Introduction

The pages of this book are the result of a series of returns.

It was a return when I crossed the threshold of the temple known locally as Kedār jī in Banaras (Varanasi; Fig. 1) to state my intention to research its narrative traditions. I had passed through that temple years earlier—when I did not yet know I wanted to formulate research questions—and been struck first of all by its darkness. Years later, I recognised the boy who had guided me into that dark space, telling stories about the divine forms it housed, and trying to persuade me to donate a large sum of money to *bābā*—a term that literally means 'father' and is used respectfully to invoke a god—who, in turn, would grant my every request. But at that time, I did not know that those stories of divine manifestations and transfers would constitute the chronological beginning and inexhaustible source of questions for my doctoral research and its subsequent development.

By the time of my first return to Kedār jī, a few years later, I had a little more awareness and had gone to Banaras to conduct research on locally disseminated mythological narratives about its divine places and the modes of their transmission. In the sources I had consulted, Kedār jī was identified as a prominent temple, so I chose it as a starting point, intending to focus on other places later. However, during that year of field research (January 2009 – February 2010), I did nothing but continually return to that temple to try to decipher its darkness.

As I will detail in the concluding chapter of this book, that period was conducive to the kind of 'immersion' described by anthropologist Olivier de Sardan (1995) using the French term *imprégnation*: the daily engagement with narratives about and of Kedār jī in texts and oral transmission, and my persistent presence within the temple, allowed me to train my eyes and learn to see in the darkness, identifying aspects of the place and its narratives that raised questions and demanded I return again and again.

Due to the initial naivety that is perhaps inevitable in any field research (Allovio 1999, 29–33), what I came to call the spatial transposition of deities—which later became the focal point of my doctoral thesis and now of this book—was not initially part of the investigation. Rather, after analysing the myths transmitted in written sources about the divine form Kedāreśvar (the formal name of the deity housed in Kedār jī), and comparing them with their oral variants collected through dialogues with interlocutors met during that first field period, the phenomenon of transposition presented itself to me as one of the main ways in which the tradition of the local temple is reinforced over time. Transposition
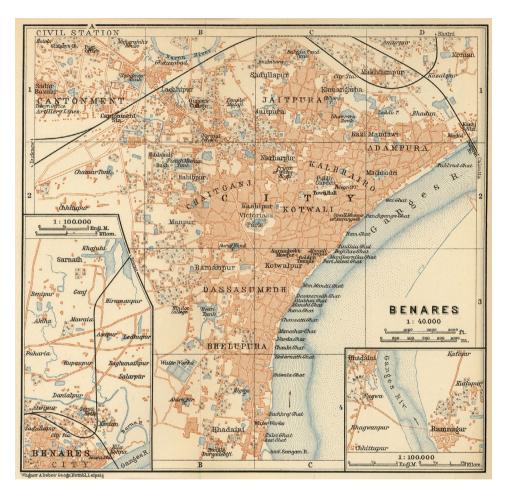
Fig. 1   Map of the centre of Banaras from 'Indien: Handbuch Für Reisende' published by Verlag von Karl Baedeker in Leipzig, 1914. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

was also the fundamental interpretative key for examining the traditions of the other temples in the city that house local forms of *jyotirliṅga*s (*liṅga* of light). Visits to those temples became an integral part of the research on my returns to the city during my doctoral research (2010–2013). The ethnographic material on which this book is based thus primarily concerns the period from January 2009 to March 2012.

Since the completion of my doctorate, I have continued to return to Banaras, developing the themes that emerged during my initial research on Kedār ji, focusing on the negotiation of religious heritage at the centre of the city and on the practices of local pilgrimage. For this book, though, I had to return to my doctoral thesis,[1] which was a first avatar of the research on transposition and redolent for me of the voices, gestures, and faces of all the people who had the patience to sit and narrate the places I was frequenting. I then revisited the material collected over the years and revised the text in the light of my other returns and new experiences, be they human, ethnographic or academic. The Italian version of this book, published in 2018, was the result of that process. As a now more theoretically-inclined scholar, and in the light of my current research interest in the workings of Hindu nationalism, it was tempting to rewrite some sections for the current English version but I decided not to take that course. Instead, I offer a translation that adheres as closely as possible to the Italian version, with the suggestion that the central argument of this book—about the polyphony and replicability of places and their traditions, rather than their fixity and uniqueness—is indeed political and needs reiteration in the contemporary moment.

Here and Elsewhere provides a nuanced look at the germination of namesakes of divine forms across the subcontinent and the practices of local pilgrimage, showing that the spatial transposition of deities, divine places and names is one of the main modes of sanctifying the territory—that is, connecting the places of humans with the deeds of gods, in order to form and sustain the sacred geographies of India, particularly those of Hinduism.

The case illustrated here is the group of temples in Banaras that locally represent the *jyotirliṅga*s, one of many clusters of deities in Hindu sacred geography. The *jyotirliṅga*s are prominent forms of the god Śiva, the *liṅga* being the 'sign' of the presence of the god in most temples dedicated to him. The pan-Indian group of the *jyotirliṅga*s is conventionally held to comprise twelve names and forms of Śiva with their associated shrines, widely dispersed across the subcontinent but connected by a trans-regional pilgrimage route.

