion and royalty in 12\(^{th}\) century Cidambaram. Moreover, there is little to tell us of how the poems were likely to have been received, beyond the fact that they were written by (and likely for) court elites. It is for this reason that they should be seen as a strategy, intent on the production of a particular notion of space, rather than as having actually produced that space.

In order to conceptualize this difference (i.e. between the intent to produce a certain kind of space and the actual production of space) it will be helpful to return to Lefebvre’s distinction between “representations of space” and “representational space.” He defines the

\(^{105}\) Blake Wentworth, “Yeaming For a Dreamed Real,” 135-136.
former as “conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent – all of whom identify what is lived with what is perceived and what is conceived.”

With regard to the “representational space,” Lefebvre defines this as “spaced as directly lived through its associated with images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users,' but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate.”

The court poetry of Oṭṭakkūttar and (to a lesser extent) Cēkkilār, describing Cidambaram as the seat of power and of religion, seems to straddle both categories. Oṭṭakkūttar's description of the temple complex is not strictly literal; it eulogizes the temple in grand terms, comparing it with mythic spaces such as mount Meru. Nor is their work reflective of being “dominated” or “passively experienced” - they seem to be constructing this ideal image on behalf of the sovereign. It would therefore not be wholly appropriate to associate them with the project of representational space. Furthermore, they cannot be strictly said to be producing “representations of space,” as their work is clearly not involved in any sort of scientific endeavor. The royal poetic discourse of space instead seems to be something in between – it creates an aesthetic of domination, a symbolic representation of real power flowing outward from an actual place, producing both “representations of space” and “representational spaces.” Lefebvre seems to anticipate the potential for his categorical

106 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 43.

107 Ibid.
scheme to be problematic in just this way in certain contexts; in acknowledging the potential difference between conceptions of space in the “East” and in the modern West (which is his area of interest), he says:

> Whether the East, specifically China, has experienced a contrast between representations of space and representational spaces is doubtful in the extreme. It is indeed quite possible that the Chinese characters combine two functions in an inextricable way, that on the one hand they convey the order of the world (space-time), while on the other hand they lay hold of that concrete (practical and social) space-time wherein in symbolisms hold sway, where works of art are created, and where buildings, palaces and temples are built.  

While Lebebfvre's conceptualization of “the East” - which is seemingly based on just one example - is undoubtedly reductive, his description of the kinds of spaces produced by Chinese characters appears to be applicable here. The poetic depictions of Cidambaraṁ serve a similar purpose, as they project the ideal character of Cōḷa sovereign in whom the functions of deity and devotee appear to converge. They are concerned with the glory and power of a real political entity in a real time and space while at the same time exalting that entity in semi-divine terms. These depictions were not passive depictions of power, but were involved in its dispensation.

**Saints and Space in the Periyapurāṇam**

Despite their references to temple of Cidambaram where the king's procession begins, the ulās of Oṭṭakkūṭtar are not explicitly religious texts. However, the *Periyapurāṇam* of Cēkkilār, also composed during the reign of Kulottuṅka II, is one of the most important

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108 Ibid., 39.
compositions of medieval Tamil Śaivism; it projects a conceptualization of the Cōla ruler and his empire that is similar to Oṭṭakkūttar's in many respects. The text is a hagiography of the 63 nayanmar, and devotes large sections of its narrative to Appar, Campantar, and Cuntarar. In addition to eulogizing the nayanmar, the Periyapurāṇam fulfills all three of the functions of the earlier hymns – it articulates a notion of Tamil Śaivism based on language, region, and religious belief. Furthermore, as the first Tamil work to be called “purāṇam,” the Periyapurāṇam represents the beginnings of a tradition of Śaiva collective memory that anchors sacred space to the narratives of events that are said to have transpired there.

In several respects, the narratives contained within the Periyapurāṇam represent a continuation of the themes borne out in the Tēvāram, while also reflecting several changes in Tamil literature of the later medieval period. One of these differences is the greater influence that Sanskrit came to have on the composition of Tamil literature. The most direct literary models for the Periyapurāṇam were likely Jain epics; as Whitney Cox points out, a variety of Jain “purāṇas,” composed in Sanskrit, Apabhraṃśa and Kannada, were the likely model for Cēkkiḻār’s text. This, coupled with resemblance that some narratives within the text share with those found in the Sanskrit story-collection called the Brḥatkathā, leads Cox to suggest that the Periyapurāṇam “gestur[es] emphatically to the non-local, indeed 'placeless' works of the Sanskrit literary and mythological imagination, or to Tamil works adhering to these same models.”

This possible appeal to the literary world of Sanskrit highlights a significant change in the Tamil Śaiva literary culture, in which the resources of the former were brought to bear

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110 Ibid., 90.
on the content of the latter to an extant not apparent in the earlier hymns.

Another manner in which the rhetoric of the Periyapurāṇam differs from that of the Tēvāram is that it makes a much stronger association between language, space, and empire. In an early verse, Cēkkilār writes “Within the borders of this sacred land whose praise I sing, the Tamil language flourishes. Claiming the whole world for himself, king Anapāyaṉ rules with a strong arm, so that all find shelter under his protection. To do justice to the greatness of this land is beyond my power.”¹¹¹ In this verse, the language of the text, and of the Śaiva poets and devotees that it eulogizes, is much more closely tied to land and the rulers that oversee it than in the Tēvāram hymns. The boundaries of the language community are therefore seen as those individuals belonging to the sovereign territories of the medieval Cōḷas. This is not to suggest that the Periyapurāṇam altogether abandons the concepts and rhetoric of language usage found in the earlier hymns. For example, in one verse describing the story of Appar, Cēkkilār says, “As an offering of praise in pure Tamil, he sang the hymn 'The one of the whom the Vedas speak,' and with loving devotion chanted “namaśivāya,” the Five Letter Prayer, as a protection in time of trouble.”¹¹² Here, once again, we see how Tamil is seen as being particularly well suited to convey devotional attitudes, while the use of the Sanskrit “five-syllable mantra” in this case confers protection upon the speaker.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the Periyapurāṇam seeks to closely associate the flourishing of Śaivism with the sovereignty of the Cōḷas. In addition to the aforementioned verse, Cēkkilār further praises the Kulottunka II by his patronage of the Nataraja temple, saying that he “won

¹¹² Ibid., 134.
enduring fame by decorating with pure red gold the holy court of the red Lord.” The text continually imagines Śaiva sacred space as that of the Cōla empire's heartland; thus, a lengthy early section of the text, consisting of 35 verses, is devoted to glorifying the Kaveri river delta. In one such verse, Čēkkiḻār states “the cool Kaveri is like the devotees of the Lord, for it too worships the supreme Lord with offerings of fragrant flowers and water at countless Śiva temples built upon the golden sand along its banks.” Here, the identification of a locus Tamil Śaiva pilgrimage sites with a specific region reflects a kind of logic altogether absent from the poems of the mūvar; it is clear that the sacred landscape that Čēkkiḻār imagines constitutes a region. That this region is the one in which “the Tamil language is in common use for speech and song” reflects the manner in which such a conception conforms to Feldhaus' definition of the term; here, the Kaveri delta is precisely an area accorded a special significance for a particular cultural and religious group. The close association of Śaiva sacred space with the imperial reach of the Cōlas is further suggested by the fact that Čēkkiḻār continually references the fact that the stories of the saints that he retells are imagined to have occurred within the boundaries of the empire. In one particularly striking example, Čēkkiḻār prefaces the story of Ėṉātinātan by saying, “The kings who rule the Cōla country sit enthroned beneath a white parasol studded with pearls. One of their predecessors once planted his tiger standard on the Himalayas” before relating the story of the saint who dwelt therein. Here, Čēkkiḻār re-imagines the boundaries of the empire beyond their historical limits; in doing so, he brings the story of this particular saint within the orbit of the regional-cultural formation that he

113 Ibid., 20.
114 Ibid., 24.
115 Ibid., v. 608.
Additionally, Cēkkiḻār places a greater emphasis than the Tēvāram hymns on the social character of Śaiva religious practice. In the Periyapurāṇam, the implied pilgrimages of the earlier poems are couched within larger narratives. The suggested pilgrimages of the earlier poems are further fleshed out in narratives in the Periyapurāṇam; for example, in narrating the story of Appar, Cēkkiḻār states, “In the course of his sacred service, the sage Vākīcar, prince of sweet Tamil, visited many shrines of the Lord. He offered worship there, wove garlands of Tamil to his name, and performed acts of service.”\(^{116}\) Furthermore, in Cēkkiḻār's narrative, pilgrimages are depicted as social affairs; for example, Cēkkiḻār describes a moment in which Appar and Campantar are said to have met during the former's pilgrimage to the latter's hometown as follows:

Now when Tirunāna Campantar heard of Aracar's arrival, he came out to meet him, surrounded by a throng of devotees. They were fired by but a single thought, the overwhelming desire to see the newcomer. Surrounded by his band of devotees and moved by deep affection, Tirnāvukkaracar came forward and made obeisance to Tirunāna Campantar's feet. He in turn, invoking the Lord with tears, took Aracar's hands in his, and addressed him simply as “My father.” “I am your servant,” Aracar replied.\(^{117}\)

Here, what is particularly significant about the meeting between these two figures is that they are surrounded by devotees themselves, highlighting the manner in which these saints were seen as the anchors of larger communities. Moreover, the intimacy with which Appar and Campantar greet one another conveys a sense of fraternity, idealizing the manner in which devotees relate to one another. That a pilgrimage serves as the context for such a meeting

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 135. “Vākīcar” is a Sanskritized form of “Nāvukkaracar” - “The Lord of the Tongue/Speech” - a common epithet of Appar.

\(^{117}\) Ibid., 138.
underscores the social dimension of that practice, a feature that is far less explicit in the actual poems of the saints themselves.

Regarding Cidambaram, the beginning of the text contains a lengthy hymn of praise to the priests (antaṅār) who live there. The existence of these verses so early in the text leads Paul Younger to conclude that “By composing his great epic in Citambarām temple, as if it were a divinely inspired work, and by starting it with praise of the Citambarām priests, he was also renewing the Śaiva tradition, and reconfirming the authority of Citambarām, which had come to be the one common denominator holding that tradition together over the centuries.”\(^\text{118}\) Given the importance of the Śaivism in Cōḷa court culture, as well as the possibility that Cēkkilār composed his epic at the Cidambaram temple grounds (a topic that I discuss in further detail in the following chapter), we see how the site also served as an important cultural and literary center. Moreover, the veneration of the saints who were described in the first section seems to have played an important role in Cōḷa religious culture. This veneration manifested itself not only in literature, but also in material culture; Vidya Dehejia notes that a hidden store-room at Cidambaram contained bronze sculptures of both gods and saints dating from 10th-13\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries, and that, at temples other than Cidambaram, the 63 Śaiva saints of the Periyapurāṇam were actively worshiped.\(^\text{119}\) The political importance of this process of canonization is summarized by Blake Wentworth, who claims:

The dominant model for asserting the order of history lay in the Cōḷa's professed creed of Śiva worship. As earlier texts were brought under the Śaiva mantle, nothing short of a

\(^\text{118}\) Paul Younger, *The Home of Dancing Śivan*, 217.

\(^\text{119}\) Vidya Dehejia, *Slaves of the Lord*, 139-141.
literary colonization took place as scholars close to the Cōḷa court specified a Tamil Śaiva canon. The deep commitment to understanding the past set the fortunes of Cōḷa rule within a broad, purposeful flow of time, proclaiming Cōḷa kings as the divine agents of Nataraja, Śiva in Citamparam, who through their perfect service and devotion to the dancing god were born on earth to usher in a new Golden Age.¹²⁰

Thus, as the temple at Cidambaram expanded in size, status, and political significance, it served as an important site in the production and content of court literature. While it is clear that the kings themselves were not objects of worship, the poetry of the Cōḷa court eulogized the rulers in much the same language that they used to describe the deity. Most significant to this analysis is the fact that both king and deity had their seat of power at Cidambaram. The court poetry of the 12th century, in contradistinction to the early medieval Śaiva hymns, was part of an elite discourse; Oṭṭakkūttar sang of the kings themselves, and even the Periyapurāṇam, which was a devotional work describing the activities of popular saints, was linked to royal patronage.

The Periyapurāṇam represents the culmination of the Tamil Śaiva tradition as it existed until the 12th century; it reaffirms the sense of community as based on language, region, and religious practice as born out in the Tēvāram hymns, while explicitly associating this community with the might of the Cola empire. Cekkilar’s epic thus represents one of the first attempts to give the collective memory of this community form, as his poem was the first to anchor the deeds of Śiva and his saintly devotees to the land they inhabited by assembling a grand narrative. This association between narrative, sacred space, and memory would

¹²⁰ Blake Wentworth, “Yearning for a Dreamed Real,” 132.
influence hundreds of other Tamil works for centuries to come.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has attempted to outline how a sacred landscape came to exist. From the 6th - 12th centuries, Śaiva poets played a significant role in this project, as they defined the most important sites in this landscape and laid the conceptual groundwork that would serve as the basis upon which a community of devotees was formed. In the latter half of this period, both the Tamil devotional poetry and the physical landscape itself were forever changed under the patronage of the Colas and the members of their court. What I have sought to demonstrate above is that the production of sacred space did not only involve the latter; its very sacrality was in large part constituted by the former. The Periyapurāṇam marks the culmination of all of these currents, as it glorified that dynasty while also continuing the process of community formation that began with the Tēvāram hymns.

All of these currents that resulted in the creation of the Tamil Śaiva sacred landscape would be remembered by devotees in the centuries that followed. At the same time, later writers engaging with this tradition – and especially those who wrote in Sanskrit – would find new ways of conceptualizing the boundaries of this community and its sacred landscape. The reorientation of these boundaries, always in ways that are unique to each individual text, would become a key feature of both sthalapurāṇas and talapurāṇams. If the Periyapurāṇam marks the beginning of a Tamil Śaiva tradition of collective memory as instantiated in purāṇic texts, it was the 14th century poet and theologian Umāpati Civācaryār who would set the precedent of composing this type of text that later poets would follow. It is to his work that this discussion now turns.
Chapter 2: “Tala” and “Purāṇam”: Fixing the Boundaries of Tamil Śaiva Time and Space in Late Medieval Purāṇas

Cēkkilār's 12th century Periyapurāṇam marks a watershed moment in the history of Tamil Śaiva literature in several respects. Alongside Kampan's Irāmavatāram, it set a new standard for Tamil court poetry with respect to its style of verse, its epic narrative sweep, and its standards for the description of places (such as, for instance, the descriptions of Tiruvārūr and Cidambaram with which the text opens). More significantly for the purposes of this chapter, however, it reflected a deep interest in both place and time. Even in the earliest layer of bhakti poetry in Tamil, the memory of the nāyaṇmār was explicitly connected to the many towns, villages, landscapes and cities that they visited, but it was in Cēkkilār's hagiography that, for the first time, all of these places and stories were bound together in a single epic work. Furthermore, in Cēkkilār's vision, the space inhabited by these devotional exemplars was co-extensive with the boundaries of the Tamil-speaking world as well as the sovereign territory of the Čōḷas. In short, the Periyapurāṇam is the first Tamil Śaiva literary work to anchor a sense of Śaiva collective memory to individual places and to the region that they constituted.

In all of these respects, the Periyapurāṇam would influence other authors of Tamil literature for centuries to come. By the 14th century, Tamil authors would begin to compose other purāṇams, especially ones devoted to a variety of Śaiva temples in South Asia. The production of this spatially oriented literature coincided with the rise of new sectarian institutions – especially monasteries affiliated with the Śaiva Siddhānta school and, from perhaps the 15th century onward, others constituted by Vedānta-influenced Smārta Śaivas. As
these groups grew in influence, they also sought to formalize the boundaries of their traditions, outlining exactly what it meant to be a Śaiva. In this chapter, I examine some of the texts that these groups produced, and argue that the purāṇas they composed helped define the boundaries of their communities. I begin by focusing on the career of the 14th century theologian Umāpati Civācaryār, perhaps the most famous medieval Śaiva Tamil writer and a very influential Śaiva Siddhāntin, who played a key role in the canonization of early medieval Tamil bhakti poetry as a corpus. Not only was Umāpati an influential Tamil writer, but he also read and wrote much in Sanskrit; this, too, marks a new beginning in Tamil literature, as Śaiva poets and theologians writing in both languages would produce a new hybrid literary culture. In the second part of this chapter, I focus on an early modern Sanskrit purāṇa called the Śivarahasya, which unifies Tamil bhakti and advaita Vedānta and also reflects the importance its redactors placed on sacred spaces.

My reading of these texts is motivated by a single guiding question: how are narratives of spaces and their pasts, as expressed in a myriad of purāṇic texts, used to articulate sectarian boundaries? In what follows, I show that one of the most significant ways in which these boundaries were articulated was in their relationship to spaces – by which I mean both individual shrines (such as the Naṭarāja temple at Cidambaram, to which Umāpati’s talapurāṇam was devoted) as well as regions (by which I mean both the landscape of Śaiva shrines praised in the earlier bhakti literature as well as a pan-Indian network of shrines of which some of them were said to be a part). To state this point simply, in all of these texts, certain spaces are represented as anchoring the communities that the texts spoke to.

**Umāpati and the Tamil purāṇam**
Umāpati was a prolific author of both Tamil and Sanskrit texts; in this section, I will focus primarily on two of his Tamil works. First, I examine the Čēkkilār Nāyaṉār Purāṇam, in which he describes how the Periyapurāṇam was composed as a response to the “lie-filled text of roguish Jain monks” (specifically, the famous Tamil poem Cīvakacintāmaṇi), as said monks were misleading the Cōla ruler Aṉapāyaṉ, who, as the patron of the Periyapurāṇam, himself becomes a kind of mythic figure within subsequent Tamil Śaiva texts. I argue that this work engages in “boundary formation” on sectarian grounds, not only in its vilification of Jainism, but also in its establishment of the continuity between the early bhakti poets, Čēkkilār, and Śaiva Siddhānta. The second text that I will focus on in this section is Čēkkilār's Kōyirpurāṇam, which is a talapurāṇam of Cidambaram and is based on the Sanskrit Cidambaramāhātmya, though it is not quite a “translation” of the sort that I focus on in Chapter 3. This text is very much a Śaiva Siddhānta talapurāṇam, advancing the theology of that school (about which I say more below) as the proper means of engaging in worship at that temple.

There are a few arguments that I will make regarding this body of texts. The work of Umāpati seems to mark the beginning of a proper Tamil purāṇic tradition. This involves, first, the incorporation of Sanskrit idioms of describing the past into Tamil poetry (as seen in Umāpati's adaptation of the Cidambaramāhātmya), and second, a real investment in the literary cultivation of the past to offer a kind of precedent for sectarian interests. With respect to the latter, I hope to use this chapter to offer a kind of historical explanation for why purāṇas, and those that describe places in particular, seem to become so popular in mid-2nd millennium South India, as the commencement of their production coincides with the rise of the aforementioned monastic institutions.
Before proceeding, it is first necessary to describe the milieu in which Umāpati rose to prominence, that is to say, to describe the rise of Śaiva Siddhānta in the Tamil-speaking south. Karen Pechilis has pointed out that, at least as early as the 7th century, Śaiva Siddhāntins were consulted in the construction of temples by the Pallava rulers in northern Tamil Nadu, and in later centuries, by the Cōḷas who reigned in the Kaveri delta further southward. Pechilis further points out that it is by the 12th century that members of this sect began writing in the Tamil language, at a time when the once pan-South Asian network of Śaiva Siddhāntins – who wrote primarily in Sanskrit – began to weaken. Regardless of the reasons for this apparent weakening, what is clear is that from the late medieval period onward, a distinctly Southern form of Śaiva Siddhānta began to flourish, as authors of this school connected their tradition to that of the earlier bhakti hymnists.

Nowhere is this trend towards the localization of the tradition more evident than in Umāpati’s writing. In all three of the purānic texts attributed to him (which, in addition to the two works mentioned above, includes the Tirumuṟai Kaṇṭa Purāṇam – a text that describes the discovery of the corpus of bhakti poetry), the city of Cidambaram with its central Śaiva shrine is described as the locus of this tradition. Furthermore, he composed a lengthy Sanskrit stotra to Śiva as Naṭarāja, entitled Kuṅcitaṅghristava (“Praise of the Curled Foot”). I argue that the purānas composed by Umāpati mark a significant moment in the history of Tamil religious

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121 Karen Pechilis Prentiss, “A Tamil Lineage for Śaiva Siddhānta Philosophy,” History of Religions 35.3 (1996): 234. Specifically, Pechilis mentions that the Pallava ruler Mahendravaraman I is described in an inscription as “a follower of Śaiva Siddhānta,” and that the Cōḷa ruler Rajaaraja I consulted Śaiva Siddhantin agamic texts in constructing the Brhadisvar temple at Thanjavur.

122 Karen Pechilis Prentiss, The Embodiment of Bhakti, 134. Pechilis argues that two factors – the rise in popularity of advaitic theology (which opposed the dualist position of early Śaiva Siddhānta) and Muslim incursions into Northern India – led to representatives of this school finding a safe haven in the Tamil-speaking South.

123 For an extensive study of this particular poetic work, see David Smith, The Dance of Śiva: Religion, art and poetry in South India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
literature, as the localization of place and time in a distinctly Tamil poetic idiom expressed in these texts initiated a new orientation towards sacred space in South India. These purāṇas served to delineate the sectarian boundaries of both Tamil Śaivism broadly and Śaiva Siddhānta specifically, as I explain in what follows.

The chief purpose of the Čēkkiḻār Nāyaṉār Purāṇam is to relate the narrative of the composition of the Periyapurāṇam. The central moment of this narrative occurs when Čēkkiḻār travels to Cidambaram to compose the text itself; after consulting the earlier texts that listed and praised the nāyaṉmār (namely, Cuntarar’s Tirutoṇṭatokai and Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi’s Tirutoṇṭar Tiruvantāti), he is inspired by the voice of Śiva himself:

\[
\begin{align*}
&ōrulako voruticalyō vorupatiyō tammi \\
&lorumarapo vorupeyarō vorukālan tāṇō \\
pērulaki lorumaṅeṛi tarunkataiyō paṅmaip \\
perunkataiyō pērōṅgō vallavē yitaṅai \\
yērulake lāmnuntō taṅkariya vaṅneṅ \\
tīraī vaṅmuta latiyěttuk koṭuttarulak koṇtu \\
pārulaki nāmakanīṅ reṭuttukkai niṭṭap \\
pāṭimuṭit taṅartoṇṭar cīrparava vallār
\end{align*}
\]

[Were they from] just one world, one direction, one place? [Did they have] just one body, one name, one lifetime? In the wide world, can their story be related in one continuous narrative? Or do they have one large, multifaceted story? Does it have a single name? Not so; Thus, the Lord graciously provided the first line, “All the beings in the world...;” Saraswati, the Goddess of speech, came to this world and extended her hand; Čekkilar, the master of praising devotees in poetry, sang and completed his work.\(^{124}\)

Umāpati thus provides a miraculous narrative for the creation a text that, by his time, had

\(^{124}\) These are the opening words of the Periyapurāṇam. Ummapati Cīvacaryar, Čēkkiḻār Nayantar Purāṇam, (Jaffna: Jaffna Tamil Books Publication and Sale Society, 1966): 45.
achieved a canonical status. As is almost always the case with purāṇic narratives, the story presented here describes the intercession of the divine in human affairs, thus providing a precedent for or justification of a particular practice or teaching. The Čēkkiḻār Nāyaṇār Purāṇam utilizes the purāṇic idiom in order to glorify the Periyapurāṇam and its author; through its narrative and poetic flourish, it affords the text and author themselves a place of emotionally charged reverence. As I explain more fully in the following chapter, Sanskrit purāṇas are often presented as authorless, placeless texts, instead being the apparent product of an original revelation passed down through a lineage of mythic interlocutors. The Tamil purāṇas, such as those composed by Umāpati, differ in this regard, and we can therefore interrogate the manner in which his text articulates the boundaries of the Tamil Śaiva around specific lines.

One of the principal ways in early Tamil Śaiva purāṇas articulated sectarian boundaries was through the invocation of polemics, especially against Jains. As I described in the previous chapter, the Periyapurāṇam includes several narratives in which Jains are the recipients of violent reprisals on the part of Śaivas. While it is possible that Jains and Śaivas competed for royal patronage in Čēkkiḻār’s own time, as Indira Peterson has pointed out, it is altogether less clear that this was the case in the 14th century; according to Peterson, Umāpati’s anti-Jain polemic in the Čēkkiḻār Nāyaṇār Purāṇam reflects “the continuing importance of Jains in Tamil Śaiva sectarian histories,” and represents the “ossification” of a kind of nationalist rhetoric found in the earlier literature that Umāpati sought to glorify.


How, then, does Umāpati represent Jains in his hagiography of Cēkkilār? The central problem in the brief narrative that the Cēkkilār Nāyānār Purāṇam relates is that the Jains have led the Cōla king Anapāyaṇ astray by composing the Cīvakacintāmaṇi. Thus an early verse reads:

\begin{verbatim}
valavaṇuṅkuṇ ṭamaṇpuraṭṭut tiruṭṭuccintā
maṇikkataiyai meyyenṟu varicaikāra
vuḷamakilṇtu palapaṭappā rāṭṭikēṭka
vupayakula maṇivilakkān cēkkilārkān
ṭilavaraṇaṇ raṇainōkkic camaṇarpoyṇā
litumaṟumaikātim maikkumarrē
vaḷamaruvu kiṇraciva kataiyimmaikku
maṟumaikku muṟutiyeṇa vaḷavaṅkēṭṭu
\end{verbatim}

The king, believing the deceptive, false story fashioned by bastard [Jains] called “cintāmaṇi” to be true, avidly coveted it; Delighted, he abundantly praised it and listened to it; Seeing the young king [do so], Cēkkilār, the jewel-lamp of two families, told him: “This is a false text of the Jains; it does not support one in this life nor in the next. The Śaiva stories, which bestow auspiciousness, safeguard one in this life and in the next”; the king listened.\textsuperscript{127}

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of this verse is the sheer force of the polemic, evident in the description of the Jains as “bastards” (kuṇṭar). Beyond these verses, and a brief mention of the Cīvakacintāmaṇi towards the end of this poem, the Jains do not figure prominently in this particular work. Nonetheless, this verse seems to support Peterson’s broader claim that the memory of anti-Jain polemics served an important purpose in the rhetoric of later Śaivism.

What is additionally significant about this particular text is the emphasis it places on two sites in particular – Kanchipuram and Cidambaram – which, together, would become the

\textsuperscript{127} Cēkkilār Nayanar Purāṇam, 19
two most important sacred centers of Tamil Śaivism; the narrative of the text is mostly situated in the latter town, while the former is mentioned in an early verse, which describes Śiva in the form of “kacci yēkāmpar tirumēṇi” - an explicit reference to the shrine of Ekambaranatha in that city. The same verse also mentions the milieu that Umāpati addressed, as it praises “The Velalar leaders who are much praised throughout the world” (vēlāṇ ṭalaivar perum pukaḷulakil ralaítattanaṟṟē).\textsuperscript{128} From these references, we get some sense of who the participants in the Śaiva literary world of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century were – wealthy, if non-brahmin patrons of Śaiva institutions centered in these two cities.

