

ARCHANA VERMA:

*Temple Imagery from Early Mediaeval Peninsular India.*

xii, 300 pp. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012. £65. ISBN 978 1409 43029 2.

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From the sixth–seventh centuries in southern India, temples to a variety of Hindu deities began to be built in stone and ornamented with a wealth of visual imagery. This book seeks to explore the relationship between the evolution of iconography from the temples built across the South between the sixth and twelfth centuries, and the changing social, religious and political conditions of the period. In order to do this an impressive volume of Tamil and Sanskrit sources are examined – religious narratives from the epics and *Purānas*, iconographic sections from the *Agamas*, inscriptions, court literature, Sangam poetry – alongside a wide range of stone sculpture from temples across southern India.

The five chapters of this book discuss the evolution of divine power, the development of “heroic discourse” and royal power, and the relationship between these two realms as expressed in visual and literary material. These discursive sections precede and follow chapter 2, “Puranic pantheons and their iconography (AD 600–1200)”, which occupies over half the book. This is a long survey of some of the major iconographic forms of the Hindu deities depicted in south India’s temples that the author seeks to relate to ideologies of royal power: these include standing, sitting and reclining forms of Viṣṇu; his *avatars* Varaha, Vamana/Trivikrama and Narasimha; Skanda and Somaskanda images; Siva as Gangadhara, Tripurantaka and in various dance poses; and the forms of the Goddess. The images selected are mostly from familiar and well-known sites, primarily Pallava and Chola-period sites in northern and central Tamilnadu. A few temples from further north in Karnataka, such as the Early Western Chalukyan sites at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal, and Ellora in Maharashtra are also cited. The examination of some of the wealth of imagery from this broad range of impressive monumental sites within a single volume, that is limited neither by a dynastic or regional framework (e.g. “Temples of the Early Cholas”), nor by the requirements of a general introductory survey, is refreshing and stimulating though not without its problems.

The connection between these sites and regions is not explained and the reader is assumed to be familiar with the history and dynastic framework of this period. Buddhist and Jain images are not mentioned, despite the presence of such worship communities throughout the region in this period. The book is illustrated throughout with 135 monochrome photographs of sculptures either *in situ* or in the collection of the Tanjavur Art Gallery, the majority by the author. For such an expensive publication the picture quality is poor and seriously detracts from the quality of the book and the conviction of its discussion. The captions are frequently inadequate: “Nataraja bronze, Tanjavur” for four photographs (figs. 99–102) with no scale, date, provenance or accession number; other sculptures are simply identified by a site name, with no indication of which temple or where on the temple the sculpture was located.

The book’s thesis – that south Indian religious imagery can be interpreted as political allegories – is certainly viable and worth examining. However, this is far from original and so the author is largely synthesizing existing material – not always very thoroughly or effectively. There is little on the critical reading of inscriptions as royal eulogies, on the fragmentary evidence for “royal” patronage, or even the

close reading of specific sites or icons, as scholars such as Daud Ali, Padma Kaimal, Michael Rabe and Leslie Orr have conducted for the culture of the Tamil region studied by this book. The many surprising absences in the survey of existing literature reinforce the sense that the author does not have a firm grasp of the field of study. Though completed in 2011, only one source cited in the book dates later than 2000; a more thorough revision of the thesis from which this emerged would have been merited. This is disappointing as the author has travelled extensively, read widely and attempted to synthesize a wealth of material in to a readable account of the development of Hindu sculpture in south India.

**Crispin Branfoot**  
SOAS, University of London

JÖRG GENGNAGEL:

*Visualized Texts: Sacred Spaces, Spatial Texts and the Religious Cartography of Banaras.*

341 pp. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2011. ISBN 978 3 447 05732 5. €52.

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The book under review is an outcome of the Vārāṇasī Research Project (VRP) at the South Asia Institute, Ruprecht-Karls-University Heidelberg and represents another work on the religious topography of Vārāṇasī. In contrast to earlier, more text-based, contributions to the subject, the core of Gengnagel's book deals with fairly recent cartographic representations of India's most sacred city.

The book is divided into five chapters, the first of which gives an introduction and a survey of available cartographic material on Vārāṇasī. Chapter 2 summarizes textual sources on the city's sacred topography focusing on accounts of the several different processions prescribed in later manuscripts. Chapter 3 presents a case study of a nineteenth-century conflict concerning the correct course of one of these processions, the "*pañcakrośīyātrā*". These three chapters serve as preliminaries for the central topic of the book, the representation of Vārāṇasī's sacred space in maps (chapter 4). Chapter 5 contains the author's conclusions. The two final chapters extend over 120 pages. The remaining 150 pages consist of colour plates, extensive appendixes, a bibliography and an index.

Starting in his introduction with the broad theme of South Asian cartography as a largely neglected field of research, the author narrows the scope of his book to "visualizations of space as represented by various kinds of maps" of Vārāṇasī. Gengnagel classifies the VRP's material into five categories: pictorial maps, printed maps, charts, panoramic views and topographical maps (p. 16). A sixth category, illustrations of the sacred topography of Vārāṇasī found in manuscripts, is mentioned in passing (pp. 19 f.) but omitted here. The core of the book, contained in chapter 4, is concerned with two specimens of the first two categories. The chosen examples comprise two "pictorial maps" representing coloured paintings on paper or cloth, probably from Rājasthān, as well as two early "printed maps", i.e. lithographs from Vārāṇasī from the second half of the nineteenth century. These maps are the subject of detailed descriptions accompanied by a number of line drawings and plates. Everyone who has studied similar materials will immediately recognize the time and effort involved in the preliminary work required to write these chapters: the first map alone, "Stylized map of Vārāṇasī", contains about 300 objects (shrines,