The first chapter of this book retraces the evolution of the idea of pilgrimage in Hinduism and introduces some concepts of Hindu sacred geography, showing that

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1   'Quando la copia offusca il modello. Studi sulla trasposizione spaziale e Banaras: il caso dei jyotirliṅgas', defended at the University of Turin in May 2013.

the transfer of toponyms and the local multiplications of the same divine form are neither extravagant exceptions designed in particular historical contexts nor do they exclusively concern only particularly significant centres. Although in the West, Banaras is one of the best-known Indian pilgrimage cities (perhaps due to its long-standing weight in the Orientalist imagination), any pilgrimage centre would lend itself to an investigation such as I have undertaken. Transposed places and deities are indeed widespread phenomena, still little understood. The intention is, therefore, to look at transposition—a term I choose among many others used by scholars and that I will define in the first chapter—by adopting an alternative perspective to previous studies, that is, literally entering the transposed places and studying them from within.

In addition to the analysis of narrative traditions in textual sources—whose nature, specificity, and necessary use in research are discussed in the first chapter—a different viewpoint on transposition was achieved precisely through an ethnographic approach anchored in long term fieldwork in and around the temples of the transposed *jyotirliṅga*s. There, it was indeed possible to interrogate the languages and strategies enacted by diverse social actors and understand how they formulate, explain and promote the transposed forms. As well, my approach contributes to the examination of modes of declination in local contexts of so-called 'great traditions'; that is, those of the mythological literature of the Brahmans—the 'traditional' holders of knowledge (according to a tradition created and sustained by them over time) and compilers of most of the scriptures of Hindu traditions. The fundamental anthropological question underlying this investigation is the multi-vocal relationship of belonging, and sometimes even identification, between humans and (divine) places; and the questions posed concern the negotiation and fulfilment of this relationship through specific devotional, narrative and performative modes.

The second chapter is dedicated to delineating that complex urban territory which is, at the same time, the mythological entity in which the places of my research are inscribed: the city of Banaras, a renowned Hindu pilgrimage centre in the state of Uttar Pradesh, in northern India, whose 'sacredness' is crafted by a vast and varied literature of glorification. In this chapter I suggest that any historical or ethnographic study of its temples must necessarily take into account and engage with the much-criticised 'idea of Banaras' (Dodson 2012)—an idea that identifies the city as a stronghold of a certain Hinduism. I do so by illustrating the complexity of Banaras' spatial dimensions (and potentially of all pilgrimage centres). As outlined in the more theoretical section of the second chapter, I draw on the tools of the anthropology of space and place, with particular reference to the dialectic between space and place . I will describe some of the dynamics of the construction of what I will define as the 'imagined space' of the city and probe the influences that this imagined space has on 'lived places'—in our case

the transposed shrines. Then I will use a phenomenological approach, taking account of the social actors, the variants of myths transmitted and the locality enacted daily at the shrines in order to illustrate their fundamental contribution to supporting and sometimes reshaping the imagined space.

Subsequent chapters are dedicated to presenting the results of my research. In particular, the third chapter introduces the history of the pan-Indian *jyotirliṅga*s, tracing their formation as a group, and their transposition to Banaras, as documented by textual sources and religious cartography. The fourth chapter presents the results of my ethnographic research in the various temples: the places themselves speak of how spaces and deities from elsewhere are conceptualised and enacted as present here and now. In the fifth chapter, the idea of the divine group is explored through the investigation of a substitute pilgrimage to the group of transposed *jyotirliṅga*s, one of a vast panorama of local urban pilgrimages in Banaras. The study of this kind of pilgrimage allows for reflections on the enumeration, grouping, selection and transmission that underlie the urban geographies of pilgrimage centres. This chapter also sheds light on the dialectic between textual prescriptions and ritual practice and contestations about ritual correctness and norms.

The concluding chapter returns to the beginning of it all. The pages dedicated to Kedār jī are a monographic study of the most complex temple among the transposed *jyotirliṅga*s of Banaras. They present Kedār jī's layered narrative traditions, as transmitted by textual sources, followed by an examination of the reformulations of these narratives in oral transmission by temple ritual specialists. I discuss the space and time of Kedār jī and the ways in which the people who spend their lives there make sense of them. In Kedār jī, transposition will no longer be the main theme but rather one of many ways in which connections are created—as my title has it, between here and elsewhere. In fact, connections, references, and links to other places and dimensions emerge as dominant strategies employed by ritual specialists to produce, maintain, enact and transmit 'locality' (Appadurai 2001 [1996]).

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Before beginning, it is necessary to make a clarification that might further complicate notions of 'original' and 'transposition'. Those familiar with the group of *jyotirliṅga*s or with the city of Banaras will notice the partial absence of an important member of the group: Viśvanāth or Viśveśvar. This name denotes Śiva as the Lord of the Universe, a divine form that has been considered the city's patron for many centuries and is also one of the pan-Indian *jyotirliṅga*s. In

Banaras Viśvanāth is the only 'original' *jyotirliṅga.* To confuse matters further, it has numerous namesakes throughout the subcontinent and even in Banaras there are at least two important transpositions of Viśveśvar. I have excluded a detailed analysis of this temple because in this book I am interested principally in investigating the transposed places. Throughout, however, the controversial history of Viśvanāth will occasionally emerge, as will contemporary contestations around it. As I show these have irrevocably influenced the practice of local pilgrimages. The role of Viśvanāth, an 'original' among 'replicas', is certainly an interesting subject for further investigation of the transposition of deities: one could consider how it influences the other, 'transposed', members of the group and delve more deeply into the ongoing transformations near it. But that is part of other paths that I have been following in the course of my more recent returns to Banaras. These opened up through ethnographic encounters, particularly those with expert in local urban pilgrimages, Kedarnath Vyas, towards the end of my doctoral research and led me to deal repeatedly with the area around Viśvanāth and the neighbouring Gyān Vāpī mosque, looking at the transformation of local urban pilgrimage, inter-religious frictions and the policing of religious offence and, more recently, the politics of heritage and security.[2]

2　Some of my articles on these topics can be found in the list of references at the end of this book.