It is clear that members of the Velalar caste played a very important role in the dissemination of Śaiva thought and practice from the inception of the Tamil Śaiva bhakti tradition. In the Porulatikāram of the Tolkāppiyam, a late ancient work (likely composed sometime in the first half of the first millennium of the common era) on the cankam-style poetics, the Velalars are described as an agricultural community who nonetheless occasionally perform the functions of the warrior castes (i.e., warfare and sovereignty).\textsuperscript{129} Of the 63 saints mentioned in the Periyapurāṇam, 13 are Velalars, more than any other caste group.\textsuperscript{130} Throughout the late medieval and early modern periods, members of Velalar communities would occupy important positions in both Śaiva temples and monasteries. Perhaps the most significant change to the landscape of Tamil Śaivsim after the end of the reign of the Cōḷas was the rise of these monasteries (Sanskrit maṭha, Tamil maṭam); these institutions would\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{129} M.G.S. Narayanan, “Social History from the Text Book of Poetics in the Sangam Age (A Study of Tolkappiyam - Section IV. Porulatikaram),” Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 51 (1990): 100.
continue to grow in influence through the seventeenth century, when they came to be patronized by the members of the Nayaka courts, especially in the region surrounding the erstwhile royal center of Thanjavur. These early modern mathas were run largely by Velalars, who composed Śaiva literature almost exclusively in Tamil.\footnote{Kathleen Koppedrayer, “The Varnasramacandrika and the Sudra’s Right to Preceptorhood: The Social Background of a Philosophical Debate in Late Medieval South India,” \textit{Journal of Indian Philosophy} 19.3 (1991): 297.}

Much of what is known about Umāpati comes from hagiographies; indeed, Umāpati's life story seems to have inspired a purānic tradition of its own. Two such hagiographies - the Rājendrapura Māhātmyam and the Pārthavana Māhātmyam – were preserved by members of some of these very Velalar-run Śaiva monasteries. Nevertheless, Umāpati himself was not a Velalar - he is identified, along with his guru Maṟaiñānacampantar - in both of these texts as a brahman Dīkṣitar. The purānic biographies of Umāpati are interesting in their own right, as they provide us with some insight into the trajectory of the development of Śaiva Siddhānta, and Śaivism more broadly, in South India over the course of the second millennium. Curiously, for works termed “purāṇa,” these texts offer relatively little in the way of mythic or divine narratives; instead, they are predominantly concerned with the details of Umāpati's lineage, education, and intellectual career (crediting him with the production of “fifteen śāstras in the Tamil language,”\footnote{\textit{Parthavanamahatmyam}, in \textit{Sri Umapati Śivacarya: His Life, Works, and Contribution to Śaivism}, ed. S.S. Janaki (Chennai: Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 1996): 190} for instance).

There are nonetheless several interesting details in these purāṇas that help us better understand Umāpati's place in the Śaiva landscape as it existed several centuries after his life. For example, the beginning of Umāpati's section of the \textit{Pārthavana Māhātmyam} makes a brief
mention of Śaṅkara, as the interlocutor (incidentally, also named Śaṅkara) tells the narrator, “previously, you said that the great ascetic Sankara, born into a family of sages at Cidambaram, composed the commentary on advaita.” The fact that a Śaiva Siddhānta text would simultaneously pay homage to the advaitin Śaṅkara (and locate him in Cidambaram) alongside Umāpati reflects a phenomenon that I discuss later in this chapter: by the second half of the second millennium, South Indian Śaivism came to be heavily influenced by advaita and the Pārthavana Māhātmyam reflects this later synthesis. This does not, however, necessarily reflect a tendency towards the brahmanization of this tradition; as David Smith points out, the Rājendrapura Māhātmyam contains a narrative that relates the story of how Umāpati, at Śiva's behest, provides initiation to a low-caste woodcutter named Sūta. This Sūta is also mentioned in passing (solely by name, in a single line of a verse, as one of those whom Umāpati initiated) in the Kuñcitāṅghristava, leading Smith to speculate that the purāṇic narrative may have in fact had a historical basis. The fact that non-brahmans could be initiated into Śaiva Siddhānta monastic orders is evident from other early modern sources; Koppedrayer, for instance, has examined a Sanskrit text that argues for the right of Śūdras to conduct temple rituals.

The potential historicity of the Rājendrapura Māhātmyam also raises further questions about the nature of the past as related in purāṇic texts, which, as stated at the outset, is one of the major concerns of my dissertation. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that purāṇic narratives establish a relationship to the past that is more akin to “collective memory” than to history. While I believe that this is indeed the case for all of the texts that I discuss here,

133 Ibid., 190.

134 David Smith, Dance of Śiva, 115.

Smith’s observations lends itself to a very basic question regarding these texts – to what extent do they relate historical facts? I address this question of historicity and its relationship to purāṇa more fully in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

I mention all of this in order to understand the relationship that Umāpati had with these new Śaiva orders. Aside from the simple fact that much of his writing pays homage to his own Śaiva Siddhānta lineage, it also alludes to the presence of these institutions in the Kaveri delta and occasionally highlights the broad scope of their influence. In a seemingly novel move, Umāpati’s Cēkkiḻār Nāyaṇār Purāṇam makes occasional mention of these maṭams, mentioning them alongside the “three thousand brahmans of Tillai” who are much celebrated in the Periyapurāṇam, as in the following verse:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{vaḷavarkōṉvara vaṟintutillaimarai} & \\
\text{yōrumvaṇmaimaṭa patikaluṇ} & \\
\text{piḷavukoṇtamati nutaṇmaṭantawaiyaru} & \\
\text{marṣumullaperi yōrkaluṇ} & \\
\text{kaḷavilatamoli koṭipurāṇakatai} & \\
\text{ceytakaṅkakula tilakaruṇ} & \\
\text{taḷavamālaiyapa yaṉaiyetirtinjīya} & \\
\text{cāravācipala cāṅrīnār} & 
\end{align*}
\]

Hearing that sound of the king’s arrival [in procession to Cidambaram], the brahmins of Tillai, the virtuous heads of monasteries, women whose foreheads resembled the crescent-moon, and other notable persons, along with that tilaka of the Gangai family, who composed the purāṇa with undeceitful words faced Anapayan adorned with golden jasmine flowers and spoke sweet words of blessing to him.\(^\text{136}\)

What is notable about this verse is that it speaks of their being “heads of monasteries” (maṭapati) present at Cidambaram itself; this is possibly a reference to the very institution with

\(^{136}\text{Cēkkiḻār Nayyār Purāṇam, 53.}\)
which Umāpati, being a Śaiva Siddhāntin active in that town, himself belonged, but there is little else in the Cēkkilār Nāyaṇār Purāṇam that would allow us to identify who he meant by this reference. Nevertheless, to mention these individuals alongside the oft-praised brahmins of Tillai suggests that he sought to include these institutions in an established tradition of Tamil Śaivism, an effort that, as I will explain later, is present in his other works. A later verse makes this connection between the maṭams and the earlier tradition of Śaiva bhakti more explicit:

\[
\begin{align*}
tellu \ tiraikkaṭaṉ \ mītu \ mitanta \ tiruttōni \\
vaḷḷalai \ yaṉpuce \ yaṉpar \ maṭanka \ toṟumpālar \\
mella \ viruntu \ mīḷaṟṟu \ purāṇa \ viruttattaik \\
kīḷaikal \ pāṭi \ uraippaṉa \ kēṭpaṉa \ meyppūvai
\end{align*}
\]

In every monastery where the benevolent hero of Tiruttoni [Campantar] which floats on the clear waves of the ocean [at the time of the cosmic flood at the beginning of creation] is loved boys softly prattle the verses of the purāṇa Parrots repeat its tune, and mynah birds listen.\(^{137}\)

In describing the fact that children – perhaps referring to young monastic students – recite the verses of Cēkkilār's purāṇam, in those places where the Campantar is celebrated (in his commentary on the text, Arumuka Navalar explicit describes these matams as “places where the Tēvāram is sung”), Umāpati places the matam as one of the primary sites in which Tamil Śaiva bhakti is disseminated. The fact that verse does not explicitly locate these monasteries suggests the broad scope of their influence in Umāpati's imagination, as the sound of Śaiva texts resounds throughout the surrounding landscape.

Landscape is a much more prominent theme in the second of Umāpati's texts that I discuss here – the Kōiyṟpurāṇam. As I mentioned above, this text is ostensibly a translation of a

\(^{137}\) Ibid., 61.
Sanskrit sthalapurāṇa devoted to Cidambaram called the Cidambaramāhātmyam, although it differs from its source in many significant respects. While I examine the translation of Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas into Tamil in some detail in the following chapter, here I simply wish to highlight the fundamental difference between the two versions – the Tamil texts, in contrast to the Sanskrit, are original poetic works attributed to the specific human authors (as opposed to the mythic interlocutors that appear in the Sanskrit texts) that place a great deal of emphasis on aesthetics.

This fundamental difference is evident from the introductory preamble (pāyiram) of the text. In his pāyiram, Umāpati pays homage to his poetic and devotional predecessors, effectively praising a Tamil Śaiva canon. For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tiruñāṇa campantar ceyyatiruvati pōrri} \\
yaruṉāvuk karacarpīrā ṇalarkamala patampōrri \\
karumāla vemaiyāluṇi kaṇṇutalōṇ valintanṭa \\
perumāḷpūn kuḻalpōrri piṟaṅkiyavaṇ parkalpōrri
\end{align*}
\]

I praise the rosy feet of the blessed Ṛṇacampantar,
I praise the blooming lotus-feet of Lord Nāvukkaracar, the compassionate,
I praise the flower-feet of the great one who was forcibly enslaved
by the god with the eye on his forehead, who rules over us so that our cycle of rebirth may be destroyed.\(^\text{138}\)

The Ĉekkiḷār Nāyaṇār Purāṇam contains a similar verse praising Ĉekkiḷār:

\[
\begin{align*}
tillaivā lantaṇārē mutalākac cirpaṭaitta \\
tollaivatān tiruttoṇṭa tokaiyatīyār patampōrri \\
yollaiyavar purāṇakatai ulakaṟya viritturaiṭṭa \\
celvamali kuṟṟattār cēkkilā raṭipōrri
\end{align*}
\]

I praise the blessed feet of the devotees described in the ancient and praiseworthy Tiruttoṇṭatokai, foremost among those who

\(^{138}\) Umapati Civacaryar, Koyirpurāṇam, 6.
dwell in Cidambaram,
I praise the feet of Cēkkilār from Kunrattur, abounding in wealth,
who composed the purānic legend of the prior ones, making them known to the world.\textsuperscript{139}

Not only does Umāpati praise these earlier poet-saints in the \textit{Koyirpurāṇam}, but he also includes a hymn of praise to the Cōḷa Anapayan, the patron of the Periyapurāṇam mentioned in the \textit{Cēkkilār Nāyaṇār Purāṇam}:

\begin{verbatim}
ōṇṟiyacī riravikula muvantarulī yulakuyyat
tunrupukaḷt tirunīṟuc cōḷaṇeṇa muṭicūti
maṅraṇaṭan toḻetellai vālarkanaka mayamākki
venṟipunai yaṇapāyaṇ vilāṇkiyapūṅ kaḷaḷpōṛṛi
\end{verbatim}

I praise the radiant flower-feet of victorious ĀṆapāyaṇ, who was graciously born in the illustrious solar dynasty to protect the world, who has attained fame as the Cōḷa who wore sacred ash on his head, who worshiped the Dance at the Golden Hall, who increased the brightness of the Hall by adorning it with gold.\textsuperscript{140}

In some respects, Umāpati’s verses in praise of prior Śaiva exemplars resembles an established practice in premodern Indian poetry; many poems composed in Sanskrit and other vernaculars begin with a \textit{kavipraśamsā} (praise of poets), which hail any given poet’s literary influences. The convention of praising earlier poets was, according to Sheldon Pollock introduced in Sanskrit poetry, by around the 7\textsuperscript{th} century; Pollock points out that this was one way in which “a poet is affiliating himself to a cultural lineage and placing himself within it.”\textsuperscript{141}

I would argue that Umāpati accomplishes something similar here; and the praise of the most

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Cēkkilār Nayanar Purāṇam}, 5.

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Koyirpurāṇam}, 9.


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significant Śaiva poets would eventually become an obligatory feature of subsequent talapurāṇams. Yet there are some key differences as well; all of the figures that Umāpati mentions are celebrated in hagiography, and he includes no mention of Tamil poets who are outside of this tradition. His payirams instead suggest the beginnings of a bounded Tamil Śaiva canon, in which the eulogized are not only influential poets, but are devotional exemplars as well.

More broadly, the inclusion of poet-saints and the medieval Cōḷas in the pāyirams of his poems reflects Umāpati’s attempt to situate the Śaiva Siddhantins as heirs to the legacy of Tamil Śaiva bhakti. This synthesis of Śaiva Siddhānta and bhakti is evident in the narrative of the poem as Koyirpurāṇam as well. The text consists of five different chapters, together relating four different narratives connected to the Śaiva shrine at Cidambaram. The first relates the story of Vyākkirapāta (“the tiger-footed one”), who undertakes a pilgrimage to Cidambaram at the behest of his father. This chapter, the Vyakirapatacarukkam, pertains to a young brahman who, upon completion of his studies, asks his father how best to engage in religious practice. Umāpati relates the conversation as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{coṇṇamoji koṇṭiraivan tōnrimakīn tutilaṇam} \\
pāṇjukena maḷamunikkup pāṃruḷum parappiramam \\
caṇṇitiyan reṇṇakoṇṭa ravaṇkurāikā nēṟṟalu \\
maṇṇitamāy niṟḷumīṭa muḷatenuṟṟa māmuṇivaṇ
d\end{align*}
\]

Listening to his father's words, [the young brahman] asked: Please tell me - in which places is the Lord manifest, dwelling in delight?”
The great sage replied to the young one: “To believe that the entire world is not the abode of the Supreme Spirit reveals a lack of merit accrued from one's austerities.
Yet, there are places on Earth where he is manifest [in some
embodied form].

ñālattā yirakōṭi narrāṇa muḷavarri
ñēlattā ṇalamāra viṭāṅkoṇṭa velīttillai
mūlattā nattoiyāy muḷaitteljunta cīvaliṅkak
kōlattā niṅpućai kolvāṇen ruraiceytu

There are ten billion sacred places on Earth; of them
you must worship the Lord
Who has established himself in beautiful Tillai [Cidambaram]
rising as a linga of light illuminating the mūlāsthāna.

As is the case for virtually every sthalapurāṇa (or talapurāṇam), the purpose of the text
is made clear at its outset – among all the sacred places of the world, there is one (in this case,
Cidambaram) that is the most efficacious means of salvation. The young brahmin then decides
to embark on a pilgrimage to this place, and his journey is described by Umāpati in elaborate
verses, such as the following (cited in the Introduction):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{moliyum moliyum parico} \ řilatā \\
\text{muṇṇān maraiyō tamulaĩ kiyakān} \\
\text{valiyum vaiyum matuvār putuvi} \\
\text{vācan takavi ciyavār kuvalai} \\
\text{kaliyum kaliyum pativan talapor} \\
\text{kamalaĩ kaṁmalaĩ kalaiyūn kayanir} \\
\text{moliyum viliyum maṉamuṅ kuḷirap} \\
\text{putumā muṇikaṇṭ ōpukaḷṇ taṇaṅē}
\end{align*}
\]

Passing through the forest path,
which resounded continuously like the ocean,
like the sound of the four ancient vedas, never
diminishing,
And passing through a marshy brackwater,
buzzing with young bees drinking the nectar from tall,
frAGRANT water-lilies,
The young brahman came to a pond
with blooming golden lotuses,
which dispels one's blemishes [malam],

\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Koyirpurāṇam}, 22-23.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 25.
and praised it,  
with eyes flowing with tears and a heart brimming with joy.¹⁴⁴

In this way, the place is glorified not only for its theological significance – which, as the young brahman’s father explains, results from the fact that God abides there in some manifest form – but also an account of its physical beauty. As I stated earlier, the Tamil verse contains a great deal of phonoaesthetic elaboration (Sanskrit śabdālaṅkāra, Tamil collaṅi, here exemplified by the repetition of the same phoneme at the beginning of each line to represent different words); Tamil talapurāṇams glorified place not only through narrative and theology, but also through aesthetics. Additionally, the reference to the pond that “dispels one's blemishes” (malam), by which the Siddhantin refers to one's sensory experience of the world which is imagined as a form of bondage (more on this below), is suggestive of Umāpati’s theological commitments. Though this term appears in earlier literature such as the Periyapurāṇam, it is used more frequently as a technical term in Śaiva Siddhānta theology.¹⁴⁵ The pond that Umāpati describes in this verse is in fact that Śivaganga tank which forms a major part of the Naṭarāja temple complex, the praise of which constitutes the lesson of the verse itself – simply, that one should bathe in the tank. What I wish to highlight here is the manner in which this message is related, as it is couched in poetic language with explicit reference to Śaiva Siddhānta principles. This is also apparent from Umāpati’s auto-commentary on the opening verses of the poem; according to Paul Younger, a part of the fifth verse of the text reads “[I] praise the lotuslike foot which took me from my confused state;” Umāpati comments that by “confused state,” he explicitly means “the soul when mixed with the āṇava malam or ego sense,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 27.
which is one of the three *malams* that keep the soul from achieving its pure state.”

Even outside of this commentary, Umāpati’s frequent employment of the technical terminology of Śaiva Siddhānta throughout the Koyirurāṇam unambiguously reflects the theological tradition from which it originated.

At the heart of Umāpati’s *Koyirurāṇam* is the vivid description of Śiva's dance, to which the Naṭarāja temple owes its name, and it is in this chapter that Umāpati most clearly expresses the experience of temple worship as influenced by the poetics of Tamil bhakti. It begins with a vivid description of the expectant multitude of devotees – both human and divine – anticipating the commencement of Śiva's dance:

```
karavaiyāṉ varavu pārkkuṉ karriṉa meṇavuṅ kārcē
ruṇaiyāṉa vaṇṇantu nōkkī yōynta puḷḷēṉavu mōṅkar
ceṟimukkuṅ Ṽuḷavu kēṭkuṅ tikāṁṕiṅ riralum pōla
viṟaiyavāṅ āṭamē cintī tītaittiṅăn kaṭattiṅ kāṅkal
```

Like a group of calves expecting the arrival of the milch-cow,
Like ṍaṭaka birds wearied by gazing at dark clouds, looking for their sustenance,
Like a flock of peacocks listening for the drum-roll of thunder resounding from clouds massing on mountaintops,
They passed the remaining days thinking only of the Lord's dance.

Alongside verses such as this, which depict the love that the assembled devotees have for Śiva, are others that suggest that Śiva imparts to his devotees the form of salvific knowledge to which Śaiva Siddhantins aspire. Consider, for example, the following verse, in

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146 Paul Younger, *Home of Dancing Śivan*, 178. Interestingly, Arumuka Navalar offers a different reading of this verse that seemingly disregards the auto-commentary Younger mentions, as he takes this phrase to mean “I praise the beautiful foot that rescued me from the (endless ocean of) rebirth;” perhaps taking the term Younger translates as “confused state” (viravi) to actually mean “birth” (piravi).

147 *Koyirurāṇam* 109. The Ṙaṭaka bird is believed to be fed by rain, and peacocks often engage in mating displays during the rainy season.
which the two protagonists of the first half of the Koyirpurāṇam (Vyakkirapata and Patancali) witness Śiva's dance:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{enñaruñ kātal kūru miruvaruñ kāṇa ŋañak} \\
\text{kaññinai nalka munñaī kārīru kalīvr řiṇna} \\
\text{vaññamen rařiya vārā valaōli mañrub ōtō} \\
\text{ṭannařī pātu kino vānanta niruttañ kaŋtār}
\end{align*}
\]

When the Lord bestowed on those two, who were consumed with unimaginable desire, the eye of knowledge, so that they might see [his dance], their prior ignorance (malam) vanished, and they saw the Dance of Bliss that the gracious Lord performs with his Goddess in the Hall glowing with an unfathomable light growing unimaginably bright.\(^{148}\)

Umāpati's mention of light dispelling darkness, in Arumuka Navalar's view, is an explicit reference to the "āṉava malam," which, as mentioned above, is one of the three impurities (along with māyā/māyai and karma/kaŋma) that must be eliminated in order to achieve salvation. Anava (sometimes translated as "ignorance")\(^{149}\) is a pre-existent condition, sometimes likened (in an earlier generation of scholarship) to an "original sin," that undergirds the other two malams. In this verse, the experience of viewing the deity in the temple shrine is not only emotionally charged with the loving sentiment of bhakti, but also acts as a means of achieving the ultimate aim of Śaiva Siddhānta practice.

The majority of the chapter is devoted to the beauty of Śiva's dance. As often seen in hymns of praise (stotras) to temple deities, these verses offer a vivid description of the

\(^{148}\) Ibid., 113. Arumuka Navalar suggests that the phrase "munnaí kar irul" (literally, something like "prior black darkness") means "The āṉava malam, which is like a beginningless deep darkness" (anātiyūlla kariya irulpōḷum āṉavamalam).

\(^{149}\) For an example of this earlier scholarship, see Ananda Coomaraswamy, "Śaiva Sculptures – Recent Acquistions," *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 20.118 (1922):17.
enshrined deity from foot to head. Consider, for instance, the following rather straightforward
description of Śiva's head:

ōṅkiya kamalac cevvi yoḻimuka malarun kaṅkaḷ
pūṅkuḷa lumaiyai nōkkum puranamum puruvap porpum
pāṅkamar nutalum pinnāḷ paṭarcaṭaḷ parappum pāṃpu
nīṅkarun tāru nīru nilavumē nilavu nīrum

With his bright face glowing with the beauty of the finest, most
exquisite lotus,
With eyes that moved, gazing at Umā with flowers in her tresses,
With lovely eyebrows, and spreading matted locks falling behind
him,
Adorned with a serpent, his customary garland of [cassia]
flowers, the moon, the river [Ganga] and the sacred ash smeared
on his body.\textsuperscript{150}

The description of the body of the deity is commonly featured in a wide variety of Hindu
religious poetry, but what Umāpati's talapurāṇam captures is somewhat different – in other
verses, he speaks of the Śiva's dance in lively, animated terms. The following verse reflects
some aspects of the sensorium that Umāpati evokes in his description of Śiva's dance:

naṭamuyal virakun tāḷa katiyunal larulāḷ perra
vaṭakuva ṭaṅaiya tōḷka ṭāyira muṭaiya vāṇaṇ
cuṭarviṭu kaṭakka kaiyā roneypa paṇmukatta
kuṭamulā velu muḷakkaṅ kuṟaikaṭaṅ muḷakkaṅ koḷḷa

Bāṇa, with a thousand shoulders resembling the northern
mountain,
Through Śiva's grace,
adquired knowledge of the skill of dance technique, and the tāḷa
and gati rhythms;
When with hands ornamented with bracelets, he struck the
many-headed kuṭamulāvụ drum,
Beating “tōml,” it reverberated with the roar of the ocean.\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 115.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 111. Banasura, a demon with a thousand sets of arms (who is thus particularly well suited to being a
drummer) is much celebrated in Śaiva literature, especially for his role in the origin myth of the “banalinga,” a
smooth stone that is found at the bottom of the Narmada river and that is a prized object of worship in many
Tamil Śaiva purāṇas. “Tala” and “gati” are technical terms related to music.
Thus, what Umāpati captures in this chapter is the joyous, ecstatic experience of an audience as they witness the most significant event of the Naṭarāja temple's past – the very dance from which it takes its name. It is this event, more than all others mentioned in the Koyirpurāṇam, that accords Cidambaram its prestige, and thus it forms the core of Umāpati's text as well.

Paul Younger rightly points out that the chapter on Naṭarāja's dance is not necessarily an accurate reflection of daily temple worship as it exists today. Instead, he argues that the final chapter of the text, which describes two festivals in the months of Maḻkaḻi and Āṉi in the Tamil calendar that celebrate Śiva's dance, more accurately reflects temple worship as it actually existed (and as it continues to be practiced).\textsuperscript{152} If the chapter on Naṭarāja in the Koyirpurāṇam is primarily concerned with the ecstatic joy of the audience viewing Śiva's dance, the chapter on the festival contains more in the way of practical detail, outlining the procedures undertaken by the king Hiranyavarman and the assembled priests (who include Patañcali, Vyākkirapāta, and the three thousand brahmans of Tillai, all celebrated earlier in the text) in preparation for this event. Younger's conclusion regarding the relative fidelity of this section of Umāpati's poem to procedural matters is drawn from passages such as the following:

\begin{quote}
Then the sage told the king: “Āṉi is the month when all the gods will come and worship. The Uttiram day of Āṉi is coming near.”

Then the king made arrangements for conducting the festival and announced: “We are going to conduct a festival for nine days beginning on the eighteenth day of Āṉi. All the people of the world and the gods Visnu and Brahma will receive joy from the procession of the Lord, and those who bow before the images will be rid of their malams.” He then hoisted the flag of the bull over
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{152} Paul Younger, Home of Dancing Śivan, 180.
the entranceway.\textsuperscript{153}

This is not to suggest that the chapter on the festival reflects a departure from the florid poetic style and imagery of the rest of Umāpati’s consideration; he is as attendant to the generic necessities of the \textit{talapurāṇam} here as he is elsewhere in the poem. Indeed, the majority of the chapter, consists of verses describing the pomp and splendor of various processions associated with the festival that proceed through the city, as well as the acts of generosity that Hiranyakavarman engaged in:

\begin{quote}
\texttt{ēłñilai mālikai cūlikai cālara mērācīr}
\texttt{vāłmati rōraṇa vāyilka ĥerani māvīti}
\texttt{cūḷvuɾa mēruvi ṅērpaḷa kōliya cōlēcaŋ}
\texttt{rālvṭan mātavar yāraiyu nīkuti cārvittāŋ}
\end{quote}

The Cōḷa king [Hiranyakavarman] who had built
Many seven-storied mansions, tall as Mt. Meru,
\begin{quote}
\texttt{fitted with windows and balconies, and hills for leisure play,}
\texttt{surrounded by beautiful walls equipped with gateways,}
\texttt{and a great highway for a fleet of chariots -}
\texttt{Humbly gave excellent residences to all of the sages.}\textsuperscript{154}
\end{quote}

While I would not argue that the chapter on the festival aspires to any sort of realism in its representation of these festivals, Younger's observation does highlight a fundamental difference between this section of Umāpati's text and that dealing with Naṭarāja's dance: the festivals are intended to be a repeatable practice, where Śiva's dance – central though it may be to the sanctity and prestige of Cidambaram – is clearly a singular event, never to occur again. As Aleksandra Wenta has discussed extensively elsewhere,\textsuperscript{155} elaborate and codified

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 181.

\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Koyirpurāṇam}, 233.

ritual traditions have developed around the great festivals of Cidambaram, and they are explicitly meant to commemorate the dance that constitutes the singular moment of its legendary past.

What Umāpati thus accomplishes in his rendering of the legends associated with Cidambaram is a celebration of its most important moment, as well as the repeated commemoration of that moment in the form of ritual practice. Though his text does contain some details regarding the performance of ritual, it is in no way an outline of procedures, as Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas so often are. Instead, it celebrates the devotee's emotional involvement in the Dance of Śiva, as well as in the festivals in which it is recalled. The communication of these legends of the distant past and the emotional involvement of their participants to contemporary audiences is, I argue, the primary purpose of these Tamil purāṇas; they offer devotees of Śiva examples of religious experiences rather than simply offering prescriptions and explications of the merits of their fulfillment. In this way, the talapurāṇam sets a different kind of precedent than the prescriptive texts that outline ritual procedures, as they offer a model of the emotional involvement the ideal devotee has in temple worship. As I explain more fully in the chapter that follows, Tamil purāṇas – and talapurāṇams in particular – relate the affective memory of place.

Here, I have more simply wished to explore what I see to be Umāpati’s chief concerns in writing Tamil purāṇams devoted to Śaiva people, places and things. In perhaps the most extensive survey of talapurāṇams conducted to date, the Tamil scholar V.R. Matavan has cataloged roughly 400 examples of these texts; the vast majority of these were composed during 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.\footnote{V.R. Matavan, Tamilil Talapurāṇankal: Irantaam Pakuti, 185-209.} As one of the initiators of a specifically Tamil tradition of
purānic writing, Umāpati's work set a precedent that subsequent poets would follow for centuries to come. Aside from expressing his devotion to Śiva with a poet's flair, Umāpati's purāṇas also suggest that he sought to synthesize the earlier tradition of Tamil Śaivism with the emergent theology of Śaiva Siddhānta. While it is apparent that he was not the first author to attempt such a synthesis – the poet Māṇikkavācakar may have attempted something similar as early as the 9th century\(^\text{157}\) - Umāpati's synthesis of these religious currents within a purāṇa does appear to be novel. Furthermore, Umāpati's purāṇas seem to place a great emphasis on the relationship between Velalars and brahmans in the maintenance of temple ritual and worship, perhaps reflecting the greater symbiosis between temples, landowning classes, and the aforementioned Śaiva monasteries that came to exist in the 14th century. Most importantly, Umāpati explicitly situates his purāṇas in Cidambaram; to a much greater extent than the Periyapurāṇam, it was his texts that bound a Śaiva collective memory to the act of temple worship.

Ultimately, I have aimed in the preceding to shed some light on the question of why Tamil purāṇas seem to become so popular in the late medieval period. Although it is clear that Umāpati sought to synthesize different currents of Śaiva devotionalism and practice, it is altogether less clear why such a synthesis was necessary, as the reader of his purāṇas is not presented with any other possible orientation of Śaivism (i.e., another, competing system of Śaiva thought/practice) that could have acted in an opposing role. As mentioned earlier, the only time that Umāpati engages in polemics in any of his purāṇic works is in his brief mentions

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\(^{157}\) Glenn Yocum, “Māṇikkavācakar’s Image of Śiva,” 22. Yocum points out that Manikkavacakar uses some of the terminology associated with Śaiva Siddhānta that is so common in Umāpati’s poetry – such as “malam” “pacam” and “arul,” although he does so less frequently than his successors; moreover, it is not entirely clear that they carried the same connotations in Manikkavacakar’s poetry.
of the Jains in the Cēkkilār Nayanar purāṇam, and this invective more likely reflects an ossified anti-Jain bias held over from the Periyapurāṇam than an ongoing competition over patronage. A few centuries later, however, other Śaiva groups would declare their own visions of the South Indian sacred landscape, as in the next text that I discuss.

**Smārta Śaivism and the Śivarahasya**

By the 17\(^{th}\) century, Śaivism in Tamil Nadu would become significantly more diverse. The groups of chieftains known collectively as the Nāyakas, who proceeded southward after the fall of Vijayanagara in 1565, would come to dominate the political landscape of the region, and would leave their imprint on its physical landscape. As Crispin Branfoot points out, these rulers would stake their claim to authority in the Tamil-speaking south both by affirming their connection to the glorious past of Vijayanagara while also casting themselves as the inheritors of Tamil religious traditions. As part of the latter process, the Nāyakas and members of their courts sponsored the rapid expansion of extant temple complexes.\(^{158}\) If the Tamil Śaiva sacred landscape came into being during the time of the Cōḷas, it was during the Nayaka period that it came to have the character that it does today.

This period also saw new theological developments in Tamil Śaivism. The most celebrated of these newer theological currents is seen in the work of Appayya Dīkṣīta, a 16\(^{th}\) century Śaiva theologian who wrote in both Sanskrit and in Tamil, and unified Śaivism with advaita Vedanta. Significantly, as Yigal Bronner has pointed out, much of Appayya's work reflects his dual interests in complex theological speculation (as one might find in a Sanskrit

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śāstra) and pedagogically useful accessibility.¹⁵⁹ This rendering of the esoteric into relatively accessible language is also seen in slightly later Tamil advaita works, such as the 17th century Kaivalliyanavanitam, which as Eric Steinschneider has examined, unites Tamil Śaiva bhakti with advaita and which enjoyed a great deal of popularity in the colonial period.¹⁶⁰ This union of vernacular bhakti with advaita was by no means unique to Tamil Nadu nor to South India; as Anand Venkatkrishnan has shown, both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva writers of the early modern period, in places such as Kerala and Orissa, were incorporating an understanding of bhakti into their studies of Sanskrit texts.¹⁶¹ It is for this reason that Michael Allen has recently argued that we must expand our current understanding of advaita as a predominantly elite and Sanskritic phenomenon, and attend to the influence of vernacular work in shaping what he calls “Greater Advaita Vedanta.”¹⁶²

The work to which I now turn my attention can be situated firmly at the center of these currents. In the majority of what follows, I discuss various sections of a single early modern purānic text from Southern India, likely compiled between the 16th and 17th centuries (and, possibly with even later interpolations), known as the Śivarahasya. The Śivarahasya is a lengthy text, consisting of roughly 100,000 verses divided into 12 sections (aṃśas). Though written in Sanskrit, it exhibits the very clear influence of Tamil bhakti and a kind of “Greater Advaita.” If it can be said to have a consistent, unifying theme, it is to declare the importance of Śaiva


bhakti in general terms, and also to delineate various aspects of Śaiva worship especially as it relates to temples.

My interest in the Śivarahasya, however, pertains more closely to its character as what we might call a “Southern text.” As a purāṇic work composed mostly in simple Sanskrit meters (that is to say in “śloka” or anuṣṭubh), the Śivarahasya does not make any reference to the conditions of its production; it seldom declares a sectarian affiliation in explicit or self-conscious terms (though with at least one exception, as I describe further below). Yet its character as a Southern text is unmistakable in two respects – first, in its uniquely Southern synthesis of advaita and Tamil Śaiva bhakti, and second (and more importantly for the purpose of my argument), in its representation of sacred geography, which is a persistent concern of the Śivarahasya. In what follows, I address both of these aspects of the Śivarahasya in turn, in order to demonstrate how this ostensibly placeless purāṇa, through various means, in fact locates itself in the South. Furthermore, despite its silence on questions of authorship, I argue that the Śivarahasya can be read as the product of Smārta Śaiva redactors, and I argue that as a whole this massive purāṇa can be seen as part of a larger literary project of cultivating the ideological and geographical boundaries of that particular tradition.

In addition to expressing a kind of general Śaiva devotionalism, it would be fair to characterize the Śivarahasya as an advaita text. This is most clearly expressed in its most celebrated section, which comprises the entirety of its sixth aṁśa – the Ṛbhu Gītā, in which the advaitic theological perspective is explicated in direct terms. The majority of the Ṛbhu Gītā is not concerned with the kind of detailed philosophical argumentation one would expect in a Sanskrit sastra, but instead relies on the repetition of phrases – likely intended as mnemonic
devices – that express the essence of advaita generally conceived. For example, it contains several sequences in which the phrase “I am brahman alone” (aham brahmāsmi kevalam)\(^{163}\) is repeated in the final pāda of each śloka. Perhaps surprisingly for a Śaiva purāṇa, the Ṛbhu Gita only mentions Śiva in a relatively small number of places (which I mention slightly further below). The text even goes so far as to declare “Śiva” as illusory as any other deity; for example, one verse in the eighth adhyāya states “The ears, eyes, lineage, secrecy, inertia, Hari, Śiva, the beginning and the end, the desire for liberation – all of these things are like the horn of a hare” - that is to say, they do not exist in any real sense, with only the non-dual brahman being real.\(^{164}\) That said, though Śiva is not frequently mentioned in the actual body of most of the chapters of the Ṛbhu Gita, each of these chapters typically opens concludes with a verse that expresses the idea that devotion to Śiva is a means of liberative knowledge. In the case of the former, these are usually just allusions to the narrative situation which frames the Ṛbhu Gita – the sage Ṛbhu narrates the text to various brahmans in precisely the manner in which he had heard it from Śiva himself.\(^{165}\) The major exception to this general rule are the opening two chapters, the first of which consists almost entirely of a customary mangalācaraṇa, or opening benediction, devoted to Śiva, while the second declares in no uncertain terms that Śiva is indeed the advaitic brahman. This latter point is indeed repeated in many other parts of the Śivarahasya, which contains a great deal of stotras declaring Śiva variously as “non-dual”

\(^{163}\) This is repeated in several places throughout the text; see, for example, the roughly 20 consecutive verses that contain this phrase in the Ṛbhu Gita’s fifth chapter. See Lingeswara Rao and Anil Sharma, trans., *The Ribhu Gita*, (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2009): 93-98.

\(^{164}\) Ibid., 147.

\(^{165}\) For example, the fifth chapter begins with a sage named Nidagha asking Ṛbhu “Tell me completely, this knowledge produced by the words of Śankara.” Śivarahasya: Amsa 4-5-6, ed. V. Swaminatha Atreyā (Thanjavur: T.M.S.S.M. Library, 1983): 324.
(advaita) or “nirguna” (without qualities). It is nonetheless significant that the Ṛbhu Gīta occasionally describes bhakti as means of understanding the non-dual nature of Śiva. As an example of one of the aforementioned devotionally-oriented concluding verses, consider the following, which comes at the end of the tenth adhyāya:

Though Śiva dwells in the midst of the people of the world, he cannot be perceived by the five-fold states of meditation, nor by the intellect, reflection, or the mind; nor by the regulation of breathing, because of his subtle nature; nor [can he be understood] by meditative absorption, nor by the hundreds of Vedic utterances; Śiva can be understood by those who are furnished with devotion and self-control, and through the wise counsel of a guru.  

The Ṛbhu Gīta thus does make some mention of the importance of devotion (that is to say, bhakti), though references such as these do not necessarily signify bhakti in the sense we often mean; this part of the text is clearly far removed from the sort of emotional experience expressed by Tamil Śaiva poets, for instance. Yet this verse does suggest the possibility that the redactors of the Śivarahasya were attempting a kind of theological synthesis of Tamil bhakti and advaita, and their attention to the latter is made abundantly clear elsewhere in the text.

There is at least one verse from the Śivarahasya that suggests a direct connection between this text and the early medieval bhakti poets. In her recent work on Smārta Śaivism in South India, Elaine Fisher cites the following verse from the text (while pointing out that it is likely an 18th or 19th century accretion) which makes this connection explicit:

All twice-borns will be of barbarous conduct, poor, And of meager intellect. In such a world, a sage will be born. O Śiva, Śaṅkara, born from a portion of me, the greatest of the devotees of Śiva,

\[166 \text{ Ibid., 198}\]
This rather remarkable verse offers an entirely different genealogy of Tamil Śaivism as seen in the earlier Śaiva Siddhānta works discussed above, while similarly appropriating the legacy of the early medieval bhakti poets. As Fisher points out, however, the verse also seems to afford a higher place of esteem to the Smārtas, whose theological system the Śivarahasya explicates. The verse also seems to have a telescopic geographical scope, beginning as it does with Śaṅkara, before going on to mention the Tamil and Sanskrit author Appayya Dīkṣita, and concluding with the Tamil Śaivas (who notably come from “all castes”) who are firmly situated in Tamil Nadu. As a Sanskrit purāṇa, the Śivarahasya seldom alludes to historical figures, and generally presents its Śaivism as placeless and universal in its scope; this verse is a rare exception in that regard. This tendency towards a synthesis of Tamil bhakti and a broader, placeless conception of Smārta Śaivism is also seen in the text’s depiction of sacred geography and of temple legends, to which my discussion will now turn.

The entirety of the fifth amśa of the Śivarahasya consists of an explication of the

The importance of 12 important Śaiva shrines- called the jyotirliṅgas - located all across South Asia and famously described in a brief stotra attributed to Saṅkara (i.e., the *Dvādaśa jyotirliṅga stotra*). The complete list of jyotirliṅgas is as follows.\(^{168}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of jyotirliṅga</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kedāra</td>
<td>Kedarnath, Uttarakhand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omkāra</td>
<td>Shivapuri, Madhya Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaidyanātha</td>
<td>Parali, Maharashtra or Deogarh, Jharkand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghuṣṛṇeśa</td>
<td>Aurangabad, Maharashtra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nāganātha</td>
<td>Saurashtra, Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahākāla</td>
<td>Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhīmeśa</td>
<td>Pune, Maharashtra (possibly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tryambaka</td>
<td>Nasik, Maharashtra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viśveśa</td>
<td>Possibly Varanasi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Śrīśaila</td>
<td>Srisaila, Andhra Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gokarṇeśa</td>
<td>Gokarna, Karnataka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāmeśvara</td>
<td>Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2.1: List of jyotirlingas*

Regarding the table above, what I primarily wish to point out is that the majority of these sites appear to be located in the Deccan, with only one (possibly two, if Śrīśaila is included) being located in the Tamil speaking south. While the entire section is rather lengthy, I only wish two point out two aspects of the section dealing with the jyotirliṅgas which are suggestive of the manner in which it reflects the “regional” character of this particular text, and the role that the text's form – as a Sanskrit purāṇa – plays in shaping this conception of region.

One of the jyotirliṅgas included in the list is “Vaidyanātha” - here, not referring to the famous Temple in the Kaveri delta devoted to Śiva as Vaidyanātha, but instead to a site mostly

---

\(^{168}\) In determining these locations, I have generally followed the editor of the Śivarahasya, Swaminatha Atreya. See Swaminatha Atreya, ed., *Sri Śivarahasya: Amsas: IV-VI*, 5-14.
likely located further north. As to the actual identity of the site, there are at least two possibilities. The text of the Śivarahasya simply describes the location of the Vaidyanatha linga as “vanakhaṇḍa” - literally “a copse of trees.” Anne Feldhaus has examined a 17th century Marathi māhātmya, written by a member of the Mahānubhāv sect named Kṛṣṇamuni, which claims that this jyotirliṅga is located in Parali, Maharashtra. Though the list as presented in the Śivarahasya does seem to include more sites in Maharashtra, these two lists do not fully agree with one another. The second possibility is the Baidyanath temple located at Deogarh, Jharkand, where a local tradition claims that the jyotirliṅga is housed there. Much of the descriptions of the jyotirliṅgas in this āṃśa consists of legends associated with each temple that serve as the precedent for further injunctions to worship there, as is more or less what we would expect of a sthalapurāṇa of any Hindu temple. But in the sequence of narrative associated with Vaidyanātha, we see a rare example of how a local Tamil Śaiva legend is relocated to this site far from South India.

The sthalapurāṇa of Vaidyanātha as it appears in the Śivarahasya relates the story of the devotee of Śiva named Kaṇṇappa (though he is simply called a “bhilla” - a member of a mountain tribe - in the Sanskrit version), famously recounted in the Periyapurāṇam. To briefly summarize the version of this story from that 12th century Tamil hagiography – Kaṇṇappa was a prince of a hunter-tribe, who regularly offered meat to a liṅga located in the forest. Once, while worshiping the liṅga, Kaṇṇappa noticed that blood was pouring out of one of its eyes; thus he immediately plucked out his own eye and placed it on the liṅga. Thereafter, blood


poured out of the other eye, and so Kaṇṭappa immediately prepared to pluck out his second eye, but was stopped by Śiva in the process; Śiva then immediately restored his full vision.

The Śivarahasya's narration of the legend of Kaṇṭappa repeats many of these details, while changing the narrative in such a manner as to conform to the standards of the Sanskrit purāṇic text of which it is a part. It is nonetheless very clear that this is the same story that the Periyapurāṇam relates, as in some respects, it even adheres quite closely to what is seen in the Tamil original. Thus, this adhyāya begins with a description of the appearances of the members of the hunter-tribe (that is to say, they are clad in animal skins and are experts in slaying animals with various kinds of weapons), and includes relatively minor details present in the Periyapurāṇam, such as the fact that Kaṇṭappa offers water from his own mouth to the Śivaliṅga, and that he used an arrowhead to gouge out his eye. But there are some differences which are also significant; as this is ultimately a sthalapurāṇa of Vaidyanātha (literally, the lord of healers), this adhyāya contains a brief digression accounting for the site's healing capabilities (owing to the fact that the Āśvin twins, the deities associated with healing in the Hindu pantheon, once performed some penances there). The story, as told in the Śivarahasya, is less about a selfless act of extreme devotion (as is generally the case in each episode related by the Periyapurāṇam), as it is about the fact that Kaṇṭappa was healed at the site, thus accounting for the apotropaic effects of worshiping there.

Often, what we see in sthalapurāṇas is the localization of a particular legend (a story originally from the Rāmāyana might be said to happen at a particular locality, for instance). In the version of this story as it appears in the Periyapurāṇam, Kaṇṭappa's sacrifice takes place near Kalahasti, a site (in modern day Andhra Pradesh) that is celebrated in a lot of Tamil Śaiva
literature; here, it takes place at the jyotirliṅga that was almost certainly much further north. Thus, what we encounter in the Śivarahasya version of this legend is a reversal of the usual emplacement of myth that we see in sthalapurāṇas – a legend of a vernacular text is transported to a far-away site, in order to bolster the authority of that distant place. I take this “de-localization” to reflect two processes. First, though it makes no reference to Kaṇṇappa as a vernacular saint, its inclusion at all suggests a clear familiarity with vernacular bhakti literature, and its adaptation can be read as part of the “synthesis” that the Śivarahasya attempts. The second point that I wish to make relates to the geographic scope of the text; here, the local legend is no longer local, but belongs to the broader sphere of a normative, Smārta Śaiva devotional system that reaches across the subcontinent in its ideological (if not actual) scope.

There is perhaps another reason why the redactors of the Śivarahasya might have chosen to relocate this particular legend. If the Vaidyanatha jyotirliṅga referred to here is indeed the same as that said to be in Maharashtra, it is possible that the Tamil story was transported there in acknowledgment of the place of origin of the Maratha rulers of Thanjavur. As I explain in the following chapter, the Śivarahasya was undoubtedly celebrated at the Maratha court on at least one occasion (as the translation of one its chapters was debuted in front of Shahoji I at the end of the 17th century). Moreover, all of the manuscripts on which the printed edition of the Śivarahasya is based are currently held at the Saraswati Mahal Library at Thanjavur. Nevertheless, there is seemingly nothing else in the Śivarahasya to suggest any particular favoritism towards Maharashtra, and this would suggest a very late date for this particular section of the text.
In fact, it is clear that the Śivarahasya’s treatment of sacred geography does not de-emphasize the South in any way; in other places, it asserts the superiority of the South in both active and passive ways, as is illustrated by the following example. In the adhyāya that deals with the jyotirliṅga at Tryambaka, there is a brief digression that describes the variety of Śaiva shrines located all over India; these shrines, and the jyotirliṅgas in particular, are mapped onto the body of Śiva himself. Thus this brief digression reads:

Those who know the past call Tryambaka the nose, Avimukta [Varanasi] is at the earth [i.e., at the feet]. Śrīśaila and Ujjain are my eyes, O Devi. Omkāra, that pure place, is my throat; the ears are Kuṇḍaliśvara [i.e., Naganatha]; Kedara and other holy places are my limbs. These are the places of Śiva that people travel to on the Earth, O Śaṅkara. The seventy-thousand [holy places] are the arteries of my body. Holy Cidambaram, O Devi, is the heart; it is there where my abode is. There, I always present in my own form, along with you, with my attendants, with Vighneśa and Skanda. Cidambaram is praised in the Veda and the Vedānta; the greatest sages say that I am dancing there.¹⁷¹

Immediately following this description of the shrines is an ornate stotra, sung from the collective mouth of the devotees gathered at Cidambaram (beginning with the mythical sage Vyāghrapāda – the “tiger-footed” one mentioned in several sthalapurāṇas of Cidambaram, as noted earlier in this chapter), which describes Śiva’s dance at the Naṭarāja temple; the chapter then abruptly resumes the more standard sthalapurāṇa of Tryambaka. As an example of the style of this stotra, consider the following verse:

\[
\text{đamarukavinadotthitaprakarṣapratisabdair badhiriṅktāmarendra}
\]

\[
\text{karacālanakhelanordhvapādapratihatabhūtalamanramastanāga}
\]

O Lord of the Gods, from whose head a snake dangles towards the ground, which is repeatedly struck by your upraised foot, and whose hands are moving to and fro; (accompanied by) the

¹⁷¹ Śivarahasya: Amsas 4-5-6, 209.
The stotra continues in this vein, describing the dance with a great deal of aesthetic refinement; for instance, it utilizes a variety of aspirated sounds in order to evoke the image of Śiva's feet striking the earth as his frenzied dance continues. Given the fact that the style of this sequence is rather different from rest of this aṃśa of the text, and that a praise of Cidambaram appears so suddenly, I would like to suggest the possibility that this, much like the aforementioned verse connecting the Smārta Śaiva theologians with the Tamil bhakti saints, is an interpolation. Even as other parts of the fifth aṃśa seem to de-localize regional stories, and as it lays out a pan-Indian sacred Śaiva geography, the text's compilers seem to have thought it necessary to bring us back southward, and to declare the supremacy of Cidambaram over all of the jyotirlingas.

The seventh aṃśa of the Śivarahasya is also explicitly concerned with sacred geography, although this section of the text does not quite conform to the standard model of sthalapurāṇa as the fifth aṃśa does. This section of the text deals primarily with temple worship conceived generally, but sets each of this explicatory dialogues in different sites in South India. Collectively, then, these chapters delineate a different sacred landscape; Kāśi is, not unusually, the first place mentioned in the list, and is perhaps the only one in which the text includes the kinds of material we would expect to find in a sthalapurāṇa (that is to say, a set of narratives declaring the importance of the city, and prescriptions for how one should worship there – specifically, it outlines the “pancakrośīyāyātra” - a journey to five different Śiva shrines located within the city). Aside from Varanasi, all of the other places are located in the Tamil-speaking region; they are Kalahasti, Kanchi, Tirvannamalai, Vriddachalam, two

\[^{172}\]Ibid., 209.\[^{172}\]
chapters set in Cidambaram (here again, we see something more like a sthalapurāṇa, with the one chapter devoted exclusively to the Śivagaṅgā tank mentioned above), Kumbakonam, Tirvittaimarutur, and then back to Kāśi.

There is perhaps a method to this particular ordering, as the list of sites seems to follow a general southward trajectory. It would be tempting, for this reason, to read this as a pilgrimage narrative, but there is little in the actual content of this section to support this; as I mentioned previously, these locations simply serve as the settings of dialogues that discuss Śaivism in very general and non-localized terms. Thus the chapter set in Kumbakonam merely mentions that its narrator, Viṣṇu, delivered a discourse to an assembled group of deities and sages while worshiping the linga at the town's central shrine, before going on to describe various aspects of Śaiva ritual and devotion. This tendency towards general description, rather than sited storytelling or ritual prescriptions, generally holds true for the other place-sections of the seventh aşaṃśa, except in the instances I have already noted. Thus these chapters alone tell us very little about the nature of place and region as expressed in the Śivarahasya barring the simple fact that it is, as is it should now be overtly apparent, a Southern Śaiva text.

Nevertheless, perhaps our biggest clue as to the manner in which this section of the text was read by early modern audiences comes from a Tamil work. The Kumpakonappurāṇam of Cokkappa Pulavar, composed at the end of the 17th century and debuted at the court of Shahoji I of Thanjavur, claims to be a translation of the Śivarahasya, but it is in fact an adaptation of the one adhyāya from the seventh aşaṃśa that deals with that city. Cokkappa adds several sections to the Sanskrit work in order to better situate it in the city of Kumapakonam (for instance, following the traditions of Tamil court poetry, he includes a rich description of
the city itself, including many of its important shrines and bathing sites, at the outset of the work, although in other places he follows the Sanskrit text quite closely). The manner in which Cokkappa “translates” the text is itself very interesting, but I simply wish to point out that this section of the text, much like other sthalapurāṇas, seems to have influenced the production of truly “local” literature. I devote much of the subsequent chapter to this translation.

The Śivarahasya, much like all other lengthy purāṇic works, is a difficult text to make sense of – its interlocutors are all divine figures, its origins are heterogeneous, and its claims are purportedly universal. What I have been chiefly been interested in, in all of the preceding, is the manner in which it is of and about a place (or a set of places); and it is for this reason that I have focused on, first, the manner in which it reflects currents in Śaiva theology in the early modern South, and second, in how it represents ideas of place. It is clear that the Śivarahasya influenced, and was likely compiled by, members of the Smarta-Śaiva community in Tamil Nadu, whose cultivation of a sectarian public through a unique textual culture has been described at length by Elaine Fisher in a recent monograph. The Śivarahasya might be seen as a part of this project, synthesizing as it does Śaiva temple ritual, vernacular bhakti (though its “vernacular” character is somewhat mitigated by both language and narrative strategy), and advaitic theology. I believe that the Śivarahasya's interest in place is related to this phenomenon of synthesis; if part of the theological project of this purāṇa's compilers was systematically bring together certain currents in Śaiva worship in Tamil Nadu, its outlining of sacred geographies similarly reflects an interest in defining boundaries. This sacred geography spans the subcontinent, but accords a place of special importance to the some of the most
famous Śaiva shrines in the South, especially the Naṭarāja temple at Cidambaram.

As I describe in the first chapter, the earliest layer of Tamil Śaiva bhakti poetry was deeply concerned with place; each poem of the Tevāram, for instance, is occasioned by a poet's visit to a particular shrine. Tamil, in that earlier literature, is not merely the default language of expression, but is loaded with a broader cultural, regional, and geographic significance. Most Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas, in contrast, glorify place in very direct ways; a particular city, shrine, or region is usually hailed as the greatest of all because of the efficacy of the duties one can perform there. In the Śivarahasya, we see something different; the Tamil-speaking region is at the forefront of the text largely because it is the heartland of a universal religious system that it seeks to bring into being.

Conclusion: Place, the Past, and Identity

The purāṇas of Umāpati and the Śivarahasya are, in most respects, vastly different texts – they advance differing theological viewpoints, are composed in different languages, share little in the way of stylistic or thematic similarities, and emerge under very different historical circumstances. Their representations of the sacred pasts of Śaiva sacred landscape and of Cidambaram in particular are thus colored by these differences; Umāpati describes the experience of viewing Śiva's dance as bestowing a uniquely Siddhāntin mode of salvation to its audience, and the Śivarahasya places Cidambaram at the heart of its advaita-influenced Smārta Śaiva religious system. Save for the reference to the Jains mentioned earlier, neither text makes any reference to these systems being in competition with one another, nor do they single out any other religious group for polemic.

I mention this in order to understand the relationship between the kinds of claims
about sectarian belonging that these texts do make and the concept of “religious identity” in medieval and early modern South India. It has not been my intention to argue that these texts spoke exclusively to the different sects to whom their authors belonged. In his discussion of the role that Indian intellectual history can play in shaping modern identity, Jonardon Ganeri argues that identity involves a dialectical interplay between “our common humanity” and “making choices based on our individual needs, natures, inheritances, and situations.” I highlight this point not in an attempt to reconstruct such a dialectic as it may have been shaped in premodern South India, but simply to argue that the matter of sectarian belonging and its relationship to texts is not necessarily straightforward.

The manner in which the authors of these purāṇas related their stories reflects the very fact that what we call “Śaivism” was being constantly reformulated. Both Umāpati and the Śivarahasya’s redactors had to articulate their own relationships to the earliest layer of Tamil bhakti literature. In the former case, Umāpati cast himself and the Śaiva Siddhānta monasteries more broadly as the literary and theological heirs of the nāyaṉmār; the Śivarahasya casts a wider net, describing a pan-South Asian sacred landscape with Cidambaram as its center, and includes Śaṅkara as one if its theological predecessors. All of these authors, the stories they told and the manner in which they told them left their imprint on the physical spaces they eulogized. Thus, to visit a Śaiva sacred space such as Cidambaram in the Tamil-speaking south is to inhabit all of these pasts simultaneously. In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, where I examine the influence of purāṇas on the way sacred landscape is experienced in one Tamil sacred center today, I will take up this issue directly.

Chapter 3: Between Sanskrit and Tamil: Translating the Past in Early Modern Kumbakonam

In what is perhaps the only surviving account we have of the production of Tamil talapurāṇams, the famous 20th century early modern Tamil scholar, U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar, describes the manner in which his guru, the Tamil poet T. Mīnātcicuntaram Piḷḷai, composed a talapurāṇam devoted to Kumbakonam in 1865. According to Cāminātaiyar, Mīnātcicuntaram Piḷḷai was asked to compose the puraṇa by a group of Śaiva dignitaries led by the tahsildār of that city. He then had a Sanskrit version of the puraṇa translated into Tamil prose, from which he produced a poetic work. Each day, completed verses were given a formal recitation at the Ādi Kumbheśvara shrine – the Śaiva shrine at the center of the city to which his work was principally devoted.174

Elsewhere in the biography, Aiyar describes the experience of the audience present at the debut (araṅkēṟṟam) of another of Mīnātcicuntaram Piḷḷai’s talapurāṇams, this one devoted to the city of Uraiyyur, a district of the city of Tiruchirapalli located 60 km east of Thanjavur:

The debut of the puraṇa commenced among the gathered crowd of many learned men, gentlemen who were knowledgeable of Tamil, and Śaiva dignitaries. Some took pleasure in hearing the description of the countryside; some took pleasure in the description of the city; some felt joy in the description of “cāti” in the section on the city. At one point, upon hearing a description of hell, it was said that the head priest of the temple shed tears.175


175 U. Ve. Caminataiyar, Minatcicuntaram Pillaiyavarkal Carittiram (Tanjavur: Tamil Palkalai Kalakam, 1986), 132
I highlight these two brief episodes because each sheds some light on important aspects of the production of purāṇic literature in early modern South India. First, talapurāṇams are often said to be translations of Sanskrit works, and second, the performance of the talapurāṇam apparently inspired a strong emotional response in its audience. These two facets of talapurāṇams – their status as translations and their affective character – animate the discussion that follows.

In this chapter, I first consider the manner in which both these Tamil and Sanskrit texts belonged to a single literary ecosystem by examining the process of “translation” from Sanskrit to Tamil (and, less commonly, from Tamil to Sanskrit). More specifically, I examine two earlier purāṇic texts written about Kumbakonam. The first of these is a brief chapter of the aforementioned Śivarahasya, entitled “Kumbhaghoṇamahimāṇuvāranam” (“Describing the greatness of Kumbakonam”), consisting of roughly 600 verses. Curiously, despite the chapter's title, the Kumbhaghoṇamahimāṇuvāranam contains little to no description of the city itself or the Śaiva shrine from which it takes its name. The second text that I describe is a late 17th century talapurāṇam devoted to Kumbakonam that is, at least nominally, a “translation” of the Śivarahasya. Its author, Cokappa Pulavar, describes the contents of his composition in the pāyiram of the work as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
İlaimaŋkai pāka riruṇṭavaṇarulār paccai \\
kalaivālar petiyil vaikuṇ kaṭamuni vēta cāram \\
mölícia rakaciyattai moli peyarttu vaḷarṇṭayay ravaṟu \\
kolitamiḻ ceyyulē kātalăr kūrinānē
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
İlaimaŋkai pāka riruṇṭavaṇarulār paccai \\
kalaivālar petiyil vaikuṇ kaṭamuni vēta cāram \\
mölícia rakaciyattai moli peyarttu vaḷarṇṭayay ravaɾu \\
kolitamiḻ ceyyulē kātalăr kūrinānē
\end{align*}
\]
By the grace of the husband of the young, well adorned Goddess (i.e. Śiva);
[I have] translated the Civarakaciya, which is the essence of the Vedas,
narrated by Agastya, who dwells on Mt. Potiyil abounding in young bamboo,
Out of love, into beautiful Tamil verse...

As I will elaborate on further below, “translation” (tamil “moḻipeyar”) had long since been a part of the production of Tamil literature in South India by Cokkappa’s time. However, given how little it resembles a traditional Sanskrit sthalapurāṇa, the Śivarahasya represents an odd choice for Cokkappa’s source. In what follows, I use these two texts to explore the process of translation, to examine how Tamil authors utilized specific literary devices to glorify place, and to better understand the place of the purāṇic past in the religious landscape of early modern South India.

Cāminātaiyar underscores the emotional response of his guru’s audience; whether or not such an account is actually true, it is evident that he saw the experience of listening to a talapūrāṇam as a sentimental one. In the case of Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas, a description of the purāṇic past served to reinforce the importance of particular devotional practices and rituals, deploying a sense of collective memory in service of praxis. Authors of Tamil “talapūrāṇams,” in contrast, drew upon Sanskrit works such as these in order to affirm their continuity with a Tamil literary and devotional past, expressing the experience of bhakti borne out by inhabiting a sacred landscape. In short, the Sanskrit works are primarily didactic, while their Tamil counterparts are affective. The translation of purāṇas in early modern South India, then, was not primarily an attempt to relate the meaning or intent of a particular text; rather,

176 Cokkappa Pulavar, Kumpakōṇappurāṇam, ed., Mu. Catakoparamanujan Pillai (Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1971), 258. The original text contains an error; the word petiyil should read potiyil, as the latter is the name the mythical mountain on which Agastya dwells while the former is meaningless.
it was a wholesale reinvention of the work.

Kumbakonam serves as a useful site for the study of the production of purāṇas given its proximity to several important places significant to the religious landscape of Tamil Nadu. First, its proximity to Thanjavur meant that it served as an important religious center for the rulers of two early modern political formations based in the latter city – the Nāyakas (15th - 17th centuries) and the Marathas (17th - 19th centuries). Second, Kumbakonam is also located a short distance away from several Śaiva Siddhānta monasteries, whose members (as stated in the second chapter) were active in the production of Tamil literature until the end of the 19th century; indeed, T. Mīnātcicuntaram Piḷḷai maintained a long association with the monastery at Tiruvatatuturai, located a short distance away from Kumbakonam.

The translation of purāṇas in early modern South India reflects the distinct ways in which language was utilized in the representation of the past and the glorification of place. As I explain further below, even as Cokkappa repeats the ritual prescriptions of his source text – recounting, for instance, the proper method of circumambulating a Śaiva shrine – much as Umapati's was several centuries earlier, Cokkappa's poetry is also concerned with the devotional experience of being at a shrine. The Sanskrit sthalapurāṇa and the Tamil talapurāṇam thus express two distinct, though related, experiences of temple worship – respectively, the obligatory and the emotional. I conclude the chapter by considering one of the rare examples of a Tamil poem translated into a Sanskrit purāṇa, which demonstrates the same functional bifurcation; the Śivabhaktavilāsa, a Sanskrit rendering of the Periyapurāṇam, relates the stories of the nayaṉmār in a manner that privileges the didactic character of early modern Sanskrit Śaiva texts such as the Śivarahasya over the affective character of its source.
Kumbakonam in Literature and Legend

Kumbakonam derives its name from a narrative with which most of the purāṇas written about the city are primarily concerned. In the bhakti poetry of the early medieval period, the city is referred to by its Tamil name “kuṭamūkku” (Sanskrit kumbhaghoṇa, “pot-nose” or “pot nostril”). While none of the Tēvāram poems that mention Kumbakonam make any other reference to the origin myth of the town, the name does suggest the strong possibility that this narrative had a long history. In what follows, I utilize a late Sanskrit sthalapurāṇa, the Kumbhaghoṇamāhātmya, in order to relate this story as well as to describe the larger sacred geography within which this particular sacred city and its central Śaiva shrine were located.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that the Kumbhaghoṇamāhātmya is only one of many purāṇic texts that were composed about this city. There were at least four different Tamil texts that were devoted to the city, and it is very likely that they were derived from one or more Sanskrit sources (as, for instance, in the case of Mīnātcicuntaram Piḷḷai’s text, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter). I begin my discussion of the city’s sacred legends with the Kumbhaghoṇamāhātmya because of the fact that it seems a likely source for such Tamil translations. In its style, content, and organization, it serves as a useful starting point for a discussion of the Kumbakonam’s sacred geography, as it outlines a pilgrimage circuit of the town and its surrounding shrines in a cursory fashion that can be regarded as typical of a Sanskrit sthalapurāṇa. I also wish to draw attention to the specific manner in

177 See Indira Viswanathan Peterson, Poems to Śiva, 215.

178 There were at least three other Tamil talapurāṇams of Kumbakonam; it is possible, if not likely, that each had one or more Sanskrit sources. I discuss one of these, the Tirukkutantaippurāṇam of Minātcicuntaram Pillai, briefly in the following chapter. See Ve. Ira. Matavan, Tamilil Talapurāṇankal, 195.
which it utilizes the purānic past; its narratives of the origins of the many shrines surrounding the city serve to supplement the rituals and pilgrimages that it enjoins.

The *Kumbhaghoṇamāhātmyam* (henceforth, “KM”) discussed here is a somewhat mysterious text. As is often the case for Sanskrit purānic literature, the KM gives us no clues as to the circumstances of its composition, and is therefore difficult to date accurately. The text itself contains a series of narratives that outline the geography of the city and its surroundings from both a Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava perspective, but suggest little else regarding the explicit theological views of the authors or the text’s intended audience. Nevertheless, as I will explain further below, the stories contained within the KM offer a relatively complete picture of the sites that constitute Kumbakonam’s sacred landscape, and therefore offers a useful starting point for an investigation into how the city is glorified. Furthermore, the identification of these places – and the relating of their associated narratives – are all deployed in order to ultimately enjoin the reader or listener to worship both Viṣṇu and Śiva in a set of prescribed ways. In what follows, I briefly summarize sections of the KM’s first few chapters, which are explicitly focused on Śaiva sacred spaces in and around the city, in order to interrogate the operating logic of the text; it is in many respects a generic example of an early modern Sanskrit sthalapurāṇa.

The KM begins by situating Kumbakonam within a pan-South Asian sacred landscape. The text plays out as a conversation between Nārada and Brahma, prompted by the former’s question as to which of the places on earth “bestows total devotion to Śiva and which increases

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179 The edition used here was published in 1895. See *Kumbhaghoṇamāhātmyam*, ed. Gururajacarya and Sitarama Sastri, (Kumbakonam: Sri Vidya, 1895).
one's devotion to Viṣṇu.”\textsuperscript{180} This deliberate inclusion of both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sacred spaces in Nārada's question continues throughout the description of the sacred spaces of South Asia that follows. Nārada goes on to mention roughly fifty sacred places,\textsuperscript{181} before going on to request that Brahma tell him of the greatness of Kumbakonam. Brahma replies that of the great many sacred places important to both Śiva and Viṣṇu, including the important North Indian centers of Varanasi and Gaya, none are equal to Kumpakonam; indeed, that city is described as being equivalent in magnificence to the divine realms of these two deities (i.e., Kailāsa and Vaikuṇṭa).\textsuperscript{182} This declaration of a place's “greatness” - usually measured by its capacity to serve as an expedient means of liberation – is a universal feature of Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas (which, as in the case of this text, are often simply called “māhātmya” - “greatness”)

The second adhyāya of the KM continues in a similar vein; it begins with a question from Nārada that outlines the sacred geography of the region surrounding Kumbakonam, and serves as the impetus for the narrations of the legends that follow. Nārada asks “Where is the sacred field (kṣetra) called Kumbakonam located on the surface of the earth? And where are its 18 great places (mahāsthāṇa) known to be? The field of the “pañcakrośa” has been described by you in the past; O Lord of the Gods, please describe that now in its entirety.”\textsuperscript{183} Contained within Nārada's question is the basis of an entire sacred geography, broadly described as the “sacred field called Kumbakonam” (kumbhaghoṇābhidam kṣetram).

After describing the greatness of Kumpakonam in these general terms, Brahma then

\textsuperscript{180} sampūrṇabhaktidam śambhau viṣṇubhaktivivardhanam; Ibid., 1.

\textsuperscript{181} It is notable here that in this account of sacred geography, the majority of the places seem to be located in South India. However, several of these, such as the Gandhamādana mountain, do not appear to be historical places.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 7.
goes on to mention the environment surrounding the actual city; he first mentions “18 mahāsthānas” in its vicinity, and finally describes five “kroṣṭhālas,” shrines located within a 5 “kroṣa” radius of Kumbakonam that are particularly important from a Śaiva perspective. Once his description arrives to the city itself, he first declares the importance of the Kāveri, and then goes on to list several important sacred bathing sites (tīrthas) in its environs.

Much of the content in the early chapters of the KM are concerned with outlining a pilgrimage to the aforementioned 18 mahāsthānas, with a special emphasis on the five kroṣṭhalas included therein. A chapter is devoted to each of latter, along with a brief description of the legends surrounding them as well as prescriptions for which rites must be carried out and the subsidiary shrines located at each place. These early chapters gradually build toward a description of the origin myth, and the practical importance, of Kumbakonam itself; the KM thus gradually and meticulously outlines an elaborate pilgrimage that culminates in that city. The descriptions of each of these places are, in some respects, formulaic; as an example of the text's operating logic, consider the following description of the second of the kroṣṭhalas, Campakāraṇya (modern day Tirunageswaram, located roughly 8 km east of Kumabakonam):

> To the southeast of Kumbakonam, in its eastern portion, Campakāraṇya, the second great kroṣa, is situated. Just from recalling it, a man's mind is purified, and he is freed of the sins of killing a brahman and so forth. Staying for a moment, one attains brahmanhood after death, O Sage. [That place] grants whatever the heart desires, [like] a wish-granting calf on the earth. Just from entering that place, one obtains the fruit of a sacrifice. Reaching that place, one worships Śiva and Viṣṇu.\textsuperscript{184}

Descriptions such as these abound in the KM, and indeed, in many of the other Sanskrit

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 12.
sthalapurāṇas; what I wish to highlight here is not only the generic character of such
glorifications of place, but also the fact that each of the locations that constitute the sacred
field of Kumbakonam are glorified in much the same manner as the city itself. Brahma then
goes on to relate the primary narrative associated with Campakārya:

Previously, in the ādiyuga, Śiva was worshiped there out of
devotion by a thousand snakes, for the purpose of adorning that
place, for the joy of liberation, and for the flourishing of
knowledge and devotion. [And Śiva was worshiped by] Śeṣa for a
hundred years; obtaining what he desired, the king of snakes
planted there the best of Campaka trees. [Śeṣa], for whom Śiva
was dear, the bestower of the desired of his kin, requested the
boon that “From seeing or touching [the tree], from naming or
circumbulating it, may one's desires be fulfilled;” And,
worshiping Śambhu for the fulfillment of his wishes, and having
obtained his wish in this way, he established a tīrtha there.

Brahma then goes on to describe how a festival was carried out at this tīrtha at the behest of
the serpent king, who also established a shrine there; for this reason, Śiva came to be known as
“Nāgeśvara” (The Serpent's Lord). 185 He concludes this narrative by saying “From seeing his
liṅga, crores of great sins are destroyed, O Nāradamuni, I say truly! And having bathed in the
tīrtha called ‘Nāga,’ praying to him who dwells near there on a Sunday in the month of Vṛścika,
one is freed from all sins.” 186

The structure of this brief narrative – which consists of a general glorification of a
place, the description of a legend concerning its distant past, and the declaration of the fruits
of worshiping there under certain circumstances, is repeated throughout the entire text.
Indeed, many of the names of these places, still in use today, are connected to these very

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185 Ibid., 13.
186 Ibid.
stories. Here we see how collective memory is invoked in the context of a prescriptive text; the entire purpose of the story is to demonstrate the benefits of a particular ritual practice for which the narrative supplies a precedent.

Sites such as Tirunageshwaram constitute a pilgrimage circuit that the KM later goes on to enjoin. This circuit consists of the aforementioned 18 “great places,” which includes the 5 “krośa” sites and finally, the city of Kumbakonam itself. This mapping of a sacred geography most closely resembles that of Varanasi, as represented in several purānic texts; indeed, it is quite possible that the pilgrimage to the 5 krośasthalas is modeled after the “pañcakrosīyayātra” that takes places in the vicinity of that city. In addition to being visited, the text also seems to glorify the very recitation of these places in succession; Brahma concludes his description of the pilgrimage to the 18 mahāsthāṇas by saying “Having listened to and having recited the great splendor of the 18 places, a man immediately becomes dear to Śiva and Viṣṇu, who carry away the sorrows of those who bow to them.”

It is important to note two things about this brief statement. First, though 18 mahāsthāṇas all appear to be Śaiva shrines, the unseen author(s) of this particular purāṇa seem to have incorporated the worship of Viṣṇu into the pilgrimage. This is evident not only from the above passage, but also from the fact that Brahma concludes his description of the route by saying “Having completed the pilgrimage to the 18 places, which removes all sins, prostrating before Sāraṅgapāṇī while full

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187 See Jorg Gengnagel, “Kasikhandoka: On texts and Processions in Varanasi,” in Words and Deeds: Hindu and Buddhist Rituals in South Asia, ed. Jorg Gengnagel, Ute Husken and Srilata Raman (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005): 65-91. The Kasikhanda, one of the most famous texts associated with the sacred spaces of Varanasi, enjoyed significant popularity in South India during the late medieval period, suggesting the possibility that the practice of pilgrimage around that sacred center could have served as a model for other pilgrimage routes elsewhere.

188 Kumbhagonthahatmyam 31.
of devotion to Hari; and having carried out that journey, a man becomes one who has accomplished his duty.” Here, a visit to the Kumbakonam's central Vaiṣṇava shrine as been appended to the Śaiva pilgrimage, further reflecting the very deliberate non-sectarian character of the text (especially in contrast to the other two texts discussed later in this chapter). Furthermore, it is quite likely that the KM offers a textual justification for an extant set of practices; in light of this, it is important to recognize the manner in which broad sectarian categories such as Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava are essentially fluid. Second, the KM not only enjoins the actual practice of the pilgrimage itself, but also glorifies the act of “listening to” and “reciting” its description. Here, spreading the memory of place, which the KM itself seeks to accomplish, is itself an act of worship comparable to the pilgrimages and rituals that are its chief concern. Later in this chapter, I will return to this theme of “listening,” as it has a rather different import in the context of Tamil talapurāṇams.

Once the description of the larger sacred field of Kumbakonam is complete, Brahma begins to describe the Śaiva shrines within the limits of the city itself; all of these stories are connected by a single narrative from which the name of the city is derived. The story begins as the end of the “day of Brahma” approaches, along with the apocalyptic cosmic flood that accompanies it. Fearing the consequences of the divine flood, Brahma asks Śiva:

The universe will be destroyed; what, O Lord of the world, is to be done? The Vedas, śāstras, and purāṇas will be destroyed, so too will sacred tradition and important works of literature. All of these are yoked to the seed of creation. This [seed of creation] will be cast about by the flood; how can I protect it?  

Ibid., 32.
What must be protected from destruction, above all else, is a literary tradition that consists not only of the Vedas and the tradition of revelation (i.e., śṛti), but also the purāṇas as well as “important works of literature (mukhyakāvyāḥ); the inclusion of these latter two types of texts seems to reflect an expansion of the concept of a scriptural canon to include the very genre of work to which the KM belongs. In order to solve this problem, Śiva gives Brahma a very specific set of instructions:

Listen to my speech which is venerated by the world, O four-faced one. For the sake of upholding the world, in the past, I gave the seed of creation to Brahma; by virtue of its being both ageless and deathless, it will not be destroyed.... I will tell you how it should be protected; listen carefully. Grasping the divine mud of this sacred place, make a lump of clay before sprinkling it with divine nectar. A pot, fashioned by my divine power, is filled with the divine nectar; place the seed of creation within it. Fill the pot with the śāstras, vedas, and itihāsas, as well as the āgamas. Cover the pot with the garment called 'Sudhākala.' And, having placed the pot in the middle of your garden on the peak of Mt. Meru, O Brahma, and having wrapped it in a netting and fastening it to a bundle of darbha grass, and having sprinkled it once again with divine nectar, be content, O four-faced one.¹⁹¹

Brahma fashions the pot as per Śiva's instructions. The pot is washed away at the time of the flood, and each of the above mentioned components (the netting, the covering garment, and the bundle of the darbha grass) fall away as a result of the tumult of the flood, and are transformed into lingas that later become shrines located within the city itself. Finally, Śiva says:

And the pot will gradually travel to the southeast of where that bundle of grass fell, at a distance of one krośa,...that pot will come to a stop there, as per my will. Then, during the time of the flood, Śankara, taking the form of a hunter, will break open the pot with an arrow, O Lotus-born one.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 33-4.
From the nostril of the pot (kumbhaghoṇataḥ) will burst forth a stream of nectar, soaking the earth within an area of five krośas.¹⁹²

The site from which Śiva launches his arrow becomes the location of Kumbakonam's central shrine, and the nectar that flows out of the pot pools a short distance away; this nectar becomes a bathing tank called the “Mahāmaha,” Kumbakonam's largest and most celebrated tīrtha. In this way, the pot legend unites all of the legends in the preceding chapters, and places the city itself, and the Ādi Kumbheśvara shrine in particular, at the center of a larger sacred geography.

This narrative comes to inform a variety of literature devoted to the city – including Mināṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai's aforementioned talapurāṇam of the city (as noted at the outset, he composed his work from summaries of Sanskrit sources that likely resembled the KM), as well as other works of poetry and drama that reference this and other purāṇic legends (I discuss these in the following chapter). In this way, a series of narratives about a distant past come to structure the sacred landscape of the city and its environs, and serve as the impetus for the performance of a pilgrimage as well as various individual rituals specific to each site. To put it simply, collective memory here has a didactic – or perhaps injunctive – purpose, supplementing prescriptions for Śaiva practice. I begin this chapter by sketching out some of these legends, and by paying attention to what I have repeatedly called the “operating logic” of the KM, as they contrast significantly with the contents of the texts that follow.

The Śivarahasya and the Kumpakōṇappurāṇam

As stated at the outset of this chapter, the Kumpakōṇappurāṇam (henceforth, KP) is a translation of a single brief adhyāya of the Śivarahasya, called the

¹⁹² Ibid., 35.
The period from the 16th - 18th centuries saw rapid changes to the political and religious landscape of South India, especially in the region surrounding Thanjavur. Two of these changes are of particular importance here; first, this period saw the rise of two successive polities, the Nāyakas of Thanjavur (15th-17th century) and the Marāṭhas (17th–19th). Rulers of both of these dynasties patronized the production of a vast body of literature in multiple
languages, giving rise to what David Shulman has recently called “an osmotic linguistic republic” - wherein Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Malayalam, Persian and Arabic all existed within a single literary-cultural sphere.\footnote{David Shulman, \textit{Tamil: A Biography} (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2016), 260-261.} Second, it was during roughly the same period that Śaiva monasteries in the vicinity of Thanjavur and Kumbakonam – particular at Tiruvavatuturai, Dharmapuram, and Tiruppanantal – came to prominence. Scholars associated with these monasteries were highly active in the production of this emergent literary culture and were, significantly, also involved in the composition of the purānic texts that I discuss here.\footnote{For a detailed study of these three maṭams, see Kathleen Koppedrayer, “The Sacred Presence of the Guru: The Velala Lineages of Tiruvavatuturai, Dharmapuram, and Tiruppanantal” (PhD Diss., McMaster University, 1990).} The rise of these political and monastic formations coincided with the physical expansion of temples in the region, with the representation of local Tamil legends becoming an increasingly common subject in sculpture.\footnote{Crispin Branfoot, “Expanding Form: The Architectural Sculpture of the South Indian Temple, 1500-1700,” \textit{Artibus Asiae} 62.2 (2002): 233.}

It was also during this period of literary activity that Tamil to Sanskrit translation became increasingly common. For example, in the middle of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, the ruler of Tenkāśi, Ativirarāma Pāṇṭiya, produced Tamil versions of several famous Sanskrit texts, including the \textit{Kūrma Purāṇa}. In the \textit{pāyiram} of that work, he describes his task by declaring that he has “expressed in pure Tamil the divine stories laid out in Sanskrit” (\textit{vaṭamoḻi tokutta teyvamāk katayai vaṭitta centamilinār ceytāṉ}).\footnote{Ativirarāma Pāṇṭiya, \textit{Kūrma Purāṇa}, ed., S. Gopal Aiyar (Thanjavur: Verrivel Accakam, 1961), 4} While the rendering of Sanskrit works such as the Mahābhārata or Rāmāyana into Tamil had been common literary practice for several centuries, the explicit reference to translation as seen in the above verse appears to be new, or
at the very least, to have undergone a kind of resurgence as a practice, in the period following
the 16th century. Much like the talapurāṇams with which I am primarily concerned,
Ativirarāma's translations were highly stylized; however, with the exception of the Kūrma
Purāṇa, he typically utilized other complex works of Sanskrit poetry, such as the
Naiṣadhīyacarita or the Kāśīkhaṇḍa. In that respect, his own work mirrors the process of
vernacular translation as witnessed elsewhere in South Asia in the late medieval and early
modern period. In contrast, the Tamil talapurāṇams were usually based on didactic works
that did not aspire to aesthetic merit; in composing their texts, poets such as Cokkappa
essentially composed in a different genre from their source material. In what follows, I argue
that this change of genre is highly consequential to our understanding of the relationship
between literature, space, and memory.

Cokkappa's translation of the KP can be placed at the center of these new literary
currents. While little is actually known about the author, we can glean some information about
his background from the pāyiram of his work. In one verse, he praises one of his teachers,
Vaidyanātha Deśika:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{avamoḻit teṇṇulḷat tamuta mūṟutin̄} \\
\text{cuvaivaṇet tamilvalaṇi curantu nalkumē} \\
\text{tavameṇēk kamalaiyi liruntu tēcikaṇ} \\
\text{tavavanai vaiyittīya nātaṇ ūṭkalē}
\end{align*}
\]

Destroying my uselessness, may the feet of the sage
Vaidyanātha Tēcikaṇ, living in Kamalai [i.e., Tiruvarur],
in penance, draw from me the flourishing of Tamil

197 For examples of other vernacular translations of Sanksrit poetic works, and of the Naiṣadhīyacarita in
particular, see Deven Patel, “Source, Exegesis, and Translation: Sanskrit Commentary and Regional Language
Translation in South Asia,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 131.2 (2011): 245-266. Though the
Kāśīkhaṇḍa is certainly a sthalapurāṇa, it exhibits a different literary character; for more on the contents of this
work, see Christopher Minkowski, “Nilakanṭha Caturdhara’s Mantrakāśīkhaṇḍa,” Journal of the American

126
as the sweet taste welling up, of the ambrosia in my heart. 198

Vaidyanātha Deśika was a well-known author of the middle of the 17th century, who was at one time attached to the court of Tirumalai Nāyaka of Madurai, and who was the author of several talapurāṇams. 199 His most famous work was undoubtedly the Ilakkaṉa Vilakkam, an early modern grammar which, according to David Shulman, “embodied a new linguistics, in which Tamil and Sanskrit grammatical science, embodied in a wide selection of classical source texts, were deliberately intertwined.” 200 Moreover, Vaidyanātha’s first guru, Aghora Munivar, also produced several talapurāṇams, including one devoted to Kumbakonam. 201 Furthermore, Cokkappa claims elsewhere in the pāyiram to be from Toṇṭaināṭu (i.e., what is now northern Tamil Nadu) and that the KP was first performed at the court of Shahoji I in Kumbakonam (as opposed to the nearby Maratha capital at Thanjavur). 202 One of the only other extant works attributable to Cokkappa is a commentary on a famous 12th century romantic poem, the Tañcaivāṇaṉ Kōvai. In the opening verse of his commentary on that text, Cokkappa describes himself as an atṭavatāṉi (Skt. Aṣṭavadhānin), a title for one who has completed a type of public test of metrical expertise, 203 and claims to be from the town of Kunrattur in northern Tamil

198 Cokkappa Pulavar, Kumpakōṭappurāṇam, 257. The mention of the “lotus” (kamalai) is a reference to an honorific title frequently added to Vaidyanātha Deśika’s name.


200 David Shulman, Tamil: A Biography, 282

201 K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, A History of South India: From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1958), 376

202 Cokkappa Pulavar, Kumpakōṭappurāṇam, 258

From these details in the preamble of Cokkappa's text, we can draw a few conclusions regarding the production of the KP and other talapurāṇams like it. First, these poets clearly participated in an intellectual circle that was strongly influenced by Śaiva adepts, if not necessarily representatives of the aforementioned monasteries; in Cokkappa's case, this is evident not only in the content of his own work, but also in the choice of his source and by virtue of his intellectual lineage. The connection that these Śaiva authors had to local political figures is evident both from Cokkappa's own patron as well as Vaidyanātha's connection to the Nāyaka court at Madurai decades earlier. Finally, Cokkappa's tutelage under Vaidyanātha suggests that his work can be located within the emergent hybrid literary culture of early modern South India, wherein the lines between Sanskrit and Tamil poetics were increasingly blurred. For all of these reasons, I read his translation of the KMA as a microcosm of these broader phenomena.

In what follows, I compare several sections of the source text with Cokkappa's translation in order to demonstrate the extent to which he reinvents the text, adding descriptions and details that reflect the fundamentally different imagination of sacred space at work in the Tamil text. As I will show, the Tamil imagination of Śaiva sacred space draws from the norms of earlier literature in order to invoke a more deeply affective sense of space, privileging the sensory and emotional experience of ritual and temple worship over the didactic nature of its source. What I will show is that language choice, in the context of early

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205 The editor of Vaidyanātha's Tirunallūrp Purāṇam claims that he was born to a family of Śaiva adepts; moreover, the name of Vaidyanātha's guru suggests a possible connection to a Śaiva Siddhanta lineage. See Tirunallūrp Purāṇam, x-xi.
modern South Indian purāṇas of place, amounted to a different understanding of the import of
temple worship and the experience of place itself.

Describing the City

These differences are evident in a comparison of the beginnings of each text. As
previously stated, the KMA contains very little in the way of narratives that are explicitly
connected to the city itself; its primary connection to the Kumpakonam lies in its opening
verses, which praise the Śaivas who dwell in the city in general terms. Sadāśiva, speaking to
Pārvati, simply describes the degree of piety of the city’s devotees, mentioning their
fastidiousness in wearing sacred ash and rudrākṣa beads and in worshiping him. The only
mention of the temple in the entirety of the KMA is the brief mention of the existence of a
“linga called Kumbheśvara” in the city, where Viṣṇu (who acts as the next narrator in the
chapter) is engaged in worship.²⁰⁶

The KP offers an entirely different and much lengthier introduction to the text, which
culminates in a grand description of the city itself. In adapting a single chapter of a much
larger purāṇic text as an independent work of this type, Cokkappa reframes his narrative as
being occasioned by the Sūta’s visit to a hermitage in the mythical Naimiṣa forest; the Sūta
then describes his purpose in the following verse:

akattiya civaraka ciyameṇ ṛṇpoṭum
cakattinir yōikkuc cāṛiṇāṇēṇa
ikattiṇil mutti viṭeṇuṅ kuṭantaiyil
makattuva mariyayar kuṟaittu...

“[A puranic interlocutor] related Agastya’s Śivarahasya, out of love,
to the yogis of the world,” he said,

²⁰⁶ Sri S. Krishnamurti Sastrigal, ed., Śivarahasam: saptamsamse caturtobhagah (Thanjavur: Saraswati Mahal
“making known to Ari [Viṣṇu] and Ayan [Brahma] the greatness of Kumbakonam, the abode of liberation in this world...”

Cokkappa's most profound addition to the text, however, comes two chapters later, in a lengthy description of Kumbakonam itself (the chapter is entitled “*kumpakōṇa ciṟappuraitta vattiyāyam*” - “the chapter describing the greatness of Kumbakonam”). Nothing of this sort appears in the KMA; furthermore, this description bears very little resemblance to the manner in which the city is represented in other Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas such as the aforementioned KM. Instead, the model for such a description comes from other works of Tamil literature, such as Kampan's *Irāmavatāram*, which often begin with descriptions of the city in which the narrative is principally set (such as Ayodhya in the case of Kampan's seminal work). As an example of the tone Cokkappa adopts, his lengthy description of the city, which is told from the perspective of Śiva addressing his consort Pārvati, begins with the following verse:

\[
\text{veṇṇilāp poḻin tamutukum pavaḷavāy miṉē} \\
\text{en-nilātatalan taranīyin mikkuḷa veniṉum} \\
\text{kaṇṇiṉērvarum poṟiyila veṉumolī kaṭuppa} \\
\text{maṉṇulē tiruk kuṭantaiyen rorupeyar maruvaṃ.}
\]

O girl [Pārvatī, being addressed by Śiva] whose face radiates moonlight and whose coral-lips drip with nectar, Although there are countless places in the world, Just as none of the other senses are quite like seeing, only the name “Tirukkuṭantai” comes close to expressing it [i.e., only Kumbakonam is worthy of being called sacred].

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207 Cokkappa Pulavar, *Kumpakōṇappurāṇam*, 5. The end of the verse is incomplete; but the narrator is suggesting the presence of a long line of interlocutors that have related the text Cokkappa is translating.

208 Ibid., 10.
Following this is a lengthy series of verses that depict various scenes in and around the city, many having little explicitly to do with religious activity as such. Consider, for instance, the following two verses describing scenes in the city:

vēḻiyil ēḻumpukaiy ā miṅṅaṇaiya nallār
niṅkuḷa līṭum pukaiyum māḷikaiyī ñerrīk
kālumukilum pīṟu kaṅṭaiyalakā
vāḻceymati māṭala matittavaṭa Ṉattāy.

Kārakil naṟumpukai kaṉintamoḻi nallār
vārkuḷal vakirntaṇa rīṟumpoḻutu vāṅar
nīrkeḷu muķīṭṭoḷīr miṇṇaḷaivar nītic
cirkeḷu kuṭantaimaṇi māḷikaicey kuṇril.

O one whose face glows like the moon,
There one is unable to distinguish between
the smoke rising from sacrifices, the smoke given off by the
long tresses of women, and the dark clouds massing on the rooftops.

In the ornamented mansions at Kuṭantai,
furnished with pleasure-hills,
where the law flourishes,
when sweet-spoken women part their tresses to perfume them
with fragrant aloë-wood smoke,
they look like lightning flashing in the dark rain clouds in the sky.209

The language of these two verses resembles nothing else in the KM nor in Cokkappa's source, the KMA, and instead bears a closer resemblance to the natural and urban scenes depicted in so much of medieval Tamil poetry. The style and content of these two verses serve as an example of how the KP truly belongs a different literary genre than the Sanskrit purāṇas, as each draws from different generic norms to represent place.

In addition to generic differences such as those illustrated above, the manner in which narratives inform the way spaces are memorialized differs quite significantly from the Sanskrit texts. The chapter on the description of the city concludes with a litany of references to

209 Ibid., 14.
various legends associated with the town; corresponding to these references are brief mentions of the sacred sites associated with them. From these verses, we see a fundamentally different configuration of the relationship between space and memory. Two verses from the beginning of this section of the chapter (which consists of roughly 20 verses) illustrate this relationship:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{māḷava tēyan taṉṉil cattiya kīrīti maṉṉaṉ} & \\
kēḻvaṉaik koṉru keṭṭa pārppaṉi kilanta pāvam & \\
nāḷalāk kuṭantaint pōṇṉi kācípa tīrttam naṉnī & \\
āḷumā makattī nāṉmuṇ nāṭiyē tīrntīṭāṉē & \\
\end{align*}
\]

The king of country of Māḷva, Satyakīrti, extinguished the sin of killing a [brahmin...] by bathing in the Kācipa tīrtha on the Kāveri at Kumabonam, for which no special day is needed, even before the day of the supreme Mamakam festival.\[superscript]\text{210}\]\[superscript]

\[
\begin{align*}
tīṅkati ramudaṅ kālun tīṅkateṇ kuṭantai mévi & \\
āṅkamiḻ turuva cōmaliṅkavarccaṇaiyī ṃālē & \\
īṅkuṭa ṛaḷaṟtu vāṉōrk kiṉṉamu tīyap perrē & \\
ōṅkuyar taḷaippat tātu mutaviṭa perrīt ṭāṉē & \\
\end{align*}
\]

The moon, who streams rays which are like sweet nectar, arrived at Kuṭantai; by performing the \textit{arcana} to the Somalinga that is ambrosia (\textit{amṛta}) in embodied form there, Here, his form grew back as it was before And he received the privilege of providing sweet ambrosia to the gods.\[superscript]\text{211}\]\[superscript]

The verses that follow immediately all continue in this vein, and generally praise either the benefits of worshiping the linga of the main Śaiva temple at Kumbakonam, or of bathing in one

\[superscript]\text{210}\]\[superscript] Ibid., 16. I am uncertain as to the details of the story being narrated here, but it is clear that the king is atoning for the sin of killing a brahmin.

\[superscript]\text{211}\]\[superscript] Ibid., 16. The story of the moon is likely a localized version of a common Shaiva legend, in which the moon, having been cursed by his father-in-law to waste away, is restored upon establishing a linga. Phyllis Granoff has described a version of this myth as narrated in the \textit{Prabhāsamāhātmya}. See Phyllis Granoff, “Defining Sacred Place: Contest, Compromise, and Priestly Control in Some Mahatmya Texts,” \textit{Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute} 79.1 (1998): 3.
of its many tīrthas. Omitted from this mapping of the city, however, is the mention of any
specific pilgrimage or of the origin myths of many of its shrines. The usage of narrative in this
section of the chapter is thus altogether distinct from that seen in Sanskrit texts. Rather than
simply enjoining a series of rituals (such as worship or bathing), these verses belong to a
chapter that glorifies this city in general terms. The memory of past events thus shapes the
very way in which the town is conceived, providing fuel for the author's poetic imagination. I
return to this theme – the usage of narrative in the sequential description of sites in
Kumapakonam, and in the imagination of space more generally – in the following chapter.

The concluding verses of this section place a great emphasis on the latter, and provide
something of a map of the town's hotspots for ritual bathing, culminating in the following list:

...ceppuvar pirama tīrta mutti tīrttamun kaṉṇi tīrtaam enṟu
ippuvi vaḻuttun tīrta marrutavē yirumpukaḷ māmaka tīrtaam
muppuva ṇattuḷ tīrta kōṭi kaṭku mutaṇmaiyeṉ rarumaṟai moḻiyum

...they are called Brahma tīrtha, Mukti tīrtha, and Kanyā tīrtha;
and another, praised by the world, is the
Māmaka tīrtha of enduring fame;
In the three worlds, it is the foremost among the millions of tīrthas -
So say the sacred Vedas.\footnote{Cokkappa Pulavar, Kumpakōṇappūṉam, 21.}

Shortly thereafter, Cokkappa provides a list of many of the important Śaiva shrines in the city:

ātikum pēcaṉ cōmalīṅkēca ṇaruṭkaṭal nākaliṅkēcaṉ
cōṭikā rōṇa vilṅka mōrenkun cuypuvan kuṭuntaivyir ruṇņip
pātakaṅ kōṭi purintava reṇiṅum paṇintiṅ muttiyil payilvār
pūṭala maṭantai kāruyir pōḷum porpatap pukalaiyār pukalvār

Worshiping Ātikumpēcaṉ, Cōmalīṅkēcaṉ, Nāgaliṅkēcaṉ, the ocean of grace,
the brilliant linga at the Kārōnam shrine, the Kārōkaṇaliṅkam,
and wherever there is a naturally-formed linga in Kuṭantai,
Even if one has committed millions of sins, one attains liberation;
Who can speak the glory of this sacred place, that is as dear as life to Mother
Taken together, these verses bring together multiple sacred spaces found within the city, and reflect Cokkappa’s attempt to transform the KMA into a truly local text. This imagination of the local is almost totally divorced from the content of the Sanskrit source, and instead looks to Tamil poetry as the primary means by which space – characterized not only by the presence of sites of worship, but also by the beauty of urban life as imagined in Tamil texts – for its inspiration. Thus, even as the author claims to be translating a work related to the city, he offers a wholly different understanding of how space can be conceptualized than his source does.

Reconfiguring Narrative and Ritual

The absolute novelty of this chapter, as compared to the KMA, raises a further question: in what sense is this text actually inspired by the work that its author claims to be translating? Much of the KP actually adheres quite closely to the content, and in some cases, even the specific language of the KMA. In what follows, I explore a few moments in the KP that reflect the manner in which Cokkappa’s text constitutes a “translation.”

As previously mentioned, the KMA contains several episodes that are less related to worship at Kumpakonam specifically, and instead have more to do with Śaiva worship generally (as I discuss in the previous chapter with respect to the Śivarahasya broadly). As is typically the case for Sanskrit purāṇic legends, the first of the narratives that I consider here carries with it a clear injunction – that the name of Śiva is to be recited. The story begins by describing the “very worst of brahmans,” who lived among the Niṣādas, and who “each day, knowingly committed sinful acts,” including that very worst of Hindu sins, the killing of

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213 Ibid.
brahmans. Once, having caught a glimpse of the Niṣāda king's young queen, the wicked brahman decided to sneak into the palace “desiring to satisfy himself with her” (*enām rantum aicchat*), bow in hand. His plan was immediately foiled, however, and he was caught by the palace guards and brought before the king. At this point, the story comes to its climactic moment, in which its didactic intent becomes clear:

The brahman then spoke to the king, who was quivering with rage:

“O king, I have committed an offense. Kill me (*hara mām*), a wicked minded man.” Hearing the words “hara mām,” the hair of the king's body at once stood on end. He put down his weapon and immediately felt in his heart “This man is virtuous, and should not be killed; he is always intent on merit (*punyasamsraya*), since I have heard the words 'hara mām’ from his mouth. This merit destroys all sins and bestows earthly rewards and the fruits of liberation. At this dark hour of night, I have been made to hear the word “hara,” which consists of the nature of Hara [i.e., Śiva] by this man; this has the power to destroy sin. Surely, this man in front of me regards Hara as supreme in each and every birth. He must always be saying “hara,” how else would I have been made to hear it? By this, this great one has done me a service (*upakāra*) on this great night. What equivalent favor can I do for him?”

The king then forgives the brahman, and they pass the night together speaking of stories of Śiva. We can see from this passage how the message that the text wishes to convey in this episode (i.e., that one should chant the name of Śiva) is embedded in the (somewhat repetitive) style of the narrative, as the king continually and emphatically repeats to himself the greatness of the favor that has supposedly been done to him. Unlike the narrative episodes of the KM, the story here does not conclude with an explicit injunction; rather, it goes on to describe the careers of the king and the no longer wicked brahman, as the former conquers his

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*Śivarahasyam: saptamsamse caturtobhagah*, 30
enemies and builds temples to Śiva in which the latter serves.

In stark contrast to his description of Kumbakonam, Cokkappa's rendering of this narrative demonstrates the degree to which he was engaged with this source text; despite the ways in which he adds to or rearranges elements of the KMA, in this particular passage, we see how he was likely working directly from the original in producing his translation. The details of the story of the wicked brahman and the king are reproduced in the exact same fashion (though he of course adds a few introductory verses explicating the beauty of the Niṣāda country). To illustrate the degree of his fidelity to the root text, here is how Cokkappa describes the moment immediately after the brahman utters the name of Śiva:

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215
avvurai kēṭṭun ṇaṭuṅki yamalanmala raṭiniṇaintu
meyvitirttuk keṭṭeniv virakariyeneppaccolli
kaivālai viṭṭerintu kaɾaikaŋkanta naṭiyaraiyō
ivvāru ceyaniṇaintē nen ceṭteṇeṇavalūtān

enkulattuk kuḷōrka lōniraiyē tanṭilviḷa
vaṅkanmaī purivērkmā maduramāṇi vācakameṇ
puṇcēviyē pulappatutta puṇṇiyaŋk kupakāram
aṅkanilat tuḷatēyen rakaṅkulainta ṇavvaracan
```

Hearing those words, the king trembled in his heart, thinking of the lotus- feet of the pure one, his body trembling,
He said “I am lost! What shall I do?”
throwing down his sword, he wept,
saying, “Alas, How could I have thought of doing this to a devotee of the god with the poison-stain on his throat? Oh, what have I done?”

The king thought, “Is there anything on this lovely earth I could do to repay (upakāram) my debt to the meritorious one (puṇṇiyaŋ),

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215 This seems to have presented a problem for the editor of the KP, who adds in a note that the key phrase appears to be missing in the original manuscript on which the printed text is based. Moreover, “hara mam” would not work in Tamil; the editor assumes that the missing phrase would simply be “arakara” - “Oh Hara!”
Cokkappa continues to describe the king's epiphany for another nine verses, before continuing the narrative in the very same fashion as his source text, by describing the manner in which the king and the brahman passed the night discussing stories of Śiva. From these two verses, we can see how translation operates in Cokkappa's work. The transformation of the KMA in the poetic work does appear to have affected the intent of the story; Cokkappa heightens the dramatic tension of the episode, as the king is overcome with a series of emotions – first doubt, then gratitude and mercy – upon hearing the offending brahman utter Śiva's name. Yet, in some rather specific respects, Cokkappa adheres to his source, as he retains the usage of terms such as “upakāra” - which is somewhat unusual in a Tamil text; also, the fact that the brahman's apparent “merit” (puṇya/puṇṇiyam) inspires the king's mercy suggests a close degree of correspondence between the two versions of the text. From these verses, and from the rest of this chapter more broadly, it seems evident that Cokkappa was not simply retelling the stories of the KMA in a general way, but was working directly from his source.

Both of these tendencies – towards fidelity to the content of the original text, and towards its reinvention according to the norms of Tamil poetry – extends into the parts of the text that explicitly deal with ritual as well. As I have stated earlier, the KMA is, above all else, concerned with different types of Śaiva ritual – such as the proper manner in which a Śaiva shrine should be circumambulated, which implements should be used in a pūja, how and why one should wear sacred ash, and so forth. Cokkappa faithfully repeats all of these prescriptions,

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Cokkappa Pulavar, *Kimpakōṇappurāṇam*, 75.
but the way in which he does so reflects a different orientation towards Śaiva ritual and praxis.

There are, nonetheless, instances in which Cokkappa more or less treats issues in the same manner as his source; his translation of a section of the KMA dealing with the method of circumambulating a Śaiva shrine reflects this. The KMA devotes roughly 40 ślokas to this topic; specifically, it outlines a method for a *pradakṣina* called “Somasūtra” (named after a channel of water flowing eastward from the central linga, which should never be crossed). The devotee is supposed to make nine stops in the route, visiting three places – the Somasutra, a shrine to Caṇḍeśvara, and a shrine to Nandi (vrṣa), which surround the temple - several times each. The KMA utilizes a formulaic verse that delineates the sequence in which each part of the temple should be visited – *vrṣam caṇḍam vrṣam caiva somasūtram punarvrṣam/ caṇḍam ca somasūtram ca punascanḍam punarvrṣam*. The KMA then goes on to explain each step in this process in detail. Cokkappa translates this formula quite closely:

\[
\begin{align*}
cōmacūt tirattin viittitai mūṇpu toṭutu cāntanai paraci \\
vāmamāyp pīṇum viittiyulic cenu valaṅkoṭu kōmukai vāluttic \\
cēmāt tīyampi viṭaiyñai vaṅaṅkit tirintupi cāntanai kumpīṭṭu \\
ēmāyyı cōma cūttira cānta niṭapamur ṛjanicītal vēntum
\end{align*}
\]

This is the method of the Somasūtra:

Having first worshiped the *vrṣa*, praising *caṇḍa* towards the left; again returning to *vrṣa*’s place and circumambulating it, praising *somasūtra* which bestows victory; hailing *vrṣa* which bestows welfare, then returning to *caṇḍa*, worshiping him with joined hands; joyfully concluding with *somasūtra*, then *caṇḍa*, then *vrṣa*; one must worship in this way.\(^{218}\)

This is, for the most part, a straightforward rendering of the Sanskrit formula contained in the

\(^{217}\) *Śivarahasyam: saptamsamse caturtobhagah*, 7. This verse appears to have been a common formula, utilized in reference to other Śaiva shrines and in other texts; see Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976): 300f.

\(^{218}\) Cokkappa Pulavar, *Kumpāṇṇappurāṇam*, 247.
KMA. However, there are subtle differences in Cokkappa's verse, such as the inclusion of minor elaborations on the nature of each shrine, and a slightly greater emphasis on the activity of the devotee engaged in the pradakṣina. These subtle changes once again reflect the different nature of Cokkappa's text, which places a greater emphasis on the state of mind of the devotee even when treating explicitly didactic topics.

Cokkappa's greater emphasis on the experience of the devotee is perhaps best expressed in another later chapter on Kumpakonam itself (also called kumpakōṇa ciṟappuraitta vattiyāyam), which, once again, does not correspond to anything in the KMA. Rather than describing the city in general or enumerating the shrines and tīrthas located therein, however, this chapter instead focuses on the main shrine itself, and the experience of those who engage in worship there. Furthermore, it is perhaps in this chapter that the evidence of earlier bhakti poetry on Cokkappa's work is most clearly seen. The following two verses are typical of its style:

\[
\begin{align*}
kumpaliṅ kattir pūcai kuyirriya polutu pōka 
imapariṅ kėṭṭiṅ tālum pāvaṅka ṭerittup pōkkum 
vampalar mulaiyāl cempoṅ malaimalī māṅkai pākattu 
umpa rukkiṟai purāṇaṅ kēṭṭirun turuku vēṇē
\end{align*}
\]

When the puja to the kumpalinga is accomplished
If one hears of it even here on earth, one's sins are burned up;
The purāṇa of the Lord of the gods
Who dwells on the golden mountain
Who shares his body with the goddess,
whose budding breasts are bound –
I shall melt, forever listening to it.

\[
\begin{align*}
alarmulaik kuvaṭu tāṅku mampikā patikum pēcaṅ 
palarpukaḷc caritaṅ kēṭṭu māṭava rōṭu maiyaṅ 
palarpukaḷc ciraṭiyārk kaṅṇaṅ kuṭantaiyī laṅṭṭu vāḷum 
talaimaiya rōṭu mīcaṅ ṇaruṭṭuṇai niṅaippārōṭum
\end{align*}
\]
Kumpēcan, the husband of Ampikā with round, budding breasts, protects and lives among the sages who listen to well-known legends, and the leaders who abide in Kutantai, giving food to the celebrated and great devotees of the Lord, and those who think of the Lord’s grace as their refuge...  

These verses return to an enduring theme of Tamil Śaiva bhakti literature – that Śiva dwells alongside his devotees in holy cities. Furthermore, here, Cokkappa presents us with a different reason for the recitation of a purāṇa; it is not strictly a meritorious activity (as, for instance, in the KM), but is a moving emotional experience in its own right. Indeed, Cokkappa seems to be using “purāṇa” to refer to something more like his own text, rather than the Sanskrit work of which it is a translation. Temple worship, for Cokkappa, is not simply an obligatory and meritorious activity, but is instead a joyful act; in this respect, once again, he appears to be drawing more from the work of earlier Tamil poets rather than the source that he translates.

In all of the preceding examples, I have attempted to make sense of the manner in which Cokkappa translates the KMA, for even as he adheres to the source rather closely in places, he changes the essential character of the text. I argue that this change in character is not simply a matter of the author’s personal taste, but is a function of the languages in use and of the literary cultures that they belong to. In this respect, I have been influenced by Gideon Toury's theory of translation as “norm-governed activity.” For Toury, a translation can be understood as a text that belongs to a particular linguistic-cultural system that constitutes a representation of an older work (i.e., the source text) that necessarily belongs to a distinct system; in other words, translation involves a correspondence between two different “norm-

219 Ibid., 217.
In the first two chapters of my dissertation, I have attempted to show that Tamil bhakti literature had its own distinct ways of representing both sacred spaces and the purāṇic past; this corpus of literature undoubtedly inspired authors such as Cokkappa in producing their own works regarding sacred space. It is Cokkappa's adherence to the normative constraints of this earlier Tamil literature that causes him to make subtle changes to the tone of the original Sanskrit text, as seen in his treatment of the story of the king and the brahman as well as in his translation of the formula for circumambulation. The generic differences between the KP and the two Sanskrit texts that I have discussed here also correspond to two distinct ways of representing the experience of temple worship. In the Sanskrit texts, pilgrimage, temple worship, and ritual are all prescribed activities; narratives are utilized in order to demonstrate their importance and their efficacy. Cokkappa's treatment of temple worship, and of the experience of being Śaiva more generally, relies more heavily on affect, as he focuses on the interior states of characters in the narratives that he translates, and places a greater emphasis on the joy of temple worship. In other words, these two texts present two distinct ways in which memory is created and utilized.

These stylistic and thematic differences, which I argue can be attributed to the different norm-systems constituted by Sanskrit and Tamil purāṇas, are borne out to a significantly lesser degree in the KMA's and the KP's discussions of theological matters. The KMA contains several sections that focus on the advaita-Śaiva theology espoused in the rest of the Śīvarahasya, albeit in very general terms. Cokkappa often reworks these usually brief discussions into lengthier passages, once again displaying his greater interest in poetic

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ornamentation. These sections reveal how Cokkappa utilizes affect in a manner that emphasizes this explicitly theological, didactic content, which is not necessarily tied to any particular place or to a specific narrative.

In one such episode of the KMA, Viṣṇu meets with a group of sages at the Śaiva shrine at Kedarnath, and delivers to them a brief sermon in which he equates Śiva with *parabrahman*, the Supreme Godhead in advaitic thought, and concludes with a *stotra* devoted to this non-dual vision of Śiva. This is made clear in the very beginning of the sermon, in which Viṣṇu says, “Order, truth, the supreme *brahman*, the *puruṣa*, the black-colored one; I praise the one whose semen is withheld, the several-eyed, whose form is universal. Śiva is the supreme *brahman* itself, whose form is *sac-cid-ānanda*; the spotless one, the one without qualities (*nirguṇo*), the eternal, the fourth (*turīya*); Śiva is called [these].” Later, Viṣṇu adds “He, the fourth, is not perceptible to us and others. However, Śiva is understood by virtue of the Vedas and Upaniṣads. What Śiva is is stated by the śruti, śmṛti, purāṇas, etc.,” thereby including texts such as the Śivarahasya itself (which could be called a purāṇa) as essential tools in the conceptualization and worship of the non-dual Śiva. Indeed, each verse of the concluding stotra ends with the phrase “Maheśa is to be worshiped, again and again” (*bhūyo bhūyāḥ pūjanīya maheśa*). Cokkappa transforms this brief episode into one of the longer individual sections of his translation; the chapter is entitled “Declaring the Ascertainment of the Lord” (*pati nirṇayaṅ kūriya vattiyāyam*). The brief narrative that frames the sermon is translated by Cokkappa in

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221 Śivarahasyam: saptamsamse caturtobhagah, 44.
222 Ibid., 44-45.
much the same way as other sections of the text; he privileges the experience of devotion to Śiva in his envisioning of characters in the narrative. A comparison of the very beginning of this episode in each of the texts illustrates this difference; the KMA introduces Viṣṇu by saying:

Then, Viṣṇu arrived, intent upon a Śaiva pilgrimage; arriving there, he worshiped the lord of Kedara, Uma’s consort. Then he praised Rudra, the lord of the mountain, with many mantras; completing a circumambulation, he prostrated himself [before the shrine]. Then, the one whose soul was delighted joyfully uttered the five-syllable Śaiva mantra; Hari then uttered the supreme mahārudra, O twice-born one. Brahma and the others, seeing Hari who was intent on worshiping Śiva, prostrated themselves on the ground\(^{223}\)

Cokkappa’s description of this scene, as elsewhere, is more emotionally charged:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{karuṇaimalai poḷintalīya kamalamalar pūttuk katiriravi yoḷimaḻukkuñ} \\
\text{kavuttuvamum puṇaintu} \\
\text{teruḷumarṭ civaṇāṇak karaikkulṭum pūti tiruntiya pararaṇantat} \\
\text{tiraṅkṣataṅ mēyntu} \\
\text{tarunamukilai koṭipataṟum vaṇaṅiram puraiyun tāḷvaraiyin} \\
\text{kāḷviluntu taṭiṟṟanantat} \\
\text{varuṇaṃami niṟṟampaṭaitta mukilirunta tēykkumāyaṅaiκ kaṇṭayaṅ} \\
\text{mutalör maiyalurru makiṅtār}
\end{align*}
\]

Seeing Viṣṇu along with the Goddess, who [together resembled] a cloud and a flash of lightning, he who had the color of a gem dark as the ocean, who was pouring forth a rain of compassion, wearing the kaustubha gem which outshines the light of the sun’s rays who wandered on the shore of the infinite wave-filled ocean of the Supreme Lord granted Śiva-knowledge through the grace of [Śiva], perfected by experience [of the true nature of reality] [the group of sages] led by Brahma, filled with love, felt joy, and fell to the ground on the base of the mountain

\(^{223}\) Ibid., 44.
that had a color resembling a mass of green mukilai creepers.\textsuperscript{224}

What is immediately evident in this passage, as in the case of the sections of the text that deal with methods for temple ritual and worship, is that Cokkappa's text is clearly operating under a different logic; the actual narrative content of the verse (i.e., that Brahma was happy to see Viṣṇu) occasions a rich set of images describing the scene. Moreover, the theological content of this verse also represents a departure from the KMA, as Cokkappa uses some Śaiva Siddhānta technical terms – such as “civaṉaṉa” (Siva-knowledge), a term for ultimate truth utilized by members of that theological school.\textsuperscript{225} Yet once Viṣṇu's sermon actually begins, the content of the KP seems to conform more closely to its source at least in tone; Cokkappa utilizes his poetry to elaborately explicate its content of the stotra. Thus he transforms the aforementioned Sanskrit verse in which several names and qualities of Śiva are enumerated into a long series of verses that addresses each title/quality in turn. Cokkappa's treatment of this section goes beyond his source material, delving into greater detail in describing the nature of Śiva; he does not so much reinvent the nature of his source as he elaborates on it, acting not only as a poet but as a theologian. This is illustrated in the following verse which explicates in greater detail some of Śiva's names:

\begin{verbatim}
viruppākkap peyarŭtaiyā civaṉavaṉē piramam vīlampiṭi lemaṉōrk
kumviravā teyeṉgal
poruvārkkuni kūṭatu nāmellā mavaṉpāl puṉariviṭait tivalaiyiṉi
tūmiraṅkaḷ pōlōm
piruṅkuṉi cuttamā yevare vākkumēḷāyti tiruntupāṛ paramavaṉē
pirmameṉat terikkum
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{224} Cokkappa Pulavar, \textit{Kumpakōṇappurōṇam}, 114. Here, I have read karaikkuṅanum pūti as karaikkuṅ anupūti – the latter word is a technical term specific to Saiva Siddhanta that refers to the experience (Sanskrit \textit{anubhūti}) of Śiva which is the endpoint of spiritual practice.

“Śiva, who has the name 'the many-eyed, 'is known to be brahman; Can we not merge with him?”
“Ones like us cannot; to him, all of us are like small, dark drops of rain in the middle of the ocean; whoever sincerely utters the holy words, by keeping intent on those words, will know that he alone is the supreme brahman; the renunciate who is the origin of our being, who manifests our bodies, the incomparable, many-eyed one, who is devoid of origin.”

In contrast to the narrative portions of the poem, this verse does not necessarily emphasize an emotional experience (i.e., the joy of devotion). Rather, verses like these seem to expand on the didactic intent of the source text, which simply lists names like “many-eyed” (virūpākṣa/virūpākkaṉ) or parabrahman. We are no longer presented with a list; in its place, Cokkappa uses verses such as the one above to more fully explicate the characteristics of Śiva that the source text lists.

As I pointed out earlier, the end of this brief section of the KMA consists of a stotra, the final line of each verse of which states that Śiva is to be worshiped. For example, the brief stotra concludes with the following verse:

> From the worship of whom the whole world is obtained,
> From the worship of whom the treasure that is liberation is achieved,
> From the worship of whom myriad religious efforts are at once accomplished,
> He is Śambhu; and he is to be worshiped always!  

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226 Ibid., 116.

227 Śivarahasyam: saptamamse caturtothagah, 48.
This is one of the few parts of the KMA that is written in a meter other than *anuṣṭubh*; Cokkappa reproduces both the general meaning and structure of these verses in that he concludes many of them with some injunction to worship Śiva, and similarly changes his choice of meter at the corresponding point in his chapter. Cokkappa's stotra is significantly longer than that found in the KMA (his consists of 40 verses, as opposed to the 9 found in the original); beyond their concluding injunction, none of his verses seem to be direct translations of those found in his source text. What is interesting about Cokkappa's stotra is that it gives us some insight into the other sorts of texts that have informed the composition of his own. For instance, one verse states:

\[
\begin{align*}
tayitti riyupa niṭṭattun takkacā pāla menyum \\
mayitti riyupa niṭatu maraikalum valuttu mamoṇ \\
kayirri riyarava nēkaṇ kāṭuva nēlla menyru \\
muyirri yāṟpūcai yanta mukkaṇar kiyarral vēntum
\end{align*}
\]

One must be engaged in worship, with effort, to that three eyed one who wears a twisted golden snake as his sacred thread, who has manifested everything and is praised by the sacred texts such as the Taittiriya, Jābāla, and Maitri Upaniṣads.\(^{228}\)

While the KMA mentions the Upaniṣads generally, this reference to individual texts suggests a deeper textual engagement on Cokkappa's part; the Jābāla Upaniṣad, in particular, appears to be one of the texts of significant importance to the synthesis of Vedānta and Śaivism. While the influence of these texts is clear in other parts of the Śivarahasya, the KMA makes no mention of them, and Cokkappa hear seems to draw upon a larger base of knowledge than the brief chapter that is his primary source.

\(^{228}\) Ibid., 127.
One additional manner in which the theological outlooks of the KMA and the KP differ is with respect to their respective discussions of caste. The Tamil text makes little to no mention of this in its didactic sections, while the KMA does contain occasional references to caste, restricting some of the practices that it prescribes to the twice-born (“dvija”). For instance, following the aforementioned description of circumambulation, the text states “this is the daily circumambulation only of the part of the twice-born.”

Similarly, a preceding discussion of daily rituals – such as bathing and daily prayer – is described simply as a list of “dvijadharma-s.” The omission – or at least de-emphasis – of caste in Cokkappa’s text is thus rather significant, as it reflects other currents occurring in the religious landscape of the area in the vicinity of Kumbakonam at roughly the same period. As Kathleen Koppedrayer has explored, at least one member of a Śaiva monastery at Dharmapuram (located a short distance from Kumpakonam) wrote a Sanskrit text that defended the right of śūdras to engage in the rites prescribed by the āgamas and to be initiated into Śaiva esoteric practices; she suggests that this argument was articulated in order to carve out a space for the monastery’s preceptors, who were members of the vēḷāḷa caste, in the realm of brahmanical ritual orthodoxy.

Many pulavars, such as Mīnātcticuntaram Piḷḷai, were also vēḷāḷars; that said, it is difficult to conclude that this might have been the reasoning behind Cokkappa's omission, given that so little information about his own background is available.

More broadly, this section of Cokkappa’s poem demonstrates the degree to which he

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229 Śivarahas̄yam: saptaṁse caturtoḥbhagah, 9.

230 Ibid., 6.

expands upon his source. His translation is not so much a total reworking of the intent of the
text, as it is in the case of the narrative or ritual sections, but is more of an expansion or an
elaboration; the KMA serves as the core inspiration for a broader praise of Śiva. The
juxtaposition of these two texts demonstrates the difference between didactic and poetic
language. This distinction is far from absolute; Cokkappa is certainly interested in relaying the
prescriptive and speculative aspects of the KMA, and even expands on the themes stated
therein by drawing from a larger body of Śaiva and Vedānta texts. Nonetheless, in contrast to
the placeless, authorless Sanskrit purāṇa, Cokkappa’s talapurāṇam is grounded in his own
place and time, and is delivered to a specific audience (i.e., the court of Shahoji I). The KMA’s
authority is grounded in its eternal character; its interlocutors are always divine figures who
instruct devotees (who are themselves deities and sages) in the correct modes of Śaiva thought
and practice. Even as he reconstructs these dialogues, Cokkappa’s project is necessarily
different, as he calls upon the memory of these dialogues to move his audience with devotional
sentiment. Translation, in this instance, is an act of bringing the supernatural into the world.
In what follows, I examine this process in reverse by exploring how the most famous of Tamil Śaiva purāṇas is rendered in the form of a Sanskrit counterpart, thereby restoring the human
text to eternity.

The Śivabhaktavilāsa

The Śivabhaktavilāsa is a lengthy Sanskrit retelling of Čēkkiḷār’s Tamil Periya Purāṇam,
relating the narratives associated with the 63 nāyanmār in generally the same manner as its
source. Much like both of the other Sanskrit purāṇas discussed in this chapter, it is authorless
and dateless, narrated to a group of sages in the Naimiṣa forest by the sūta, who claims that
these stories were originally told by the mythic sage Upamanyu. The narratives within the text appear to follow the Tamil source in many respects, although J.R. Marr has said of this text that it “almost ludicrously misinterprets the original text at certain points,” for reasons that I explore further below. Its most significant departure from its source lies in its beginning, which provides an entirely different framework for understanding its narratives as opposed to the Tamil text.

The *Periyapurāṇam* begins in much the same way as the KP (as it was likely to have been Cokkappa's greatest influence); Čēkkiḻār furnishes his poem with a customary preamble, decrying the deficiencies of his own poetic acumen and praising the virtue of his patron, the Cōḷa ruler “Aṉapāyaṉ” (likely Kulottuṅka II). He frames his story as being recited by the divine sage Upamanyu on the slopes of Mount Kailasa. In introducing Upamanyu, and thus the narrative of the text as a whole, Čēkkiḻār once again places a great deal of emphasis on devotional sentiment, especially as embodied in Tamil texts. For example, the narrative commences with the following exchange between the assembled sages and Upamanyu:

> “You worship nothing but the lotus feet of Śambhu; Our Lord, how is this so?”  
> “We should be as Nampi Ārūraṉ, who embraces the Lord within his heart.”

Hearing this, bowing, they said:  
“We would love to hear of the one whose penance is glorious, and who is effulgent with victory. Please grace us by speaking of him.”

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232 Marr claims that *Śivabhaktavilāsa* was written by a figure named Hariśarmanuni, and assigns it to the 14th century. He does indeed appear to be referring to the same text, although Marr does not discuss its contents in detail, and the basis upon which Marr assigns the aforementioned date is unclear. See John R. Marr, “The Folly of Righteousness: Episodes from the Periya Purāṇam” in *The Indian Narrative: Perspectives and Patterns*, ed. Christopher Schackle and Rupert Snell, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992): 117-118.

Here, “Nampi Ārūraṉ” refers to Cuntarar, the nayanār who serves as the protagonist of the Periyapurāṇam; what occasions all of the narratives that follow is a simple inquiry on the part of the assembled into the depth of Upamanyu's devotion. The entire introductory sections of the text resemble the KP, as the reader (or listener) is always aware of the voice of the author (i.e. Ĉeκkiḻār), and the language he uses always places the greatest emphasis on a uniquely Tamil form of Šaiva devotion. The manner in which bhakti is represented throughout this text is thus rather similar to that of the early poets, such as Cuntarar himself.

In making Upamanyu its primary narrator, the Śivabhaktavilāsa does follow the example of the Periyapurāṇam. Yet the Śivabhaktavilāsa differs significantly in what precedes his introduction, which is nothing less than an excursus on the relationship between text, devotion, and practice, thereby re-framing what follows. The text commences with the assembled sages addressing the sūta not with a request to narrate a particular story, or with a question about Śiva specifically (as in the case of the Periyapurāṇam), but with a more generic one to explicate the meaning of the “Vedas, agamas, mantras, rituals, instructional dialogues, and sacred utterances,” as well as with the question “how is it that one is not freed from continuous bonds of action, despite having considered the Vedanta and having understood its meaning?” Bhakti, as presented in this text, supersedes rather than complements the complex theological engagement of Vedānta or the performance of ritual; this is made clearer in the sūta's response, which states:

“With respect to untrue knowledge and things contrary to that
https://shaivam.org/devotees/the-glory-of-the-divine-mountain This is the Tamil scholar T.N. Ramachandran's translation of Periyapurāṇam vv. 29-30, to which I have made minor changes.

knowledge, the hundreds of Vedāntic utterances do not dispel
them. For a long time, Brahmans have made efforts to dispel
these things. The ignorant say that there are many means of
doing so; some say that ritual is the cause of liberation, others
declare that it is gifts, pious acts, or vows; others that it is bathing
in tīrthas, others that it is residing in sacred places; others say
that it is the practice of eight-fold yoga, others that it is listening
to the Vedānta [i.e., the Upanishads]; others that it is practicing
the teaching of the Veda, or the worship of images; others that it
is associating with the virtuous; the ways are many. Doing all of
these things, one is immersed in [the cycle of] rebirth. A sage
leaving aside all of these actions can easily obtain liberation.
Aside from all of these teachings, there is a means of liberating all
beings that does not agree with nor contradict them; it is called
bhakti.235

No rebuttal of this sort exists in the Periyapurāṇam, as Čēkkilār's text does not engage in
didacticism of this kind, nor does he assert bhakti as a special category of religious activity
comparable to others (such as ritual, temple worship, alms-giving, etc.). This passage indicates
the extent to which the Śivabhaktavilāsa participates in a different textual world, one which, as
I have shown thus far, is consonant with other Sanskrit purāṇas.

As the sūta elaborates on this initial teaching, the influence of South Indian Śaivism as
taught and practiced in the centuries after the Periyapurāṇam's on the composition of
Śivabhaktavilāsa becomes clearer. In this respect, the Śivabhaktavilāsa resembles the
Śivarahasya, save for the influence of Vedānta exhibited in the latter. The sūta elaborates on
the aforementioned system of religious practice by then declaring, in a rather systematic way,
what sorts of practices constitute bhakti:

Listening to the purāṇa, repeating the names of Śambhu,
contemplating him, seeing him, engaging in puja to him,
worshiping him, being a slave to him, being a friend to him,
offering oneself to him – these are the nine forms of great

235 Ibid., 3-4.
devotion, each greater than the last.

Whoever attains bhakti, that being is rid of its fetters. A fool is said [to engage in bhakti] for earthly rewards; doing so for the attainment of his abode is said to be intermediate; the bhakti that is highest bestows the end of rebirth – this is hard to attain for humans. From the stupidest person to Brahma, it bestows joy. Besides devotion to Śiva, no other means is necessary. One who knows this is said to have truly cast off one's fetters. 

There are several points of interest in the passage. First, the two references to “fetters” (Skt. pāśa, Tamil pācam) recall language that is commonly used in Śaiva Siddhānta texts, as I explored in the previous chapter. Second, as in the KM, here we have a declaration that listening to “purāṇa” - likely signifying stories of Śiva more generally, as opposed to Sanskrit texts specifically – as a means of putting bhakti into practice. If, as I argue throughout this dissertation, purāṇa is best understood as a kind of Hindu mode of collective memory, we can see from passages such as these that the preservation and dissemination of this memory was very consciously cultivated as a meritorious act. Finally, the references to the kinds of relationships one can have with Śiva, which might be characterized as enslavement, friendship, and total submission, prefigure the narrative that follows as Cuntarar is both a slave and a friend to Śiva. What this suggests is that the Śivabhaktavilāsa incorporates elements of the Periyapurāṇam ’s narrative into a systematic mode of belief and practice.

In terms of its representation of narrative, the Śivabhaktavilāsa adheres to the Periyapurāṇam in many respects, as it reproduces the stories of the latter in more or less the same sequence and places its greatest emphasis on the mūvar (i.e., Cuntarar, Campantar, and Appar). Nevertheless, as the following example illustrates, it would be more accurate to call the Śivabhaktavilāsa a retelling or a reconfiguration, rather than a translation, of the

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236 Ibid., 5.
Periyapurāṇam. One of the more brief episodes in the Periyapurāṇam is that devoted to the “Poets free of base falsehood” (as Marr translates the term “poyyatimaiyillāta pulavar”) which consists only of the following two verses:

Having concluded “The clarity of utterances that constitute poetry
And the consideration of righteous texts
are indeed the means of experiencing true knowledge,“
The well renowned Poets free of base falsehood
serve the lotus feet of the one
whose throat shines with a dark glow.

Their mouths do not speak of anything
other than praise of the ones whose locks are adorned with snakes;
they are the foremost among those who serve;
these great ones are slaves to truth;
knowing them to be great, other clever ones speak of them.  

It is perhaps the description of these poets as “slaves to truth” (mēy aṭimai uthaiyār) that leads the the Śivabhaktavilāsa to reinvent these two verses as a brief story about a figure named “Satyadāsa,” (literally “a slave to truth”) which itself only consists of a few verses:

There was once a city called Vedapura, the abode of those who know the Vedas and Agamas, where Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī were said to reside together. There lived one named Satyadāsa, the foremost among the twice-born. Bhakti to the lotus-feet of Śiva was as though his own sister. He worshiped Śambhu thrice daily in accordance with the Veda and śāstra. He worshiped the goddess of speech with the three-syllable mantra. For twelve years, he worshiped the goddess of speech, who is pure like the autumn moon; she, being pleased, came to him herself in a dream and fed milk to that emaciated one. Immediately, he awoke, and his speech was like a torrential shower of nectar, like the Ganga billowing from the locks of Śiva.  


238 Śivabhaktavilasa, 414.
It was, in fact, this story that prompted Marr's harsh condemnation of this particular text as “ludicrously” misinterpreting its Tamil source;\footnote{Marr claims that the Śivabhaktavilāsa wrongly treats the group of poets in the Tamil text as a single individual, as the Tamil language is somewhat ambiguous; that they are, in fact, a group is confirmed by the fact that they are represented as such in a frieze at the Airatesvara temple in Darasuram, located a short distance from Kumbakonam. See J.R. Marr, “The Periya purāṇam Frieze at Taracuram: Episodes in the Lives of the Tamil Śaiva Saints,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London 42.2 (1979): 268-289.} its only connection to the verses from the Tamil text are the name of the brahman mentioned here and the fact that both versions are in some sense about those whose speech is gifted. This story continues for a few more verses, in which the now sweet-spoken brahman asks his guru what he should do with his newfound power; the guru replies that he should “praise Śiva with his speech,” as “the meaning of the four Vedas and the Agamas, as concluded by sages who speak of brahman, is Śiva.” The story concludes by declaring Satyadāsa “the lord of poets” (kaviśvara).\footnote{Śivabhaktavilāsa, 414.} Rather than seeing the invention of this story as a transgression against the source text, I argue that it can be seen as the means by which the Tamil text – which, in this case, contains no narrative or detail – is refashioned into something that conforms to the norms of the Sanskrit purāṇa. The Śivabhaktavilāsa not simply praising an exemplary devotee; it concludes with a declaration from an unnamed guru that a poet must praise Śiva. If we were to call the Śivabhaktavilāsa a translation, it seems to operate in the exact reverse manner as Cokkappa's text, reconstituting the affective poetry of the Tamil source as didactic Sanskrit.

As is often the case with Sanskrit texts of this type, the concluding section of the Śivabhaktavilāsa consists of a phalaśruti, declaring the various kinds of benefits that can accrue from listening to it. Here, as in the KMA, we encounter a more frank discussion of caste than is
typically found in the Tamil sources, as the Śivabhaktavilāsa is said to have different benefits for members of each of the four varṇas:

A brahman, intent upon devotion to Śiva, hearing this from another brahman, quickly obtains whatever desire he wishes for. As a rule, listening to this, a barren woman obtains a son; a bachelor, a pure wife; a maiden obtains a husband. A kṣatriya, hearing this from a brahman, will achieve complete victory over the directions; a vaiśya, hearing this supreme purāṇa from a brahman, will obtain wealth for himself even if gone to a foreign land; a śūdra, hearing this from a brahman, will be worshiped by his family; those of mixed caste, hearing this, will be freed from their multitude of sins.  

In this way, the Śivabhaktavilāsa appears to privilege a kind of brahmanism in a way that the Periyapurāṇam does not. As Karen Pechilis has argued regarding the Periyapurāṇam, the story of Nandanār in that text reflects a more complex engagement with caste – one which simultaneously acknowledges the reality of caste in medieval temple worship while also questioning “the assumption that heredity is a manifestation of religious capacity.” More significantly, this concluding section of the work suggests an entirely different understanding of the role that memory, as embodied by purāṇa, plays in the roles of the devotees who regard it as sacred. If the performances of talapurāṇams were public events, attended by learned or courtly audiences, the hearing of Sanskrit purāṇas – at least as represented in the texts themselves – seems to have a more explicitly practical function; these texts rarely use the language of enjoyment to describe the act of listening.

Conclusion

241 Ibid., 470.

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to argue that Sanskrit and Tamil purāṇas constitute two distinct ways of understanding and representing the past. The Tamil purāṇas, drawing from the rich history of vernacular bhakti literature, utilize affect in order to represent the legends of the past, while the Sanskrit texts employ more straightforward language in order to enjoin various modes of religious practice. Texts in each language have their own respective means of staking their claims to authority, and (at least in the case of sthalapurāṇas and talapurāṇams) generally represent different ways of experiencing sacred spaces. All of these currents are evident in Cokkappa’s own translation, and what I have attempted to show here is that the translation of purāṇas from one language to the other ultimately involves a mediation of “norm-systems,” represented by each language.

As I previously mentioned, there is little available information on Cokkappa’s life. I began this chapter by describing two episodes from the life of T. Mīnātcicuntaram Piḷḷai, a figure whose biography affords us perhaps the most detailed account of the life of a Śaiva poet-scholar, of which Cokkappa was likely a comparable (though significantly earlier) example. In describing the literary world in which Mīnātcicuntaram Piḷḷai was active, Sascha Ebeling has argued that poets such as him existed within an “economy of praise,” in which poets, audiences and patrons (who were often members of courts or representatives of Śaiva monasteries) were all linked; poets praised one another and their patrons in their works, the patrons offered financial support to the poets, and the debuts of these poems were public affairs in which the audience’s appreciation would be evident.243 It seems likely, from the pāyiram of the KP, that Cokkappa himself participated in such an economy, writing for an elite

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audience of poets, scholars, and court officials. Why would talapurāṇams have been such a prized commodity for poetic translations within this economy, in which most of the participants were elites? While I will not attempt to provide a definitive answer to this question, I believe that one way of approaching this question is to consider how purānic themes appear in representations of place and space in the Tamil-speaking world at this time, and in examining more closely the spaces being praised themselves. I engage in such an analysis of Kumbakonam in the following chapter.
Chapter 4: Purāṇa Beyond Purāṇa: “Memory” Outside the Purāṇic Text

As one enters the Ādi Kumbheśvara temple, to the immediate right of the entrance to the garbhagrha are a series of panels, painted in a simple style, that illustrate the origin myth of the temple and the town itself. The panels depict the legend of how Śiva, in the form of the hunter (kīrāta) celebrated in the Mahabharata and elsewhere, shoots a pot of nectar in the time during the time of the primordial flood, releasing the “seed of creation” contained within. The Śivalinga (usually simply called the “Kumbalinga”) housed within the sanctum commemorates the very spot upon which the pot that created the town fell. Visitors to the shrine are thus immediately reminded of the story just before they experience the darśan of the Kumbalinga. The panels serve a simple purpose – to remind visitors of the narrative of the shrine just as they are about to view it, thereby bringing the narrative out of the realm of the text and into that of experience.

As one visits shrines in Kumbakonam, one encounters many such visible reminders of purāṇas. Art and text have long been an important feature of South Indian temples; older temples in throughout the region often prominently feature extensive murals and inscriptions. Modern signage, however, reflects an altogether different set of intentions than inscriptions, which usually recorded the details of donations and renovations to temples, or included verses of praise (praśasti) to the donor or patron ruler. In contrast, these contemporary signs serve as reminders to pilgrims of the importance of the purāṇas in the sacralization of the places that they visit. Such signs thus reflect an altogether different purpose than the public declarations of faith made on behalf of (usually wealthy) donors; these purāṇic signs speak from the authority of traditions of collective memory that transcends
historical time.

Fig. 4.1: Sign Outside Mahamaha Tank

The sign in the picture above, located on the western side of Mahamaha tank, illustrates one particular use of the term “purāṇa” in public declarations of the sacrality of place. Under the title “Kumpakonam purāṇam,” the text reads “Traveling to Kāśī and other places and bathing in their exalted waters is of no use whatsoever. Bathe in the great sacred waters that even purify evil men, to attain the reward of bathing in every celebrated tirtha in the world!” Here, the term “purāṇa” is not utilized in the sense of a narrative at all, but is instead used a signifier of authority, reminding the visitor of the efficacy of bathing in the tank. Nonetheless, as has been shown repeatedly in the preceding chapters, such language is commonly found in purānic texts, which very frequently proclaim the superiority of one particular place over all others. Another sign posted outside the tank (this one on the northern side reflects a similar usage of purāṇa:

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This sign, entitled “Makāmakat tirukkuḷa makimai” (“the greatness of the holy Mahamaha tirtha/tank”) explains the significance of visiting the 16 smaller Shaiva shrines that surround the kulam, while also glorifying the act of bathing in the tank, as well as the entire town itself.

The text reads:

If one worships the Mahamaha tirtha just once, one [gains the] merit of worshiping any of the gods; if one circumambulates it once, one gains the merit of circumambulating the earth 100 times; bathing in it just once creates the merit of living by the Ganga for 100 years. If one bathes in the holy water of the Mahamaha, his mother, wife, and first seven gotras will have their sins extinguished.

**The Greatness of Kumbakonam (Bhaviṣyottara purāṇa)**
Sins committed in other places are destroyed in holy places!
Sins committed in holy places are destroyed in Varanasi!
Sins committed in Varanasi are destroyed in Kumbakonam!
Sins committed in Kumbakonam are destroyed in Kumbakonam!

Immediately below this is the same Tamil verse as posted on the other sign outside the kulam. It is significant that the Sanskrit verse is attributed the Bhavisyottara Purāṇa, although it is unclear which version of the text this particular verse comes from. Nonetheless, as we will see further below, it is quite likely that this verse was a rather popular statement in praise of the city. These signs treat purāna less as a form of “memory” embodied in storytelling than as signifier of scriptural authority that proclaims the greatness of the Mahamaha tank.

Elsewhere, however, clearer signs of the relationship between narrative and the public display of sacred places are evident. At the northeast corner of the tank is a Śaiva temple, called the Kāci Vicuvanātar, which makes this connection more plain:

Fig. 4.3: Front Gate of Kāci Vicuvanātar Temple

The gate outside the temple bears a sign that reads (in English and in Tamil) “Lord Śiva takes
the Navakannikas [“the nine maidens,” i.e., the nine sacred rivers] for a holy dip in Mahamaham tank” with representations of each of the rivers personified as goddesses just above. Much as in the case of the mural located outside the Ādi Kumbheśvara temple, this sign immediately reminds readers of a core narrative that is associated with the temple’s establishment; visiting the temple is thus intimately connected to the recollection of this narrative. This, I argue, is one of the primary functions of the talapurāṇam; it facilitates a deeply felt connection to holy sites, thereby imparting the affective experience of memory onto the visitor.

The public display of “purāṇic signs” thus appears to serve both of the functions of the texts that I mention in the previous chapter – the prescriptive and the affective. Such dispositions towards the usage of purāṇa are thus not solely restricted to the purāṇic text itself but are part of a larger awareness of what constitutes the public perception of sacred space. Both the texts that I discuss below and these public signs have as their intent the cultivation of these two aspects of the experience of place – it is both fruitful in a practical sense (i.e., it is ritually effective) and is rooted in the imagination of the mythic past. The image below, however, suggests that there is another sense in which the past is imagined by such public signs:
This partially obscured sign outside the Mahamaha tank informs the visitor that the 16 shrines located alongside the tank were initially constructed by Govinda Dikṣita, who served in the court of Acyutappa Nāyaka at Thanjavur at the end of the 16th century. The (somewhat awkward) juxtaposition of these two signs reflects an uneasy distinction between two uses of the past – the mythic/purāṇic and the historical – which I alluded in the introduction to this dissertation. More broadly, other materials that relate purāṇic narratives reflect the emergence of newer forms of understanding sacred space that cater to the sensibilities of modern audiences.

The goal of this chapter is to consider the manner in which purāṇic narratives are disseminated and utilized, and the presence of these signs raises two questions that I explore further in what follows. First, it is apparent that narratives contained within sthalapurāṇas are disseminated in a wider variety of media than the purāṇic texts themselves. Furthermore, it stands to reason that the majority of devotees who visit these shrines probably do not read these texts in either Sanskrit or in medieval/early-modern Tamil verse. Rather, it is more
likely that the majority of devotees are familiarized with the narratives contained therein through oral traditions, performances, signs posted throughout the town, and through visual media such as the aforementioned mural. In what follows I briefly survey some of the other vectors of purāṇic narratives associated with Kumbakonam, in order to show “purāṇa” refers not only to a set of narratives (and even less so to exclusively a genre – or two genres – of texts) but more broadly to a distinct understanding of the past that is akin to collective memory.

The second question that I approach in this chapter flows directly from the first; in what follows, I consider some of the ways in which local purāṇic narratives are utilized. A consideration of material from contemporary texts that describe the Ādi Kumbheśvara temple and the Śaiva sites of the city in general, I argue, reflects a novel use of purāṇic narrative – rather than being “affective” or “prescriptive” texts, these modern materials more simply serve to inform a prospective visitor to Kumbakonam with information about its shrines. I thus call the mode of purāṇic narrative that these texts adopt the “informative.”

**Performing the purāṇa**

The first purāṇic vector that I consider is the text of a play, intended to be performed through dance with musical accompaniment, called the *Kumpēcar Kuravañci Nāṭakam* (henceforth KKN), which was composed by Pāpanāca (or Pāpavināca) Mutaliyār in the late 17th century, during the reign of the Maratha ruler Ekoji I of Thanjavur. Little is known about the poet himself; he was likely the composer of a popular song called “naṭamāṭi tirinta umakku”

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244 I am grateful to Indira V. Peterson for assisting me with the translations from this text, and for sharing some thoughts on it and on the genre to which it belongs, which she will discuss in a forthcoming publication.

245 Pāpanāca Mutaliyār mentions the name of Ekoji I of Thanjavur in a verse at beginning of the text; See Pāpanāca Mutaliyar, *Kumpecar Kuravañci Natakam*, 5.
devoted to Śiva in his form as Nataraja enshrined at Cidambaram. The play itself was composed under the patronage of Natarāca Cettiyār, described in the opening verse of the KKN as the tarumakarttār – the chief monastic official – of an unspecified Śaiva maṭam.

The kuṟavañci was a very popular genre of early-modern Tamil dance-drama that typically follows a generic plot. As Indira Peterson points out, roughly 100 kuṟavañcīs were written in Tamil Nadu between the 16th - 19th centuries, the authors of these plays melded the emphasis on landscape poetics as found in Caṅkam literature with bhakti themes, placing a particular emphasis on the cult of sacred spaces. In these plays, a heroine (talaivi) catches sight of a “hero” (talaivāṉ, usually either a king or an image of a deity being carried in a procession) and falls in love. The heroine expresses the pangs of sorrow brought on by her unfulfilled love to her friend (caki/sakhi); the pair then consult a figure who gives this genre its title – the kuṟavañci, a fortune-telling woman who travels to the town from the wilderness. My interest in this particular instantiation of the stock kuṟavañci lies not in the details of this plot, but in the description of the city of Kumpakonam that lies therein, as it exemplifies the manner in which purāṇic narratives were disseminated in poetic forms that lie beyond that of the purāṇa itself.

It is immediately apparent that the KKN as a whole is a devotional work, in which the heroine's love for Śiva serves as a metaphor for the devotee's experience at the temple. The

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248 For an extended formal and thematic discussion of features of this genre, see M. Muilwijk, The Divine Kura Tribe: Kuṟavañci and Other Prabandhas (Groningen: Egbert Forsten: 1996).
text praises Śiva – in his localized form as Ādi Kumbhēśvara – throughout, occasionally peppering references to the narratives I described in the previous chapter in its panegyrics.

Pāpanāca describes the initial moment at which the heroine, Cekaṉ Mōkiṉī, sees the liṅga of Kumbhesvara accompanied by his retinue as it is processed through the city as follows:

\[
pavalamē niyirkavāla kalirruriyār
tirukkuṭantaip patiyin mēvu
tivaḷaničēr kōṅkaimaṅkai paṅkarenįgał
tivavaliṭa mērpavanį kaṇṭumayal
tuvaḷumiṭaic cekaṅmōki niṭpeneṇa
murukimikat tutikkin ŋālē
\]

Seeing our Lord,
who wears the hide of a slain elephant on his coral-red body,
the husband of the goddess whose breasts are adorned with glittering jewels,
he who dwells in the sacred town of Kutantai,
our Kumpalinga, going on procession in the street, riding his white bull,
Cekaṅ Mōkiṇi, the girl with a wist as frail as a flower garland,
is overcome with desire -
her heart melting, she sings a fervent song of praise.²⁴⁹

Cekaṅ Mōkiṇi's encounter with the temple image (in this case, a Śivalinga rather than an embodied form of Śiva) prompts a reaction that recalls a familiar trope to any reader of South Asian devotional poetry²⁵⁰ – she simultaneously expresses her devotion to Śiva and her romantic longing to be united with him. Though what the heroine actually sees is the linga – and not the corporeal form of Śiva – Pāpanāca Mutaliyar frequently equates these; viewing the temple image, in his poetic imagination, is equivalent to a vision of both his embodied form, as

²⁴⁹ Pāpanāca Mutaliyar, Kumpecar kuṟavañci natakam, 17.

²⁵⁰ Specifically, the concept of viraha-bhakti – devotion as expressed through romantic longing for the divine, who is seemingly inaccessible – is a familiar theme of devotional literature throughout South Asia. This is also an extremely common feature of Tamil bhakti poetry (both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava) from the inception of the tradition. See Freidhelm Hardy, Viraha-Bhakti (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).
is reflected in some of the verses translated below. Following this initial sighting, Pāpanāca Mutaliyār first composes a stotra to Śiva as uttered by the heroine, and follows this with a brief description of the torment that she feels as a result of her unfulfilled desire. The latter portion of the text is punctuated by the expression of the following two lines, which were meant to be sung after each individual verse of poetry:

nilavē yiṅkēṉ vārāy eṉ nilavaramariyāmal?

(Pallavi): “Oh moon, why have you come here – do you not know my condition?”

valavara kumpakōṇattil varuṅkumpanātar eṉṇai pētakanceyvarō!

(Anupallavi): “Kumpanātar [i.e., the “Lord of Kumbakonam”], who has come to Kumbakonam, that treasure of place, has ruined me!”

Afflicted by unrequited love, the heroine is tormented the ordinarily pleasant light of the moon, and she chastises Śiva for causing her distress. Her friend (caki/sakhi) advises her to seek the advice of the titular character of this genre, the kuṟatti or kuṟavañci:

taṭatti lētuḷḷic cēlpāyntu tāmarai
tavici lēyacain tātuṅ kuṭantaiyīṛ
tuṭatti lēvalāri tōṅkuntri yampakar
kumpa nāṭār koṭuttarā ḍācaikkē
catuṭti lēmalā raṅkaikkal lēmukam
tanṇai pērttuk kuṟicōl kuṟattiyuṅ
iṭatti lētaya vāyvaru valkuṟi
eṇṇai vēṇu minikkēṭka lākumē

In Kuṭantai, where
carp leap in the ponds
and sway on lotus pads
you have fallen in love with the gracious three-eyed Lord of Kumbakonam
Taking pity on you,

251 Pāpanāca Mutaliyar, Kumpecar kuṟavañci natakasam, 20. In Carnatic music, the pallavi and anupallavi act as the chorus of a song, and are repeated between each subsequent verse.
a kuṟatti fortune teller, who tells fortunes by looking at body signs, lotus-like palms and a woman’s face will come to you. Ask her to give you a sign of your desire’s fate.  

What follows is an extended section of continuous verse which ultimately serves to introduce the character of the kuṟavañci to the audience. Pāpanāca signals the arrival of this character with 143 lines of verse; the first half of this section constitutes a kind of talapurāṇam in miniature, fulfilling all of the functions of those texts, as described in the previous chapters. Thus this section begins:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tāmarait taviciṛ catumukan paṭaitta} \\
\text{pūmiyiṛ ciranta poṉmalaik kaṭutta} \\
\text{tenricula viḷaṅkuṇ tirunāvṛ ṛivil} \\
\text{veṇricēr paravai venṭirai cūnta} \\
\text{paratakaṇ ṭattir pakarpoṇī yāṟraṇ} \\
\text{karaitanin marutan kalantanai nilattil} \\
\text{nilakanaṅ mukamāy niṟaintuviṇ nāṭar} \\
\text{tavacūta ṇaimi cāraṇark kuraitta} \\
\text{tivaḷumā ḷikaicēr tirukūṭantāpuri}
\end{align*}
\]

On Earth, created by the four-faced one seated on his lotus throne, In Jambudvīpa, in the southern direction from the great golden mountain [Meru], In the land of Bharata surrounded by the white waves of the triumphant ocean, on the banks of the splendid Poṉṉi river [Kaveri], In the good landscape of paddy fields; glorious as the face of Lady Earth, as lofty as the celestial realm, is Kumbakonam; The holy town of Kutantai, city of glittering mansions, whose story was told by the sage Sūta to the sages of the Naimiṣa forest.  

Here, in brief, we are presented with a telescopic vision of the city as situated in the world; this

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252 Ibid., 26; “Kutantai” is an abbreviated form of “Kutamukku,” which is the Tamil form of “Kumbha-ghona;” in short, it is another name of Kumbakonam.

253 Ibid., 27
description, despite its brevity, thus resembles the initial descriptions of holy cities as in Sanskrit purāṇas. The reference to the Sūta, the mythical narrator of all puranas, makes it clear that Papanāca Mutaliyar was drawing on a purānic source in composing this section of his drama. The resemblance of this portion of the KKN to some of the purāṇas already described is further born out by the lines that immediately follow:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{anṇiya talatti larumpāvam ceyyil} \\
\text{taṇṇilē puṇṇiya talattinīr rūrum} \\
\text{puṇṇiya talattir pūṅta pāvaṅkal} \\
\text{kaṇṇipār kāṇak kāciyir rūrum} \\
\text{cētvīr kāciyir ceyperum pāvam} \\
\text{kōṭilāk kumpa kōṇattir rūrum} \\
\text{kumpakō āttir koṭiyati vīṇaikaḷ} \\
\text{kumpa kōṇamām kūṭantaiyir rūrum}
\end{align*}
\]

If one commits a grave sin in other places, it is easily extinguished in sacred places; All of one's sins, even if committed in holy places are extinguished in Kāśi, if seen with one's own eyes; A great sin, committed in Kāśi or in Setu [Rameshwaram] is extinguished in blemishless Kumbakonam; One's most heinous bad karma, [even if collected] in Kumbakonam is extinguished in Kutantai, born from the nostril of the pot/as did the stars Magha and Cani (kumpa kōṇamām)\(^{254}\)

Once again, the resemblance of this kind of panegyric to that found in sthalapurāṇas/talapurāṇams is striking. This section of the text is virtually identical to the Sanskrit verse, attributed to the Bhavisyottara purāṇa, posted on a sign outside the Mamaka tank mentioned above. Regardless of the actual source of this verse, it possibly had been popularized in a variety of sources as a formulaic declaration of the greatness of the city. This is, after all, one of the chief functions of both Sanskrit and Tamil texts of this type – to declare the greatness of one place over all others.

\(^{254}\) Ibid.
The rest of this section of the text recounts many stories associated with the city, most of which are devoted to different sites around the town which are associated with individual purāṇic legends of their own. The first such story recounted in this manner is referenced by the poet as follows:

\[
mēvupaka vangpītā ventavel īllumpu \\
pūvāt tōnrum puritiruk kuṭantai
\]

The city of holy Kuṭantai is where Pakavaṉ's father's bones appeared as flowers;\(^{255}\)

In this story, a sage named Pakavan was traveling to Varanasi to perform the last rites for his father. Along the way, he passed through Kumbakonam and decided to have a bath in the Kaveri. Before doing so, he placed a pot containing his father's bones on the branch of a tree. While he was bathing, a young boy passed by and looked into the pot, and saw that the bones had turned into flowers. As a result of this, Pakavan realized that bathing in the Kaveri was just as efficacious as doing so in the Ganga at Varanasi; this story thus accounts for the origin of a particular tirtha (called the “Pakava tirtha”) in Kumbakonam, and not the actual temple to Śiva itself. The story of another tirtha is recounted as follows:

\[
kōtamāṇ pacuvaik konravem pāvam \\
ātiyir īrū māvaṇak kalari
\]

[Where there is] the storehouse of manuscripts [i.e., the temple itself] at which Kotaman eliminated the grave sin of killing a cow;\(^{256}\)

In the story referenced here, a sage named Kotaman unwittingly kills a cow that was sent to

\(^{255}\) Ibid.

\(^{256}\) Ibid. This is a popular story in purāṇic lore – Jurgen Neuss mentions this story in a purāṇa declaring the importance of taking a pilgrimage to the Narmada river. See Jurgen Neuss, Narmadaparikrama – Circumambulation of the Narmada River: On the Tradition of a Unique Hindu Pilgrimage (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 150.
him by a group of sages who wanted him to be guilty of the sin of doing so; he travels to Kumbakonam to rid himself of this sin. While the “storehouse of manuscripts” (āvanaṅkaḷari) mentioned here appears to simply be a reference to the main Shiva temple itself, this particular legend is actually associated with another tirtha, called the “kohatti tirtha” (Sanskrit “gohatya,” the “cow-killing” tirtha). Most of the legends mentioned here continue in this way – the describe the manner in which different sites are glorified by the past presence of a devotee of Śiva, which sets the precedent for the sites' ritual efficacy. The only non-Shaiva legend recounted here related to the “Amuta tirtha” or the “Poṟṟāmarai Kuḷam” (the golden lotus tank) - a tank located in between the Vaishnava Sarangapani temple and the Ādi Kumbheśvara temple:

ēmamā muṇiva ṇilakkumi tuḷacit
tāmaṅai vaṇaṅki tavampuri pūṅkā

The city in which the great sage Hema worshiped Viṣṇu, whose consorts are Lakṣmi and Tulasi;\(^{257}\)

In the story, Hema raises Lakṣmi as his daughter as a result of a boon from Viṣṇu. I speculate that Pāpanāca includes this story because of the location of the tank with which it is associated – to the immediate east of the main entrance to the Ādi Kumbheśvara temple. It is clear from this section of the text that Pāpanāca has a particular sacred geography of the city in mind, and this seems to have affected his choice of narrative to some extent. With that said, it is difficult to discern a broader organizational pattern that governs the sequence in which these stories are told; they do not conform to any specific pilgrimage circuit, nor does their order suggest a specific sequence that proceeds in a certain direction.

\(^{257}\) Ibid., 28.
Fig. 4.5: The Poṟṟāmarai Kuḷam as viewed from the south; the Sarangapani temple can be seen on the right.

Perhaps the most celebrated of all the tirthas in Kumbakonam is the Mamakam tank situated in the center of the town. Pāpanāca similarly references a narrative associated with it, in which Shiva extinguishes the sins of the nine rivers whose waters are said to mingle in this tank, in his description of the city:

\[
\text{āṟon patukku marupāva nācam} \\
\text{māṟiṭāt teṇṇir māmaka vāvi}
\]

The eternal water of the Māmaka tank
effected the destruction of the grave sins of all of the nine rivers.\textsuperscript{258}

\textsuperscript{258} Ibid., 29.
For the most part, the narratives included in this section of the drama are recounted very briefly; usually in only one or two verses. The commentator on the 1961 edition of the KKN identifies Minatcicuntaram Pillai’s *kuṭantai purāṇam* as a reference for these stories in their more complete versions; it was nevertheless not Pāpanāca Mutaliyār's source for the simple reason that he wrote his text roughly a century before Minatcicuntaram's *purāṇa* was composed. However, the fact that the narrative logic of this set of verses resembles a *talapūrāṇam* so closely in organization (and, as I will show later, in its language) suggests that Pāpanāca was indeed consulting a *talapūrāṇam* in composing his play. Towards the end of this interlude, a description of the central legend of the town's main Shaiva shrine:

*kaikkaṇai cempor kaṭattinait takarkka*
The husband of the goddess Umā took the form of a hunter and shattered that pure golden pot with an arrow, whereupon the ambrosia that is divine reality itself became the crescent moon and the soaked earth itself became the embodiment of wisdom to be praised by scholars.  

After briefly recounting the story of how the mythic king Māndhātṛ initiated the tradition of the spring festival in the town, Pāpanāca Mutaliyār praises Shiva before finally introducing the kuṟatti:

The pure Lord who crowns the three well versed in three-fold Tamil.

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259 Ibid., 29.

260 i.e., iyal, icai, and natakam – poetry, music, and drama.
the lord who is half-woman,
The God of beautiful Kutantai
where he rides on the temple-car during the Makam festival
He who is the ambrosia of Kuṭamūkku/from the nostril of the pot,
Resplendent with sacred ash, garlanded with skulls,
Ornamented with a snake as a garland, the Lord of the amṛta-
inga,
Whose shoulders are garlanded with tumpai flowers and maru
leaves
The Lord who graciously manifested as Ādi Kumbheśvara,
The one whose foot is curled as he dances, the one whose head is
adorned with the river [Ganga],
The Lord of the Kumpalinga, who came to Kutantai,
Kumbheśvara, who shares his body with the Goddess, the
younger sister of Viṣṇu -
Mōkiṇi, upon seeing the form of that one, swiftly moving in
procession
on his bull, at the temple of the one with the eye on his forehead,
In the springtime when the full moon flourishes,
Her bracelets, her clothes, her very mind fell away,
as she was caught in the chaos of the God of Love.
Seeing Cekaṇ Mōkiṇi suffering, tormented and seized by
confusion,
the meritorious kuṟatti, in whom the knowledge of pure Tamil
flourishes,
came over, moved by compassion common to hill-folk.²⁶¹

The kuṟavañci is literally a woman from the mountain wilderness (kuṟiṅci), who brings with
her the knowledge of her travels. Much of the rest of the KKN is devoted to demonstrating the
kuṟavañci's knowledge of various subjects; she tells the heroine about the planets, mountains,
and rivers. At one point, the kuṟavañci describes various sacred places to the heroine, who
asks to her to name all of the places that destroy sin:

\[
\text{taricikkun talaṅcolvē ṇammē nāṉ}
\]

Pallavi: I will tell you of the holy places, noble lady, which you must visit (for
darśan)!

\[
\text{taricikkun talaṅcolvē ṇarumppen ṇamutēkēl}
\]

²⁶¹ Ibid., 30.
Anupallavi: I will tell you of the holy places, sweet, noble lady, which you must visit (for darśan); listen! Cidambaram, which daily bestows liberation to even the gods, is the foremost among them.

Kalaicikkku vaḷaịṅḷra kaṅkāḷa ṇārūr
callaṇai vaḷaṅṅra kalaiṅḷra tōrūr
valaccevimēṛ praṇaṅvaṇṭaṇ vaḷaṅṅivarumōrūr
maṇaḷorukāṛ civāḷika vaṭivāṇṭatōrūr

There is the city where the Lord who carries a skeleton bent towards the girdled maiden [Tiruppanantāl]; A city where stone elephants fed on sugarcane [Madurai]; A city where [Śiva] approaches as one's life breath emerges from one's right ear [Vṛddhācalam]; A city where the Śivalinga was fashioned from sand [Rameshwaram];

uṟakkamilā vāḷaiyṅḷal lurukkoṇṭatōrūr
umaiyēntac cīvaṇāṛvāṇ tūpātēcān tarumūr
pirakkamutti yāmēṛu pērāṇa tōrūr
pillayṅaik kaṟipāṇṭīp pōtēṇratavaṇṭūr

A city where [the seven maidens] took the form of plantain trees that never decay [Paṅṅiḷi]; The city where Śiva teaches [the tārakā mantra] to dying persons on Umā's lap [Kāśi]; A city whose name indicates that all who are born there are granted salvation [Tiruvārur]; The city where [Śiva disguised as] an ascetic asked [Ciruttoṇṭar] to give him a meal by cooking his own son as a curry [Paraṅcōṭi].

Much as in his description of the town, Pāpanāca Mutaliyār here recollects both narrative and ritual references (as in the description of Vṛddhachalam, where Śiva is said to speak in the right ear of the dying) as a generalized description of place. The play reveals how the act of storytelling – in this case, embodied in the form of references to purāṇic narratives – is an essential component of Pāpanāca's imagination of place itself. To lay out the geography of the

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262 Ibid., 55-56. The names of the places that correspond to these narrative references are provided by the text's commentator.
town is to recount these stories, and the devotee's experience of the places that constitute this geography is connected to their recollection. This passage also suggests that these stories were popular enough that the audience of the play would recognize these references; nowhere in the verse are the actual names of these towns given.

Ultimately, what I wish to suggest regarding the KKN is that the purāṇa is not only a label that applies to certain Sanskrit or Tamil (or other South Asian vernacular texts), but can be considered a unique mode of engaging with the past. This sense of the past is always tied to the necessarily contemporary concerns of the devotee. Pāpanāca's play is, above all else, a devotional work; as such, the narrative references to purāṇas that he employs serve the purpose of arousing a devotional feeling in the audience. In this respect, the KKN reflects a close affinity to the talapuranams discussed previously.

**Describing Temples in Modern Texts**

Virtually all of the Sanskrit and Tamil texts that I have described above were likely composed by and for specialists and poets familiar with the relatively inaccessible literary traditions in which they participated. However, aside from the oral tradition, contemporary audiences are likely familiarized with the narratives associated with these places and the rituals to be performed therein from manuals and pamphlets that present the material of the sthalapurāṇa in an accessible manner. These manuals reflect a different understanding of the past, incorporating a sense of the historical into the tradition of collective memory; as opposed to the “prescriptive” and “affective” forms of memory that I described in the previous chapter, I call this mode the “informative.”

My interest in the introduction of the historical to the tradition of collective memory
has been influenced by Pierre Nora’s study of collective memory and its transformation in modern France. In his study of the relationship between memory and history in 20th century France, Nora argues that an earlier, mythical nationalist discourse that served to bind the nation together eventually became directly tied to a historical consciousness – with the latter primarily constituted by the academic discipline of historical writing. Critically, for Nora, this new mode of historical analysis came to serve the more general purpose of the cultivation of a national memory, albeit along different historical lines. 263 Much of the material I consider below reflects a similar merging of the study of purānic texts with a variety of new methods for understanding sacred space that are perhaps best characterized by the German term wissenschaft264 – not just history, but philology, cartography and architecture as well. More generally, modern print texts related to pilgrimage sought to provide the potential visitor or donor with a wide variety of information regarding the shrines at Kumbakonam, and employed a variety of methodologies with which to do so. The texts to which this discussion now turns are nevertheless still devotional works that are chiefly interested in providing some background to an educated lay audience regarding various aspects of temple worship.

Much like sthalapurāṇas in earlier centuries, these modern texts are chiefly concerned with providing a pilgrim with the essential information that they need to know in order to worship at the temple. One such text, a volume entitled Kumpakōṇastalapurāṇavacaṇam (Digest 263 Pierre Nora, “General Introduction,” in Rethinking France: Les Lieux des Memoire, ed. Pierre Nora (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), xx.

264 As Bas van Bommel has recently studied, the term wissenschaft came to represent the systematic study of a wide variety of fields of knowledge, including both the humanities and natural sciences, in 19th century Germany. More specifically, the study of literature shifted away from aesthetics and towards philology, which was felt to be a more “scientific” methodology. See Bas van Bommel, “Between Bildung and Wissenschaft: The 19th Century German Ideal of Scientific Education,” European History Online, http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/models-and-stereotypes/germanophilia-and-germanophobia/bas-van-bommel-between-bildung-and-wissenschaft-the-19th-century-german-ideal-of-scientific-education (Accessed July 5th, 2019).
of the sthalapurāṇa of Kumbakonam), explicitly connects these two bodies of literature, signaling a broader shift in South Indian literary practices in the early part of the 20th century. This text, published in Chennai in 1933 (though with the blessing of the Adi kumbhesvara temple trust – whose leader wrote a brief introduction to the text), is ostensibly a companion volume to Minaticicuntaram Pillai’s talapurāṇam “so that it may be understood by people other than scholars.” Modern simple Tamil prose texts such as these were evidently published with the expressed purpose of popularizing a relatively inaccessible set of literature.

These shifts – towards a reorientation of purāṇic material in a more “scientific” manner as exemplified by the material that is discussed below, and towards a more accessible language and mode of presentation – can be situated in the larger context of changes that occurred in the landscape of Tamil literature in the 19th and early 20th centuries. During the 19th century, Tamil poets were patronized by members of mercantile and landowning classes, who occasionally styled themselves as royalty despite their diminished sovereignty at the dawn of the colonial rule. However, even as such systems of patronage rooted in idealized notions of kingship survived as late as the early 20th century in some places, this period also saw the rise of new vehicle for the dissemination of literature – print media. As Sascha Ebeling has recently pointed out, poets who were traditionally sponsored by courts and maṭams came to run printing presses, and worked with British scholars towards “the modernization of entire disciplines.” Such a modernization did not necessarily signal an absolute rupture of the older

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265 Here, I translate the term “vacanam” as “digest,” though the Sanskrit and Tamil word nibandha/nipanta is usually translated as such. The latter term actually signifies a prominent early modern genre of jurisprudential literature that often compiled quotations from other texts. See Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Performance in World of Paper: Purāṇic Histories and Social Communication in Early Modern India,” Past and Present 219 (2013): 95.

266 M.S. Turaicami Pillai, Kumpakonastalapurāṇavacanam, (Cennai: Sri Jayakumari Antu Company, 1933), 5.

267 Sascha Ebeling, Colonizing the Realm of Words, 161.
system of patronage – landowners themselves often funded the publication of such texts – but as I will explain below, it also initiated changes in the way Tamil literary and religious texts were presented to audiences.

Despite the modern character of these prose texts, they do resemble the Sanskrit texts in one respect – the relatively straightforward manner in which they relate stories. Consider, for instance, the following passage which describes the origin of the shrine and its linga itself:

When Lord Śiva, who had taken the form of a hunter, arrived near that pot, a place immediately appeared that was suitable for the drops of liquid, which had dampened the surface of the earth, to collect. Then, fashioning a linga out of the mud that had mixed with the nectar, and having bathed the linga with the very nectar that had emerged from the nostril of the pot and having worshiped him, Brahma and the other gods looked on; [Śiva] then entered the linga and vanished, appearing [instead] as pure light. Then, wanting to give a blessing (mangalam) to the world, all of the gods raised up Uma from Kailasa to the left side of the linga and worshiped her; they thus called her “Mangalanayaki.” All of this happened in the month of Masi; thus Brahma, after establishing a shrine to Ādi Kumbheśvara and Mangalanayaki there, began the practice of a festival; it was an 11-day festival, and having bathed in the pond of nectar on the 10th day, Brahma worshiped the Gods at the Mamakam tank. In this way, the annual tradition of the “Brahma Festival” was initiated.268

The passage above accomplishes almost everything that the Sanskrit ṭuarāṇas I describe in the previous chapter do – it offers a concise account of the origin of the shrine and the precedent for some of the practices that take place there. And despite the vast difference in languages used (Sanskrit śloka versus modern Tamil prose) the tone is rather similar; the reader is presented with information rather than moved to feeling. At a glance, then, these modern prose texts appear to be a fulfilling a similar function to Sanskrit sthalapurāṇas.

268 *Kumpakonastalapurāṇavacanam*, 6-7.
Yet the differences between modern volumes such as these and Sanskrit purāṇas are even more obvious, and are suggestive of a fundamental shift in the representation of the past that this modern text exemplifies. At no point does M. Turaicami Pillai, the compiler of the text, make a claim to spiritual authority – he certainly is not claiming to narrate an originally divine revelation that has passed through mythic interlocutors, as Sanskrit purāṇas generally do. Furthermore, this text and others like lack all of the features that lend the Sanskrit works the authority to make prescriptions or injunctions – such as their claims of divine narratorship, or the phalasrutis for reading or listening to them. In the previous chapter, I argued that Sanskrit and Tamil sthalapurāṇas represented two modes of engaging with sacred spaced; to this, I would add a third mode, the “informative,” wherein the mythic past is recounted simply to provide the reader with more information about the shrine. Furthermore, this “informative” mode is marked not only by a certain style of prose, but also by the formal characteristics of the printed text.

The Kumpakōṇastalapurāṇavacaṇam can thus be taken as a representative example of a larger trend, in which the information conveyed by purāṇic texts was presented in a manner that was facilitated by print. Although it claims to be a companion to Minatcicuntaram Pillai's poem, it does not seem to engage very closely with its source text; rather than providing a detailed reading of its poem (as a scholar's commentary might), it more simply provides a summary of the narratives contained therein along with some basic instructions for a pilgrim visiting the site. For instance, after recounting the story of the formation of the town, the text simply provides a numbered list of all the local shrines:
Fig 4.7: Numbered list of shrines in Kumbakonam

In providing such a list, the *Kumpakōṇastalapurāṇavacanam* indeed accomplishes just what its title suggests it will – it provides a neat summary of pertinent information from the source text in manner that is easily understandable for a contemporary reader. The list tells the reader where each shrine is located in relation to others, and the author also provides a note that lists the shrines not mentioned in the other purāṇa at all. One addendum to the list, for example, explains that “Near this shrine [a Vaiṣṇava shrine devoted to Narasimha], the purāṇa says, 'Whenever a person possessed by a spirit comes in the proximity of this temple, the spirit leaves;' this continues to take place today.” The whole texts thus adopts a similar tone, as it is clearly intended for a modern audience who may be interested in visiting the shrines themselves.

Above all, what I wish to suggest about this text is that the manner of its presentation is
only possible within a printed text. The author of the text, M. Turaicami, is described in the
foreword as “The Lion of Kings of Poets of Three-Fold Tamil” (muttamiḻkavirācaciṅkam),
situating him squarely within the poetic tradition of earlier centuries. Moreover, the text
begins in a manner not dissimilar to the talapurāṇams discussed in previous chapters – it
opens with by citing a verse in praise of Ganesa from the source text\textsuperscript{270}, followed by quotations
of several verses from the Tēvāram that are devoted to Kumpakonam. Nevertheless, what the
Kumpakōṇastalapurāṇavacaṇam ultimately offers is not a guide to actually reading
Minatcicuntaram Pillai’s poem, nor is it the emotionally resonant savoring of devotional
poetry; it is, much more simply, a guide to visiting the shrines of Kumpakonam. In its use of
numbered lists and simple prose, it accords to the formal standards of printed literature; it is
hard to imagine such a text being composed on palm leaves.

What is absent from this text is any kind of systematic study – historical, architectural,
or otherwise – of the sites they describe; Turaicami is content to simply recount purāṇic
narratives while occasionally providing additional notes regarding the manner in which
worship occurs at the shrines. Nevertheless, this text represents a clear departure from an
earlier tradition of commentary; the Digest is not a guide to reading the source text (as a
traditional Tamil urai would be) but is simply a distillation of the essential information found
in that text that would be relevant to a pilgrim. Thus, while the Digest does not embody
“wissenschaft” in the manner I describe above, it does represent a significant departure from
older modes of scholarship.

The manner in which print facilitates the “informative” mode of purāṇic presentation
is better exemplified by the next text that I will discuss. This text, entitled Śrī Ātikumpēśvarar

\textsuperscript{270} See Minatcicuntaram Pillai, \textit{Tirukutantaippurāṇam}, Dharmapuram Adhinam Library no. 862, v.1.
Ālaya Talavaralāṟu (“The History of The Site of the Temple of Ādi Kumbheśvara”), was published in 1956 by the Ādi Kumbheśvara Temple Trust and was ostensibly written for the same reasons as the text discussed above. Its author, R. Pancanata Pillai, states in the introduction “It is good for those visiting the temple to be aware of the temple's greatness. In accordance with the circular sent by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department [Board], after consulting the Tiru Kutantai purāṇam composed by T. Minatcicuntaram Pillai together with the commentaries written by Dr. U. Ve. Caminataiyar, [this volume] has been concisely prepared, with the assistance of the Deputy Director of the HR&CE.”

Despite its brevity, this statement regarding the background about the composition of this volume tells us much about the different world in which purāṇic literature was disseminated in post-independence India.

Originally formed in 1926 as an independent organization before being made a formal government agency in 1951, the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board manages many temples in Tamil Nadu by assigning its own executive officers to the shrines. As Joanne Waghorne points out, the formation of the HR&CE reflected an attempt, in part, to ensure that caste was no longer an obstacle for potential devotees to worship at temples in Tamil Nadu. While it is impossible to firmly attribute a similar intention to Pancanata Pillai, who was a Tamil professor based in Tiruchirappalli, he does seem to have been less connected to the world of traditional poetics than the author of the aforementioned volume. At the same time,

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271 R. Pancanatam Pillai, Sri Ati Kumpesvara Alaya Talavaralaru (Kumbhakonam: Sri Atikumpesvaracuvami Tevastanam, 1956), iii.


273 Ibid., 147.
he has consulted the very same material that Turaicami Pillai did in preparing his volume over two decades earlier. Pancanata Pillai further adds “Consciously wanting to preserve the ancient, small artifacts of temple art, and wanting to publish the histories of [sacred] places, the leaders of the HR&CE came [to me].”274 Thus, the motivating impulse of the text is not strictly devotional, but is also preservationist; in the eyes of the government, by this time stories, much like artifacts, needed to be saved from potential oblivion.

The actual prose of the Śrī Āti kumpēśvarar Ālaya Talavalarāṟu is rather similar to that found in the Kumpakōṇastalapurāṇavacaṇam, consisting primarily of straightforward recollections of the stories associated with Shaiva shrines within the town, occasionally interspersed with quotations from famous Tamil Shaiva texts such as the Tēvāram. For example, in a general introduction to the text that describes the experience of the ideal devotee, Pancanata Pillai writes “…in the past, the God who flourished in the temple bestowed his grace on those devotees who had worshiped him with devotion and who had thus made their hearts temples,” and then quotes Appar, who says 'Those hearts of those who worship morning and evening become temples.”275 In this way, Pancanata Pillai occasionally uses older sources to flesh out basic points that he makes regarding devotion and temple worship, without attempting any kind of systematic theology. This volume differs, however, in that it is much more concerned with logistics of pilgrimage to Kumbakonam, explaining at one point that there are numerous rest houses in the vicinity of the train station, indicating the presence of various municipal offices and tourist attractions within the town, and mentioning several

274 R. Pancanatam Pillai, Śrī Āti Kumpesvara Alaya Talavalarāru, iii.
275 Ibid., 2.
famous individuals who have lived there, such as Pāpanāca Mutaliyar, the poet discussed above. In addition, Pancanata Pillai includes much more basic information about the shrines of the town, with labeled maps of the temple and photographs of the shrine.

Fig. 4.8: A map of the shrines surrounding the Mahamaha Tank

In this way, the *Sri Adikumpesvarar Alaya Talavaralaru* better exemplifies the informative mode than *Kumpakonastalapurāṇavacanam*. While the earlier text largely consisted of an accessible retelling of a Tamil poem, Pancanata Pillai's text uses a wider variety of forms of knowledge in order to present the potential visitor with as much information relevant to temple worship as possible.

Regarding the representation of the past specifically, Pancanata Pillai juxtaposes both the recent history of the shrine with the purānic past. Regarding the former, for instance,

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276 Ibid., 5-6.
writes of the history of renovations of the shrine, “Before, in 1810, through the great efforts of
the chief religious official of the temple, many renovations were carried out and the
kumbhabhiseka was performed. Before, starting in 1938, many renovations were carried out
through the great efforts of the temple managers; the interior portion of the rajagopuram was
reconstructed.”277 The section of the text that deals with the history of the shrine also briefly
relates the history of its administration (albeit limited to the 20th century) and mentions some
of the inscriptions – all from the 18th century – that are found at the temple. In including
details such as these, Pancanata Pillai goes beyond the purview of a traditional purāṇa, seeking
to represent the temple’s past through a wider variety of means. As far as the recollection of
purānic narratives goes, Pancanata Pillai summarizes important moments from the
Minatcicuntaram Pillai’s version of the purāṇa in a manner very similar to the earlier volume
discussed above. Pancanata Pillai is nonetheless careful to point out that these stories exist in
several different versions, pointing out that several of the Sanskrit mahapurāṇas relate the
story of the town as well. Pancanata’s text concludes with a collection of verses devoted to
Kumbhakonam compiled from various texts, including the Tēvāram, Tirukkutantai Purāṇam, and
Pāpanāca Mutaliyar’s Kumpecar Kuruvaṇci Nāṭakam. This reflects the somewhat more text
critical approach that Pancanata takes; his is a text that is clearly written by an academic who
is nonetheless invested in the devotional practices that take place in the temple. By virtue of
this manner of presentation, I argue, the Śrī Ātikumpēśvarar Ālaya Talavaralāru exemplifies a
fundamental shift in the perception of the purānic past – the purāṇa itself is no longer a
dominant mode of understanding the past as it relates to sacred space; it now exists alongside
other forms of knowledge, especially history.

277 Ibid., 21.
This turn towards a more diverse methodology in describing sacred space is even further exemplified by the final text that I will mention here. Entitled Aruḻmiku Śrī Āti Kumpēśvarar Svāmi Tirukkōvil Varalāṟum Nirvākamum (The History and Maintenance of The Holy Temple of Lord Ādi Kumbheśvara, Full of Grace) and published in 1986, this volume provides a comprehensive study of various aspects of the shrine. The portion devoted to the purāṇic narrative is in fact very brief, and lists the central narrative under the simple subheading “The reason for the [temple's] name.” Here, the story has been reduced to another piece of relevant information about the shrine, rather than providing the framework for worship there. Instead, the majority of the volume consists of material not dissimilar to Pancanata Pillai's work; it contains an extensive study of the shrine's architectural features, describes some of the rituals that take place there, and provides a more detailed summary of some of the inscriptions found at the site.

The Aruḻmiku Śrī Āti Kumpēśvarar Svāmi Tirukkōvil Varalāṟum Nirvākamum is thus less interested in recounting the legends and poems associated with the temple than it is in providing the visitor (or donor, as I will explain further below) with the essential information needed to worship at the site. For example, consider the following map that he includes with the text:

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In this map, the author of the text, V. Tanikacalam, includes a great deal of simple, practical details, noting both the locations of shrines in the town as well as various facilities – such transportation hubs and pharmacies – with which a potential visitor might like to be familiar. At the same time, Tanikacalam also includes details of a more esoteric nature, explaining, as in the image below, which seeks to clarify the relationship between vastuśāstra (i.e., the Indic discourse on temple architecture) and the construction of the vimāṇa of the temple:

Despite the vast differences between the two texts, this image reflects the similar intent that underlies the composition of both this volume and Turaicami Pillai’s text fifty years earlier – they both seek to present inaccessible material pertinent to temple worship in a manner that in readily understandable to a modern audience.
Furthermore, this volume reflects a much greater interest in the financial aspects of temple maintenance, a topic to which Tanikacalam devotes a third of his text. This section of the text consists mostly of tables that show, for instance, a list of donors and the donations that they have made to the temple, a list of sources of income for the temple, and a list of the costs that the temple charges for special services such as weddings.\textsuperscript{279} In the conclusion to his text, Tanikacalam makes his purpose in writing the text plain, as he says, “In prior times, kings had temples constructed and excellently maintained them. However, at the present time, despite having an excess of wealth, many temples are in a poor condition, having not been maintained properly.”\textsuperscript{280} Tanikacalam's purpose, in making this observation, is to indicate the

\textsuperscript{279} Ibid., 36-51.

\textsuperscript{280} Ibid., 52.
need for better temple administration and for them to diversify their revenue streams; his text is thus both a pilgrim's guide and an administrative document indicating the need for visitors to make donations to the temple.

Taken together, these three texts devoted to the town reflect broader shifts in the landscape of Tamil literary and religious culture in the 20th century. Most significantly, the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the decline of a political and economic system that supported traditional poets. Such scholarship found a new home in the academy and in the publishing house, although this had consequences for the nature of the literature produced thereafter. In the case of the local purāṇa, these texts all offer readily understandable, practical guides to temple worship, and to the narratives that associated with the shrines at Kumbakonam. Moreover, the use of print enabled new modes of presenting such information, as seen in the presence of numbered lists, images, and maps in these volumes. The formal possibilities created by print also enabled the production of texts that employed diverse methodologies in presenting this information, and in this mixture of approaches, the study of traditional purāṇas was one among many. This manner of representing the temple's past – as both historical and mythic, supplemented by other forms of academic inquiry – constitute what I call the “informative” mode of representing the past.

Conclusion

Purāṇa refers to more than just a genre (or two genres) of texts; this chapter has sought to explore some of the myriad ways that purāṇic memory is disseminated outside the texts bearing that name and has considered just a few examples of how this is accomplished. The transmission of purāṇic memory conditions the experiences of the visitor, and as the signs
pictured in the opening of this chapter demonstrate, one is constantly reminded of the continued force of such memory in structuring the visitor's experience of the sacred spaces within the city. The KKN affords an example of how purāṇa influenced a poetic envisioning of space; Pāpanāca Mutaliyār's use of purāṇic references as a way of actually naming places (as in the kuṟavaṇci's description of her journeys to the heroine, for example) demonstrates the powerful connection that stories had (and continue to have) with sacred spaces.

The methods for the transmission of purāṇa have undergone a major shift over the course of the last century. In the modern era, purāṇic memory exists alongside other modes of engaging with sacred spaces, such as history. Printed literature affords authors interested in glorifying sacred space to engage with their chosen subject in new ways and to write for broader audiences; such “informative” texts, as I have called them, have increased in popularity, and such materials are readily available for purchase outside many temples in South Asia. None of this is to suggest, however, that the importance of purāṇic memory has receded in its significance, even if the economy that allowed Tamil poets to compose their works has changed dramatically. Just as much as ever, the Śaiva sacred landscape is produced through narratives, even if those narratives now reach us in new ways.
Conclusion: Space, Religion, and Memory

The preceding chapters have attempted to sketch the history of an idea that was of central importance to the Tamil Śaiva tradition. From the beginning of the latter half of the 2nd millennium CE, poets within the tradition sought to glorify the many abodes of Śiva. Over the centuries that followed, a series of distinct but related traditions grew around each of these shrines, as writers and poets glorified the stories associated with each shrine through narrative and verse, while also paying homage to their literary predecessors. Thus, for all of the temples that constitute the Śaiva sacred landscape, there exists a richly textured set of narratives, conveyed through different media, that influence the experience of the devotee who visits – or in some cases, simply imagines – each shrine. Together, these narratives constitute the fabric of a Tamil Śaiva collective memory.

The bulk of this dissertation has consisted of close readings of a type of text that appears to have been more popular in South India than anywhere else in the subcontinent. Space has always been a prominent theme of Tamil Śaiva poetry – as I describe in Chapter 1, the concept of sacred spaces and the region to which they collectively belonged constituted one of the bases upon which a Śaiva community was initially formed in the early medieval period. Deeply influenced by the literature of that time, the Tamil talapurāṇam represents an elite and complex poetic corpus that rendered popular legends, often taken from simpler Sanskrit sources, into ornate verse. Much of what my consideration of this material alongside its Sanskrit counterpart has sought to demonstrate is how purāṇas written in these two language conform to two different types of collective memory. The work of translation in the examples that I have considered did not prioritize fidelity to the source text; by virtue of their
style and the content that the poets sought to include, talapurāṇams offer a very different
depiction of the experience of sacred space that was explicitly tied to the poets' reverence for
early medieval Tamil Śaiva devotional poetry. In contrast, some Sanskrit renderings of Tamil
works (such as the Śivabhaktavilāsa) sought to formalize the emotionally charged material of
Tamil texts, bringing within the orbit of a brahmanical Śaivism that saw its outer boundaries
lying outside of the Tamil speaking country through the use of more direct and prescriptive
language.

It is for this reason that, in Chapter 3, I found it useful to frame the translation of
sthalapurāṇas into talapurāṇams as a “norm-governed activity,” as described by Gideon Toury,
in which the purāṇas composed in each language were bound by literary and theological
norms that were specific to each. As the cosmopolitan language of South Asia, Sanskrit texts
necessarily attempted to speak to as wide a readership as possible; their narratives were
unbound by place, time or author, and they held the truths that they asserted to be universal
even as they were glorifying very specific places. The Tamil texts, in contrast, were the
products of individual poets, usually sponsored by wealthy and powerful patrons, who
composed their translations in accordance with the norms of Tamil poetics and were
influenced by the long history of devotional poetry in that language. This literary history is
deeply significant to the popularity of talapurāṇams in early modern South India; it is perhaps
because of the prominence of space as the organizing theme of early Tamil bhakti poetry that
later writers wrote about sacred places so frequently.

Building on the work of Gideon Toury in theorizing a “systemic” approach to the study
of translation, Andre Lefevere has described translation as a form of “refraction,” which he
defines as “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work.”

Lefevere further argues that patronage plays in a key role in determining the content of translations; the institutional forces that fund a translator's activity act as both formal and ideological influences on the characteristics of each translation. Lefevere's characterization of translation as “refraction,” and his observations regarding the importance of patronage are pertinent to the example at hand; in choosing to reconstitute the Sanskrit texts as elaborate Tamil poems, poets such as Cokkappa were also writing to the tastes of the courtly and monastic audiences that sponsored them and for whom exceptional literary flair was prized.

As I have argued in the preceding, Tamil and Sanskrit purāṇas of space constitute “affective” and “prescriptive” modes of collective memory. On one level, this distinction is purely literary, and refers to the formal and thematic differences between these two sets of texts that I have described above. This distinction recalls Erich Auerbach's description of the narrative styles of *The Odyssey* and the book of Genesis, respectively:

On the one hand, externalized, uniformly illuminated phenomena, at a definite time and a definite place, connected together without lacunae in a perpetual foreground; thoughts and feelings completely expressed; events taking place in leisurely fashion with very little suspense. On the other hand, the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies beyond is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and

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directed toward a single goal (and to that extent far more of a
unity), remains mysterious and “fraught with background.”

While there are some differences between Auerbach’s differentiation of these two epic
narrative forms and the South Indian examples discussed previously, his delineation of these
two styles conforms to the talapurāṇam and the sthalapurāṇa in many ways. As I have stated
above, what accounts for these differences in the case of South Indian purāṇas of place is the
influence of emotionally-charged bhakti poetry on the Tamil poets who wrote the former. Yet,
as I have argued throughout, these distinctions are not solely literary – they also suggest two
possible modes of engaging with sacred spaces, speaking to unique (though overlapping) types
of religious experiences. Conceptualizing purāṇa as a form of collective memory allows us to
better understand the relationship between literature and such experiences.

There is some precedent, within the tradition of Sanskrit theology and literary
criticism, for thinking of purāṇa as “memory” generally conceived. Purāṇic literature, and
Sanskrit purāṇas in particular, were traditionally grouped under the larger category of “śmṛti”
texts; medieval Sanskrit commentators typically used this term to refer to any non-Vedic text
that they deemed authoritative, which includes epic literature (itihāsa), texts on law and ethics
(dharmaśāstra), and purāṇas. The term “śmṛti” literally means “what is remembered” (from the
Sanskrit verb root śmr, “to remember”). David Brick has argued that early appearances of the
term śmṛti in dharmaśāstra describe it as “the standards of right conduct that people
remember from the past and become conscious of as the occasion arises;” in short, it means

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283 David Brick, “Transforming Tradition into Texts: The Early Development of Smṛti,” *Journal of Indian
Philosophy* 34.3 (2006): 287
something like “tradition.” Smṛti, in this sense, can be seen as a form of collective memory. Conceiving of smṛti along similar lines, Gerald James Larson has argued that this term – and purānic literature in particular – refers to the “corporate memory of a community.” Larson further argues that such a form of memory is “always synchronic,” and thus suggests that purāṇa, and smṛti more broadly, can be thought of as “synchronic phylogeny.”

While I broadly agree with Larson’s and Brick’s assessments of the term smṛti (though the former’s use of the term “phylogeny” is unclear), my own concern has been much more narrow. My goal has been to explore how – in one particular tradition – the memory of spaces has served as a fundamental concept. Purāṇa, smṛti, and memory are not homogeneous; as I have repeatedly argued, “purāṇa” does not refer to a discrete textual genre, and “memory” functions in many different ways. All of the aforementioned modes of collective memory exist simultaneously at each place, and visitors to the shrines of Tamil Nadu might be familiar with some or all of them.

This layered and multifaceted tradition of collective memory influences the experiences of visitors to the shrines, inspiring devotional sentiment and cultivating dispositions conducive to the performance of temple worship. Catherine Bell's theory of “ritualization” - and of the “ritualized body” in particular – serves as a useful frame for envisioning the manner in which this collective memory shapes religious experiences at shrines. For Bell, the end result of the process of ritualization is the production of a “ritualized body;” she describes the latter as “…invested with the 'sense' of ritual. The sense of ritual

284 Ibid., 293.
exists as an implicit variety of schemes whose deployment works to produce sociocultural situations that the ritualized body can dominate in some way.”

I suggest that collective memory, as instantiated in purāṇic literature, can be seen as one among these schemes; through the deployment of the both devotional affect and scriptural authority, purāṇic narratives and ritual prescriptions aim to cultivate dispositions conducive to temple worship, thus producing a ritualized body. Furthermore, Bell argues that the ritualized body also works to reproduce the very behaviors that are the result of ritualization; using the example of “required kneeling,” which expresses subordination, she states when seeing such an act performed “we see an act of production – the production of a ritualized agent able to wield physically a scheme of subordination or insubordination.”

Finally, Bell argues that space plays an important role in such production; she argues that there is a “circularity” inherent in the relationship between the ritualized agent and the space she inhabits. According to Bell “By virtue of this circularity, space and time and redefined through the physical movements of bodies projecting schemes on the space-time environment on the one hand while reabsorbing these schemes as the nature of reality on the other.” In other words, the dialectical interplay of the ritualized body and the space in which the ritual is performed (in this case, the temple) reproduces the meaning and structure of the ritual itself.

Bell’s argument regarding ritualization can be applied to some of the examples of rituals mentioned in purāṇic texts that I have described previously. In chapter 3, I described the method for circumambulating a Śaiva shrine, as laid out in the Śivarāhasya and in the Kumpakōṇappurāṇam. This method is both a ritual formula prescribed by an authoritative

286 Catherine Bell, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 98

287 Ibid., 100.
source and, in the broader context of the Tamil text, a source of joy for the ideal devotee. As people engage in the circumambulation in the recommended fashion, they are not simply obeying the text; they are in effect creating a new vector for the transmission of collective memory, here instantiated in the behavioral precedent of ritual performance - they see and are seen by other visitors to the temple. In this way, the ritualized bodies of temple worshipers carry on the process of the formation of memory. The relationship between ritual and memory is also expressed by Paul Connerton, who in his examination of commemorative ceremonies (by which he refers to rituals that re-enact moments that are believed to have taken place in the past) argues that such rituals constitute a form of “bodily social memory.”

It is nevertheless difficult to determine exactly how purāṇic literature conditions experiences of sacred spaces, as each individual's experience of shrine, city and region varies. What I instead wish to indicate is that both sthalapurāṇas and talapurāṇams used the collective memory of a distant past in order to condition such experiences – the former do so by enjoining rituals, the procedures for carrying them out, and the benefits one accrues from doing so, while the latter to seek to condition the emotional state of the devotee visiting the temple. In distinct ways, each offered an ideal vision of what constituted temple worship, Śaiva theology, and community belonging. It is through this effort in articulating ideal modes of devotion that such texts played a role in producing sacred space.

Memory can also be contested, as the stories that writers told about sacred spaces often expressed different theological claims over the ownership of sacred spaces. This is perhaps most clear in Umapati's purāṇas, which tell stories about Cidambaram in such as manner as to

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emphasize the importance of the Śaiva Siddhānta school in shaping the larger Tamil Śaiva tradition. In her study of the contested claims over the ownership of sacred landscapes in late ancient Antioch, Christine Shepardson argues that “Landscape, memories, and individual and collective identities work symbiotically with one another; to change physically or rhetorically how a place is perceived is to affect the politics and identities associated with it.”\textsuperscript{289} Such an ever shifting set of symbiotic relationships was as much a part of the sacred landscape of Śaiva South India as it was in the context that Shephardson examines.

Finally, as I have argued throughout, the imagination of sacred space in purāṇas is not restricted to individual shrines themselves; these shrines are always imagined as parts of larger networks or regions. The Ādi Kumbheśvara temple, for instance, is explicitly associated with at least two other temple networks, as it is both one of the pāṭal perra talaṅkaḷ, or places eulogized in nayaṁmār poetry, and the final stop on the local paṅcakoṣīyayātra, the pilgrimage circuit that includes five shrines associated with the central Śaiva narrative of Kumbakonam that I summarize in the beginning of Chapter 3. Yet there is some evidence that narratives of place as recounted in purāṇic literature traveled beyond the temples and cities with which they were principally associated. For example, the following image, painted on the outer wall of the Bṛhadīśvara temple at Thanjavur, illustrates the lives of purāṇic narratives outside of the spaces to which they are devoted:

\textsuperscript{289} Christine Shephardson, \textit{Controlling Contested Space: Late Antique Antioch and the Spatial Politics of Religious Controversy} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 10
Fig. 5.1: Marriage Scene From Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam, Thanjavur

This image depicts the marriage of Śiva to the goddess Mīnākṣī, the patron deity of the city of Madurai. This mural is just one of a long series that display narratives from the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam*, the talapurāṇam of that city and unquestionably the most popular text of this type from South India. In seeing these murals, contemporary visitors to the temple at Thanjavur are reminded of the broader scope of the Śaiva sacred geography.

To travel to many of Tamil Nadu’s Śaiva shrines is thus to traverse a landscape of memory. Thinking of these places, envisioning them in the mind's eye, seeing them in person, and worshiping at them are inextricably linked to the act of storytelling. Nowhere is this connection between narrative and the imagination of place clearer than in Pāpanāca Mutaliyār's *Kumpeca Kuvavaṇci Nāṭakam*, where sites in Kumbakonam as well as temples outside the city are mentioned through references to specific stories even when the places themselves remain unnamed; the stories convey something essential about the character of each place. A large part of what affords each temple, city or region its sacrality is the rich and
multifaceted tradition of memory that has accrued at each of them over the course of centuries. In South India - perhaps more than anywhere else in the subcontinent – purāṇic literature has played an essential role in this process. Above all else, the goal of this dissertation has been to show that the manner in which these stories are told is shaped by and in turn continues to shape their very being.
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